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BIBI LOVE

By SOLON K. STEWART

The love of a British soldier for an Arab girl—a romantic story of the Mesopotamian campaign

QUALAT AL MUFTI on a summer afternoon in mid '17 was the quintessence of sun-baked desolation.

A few mud huts round which lay a scant two acres under cultivation, the water raised in goatskin bags from the muddy Diyalah, thirty feet below; a few straggly, dispirited date palms, in whose scant shade dozed a dozen tiny donkeys daubed with henna—this was what filled Jennet Carlton's vision as he stood considering whether to go up the river, or down. Pausing a moment, he dropped down the steep path to the water's edge.

The Diyalah runs through a deep channel, through the unproductive clay of Iraq. Along its edge is a narrow strip of beach which the Arabs used as a road, the bluff affording grateful shade from the blazing sun.

The swirl of the water, hurrying from the snow-clad Pusht-I-Koh down to the Tigris, made pleasant music in his ears. A vagrant current of air felt cool and pleasant as it touched the breast of his sopping shirt. So immersed was he in his reflections as he walked that it was only when he was face to face with her, a scant yard away, that he was aware of an Arab woman standing at the water's edge.

Being the walker, he gave the salutation, "*Salaam alekum.*"

"*Wa alekum es salaam, Sabib,*" came the smiling answer in deep, full-toned gutturals; and a moment later she added with a laugh, "Goo' night."

The *bibi's* laugh was that of the Occident, rather than the shrill, cacophonous

falsetto of the women of Mesopotamia. It affected him like the notes of a melody long unheard. The stumbling accents of her "Goo' night," the first syllables of his own tongue heard on a woman's lips for months, filled him suddenly with the desire for female companionship.

Unslinging his rifle, he sat down cross-legged; the woman sitting on her heels a few feet away.

"You're rushing things, aren't you?" he asked laughingly. "It won't be night for hours, yet."

With a puzzled frown, but smiling lips, she signified that she did not understand—"Ma *afthaham.*"

"No," returned Carlton, regarding her with a whimsical smile, "I don't suppose you do.

"*Tachi Inglesi?* No? Well, we'll speak Arabic, then."

It was more difficult than Hindustani, which he had learned to speak with barrack-room fluency in India. But he made her understand. And in queer, outlandish dialect, of which familiar words here and there enabled him to guess the rest, she told him she was from the hill country near Karind, and had made her way through the Turkish lines near Kizil Robot on her way to Bagdad.

In answer to his question, "*Shismak?*" she told him her name was "Maryam."

In the medium of the Mesopotamian bazars, the weird *lingua franca* whose component parts are English, Arabic, Urdu, with occasional words in French, soldier and hill woman talked of the interminable nothings of the East; their



"My home is in the heart of my master."

low-pitched, monotonously intoned conversation interspersed with the long silences of the desert—silences in which their *jigaaras* took on a vast importance as they watched the drifting smoke curl into nothingness as they puffed.

It was not till the noise of some one descending the bank broke a longer silence that he realized how long he had been talking with this beautiful, wonderfully fascinating Maryam. He asked the time of the Arab.

"Five!" he exclaimed, rising hastily when the man told him. "I'll be late for parade if I don't hurry. It's at a quarter past."

As he stood regarding her full-bodied, graceful, calm-faced beauty, almost without volition the words rose to his lips. He spoke them, hardly realizing their import, or how they would be received.

O. S.—3

"*Wayn baytak?*" he asked; then wondered what she would say; for he knew that he should never ask an Arab woman where she lived.

She regarded him a moment with inscrutable eyes. Then bowing her head, and placing the back of her hand on her forehead, she answered in the poetic Arabic, "My home is in the heart of my master."

As he turned to go, he whispered, "*Ashra'*"—at ten. And as he scrambled up the bluff, her voice came to him in the soft sibilant "*Allab yusellemek*"—God give you peace.

WHEN all in the tent were asleep, Carlton rose from his *charpoi*, drew on his boots, and made his way through the star-shot velvet shadow of Mesopotamian night, past the clustered

Arab huts, and scrambled down to the water's edge.

