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BY ROBERT SHECKLEY

# LIVE GOLD



# **THE GREATEST SLAVER OF THEM ALL!**

Mustapha ibn Harith was the most successful slaver of the modern world. Unctuous, wily, completely pitiless, he dealt in men and women. He told them they were on the holy pilgrimage to Mecca—and took them to the slave markets of the Red Sea . . .

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 **PILGRIMAGE TO EARTH**

 **IMMORTALITY, INC.**

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 **STORE OF INFINITY**

 **CALIBRE .50**

 **DEAD RUN**

 **Published by Bantam Books**

# LIVE GOLD

BY ROBERT SHECKLEY



BANTAM BOOKS

**LIVE GOLD**

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**LIVE GOLD**

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**I**

Auda had weighed his possibilities, and the plan had seemed to offer a modest chance of success. That was not much to gamble his life on, but he couldn't hope for anything better. There was a knife concealed beneath his white gown, and he moved through the streets of Mecca like a man going about his business, past the bare-chested Bedouin guard with the sunglasses, to the line of people standing in front of the bus to the seaport of Jidda.

He couldn't tell if the guard was watching him or not; the man's eyes were hidden behind the wide green sunglasses. Those eyes could be looking anywhere, like the huge eyes of a fly. Auda moved forward on the line. Ahead of him were two merchants, a Juheima tribesman, and a Nigerian. Three manacled Baluchi slaves were entering the bus now with their owner, a wild-haired Yemeni.

The Bedouin guard watched them all with a deep and impersonal mistrust. He was a soldier of the house of Saud, taken from the Nejd and given a pair of sunglasses and a Lee-Enfield rifle. Mistrust was his heritage, suspicion was the mark of his mentality. His bare feet shuffled on the pavement and his great curving sunglasses seemed to glare directly at Auda. Auda stayed on the line, determined to knife the Bedouin if he tried to stop him. If he did that, the other guards would probably kill him on the spot, in hot rage, instead of preserving him for punishment.

He had no regrets. He had weighed the possibilities, and had known that another chance like this might not come in ten years. His owner, Bedr ibn Shefia, had gone to Medina on business. And Shefia's wife, taken in by Auda's show of docility, had entrusted him with a silver bracelet for her son at Taif. Auda had seized the moment, sold the bracelet to a Syrian for a third of its value, and bought a bus ticket to Jidda. He was a thief as well as a runaway slave. He had to escape; but if escape was impossible he had to die quickly, to prevent the Saudis from killing him slowly.

The line moved, and Auda mounted the steps into the bus.

The guard was still glaring, but Auda realized that it was not directed at him. The man glared simply because he was a Bedouin, and a soldier, and a man of the house of Saud. He glared at everyone, swelling his soul with the sensation of power.

Once inside, Auda moved quickly to the rear of the bus. It was nearly empty. The yearly hadj was over, and now the people of Mecca slumbered and waited for new pilgrims. Auda went past the luckless Baluchis. Behind them was the man from Nigeria, a man of his own race. By his turban and gold-topped cane, he was an emir from Kano. He looked like a man of influence; would he help a countryman? Probably not. Why would a wealthy emir of the north give help to an escaping slave? Auda decided not to ask; but he sat down beside the emir.

The bus started. The Bedouin guard glared at it for a last time, then turned away. The bus left the city gate and wheezed up the low hills beyond Mecca, then picked up speed on the descent into the flat desert country. Auda breathed more freely. His escape had begun. In two hours he would be in Jidda, just at nightfall. Then—if God were willing—he would find transport out of Arabia.

He would escape or die. No other possibility had occurred to him since the first day of his captivity. He could not remain a slave; he was a Fulani, and his tribe had long been feared and respected in West Africa. Not many generations ago, his people had conquered both the trading Hausa and the cruel Tuareg of the Sahara. Today there was an uneasy and superficial peace among the fighting tribes of French and British West Africa. Even so, the Fulani never forgot who they were. They were not Bellas; they did not become slaves. They killed and went free, or they died.

The bus moved faster, putting more distance between him and the wonderful, treacherous city of Mecca. A gravel plain stretched as far as he could see, to the dim black edge of the mountains to the east. Now they were coming to the first guardpost.

Auda stiffened, and his fingers touched the dagger under his gown. These checks were used mainly during the pilgrimage season, to turn back unbelievers, and to capture Moslems without official papers—like Auda. Remembering, he grew angry at the Saudi thieves who ruled the sacred cities of Islam, who professed to be stern Wahhabis, but who grew prosperous by cheating and enslaving their brothers in Islam. He hated them all, the strong ones who raided for slaves, and the soft ones, like his former master, who bought the



slaves. But his deepest hatred was reserved for Mustapha ibn Harith—the generous, the well-loved of God—for whom a special place had doubtless been reserved in Hell.

The bus slowed for the guard check. Auda sat with one hand on his knife, thinking about Mustapha ibn Harith.

Auda had been born in Ishan, near the great city of Kano in northern Nigeria. Two great events had taken place in his life. The first happened when he was seventeen. In that year, after considerable soul-searching, his uncle had decided to take Auda as his assistant truck driver instead of selling the position to the best-paying applicant. Because of his uncle's marvelous generosity, Auda's future was ensured. Eventually he would be a truck driver himself, with a British driver's license, a high income, and a lofty social status. This was unbelievable good fortune for a penniless young man, and Auda had worked hard to prove himself worthy of it. He had learned all the intricacies of the Ford truck, and had come to know every rut and hole on the dusty road from Ishan to Kano.

The other great event took place in his nineteenth year. That was the year in which Mustapha ibn Harith had come to Ishan.

Harith was a preacher, learned in the Koran and the commentaries. His joy was piety, and his ambition was to help others in the fulfillment of their duties to Islam. He was no double-faced Arab; he was a fellow African, born in Bamako of a prosperous family. He had gone to Arabia as a boy, and had lived and studied in holy Mecca. In his middle years, overcome by an irresistible religious impulse, he had returned to his native Africa to spread the Faith and to urge the Faithful to perform the great hadj to Mecca.

The Moslems of Ishan had listened openmouthed to Harith's descriptions of Mecca, and of the 'ummra, the meritorious little pilgrimage, and how the devil was stoned at Mina. When Harith spoke, men could see these things; they could see the nineteen gates leading to the Masjid-al-Haram—the great mosque which enclosed the holy Ka'aba; and they could see the Ka'aba itself, the great stone building covered by its embroidered black mantle, within which was the Black Stone.

They were true Moslems in Ishan, but somewhat lax. They knew that the hadj to Mecca was a necessity of their faith, one of the five basic obligations of Islam. But, for one reason or another, they had put off the long and rigorous trip to Arabia. All of this was changed after Harith had preached.

The two or three successful merchants of Ishan made arrangements at once. But the poor, like Auda, were unable to do anything. Mecca was more than two thousand miles away, a journey of several months. It was an impossible dream for men who had never in their lives possessed more than a few shillings at a time. How could they pay for transportation, food, lodgings, on the long trip across Africa? Their religious zeal was strong, but it could not overcome the dismal state of their poverty.

The pious Harith brooded over the plight of these people. By his own admission, he spent many nights in thought and prayer. He pondered the problem of those whose souls burned for Mecca, and who lacked only the money. . . .

Then one morning Harith announced a momentous decision. He told the villagers how sorely it troubled him to see fellow religionists barred from the fulfillment of the Faith. Therefore he, Mustapha ibn Harith, humblest of God's servants, by no means a rich man, an aspirant only to righteous deeds and to the paradise to come—he would undertake the fulfillment of those poor but worthy souls whose heart's dream was the hadj. He himself would pay for their food and transportation, and would travel in their company to the holy city. For this he expected no earthly reward; he only hoped to win favor in the eyes of God the All-Seeing, and to bring to others the felicities which religion had bestowed upon him.

There was great excitement in Ishan over Harith's decision. The elders of the village declared him a saint; they said that a journey in his company would surely bring special merit. Mustapha's single stipulation—that only the young and strong accompany him on the difficult journey ahead—seemed perfectly reasonable. Auda, straight and tall, only nineteen years old, received special permission from his deeply religious uncle, who promised to let him have his job back when he returned. In a state of high exultation, Auda joined the group of eighty men and nineteen women whom Mustapha had gathered from Ishan and several nearby villages.

They traveled to Kano and then to Fort Lamy, where Mustapha's greatness of soul made him take another fifty improvident pilgrims. These were men from Ubangi-Shari, whose language no man could speak. They went by truck to El Obeid in the Sudan, where Harith's astounding generosity added twenty newly converted Nuba tribesmen to the group. Harith swore that the duties of religion would beggar him before this hadj was completed. He put his pilgrims, now numbering almost two hundred, on the train to Khartoum,

and then to Atbara, and then to Suakin on the Red Sea. At Suakin, Harith chartered a dhow and took his pilgrims across the narrow sea to Lith, on Arabia's Hejaz coast.

They entered Lith on the fifth day of Dhu 'l-Hijja, a week before the obligatory day. The hadjis put away their everyday clothing and dressed in the seamless white ihram. Their religious fervor mounted to a hysterical pitch as they prepared for the final short overland trip to Mecca. But before they could leave Lith, Saudi guards stopped them and asked to see their passports and visas.

The African villagers were amazed. They had never considered passports; many of them had never heard of passports. Who would think that such things were necessary for the hadj to Mecca? They told the guards that Mustapha ibn Harith, their sponsor, had arranged all matters.

But where was Mustapha now, the man who would explain everything? He was nowhere to be found. The Saudi guards, deaf to prayers and pleas, locked the entire group in Lith's granite prison. There they remained for three weeks, throughout the entire time of the pilgrimage. Then they were dragged out and questioned by a Saudi judge.

What happened next was enough to make a man doubt his reason. The Saudi judge imposed a heavy fine on them for entry into Arabia. The pilgrims were unable to pay; but then Harith appeared in the court and paid for the entire group. When he had done this, the judge declared that the bankrupt foreign debtors were now the sole and exclusive property of Mustapha ibn Harith. By Saudi law, they were Harith's slaves.

Now they realized what Harith was, but it was too late to do anything about it. Harith, supported by his armed men and by Saudi soldiers, had the entire group transported to the slave market in Riadyh. Here he sold them at public auction. There were some who screamed and struggled until the guards beat them with wire flails. Some bore this shattering turn of fortune with resignation. And some, like Auda, were too dazed to react.

Auda had always known about slavery. It was woven deep into the life of western Africa, from ancient times to the present day. The emirs of Kano still possessed slaves, though British law forbade them to take new ones. To the north, the Tuareg had never given up their Bellas, who farmed the Tuareg land and tended their shops in Timbuktu and Kambara. Even some of the Hausa owned slaves.

In spite of this, Auda had never considered the possibility that *he* might some day become a slave. That could not hap-

pen nowadays. It certainly could not happen to a pure-blooded Fulani, an apprentice truck driver who had passed the tribal test of courage and had come into his manhood. A Fulani simply did not become a slave; but Auda had become one.

He lived through his first weeks in a merciful daze. Dead-eyed, unresponsive even to the whip, he was judged to be afflicted by God. The Omanis couldn't use him for the dangerous and exacting work of pearl-diving. The Bedouin from the Nejd, perceiving his feeble-mindedness, decided that he could not survive a month in the desert. He was too old for successful gelding, and too dull-witted to work in a shop. At last a merchant of Mecca bought him at a bargain price, to use as a houseboy.

Long after Auda had recovered, he continued to act simple-minded. There was temporary safety in that degrading pose, and there were better possibilities for escape. During the next three months Auda worked and waited, and kept up his pretense. He never thought of submitting to his fate; submission would be contrary to the mentality of his people. He had to escape, he had to avenge the dishonor done to him by Mustapha ibn Harith—that man of false piety, defiler of hospitality, eater of carrion, mocker of bread and salt, accursed of God. Harith had to die. And in order to kill him, Auda had to be free. . . .

The Saudi guard waved the bus on, and Auda relaxed his grip on the knife. In an hour they had passed a second guardpost. The Kano man beside him was asleep. Ahead, the white buildings of Jidda were edged in crimson by the setting sun. Fifteen minutes later, when they entered the city, the crimson had faded to a dirty twilight gray.

An American car roared past the bus, nearly killing a waterman and his donkey. Auda sat up abruptly. Had that been Shefia's car? Impossible, he told himself. Bedr ibn Shefia was in Medina. He couldn't have cut short his visit on this day of all days! The car probably belonged to some wealthy oil sheikh who liked to drive fast over the bad roads. . . .

The car swung across the road and stopped fifty feet ahead of the bus. The bus driver slammed down hard on his brakes, with no perceptible effect. Auda could see four Saudi guards scrambling out of the car. A crowd was already gathering. The bus driver screamed in rage and yanked up his emergency brake. The bus swayed from side to side, slowing down at its leisure. It stopped not quite soon enough. It hit the

American car gently, just hard enough to dent the side and infuriate the owner.

The owner, Auda could see, was Bedr ibn Shefia. Yes, he had cut short his visit to Medina.

After surveying his dented car, Shefia howled curses at the bus driver, who answered in kind, but with greater force. Then Shefia tried a subtler form of recrimination. He suggested that the driver was feeble of sight, and could not really be blamed for failing to see an object as infinitesimal as an American automobile. The driver thought for a moment, then agreed that the accident was indeed his own fault; he had not known that it was the custom of certain feeble-minded individuals to park their cars across a main street.

The soldiers and the crowd were enjoying themselves immensely. Noticing this, Shefia abruptly stopped quarreling and announced that he had come from Mecca to take back a runaway slave.

The crowd, eager and ready for news of a revolution, an accusation of high treason, or an abduction of King Saud's third wife, were disappointed by Shefia's mundane declaration. Slaves were unimportant. The execution of the runaway would be amusing, of course; but the sentence would probably be carried out in Riadyh, to spare the feelings of foreigners. That was all very well for the foreigners, but it cheated the people of Jidda of their entertainment. Still, chasing a runaway slave was better than no fun at all.

"A runaway slave on my bus?" said the driver. "Well, then, take him off."

Shefia entered the bus, followed by the four Saudi guards. He looked around carefully, but there was no sign of his slave. Then a Negro emir from Kano touched him on the sleeve.

"I think I saw the man you want," the emir said. "He was sitting next to me."

"Where is he now?" Shefia asked.

"He left the bus," the emir said, pointing to the rear door. "I had been sleeping. I awoke to find the bus stopped, men shouting, and this fellow gliding out the rear door as cool as a snake."

"Why didn't you cry out?" Shefia asked.

"That is not how we do things in Kano," the emir said loftily.

"But you *should* have cried out!" Shefia shouted. "You should have told me at once! Quickly now—in what direction did the slave run?"

The emir looked at him in silence. Shefia tried to glare back into that haughty, menacing face, but he soon gave up the attempt. There was danger in those flat, expressionless eyes, and in the big, gnarled black hands resting quietly on a sword hilt. This was not a man to be hurried or shouted at.

After a suitable pause, the emir said, "I would have told you sooner if you had asked me sooner, and in a proper manner."

"My nerves," Shefia said. "All this rush and activity, this upsetting event . . ." He trailed off, hoping the explanation would serve in place of an apology.

"As for direction," the emir said, "the slave walked through the crowd and went up that alley to the right."

Shefia knew that the alley led into a rabbit warren of twisting streets and arcades. It meant a difficult search. He wrung his hands and said, "I can't understand why he did it. I treated that ungrateful bastard like a son. Why did he do this to me?"

