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SURRENDER

J. C. Snaith

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By J. C. SNAITH

SURRENDER
THE HOOP
WHAT IS TO BE
THUS FAR
THERE IS A TIDE
ARAMINTA
THE VAN ROON
THE COUNCIL OF SEVEN
THE ADVENTUROUS LADY
THE UNDEFEATED
THE TIME SPIRIT
THE COMING

SURRENDER

I

Dorland woke with a shudder. Yes, It was just as he feared. Hour by hour he had fought against a kind of terrible dream. Lying in a trance of half consciousness he imagined that he was a rat in a sewer. And now when his eyes had come open, and with them the gates of his mind, he realised that his vision of himself was more or less true.

Absinthe had a little to say in the matter. But there were other things besides. First among them was the all pervading stench in which he lay. He could hardly breathe. His throat and nostrils were corroded by a miasma, sweat was pouring from his body, he felt he was going mad. To one as keenly sensitive as Ambrose Dorland his surroundings were incredibly foul. By his side, a few inches from him, a man was talking in his sleep. What proceeded out of that mouth was of a piece with the stertorous brute who let it forth. The sleeper was a low type of half caste, whose face was scarred by disease. Stretched half naked in that sticky heat, he was one of thirty in an overcrowded dormitory. And to judge by the poisonous fumes that rose from the mattresses ranged along each of the four walls, the other forms of life which shared these beds could only flourish so abundantly in sheer defiance of the laws of nature.

Every window was shut. But had they been open, those six narrow panes high up in the whitewashed wall, they would have made very little difference to one in Dorland's condition. Had he lain out in the open desert under the African moon that now looked down upon him, he would still have gasped like a dying fish. God, why had he come here! What was he doing in this inferno? A young man, barely twenty-three, educated, accomplished, intensely ambitious, he had absolutely nothing in common with the *scélérats* of three continents.

Meditations of this kind were no use now. Yet one thing he must do. Let him contrive to get one of those windows open before the power of reason slipped away from him. Summoning the will with an effort that was desperate, he rose from his mockery of a bed with great caution, not making a sound. The men around him cherished a superstition in the matter of fresh air. On the hottest night they held even a minute quantity to be highly dangerous. Even if it meant a *brodequin* in the ribs one of those panes would have to yield. With painful caution Dorland climbed up to the sill. The hasp was broken, the window stuck. He shook it gingerly but it wouldn't move. Half measures were plainly no use. Still it would have to yield, whether it disturbed these beasts or not. Growing suddenly frantic he pushed an elbow through the glass.

The crash was modest but it advertised the crime. Near by the worst bully in the caserne lay awake and watchful. "*Cré nom de nom de bon dieu de dieu*!" he growled. Experience taught Dorland to look out for developments. These quickly arrived in the form of a heavy missile flung at his head. But the moon gave light enough to see it coming. He had time to duck, and the iron bound boot which his old friend Jabot, an Apache from the stews of Marseilles, had flung, knocked out another pane and fell to the floor with a thud.

Dorland now held himself ready for something worse. Knowing his man he half expected a blow on the jaw or a kick in the stomach. However, for the moment, there was neither. Jabot having no other missile handy was too apathetic to follow up the matter. He was dog-tired and half drunk and his only real interest in the affair was a vent for that grudge which he held against the universe. But at two o'clock in the morning he lacked the energy to let himself go, and was content to turn over from his right side to his left with a horrible promise of what he would do when he was really awake.

The instant Dorland knew that he need fear nothing more from his neighbour, at any rate for the time being, he slipped back to his mattress. By the mercy of Allah, the *caporal de chambrée* slept at the other end of the long room. He made no sign. A few stray oaths were loose, from those members of the *escouade* who had been disturbed, but they did not allow a couple of panes of broken glass to worry them. All the same if four hours later, those panes happened to catch the eye of the sergeant major at kit inspection, they were very likely to mean three days *salle de police* for legionnaire 17883, that unlucky number.

Yes, that number was unlucky. As Ambrose Dorland lay on his mattress, which was hard and rough to the spine as a granite sett, he was in a sweat of panic fear. It was not so much that he was afraid of the men around him, as that he was unequal to the life he had to live. Physically, mentally, morally, he could not support a life of that kind. Brought up soft by a doting mother, who lived to gratify every whim of an only child, until the fatal decision, a few months ago, his life was almost too happy. He had been born and bred a gentleman, but at Sidi-bel-Abbès, the depot of *la légion étrangère*, they did not know the meaning of the word.

At Sidi-bel-Abbès, nevertheless, they were aware that the *bleu* Ambrose Dorland was not "one of us." Nor would they ever be able to make him one. They had a down on him accordingly. He was *un mauvais sujet*. And so he was in the black books of the sergeant major and the other *sous-officiers* who had it in their power to make his life a hell. Even without help of theirs life for Ambrose Dorland under such conditions was hard to bear. The low bestiality of men whom he declined to think of as comrades, the grotesque, dirty, ill-fitting clothes, the bad food, the sense of degradation, the all pervading filth, the soul destroying monotony, the disgusting corvées, these things were bitter. But on top of all was the brutal ill will of chartered bullies from whose clutches there was no escape, from whose malice there was no appeal.

Lying on his mattress, gazing at the African moon, this young man of twenty-three felt he was very near the end of his tether. Absinthe, to which he had been weak enough to yield, had had a little to do with it, but the coarse food which nauseated him, the squalor that galled his peculiar temperament, and a touch of fever, all had a part to play. He had heard them speak of *le cafard*, the desert madness, which was universally dreaded, even by the most vile. Was this final curse upon him already? Lying there among those foul and noisy sleepers, his brain already beyond control, he began to fear that it was. Surely his will was loosening. It was the only thing he had to hold on by. If that went, all went. But in the last few days it had grown flaccid. And in this airless night he felt that a heavy curtain was being drawn across the mind.

Behind that curtain lurked nameless horrors. If the will passed from him he would not be able to evade them. The one chance of escape he had was to retain a power that in the last resort might consent to put him out of life altogether. Perhaps it would only be exchanging one hell for another hell. In his present mood he felt it must be so, but the darkest region of the beyond could not be worse than what he saw now as he lay on his back gazing at infinity.

The cold truth of the matter was that he was a born coward. At least so he had been made to believe. As they reckoned men and things at the depot of *la légion étrangère* that was the rank accorded him. Far better he were dead than that stigma had been fixed upon him. Bullies and blackguards, from whom the commissioned officers kept strictly aloof, these criminal sweepings of Europe, Asia and Africa were only too ready to take advantage of any form of weakness. Yet the real tragedy of Ambrose Dorland was that in his heart he knew that he was not contemptible.

You do not ask a razor to cut a block of marble. If you do you merely destroy the razor. Even if he could not pass the test of brute courage demanded by the Apache, there was a lamp in his brain which he had always felt must carry him far. He had a talent whose wise development should make him one day a master man. A single error of judgment in a moment of enthusiasm had changed all that. When in Rome one must be as the Romans. In a few months of mental and physical degradation it had been branded upon the too sensitive soul of Ambrose Dorland that he was no Roman. And he never could be one.

At five o'clock came *réveil*. By that hour Dorland had passed into a light doze. The note of a bugle rudely shattered it. Once more he was faced with the horrors of the day, which in a sense were more real than those of the night. At the hated sound he forced himself to spring up from his mattress, and though shaking in every limb as if in the grip of ague, he got into his clothes. Like everything else in this inferno they were hateful to him. Coarse, heavy and grotesque, it was beneath any man's dignity to wear them. When he had put his trousers on, he considered whether he would have the time and the strength to go down to the lavabo and scramble for the pump. As a rule it was a dog fight. Force as well as enterprise were needed. This morning he lacked both. Moreover he suddenly remembered it was the first Thursday of the month.

For those who suffered as he did it was one of the world's worst days. There would be a long route march in a fierce sun, manoeuvres in the field, an encampment in the forest where the night would be spent, and a return to barracks the following day. Five forty-five A.M. was the hour of departure with music and complete kit. Everything must be close packed in his knapsack. Also he must carry pick and shovel, parts of the tent, water bottle filled to the brim, cartridges, gun and bayonet, and some food in the *musette*, the entire outfit weighing about forty kilogrammes.

Such a load was staggering for a weak man. Dorland had a powerful impulse to report himself ill, but he knew that his plea was not likely to be accepted by the doctor. And if it were not he would receive a fortnight's imprisonment for reporting himself without cause, and he would also lose the privilege for two months of staying out once a week until midnight. In spite of that there would be many applications. And many would pay the penalty. The doctor took no account of feet lacerated by the clumsy, ill-fitting brodequin.

Dorland's feet were in very bad condition. So when his kit was packed he gave the two or three minutes he had to spare to tallowing them, and to the careful readjustment of his *chaussettes russes*, the strips of greasy linen worn by the legionary in lieu of socks. Hardly had he done this when all else was banished by the entrance of Sergeant Major Hauptmann, the worst of his foes.

The dreaded moment had come. Bridling like a turkey cock Sergeant Major Hauptmann cast a ruthless eye about the room. He was bound to see the broken panes. Guilt would be promptly fastened upon the guilty. And Hauptmann being Hauptmann could be trusted to make the most of the case. The culprit shivered in his coarse shirt. If I am lucky, he thought, it means three weeks *garde de chambre* at the least; if I am not lucky the matter will be carried higher and then it's *salle de police*.

Hauptmann, however, had no time for broken windows just now. He was there to inspect kit and to remind the *escouade* that it was the first Thursday of the month. In the stress of the moment the kit received only a perfunctory eye, a few hasty instructions were given to Corporal Fabre and then to Dorland's intense relief the great man went away.

A cup of good *jus*, handed by the room orderly, helped further to give Dorland a little heart.

God knew how sorely that heart was needed! But there was no remedy. He would have to go through with it. The march would be torture, but pains equally severe and in kind more ignominious awaited any attempt to shirk. Whatever he did now there was no escaping the penalties of his folly. And the penalties were cumulative. They waxed and multiplied. As the mind weakened and the nerves wore thin his sufferings grew.

He managed to get his knapsack tightly packed and his entire kit assembled. He swept under his bed, did a few chores connected with the foul room in which he had lain, and then came the sound of the "fall in." Laden like a camel he staggered down the stairs to the barrack yard. How horrible he felt! His brodequins galled him cruelly, his brain opened and shut, he sweated at every pore and yet he was shivering. For the hundredth time since he had come to this rat trap he was cursing the hour in which he was born. But what was the use of that?

II

What is the use of cursing the hour in which you were born? Dorland asked himself as the battalion swung out of the barrack gates to the strains of *Tiens, voilà du bondin*, the march of the Legion. As it entered the stifling filth of Sidi-bel-Abbès he asked the question again. You have only yourself to blame, mon ami, was the answer. It is well sometimes to look before you leap.

Had there been a friend beside him to share his troubles he might have cared less. But where could he look for a friend among this sullen mass of thieves, cut-throats, *embusqués*, men of low class and no class? For one reason or another this precious crew had put themselves on the wrong side of the law. That was the truth about *la légion étrangère*. Men went there for sanctuary. In nine cases out of ten they sought to escape the consequences of a crime. But they did not always succeed. In the few months Dorland had been with the Legion he had seen more than one man tapped on the shoulder by a detective as he sat at mess.

Dorland himself in his naïve simplicity had enlisted to fight against the Boche. His country had yet to enter the war and in a fit of idealism he had been ready to show it the way. He had read and he had heard about the Foreign Legion. For a young man of inexperience, who did not know too much of the world, a romantic halo surrounded it. Being

headstrong and used to his own way he had not troubled to make enquiries. Besides his nationality was a bar to other French regiments. It was for the army of France that he had a sentimental fancy and in his total ignorance of *le militaire* one branch of it seemed as good as another for a young enthusiast.

Disillusion came soon. He was out to fight the Boche. But almost the first thing he learned was that the Foreign Legion was mainly German. Nearly all the *sous-officiers* had a Teutonic name. And a large majority of the rank and file were akin to that nation.

As soon as the battalion was through the gates of the squalid town the band ceased playing. Then began a weary trek along a rough and treeless road. Mile upon mile there was not a hint of shade. The sun grew more powerful, the terrain more difficult, and men began to prove unequal to the pace. Some lagged behind, others fell out by the road side, there were some who fainted.

Sergeants and corporals stayed to look after these. None of the stragglers was trusted to fend for himself. It was like a penal battalion. For Dorland this was exactly what it was. But in spite of his feet which gave him great pain and the buzzing of his head and the ever growing weight of his sac, which at every mile threatened to become too much for his failing strength, he somehow managed to keep going. In this he was helped considerably by a ten minutes' halt every hour. Without that rest and a little relief from his water bottle for a parched throat he could not have kept on.

Even so the time came when he had to yield. Towards noon, with the forest not yet in sight and the sun at its fiercest, his head began to spin. Do as he would he was no longer equal to the load on his shoulders. His knees sank, a strange darkness invaded his brain and then he grew suddenly aware that he was lying on his back in the white dust at the side of the road. He lay supine and gasping on the verge of consciousness. The time seemed like hours, although it could not have been more than a few minutes. Afraid of what might happen he made frantic efforts to rise. But in vain. His legs refused to support the weight of his pack. He might have been a fallen horse pinned down by the shafts of a cart.

"What are you doing there, you lousy swine?" He recognised the voice. It belonged to Sergeant Major Hauptmann, the tyrant whom he most feared.

"Get up, you." Hauptmann offered the encouragement of his boot. Yet in spite of a couple of well directed kicks Dorland was unable to rise. The sergeant grinned and spat in a way he had. "Look here, my old," he said, "don't sham dead with me or when you get home you shall have another dose of the *crapaudine*."

Dorland had had one go already of that brutal torture. His flesh crept at the thought of a second. But it was no use struggling, he was unable to rise. In spite of all he could do his eyes darkened again. When with a mighty effort he regained a sense of himself he heard another voice speaking.

"All right, Sergeant. I daresay I can fix him."

"Only shamming, the white llvered——!"

"Well, leave him to me. I'll fix him."

With an oath foul enough to poison the air Sergeant Major Hauptmann passed along the road, and Dorland, numb and sick with the effects of the sun, peered miserably at his new tormentor. This was a corporal he did not remember to have seen before. At any rate he had not had to do with him. He was a small, wiry man, lean as a jackal, and he belonged to another company. His ministrations would probably involve another kick in the ribs, but Dorland was inured to those by now. However, his methods to begin with were new. Without saying a word and keeping his brodequins to himself, the Corporal knelt and drew a handkerchief from Dorland's tunic; then he poured water over it from his own bottle and bound it tightly round the temples of the stricken man. It was the first spontaneous act of friendliness Dorland had received since he had joined the Legion. The effect was magical. Strength flowed back into his brain; earth and sky stopped spinning.

"Thank you, thank you," murmured Dorland. He spoke in English.

The Corporal, not at all roughly, offered his own water bottle. "Take a drink, old man," he said. To Dorland's keen

surprise the Corporal also spoke in English. So acute was his relief at hearing his own mother tongue in lieu of the language whose many bastard forms he had grown to detest, that he suddenly acquired the power to sit up and press the tin cup to his parched lips.

The English-speaking Corporal held it for him while he did this. "Go easy, old son. No hurry." Such odd, curious gentleness was almost feminine.

Dorland returned the empty cup with real gratitude. He was feeling a new man already. And when the Corporal knelt and unstrapped the pack and then relieved Dorland's shoulders of its weight this feeling grew. Here was a very strange kind of non-com for the Foreign Legion.

Once more Dorland made an effort to rise. But it was not very successful.

"No hurry, my boy," said the Corporal watching it. "Better go slow for a bit." He helped the stricken man to move out of the dust into the rough grass at the side of the road and then made him comfortable, unbuttoning the collar of his tunic and propping up his head on his knapsack. "Not much shade," said the Corporal, "but I daresay you'll be all right presently."

"Yes," said Dorland gratefully, "I'll soon be all right." Already his voice was stronger and he was feeling wonderfully better.

"English aren't you?" said the Corporal.

"American," said Dorland.

"More or less the same."

"Yes, more or less."

"A good lad, whoever you are," said the Corporal, who had already noticed the wide bright eye, the finely modelled nose and chin, the sensitive lips. "But what in God's name brought you here?"

"I wanted to do my bit," said Dorland. "A regular French regiment wouldn't have me unless I changed my nationality. And the English only have their own nationals, too."

"Well you've come to the wrong shop, old son, which of course you know."

There was such a depth of sadness in the voice of the Corporal that even had Dorland lain in ignorance of that fact there would have been no excuse to remain so. The unexpected friendliness, the human intimacy brought sudden tears to the eyes of Dorland. He was deeply ashamed, but at that moment he was powerless to hold them back. After being insulted, bullied, knocked about for months on end, to be treated in this way was almost more than he could bear.

"What were you doing before you came here—if the question is not impertinent?" The Corporal wore a battered *képi*, a dirty, ill fitting uniform and his chin had not known a razor for some time, but there was no mistaking the tone and manner of the sahib. Dorland had heard nothing like that voice for many moons.

"I was studying art in Paris when the war broke out. Then I went to Italy. And when our people at home sat on the fence I thought the best thing I could do was to come on here."

"Poor chap," said the Corporal sympathetically. "Pity somebody didn't put you wise."

"Yes, I wish they had. But I was told that I might expect to find a lot of decent Americans here."

"Not in the Legion, old son. We are wrong 'uns."

You are worse than wrong 'uns, you are the scum of the earth, Dorland would have liked to add. He might have done so had he not realised that to every rule there are exceptions and that in this case the Corporal provided one. Such a man

must have his reasons no doubt, or he would not be a corporal in the Legion, but in spite of his uniform there was no concealing that he belonged to a type whom Ambrose Dorland had never expected to meet again.

In a space of time much less than would have been the case had he not been sustained by the hand of a friend, Dorland was once more ready for the road. Weak and ill he still was, yet he felt stronger for the Corporal's help. They moved along at the tail of the column, keeping in touch with it as well as they could, although for Dorland the process was more than a little painful. But now there was a good Samaritan to help him on his way. Not only did the Corporal support him from time to time as they marched along together in the ever growing heat of the sun, untempered as yet by a hint of shade, but also he relieved him of some of the weight of his pack and thereby added to the burden of his own. "We shall get to the forest presently," he said cheerfully, "and then you'll feel a new man."

To Dorland, however, the time seemed interminable before the forest came in sight. And he was quite sure he would never have got there had not a true friend been at his side. But the Corporal made a world of difference. Some natures have little power of ploughing a lonely furrow. They need sympathy and kindness as the flowers of the earth need sunlight and air.

On the outskirts of the forest was a dingle of leafy sweet-smelling pines. The Corporal led Dorland into the shadow of these, placing him carefully out of the sight of the regiment with his back to the trunk of a tree.

"Stay here, my boy, for the next few hours," said the Corporal. "But don't let them see you, if you can help it, or they may knock hell out of you. They'll be manoeuvring over there"—the Corporal pointed southeast—"most of the afternoon. But we shall encamp for the night yonder." With the precision of an old soldier he pointed west. "You'll find the place about three-quarters of a mile off. Wait till you hear the *rassemblement* before moving out of this. Eat some food. And here's a couple of cigarettes. Get a nap this afternoon. And don't come out too early. Good luck, old man. So long. I'll look out for you again." The Corporal moved off into the sunlight, his slight figure tough as pinwire, a soldier's every inch for all its opera bouffe tunic and breeches.

As Dorland watched him go his heart sank. It was like the withdrawal of clear sunlight from a swamp of foetid horrors. But for the time being that kindly presence had done its work. An hour ago he had not a friend in the world. He had one now and it made all the difference. When the Corporal had gone, however, he felt sick unto death, yet he wished he might believe that was really the case. Death was a long way off. There was a great deal more to suffer before he could honestly claim it. He lay very still against the bole of the pine, until the other stragglers had passed along the road into the forest. It was sound advice the Corporal had given him. None of his own officers must catch him there.

Presently the road grew clear. Nobody had seen him under the tree. That in itself was reassuring. He was grateful for the shade, and a few hours of complete rest was doing wonders for his broken feet. But he must not be seen until the time came to join the others. That time would be the cool of the evening, not that the evenings were ever cool in Africa at this season of the year. As the afternoon wore on he grew well enough to eat some bread and cheese which he carried in his *musette*. Then he smoked the Corporal's cigarettes and his nerves grew stronger.

Almost for the first time since his arrival at Sidi-bel-Abbès, that outpost of hell, he had an idea that a word might be said in favour of life itself. Yet he had no doubt that the next few hours would destroy any such illusion. Sergeant Major Hauptmann was saving it up for him. Or if not Sergeant Major Hauptmann some other savage brute. He was not instinctively a martyr, as some men and women are, but he suffered from a peculiar order of mind. His brain was too active, his imagination too keen, he was much too easily hurt. The hurts other natures threw off as lightly as a duck shakes water from its tail, cut deep into his soul. It was because he had been weak enough to let these beasts know it that they took such a pleasure in baiting him.

After his food he was able to get several hours' real sleep, of which his frayed nerves stood much in need. It was many days since he had slept like that. When he woke up it was not as a rat emerging from a sewer. He was in full possession of his mind. The sun was perceptibly lower, it was dipping rapidly behind the trees. But the golden haze of a tropical sky reminded Dorland that his eye was that of an artist. If only he could stay here undisturbed and put what he saw upon canvas!

Forêt in Paris, less than a year ago, had prophesied that his sense of colour would carry him far. One of his pictures

had been accepted for the Salon. He had felt deep in his heart that big things lay ahead. Already he could see, draw, compose, handle paint in the way of the few. Had there been no war the world must have heard of him. But it would never hear of him now. They were going to squelch out his life with their brodequins as they squelched rats when they cleaned out the latrines of the town gaol. Ugh! He had rats on the brain. Was it that the madness he dreaded had already overtaken him?

A sudden wave of nausea flowed over the walls of his mind. He cursed himself for yielding to the thought. Weak, vain, cowardly. But he couldn't help it. Why pretend otherwise? It was the kind of poor fish he was. He needed fair weather. A great man in the making—while the weather kept fair. But when it turned foul he could not hold a candle to these sweepings of the gutter who never tired of offering him violence and indignity. The raw truth was he was not enough of a man to face this ugly world into which he had strayed. He was planned for things very different. Still, why make excuses? All the excuses in the world could not hide the plain fact. Sergeant Major Hauptmann had described him pretty correctly. It only remained for such as Ambrose Dorland to curse the hour in which he was born.

III

Over the feathery tops of the sweet-scented trees came the notes of a bugle. It was the *rassemblement*. He must be getting on now or he would pile trouble on the head of trouble. Nay, there was little doubt that he had done so already. The *sous-officiers* made a point of taking every chance against him. Painfully he rose from under the tree, strapped on his pack, and began gingerly to move forward through the short grass In the direction of the sound. He was feeling better now. The fever in his head had abated. Suddenly a covey of young partridges flew out with a whirr from under his feet. He might have been walking in the woods of his native Maryland. God, he had never thought he should live to curse the dear woman with whom he had walked there so often.

Let him be a man and learn to stand up to things and keep off absinthe. It was not that he was by nature vicious. But in Paris, in the care-free life of the boulevard, he had acquired a taste for the stuff. There seemed no danger in it then, for it was always easy to control. But in this life of misery it was the devil. Not only did it evoke memories of happier days, but in a subtle way it went with the climate. It was the only anodyne he had, but already it had become a terrible menace.

Following as well as he could the hateful call he had not gone more than half a mile when the bivouac came in sight. His heart was in his boots as he passed beyond the provision wagons into the midst of the troops. He soon recognised various members of his own *escouade* who were occupied in fetching water in canvas buckets, while others were gathering wood to make fires for the cooks. It was a scene of such activity that he was able to join it unnoticed. Everything was being carried on as though it were a real campaign. The afternoon had been spent in manoeuvres with the firing of blank cartridges and now entrenchments were being rapidly prepared against the imagined threat of an attack. Sergeants and corporals were far too busy to pay much attention to the stragglers.

Dorland rejoiced in this piece of luck. He promptly slipped off knapsack and tunic and began to make himself useful. First he lent a hand in the pitching of a tent, of which he bore a sixth part in his own kit. It was a further stroke of luck that he was in time for this ceremony, otherwise his absence must have provoked comment. When this was done he took pick and shovel and joined those at work upon the raising of the fortifications. He bore a hand in building up a high earth platform and fixing the wooden *mitrailleuse* upon it, as if to repel a real attack. By sundown the camp was in being. Trenches were dug, fires lit, supper cooked, the watch and guard were set. He was able to eat his food in reasonable comfort under an oak tree. And then having been solemnly warned of an attack during the night and that he must retire duly equipped with bayonet and rifle and full cartridge cases, he was free until bed-time.

The aspect of the camp was truly magnificent: the low tents of the soldiers, the tall tents of the officers, the watch fires, the sentinels. To add to its impressiveness they had been joined by half a battalion of the Spahis, and their gorgeous costumes and their splendid Arab horses hitched together lent a touch of romance to the scene. As Dorland watched it with his painter's eye he felt a thrill of aesthetic pleasure. Here and there were soldiers gathered about a fire, the light playing upon their swarthy faces. On one side was the dark forest, and on the other the wide vast plain which seemed to

stretch interminably into the growing mist. The damp rich odours of the earth and pines, the neighing and stamping of the horses, and the gradual silence which crept over the scene fixed themselves upon Dorland's memory.

He had no wish to enter a small tent and woo further sleep in the company of five unwashed men who had been sweating all day under a pitiless African sun. So he sat outside, in front of the tent, contemplating the scene and musing upon the entire life of the Legion. How incongruous it seemed in comparison with this really wonderful picture which only showed the beauty, the colour, the mystery, the hazard and the fascination of the life of warriors. It was good to be out there in the open, inhaling the pure air of the night. His pains and his cares seemed to fall away from him. For the first time since he had entered upon a career that was killing him there came some ease of spirit. These were rare moments. A connoisseur of life's finer essences, he drank them greedily. And drinking he fell asleep.

He woke at the sound of the bugle. It was dawn already. There had been no night attack. Dorland realised as he rubbed his eyes and stretched his limbs that he had had the finest sleep of his life. In mind and body he was reborn. His cup of hot *jus* and piece of bread tasted very good. As he moved about in the strong air he was able to look the world in the face. The cloud growing daily in his brain appeared to have receded. If only he could keep out of that dive in Sidi-bel-Abbès and refrain from the green poison there was still a hope that he might be able to carry through this grim adventure. It was but slender, yet the hope was there.

He looked around for his new friend. This change of heart was wholly due to him. But it was not a moment to pursue the acquaintance. Corporals did not mix with common soldiers. Besides it was highly probable that his superior in rank had forgotten his existence. It was what one must expect in a life of this kind. To Ambrose Dorland such a man was simply everything just now, but for a *sous-officier* a sunstruck bleu was a sunstruck bleu. However it was not a time to weigh the matter.

Already the camp was breaking. Orders were being shouted, all was hustle and intense activity. Tents were packed, earth was levelled where the fortifications had been, the place was made to look as if an army had not been there. In a little more than an hour the battalion was again upon the march. The road chosen for the return was still longer than the one by which they had come. Again the heat was stifling, but Dorland was now a different being from the previous day. He was well rested, and in a magical way the sense of his manhood had returned. These brutes as yet had not completely broken his will. Please God they would not! He plodded on and on through the reddish white dust. And so intimate was the sense upon him of the Corporal's kindness that he tried to make friends with the man by whose side he marched.

He could not have had a more unpromising subject to begin upon. It was the pockmarked man who slept next to him, the fellow who talked in his sleep. Under those conditions he was a better conversationalist than when he was awake. A half caste negro from one of the Algerian coast towns, with the face of a criminal and half mad with disease, there was nothing to be got out of him beyond a few grunts.

This was discouraging but Dorland felt it was something to be able to make the attempt. He had formed a resolve in the course of the night. Upon finding out the kind of people among whom he was thrown he had held strictly aloof. But low types though his brother legionaries were he felt now that he must make a bid for their goodwill. It would not be easy. By nature he was fastidious and lacked experience in the art of "mixing." They could never be his friends, but if he thought more of them and less of himself he might yet be able to save his reason.

He could get nothing out of the poilu at his side, and not knowing his bastard Arabic could hardly hope to do so. Although meaning so well, he was not sorry. In the entire regiment there was not an uglier mug.

It was a weary foot-slog in the heat. Even the halt of ten minutes every hour did not help so very much. But Dorland fixed his will, and though his head began to buzz again and he soon became a welter of pain, he managed to keep going. About noon, to his intense relief, they entered a grove of mulberry trees. In the shade of these *Rompez* was sounded and they were allowed to rest for an hour.

Then it was that Dorland, who kept a sharp look out, suddenly caught sight of his friend. He was in sore need of rest, yet still greater his need of that kind voice. Contrary to rule though it was, he could not resist the impulse to draw the Corporal's notice. Rising from where he lay he threw himself deliberately across his path. Would the good Samaritan remember him? At first Dorland feared not. The Corporal looked very tired and very hot, and now that Dorland met him

unexpectedly he saw how finely drawn was that face, how strange the light in those sombre eyes. Seen as Dorland saw it now that could not be the face of a man who was happy. Yet why expect any legionnaire to be happy? Almost without exception its rank and file had the best of reasons for being miserable. But it was a shock to come on this man unaware and to find that which made him akin to the rest.

Observing this new aura upon his friend Dorland the impressionable began to think better of his impulse. Wiser perhaps to let well alone. The kindness he had met with the previous day would never pass from his mind, but that was no excuse for obtruding upon good nature. A *sous-officier* was a *sous-officier*. He was a celestial being, moving upon a superior plane, with great powers over a common soldier like himself. It was Dorland's experience that almost invariably these powers were abused. But this man was not as the others. Here was a sahib. Such consideration as he had shown must come from the heart of understanding.

Involuntarily Dorland blocked the Corporal's path. Reason had nothing to say in the matter. He was obeying a force stronger than reason. The Corporal gazed at him with a curious look in his eyes. Dorland was struck by what those eyes revealed. And he was afraid that he was not going to be recognised. But the next moment proved this fear to be groundless. The haggard face changed suddenly to what it had been as Dorland first remembered it.

"Hulloa, *mon ami*," said the Corporal In his deep voice. "How do you find yourself this morning?"

Gratitude and relief surged through Dorland as he promptly declared himself very much better.

"You are certainly looking very much better. Did you get a good sleep under that tree?"

"Oh yes, thanks, I did."

"I hope there were no developments when you joined *les autres*?" The Corporal smiled just a little.

"Fortunately none."

"In luck, old man. I meant to look you up to see if you were all right, but our lot was fixed at the other end of the wood, and this is the first free minute I've had since I left you." It was not a corporal of the Legion speaking to a common soldier, it was the genial note of one friend to another, the tone Dorland was accustomed to in the only world in which it had ever seemed worth while to exist.

"May I offer you a cigarette?" It is not usual for a common soldier to offer a *sous-officier* a cigarette in the middle of manoeuvres, but one irregularity is apt to beget another.

"Thank you so much." The Corporal's air as he accepted the cigarette suddenly thrust back the mercurial Dorland to *le Cercle* at Paris and the Lambs in New York. This was a delightful fellow.

"Let's find a place in the shade," said the Corporal. "Over there, right among the trees where we can't be seen." The senior in rank and also in age led the way through the grass, past a group of sweating legionaries gratefully stretched in siesta, to a cool place under a large oak where nothing human was in sight. Each waited for the other to sit down. It was as if they were not quite sure whose club it was, and whose the privilege therefore to take the second fauteuil after having pressed the button to summon the waiter.

Alas, there was no button to press, no waiter to summon.

"Try one of these. I got them the other day when I was over at Oran." The Corporal held the match while Dorland lit the cigarette he had been given, and then with a slight bow indicated to the American the spot that looked most comfortable beneath the tree. For all that the Corporal was so tattered and razorless Dorland acutely felt the grand seigneur behind the simple gesture.

"Do you know, old man," said the Corporal when they had arranged themselves and were puffing away contentedly, "it's done me good meeting you. I find one gets so depressed living month after month with nobody but oneself to talk to. I've nothing in common with these chaps. They can't be as bad as they seem, but one doesn't understand their lingo nor

does one particularly want to. Most of them are as crooked-ugly as a bunch of rattlesnakes."

That was exactly Dorland's feeling, but he was content merely to nod so as not to interrupt the confidences of the elder man.

"Still if one must fix oneself up with a bed of nettles, why complain when one has to lie in it?" The Corporal laughed bitterly. This again was precisely Dorland's feeling. "I wouldn't mind so much," the Corporal went on, "if they meant to give you a square deal. But they don't. Here you are at every dago's mercy. I've done three years' hard service with this regiment and I thought I'd earned a right to fight in France. But not at all. They've turned down every application I've made. And it begins to look now as if they mean to send me back to the Sahara." On those last words the tone and manner of the Corporal abruptly changed. At the word Sahara a shudder ran through him. It was long drawn and tense, the sudden emanation of a despair beyond despair.

The silence was painful. And then the Corporal spoke again. "But why meet trouble half way?" He took a long pull at his tobacco. "Only fools do that. Let us talk of something cheerful. Tell me about yourself, old son." In the ear of Dorland that sounded like irony, yet he knew it was not. He knew that this man in his own way was suffering as much as he. The Corporal was more balanced, more stable, far more experienced, but he, too, was absolutely "fed." This poor fellow, too, was almost as weakly human. Dorland pitied him deeply, yet a shade of disappointment mingled with his sorrow. He had hoped for a kind of demi-god, but demi-gods simply did not happen in such a world as this.

"Dorland you said your name was. Artist, eh? Must be hell all the time, for a chap like you."

With a queer tightening of the throat Dorland allowed that much. It was due less to his own private emotions than the recognition of an echo from a charming and gracious mind. Whoever this man was he, too, suffered very deeply.

"I wonder if you'd mind telling me your name?" Dorland ventured.

The Corporal's melancholy plucked at the gentle heart of the questioner. "James Smith is my name," he said. And then he began to mingle a curious blend of humour with his gloom. "Otherwise Jimsmitt. Otherwise Smitt. Otherwise Smitten. Otherwise Smitten-of-Allah. A queer sort of perisher. Been through many incarnations no doubt. Some of 'em very unsuccessful, or they wouldn't have saved it up for him in this one the way they have. But grousing leads nowhere." With a sudden wrench of the will that Dorland could almost feel the Corporal broke off short. "If one gets thinking about oneself in this outfit one is bound to go mad," he added rather piteously.

"Tell me, old man, have you put in for the Western Front?"

Dorland said he had.

"And they turned you down?"

"I'm afraid so. At any rate I've had no reply."

"They don't play the game," said the Corporal. "Policing the Sahara isn't a white man's job and these people know it. But the fact is any man, no matter what his nationality, loses any sort of caste as soon as he is fool enough to join *la légion étrangère*." The Corporal did not disguise a note of bitterness. "They ought to stick up over the barrack gates at Sidi-bel-Abbès, 'Abandon hope all ye who enter here.'"

"Yes, that's absolutely true," said the American in his heart, but refrained with his lips. To complain of fate never brought solace to any man.

Half an hour they sat and talked. They had much in common. Jimsmitt, as he quaintly called himself, seemed to know a great deal of that world in which it had always been Dorland's ambition to move. But it was the fact that he tried to conceal his knowledge that so much impressed the younger man. Before that memorable talk was at an end Dorland was convinced that Jimsmitt, whoever he might be, had a history. And the more they talked the stronger this feeling grew. The American with his keen perception was soon aware of hidden things. It needed them to explain his presence in the Legion. Nearly every legionary had a secret of some kind which constituted his *raison d'être*. Dorland, without venturing

a guess at Jimsmitt's past, and without giving rein to an impertinent curiosity, would have paid a good deal to learn who Jimsmitt really was and why he had entered this antechamber of hell.

For these men only terms of that kind could paint the life they were condemned to live. Each looked into the heart of the other. The Englishman was older than Dorland in more things than mere years. And there was something a little paternal in his attitude towards him. Clearly he had taken a liking to this rather naïve and simple-hearted young man. But when they came to talk the American was far the more open of the two. In a fashion curiously frank, and very pleasing for one craving human intercourse, the young fellow told a good deal about himself, the life he had led in New York, Paris, Rome, his secret ambition, his present eclipse.

Jimsmitt, on the other hand, was careful to disclose very little. One fact in regard to him, however, soon emerged. He was afraid of something. His sombre eyes, the overtones of a singularly deep and beautiful voice, the occasional twitching of his slender hands, the nervousness of every gesture, betrayed him to the keen-eyed Dorland.

Was this man afraid of madness? The American was inclined to think he was, and perhaps the more readily because his own mind was haunted by that awful fear.

"This death-in-life," said Jimsmitt, as he offered his companion another cigarette, "drives one to absinthe. It's something in the climate. But dope is worse than damnation for you and me." The Corporal shuddered, and Dorland by the force of experience also shuddered. "Don't touch the stuff, my son. Sooner or later it means *le cafard*."

Dorland had heard a good deal about that strange form of madness that so often comes upon the white man in the desert. Therefore he was not in need of warning; that is to say, he had refused to take warning already. His loosening will had toyed for some time with an illicit remedy for blank depression.

Did this new friend know that? Could he have guessed a secret of which Dorland was heartily ashamed? His words had an impressiveness which made it seem exceedingly likely. Yet how could he know? Dorland did not believe there was anything in his own speech and manner to tell him. Nor did he believe, bag of misery though he was, that the fatal signs had yet come out in his appearance. This man could not, and Dorland vowed that he should not, pierce his secret.

"Is it so bad as all that?" He tried to speak lightly and in his own ear succeeded. The cleverest man alive would have been taken in by such an offhand tone.

"Hell and damnation, old man." Somehow the voice of Jimsmitt made his blood run thin. "Leave the green stuff alone whatever you do." Again Jimsmitt shuddered, again Dorland realised part of the truth concerning him. "If you don't, and you go up into the Sahara, and from what I hear it looks as if they mean to send us there pretty soon, it would be a thousand times better you had never been born."

That seemed to be the point to which an unforgettable conversation had been leading. At any rate it was the end.

"There's the bugle." The Corporal, gaunt and livid, rose from beneath the tree, "Don't think me impertinent, will you?" Appeal, solicitude, apology were in the charming voice. "But I felt I must tell you. Promise you'll keep off it."

A tense moment was filled by the strident notes of the "fall in." And then Dorland, with those deep, sombre and tragic eyes fixed upon his own, said huskily, "Yes ... I'll promise ... to keep off the filth."

IV

Soon they were on the march again. It was still very hot, but a change was in the sky. Banks of cloud were piling up in the southwest. A heavy storm rode in their midst, but to Dorland the sight was not unwelcome. Anything was better just now than that ball of living fire which shrivelled him. The pendulum had swung back. His tongue was out again, he

was limping painfully, his head was at its tricks. He was organised too delicately for prolonged endurance. Soon the weight of his pack began to seem intolerable and he found himself stumbling, but this time he was determined that no matter what happened he would not give in.

The journey home was very trying. Instead of a straight four hours' march back to Sidi-bel-Abbès the return was by a circuitous route of nearly eight. Early in the afternoon came the threatened storm. Rain of a tropical violence overwhelmed them. Dorland was pierced to the skin, water flowed from his knapsack in a never ending stream, his boots were waterlogged. Hard the going had been along the rough desert roads, but his ironshod brodequins had now to squelch through a heavy paste of red mud. Had it not been for a couple of short halts he must have fallen out. As it was he could just keep up with the battalion. But for Dorland savage rain was a less evil than brutal sun, so that when the gates of the town hove in sight, and the band of the Legion struck up the *Marseillaise*, he was still miraculously in step with his own *escouade*.

Painfully he entered the caserne. Then he climbed up to his *chambrée*, stripped in the midst of thirty others, dried his body as well as he could and exchanged his soaked uniform for fatigue dress. As he did so his eye lit on the broken panes and his heart sank. No questions had been asked as yet. Everybody had been far too busy; yet he felt sure of trouble. The only thing in his favour was that the window was high up and did not readily catch the eye. All the same he had precious little hope of escaping the punishment he had earned.

When he had changed he went down to the lavabo and wrung out his clothes and then returned with them and spread them out over his cot. As it was still raining in torrents there was nowhere else to dry them. Besides he must not let them out of his sight. Kit was continually stolen and according to the law it was the victim who had to shoulder the responsibility. Either he must replace the missing attire with that of somebody else or pay the price of his negligence. Dorland had paid the price several times already.

When he had strung out his clothes he sat down beside them. Having a little time on his hands he fell into another fit of the blues. The discovery of Jimsmitt had cheered him immensely. But already the first elation had worn off. Again the mercury had fallen. He was lonely as ever. Yet not quite. No longer was he utterly friendless, and the thought was like wine. It had always been his nature to seek the countenance of others, first his father and mother, both of whom were dead, then his pastors and masters at Harvard and at Paris. This man Jimsmitt had come to him in a sore hour; he was like a special messenger from God. Dorland felt that life had changed already, and he would have yielded ten years of it gladly in his present mood had Jimsmitt been the room-corporal of the hateful dormitory in which he sat.

All that remained for him now was to look forward to the hour when he should see this friend again. But when that hour would be was hard to say. It was unlawful for a *sous-officier* to fraternise with a common soldier and there was the further drawback that he belonged to another company. Dorland, however, could only hope that it would soon be his privilege to foregather once more with a "white man." In the meantime he must bear in mind the promise he had solemnly given that he would keep off absinthe.

As a fact Dorland had made that decision before Jimsmitt put it up to him. He knew the green stuff was threatening his brain. The awful despair that had sandbagged his mind was the result of dope. Seated on his cot in the midst of a babel he made no effort to follow, well knowing sheer disgust would have been the only reward, he began to realise how slight was the chance of keeping his word. All the omens he had learned to fear in the very depths of his soul were swooping upon him like vultures. The craving for the strange liquor was cruel. Already he was near the point when the will unaided could not carry on. If he was to get through the night of stifling horror that lay ahead of him in the inferno wherein he sat, if he was to ward off insomnia that so surely was unanchoring his brain, he must slip out into the town after the *appelle* and drink a little, just a very little of the only antidote there was.

What thoughts was he thinking? He must do nothing of the kind. In that direction lay madness.

To break the spell of his ideas he got up from his mattress. The aura of this spot was the seventh circle of Dante. Let him go somewhere else and change the sequence of his thoughts. Let him get away from this *canaille* with its bestial manners and happily unintelligible conversation. But there was nowhere else he could go. It was still raining cats and dogs. So he turned feverishly to *astiquage*, the eternal polishing of black leather straps and large cartridge cases. Work, work, work, incessant and for the most part senseless, that was the only anodyne for the ill from which he suffered.

That night, as it happened, Dorland's bed was less unkind than it had been for weeks. In part the change was due to an illicit cause; ventilation was provided by the broken panes above his head. He could breathe. Moreover he was bone tired after all those hours of marching in tropical rain and blistering sun. Also a moral factor was at work. He felt for the first time that within the precincts of those noisome barracks there was a friend. And the vital sense of that friendship had already borne fruit. Thus far he had been equal to his word. But for the promise to Jimsmitt he would have slipped off into the town after supper when the rain had ceased and bought temporary courage. However he had not done so, yet quite surprisingly he had managed to sleep. This successful exercise of the will gave him a glimmer of new hope.

Crushing monotony in the days which followed tried his resolve very severely. And he had to contend with the hostility of the others. Upon his first arrival he had made the mistake of letting them see how much he disliked them. In those moments of bitter disillusionment when he understood the tragic nature of his mistake and the character of those among whom he had cast his lot, he took no pains to hide his feelings. Hating the look and the sound and the smell of this rabble of low class foreigners with their unwashed bodies and foul clothes and dirty minds, his one aim was to give them a wide berth. It had advantages, but in the end the disadvantages outweighed them. *Vieux routiers* are past masters in the art of giving a *bleu* a bad time. As soon as they found out that Monsieur Mutt, as they called him, was keeping so much to himself because he despised them, that he never ate or drank with them, or walked and talked with them if he could possibly avoid so doing, they knew how to deal with him. And as they set him down a natural coward it was quite an easy job. They stole everything of his they could lay hands on, they did him a bad turn whenever they could, he often got a sly kick or a covert blow.

To make matters worse his enemies included the *sous-officiers*. These were dreaded by the hardest and most experienced *soldat*, for in the Legion as throughout the entire army of France they were all-powerful. Better be dead, said the old hands, than be in wrong with your corporal, your sergeant, your sergeant major and your adjutant. By this time the unfortunate Dorland knew in the marrow of his bones it was the truth. Better dead, yes, than to be in the black books of such men. More than once the dreaded Sergeant Major Hauptmann had promised faithfully to see that he ended up in the *Zéphyrs*. There was a tradition in the Ninth Company that Sergeant Major Hauptmann invariably kept his word in matters of that kind. Dorland felt he was condemned already by Court Martial to a long term of the terrible *Travaux Publiques*. Sergeant Major Hauptmann in his own good time would see that Monsieur Mutt received his due.

Meanwhile the scroll was heavily charged with minor punishments. Day after day he was given tasks that he loathed inexpressibly. Time and again it was his lot to fumigate sewers, load manure, clean out latrines. Every kind of fatigue there was greater competition than usual to escape invariably fell to Monsieur Mutt. He had *garde de chambre* weeks on end. Three times already he had undergone *salle de police*. And as Sergeant Major Hauptmann said with a touch of that sinister humour that endeared him to nobody, three goes of *salle de police* in the first six months of a *bleu's* career was a sure stepping stone to higher things. "One fine morning, my old, you will pay a visit to Oran and make your bow to *le Conseil de Guerre*. And then..." Sergeant Major Hauptmann, who had been bred not as an actor but as a pickpocket, had yet too fine a sense of the theatre to complete his prophecy.

If Monsieur Mutt did not realise that the rope was as good as round his neck it was not for lack of mass suggestion. One and all took a pleasure in bringing that home. Yet, strange to say, at the end of six months he was still alive, and, as far as a soldier of the Legion may be said to be free, he was still free. They had scared him pretty badly one way and another, but he now felt the time was coming when they would be able to scare him no more. Imagination had made him sweat blood. Still he was passing through the fire. He had been knocked about pretty badly, but no bones were broken so far. And he was now fearing blows and shrinking from insults less. A man is a man wherever he may be, no matter how savagely he is tormented.

Dorland waited uneasily for developments in the matter of the broken windows. Had another member of the *escouade* been guilty of a crime that was not specially heinous, things might perhaps have been made easy for him. But things were never made easy for Monsieur Mutt. Howbeit one day passed, then another, no comment was made, no question asked. Perhaps the affair would blow over. Certainly those panes so high up in the wall did not accost the eye. Even the lynx eye of the Sergeant Major at kit inspection had overlooked them. And Corporal Fabre, who by a miracle had heard nothing of the matter at the time it occurred, did not seem to have noticed them either. Or if he had, and no doubt this was the true interpretation, he was far too old a hand to stir up a hornet's nest.

For a few days nothing much happened. Dorland managed somehow to keep out of trouble. He was no fool in

anything to which he gave his mind. And he seemed to have a run of luck. For several nights he slept better. It may have been that the fugg was less overpowering in the *chambrée* now that its windows were no longer sealed; again the knowledge that somewhere in the barracks was a friend and comrade may have acted upon him. Yet there were times all the same when he was sunk in black despair.

This hateful life was doing nothing to advance the cause Dorland had at heart. He was prepared to make sacrifices of personal comfort, of mental habit, but they must be leading somewhere. In this blind alley he was merely rotting. Evil, injustice, meaningless degradation were rife. He felt that he would give his very soul to get away from it all. But there seemed no chance of that. The chains were too firmly riveted. He had made several appeals by letter to be transferred to the Western Front, but he was without friends who could help him, or any kind of military credentials or influence and he had received no reply.

The prospect before him was terrible. He had enlisted for five years, but he did not know how he was going to keep on for half that period. His nerves had worn thin, and he had a perpetual craving now for the only alleviation of which he knew. But he had been solemnly warned that if he persisted in this false remedy the end would be madness, crime, and a death of dishonour. Such an end would be of a piece with his present surroundings, but none the less he wanted to avoid it. During these highly critical days he tried very hard to brace his will.

While his sanity hung in the balance, for the fight that was going on in his brain was a threat to reason itself, he craved an opportunity to talk again with Jimsmitt. But the heavy round of his duties and his subordinate position were much against him. Besides he soon found more trouble. He had been lucky in the matter of the broken windows, but a few days after the manoeuvres somebody "borrowed" his sash, and as he had neither the inclination nor the address to "borrow" that of somebody else, as any other man in the caserne would have done, he met with severe reproof from the Sergeant-Major, who promptly gave him three weeks' *garde de chambre* with a lively promise of worse to follow.