She was waiting; the outlines of her lithesome figure vague and indistinct, merging into the shadow of the bluff.

The inheritance of untold unchanging generations of broad-hipped, high-breasted hill women was Maryam's: the knowledge of the primeval world unobscured by the intellectual veneering of civilization. She knew that when the sun shone upon her, she was warm; knew that the red and gold and saffron splendor of the Mesopotamian sunset, seen from the slopes of the mighty Persian Hills, delighted her eyes; knew that the sound of the rushing Diyala was music in her ears. The breath of this man warmed her as never the sun had done; the yellow of his hair, the blue of his eyes, the ruddy-golden tint of his skin delighted her eyes as never a sunset had. The sound of his stumbling Arabic-Urdu was the grandest music ever heard.

The warm clasp of his fingers as he seized her hand, bespeaking primordial man, the touch of his lips on her fingers, the temporary abnegation of the dominant male, were to her eighteen-year-old womanhood familiar through a thousand rehearsals since the world was young. In silence she stood looking at his face, dimly seen in the shadow. Then her clasp was about his neck. As he threw his arms about her, straining her against his breast, their lips met in the first long kiss.

It was past midnight when he told Maryam good-night, and made his way back to his *charpoi*. Removing his boots, he crawled into it, tucking the net in carefully. He finished undressing; and lay on his back watching the procession of the constellations across the garnished sky.

As on the first night, darkness had scarce settled on the desert when he made his way to the river. Her eyes luminous

in the shadow of the bluff, she was waiting for him in the murmurous darkness.

In the quiet night, the hard, clear light of the stars shining with a brightness found in no other land, they would stroll for hours; his arm about her, his head bent as he whispered in stumbling Arabic, teaching her a few simple English phrases.

For Jennet the glamor of the East was non-existent. He had seen the marsh Arab in all his native degradation. He had seen the desert Arab, after fighting with the Turks against the invader, despoil the bodies of his whilom comrades in arms. He had seen the women of the Mi'dan mutilate the dead. He had seen Arab villages in their bleak, unadorned, squalid filthiness as the British fought their way up from the head of the Persian Gulf. He was no admirer, no respecter, of the Mesopotamian Arab.

Maryam was a far higher type, mentally and physically, than the *bibis* he saw daily. Her laughter first attracted him, being so different from that of the others: more like that to which he was used at home. The wide-eyed, bronze-tinted beauty of her face, the luscious, firm roundness of her lithe body, the inimitable grace with which she carried herself—the inheritance of the East, never to be acquired by the women of the Occident—obsessed him.

Wherein lay her subtle, compelling charm, he did not ask himself. She was simply there; giving him glance for glance, the warmth of the sun imprisoned in her veins, suffusing the bronze texture of her skin with a rich warmth of coloring; the honey tint of the white skin touched by centuries of that ardent sun. The rushing of the winds and streams of the Pusht-I-Koh sounded in the softest cadences of her voice.

In answer to his question, spoken without volition, she had given the answer, "My home is in the heart of my master."

Swept unresistingly along by the impulse of the primordial male, he had taken her in the passive acceptance the East engenders, however tumultuous the emotions. It was an acceptance which had insensibly come to him in the days of searing heat, the nights of brooding silence on the desert.

And he surrendered himself to this love with an intensity which blinded him to every consequence.

Night after night, at imminent risk of court martial, or death at the hands of some nervous Indian sentry, he would steal away to sit with her in the starlight; listening to the interminable babble of the people of the Pusht-I-Koh, the journey down to the plains, the escape from a roving *solnia* of Cossacks beyond Khaniqin, the perilous threading of the Turkish lines near Kizil Robat; the wondrous heaven-sent consummation of earthly desires—her meeting with Yeanne. For that was as near as she could come to the proper pronunciation of his name. But it was one he found entirely satisfactory. He would kiss the full red lips, laying his cheek against hers while she crooned in his ear some weird, melancholy Lurdish love song, containing all the passion and sorrow of the world.