The emir shrugged. He rarely bothered to inquire into men's motives.

"And the poor fellow was afflicted in the head," Shefia said. "He was simple-minded."

"He looked as simple-minded as a hyena."

"He will be caught!" Shefia screamed, and rushed out to help in the search.

The emir leaned back and silently wished the slave luck. Obviously the man was a Fulani. The emir had a little Fulani blood himself, though most of his stock was pure and ancient Hausa. Still, it wasn't as though the man had been a stinking Yoruba or an Ibo, or an unwashed pagan from the hills. One could feel a certain sympathy for a Fulani man—even though it was beneath one's dignity to help a runaway slave.

## II

Torches and lanterns flared in the streets, carving pockets of light in the huge darkness. An occasional electric bulb glowed feebly, illuminating only itself. Night had thrown itself upon Jidda like a hungry beast. The white buildings had turned to a dim and hopeless gray, and the streets were black tunnels pocked with white dots.

Saudi troops searched through the town, shouting advice and encouragement to each other. The Jiddans joined in the hunt, combing the back alleys and courtyards with furious

energy. They hadn't had such a holiday in years, not since 1947 when a Christian had tried to enter the mosque with his shoes on and had nearly been stoned to death. Many runaway slaves had come to Jidda before. Some had managed to escape before their pursuers arrived; if not, they were usually captured within the hour, weeping and weak-kneed. But this time it was a real hunt, and every man's sporting instincts were aroused.

A crowd went up to the big new sewer that carried most of the town's waste to the sea. They raised their torches and stared into it with fascination and revulsion. The pipe was wide enough for a man to walk upright to the sea. But what man, even a runaway slave, would defile himself so utterly by entering it?

After a long argument, they agreed that a really desperate man *might* do such a thing. But if so, it was the job of the soldiers or the owner to go into the sewer after him. Certainly it was not the crowd's concern. By common agreement, they left the sewer and went to hunt on the docks.

The rabbit warren of streets had been gone through a dozen times; the bazaar had been searched, and several shops had been ransacked. On the long, dim wharf, the rows of dhows had been searched. There had been a few false alarms, and two Somalis had been arrested and beaten, then apologized to profusely when Shefia declared that neither of them was his slave.

Now, for some inexplicable reason, the main search centered on the brightly lit cafés.

Auda stood in the deep shadow of the customs shed near the wharf. He wasn't even winded. At no time had he been forced to run. Once out of the bus, he had walked through the streets for a few minutes, and then he had joined one of the search parties. There was no difficulty about this; Jidda was the port and air terminal for Mecca, and the city was always host to Moslems of a dozen countries. The visitors ranged in color from ebony Nubians to white-skinned Baluchis, and in dress from loincloths to djellabahs. Except for Omdurman, there were more races living in Jidda than anywhere else in the world.

As a searcher, no one took any particular notice of Auda. His only precaution was to stay well away from Bedr ibn Shefia, the only man who could identify him.

Auda had looked at the sewer and had rejected it as a way of escaping. Next he had gone down to the waterfront and helped search the dhows. He had slipped into the shadow

of the customs shed when the crowd went on to the cafés. Now he was waiting until the Saudi guards reached the far end of the wharf.

He knew which dhow he was going to hide on. It was a big, unkempt Kuwaiti, apparently ready to sail soon, its cargo of green hides and firewood already loaded and stamped with the customs seal. There had been no one aboard when Auda and the crowd had searched it. The captain and crew were probably drinking coffee in one of the cafés.

When the Saudi guards came to the far end of the wharf, Auda stepped out of the darkness of the customs shed. No one seemed to be watching from the long line of boats, and the stone buildings behind him were dark and silent. He crossed the dock and boarded the Kuwaiti dhow.

For several minutes he waited in the airless little cabin. There was no sound of pursuit outside. After a while he heard the guards passing again, going to the opposite end of the pier.

Auda crept out to the deck. The moon was hidden behind clouds—praise be to God the All-Merciful—and no one stirred on the neighboring boats. Auda climbed across the firewood-laden bow. Carefully he removed a few armloads of wood from the great pile. He eased the wood over the side piece by piece, hoping that wind and tide would carry the sticks out to sea or under the wharf. Doubtfully he looked at the hole he had made. He hated the idea of trapping himself in a hole. The plan which had seemed so good now struck him as the dream of a madman. God Himself would have to bless this plan for it to succeed.

But there was nothing else to do. Auda, devout Moslem, hater of Saudis, free-born Fulani, escaped slave, crawled feet-first into the hole in the woodpile. He squirmed and twisted deeper, shoving bundles of wood out of the way with his feet. Now I am a tree worm, he thought. His knife was in his hand as he crawled. He was a tree worm with a knife. Nothing would save the first man who discovered him, and perhaps the second and third as well.

With great effort he got his head below the level of the wood and pulled down stacks of kindling to cover his hole. The thing was done now as well as he could do it. If they searched the dhows a second time, he might be found; but they probably wouldn't search again. The captain and the crew might find him before sailing, but Auda doubted it. He had burrowed in from the bow, and the entire great mound of wood concealed his hole from the rest of the boat. A man



would have to row around to the front in order to see where he had hidden himself.

He settled down to wait. It struck him that he didn't know the dhow's destination. The boat was probably in Jidda to await a favorable wind to Africa. But where in Africa? If the dhow went to some nameless little port south of the Sudan, he might be worse off than before. The Ethiopians were worse slavers than the Saudis, and the Somalis were worse than the Ethiopians, or so it was said. All of those foreigners were savages, and they had no understanding of what it meant to be a free-born Fulani.

And what would happen if the dhow didn't sail for a week? He couldn't swim the Red Sea. He couldn't go back into Jidda.

Auda told himself that the future would be as it would be, and no worrying could change it. If the dhow didn't leave Jidda, he would die beneath the wood. If it landed among the ferocious Ethiopians, he would die fighting. The important thing was that he was free, even if that freedom only brought him death.

There were several hours until dawn. Auda made himself as comfortable as he could, closed his eyes, and went to sleep.

### III

Zeid Mohammed Mijbil sat in the small cabin of his dhow and tried to concentrate on the figures in his account book. Zeid was part owner of the dhow as well as its captain. The rest of the dhow was owned by the Mabeirig business house in Kuwait. Most of the crew were poor relations of the Mabeirigi, working on fractional shares. The arrangement was customary, complicated, and not too satisfactory. It required a continual balancing of the accounts, which was difficult work for Zeid. He was an ocean-sailing captain, a man whose concern was with wind, water, and land, not with tiny figures in a ledger.

Zeid straightened up from the account book and rubbed his eyes. His beard was a grizzled gray. He was growing too old for these trips into Africa's smothering heat. He should be sitting in a house, his own house, near the harbor at Kuwait, smoking and drinking coffee with the other captains, discussing boats and cargoes and other serious matters. Instead, he suffocated in the closeness of the cabin, in the clinging wet heat of the African coast, adding up accounts.

The hides had all been unloaded here at Port Sudan. The wood was destined for Suakin, fifty miles down the coast. He would sail immediately after the morning prayer—if he could collect his crew from the brothels of Port Sudan. They had left as soon as the hides were unloaded, swearing to be back by sunset. Now it was night, and naturally enough they had not returned. . . .

Zeid lifted his head. He had heard a sound come from the bow. A rat? Something larger than a rat. A man, then. A thieving Dinka perhaps, who had thought the dhow deserted and had paddled over to see what he could steal.

The noise from the bow came again. Zeid closed his account book. He drew his knife—the curved khanjar without which he would feel naked. He tested the point and edge, then moved to the side of the cabin door, waiting.

Footsteps padded down the deck, moving toward the stern. As the man moved past the cabin, Zeid shouted and sprang forward. The thief—a white-gowned young Negro—turned quickly, trying to protect himself. He was saved only by a brazier on the deck, over which he tripped. He fell backward, and Zeid's overhand stroke just missed.

Zeid moved toward the fallen man, but the young thief had rolled backwards and come to his feet. He had a knife in his hand. Zeid charged while the man was still off balance, hoping to finish him with a single thrust. They fell to the deck, Zeid on top, the thief clutching his knife-wrist and trying to get his own knife free. Zeid rolled quickly and caught the man's knife-wrist, trying to smash it against the deck.

But now all advantage of surprise was gone. Locked together, they rolled on the deck. It was a test of strength now. The thief was a young man, slender but well made, strongly made. Zeid was an old man—over fifty years old, well past his prime. But he had labored on the sea all his life, and his body was like seasoned oak.

He secured a position on top of the thief and redoubled his efforts to drive his knife home, at the same time cursing loudly. There was no shame in cursing, and perhaps someone on shore would hear.

The young man shouted back, "I am not a thief!" And he nearly wrenched his knife-hand free.

Zeid replied with a string of curses. By now both men were struggling less hard, trying to preserve their strength, but each keeping a wary grip on the other.

"You lie in your teeth!" Zeid shouted. "How can you say you are not a thief?"

"Because I am not!" the young man roared back. "I hid on your boat at Jidda, and now I was trying to leave it!"

"Ah," said Zeid, "the escaped slave at Jidda!"

"The man who had been enslaved!" Auda shouted.

Zeid's anger was already leaving him. A thief was one thing; an escaped slave was something else entirely. Also, he had lost all advantage in this fight. It was a deadlock, and there was nothing to be gained from it except perhaps a knife in the throat.

"Listen to me," Zeid said. "If I let you go, will you not try to kill me?"

"Why should I want to kill you?" Auda asked. "I swear before God that I want nothing more than to leave this boat in peace."

"So be it!" Zeid said, and flung himself off the man. He rolled quickly to his feet, his knife ready. But the man hadn't moved to attack him; he was slowly trying to stand up. Zeid remembered that the dhow had been nearly three days crossing from Jidda to Port Sudan. If he spoke the truth, the runaway must have been hidden under the wood all that time, without food or water, under the cruel sun—

It must have been the truth, for the man's legs crumpled and his knife clattered on the deck. Zeid watched the prostrate figure for several minutes, trying to decide what to do. Then he moved to the fallen runaway.

When Auda recovered consciousness, he was lying in the dhow's cabin. The old Arab was mopping his face with cool water, and Auda quickly took some to drink.

"Not so fast, not so fast," the old man cautioned him. "Can you sit up? Can you tell me what happened to you?"

Auda could. He sat up and told the Arab his entire story, about Mustapha ibn Harith, the Saudi guards, and how he, a Fulani, had been sold into slavery, and how he had escaped from slavery.

"By God!" Zeid said. "That is a good story! I myself have no love for these slavers. Wealthy men in Kuwait put their slaves to work on the dhows. When slaves work on a boat, no free man can make a living."

Auda had never thought about it that way, but it seemed to make sense. One fed slaves, but never paid them. Quite naturally they would affect the livelihood of a sea merchant like this man.

"But I am forgetful," Zeid said. "Will you do me the pleasure of eating with me?"

Auda, starved from three days without food, nearly said

yes at once. But he remembered that he was back again in the civilized world, the possessor of his own honor, the arbiter of his own dignity. And just as the injunction of hospitality lay upon the old Arab, so the necessities of self-respect lay upon Auda. He refused, politely but firmly. Since he was very hungry, he refused more vehemently a second time. And then he accepted with a fine show of reluctance the third time.

The old man gave what he had: bread, fish, a few dried dates. Then he brewed coffee. Presently he and Auda were sitting over their second cups.

"And what will you do now?" Zeid asked.

"I will kill Mustapha ibn Harith," Auda said.

"That is best, of course," Zeid said. "But where will you find him?"

"I don't know," Auda said. He hadn't gotten around to considering that part of the problem.

"A slaver is usually a traveling man," Zeid said. "Last year you say he was near Kano. This year he could be in Juba or Dar-es-Salaam, or Bamako, or Berbera. He could be anywhere in French Africa or Nigeria or the Congo or Tanganyika or the Sudan, since slaves are taken from all those places. He could be anywhere in the vastness of Africa. Or he could still be in Arabia or Yemen."

"He may be difficult to find," Auda acknowledged.

"And suppose you do find him and kill him," Zeid said. "What will the police do to you?"

"That doesn't matter," Auda said.

"Are you married?"

"Not yet. I plan to marry in a year or two, after I have completed my examinations to be a truck driver."

"Then listen to an old man. Do not throw away your entire life for the sake of revenge. If you kill this slaver, the police will kill you. And you have no sons yet to carry on your name."

"But the great wrong he did to me—"

"Tell the police," the old Arab suggested.

"The police! What will the police do?"

"Perhaps nothing, perhaps a great deal. You must pray to God that the police will capture and kill this man. They have done so to other slavers. A slaver was executed two years ago here in the Sudan."

"Can this be true?" Auda asked.

"It is true. Sometimes the police are very good. And you are a young man with a promising future, your enemy may be anywhere in Africa or Arabia, and you have no sons.

... Go to the police."

Auda thanked the old Arab and said he would think about it. He left the dhow and walked down the road to Port Sudan. Under the black sky he thought about his revenge, and how he could never hold his head high until he personally had taken that revenge. But near town, he heard music and laughter. Life suddenly became very precious to him again. Perhaps life was more precious than revenge.

It was a difficult decision to make, but Auda decided—for a time—that he would hold his hand. He would tell the police the full story of Mustapha ibn Harith. Then he would see what happened.

**May 10, 1952—EL GEZIRA**

**I**

It was a routine sort of report, and Colonel Frank Parris would normally have read no further than the title: **PRAC-TICE OF SLAVERY IN NORTH AND NORTH-CEN-TRAL AFRICAN AREAS**. Having seen that it did not pertain to him, he would have put it away with a thousand other documents sent to Parris's bomber base at El Gezira in Libya.

This time, however, Parris did not file and forgot the report. Quite suddenly he could see how slavery might be of considerable interest to him. He read the entire bulky document with care.

The report had been drawn up at Khartoum. Copies had gone to the police authorities in the areas concerned. These police authorities had sent more copies to the British, French, Belgian, or American Army Command Posts in their areas. Additional copies of the report had seeped slowly downward from Command Posts to Regional Posts. In this way the report had, in six months, made its way to Colonel Parris's bomber base deep in the Libyan desert.

Specifically, the report concerned the activities of an alleged slaver known as Mustapha ibn Harith. (Description appended.) A Complaint (see Appendix I) had been filed against him by a Nigerian national, at Khartoum, on November 30, 1951. This unsupported Complaint was not sufficient in itself to support a charge of slavery against Harith. It did, however, support all that the Police Authorities had learned about Harith's activities since the end of World War II; and it served to emphasize the need for immediate and effective action against Harith. (See Appendix II: Political Consequences of the Slave Trade in European-Controlled Areas of Africa.)

Harith was believed to be the most important slaver operating in north and north-central Africa. He had been cited in five previous Complaints, and had been brought to court twice, in 1947 and in 1949, in Fort Archambault and in

Djibouti. Both cases had been dismissed due to the death or disappearance of key witnesses. (See Appendix III.)

Harith was reliably reported to export from two hundred to five hundred slaves a year to markets in Saudi Arabia. His method was to visit isolated villages posing as a Moslem teacher and philanthropist, and to gather a number of indigent Moslem villagers for the yearly pilgrimage to Mecca. Upon their arrival in Arabia, the pilgrims were seized for illegal entry, fined beyond their ability to pay, and then enslaved. (See Appendix IV: Legal Status of Chattel-Slavery in Saudi Arabia.)