For Dorland three weeks' *garde de chambre* was bad enough. It meant never a moment to oneself from morning bugle to lights out. He was at everybody's beck and call. All the things to avoid fell to him automatically. Moreover he was not able to get into the town. That cut two ways since the green stuff was not sold in the canteen in the barrack square; but it also destroyed any hope of meeting his friend. And the injustice seemed to fill his cup. He should have taken better care of his sash certainly, for loss of equipment was treated as a felony, but its abstraction had been the work of an expert thief and the whole thing rankled.

Now that Dorland was strictly confined to his own section of the barracks his chance of meeting a corporal in the Fifth Company was very remote. In fact his only hope was the weekly march out to a *champ de tir* some distance off, where special evolutions were performed by the whole battalion. Dorland kept a sharp look-out for his friend on these occasions. Once or twice he fancied he caught a glimpse of that slight, trim form. Yet there was no opportunity of making himself known even had it been he, and of this Dorland was not sure.

Resentment and bitterness were taking root in what until a few months ago had been a sweet nature. And that nature, not really perverted as yet by all the foul use it had received, had a longing that was almost a passion to meet again a "white man." But it looked as if this simple boon was to be denied. One week grew into two, two grew into three, but Dorland was able to get no word with Jimsmitt.

Meanwhile he was becoming desperate. The life was beyond his physical strength and to make matters worse he was the prey of insomnia. Worn out though he was, aching in every bone from sheer fatigue, when he threw himself on his mattress he could not rest. His nights were broken and disturbed. All this weighed him down. Therefore it was not surprising that as soon as his term of *garde de chambre* was up he turned to the only palliative now open to him.

At the first opportunity he went into the town. Almost without conscious volition he found himself in the narrow and squalid by-street in which "the stuff" was to be had. It was, of course, no remedy. Nay, in this stifling heat it was a form of suicide. But this evening, the first of his release, he simply could not resist it. He must have something to make him sleep tonight, something to deaden the pain of an intolerable life. If he sipped enough of the green mixture it would induce pleasant dreams. The dreams were very transient, but while they lasted they made an illusion of well being. When the effect of the drug wore off it was, of course, another story. Soon or late it was bound to destroy him. Being this evening in a state of utter despair, he felt the sooner he made an end of things the better.

Limp and wretched and possessed by a sense of mental and moral uncleanness, he walked along the lane until he came to the door of a dismal sort of dive called the Golden Bowl. It was a hole-and-corner affair kept by a Levantine who answered to the name of Mustapha. Two Spahis and a civilian who had the look of a Greek sat drinking some kind of hooch at a little table. This haunt was known only to the few. Queer sorts of dope of all nations, from the yala-yala of the Berber and the kmalla of the Senussi to the special blends of firewater which rejoiced the heart of the civilised European, could be had at the Golden Bowl. The capacity to pay for them was all that was necessary.

Dorland's pay as a member of the Legion amounted to the magnificent sum of one halfpenny a day in the currency of France. This did not go far with Mustapha, but unfortunately the young painter was able to supplement it with money of his own. A couple of thousand francs still remained to his credit at a bank in the town; and this sum would keep him in absinthe for some time. Mustapha gave the gaunt and hollow-eyed legionary the bland smile he reserved for the regular and approved customer. Then he jerked a brown thumb over his shoulder towards an inner sanctuary, lifted the flap of a zinc counter, pulled aside the curtain of this holy of holies and politely bowed Dorland within.

It was the Mecca of the solitary and experienced drinker. Dorland entered this airless place, whose cubic capacity was about six feet by seven, with a feeling of shame. He loathed himself for the thing he was doing. Was it not a deliberate breaking of his word? Nay, it was a breaking of the promise made to his mother's memory. Every time he entered this seductive little hell brought him one step nearer damnation. Well, what of it? He couldn't go on as he was. Life had come to a dead end. The sooner the curtain was rung down the better; yet he knew only too well this was not the way to do it. As he passed into this private fugg-hole he saw the consequences plainly before him. But his strength had gone. And as he had not the pluck to shoot himself he must risk *le cafard*.

Bogged in a morass of black thoughts it came rather as a shock to Dorland to find a man seated at the table in the tiny room. He had not expected to see anyone. But it did happen on occasion that another connoisseur was seated there. This one was holding a curious long-stemmed delicately wrought liqueur glass up to the light, and it was full of a green fluid. For the moment Dorland did not recognise him. Indeed the recognition came first from the connoisseur. "My God," he said.

To Dorland the sound of that gentle voice was like a blow in the face.

"Just in time, old man," said Jimsmitt very quietly, as if it were the most ordinary matter in the world. "Just in time to take this stuff off me." Thereupon he lowered his glass and with a wan smile set it upon the table.

Before the bewildered and unhappy Dorland could find any words to speak, Mustapha, whose efficiency in such matters was remarkable, had brought in a glass that was an exact replica of the one Jimsmitt had just set down. They waited for Mustapha to retire, and then Jimsmitt, having politely indicated a vacant seat the opposite side of the table and Dorland having taken it, they sat gazing at one another in an odd silence which for the younger man was full of an intense embarrassment.

"Set a thief to catch a thief, eh, old man?" said Jimsmitt lightly. The half humorous tone somehow took any hint of tragedy out of their meeting. "You must have guessed the other day the sort of bird I was. But I'm bound to say, if you'll forgive me, I hadn't quite guessed the sort of bird you are."

The note of camaraderie took any sting out of the gentle thrust, but Dorland was feeling very uncomfortable. He lacked the sang-froid and the poise of the elder man. Whatever Jimsmitt had in the way of shame was concealed under his banter. Behind all, however, was the gravity of one who knows he is very near the end of his tether.

"I hope you realise," said Jimsmitt when each had more or less recovered from the shock of the other's presence in that room, "that we are both heading straight for the precipice?"

Dorland did realise that and confessed it.

"Well, what's to be done about it? You see we are both sensible men at bottom."

The American for his part was not quite sure that either of them deserved that compliment. The two glasses of absinthe that stood between them were a very bitter comment upon any claims they might have on that score.

"Fact is I've heard bad news," said Jimsmitt in a low voice. "I daresay you've heard it, too."

Dorland's head-shake denied that he had lately heard any worse news than usual.

Jimsmitt got up from the table and went to the curtain to make sure that it was drawn properly and that no one could overhear. Then he came back and resumed his seat heavily. As he did so Dorland was struck by the grey weariness of that enigmatic face. It was somehow a little fey. The look in the sombre eyes, which yet miraculously retained the power to smile, drove to the heart of the younger man. Here was mystery. And he did not doubt that here also was tragedy.

"They say," continued Jimsmitt in that voice gentle, low and kind that had such a fascination for the American, "that In about a month's time half our battalion will be moving up into the Sahara."

"Well, I hope I shall be chosen, although I'm afraid there isn't much chance."

"Why do you say that?"

"Because," said Dorland, "I'd rather be anywhere than where I am now. If I stay here much longer I shall go mad."

A look of genuine pity came into the face of the elder man. "My dear fellow, you've not been in the Sahara, have you?"

"No."

"Well, I have. I've served there a year, cooped up in a mud fort, two hundred miles from the nearest Arab village, in the midst of two thousand miles of burning sand, with a sun twice as hot as it is here pouring down on you all day. It is like living in a baker's oven. I tell you, my friend, Sidi-bel-Abbès is a health resort compared to the place we are going to in the Sahara."

Jimsmitt shivered as he spoke. Involuntarily his fingers strayed to the liqueur glass on the table. But he did not raise the fatal brew to his lips. He, too, was almost at the end of his rope, but he still retained the embers of sanity.

"You can't imagine what the place is like. I wouldn't condemn my worst enemy to spend a whole year in that lime kiln. Twelve months is the limit, but it's much too long for most of those who go there. Two in five go mad within six months. And if once you take to this stuff"—Jimsmitt held up his glass—"you have simply no chance at all."

"And if you stay here," said Dorland, "you've not much chance either."

"Not much," Jimsmitt agreed, "unless you can keep off this."

"Well," Dorland confessed, "as things are with me now I don't see how I'm going to keep off it."

"How long have you been at this game, old man?" The question was put in the affectionate voice of a kindly elder brother.

"I first acquired the taste in Paris," said Dorland frankly. "But there, living a good life, a sensible life, a happy life, I could always close it down when I wanted to. Here it's different. It sort of gets hold of you in this hell on earth. It kind of masters you. I'm at the point now when I simply can't carry on without it."

"Yes, I see you are. When I met you first, three weeks ago, I rather guessed something was wrong, but I didn't think you had gone so far." There was a pause that was painful and then Jimsmitt added, "Well, old son, what's to be done about it?"

"I just don't know," said Dorland dismally.

"Nor I," said Jimsmitt. "We're in the same boat it seems. As things are with us there's only one remedy. If it is a remedy."

"Blow our brains out, I suppose."

"Yes, there's always that. But even that prescription has to be taken in time. If you play about too long with this dope you lose all volition. Absinthe saps the will."

Dorland knew that. Privately he doubted if he retained the power, if he had ever had it, of applying such a drastic cure. But he was careful not to betray his anxieties on this point.

"Still, after all, there may be an alternative," said the Englishman, looking steadily at the man before him. "I don't urge it for you. I wouldn't urge it for anybody. It may not be any good. From all that one hears it doesn't work out right once in a hundred times. All the same I've made up my mind to try it."

"Tell me what it is," said Dorland eagerly.

Jimsmitt cast an apprehensive eye towards the closely drawn curtains. "I'm thinking of going on pump." His voice rose hardly above a whisper.

"You are going to desert!" Dorland could not control a wild flutter of the nerves.

"Yes," said Jimsmitt sombrely. "I've thought the whole thing out and I've pretty well decided to do it."

Dorland suddenly felt the room to be stifling him. He, too, had given thought to that way of escape, but his common sense had assured him that the hope was too slender. It was not a reasonable hazard. Yet if this friend, a real campaigner who had had experience of the desert, had really made up his mind to the chance, it seemed like a heaven-sent opportunity.

"Jimsmitt," said Dorland hoarsely as he half rose from his chair, "please take me with you."

The man the other side of the table looked at Dorland steadily and with a sort of pity. But he said nothing.

V

"I mean it," said Dorland breaking a tense silence. "Better to die of thirst and sunstroke out in the desert than like a rat in a sewer in a French penal battalion."

"Ye-es, I think you are right," said Jimsmitt slowly. "At least it means a run for your money. If we stay here, now we've fallen for this green filth, there's simply no chance at all. If we take to the desert we've not much chance either. They say the successful *poumpistes* don't work out at one per cent. So ponder it well, old man. And if there is any other cure for your complaint, if you can even see the ghost of one, you had better take it. For, as I say, it's not easy to exaggerate the chances against us."

Dorland felt his case to be so hopeless that his decision was made already. It was a drowning man clutching at a straw; but there was no alternative. He was under a threat of madness anyway. Life in the Lost Legion had driven him too far.

"You must think it over." Jimsmitt spoke gently and kindly. "Look all round before you take the plunge. There's not only thirst and starvation to think of, there's the Bedouin, too. You've seen what they do, the gentle Touareg ladies. I hope you've examined that jolly little collection of photographs on the wall of your caserne."

Dorland had done so and wished he had not. Those pictures spoke of mutilation and torture beyond belief. Still if the worst came it would be over comparatively soon. It would not be a world-without-end of slowly accumulating misery.

"Then there are the *goums* who are always on the prowl," Jimsmitt proceeded, "not to mention the police spies in all the towns and villages within a radius of two hundred miles. There's a substantial reward you know on the head of a deserter."

Dorland was aware of that. Was he not only too familiar with most of the arguments against going on pump? He knew how powerful they were. More than once lately he had considered the pros and cons of the matter. But tonight in spite of everything there was not a doubt in his mind that a heaven-sent opportunity had presented itself. It simply must not be missed. "Jimsmitt," he said hoarsely, "if you are really going you must let me come with you."

"Sleep on it, old man."

"But you—really—are—quitting, aren't you?"

"Yes, I'm quitting all right. The only question is when. You see it's no use rushing your fences in a sport of this kind. Look before and after, that's the correct card. And when you've done all you can and taken every precaution there's not much hope in the desert for a lone Roumi."

"There'll be two of us anyhow."

"It'll need more than two of the likes of us, my son, to put the wind up a war party of the Touareg. By the way, do you happen to have picked up any Arabic?"

"Only a very few words I'm afraid."

"That's a pity." The voice of Jimsmitt told much. "One hears it is necessary to have some Arabic when you go into the desert."

Dorland's heart sank. It was hardly wise to confess his ignorance, yet it would not have been honest to pretend to knowledge he had not.

"You see it all needs very careful planning if we are to give ourselves half a chance of getting clear."

"It must be the desert I suppose?"

Jimsmitt thought there was no other way. It would be hopeless to try the sea. "No chance at all on the coast, particularly in war time," he said. "Everything is far too well organised. No, it's the desert. And at the very worst time of the year."

"I'm quite game," said the American, his heart beating fast. "If the risk is good enough for you it's good enough for me—if only you'll take me along. Of course, I've no Arabic, but I won't let you down." He could tell from Jimsmitt's race how damaging was the admission. But if the Englishman was a true friend he would surely stretch a point. Was he a true friend? Dorland peered across the table anxiously. The silence was painful. He knew that a man like himself adrift in North Africa and unable to speak Arabic was bound to prove a dangerous passenger. He might easily give away those who did. And it was pretty clear that the Corporal saw that only too plainly.

"I won't let you down—if you'll take me," Dorland persisted.

With a gesture that told nothing Jimsmitt laid his untasted glass on the bamboo table. "Let us think it over, old man," he said in his soft, melancholy voice. "It is not a thing to jump into."

"Will you take me?" the young man persisted.

"Sleep on it, *mon ami*."

"If I sleep on it for a month I shall not change my mind. I'll run any risk to get away from what is coming to me here."

There was a long pause. It was ended at last by Jimsmitt rising slowly from the table. Very simply he laid his hand on Dorland's shoulder. "Don't let us decide it now," he said. "It's not a thing to decide on the spur of the moment. You are a young man, you have a clean bill; when you've done your time with the Legion there's a place waiting for you where you belong. With me it's different. Whatever happens I'm a washout anyway. But with you, as I say, it's another pair of shoes. Before you take the plunge you must think ahead."

"Oh, yes, I know," said Dorland. "But don't you realise it's the only chance I've got?"

"It may be so. And yet for your own sake I'm rather hoping you are mistaken."

Finally leaving their liquor untouched to the keen surprise of Mustapha, who, however, was duly paid, they passed out of the sanctuary together and through the outer door of the Golden Bowl into the dark and narrow lane. Arm in arm they went towards the *sôk*, which was in the centre of the town. In the course of a long stroll through the purlieus of Sidi-bel-Abbès the two men continued their discussion. The American was in a state of excitement he could hardly control, but his friend the Corporal, richer in years and experience, was strangely cool. He verged upon reticence. Plans were being matured, and Dorland gathered that other legionnaires were in the scheme. The attempt was to be made on scientific lines. Otherwise, said Jimsmitt, it was worse than useless to make it. But what the plan was, and just how it was to be put through, Jimsmitt would not divulge. His only sop for the American's passionate curiosity was a promise of further details when they met again.

In a tone that made no secret of disappointment Dorland asked when that meeting was likely to be.

"I'll look out for you at the route march next Thursday, old man. In the meantime we'll both put on our thinking caps. We really mustn't decide in a hurry."

So they went on through the alleys of the town. Silence and constraint overtook them, yet a sense of real and growing friendship was always there. Ultimately they entered the dismal lane that divides the barracks of the Spahis from those of the Legion. And then the younger man fixed a sudden grip upon the tunic of his companion. "Jimsmitt," he whispered hoarsely, "I simply have to be in this. If you won't take me I shall go by myself. And that's all there is to it."

They shook hands in the gloom and went their ways after a final and desperate, "You will look out for me Thursday, won't you," from the American.

Feverish with excitement Dorland climbed the dark stone stairs to his dormitory. New vistas were opening in his mind. To escape, to be free of this squalor! Why had he not made up his mind sooner? A man of less imagination would certainly have done so. It was said that to go on pump by yourself in the desert was a short cut to hell. Perhaps. But that was the point he was coming to now. Things had gone so ill with him and there was so little hope of amendment they were bound to get worse. It was surely the hour for a gambler's throw.

Would the Englishman let him into his own caravan? A few brief days would decide. Meanwhile Ambrose Dorland must forswear absinthe and keep out of "clink." To miss the route march would be fatal. In that event he was never likely to see his friend again. Caught in a mill race of hectic thoughts he sank once more into vile dreams.

Next day, for the time being free of *garde de chambre* and with nothing more tangible against him than the ill will of the *sous-officiers* and the malice of *les autres*, he gave himself up to a mirage of hope. He was like a galley slave who ventures to believe that his dhow is about to sink. That was the kind of exhilaration Dorland felt. It was a choice between the frying pan and the fire. Dorland preferred the fire. Would Jimsmitt take him? Hour by hour that grim question tore his mind. It was the thought that closed his eyes at night, the problem that opened them in the morning.

Sunday passed, a sorely needed time of comparative rest. One had to be a legionnaire to realise the true value of Sunday. Then came Monday, a day of peril, spent under the shadow of the sergeant major. On Mondays there were two kit inspections of a strict kind. This bully invariably started a new week by making it hot for somebody. *La cellule* never loomed so near as on Monday. Dorland went about his chores walking very delicately, hoping thereby not to incur notice. He slunk along corridors when nobody was by, he watched the colour sergeant as a performing dog watches the man with the whip. It was degrading to be in the toils of chartered brutes like these, but if the untoward happened

between now and Thursday, so that when the battalion marched out on the monthly manoeuvres he was doing *salle de police*, his last hope was gone. Nothing would be left to him then except to go out into the desert alone.

Monday passed, Tuesday passed. He was still free. Wednesday began badly with a sharp reprimand from his corporal for some minor fault committed by somebody else. It was the kind of thing he was used to, but he knew how easily it might lead to trouble. Incidents of that kind had a knack of breeding ugly and unforeseen consequences. On Wednesday night, therefore, it was a blessed relief to seek his hard mattress with nothing definitely against him. Unless Fate was holding some dirty trick in reserve which she meant to play at the very last moment, and you couldn't trust the jade an inch, No. 17883 Ambrose Dorland *soldat deuxième classe*, would march out with the rest of the Ninth Company at 5:45 A.M. the next morning.

As it happened that inefficient bleu, that *pékin* did march out. Behind the famous band of the Legion playing *La Pompomière*, he swung through the town with the others. As he did so he felt that for once certain ladies busily weaving a malign web had been caught napping. He was in a turmoil of excitement. But he managed to keep himself in hand. It was not yet six o'clock in the morning, but the heat was already severe. His mind went back to that other hot day a month ago which had changed his life. Odd the way things happen. Had not the cruel heat of that day knocked him out he would never have met a good Samaritan disguised as a corporal of the Fifth. Today the sun of Algiers promised to be just as hard upon a nerve-racked poilu whose kit was more than he could carry; but a new strength was in his veins.

The march, as usual, was terribly gruelling. By now the terrain was only too familiar to Dorland. The hard rough track was sown with painful memories, but at least one spot which he passed was hallowed by the aura of a friend. He was a different man from what he had been a month ago. It was as if a lamp was lit in his heart. At each brief halt he looked around for Jimsmitt with a feeling of curious excitement. But disappointment succeeded disappointment. His friend was nowhere to be seen. Dorland told himself that a wide gulf yawned between a corporal of the Fifth Company and a common soldier of the Ninth. He must possess his soul in patience until the serious business of the day was over, then he would be able to go forth boldly and seek him. But in the meantime he could not allay a gnawing anxiety. It was difficult not to put a sinister construction on this aloofness. Had the corporal had good news for him he must have found an early opportunity to let him know it. To Dorland his absence was significant. Evidently Jimsmitt had decided to turn down his appeal.

VI

Hour by hour they halted for a few minutes' rest, but no corporal of the Fifth Company appeared, and Dorland's heart sank lower. He had been much too optimistic. Jimsmitt was not going alone on the great adventure. What more likely than that the others should decline to encumber themselves with an inexperienced rookie, physically weak, who hardly knew a word of Arabic. Yes, it was asking too much. Dorland tried to pluck the thought from his mind. But at each halt the shadow grew. By noon it filled him with such savage depression that his head once more began to swim. Still he was determined to keep on now even if in the end he fell down dead by the roadside.

Would that he might do so. If his appeal were refused a worse death awaited him. He didn't know how he managed to keep going through all the evolutions of a dreadful afternoon. The twistings and turnings, the taking of cover, the firing of blank cartridges became a form of delirium. He sweated and frizzled in his *capote*, he couldn't get his breath after *pas gymnastique* uphill and down. All he did was merged in a Walpurgis Night of crass insanity. About five o'clock these orgies were ended for the time being by the sound of the *Rompez*. And then Dorland, weak and gasping, sank to the earth on the verge of collapse.

He had just strength enough left to go and collect a *gamelle* of *soupe*. After that was eaten in the shade he felt better. Then he was free to lie down and sleep for two hours or to wander in the woods and the fields before turning in for the night. He must not think of rest, however, until he had run to earth the corporal of the Fifth Company and had spoken with him. When he had smoked a cigarette he went forth to look for Jimsmitt.

He had hardly gone ten yards upon his quest when he saw a familiar form approaching. Dorland realised at once that Jimsmitt was looking for him.

A complex of strange, rather wild emotion, the American leapt forward to greet his friend. But he did not dare to glance at that face. Doom was in it. Dorland's heart sank. He did not know how he would survive the blow he was about to receive.

"So here you are, old man," said the Corporal in his charming manner. "Lucky to find you. Like looking for a needle in a bundle of hay."

Dorland tried to read his fate in the casual tone. But he was not successful. The tone was just as usual. It told nothing.

"Where can we go to be quiet?"

"In the middle of that wood yonder," Dorland suggested huskily. It was as if each word clove to the roof of his mouth. "No one there to overhear, I fancy."

"Righto," said Jimsmitt cheerily, "I'll lead the way."

They walked across a carpet of pine needles, moss and fern and dry leaves. At every step Dorland felt his heart against his ribs. Was this white man, this congenial spirit about to dash the cup from his lips? He was friendly as ever. Was it in him to deny one who was thirsting and hungering for a little kindness? Surely not. Yet a voice whispered in Dorland's ear that there was no ground for hope.

"This place looks all right," said the Corporal when they had trekked in silence, one behind the other, for about a quarter of a mile. "Sit, my son."

Dorland sat.

"We'll light our fags and then we'll talk things over." And Jimsmitt also sat.

It seemed an age to Dorland before Jimsmitt really opened the ball.

"Well, young fellow," said the Corporal in a fashion curiously slow and deliberate, "let us come to the horses. We've gone into this matter very carefully, my friend and I, we've talked it over pretty fully, and we've decided that if you've really and truly made up your mind to join the expedition you may do so."

Dorland needed some little time to grasp the full significance of these words. And then came a wave of intense relief. A burst of gratitude followed, low toned but emotional.

Jimsmitt cut it short with a laugh. "My dear lad," he said, "keep all that. There's precious little to be thankful for. I want you to get that fixed in your mind. You know pretty well what your present troubles are, but when we find ourselves out there, a thousand, two thousand, three thousand miles from the white race, if we ever get as far, there's simply no saying what they will be."

"That I realise," said Dorland, "but I still thank you."

"We may go mad with thirst," said Jimsmitt, "we may be filleted by the Touareg, we may be eaten by lions, we may be recaptured by *goums*, we may be mutilated by marsh Arabs. And even if we avoid every one of these luxuries at the best of it we are bound to find life most damnably unpleasant for a long time to come. So I say again think it all well over before you decide."

"I have already decided. If you take me, I come."

"Stout fellow," laughed Jimsmitt.

But there was no laugh in Dorland. Deep in his heart was the knowledge that he was not a stout fellow.

However, that was neither here nor there. It did not matter in what colours Jimsmitt painted the picture, the younger man had fully made up his mind to a great hazard.

"When do you start?"

"Wednesday evening at nightfall. The sooner we go the better."

Dorland agreed.

"It suits you I hope."

"As far as I know at the moment it suits me down to the ground. But as the sergeant major always has it in for me I am quite likely to get another trick of *garde de chambre*. And should I happen to be doing it on Wednesday I may not be able to get away until lights out."

"If you can't we'll wait till you come."

"Where do I pick you up?"

"You know the Arab quarter at the far end of the town?"

Dorland knew where it was.

"Then you know the common, and the bridge that leads to it."

"Yes, I can find those all right."

"Cross that bridge, and just before you enter the path that leads to the Village Nègre turn rather sharp left. Cut straight across the common and you'll find a nest of squalid and rambling Arab houses. When you get into the nest take the first turn right, and then the first on the right again. Then keep to the left until you come to a long narrow street. In the middle of the street you will find a kind of archway. The second house on the right under the archway has a yellow door. Give three sharp knocks on that door, and say to anyone who opens it, 'I am a friend of Zeyd Mohammed,' and walk right in. I hope all this is clear."

To avoid any mistake Dorland repeated these directions in every detail.

"Good," said Jimsmitt. "But in the darkness it may not be easy to see the colour of the door, so don't forget to bring a box of matches. By the way," he added, "I suppose these blighters made you part with your suit of civvies when you came here?"

Dorland said they had.

"Well, I'll arrange for some clothes for you. And, by the way, do you happen to have some money? Every penny we can scrape together will be needed. And the more we have the better our chances at the start."

Dorland, it seemed, was very well provided with money. Astonishingly well provided for a legionary. He had no less than two thousand francs to his name at the Crédit Lyonnais in Sidi-bel-Abbès.

"Croesus," said Jimsmitt with a glowing eye, "that's a sum that will help considerably."

"I will draw it out as soon as we get back," said Dorland, "and then I'll hand it over to you."

"Splendid," said Jimsmitt. And they proceeded to arrange a meeting outside the bank in the town at half past five on the next afternoon but one. It was the earliest practicable moment and it seemed to clinch their bargain.

"I suppose I mustn't bring my gun and bayonet?"

"No, old man, you mustn't. Travel as light as possible. And at the first opportunity you've got to look as little like a legionary as you can. Leave your knapsack, also your *capote*. But there's one thing you might do. Should you happen to see the sergeant major's automatic hanging up in the guard room slip it into your pocket if you get the chance. In the places we're bound for it may be worth its weight in diamonds."

"Anything else?" said Dorland with a dour smile as he made a note of the suggestion.

"Let me urge you to be at the tryst as soon after dark as possible. The start may be touch and go. It is of great importance to be well on our way before dawn."

Dorland promised to bear this in mind. But he said again that he might be faced with certain obstacles. Jimsmitt in his wisdom was ready to make allowances for these.

This matter finally settled, the two friends lay side by side under the spreading leaves of an acacia, talking a little, smoking steadily, thinking a great deal. To the younger man with his peculiar temperament the sense of comradeship was soothing and delightful. He knew really nothing about this man he had picked up, but there was no mistaking the white man and the gentleman. Dorland had no doubt that he was a man with a history. That applied, almost without exception, to every soldier of the Legion. Unless he were an ignorant fool, a term Dorland did not hesitate to apply to himself, no man with the hallmark of birth and breeding upon him would ever find his way to the depot at Sidi-bel-Abbès except for some very private reason. What crime had Jimsmitt committed? What wrong had he wrought? It was hard to think of one who remained so gentle and charming in spite of the life he led, in any such connection, but Dorland felt that so it must be. All the same, these were blissful hours. They were a couple of down-and-outs; the world to which they both belonged was bound so to regard them; but deep called unto deep in a miraculous way. Each was stronger for the proximity of the other. The things they had suffered were branded upon their hearts. Others, perhaps more terrible, lay immediately ahead. Yet Dorland felt it was going to be far easier to sustain them, whatever they might prove to be, with the help of this unknown who in his darkest hour had come to him so providentially.

VII

When Dorland found himself back in the caserne, about five in the afternoon of the following day, he was still in the throes of an excitement he could not suppress. Dead beat with marching and toiling under an African sun, he went straight to the *chambrée* and flung himself onto his cot. Yet he could not rest. A thousand devils had him in their grip. He closed his eyes, but strange horrors swam in front of them. There was naught for it but to rise and turn to *astiquage*, that eternal meaningless polishing of leatherwork which every man did so unwillingly and with a sense of grievance. He was coming to think, however, that even *astiquage* had its uses. Just now it was a bromide for a mind feverish with anticipation.

Where a week ago he counted the days he now counted the hours. If all went well the freedom he craved with his entire being was very near. At the back of his mind, however, he knew the "if" was a big one. Lately a sense of malign fate had fallen upon him. He felt in the marrow of his bones that he was in the grip of an occult power. Something told him, even as he applied wax and elbow grease furiously to the leather, that before Wednesday at sundown a concealed rock was bound to trip him up. Was it that in his overburdened *cafard*-haunted brain he already carried the germs of dissolution? Imagination doth make cowards of us all. It was tragically true. Dorland had always been strung a little too high. As a child he had been afraid of his own shadow. Ambitious to prove his manhood he had joined *la légion étrangère* as a common soldier. What a piece of vainglorious folly!

He heard a heavy step at the far end of the long room. It was so familiar and so disconcerting that Dorland bent his sweating face lower. He did not dare to look up, yet he knew that Corporal Fabre was gazing at him. Also he knew that Fabre was in a sour mood, and that he was only too likely to vent it upon somebody. Dorland held his breath. What new

injustice was this low bully about to wreak? In a quake of fear the young man waited for the sound of that hated voice. Would it be some loathesome *corvée*? Would he rivet some imaginary crime upon him? If so it meant one further skid upon the precipitous path that was sending him headlong to the *Zéphyrs*.

Dorland heard the fellow's mattress creak. Still not daring a glance towards the zone of danger he realised that Corporal Fabre, too dog-tired to bully for the sheer love of the game, had decided upon slumber.

The young man waited until his enemy had fairly closed his eyes. Then he left the room with a swiftness that suggested the presence of a rattlesnake. He would have to be horribly cunning if he were to retain his freedom until Wednesday night. Hope was making him a worse coward than usual. But he couldn't help that. One and all these incarnate beasts had it in for Number 17883. The sergeant major had already announced that the next go of *salle de police* would mean *Conseil de Guerre* for Monsieur Mutt. And then, *mon enfant*, the *Zéphyrs*. Yes, the only wise course was to keep out of their way. The mere sight of such a *pékin* was enough to inflame them. Let him not meet Sergeant Major Hauptmann in the middle of the stone stairs as he crept down. Rather would he meet a tiger.

Sweating blood Dorland dragged his weary bones across the barrack yard to the canteen. Several men were there, but having made sure they included none of his own *escouade* he found the courage to order a litre of red wine. It seemed to give him a little of the strength, not only of body but of soul, that he so cruelly needed.

Thus fortified he made his way to the gate. He had an appointment at the bank in the town at half past five, but it was in the power of the sergeant of the guard to prevent his keeping it. This functionary turned men back on the slightest pretext. A missing button or a sash askew was enough. Dorland had an anxious moment while the jack-in-office passed an eye over him. But he was dressed carefully and the fellow let him through.

Dorland found himself on the narrow pavement outside the Crédit Lyonnais a few minutes before the appointed time. But Jimsmitt was there already. "Welcome as the flowers in May" was his greeting of the American.

The young man entered the bank, presented his chit and received all that stood to his name, which was rather more than two thousand francs. Then the two friends walked down the street to a quiet haunt where they could buy a cup of coffee. Here, while they refreshed themselves in a deserted corner of the room, the money was handed over.

"It feels good," said Jimsmitt, crinkling the notes in his fingers. "I had no idea I had struck such a plutocrat. But this is going to help considerably. It will give us an excellent send-off at any rate. Still, my son, you had better keep two hundred francs for yourself."

Dorland in his generosity was inclined to demur. But Jimsmitt was firm. "It's an insurance against rubs in the meantime," he said. "One should never be without a little of the ready in a crisis. You may have to grease the palm of a corporal or a sergeant between now and the night. It's always well in the Legion, or anywhere else for that matter, to have a bit in hand. But this princely nineteen hundred of yours together with the bit I've scraped together myself should give us a really good start. Still, it's bound to be touch and go all the time. The military police around here are the devil. We must get out into the desert as soon as ever we can. Once there we may take some tracking."

The American proceeded solemnly to rehearse his previous instructions. He was found to be letter perfect. They sat in the café talking and smoking until it was time to return to barracks. Dorland, however, went forth a few minutes before the Corporal; it would have been unwise for them to be seen together.

The night was very hot. Bone tired though he was, Dorland slept ill. Tossing from side to side on a hard and narrow mattress, he felt a kind of vertigo as the events of the past two days flowed back into his mind. The prospect of escape filled him with a wild excitement. It seemed too good to be true. Days ago he had given up hope of getting away from this Inferno. Dope had begun already to inhibit his will, yet with the help of others he might achieve what he could not begin to do for himself. And taking things at their lowest, an end in the desert, whether at the instance of thirst, starvation, pestilence, wild beasts or the merciless Bedouin, was to be preferred to dying like a rat in a sewer or, if *le cafard* came upon him, like a mad beetle in the sun.

Sunday went off very well. By the mercy of Allah nothing of consequence happened. Corporal Fabre, Sergeant

Major Hauptmann and other dangerous luminaries did not trouble him much and he took care not to trouble them. But it was like being in a powder magazine, lighted candle in hand. One spark might blow him up. Not for a moment of that long day could he ignore the painful necessity of keeping out of *la cellule*. If he found himself locked up there on the fateful Wednesday evening there would be an end of the good chance.

However, Sunday passed without mishap. More or less it was a day of rest for this herd of bullied, over-driven men. Dorland felt the better for it, particularly as he was able to snatch a little sleep in the afternoon. When he turned in that night and was out of harm's way for another eight hours, it was with a thankful heart. The time was getting short and he was still at liberty.

Monday, however, as Mondays did as a rule, began ill. Sergeant Major Hauptmann informed him at kit inspection, an ugly sneer in his tone, that he would be required for *garde de chambre* the whole of that week. This was a heavy blow. Not only did it mean extra *corvées*, and being at the beck and call of the *escouade* from *réveil* to lights out, but also it meant he would not be able to get through the barrack gates into the town. It was sheer injustice, a fresh mark of tyranny and ill will, for it was not Dorland's turn for this hated duty. Besides, had he not, thanks to the spite against him, just had three weeks on end?

The *pékin* had to accept it with the best grace he could. There was no appeal. Still he was half prepared for something of this kind. A week seldom passed in peace. It was quite certain now that he would not be able to keep the tryst on Wednesday at the time appointed. Forewarned, however, was forearmed. He must make his plans accordingly.

If not very brave he was pretty desperate now. The attempt was going to be vastly more risky, but even if it spelt death he was determined to make it. He must wait until lights out and the officer of the night had paid his visit of inspection, and then he would creep like a mouse into the barrack yard, scale the high wall unobserved, and slip away down the line at the back which led to the town gate. This programme would add immensely to the hazard. But it was the only one practicable now. And even this depended on no fresh trouble overtaking him between now and Wednesday night.

Monday was a strenuous day. It was full of excursions and alarms of a minor sort. But any one of them might lead to a clash with the Sergeant Major whose attitude towards him had never been more threatening. The same applied to Corporal Fabre. Among his *corvées* was the cleaning of that officer's boots and the performance of his *astiquage*. Dorland hated this as much as he dreaded it. The ruthless eye of Corporal Fabre was quite likely to see flaws in his work where none existed. Any pretext sufficed to put some new indignity upon him. And Fabre knew, none better, how little was now required to fix up this *pékin* with the Sergeant Major.

Monday was a day of tribulation, yet it wore to an end without disaster. No. 17883 was still unmarked for punishment. He stretched his weariness upon a hard couch with a more or less thankful heart. Two days more. That was the thought that flamed like a torch in an overwrought brain. If anything untoward happened now he felt he should go mad.

Tuesday dawned. Already he was on the threshold of the day, and was still out of "clink." If flesh and blood could manage it, he must remain at liberty. But the sharp note of the bugle in the yard below had a truly inimical sound. Still the day wore on. He was overmuch in the eye of Corporal Fabre, but he did his work so thoroughly that it left no loophole for his tormentor.

That night as Dorland turned in he could hardly realise how near he was to the grand finale of the morrow. Rather unexpectedly he was soon asleep and for once bad dreams were spared him. Wednesday broke with the usual promise of stifling heat. But as Dorland sprang from that hateful mattress for the last time he felt ready for anything. He was keyed to a high pitch now the day had come at last. Every spark of nerve would be tested to the utmost before that day, or rather that night, was out. But he was still a very young man. Life was sufficiently unexplored to be dear to him. He felt an exhilaration almost terrible when he thought of what he was about to do.

The preliminaries would have been quite simple had it not been for the unlucky fact of *garde de chambre*. Absence would be noticed at once, and must rouse a hornet's nest inconveniently soon. Besides it was hardly likely the sergeant would let him through the barrack gates when the others passed out at five o'clock. He was half inclined to try it on, yet

all things considered it seemed wise to refrain. Why risk an almost certain miscarriage? Therefore he was content to take a stroll round the barrack yard about six o'clock and carefully survey beforehand the place for his climb. The wall was high and there were spikes on the top, but adventurous spirits had recourse to it constantly when they desired to be out late without permission. Sometimes they failed, but Dorland being light and active had no fear that when the time came he would not be able to get over the top. Would he be seen by the sentries? That was the question.

He must wait for the *appelle*. There was no bugle or whistle for the *appelle*, but at nine o'clock sharp an officer made the rounds to see that all were in their rooms and to note the missing. The door would burst open as if a cyclone had struck it, and the officer would look about to see that every man stood to attention at the foot of his bed, if he was not in bed already. If a man came in after the *appelle* he was punished and further permission to go out refused. At ten o'clock the bugle played for the last time and all lights were extinguished.

Dorland had decided to wait for this ceremony. But he must not try to get away too soon afterwards, as there was still too much light in the sky and he might be seen climbing the wall. He made his arrangements, as far as he could, against the moment of flight. But they did not amount to much. Jimsmitt had advised him to travel with but a very little of his kit.

One article there was which Jimsmitt in his wisdom had suggested he should bring. That, if he could lay his hand upon it, was the automatic of the Sergeant Major. Such a weapon, Jimsmitt had assured him, might prove beyond rubies. But Dorland did not feel inclined to run any undue risk in the matter. Yet it was on the cards when at a quarter to nine he went down to the guard room with the daily list of defaulters, one of the numerous extra duties of a *garde de chambre*, that a chance would arise.

At a quarter to nine Corporal Fabre handed him the list as usual. Already seething with excitement he went to beard the lion in his den. The door of the guard room was open, but Sergeant Major Hauptmann, who was generally there at that hour with a large pair of spectacles obscuring his ugly nose, was mercifully absent. Hastily Dorland placed the list on his desk. As he did so he grew aware that Sergeant Major Hauptmann's automatic, the dreaded of all men, which had taken more than one life in cold blood without cause, was hanging on a nail in its usual place.

Dorland gazed swiftly round to make sure that the room was empty. Then just as quickly he made a dive for the weapon and slipped it in his tunic. The whole thing did not take more than a minute, yet it opened the door to immediate consequences. Dorland had not time to pass from the room before he was arrested by a sound on the threshold. Smartly he drew back, and so avoided butting Sergeant Major Hauptmann full in the middle of the stomach.

"It's you, my friend," said Hauptmann with the dangerous suavity he reserved for the most eminent members of his black list. "Here, what's your hurry? Stay a minute. Don't scuffle off like that, you rat. Let me see if your name is in the bill."

Dorland had no reason to think it was, but he waited in considerable fear, while the chief bully put on his spectacles and ran his eye over the names. "Seemingly not," he said. "I must find out the reason. We must have that little matter put right, eh, *mon gars*?" He smiled like a wolf with two rows of long yellow teeth. "You'll like to know, I'm sure, that this next time I am bringing your name to the Captain's notice."

Dorland felt it wise to say nothing. He was content to salute smartly and go. Nor did he stand upon the order of his going. He had a horrible dread that Sergeant Major Hauptmann's truculent eye would stray to the wall above his desk and behold the rape of his beloved pistol. Even as he bore the Sergeant's persiflage he cursed himself for being such a fool as to run this risk. Serve him right if the beast caught him out.

Luckily for Dorland it was the beast who was caught out. At any rate for the moment. In a horrid state of nerves Number 17883 got clear away from that grisly room. God, how he was sweating as he went up those stone stairs to his *chambrée*! What an idiot to put his neck into such a noose! At the first boom of nine from the clock in the hall below he was standing at the foot of his cot. It was the hour of the *appelle*. His many duties of that never-ending day were ended. And now the fun was about to begin. He had been careful to prime himself with a couple of litres of the good red wine they sold at the canteen. This gave him a kind of Dutch courage. Heaven knew he would need it before the night was through.

Into the room burst Sergeant Major Hauptmann like a shot out of a gun. God, the beast had missed that automatic! What a treble-plied fool to be carrying it upon him! He was bound to be suspected. Why in heaven's name had he not had the sense to pitch it over the barrack wall before coming upstairs? Discovery was certain. And then...

Sergeant Major Hauptmann, however, had not yet made a sign. He was running an accusing eye over the room, but it was accusing nobody in particular. It was simply that a human cyclone was making its rounds as usual. In rather less than two minutes Sergeant Major Hauptmann was gone. Sweating like a pig Dorland lay down fully dressed on his cot. He must wait until the swift African darkness had fallen. Then he would creep down those stairs and shin up the outer barrack wall and drop into the lane beyond. He filled in some of the time by furtively stowing about his person a few light articles, which included a jack-knife, a box of matches, a ball of string, a packet of cigarettes. Then followed more waiting, accompanied by a growing nausea of excitement, which made him feel physically sick.

VIII

At last he decided it was dark enough. The bugles had not yet sounded the general "lights out," but it seemed best to go before they did. To slip down the stairs of the caserne and out into the deserted barrack yard took but a few seconds. Moving like a cat, for danger was everywhere, he crept swiftly along in the shadow of the main wall of the barracks, made a dash across to the outer wall at a timely moment with no sentry by, and came to the place he had chosen. It had been chosen by the light of day, and with judgment. The climb was not really difficult. It called for resolution, but his nerves were geared high. Something more than ten feet of bricks and mortar was needed to stop him now.

He had to look out for the row of spikes at the top. However, as there was still a fair amount of light it was tolerably easy to avoid. Quick as thought he came down the face of the wall and half slid, half fell into a bed of rubble and short grass on the other side. At first he held himself close to the wall in case a sentry was near. But there did not seem to be a soul about. Hugging the shadow of the wall he slowly approached the outer barrack gate. This he must pass if he was to find his way into Sidi-bel-Abbès.

As he crept along by this wall it was disconcerting to find how much light still remained. The sky, glowing like a dark jewel, was sown thick with stars. And the moon was already up. Being in the fourth quarter it was very much against him. Still he must take his chance. The question was should he walk boldly past the gate as if on a lawful occasion and run the risk of being challenged, or should he proclaim its obvious irregularity by creeping on all fours, with a final bolt, hell for leather, if the sentry spotted him?

This nice point occupied him some little time. Then he conducted a reconnaissance of a very cautious kind with the shadow of the wall to cover him. The commonsense of the matter seemed to be to lie doggo. Any sentry would guess what he was up to at that place at that hour. Hands and knees were the only safe mode for the moment. He got down to them accordingly. And very thankful he was that he did. For just as he had done so a bayonet gleamed suddenly in the moonlight from the farther angle of the barrack wall.

Observing the sentry coming along by the wall at the regulation pace Dorland wriggled on his belly into some fairly long grass a few yards off. This made excellent cover. As soon as the sentry had walked past him, Dorland set another angle of the wall between them. Then, having satisfied himself that no one was coming round the other angle, he made his way boldly and swiftly into the lane that ran past the barrack gate.

Once there the worst was over. He was not likely to be challenged now. In a few minutes he would be through the town gate. It was one of five and they were always unguarded. There would be other perils to look out for by the time he approached the Village Nègre. But so far he had done well, and for the time being might count himself reasonably safe.

Without misadventure he got into the town. Just as he entered the rue Sidi Carnot the clocks began to strike ten. Even at that hour the streets were fairly busy. Some of the men of his own regiment had permission to be out until midnight, and there were many Chasseurs d'Afriques, Spahis, Houssas and other picturesque looking folk who shared this

privilege. But Dorland did not loiter even for a last drink at one of many cafés that invited him. Every nerve was at the stretch; his heart beat up into his throat. He would know no peace until he had found Jimsmitt. And it was by no means certain that he would know it then. His boats were burnt. For better, for worse, the great chance was already taken.

As he went swiftly through Sidi-bel-Abbès towards the Arab quarter new fears attacked him. The Arab quarter was a nest of foul slums and alleys which could only be reached through the Port Cocu. This gate, with narrow bridge, gave directly onto a common, and was the main highway to the Village Nègre, which was strictly out of bounds for a legionary at any time. A man entering it at this hour ran a double risk of having his throat cut and his pockets rifled or being spotted by a sergeant and picket and run back to barracks at the point of the bayonet. The sequel to the latter was thirty days' hard labour.

As Dorland drew near to the Port Cocu his fears took a new shape. Maybe his real troubles were only now beginning. He could see the dark bulk of the Arab quarter away to the left not far ahead. Moonlight bathed that huddle of roofs with a sinister radiance. Such filthy stews were full of danger. But he must chance all that. It was even more important to keep a sharp look-out for the sergeant's guard.

Passing through the Port Cocu he was met by the long and narrow bridge. This spanned a broad ditch which ran between the town walls and the common. Beyond the common, immediately ahead, was the Village Nègre, and rather sharp to the left was the place Dorland was now making for, the network of squalor that formed the Arab quarter. Already he was on forbidden ground. It behoved him to be watchful indeed since this was just the hour in which he was most likely to be trapped.

He had crossed the bridge and was stepping on to the common when he suddenly realised that the very thing he feared was about to happen. A sergeant of the Legion with a picket of four men who carried fixed bayonets were coming along the path from the Village Nègre and heading straight towards him. The bright moonlight made that clear enough. They were perilously near and even if he stepped aside to allow them to pass they were bound to see him.

It was an awkward fix, and it was full of danger. What should he do? There was only a very few seconds in which to make up his mind. They were almost face to face. Two courses were open. He could right-about-face and bolt the way he had come, trusting to escape in the maze of streets of the town itself, or he must dodge quickly out of their path and set off across the common direct to the Arab quarter. As it was unlawful for a legionary to be across the bridge at that hour pursuit was certain in either event.

There was no time to weigh the pros and cons. Suddenly he decided upon the bolder line. In the thrall of fear it was less a decision than an instinct. Now that he had come so far he could not turn back and re-enter the dangerous town. Yet the alternative was even more perilous.

Barely had he stepped aside to allow the guard to pass when he was challenged. "Halt! Who goes there?" Instantly he broke into a run. There was nothing else for it. His promptness gave him a few yards' start. When it came to a chase those few yards would be precious.

"Halt!" cried a stern voice, "or I fire."

Dorland took no notice. He ran on, not daring to look back. But he was not really afraid of the threat. Everybody knew the picket did not carry ball cartridges. Their bayonets were the things he had to look out for. And these could only be used at close quarters. Again he heard the harsh voice of the sergeant. There came no shots, yet he had a sense of what in the circumstances was something worse. The picket was coming after him as hard as it could lick.

All depended now on one simple factor. It was his legs against theirs. He judged that he had a start of a hundred yards or even a little more. Every one of those hundred yards would be needed. Still he was not without hope. Young and active, and with very life at stake, he was prepared to run until he dropped. His pursuers had no such spur. They were merely doing their duty at the beck of a hard taskmaster who alone would receive *kudos* for his capture. Also they had their guns to carry. And in the fashion of the Legion which even wore it on a forced march through the heat of the desert, each man was probably encumbered with a *capote*.

As Dorland maintained a good pace over the rough and stony common without the enemy seeming to gain upon him, he felt that if he kept his head and did not trip over some unforeseen snag he had a fair prospect of getting away. Never had his brain been so alert. His objective was the Arab quarter, but he must be careful not to let them know the exact spot he was making for lest they found a means of cutting him off. The common had many pitfalls. Boulders and potholes and trappy bits of ground abounded, while to make matters worse Dorland's feet were very sore. But with life hanging in the balance, all that he had of mind and will and energy made a powerful response.

By the time he was half way across the common, perhaps a distance of a quarter of a mile, he ventured to look back. His pursuers were following as hard as they could, but they did not seem to be gaining upon him. He decided not to go any faster for the time being, although he might have done so. But he wisely determined to leave something in hand for a final spurt when he reached the Arab quarter. This was where the real chance of escape would occur.