Living a life thus strongly divided between the stern realities of a desert outpost, and the allurements of a desert love every whit as stern, tempered by the tuneless music of the swift-flowing Diyalah, the soft whisper of the desert breeze in the lazy fronds of the palms, a love which was an epic—passionate, ethereal, enduring—the time sped away unnoticed.

INTO the quiet of his tent one afternoon came the strident voice of platoon sergeant Pilkington.

"Fall in outside the cookhouse at seven for three days' rations. Tea at five," he boomed.

Then the afternoon silence of the desert fell once more.

He had no chance to say good-bye to Maryam; was unable to catch a glimpse of her.

In the strenuous days and nights which followed, he moved as one dazed. As day followed day in wearying, endless procession, and the prospect of returning to Qualat al Mufti and Maryam became more remote, he became taciturn and moody; a phase which was replaced by a dangerous sullenness which at first caused wonder, and in the end estranged him from the men of his section, with whom he had been a prime favorite.

Baku had been occupied; and his regiment was guarding the line of communication, billeted in a Persian village in the Pusht-I-Koh. With three days' leave for hunting, he had become separated from the rest of the party, lost his way, and wandered through the mountain passes. Late in the afternoon he stumbled on a hut once used as an outpost, abandoned when the Turks retreated northward beyond Takrit and Kifri.

The wind was whistling shrilly, piling the snow against the mud walls, threatening every moment to tear off the crazy roof of palm-leaf fibers, covered with tarred paper brought on the backs of Lurd coolies from the dump on the other side of Table Mountain, and weighted down with stones.

A lustier gust flung the door open, filling the smoky hut with swirling particles of driven snow. In the cloud of dancing flakes, clutching a blanket-wrapped bundle to her breast, her head and shoulders powdered with the clinging crystals, Maryam stood before him: a gaunt, spectral Maryam, in whose pinched features and luminous eyes was a greater beauty than he had ever seen before.

She stood regarding him in wondering, doubting silence; then walked across and

laid the bundle carefully down by the fire.

As he sat wrapped in greatcoat and blanket, gazing at her speechlessly, half believing it was her eidolon, conjured up in his disordered brain, she bent down, and brushed his cheek with her fingertips, whispering the one word, "Yenne!"

The touch of her fingers, the sound of her deep, full voice, surcharged with love and joy, after months of impotent longing and regret, galvanized him into action. With the lithe motion of a panther he gained his feet, gathering her in his arms with a deep, choking sob of joy.

"By God, Maryam!" and the words were a pæan of thanksgiving, "I've got you back; and I'm never going to let you go again."

"No, Yenne; not go, not go!"

A moment he strained her to his breast. Then in silence he sat her down, and turned to close the door.

"What's the bundle?" he asked, as he sat down by her side.

Her eyes followed his gesture. Then she turned them to him with a look full of meaning. Placing the bundle carefully in his arms, she raised a corner of the blanket.

A tumultuous, surging medley of thoughts rushed through his mind as he looked at the rosy, sleeping face of his son.

In all his thoughts of Maryam, such an eventuality had not occurred to him. Now, he could only sit and gaze at the tiny crinkled face; enraptured, puzzled, dismayed. Still gazing, he listened as Maryam told of waiting till nearly morning the night he left; her fruitless efforts to find him, her life at Qualat al Mufti; her wandering pursuit of more than one mobile column; the birth of Yenne ibn Yenne, high up among the crags of her native Pusht-I-Koh; her finding of this deserted outpost a month before. She

was working, she told him, at the advanced base on the other side of the valley, five miles away.

"And you come all this way to live! Why?"

Instantly her face was an impassive mask. The firelight was reflected from the flat surface of inscrutable eyes: eyes which seemed without depth, giving no hint of a human soul within. She shrugged slightly; and her voice was dead and flat when she answered.

"Many mens there. Me bootiful. Have *walad*," and she waved a hand toward the sleeping child. "Not have any *zoj*—'usband."

He understood. And his teeth bared in a snarl like a dog's, as the hot wave of impotent rage swept through him. Before he could speak, she placed her fingertips on his writhing lips.

"Me *helu*—bootiful. But I belong me Yenne. I swear by *Nesrani* prophet *Yesoo* I keel *Arabi*, *Inglesti*—any mans who think I am one *gaahiba*, and try to use me so.