Harith's sources of procurement were in an area bounded north and south by the Niger and the Congo rivers, and east and west by Timbuktu and El Obeid. This region included all or most of Niger and Upper Volta provinces of French Equatorial Africa; the Cameroons; the Northern Region of Nigeria; Oriental Province of the Belgian Congo; and Darfur and Kordofan provinces of the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan. Harith's total operational area was approximately one million nine hundred thousand square miles, roughly twice the size of India, or equal to the combined areas of India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Burma.

It could not be inferred that Harith was known, or that his presence was even felt, throughout this area. The vast extent of the land and the isolation of its many villages gave him a virtual immunity from detection. Furthermore, his practice of taking pilgrims across Africa to Arabia was not, *per se*, illegal. Unlike the outright slave raiders of the Sahara and the Somalilands (see Appendix V), Harith was able to operate quite openly.

His usual collection point was reported to be Fort Lamy in the Chad. From there, he proceeded eastward by truck into the Sudan, then by railroad to Port Sudan or Suakin, and finally by dhow across the Red Sea to Arabia.

This, however, was only one of his routes. According to some sources, Harith sometimes went south to Yaounde or Bangui, and then northeastward into the Sudan's Kassala Province. Continuing to the Red Sea, he would then have a choice of numerous small ports along the three-hundred-mile coastline between Port Sudan and Massawa.

His most favored route, though, was the first-mentioned: Fort Lamy, Khartoum, and Port Sudan.

Harith was believed to be extremely dangerous. He was considered responsible for the murders of three European police agents over a period of seven years.

Any aid and assistance that could be given toward pro-

viding proof of the slaving activities of this man would be very much appreciated by the Authorities involved. . . .

Colonel Parris believed that he could give aid and assistance on this case. It happened that the colonel was presently playing host to a civilian employee of Military Intelligence, a man named Stephen Dain. To Colonel Parris, it seemed both reasonable and desirable that this highly trained cloak-and-dagger man should be off chasing a romantic and notorious slaver instead of hanging around an unimportant little bomber base inspecting the records of sales of surplus and obsolete equipment.

The more Parris thought about it, the more he liked the idea, especially since some of the equipment he had sold hadn't yet been surplus. In the Sahara, where new equipment broke down and had to be discarded monthly, who was going to care about the fate of a dozen or so World War II trucks and weapons carriers? Who was going to find fault in the disappearance of a few hundred out-of-date Springfields and some badly worn Garands? Who was going to question a few thousand rounds of ammunition unaccounted for?

Annoyingly enough, the Finance Section of Bomber Command in Tripoli had become interested in those items. It was some sort of new economy drive, and so far it was just a routine check; but it spelled the end of the happy, free-wheeling postwar days.

Colonel Parris had stretched the happy freewheeling days about five years longer than anyone else, to the point where a narrow-minded man might consider some of his practices to be nothing more than downright theft.

Well, he was pretty well covered. They'd have a damned hard time proving anything. But this Dain was a tenacious sort, and he went about this routine check as though he were gathering evidence for a court of inquiry. It got on Parris's nerves. Dain might turn up something; it would be a lot pleasanter if he were away chasing a slaver.

The trouble was, Parris could think of no reason why a man from U.S. Military Intelligence should be involved in that sort of thing.

But Parris was not one to give up a good plan lightly. He needed a connection between his own command and Harith. And by God, there was going to be a connection. Harith had been reported recently in the Lake Chad area, less than three hundred miles from El Gezira. Already a possible connection was forming in Colonel Parris's mind.



He called in his duty officer and ordered a questionnaire prepared for the civilian workers at El Gezira field. The duty officer, Major Forbes, had been with Parris throughout World War II. He, too, was a freewheeler. He understood at once what was wanted, and by selective questioning he obtained it.

Two days later, Parris telephoned British Army Headquarters in Khartoum and questioned an Intelligence officer about Mustapha ibn Harith. He made similar calls to Lagos and Kano, and to French Army Headquarters in Brazzaville, Yaounde, and Bangui. The only purpose of these calls was to pull the Harith report out of somnolent files, to keep the issue alive. With this accomplished, Parris called Bomber Command in Tripoli. He spoke to General Dale, a man who laid great stress upon public relations.

"It's about this slavery thing, General. Perhaps you saw the report? No? Well, there's an official British report being circulated about a slaver named Mustapha Harith. Seems to be a rather big operator; the biggest, in fact. I've done some checking around, and I find that the man's apparently done some slaving here at El Gezira. Not at the base, I mean in the town. But I'm afraid it's given us something of a black eye all the same. Some of our native civilian personnel were taken in by this Harith. They went away with him, and they haven't been heard from since. Not *our* fault, God knows. But since we represent law and order in this part of the desert, I'm afraid the locals aren't too happy with us. . . ."

General Dale said that local opinion was an extremely important factor in the maintenance of a foreign base. He would read the Headquarters copy of the British report and phone back.

In an hour he was talking to Parris again. He had skimmed through the report and had had hasty conversations with Khartoum and Brazzaville. He agreed that it looked like a serious issue.

"Very frankly," Parris said, "it's the over-all picture that disturbs me. There's been a lot of opposition to our bases in Libya, and various attempts have been made to turn local opinion against us. The story going around El Gezira is that the U.S. Military isn't strong enough to keep the slavers out of its operational areas. Rumors like that undermine your prestige—and once your prestige is gone in these Arab-type places, you're as good as finished. Like our bases in Morocco. But I shouldn't be speaking out like this. . . ."

"Thank you, sir. Then to be as forthright as I can—and expressing only my own personal opinion—this slavery thing

has me worried. It's a focus for unrest and dissatisfaction, and our apparent lack of concern gives the impression of callousness. Then, too, this sort of affair is perfect grist for communist propaganda, though I don't have any direct proof of any as yet. I don't want to be an alarmist, General, and I'm only speaking for the situation at El Gezira. That's all I'm competent to speak about.

"I don't know if this could have any effect on Wheelus Field or any of our other bases in Libya. But I know that it would help us enormously here at El Gezira if we could do something about this slaver. I'd like to see us catch the bastard with the goods and put him away. If we could send out a fully trained man to take care of this, it would pretty well settle the problem of local dissatisfaction.

"Well, let me think. . . . There is that Military Intelligence man who came down here to look over Records. Stephen Dain. He was in O.S.S. during the war, and I believe he has some connection with C.I.A. He knows the local conditions, and it seems a shame to waste a man like that on routine paperwork. But still, perhaps this wouldn't be in his line. I mean, he'd have to operate in French and British territories, which would require special permission. And there is an element of personal risk which might outweigh the advantages. . . .

"If you really think so, sir. . . . Yes, sir! All right, I'll get on it at once. Thank you, General Dale."

Colonel Parris put down the telephone and treated himself to a cigar. Now he was ready. He had laid down a smokescreen of purest fantasy—but behind it was the very real and ugly fact of Mustapha ibn Harith, and of slavery. And he had done a very neat job of boxing in Mr. Dain. If Dain took the assignment, he would be off Parris's back. If he refused the assignment, Dain's reputation would suffer. Then, with a few judicious hints in the right places about courage, duty, and one's obligations to others, Parris might be able to cast doubt on Dain's report. At the very least, one way or another, Parris could expect Tripoli to forget about those lost trucks and rifles for a while. A few months at least, a chance to breathe, a chance to plan. Forewarned, you could do a hell of a lot with a few months.

Considering all this, it was with a definite feeling of good cheer that Parris went to have a little talk with Stephen Dain.

## II

"So that's pretty much the whole picture," Colonel Parris was telling Dain several hours later. "I personally don't see where it concerns us, but you know how General Dale feels about public relations. Anyhow, the French and British are willing to let us have a crack at it."

Stephen Dain nodded and put down the report. He had read a copy of it in Tripoli a month ago, and had been very interested. He also had had his misgivings. It had seemed to him more a matter for politicians than for a special agent. The arrest and conviction of one Harith would not impede the other two hundred or so slavers in northern Africa; it would not interfere seriously with the slave trade; and it would have no effect upon the institution of chattel slavery. According to the Khartoum report, the buying and selling of slaves was legal or quasi-legal in Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Oman, and some of the Trucial States. As long as that was true, the removal of any individual slaver would simply result in his immediate replacement.

But this had seemed to him too long a view of things; and the sheer size and vigor of the slave trade had fascinated him. It operated over large and inadequately policed areas of the world's second largest continent. It struck at the poor, the helpless, the isolated, the religiously naïve. The margin of profit from the enterprise ranged from three hundred to fifteen hundred per cent, leaving plenty of money for the bribery of policemen, judges, and port officials. Slaves could be taken from anywhere in the vast continent of Africa, and transported to any of the eight countries that lay within easy reach of the Arabian slave markets, from anywhere along the 2500 miles of coast between Bir Shalatein in Egypt and Dar-es-Salaam in Tanganyika. There was no political action against the oil-rich slave-buying countries beyond an occasional polite question in the United Nations. Under the circumstances, Dain had felt directly challenged by this casual trafficking in human lives.

He had also felt challenged by the personality of Harith. Stopping the man was certainly important; and even though Harith could be replaced, his highly developed talents would be hard to duplicate. According to his dossier, Mustapha ibn Harith had the talents of a first-rate con man, as well as a special aptitude for languages. He could preach convincingly in villages spread over two million square miles, and

he seemed to have a command of a dozen or so local languages and dialects. If he were removed, an outright slave raider would probably take his place, to harry the villages and be himself harried by the police. But a raider, traveling by stealth across the deserts with his thirty or fifty slaves, would be a very different proposition from the talented Harith, operating openly and within the law, dealing in his three or four hundred slaves a year. If it came to a choice between evils, a raider was to be preferred.

Dain had wanted the case, but it had been very difficult to arrange. Before he could even begin the preliminary work, he had to carry out his assignment with Military Intelligence. That was what had brought him to Colonel Parris's bomber base at El Gezira.

Parris's loss of equipment had been noted, and would normally have been handled through military channels. But there had been a strong rumor that Parris was selling more than old rifles. According to the rumor, Parris was planning to sell any strategic material he possessed, including the planned sites of future SAC bases in the Mediterranean area. A specific Soviet agent had been named, and a detailed *modus operandi* had been described. The story was too well documented to let pass, and Dain had been sent down to investigate, using his bookkeeping chores as a cover.

The detailed story had proven untrue. No contact whatsoever could be traced between Parris in Libya and his supposed Soviet contact in Cairo. The colonel was a thief, but he was not a traitor. He was a thief like Military Intelligence's informant, a businesslike Arab from Tripolitania who had run out of information before he had run out of a need for money. That aspect of the case against Colonel Parris was over; but now Dain was amused to find that the nervous colonel had done most of the preliminary work on Harith for him.

Under the circumstances, Dain decided to let Colonel Parris go right on working. After all, it seemed to ease Parris's mind.

"Is there any way of finding out where Harith is now?" Dain asked.

"I've already looked into that," Parris said quickly. "According to French and British Intelligence, Harith is believed to be recruiting this year in Ubangi-Shari and the northern Cameroons. From all indications, he'll use Fort Lamy as his collection point, and then proceed across the Sudan."

"You've worked fast," Dain said dryly.

"Well, hell, there's not much difficulty in *finding* Harith.

The real problem is collecting evidence that'll stand up in court."

Dain nodded. "That does seem to be the difficult part."

"Harith runs a pretty good organization," Parris admitted. "And he can pay for it, of course. It can't cost him more than fifty dollars to feed and transport a man across Africa. In Arabia he can get something like four hundred dollars for that man, maybe fifteen hundred dollars for a young woman or a child. That's a damned good profit margin, even including expenses for personnel and bribes. Still, a trained operative with plenty of money and international cooperation . . . Anyhow, what do you think?"

"This could be a very tough case," Dain said impassively.

"That's true," Parris said. "You'd have to be careful, of course. Do you have a plan?"

"I'm considering a few possibilities."

"Then you're taking the case?"

"Yes," Dain said, confirming the decision he had made a month ago. "I'm taking it. But I'll want more information."

"I've already wired the Anti-Slavery Commission in London for a comprehensive report," Parris said. "If there's anything else I can do, just say the word."

"You certainly do work fast," Dain said. "As a matter of fact, there are a few things you might do for me."

"Just tell me what you want and I'll get it for you."

"Fine," Dain said. "The first thing I want is a list of all slavers over the last five years with one or more court convictions. The list should be as complete as possible. I also want a list of anyone ever arrested on a slavery charge in the last five years, even if he wasn't convicted. A third list should include all suspected slavers. I'll need full details and descriptions on the men in those three lists."

"That's a pretty big order," Parris said dubiously. "According to this Khartoum report, there may be as many as fifty slavers in northern Africa. Over the last five years there's probably been a few dozen convictions, and God knows how many arrests. And once you start asking the police who they suspect—"

"That's the information I require," Dain said. "But not just for northern Africa. Those lists should contain the names of all known or suspected slavers on the continent."

"You mean on the whole damned continent of Africa?"

"Right."

Colonel Parris was stunned for a moment. "Now look, Dain," he said. "To get information like that I'd have to query

the police of every individual country on the continent. That would mean about thirty separate inquiries."

"More like forty," Dain said. "But since General Dale is so interested in the problem, I'm sure you won't mind. Especially since you've been so helpful already."

"All right, I'll get the information," Parris said. "But it'll take time."

"I've got plenty of time," Dain told him. "While you're collecting the lists, I can continue my bookkeeping here."

"I see," Parris said. "All right, Dain, since this is an important case, I'll put every clerk in the base on it. Hell, I'll put on every man who can write his name. We'll have things humming, I can promise you that."

"I appreciate your cooperation," Dain said. "How long do you think it'll take?"

Colonel Parris made rapid calculations. "I'll have the data for you within three days. I'll have it or I'll bust every man on the base. But look, what the hell do you want it for? Do you think this Harith might have a slavery conviction under a different name?"

"I doubt it," Dain said.

"Then why do you want the lists?"

"They might come in useful," Dain said.

"All right," Parris said. "I guess you've got a right to keep your plans to yourself. A man can't be too careful on a thing like this. Is there anything else you want?"

"Just one more thing," Dain said. "As soon as the lists are complete, I'd like air transportation to Teneriffe."

"Teneriffe? In the Canary Islands?"

Dain nodded.

"I don't get it," Colonel Parris said. "The Canaries are just off the coast of Africa, but I never heard of any slavery there. . . . Wait a minute, maybe I *do* get it! You don't want to land in Fort Lamy in an Air Force plane. Might be a little conspicuous, huh?"

"It would be," Dain said. "But I want to go to Teneriffe anyhow."

"Sure. Can do. How about your transportation onward from there? I could book you with a commercial line."

"Thanks, but I can handle that," Dain said. "Besides, I expect to spend quite some time in Teneriffe."

"Why?"

"I hear it's a very pleasant place for a vacation."

"You're kidding me," Parris said.

"No, I'm perfectly serious," Dain said. "I think I could use a few months' vacation."

Parris stared at Dain for a few moments, then said, "Well, it's your baby. Have fun with it. I'll get rolling on those lists."

Dain nodded pleasantly. Parris marched away to his orderly room.

In three days, Colonel Parris accompanied Dain to an idling DC-4, shook hands warmly with him, and wished him luck.

"Thanks," Dain said. He started up the steps into the airplane, then stopped and turned. "By the way, Colonel, I wasn't able to finish going through your records."

"Well," Parris said, "I suppose they'll send someone else down."