Soon he was upon the outskirts of that noisome, evil-looking village. At the sounds of running and shouting from the men behind, the rattle of arms and the clatter of feet, dark forms scuttled off like rabbits into their burrows. Arabs are never fond of moonlight and after sundown they do not care for noises in the street. *Gendarmes* chasing a thief or a murderer through the bowl of night was a fact with which the quarter was only too familiar, but the sons and daughters of the Prophet indulge no idle curiosity in such affairs. One man is so very like another in the sight of the law that mistakes sometimes occur, and if the *goums* lose one quarry they have been known to pick up a substitute.

As the sounds of the hunt, clear and distinct, approached, the few persons abroad hastened to find shelter. When Dorland entered the main street he was still a hundred yards ahead and going as well as his foes. But it was now that he had to use his brain. He must recall the instructions of Jimsmitt. Above all he must turn them to account. Yet as soon as he entered the first of these devious ways he realised that it would be fatally easy to run into a trap. If his pursuers saw the point he was making for they might catch him presently in an alley or a cul-de-sac.

"First to the right," said Jimsmitt, "first to the right again. Then keep to the left until you come to a long narrow street. In the middle of the street you will find a kind of archway. The second house on the right under the archway has a yellow door. Give three sharp knocks on that door."

There was much to remember, grave risk to run. Dogs began to bark furiously as the chase went by. Dorland was still well ahead by the time he took the first to the right, yet before he could take the first to the right again the picket had turned the corner and was able to see the way he went.

Now it was he spurted in the hope of making the next point, the first turn to the left, before they were again in view. But again he was unlucky. The hunters were keeping track of him extremely well. He ran harder than ever. Another turning brought him into the street that was the longest yet. And its houses were so close together it was also the darkest. Soon he saw the archway. It was exactly where Jimsmitt said it would be, on the right, half way down. Dorland cast back a hasty glance. The enemy had yet to round the corner.

He turned aside into the darkness of the archway. Crouching down close to the wall of a house whose shutters gave not a ray of light, he waited for the sergeant and his men to pass by along the street. But it was taking a horrible chance. He was gambling on the prospect of his foes keeping straight on. It was foolhardy. If they happened to turn aside and explore the archway, as they were quite likely to do, he would be neatly trapped.

Crouching in the darkness, his heart in his mouth, Dorland seemed to live a lifetime in a few seconds. He could hear the loud clatter of boots on the rough cobbles, he could even hear the grunts and the wheezes of the heavy-breathing runners. Prone in the dust of the entry to minimise every chance of being seen as they passed, Dorland lay in a moil of fear. In spite of the panics he had lived through in the past eight months, this was the worst yet. His enemies were within a very few yards. But as far as he could tell they were not stopping. Grunting and wheezing they were keeping steadily on down the long and narrow street.

When Dorland was quite sure they had passed he rose from the dust of the alley. Before anything else happened or they had time to turn upon their tracks he must find the house with the yellow door. There lay sanctuary. But under the arch it was so dark he would have to strike a match to look for it. Listening keenly he made sure that the sounds of pursuit were fading in the distance to a continual accompaniment of barking dogs, and then he struck a match. It gave

precious little light. Five were required before he could satisfy himself that the house with the yellow door was the second up the short dark alley.

It was a real satisfaction to find that the door, although very dirty, had claims to be called yellow. Dorland felt for the latch and tried it, only to discover that it was securely barred. Then he remembered Jimsmitt had said it would be and that he must knock three times. Before doing this he listened again. All sound of the hunt had ceased. He took the automatic from his tunic and gave three smart taps upon the door. The only answer was the furious barking of a dog in the next house. He knocked again, still harder. There was no time to lose. At any moment the picket might return.

Pressing his ear to the wood he could detect sounds within. It was like a person shuffling across a flagged courtyard. Through a crack in the door he could now see a flicker of light, very faint. There was a click of bolts, the grunting of a key. "For God's sake be quick, whoever you are!" muttered Dorland. So far as he knew the real danger was past, but the tug at his nerves was still heavy.

The door opened a few inches, slowly. An Arab woman, veiled to the eyes and wearing a haik, held a small petroleum lamp above her head. She peered at him cautiously.

"I am a friend of Zeyd Mohammed." Dorland remembered his instructions.

The Arab woman made no reply, but she opened the door wide enough for Dorland to pass in. As soon as he entered she hastened to close the door. With relief indescribable the fugitive heard the shooting of the bolts and the turning of the key. He was free. More or less he was free. But even now he did not feel quite out of the wood. Beyond the lamp in the Arab woman's hand the place was like a pit. And it had an unwholesome smell, a sort of atmosphere you could cut with a knife. Dorland, however, was ceasing to be fastidious. Besides, it was sheer ingratitude to be critical of this asylum.

He was in a kind of stone-flagged patio common in Arab houses. It was across this he had heard the woman flapping in her red slippers. Through the shadows he could make out dimly a row of wooden stairs. Dorland was not invited to ascend, but was conducted by the lamp bearer through a curtained alcove at the foot of them into a small airless chamber whose heat was stifling. But that didn't trouble him. At last he was beginning to feel reasonably secure.

So far as he could tell no one else was in the small room. But he soon learned this was an illusion.

"Here you are, old man," said a familiar voice. "Make yourself quite at home." It was the voice of Jimsmitt, there could be no doubt about that.

In vain Dorland cast his eyes around the room. There was not a sign of a third person. Only the Arab woman in her veil and her voluminous haik was there, he would take his oath. Suddenly a low rich laugh struck through the maze of Dorland's bewilderment. Yet he could not find a key to the mystery. There was no one else except the Arab woman, that he would swear.

IX

The Arab woman, as it happened, was the key. Dorland gave a sharp cry as the truth broke upon him. "Some disguise," he said, laughing heartily. It was the first real laugh he had enjoyed for many a month. "I am completely had. If you hadn't spoken I'd never have guessed."

"We've taken pains in the matter," said Jimsmitt, grinning through his veil with modest pride.

"Simply gorgeous." Dorland for the first time since his arrival in North Africa was moved to enthusiasm. He felt this perilous attempt was going to be made upon the best professional lines. Jimsmitt was plainly an expert who meant to

leave nothing to chance. Taking the matter at its lowest it seemed as if his nineteen hundred francs had been well invested.

"Allow me to lead you into the beauty parlour," said Jimsmitt. "And I'll lend a hand in transforming you into a Moorish lady of fashion. Come on this way." In a businesslike manner, but still wearing haik, red slippers and veil, so that only half the eyes were visible, Jimsmitt opened a little door, drew aside a curtain and bowed Dorland into a second fugg-hole. It was a little larger, and if anything a little hotter and a little smellier than the first. A sort of *batterie-de-toilette* was laid out on a small table. And a number of articles indispensable to an Arab woman of the better class were arranged on a divan.

"There's no maid to help you to prettify yourself," said Jimsmitt, "but you are very welcome to the services, such as they are, of your Aunt Fatima."

"Meaning yourself I presume," said Dorland, who could not help laughing at the air of Oriental gravity.

"First you had better wash yourself thoroughly—face and neck, arms and hands, feet and ankles—with the brown walnut juice in this bowl. I don't mind saying that personally I have had a complete bath in the altogether. Best to go the whole hog while one is about it, but of course that's optional."

"I shall go the whole hog," said Dorland with a grin.

"O wise young man! Take off your clothes. Step into this canikin. And then I'll pour the stuff gently over you. It stains like sin, but it is none the less excellent."

Dorland promptly took off every stitch of the hated uniform he wore, stepped into a kind of hip bath and received the contents of the bowl. It was a brown mixture, rather gummy, but as far as he could tell from the uncertain flicker of a tiny lamp suspended from the ceiling and the light which Jimsmitt had set upon a stool, it did its work. Jimsmitt took up a large sponge and proceeded to anoint him freely. Said Dorland, "I hope this stuff will not further inflame the blisters on my poor feet."

"I hope not," said Jimsmitt in a tone not devoid of sympathy. "But I'm afraid those poor feet will have to be left in the hands of Allah. It is up to me to make you a complete work of art."

When Dorland had been duly painted he was advised to stand on a rug until he was dry. Jimsmitt then proposed to show him what to put on in the way of clothes and how to wear them. Meanwhile he would go and see how supper was getting on, promising to return in five minutes.

Dorland had not bargained for a change of sex, but he did not doubt its value in the circumstances. As both were men on the short side, light and spare of frame, with limbs of some delicacy, there was nothing strikingly unfeminine to catch the eye. The large veil which obscured the whole face except the upper part of the eyes and the long haik reaching to the heels completely disguised the figure. A clever ruse thought Dorland, and he began to feel that he had a chance of life.

Within the promised five minutes Jimsmitt returned.

"The third member of our party is not here yet," he said. "I hope nothing has happened to him. He should have arrived before now. But I expect he's all right. He's the sort of lad who can take care of himself. Now, my son, are you dry enough for your clothes?"

Dorland thought he was. Underclothes were recommended to begin with. These took the form of the coarse shirt and thick drawers he had already removed. They were unladylike garments, but equally good against the burning sun and the chill wind of the desert. The veil and the haik, however, were the all-important things. The haik was draped carefully by the expert Jimsmitt, a caftan was bound Moorish fashion round the temples and the veil was fixed *le dernier cri*.

"There you are, old man," said Jimsmitt, stepping back a couple of paces and surveying this work of art with a chuckle. "Your mother wouldn't know you now. And if one of those infernal *goums* finds you out he'll deserve a prize."

"Yes, I think so, too," said Dorland. "That is if I make up half as well as you. I was properly taken in myself."

"You'll find a couple of very useful pockets inside your gown. So transfer from your tunic all the things you're likely to want. Aha, is that the sergeant major's automatic I see before me!"

Dorland without one prick of shame confessed the crime.

"Excellent youth! And here is its peer." Opening his haik the Corporal disclosed his own belt. It was full of cartridges and there was a natty weapon beside it.

"Didn't seem worth while to bring cartridges," said Dorland. "Ours, you know, are blank."

"So are everybody's."

"Mercifully yes," thought Dorland, "otherwise I should not be here now."

"Well here are a few to be going on with. Stick them into your pouch." Jimsmitt counted out a dozen cartridges and handed them over. "And now for a bite of grub."

Taking up the light from the stool on which he had placed it, the Englishman led the way along a short passage. This was a typical rambling Arab house of infinite ramifications. It was very dark and close and smelt ill. Yet as Dorland followed in the wake of his friend the smell improved. It was not less pungent but distinctly more agreeable. Odours of roast meat began to mingle with the permanent aroma. And the spirits of Dorland accordingly rose. After many weeks of the extremely coarse fare provided by Madame la République, a mere promise of other dishes was in itself a feast of Lucullus. As Dorland waddled along in loose Arab garments and the comfortable red slippers that had replaced the hated brodequins he felt that already things had begun to pan out well.

The room in which the feast awaited them was larger than the others. It contained two Arab women, presumably mother and daughter, neither of whom was prepossessing. To judge by the elaborate way their hair was dressed, the trinkets and gewgaws that bedizened them, the strong coarse perfume with which they were anointed and the liveliness of their gestures as they approached the table they were members of the oldest profession in the world. But they could not be said to charm the eye of a Roumi. However, that was a small matter compared with the business that occupied them now.

A *couscous* made of balls of boiled wheat and slices of chicken was promptly set before the guests. It was excellent and the two legionnaries who had not tasted such food for many a day fell upon it with real appetite. Roast kid followed and this proved equally delectable. Red wine accompanied these good things. Then came sweet cakes, fruit and coffee, altogether an admirable meal and well calculated to hearten the travellers. It was eaten in the Arab fashion, without the aid of knives and forks, but at the end of each course a bowl of water was proffered into which the guest dipped his fingers.

When the repast was over, Dorland and Jimsmitt feeling well satisfied, retired to one of the smaller rooms to smoke and also to await the arrival of the third member of the party. He had been expected sooner and Jimsmitt betrayed some little anxiety on his account.

"I hope nothing is wrong," he said as the clocks chimed midnight. "It is always the unexpected that happens, so we ought to be prepared."

However, these fears were soon allayed. Almost as Jimsmitt spoke a knocking could be heard on the outer door of the patio. "Here he is, I think," said Jimsmitt. And he shuffled forth in his red slippers across the courtyard to find out who was there.

He soon returned with a tall man, young and very handsome, who had the look of a pure-bred Arab. This man wore a burnous over a jellab, and his air, his dress and his features, very swarthy yet finely cut, all combined to give him a look of singular impressiveness. Jimsmitt played up to him in a humorous manner. "All hail, O lord and master," he cried prostrating himself like a woman of the harem.

The newcomer appreciated the jest keenly. His lips parted in a flashing smile in which some very white and even teeth were displayed. Zeyd Mohammed was his name and Dorland and he were promptly made known to each other. Dorland, who did not feel equal to clowning the rôle of wife that had been thrust upon him, was content to offer his hand. It received a very powerful grip, in keeping with the fine specimen of manhood who gave it.

"Is Abdulla all right?" Jimsmitt enquired in English.

"Oh, yes, yes," said Zeyd in the same tongue.

"Good," said Jimsmitt. "Now go and eat the excellent supper that awaits you. Then come back here and smoke the pipe of friendship. And then we must start on the long, long trek."

When Zeyd had gone Jimsmitt asked the third member of the party what he made of him.

"Difficult to say," Dorland answered guardedly, "but he looks as if he might be terrible to his enemies."

"Yes," said Jimsmitt, "that is more than likely. And I know by experience that he is faithful to his friends. We are lucky to have him with us. He was born and bred in the desert so there can be no better guide."

"Is he on pump also?" Dorland enquired.

"Yes, he is one of us. He, too, has had enough of the Legion. Fresh pastures call him. And that is mainly the reason why we three meet here tonight."

"By the way, are you planning to make for any definite point?"

"More or less. But of course we shall have to be guided by circumstances. So many things may happen, so many hazards may arise. Our present idea is to trek across the desert into upper Egypt. Of course, it is a terrific journey. And if all goes well and we don't lose our way, which is almost certain, if we are able to escape hunger, thirst, smallpox, cholera, the Bedouin, and the thousand and one things likely to undo us, we shall be lucky if we make Khartoum in a year. We may find ourselves in places in which a white man has never set foot, but we could not have a better guide than Zeyd. He has made the journey to Mecca, therefore he is a hajji of experience who has taken high degrees; he is desert-wise as only a man of his sort can be; he is familiar with many dialects and many tribes. Without the help of a man like Zeyd such a journey would be madness. Even as it is the scales are weighted heavily against us. But '*In sh'Allah*' as the Arabs say. As God wills."

"As God wills," said Dorland. And then he repeated the phrase "*In sh'Allah*," softly.

X

While Zeyd ate his supper the two friends smoked and drank some excellent coffee. They were at the threshold of high adventure, and neither could dissemble a feeling of excitement. But in Dorland the emotion uppermost was relief. He had contrived to escape from the veritable hell in which he had been engulfed. Even now he was not clear of the wood, but it was his fixed intention never to return alive to those dreaded barracks. Though he did not underrate what lay ahead he could only rejoice that the pains he was about to suffer would be leading somewhere. No longer would he be a mere butt for malignant stupidity. Besides, he would fare in the company of a true friend. Jimsmitt was already very dear to him. He liked the man, he trusted him, they had many things in common, their minds marched together.

Zeyd did full justice to his supper. There was no saying when he would get another meal of that kind. But in the process of time he returned to the others, accepted a cheroot of strong Arab tobacco, and then at Jimsmitt's bidding they went forth to seek the mysterious Abdulla. They would then proceed upon their way.

It was a perfect night for a journey. The air was balmy, the roads were dry, the moon was near the full. If anything there was more light than they desired, for they had no wish to court the notice of the inquisitive *goumier*. But as they left the house which had served them so well, and passed through the archway into a maze of zigzagging streets they had every confidence in their disguise. Only an Arab *gendarme* of supernatural powers, or a sergeant and picket gifted with second sight could hope to perceive three deserters from *la Légion Etrangère* in the bearded sheik in burnous and cowl, ambling peaceably with his two veiled wives.

After moving for about twenty minutes through native hovels whose reputation was none too clean they came without mishap to an open field at the end of the village. This contained a small stable, an affair of mud and straw. It also contained the mysterious Abdulla.

He was in the care of a negro who lay coiled up in a corner of the stable. As soon as Zeyd entered the negro sprang to his feet. Abdulla proved to be a donkey, a pretty mouse-coloured little moke with four white stockings. A full load for him had already been assembled in this hovel, over which the negro was mounting guard. The first item, and in some respects the most important, was a small jointed tent of black camel hair. A true desert nomad asks naught better in which to sleep on the longest and most arduous haj. Also there was food, a fair supply in divers gunny bags, three large girbys of water, several thick rugs, a modest quantity of spare clothing, a copy of the Koran, materials for writing, a box of ball cartridges and various other articles that were likely to prove of service.

By the time Abdulla was saddled and loaded up it was getting on for two o'clock. The moon was like day when the party set forth in Arab fashion single file, this peaceable, rather rustic sheik and his two wives. None could have guessed their destination. It had surely been pronounced sheer madness had any done so. A sense of high exhilaration was in all three. Even Abdulla stepped along so nimbly that he might be said to share it.

Zeyd was an ambitious young man. But his age was camouflaged by the length of his beard, which having multiplied itself by ten in the space of a few minutes was now worthy of a prophet or a patriarch. All the same the fire of youth burnt in his fine dark eyes. And big schemes were in his heart. He had acquired some experience of men and cities, he had mingled with the Roumi and he was a first class warrior. And now he was afoot once more in that trackless desert which he knew and loved as few men knew and loved it. For that very reason none could have been more keenly alive to its dangers.

By the time the dawn was showing this small caravan was well away on its great journey. Sidi-bel-Abbès, that abhorred place, was already out of sight, some kilometres behind them. The going was not bad, although perhaps a little severe upon the red slippers of the ladies. At present it was mainly hard clay. When they came to the desert it would yield to honey-coloured sand. And then the ladies could doff their slippers and walk barefoot.

Not extending themselves fully they maintained a very fair pace at the start. But as their trek was to be four thousand miles as the crow flies, and only Allah could say what its length would prove to be in the light of many unforeseen haps by the way, it was wise to keep something in hand. But they meant to lose no time in getting beyond the immediate zone of danger. A sharp look-out was kept for parties of cursedly officious *goums*, who received a reward of twenty-five francs for any deserter they brought in whether dead or alive. As the reward was the same in either case the *goums* were quite impartial in the matter. But the three wayfarers, so complete was their disguise, felt they need not fear these prowling enemies unduly. However, it was not their intention to wander out of the path to seek sorrow. It is ever the unexpected that happens. *In sh'Allah*. As God wills.

They made such excellent use of the early hours that by the time the sun was up they were well on their way to the desert. The scene had great beauty. Away to the east was the noble bulk of the Tell Atlas, whose rocks, crowned with their gloom of trees, looked awe inspiring. All around was a green and fruitful land. But already they were descending to a plain that led straight to the open wilderness. The sooner they reached that bourne the safer they would be. Yet it would mark the beginning of other perils. They were entering a zone that only very brave, very tenacious, very fortunate men, the chosen of Allah, could hope to traverse. Every crumb of bread, every drop of water they carried was likely to be most precious, but towards noon they decided to eat and rest.

It was while they sought a favourable spot among a grove of trees, perhaps the last they would see for many a long and bitter hour, that they came quite unexpectedly upon a party of six Arabs. They were fierce looking men, well

mounted and well armed, and their rig proclaimed them at once as of the kind the fugitives least wanted to meet.

These were the dreaded *goumiers*. And it would be necessary to sustain their scrutiny.

"Peace go with you, brothers, in the name of Allah," promptly sang out Zeyd Mohammed in his choice Arabic. He saluted his brethren in the polite fashion of his race. The *goums* looked him over keenly, but in the Oriental manner they refrained from direct and open scrutiny of his wives.

The result was satisfactory. Indeed they must have been very sceptical to doubt that a sheik so handsome and so courteous was other than he seemed. The *goums* responded with the hauteur of a proud clan to the genial long-beard. But they gave him greeting for greeting and passed on.

Zeyd chose a good place in the shade of some cork trees, the worthy and charming Abdulla was out-spanned and then all set to upon the first meal of their pilgrimage. It had been fully earned. And for that reason it tasted sweet. Yet it was severely plain, a little unleavened bread and a few dates and for Abdulla a bit of honest corn. If they ate sparingly there was food for twenty days. But water promised to be the chief problem. They drank a very small quantity, for already there was no saying when they would be able to replenish the skins. The drought had been longer than usual and they had just passed a watercourse that was hardly more than a bed of stones.

After this frugal meal they had a siesta. Dorland stretched himself luxuriously upon the warm sand. For the first time for many a cruel week God was in his heaven. The tide of life flowed back into an embittered heart. Man's brutality had brought him to the verge of madness. But there was also a reverse side to the medal. And the intensity of his present realisation of that fact gave him a strange joy. He could not guess what hardship, what terrors lay ahead, and he was wise enough not to try. This thrice blessed hour sufficed for Ambrose Dorland. He was free as the sky above him, he was sound in mind and body, a friend was stretched on either side. Could man ask more?

They did not go on until they were well rested. Already the sun was dipping when Zeyd smiling and cheerful led Abdulla forward at a comfortable gait. The two ladies of his harem walked behind him, side by side now, talking in English. Never in his life had Dorland felt more happy. The reaction from panic fears and the life of the underdog was infinitely sweet. "Jimsmitt," he said, thrusting an arm through that of his friend, "I can never thank you enough for bringing me with you."

"Better not sing too soon, old man. We are only just entering the wood. No saying what the next turn in the game will be. Zeyd, who knows all there is to know about the desert, doesn't know that. Every sort of trap lies in wait for little excursion parties like ours."

"So I understand. But after that hell-upon-earth we've just quitted, this life somehow makes you feel good."

"It does. All the same, let us continue to replenish our waterskins and keep out of the hands of the Touareg or we shall find ourselves up against something worse."

Dorland had heard tales of that dreaded veiled bandit of the desert into whose country they were about to venture. Unspeakably cruel, very bold, unceasingly active, the Touareg were a menace alike to the lonely nomad and the armed caravan. Zeyd did not minimise the danger. He was the sworn enemy of these robbers and with reason. It was the Touareg who had impaled the living body of his father upon a palm tree and had carried away his mother and sisters into captivity. The guide had every reason to hate and fear the Touareg. And now he was so near the hunting grounds of these savages he marched with eyes all round his head and slept with one of them open.

Zeyd Mohammed advised travel by night with the help of a friendly moon to avoid the heat of the day. There was the further advantage that the gentle Touareg was not fond of the moon. It was known to be a powerful deity, one of the many evil spirits who played them tricks. The Touareg could not be said ever to lack boldness. None who had to do with him questioned his courage, but it was thought he was most to be feared in the daytime.

The caravan made excellent progress. By noon on the fourth day all signs of vegetation had been left behind. Mile upon mile, as far as the eye could scan, there was never a sign of a tree or a watercourse or even a blade of grass. A yellow wilderness stretched all round them. The sense of infinity struck at the heart. And as the sun poured down at

midday with no friendly rock or tree to mitigate its terrible power, Dorland understood why Jimsmitt had thought well to dash the cup of rejoicing from his lips. Nature the pitiless was just as much to be feared as Sergeant Major Hauptmann of the Ninth Company or the Touareg of the Sahara.

It was now that the hair tent borne by Abdulla proved such a boon. At any time it could be fixed up in a few minutes. And in the midst of a furnace of burning sand, with no hint of shelter for a hundred miles, it was a true blessing. Moreover it was shared equally by three men and a donkey. A merciful man is merciful to his beast. It was their first care to see that the willing and gentle Abdulla had an honest share of this precious shade.

As they spread their rugs and lay down in the lee of the tent Dorland expressed his gratitude in a sigh. Had he ventured alone upon this trek it would never have occurred to him to travel with a donkey and a hair tent. Jimsmitt laughed when this was pointed out to him. "Yes, my son. You are certainly faring *en prince*. But don't forget that it is your own private wealth that has made it possible. Even in the desert money counts, although there are fools in the world who say that money doesn't matter anywhere."

"I used to be one of them," said Dorland.

"Then I expect you were born to more than was good for you. It is generally people who have more than they know what to do with who talk in that way."

Only Zeyd Mohammed who was desert bred could woo sleep in that torrid heat. His companions envied him. A descendant of the Prophet, his forbears had ranged these sterile wastes for thousands of years. He was lean as a bone, hard as a nail, of wonderful endurance. Suckled in every kind of physical hardship he put all Roumis to shame. Yet he was a true friend, a faithful servant, a great companion. What he would have been as an enemy was another matter. There was a terrible gleam in his black velvet eyes when he spoke of the Touareg. But, as Jimsmitt said of him, if he liked you he liked you. Certainly this son of a robber, for he made no secret of the fact that the Howeitat, the famous tribe of fighters to which he belonged, had little to learn from even the Touareg, greatly liked the Englishman. Nay, it might be said that he loved him. At Jimsmitt's lightest word he was standing by to go about. He would surely have plunged his right hand in a fire or his fuzzy head into the mouth of a lion at the bidding of that enigma.

Dorland asked himself what the bond could be. Two creatures more diverse would be hard to find. The American could only ascribe it to his fellow traveller having a strange power over men. In the very hour of their first meeting he had felt that. Jimsmitt had a subtle quality that attracted other minds. Zeyd was a savage, although so fine of his kind that he hardly deserved the name. When he spoke of white people, the Roumi he called them, a note of contempt was heard in his voice and his eyes shone like a crouching panther's, yet the kindliness and humour of Jimsmitt, displayed in the most trying circumstances, seemed to have conquered entirely this son of the desert. Dorland for his part was always a little afraid of Zeyd. When he saw that warrior, hawklike and sinister, raking at dawn the far horizon for a sign of his blood foes, he could not help wondering what would happen if things went wrong and death overtook Jimsmitt. Zeyd's scorn of the Roumi was disturbing. No matter how regarded he was a truly formidable man.

Water was getting very scarce. It was already a problem. Several waterholes to which the expert eye of Zeyd directed them had proved to be dry. The rainfall was much less than usual. It was a serious situation to meet so early in their travels. Each day they drank very sparingly of the water they carried; nay, it was hardly more than a moistening of the lips. For they were now in the heart of a barren country. There was not a hint of green among the endless waste of sand and scrub that engulfed them. And the further they went the greater the sun's power.

Soon their throats grew so parched that tongues and lips began to swell, yet they could only moisten them from time to time with what remained in the goatskins. But as each day led to a new disappointment the store borne by the patient Abdulla grew perilously low. Their sufferings were acute. They could hardly swallow their food; so little water remained in the skins they were reduced to a ration of a few drops a day. In spite of that they drove steadily on in the cool of the night, and rested in the daytime from the worst of the heat. Hope of better things was the only spur, but the farther they went the more slender that hope grew.

One morning, about an hour after dawn, they came upon a strange sight. In some wise they were prepared for it by a curious foulness of the air. When they approached several huge vultures rose from the ground with a terrific whirr. The

reason for their presence was at once apparent. Zeyd's nose had led him to a scene with which he at any rate was only too familiar. A party of desert travellers had been horribly massacred. They lay upon the sand, more than a dozen tormented and mutilated bodies, upon whom the carrion birds had not yet completed their work, although evidently dead some days.

Both the white men were so affected by the sight and the stench that they did not care to approach. Zeyd, however, had no qualms. Far from being oppressed by the hideous spectacle, he saw it as a favourable omen. A close examination of the slain, which he was left to conduct alone, strengthened this view. It was clearly a band of wandering Arabs, and in Zeyd's opinion they owed their fate to the dreaded Touareg. Only the Touareg so foully mutilated and disembowelled their hapless victims. But it was not the work of these bandits of the desert that gave him pleasure.

Most of the corpses had been looted. Therefore it was the more surprising that several skins filled with water had been left behind. Zeyd raised the ululations of his race as he returned to his two friends with these things of price in his arms. They were doubly precious. First the water would allay their present pangs, for there was no reason to consider it other than quite drinkable in spite of the horrid circumstances of its discovery. And to the sagacious Zeyd what was of even greater moment, since the Touareg had not taken the trouble to carry the water away with the rest of their loot, it was to be inferred that they had a good supply and that more was at hand.

"Yes," said Zeyd, "there is a well nearby, or those accursed, no matter what else they took, would certainly have taken these skins of water."

This was so reasonable that in spite of the proximity of a foe even more terrible than thirst, the little company took fresh heart. They had the first real drink for several days, and then in vastly better case went on in search of the oasis which could not be far away. All the same it was necessary to proceed with caution. This was the country of a deadly foe. Evidently a war party was near. They must be ready for all contingencies. And not least of these was the likelihood of sharing the fate of this hapless band of fellow travellers. They looked to their weapons and then moved resolutely on. If possible they must find an oasis before the sun grew too fierce. But they had ever to bear in mind the prospect of selling their lives dearly in the process.

Zeyd, curiously desert-wise, gave careful study not only to the few fragments of barren rock and patches of scrub they met from time to time, but also to the general lie of the land. He was convinced that water was not far off. Also he was convinced that his blood enemies were near. The robbers had left a broad trail, easy to pick up. There were many hoof marks of horses and camels. They led south by southwest. It was there the hope of the travellers lay, and it was there lay their danger.

A little before noon, away to the right, towards the far horizon, Zeyd pointed out what appeared to be a mere thickening of the all-pervading haze which for a whole week had made their eyes ache.

"Trees," said Zeyd.

They had to take his word for it. A keener eye than a Roumi's was needed to detect trees at that distance. They had been deceived too often already in this land of mirage. But Zeyd had not a doubt. With a thrill of hope they moved steadily on.

An hour's steady going made it abundantly clear that Zeyd was right. A cluster of date palms with their high boles and graceful feathery tops could be plainly seen. And in the course of the next hour patches of the living green appeared beyond this grove of trees. Here at last was the promised land. But Zeyd in his wisdom did not exult. On the contrary he became silent as the tomb. This beckoning oasis was more likely to harbour a worse foe than thirst. He must use every care. Before long they saw that the clump of date palms marked the boundary of a desert village. About a mile beyond was a huddle of low-roofed mud huts. Here, without a doubt, was water. The problem now was to gain access to the well. Was it jealously guarded, that was the question. And was the village in hostile hands?

Zeyd held both these contingencies to be most likely. Before deciding what should be done a halt was made and they indulged in well-earned rest and a little food. Nearby was a dip in the ground, what the Arabs call a *wadi*. It seemed a good place wherein to lie hidden. There was a fair amount of cover, and though some highly dangerous

neighbours might be lurking around it offered a prospect of concealment. If not of the best, it was certainly better than nothing.

Accordingly the tent was pitched, Abdulla was hobbled, a ration of dates was handed out. And what was of more consequence each man was allowed a cup of water, with a portion for their honest friend. The taste was brackish, as it often is in the desert, yet the precious stuff was gladly drunk. Much refreshed and in better heart than at any time for the past week, the travellers stretched their weariness in the golden sand. Lying in the lee of the tent they presently held a council of war.

The Touareg was now the problem. To enter the village, which Zeyd judged to be about four miles away, might be to walk straight into the lion's mouth. Even if it were not infested by the people he most feared, the villagers, like many desert tribes, were probably hostile to strangers. Zeyd proposed to go forth alone and explore. His friends were averse to his taking the whole burden of the risk. But the Arab, shrewd as he was fearless, held that one man was less likely than three to excite an enemy. Besides, he could find out what he desired to know without exposing himself. If he went alone the *flissa* of the Touareg should be kept from his throat by the exercise of cunning. His movements would be unhampered. And his friends were in need of rest. Zeyd was quite sure he would do best alone.

Jimsmitt and Dorland had a generous desire not to put too heavy a burden upon him. But in the end they could not withstand the arguments of the Arab. It seemed wise to let him carry out a highly dangerous reconnaissance in his own fashion, particularly as the brave fellow was sure the hazard would be less if allowed to pursue it in his own way. Reluctantly his friends consented. As they watched him go they felt that he took his life in his hands. But there was no help for it. Even against their own sense of sportsmanship they were bound to yield to his judgment. And they consoled themselves with his own belief that if he met with enemies the lore of his kind would enable him to outwit them.

The two white men were full of anxiety for the return of Zeyd. They were tired out and must have rest, yet they could not stifle their uneasiness. Were they not shirking a responsibility they were bound in honour to share? Commonsense declared this was not really the case. Zeyd knew what he was about, and his friends must respect his wishes, even if it hardly seemed to be playing the game to let him go alone.

The *wadi* being fairly deep gave some protection from the sun of Arabia. Further comforted by the hair tent, the two desert-galled men found themselves in more luxury than they had reason to expect. The water which had flowed down their parched gullets was most soothing. Presently a sense of lassitude began to creep over them. Much needed sleep was not far off. Dorland in fact had closed his eyes and was in a doze when without any warning his rest was very rudely shattered.

All at once he heard the man who was stretched at his side utter a high wild cry. It was part curse, part yell, part scream. And then Jimsmitt sprang to his feet as if he had gone suddenly and completely mad.

XI

Dorland for a moment had an illusion of undergoing a hideous desert nightmare. But as soon as he opened his drowsy eyes he understood. A mob of the wickedest faces he had ever seen was peering into the tent. Their owners brandished knives and spears, they rolled eyes that were horrifying in their frenzy and their menace. Bewildered as the American was, and numbed with fear, he was yet able to see that the behaviour of Jimsmitt was in the last degree irrational. He was dancing, literally dancing, and snapping his fingers, and letting forth a volley of Arabic in the form of curses. The futility was pitiable. Surely Jimsmitt had lost his reason.

Dorland just then did not realize that such was the impression he sought to convey to these atrocious savages. Obviously they meant to treat this pair of tent dwellers in just the same manner as the luckless caravan a few days ago. By desperately feigning madness Jimsmitt hoped to give them pause. The wildest bands of the desert were said to respect madness. How far they did so was now the question.

Would fear of the evil eye cause them to spare the lives of their captives?

Doubt sprang to those wild and savage faces. But Jimsmitt guessed it was due as much to the clothes worn by the travellers as to the fact that one of them was surely insane. Who were these men-women? To what tribe did they belong? The haik and the headdress were only worn by females of any tribe they knew. But the growth of beard upon their swarthy faces—days ago they had discarded their veils—just as surely proclaimed their manhood. What outlandish sect was this?

The Touareg were puzzled quite as much by their garb as by the behaviour of Jimsmitt. They brandished *flissas* and spears, they uttered murderous cries, yet doubt prevailed. At the beck of a grotesque figure in a loose white robe, who grinned like a monkey and waved a heavy sword, these wretches stayed their hands. For a time they were content with half measures. Yet it is certain these two unfortunate men would have been tortured to death upon the spot but for the intervention of the wazir of the tribe, who was clearly at a loss how to deal with them.

As it was they were roughly seized and their hands bound tightly with cords. Then they were dragged forward and each was fastened to the saddle of a camel. The tent was left standing, but Abdulla was loaded up with what remained of the food and water. And then at a foot pace the whole party set off across the sand in a direction contrary to that taken an hour before by Zeyd.

The two prisoners had to keep up as well as they could with the cavalcade. Happily it was not going at speed, else they would have been dragged over the stones and through the scrub. They were in a hopeless pass, entirely at the mercy of those who knew nothing of mercy. Plainly their captors being uncertain what to do with such demented nondescripts, for the behaviour of one left no doubt of their madness, even had not their wild garb announced it, were going to take advice in the matter from their emir or sheik or one having authority.

What lay before the two victims was terrifying. They had little chance of saving their miserable lives. The best they could hope for was a quick death. Nay, they had not gone far on their painful and humiliating journey when each regretted that death was not his already. Each felt it had been wiser to have sought it at the point of the sword. At least it would have spared them torture unspeakable, for which this dreaded tribe was notorious.

However, it was too late now for the end it had surely been wise to embrace. Bound securely to the camels they were being dragged to their doom. The pace was not unreasonable. Clearly the gentle Touareg meant to bring the prisoners alive and in good shape to their chief. It was for him to say in what manner they should be killed.

This journey through the waste of burning sand was horrible. Heads throbbing, nerves on the rack, the two unhappy men were propelled in the glare of a powerful sun. It was no more than a foretaste of tortures to come. Yet their throats soon grew dry again, their eyes stung, their nostrils were choked with the dust of many hoofs. After a time as the pace of the camels increased, they could hardly keep on their legs. But the alternative was to be dragged head foremost. Had they been sure that such a mode would hasten the end they must have accepted it.

When they had gone about ten miles, their captors, who seemed in no particular hurry, drew rein at a green place. The savages refreshed themselves at a well. Without loosening the bonds of their prisoners they had the humanity, although humanity was hardly the word, to hold a gourd to their burning lips. The more surely these dogs were kept alive the better sport they would offer. He to whom they were going at a comfortable leisure would know how to use them. Meanwhile no hurt must come to these spawn from the heat of the sun or the haps of the way. The stronger the bull the louder he roared when the knife gored his entrails.

The captives, had they been able, would have declined the gourds when pressed to their lips. But nature forbade. Even at the price of extending their lives they drank greedily. It needed more than human will power to resist that delicious coolth. The wily Touareg knew that. And Jimsmitt could read their minds. So much the better for the emir if his victims were tended now.

The cavalcade went on and on. Water and rest had revived the captives, yet the flow of new strength did but seem to worsen their pains. Their bound wrists became swollen and lacerated. Fine dust assailed their eyes and nostrils; their very brains were on fire. Hour by hour their suffering grew, and with it the nightmare of their oppression.

At last the cruel sun went down. Straight ahead it sank in a rage of green, crimson and gold. Never had Dorland seen such a sky. Much of his three and twenty years had been passed in the study of nature's pageantry. But none had equalled this in wild beauty. It was the last sunset which he was likely to see, yet the wonder and the glory of it amazed him. All he had borne in the last few months seemed but little compared with this final pass. He was being dragged by savages to a death of horror, of a long drawn, inhuman ignominy. But the soul of the artist was quickened by that amazing light in the sky. And he felt that whatever price was exacted at the last, the life of man was a truly worth while adventure. Was it not something to have known it? Was it not something to be able to realize its possibilities?

The stars came out over the desert and there was a bright moon. But there seemed no end to this awful journey. Yet just as Dorland's mind had ceased to speculate upon what their doom must be, they came suddenly upon a gloom of trees. The camels halted. Soon the prisoners realized that they had reached a kind of encampment, and that here for them was probably the end of all things.

A rope was cast around each prisoner's neck and they were dragged to a couple of palm trees to which they were tied. Water was offered and again they drank. Then came a man older and taller and with more dignity than any of the others. He was accompanied by the ape-faced grotesque who had first intervened to save them from the knife.

"Who are you, you dogs?" said the tall man, who had the air of a chieftain, speaking in Arabic. "Whence come you?"

"Holy men, O unbeliever!" cried Jimsmitt in a kind of rage in the same tongue. Evidently the Englishman knew something of its use. His voice was very hoarse, his words very halting, but yet they were intelligible to this wild folk.

"What is your tribe?" demanded the sheik, "that ye wear the robes of a woman and the beard of a man?"

"We are humble followers of the Prophet," said the Englishman, "But also we are *hajji* of great experience. We work miracles. And we have taken high degrees."

"There is only your word for that," said the sheik scornfully.

"Is not the word of a magician, a wonder worker, more than enough?" And Jimsmitt suddenly broke into a wild song.

"What proof do you offer?"

Tightly bound by the middle to the palm tree though he was, the Englishman began to kick his heels as if he were dancing. And then he poured out a flood of strange gibberish.

"This dog is mad or he is feigning," said the chief to the first of his henchmen.

As it happened that was the opinion of the wazir. It was because he could not decide the question and did not wish to court the displeasure of Allah by hurting and slaying one who claimed to be at once a holy man, a wizard, a genuine lunatic and therefore a possessor of the evil eye, the most dreaded thing in the world, that this functionary had recourse to a higher authority.

"I think the dog is feigning," said the tall man, who it would seem was the emir of the tribe.

"It may be so, Illustrious," said the wazir, "but I ask myself why does he wear the haik and the tazal and the djellaba and why is there a beard under his chin if he be not truly mad?"

The emir perceived the force of the argument. Such uncanny wearers of female garb were surely not as other men.

"We will not decide this thing by the light of the moon, El Balar," said the emir. "That were surely unlucky. Let us sleep upon it. And then we will consider it in the fair light of day. If they cannot show us to-morrow a plain reason for our protection they shall journey to heaven by the roughest way. Deceit calls for a bitter penalty. Meanwhile see to it, El Balar, these dogs remain close bound with thongs. If they are true wizards they will go away in the night. But if the dawn

proves their impotence we shall know what to do with them."

For the captives, only one of whom could understand, there was no comfort in these words. Bound so cruelly there was no hope of escape. Moreover a guard with naked *flissas* was set to watch over them. If they had magic the emir in his wisdom was determined to make a severe call upon it. The palm fibre bit deep into their flesh. Thirst continued to devour them as the hours slowly passed. Yet when morning broke, the pangs of the present would be as naught with those which then awaited them.

XII

It was an eerie scene as the rays of the moon stole through the tops of the palm trees. Time's tardy flight was slow agony, yet both men knew it for a mere prelude to what must come.

"Dor, old man," came a gentle voice breaking in softly upon a long and terrible reverie, "are you bearing up?"

"Trying to," was the answer in a faint, weak tone. "God, I wish we had made an end when we had the chance."

"So do I," muttered Jimsmitt. And then hearing a deep groan from the next tree, he set his teeth and gasped with the stoicism of a true hero, "We are not done in yet, old man. As long as there's life there's hope. I've always heard so, anyway."

"It's the kind of hope we should be better without," thought Dorland. But he refrained from expressing his thoughts. He understood the effort the good comrade was making in a situation that admitted of none. And he appreciated it. There was something in this fortitude that gave him courage. The man at his side who equally with himself was suffering the torments of the damned, was ready and willing to show him how to die. Dorland felt that a Power which sends a friend of this calibre in such an hour cannot be wholly impotent, wholly uncaring.

The hoarse fragmentary words of the man who was bound to the next tree gave Dorland a new strength of soul. Let these fiends do their worst. No matter what inhuman devilries they contrived, he would not flinch.

Jimsmitt and Dorland had given up all hope. Their chance was so slender the mind could not dwell upon it. Zeyd might conceivably find a means of bringing them help, but it was not to be expected. It was asking too much of Providence. And in the middle of that terrible night, when the moon was at its brightest, a thing happened which seemed to denude them of even this possibility.

A sudden shrill outcry arose among the guards who were keeping watch over the prisoners. Its effect was to wake Jimsmitt and Dorland from the stupor that had now overtaken them. By the light of the moon they saw that two or three horsemen had arrived in the camp. One had a dead body attached to his saddle and was trailing it along the ground. This it was that had caused the commotion among the sentries. But soon the horseman passed out of sight with the corpse, the sentries ceased their clamour and the night resumed its eeriness.

The prisoners could discern nothing of the dead man's appearance, but they felt their last hope was gone. It must be the body of Zeyd that had been dragged in. The cup of their woe brimmed over. Yet one grain of comfort there was. Zeyd had not had his sufferings unduly prolonged. He must be counted lucky. It was not least of what they had to bear themselves that the precise nature of their fate was still uncertain. Their own death, whatever form it might take, was unlikely to be so merciful.

Stupor descended upon them again, but their pains were too severe to obscure all sense of time and place. Their bodies turned to fire as the thongs bit deeper, and long before the grey light of dawn began to filter through the trees the pangs of thirst grew terrible.

Those flecks in the sky were more than welcome. Yet beyond a doubt they were a signal for a bloody and obscene death. But anything, anything seemed better now to their overwrought minds than this present agony. While the light slowly broadened, a partial insensibility, which was all they were likely to taste of mercy, began to drug their brains.

Soon, however, they understood it was now broad day. They heard a trample of feet. And it was followed by a babble of voices. The chieftain who had spoken with them the previous night emerged from the grove. He was accompanied by a mob of others, including women and some children, yet all as wild, savage, inimical as himself. Swords, knives, spears shone in the light that came through the trees.

The chief and his wazir came up and stood before Jimsmitt. And as the emir gazed at that strange, portentously clad magician, he waved his followers aside. A large cup of water was in the hand of the emir and he pressed it to the lips of the bound prisoner.

Jimsmitt drank half of it greedily and then said in Arabic to the man who held the cup, "Give the rest of the water to my friend."

"Nay, there's plenty for him," said the emir. And when the Englishman had drained the cup the emir had it replenished and offered it to Dorland.

Both prisoners felt this boon, so wholly unexpected, would prove to be a mere intensification of their agonies, yet overdriven nature simply could not resist.

When each had drunk the wazir handed a long knife to the chieftain. And with his own hands the emir proceeded to sever the palm-fibres that bound the prisoners. As soon as this was done Abdulla the donkey was led out from among the crowd. The little beast had been loaded up with food and skins of water.

"Go with God," said the emir. The words were addressed to Jimsmitt, who, no longer bound, leaned half fainting against the tree. "You are holy men and true magicians who have given proof of your worthiness. Allah be with you. Go in peace."

The speech was perfectly intelligible to the released captive. But he heard it in a kind of dream. It was impossible to relate it to the circumstances. Such words must be some final trick of a dissolving mind. Still the effect was potent; new life ran through his veins. And as the presence of Abdulla lent force to the words of the emir, Jimsmitt found strength. Moving to the comely little beast he took it by the bridle.

As if in a dream the Englishman turned to his companion. Dorland also had been cut loose. Verging upon collapse, his back was still against the tree to which he had been bound.

"Come, old man," said Jimsmitt.

Fearing to delay the order of his going and expecting some cruel and subtle trick, he took hold of Abdulla and led him very slowly out of the glade. The Englishman could hardly drive his stiff, aching, lacerated limbs, yet the sudden excitement of deliverance was so intense that they were quickened with fresh life.

Feeling the whole affair was other than it seemed, Jimsmitt looked back to see if Dorland followed. The American was stumbling heavily forward in his wake. He was slowly emerging from the solemn ring of their enemies; all of whom stood silent with their knives and spears upheld.

The two captives hardly realized that the incredible had happened. But they stumbled on and on, half blindly, one each side Abdulla, out of this oasis and once more into the burning gold of the desert. For a reason they could not fathom their foes offered no impediment. What was it that had made them free men? By what dark alchemy had their lives been spared?

Jimsmitt and Dorland moved into the desert with as much speed as they could muster. The simple act of volition loosened their limbs; again the blood flowed through the restricted muscles, so that in the course of every hundred yards the pace improved. They managed to stumble on for several miles. By then their enemies were far out of sight and there

was good hope of their not changing their minds. And so the two painfully bewildered travellers called a halt and proceeded to investigate Abdulla's pack. To their surprise they found the dates and dried figs of the previous day had not been touched. Moreover several loaves of wheaten bread had been added, with a liberal supply of fresh water.

Devoutly thankful, Jimsmitt and Dorland sat down on the sand to enjoy the most welcome repast of their lives. They could not begin to fathom this mystery. What had occurred in the course of the night to soften their foes? Jimsmitt was completely at a loss.

"We are holy men and true magicians who have given proof of our worthiness. I can only say, old man, I give it up."

The more they looked at this riddle the less could they solve. But in sudden release from an unthinkable pass they ate and drank their fill. Yet they could not forget that the body of Zeyd had been brought into the camp during the night. Surely it was his corpse they had seen. Brave fellow, he had no longer to fear the Touareg, nor madness, nor torture, nor thirst.

Their sense of loss was keen as they remembered their guide. What fate awaited them? The previous night had been worse than death. Whenever it came to them now it would be merciful. As they gazed around this fiery waste they saw menace on every hand. What must they do? Which way must they go, now there was none to shape their course?

After a little discussion they began to look for the trail along which they had been dragged from the wadi. If they could strike it they hoped also to discover the small village Zeyd had set out to explore. He had said they might perhaps find water and sanctuary in that oasis. For the time being it was the only chance. With the help of Jimsmitt's compass they were presently able to hit their own trail of the day before. The way proved long and trying, for the sun was fierce. Yet they were sustained by the sense of a real objective. Not only was there the lure of water and food, but they did not forget that a comfortable hair tent might still be standing in the wadi. To the best of their knowledge the Touareg had not troubled to loot it.

About noon they were lucky enough, these smitten travellers, to light upon some low rocks which promised a shield from the sun. Here they lay several hours. Their repose was not improved, however, by the knowledge that a nest of vipers, of the deadly horned variety, was not far off. Several glided away at their first approach, and rather than woo sleep Jimsmitt and Dorland used their voices freely.

When they went on again, in spite of food, water and rest and complete freedom, both grew terribly depressed. The loss of Zeyd bore upon them cruelly. He had been a tower. And now he was gone they seemed to be caught in a trap. To postpone the inevitable was merely to prolong their agonies.