"But better this my *bayt*," and she nodded wisely.

"Yes, Maryam," he agreed softly. "Much, much better."

He looked longingly, searchingly into her eyes, in whose depths he saw the light which seldom appears in those of the woman of Islam. The flame of passion burns often there. The dull glow of obedience to her lawful *zoj* is there. In Maryam's great amber eyes shone the clear light of purity and love.

They had been swept along the current of Life, unresisting, unthinking; heedless of anything but the ecstasy of the moment. But in the soul of the woman had been born a passion great and true as life itself. In the even, toneless words spoke a devotion which would end only at death.

The warm, glowing colors of the East

are spread on Life's canvas with large, bold strokes. But they are laid in on the drab sizing, the hue of tragedy. And the colors with which Carlton's life were limned were wearing thin; though never had they glowed brighter to his eyes than at this moment, when the woman he loved found him; when he felt the pride of fatherhood in all its surging strength, mingled with a vague, indeterminate, unrealized—but potent, inescapable—dread of the future.

LITTLE Yenne was sleeping in the fire's glow when, sounding above the wind's insistent clamor, came a roar like a thousand batteries in action. The earth trembled. The hut's walls gaped as if about to fall and bury them. Shrieking some unintelligible words, Maryam gathered the baby in her arms, sprang to the door, and disappeared in the darkness.

He followed as closely as possible. But reaching the door, he could see no sign of her. An unnamed fear tearing at his heart, he plunged into the swirling snow. He had not taken a dozen steps in the thunderous darkness when the roaring swelled to an unbelievable volume. His nose was assailed by a sulfurous smell. The ground rocked drunkenly. Then, as if his feet had been jerked from under him by invisible hands, he plunged headlong into a drift. He heard a splitting, cracking sound, as if the very earth was riven, felt a quick, sharp pain—and was engulfed in oblivion.

He was recalled to consciousness by icy hands stroking his face, an impassioned voice calling in his ear. His eyes opened slowly to the dull, sodden light of morning; the opaque, leaden clouds banked about the top of the cliff far above.

He was lying on his back in one end of what had been the hut; and knew that the rest was lying a thousand feet below in the bed of the Ab-I-Karind, hurled there

by the slide which had left the great scar in the mountain's tortured flank.

Maryam was kneeling at his side.

"What has happened?" he asked weakly, conscious of no pain; knowing only a dull numbness, realizing that death had passed closely by in the hours of unconsciousness.

In a voice hoarse and broken, she told him of the slide, whose familiar warning she had heard, the edge of which had caught him as he followed, flinging him aside, maimed and broken. With the first light of day she had discovered him, half buried in the drift, the ragged boulder across his back. After an hour's heart-breaking toil she had won his body from the stony clasp, and dragged him to shelter.

He complained of thirst; and she melted snow in his billy-can. Fortunately, of her slender store of fuel most remained. When the chill began to creep, she brewed tea from the three days' rations in his haversack.

He found, on trying to swallow some of the bully beef and biscuit, that he had no appetite. He was satisfied with copious drafts of tea. Maryam ate her frugal meal of *khubz*; the thin, flat cake of Arab bread, warmed on the coals.

Nursing little Yenne, and crooning him to sleep, she laid him under the blanket, his head in the hollow of the soldier's arm. Then she squatted by the side of the rude pallet, holding Carlton's hand in both of hers, a piece of burlap drawn about her shoulders. Late in the night she crept under the blanket, and slept with her head on his shoulder.

Morning brought a heavy fall of snow, swirled into their shelter by a wind which cut to the marrow; flecking the blood into their cheeks like the invisible snappers of countless tiny whips. Jennet was hungry; but his stomach revolted at the unpalatable bully beef, the adamantine bis-

cuits, even when she soaked one of the latter in water.

And in impotent rage and misery, like a great tawny lioness ensnared, and snarling her defiance, she paced for hours the narrow granite shelf which formed her world. The sheer drop on three sides, the beetling cliff on the fourth made a cage from which there was no escape—save by one door. But that was swinging slowly open.