"I suppose they will," Dain said. "Or just possibly they might ask you up to Tripoli. I happened to find an unaccounted loss of several trucks and weapons carriers, some rifles, and a few thousand rounds of ammunition. I'm sure there's a reasonable explanation for it, but Finance Section at Bomber Command seems to want to explore the matter."

"Do they?" Parris asked.

"That was my impression when I telephoned them last night," Dain said. "Good-bye, Colonel, and thanks for your hospitality."

Parris watched the DC-4 taxi down the field and take off. He watched until the plane had dwindled to a black point in the superheated Sahara sky. That damned Dain, he thought. He'd found something, and now there would be a very unpleasant time in Tripoli.

But if Dain had put something over on him, he had returned the favor with interest. Harith sounded tough, and he was working on home territory. Taking everything into consideration, one couldn't reasonably predict a long life-expectancy for Dain. It would serve the nosy bastard right.

Momentarily bolstered by such thoughts, Colonel Parris returned to his office to await a phone call from Tripoli.

## **August 2, 1952——FORT LAMY**

### **I**

Mustapha ibn Harith sat alone in an open-air coffee shop in the Djembel Bahr section of Fort Lamy. In front of him was the market, crowded now at midday with Kotoko men from the surrounding villages. Behind him was the broad expanse of the Chari River, thick with fishermen, curving past the European concession. This spot, between the noisy market and the broad, placid river, usually brought a sense of well-being to Harith. But not today. Harith had problems, and he saw no easy solution to them.

He was a large man, over six feet in height. In color he was nearly a blue-black—a color which brought him respect from the lighter-skinned races to the south. Of mixed Arab and Negro blood, he considered himself an Arab of the Rifaa tribe of Arabia's Nejd. He was proud of this, and he was also proud of his Negro blood, since without it he could never have established his successful business. He wore the green turban of a hadji, white Bedouin robes, and an embroidered waistband from Marrakesh. He wore five rings; wealth flashed from his flawed emerald and his Ceylon ruby. His features had a Bedouin's hawklike sharpness, all points and angles, all sternness, dignity, and harsh pride. But his hard eyes softened whenever a beggar came up to him; it was his boast that no supplicant with the name of God on his tongue turned away from him empty-handed. This generosity earned him great respect. It was suitable to his reputation as a man of open heart, a benefactor, a successful one of far-flung business affairs, a pious one noted for his extraordinary services in the cause of Islam.

The tales of his piety and his love for his fellow man were so well known that Harith believed them himself. No discrepancies bothered him. He was a man of Bedouin mentality, and he took it for granted that all men led multiple lives, lives which were mutually exclusive and usually contradictory. The life of the home was separate from the life of business, which was separate from the life of religion, which was separate from the life of pleasure. Each of these exist-



ences was ordered according to its own distinct code of values, and was mediated only by its appearance in the world. Harith took this to be the only natural state of affairs.

His work was slavery. He went about it matter-of-factly, much as he would have gone about doctoring or shopkeeping. He knew that the Europeans did not like his occupation; but they were only infidels, momentary conquerors whose opinions didn't matter in the lands of Africa and the Middle East. The Europeans would depart, leaving nothing behind; but the slave trade would go on. Slavery was an ancient and traditional occupation of the Arabs. Since it was traditional, it was also respectable. Apart from its social sanction, it had a religious sanction as well. Had not the Prophet declared it an act of greatest mercy to free a slave? It was the slave dealer who made this act possible.

There was a religious stipulation that one could not enslave a fellow Moslem. Harith accepted this, but he gave it his own interpretation. He had come to the conclusion that only men of the Wahhabi sect of Saudi Arabia, his own religionists, could be considered true and undefiled followers of the Prophet. All others who professed different Islamic creeds had fallen into error. These others, who made up a grievously large portion of the Moslem world, could be enslaved. Although they might not know it, this would be a blessing to them; through it they would receive instruction in Wahhabi practices. This made of slavery an act of religious merit as well as one of profit.

Well-provided on earth, assured of the paradise to come, Harith should have been a contented man. But prosperity had brought its own problems. The Europeans continued to harass him, even though he had never broken the law of their lands. His most recent persecutors had been the French, who had withheld his exit visas for over a month, delaying the departure of his pilgrims and thus compounding the difficulties of the long trip to Arabia. Then there were the merchants of Mecca and Medina, who bought his goods and loaned him money for his enterprises. In order to live in the style which his position called for, Harith had been forced to borrow heavily in order to build a great house in Medina. He was deeply in debt to the merchants. Last year's profits had been meager, and now the fat moneylending vultures were pressing him for payment. Nearly all the profits from this trip would be needed just to pay his debts.

But even this was not all. Worst yet, his business itself was threatened. More and more Arabs were entering the slave trade. Most of the newcomers were still to the south

and east, concentrated around Mombasa and Dar-es-Salaam. But some had started moving north, into Harith's personal territory, vying with him and quarreling with the already established Tuareg of the Sahara. This was bad enough; but one slaver, a tall Ateiba named Saleh Mohammed el Tikheimi, was now trying to secure an absolute supremacy in Chad and the Sudan. This pockmarked Saudi seemed to have a great deal of money behind him, many friends, and limitless ambitions. Like Harith, he would stand for no serious rival. Therefore it seemed likely that one of them would die—probably in an ambush.

These were the sort of difficulties which prosperity brought.

Harith was brooding on his difficulties when a thin, rat-faced Greek trader slid up to his table. Harith instinctively made a sign to avert the evil eye. The Greek grinned and sat down opposite him.

"You are Mustapha ibn Harith?" the Greek asked, speaking the low Arabic of the coast.

Harith inclined his head a stiff inch.

"I bring you greetings from your cousin in Augila," the Greek said. "The French doctor treated his eyes, they are healing well."

"That is good news," Harith said. "You have come a long way to tell me this."

"A trader is used to long roads," the Greek said. "As it happened, I was passing through Augila on my way to El Gezira in Libya." He watched intently, but the name meant nothing to Harith. El Gezira was a dreary little town in the Sahara, a town where the Americans had built an air base. It was of no importance.

"From El Gezira," the Greek went on, "I usually ride the bus back to Benghazi. But this time I felt that business would be good for me in the south. I always go where business takes me."

Now Harith knew that the Greek had something specifically for him. He ordered coffee for both of them, and said somberly, "That is a long way to go."

The Greek nodded. "South of the Sahara, the first important city is Fort Lamy; and the important man in that city is Mustapha ibn Harith, whose fame has spread all the way to the cities of the coast. To serve such a man, a poor trader would be more than happy to spend weeks in the terrible desert, far from business, far from home. Any trader who knows of Mustapha ibn Harith el Hadji's reputation for

generosity would travel ten times the distance in order to bear important information to the feet of the Hadji."

Harith rolled his eyes to heaven and said, "You are too kind with your words, young man! I am the humblest of God's creatures, a poor merchant who desires nothing more than to live by the Law and to perform such acts of charity as are possible for my limited means."

"Ah," said the Greek, "I can see that your great-heartedness is surpassed only by your modesty. Blessed is such a man in the eyes of God the All-Seeing."

"Are you of the Faith?" Harith asked sharply.

"I am, praise be God's name," said the Greek.

Harith nodded. He knew these Greeks: Moslems in Africa, Christians in Europe, true worshipers of nothing but expediency. He said, "I do not have the honor of knowing your name, my friend."

"I am called Rasim Nicholai Prokopulous," said the Greek.

"And, my dear Rasim, you say that you have information for me?"

"I have, sir," the Greek said. "Only the importance of my information and my esteem for your reputation would make me give up many weeks of trading at this time and travel here to tell you what I know."

Now the bargaining had begun. Harith pursed his lips scornfully and said, "Information is usually overvalued. Still, if yours proves of use, you will receive a suitable reward. I have been known to pay as much as eight or nine thousand francs for really important information."

Prokopulous was accustomed to dealing in dozens of currencies. He found no difficulty in converting Harith's CFA francs into Egyptian pounds, and then into American dollars. The eight or nine thousand CFA francs were worth a little more than seventeen Egyptian pounds, or about fifty of the desirable American dollars.

"Can I be hearing right?" Prokopulous asked. "Is this sum being offered to *me*, the bearer of news worth at least two hundred thousand francs?"

"What a glorious dream of avarice!" Harith said, laughing. "I might pay twelve thousand francs if—and only if—the news is of true value. But I would have to hear it first."

The Greek rose to his feet and bowed stiffly. His thin face had gone dark with rage. In a choking voice he said, "Nine thousand francs! Twelve thousand francs! Is this how you prize my information and my long journey? Is this your estimate of my honor? Is this the value you place on a matter of

life or death? So be it! I prefer to go penniless than to accept such a sum. Good day, Mustapha Harith!"

Prokopulous rose to go. Harith stretched out a jeweled hand and said, "Calm yourself, Rasim! You are too excitable, and you judge me wrongly. You didn't mention life or death before. Often such a phrase is exaggerated; but if it is true in this case, I will gladly pay you—fifty thousand francs!"

Prokopulous sat down. He said that to pay for his information, and for his long trip, and for the others who had assisted him, no less than a hundred thousand francs would be required. Harith swore that such a sum would impoverish him, and that by selling the clothes off his back he might be able to raise sixty thousand francs. Prokopulous said that he wouldn't even clear expenses on less than ninety thousand francs. After half an hour of spirited haggling, a bargain was made—conditionally—at seventy thousand CFA francs, which Prokopulous estimated at approximately four hundred American dollars.

Harith said, "You bargain too well for me, Rasim. Now tell me your news."

"At once," said Prokopulous. "I await only the money."

Harith's face stiffened, and his hand dropped to the knife in his belt. "Do you offend my honor by implying that I will not pay in a bargain made in the name of God?"

"I imply nothing," Prokopulous said. "But *my* honor has been offended by the implication that my news is to be trusted only after payment."

The two offended honors soothed each other, and in another half-hour they had worked out a formula for payment. Prokopulous would state the theme of his information, leaving Harith to judge its importance. If accepted, Harith would pay seventeen thousand francs and would be told one half of the news. If satisfied still of its importance, he would then pay thirty-five thousand francs and hear the second half. After hearing it, he would be bound by his sacred oath to pay the remaining eighteen thousand francs.

"The theme is easy enough to state," Prokopulous said. "There is an American colonel at El Gezira air base who has determined to capture and perhaps to kill Mustapha ibn Harith, whom he believes to be foremost among slave dealers."

Harith smiled and said, "Do you consider *that* news? Many infidels—Americans, British, Belgians, and French—have sworn to do this. They are clumsy men, and several of them have died. The news you bring me is ancient history."

Prokopulous shook his head. "The fate of those others has

been noted. Cunning precautions have been taken this time, and a net has been stretched across Chad and the Sudan, to the shores of the Red Sea. This net was begun with a telephone call, and it was completed with the dispatching of a famous police agent."

"Go on," Harith said.

Prokopulous shrugged. "Why should I waste any more of your time, Mustapha ibn Harith? Perhaps it is as you say—a matter of ancient history."

Harith took out his purse and paid out seventeen crisp thousand-franc notes. Prokopulous bowed deeply, pocketed the money, and leaned forward.

## II

Prokopulous's interest had been stirred by a marked change in the behavior of Colonel Frank Parris. For many years, Prokopulous had come to El Gezira to trade. From local gossip, he knew that the American colonel had commanded El Gezira air base for six years, and in all that time had never interested himself in anything but his own personal profit, which he obtained in the way of soldiers and officials all over the world. This was natural and normal. But one day an American arrived in El Gezira, a man not in uniform, but traveling by Army transport; and soon after his arrival great changes took place in Colonel Parris.

He who had not stirred himself for six years suddenly became very interested in the institution of slavery. He sent out interpreters to question the village people about slavery, and specifically about the activities of Mustapha ibn Harith.

The colonel made telephone calls to Tripoli, and to British Army Headquarters in Khartoum, and to French Army Headquarters in Brazzaville. The substance of these calls—obtained at some cost from a local operator—was always the same; the slaver Harith had to be stopped.

Why had Colonel Parris suddenly interested himself in this? Quite obviously, he had received orders from the new arrival, who had brought them from Washington. This new man, a government agent past any doubt, had chosen to remain in the background while the colonel collected information and deflected attention. The agent worked in secrecy; and the net, begun in Washington, was spread across Chad and Niger, Darfur and Kordofan.

"Interesting," Harith said. "But why have the Americans become interested in slavery, and in me?"

"The answer," Prokopulous said, "is apparent when one understands the Western mentality. Guilt rules those men, Mustapha ibn Harith. They were slavers once themselves, and their cruelty was never surpassed. From time to time, they make atonement by condemning in others what they permitted for themselves. Perhaps you remember, before the European war, how strenuous their efforts were against slave trading?"

Harith remembered: French, British, and Belgian soldiers sticking their ugly crimson faces into a thousand African villages; the anti-slavery patrol in the Red Sea; the British privilege of manumission in the Hejaz. Those had been terrible times. But the war had changed all that.

"Well," Prokopulous said, "the war is over now, and the old guilt rises again. Wipe out slavery, they say in the West; but wipe it out in its most convenient form. Not in South Africa or the Belgian Congo or Portuguese Angola. That would be much too difficult. Instead, we will wipe out Mustapha ibn Harith, largest of the independent slavers. Harith is the ruler of no country, and he has no voice at the United Nations. The Saudis may love him, but he isn't a native-born Saudi himself. Not one word will be said against us if we wipe out Harith. That is how Washington thinks, and that is why it has become a matter of American policy to destroy you."

"It may be as you say," Harith said. "I have never understood Americans or any other Europeans."

"It is just as I say," Prokopulous assured him. "They plan to destroy you, and this American agent is their chosen instrument. All of their plans center around this man. But as to that, and what happened after the agent departed from El Gezira, I think it might fairly be considered the second half of the story."

With barely a hesitation, Harith gave thirty-five thousand francs to the Greek.

"I learned," Prokopulous said, "that the American agent is called Stephen Dain. Perhaps he knew that dain means debt in Arabic, so perhaps it is not his real name. Nevertheless, he is called Stephen Dain. I saw him only once, and at a distance. He is above medium height, lean, and his hair is dark and straight. I saw no scars or birthmarks, no peculiarities in the shape of his limbs or in the caste of his features.

I saw nothing to fix my eye upon. He had the anonymous look which many great spies and assassins have possessed. He is to be feared for that; it is a strength. I do not know yet what his weaknesses are.

"One day, very abruptly, he left El Gezira. He left in a U.S. Army plane, and only the pilots flew with him. Where do you think this Dain went? To Khartoum, perhaps, or Brazzaville? Not at all! The scheme was deeper than that. He flew direct to Teneriffe in the Canary Islands."

Harith raised both eyebrows.

"I don't blame you for doubting," Prokopulous said. "I doubted my own information. But fortunately, I have a cousin who works as a bellboy in a hotel in Teneriffe. I telephoned him (at enormous expense) and told him what information I desired.

"The next day, my cousin telephoned and said that an American Army plane had indeed landed at Teneriffe, discharging one passenger. The passenger was as I described him. He checked into the Gran Canaria Hotel—under the name of George W. Barker! And there in Teneriffe he stayed for two months!

"My cousin does not work in the Gran Canaria, so he was unable to learn anything about the messages this man received. But he could use his eyes, and see that for two months this Dain who had become Barker lived just like a tourist. In the mornings he went to the beach. In the afternoons he swam or slept, or read books. In the evenings, Dain went to the wine shops and the taverns, talked with the local inhabitants about the weather and the fishing, and sometimes slept with a Spanish woman he had met on the beach. His appearance, according to my cousin, was just as I have told it. My cousin could only add that Dain moved well and looked like a man who knew how to fight.