All the same they were the sport of a providence deeply mysterious. A few hours ago the incredible had occurred; and there was no reason why it should not happen again. But as they returned in those tracks which reeked with the tortures of the previous day, fear like a ravening vulture hovered around them.

Towards evening came a moment when Jimsmitt suddenly drew Dorland's attention to a sinister portent. About a mile off was a camel with a man upon it. Even at that distance in the clear bright air it could be seen that a gun was slung over his shoulders and that in his hand was a spear. "One of those cursed Targui," said Jimsmitt. "No doubt he belongs to the party which has just entertained us so royally."

"Quite likely to be full of mischief," said Dorland.

"Highly probable. And I fancy he has spotted us. Anyhow he is coming on pretty straight, so we had better look out." Jimsmitt opened his haik to see if the automatic he carried loaded in every chamber was still in his belt. Yes, it was all right. The Touareg luckily had not suspected its presence. Dorland followed his friend's example. His own weapon which had once belonged to Sergeant Major Hauptmann was still intact.

"This sportsman will get it in the neck if he tries any of his tricks," announced Jimsmitt grimly. "The moment he looks like raising that gun I shall simply plug him."

While the distance rapidly lessened between themselves and this bird of ill omen they speculated keenly as to what

the Targui scout would do.

"These warriors don't stand on ceremony. They are always out for blood. But perhaps we can meet him in that little matter." And Jimsmitt took out his pistol.

The camel and its rider were now pretty near. It was a beautiful white *mehira*, of an unequalled speed and endurance, a genuine ship of the desert. The man who rode it looked a formidable warrior, but as he came rapidly towards them he did not change the position of gun or spear. It was just as well for him that he did not, since unknown to himself the two Roumis had him well covered.

Suddenly the man on the camel gave a high, wild cry. He waved both hands in the air, and then so that there should be no mistake about the nature of his greeting he removed his white caftan and waved it on the end of his spear.

XIII

To the utter surprise of Jimsmitt and Dorland and to their profound joy they promptly realised an astonishing fact: the rider of the camel was their friend Zeyd. It was a great moment. Each had given up the other for lost. It seemed not less than a miracle, this wonderful meeting. Zeyd dismounted at once and embraced both his friends affectionately.

Jimsmitt gave a brief account of their own terrible adventure. He then asked Zeyd for his story.

The Arab, it seemed, having reached the village in the oasis, had talked with the sheik. He found him not altogether well disposed towards strangers, only too ready in fact to view them with suspicion. Above all he was in lively fear of the Touareg, of whom a war party was very close at hand. Although willing to let Zeyd replenish his girby, also to provide him with food if paid for, he did not seem greatly to care for this wayfarer. As the wayfarer had a similar feeling in regard to the sheik he did not say overlong in his company.

Zeyd on returning to the wadi at sundown knew at once what had happened. But the Touareg had a start of several hours and in any case there was absolutely nothing that one man, however resolute, could hope to do against them. All the same he decided to follow their trail. He had proceeded a few miles and the moon had risen when he found himself face to face with a Targui scout who had observed him some little way off and had hastened to ride him down. The Targui drove at Zeyd with lance poised, fully intending to kill him. But as Zeyd explained with a grin broadly sardonic the devil met with his master. The simple looking nomad carried a pistol in his jellab. And as the robber came on Zeyd took steady aim and shot him dead.

The hero of this exploit clearly took a pride and a delight in it. He was the blood foe of these bandits. For generations his family had waged a feud against them. He gloried in his success and rendered all the details with humour and gusto.

To Jimsmitt and Dorland the return of Zeyd and the tale that he told was one more astonishing shake of Fate's kaleidoscope. It added a further marvel to that day of marvels. Yet when they came to reconsider the matter they perceived something of the truth. The corpse that had been dragged into the camp in the middle of that terrible night was that of the scout who had been picked up lifeless and camel-less in the open desert by a party of his friends. And as Jimsmitt read the riddle now, the Touareg being deeply superstitious had seen an omen in the mysterious fate of their comrade. It was due to sorcery. For had they not two reputed wizards in their midst who must give proof of their powers if they would save their own lives? The wise men of the tribe had not the slightest doubt that these two dangerous madmen dressed as women who possessed the evil eye had shown what they could do. Hence gentle treatment, and in lieu of a death by torture, a prompt and merciful release.

Jimsmitt's new reading of the riddle appeared to cover all the facts. And when it was duly expounded to Zeyd that man of infinite desert lore accepted it. None the less all three agreed it was a wonderful deliverance from a truly

desperate pass.

Ere the moon had fully risen they had returned to the wadi. It was good to find their outfit just as they had left it. Poles and cords had not been tampered with and the little tent of hair could still give shelter. They tethered the camel and also the worthy Abdulla. Then the three friends sat down and celebrated Allah's bounty by eating and drinking heartily. This they could afford to do since their wallets had been replenished; and in Zeyd's opinion further sustenance was at hand. Before going to seek it, however, they considered what they should do.

Zeyd, who mingled shrewdness and caution with the heart of a lion, was none too sure of the head-man in the neighbouring oasis. He was a rude kind of Bedouin who looked askance at strangers. But Zeyd quite agreed with his friends that it was highly necessary for this sheik to be won over. Why run the gauntlet of enemies more formidable in the open desert? Besides, there was no saying how far they must travel before they came to the next water. And so after much talk in the lee of the tent while the moon waxed higher and the stars shone brighter, Zeyd made a wise proposal. When the sun was up they would fare to the oasis and buy the goodwill of this doubtful sheik by presenting him with a much coveted war djemal lately in possession of the Touareg. If this signal proof of good-will did not appease the sheik nothing in Zeyd's opinion could.

Undisturbed by lurking robber and prowling beast the three friends slept for several hours. Never since beginning their travels had they rested so well. The sun was already high when they awoke. They ate an excellent meal which their changed fortunes sanctioned, and then struck tent, loaded up Abdulla and the djemal and without more delay set out for the oasis. It was not wise to linger in the wadi. That spot was familiar to the Touareg and a second encounter might have an issue less happy.

To the best of their reckoning the place they were making for was about four miles off. It was in good cultivation and extensive. There was a grove of date palms, tamarisks and pomegranates; also a large well. At the moment the three travellers came upon it some women were drawing water. Beyond was a nest of mud huts and a patch of yellowish green which proclaimed growing wheat.

Zeyd paid no heed to a number of fierce looking, heavily armed villagers who eyed him askance, but led his camel straight to the hut of the sheik. He was an old man, tall and severe, with the look of a patriarch. But the beautiful djemal which Zeyd, with some flowery speeches offered him, won his heart at once. Actions speak louder than words, never more so than with the Bedouin. Zeyd told the story of its capture in such a simple open manner that the old chief was delighted.

It was his nature to be deeply suspicious, particularly with the Touareg at his door, but he had no reason to doubt this traveller's tale. Seeing is believing. Zeyd, judging the moment happy, summoned his two friends, who were close by yet out of sight of the sheik. These were presented to Abd-el-Kyr, the village elder, as two holy men of renown, one of whom was under a vow of silence, who had made the haj to Mecca. Abd-el-Kyr looked at the holy men a little doubtfully. He did not seem greatly to approve their appearance, but when Zeyd whispered in his ear that they were medicine men of acknowledged powers he was reassured.

In spite of Abd-el-Kyr's doubt of these two strange looking men-women his mind was soon at ease in regard to the descendant of the Prophet who sponsored them. Zeyd was a man of parts. He had a ready tongue, he had wide information, he had travelled much. Acquainted from infancy with the tribes of the desert, among whom he had been raised, he was able to play upon their weaknesses and to know what burdens could be laid upon their credulity. Moreover to the cunning of the desert breeds was added the more subtle address that comes from travel and worldly wisdom and association with the Roumi.

Zeyd knew the nature of the Bedouin even better than he knew men and cities. And as Jimsmitt deserved to Dorland, "In a couple of shakes of a duck's tail, our lad of the village will be simply running rings round old father Ibrahim."

This was surely well, for the hamlet was full of ugly customers armed with *flissa* and spear, who plainly needed but a word from their chief to fall upon the travellers. No doubt they saw a robber in every stranger. In any case visitors were few. One every ten years was about the average, so they were hardly so well up in treatment of the tourist as the Arab of more fashionable places. But so long as Zeyd basked in the favour of the patriarch his companions held

themselves moderately safe.

Zeyd lost no time in consolidating the good opinion of the sheik. At the going down of the sun, when the elders of the village sat in a half circle about the door of the chief's hut, and a *couscous*, green figs and rice were eaten and coffee was drunk, to which ceremony the three strangers were invited, Zeyd Mohammed gave a thrilling account of the capture of his friends by the wicked Touareg. He told how they had been dragged many miles to their camp, had been bound to a palm tree and threatened with horrible torture.

"If you are wizards give proof of your powers by saving yourselves from the worst of all possible deaths."

Zeyd told the story with lively gesture and dramatic emphasis. "That was the charge laid upon them by the emir himself. And how do you think they met it, our two magicians?" Zeyd asked the question with a merry laugh. "Why, in the course of the night they changed the emir himself into a dromedary. And that is why the Touareg hastened to cut their bonds and send them away."

This wonderful tale aroused great laughter. Yet it was clear from the look on the face of the old sheik that he accepted it. Seeing is believing. Had he not been given a war camel, a thing of real beauty? The modern curse of scepticism might attack some of the younger members of the tribe, but Abd-el-Kyr himself had always respected signs and wonders. It was an amazing feat even for two magicians of renown to compass, but never in his life had Abd-el-Kyr owned so fine a *mehira*.

The villagers were in a state of ferment. Their dreaded foes were close at hand. They had not been attacked by these bandits for more than a year, but an onslaught was expected at any hour. This tribe of Bedouin had earned the name of being able to take good care of itself. Their village was well armed and in a good state of defence. It had two score real fighting men, and, unless the Touareg heavily outnumbered them, was likely to give as good as it got.

The strangers having made a favourable impression on the old sheik, which was increased by their bearing at the public feast, they were made welcome and allowed to pitch their tent at the far end of the village. Like wise men, however, they did not presume too much on this. They were there on sufferance. The tribesmen were dangerously excited. Though the magicians had promised to use their powers against the Touareg these Bedouin did not wholly trust them. And the magicians did not wholly trust their hosts. Yet just now they felt far safer under their protection than out in the open desert. So they decided to keep with these Bedouin as long as it was safe to do so, to take much needed rest and to mature their plans.

At first things went well. That relentless enemy the sun was less formidable here. They chose a spot among the palm trees, some distance from the other tents, which afforded shade, and here they pitched their own. With food to eat, water to drink, coolness to lie in and the vigilance of many against the common foe, the travellers were in infinitely better case. But it would not be wise to dwell overlong with these people. Magicians have to walk with delicacy. While neglecting no chance of improving their fortunes, they were able to pass the time not unpleasantly and with even a certain amount of profit.

Zeyd, who was pretty well at home in the patois of this tribe, acted as spokesman and emissary. Jimsmitt whose Arabic was not inconsiderable was not afraid to air it, and it seemed to Dorland that the charm his friend had for men of every kind was not lost upon this desert folk. As one day followed another they grew less suspicious. For one thing the expected onfall of the Touareg, who still prowled around, had yet to occur. This favour was credited to the strangers, Zeyd having assured the sheik that the robbers dare not approach his village if they knew it held the two magicians. And if they did they would certainly rue the day.

The strangers were kept well supplied with food. Rice, dates, bread and coffee were the staple, and though payment was offered it was declined. While Zeyd fraternised with the villagers the two Roumis gave much time to the study of the Koran and the language in which it was composed. By now they realised its value. And the farther they penetrated into the desert, the more important would a knowledge of Arabic become.

In the course of a week or so, leading a life not unpleasant, they felt renewed in body and mind. On first entering this retreat their spirits were at a low ebb, but the good things now enjoyed did wonders for them. The pure desert air

had a tonic quality. Little food was needed, but it was forthcoming in some abundance. Many wells were tainted with the germs of cholera and other diseases. But it was part of their good luck that in this place the water was pure.

As the result of Zeyd's many talks with the old sheik in which the two magicians sometimes joined, that is to say the elder did so while the one vowed to silence was content to listen, they were able to make a plan for the future. The sheik was a man of knowledge and ripe wisdom, who had ranged the desert widely in his youth. He had been to Mecca and other holy places, and had a good name with other tribes. He said the best line for strangers to follow lay to the southwest. Along that route the oases, to begin with at any rate, were more plentiful, and as the villages were warlike they were less at the mercy of the Touareg, who seldom went far into that country. Farther on, said the sheik, was the land of the Sabyles, a folk not always friendly to the stranger, but true believers and followers of the Prophet. These might be trusted to respect holy men who had made the haj.

The nearest village in that direction was a journey of twelve days on foot. It was occupied by a kinsman and friend of Abd-el-Kyr. He, too, was a man of travel and wisdom, bearing the name of El Bassim. Ever mindful of the war camel, Abd-el-Kyr was ready to commend the strangers to El Bassim personally at any time they chose to woo his favour. The better to do so, the old man would send one of his own sons with them as guide and harbinger of goodwill.

Zeyd was much pleased by this fair offer. Among the desert tribes links of this kind were of high value. The Bedouin set great store by ties of blood. Abd-el-Kyr's bounty was gratefully accepted.

How soon must they avail themselves of it? After their recent experience they were loth to quit this kindly oasis. But there was a danger of outstaying their welcome. The younger warriors not having received a war camel were a little sceptical of their magic powers. Proof might soon be required. Besides the caravan was now fully rested. It would be wise, all things considered, to take advantage of the old man's kindness, and push on at once to the next village.

Twelve days of hardship was involved, but Jimsmitt and Dorland acceded to this plan. They were keen to make a new point in the long and terrible journey that lay ahead. A return to the civilisation of the white man was their ultimate goal, but it could only be won by seizing every chance. Sooner or later they hoped to make the banks of the Nile, but it was certain that if they tarried overlong in the villages of the Sahara they would never get there.

Compared to their state when they arrived in the oasis they were in excellent case. But much depended on the prowling Touareg. Every precaution must be taken to keep out of his hands. For some little time now he had made no sign. The village had kept a sharp lookout, but nothing more had been seen or heard of the war party. There was good hope of these bandits having sought fresh pastures.

Judging the road ahead to be reasonably safe this seemed a favourable moment for departure. When they told the sheik he called to him one of his sons, by name Felim, and confided the strangers to his care. He was to conduct them across the waste to his kinsman El Bassim and give to his personal charge Zeyd Mohammed, the descendant of the Prophet, and his two friends.

Should they buy camels for the journey? As these beasts, immensely useful though they were, cost money of which they had little, and as speed was no object, they decided to keep to Shanks' mare. Zeyd, however, with his usual address, caused the sheik to order Abdulla the donkey to be fully loaded at dawn on the morrow with water and provisions when the little party of four set out.

XIV

Many were the expressions of mutual esteem as the guests took leave of Abd-el-Kyr and the elders of the village. Mingled therewith was perhaps a little mutual relief. The presence of the two magicians was felt to have been sovereign against the Touareg, but sorcerers in general are queer tempered folk, who at the instance of a sandstorm or a sudden change in the weather have been known to bite the hand of friendship. On the other side the wizards had no wish to

disappoint their hosts in the matter of their powers. If any ill befell or a disease broke out that they could not cure, they might easily become unpopular. And as Jimsmitt said to the magician who was under a vow of silence, unpopularity among the Bedouin does not always mean a Christian death.

All things considered it seemed wise once more to embrace the rigours of the desert. Felim, their guide, was an interesting young man. Beauty of countenance was not his strong point, but he was well grown, hardy and without fear. Moreover, he was quite familiar with the road to Khora-aï-Belak, although strictly speaking it was not a road at all. Twice a year he made this journey in the way of trade, sometimes bartering food and camels for the things El Bassim could supply. Also he was a young man of great endurance. So it seemed, at least, to the two magicians. Long after they were conquered by the sun he could keep going. He scorned to lie in the tent during the halt at midday, his power of eye was fully equal to that of Zeyd and he did not know the meaning of fatigue.

The heat of the sun was intense, but the nights were cool, and it was then they made progress. On the morning of the fifth day the stock of water gave out. It had been used rather liberally, as Felim had promised to get more. But when empty skins confronted them Jimsmitt and Dorland grew alarmed and even Zeyd was uneasy. Far as the eye could scan the land was barren. There was not a speck of green in a hundred miles.

Felim, however, showed no concern. He led them presently into a wadi strewn with boulders and cactus and loose stones. It might once have been a river bed, yet was now as dry as the sand around. The guide told them to fix their tent and lie down and rest. Then he chose a place and began to delve with a short stick and his bare hands.

"He will have a long time to dig, I fancy, before he gets a full skin," was the comment of Jimsmitt. Zeyd thought so, too. Moreover, the Arab did not dissemble his anxiety. It had been against his advice that the water had been used so freely. But after they had grilled for an hour in their siesta, for the sun had such power that even the hair tent was no great protection, and they went to see how Felim was getting on, they were astonished to find that he had been successful. The water was not of the best quality and the supply was limited, but it carried them well on into the next day.

Zeyd no less than the Roumis were astonished by Felim's success. Beyond a doubt their guide had extraordinary powers as a water finder. Next day the same thing occurred. Again he led them to a spot where even Zeyd would not have chosen to look for water; again he was rewarded.

"Had we been making this journey alone," Zeyd confessed, "I do not think we should have reached the end of it. This man is a wizard."

The Bedouin are famous for their craft and lore. But for the two white men it was a powerful lesson as to the dangers of travel in the desert. It was disconcerting to feel that Zeyd himself would have been at a loss. Every mile they fared now the country grew more inimical. They were very far already from the things they knew. Yet this was but the threshold of a stupendous journey. Perils menaced them on every hand. Day by day, hour by hour, mile by mile, they seemed to increase.

Felim had reckoned upon completing this trek in twelve days. But it was not until sundown on the fourteenth that he brought them to the oasis of Khora-aï-Belak. To the two white men it was a blessed sight, to Zeyd also it was grateful. Each day the sand had grown hotter, the sun more pitiless. With throats parched and tongues swollen and lips very sore Jimsmitt and Dorland were one ache of weariness as finally they entered a large grove of date palms at the end of which was running water.

Felim led the three travellers at once to El Bassim. He craved the emir's protection for them on the ground of their being holy men who had made the haj. El Bassim, himself a man widely travelled, was greatly interested, as his uncle, Abd-el-Kyr, had shrewdly guessed he would be. The emir was a younger man than he, probably fifty or so, and as became one who had fared to Damascus on the one hand and Tangier on the other, a distance almost incredible as reckoned in the mileage of the desert, he had larger ideas.

Perhaps for that reason the folk he governed appeared less close to savagery. But they had their superstitions. They did not care overmuch for strangers, nor trusted them more than they could help. However, these visitors had been well spoken of by El Bassim's worthy uncle Abd-el-Kyr, so they were bound to show them hospitality. The chieftain heard

with concern of the Touareg. But for many a moon he had not been troubled by these veiled robbers. His oasis lay outside their territory, and though it did not lack protection, for it comprised nearly three hundred armed inhabitants, the emir rejoiced that so it was.

Received with excellent courtesy, the travellers sought the shade of a green grove. Lying there in the midst of plenty in the shape of fruit, buttermilk, fresh mutton, bread and wild honey and their credentials respected, they gave themselves up to repairing the sore fatigues they had undergone. Once more the two white men applied themselves diligently to the Koran and to a verbal study of the Arab tongue. The more deeply they penetrated the wild and trackless country which lay before them, which Zeyd declared the foot of a white man had never trod, the more urgent their need of intercourse with the tribesmen. Every chance must be taken of making themselves proficient. In this they were greatly helped by Zeyd, who made an admirable go-between. He talked with the emir and satisfied the curiosity of the villagers as to who they were and why they had come so far.

Zeyd learned much from El Bassim. This chief was wonderfully informed for a man who dwelt in a part so remote. It was from the lips of El Bassim that he heard of the mysterious city of Krav. This holy place was said to be the oldest in the world. It contained strange mysteries, it practised strange rites, and for men as devout as these pilgrims who had made the haj to Mecca and Medina and the holy cities of the south, it was infinitely worth a visit. Krav was a home of marvels. El Bassim himself, who made the pilgrimage every five years, would answer for it that the Sultan of Krav, whom he could claim as a friend, was strong in the faith. He was sure to welcome Zeyd Mohammed, particularly if he explained that he was forty-second in descent from the Neby.

"*Billah*," said El Bassim as he offered his guest a pipe of the rather acrid tobacco of Southern Arabia, "I have no doubt the sultan will receive you well. He is not a travelled man himself, but he is not without his ideas and he has heard of the Roumi with whom you say you have mingled. It will interest him greatly to meet one who has intimately known the Frangesy. And if you have really studied the art of war with that strange people who are said to have trained the vulture and the eagle, the kite and the condor to fight their battles for them as they fly overhead and to swoop from the air upon the enemies of the white race, it will not surprise me at all, *effendi*, if the Sultan of Krav appoints you to the command of his army."

Such words tickled the ear of an ambitious young man. First among his reasons for adventuring so far in a remote land and taking service with that queer people the Frangesy, had been his desire to master the whole art of war. Many desert wanderers had told him that the despised Roumi had war magics of their own. Zeyd Mohammed had surely discovered them. And now he would be quite happy to sell his hard won knowledge to the governor of the sacred city of Krav, who kept a fine army, or to any other commander of the faithful who would reward his services.

Thus listened Zeyd to the emir with a burning eye. His words were exactly those he sought to hear. The young man knew that his sword must have a great value for the wise sultan of a backward province.

"O Bassim," said Zeyd, "tell me, how far is it to the sacred city of Krav?"

"Upon my best camels," said the emir, "accompanied by a retinue, I have made the journey in thirty-two days."

"We are poor sons of the desert," said Zeyd, "rich only in faith. All our faring is upon our flat feet."

"I doubt if your feet will ever get you there. You will have to venture at least a hundred days through a land of famine. I do not say you will not; all things are possible to the true believer. Yet, my son, it is so much better to have camels."

In his heart Zeyd agreed. But present circumstances put camels out of the question.

However the good fellow lost no time in reporting this conversation to the two Roumis whom so oddly he had come to love. To them also the sacred city of Krav was not without allure. As El Bassim described its whereabouts, it must lie in the direct path to the Nile. It was therefore one more stage of their great journey. But now fully imbued as they were with the endurances of the desert, they had a clear sense of its perils.

"It is a case for camels," said Jimsmitt, "yet if we buy them we must go short of things more important."

This was a sore problem. Even in the heart of the desert, pieces of silver have a magic power. And so few remained that had they bought camels there had been no food for their owners. "No," said Jimsmitt, "let us go afoot to the city of Krav."

Zeyd thereupon made further shrewd enquiries of El Bassim. The rigour of the way would be severe, and the emir did not advise it upon such conditions. Yet the worthy chief had to own that it was performed every year by resolute pilgrims even from Khora-aï-Belak. Half of those who set out on foot never returned, so he could only discourage that mode of travel. Still as Zeyd Mohammed was forty-second in descent from the Neby, and his friends were noted hajji of the holy places there was no doubt they would be able to count on the friendship of Allah. But it would be truly needed, for it was a bad country.

Zeyd, remembering how much they owed Felim, asked the emir if it would be possible to obtain the services of a guide.

El Bassim feared not.

"We will pay him well."

"Yes, but the bad season is coming. There are terrible sandstorms in the fall, about the time he would be returning alone. Were he caught it would be death. You see, O friend, no man fares alone and on foot to the city of Krav. Nor therefrom if he can avoid it."

This was bitter news. None the less the ambition of Zeyd Mohammed had been fired. What the wayfarers had next to consider was the question of some less exacting route. The journey to Krav might prove too great a hazard. Was there some more accessible city in the line of their long trek to Asia?

"No," said the sheik, "the nearest place is El Fandy from which you are lately come."

"But that is to return in our tracks," said Zeyd, "which is far from our intention."

"You must go on to the city of Krav, you must go back to El Fandy, or you must stay here," said El Bassim.

XV

When Zeyd reported this conversation to his friends a severe depression fell upon all three. It looked as if Fate had caught them in a snare. The plain truth was that the oasis in which they lay was on the main track to nowhere. Camels were needed to go on. But to return to El Fandy and the grisly country of the Touareg was out of the question. The only choice was to stay as they were for the time being. They had been well received, they were in good care, there was nothing to complain of. All the same they had no wish to remain indefinitely. Such a life, although paradise compared to the rigours of the open desert, might become intolerable. Yet for the present they must resign themselves to it.

Days passed. Week succeeded week, but the three travellers still abode with El Bassim. There was no flaw in his hospitality. He was a Bedouin rude and simple, and he had very little beyond goodwill and the plainest fare to offer. For these his guests were by no means ungrateful, yet had he been able to read the anxiety of their minds he might have deemed them otherwise. Many hours they spent together devising plans they had not the courage to pursue. After their sharp experience of the open desert the benefits of Khora-aï-Belak must not be lightly eschewed. It was good to enjoy protection from the sun at noon, to have sweet water to drink in abundance, to be saved the imminent dread of thieves and murderers. Why cast these things away for the sake of what was only too likely to prove a mirage?

If they ever got as far as the city of Krav, and it was a very bold assumption, was there any surety they would be as well off as they were now? As for returning to El Fandy that was out of the question. But it was right to look ahead. They

must not hope, even had they so desired, to lie the rest of their days in Khora-aï-Belak. A plan for the morrow was eminently necessary.

When at last the plan came it was the gift of Kismet. A *djinn* turned the water foul. The sequel was an outbreak of cholera in the village.

For the three guests this was a tragic misfortune. Some among their hosts had been a little suspicious of them from the first. They were said to be magicians, yet they had given no proof of their powers. Now was their opportunity. Those who believed in them asked that they should exorcise the evil spirit. But the sceptical did not hesitate to say that as wizards were known possessors of the evil eye they must have already used their wicked powers against those who had shown them friendship.

For the three strangers, therefore, the appearance of cholera was in every way unlucky. The disease itself was a menace to their own lives, while the attitude of the village was one of growing suspicion. Even the friendly El Bassim sought a demonstration of their occult powers.

When Zeyd carried to his friends the bad news they were resting in the shade of their tent. The look upon the face of the Arab declared the heaviness of his heart. And when the two white men heard what he had to tell they were also much troubled. Such tidings were very grave. Their position was already full of peril. Jimsmitt saw at once they must not stay an hour longer than they could help. The dangers that awaited them in the open desert could hardly exceed those which had now arisen. That evening, after much discussion, they made up their minds to leave Khora-aï-Belak without delay.

They decided to make for the city of Krav. Luckily they had been able to glean a good deal of information as to the direction in which it lay. The road, or rather the lack of it, held many perils. It would be taking their lives in their hands. Yet such a journey, after all, was no more hazardous than a return to the country of the Touareg.

Howbeit, they did not hesitate. The sudden appearance of a foe even more dreaded than the robbers of the desert had made up their minds. Delay would be highly dangerous. And it would be prudent to slip off in the night quietly without declaring their intention, lest they be accused of commerce with the *djinn*. Flight was bound to look like guilt. Their first care must be to allay suspicion. Let them make in secret every preparation and then suddenly go.

No time like the present, the travellers agreed. The great decision taken, Zeyd went at once to the huts to procure as much food as he could lay hands upon. And he took pains not to rouse comment. Happily the strangers were allowed to draw without payment a liberal ration from El Bassim's private store. By judiciously offering the sutler a few pieces of silver the wily Zeyd intended to increase the quantity. This he would load privately upon Abdulla, while his two friends went down to the wells and filled the girbys with water against a long and perhaps a terrible journey. It meant risking infection and the spells of the *djinn*. Needs must, however, when the devil drives is as potent a saying among the Bedouin as with the Roumi. There was no help for it. Who could tell when they would again find water?

To begin with the plan or campaign worked out very well. Zeyd without exciting remark contrived to get a very good ration indeed from the sutler. It consisted of bread, rice, dates and figs. The sutler was a simpleton completely absorbed in his office. Not his to ask questions. He did not seem to know that a *djinn* was at work, nor that these strangers who were clearly preparing for a long journey were darkly suspected of illicit dealings. An ill thinking man could easily have made difficulties. But the sutler made none. Upon receipt of a mild *bakshish* he allowed the travellers to take a liberal supply of food from his own abundant store. There had been a very good harvest and bread and fruit were plentiful. Used with care there was enough loaded on the back of Abdulla to carry the travellers far.

Later that evening Zeyd had a final talk with the chief. El Bassim was still his friend, but his mind was now much exercised by the sudden death of three of his flock. It was due to a sickness caused by the malice of a *djinn*. The emir made no secret of the fact that he looked to the two magicians, who for several months had enjoyed his hospitality, to thwart the machinations of this evil spirit.

Zeyd Mohammed promised solemnly that he would do his best in the matter. But wizards are a difficult folk who can only act when the magic lies upon them. The young man deftly turned the conversation to the holy city of Krav and the chances of three pilgrims getting there on foot. If all went well and they were able to strike the caravan route to

Southern Arabia about the twentieth day of the journey, El Bassim inclined to think they might hope. The worthy sheik did not put it higher, but he thought they might hope.

Their hasty preparations made, the travellers were now ready to depart. It was clearer than ever that danger lurked in any delay. Thus as soon as the village was asleep they folded their tent and stole out with the fully loaded Abdulla upon the stony track. They took the road which led from this pleasant valley into the cruel and trackless unknown. As they did so their hearts were heavy. It was as if they held a premonition of things to come. They were leaving ease and abundance for they knew not what. But there was no help for it. To bide a day longer might involve death by sickness or by torture. They had no great hope of reaching the place they sought, nor could they guess the kind of place it would prove should they ever arrive. But they were not in a position to choose. And to repine was vain. All their energy was needed for the task before them now.

They had gleaned some knowledge of the direction they must take. But so many haps were likely to arise, and the landmarks were so few that they could hardly hope to escape grave miscalculations. Their best, nay, their only chance lay in hitting the caravan trail to the city of Krav before their food and water gave out. So they decided to push on as quickly as they could in search of it.

The sun that day, as every day, had cruel power. Being well rested, however, and imbued with the fire of despair, they gave it scant heed but went determinedly on, with only a few brief halts and not pitching their tent until night fell. They rested there until the moon rose and then went on again. Far out now in a barren, treeless, waterless country of loose sand, rock and scrub, there was no road or any kind of mark to guide them. They had to travel by the sunset and the stars. Jimsmitt had a compass, but in such conditions its value was uncertain. The city of Krav had been vaguely described to them as "over there." But the pointing finger of El Bassim had left a margin for error which might easily amount to a thousand miles.

In sore depression the three travellers went on. They went on through the day and through the night. Never had their spirits been so low. It was as if a pre-vision of untoward chance was already upon them. Were they not far out upon that bourne whence no traveller returns?

In this sore travail these men of diverse nature grew strangely close to one another. Their fates were linked so intimately that each seemed a moiety of the others. It was a curious fellowship. Yet there was something deep and sacred and immortal in it.

Jimsmitt had once remarked that Zeyd was a white man all but his skin. It was the highest compliment that one of his race had in his power to pay an Arab. But with equal justice, now that they were far out in the Sahara in complete and terrible submission to the will of Allah, the child of the desert might have said of his two friends that they were Bedouin in all but name. Inexorably they kept up hour by hour, day by day. Sternly they limited themselves to a few drops of water and a very little food at sundown. Zeyd did not forget that his companions were white men accustomed to eat and drink more heavily than the desert bred.

Presently the wayfarers began to lose count of time. But as they drove on through that pathless waste, with never a hint of their goal and very little hope of it, they knew the precious days were passing. They kept a sense of direction as well as they could, but the "over there" of El Bassim was now a mockery. It was very doubtful now if they could have found their way back to Khora-aï-Belak.

They had still a fair supply of food in their wallets, but the girbys were almost dry. Shrivelled tongues, swollen lips and burning throats were causing much pain. But near sundown one evening when both white men were beginning to fear madness, came one more signal instance of the kindness of God. They were stumbling among rough stones which formed a sort of trough in the sand when Zeyd suddenly picked up a piece of grey green moss. The next moment he was on his knees digging with bare fingers as if for very life.

His friends had little expectation. Their joy was the greater therefore when Zeyd held up his hands and showed them moist. Jimsmitt and Dorland joined feverishly in the digging. And before night swooped down they had scraped water enough to allay their pains. There was also the hope of more. To do full justice to this cache they camped till dawn. The water was hard to get, but they were able to collect enough for several days. And they were loth to quit this

land of promise. There was no saying when they would strike water again. But they must not stay long lest their supply of food give out.

When they moved on, although water and rest had done wonders, the two white men soon began to flag. Zeyd, the child of the desert, was still untiring, but his companions were asking too much of nature. Already it was certain their limit was near. They did all they could to keep the knowledge to themselves. But their strength was going. It was a point of honour not to complain, yet as mile after mile they lurched and stumbled on by the faint light of the stars they might have been drunken men.

The day came at last when exhaustion, lack of water and food and the heat of the sun told their inevitable tale upon the most fragile of the three. Dawn one morning found Dorland in the throes of fever. It was clear that he could no longer keep up with his companions and it would have been futile to urge him to do so. He begged them to leave him, since any delay in the open desert would involve the death of all. But the others would not hear of this. Even at the cost of their own lives they were determined not to abandon him.

In sheer desperation and not knowing what to do, Dorland insisted on dragging his failing limbs a few miles more. But when they had come to a watercourse completely dry, which yet offered partial shelter from the sun's brutal rays, he sank down in a kind of vertigo and was unable to rise. Here he lay gasping and writhing in a low fever for the rest of that day. And even when the night brought a little ease, he could not continue the journey. He realised as he lay tossing helplessly hour by hour that only one thing remained to be done.

If he were not to involve his friends in his own fate he would have to blow out his brains. For one of his nature it would not be easy. But no choice lay before him. He must screw up his courage to the deed. The idea once firmly lodged in his mind the problem was how and when to execute it. Both his friends kept with him in the shelter of the tent. And to judge by their vigilance they had guessed his purpose.

All that day Jimsmitt and Zeyd kept their eyes upon him. And when night came and he feigned sleep in order to put them off their guard he was still unable to outwit them. For when seizing his moment he rose very stealthily in the darkness and took the automatic from his belt, he was unable to apply it to his temple before Jimsmitt, who had been feigning sleep, also had sprung up and wrested the pistol from him.

"No you don't, old man," said Jimsmitt. "One for all. All for one. That's the motto of this caravan."

Dorland had not the strength to contest the matter. He could but regret his own feebleness and lie down again with a groan. Weaponless now and growing ever weaker he felt that chance was past. Again he begged his friends to leave him to his fate, but their only answer was to press to his lips more than a fair share of the scant water that remained.

XVI

The skins were again so low that early one morning Zeyd set off with a girby and a digging tool. By the light of recent experience his hope was not high. There was little chance of finding water within a reasonable distance of the wadi. But the good fellow knowing the sheer necessity went off alone cheerfully, leaving Jimsmitt to look after the sick man.

Zeyd had been gone about two hours when there came a sudden fall of temperature. It was more than welcome. At that moment Jimsmitt and Dorland guessed little of what it portended.

Enormous clouds began to appear in the south west. Soon arose a heavy distant sound of rushing. Then it was that Jimsmitt, who had experience of the Sahara, felt a sudden grip of terror. What he heard could have only one meaning. A sandstorm was coming. And its awful fury gathering momentum over thousands of miles, with nothing to break its force, meant almost certain death for those who were exposed to the full blast.

Zeyd had not yet returned. Fears for his safety were now rife. But he was far beyond human aid. The best there was to hope for, as far as he was concerned, was that he would be able to find some kind of wadi or *donga* in which to lie while the worst of the storm passed. Yet even that would mean an intervention of Providence.

It was useless to speculate. Nor was this the moment. The coming storm was almost upon them. Jimsmitt must act promptly if he were to save his own life and that of his stricken friend. He ran forth at once to find Abdulla. The good little beast had been hobbled as usual, but a few yards off. Quickly he was led into the tent. Ropes and pegs were firmly adjusted; then the moaning semi-conscious Dorland was dragged within. The entrance was closed up to keep out the sand. And then in complete darkness Jimsmitt, who stood in the middle of the tent, the better to hold on to the fabric, awaited the storm. Abdulla seemed to share the terror of the Englishman. The poor beast snuffed and sweated and made queer noises. Dorland alone of the three was in no condition to appreciate the new peril.

Barely had Jimsmitt made his dispositions when all the Furies of the desert swept down upon him. Amid shrieks and screams to affright the boldest, a terrific wind struck the little hair tent. By the mercy of God the wadi was deep enough to break its fury. Save for that the house of hair must surely have been torn from its moorings and cast away. Even as it was, the issue of the storm was long in doubt. Jimsmitt held on to the roof of the tent with better success than he expected, but soon came another menace. The flying sand had a trick of completely burying everything which dared to stand against it. Even if the tent could keep the perpendicular, sooner or later it would be over-borne by the sheer weight of sand. And then a death by suffocation would almost certainly follow.

Still this was a chance that had to be taken. To venture now into the open was to woo even more certain death. By far the best hope for all three was to stay as they were. It was a gamble upon the tent being strong enough to resist to the bitter end. But it was wise. The wadi continuing to break the fury of the storm Jimsmitt was able to hold on until it had passed.

For rather more than three hours the simoon was at a height. Then it began to diminish sensibly. By the time the sky had cleared and light had pierced the sides of the tent the air was nearly calm again. Jimsmitt was able to open the flap, although a considerable weight of sand had gathered about it, and so escaped a powerful and growing threat of asphyxiation. When the flap was open the air was much the cooler for the storm. It smelt quite refreshing. The temperature was lower by many degrees than at any time since they had left Khora-aï-Belak. But the heart of the Englishman was heavy as he came forth to survey the picture.

In a sense the havoc was surprisingly little, perhaps for the good reason that amid such barrenness there was hardly any mischief for Nature to do. An earthquake must have left things much as they were. But here and there, by the wind's caprice, the blown sand had been greatly displaced. Owing to the shelter of the wadi they had met no personal harm. All the same their camp was half burled. It was grim evidence of what would have happened had they been caught in the open. They owed much to the clemency of God. Yet the heart of Jimsmitt sank. It seemed as he gazed upon the wild and terrible scene that there was little hope for Zeyd.

Had the Arab been able to take shelter? It was immensely unlikely.

For the whole of that day clouds obscured the sun. The fall in temperature continued and the change was tonic. It brought such relief to Dorland that his fever abated. His friend was careful to keep from him the loss of Zeyd. Jimsmitt by now could only believe that the Arab had been overcome or had lost his way, and that they must not hope to see the good fellow again.

It was a tragic blow. All through this incredible journey they had leaned very heavily upon their guide. His knowledge, his cunning, his endurance—without these in abundant measure they could never have come so far. And their withdrawal just now was tantamount to sentence of death. Had Zeyd been with them still it was hardly to be expected that they would emerge alive from this sore pass. Now that he was gone their case seemed hopeless.

All through the night which followed—to Jimsmitt one of despair—he sat by Dorland's improvised couch. Once or twice the stricken man asked for their friend. Each time the Englishman parried his question. When another day broke it was clear that Zeyd would not return.

The water by now had all but given out. Dorland was still consumed by thirst, and Jimsmitt, who for the sufferers' sake had been content with less than his share, for several days was himself enduring torture. As he went forth with a waterskin and a pointed stick he felt that he was upon a hopeless quest. The watercourse in which they were encamped had seemed bone dry. It had been thoroughly prospected by Zeyd and himself three days ago. Coming madness and a cruel death were stalking them already, as Jimsmitt moved listlessly upon what in seasons more favourable was the bed of a tiny river. Already the sun was out again like an avenging sword. Without water it would not be possible to sustain its fury.

But the despairing man had not gone far when there happened a strange thing. In certain parts of the river bed, where the full force of the *huboob* had struck it, there had been a considerable displacement of loose sand. Here and there the face of the watercourse was much changed. Dark patches were showing. Thrilled by a hope he dare not entertain the unlucky man fell on his knees and began to dig. Soon there was a promise of results. As with a mounting excitement he went deeper and deeper there came a tiny trickle of the precious fluid. In the course of an hour, working hard, he was able to collect and strain a full girby.

It was their best strike for many a long and bitter day. And there looked to be more at hand. Wildly excited, Jimsmitt bore his discovery to the tent. Dorland and he drank greedily. The water tasted wonderfully sweet. And that was also the judgment of Abdulla. He too had had to suffer. Indeed they feared their willing friend was about to die. But this providential finding of water meant a new lease of life for all three. The spring was less than a mile from where Dorland lay. And Jimsmitt, strengthened immensely by what he had found already, soon returned for a further supply. It would be wise to get what they could while they could lest the growing heat of the day suck it dry.

Jimsmitt continued to dig with excellent results. Girbys were replenished by noon. And then later, as evening approached, he went again and found more. And there was still a reasonable quantity left for the morrow.

This wonderful piece of luck made them new men. Their food would last several weeks. Water all along had been their problem. Now that for the time being it was in fair supply their pangs were stayed. They hoped for strength to move across the waste in search of the caravan route to the city of Krav. It was said to intersect the desert but a few miles from where they were now. If only they could strike it there would be a prospect of new oases. Anyhow the present discovery gave them a further lease of life.

Zeyd's fate, however, could no longer be hidden from Dorland. In a sense that dire tragedy completely embittered their cup. Not only had they lost a self-sacrificing friend but the lack of his incomparable skill and craft was as heavy a misfortune as could well have beset them. What a grim irony underlay the whole matter! Zeyd had no need to go afield in quest of that which unknown to them was at their very door. And that act of nature's violence which had disclosed its presence had undoubtedly robbed their friend of his life. The inscrutable providence upon whom all depended had given freely with one hand while it cruelly took away with the other.

Heavy of heart and yet sensible of their luck they stayed by the water several days. It was of a good kind and so deep was the havoc of the wind along the river bed that the flow was fairly copious. They might have remained longer in the land of plenty, and would have been glad to do so, but there was food to consider. The one real hope of life was to reach the caravan route before that gave out. And so they must take one more chance in this land of chances and go in search of it at the earliest moment.

That moment came as soon as Dorland's fever had subsided and he was strong enough to walk. Then it was in the cool of the night, by the light of the stars these two unlucky men led forth a creature hardly less unfortunate. Jimsmitt in his devotion would have had Dorland mount Abdulla. But Dorland would not hear of this. "No," he said. "It isn't fair. Let each bear his own burden. Share and share alike is the law for us now."

Bay after day, night after night, they stumbled blindly on. Their store of food grew rapidly less, for there was never a sign of succour. Again they were afflicted with a cruel need of water. Tormented by thirst and hunger and a powerful threat of sun-blindness, it was now certain that madness and death were not far off. Mile by mile Jimsmitt continued to sustain his friend. As long as Dorland had that shoulder to lean upon and a voice, gentle, kind and whimsical, to charm his ear he was somehow able to keep going. Time and again it seemed that he must fall dead in his tracks. But the sense of Jimsmitt ever by his side lent force to his limbs, nerve to his heart, even in those grim hours when the face of God was

hid.

And so it was that one morning at sunrise, with a dread and strange darkness falling upon their eyes, they suddenly realised that only a little way off and coming towards them in a cloud of dust was the thing they sought. It was that for which for many days they had longed. Their faith had met with reward. It was a caravan of pilgrims making the haj to the sacred city of Krav.

An hour later the two worn and broken men had joined up with this band. Food and water were once more obtainable. The caravan led them to one oasis after another. Finally they reached that wonderful and mysterious city of which they had heard.

Of what these desert travellers did there this is neither the time nor the place to tell. Nor of their going thence. Nor of their further travels in wild and barren and trackless places never before trodden by the Roumi. Nor of their many sufferings. The story of these adventures among strange peoples, in old and remote cities, may never be told. Nor the story of a bitterly painful captivity at the hands of a cruel sultan.

But through many terrible hazards Jimsmitt and Dorland fared together. And each continued to sustain the other with a devotion passing the love of women.

This odyssey, in the beyond of which a record has yet to be made, endured nearly three years from the time of their flight from Sidi-bel-Abbès in North Africa. And then by many devious ways they came to the city of Damascus. Afterwards they went by the Red Sea and through the breadth of Syria to the Nile. Thence to Khartoum, and finally one morning of spring, they found themselves at the gates of Cairo.

Gaunt as shadows, burnt dark by the sun of the desert, barefooted, mere bundles of rags that would scarce hold together, they reached that city in the guise of beggars. There was nothing in the outward aspect of these vagabonds to relate them to what they had been. None could have guessed their nationality. Their unkempt beards, their inscrutable, half vacant eyes, the colour of their skins, the strangeness of their gestures were far indeed from the civilisation of the West. It would have been difficult for Jimsmitt's mother to have recognised her son, an English gentleman. Nor would it have been easy for the mother of Ambrose Dorland to recognise a graduate of Harvard University.

Their sufferings had been terrible. Many times it had seemed they could never hope to win back to the haunts of the white race. Certain it is that they could not have done so had they gone alone. But their united strength, the one helping the other through the barren lands and an utter darkness of the spirit, had somehow brought them home. As they came in sight of the minarets of Cairo they were walking like a pair of children hand in hand. It was the measure of Allah's bounty. It was the measure of a darkly inscrutable Providence.

XVII

They found a cool and quiet place within the Fazil gate. Here they sat. And then they considered what they should do. They were back where they belonged. After all they had been through it seemed incredible that they should live to see this day. But as they sat weary and numb inside the Fazil gate they could make no plans. Adrift so long in the wilderness it was as if they had lost the power of consecutive thought.

They did but ask to rest. That was now their sole demand of a highly mysterious cosmos. Had it not been for the other's presence each would have sought to die. Life as they had learned to know it through those awful years had only one guerdon. And that guerdon was the face of a friend. In the wan eyes of each lay a mystic talisman which wrought upon the other's soul.

Jimsmitt and Dorland sat together in the shade of the Fazil gate. The younger man, after his wont, laid his turbaned head on the ragged shoulder of his friend. And then in utter weariness he fell asleep. Several hours he slept, while his alter ego, not stirring a limb, gazed steadily at the pageant before him with eyes half blind. He gazed upon the busy life around him, wherein men and women of his own kind abounded, and upon those curious familiar things he had not expected to see again.

Strange it was to be seated thus by the highway in the very nexus of affairs in the heart of the eastern world. To the Englishman it seemed that his years of weary travail, of hardship and misery unspeakable, were but the fabric of a dream. Now that he saw again the people of his own race, amid the trappings of a civilisation he had once enjoyed, the hell through which he had passed lost its grip.

When Dorland woke up they tried again to make plans for the future. But it was no use. Each felt that the linchpin had been knocked out of his brain. There was a total lack of the co-ordinating will that enables a man to mould his destiny. Yet if they were not to spend the rest of their days a mere couple of *fellaheen* beggars by the wayside, they must be up and doing.

They had still a little money. It was only a few pieces of silver, which with grim tenacity they had managed to keep through many vicissitudes. Sitting by the Fazil gate it seemed a very meagre store. But if they were to bend the future to their purposes it behoved them now to eke out these piastres and drachmas and Arabian dollars to the most careful advantage. When they had rested awhile they ate the last of their dates. And then they fell again to discussing what they should do. But they reached no practical goal. In the true oriental manner they talked about it and about it but came out by that same door wherein they went. At last in the late afternoon as the sun began to dip behind the tamarisk trees that screened the western sky and the waters of the Nile there happened a strange thing.

This occurrence in itself very simple, perfectly congruous, made upon Dorland an extraordinary impression. The spot they had chosen, although protected from the sun, was well in the eye of the passer-by. Being one of the chief highways of the city, there was a constant stream of traffic. Both wayfarers had been enormously interested by a garish and brilliant throng. All the chief types of the Orient were here to be seen, mingled with many typical westerners of the upper class. Automobile, rickshaw, horse, mule and camel made a continual procession,

Jimsmitt and Dorland were fascinated by the spectacle. The whole thing was a brilliant panorama, a vivid picture they had never expected to see again. In the midst of the scene which so deeply stirred their emotions an unforgettable incident arose.

Dorland observed coming slowly towards them the most completely beautiful woman he had ever seen. Such an impact upon his vision may have owed something to the circumstance. The painter was as one returned from the dead. His artist's eye, open always to vivid and swift impressions, was now almost morbidly excited. Versed in the esoteric values which only a highly trained craftsman can assess, he was stirred very deeply by this apparition of exquisite grace.