On the third day the tea gave out. And then she saw a way of escape—for her and Yenne ibn Yenne.

In a brief lull in the snowing she ventured nearer the edge of the shelf than she had yet been.

It was a perilous climb; not to be accomplished by one not born and bred in the Pusht-I-Koh. A narrow jutting point of rock offered precarious foothold, with a sheer drop hundreds of feet to the cruel rocks. Then, the diagonal crack; broadening and deepening as it neared the top, affording a secure way for such nimble feet and hands as hers. With little Yenne's weight slung on her back she could make it—had made giddier climbs before.

But the other Yenne! Her golden, ruddy Yenne, who loved her—not as Arab men loved; though she vainly strove to realize wherein the difference lay. *Helu?* Yes; she was beautiful. And being beautiful, she was desirable. Yenne had told her so: other men had tried to. But there had been in his eyes a look quite different from that which gleamed in theirs. Once, before that day at Qualar al Mufti, that look had not been distasteful—had pleased her, even. Once or twice she had felt vague promptings, faint stirrings, when men looked at her: felt herself thrilling responsively; knew—instinctively, without thinking—that that light was coming into her own in answer. And she had, though she could not have told why,

veiled them; the heavy lashes lying on her cheeks, more provocative, more alluring than ever.

But that was over now. When a man looked at her that way, it filled her with subtle fear and hate; shame and hot anger.

Helu? Yes; she was still beautiful; more beautiful than ever. But when men—*Arabi*, or *Nesrani*—tried to tell her so, it no longer pleased her. Why? Her beauty was for Yenne alone. *Naseeb*—fate. *From the beginning it is written.*

All this flashed through her mind as she looked upward, poised lightly on the brink.

She would die for him, live for him—Yenne, the lord, the master. But she could not, strong as she was, carry him up. Yenne ibn Yenne, yes, Yenne, no.

If she climbed with little Yenne—what then? She drew back, and shut her eyes in thought. These mountains were familiar from childhood. She knew every ridge and valley. Could she gain the top, what then? She pictured the interwisting maze of valleys and defiles. The scattered dwellers in this part of the Lurd uplands had all left; gone to seek safety in the towns from the marauding bands of Turks and wild hill Arabs.

But there was one place where aid was to be had. There was a path, she knew, along the top, down the shoulder of the mountain into the pass, where it joined the path which had run along the broken ledge on which she stood. It was a fearful, breakneck route, used only by some desperate *baraame*, escaping after a raid. It was dangerous at best, doubly perilous now. But what a wild mountain thief could do through fear, she dared for love. If she could gain the path, she would reach the advanced base. She could find some one who would understand. They could do anything, she thought with pride, these men of Yenne's blood!

They would find a way to save him.

Yes; it could be done—*must* be done! She looked up once more.

The fear which had filled her at the roaring of the slide was as nothing compared to the cold wave of terror and despair which settled on her heart as her gaze rested on the ant-like figure, clear-cut against the sky, far above. To Western eyes it might have been a man or a mountain sheep. To the keen eyes of the hill woman it was clear, unmistakable.

Naseeb! From the beginning it is written.

She had told Yenne the truth, but not all of it. Here was proof of what she said; proof that she had not told all. Fear died; and into her heart swept the protective rage of the lioness, her mate menaced. Raising her hand to her mouth, she sent up the clear, piercing mountain call.

For nearly five seconds she stood watching, before the climbing figure paused. She called a few quick words in Kurdish, and turned to the shelter where Yenne and the baby lay. Both were asleep. His equipment lay where he had placed it. She drew the bayonet, her teeth baring at the rasp of steel. She had lost her knife in the wild flight from the slide. She lightly kissed the man's cold cheek. Thrusting the bayonet in the man's *hizam* about her waist, she covered it with the folds of her *libis*.

THE climb was not as difficult as she had imagined. Swinging over the edge, her feet dangling above the dizzy height, she swung to the projecting point. She got purchase for her feet. A scramble and a tug and she reached the end of the crevice. The rest was easy. Resting a moment, she began the long climb.