"This Dain sent many cables, which my cousin was unable to read. But he did learn one interesting thing. It seems that Dain had a long conversation with a man who flew to Teneriffe from Miami. The two talked late at night. They met on a wide, deserted beach near the tideline, thus making it impossible for anyone to overhear. My cousin was not even able to see the man's face or to hear his voice. But he found out that the man left Teneriffe that same night, on an American bomber going to Capetown. Who was this man, why had he come and gone, and what part does he play? These questions cannot be answered yet; but we do know that he must be part of the net.

"For another two weeks, nothing happened. Then Dain

received a cable, and the following morning he was gone. There had been no previous hint of this, no airline bookings, nothing. One night Dain was drinking wine in Teneriffe, and the next morning it was as if he had never been.

"My cousin made inquiries. He found that no ships had sailed that morning, and only three airplanes had left Teneriffe field. One was a Pan American flight to Madrid; the second was an American bomber going to Capetown; and the third was an Air France flight to Dakar. By discreet questioning, my cousin learned that Dain had taken the flight to Dakar.

"Once I knew this, I studied all the facts at my disposal. At last I understood why Dain had stayed so long in Teneriffe, and why he had summoned a man from Miami, and what his next moves would have to be.

"I have given you all of my factual information. But I would like to tell you my conjectures. And, my dear Harith, I would also like to offer you my complete and total cooperation in this matter."

Like a man bewitched, Harith paid over the final eighteen thousand francs.

"Dain's stay in Teneriffe," Prokopulous said, "served to establish his new identity as George Barker. Only his bad fortune puts me here to establish the vital link between the government man at El Gezira and the tourist at Teneriffe. But the establishment of a new identity was the smallest part of Dain's plan."

Prokopulous smiled subtly and learned closer to the majestic Harith. "Why, we must ask ourselves, did Dain loiter in Teneriffe for two entire months? Why did he meet a man in secrecy and dispatch him to Capetown? And why did Dain himself leave for Dakar just two days ago?

"After a moment's reflection, certain reasons seem clear. The man that Dain sent for is surely another American agent. Past any reasonable doubt, this man will come north from Capetown when Dain sends for him, perhaps to Khartoum or Port Sudan. As for Dain's departure—he was waiting for the time of your hadj to Meccal!"

Prokopulous paused to let that sink in. "If he made any study of your business, Dain knows that *now*, close to the beginning of the month Dhu 'l-Hijja, you must leave Fort Lamy and escort your pilgrims across Africa to Arabia. Therefore *now* is the best time, and indeed the only time, for Dain to act. You can, of course, stay safely in Fort



Lamy and do nothing. But what then of your hard-earned profits for the year? What of your pride? What about your promises to the merchants of Arabia? How much will your reputation suffer, and what will the future hold for a man who cannot deliver promised merchandise? Can you *not* undertake this pilgrimage?"

Harith didn't answer.

"That is how I think Dain reasoned," Prokopulous said. "And *this* is the moment he waited for. He wanted you fully committed, your pilgrims assembled and waiting, your reputation at stake in Arabia. The twelfth day of Dhu 'l-Hijja is only a little more than three weeks away; its European date this year is August twenty-third. Dain must know that your success depends upon getting the pilgrims into Arabia by that date. If you cannot, even the most ignorant villager knows that his pilgrimage is worthless, and he will refuse to leave Africa. Knowing this, Dain enlisted the aid of the French to delay you; and he has chosen to act now, when your hands are tied."

Prokopulous sighed and spread his hands wide. "That is my information, Mustapha ibn Harith, and also my conjectures. Was it worth the price?"

Harith nodded. "This Dain sounds like a clever man," he said sourly. "But you sound cleverer still. Where did you learn so much about my business?"

"A poor trader must know as much as possible about the men he deals with," Prokopulous said. "Otherwise, how could he anticipate their needs?"

Harith smiled, deciding that he disliked this Greek. No honest man should know so much about another man's business. It always meant trouble. The problem of the American agent came first; but the Greek would not be forgotten.

"This Dain must be killed," Harith said. "I cannot withdraw from the pilgrimage."

Prokopulous nodded. "Perhaps that killing will not be too difficult. He will have to travel with you or near you in order to obtain evidence for a European court. The journey from Fort Lamy to Port Sudan is long and difficult. Accidents can happen."

"Yes. If I know to whom the accidents should happen."

"There I might be able to help," Prokopulous said. "I saw Dain at El Gezira, though at a distance. Even so, any disguise can be penetrated."

"Then you will accompany me?" Harith asked.

"I welcome the opportunity to serve you. And of course I

rely on your well-known generosity to recompense my loss of business."

Harith sighed heavily. "Very well, we will make suitable arrangements. When can we act?"

"In the morning," Prokopulous said. "The weekly Air France plane comes from Dakar, and Dain will be on it."

"How do you know?"

"It seems a reasonable assumption. For the next three weeks, all flights have been taken by wealthy Moslems making the hadj. This will be one of the last flights with Christians aboard. After so much planning, Dain surely wants to arrive here at the proper time. And of course, tomorrow is the proper time."

"Why?" Harith asked.

"Because you plan to leave Fort Lamy on the day *after* tomorrow," Prokopulous said.

Harith was amazed and annoyed. This dirty Greek knew far too much! There was little doubt, the rat-faced man would have to die—at the right time. But for the moment, there was work to be done with Prokopulous's help.

"We will meet the Air France flight tomorrow," Harith said. "We will identify the man, and then come to a decision about how to handle him."

Prokopulous bowed in agreement. "At the airport, at eleven in the morning."

"Peace be with you," Harith said, rising.

"And on you be peace," Prokopulous said, bowing.

## **August 3, 1952——FORT LAMY**

### **I**

The plane from Dakar landed on schedule. The seven European passengers got off and had their first look at a vast dun-colored land dotted with thorn bushes, sweltering under a sullen gray sky. An immigration official led the European passengers to customs and passport control in a corrugated iron shed; another official led the African passengers to a similar shed farther down the field.

There was a disappointment waiting for the European travelers who tried to confirm their next flight. Contrary to what they had been told in Dakar, they now found it impossible to get a plane out of Fort Lamy for at least three weeks. Every flight was booked solid for the yearly hadji to Mecca; there were more pilgrims than the airlines could handle, and the U.S. Air Force had organized a special airlift from Beirut to Jidda. The Europeans in Fort Lamy were assured of air transportation as soon as possible, but no one could say just when that would be.

Within the European customs shed, several dozen Africans waited and watched while the Europeans filed through. They were taxi drivers, guides, hotel runners, souvenir sellers, and the usual group of idle observers. Among the observers was a tall Negro with Bedouin features, dressed in white robes and the green turban of a hadji. At the opposite end of the shed was a sharp-featured little Greek in a worn brown business suit and narrow black shoes. Both men watched and listened as the European passengers stated their probable length of stay in French Equatorial Africa, their business, and their next destination.

There was a tall, blond Rhodesian going to Beirut and very annoyed at being re-routed for the third time since leaving Bulawayo. There was an American engineer who had just finished a job on Mbour harbor in Senegal, and who now was going to do the same sort of work on Jidda harbor in Arabia. A mustached British captain was returning from a conference in Gambia. Two South Americans were traveling to Aden. A Dutchman was crossing Africa on vacation.

A German archeologist was going to join a group digging at the ruins of Meroe in the Sudan.

None of the Europeans had planned more than a brief stopover in Fort Lamy. They were annoyed about the delay and inconvenience. They wanted to be philosophical about it, but they wished they had been stranded almost anywhere else. Lagos was a city of considerable interest, Dakar had a cosmopolitan atmosphere, and Kano was ancient and picturesque. But Fort Lamy was just a collection of buildings flung together on the left bank of the malarial Chari River, in the tropical desolation of Chad Province. Fort Lamy had no native history and no economic importance; its bazaar was unimpressive and its indigenous arts were dull. It was simply a place one passed through.

The Europeans left customs and passport control and went outside into the steaming heat to engage taxis for the drive to town. When the last of them had gone, Harith walked over to Prokopulous and asked, "Which one was Dain?"

"I don't know," Prokopulous said.

Harith nodded; he had expected this. He said, "You talk very well, Mr. Prokopulous, and you have many ingenious ideas. It is a shame that when put to the test—"

"He must be one of that group," Prokopulous said. "Remember, I saw Dain only once, and at a distance. He must have disguised himself and changed his name and passport in Dakar. The French would have helped him."

"Perhaps," Harith said. "But perhaps he wasn't even on today's flight. He might have made arrangements with one of the European air forces to fly ahead and wait for me in Khartoum."

Prokopulous shook his head. "Dain can't be sure you'll even go near Khartoum. What if you went south to Gedaref and then to the port of Massawa?"

"Impossible," Harith said. "I can't re-route a party of four hundred pilgrims at the last minute. The rail and truck connections have already been made. Besides, a part of the Massawa road washed out this spring, and I don't have the time to go further south to Berbera or Djibouti."

"You may know that," Prokopulous said, "but Dain can't know. How can he be certain what roads you will take and what cities you will pass? All he can be sure of is finding you here in Fort Lamy. He must find you, and then he must stay near you until he has his evidence."

"That seems to be true," Harith said. "Very well, he must find me here in Fort Lamy. But can I be sure he was

on today's flight? Is there any other way he could have come?"

Harith closed his eyes to visualize the alternate routes. "Three days ago you say he was in Dakar. He could have flown from there to anywhere in Africa, and then here. But no other plane has landed here in the last three days. If he came by the train, he would need three days just to reach Bamako, and then two days on the bus to Ougadougou, and perhaps a week from Ougadougou to Fort Lamy. Twelve days, and longer if he came by car. No, if your information is correct he must have come on this flight. He must be one of those seven Europeans—unless he disguised himself as a Moslem pilgrim."

"A few Europeans have done that," Prokopulous admitted. "But it is very difficult. Why should Dain take the risk? Why should he try to deceive you in the thing you know best when he can deceive you in the thing you know least? He can travel to the Red Sea as a European businessman, engineer, tourist, or scientist. How would you know which of those men was Dain?"

Harith nodded slowly. "That would be his best plan. So I must assume that Dain is in Fort Lamy, wearing a European disguise. But how can I learn which of the seven travelers he is?"

"You can't," Prokopulous said. "But if God is willing, I can find out for you. I am a European, and I know how men of different countries speak and act. I can enter the Metropole bar and drink with them. I can discover which is the imposter. And for this additional service I will ask only a small reward—fifty American dollars, say."

Harith silently contemplated the Greek. Prokopulous grew uncomfortable under that steady gaze. After a while, in measured tones, Harith said, "Mr. Prokopulous, you have done me good service so far, and you have received good payment from me. I will pay this additional reward also. I have no complaint against you, nor can you have any complaint against me. Perhaps you are indeed a trader; but perhaps you are something else as well."

Prokopulous didn't answer. Harith went on. "If, for example, you were a police informer, I might have to spend some years in a prison at Fort Archambault or Omdurman. That would be my bad luck; but it would be even worse luck for you. I have a large family and many friends throughout Africa. My family, my friends, and I, we pay each other's debts."

Prokopulous's brown face grew hard. In a low, bitter voice

he said, "You should not threaten me. If it comes to that, I also have friends in Africa."

Harith nodded in a perfunctory manner. "My apologies, Mr. Prokopulous. You will go to the Metropole this evening?"

"Yes," Prokopulous said, "and I hope to have interesting news for you by morning."

Harith called a taxi and the two men drove into town.

## II

European travelers in Fort Lamy tried to stay at the homes of French officials; those who could not get invitations invariably put up at the Metropole, which was considered the only hotel in town suitable for Europeans. Because of the Metropole's unique status, its owner didn't have to worry about frills. This was particularly apparent in the Metropole barroom, a large, cheerless room, poorly lighted and indifferently maintained. Its liquor was mediocre, its service bad, and its atmosphere was terrible. Roaches and beetles scuttled past the patrons' feet, closely followed by hungry lizards, who were themselves followed by ravenous rats from the Chari River. The rats, in turn, fell to the owner's broom, and were thrown outside to be eaten by the roaches and beetles. One could feel close to nature in the Metropole barroom.

The scurrying life on the floor was matched by the buzzing life in the air. No screens could hold back the squadrons of mosquitoes, black flies, and moths, which fluttered between the dim light bulbs and the sluggish overhead fan. The fan itself worked just fast enough to send gentle, stifling waves of overheated air to the patrons' overheated bodies. In Europe, or even in Dakar, the Metropole couldn't have stayed in business a week. In Fort Lamy it prospered.

Mr. Prokopulous arrived at the Metropole at nine in the evening. The usual locals were there, bored with drinking at home. And most of the people from the Dakar flight were present. Mr. Prokopulous went straight to the bar and ordered a vermouth cassis. He drank half of it, looking neither to right nor left, considering ways and means of beginning a conversation. The problem was taken out of his hands when a voice at his left asked him, "Are you a local resident?"

The Dutch tourist had spoken to him. He was a tall, affable man, lean and brown-haired, with two cameras and

a light meter slung around his neck. He introduced himself as Lorens van Haarnin.

Mr. Prokopulous bowed and gave his own name. He said that he was not a local resident, but that he frequently traveled in the Chad.

"I wondered," van Haarnin said, "if the officials here had ever considered spraying the river area with DDT."

"I believe there was talk of it," Prokopulous said. "But they decided the job would be hopeless. For a lasting effect, DDT would have to be sprayed over all of French Equatorial Africa. Nine hundred and sixty thousand square miles, to be exact," he added.

Van Haarnin seemed impressed. He asked questions about tropical Africa, and the blond man from Southern Rhodesia joined the conversation. Mr. Prokopulous talked, and tried to decide which of the men in the room were the most likely candidates for the role of disguised secret agent.

His immediate suspicions centered around van Haarnin, the Rhodesian, and the American engineer. They were all of approximately the right size and build. The British major seemed too short and leathery, and the German archeologist appeared too old. But still, they couldn't be ruled out entirely. Who could tell what marvelous disguises an American agent might devise?

Now the two South Americans were entering the barroom. The tall one was a possibility, but his friend looked too short and plump. But still . . .

There were entirely too many men who could be Dain. Out of the seven here, four or five were very possible. That number had to be reduced.

He tried to think what sort of a disguise an America agent would be likely to choose. Would he try for a bizarre effect, hoping to throw off suspicion by his obvious outlandishness? In that case, Dain might be the German archeologist. Or would he conceal himself as little as possible, counting on the misplaced subtlety of his enemies to overlook the obvious? In that case, Dain might be the engineer, the tall South American, the engineer, or the Rhodesian. Looking at his seven suspects, Prokopulous thought about Mustapha ibn Harith, waiting for definite news. He felt a cold touch of apprehension. Harith was a dangerous man; for his own safety, Prokopulous had to discover which of these men was Dain.

He began to question the travelers about the customs and traditions of their own countries. He was proud of the way

in which he did this; openly and ingenuously, as a simple foreigner interested in faraway places. And the travelers answered him without a hint of suspicion, as though he were nothing more than he seemed to be.

His secret role gave him an intoxicating sense of power. Hidden behind his mask of polite amiability, he could bring death to any man here. And no one could guess the truth about him—except possibly Dain. But even if Dain guessed, he couldn't *know*. Therefore the initiative rested with Prokopulous, and with it the power.