She might have been in the late twenties and she was accompanied by a young girl. Sauntering past in the grateful shade of the lime and the tamarisk, there was ample opportunity to look at her. But when Dorland came to think the matter over afterwards he could never really decide how much of the lasting effect this woman made upon him was the fruit of what occurred. Yet he could not help thinking that even had she passed them by, Jimsmitt and himself, squatting from habit in the shade like a couple of eastern beggars, this wonderful creature would still have awakened the deepest and subtlest forces in his nature. For him it must have been a moment of rebirth. The mere sight of such beauty must have roused a dead ambition.

Was it that eyes burning with recognition of things forgot pierced a secret in her heart? Or more likely, as Dorland came to believe, it was a similar phenomenon stirring in the tormented soul of Jimsmitt. For as this lady approached those two dark bundles of rags, which presumably contained the Bedouin of the desert, she halted suddenly and gave Jimsmitt a long and piercing look. Then at the beck of an obscure impulse which yet was plainly rooted in pity, she opened her *sac-à-main* and very gently with a gesture that Dorland was never to forget laid a silver dollar in the lap of his companion.

Jimsmitt, who had had no thought of *bakshish*, was too much astonished to acknowledge the alms. He made neither

movement nor sound as the two women immediately went on. Yet so great was the tension of the man at his side that Dorland well knew the incident had cut very deeply into his soul.

Clearly this man, whom impenetrable mystery enshrouded, was greatly and strangely affected.

The silence which fell upon the two friends continued until the lady and the girl were out of sight. Jimsmitt then remarked in a far-off unhappy voice which gave the man who loved him a sense of ice along the spine, "This, my son, is one more of the things that simply don't happen." And very softly and gently he laughed to himself.

Nothing more was said of the matter at that time. Dorland feeling that it held the seed of the uncanny, summoned all that he had of will to dismiss the thing from his mind. To that end he rose from the grass and taking his friend by the arm moved farther on into the city. They bought a little food and then in the native quarter found a very cheap lodging for the night. Their means entitled them to a roof of some kind to cover them, but until they had formed a definite scheme of life they would do well to conserve every cent of their resources.

It was strange indeed to be lying under a roof once more cheek by jowl with the civilisation of the west. They slept amid bedfellows of a lively kind. But a long captivity with the Sultan of Krav and their recent mode of life had inured them to these. Followed a breakfast of rye bread with a bowl of the bitter but excellent Arab coffee for which they had developed a taste in their travels. And then towards noon they went forth as far as l'Avenue des Fleurs, a very gay and pleasant thoroughfare, and sought the friendly shade of the tamarisk.

Here it was, stretched at ease, that Dorland's mind turned again to the future. He was a man still young, not thirty as yet, in whom ambition was beginning to stir in its long sleep. A dormant talent must soon be calling to him. After years of misery almost too great to be borne he felt that he must do something to justify the life for which he had striven and had so hardly won.

It was while he lay thus, with these ideas germinating in his mind, that his companion spoke again of the incident of the previous evening. Dorland had tried to dismiss it. Better for the health of Jimsmitt's soul that it pass into oblivion. But it was Jimsmitt now who took up the tale. And he did so in a curiously dramatic manner.

Without reason or rhyme, the man by Dorland's side rose suddenly from the ground on which they lay, opened his tattered *jellab* and disclosed round his thin brown neck a locket suspended by a fine chain of gold. The American had observed that locket on other occasions. But Jimsmitt had never alluded to it, and Dorland had had no curiosity about it. Doubtless it was some heirloom or charm, or it may have held a portrait of Jimsmitt's mother.

Now, however, in a startling fashion, Jimsmitt slipped the chain from his neck and handed the locket to Dorland. "Open it, old man," he said in a soft, wistful tone.

Little suspecting the thrill in store Dorland opened the locket in a casual way. He recoiled sharply. It was as if a viper had bitten him. The locket fell from his fingers into the sand.

He had seen the portrait of a woman, an exquisite miniature. She was hardly more than a girl. But it was a face seen very recently. And to an artist's eye it was unforgettable. "God," said Dorland with a gasp. All at once he felt a queer tightening of the throat and breast.

"Ye-es," said Jimsmitt half to himself, "the ways of Allah are inscrutable."

Whimsicality masked the words; yet it could not mask the anguish in the eyes of him who uttered them. They held a depth of pain the man at his side could not bear to see. Almost from the hour of their coming together Dorland had known that James Smith, otherwise Jimsmitt, otherwise Smitt, otherwise Smitten-of-Allah, guarded a vital secret. Not his to penetrate, he had dismissed it from his mind. Yet now, in this strange hour, the sense of it returned upon Dorland with awful intensity. The hand of Fate itself, imperious and merciless, had suddenly descended again upon Smitten-of-Allah. That odd self-description once more recurred to Dorland. It was surely a portent of great suffering. The look of the man as he uttered those sinister words smote upon his friend's tender heart. Alas, poor Jimsmitt!

Dorland said nothing. What could he say? "More things are in earth and heaven, Horatio, than are dreamed of in our

philosophy" was a phrase that formed in his mind. But he was silent.

Most of the day was spent under the trees. Little in the way of words passed between them. Yet the mind of Dorland was full of the immediate future. And this concern was intensified by what befell when they returned in the evening to the byways of the city. En route to their squalid lodging they had to pass a dive wherein liquor of a crude and fiery sort could be obtained. Here the Italian could buy lacrima cristi, the American a horse's neck, the Russian vodka. It was a haunt of many doubtful members of a heterogeneous floating population.

"Let us celebrate our good luck, old man." As they came to the door of the White Dove, Jimsmitt unexpectedly broke a silence which had grown painful to his friend. "I must buy you a drink."

Dorland had no particular wish for a drink. His wanderings had somehow cured his morbid taste for absinthe. And there was reason to hope that lack of opportunity had also cured Jimsmitt's. But now as he suddenly entered this place and his friend unwillingly followed there was in his tone and bearing that which caused Dorland's heart to sink. His companion led the way through the swing doors up to a glittering counter presided over by an obese Turk wearing a fez.

To Dorland's horror Jimsmitt produced the silver dollar the woman had given him and demanded absinthe. He ordered two glasses.

"No, no," said the younger man firmly to the Turk. "Do not get it." And then without another word he took Jimsmitt by the arm and half led, half dragged him out of the place.

XVIII

Gripping his companion as if he were a prisoner Dorland led him down a long and squalid street to the cheap eating house they had visited the previous evening. Here another meal of sorts was placed before them. It cost only a few cents, but in comparison with desert fare it was not unpalatable. Jimsmitt could hardly be got to touch it. But the younger man, already feeling immensely better for his return to civilisation, was able to do justice to the rice and eggs and the excellent coffee. All the same he was not in a happy mood. He had a growing concern for his friend. Since the incident the previous day Jimsmitt's manner had become very strange. His sudden demand for absinthe was in the circumstances extremely disquieting. Dorland feared that the blow Fate had dealt him was beyond his strength to bear.

This evening Jimsmitt had a curious apathy. His eyes seemed veiled and gazing inwards. All day he had been without food, yet he pushed away his plate untasted. Finally he said as Dorland led him away to their lodging, "I think, old man, we had better clear out of this city."

Dorland thought so, too. Cairo seemed no place for either of them. And presently when he lay stretched on a hard bed in a stuffy attic he gave his mind to the new problem. For the sake of his friend let them move on. Cairo had become intolerable to Jimsmitt.

Dorland felt menaced by the whole responsibility of the future. It was left to him not merely to plan but to carry out a new orientation. The blow which had fallen so unexpectedly, so mysteriously upon Jimsmitt seemed to have broken his will. His growing apathy was alarming to the man who loved him. Dorland as he reviewed their unhappy situation felt that it behoved him to do all in his power to renew the link which had snapped in each of their lives. He had no idea who Jimsmitt was; he did not know his real name or of anything pertaining to him. But he was so obviously other than his circumstances that his friend must not rest until he had been able to re-establish him, to put him back where he belonged.

As for Dorland himself, when he had joined the Foreign Legion at the end of 1915, he had been a painter of brilliant promise. His friends in Paris did not hesitate to speak of his genius. But as things were now it would not be possible to pick up the threads of that life just as they had been left. It was true the war was over and the Armistice had been signed nearly six months, yet it was hardly likely that its terms included an indemnity for deserters from the French Foreign

Legion. Anyhow, Dorland had no intention of taking the risk by showing himself in Paris. He was too well known there, and he had enlisted in his own name. One thing he could do. And he felt it must be done at the first opportunity. There was a sum to his credit at one of the French banks. It was not large, but it was the residue of the much diminished estate that had come to him on the death of his mother. Except the money Jimsmitt and he had stowed away in their own rags, which at best amounted to a few pounds English, this sum in the Paris bank comprised the whole of their resources.

As Dorland lay in his bed that night he came to several important decisions. He felt that the best, perhaps the only, chance Jimsmitt had was to return to his native land. He must break the spell that was upon him. Let him forget the awful years in the tropical heat of the dark continent. A means must be found to relate him to the life he had formerly known.

The next day was full of significance. Its events seemed to fix and develop the scheme for the future that had already formed in Dorland's mind. It began inauspiciously. Jimsmitt refused to eat a crumb of their meagre breakfast. This was a bad sign, for the previous day he had also eaten nothing. Also the cloud, so alarming to Dorland, which had spread over his mind, appeared to increase. He seemed to be losing his memory. And he spoke hardly at all. Dorland, however, began to develop power of will as that of Jimsmitt waned. The younger man faced with an ever-growing responsibility waxed ever higher in resolve as his friend grew weaker.

In the course of a momentous day the American might be said to take upon himself the rôle of mother, wife, nurse and comrade. He began by compelling, literally compelling the Englishman to swallow a little food. And then, taking him by the arm, he led him from the stews of the city to a pleasant spot near the Jamsar gate where he would be safe from the sun and the traffic. Then having drawn a solemn promise from the stricken man that he would not stir from this place until his own return, Dorland left him comfortably in the shade and went forth into the city.

The French bank that held his money did not appear to have a branch in Cairo. Of that he was informed by the Crédit Lyonnais. Nor, as he was further informed, had it an accredited agent. The reason was simple and it was cogent. It appeared the bank in question was in liquidation, having stopped payment and failed for a very large amount. The Crédit Lyonnais took a gloomy view of its affairs. Its creditors were only likely to receive a very small dividend, if any, and many months must pass before even that could materialise.

This news was staggering. The one weapon Dorland possessed had broken in his hand. His sole means of re-establishing himself in the only world he knew had completely vanished. There was none to whom he could turn. His European friends all lived in France. And that was a country to which just now he must give the widest possible berth. He had no friends in England, for he had never been there. In Rome he had only made acquaintances. Even if he could get as far as that city there was nothing to ask of it in the way of help.

The one alternative was to scrape the wherewithal together by hook or by crook and go back to America. But even there he was hardly known. He had formed friendships at Harvard which long ago had lapsed. And in any event he was far too proud to pick up the threads in the too obvious rôle of a down-and-out. The same held true of his few relations. Some there were, no doubt, scattered up and down the length and breadth of the United States, but he knew little of them, and they still less of him. Had his mother been alive it would have been otherwise. As it was, with a sick man on his hands, hardly a dollar in his pocket and but a few rags to his back, his own country appeared to be about the last place on earth he cared to visit.

Yes, the blow was crushing. He felt completely stunned by it as he strolled round the city and tried to shape in his brain some alternative scheme. The more thought he gave to the matter the more imperative it grew that Jimsmitt should leave the East as soon as possible. As Dorland read his case it needed the astringent air of his native continent to pull him together. The one chance, it seemed to Dorland, to restore his mind was to banish from it the nightmare of the last three years. If he stayed where he was he would sink lower and lower. And there was reason to fear that he had already gone too far.

Growing pretty desperate and knowing that what was done must be done quickly, Dorland had come to no further decision when towards evening he rejoined his friend. Jimsmitt still sat where he had been left. He was sunk in tragic gloom, but at the sight of Dorland a light flickered into his eyes. For days, for months past, that beacon had always shone there, no matter how transiently, at the mere approach of his friend.

"Good to see you, old man," said Jimsmitt faintly.

And then he added in a slow reluctant voice: "I expect the time has about come to dissolve our little partnership."

Dorland asked what he meant.

"We are at the end of our journey, aren't we?"

"No, we are not," said Dorland. "There's a long way to go yet."

"Not for me, old son. I feel I can't keep on any longer. And you have all the world before you, so it isn't right to hold you back."

"That's as may be," said Dorland. "But we are going to travel to Europe together. And the air of that old place is going to put you right."

But to judge by the look of Jimsmitt now it was quite clear that he had no wish to be put right. He seemed to feel that he was done. In fact he roundly asserted that he was a watch whose mainspring had snapped.

Rather than be a heavy drag upon his friend, Jimsmitt asked to be left to his fate. But Dorland let him see that he had not the least intention of consenting to that. Moreover, with a robust optimism he did not really feel, he declared that it was in his power to set him right again.

Jimsmitt, for some reason, appeared to have no wish to be put right. His one object during many incredible months spent in places "off the map" had been to get the man he loved safe into port. Well, he had brought him there at last. That was the appointed end of a long and terrible journey and, as far as Jimsmitt was concerned, an end of the whole sorry business of life.

However, it was to be nothing of the kind. Bonds had been forged in the hearts of these two men while they had suffered and borne and striven together. And now in this new phase of their extremity in a sense their minds had become one. That is to say they had only one will between them. And for the time being that will was in possession of the younger, the stronger, the more virile, the more forward looking nature. Had Jimsmitt been free to act for himself, he would have taken himself off altogether, so that Dorland unimpeded might go on alone. But Dorland was now so much stronger than he that he was able to dictate the actions of both.

"You are coming to Europe, Jim," he said. "And Europe is going to put you right."

Jimsmitt gently shook a head of blank despair. But just then he had neither the wit nor the will to disabuse the mind of his friend.

XIX

Dorland had fully decided in his own mind that they were going to Europe. But he was much puzzled as to the means of getting there. While they sat in the cool of the tamarisks turning over the pros and cons of the whole matter—that is to say, as well as Jimsmitt was in a condition to apprehend them—Dorland saw that, assuming he was able to maintain his present ascendancy of will power, the problem must resolve itself into one of ways and means. Could they raise enough money to get to Europe?

Dorland soon concluded that the difficulties of reaching England were likely to prove very great. But if attacked with boldness perhaps they were not insuperable. After considerable thought and a survey of their joint resources, he made a definite plan. But it was contingent upon everything turning out favourably. An adverse wind, an unforeseen chance, would instantly shatter it.

First they must exchange their present rags for some clothes of the European kind. It did not matter how cheap they were. Then they must make their way to Alexandria, seek out the skipper of some ocean tramp at that port and persuade him to take them to Europe. To this end Dorland would propose to work his own passage. He lacked experience of the sea; but he was fairly strong now and more than willing. Jimsmitt was in no state to earn his own keep, but Dorland ventured to hope with an optimism the case hardly warranted, that he would be able to fix terms of some kind by which his friend could accompany him upon the voyage.

Unfortunately they had very little money. The most skilful accountancy could not stretch it far enough to cover their needs. And when Dorland outlined the scheme to Jimsmitt, the Englishman showed so little interest in it, for one place seemed to him as good as another to die in, that it was clear he must look for no help from that failing mind. But each day now brought new fighting power to Dorland. He had formed his plan and nothing less than a definite non-possumus on the part of Fate was going to turn him from it.

To begin with he was driven to do a thing which he greatly disliked. Beyond a few pieces of silver, odd bits of bric-à-brac such as Arab charms and two or three stones of very doubtful value, the only articles in their possession which could be turned to commodity were the gold locket and chain that Jimsmitt wore round his neck. These undoubtedly had a definite value even with the goldsmiths of Cairo. Dorland had perforce to explain to their owner that the chain at least must be used for their needs if they were ever to see Europe.

To Dorland's surprise Jimsmitt promptly opened his shirt, removed the talisman and without saying a word handed it to his friend. Dorland would have given much not to have had to barter the gold chain. But there was no help for it. As far as the locket was concerned and the exquisite miniature it contained, he felt that it had a considerable value. Whether a Jew dealer in the rue Denise would be persuaded to give a reasonable sum for it was an open question. However, his dealings with the goldsmith were satisfactory enough to make further negotiation for the time being unnecessary.

The sale of the gold chain enabled them to buy a couple of reach-me-downs from a slop tailor in the ghetto. They were ill fitting suits of poor quality but they served. Also they bought thick shirts and drawers and new headgear, which, after complete immersion of themselves in the public baths, they were glad enough to don. It was not exactly Bond Street attire, but compared with the masses of unclean rags they had been able to discard, it was undoubtedly an advance in the right direction.

The next thing to do was to proceed by train to Alexandria. This would deplete their resources very considerably. But it seemed economically sound. It would take too long to perform the journey on foot as they would still require food each day. Moreover Dorland was not sure that Jimsmitt was in a condition to undertake it. Indeed, throughout all these preliminaries his rôle was entirely passive. As always he seemed to be living in a cloudland of apathy.

When they reached Alexandria it was late in the evening. They had some food at a café, although it was little enough that Jimsmitt could be persuaded to eat. And then for the sake of economy they found places on a seat in one of the public parks. The air being dry and the night warm, they rested in fair comfort until dawn. For men of regular life such a night had been sorry enough. But compared with what they had undergone in the Sahara and elsewhere this repose had a touch of Elysium.

As soon as the sun was up they moved off slowly to the docks. Dorland was the nerve and the sinew, the blood and the bone of the enterprise. Wherever he went he could now muster the force of will to compel his friend, no matter how reluctantly, to follow. At the waterside Dorland found a place in the shade of the jetty for Jimsmitt. And then he went along the front in search of a passage to Europe.

The quest was not very happy. All the morning he tried hard to discover the kind of skipper he was looking for. But only one boat was going to England immediately and that had a full complement of hands.

At noon he returned to his friend with the tale of his non-success. Jimsmitt received it with a smile of truly Oriental indifference. One place is as good as another to die in, that smile seemed to say. But the American, undaunted, took a little rest, denied himself one of the few crusts they had with them since these must serve as their supper that night, and then he went back to the waterfront. Was there a hope of better luck? He rather fancied not by the look of it. But as he walked slowly along the quayside he came to a jetty at which a coffin-like steamer had arrived in his absence. And she

was evidently about to engage in coaling. By no means a prepossessing craft. But beggars cannot be choosers, particularly in matters of this kind. Dorland gazed eagerly around. Presently he observed a masterful individual who in an odd way matched the queer looking craft from which he had just stepped ashore. "Excuse me, sir," said Dorland politely, "but do you happen by any chance to be making for the port of London?"

"Shall be by this time tomorrow if all goes well," was the gruff answer.

"Do you care to sign on an extra hand?"

The skipper was non-committal. He stroked his jaw. Then he passed the eye of knowledge over this outlandish bird. "What experience?"

"None, sir," said Dorland quite frankly. "But you'll find me willing to learn and not afraid of hard work."

The skipper continued to ruminate. Again he had recourse to the eye of knowledge. Yes, a strange kind of fowl. He spoke like an educated man, and to Captain Jonas that was a point in his favour. "We travel pretty rough y' know. More work than grub and more grub than pay."

"Will you take me, sir?" said the American with quiet determination.

"I don't like the cut of your jib altogether."

"That doesn't surprise me," said Dorland cheerfully. "But if you'll hold the berth open while I go along and get a shave I've a sort of idea you may like it better."

Once more the skipper ruminated. And then he said, "Well, my lad, that seems a fair proposition."

"Right you are, sir," said Dorland. "I'll be back pretty soon."

He simply hated the idea of spending two sous on a shave. At the best this outlay was a gamble. There was no saying what impression he would make even when his beard was removed. Once he had had the look of a white man. But three years' unadulterated hell in the back of beyond might have changed the landscape considerably for the worse.

Dorland had already taken a few steps in the direction of what had the appearance of a barber's shop at the side of the quay when the skipper abruptly recalled him. "Hi, you! Come you back."

Dorland came back.

"If your papers are all right I'll take a chance."

It was an anxious moment as Dorland produced his papers. He had managed somehow to hold on to them like grim death through all his travels.

"Yankee I see," remarked the skipper as soon as his eye lit on the Eagle. "One of the war winners, eh? Well, boy, I'll chance you. You can get hold of a shovel and a suit of dungarees as soon as you like. I promise you it's a hard ship. And a shilling a day and a chew of bacca is all we pay. But there's worse grub than ourn, although you'll have to go some way to find it."

"I don't mind the work, sir, and I don't mind the pay, and I shan't mind the grub, for I've come from a place where you have to tighten your belt."

"Yes, they do say these Egyptian gaols are fair belly pinchers. What was you in for—if it's a fair question?"

"As a matter of fact, sir, I never was in—touching wood," and Dorland pressed a grimy forefinger upon the exact centre of a dusky forehead.

"Now, now, boy," said the skipper, "don't lie to me."

"God's truth, sir."

"Well, I can only say that if a chap with a phiz like yours has not been in choky he bloody well ought to have been."

Dorland smiled broadly. There was something about this seafarer which appealed to him. Suddenly he decided to take his courage in both hands. Now or never was the time to put the crucial question. And upon the answer he received all depended.

"I have a friend, sir, I'd much like to come aboard with me."

"Be content with wangling yourself, my lad. 'Taint every man y'know who'd take a chance with a hairy baboon like you."

"No, sir, I expect not," said Dorland good humouredly. "But you see this man and I left the north coast of Africa just three years ago. We've walked right across the Sahara; we've been to Timbuctoo, to Damascus, to every hell there is in the heart of that infernal continent. What we've been through you wouldn't believe. I can hardly believe it myself. But my friend has hung on to me when, as you might say, I couldn't hang on to myself. And now he can no longer hang on to himself it's up to me to hang on to him."

"Can he work his passage?"

"No, I'm afraid not. But as far as I can I'll work double trick. And I won't draw a penny of pay if only you'll take him. There'll only be his food, and he hardly eats at all. I'm sorry there's nothing at the moment I can offer to pay you for him. But if you'll name a price for his passage and trust me until I can raise it in London I give you my word that sooner or later it shall be paid."

"All very queer." The skipper at once resumed the mantle of deep thought. But the Armistice was not yet six months old and things in general were still very queer. It was not a case, all the same, for a hasty decision. The *William Walker* was in need of hands, but this was about the funniest piece of junk he had come across lately.

The style of this chap somehow gave the impression of an honest man, but it was a very odd story that he told. Very odd. The skipper's instinct was at once to say no. Yet for some obscure reason he reluctantly decided to think the matter over.

XX

While the skipper was thinking the matter over this strange bird returned with his friend. He led him slowly by the hand, almost as if he had been a blind man. This chap, too, in his tarry suit with a growth of rough beard was a decided oddity. But the skipper, who was a connoisseur in human debris of every kind, was rather interested. These two men were quite unlike the specimens he usually had to do with. The gentle care with which one brought the other along by the hand reminded the skipper of a very young child and its nanna.

Captain Jonas looked keenly at the vacant eyes, the frail form and then he fired off a few sharp questions. "Got friends in England I presoom?"

Jimsmitt did not seem very clear upon the point.

"Ye-es, I suppose I have. But it's so long since I was there."

"Then what do you want to do when you get there?"

"To die."

The plain and blunt answer seemed to impress the skipper favourably. But it was not the answer he expected nor was it the one Dorland wished him to receive.

"Don't believe him, sir," said Dorland cheerfully. "He's far too good a fellow to die just yet. And when he gets out of this oven, away from this fly walk, back to his own country, he will soon be a very different man."

"I'm not so sure about that," said the skipper with brutal candour. "Looks to me there's death in that face."

"*In sh'Allah*," said Dorland softly, his voice hardly more than a whisper. And then with a change of tone: "But he is my only friend. He is the whitest man in the world. And if I can help it I don't intend to lose him."

The skipper was a hard file, but even he was touched a little by the devotion of this queer looking Yankee. There was a depth of emotion in him when he spoke of his dazed and battered companion that made an appeal. Captain Jonas had no pretensions to be considered a philanthropist, but after sizing up carefully this brace of birds, he decided to stretch a point and take them both on board.

It was more than likely one of them would not be able to do a hand's turn. Still it would not cost much to ship him to the port of London. The *William Walker* being shorthanded, this American, although a lubber, might earn his own keep and more, so perhaps there would be no harm done. All the same an irregular proceeding, quite contrary to the principles of Jonas Jonas.

The upshot was that after Dorland had renewed his entreaty the skipper reluctantly allowed Jimsmitt to be helped on board. He was tenderly stowed away, out of the sun and out of the way of the crew, in the lee of the chart house with a bit of an awning to protect him. Dorland having done this went ashore in search of an outfit of dungarees, so that he might at once begin his job. By the captain's advice he visited a slop shop near the water's edge where he managed to get a cheap suit and a spare shirt. These purchases were just within his means. But the margin left over was uncomfortably slim.

Dorland then returned to the *William Walker* and set to work with a will. To start with he had to load coal from the quayside into the hold of the ship. By no means a pleasant job, it was child's play to some which had devolved upon him in the course of his travels. It was remarkable what strength the prospect of a return to civilisation had already given him. He was a new man. After long years of a hateful life he was coming back to his own.

He had told the skipper he was not afraid of hard work and he meant to live up to his word. Captain Jonas, however, kept a sharp eye upon him, also upon his friend. While one plied a shovel so heartily as to earn the ill will of his mates, who struck the note of "ca' canny" with some success, the other did not stir from the cushy place that had been found for him in the lee of the chart house.

Towards evening the next day the *William Walker* lifted anchor and put forth into the roads on her voyage to the port of London. She was not a craft one would have chosen for a pleasure jaunt. Even in a sea fairly calm she pitched a good deal, and on slight provocation shipped a lot of water. Moreover she had not many superfluous inches in the matter of deck space. And her crew, a scratch lot of mixed nationality, were not a happy family. The reason, in Dorland's opinion, could hardly have been the food. It was plain enough, but of its kind good, and in very fair supply. At least that was Dorland's view. But it was coloured by his experience of three years in the desert. Judged by a Saharan menu salt junk and remainder biscuit with occasional jam and pickles and plenty of tea was the fare of Lucullus. Perhaps the root of the trouble was that Captain Jonas was a hard master. He kept the crew at it and now and then treated them rough. It was a theory of his that these sweepings of the ports were the better for a free use of his tongue, his fist and his boot.

Still in his way he was a just man. In that he was helped by a gloomy strain of piety. A kind of cockney-fied Welshman, like most of his breed he was excessively shrewd. And though wanting it himself he valued the signs of education in others. The two men whom he had shipped at the port of Alexandria were the only members of his crew who were troubled in that way, and as the American, though without any sea experience whatever, was so cheerfully willing and the Englishman gave no trouble, he showed them favour. Obviously these two down-and-outs were men of cultivation. Captain Jonas would have liked to know how and why men of that class had fallen so low in the world. The one interested him quite as much as the other. Both had been up against it, if ever men had. But whereas the American

had survived his gruel and was full of buck, the other fellow's number was about up.

All day and every day the Englishman sat in the place that had been found for him out of the way of the crew. He never stirred, but merely gazed with fixed eyes over the rail and out to sea. What passed through his mind as he thus sat who should say? On several occasions Captain Jonas tried to get him to talk but without much success. He appeared to have lost his memory, or at least the power of expressing himself. A strange figure. A queer fish.

The *William Walker* made quite a fair passage to Marseilles. It was void of any particular incident. The first and second mate, Mr. Johnson and Mr. Pearce, were the only white men of the crew; the rest were half breeds and worse. For the most part they were a sullen, idle, disaffected lot. It was against Dorland's ideas to have truck with them. He kept to himself as much as he could, eating his grub by Jimsmitt's side and resting there whenever he was off duty. No love was lost between Dorland and the crew. But after many months of forced intimacy with the wily Bedouin, the gentle Touareg and the playful followers of the Mahdi, he minded his shipmates not at all. His recent life provided a standard of comparison. It was one before which all others paled. If a man could survive the sacred city of Krav he had naught to fear on the deck of the *William Walker*.

When their craft entered the harbour at Marseilles, unloaded half its cargo of rice and took aboard tallow, sardines and dried fruit, Dorland was particularly careful not to venture far away from the quay. The old fort on the hill was a house of call for the Foreign Legion. He was privileged to see more than one wearer of that hated uniform on the quayside while he attended sedulously to his job. His experiences at Sidi-bel-Abbès had been burnt into him so deeply that even the Sahara had not effaced them. And rather than fall again into the hands of Sergeant Major Hauptmann and those other brutes and be condemned to *Travaux Publiques* in Central Africa he would jump into the sea. There would be no ease of mind for Ambrose Dorland until the *William Walker* had left the port of Marseilles. However, as he told himself, there was really nothing to fear. None could have recognised No. 17783 *Soldat zième Classe* in the hirsute, chocolate coloured scarecrow sedulously loading dry goods into the hold of that vessel.

After a good deal of pitching and tossing in the Bay of Biscay and quite a nasty turn in Southampton Roads, the little tramp came finally to anchor in the mouth of the Thames. It really seemed too good to be true. This event occurred on a fair morning of May whose soft beauty gently but firmly belied the legend that enshrouds the maligned island of Britain. A certain amount of mist there was, but it was not of the heavy, all pervading kind for which Albion is famous. Nor was its breath as chill as Dorland had expected to find it. Nay, as they cast anchor by the docks it was like a fairy tale come true. By the grace of Allah he had got himself into port at last with a rare and precious cargo. Jimsmitt was still alive, and if he seemed no better than when he came aboard at Alexandria, his friend did not think he was anywise worse.

In spite of rather too much hard work, Dorland had not found the voyage unpleasant. He was really the better for it. The cranky little tub at one time and another had pitched a good deal, but on the whole it had behaved very well. Some of the days aboard had been lovely. Even Jimsmitt, propped up against the chart house in a sort of coma, felt their magic.

Dorland's cheeriness, which seemed to increase the nearer he got to Europe, won the respect of Captain Jonas. So that when the *William Walker* arrived at the port of London and this hand was duly paid off, the skipper very civilly expressed his willingness to forego any payment in the matter of the stricken man. His charges in any event would not have amounted to much, but Dorland none the less was very grateful for this generosity. Confident, however, of his ability one day to discharge it, he offered to hold himself responsible for the debt. But the skipper said no. The Yankee by his exertions had earned a free passage for his friend. When they parted on the quay the skipper shook hands with them both and wished them the best of luck.

Not long had the two wayfarers been ashore in the purlieus of Wapping when one of them at least began to realise how much that luck was to be desired. At the first beerhouse they came to, over a very modest repast of bread and cheese and a pot of four-half that is said to go so well with the climate, Dorland made a further examination of their means. The result was depressing. Less than two pounds remained. It was true that Dorland still had the locket which he wore by a string in lieu of the former gold chain round his neck. The miniature it contained as well as the locket itself must have some little value, but he did not intend to part with them if he could help it.

Jimsmitt, of course, was still a serious care. Dorland had hoped that the voyage to Europe might set him up. But it was clear that Jimsmitt's general condition had not improved. And now they were ashore in the land in which Smitten-of-

Allah had been born and bred he was really no better. If anything Jimsmitt was rather worse than when they left Alexandria.

XXI

Dorland first must put his friend in a place of security. And then he must find a means of keeping body and soul together. It was almost certain from what he had been told at Cairo that there was nothing to expect from the French bank in which the residue of the monies that had come to him at his mother's death had been placed. Meanwhile he had to live. They both had to live. Unfortunately this was Dorland's first visit to England. He had not one friend there. In Paris he was already beginning to be known as a "coming man" when the war broke out. But a deserter from the Foreign Legion dare not return to his former haunts. And this was a great pity. Already he felt a stir of the old ambition. He longed to turn again to his art. Deep within him was a consciousness of talent. He had the painter's eye for colour, the trained hand of the accomplished draughtsman.

Howbeit, this was not a time to think of pencil and brush. Without money and with a sick man on his hands he must turn to the first thing that offered. As the two men sat in the Wapping beerhouse at midday trying to make plans it occurred to Dorland that the time had now come to find out who his friend really was. James Smith was the name he had borne in the Legion. It was the name he had borne throughout their travels. And Dorland from motives of delicacy had never once sought to pierce the veil of his anonymity. But face to face now with destitution in a city which Jimsmitt, to judge by scraps of talk he had let fall, must have known intimately, it was surely time to make an end of these scruples. When Dorland broached the subject, however, it was clear that even had Jimsmitt wished to help him in the matter he was no longer able to do so. Ice crept through Dorland's veins when it slowly dawned upon him that his unhappy friend had actually forgotten his own name.

Yes, that was the truth of the matter. It was hard to believe that such a thing could be. But when Dorland put the frank question "Who are you really, my dear old chap?" the sufferer merely shook a tragic head. The eyes became vacant and he said in a soft voice charged with strange and terrible meaning, "I am Smitten-of-Allah, old man. In other words, I am just a lost soul in Hades."

For the time being that was literally and painfully true. It left no more to be said. This man driven beyond the limit of the bearable by all that he had suffered had lost his own identity. This grim fact was the most immediate of all their problems. Dorland must put him in a place of safety. And then he must find a job to tide them over their present difficulties.

"I think a vet of some kind had better see you, old boy. Perhaps he would get you into a hospital."

Yet as Dorland spoke he felt his coat sleeve plucked in a weak and flaccid grip.

"Don't leave me, old man. Don't leave me to anybody." The stark entreaty of the appeal tore at Dorland's heart. "I don't want anybody but you to take care of me. You are all I have in the world. You won't leave me, old man, will you?"

These halting words had a kind of occult power that Dorland simply could not resist. Together these two had met unnameable things. And the younger man with those searing words upon him felt that Fate required them to share the sufferings of each other to the very end.

Dorland in any case would not have had the heart to forsake his friend. Already the mind had gone. It had been more merciful perhaps to yield at Cairo to Jimsmitt's wishes. At all events the younger man realised pretty acutely now that he must accept full responsibility for a tragic life. It was the will of Ambrose Dorland that had brought home that empty shell. Jimsmitt had begged to be allowed to go out in peace, and now on the benches of this Wapping public house it seemed a hundred times better had he done so.

Dorland did not give much time to these vain regrets. He had made himself responsible for Jimsmitt. And not for an instant did he mean to shirk the task he had laid so unwisely, perhaps so selfishly, upon himself. Without delay he must find a roof for this unhappy man. And he must find a bed. Beyond everything he needed that.

As it happened a bed was not difficult to come by. The locality abounded in a floating population, here today, gone tomorrow. Within a stone's throw of the docks, at the end of the long street in which they sat, was a large, gloomy, massive building. On a basis of charity it provided the casual wayfarer with a mattress and clean sheets for the modest sum of fourpence a night. So long as a man had that sum about him he would not lack a bed in Wapping.

A few words with the custodian of the Pilgrim House, as it was called, and a brief inspection of what it had to offer told Dorland it was the kind of place they were seeking. Things were done on such a lavish scale that each guest was provided with his own tiny cubicle. There was hardly space to swing a cat in it, but it offered a privacy that was still dear to these wanderers. By good luck they were able to secure adjoining cubicles in a cool and quiet corner of the vast building. Out of the scant wages Dorland had just received from the skipper of the *William Walker* he paid enough in advance to secure their present address for a week at least, gaining thereby an aura of financial standing. He then helped Jimsmitt off with his boots and laid him on the bed.

Dorland's next act was to give a judicious threepence to the janitor. From this worthy he extracted a promise to keep an eye on his friend, who was not drunk but had got a touch of the sun travelling from Egypt by long sea. Then Dorland went forth to a shop a few yards along the street and invested in some pyjamas. After a warm bath which could be had on the premises for the sum of a halfpenny, the ghostlike form of Jimsmitt was inducted into these garments. The combined effect was to make him more comfortable in mind and body than he had been for many a day. Soon the poor fellow stretched the weight of his weariness upon this luxurious couch and with a grateful sigh fell into a troubled doze.

Early next morning Ambrose offered himself for casual labour at the docks. By then he had had a shave, his queer tawny locks had been trimmed and he looked altogether more prepossessing than when he had come ashore. While the critical operation was being performed he had gazed into the barber's mirror with a powerful curiosity mingled with equally powerful misgiving. What in wonder's name was he going to look like now? After all these days, all these years of a life that did not bear thinking about, how in the name of Allah would he emerge?

The result was certainly better than was to have been expected. Thin as a lath, brown as a berry, gaunt as a spectre, he hardly knew himself. He was no longer the young painter Ambrose Dorland who in a moment of enthusiasm had insisted on joining *la légion étrangère* in the fall of 1915. No, this was a very different person. But the exigent artist eye had to own that he looked quite an "interesting" fellow.

Down at the docks the next morning he managed to get taken on temporarily as a stevedore. It was the line of least resistance, but as long as the job lasted it would keep a roof over Jimsmitt. For the time being that was the only thing that mattered.

Casual labour might also help Dorland to think out a plan for the future. At present his brain was painfully barren of all expedients. He had completely lost touch with the ways of civilisation. No doubt he would settle down again after a while. Eventually he would again fit into the niche provided for a graduate of Harvard University and a student of promise at l'Atelier Forêt. But at the moment he was a square peg and the entire world was one large round hole.

However, he had found a job, and if he could hold it down for a bit it might tide Jimsmitt over a very critical time. Let the poor dear chap rest, really rest in a cool spot, in a comfortable bed, with regular nourishing food, and his memory might come back. It drove to Dorland's heart that this man to whom he owed more than life, who had helped him months on end to beat off devils of every kind conceivable, should be completely marooned. He had forgotten his own name.

Dorland felt that he could earn by the waterside enough money to keep a roof over Jimsmitt and himself. But the rough work was far from his liking. It was not so much the physical strain as that work of this kind led nowhere. He was fashioned for something wholly different. The return to civilisation, of which to be sure he had only touched the merest fringe, had infected him with a new ambition.

He had known in those last few months in Paris before the war that he was a born painter. Some inner genie, some secret voice there was no mistaking had told him so. And now that he had found his way back after many days to where he belonged, the sense of his destiny was again upon him. The life of a dockhand was not the true métier of Ambrose Dorland.

Still there was Jimsmitt to consider. He was earning enough at the docks to provide the invalid with meat extract and eggs and bunches of grapes and other delicate fare to tempt the appetite. The poor fellow of course protested, yet he had to yield to the more virile will. But Dorland was painfully aware that the life of a dockhand led only to a dead end. With ambition calling let him make a supreme effort to pick up the threads of a broken life. Just now, however, he did not see how it was going to be done.

He devoted a portion of his first Sunday in England to exploring the city of London. Work at the docks had severely restricted his activities. But with a free day before him he made Jimsmitt comfortable and then he set off to have a look at the West End. Far down in his mind lurked a hope that some idea might occur to him by which he could get back on to his natural plane. As it happened in the course of his wanderings that Sunday about the streets an idea did occur to him. But it was of such a fantastic kind that it could hardly be said to promise anything material.

Near Hyde Park Corner his eye was caught by a pavement artist. The drawings in coloured chalk exhibited by the artist were crude to the last degree. They bore little relation to the things they were supposed to represent, while the draughtsmanship was feeble. All the same, poor as these efforts were, they attracted a fair number of pence into the artist's cap.

It suddenly occurred to Dorland that here was a field for his talent. Beyond a doubt he could make a far better showing than this chap. At any rate it would serve to keep in his hand, and with luck it might even be as profitable as the distasteful work that occupied him now. Yes, it would be a relief from the grinding monotony, the general hopelessness of manual labour for which he was physically unfitted.

That evening as he returned to Wapping and Jimsmitt he made up his mind to give the scheme a trial. He would continue to work on weekdays at the docks, at any rate for the present, and on Sundays he would choose a pitch in the West End and see what happened.

It would first be necessary to acquire some coloured chalks. Artists' colourmen were to be found in the neighbourhood of the Pilgrim House as he had already discovered. And in the course of the week that followed he bought what he required. Then when Sunday came, a fine spring day, he set out at a very early hour to look for a pitch in a favourable spot.

Being so early on the ground he had the run of it. The place he chose, after careful survey, was in the lee of St. George's Hospital. Here the sun would not kill the pictures, nor what was just as important would it kill the artist. Having made his choice he knelt on the pavement and got to work.

XXII

Dorland soon found that his fingers had not wholly lost their cunning. It seemed aeons since he had held an artist's crayon in his fingers. But the highly trained craftsman had already thought out his picture fully beforehand, also the means of executing it. The subject was Scenes from the Upper Nile—Morning. Evening. They were to be companion pictures.

Once he had got into his stride the first grew with astonishing celerity. It was boldly devised, and, within the limits of such a medium, brilliantly executed. When it was finished he stood up to examine it, and as he did so the secret pride of the artist stirred in him yet again. He was pleased with this experiment. After all it was the thing he was born to do. For the first time since the fatal day in 1915, he felt something of an inner harmony. This effort, tentative as it was, primitive, naïf, was not altogether negligible. What it set out to do it did. The adaptation of the means to the end, the unity

of the composition, the sense of values and above all the pictorial effect which was intended to leap to the eye of the passer-by were rather remarkable.

Feeling exhilarated by such a result and happy in his labour, he set to work on the companion picture. Somehow the subject had a touch of inspiration. The tinkle from time to time of an occasional copper falling into his cap, which he had spread out on the pavement, was a further stimulus. Without pausing in the honest pursuit of a second chef-d'oeuvre, he would utter a polite "Thank you, sir," "Thank you, madam," as the case might be. When complete, the Upper Nile—Evening, in the artist's opinion was even more successful than the sister work.

For one thing he had produced a truly wonderful sunset. Anyone who had seen the Upper Nile would recognise an authentic study. But also it had the flamboyance that was likely to hit the man in the street. Already the Upper Nile—Morning was enjoying some success, mostly copper, although by this time one sixpence had found its way into the cap. But in the artist's opinion it was the second pastel that earned the supreme and dazzling triumph, shortly before midday, of a real genuine half crown. Moreover it was accompanied by words that gave as much pleasure to Ambrose Dorland as certain remarks upon his work that he had once been privileged to overhear at the Salon.

"You know," said a voice, and it was a kind of voice whose owner has half crowns to throw into the cap of a street artist, speaking to a friend whose eye could also appraise such an unexpected display of virtuosity, "You know a chap of this sort ought not to be doing this."

In those careless words Ambrose Dorland perceived the recognition of one artist by another. Somehow that speech was like manna in the wilderness. He felt too shy to raise his eyes from the pavement to take stock of this generous hearted brother in the craft, but when the speaker had passed on he was sorry for the omission. The kindly words would not have been less sweet to his ear had he been able to recognise the man who had uttered them.

That incident was the crown of the day. But all through the afternoon and evening the pictures of the Upper Nile, later supplemented by scenes from the Sahara, not only enjoyed a *succès d'estime*, but what was even more important, they continued to attract a steady trickle of pence.

At the end of the day Dorland found his pockets bulging. To be sure the spoils included only one half crown and three sixpences, yet they amounted to several shillings more than he would have been able to earn at the docks in the same length of time. As he returned to Wapping on the top of a bus he was inclined to consider the experiment highly successful. One thing struck him in especial. It was the politeness, the tolerance, the immense kindliness of London. Policemen had not interfered with him, passers-by had been careful not to walk over his pictures, all the comments which had reached his ears had been admiring and friendly and even discriminating. Somehow these people among whom he found himself now for the first time not only respected themselves but also the honest effort of others.

On his return to the Pilgrim House, he sat in the dark in Jimsmitt's cubicle and told the story of the day's adventure. He told it with humour and point, but poor Jimsmitt, whose mind was now very dim, was not able to respond. The cloud that had spread over his brain seemed to be growing heavier.

Dorland put in another hard week at the docks. And then when Sunday came his experiment of the week before was repeated. Again the day was all that a pavement artist could desire, but the results considered financially were hardly so good. Perhaps his inspiration was not quite equal to the first occasion or it may have been the caprice of the public. Nevertheless the effort ranked as a success, particularly as it again received the meed of a half crown.

This time Dorland was able to catch a glimpse of the generous donor. He was a tall sunburnt man who wore a brown flannel suit with a touch of elegance. Dorland looked up just in time to see this Maecenas disappear round the corner of the Hospital.

As the mental health of Jimsmitt did not improve, and his memory if anything grew worse, Dorland asked the custodian and general factotum of the Pilgrim House, who answered to the name of Wiggy, if he could recommend a doctor. Wiggy recommended a Dr. Perry, who had a surgery in the next street.

Dr. Perry called one morning at the Pilgrim House when Dorland was at the docks. He put a few questions to the

stricken man, listened to his heart, felt his pulse and then left word with Wiggy for the friend of the sick man to come and see him that evening on his return from work.

Dorland did so.

"I'm afraid there's nothing I can do for him," said Dr. Perry. "He seems sound enough in wind and limb, although he's terribly thin. But I am inclined to think from what you tell me that the sun of the desert has affected his brain. Complete rest, good food and careful nursing may pull him round, but frankly I doubt it. His memory beyond a certain point is a total blank and he seems not to want to recover it. And that of course is a very bad sign."

Dorland felt it was Jimsmitt's worst symptom.

"I suggest," said Dr. Perry, "that we get him, if possible, into a home where he can be properly taken care of."

"I'd prefer to take care of him myself."

"But you are working all day at the docks for a low wage," said the kindly doctor. "He must press heavily upon you. Besides there are institutions which specialise in such cases."

"If I thought they could do him any good I would let them have a try. But he thinks, and I think, that if I can't pull him round no one else can."

"Pray what can you do for him, my dear fellow?"

"Well it seems to me his case is purely mental. It's a matter of the will. By imposing my will on his as you might say I've kept him going ever since we left Cairo. And when he hasn't my will to hold on by he'll go out."

"Assuming that is so, and of course I express no opinion, is it quite kind in the circumstances to keep him going?"

"Sometimes I ask myself that," said Dorland candidly. "But what I feel about him is that there is something in his life that ought to be cleared up."

"Who is he, do you know?"

"His name is James Smith, and he was born and educated in this country."

"But that may not be his real name. At least one has a feeling that it isn't."

"I have told you all I know about him, sir, but I, too, have that feeling."

"Where did you come across him first?"

"In the French Foreign Legion at Sidi-bel-Abbès. We served together; and then we deserted. And we've just done three years foot-slogging up and down the length and breadth of Africa. Every kind of hell that exists on this planet we found and survived. But that chap held on to me when I couldn't hold on to myself, and I've made up my mind whatever happens to hold on to him now."

Dr. Perry could only conclude that it was a very strange case. Yet things being as they were there was nothing he could immediately do in the matter.

The unsatisfactory episode of Dr. Perry, for which a good and kindly man was in nowise to blame, had the effect of stiffening Dorland's will. He would see his poor friend through to the very best of his power.

Jimsmitt was more than content to remain as he was. He had a real dread of strangers. All he asked was to rest in his clean and quiet cubicle, looked after in the daytime by the experienced Wiggy. The janitor was by no means a bad fellow at heart, although not an oil painting to look at. But if you managed to get the right side of Wiggy he was quite a useful man to be in with. Dorland had certainly managed to do that.

As for the invalid, it was simply his nature to get the right side of everybody. He was a kind of man who found a short cut to the hearts of most people. Wiggy in the depths of his experience supposed the poor cove had "done something" to find himself on such a mudbank. It was pretty clear when new faces suddenly appeared in the House that he was in fear of the police and detectives and so on, but in spite of that Wiggy could not help liking him. He never complained, he gave no trouble, and there were a hundred subtle things which told Wiggy, the world-wise, that no matter what games he had been up to he was a thorough gentleman.

The third Sunday, after one more honest week at the docks, which meant better tobacco and nicer fruit for Jimsmitt, the artist paid another visit with his chalks to Hyde Park Corner. For the third time all the conditions were favourable. The pictures were drawn with the same force, the same truth, the same mastery, all rather astonishing in their way, no less to the eye of the instructed than to the man in the street. The coppers again flowed steadily into the cap. And then shortly after midday the half crown for the third time made its quasi-miraculous appearance.

But on this occasion there was an odd development.

Dorland realised that a tall, slim, well-tailored form was bending over him. And then he grew sensible of a polite and very agreeable voice speaking in a low and friendly tone.

"You'll excuse my asking, won't you? But I do hope there's no real need for you to be doing this sort of thing."

Dorland looked up quickly. A flush deepened the bronze of his face as he met a shrewd pair of grey eyes.

"You are very kind, sir." It was the answer of a man able to appreciate a charitable impulse in a perfect stranger and yet, without any undue display of pride, able politely to repudiate it.

"Don't think me impertinent, but somehow it doesn't seem right that you should be here." That had been this passer-by's first impression, and the bearing and attitude of this remarkable looking young man now confirmed it. Surely he had first-hand knowledge of many things, and it was reasonably clear that he had been taught at some time or other to use chalks by the first masters.

"Don't think me impertinent, but if you care to come and have breakfast with me one morning here's my address." The friendly stranger took out a case and handed a card to the man on the pavement. "What about to-morrow morning at nine o'clock?"