The man, hated and feared above all others, had not moved as he awaited her where she had first seen him.

It was a sinister, evil face on which her

eyes rested, when at last she reached the top. Deeply pitted by *jidra*, the ubiquitous smallpox of the East; with loose lips and goat-like eyes, it was a countenance in which were all the things loathsome and fearful to Maryam. But, despite its grotesque ugliness, there was—and this was the reason for her secret dwelling—a certain taurine strength; insistent, compelling—fascinating in some sinister way.

She knew—though she strove to keep the knowledge from herself—that but for the memory of Yenne's clear gaze she would have yielded to some responsive emotion stirred to turbid life by his compelling desire. Now, that dread was present no longer. It went at Yenne's coming—gone forever.

He misread the pallor of her cheeks, her shifting gaze; and with the imperturbable patience of the East spoke as if she had parted from him five minutes before.

"But some day, *malika*, thou wilt come to me."

Now, as always, he called her queen; in the husky, broken voice she loathed and dreaded. Before she could answer, he continued.

"Night after night I followed, always to lose thee. And then I found it—there," and with a greasy laugh of triumph he pointed down to the broken ledge. "But another was before me; another who shall not have thee long," and hate blazed in the little twinkling eyes.

Still she was silent; regarding him with wide-open, unblinking stare.

"And so," he resumed, his passion under control, "I went back to the *Inglesi*. I have told them. They know. They will come and take him: take him to be shot that thou bore him a child. It is the law of the *Inglesi askar*.

"But I—I," and as he half extended his arms his splayed fingers were curved

like the talons of some bird of prey, "shall take thee first, *malika*."

For the first time she spoke; her voice dead and flat, her eyes still on his face.

"They are coming for him?"

"*Nazar!*" and he threw his arm abroad in a wide gesture.

She looked. Far away, black dots against the dreary waste of blinding white, she saw the search party, sent out to look for Carlton when the rest of the hunting party returned with the news that he was lost. She turned again to look at that hateful face. She read there only desire and triumph.

What did she know of these strange *Ingleesi*, after all? Only that she loved one of them better than her life. It was only on the Arab that the full weight of the Turkish law had borne down. But the *Ingleesi*, conquerors of conquerors, had a different way. She had seen their stern, even-tempered justice falling on *Arabi* and *Ingleesi* alike. Ali knew. He was *naazir*, in charge of all the coolies at the base, high in the councils of the *Ingleesi*. She was only an ignorant, loving woman. But he knew. She read triumph in his face.

"They are searching for him?" she asked again.

"Ay! And they will lead him before the *shabat*, who will give the order. They will stand him with his back to a wall, the *captaan* will say the word, and the rifles will shoot—*pow!* And he will be dead," and Ali spat on the snow.

"And thou wilt come to me," he concluded, in the certain, patient voice she dreaded. "I know he is there. I will bring them—after I have taken thee. It is for this I have searched two days," and his voice shook with the triumph he strove to repress.

"They will shoot him—my Yenne?"

"Ay."

"*Ablif!*"

"I swear. By the Beard of the Prophet, it is so."

"But thou wilt never live to see it!"

He had not noticed the slender, sinewy hand creeping under the folds of her *libis*, so intent was he on watching her face; gloating on the white, sick terror he saw, reading in the increasing pallor, the fluttering eyelids, the gasping breath the signs of surrender. But as the sudden light flamed in her eyes, and her cheeks were suffused, he knew—but too late to avert the blow, as swift and unerring as a *haiya's* stroke. The bayonet flashed, and was buried in the folds of his *aba* before he could move a hand, or step backward.

He clawed at his breast, and sank slowly to his knees; the hilt covered with the spouting blood, which smoked as it reddened the snow. Then he fell forward, driving the bayonet home. He slid down the slope, and shot over the edge of the abyss. She watched him hurtle downward, turning round and round as he fell.

MARYAM stooped down, and rubbed her hand in the snow till the spots were gone. She looked round at the snowy desolation. She cast a glance at the black dots of the search party. Then she turned to the crevice by which she had climbed.