That was how Prokopulous felt—in part. But in part he was also more than a little dismayed by the problem of detecting Dain. He had spoken briefly to most of the travelers except the American engineer, and he still had no idea which of them was the American agent. Doubts were beginning to gnaw at him. He had told Harith that he was a man of Europe. It was true; but his birthplace was the island of Chios, a few miles from the Turkish coast, at the very end of a Europe he had rarely visited. He had spent most of his life in the Middle East and Africa. He could speak half a dozen languages, but none of them perfectly, not even Greek. His English was good, but nuances of accent escaped him. He wasn't sure of the difference between an American accent and a British accent. He knew even less about the South African and Australian accents.

He forced himself to put his anxieties aside. Accent was only one small aspect of a man. There were other ways of learning the truth. He was going to succeed in this, he was sure of it.

Now, smiling affably, he approached the American engineer at the far table. "Well, sir," Prokopulous said, "how do you like this city of Fort Lamy?"

The engineer's name was Tim McCue. He was a lean, tanned man with cold eyes. He said flatly, "Fort Lamy's fine."

Prokopulous recognized the rebuff but refused to accept it. He said, "It is not very pleasant now during the rains. Too sticky, eh?"

McCue shrugged and looked down at his drink.

Prokopulous persisted. "It is amazing to think that just a few hundred miles north of here is the Sahara. Perhaps you have seen the Sahara, sir?"

McCue looked up and stared at him for perhaps three seconds. Mr. Prokopulous smiled nervously and took an involuntary step backwards. At last McCue said, "I thought it was obvious that I'm not in the mood for conversation."



"Ah, sir, excuse me, I meant no offense—"

"Fine. Apology accepted. Now will you kindly leave me the hell alone?"

Prokopulous moved away, wondering what had brought on that unprovoked display of rudeness. Perhaps the man was just naturally surly. . . . But surliness could make a very interesting disguise for Dain. He could travel across Africa, moody and preoccupied, not interested in anyone or anything—until the proper moment. Yes, this engineer could not be written off yet.

The Rhodesian, Charles Ott, had overheard the exchange. He asked Prokopulous, "What brought that on?"

"I do not know," Prokopulous said.

"Well, it was damned rude," Ott said. In a louder voice he added, "Someone ought to punch his nose for him."

The engineer didn't even look up.

Ott turned away. "Maybe it's the heat," he said. "Deadly heat here in Chad. I'll be damned glad to reach Beirut."

"It is also hot in Beirut," Prokopulous said.

"But the hotels have air conditioning. I'm really looking forward to the air conditioning. Also the food. I can't take the slop they serve in this hotel."

Ott spoke in an abrupt, reedy voice. He seemed nervous, and Prokopulous wondered why. Would a disguised American agent become nervous if he thought he had been detected?

"Beirut is a beautiful city," Prokopulous said. "It is a wonderful place for sightseeing."

"Well, I'm afraid I won't have much time for that sort of thing," Ott said. "I'm traveling on business. Iron ore. Family connection. Maronite Christians are as thick as thieves; that's a joke they make about us. I suppose you're Greek Orthodox?"

"Yes," Prokopulous said. "Though my work makes regular church attendance difficult."

"Of course," Ott said. "Same with me. Is that engineer staring at me?"

Out of the corner of his eye, Prokopulous could see that McCue was not looking at anyone in particular—except possibly Prokopulous.

"I don't think so," he said.

"Can't tell about Americans," Ott said cryptically. "Still, what the hell difference does it make? Another drink?"

Prokopulous had another drink, and then found himself talking to the tall South American. His name was Diego Raúl Alvarez Ribera y Castillo, and he had come across

the Atlantic to hunt. He was a colonel in the Paraguayan army, presently on leave, and enjoying himself enormously.

"I have always considered soldiering a fascinating profession," Prokopulous said.

"Perhaps it is," Ribera said. "To tell you the truth, I have never thought much about it one way or the other. The eldest son of the Riberas has always served in the army as a matter of course, while the younger sons usually enter the Church."

"A fine tradition," Mr. Prokopulous said. He learned that the Riberas of Montalbán were an old family, though not *very* old, as Spanish families went. They were of noble blood, and had usually been advisers to the cortes of Aragon. Their influence in Spain had ended during the time of Azaña, and the Riberas had emigrated to South America.

"Politics," Ribera sighed. "I was a child at the time. My father decided that Paraguay offered him the best opportunities, and there we settled. When I came of age, I entered the army as a lieutenant."

"You rose very rapidly in rank," Prokopulous said.

Ribera made a deprecating gesture with his graceful brown hands. "General Stroessner always needs reliable officers, especially in the higher ranks. The General is a traditionalist, you understand, and South America's main bulwark against communism. But he has many enemies. These factors have undoubtedly helped my career. But I also like to think that I am not entirely lacking in personal ability."

"You have the unmistakable look of a soldier," Prokopulous said.

"Thank you," Ribera said. "And you, my friend, have the look of a man who knows a great deal about certain things which are generally not discussed in public."

Startled, Prokopulous couldn't think of anything to say.

"Yes," Ribera went on, "I took one look at you and I said to myself, 'Here is a clever man who knows how to arrange certain delicate matters.' That is what I thought, Mr. Prokopulous."

"Did you?" Prokopulous asked, wondering what Ribera was talking about.

"I did. And I also thought, 'This estimable Mr. Prokopulous would possibly—for a suitable fee, of course—give his assistance to a traveler far from his home.'"

"Of course," Prokopulous said. "Any service I can perform—"

"Thank you!" Ribera said. "I had hoped that my estimate

was not wrong. And I think you know what I want, Mr. Prokopulous."

Prokopulous forced himself to smile subtly. "I think I do, sir. But if you could be just a little more specific—"

"Nothing simpler," Ribera said. "My interest, of course, is in the field of entertainment."

"Entertainment?" Prokopulous echoed.

Ribera dug him in the ribs and chuckled. "You have a marvelous face, Mr. Prokopulous, you should have been an actor! But let us get down to business. Do you have access to the right sort of girls?"

Prokopulous was startled for only a fraction of a second. Then, sadly, he was back on very familiar ground. He took a careful look at Ribera, then said, "It just happens, sir, that I may be able to help you. I have a friend who knows of a very nice fourteen-year-old girl—a virgin—"

"Yes, she should be a virgin," Ribera said. "But fourteen is already past the prime. I suppose she's a tall, strapping wench with heavy breasts."

"Not at all!" Prokopulous said. "The girl I am speaking of is small for her age. One would take her for twelve, at the oldest. And sir—her delightful little breasts are barely formed."

Ribera's eyes sparkled when he heard that, and Prokopulous, aware that a clever man could always manage several businesses at the same time, was wondering frantically where he could find such a girl.

"It may take a day or two," he said.

"I would prefer it didn't," Ribera said. His eyes were very bright, and his mouth had gone loose and moist. "I shall require her services tonight, and I will swear upon my honor that no harm will come to her. As to the price, I think we can agree upon—"

Ribera broke off abruptly. Prokopulous turned and saw the other Paraguayan coming toward them. He silently cursed the man for interrupting a profitable business transaction. Somehow, somewhere, he would have found a suitable girl for tonight!

Ribera introduced the man as Captain Echeverria, and made a joke about his solemn appearance. When Echeverria didn't answer, Ribera began to talk with great animation about the hunting in Arabia and Africa.

"It should be very interesting to shoot animals," Echeverria said at last. "The colonel is a deadly shot with pistol or rifle, though I fear he has little experience with the heavy

calibers one uses against elephants. But he will accustom himself to them."

"And you?" Mr. Prokopulous asked. "Are you looking forward to the hunting?"

"Not very much," Echeverria said. "I am an indifferent marksman and I hear that African game can be very dangerous, particularly the buffalo."

Ribera laughed.

"The colonel of course is a daredevil," Echeverria said. "One could really expect nothing else from a Ribera of Montalbán. But he is an important man in our army, Mr. Prokopulous, and a personal friend of the great General Stroessner. General Stroessner has expressly commanded me to let no danger befall Don Diego."

He looked at Prokopulous, and the look from those heavy-lidded eyes was as clear as words. It said: "You are a pimp, Mr. Prokopulous, and you probably deal in diseased women. I must keep my colonel out of the hands of men like you."

Prokopulous burned inside, and he longed to drive a knife into Echeverria's protruding belly. Instead, he talked with both men for a while about hunting, then turned to the bar for another drink.

And then it struck him that this—like the engineer's rudeness and the Rhodesian's nervousness—could be a disguise. Ribera could be Dain. It was very annoying.

There seemed to be nothing more to be gained this evening, and Prokopulous started to leave. But before he could get out the door, the German archeologist had seized him by the arm.

"If you could spare me just a moment?"

"Of course, of course," Prokopulous said, wondering what this one would want.

The archeologist's name was Klaus Eberhardt. He was over six feet tall, and he had an habitual stoop. He wore gold-rimmed glasses, and his hair was plastered down tight. He asked, "I was wondering if you knew anything about the ruins of Dobara?"

"I'm afraid I've never heard of them," Prokopulous said.

"They're about five miles from the port of Suakin in the Sudan."

Prokopulous had been to Suakin. Now he vaguely remembered some stone pillars which could be just seen as you drove on the road to Sallom. He told this to Dr. Eberhardt, who nodded quickly.

"That is it! That is exactly it! That is Dobara."

"I did not know," Mr. Prokopulous said. "At the time, I thought it might have been some ancient outpost of the Egyptians."

When he said that, Dr. Eberhardt's face changed. He asked, "Is that the general opinion? That the pillars are Egyptian?"

"That's what I've heard them called," Prokopulous said. "But I remember someone else telling me they were Roman, not Egyptian."

"I see. Is there anything else you have heard?"

Prokopulous thought for a moment. "No, nothing I can remember."

"Interesting," Dr. Eberhardt said. He fell into a long silence. Prokopulous waited, a tentative smile on his face.

Eberhardt pursed his lips and said, "Those pillars are neither Roman nor Egyptian."

"No?"

"Absolutely not. Egyptian artifacts have been found near the spot, of course, and this has led to the confusion."

Prokopulous nodded, wondering what the man was talking about.

"But the truth," Dr. Eberhardt said, "the almost certain truth is this. Those pillars are Sabaeen. And from their size and quantity, there is—almost past a doubt—a Sabaeen city buried beneath them."

"Really, sir?" Prokopulous said.

"The city is there, if my theory is correct," Eberhardt said. "And if the city is there, it will stand as a major archeological discovery. That lost city of Dohara was beyond doubt the hub of Sabaeen civilization in Africa. From it, the high civilization of ancient South Arabia spread north and south along the African coast." Dr. Eberhardt paused and smiled ironically. "And to think; I will be working at the ruins of Meroe, while less than four hundred miles away may be the greatest discovery of the age!"

"Amazing!" Prokopulous said.

"Yes. And do you think that any university would give me a grant for Dohara? Never! They prefer Meroe or Zimbabwe; they would rather remove another layer of dirt from a proven site than take a chance on a world-shaking discovery! If I dared, I would take my own savings, I would hire diggers and go to Dohara. The money would come in soon enough when I had made my first discoveries. The universities and the foundations would beg me to take their money! If I dared . . ."

Dr. Eberhardt seemed lost in thought. Prokopulous bowed

politely and started out the door. As he passed, the doctor's hand shot out again and seized Prokopulous's shoulder with an astonishing strength.

"Do you know," Eberhardt said, "that Schliemann who discovered Troy began with less evidence than I possess on Dobara?"

With that statement, which Prokopulous found completely unintelligible, the doctor released him. Prokopulous stepped outside into the humid night.

What a crazy old fool that Eberhardt was! Spouting wild theories as fast as he could talk! The old idiot should be locked away. . . .

Old?

Not really old. Eberhardt looked like a man in his early fifties. But what would he look like if he combed his hair properly and threw away those gold-rimmed glasses? How would he look if he straightened out of his scholar's stoop?

Surely ten years younger.

Makeup could give the appearance of age. And the strength of the man's hand had been surprising. . . .

And what a marvelous disguise *that* would be for Dain. To cross Africa as a doddering German archeologist, not quite right in the head, buttonholing people wherever he went—and perhaps changing his mind at the last minute and going to this lost city he called Dobara.

Conveniently enough, the doctor's lost city was only a mile outside of Suakin, a major slaving port to Arabia, and less than twenty miles from Port Sudan.

Dr. Eberhardt would have to be kept in mind.

But there were too many suspects. By stature and age, most of the travelers could be made to fit the image of Dain. Prokopulous could conjure any one of them into a secret agent. He could find hidden reasons and motives in the most casual statement, and he could avoid with ease the traps set by plausibility. His own talents were working against him now, and he was finding too much in too little.

Detective Prokopulous abruptly decided that he needed a long night's sleep.

### III

Immediately after the morning prayer, Mustapha ibn Harith went to work. This was his last day in Fort Lamy. Early next morning, he and his pilgrims would set out upon the hadj to Mecca. The four hundred pilgrims would leave by

truck convoy, shepherded by a dozen of Harith's men. Harith would follow in an old Land Rover. Their journey would stretch across a thousand miles of sub-Saharan Africa, through El Fasher, El Obeid, Omdurman, and Atbara. At Suakin they would be taken by dhow to Lith in Arabia, and another year's work would be completed. But now, on his last day before departure, Harith had to make a final check on all details. Everything had to be right; a mistake or an oversight now might jeopardize the entire shipment.

First, Harith consulted with his agents to make sure that the necessary bribes had been distributed. That was the single most troublesome problem, the most expensive, and the most necessary. It was easy enough in Nigeria and Chad, but very difficult in the Sudan, now on the verge of independence. The Sudanese police and the desert patrols were often hard to deal with. It took careful planning to find a few key officials who would issue the proper permits, and who would not send the pilgrims back simply because they lacked passports.

Bribery was vital, for without it the slave trade couldn't exist a year. But it was only one part of Harith's work. He also had to make sure of his transportation facilities across the enormous stretch of Africa. Even a short delay was costly, since Harith was feeding the entire group of pilgrims out of his own pocket. And a long delay would be disastrous. Most of the pilgrims would refuse to leave Africa if they could not be in Mecca by the time specified in the Koran—the twelfth day of Dhu 'l-Hijja.

The hadj had fallen this year during the late summer rainy season, so the roads between Fort Lamy and Omdurman might be washed out at any point. If so, the pilgrims would have to make their own repairs, and perhaps build their own bridges—at a cost of hours and days. This lost time meant money out of Harith's pocket.

Although the slave trade was very profitable, the costs had to be figured with great care. Between a quarter and a third of Harith's total proceeds was paid out in bribes. Then there was the cost of food and transportation, and the cost of hiring guards and helpers, and the additional cost this year of the Greek, who still had not reported on his evening with the Europeans.

Also this year, there was the additional problem of Saleh Mohammed el Tikheimi.

In previous years, el Tikheimi had confined his operations to Tanganyika and the Somalilands. He was a slaver of the old style, who bought his slaves outright, or raided for them

in the villages of the interior. When he had collected ten or twenty, he smuggled them into Massawa or Djibouti for a swift crossing into Arabia or Yemen. It was a good, reliable, old-fashioned business. But el Tikheimi had grown greedy because of the rising prices in Arabia. He had looked to the easier slave route to the north, from Niger and Upper Volta across the desert to Suakin.

Many slavers operated in this area, and Harith tolerated them because they were small. But now el Tikheimi had come, and it was said that he brought financial backing from a group of Yemeni buyers in San'a. Harith knew that northern Africa couldn't support two large slaving operations. The local officials would be forced to act whether they wanted to or not.