"You are very good," said Dorland, "and I should like very much to accept your invitation. But if I do I shall lose a day's work at the docks. And as I am only a 'temporary' that might mean losing the job altogether."

"I see," said the patron and connoisseur. "Well, fix your own time. And your own day. That is if you care to come and see me."

The pavement artist said he got half a day off on Saturdays. If four o'clock next Saturday afternoon would do he would make a point of being at the address given.

"Excellent. I shall expect you at my studio—it's on the card—next Saturday at four."

They left it at that.

Dorland glanced at the card as soon as this friend who had fallen from the skies had passed round the corner.

Mr. Alastair G. Graeme, R.A.
49b, Oakley Street
London, S.W.
Burlington Club

Dorland seemed to remember the name as one of the younger group of British painters that was rapidly coming to the front in those golden days before the war in which his own art had touched its zenith. The thought uppermost as he held that card in his hand and heard a coin fall into his cap and uttered his statutory, "Thank you, sir," "Thank you, madam," was that odd as the cosmos was said to be, the reality far surpassed the legend of its strangeness. Mr. Alastair G. Graeme was a man of assured position in the world which bought and sold and created pictures.

XXIII

Saturday was slow in coming. It was impossible for Dorland to stave off a growing excitement as the day approached. Who knew what change it might work in his fortunes? *In sh'Allah*. That magic phrase he had brought home from his travels was still the dominant factor in the case. There was no anticipating the next turn in the game of life.

Without saying a word to Jimsmitt on the subject, and indeed his unhappy friend was hardly in a state to comprehend it had he done so, Dorland put on a carefully brushed yet ill fitting suit of shoddy and a presentable tie and collar. Then allowing plenty of time for the journey he set out for Chelsea. He was amazed by the new chance that had arisen. Yet it somehow chimed with the general air of large humanity of this metropolis. That was the impression it left upon Dorland. It was less crowded, a good deal more leisurely than he had expected to find it. But it had its own peculiar aura. Something about this kindly, cheerful, law-respecting, bourgeois London set it apart from Boston, New York, Paris, Rome and other great cities he had known.

Once in Chelsea, the London *quartier Latin*, Oakley Street was not at all difficult to find. Mr. Alastair G. Graeme received him very cordially. He had had the tact to give his servant instructions that he would not be at home to anyone else. Graeme like many men of real attainment was a bit of a Don Quixote. He made rather a hobby of collecting queer specimens of the human race. Odd fish he called them. His sentimental weakness for helping lame ducks to swim amused his friends. But it was his way of expressing gratitude to life for having treated him so well.

Alastair Graeme had promised himself an interesting hour with the pavement artist. A connoisseur in the more *recherché* types that make up the human comedy, one glance at the nondescript figure as it entered his studio convinced him that he was about to enjoy himself.

In this expectation he was not disappointed. As he told a friend with whom he dined that evening, he spent perhaps the most enthralling hour of his life. He began, after his hospitable manner, by offering his visitor tea. And while those delicate hands toyed with saucer and cup, the host who prided himself on being a Sherlock Holmes in a modest way, built up certain theories about their owner. Questions of a kind not too blatantly inquisitive would follow in due course. But to begin with it was so much more amusing to draw the portrait of this queer bit of flotsam by the private exercise of one's own wits.

A highly educated man. That was the first clear impression. A man at all events schooled and disciplined in the outward forms of the social hierarchy. The air of breeding which underlay each word, each gesture, each trivial act was distinctly attractive. But how had a man of this quality come to be a down-and-out? Of course, there had been a war. And many strange things had happened. Yet that did not alter the fact that such a man had simply no right to be earning a living by drawing in chalks on the pavement outside St. George's Hospital.

Graeme had merely touched the fringe of the subject by the time he had fixed up his visitor with a Turkish cigarette. But then offering gentle encouragement he got the man of mystery to lift a corner of the veil. Told in Dorland's very simple, rather naïf, extremely lucid style, his story was astonishing. Even with certain suppressions and hiatuses the effect was powerful.

Two facts announced the prescience of Alastair Graeme. The first was that Ambrose Dorland—in his charming

naïvety the young man did not hesitate to give his real name—had intimate knowledge of the Nile and the Sahara. And he had studied pastel under the guidance of some very modern master. Upon these points the amateur Sherlock Holmes was fully entitled to plume himself. He had deduced them from the drawings on the pavement. They were the basis for this intimacy.

"Forêt, you say? My private shot was Vallière. All the same I doubt whether anybody taught you that trick of flinging those scorching yellows, those terrific greens, those burning reds all over the pavement without setting fire to the city of London. That, if I may say so, my dear sir, is something devilish like genius. And it's all your own. By the way, have you exhibited? Perhaps I ought to know."

"There's no reason why you should know," said Dorland, smiling a little at this generous enthusiasm, "I was still *ab ovo* when the war came. But I did have a little thing hung in the Salon, and I like to think that it sold for seven hundred francs."

"Well," said Graeme, "I hope you'll let me help you to get on with your real job. You are about as fit to be unloading sides of bacon and carcases of mutton down at the docks as Mr. Lloyd George is to be prime minister of England, and that to my way of thinking is the very limit of incongruity."

The downrightness amused Dorland, but he saw that it was leading to a heaven-sent opportunity. And for the sake of the stricken friend whom up till now he had kept in the background of the picture he must prepare to grasp his chance.

"You shall have a corner of this studio to work in, until you are able to fix yourself up with one of your own."

Dorland was a little overwhelmed by the offer. To his practical mind it seemed quixotism. But Alastair Graeme had been thrilled by the story he had heard. Moreover he had been captivated by the telling. Not for a moment could one doubt the absolute honesty of a man who told such a story in such a way. And it was a record of sublime endurance, defiant courage. To have trekked three years in the very heart of the African deserts, holding on by one's eyebrows, as it were, in the midst of unspeakable indignities, hunger, thirst and madness, and yet to retain the wits to tell of these things with a quiet power of humor was something to place to the credit side of human nature.

"You really must allow me to help you, my dear Dorland," said Alastair Graeme. "Men like myself who have had the luck to turn up the smooth side of the medal—even in this filthy war I have been able to get myself demobilised at the first possible moment and I don't mind telling you I did so without any sense of shame—as I say, men like myself owe it to men like you to throw out a loose spar whenever the chance occurs."

Yes, this man in his way was something of a Don Quixote. But it would not be less quixotic to refuse such an offer. At the same time far more was involved in it than a studio in which to work. Even if Dorland could take up the brush where he had laid it down, and that was exceedingly doubtful, it would still be necessary to find the sinews of war, not merely for himself but for Jimsmitt, until such time as he could get his work to market.

Graeme saw at once a part of the difficulty, yet Jimsmitt for various reasons had been kept so much in the background that his presence in a Wapping doss house was not suspected. Even with the whole scheme hanging in the balance, Dorland felt it the part of loyalty to a helpless friend to keep him entirely out of the picture. The generosity of Alastair Graeme made this easy.

"You must please allow me to finance you until you get on to your legs. I'm sure it won't be long before you do. And it really hurts me to think of a man of your powers slaving at those docks and then drawing pictures on the pavement when you get a day off. Take a rest tomorrow, Sunday. And then on Monday morning turn up here as early as you like. I can find you a few tools. And here's ten pounds with which to get a few necessaries."

Alastair Graeme went to a bureau in a corner of the large room, took from a drawer a bundle of notes and handed them to Dorland. "Pay me back any time it's convenient. And you can have some more when you want it."

Dorland felt a little breathless. There was a touch of Haroun Al Raschid about this distinguished painter. "But suppose I'm a wrong un," said Dorland, "suppose I'm a crook."

"Well if you are, my friend," laughed Graeme, "I leave the sin to you. But I don't mind saying that no man could have told the story of his life as you have told it, who was either the one or the other. The nemesis that invariably overtakes the damned liar must certainly have tripped him up at some point."

"But how can you possibly know that what I say is true?"

"How indeed?" Graeme laughed softly. "All the same what I know I know. And among the things I know is that I am going to lend you ten pounds, with I hope the privilege of lending you considerably more should you happen to want it."

It was a fairy tale, beyond a doubt, thought Ambrose Dorland on the morning of the next day but one, Monday. Instead of clocking in at the docks at 7 A.M. he lay in bed one delicious hour longer; for he really was bone tired after all the stresses recently laid on a delicate frame. And then having titivated himself carefully he set forth in what he called his Mayfair suit, which he had bought in a slop shop at Cairo and was still the only decent one he possessed. He went by Bus 39, changed at Charing Cross into Bus 23, and so to the London residence of the Caliph Haroun Al Raschid.

He was received by his host in a very genial manner. A good deal of the morning was spent in a discussion of art in general and the choosing of a subject for Ambrose Dorland to begin upon. Graeme felt that he could hardly do better than to start with a few studies in chalk of those light effects on the Nile which the more mature artist considered amazing. Moreover Graeme was inclined to think there was a modest public for them. Anyhow as soon as there was something to show he was quite willing to sound the dealers of his acquaintance. Yet this brother in the craft assured Dorland there was no need to hurry. "Don't rush your fences," he said. "Get nicely into your stride before you go out for everything."

"I'll do as you tell me," said the amenable Dorland, "It's good advice."

Alastair Graeme liked the air of quiet competence; also the perfect modesty with which his "find" deferred to every suggestion that he made. Dorland was fully aware that the name of Alastair Graeme stood for something in the craft. Both in portraits and landscape he enjoyed a considerable vogue. His work fetched high prices, and in the opinion of the expert deserved to do so. Solidity was combined with genuine imagination and over all was the lustre of a finely individual technique.

Dorland, although he had decided to make haste slowly, took Graeme's advice and set to work with a will. But it was not altogether easy at first. He had a fine talent but it had grown rusty from long disuse. Careful preparation, continual labour might be called for, yet neither Dorland nor his generous sponsor doubted that in the end his gifts would bear fruit. In the meantime Graeme was quite willing to finance him to a modest amount. And until Dorland could afford a studio, a corner of his own was at the young man's disposal.

Some of the money advanced to Dorland was spent on much needed clothes. But for the sake of Jimsmitt he still retained his cubicle at the Pilgrim House, although at a higher rental than fourpence a night. Thither he returned at the end of his day's work to cheer his sick friend. Dorland knew that it was he alone who kept him going. He had but to withdraw the light of his presence for Jimsmitt to go out like a candle. In some respects the situation was one of growing difficulty. His changed circumstances made it imperative that he should alter his way of life. Graeme, by now, was not unaware of Jimsmitt's existence. But Dorland had spoken of the stricken man in a vague and guarded way. And when this new friend had asked whether there was anything he could do for the man Dorland was looking after—the case had been described to Graeme as loss of memory—he was assured there was not. Moreover Dorland was so uncommunicative on the subject that Graeme soon let it drop.

Jimsmitt in those critical weeks got no better. Still it could hardly be said that he got worse. He had found a protector in Wiggy. During the long absence of Dorland each day, the custodian of the House, who received weekly a small tip and a screw of tobacco from Dorland, really looked after the Capting very well. Wiggy always spoke of Jimsmitt as the Capting. An old soldier himself, and a batman of experience, you simply couldn't deceive him, as he explained to Dorland, in the matter of what he called a Nofficer. He had served as personal batman to various ornaments of the British Army in various places including India, Afghanistan, Egypt and the Soudan.

Wiggy took a lot of knowing. His motto was to "keep hisself to hisself," but if you took pains to cultivate his acquaintance as Dorland did, it was worth the trouble. Beneath a rude exterior Wiggy kept a heart. That is to say if he

liked you he liked you. But the reverse also held true as the clientele of the House sometimes found to its cost. If Wiggy didn't like you, well, he didn't. You might just as well go and boil yourself as be in wrong with Wiggy. Such at least was the opinion of those in a position to know. And they were many.

Jimsmitt had nothing to fear in that way. He did not court Wiggy's favour, but there was something about him that immediately gained it. No doubt he was "wanted." In Wiggy's opinion he would not be where he was otherwise, but no matter what sort of life he had lived or what the cause of his fall, Wiggy found a soft spot for the Capting.

The invalid was quite as comfortable as was possible in the circumstances. The place was clean, and in the daytime absolutely quiet. At very little cost it offered him that rest of which he was so much in need. It was not an ideal nursing home. But having Dorland to look after him and being in with Wiggy and being able to get a hot bath as often as he wanted one he might have found himself worse off elsewhere. He was out of the world, out of that orbit of observation from other people which for some mysterious reason he so much feared.

It was Dorland's hope that in a few months' time when he had really begun to earn money, he would be able to repay the loan to Graeme, which was mounting steadily week by week. Perhaps he would scrape enough together to take a cottage in the country. He felt sure that Jim would be the better for pure air. Already he had broached the subject. But Jim was content, more than content, to remain as he was, so long as his friend returned to him every night. And so that friend, although greatly occupied with plans for his welfare, decided for the present to let well enough alone.

The few weeks immediately following his own discovery by Alastair Graeme were uneventful. For Dorland they were a period of renewal, of hard and strenuous preparation. It was not the least wonderful episode in the amazing life of the last three years. The workings of providence were indeed mysterious. As ever it took with one hand and gave with the other. But week by week, now that brain and will were fully awake, pencil and brush responded. It would not take long, at the rate he was progressing, to be back where he was in 1914. And as ambition waxed in a mind that could still look forward, for this young man was not yet thirty, he saw no reason why in the process of time his hopes should not flower.

Graeme at any rate, who had now become a kind of mentor, declared himself well satisfied with his progress. He prophesied the day would come when the name of Ambrose Dorland would stand for something very considerable. For that reason he must not rush his fences. In other words he must not offer hastily produced and immature work.

"That's all very well," said Dorland, "but I'm pretty far in your debt already."

"Don't mention it, my boy," said Maecenas. "Money is a much overrated commodity. And what finer investment is there than to develop genius?"

All the same, in spite of a generosity that he could only regard as princely, Dorland was fully determined to start earning money with as little delay as possible.

One day they were talking about portraits. Dorland shyly confessed that he hoped to be able to paint them. It was the direction in which his ambition was now moving.

"There's no reason why you shouldn't," said Graeme. "I don't think you'd find it difficult to adapt your technique to a lady in a court dress or a gentleman in a tweed suit. Personally I wish I'd never touched them. I was a better painter before I took to supplying ancestors. But of course they pay like billy-o."

"I wasn't thinking so much of the shekels," said Dorland, "although it will certainly be very useful if I can connect with a few, but it must be so interesting to have real live people to deal with. Character, it seems to me, is the one thing in the world that is worth while. And if one can develop the power to seize character and bring it out in all its quiddity one never need be at a loss for a subject."

"True, I admit. But nothing to my mind is more boring than having, as so often happens, to make a silk purse out of the wrong material."

"I should like to paint faces exactly as I see them."

"One should do that of course. But when one is up against certain forms of sterility, conceit, arrogance, pretension and all the other cheap vices of homo sapiens one gets a kind of nausea from trying to treat them pictorially."

"There's that, of course. But there must be compensations in a really fine subject."

"Yes, but fine subjects are rare. As a rule they are not the people who go in for ancestor worship."

"I daresay not. But as I see the world there's no lack of scope for a painter of portraits. For instance there's yourself."

"You are not going to persuade me that I am a thing of beauty."

"I don't know about that," said Dorland naïvely. "As I happen to see you. Anyhow you could be made extremely decorative in that bright suit, with that yellow tie, and your hair and eyes and that subtle Highland colouring. Yes, I see 'some' picture there."

"Well," said Graeme laughing, "when you come down to my Hertfordshire cottage next month, we'll choose a setting in the garden—I think the garden will please you—and you shall try your hand on a subject that may not be quite as good as you think."

"That's a bargain," said Dorland. And then still pursuing the topic he said in his boyish way, "Don't you get a thrill from putting on canvas a really beautiful woman? I know that I should."

"Oh yes, one does. But really beautiful women don't live in every street."

"Yet in a place like London one sees every day women who are marvellously paintable."

Graeme agreed.

And then suddenly, on the spur of the moment Dorland remembered the precious locket Jimsmitt had given him which he still carried upon him for safety.

"Now here's a subject," he said. "Here's a face that to me is exquisite." Immersed in the depth of his argument he took the locket from his breast pocket and opened it without paying much heed to what he was doing. "This face has everything. Line, expression, character, mystery, colour, all that a painter wants and more. To my mind it's unique."

He handed the locket to Graeme.

"You'd say so, my boy, if you'd seen the original," was the comment of that connoisseur.

As the words were spoken Dorland did not immediately realise their significance. But after a moment he grasped it fully. This face, a modern Helen's, was the key to the mystery of Jimsmitt.

XXIV

Dorland knew the ground upon which he had entered was highly perilous. But having gone so far he was obliged to proceed.

"You know this lady?" He spoke with a certain excitement.

"Oh yes, in the way that everybody knows her," said Graeme lightly.

"Who is she? Tell me."

"The woman in that locket is Mary Adeane, about ten years younger than she is now."

"And you know her?"

"I know of her. She was and is the most beautiful woman in England. At least we painters think so."

"Well, I'm a painter too. And I'll say that if England has a more glorious creature than that it is a remarkable country."

"May I ask how you came by this miniature?" said Graeme as he examined it. "A bit of truly fine work, almost worthy of the subject."

Dorland suddenly grew cautious. "Perhaps I'll be able to tell you sometime. Mary Adeane, you say, is the name of this girl?"

"Was. She's changed it since that was painted."

"Ye-es," said Dorland. "I expect so."

"Married a very rich man. A tobacco king or one of those magnates. But a rather painful story."

"Tell me," cried Dorland eagerly.

"There's not much to tell. Except that he was the wrong kind of man altogether. Having married the most beautiful girl in England, of a class far above his own, he must needs give all his time to chorus girls and the ladies of the half world. A sensual brute of immense wealth, he made her very unhappy."

"How did she come to marry him?"

"A brace of thoroughly selfish parents were the cause. She belongs to an old family pretty far gone in financial decay. And they thought the millions of this fellow Benton—that was his name, Bob Benton, he was about my standing at Eton—would put things right. So they did in a sort of way. He made her very unhappy, but one must give his money its due. Benton was killed in the war, but he left her the bulk of his fortune. All the same she has suffered."

"There was someone else I suppose," said Dorland tentatively.

"Yes, that's where the real tragedy came in. She was wildly in love with another man, he with her. But as he seemed to have no prospects and those two parents of hers had wills of iron when it came to self-protection, in the end she sacrificed herself for them and the things they stood for."

"My God!"

"It shattered the other poor chap. One of the best fellows that ever stepped. We were both in Duncan's house at school, but I was a bit senior to him."

"What was his name?" There was a sudden catch at Dorland's heart.

Graeme pondered a moment and then he said, "Odd that I should not be able to tell you. I know his name almost as well as I know my own. But it has passed completely out of my mind. I shall think of it presently. Such a good fellow. Of course he had no prospects at that time. A younger son of a younger son. Yet it's funny how things work out. Had Mary Adeane been allowed to marry him it would have been all right."

"How?" asked Dorland.

"All the intervening lives were swept away in this holocaust. If that poor chap were alive now he would have an

old title and several large properties."

"Is he dead?"

"There's every reason to think so. When Mary Adeane jilted him at the instigation of her parents he disappeared. That was some little time before the war. It was said he went all to pieces, took to drink and gambling and so on. But that one can hardly believe. In my recollection he was not that kind of man. And yet I don't know. A charming fellow with a weak will. Perhaps he was just the type to be broken by an unlucky love affair. I don't know. But I do know that behind the face in this locket—what a wonderful face it is!—lurks a very tragic story."

"One can read it, I think." Dorland felt a curious tightening of the breast. He was not listening to his own words. His thoughts were far away. They were in the Pilgrim House at Wapping, where the man this glorious creature had loved was lying gaunt as a spectre, broken in body and brain.

Dorland had to set a powerful curb on himself not to disclose what he knew. The time was not ripe. He had made certain promises to Jimsmitt. Besides, the whole situation needed extremely careful handling. His friend to whom he owed his own life over and over again was as good as dead. Deliberately Jim had sought oblivion, and with all the little strength he had was determined to ensure it. Would it not be cruel to drag this spectre back into the light of day? Surely it was kinder to let him bide.

For that reason Dorland forbore to ask Graeme a second time for Jimsmitt's real name. By searching his memory an old schoolfellow could beyond a doubt have found it. But it seemed best just now not to delve too deeply into the matter. He must weigh it carefully. He must think out a definite plan of action. Yet Dorland could only marvel at the uncanny smallness of the world. For he did not doubt that he had just heard the true story of Jimsmitt and the unforgettable face in the locket. As far as the broken man in the Wapping doss house was concerned that story was no more than half told. He feared to dig down to the roots of the matter, but there were times when the force of curiosity was insurgent.

As the days passed Jimsmitt grew no better. In fact he became weaker. But the process was so gradual as to be almost imperceptible. Dorland had him vetted by another doctor, a specialist in mental cases. Alas, the case of Jimsmitt was one of those obscure ones that are a puzzle to the faculty. It was impossible to say exactly what was wrong with him. A mysterious apathy and loss of memory were the outward symptoms, yet as the second doctor saw at once, as soon as one probed beyond these barriers other things were involved. After all it was a psychical condition. Like the other doctor he recommended complete rest, nourishing food, and if possible good country air. Jimsmitt being more or less at ease, and lacking nought save the last of these requisites, his friend saw no reason to disturb him. But Dorland felt the time was coming when he would have to be disturbed. Jimsmitt could not go on for ever in the seclusion of the Pilgrim House. It did not seem right that he should.

Soon it would be necessary to make other plans for him. Perhaps it might be best to explain the whole position to Graeme. The generous fellow might find a corner for the invalid in his beloved Hertfordshire. Nor was it essential to divulge Jimsmitt's identity. He was beyond a doubt one of the protagonists of the tragic story of the ill-starred lovers. But in the peculiar circumstances it might be wise to leave Alastair Graeme to find out the truth for himself.

No doubt he would do so in the process of time. Let the onus of discovery lie upon him. Yet Dorland felt it was hardly playing the game. It was moral cowardice. Still the whole subject was beset with thorns.

The American had reached no solution of his perplexities when an event occurred which changed the aspect of the case.

XXV

Dorland after a busy day in Oakley Street was returning one evening to the Pilgrim House. The most agreeable part

of the long journey was being made on foot for the sake of exercise. It was a delicious evening of summer and he was sauntering pleasantly through one of the fashionable squares. Yet at that moment his mind was less occupied with the magical change in his own fortunes than with the problem of Jimsmitt.

While in the act of passing a stately house at the corner of the square he noticed a woman of very striking appearance stepping from a motor. Before he quite realised the situation he was looking into her face. And then to avert a collision he stepped back swiftly to allow her to pass. At the same instant in a vivid blinding flash he recognised her. There could be no mistake. She was the woman of the Fazil gate at Cairo, the girl of the locket, the heroine of Alastair Graeme's story.

A tide of wild emotion swept over Dorland. An impulse he was powerless to restrain took complete charge of him. It was not a matter of reason. The action was so involuntary that reason had nothing to do with it. But as a manservant stood holding the door of the car the American sprang forward. Sweeping off his hat he said eagerly "I beg your pardon, but could you—could you spare me a minute? There is something of importance—of great importance—that I have to tell you."

Taken by surprise the woman stopped and drew back. And then she hesitated.

"I apologise most humbly," said Dorland. "But I am sure it is something you ought to know."

In the urgency of Dorland's manner was that which immediately decided her.

"Oh yes, certainly," she said in a voice low and deep. Plainly this was a woman who did not easily lose her self-possession. And even when lost it was quickly recovered. "Come in here, won't you," she said in a tone of quiet kindness as if in the act of welcoming a friend.

She turned and led the way into the house, across an entrance hall, up a set of three stairs into a noble room which spoke to the artist in Dorland by its air of magnificence tempered by great taste. As soon as the door closed upon them, and this lady did not hesitate to close it, although giving sanctuary to a complete stranger, Dorland produced the locket. As always he carried it in his breast pocket.

"May I ask if you recognise this?" And with an excitement he did not try to conceal he handed the locket to her.

She took it in her hands and held it up to the light.

"Open it, please," said Dorland huskily.

The instant she had done so a cry escaped her. By the strong light that bathed the room the young man saw that a face which a few moments ago had a high and beautiful serenity had entirely changed. The ashen look upon it now was pure agony.

"Tell me, tell me—how and where did you get this?"

"It was given to me."

"By whom?"

"By a friend. And I have reason to believe that it was the friend to whom you gave it."

"Impossible."

"Nothing in this world is impossible." As Dorland uttered the words with a slow force that seemed to render them sacrosanct, the woman whose face was now drawn and wan looked into his eyes with a kind of awe. She shivered as if a voice from the dead was in her ears. "You know this man to whom I gave it? Is it?—is he?—" She obviously feared to shape her question.

"He is alive," said Dorland calmly.

"And you can take me to him?"

"I am here for that purpose."

Scarcely had Dorland spoken when the woman touched the electric button. A servant came in. "Jevons, please—the car."

"Very good, my lady." The man impassively retired without so much as a glance at the visitor.

"And you say he is alive? Jim Wendover?" she gasped looking again into the eyes of Dorland.

"Yes—alive—Jim Wendover." Dorland spoke upon a slight note of triumph. At last he had the name of Jimsmitt. It needed no sixth sense to tell him that his real name was Jim Wendover. But it was not the mere discovery that was the ground for his elation. Was it not rather because Ambrose Dorland, alone and unaided, under an inscrutable providence had towed this storm broken waif of the high seas into port?

"Where is he? I will go and see him now." This woman like every woman was all impulse, all fire when her heart was in the crucible.

"You shall," said Dorland. Now that the great plunge was taken, the immense risk accepted, he was strangely calm. Perhaps what he was about to do would kill his friend. It might kill him as surely as if he drove a knife into his heart. He had not forgotten, nor could he ever forget, that it was the sight of this woman, the mere contact with her fingers, that had so suddenly and so grievously dethroned his mind.

Well, it was to be kill or cure. A heroic remedy. That which had undone the brain of Jimsmitt must re-establish it.

"Where is he?" asked Lady Mary Benton as a tide of wild hopes sped through Dorland's heart.

"Do you know the Pilgrim House along by the old quay at Wapping? No, I expect you don't."

"I have heard of Wapping," said Lady Mary. But it was rather the tone in which she might have said that she had heard of Popocatapetl.

"Well, I daresay your car will get us there in about an hour—if you will take me with you to show the way."

In something under three minutes Dorland was sitting beside Lady Mary and gliding towards the strange land of Wapping. She piled him with question after question in regard to Jim Wendover. Dorland parried discreetly where he could. And where he could not he used equal discretion in telling enough of his story without saying too much. Already she was painfully excited, deeply distressed. She had a premonition that this messenger from the dead—long years she had mourned as dead the man she had loved, whose life she had destroyed at the instance of those who had forced her to break the promise she had given him—was no bearer of gentle news.

Wapping was somehow significant. In what sort would she find him? Broken of brain, shattered of will, paralysed, maimed, down-and-out, her woman's mind raced on and on as she beset this emissary with questions and strove to adjust her heart to his careful answers.

"Do you happen to remember," said Dorland finally, "a couple of *fellaheen* beggars sitting by the Fazil gate at Cairo in the early spring? But no, of course you don't. Why should you?"

"Oh, please go on."

"You put a dollar into the hand of one of them. It was the hand of Jimsmitt. Smitten-of-Allah. The man you call Jim Wendover."

She gave a little cry. "I remember him so clearly. There was something in the look of that man that held me as I

passed him. But I had no means of guessing, had I, that he had risen from the dead, and that he would be sitting like a fakir in rags and a beard, dark as an Egyptian and gaunt—gaunt as a spectre. I had no means of knowing, had I?"

"None," said Dorland. "But there was something in you that did know. And it spoke for you. It is that something that has almost completed the wreck of him—of the finest man on the wide earth. And I have a hunch, as we say, we Americans, that what has brought him so near to destruction is going now to pull him back from the very edge of the precipice."

"How I pray that you may be right."

"I too. Well, here we are. This is the Pilgrim House. And the faith that I have is now about to be put to the proof."

XXVI

Lady Mary shuddered as Dorland helped her out of the car. She spent a brief but rather harrowing moment in glancing at her surroundings. The Pilgrim House at Wapping, grim, dirty, and for all the roots of its charity in some ways very foul, was about the last place on earth that a woman would desire to greet one dearly loved on his return from the dead. She had been prepared for this nadir of fortune by all the tact that Dorland could muster. But the accumulative force of the attendant circumstances drove at her heart as she was ushered into the evil gloom of the place and she found herself glared at and gaped at by certain of its denizens.

They were received on the threshold of the inner sanctuary by the redoubtable Wiggy.

"How is the Captain tonight, Wiggy?" asked Dorland with the cheeriness he never failed to assume when he entered this house of dolour.

"Werritin' because you're not home sooner. He's never hisself isn't the Capting until he comes." Wiggy turned to address these confidential remarks to Lady Mary. "What I say is, it's this Mr. Dorey what keeps the Capting alive. The power of the human heye, mum, that's what I say. Mr. Dorey, you might say, has fairly put the comether on the Capting. Left to hisself he'd have handed in his checks weeks ago. But Mr. Dorey says no."

"Tell me, Wiggy," said Dorland who felt it was high time he intervened in the conversation, "Ought we to break it to the Captain that a lady has come to see him?"

"Well, sir, you know better than I do how tear-bull shy the Capting is of all strangers. Tear-bull shy he is, mum."

"It so happens this lady isn't a stranger. She is the oldest and best of his friends."

"All the same you know what he is, sir." Wiggy turned again to Lady Mary. "That queer, mum, the Capting is. Always afraid of something. Always afraid of meeting somebody. But I'll say this for the Capting. Queer as he is he never forgets that he's a Nofficer and a gentleman."

Again it seemed time for Dorland to intervene. "I think, Wiggy, we'll chance it anyway. Perhaps you'll put a light in the Captain's cubicle."

"Right you are, sir."

"And Wiggy"—there was a moment's hesitation—"I think all things considered it were best if you said nothing about a visitor. Give him no hint that a lady has come to see him."

"Very good, sir."

They allowed Wiggy a few minutes to tidy up the cubicle. And when the janitor returned to say that all was ready Dorland without further preface led the visitor to the door and gently ushered her in. As soon as he had done so he drew back without being seen by the gaunt figure on the bed.

To Mary Benton it was like entering a prison. She had never been in one, but she imagined this cell, for it was hardly more, was exactly what a prison was like. It was so bare, so tiny, so ill-lit, so comfortless. And yet that was to do it less than justice. Compared with its surroundings and the other cubicles wherein she had peeped it was decorated with kindly human touches. A small table containing a bowl of flowers and a bunch of grapes was near the bed. There was upon it also a pipe, some tobacco, a magazine, several books.

She hardly dared to glance at the frail bearded form. But suddenly she heard a well remembered voice. "Is that you, old man?"

The depth of melancholy in that voice was indescribable. It tore at her heart. But it was the voice she had always loved and never hoped to hear again, a thing of charm, of humour, of an infinite whimsical kindliness.

In the next moment she was on her knees and her arms were round him. "Oh, my dear, my dear!" She caught him to her. "Oh, my dear, my dear!"

Jimsmitt uttered a wild sigh. It was as if his dreams were tormenting him. And then the confused and twisted brain, that had passed through more of suffering than is meet for any man to know, was abruptly cast once more into the mill race of fate. Like a child, very tired, resting its head upon the breast of its mother, Jim Wendover yielded to those arms. A miracle had happened to him. He was with the woman of his dreams.

Dorland, who had been careful to keep some distance away, up the corridor, heard a sound of sobbing. It was eerie, wild, intense; that of a man completely overwhelmed. Amid his travels and vicissitudes he had seen and heard far too many things he desired to forget, but there was something in that sound whose pain exceeded any he had known. He went further and further away, until he could hear those sobs no longer. And yet he could still hear them.

This travail of the soul was more than Dorland could bear. He had been with this friend through scathes and hazards it chilled the blood to recall. They had suffered many strange and unlucky chances. Wendover had fought for him when he could no longer fight for himself. Such endurance as Jimsmitt had shown was unbelievable. But those pitiful sounds now in the ear of Dorland proved that what the horrors of the Dark Continent could not do, inexorable fate was able to accomplish. Dorland shrunk back against the whitewashed wall at the far end of the corridor.

He had tried his friend too high. His plan had succeeded only to fail? Perhaps he ought to have known that the shock of such a meeting would be too great for human endurance. It was surely wrong to have acted on the spur of the moment even by the light of intuition?

The idea at the back of Dorland's mind had been to re-establish memory upon her throne by the mere shock of this coming together. In the first instance a similar clash had cast it down. He knew that it was a heroic remedy, a case of kill or cure. Had he taken the advice of a doctor no doubt the attempt would have been made in a different way. Yet Dorland told himself as now he fought against panic that no matter how this meeting were arranged the shock to Jimsmitt had been terrible.

The American knew now that it was foolhardy. Yet in obeying a sudden and powerful impulse, he had felt that when all was said the case of Jimsmitt was not a matter for the doctors. It was an affair of the soul. The cleverest physician in the world would never get right down to the root of the trouble in the way of the sole companion of many incredulous adventures, the sole witness of the uncanny incident of the Fazil gate.

What did the doctors know of this man? What did they know of absinthe? What did they know of the French Foreign Legion? What did they know of sandstorms in the desert? What did they know of captivity, misery, torture, hunger, thirst, of indignities worse than death? No, this was not a case for doctors. It was a case for the love, the faith, the insight of a friend. Those pitiful sounds were still in Dorland's ears, but in spite of them he refused, he simply refused to despair.

How long Dorland stood at the far end of that dim corridor awaiting the return of Lady Mary he could not tell. It

seemed like hours. Yet the play of light on the wall opposite told him that reckoned as mere time it was but little.

Had he wholly destroyed that weakened brain? Or had the desperate trick succeeded? No doctor, no professional psychologist with a diploma and degrees and a name on a plate in Harley Street would ever have countenanced that gambler's throw. But the thing was done, the die was cast for better or for worse.

The door opened at the far end of the corridor. She was coming now. Overhead a shaft of golden light caught her hair, her eyes, her wonderful face. Ravaged by its emotions, that face was even more wonderful this evening than when he had seen it first by the sunset of the Nile.

To Ambrose Dorland it became almost a sacrilege to look upon it. He did not dare. What it had to tell must be left for other eyes to scan.

"I must go now," she said as she came up to him. Such control, such mastery of self were extraordinary. "But tomorrow morning I will come again. And then perhaps we can decide what is to be done." Her voice so gentle and so calm told nothing of what she felt and what she feared.

Dorland with his curious sense of delicacy forbore to ask any questions. For one thing he had every reason to shun the answer he might receive. But more than dread was at work in him. He had fine perceptions, he was a creature of intuitions. This woman must not be made to suffer one pang that could be spared.

He took her back to her car. She let her hand linger an instant in his as she wished him good night.

Beyond a further promise to return as early as possible the next day, there was no other allusion to the subject of Jimsmitt. Nor was there any indication of her private feelings or of what was in her thoughts. But knowing what they were and must be, for those harrowing moments in Cadogan Square had told much, he marvelled that any woman could mask her emotions with this perfect skill.

He saw her go. And then numb with fear he re-entered the Pilgrim House and walked along the corridor to the cubicle of his friend. Had he destroyed him? The thought seared Dorland as if barbed with fire. Was the inhuman composure of their recent visitor meant to convey that the worst had really happened?

With a thrill of joy he heard the voice of the stricken man.

"That you, Dorey, old man? Come and sit with me a bit." Faint that voice was, hardly more than a whisper, but it was that of one who still had control of his own mind. Up to that point at all events Jim Wendover was able to exercise the functions of a reasonable being. Therefore it was surely too soon to say that a dangerous experiment had failed.

Dorland that night slept ill. He was overstrung. As he lay wakeful through the small hours in his own cell-like cubicle, listening for any sounds from next door, he felt that all was in the balance. Was Wendover going to weather the storm? The shattered brain was still in being, so much could be said. And the mind was less clouded. Jimsmitt now knew his own name. This fact, it seemed reasonable to hope, might be a prelude to the recapture of a lost identity. But it was far too soon to count on anything.

The clocks struck two. Dorland crept into the next cubicle to see how his friend did. He had the pleasure of hearing him breathe peacefully. That at least was a fair omen.

Next morning the American did not go to Oakley Street. He waited at the Pilgrim House in a flux of anxiety, not unmingled with other and perhaps more complex emotions, for the coming of Lady Mary. Meanwhile Jimsmitt was not disturbed more than was absolutely necessary. There was reason to think he had had a good night, but the less he was troubled with promiscuous talk the better. Dorland therefore had to possess his soul in patience. Almost on the stroke of noon Lady Mary's car stole up to the portals of the Pilgrim House.

Wiggy who happened to be scrubbing the front steps, an office he performed with an air of dignified protest once a week—you might just as well holystone the steps of the Zoo!—would have registered astonishment at the spectacle, had it not been a fixed rule of his life not to be astonished by anything. Moreover the sight of a tall man wearing an eyeglass

and a braided morning coat and striped cashmere trousers, a Nofficer handing out a real Looker, would also have ministered to that emotion had Wiggy been susceptible to it.

Cool as on parade, he stood at attention beside his bucket and mop while the two most distinguished visitors ever received by the Pilgrim House alighted. And in response to a kindly good morning which in Wiggy's opinion would have been no discredit to Queen Mary herself, he returned a judicially deferential, "Good morning, my lady," gloomily adding, "I dessay you'll find the Capting a bit more hisself this morning."

The wearer of the striped trousers and the braided coat was the most famous alienist in London. He spent a long quarter of an hour with Jimsmitt while some way off, outside in the corridor, Lady Mary stood talking to Dorland. Now she had had time to arrange her thoughts and to consider them in relation to the whole matter, she could not repress a little bewilderment that a man such as Dorland, who had acted the part of good fairy, should not have gone a step further and had his friend placed in a nursing home.

A question of means, no doubt. But there was complete disparity between the Pilgrim House at Wapping, where apparently he was content to live with poor Jim, and the marks of educational and financial status that he certainly bore. However as they waited now while the brain specialist, Sir Hector Wilbraham, talked with Jimsmitt in the privacy of his cubicle, she made a few delicate soundings upon this deeply perplexing subject.

From the moment she had seen Dorland first, had heard his charming voice, had experienced his unstudied candour, she had taken a great liking to him. Her intuitions seldom led her astray. She saw this young man as he was: one of those rare people who are completely themselves because they can afford to be. He had all the perceptions, all the nuances, of certain members of her own sex. And yet one somehow felt he was not less a man for that.

As she talked with him now, while they waited for Sir Hector's report, she dug tactfully to the roots of a very strange story. Where had he first met Jim? In what circumstances? And why, oh why, if she might venture—and in the end she did venture before she was really aware of her own temerity—had they chosen to live together in the Pilgrim House at Wapping?

Faced with the question the young man was perfectly candid. "Well, Lady Mary," he said with a frankness she admired, "you see when Jim and I landed in this country we were absolutely broke. We had just about enough to pay for our lodging here, fourpence a night, and that was all. I had never been in this country before, I hadn't a friend in it, and I had heard at Cairo, what I've verified since, that what remained of my money had been lost in the failure of a French bank."

"Oh yes... But Jim?"

"I think I told you last night that Jim had completely lost his memory. For the life of him he couldn't remember his own name." Dorland felt his companion wince a little as she leaned against the wall beside him. "I was inclined to think he had a particular reason for forgetting everything. But in that you have proved me wrong."

For those naïf words she would have liked to offer him a kiss.

"That was six weeks ago. You see we had no money and no means of getting any, beyond what I could pick up at the docks as a stevedore and by drawing pictures of the Nile on the pavement outside Saint George's Hospital."

"Oh, but—but—surely." She shivered an incredulous dismay.

"No buts, Lady Mary. It was so I assure you. We had to keep going somehow. Jim was done, and he begged me not to let him go out of my hands. Two doctor men I found around here offered to get him into an institution. But Jim was dead against it. He would have nothing to do with strangers. And I felt that until we could make some private arrangement it would be best to let him lie in peace. He only asked not to be disturbed. That was his instinct, and it was mine. So as I say, I set to work. And then—yes, I must tell you—while I was drawing the Nile on the pavement outside that Hospital and collecting a fair amount of loot in my docker's cap, an angel came straight down from heaven."

The young man paused in his narrative to laugh. As he did so he glanced at the glowing face of the woman by his

side. "Yes, an angel, if ever one did come straight down from heaven into this strange, uncanny muss-of-a-world."

"Oh do tell me about the angel." His auditor clasped her heart with excitement.

But at that moment, just as Dorland was about to continue the story of the angel, Sir Hector Wilbraham stepped out of Jimsmitt's cubicle and came slowly along the corridor. And as Dorland the previous evening had feared to traverse the face of Lady Mary, so now both these friends of Jim Wendover instinctively averted their eyes from the face of the specialist.

"A strange case," said Sir Hector after a brief moment of awkwardness. "That poor fellow has been in very deep places."

"Yes, sir," said Dorland in a slow and quiet voice which yet had the power to startle both its hearers. "He has been in the nethermost regions of hell." And then breaking the silence that followed, the young man went on: "If he hadn't he could never have dragged me out of them. And I now want to know if it lies in my power to do but a very little in return for what he did for me."

Sir Hector smiled. He said dryly: "From what Lord Wendover says you appear to have done a great deal already to liquidate the debt."

"No need to believe all the poor old boy tells you. But can you give us some hope of him, Lady Mary and me?"

There was a pause. And then the specialist said: "I hardly dare to promise anything at this stage. He may have a chance of recovery. One in a hundred—perhaps a fraction of one—I won't put it higher."

"Then we are going to bring off that chance," proclaimed Dorland stoutly. "We are going to get him well—Lady Mary and I."

"Let me say this. If between you, you can't, there's no power in this world that can."

"That we know to be true, Sir Hector," said Lady Mary. "We both feel that—Mr. Dorland and I. But before we try to do anything he must be got away from this—this dreadful place."

"I agree."

"My plan is to take him to Round Hill this afternoon with your permission."

"Quite the best thing you can do."

"And you will come with us, I hope, Mr. Dorland."

"Only too delighted," said Dorland promptly.

"It is arranged then," said Lady Mary. "I will take Sir Hector back to Portland Place. And then I will come straight back here for Jim and you. In the meantime will you have him dressed and his clothes packed?"

"He can't have it both ways, I'm afraid," said Dorland. "If he is dressed he will have no clothes to pack. And the same applies more or less to me."

Lady Mary laughed a peal, yet in her eyes was not one spark of mirth. But the matter was left as she proposed. Sir Hector went off in the car with her while Dorland presided over the toilette of his friend. He would like to have fetched a barber from the next street to remove Jim's beard, but to this desecration its owner would not submit. Oddly enough he preferred that it should continue to disguise him.

Dorland felt that in some ways Jimsmitt was the better for the thing that had happened. He was still plunged in an abysmal gloom. But a part of his memory had already returned. And now and again there was a flash of the old whimsical humour. Perhaps no harm had been done by a daring experiment. There was even a hope that as Jim Wendover

was adjusted to his natural plane his sense of identity would develop and that in the process of time he would return to his former self.

XXVII

True to her word Lady Mary was back at the Pilgrim House in little more than an hour. In that time Jimsmitt had been helped to dress and a comb had even been applied to his beard for which he showed more concern than in Dorland's view it warranted.

Before they started, this party of three, upon a happy journey into the heart of Kent, there was a pleasant little ceremony.

"Can you lend me ten pounds?" said Dorland in an aside to Lady Mary. "You shall have it back, I faithfully promise, the first money I earn."

As her *sac à main* contained that sum it was promptly handed to him.

"This is for you, Wiggy," said Dorland, bidding goodbye to the faithful janitor. "But I want you to promise that you won't go at once and blow it on a horse."

The astonished but not ungrateful Wiggy promised. "I'll put it straight in the benk, sir." And as Wiggy stood at the door of the Pilgrim House to watch the Capting, "the nicest gentleman as ever dossed here," drive off with his friends, he turned to confide one of his own favourite aphorisms to a regular habitué of the House who was standing beside him. "Once a gentleman always a gentleman," said Wiggy. "And that's what Muck like you can't never ree-lise."

To Dorland it seemed that night as he lay in a bed smelling of lavender in a chintz clad room, that a fairy had waved a magic wand. The contrast between his new pillow and his fourpenny doss of the night before, not to mention those of the thousand and one nights previous, was so great that his senses were bewildered. But after many days he was strangely, almost wildly happy. He felt that he was coming into his kingdom at last. Moreover his faith was strong that the high mission to which he had been called by providence had a quite reasonable chance of fulfilment.

Jimsmitt, duly brushed and combed and bathed and fed and cared for, was in the next room. He was not yet himself. That was too much to ask all at once. Weeks, perhaps months would pass before the breach in that mind was healed. But when he had been put to bed in a delightful room, and Lady Mary herself had brought him tempting food he had sat up and taken nourishment. That is to say he had made a gallant effort to do so. "To please me, old boy," as she had put it cajolingly, and he had bravely done his best.

It was idle to pretend that he was the Jim she had known. A shadow was athwart his brain. In the time of their boy-and-girlhood, when she had made that promise her selfish parents would not allow her to keep, the mind of Jim was all sunshine, all mirth, and whim. He had a wonderful power of keeping one amused. The things he said, not, alas, in the least illuminating, the things he did, not, alas, in the least useful, yet what would she not give for his joy of life, that was like a strong wine, to return!

Still there was no need to despair. Both these dear and great friends of Jim Wendover were tonight in cordial agreement upon that. He had stood the journey to Round Hill very well, nay, he had borne the transplanting in a way that exceeded their hopes. He remembered his own name; he remembered Mary Adeane; a ghost of a smile had flitted across those vacant eyes.

In spite of a secret excitement the young painter slept deliciously. He woke to the sound of larks and the scent of honeysuckle. Round Hill had a name more than local. It was one of the stately homes of England. An aura of history, of tradition, of chaste magnificance was upon every stone of this old and lovely house, upon every acre of its gardens. From

the terrace with its Italian colonnade, under which Dorland sat smoking an after-breakfast pipe, he amused himself by counting the deer in the park below. Everything about this pleasaunce leaped to the ravished eye of an artist. It was a realm of faëry, and its mistress, crossing a mosaic of Roman tiles with the grace of a cygnet as she came towards him, was the one thing needed to complete the picture.

"How is old Jim this morning?" said Dorland as he rose to greet her.

"He has slept," said Lady Mary, "and like a good boy he has eaten his porridge. I have given him a cigarette as a reward. And now, of course, he asks for you."

"Harmless, necessary me," laughed Dorland. As he did so he felt a sharp bite of happiness. Life could play amazing tricks. It did play them. To be on terms of intimacy, of camaraderie only possible to those who have community of taste and interest, with this royal creature was almost compensation for the years of horror he had passed through.

Lady Mary leant against the balustrade. "Before you go to Jim please tell me something."

"Command me."

"Yesterday we were interrupted as you were recounting a miracle that happened when you were drawing pictures of the Nile on the pavement outside St. George's Hospital. I burn to know what that miracle was."

Very simply, with the naïve charm that was so powerful, this young man told exactly what had occurred. He described the sequence of half crowns on three consecutive Sundays; "One has to be a pavement artist, the real genuine thing like Ambrose Dorland to taste the full flavour of such a phenomenon. Think of it! A tinkle of pennies hour after hour. And then wallop—a whole half crown."

"Yes, but that was merely an outward symbol of the miracle."

"True, True. Maecenas introduced himself personally on the third Sunday. He invited me to breakfast. He insisted on taking charge of me. Literally he picked me out of the gutter and set me on my legs. I have his card somewhere. Yes, I thought I had." Dorland produced the card rather after the manner of a conjuror from some obscure recess of his person. "This talisman I carry upon me for luck."

"And so you ought, my dear boy," said his hostess with sisterly warmth as she glanced at the card. "Things of this kind only happen to fortune's favourites."

"The jade owes me a bit all the same. But I am not going to crab my luck. I suppose you have heard of Alastair Graeme?"

"He is quite famous. One of the most accomplished painters we have."

"And well enough off to paint only the kinds of pictures that happen to amuse him."

"So I believe."

"He is a regular Don Quixote. At least I tell him so. His fishing out of the gutter a queer skate like me proves it."

"Let us call it Kismet, as poor dear Jim would say. My view is that most of our actions spring from causes we know nothing whatever about."

"I agree," said Dorland. And then shivering in spite of the genial warmth of the sun of Kent he added, "Old Jim and I have proved it."

"Yes, I think you must have," said Lady Mary.