She would go back to Yenne and Yenne ibn Yenne. There was now nowhere else to go. *Naseeb*. *From the first it is written*.

She could never go away, now. Ali's body would be found. Yenne's number was cut in the bayonet hilt. The *Ingleesi* would know. Yenne was hers now, forever. For her, he had risked the rifles of *Ingleesi* law. To save him, she had put herself outside the law. Well, she was content.

But the door of escape through which she had known they would pass, even

while she climbed to Ali, was swinging wider.

She was a woman. She had no soul. The Koran said it. It was the Law—*Kanoon*. But Yenne worshipped the prophet *Yesoo*. The *Nesrani* said *Yesoo* was the son of Allah, therefore greater than Mahomet. His mother was a woman like her: like her named *Maryam*. So women *did* have souls, despite the Koran. The law of the *Nesrani* was one wife to one husband. And she was Yenne's. Yenne was her husband—was not Yenne ibn Yenne asleep by his father's and her husband's side tonight than be taken in disgrace to face the rifles of the *askar*. He would go to the *Sama* of the *Nesrani*, where the prophet *Yesoo* ruled: not the Paradise of the Mahometan, but to one where the soul of the one wife went also.

Here was the ledge. She swung across the chasm and scrambled up to the granite shelf.

The baby was asleep. But Yenne awoke as she bent over him. His face was gray and drawn. *Maryam* felt icy fingers grip her heart as she looked at the pinched nose, the sunken cheeks. The shadow of *Azrael's* wings was on him.

It had begun to snow again, heavier than before. Instinct told her it would get colder and colder through the night. Well, she had done her best. It was not to be. By morning she, too, without food, would be in the Paradise of the *Nesrani*. Hand in hand they would go. But she would be the last to go, being the stronger, unless his life could be prolonged till she felt the languorous, delicious warmth creeping through her, following the chill, and she sank into the sleep. . . . She did not fear death. But it was better to go with Yenne. She could keep him alive till the cold gripped her, too.

She whispered softly, clasping one hand under the blanket. The other

pressed Yenne ibn Yenne's body to him.

"Yenne? Yenne? You want ear?"

"What is the use, my beloved? I am dying—and there is nothing."

"Yes, you eat, Yenne. We live tonight. In the morning, we die.

"I not want to die," she continued, in the stumbling English learned in happy whispers by the rushing *Diyalah*, when death was close, but still so far away, "but I must. I not want you to die before me. But," and her mountain-wise eyes scanned the leaden, impenetrable clouds, "is be colder. You not eat, you die quick, and not wait for me.

"I not *Arabi* now. I *Nesrani*, like you. I love you. I gave you man-child. I give you life for little time—till we die together."

Throwing open her *haik* and baring her bosom, shielding the naked flesh with burlap from the wind, she bent low. Putting one firm strong arm underneath his shoulders, she raised him till his lips were against her breast.

The wind began more dimly to moan through the gorge, and about the wrecked hut. The torn streamers of tarred paper and palmleaf fibers flapped dolefully. Yenne ibn Yenne awoke, clamoring for food. She uncovered her other breast; bending forward, her shoulders drooping, an expression not born of the amenities of civilized wifehood or motherhood on her face.

The child was the first to sleep. She deftly wrapped him in the coarse fragment of army blanket, so that he would be alive when the *Inglese* came. They would know to save him. Yenne's race would not end with him because of her. And ever and anon, supporting him now with both arms, swaying a little to and fro, she sobbed a wordless melody—which might have been a love-song, or a lullaby.

The snow fell steadily. When Carlotto

dropped in her clasp, and she laid him back in the blankets, it was piled thick on her protecting shoulders. She gently kissed the eyes she knew would never look into her own again.

Standing upright, she cast a quick, searching glance into the swirling eddies, through which she could not see fifty feet. Already it was colder.

Shaking her head, she fastened her *haik*. She kicked off her heavy sandals. Saying the Mahometan prayer for the dead, she lay down by Yenne's side. Her face wore an expression of ineffable content as she lightly kissed his pallid lips. Composing herself at his side, she drew the blankets over them.

Naseeb! From the first it is written.