But before that unhappy time had been reached, either Harith or el Tikheimi would act first. This year they were traveling over roughly the same route. Harith had formed his plans, and had taken suitable safeguards. Past a doubt, el Tikheimi had done the same. They would soon find out who had planned best. Harith felt cautiously optimistic about the outcome. El Tikheimi was reputed to be a clever man; but he was also an Ateiba, one of a tribe of braggarts, men of great words and meager deeds. And Harith was of the Rifaa, a tribe whose valor was known to the ends of the earth, and whose worship of Islam was not infected by heretical practices. This contest would be decided by courage, character, and the will of God; on those grounds, Harith knew that he stood second to no man.

All through the day, Harith's agents reported to him in his dim, shuttered house on the edge of the Djembel Bahr. He learned that el Tikheimi was north, in the Tibesti. Prokopulous had returned to the Metropole, where he was talking to some of the Europeans. The other Europeans were still trying to arrange transportation out of Fort Lamy. By evening, Harith learned that they had chartered a bus to El Fasher.

That was bad news. It meant that Harith and the Europeans would be leaving at the same time. From El Fasher, the Europeans would be able to hire transportation to El Obeid, then take the train to Khartoum. They would be near him for the entire trip across Africa, and the American agent was surely one of them.

Harith considered delaying his own departure by another day or two, and then decided against it. That would be a suspicious-looking thing to do. Whenever possible, ground transport traveled together during the rainy season, in order



to have many hands available to help on the washed-out roads. Also, if Dain were behind this, he would find good reasons why the Europeans must also be delayed—just long enough to depart with Harith and his pilgrims.

The best thing to do was the usual thing. He would leave as he had planned, and he would act as he had always acted. The presence of Dain was bothersome, but not yet acute. There had been other agents; they had all died, in one way or another, on the long empty roads across the Darfur hills, or in the Kordofan desert. There was no reason to think that matters would be different this time.

Harith remained in his house all evening, and his agents continued to report. He sat like a spider at the center of his web of communications, and one by one the radiating tendrils twitched and gave him news. His lines of inquiry ran north into Tibesti, south to Ubangi-Shari, west into Niger, and east across the Sudan.

He speculated endlessly on the fragments of news he received. Intrigue was dear to his heart, a game of indirection and sudden assault. He loved his profits, but he also played the game for its own sake. To outsmart the pompous colonial officials of Britain, France, Belgium, the United States—that was a game worth playing. He found them all contemptible; el Tikheimi alone was more of a menace to Harith than the British police of the Sudan, or the French army in Chad, or the Belgian troops in the Congo. The Europeans lived by themselves in their fine, cool houses. They couldn't be bothered to learn any of the languages of Africa, and they shunned contact with the Africans. In their carefully guarded isolation, seeing only each other, they believed they could rule by some magical property in the pasty white color of their skins. And they expected gratitude as well as obedience from the conquered populations.

These were Harith's antagonists, and it was Harith's pleasure as well as his profit to take his pilgrim groups under the very noses of the baffled Europeans. He despised them, but he acknowledged their value. It was the Europeans who closed their eyes tight and bought Arabian oil, thus supplying the money with which the Saudi princes could buy Cadillacs and slaves. There would be slavery even without the Europeans, of course; but the demand would be limited by the small wealth of the Arabian peninsula. So it was the Europeans who made a rich existence possible for Harith, for el Tikheimi, and for a hundred lesser slavers from Atbara to Djibouti, and around the Horn of Africa to Dar-es-Salaam and Zanzibar.

By late evening, the trucks for the hadj were fueled and ready to go. The Europeans were also ready to leave in their hired bus. A detachment of French soldiers was traveling with the two groups as far as Abeche. And at last, Prokopulous reported.

One look at his face told Harith that the Greek had failed to identify Dain. But he listened attentively to Prokopulous's account of his evening in the Metropole. Harith decided he would try to meet the Europeans himself on the journey ahead, and see what he could learn. As for the Greek—

"As for me," Prokopulous said, "there is still some business to settle. First, I wish to return the money you gave me for going to the Metropole. Four dollars I spent on drinks, and I did so in your service. But the remainder I did not earn, and I beg you to take it back."

After several protestations, Harith accepted the money. And then he waited, curious as to why Prokopulous had done this, and wondering what would follow.

Prokopulous said, "Tell me truthfully, Mustapha ibn Harith, has my information been worth the money you have paid me?"

"Your price was high," Harith said, "but the information was worth it."

"And have I not returned your money when I could *not* deliver promised information?"

"You have."

"Then this is what I ask," Prokopulous said. "I am certain that I can identify Dain. All I need is more time with the Europeans, time to see how they act, time to strike a few of them off my list of possibilities. One evening was not enough; a man cannot do everything in one evening. But if I accompanied you and the Europeans to Khartoum—"

"At my expense," Harith suggested ironically.

"Not at all!" Prokopulous said. "At *my* expense, my own personal expense, done out of a sense of duty and love for you."

"That is very generous of you," Harith said. "It is a princely offer, Mr. Prokopulous."

"I only wish to do the proper thing by you and by myself," Prokopulous said. "My pride has been touched; I do not want to leave this matter unfinished. I feel this so deeply that I offer—I insist—upon paying my own expenses. If I fail to find which man is Dain, I would not ask you for a penny. It would be beneath my dignity to ask."

"And if you succeed?" Harith asked.

"In that case," Prokopulous said, "I hope you would want to pay my expenses. Your honor would demand it, since I traveled in your service."

"Very true."

"Beyond that, I throw myself completely upon your well-known generosity. If I am successful and you wish to reward me, that will only be just. Whether it be seven hundred dollars or six hundred dollars, or even five hundred dollars, I shall not argue or complain. You hold your honor in your own hands, Mustapha ibn Harith, and no man can preserve it better than you."

Harith nodded abstractedly, figuring and re-figuring costs. Five hundred dollars was about a hundred and seventy-four Egyptian pounds; a heavy sum to give the Greek dog. Still, it was one that he would pay. His honor required that of him—if he paid anything at all.

"I am very moved by your generous offer," Harith said. "Successful or not, I would gladly pay your expenses; I cannot, since this would go against your honor. But I *will* pay for success, and my reward will not be stingy."

Prokopulous bowed deeply and said, "I expected no less from the great Mustapha ibn Harith of the Rifaa."

Harith bowed in return. He asked, "Can you arrange for a seat on the European bus?"

"I have already done so," Prokopulous said, "in the earnest hope that you would accept my further services."

Both men bowed again and exchanged compliments. As Prokopulous prepared to leave, Harith asked him, "Tell me, have you ever heard of a man named Saleh Mohammed el Tikheimi?"

"I have heard of him," Prokopulous said slowly.

"Do you know where he is?"

"I have heard rumors that he is in Tibesti or Borkou."

"And do you know why el Tikheimi has come to this part of Africa?"

"I have heard certain rumors," Prokopulous said.

"What do you think of el Tikheimi?"

"I have never met him. I only know what I hear in the market, where they say he is a dangerous man with a smooth tongue, a cruel and impious man, and a bad man to cross in business."

"What they say is true," Harith said. "I am happy to see that el Tikheimi's reputation clings to him like the smell of carrion clings to a vulture. Would you like to aid me against this man, Mr. Prokopulous?"

"They say he is very dangerous," Prokopulous said.

"He is a bad Moslem. That should be reason enough for a true upholder of Islam."

"Yes, of course."

"And the man who helps me against el Tikheimi—not just by words, but by deeds, when the time comes—that man may count himself the master of my purse." Harith paused to let that sink in. Then, more specifically, he added, "If I would pay five hundred dollars for help against this American agent, I could pay no less for assistance against the accursed dog el Tikheimi."

"Your generosity is breath-taking," Prokopulous said fervently. "You know I wish to be your servant in all matters. My wholehearted assistance is yours without reserve, Mustapha ibn Harith!"

Harith thanked him, and Prokopulous left to catch a few hours of sleep before his dawn departure on the bus.

Within his house, Harith smiled and poured himself a cup of coffee.

In the darkness of Fort Lamy's streets, Mr. Prokopulous was also smiling.

## **August 5, 1952—OMDURMAN**

### **I**

The Sudanese sergeant of police was tall and powerfully constructed. Above him, a ceiling fan sent out stifling waves of summer heat. In front of his desk, standing with head bent and eyes downcast, was the foreigner named Auda. This was the man's tenth or twelfth visit, and as usual, the sight of him filled the sergeant with an angry, baffled feeling of impotence.

"Is there any news yet?" Auda asked.

"No news, no news at all," the sergeant bellowed. He was a kindly man, and he tried to hide his kindness behind a loud voice and crude manners.

"Surely the pilgrim caravans know something," Auda said.

The sergeant shook his head impatiently, wondering if all Nigerians were as stubborn as this one. Auda was very much an alien to him; even his Arabic was difficult to follow, not like the lucid Arabic of the Sudan.

"Perhaps there has been some report from the seaports," Auda suggested.

"I tell you, nothing!" the sergeant shouted. "If I had heard anything of Mustapha ibn Harith, I would tell you. But there is nothing." He glared at Auda, who stood motionless with eyes downcast and head bowed. It was the correct posture for a supplicant; but somehow, Auda made it look as if his head were bent merely to look for some lost object on the floor. Really, the sergeant thought, this man is insufferable.

Still, without that kind of stubborn spirit, he could never have escaped enslavement in Saudi Arabia. When Auda had first told his story to the Omdurman police, it had caused quite a stir. In the administrative capital of Khartoum, a mile away, Auda's presence had been requested. The senior British inspector of police had interviewed him, many telegrams had been sent, and there had been telephone calls to French West Africa and Libya. But no one had been able to do anything about Harith, and the case had faded from sight like a thousand other one-day sensations. Omdurman was a

large city, the greatest in Africa next to Cairo. Every day brought new problems and new iniquities. Auda's case had disappeared into a gray steel file drawer, but Auda hadn't disappeared. Even now, almost a year later, he was still coming to the police station, his head inclined out of respect but not bowed. The sergeant liked this young man, so he put on his sternest face whenever Auda came to the station.

"There's nothing to be done," the sergeant said. "Why don't you leave the city? Why don't you return to your own country?"

"Not yet," Auda said. "Not until the insult has been wiped out."

"The police will wipe out the insult."

"That is what I was told last year," Auda said.

"You must realize—"

"I realize that Africa is very large," Auda said. "And I know that Harith is only one man among millions. The police told me that last year. They also told me that they have a great deal of other work to do, and that Harith might be living in any one of a dozen countries."

"If you know all that," the sergeant asked, "why do you stay here?"

"I think he will come back to Omdurman. And I must see the insult wiped out, or wipe it out myself."

It was within the sergeant's power to have Auda deported. He knew that the man had no papers, no passport or visa, and no legal business in the Sudan. But he also knew that he would not deport him. The workings of justice were important to the sergeant, and he understood what slavery meant to a proud young man like Auda. If blood was shed, it was on Harith's own head.

"I can't help you," the sergeant said. "I am sorry."

Auda thanked the sergeant and left. He had grown fond of the man over the past months. In spite of the sergeant's roaring and shouting—in terrible Arabic—he was a good man, and trying to help.

Auda went through the crowded alleys of Omdurman to a small blacksmith's shop near the Mahdi's tomb. He had been very lucky to find employment there. The pay was barely enough to feed him; but it kept him alive, and gave him something to do while he waited for Harith.

The owner of the shop was a Hausa ironworker from Kano, who had come to the Sudan to make his fortune. He had found conditions for a small business not much better than in Nigeria. People paid less for good ironwork than they did in Kano; but at least there was a steady stream of customers,

Arabs from Cairo and Jidda, slim, quiet Shilluk and Nuer tribesmen, Bagarra Arabs from the north. The Sudanese tribes knew that their country would soon be freed from British rule, and they were arming. No one knew why the arms were necessary; but a thousand rumors were whispered in the bazaars, and prudent men bought cartridges for ancient Lee-Enfields, sharpened old family swords, or had new swords and daggers forged.

The Hausa merchant—Auda had recognized him at once by his turban—had sworn that he needed an employee as badly as he needed a dose of the pestilence. But of course, being a Hausa, he had preferred hiring a Fulani rather than a man of the Sudanese tribes. So Auda operated the leather bellows, stoked the charcoal fire, and occasionally was allowed to hammer out the crude shapes of sword or dagger, although the Hausa always did the finishing work himself. This dirty iron-shaping was not congenial work for a man who had once been an assistant truck driver; but it was the best Auda could find.

"Any news?" the blacksmith asked when Auda entered the shop.

"Nothing."

"Well, Africa is very large, and this Harith could be anywhere."

"I know, I know," Auda said.

"Then why don't you forget him? God will punish the man."

"Punishment is in the hands of God," Auda said, "that is true. But there is blood between Harith and me, and nothing can change that. The justice of God is sure; but sometimes He chooses a man to be His instrument."

"That sounds like blasphemy," the blacksmith said. "If not, it's foolishness. Suppose you find Harith, suppose you kill him? Then the police will hang you. What kind of a revenge is that?"

"The best I can hope for," Auda said.

The blacksmith was a burly, cheerful man, and he had grown fond of his assistant. Auda never asked for higher wages, and he worked as many hours as he was asked. Also, he himself was a Kano man, and the Fulani were kin to the Hausa.

"Foolishness!" the blacksmith said. "Revenge is for the rich, Auda. You would do better to forget this man and attend to your work."

"I do all the work you ask of me," Auda said.

"I have no complaints. But since my wife died, I have

been alone in this foreign country. I don't complain, I'm not lonely. But I can't live forever, and I would like to pass on my business to a countryman, since I can't pass it on to a relative. There is no reason why we couldn't be partners after a few years. There is no reason why you shouldn't have the business after I die, if you could stop dreaming of your impossible revenge."

Auda found it hard to repress a smile. He was an assistant truck driver who understood the mysteries of the Ford, and who only needed to take his examination to be a fully qualified driver. It was very like a Hausa to think that any man would leap at the chance to squat for twelve hours a day in his own dusty little shop. But the blacksmith had meant the offer as a compliment, and Auda was grateful. A Hausa blacksmith simply couldn't understand what revenge meant to a full-blooded Fulani.

"Thank you," Auda said. "I am very grateful to you. But I must wipe out the insult. After that, I will go home."

"If the police don't have other ideas."

"Of course," Auda said.

The blacksmith shook his head. These Fulanis would never be civilized, they would always have their revenges and their blood feuds. They still remembered when they had been the conquerors of West Africa. It was ridiculous; the Hausa had also conquered West Africa, but those days were gone, and the Hausa did not live in the past. In his mind, the blacksmith could see Auda mounting the scaffold, his eyes calm and proud, knowing only that he had killed his enemy and that now the police were going to kill him. It would be a very great waste.

"Well, do as you wish," the blacksmith said. "But in the name of God, take care! If you ever find this man, choose your time and place with care. Strike like a shadow, and escape before the cry is raised."

"When I find him," Auda said, "I will kill him in any way that seems worthy."

There was no arguing with this stubborn young man. He seemed determined to end his life on a scaffold. The blacksmith sighed heavily and told Auda to heat up the fire. Two daggers had to be forged that afternoon.