For Dorland these were enchanted days. Each hour in this wonderful place revealed a deeper beauty. And somehow his two friends, the old one and the new, fitted into the picture with a harmony curiously perfect. The house itself had no

peer even in that corner of England, and with these noble spirits to lend it sorcery it wrought upon this impressionable young American. He was in the land of his fathers for the first time. All was new and strange. And yet in a subtle way it was familiar. The Dorlands, his father had once told him, were a noble West Country stock in the days of Elizabeth.

Round Hill was a continual delight. Even the clipt hedge of yew, the sundial, the flaunting peacocks had the charm of kinship. These were the things he had known in happier existences. But he swam back into their remembrance with a sense of gratitude. Amid this well loved scene his painter's eye, his artist's imagination were soon at work.

Alastair Graeme, whose judgment on such a matter few would dispute, had described the chatelaine of Round Hill as the most beautiful woman in England. Ambrose Dorland could only endorse it. As he saw her now, fixed in her own ethos, his mind simply refused to conjure a vision equally fair.

She fitted into her frame of centuries like a star in a clear sky. Dorland felt that such beauty as hers was a part of its setting and yet transcended it. For this enthusiast, with the first impact of the land of his fathers upon him, she was tradition and romance incarnate. Verily a sorceress, within three days of his arrival at Round Hill she had called his ambition from its long sleep.

"I shall have to paint her, I shall have to paint her," he said to himself as he awoke on the morning of the fourth day. The sun was on the wall beside him and the blackbirds sang in the laurels around the oriel window. Such hours in such a house would have to be commemorated. And there was but one way for a young and rising painter.

Before proceeding in that matter he went up to town for the day. When he arrived at Oakley Street just before luncheon he felt like an idle apprentice. Alastair Graeme who had already done a long morning's work promptly charged him with truancy.

"Give an account of yourself, my son. I got a postcard without an address but with a Kentish postmark, saying that something wonderful had happened and that you would explain all about it this Wednesday morning at luncheon. So you see I have got Mrs. Griffin to set a place for you. She has also laid in a couple of *langoustes* and a bottle of Johannisberg to tide us over the telling of this wonderful story of yours."

"It is a wonderful story, I promise you," said the truant.

"You seem rather to have made a corner in wonderful stories, *mon ami*."

"So you'll say when you've heard this one."

"Well, let us wash our hands and start lunch and then you shall tell it. Real honest work always gives me that hungry feeling."

"Even without real honest work I somehow get it." And Dorland sat down gaily at the pleasant little table which held tempting things. Yet before he had picked a claw of the *langouste* he began his story.

Graeme listened with a kind of entrancement. "You are an amazing fellow," was his comment when Dorland reached the end. "A life such as yours is a tissue of marvels."

"It certainly is just now. There's a lot I'd like to forget. But the last few days almost make up for everything. Round Hill is unique."

"One has always heard so."

"Lady Mary would like you to come down for a week end."

"Nothing could give me more pleasure."

"If you can, why not come next Saturday? Then you will see what the place is like."

Graeme was a man of many engagements. But it so happened he was free for that week end. Thus he accepted the cordial invitation that had been sent to him by a woman he wanted very much to meet.

XXVIII

Saturday came and Alastair Graeme arrived at Round Hill in the middle of the afternoon. Here for him was the flower of romance. Was he not deepening acquaintance with a story that had long been half familiar? And the two chief actors in the drama were also known to him. That an act of promiscuous charity in reclaiming from the gutter an obscure young artist should have these consequences was indeed remarkable.

Dorland has been obliged to fit Wendover into the picture as well as he could. Graeme now recalled that the name of the man he had forgotten was Jim Wendover. And he knew that Round Hill was the historic domain for whose sake Mary Adeane had sacrificed Wendover's happiness and her own. Yes, a romantic story. And its meaning came home to him that Saturday afternoon as he swung his Morris Cowley, which somehow went with the slightly Bohemian appearance of its driver through wrought iron gates surmounted by an ancient coat of arms.

Quite apart from all that Dorland had told, Alastair Graeme was keenly looking forward to seeing Wendover again, and to making the acquaintance of Lady Mary Benton. He remembered seeing her at a dance when she first came out. A more radiant being he could not imagine. Life, since then, had treated her ill. But her fame was still widely celebrated.

Alastair Graeme felt a rare emotion as he was ushered on to the broad terrace with its spacious view of three counties. It was intensified by the handshake of his hostess. He was very much a man of the world. *Un vieux routier* he liked to describe himself. There were very few of the really famous he had not met, for he was *persona gratissima* everywhere, but even he, experienced as he was, could not subdue a thrill of a kind he had long outgrown when he felt the pressure of those exquisite fingers.

She was very tall, very slim, with all the grace and stateliness of long inheritance. Yet there was nothing formal about her. She was *bon enfant*, naturally gay. A light of humour looked out of a large and lovely eye set in a face perhaps too much alive, perhaps too enkindled to be strictly classical. Youth was still hers. There was not a hint of the recent past. Maybe one supremely endowed by nature and fortune had taken great pains not to show it. Certainly she looked younger and was rather gayer in manner than Alastair Graeme expected to find her. But the effect upon him in the moment of greeting was the effect she made upon all the world.

Was this the face that launched a thousand ships,
And burnt the topless towers of Ilium?

Those familiar words sprang involuntarily into his mind as he gazed.

"You are an old friend of Jim's, I know," she said. "But I'm afraid he won't be able to see you. Sir Hector Wilbraham thinks it's a little too soon for him, so please take the will for the deed. Mr. Dorland has told you, of course, of the amazing adventures of Jim and himself in the African desert?"

Whatever of awkwardness might lurk in such a meeting, the virtue rooted in manners of the heart tided them most happily over every difficulty. Rumour had not belied her. A beauty which on a first view was a little awe inspiring, at any rate to the morbidly susceptible soul of a painter, was softened, made accessible, brought down to common earth by a virile humanity. Simplicity was not the least of her gifts.

This came out in her attitude to Ambrose Dorland. He was accepted just as he was, as the hero of a fairy tale. There

was something maternal in the smile that regarded his enthusiasm. Yet Graeme saw at once, and with a good deal of pleasure, that she liked the young American extremely. Something there was about Dorland, which Graeme could not quite explain, that was oddly engaging. Perhaps it was his un-English knack of taking things in his stride. Already he was as much at home at Round Hill as if he had lived there all his life. Yet his delight in the place and all pertaining to it was quite disarming. It was the love of a nature profoundly sensitive, deeply perceptive, for an incomparably beautiful thing. Graeme was much struck by this. In all that Dorland said, in all that he did it was now apparent.

Already he had made considerable use of his time. Clearly he was not one to let the grass grow. Easel and canvas and other materials of the craft were set out on the terrace at the moment Graeme arrived. Dorland was absorbed in study of the view. The elder painter was amused when the young man with superb candour announced his purpose. "Lady Mary has very kindly promised to let me have a shot at her portrait. I want it to be in the grand style, so I am taking a few notes of this wonderful setting where she belongs."

"My ears burn," said Lady Mary, who was standing by.

"If I can only get you down on canvas as I see you," said Ambrose Dorland unabashed, "with all the centuries upon you and those old trees and these stones and this old turf around you, and that bit of pure English sky above you, and that vista of woodland, stream and hill as Wordsworth says, you will make me famous and Mr. Graeme will know that it was right to pick up such a hobo off the pavement by St. George's Hospital."

"Pure officiousness on his part I assure you," said Graeme laughing heartily. "The hobo would certainly have picked himself up at any time he chose. And it is plainer now than it ever was that he is going to be a very considerable man."

"With you and Lady Mary to help me I somehow feel that I ought to be." Dorland spoke without a suspicion of immodesty.

It was a very agreeable week end which Graeme keenly enjoyed. But he was disappointed in not being given a sight of Jim Wendover. Still the invalid was understood to be making good progress, although at present Lady Mary and Dorland were the only people who were allowed to see him.

Lady Mary was genuinely pleased to have made the acquaintance of Alastair Graeme. Very gracefully she said so to the departing guest. She hoped he would return in the autumn for a longer stay, when it might be possible to have a party to meet him. The coverts were not as full of partridges and pheasants as they were in her father's time, but she would like him to bring his guns. And by then she hoped that Jim would be quite well again and they would be able to tramp the fields together.

Graeme returned to Chelsea rather elated. It was good indeed to have added this royal creature to the long list of his friends. He had an infinite capacity for making friends, and what was still better, for keeping them. A little harmless eccentricity apart, he was an entirely lovable fellow.

In the days that immediately followed he did not see much of Ambrose Dorland. His protégé appeared to have become a fixture at Round Hill. Now and again the young man would run up to Oakley Street for a few hours; it was hardly more than thirty miles as the crow flew. Graeme, however, did manage to lure him down to his own modest house in Hertfordshire for a day and a night towards the end of the summer.

It was a typical bit of England and Dorland absorbed it greedily. But he did not forget that Wendover, who was having an uphill fight to get his mind back to a normal plane, could not bear to have him out of his sight more than a few hours.

"It's really quite odd," said Dorland, "the feeling that dear chap has for me. Of course I have it for him too. We might be twin brothers. I suppose when we were up against it, as few men can ever have been, we got to depend on each other so completely that now old Jim imagines he can't carry on without me. Seems rather ridiculous, doesn't it? Yet I know it was the will of Jimsmitt that brought me alive through the desert. And I think it was my will that brought him home out of Egypt to old England."

Graeme agreed that it was a remarkable case. But it was understandable. Two men, intensely *simpatico*, placed in

exceptional circumstances were likely to have these reactions towards each other. David and Jonathan, Damon and Pythias, there had been historical instances. All the same it did appear that Jimsmitt and Dorland were rather overdoing it.

"And how is Lady Mary's portrait getting on?" said Graeme, a note of mischief in his voice as they sat out after dinner in the pleasant loggia in the cool of an August evening. "If you don't make it a real chef-d'oeuvre, my friend, I shall never forgive you."

"It's simply got to be one," said Dorland. But he then confessed, "I'm afraid it's not showing many signs at present."

"Not working, eh?" A touch of disappointment crept into the banter of Alastair Graeme.

"Oh yes. I keep hard at it. But somehow it doesn't get on."

"Why?"

"The subject's too big for the artist. At present anyhow, if you understand me."

"Yes, I think I understand you," said the man of wide experience. "Too many implications, eh? One sees too much. But I suppose every painter does. Selection after all, in every art, is the final secret."

"Anyhow," said Dorland ruefully, "I have already destroyed three canvases. I am working and thinking and planning all the time; yet I seem farther than ever away."

"Well, stick to your subject and see what happens."

"I am simply bound to stick to it. I can't help myself now. But I don't begin to get near the glory I behold. To me it is the light that never was on sea or land."

Alastair Graeme laughed fraternally. "I'm not sure whether it's a good thing or a bad thing to feel like that."

"A good one surely."

"I don't know. A question of temperament I suppose. Such a feeling as that, to my mind, must be terribly discouraging unless one can muster a colossal amount of genius."

"I can't hope for that. But by dedicating what talent I have to a wonderful theme, perhaps in the end it may get me somewhere."

"Well, go on with your picture. And may it prosper. But I appreciate your difficulty. I think I know where the problem begins. And to know that, as old man Goethe once said, is to be just a little way on the road to wisdom."

Dorland had not exaggerated his perplexities. He was giving long days and sometimes long nights to the intensive study of his art. But the odd thing was that the more time he lavished on the preparation of this chef-d'oeuvre he was planning the more dissatisfied he felt with the result of his labours. Every day he worked in the beautiful room that had been placed at his disposal or out on the terrace when the weather enticed him, but the problem did not simplify. Of course his conception was ambitious. And to begin with, his technical resources were not equal to the call. Yet he was more conscious than ever of a genuine talent. It was merely that his vision had deepened since the days in Paris. There was no place now for the trivial in his cosmogony.

Anyhow he did not lack courage. If it took him ten years, working ten hours a day, to achieve that picture he meant to do it. But it would be something more than a portrait. It was to be a milieu, a whole civilisation. As the artist saw it in the eye of his mind it was to be a conspectus of what man himself had achieved in aeons of years by blood and tears. Even before Ambrose Dorland took up the brush he felt this picture to be a very vital part of himself.

All this time he was also much occupied with the problem of Jimsmitt. Recovery was painfully slow. Jim had his

good days and his bad days, that is to say his mind seemed to fluctuate considerably. In a room brightly cheerful with fine window space he lay hour after hour. Rest, rest, rest preached the doctors. Jimsmitt was able now to carry out these orders under ideal conditions; still he did not go on as well as his friends could have wished. Since his meeting with Lady Mary in the Pilgrim House, his lost memory had flowed back to him. The shock then administered had forced a door in his brain. Yet for some reason more abundant consciousness did not seem to bring ease of mind.

Dorland watching him as a nurse watches a patient or a mother a child, felt the magic change of fortune hardly affected him at all. Those eyes were no less tragic than they had been at the Fazil gate at Cairo or in the doss house at Wapping. He was re-established, he was with his own again, he had nothing to fear from anyone, yet a mysterious shadow still hovered about him. It was truly baffling. Neither medical science nor the devotion of his friends could melt this cloud.

"It does not matter how much we try, we doctors," Sir Hector Wilbraham one day remarked. "We cannot see right inside the mind of another person."

No, poor Jimsmitt did not respond to treatment as he should have done. But there was everything now to lure him back to the paths of happiness. It was clear—at least to Dorland, who studied their bearing to each other with almost morbid care—that Lady Mary really loved him. He was the playmate of her youth, to whom she had once plighted her troth, and there was no reason now why she should not redeem the promise made to him then. It was her last-minute withdrawal, her deliberate sacrifice that Round Hill might be saved which lay at the root of his troubles. All that was now past. Her object had been gained. And the man whose name she bore, in many respects so unworthy, had not only had the grace to endow her with an ample fortune, but two years ago he had died in battle.

To Dorland it was clear that Lady Mary owed very little to the memory of her late husband. A marriage of convenience, she had borne her part with a courage akin to heroism and she was now free. She was now free to marry the man of her heart. Oddly enough, and rather ironically, fate had also been busy in the matter of him she loved. Eight years ago on the brink of his tragedy, Jim Wendover had been no more than a younger son of a younger son. But in that time there had been a war. And with the men of Wendover's caste the effect had been simply devastating. The head of his family, serving with the Brigade of Guards, had been killed in 1915, and two other lives that stood between him and the title had ended untimely, one at Festubert, the other on the plains of Gallipoli.

James Wendover, 12th Earl, was not rich in an age of plutocracy, but he was now the owner of three fine old properties, so that even if he had to pinch a little to maintain them he was by no means poor. He now had something very substantial to put in the scale against the ducats of the woman he adored. Not that it was necessary, except that he was a proud man. Yet the irony was that had his present status obtained eight years ago, when the parents of Mary Adeane insisted on bringing her beauty to market and selling it to the highest bidder for the sake of Round Hill, the long term of bitterness that had seared one and had shattered the other would have been spared them.

In such circumstances the tardiness of Jim Wendover's recovery was doubly galling to those who loved him. Dorland in especial was disconcerted and impatient and more than a little anxious. "Jim," he would say, "if you don't buck up someone else will get her."

XXIX

On good days Jimsmitt would find his way downstairs and even on to the terrace if Ambrose happened to be working there, which generally he was if there was no rain. Jim would sit by the easel and in a curious melancholy silence would follow agile fingers and even interpret the thoughts of a daemonic brain. It was at these times the painter worked best. Then it was that the harmony, the aesthetic unity he sought so painfully and had not yet found seemed very near.

Laughingly Ambrose declared that he worked thrice as well when Jim sat with him. He did not speak a word, old

Jim, he asked no questions, he never dammed the flow of inspiration with an ill-timed remark. In fact he reminded Ambrose of a faithful dog they once had at home. Hours on end he would lie in a nobly intelligent silence, his head between his paws, assisting in the meditations of his friends. Jim was rather like that as he stretched his gaunt body at ease between the painter and the subject, making no sound, uttering no word. But somehow his mere presence was a benediction. And the artist wrestling with his medium, often with sore travail of the spirit, was truly grateful for it.

Gradually, with this silent help, the picture grew. From very tentative beginnings and many false starts an organism slowly emerged. At last came the dawn of a real idea. Very painfully yet very surely it took shape. And as it did so came a vision of the means by which it was to be accomplished.

But the hand of the unseen was still heavy upon Jimsmitt. He did not improve. With his two friends he was perfectly charming but he shunned the world. Even when he grew comparatively strong he had no thought of going to London to take up the thread of his life. And the matter of his inheritance, which soon or late he would be compelled to investigate and to accept the burden it cast upon him, seemed to fill him with positive dread. He begged his two friends to keep his return from the dead—for that was what it surely was—as dark as possible.

Wendover avowed that he had no wish to claim his title and estates. As he said, why should a broken reed upset the bassinette of a certain lusty infant who had already entered upon its long minority?

Ambrose Dorland, in spite of his republican principles, was shocked by these ideas. To his mind they were inexplicable. And if this attitude was persisted in, his friend must renounce all claim to the hand of the woman for whom he was surely predestined. The younger man was bewildered and he was troubled. Here was a subtle lesion of the soul. And this theory gathered force from the little things that happened day by day.

One of these, which worried Dorland considerably, was Jim's opposition to the second visit of Alastair Graeme. He had kept his room on the first occasion. And when their hostess announced that she was looking forward to the arrival of Jim's old schoolfellow on a particular afternoon Dorland surprised a poignant horror in that wan face. Such a look of agony drove to Dorland's heart. It could only mean that the news of Graeme's coming was profoundly unwelcome. Jimsmitt strove not to let it appear; but it was no use. There was no concealing anything from the lynx eyes of Ambrose Dorland.

What reason had Jimsmitt to shun his kind? For it was now clear he was determined to evade all the people who had known him, all the people who were likely to remember him as he was. Many small things confirmed this view. For instance nothing would induce Jim to shave his beard. It was so ragged, so grizzled, so unkempt that it was rather a joke. His two friends ventured to remonstrate, but with humorous tenacity he declined to have it touched. So cleverly did he mask the dead seriousness of the refusal that at first Dorland was deceived into thinking it a mere whim. But he saw now it was part of Jim's design.

Wendover was not a man to intrude his own private feelings. Nay, he concealed them so well that it was doubtful whether Lady Mary had any perception of his attitude in the matter of Alastair Graeme's second visit. Upon the occasion of his first he had lain *perdu*. And now with this other sprung upon him suddenly he had no intention of meeting an old schoolfellow.

Much, however, was destined to happen before the second appearance of Alastair Graeme at Round Hill. To begin with, owing to the sudden death of a relation, Graeme wrote to postpone his visit. Wendover could hardly dissemble his relief. It might not have been apparent to Lady Mary, but to Dorland it was very clear. And he took an early opportunity to express himself pretty forcibly on the matter.

It was a delicious September morning and the two friends were walking the stubble to win an appetite for luncheon. They rested a little under an elm tree in the old campaigning style of four years ago. And then Dorland began. "Look here, Jim," he said attacking the thorny subject with characteristic boldness, "you've just got to stop playing the ostrich."

His friend gazed at him in mild surmise.

"What I mean is you've got to come out of your shell. You have a position in the world, and we both feel, Lady Mary

and I, that you ought to take it."

Pain and alarm came into the enigmatic eyes of Jimsmitt. "Ah, you don't understand," he said.

"We don't. And yet we do." Dorland could not remain insensible to the tone, nor could he escape the look in those eyes. But he had a duty to perform. And as far as the man he worshipped was concerned, much depended on the way he tackled it.

"You are strong enough now to stand up to things, dear old man." It was the way in which a very patient and gentle mother speaks to an intractable child. "And we both think you ought to. You are a peer and all that, your name is one of the first in England, the world expects a lot of you, and it is time you stood up to your job."

Jimsmitt shook his head forlornly but said nothing.

"Why not quit playing the ostrich? Even if you stick your head in the sand people still know that it's the head of Jim Wendover. Our friend Graeme—and what a friend he's been to us both I can't tell you—knows you are here. And there's lots of others who must know too."

"Ye-es, I suppose they must," said Jimsmitt wearily.

"Alastair Graeme wants very much to meet you. Lady Mary would like you to meet him. So tomorrow I am going to drive you up to Bond Street for that beard to be shorn or at least bobbed, and then we are going on to your tailor's to have you measured for a proper outfit."

"But, my dear boy, it's impossible, I assure you."

Dorland ignored the alarm of those haggard eyes. "If we meet the thing properly," said the man of stronger will, "it will help your brain to shed its shadows. Lady Mary thinks you are a case for firmness. And so do I."

The painter it seemed had fully made up his mind in the matter. Having done so he was able as on many occasions since the episode of the Fazil gate to impose his will upon the weaker vessel. That will, a joint affair, had passed definitely it appeared into the keeping of Ambrose Dorland.

So it was that the very next morning Jim Wendover and Ambrose Dorland drove up to town with Lady Mary whom they left in Cadogan Square while they paid a visit to the barber and the tailor. Then they collected their hostess, and so back to Round Hill in time for dinner.

Jim could not be persuaded to forego his beard altogether. It had grown into a kind of symbol of the things that had happened to him. But he had compromised by having it trimmed along with his abundant locks into a semblance of the current mode. Both his friends had to own privately that this adornment lent its wearer a curious distinction. Somehow it was in harmony with his type. It added to the look of mystery for ever brooding in those sombre eyes, it seemed of a piece with the singular quality of his mind and fortunes.

That evening at dinner he was almost gay. "*In sh'Allah*," he said as he raised a glass of dry champagne to his lips.

"*In sh'Allah*," said Dorland reverently. And he did the same.

Tonight for the first time since his mind had clouded Jim was almost his real self. He talked freely of the world. It was clear that the visit to town, the transactions with the barber and the tailor had stirred the sap in his brain. The old life had begun to flow back; the things to which he was born, which once held an indescribable fascination, had still the power to strike home.

Lady Mary as well as Dorland was delighted with these first fruits of their experiment. Surely it was a success. Ambrose was congratulated by his hostess on having exerted his will to such good effect. Tonight the man they both loved was so much nearer himself than at any time since his return from the dead.

Dorland, who was no believer in half measures, had arranged that they should go up to London again in three days' time. Jim could then have his new clothes fitted, also he would be able to have an interview with his lawyers. A battle had to be fought, however, before that decision could be reached.

Jim was most obstinately perverse. He seemed to have some very special reason for avoiding his lawyers. But Dorland, very ably seconded by Lady Mary, expressed himself cogently. His manner was almost that of a father to a boy at school. It was high time a visit was paid to Chancery Lane. Jim tried his hardest to escape the ordeal. But he could advance no valid reason, or one that his friends considered valid. And so the will of Ambrose Dorland once more prevailed.

"You are bullying me frightfully, you know," said Jimsmitt with weary resignation.

"Yes, my friend, we are. But it is all for your own good. It is going to make a new man of you. See if it doesn't."

The only answer was a deep sigh. But Dorland was inflexible. It was necessary to take a strong line. So when the third day came he simply hustled Jim up to town, not only to his tailor's but also to Chancery Lane.

The visit to the lawyers seemed to worry Jimsmitt a good deal. As his friend laughingly said, to judge by the way in which he shunned people he might have committed some fearful crime and be hiding from the police.

Howbeit Jim spent nearly an hour with his solicitors, who received him with open arms. He insisted on Dorland being present at the interview and as that young man afterwards described it to Lady Mary, the senior partner, Mr. Scrymgeour by name, almost fell on his neck and wept. The long lost heir, the prodigal son, Enoch Arden and Robinson Crusoe had nothing on a scene which out-movied the movies.

According to Mr. Scrymgeour the estates were in apple pie order. The revenues had been carefully nursed, certain retrenchments and substantial mortgage redemptions had been effected, and it was reasonable to suppose that the 12th Earl would be able to enter upon his inheritance in comfort and security.

"Comfort and security" had been the phrase the excellent Mr. Scrymgeour had used. But Dorland saw a wan look return to the eyes of Jimsmitt and he saw a strange unearthly light fit across the drawn and haggard face.

Still, Dorland told himself, Jim was none the worse for his excursion. The talk with his lawyer had been a strain on his nerves but he had survived it. He was singularly unelated by the news he received. From his manner the inheritance might have belonged to someone else. He told Dorland frankly, as soon as they returned to the awaiting car, that he felt quite unequal to the responsibility it cast upon him. And he sincerely hoped that for a time at any rate the present arrangement could be allowed to continue.

Dorland said nothing. An idea was growing up in his mind that the more Jimsmitt was forced into doing things the better. This was also the opinion of Lady Mary. And they were fortified in it by Sir Hector Wilbraham. The mental specialist quite agreed that the will must be steadily built up by the rigid performance of daily tasks and duties no matter how irksome they might be.

There was no house party for Alastair Graeme. It would have been trying the patient in his present state far too highly. But six people sat down to dinner on the evening of Graeme's arrival. These included a Mrs. Rea, an aunt of the hostess, an elderly widow lady of much charm, and a Miss Mabel Frensham, a lively girl full of good looks and good sense. Jimsmitt, carefully dressed and valeted but feeling "horribly new" as he confided to Dorland, occupied the seat of honour at the head of the table. He looked precisely what he was, the grand seigneur, the long-descended man of many acres. In spite of the ineffable weariness and the secret terror that was in those tragic eyes as seen by the overanxious Dorland, the special circumstances and the man's own courage enabled him this evening to give of his best.

For once and almost for the first time he was delightfully himself. His voice, and what a voice it was, had the old magic. No wonder this woman loved him. Dorland felt that tonight all the world must love him. He was the born *charmeur*, yet with none of the tricks of those who set out consciously to please. With Jimsmitt it was more a question of a noble courtesy. It was something native to the man, which gave bouquet to his gentle presence. Dorland's mind went back, in spite of the happy aura of that night, to his first meeting with the corporal of the Fifth Company of *la légion*

étrangère. Again he was the cowed and broken piece of human wreckage, again the voice of the good Samaritan was in his ear. He who spoke now from the head of the table was he who spoke then. This man was like no other. It filled Dorland's heart to see this dear friend sitting "where he belonged," clothed and in his right mind.

An irresistible impulse caused him to raise the first glass of wine. "Jim," he said huskily, "*in sh'Allah*."

"Dorey, old man." The good comrade raised his own glass with his rare smile. "*In sh'Allah*."

"What does it mean, that strange mystical incantation?" cried the hostess gaily. She too was a good comrade.

"As God wills," said Jimsmitt. "It has a clear and simple meaning. But when we hear that phrase, Dorey and I, it means all sorts of things we can't express."

"Fate is what the Arabs really mean by it," said Alastair Graeme. "I once travelled the Dark Continent myself. But as far as possible I kept to the route of the common tourist."

"My dear Mr. Graeme," said Lady Mary, "we both seem to have a share in the mystery. I too have been in the desert." She spoke lightly, but in her eyes was something strange. "*In sh'Allah*." She raised her glass. Uttering the phrase her voice trembled oddly.

"*In sh'Allah*," Graeme followed her example. But as he did so there came a brief intensity of silence. It was as if the sense of fate had descended upon them all.

XXX

They did not allow even the sense of fate to impede the flow of their gaiety. Surely the circumstances required it of them. The Odyssey as Alastair Graeme called it, now that Ambrose Dorland had set forth its salient details for his especial benefit, demanded the homage of a brave and confident heart. Providence after all gave more than it took. At least such had been his own reflections when he had come to think over the queer impulse that had moved him to fling half crowns into the cap of a pavement artist.

What esoteric sense of kinship had moved him to that deed? Who should say? What trick of the subconscious linked him to these new and delightful friends? Ever since he had first set eyes on Mary Adeane as a girl in her teens he had yearned to know her. Then she had married, the war had come, the whole world of men and things had overturned. So when the young American dramatically revived her memory he had well nigh forgotten her existence.

By a chain of mystical circumstances she had now entered his life. Confirmed bachelor though he was he would not have it otherwise. She was very woman. And to the ravished eye of a painter, trained and inured to beauty through many a year of discipline, she had the classic quality his art demanded, which nature when greatly inspired could sometimes give. He knew many famous women, yet this modern Helen had an unseizable ethos that surpassed them all.

Graeme was delighted to meet Wendover again. For a short time he had been Graeme's fag in Duncan's at Eton. In those days of course, as the painter now laughingly reminded him, he was a very big dog, and young Wend as he was called was a very little dog. "I hope I wasn't too overbearing," said Graeme as he now recalled that early relationship.

"Who can imagine you ever being that?" said Lady Mary with whom he already ranked as a prime favourite.

"Not so very difficult, believe me," laughed Graeme. "All boys of that age, when they are striving to keep abreast of their opportunities, are perfect young beasts. What do you say, Wendover?"

"You had a good name in Puppy Hole," was the judicial answer. "You smacked me once for burning your toast but I daresay I deserved it. Anyhow I bear no malice."

"'A beast, but a just beast,'" quoted Lady Mary. "Although I'm quite sure that beast is not the word either."

"He was too popular ever to be a real beast," said Wendover. "Even when he was lamming you with a toasting fork he always managed to retain a certain bonhomie."

"One can't believe he ever did anything of the kind," said Lady Mary with feminine defiance.

"I give you my word for it. Quite well and faithfully. But the odd thing was I liked and respected him the more."

"A truly generous nature," laughed Graeme. "Had the boot been on the other foot I should simply have hated you to all eternity."

"Now please come off it, Alastair Graeme," interposed Dorland. "You are not a kind of man who could ever hate anybody to all eternity. I doubt whether you could hate at all for more than twenty minutes, and even then you would need at least a year's training at Heidelberg."

General mirth followed this sally. It helped to keep them all on a plane of unforced hilarity and cheerfulness. These six people, three of whom felt that old unhappy far off things were only just beneath the surface as mirrored in the haunted eyes of Wendover, only wanted to live in the present moment. They wanted to enjoy it to the full. Courage on the part of the man at the head of the table and the social graces of his friends brought a rather gay evening to a happy issue.

As Wendover in his rôle of invalid, for whom two hours' rest before midnight had been strictly prescribed, was packed off to bed on the stroke of ten, Lady Mary confided to Dorland that Jim had played up far beyond her expectation. He had behaved beautifully. Dorland cordially agreed. Jim had played up splendidly. And the young man felt that so far his plan was going better than he could have hoped. The look of secret fear never for an instant left those haunted eyes, but now he seemed able to hold it in check.

Next morning, in a light good enough by which to judge it, Alastair Graeme inspected A Portrait of a Lady. It was not yet complete. Much in the way of detail remained to be wrought, the finishing touches still had to be put in, but enough of the subject had already emerged for the eye of a fine craftsman to assess its technical merit and to gauge what the effect of the whole was likely to be.

Alastair Graeme was astonished. He had ventured to predict great things of the man he had discovered in such romantic circumstances. The more he came to know him the deeper grew the respect for his talent and for the solid worth of his character. Dorland had seen at the outset exactly where he wanted to go. With the commonsense of true genius he had grasped all the essentials. And here before the eyes of this friendly critic was a proof of the distance he had travelled already upon the long and hard road to the goal.

The elder painter had expected much. But this chef-d'oeuvre promised far to exceed his hopes. It had every sign of a master. A glorious harmony of daring, skill and delicacy, the whole thing promised to be unique.

"I can only congratulate you," said Alastair Graeme, a little breathless in the presence of such power.

"Unlucky to do that before it's finished."

"It is complete enough for one to see what it means. I see your plan, your design, and I see where it leads. To my mind it's already a triumph."

"I wonder," said the modest Dorland.

"If there's any justice anywhere, and one sometimes asks oneself if there is, this is a work that can hardly fail to put you where you belong. Apart from the technique, which is as powerful as Forêt's—in the days when Forêt was Forêt—you have somehow got magic into it. 'Was this the face that launched a thousand ships?' the canvas is saying all the time. It haunts one with the things no pen can write, no tongue can utter. The beauty of that face simply tears at the heart. All the accursed desert is in it, from the barrack square at Sidi-bel-Abbès to the Fazil gate at Cairo. But more than that is in it. All the tears shed by men and women through the ages, and all the laughter they have heard seems to look out of that

canvas in a way that hurts you, in a way that stops your heart. I am more than glad that the wanderings of Odysseus have taught you how to do a thing like this."

The generous craftsman wrung the hand of his protégé. "It's the sort of thing, my dear boy, that makes a chap like me feel a mere painter of inn signboards."

Graeme was more than rewarded for all that he had done. Not for a moment did he doubt that A Portrait of a Lady was going to be one of the significant pictures of the world.

Alastair Graeme went back to town and his own work, of which he had a great deal on hand, after a brief three days of Round Hill. He left a deep sense of his own merits behind him. Not only had he enjoyed himself, he had been a cause of enjoyment in others. Strong, wise and happy in his own accomplishment, he had a very genuine faculty of appreciation. It had given him real pleasure to renew his acquaintance with Wendover. There was something mysterious about the man, something even a little fey. But when he had married the "most beautiful woman in England," a verdict now amply confirmed by the living reality, all that must surely pass.

"Of course he'll marry her," Graeme confided to Dorland. "Everything points to that now. He can give her the setting she requires. And if without impertinence I might hazard a guess she must love him as much as ever. He is one of those men you can't help loving."

Dorland sighed a little. "Yes," he said, "old Jim is an adorable man."

There were now two things Dorland felt he must immediately do. One, and it was the less important, he must finish this picture which had already received the imprimatur of a fine judge. He was delighted to have it, even if he was a little overwhelmed by the fervour with which it was expressed. It seemed far too good to be true that such a judgment should be passed upon work of his, but he did not question its absolute sincerity. And when all was said, if human suffering could win the heights, Ambrose Dorland was fully entitled to any recompense a view from the top could bestow. He was not unmindful of what such a success implied, but as he felt just now it was but a secondary matter. The reinstatement of Jim Wendover was his first concern. He must be throned again upon that plane of reason and balance, of wit and urbanity that was his birthright. A means must be sought of killing the fear that crouched at the back of those haunted eyes.

One morning as Lady Mary watched Dorland at work, and she marvelled secretly at the power in those slender brushes, it came upon her suddenly what a wonderful thing he was making of her in a funny gaudy old fashioned gown she could not bring herself ever to admire. Yet the enthusiasm and the tutelage of Alastair Graeme had gone some way towards enabling her to see wherein lay the picture's transcendent qualities. Had she not heard him compare this to Degas, that to Jerome, that to Forêt, this to Leonardo? But as he finally said it was the fact that Ambrose Dorland had been able to put all of himself, all of his modern vision into it, that made it the thing it now was.

This morning, perhaps, there was a certain irony in recalling these eulogies. Ambrose this morning, poor dear, seemed quite unable to get himself into the large, exotic, strangely glowing canvas. He was perfectly frank about it. Suddenly he gave way to impatience. With a heavy scowl he laid down brushes and palette. "I am hanged if I can work this morning," he said plaintively. "No, I simply can't."

"'O what can ail thee, knight-at-arms?'"

"'La belle Dame sans Merci,' I suppose."

"Not meaning poor stupid me, I hope?"

"Well, I'm not sure that I don't. You certainly have something to do with it."

"And I was foolishly and fondly hoping that I was a source of true inspiration."

"So you are. Nothing can ever make you otherwise. But I can't help thinking of Jim. My mind runs on him continually. He doesn't get on as he ought and it is beginning to worry me."

"Well, I must say that I have that feeling too."

"It runs in my mind that we are not doing as much for him as we might."

"I am sorry you feel that," said Lady Mary with concern. "Pray what is there else that we can do for him?"

"I must lead up to that gradually lest you think me impertinent." Dorland lapsed into the naïvety that she liked so much. "What we have to do is to get that scared look out of his eyes. Of course you've noticed it."

"Oh yes, I have. And I grieve over it. That terrible look means great mental suffering. Yet it is something I can't account for."

"Nor I. Almost the first time I met him I saw it. But since he came home to where he belongs it seems to get worse."

"Do you think so?"

"Honestly I do. But as you say, it is something unaccountable. The question is how are we to get rid of it? Jim will never be himself otherwise."

"What is there we can do?"

"Well, my dear gracious lady, I have been thinking the whole matter very carefully over. And I've come to the conclusion that just one course remains. While Jim is as he is now I am his other self, his alter ego, as you might say. So I take it upon myself to ask for something on his behalf which he has not the will, nor the mental force to ask for himself."

The almost eerie intensity upon the face of the young painter warned Mary Benton of what was coming. With the unconventional daring of his character he was about to make a very high and grave demand upon her.

Ambrose Dorland laid his hand on his heart. "Something right inside here seems to tell me there is just one way now of putting Jim right. And it is this. I suggest that you go to him and tell him you are ready and glad to carry out the promise which you made to him when you were a girl. If you go to him now and tell him just that I somehow believe it may save him."

She did not resent his boldness. It was part of him. And it had been accepted in the first hour in which they had met. But for that boldness the astonishing sequel had not been possible. She had come to delight in the intrepidity of this young American. And as applied to the present case she recognised its wisdom. Jim loved her still. Of that she had every reason to be sure, although it was she who had dealt the blow that had broken him. But it was simply not in his nature to bear malice. A just man, besides, he knew the fault was not hers. Their happiness had been sacrificed on the altar of others.

Much as she liked Ambrose Dorland, and of recent days while A Portrait of a Lady grew in wonder she was coming to think about the artist more than she cared to own, at this moment, when, taking his courage in his hands he made this brave suggestion, she had never esteemed him so greatly.

Deep in her was the knowledge that such a request was something beyond mere bravery. "If you really do feel that," she said tensely, "I will certainly ... certainly...." Amid the spate of rather wild emotion she was unable to go on. Yet she left not a shadow of a doubt as to the resolve that had now entered her mind.

"Be it so," said Dorland. And with the gesture of a poet, a courtier and an artist fully conscious of his own power, he raised those fingers, long, slender, exquisite, to his lips.

XXXI

Work was over for that morning. Perhaps for many mornings. Only Allah could say. No sooner had Dorland extracted this promise from this woman, a promise he hardly dared to think of being made, let alone being kept, he went hatless to the autumn fields. They were still bright and warm with the October sun. For all that he had acted with perfect sincerity, not upon impulse but at the cool instance of reason, as soon as the thing was done, he was overcome by a terrible conflict of feeling. Yet God knew he must not harbour one breath of disloyalty to his friend. Jimsmitt could not help himself; had never been able to help himself since that darkly awful but glorious hour of the Fazil gate.

In these dynamic moments as Ambrose Dorland strode over the stubble he seemed a traitor to his own heart. "Oh what have you done! What have you done, Ambrose Dorland!" It was not his own voice, yet as he heard it and strove to outpace it he knew it sprang from the ultimate self. There was in that faint cry the protest of the genie within him, the despair of the great artist he had slain.

In the hush of noon, a mile from the house, with the placid deer, and oaks a thousand years old around him, he felt a sudden ache of loneliness. Had he not reft himself of the inspiration which fed his ambition? "Was this the face that launched a thousand ships?" Yes, this woman had the fatal beauty of Helen.

To live as he had lived in the light of those eyes, to trace the glancing shadows of that immortal face was to be smitten with the desire to possess her.

The desire of the moth for the star,
Of the night for the morrow.

Yes, it was true no doubt for Ambrose Dorland the waif, the hobo, the down-and-out drawing with chalks on the pavement at Hyde Park Corner. But for Ambrose Dorland the godlike youth who had gazed with eyes unabashed upon that sun of beauty, who had taken it in his hands and set it alive upon a fair canvas, for the man Ambrose Dorland who had done this thing it was a very different matter.

God, what thoughts was he thinking? If this were not disloyalty...!

Looking at his watch and fearing to be late for luncheon he made his way back to the house.

At that meal, whose delicate fare, such was his excitement, he could not touch, there was very little to show what had happened. Jimsmitt was there as usual at the head of the table; also the three ladies. One there was at whom Dorland dare not look. Yet had he done so there would have been nothing to proclaim any development. Had there been any development? Jimsmitt looked gaunter, grayer, more frail than ever. No matter what had occurred, this was certainly not one of his good days. It was pathetic to see him like that, although the fine courtesy with which he presided over the little feast was nowise lacking.

He spoke little; but he retained the gentle raillery, of a special and peculiar blend which somehow endeared him to all who came within his ken. Dorland felt none the less that he was intensely unhappy. No, this was not one of his good days. And his friend could only ask himself whether the ruse he had sprung had miscarried or had merely given one more twist to the secret barb that was festering in his flesh.

For two days this state of things went on. Dorland could glean nothing of what had transpired. Perhaps it was nothing. She might not have mentioned the matter to Jim. That, of course, was exceedingly likely. And it was not a subject that he could ever refer to again. It must be left to the protagonists of this drama to make the next sign. Would they do so? Could they do so? Such a question was as far beyond his power to answer, as it was beyond his capacity to ask.

While the matter hung fire Dorland lost the co-ordinating will which enables the artist to prosper in his work. A Portrait of a Lady only lacked a few last touches now. It was complete save for the final strokes. Nevertheless he could not give them. He could scarcely bring himself to look at his work. Even to be in the same room as the picture was to feel a kind of nausea. It was as if his act of sacrifice had desecrated the highest part of himself.

At the end of dinner on the second day Jimsmitt and Dorland were seated alone at the table. The ladies had gone to the drawing-room, the port was circulating and the servants had retired. Jimsmitt held a goblet of old brandy in his hand. After the manner of one who understood the good things of life he was affectionately raising its temperature with slender fingers pressed upon the glass when he suddenly said, "Mary has told me she is ready and willing to keep her promise. And I have had to tell her I can't keep mine." The tone was flat and level. It was so perfectly under control that it was impossible to guess what such words implied.

Ambrose Dorland felt his heart beat into his throat. "Why can't you?" There came a moment of silence that to the younger man was a form of death. And then his friend went on in the same heavy, lifeless tone which yet was almost casual, "I mustn't tell you, old man, but I simply can't."

Dorland feared to meet those tragic eyes, knowing only too well what he must find in them. He had not the courage to pursue the subject. More or less he understood.

The next day Dorland turned again to his work. He had a bout of feverish energy. Not only did he manage to complete A Portrait of a Lady, but he was able to plan a study which he proposed to call Zeyd. No further allusion was made by Lady Mary or by Wendover to the subject which had had such a disastrous effect upon the painter. But the two friends continued to stay on at Round Hill. Lady Mary was only too glad to have them there. In a fashion quite maternal she had taken charge of both.

The time was not ripe for Jim to enter upon his inheritance. His will was atrophied by the shadow which lay across his mind. Doctors and friends alike were sorely puzzled. He still had a dread of meeting his kind, and it was only with the greatest difficulty he could be persuaded to go about London. And when he did so he was never alone. Often he gave Dorland the impression that he dwelt in continual fear of losing again the sense of his own entity.

One day, however, early in the New Year there came a truly singular development. The two friends had gone up to town on their weekly pilgrimage, which was designed to keep Jim in touch with men and things. Upon this occasion they were sauntering about the streets of the West End, looking in the shop windows to pass the time, when Dorland saw an Arab *flissa* in a pawnbroker's window. This sword was so exactly the article he wanted for the new picture he was contemplating that he went in straightway and bought it.

Wendover accompanied him into the shop. While Dorland was engaged in the transaction he was suddenly aware that a wild yet half repressed cry had escaped his companion. He turned to look at him in astonishment. Clearly something pretty serious had happened to Jimsmitt. His face was ashen, he was trembling violently, his eyes seemed to be starting out of his head. The tide of emotion sweeping over him was almost beyond his power to control.

Dorland then saw that Jim was holding in his hand a large heavy overcoat. It was lined with a curiously distinctive fur, a kind of caribou. Obviously imposing a powerful check on himself Jim asked the pawnbroker the price of this garment. He at once paid the sum demanded and then took possession of the overcoat.

When the purchase was complete Wendover said to the pawnbroker in a voice that Dorland could barely recognise, "I wonder if you can give me a little information as to how this coat came here?"

To the best of the pawnbroker's recollection it had been sold to him about two years ago by a Frenchman.

"A Frenchman!"

"Yes, as I remember him," said the pawnbroker. "And I think I am right, for I was even more struck by the man who offered that coat than by the coat itself, although it is a funny looking thing."

"As you say, a funny looking thing," said the coat's new owner. "I should know it anywhere. Can you describe the Frenchman?"

"He was a tall, ugly looking fellow. There was a scar on his cheek and he had only one eye."

Jimsmitt drew in his breath sharply. "My God!" he gasped. And he reeled out of the shop like a drunken man.

Very slowly and in profound silence, Jimsmitt and Dorland made their way to the spot where Lady Mary's chauffeur awaited them. One carried the sword, the other the fur coat. Wendover offered no explanation of his queer behaviour at the pawnbroker's. He was intensely reserved all the way home. By this time Dorland was well used to the abrupt changes in the manner of his friend. More than ever was he convinced that poor dear Jimsmitt was a little mad.

Dorland could not help feeling some concern for this new manifestation. Just before they turned in at the lodge gates of Round Hill he observed, "I shouldn't wonder, Jim, if that fur coat you have taken the trouble to bring home has a history."

The words were uttered lightly but they were intended to draw the queer fellow. And they succeeded in their object. "Yes, my dear boy," said Jimsmitt in an odd, rather excited tone, "that coat undoubtedly has a history. And tonight, after dinner, I will tell you something about it."

As he spoke Dorland noticed once more a strange light in those sombre eyes.

XXXII

Jim was as good as his word. After dinner that evening, as they sat together over their cigars, he told Dorland the story of the fur coat. The man who listened did not hesitate to describe it as the strangest and in some respects the most terrible story he had ever heard.

"To begin at the beginning," said Jimsmitt, "I had better start by telling you what you already know. Anyhow, as it was more or less public property, in a semi-private way of course, it is highly probable that you have all the necessary information. Briefly it is this. When Mary, poor child, through no fault of her own had to turn me down—she was simply forced to do it—I went to pieces. All the plans I had made for her future and mine, all the things I had to work for and the reasons for them were knocked askew. That wicked marriage took the linchpin out of our little coach and four. It's a confession of weakness I know. But there it is, and that is one of the reasons why, old man, I really look better with a beard.

"Well, as I say, after Mary's marriage I went to pieces. After Monte Carlo and so on I spent some little time in Paris playing ducks and drakes with my meagre patrimony. It was the behaviour of a weak fool. Why disguise it? I gambled, I drank, I wenched, I cursed God. And then a thing happened which pulled me up with a round turn. One evening I met a very pretty little girl at a cabaret. She had taking ways as most French girls have, and I was in the mood for what I was pleased to call 'adventure.' We arranged to meet the following evening. After we had dined I took her to 'a dancing,' and then in accordance with her request I saw her home. The address she gave the taximan was not a very distinguished one, and it struck me so at the time. It was right in the heart of that nest of uncleanness behind the Butte of Montmartre. A man with any sense would never have gone with her there. But I had no sense just then. I was in that frame of mind when one simply asks for trouble. So we drove off to the rue des Capucines—I think that was the name—where we arrived some time after midnight. And in response to her pressing invitation I saw her to her *appartement*, up I don't know how many pairs of stairs. Here the charmer made me very welcome and offered me something to drink. I had had more to drink already, considerably more than I should have had. But she produced a bottle of champagne and insisted on my sharing it with her. It was pretty horrible stuff, at least it seemed pretty horrible after what I had already had. And we had just finished drinking it when I heard a key fumbling at the lock of the outer door.

"'*Mon mari*,'" exclaimed the lady. 'Oh what shall we do.' She suddenly threw herself into a state of great agitation. 'You must hide yourself,' she said. 'He will kill you if he finds you here.'

"Her part was very well done. But I still had enough sense to know that the advice she gave was the worst possible. Something in her manner told me that I was in a carefully laid trap. If I hid myself I should be caught in no position to put up a defence against the blackmail or robbery or worse that was to follow. Heavy male feet were already outside the door of the room in which we were. More than half tight, I felt in an awful state of rage at the trick that was being played

upon me.

"The door opened and the most fearsome looking *maquereau* entered the room. He was a very powerful man with a deep scar on his cheek and with only one eye, and there was a revolver in his hand. I knew in a flash that the only chance for me was to get my blow in first. I picked up the empty champagne bottle from the table and simply broke it over his head. He went down with a crash. The thud of his fall was so horrible that I was sure I had killed him.

"I dashed down the stairs six flights to the street, but before I had got to the bottom I could hear the woman shrieking murder. In my panic I didn't stop running until several streets were between me and the scene of the crime. I was in mortal fear of the police. But I was able to hail a taxi and give my address and drive off without being challenged, for it was very late and very dark. And I was just beginning to hope that I had made good my escape when I realised that in my mad haste I had left behind not only my hat but also my fur overcoat.

"That, however, was not the worst. For I remembered that not only was there in it the name of the tailor who had utilised the caribou skin a friend had recently sent me from the Yukon, but my own name was also In it. I returned to the hotel where my name and address were in the register and spent the night getting sober and wondering what I should do. I felt certain I had killed the man, and the police with that coat in their possession would have no difficulty in laying hands upon me. And I could not help feeling I should thoroughly deserve any consequences, however grim, that followed. I had dragged an old and decent name through the mud. For I now realised not only what a fool I had been but how low I had sunk. The sense of degradation was awful. I could not bear to think of myself in such a position. And so there seemed only one thing to do. It was to disappear, to vanish completely. Not only must I fly from Paris, I must lose my identity. In this I was confirmed by seeing in a late edition of a morning paper that a murder had been committed in the small hours in the rue des Capucines on Montmartre and that the police were investigating the crime.

"That paragraph decided me. I paid my bill at the hotel and in less than two hours was on my way to Marseilles to enlist in the Foreign Legion in the name of James Smith. I knew it meant a hard life—how hard I had yet to learn. But I was in a mood to welcome heavy gruel. Besides, England was no longer open to me. Even had I cared to return there, and I had not the slightest wish to do so, I should have been extradited as soon as the French police had completed their investigations. And as I say I felt the need of a drastic remedy. The life of a common soldier in the Foreign Legion seemed the best means of supplying it."

"You never doubted that you had killed the man," was Dorland's first comment on this terrible story.

"No," said Jimsmitt in a hollow tone. "And from that day to this I did not question that the moment James Wendover returned to the land of the living the French police would arrest him. You see the overcoat I had left behind with that name in it was conclusive evidence."

"How do you account for the paragraph in the newspaper?"

"Either it was pure coincidence, for I have since learned it was a quarter of the town where murder is of frequent occurrence, or as I now think more likely, a piece of false news based on the cries of the woman. For it is clear the *maquereau* was no more than knocked out temporarily, or he could not have sold that coat, after it had had a considerable amount of wear, in London several years after the affair."

"My God, you must have suffered!"

"Yes, I have suffered. I can't tell you what I have been through, particularly since I came back here and found Mary willing to take me on the old terms. Somehow I couldn't bear to let her know that I had been the associate and the prey of prostitutes, thieves and blackmailers, and that at any time I might be sent off to a long term of imprisonment in a French gaol. It seemed like dragging her as well as myself through the mud."

"Yes I quite see that," said Dorland. "You were in a dreadful hat."

"No one can appreciate such a position unless one is actually in it. To live with a sword of Damocles hanging over you is more than the mind can bear!"

"My poor dear old chap!" Dorland's voice had a woman's tenderness. "But let us praise Allah it is all over now. And by no means the least amazing part of the story is that you and I should have come upon the coat this afternoon in that pawnshop."

"Indeed, yes! One can't imagine anything more remarkable." There was a hint of hysteria in the voice of Jimsmitt. After long years of mental torture Providence surely owed him something. He was too sweet natured not to own that much of what he had borne was a fruit of his own weak folly. But it did seem to him also as it seemed to his friend, that the penalty exacted by fate had been brutal. Destiny had insisted on its pound of flesh.

No sooner had Dorland heard this extraordinary story than he knew that the world had completely changed for Jimsmitt. He rejoiced unfeignedly that such was the case. The long and dark night was over. The impending sword would never fall. There was no reason now why he should not marry the woman he adored and take the place in society to which he was entitled. It was a fairy tale come true.

The result was immediately apparent. A new, a more wonderful Jimsmitt began to emerge. It was a Jimsmitt only hinted at in Dorland's experience of him. The flashes of gaiety were no longer so transient, the mind and the will now miraculously freed of their inhibition were poised again on a stable basis.

Wendover's first use of this new power, this new drive, was to reopen the fine old house in Berkshire that had come to him by inheritance. Here he meant to live quietly but with his friends about him. Of these, apart from the woman who the world took for granted would soon be his wife, he made no secret of the fact that the foremost was Ambrose Dorland. It was to the pure devotion of this alter ego that he owed his reason if not his life. Almost the first thing he did now that his will was clear was to make a bid for A Portrait of a Lady.

He knew exactly where that picture must hang in the large hall at Clavering End. And the sum he offered, although very large for the work of a man whose name was in the making, was yet not excessive considered as an investment. At any rate so said the experts who had already seen the picture. Not only was this price designed to keep the picture where it belonged, but it would give Dorland a ready means of discharging his liability to his excellent friend Alastair Graeme. And it would enable him to set up a studio of his own. In a word it would furnish him with the munitions of war for some time to come.

Ten thousand pounds was the offer. Considerable pressure had to be brought to bear upon Dorland before he would accept it. He did not disguise from Jimsmitt that it was princely and that he would gladly take far less. Nay, he wanted to do so. With the naïvety that was so endearing he declared, "Jim, old man, you are paying through the nose. I'm not a Velasquez or a Jan Vermeer or a Mathew Maris. Divide the sum by five and then it's a pretty tall figure for the work of an *inconnu*."

"Nonsense, Dorey. You know very well that one day that picture is going to be worth many times more than I propose to give for it now."

"Nobody knows that. But I do know its present price in the market cannot be near that sum."

"That's as maybe, my dear," said Jimsmitt. "But a work of art is worth just as much as it will fetch."

Great argument followed, but finally the artist had to give in.

Dorland entered now upon a new phase. No longer was he working well at Round Hill. For a time that enchanted spot had ceased to inspire him and so he moved up to town. He had the good luck to find a studio that suited him in Glebe Place, which was almost next door to his friend of Oakley Street. And as ten thousand pounds takes a good deal of spending and he felt pretty confident now of his ability to earn a good income, he acquired a convenient yet rather expensive flat in Knightsbridge.

In this new setting he hoped to recapture the passion for work that had marked the earlier stages of his renascence.

At the exhibition of the Royal Academy at Burlington House in the spring, A Portrait of a Lady made a profound sensation. This chimed with the prophecies of certain judges who had seen the picture before it was publicly shown.

And when, perhaps with the help of a very influential friend at court in the person of Alastair Graeme, it was very favourably hung, the quality of the work and the importance of the painter were instantly recognised.

One critic described it as a faithful portrait of a great lady, which yet after the manner of a poet and seer was able to suggest that she was "a day younger than the dawn, a day older than the world." To immense technical accomplishment was wedded the daring of an innovator, who with an almost uncanny flair knew how to harmonise modernity with the august traditions of the past.

Everybody spoke of this young and unknown American as the legitimate successor to the great John Sargent, lately dead. But even he at the crest of his virtuosity had never so fully satisfied the higher criticism with a work solid yet brilliantly alive, a thing of poetry and imagination.

If aught was needed to confirm the verdict of the pundits, at least as far as the large public was concerned, it was the rumor that a fabulous sum—for a man unknown—had been paid for the picture by a certain peer. No names found their way into the newspapers as to the original of the work or the identity of its purchaser, but a romance dear to the heart of sentimental England was said to be at the back of the transaction.

To lend piquancy to a dish already highly seasoned it was said that an exclusive circle of English society would have no difficulty in recognising a singularly beautiful woman who "did not advertise." Moreover one of many adorers had celebrated a mysterious return from the grave by paying a fancy price for a classic work. Thanks to the judicious Graeme who knew exactly what to say, how it should be said and when, tongues were soon busy over dinner and luncheon tables. And nowadays it is in those places that reputations in the arts are made.

Within a month of his first impact upon an astonished world, commissions began to reach the new portrait painter, Ambrose Dorland. They were of a very desirable kind. Some of the fairest and most influential women in the land desired to have themselves immortalised by this young man of genius. But in spite of the furore his work was creating, he remained very much a man of mystery.

He declined every invitation, he was seen nowhere, he was known only to two or three people in London. Of these the one who really counted was Alastair Graeme. It was mainly due to the stage management of that large-hearted friend that his protégé had enjoyed such a triumph. But it was rather disappointing to Graeme that the young man having made a dramatic entry into a city it was not easy to storm, had such a reluctance to turn it to advantage.

Complaint soon came to Graeme that not only was the new genius hiding his light under a bushel, but still worse he was refusing commissions which the most established painters would have considered far too dazzling to be trifled with.

Having dined one evening in high places, when the London season was at the peak, and being informed with a touch of rueful indignation by a brilliant young hostess that the new man had declined even to consider a *carte blanche* offer to paint her portrait, Alastair Graeme came round betimes the next morning to Glebe Place to discuss the matter. To his surprise he learned from a caretaker that Dorland had not been to the studio for a fortnight.

As it was a delicious morning of summer Graeme walked quietly along the King's Road and down Sloane Street to his friend's flat. By that time it was approaching noon. On arrival Graeme was informed by a servant that Mr. Dorland had not yet gone out, but the man seemed very doubtful whether he was at home to anybody.

"Oh, he'll see me all right," said Graeme. And taking the bull by the horns he stepped boldly across the mat and went forward unheralded into the little sitting room.

Here a shock awaited him.

Ambrose Dorland was seated at the table in a dressing gown. He was unshaven, he looked very gaunt, rather wild about the eyes, and his manner was strange. Moreover, and this was the thing that caused Graeme real distress, a bottle of green liqueur with a cork beside it was on the table at which Dorland sat. A long, slender-stemmed glass, half full of the pernicious fluid was also there.

"My dear, dear fellow," cried Graeme, aghast at the entire spectacle, "what *are* you drinking?"

Dorland laughed in a key that sent a chill down the spine of his visitor.

"Absinthe. The last resort of weak and unstable wills."

Hypnotised by the tone of blank despair, Graeme asked what ailed him.

"I simply can't work."

"Can't!"

"No; the mere sight of canvas and brushes gives me the pip. The penalty I suppose exacted by Nature for having worked in too fine a frenzy at that other job."

Alastair Graeme looked keenly into the tragic eyes. Again he was met by blank despair. In a flash he saw what had happened. The young and impressionable man of genius was in thrall to "the face that launched a thousand ships." That subtle loveliness had unwittingly enslaved him. It could hardly be given to any man after such an outpouring of his own vital spirit to issue unscathed.

Already it was being freely said in certain quarters that the announcement the world was looking for was overdue. Mary Benton—they preferred to call her Mary Adeane—was going to marry dear old Jim Wendover who had so mysteriously turned up again after wandering for years in the African desert. Everybody who knew them and their story was delighted. After all those years of vicissitude such a consummation was like a page from the *Arabian Nights*.

"Yes," said Dorland, "I'm afraid I put too much of myself into that picture. It's the confession of a weak man. But if it comes to that, no man can be stronger than nature, the jealous old beast, allows him to be." As he spoke he raised the glass he held in his hand. Then he sighed heavily and without bringing it to his lips put it back on the table.

"You must pull yourself together, my dear fellow." Alastair Graeme was painfully conscious of the banality in such circumstances of such words. But he had to say something to relieve the tension and it was the only thing that occurred to him to say. Then he went on, still keenly aware of his own inadequacy. "You are simply playing ducks and drakes with your prospects. I hope you realise how wonderful they are."

"Oh yes, indeed I do," said Dorland in a hollow voice.

"Well, please don't make hay of such chances as no painter ever had."

"Oh yes, yes, yes," Dorland exclaimed, "but what can I do?"

"Last night I was dining with the Brancasters. And before I came away her Grace took me aside and complained bitterly that my mysterious American as she called you had refused I don't know how much for a portrait to hang in Saint James's Square."

"I know, I know. But I can't take commissions I have no earthly chance of being able to fulfil."

Graeme looked at him with growing concern. "Oh, my dear chap, you mustn't say that! Why, you have the ball at your feet."

Dorland shook his head. "All the life has gone out of me. I feel as if I was lying out in the desert without water or food and praying for death."

"You have been overworking, *mon cher*. A good long rest is what you need."

"More than that I fancy. The longer I rest the more surely all inspiration will dry up. Of course I might try to make some feeble copies of what I have done already, but that is not the way I am made. As I feel now my career as a painter is over."

"My dear boy, it is hardly begun!"

"I must rest content with being a painter of one picture."

"But that technical mastery, that use of colour, that sense of values, do they not give you any pleasure to exercise them?"

"None—merely for themselves. I must have something real, something tangible to work for, a definite end in view."

Dorland spoke with a kind of weary exasperation. It was clear that for the time being he was at the end of his artistic tether. Graeme, thoroughly good fellow that he was, did his utmost to rouse him. But he soon concluded that just now such efforts would do no good.

"I can't get away from London at the moment," Graeme finally said. "I am fixed up all this week and some way into next, but as soon as I can I mean to take you down into the country."

Graeme was full of solicitude, but he knew the hopelessness of mere words. This very impressionable young man had been pretty badly scorched by the flame. But there was nothing that sincere friendship and keen sympathy could do for him just then. So the elder painter took his leave, sad at heart.

XXXIII

Just as Alastair Graeme turned into Knightsbridge, as luck would have it, he tilted plump into Wendover.

"Hullo," he cried, in his exuberant rather boyish way, "I have just been to call upon a certain friend of ours."

"That forestalls me," said Wendover. And then with sudden anxiety in his eyes: "I hope he's all right. He didn't seem very gay when I left him the other day. One has a sort of Idea that London doesn't agree with him."

"Very true. Take him back to the country with you—if you are still there. He is moping in town."

"Yes, I will. Very temperamental chap. Most geniuses are, aren't they?"

"If they are real dog, yes. Although all temperamentalists are not geniuses."

"That's one for me," said Wendover gaily.

Graeme, a very close and shrewd observer, was astonished by the change that had come over Wendover since he had last met him a few weeks ago at Round Hill. This summer morning he looked years younger. Somehow he was entirely his own graceful, debonair self. His laughter, no longer hollow and forced, had a ring in it. The large, deep, singularly magnetic eye was almost merry. Plainly there had been some recent development in his life. It was the difference between a man with one foot already in the grave and a hale spectator of the human comedy.

Graeme could only ascribe such a change to one cause. Yet even that theory did not wholly cover the facts. At their last meeting, six weeks ago, the painter had made the mental note that for a man entering into his kingdom with every obstacle removed from the attainment of his heart's desire, Wendover was strangely unhappy. Graeme felt that in spite of an exquisite politeness and a chivalrous determination not to depress the people around him, some medical specialist had surely numbered his days.

This morning, however, with the sun beating down on the pavement of Knightsbridge in a fashion almost worthy of the Sahara, everything about this curiously attractive fellow was different. He had all the élan that had charmed pre-war London. The fine-drawn face was that of a younger, more confident, more controlled, altogether happier man.

As Graeme looked at him, anxious to direct the conversation into a particular channel, yet not quite knowing how to do so, he suddenly had an inspiration. "I say, Wend," he said with the dash of mockery such audacity demanded, "I have an idea. Take the young fellow Ambrose to Berks. Stand no nonsense but see that he comes with you now unless it means breaking other engagements. And then set him to work good and honest on the companion picture to that one which rumour says you have acquired at a rather fancy price—although between ourselves posterity will applaud your judgment."

"Well, you know you vetted it for me," said Wendover with the sigh of a lover, "And it was on your advice that I wrote the cheque. But I might as well confess that even had your advice been otherwise I should still have backed my own judgment and bid up a corking fine picture. A mere layman can't help seeing its quality."

"Of course he can't. And now, as I say, you must lose no time in setting him to work on the Portrait of a Gentleman, as a companion piece to stick in the R.A. show next year."

"Ax my futt." His former fag was suddenly reduced to schoolboy persiflage.

"I mean it, young fellow, my lad." Graeme looked him straight in the eye. Yet though his gaze was so intent he did not observe that a dark cloud gathered. "Portrait of a Skrimshanker, belike, if you mean present company."

"The pride that apes humility," said Graeme.

"You keep precious little pride about you if you have been dragged through the places I have been, by the hairs of your tail."

It was then that Graeme saw the shadow. All the same this was a new Wendover, or rather it was a new edition of the original Wendover and therefore a particularly captivating one.

"Don't think me impertinent," said Graeme with a sudden change of note. But he could no longer stave off a question he was burning to ask. "For the last six weeks I've looked each day in the *Morning Post*. Everybody says it's an open secret but there's been nothing official. When is the announcement? As I say, don't think me impertinent, but I simply want to have the pleasure of being the first to congratulate you—that's all."

Wendover was touched by a tone of affection. He had always liked this fellow. As a very Junior member of Puppy Hole he had looked up to him as a "bit of a swell" in the full and true Eton sense. A bit of a swell he remained though he had learned the trick of bending a meretricious world to his will.

"It's more than good of you, old man." Very simply Wendover laid a gentle hand on the other's sleeve. "I won't pretend I haven't guessed what people are saying. In such odd circumstances it's natural they should make haste to put two and two together. But they oughtn't to forget that she is the most glorious creature in England, the absolute best, the most unselfish." The ring in Wendover's voice was so emotional that Graeme with his instincts on the alert and beginning to sense dangerous ground promptly changed the subject.

He hastened back to the topic of Ambrose Dorland. The painter and his affairs still dominated the minds of both. "I hope, Wend, you'll lay hold of him and pull him together," were Graeme's final words. "You have more power over that young fellow than anyone else. Overwork on the top of those horrible years in the desert seems completely to have upset his applecart. If we don't watch it he will go permanently wrong. And if that happens we shall never forgive ourselves."

Alastair Graeme spoke with a depth of feeling that was rare. Like Wendover he clearly had a deep regard for the young American. The two men parted fraternally with a mutual promise to do all they could in a matter that was disturbing them a good deal.

A minute later Wendover was seeking admittance at Dorland's flat. As in the case of the previous visitor it was vain for Wilkins the servant to deny him. Nay, he was not given a chance. Jimsmitt simply walked past him into the pleasant little room overlooking Hyde Park wherein Dorland sat.

Graeme had prepared the caller for bad news, but the figure Ambrose presented filled him with dismay. His mind

swung back to that hot morning four years ago when he found a *bleu* by the roadside, knocked out by the sun of Africa, and a sergeant of the Legion ministering to him with his boot.

For a few moments, without a word, Jimsmitt surveyed the scene. He soon decided upon a line of action. Like Dr. Johnson on a celebrated occasion the first thing he did was "to put the cork in the bottle." Then he turned to the unkempt figure seated at the table and said, "'Young Mr. Oliver Goldsmith, let there be no more of this?'"

Without further apology or preface he rang for Wilkins and asked him to pack Mr. Dorland's suitcase.

"As soon as we have had a bite of lunch you are coming down to the country, my boy."

"But I don't need any lunch and I don't want to go down to the country," said the feeble Dorland.

Jimsmitt shook a head that had grown sternly decisive. No hint there of the weak-willed drifter. It was the gesture of an extremely strong-minded guardian. Once more between these two had occurred a complete overturn of power. Ambrose Dorland had said they could muster only one will between them. Somehow that phenomenon was literally true. And now that by the stress of circumstance a much tried will was no longer his, it passed automatically into the keeping of Jimsmitt.

By fate's alchemy it gathered strength in the process. No one could have wielded it more vigorously at this moment than Jim. Taking upon himself the rôle of mother, nurse, physician and *valet de chambre*, he stood over Ambrose while he shaved. Jim even dipped the brush in lather and stropped the razor. Then with the help of the sympathetic Wilkins he prepared a bath and peremptorily hustled Ambrose into it.

Clad presently in an elegant country suit whose art shade would match the chaste browns and greens of Berkshire, the painter was collared and tied, booted and hatted with distinction and care. And then with never a with-your-leave or by-your-leave he and his gear were put into a taxi.

As the clocks of the metropolis struck one, Jimsmitt and Dorland were sitting opposite each other at one of the most desirable little luncheon tables in all London. Here in sight of green trees they awaited the arrival of iced cantaloup, omelette aux points d'asperges, sweetbreads and Perrier Jouet.

The contrast with that terrible day of their first meeting was remarkable. Yet in essentials it was the same. Ambrose Dorland had fallen again by the wayside. Jimsmitt was as completely the good Samaritan. Nay, in a more intense degree he played that part, for now he was acting on the belief that he was the one man in the world who could save the man who had saved him.

XXXIV

They caught the 3.10 to Newbury. And by five o'clock they were sitting on one of the fair lawns of Clavering End. The journey had done much to revive Ambrose Dorland, and the old house, an authentic piece of the past, did not fail to ravish his eye. For an artist it ranked only second to Round Hill. In spite of his malaise it had an equal glamour. What a power of sheer beauty was in these ancient places. Even for a down-and-out like himself they had all the sorcery of the centuries.

As each sat wrapped in thought, Dorland suddenly found courage to ask a question. Perhaps it was intended to numb the ache in his mind. He hated and despised himself yet he could not forget that it was always there. No chain is stronger than its weakest link. A secret gnaw at the back of the brain marked the point of danger upon which all depended.

"Jim, you haven't told me yet when the great event is to be. Everybody knows it's soon, but there's nothing in the papers."

"No, there hasn't been." The tone was light, so light that a jealous ear was a little surprised. There did not seem a ripple in the placid nerves of Jimsmitt who was sucking quietly at his pipe, but that did not apply to his questioner whose voice trembled oddly, whose heart beat wildly.

Beneath Jim's indifference a very shrewd if veiled glance was at work. Not a flicker of Dorland's eyes, not a tremor of his voice was lost upon Wendover as he went very calmly on. "You see nothing is really settled."

"But I thought...." Dorland stopped abruptly. In common with the rest of the world he had taken all for granted. And with reason. In a way of speaking was not he the instigator of a thrice happy consummation? Of course it was only a figure of speech for Jim to say nothing was settled. From the look of him, from the sound of that rich note of deep content, it was certain that everything was working out all right. Ambrose Dorland could only rejoice. And he did so unfeignedly. He would not have the affair otherwise. God forbid that he should envy old Jim such happiness. Already he felt marvellously better for having been taken so firmly in hand. And when he learned, as he soon did, that Mary and her aunt Mrs. Rea were coming down from London the next day and had promised to stay a whole fortnight at Clavering End a strange exhilaration caught hold of him.

Ambrose that evening was more himself than he had been for several months. The new orientation had lent him courage. He told himself, as he undressed in a delightful room, that no matter what the future held he would play the man. Otherwise he were unworthy of the high and signal gifts of friendship bestowed upon him by providence. He owed everything to Jimsmitt, almost the suit of pyjamas in which he lay. Please God, he would prove worthy of a noble mentor. Enfolded in that prayer he fell asleep.

He woke a new man. A deep draught of oblivion in an enchanted room in a lovely house whose rooftree was that of one so dear to him, was full of healing. Even if a morbid ache was still at the back of his mind, life was a thing far richer than Ambrose Dorland deserved to find it. Who was he that he should expect to inherit the earth?

At breakfast, however, in spite of all, he somehow felt that he had inherited it. There at the sideboard was Jimsmitt, gay and charming, stacking his plate with traditional English bacon and eggs. How many generations of bacon and eggs had it taken to produce a man of that quality? Never had Dorland seen him so abundantly himself as he stood there, glossy and trim, clothed and in his right mind, a picture of a highly civilised gentleman. What a subject for a painter. Oh, that a wayward brush were worthy of it!

In the course of the afternoon Mary and her chaperon arrived. Then for the time being fled the dejection of Ambrose Dorland. That magnetic presence gave him new life, new faith. Immediately it sought expression. The day was hot and they sat in a corner of a spacious lawn in the shade of a picturesque old tree. As they gossiped idly Dorland suddenly caught the spirit of place in the face of Jimsmitt. Seen at a certain angle in those golden shadows his features might have been carved out of the ancestral oak. Fired by sheer beauty of line into a quick inspiration the artist began to sketch him.

Jimsmitt encouraged him by carefully keeping his pose while at the same time he pretended to be unaware of what was happening. The two ladies with their woman's wit, were careful also not to break the spell. They had received a hint that all was not well with the painter and that the natural remedy for his unease was to get him to turn again to palette and brush. With his friends about him, roused by an unspoken yet active sympathy, the artist worked for more than two hours. Almost feverishly he wielded his pencil. All was perfect. The peace of the evening, broken only by the cawing of rooks, bathed in "the light of setting suns" played on the face of Jimsmitt and was yet more poignantly reflected in the haunting beauty of the woman opposite. It was a moment of life, an unforgettable harmony of the spirit of place that could never recur.

So happy was Ambrose Dorland with the idea which had come to him, that next morning in the middle of breakfast, he announced his intention of going up to London. He must collect the tools of his craft in order to lose no time in getting to work. "I am going to call it A Portrait of a Gentleman. Or perhaps I may call it Jimsmitt. In some ways I think that title will be best. How say you, milady?"

"I vote for Jimsmitt," said Lady Mary.

"Then Jimsmitt it shall be. Yours is the casting vote. And if all goes well and you continue to inspire me it will be

ready in time for the wedding."

The words provoked a laugh. No date was yet fixed for the wedding. Jim, however, and his bride-to-be were none the less eager that nothing should interfere with these plans. Not only did the host promptly offer his new car, but Lady Mary who had more than a little skill, volunteered to drive it. Finally the driving was left to a professional chauffeur, yet when Ambrose set forth he was accompanied by his two friends. They spent a memorable day together and returned early in the evening with the necessary outfit.

Once more came enchanted days. It was Round Hill over again. Yet there was one material difference. In the halcyon time when A Portrait of a Lady was taking an immortal shape Ambrose Dorland was his own master. In other words the will he shared with Jimsmitt was in his own keeping. And it was by its full exercise that Jim carried on from day to day. But now as he worked on the lawn at Clavering End it was surely, Jimsmitt who held the master key to fate.

The idea in a sense was fantastic, yet Dorland could not rid himself of it, that it was by the vicarious power of Jimsmitt that he was able to do as he now did. Once more a brain, which perhaps had been a little damaged by the sun of Africa, was strung to a dangerous pitch. It could only find relief by toiling furiously; yet Ambrose Dorland now believed he had no true volition. As in those awful months in the Sahara he felt that every act was dictated by another. Notwithstanding this he was living wonderful days. The picture of Jimsmitt under the ancestral oak rapidly took on those qualities which had already brought fame to Ambrose Dorland.

Perfect weather made it easy for Jim to keep his pose in a favourite spot. Working in a kind of subdued frenzy, with a creative rapture beyond any he had known, Ambrose was able to forget for the time being the sharp edge of terror. For its antidote was always there. In a garden chair, reading, writing, and sometimes even attempting a little sketching was the only true inspirer of those busy fingers. The artist did not realise the fact, but the sorcery of Lady Mary was more potent than ever.

These days she was curiously silent. During long hours she spoke little. But day by day as the power of a great painter unfolded itself, her senses merged ever more fully In the spirit of place. Grave joy flooded her eyes as without speaking or moving she watched the young man at work. All the hidden power, the subtle grace that was Jimsmitt he evoked and like a magician, transformed into a living thing.

The golden days slipped by, the work took shape, and a fourth person, occasionally present at these sessions of sweet silent thought, was impressed by a salient fact. Only one of three very dear friends had any sign of gaiety. The painter himself was in grim earnest. Lady Mary had an ever deepening gravity as each day she reclined in a wicker chair by the easel. In her eyes, as the work went on, came a growing perplexity, a lengthening shadow of anxiety and pain.

Jimsmitt alone seemed in full enjoyment of the moment and of himself. He alone was carefree. The translation from the broken-brained waif of a few months ago was complete. Having come into his kingdom he was born again. The old Jimsmitt was there, the gentle soul, the friend in need, yet now that he had returned to the place where he surely belonged he was a Jimsmitt raised to a higher power.

His look of happiness was a thing to see, the note of his laughter a thing to hear. But there were times when a shadow crossed those unfathomable eyes, when mystery brooded over them. And as the day all too rapidly neared for Mary's return to London, a kind of agonised uncertainty hovered about him. What Jimsmitt was thinking none could have told. But the mirth grew rarer on his lips, his face took on a new austerity.

Sitting hour after hour in that enchanted garden, presiding over the white magic that was being enacted by a man of true genius, it was as if the very texture of his mind suffered a change. At last the day came when Mary was to leave Clavering End. It had been arranged that she should go to town by car in the afternoon. She would have loved to extend her stay but she had engagements to meet.

The dark moment of her going was very near. Ambrose Dorland felt more acutely than ever that he did but wield a vicarious power, so he worked in a kind of frenzy against the time when she would be there no longer to inspire him. When she went, all would go. He must be a brave man, he must accept the inevitable, but how he was to keep on he simply did not know.

The last morning came. And as usual, no sooner was breakfast over than Ambrose set up a brilliant and glowing canvas at the end of the lawn. He began at once to work steadily, touching and retouching what he had already done. But an hour passed and his two friends did not come to him. At last, however, came Lady Mary. She brought the news that Jim had had to go into Newbury, but he hoped that for one morning Ambrose would excuse him.

The young man felt a little surprise at this unexpected desertion. Nothing had been said at breakfast. It was the first time Jim had let him down over the portrait, if in anywise it could be called "a let down." But the picture was now so far advanced that the absence of the central figure did not really matter. A look of melancholy in the eyes of Lady Mary as she came and sat by the easel was far more disturbing. In the course of the last few days the painter had watched it grow. This morning it was painful to see. And with the force of the perception that was upon him now he knew the reason for it.

Could it be that Jim also knew why those eyes were desolate? Was it the chivalry of his heart that had planned to give them this last morning together? It was a far-sought idea, yet Ambrose Dorland could not rid himself of the conviction that it was the truth.

The pressure of the occasion induced a deep excitement. An intolerable weight of emotion was upon him. For a little he painted furiously, striving to forget that the mainspring of his life was about to snap. But in spite of all he could do, he was once more in the grip of an occult power. He tried to put it away from him, but signally failed. Something was going, had gone out of the will. It was almost as if a malign force hovered about this garden.

Was this the face that launched a thousand ships,
And burnt the topless towers of Ilium?

He gazed upon that face of sorcery and gazing his eyes were pierced. Something mysterious enfolded him. Madness seemed to come upon him. He laid down palette and brush. Something not himself, a force wholly beyond him, descended from the upper air.

"I might as well tell you, Mary," he said in a voice he did not recognise as his own, "I might as well tell you what I am sure you already know. Simply that I adore you. I love you so much that I can't see any future without you. I—I hate and despise myself for saying this—but I can't help it."

To the disordered sense of the young man horror and joy appeared to contend in this woman. She sprang to her feet with a half checked cry. Her face was transfigured, yet for the unhappy Dorland her eyes were dominated by furtive terror.

But in this moment he was at the mercy of the Fates. Suddenly he took her in his arms, crushed her to him with wild force, covered her mouth with kisses.

She yielded like a young girl, this great and noble woman. With a sensation of utter despair Ambrose Dorland knew that she was his.

XXXV

Jimsmitt came to them across the lawn. "Only ten minutes to luncheon, thank God. I'm hungry as a hunter." His words had the gay insouciance of a man completely happy.

Ambrose Dorland murmured something about "base deserter." His voice was barely audible. The words were addressed to space, for he dare not look at the friend he had betrayed. He did not know what he should do. A sense of

coming madness was upon him. But so long as the goddess who had bewitched him remained in that house, he still had the power to live in the moment. What would happen when, cast upon his own resources, he was left to pay the penalty for what he had done, was beyond his power to guess.

At this final meal Jim was all whimsicality and verve. To Ambrose Dorland he seemed to approach beatitude. Was it that at last the day of their nuptials had been fixed? The young man did not venture to ask the question. How could he with that look of stony horror in the eyes of the woman opposite? He kept wholly clear of the topic. At three o'clock her car was at the door. Then the two men who loved her said good-bye.

Women are great actresses. None could guess from the bearing of Mary Benton what her emotions were as she drove off with the good Henrietta Rea. Gaily she waved and kissed the tips of white gloved fingers to both her friends. Dorland would have defied Jimsmitt to read the grim secret in her bosom. Nay, her woman's art was so consummate in this dangerous moment, he almost doubted after all whether he himself had done so.

As the car glided out of sight along a glorious avenue of beach and sycamore Dorland became dazed. The grisly problem that had haunted him for some days must now be met. What was he going to do? The nature of the spectre which faced him was even more terrible than at first he had realised. She loved him. Beyond a doubt she loved him. Oddly enough that sinister, that immensely complicating factor had never entered into his calculations. But that morning, in one instant of madness she had allowed him to tear the hidden proof right out of her heart.

In this hour of withdrawal it seemed a form of death and damnation for both. What of their duty to Jimsmitt? Each loving him as they did, each a very special part of his destiny, it behoved them at every cost to be absolutely loyal. Like the world at large Jim took for granted that Mary would keep her promise whenever he asked her to do so. Had she not assured him of that? Nay, it was at the instance of Ambrose Dorland that she had lately renewed her pledge.

There was no way out for her. Even had she or either of her lovers desired, one there was no way out. Jim had the first claim. By all the laws of right she must be his wife. It was only left now for Ambrose not to sully a noble friendship. He owed this man all; fortune, life, and that which he knew to be beyond either, reason itself. He could only pray that such a clear fact would suffice to keep the frail barque he called himself upon its course.

That evening as the two friends sat in the cool of the garden Ambrose found courage to ask a question. "Jim," he said softly, "when is the great day?"

The answer was long in coming, and when it came was not as expected. "Dorey, old man, perhaps the time has come to let you into a secret. I am afraid, after all, there is to be no great day for me."

"What do you mean, Jim?" Dorland was full of amazement. In the growing dusk he could not see the face of Jimsmitt. Perhaps it was well he could not.

But an odd change of voice disclosed what the shadowed eyes concealed. "I mean this, old man. It is too big a thing to happen to a broken reed like me."

"You are that no longer, Jim. Since all has come right for you, you are as good a man as you ever were."

"That's as may be. But what I know I know."

"Well, you can't back down now. You simply can't."

In the long intensity of silence that followed both seemed to grow years older. This was one of those crises in which each felt the other man was more to him than life Itself.

"She means your happiness, Jim. Always she has meant your happiness."

"It may be so, old man. But the question now is do I mean hers?"

The continued pause had an element of the uncanny. For to Ambrose Dorland it brought sudden revelation. "You did

mean her happiness." The younger man spoke clairvoyantly, not consciously shaping his words yet fully apprehending their meaning. "Until you willed otherwise. She loved you until you saw that I needed that love as much as you. And then you set to work with that joint will of ours to undo for my sake what I had far rather be done for yours."

"Ah, my dear boy," said Jimsmitt. "You are too imaginative."

Neither, just then, had the strength to pursue the topic. It was of extreme delicacy and it was full of peril for both these men who had been more than once in very deep places. Both felt they were heading for very dangerous ground. One fact, however, emerged for Ambrose Dorland. If as he fully believed just now the happiness and the well being of Jimsmitt were of more consequence than his own, he must bring all the force of his nature to bear on wresting from him a due share of motive power.

Jim was in the ascendent just now. To his own undoing he was imposing his will to help his friend.

Dorland began the next day strong in resolution. There was but one way in which he could now be true to Jimsmitt and vindicate his own sanity. It must be through his art. In future let that be his whole life. Let it fill the place of mother, sister, wife, mistress. There would still remain this sacred friendship with the man he worshipped.

Standing in front of the canvas, in the lee of this ancient tree, he saw how strong and fine a thing this portrait of Jimsmitt promised to be. And when Jim came presently to resume his pose he saw it also.

"By Jove," he said, "you've got magnificent work there. I offer no opinion, of course, upon the likeness. Privately I call it sheer flattery. But the altogether of the thing, the conception if I may so ignorantly express it, the boldness, the colour and yet the simplicity make one think of those things in the Prado by Goya and Velasquez. But you'll laugh at me for that!"

"On the contrary I am grateful. You wouldn't say so unless you meant it."

"Still the opinion of an ignoramus is not worth anything. We must get Alastair Graeme to come and see it. I'll write to him today."

"Not today, Jim," said the artist. "It isn't quite far enough on. There's a lot more to be put into that face—although I'll own that already it's a fair likeness. But it hasn't quite the subtlety and the depth it ought to have. 'Tisn't just the face of Jimsmitt as I see it. I must get the-light-that-never-was look into it somehow."

"You mustn't spoil a wonderful thing by trying to put in more than the subject will bear. After all I am pretty common clay."

"Sit down there, under that tree, and don't talk bilge, my dear old lad." The artist spoke imperiously. This morning, girt with power, he was determined to regain his lost ascendency. It should be accomplished by the force of his brush, the inspiration of his talent.

Ambrose Dorland was to find, however, before the morning was out that art is a supremely jealous mistress. Do as the painter would, and he drove his will to the utmost, he found it impossible to ignore the truth. Something vital was missing from this séance. A presence was withheld. There was a vacant chair. And every spark of resolve Ambrose Dorland could muster was not enough to fill it.

As he went grimly on with his task, biting savagely at the stem of his briar, he knew the day was going against him. All too soon the fire had waned. The thing he had feared with all his soul, which he had simply declined to face, was already upon him. Like a pricked balloon the divine afflatus was spent.

After a couple of hours of moral torture, doggedly and silently borne, in the course of which every vacillating touch applied to a masterly canvas meant a weakening of the artist's intention, he yielded to the inevitable. It was clear that he was doing no good. Nay, he was doing positive harm. So he downed tools.

"Come on, Jim." Dorland stifled a groan. "Let us go for a little walk. We've done enough for this morning."

The painter did not utter a word of the cruel fact that had entered his mind. But it had never been so plain as now to Ambrose Dorland that art cannot be trifled with. She demanded all or nothing. Whatever of moral force he had must not be diverted from her in the altruism of friendship.

XXXVI

The next morning the same thing occurred, but in an intensified degree. Overnight Ambrose made resolutions he found impossible to keep. More than will power was needed to finish the portrait of Jimsmitt. Cunning had gone from the right hand of the artist. No matter how he strove there was no means of co-ordinating sense with faculty. Inspiration had flown. Every cell of his being ached for that presence whose lack no devotion could atone.

Dorland went from bad to worse. Each day was a replica of the previous one; the impotence of the artist grew ever more exasperating. He knew that every touch he gave the picture now weakened the original design but he could see no remedy. It had been wiser to refrain from it altogether for a time. Jimsmitt urged him to do this. Knowing, however, that if he did not complete it out of hand he would never be able to look at it again, he persisted in going on with his task to the bitter end.

How bitter that end was to be Ambrose Dorland had no conception. The climax occurred with a break in the weather. Late one evening, after nearly a month of radiant skies, much needed rain was promised by a heavy bank of cloud in the south west. A night of thunder and lightning was accompanied by a deluge of rain. The morning was cold and very wet. There could be no thought of work that day in the drenched garden. And so Dorland set up his easel in a room with a north light that had been placed at his disposal.

No sooner was the canvas fixed, and the painter came to examine under new conditions a work that he ventured to hope was very near fruition, than he received a shock. The portrait was ruined. What eight days ago, on the eve of Mary's departure, had been within an ace of a masterpiece was now but a chaotic daub. Every touch he had forced himself to apply since that hour had been a tragic blunder.

Art and nature had indeed avenged themselves. Seen now in this cold impersonal light all illusion vanished. The picture before him had a certain savage power but it was no longer coherent; that is to say though it may still have borne a kind of resemblance to Jimsmitt, it was altogether remote from the artist's intention. Compared with the noble thing of eight days ago it was as if a madman had tried to complete it. In lieu of the beauty and the mystery he had sought to give the exquisite face of a friend, was an expression of ironic wickedness; a portrait of one who had sojourned overlong in the dark places of the earth amid evil magics, fate and the devil.

When Dorland fully realised what a savage trick an overdriven mind had played upon him he recoiled with a gasp of horror. In that direction madness lay. Merely to look upon this thing was damnation. He covered his eyes with his hands as might a child in the presence of a bogey.

Thus was he standing, a sense of doom upon him, when Jimsmitt entered the room unheard and so found him. A flash of that uncanny insight with which each of these men penetrated the heart of the other, showed the artist was shattered. One glance at the picture in its new setting told why. Jimsmitt could but reproach himself for not having made the discovery sooner, for not having interposed his will. In a sense he had done so, but it was impossible to make that will effective until the painter saw for himself what he was doing and where his defiance of danger was leading. Art had indeed taken a cruel revenge.

Shattered by the total ruin of what eight days ago had been a noble work, Dorland as he stood before the easel broke into weak sobs. The tender heart of Jimsmitt was pierced. He could say nothing. For a layman to attempt to offer comfort had been an outrage. This man had already proved himself to be a great master of his craft. But he was a man of exceptional nature who had suffered too much. He was haunted by an obsession which had gravely imperilled his reason.

At last the artist perceived that his friend was at his side. "Do you see what I have done, Jim?" His voice had a note of curious hysteria. "It was my intention to show you as you have always been to me, an angel of light and sweetness. Instead of which I have made you a devil, I have simply made you a devil, as black-hearted, as subtle, as hellish as those fiends who used to visit us in the torture dungeon in the sacred city of Krav."

So it was. Jimsmitt dare not deny it. That terrible canvas would too surely have given him the lie. He was powerless to help or to console. For each word of the unhappy Dorland was punctuated by the fierce stab of the palette knife he held in his hand. At each epithet he drove it through the canvas. Soon it was in ribbons. Cut to shreds, its ruin was complete.

They stood gazing at one another in silence. It was as if a living horror had entered the room. "I want you now, Jim, to do me one last service. You still have the force I lack. Drive this through the heart of a weak, contemptible fool and let him make an end." He offered the knife with eyes of entreaty.

Very gently Jimsmitt took the knife from him. "It seems to have stopped raining." He spoke so matter of factly that his calm voice in the brain of Dorland was an obtrusion of sanity into a Walpurgis Night. "Let us take a spin in the new car to get an appetite for luncheon." Then he laid a hand on the painter's arm and led him out of the room.

The rest of the day went as if nothing untoward had occurred. Yet these men whose love for each other was passing the love of women knew they were poised on the verge of a chasm. Fate had played things up so high there seemed no way of escape. These twin souls were very near destruction.

Reason has its laws, its clear and definite limits. Those who transcend them have soon or late to pay a price of inexpressible bitterness. A sense of this was in the minds of both, when late that evening, measuring a final glass before bed, Jimsmitt remarked in a tone apparently casual: "I should be in no hurry to get up tomorrow if I were you, old man. Have breakfast brought to your room. You've been overdoing things a bit. Rest is what you need."

"Oh, I'm all right," said Dorland stoically. But a hint of hysteria remained in his voice.

"You are far from all right," said his friend gravely. "I am sure an extra hour or two in bed will do you no harm. You are not as strong as you think. That active mind takes a lot out of you. And since the holy city of Krav, neither of us can stand much in the way of mental racket."

"Oh, I'm all right, Jim, believe me."

"Take advice and don't show up till luncheon. And by then I daresay Mary will be here to greet you."

"Mary!"

"Yes, I've telephoned to her to come down here first thing tomorrow without fail."

There was a silence. And then the younger man broke in with a rather wild but half suppressed cry: "Oh Jim, Jim, you shouldn't have done that!"

"But why not?" said his friend gently.

"I don't think I can bear the sight of her—after what has happened."

"Rubbish, my dear. And it is a mere prelude to what is going to happen. Mary, as far as you are concerned, is the key to everything."

"No more of that, Jim—if you love me. Even you do not realise how impossible the situation is. Make allowance for the ferocious egotism that burns in the soul of every artist."

"I do. But it is not you I think of now. I am thinking of Mary. She loves you, old man."

"How can she love us both?"

"A very simple matter for such a nature as hers. She loves me as a mother loves a weak and wayward and rather worthless child. She loves you as a wife loves a noble and puissant husband."

"No, no." The younger man grew imperious. "That can never be. You have the first claim upon her. She is yours. I cannot rob you. If you persist in this you will drive me mad."

"Well, well, well." There came an abrupt change in the voice of Jimsmitt. "Sleep the sleep of the just, my dear Ambrose, and I repeat, be in no hurry to get up tomorrow."

They went up the broad central staircase arm in arm. For a moment they lingered at the head of the first corridor outside Jim's room. Suddenly he gripped Dorland's hand. "God bless you. God bless you both. Dear old man!" He opened his door, stepped quickly within and closed it resolutely behind him.

XXXVII

Dorland had not meant to take the advice of Jimsmitt, but he somehow did. Following a series of violent dreams he fell into a good sleep after the sun had risen. When he finally woke it was to find the hour sometime after nine o'clock and that a servant was bringing in his breakfast. This seemed like intelligent anticipation on the part of his host who had a power of imposing his wishes in subtle and unsuspected ways.

Dorland resigned himself to the inevitable. He managed to swallow a boiled egg and a cup of tea and then feeling generally cheap and in a state of mental eclipse gave himself up to further repose. That is to say he remained where he was, while with the help of tobacco he tried to think out a line of action. As he saw things this morning the future for Ambrose Dorland was a total blank. He could not see where life was leading him. Yesterday had been a confession of abject impotence and failure. Today must be the same. And tomorrow? In his present mood it was impossible to envisage a tomorrow.

Between eleven and twelve he rang for shaving water and bathed and dressed leisurely. He was feeling unbelievably wretched. The mind had failed and the consciousness of it gained upon him with every movement that he made. His recent behaviour had been in the last degree irrational, but as matters were there was no hope of betterment. One thing, however, he was more than ever determined upon. Jimsmitt with rare insight, with selfless devotion had proposed a certain remedy for his malaise. This he would oppose. It was due to their sacred friendship that even if his life as well as his art were laid in ruins he must resist to the bitter end Jim's self-immolation.

This decision made, the painter descended on the stroke of noon the lovely staircase of black oak to the panelled hall. He was in no haste to find Jim. The day was again a glory of hazy summer warmth and his friend was most probably basking under his favourite tree. Just now, loitering in the hall, Ambrose did not know how he was ever going to sit there with him again. Something in his brain was making of everything a chaos. Leaning heavily on the old chest at the foot of the stairs, he was overcome by a feeling that he was a wayfarer in the trackless desert, without compass or chart.

After a minute or two he cast an eye involuntarily upon the top of the chest to see if there were any letters for him; it was where as a rule they were put. It seemed there was one. The envelope simply bore his name; it lacked address, postmark, stamp. With a curious thrill he recognised the hand of Jimsmitt. He tore the letter out of its cover. And then he read the following:

> Dorey, old man, there is only one thing to do and I do it. Fate—Kismet—*In sh'Allah*. I am but an instrument under God. Yet I lay the sacred charge upon you, in the name of our friendship, to do as Life would have you do. You are a young man, of a noble

genius, of a truly creative spirit; you are called to fill the world with immortal pictures. Mary too is young, in every way a worthy mate for you; it is surely hers to give lovely and noble children to the world. If she marries me these things will not happen. I give you my solemn assurance of this. Fate has so willed it... Dorey, do not search for me. You will never find me. But I shall always be very near to you both. My prayers and my love will be with you eternally. Regard me as a friend who will never fail you whenever you desire his presence. Think of him without remorse or pity, for believe me he needs nothing of that kind. He desires your happiness and Mary's as ardently as the Time Spirit desires it. By this path alone can you both achieve a high destiny. And in the full and complete happiness of one's friends one achieves one's own... Remember, Dorey, I am always with you when you really want me. But I lay the solemn charge upon you both to do nothing to disturb the peace that is now upon your devoted Jimsmitt.

The reading of this letter struck Ambrose Dorland numb and chill. It was like the fabric of a dream. He had a sensation that his eyes were taking part in an experience that was not really happening. Was it that already he was losing touch with himself. Was he losing hold on reality? Back into his thoughts flooded a memory of the infernos he had passed through. The barrack square at Sidi-bel-Abbès, the dusty and arid wayside when he had first met the Corporal of the Fifth Company, the appalling night with the Touareg, the long torture of the desert, the final horror of the sacred city of Krav.

Was it that an overburdened brain had broken at last from its anchor? He held the letter in his hand in a trance of fear. At that disintegrating moment it alone kept him together. All around was chaos and old night. There was naught but that faint scrawl on that flimsy page between him and the sundering of his entity.

Ambrose Dorland had no perception of time or place as he leaned for support against the oak chest. But at last he moved a few paces forward across the hall. As he did so he grew conscious of a sudden flood of light. The large doors at the farther end of the hall had opened. A figure, lithe and splendid, yet familiar, was upon the threshold.

For an instant Dorland had the illusion that here was one more dark trick of the soul. Almost immediately it was dispelled. Mary Benton came quickly towards him, both hands outstretched, a little cry of welcome upon her lips.

"Jim was so urgent. He said you had such need of me I felt you must be very ill. How good it is to see you. And how glad I am to get away from that horrid London; a place of evil smells, evil noises, evil dreams."

The sound of that voice, the contact of those hands broke the spell that was upon Ambrose Dorland. "Tell me," he gasped, "when did you last communicate with Jim?"

"Last evening. He rang me up just before seven. I was made to promise solemnly that I would come down here this morning at the earliest moment. You would have great need of me, he said. But he would not say why. He was so insistent that I felt rather alarmed. I could get no definite reason out of him. He gave me a kind of feeling that something must have happened to you. All the way down here I have been in a state of nerves."

"The fact is something—something rather strange—rather uncanny—has happened to us both."

Ambrose Dorland put into her hand Jimsmitt's letter.

THE END

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