## II

On August 5, just after dawn, the pilgrims left Fort Lamy. There were nearly four hundred of them squeezed into eight



trucks, and they knew that this was the real beginning of their hadj. Everything before had seemed preparatory and tentative; not even those who had traveled a thousand miles from Upper Volta or Togoland to Harith's collection point at Fort Lamy had considered themselves truly embarked upon the pilgrimage until now. Nearly all of them were from small villages. They had come from west and south, men, women, and children from Volta, Nigeria, Dahomey, from the Cameroons, from Ubangi-Shari in the southern Chad, and from the northern provinces of the Belgian Congo. Now their journey lay due east, to Mecca and the holy cities of Arabia. They were filled with wonder that the trip had actually begun.

Discoveries were being made in the crowded trucks. Nearly every man found himself crowded in with strangers from a dozen countries, speaking a babel of twenty different languages. The white-gowned men of the north, from villages near Timbuktu, Mopti, Gao, Ougadougou, and Kano, could hardly believe that the men of the south were true Moslems. The southern men, from villages near Yaounde, Fort Archambault, Bangui, and Brazzaville, suspected the northerners of aping Arab ways. Yet they were all on the pilgrimage together, and all were brothers in Islam. The Faith alone made it possible for Fulani to ride with Yao, Hausa with Songhay, Yoruba with Ashanti. Islam opened the doors of the world to them, made them brothers, and carried them to a common goal.

These marvels were possible only through the generosity of Mustapha ibn Harith. The four hundred pilgrims knew this, and they took care to remember Harith in their prayers.

The pilgrim trucks were led by Harith in his Land Rover, with Prokopulous sitting beside him. Then came a truckload of French soldiers, and then the bus hired by the Europeans.

Because of the heavy July rains, they took the northern road by way of Moussoro, avoiding Lake Fitri and the flooded Batha River. Their road led along the edge of the Sahara, across a flat sandy plain dotted with thorn bushes. Their luck was good; in the first hundred miles, they were only delayed once, at a flooded wadi. After passing Aouni, they traveled at good speed, reaching Ati during the night.

Here they stopped to rest and refuel. After a talk with Harith, Prokopulous went to visit the Europeans. He found them in varying degrees of ill-humor; a springless Fort Lamy bus was not the best vehicle for the trip to El Fasher.

Mr. Prokopulous sympathized. And he had a practical suggestion to make.

"My associate, Mr. Harith, has very generously put his Land Rover at your service. He thinks you will find it more comfortable than the bus."

"That is very kind of him," Dr. Eberhardt said. "But we cannot all fit."

"No, that is unfortunately true. But half of your group can be seated with some comfort. Mr. Harith suggests that four go with him as far as Abeche, and then the other three ride from Abeche to El Fasher."

"Sounds fine to me," Ott said. "Who'll go on the first stretch?"

"That, of course, is for you to decide," said Prokopulous.

After some discussion, they drew matchsticks. In the first group were the two Paraguayans, the American engineer, and the British major. They left their baggage in the bus and went to the Land Rover. Prokopulous was well pleased. Now he would be able to talk to each group for eight or ten hours, to listen while they spoke to each other, and to observe each man at leisure. Between Fort Lamy and El Fasher, he was sure he would learn which of these men was Stephen Dain.

He introduced the four Europeans to Harith, who bowed gravely and welcomed them in bad French. At dawn, they set out for Abeche.

### III

"Were you stationed long in the Sudan?" Prokopulous asked the British major.

"I suppose you might call it a fair length of time," said Major Harkness. Prokopulous waited, but the major didn't elaborate. He had turned and was staring out the window of the Land Rover at the monotonous yellow and gray plain. The two Paraguayans were talking in Spanish. The engineer was lighting a cigarette.

"You must have had some very interesting experiences," Prokopulous said, trying a little desperately to start a conversation. Hardly any words had been exchanged since they left Ati.

"Well, I don't know. I've had the usual sort of experiences," Major Harkness said, not turning from the window, and not saying anything more. He had the sort of mild, impenetrable manner which Prokopulous associated with all Englishmen. He was very polite; but his modest replies smothered any attempt at a conversation. He was impossible; but McCue

the engineer wouldn't answer a civil question, and the two Paraguayans were laughing about something in Spanish. There had to be conversation. With hatred in his heart, Prokopulous said, "Have you enjoyed living in the Sudan, Major?"

"Well, yes, it's quite an interesting country."

"But there isn't much in the way of cinema or theater," Prokopulous said, forcing a little laugh. "Don't you miss those things?"

"I haven't really thought about them much one way or the other," said Major Harkness. The little trickle of conversation was lost. The major continued to stare out the window, evidently interested in the unchanging landscape. Prokopulous couldn't decide whether he had been insulted or not. The Land Rover lurched over the deeply rutted road, and the Europeans sat like mourners in a funeral hearse.

After five minutes of silence, and with no sign of self-consciousness, Harkness said, "Theater's not very much my sort of thing. But I do enjoy hunting."

"Oh?" said Prokopulous.

"Yes. The Sudan is a fine place for hunting, especially in the Upper Nile Province. It's not what it was ten years ago, but it's still the best hunting in Africa."

Prokopulous was amazed at this unprovoked burst of volubility. He knew nothing about hunting; he couldn't understand why some men like to go out and shoot animals. To keep the conversation going, Prokopulous asked, "Have you hunted in other parts of Africa?"

"Yes. Mainly in East Africa."

Colonel Ribera had looked up with interest at the first mention of hunting. He asked, "Then you have hunted in Kenya?"

"Yes," said Major Harkness.

"I plan to hunt in Kenya," Ribera said. "Also Tanganyika. After Aden, I plan to hunt extensively in East Africa."

Prokopulous sat up straighter.

"I had hoped to hunt in Yemen," Ribera said, "but I was refused a visa. Still, there are superb gazelle in the Aden Protectorate."

"There's oryx, too," Harkness said. "Perhaps we could go out together sometime."

"Major Harkness," said Ribera, "it would be my very great pleasure if you would accompany me on a hunt."

"Well, fine, we'll really have to fix it up."

Prokopulous said to the American engineer, "Excuse me, sir, but are you also a sportsman?"

McCue looked up, a frown on his hard, tanned face. "No," he said. "I don't hunt."

"Nor I," Prokopulous said. "But still, there are other things to do in the world. The Sudan is fascinating. And Arabia! Arabia is a land of enchantment."

"Do you think so?" McCue asked.

"I have never been there, but that is what I was told."

"Then you've been told a lie," McCue said. "Arabia's a wasteland. It's good for nothing but the oil underneath."

"It is a barren country," Prokopulous agreed. "But the people—"

"A few of them are rich," McCue said, "and the rest are damned near starving. I also noticed that most of the kids have trachoma."

"If you feel that way, why are you going back to Arabia?"

"Because I've been sent there," McCue said. "My company is constructing a new breakwater in Jidda harbor."

"Jidda can be uncomfortable, especially in the summer."

"It's uncomfortable all year around," McCue said. He had become affable; he seemed happy only when he was talking about things he disliked.

"What will you do when you finish the Jidda breakwater?"

"How should I know? I'll go where the company sends me. The world is full of hot, dull, disease-ridden places, and I'll probably see most of them."

"Perhaps your luck will improve," Prokopulous said. "Perhaps your company will let you work in your own country, near your home."

"That's unlikely. They've got a million engineers in California."

"Still, one may hope. I have been told that California is very beautiful."

"You were told correctly. It's great. Personally, I hope I never see it again."

"I am afraid I do not understand, sir."

"Forget it," McCue said. "I simply like working abroad in places like Jidda. Trachoma, filariasis, double pay, and traveling allowance. It's a good deal."

He turned away. Prokopulous didn't know what to think of this outburst. The man might be unbalanced. He might also be acting.

The engineer, the Paraguayans, and the British major were all going to the Arabian peninsula. Who might be going out of the other group?

It was nearly noon, and the overheated desert air poured through the open windows. Prokopulous could barely keep

his eyes open. Echeverria was asleep; McCue sat with downcast eyes; Ribera and Harkness were discussing rifles and cartridges.

Harith, at the wheel of the Land Rover, asked in Arabic, "What did they say?"

"They talked about hunting and engineering," Prokopulous said.

"Do you think one of them is the American agent?"

"I want to speak to the other group first," Prokopulous said.

Harith nodded. The Land Rover speeded on toward the Sudan frontier, followed by the bus and the eight pilgrim trucks.

#### IV

The truckload of French soldiers left the travelers at Abeche, turning north to relieve the Borkou outposts. The travelers had a four-hour rest before pushing on for the easy run to Geneina in the Sudan. They were in the true Sahara now, and there was no sign that a rainy season had ever existed. The soil was gray and infertile; every year the sands crept further south, threatening the sparse millet fields. Only a few clumps of trees broke up the harsh yellows and browns of the countryside. Abeche itself was a dreary place of camels, sheep, and mud huts. It had a French army post built of unburnt brick, looking very much like the Hollywood concept of the Foreign Legion headquarters at Sidi-bel-Abbes.

The first group of Europeans went back to their bus, and the second group entered the Land Rover. Soon they had left the town behind them, and were driving over a flat plateau toward distant gray mountains.

Prokopulous found that conversation was not the problem it had been with the first group. Dr. Eberhardt wanted to talk about Africa's archeological riddles. He picked Charles Ott, the nervous South Rhodesian, for his audience, assuming that Ott would have a natural interest in the prehistory of his country. Accordingly, Dr. Eberhardt spoke of ancient Mapungubwe, on the border between South Africa and Rhodesia, and the great kingdom of Monomopata, which once stretched from the Transvaal to the Belgian Congo. Ott listened apathetically, trapped by the other man's obsession. But he became interested when Eberhardt told him about the gold found at Zimbabwe. There had been a great deal of gold, more of it at Mapungubwe, and golden artifacts had been discovered at Niekerk and Inyanga in Southern Rhodesia.

When he heard this, Ott said that archeology didn't sound bad; he wouldn't mind taking a crack at it himself.

Prokopulous was content for the moment to listen and observe. He was interested in the Dutchman, Lorens van Haarnin, who had described himself as a tourist. He was a tall, lean, powerful-looking man, deeply tanned. There was a small scar on the back of his left hand; it looked like an old knife wound. He carried two cameras and a light meter, and he told Prokopulous that he occasionally sold some pictures to Dutch magazines. But so far, Prokopulous hadn't seen him take a single shot. He was a calm-looking man, one who looked dependable in an emergency. Prokopulous thought he had a hint of violence about him. He had also noticed this quality in Ribera and McCue, and in Charles Ott. The quality seemed to differ in each of them. The Paraguayan gave the impression of a cool, vicious immorality. The American engineer was more obviously looking for a fight. In Ott, the violence hinted at treachery. And in van Haarnin, it seemed to be under careful control, ready to be used when necessary.

But all of this probably meant nothing, Prokopulous told himself. These were impressions, not backed by facts. Still, he had nothing to go on but his impressions. Following them, he had tentatively scratched three men from his list of suspects. Dr. Eberhardt seemed too old; Major Harkness and Captain Echeverria weren't tall enough.

That left four suspects: McCue, Ott, Ribera, and van Haarnin. Two of these men were going to Arabia: Ribera to Aden, and McCue to Jidda. Ott was going to Beirut, and van Haarnin was going to Cairo. On the face of it, the two going to Arabia were most suspect. But were they? Perhaps they were really the most innocent. A man can say he is going to Cairo or Beirut, and then go somewhere else instead. A police agent might do that.

Prokopulous felt a sudden annoyance at the imponderables he had to deal with. Dain was only a part of his problem; there was also el Tikheimi, probably somewhere to the north, traveling toward Omdurman. There was Harith himself, not to be trusted for an instant. And there was something else, something about the four suspects, something important. It was a fleeting thought; it had to do with Dain's work at El Gezira, his long stay in the Canaries, and then his sudden departure for Dakar. What was it? What part of that trip had taken on a new significance? He almost had it . . .

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Prokopulous," van Haarnin said. "Is that Adre ahead?"

Prokopulous looked up and saw a rose and orange town on a slight rise. Many of the houses had overhanging roofs of slate or tile. It looked like a European village.

"Yes," said Prokopulous, "that is Adre." He searched for the elusive thought, but it was gone. Perhaps it had never existed.

"It is cooler here," van Haarnin said. "And the town is very pretty."

"It is," Prokopulous said. "Would you like Mr. Harith to stop so you can take a picture?"

"No, no," van Haarnin said. "I have seen a thousand places like it. I usually don't bother with landscapes or architecture."

"What do you like to take pictures of?" Prokopulous asked.

"People," van Haarnin said. "I am fascinated with the faces of people. Every man's history is written on his face."

"So it is said."

"And sometimes the history of his country or race is written there as well," van Haarnin said. "It is easy enough to read a man's past in his face; sometimes one can read his future there."

Charles Ott asked, "Do you need both cameras for this fortune-telling?"

"Not really. But for a portrait, I like to use the Rollei. For candid shots, I have my Leica. Often the only way to catch a face is by surprise."

"Very interesting," Prokopulous said.

"I am glad you find it so," van Haarnin said. "You must allow me to take your picture, Mr. Prokopulous. I will mail you a print when I have the pictures developed in Europe."

Prokopulous frowned and said, "I am sure that would be very nice. Do you find a history in my face?"

"Every face has a history. But yours seems very complicated."

"This sounds like a lot of mystic stuff to me," Ott said. "D'you want my picture, too?"

"I already have it," van Haarnin said.

"What do you mean?"

"I took the liberty of snapping a candid snapshot of you in Fort Lamy. I hope you don't mind."

"Why should I mind?" Ott said, sounding as if he did mind. "Did you take a picture of Mr. Harith, too? There's a face with some history on it."

Van Haarnin glanced toward the driver's seat, where Harith sat silently behind the steering wheel.

"No," van Haarnin said. "I have not taken his picture. But I would like to, if he would not mind."

"Personally," said Dr. Eberhardt, "I see no sense in photography except for scientific classification."

"That is not an unusual view," van Haarnin said pleasantly.

They had gone through Adre. The frontier lay ahead, marked by a deserted guard hut. They passed it and were in the Sudan. Prokopulous thought about the conversation with van Haarnin. He hadn't liked it, and he assuredly didn't want his picture taken. Why had van Haarnin spoken about it? Would a secret agent do that to unnerve his enemy? Or had it been the innocent request of a tourist?

They passed Geneina and began to climb. They were in a mountainous country of tortured rock and dried-out wadis. The Land Rover's springs were put to hard use as the wheels slammed in and out of potholes. They climbed for nearly five hours, and just after sunset they came onto a high plateau. The air was very fresh and clear, like the air of an alpine meadow. The town of Kebkabiya was at the end of the plateau. All the vehicles refueled there, and the passengers ate and dozed in the cafés until dawn.

At first light they were on the road again, descending now through a dangerous tangle of boulders, the trucks whining in low gear, the brakes squealing and threatening to fade. They came out on another plateau, larger than the first. It was dotted with shrubs and thorn trees; far ahead lay a series of round-topped dunes. They came closer and saw the city of El Fasher surrounded by low hills.

They would stop here for a day or two; and here, Prokopulous told himself, the matter of Dain would be resolved. The man should be killed during this stopover. It was urgent to strike now, while they were still six hundred miles from Khartoum and the central police bureau. But which of the Europeans should die?

Prokopulous had been thinking about the travelers ever since meeting them in Fort Lamy. He had weighed their traits and actions against the few facts he possessed about Dain. He had measured each of them against his concept of a secret agent. Now, as they entered El Fasher, he came to a conclusion.



## **August 8, 1952——EL FASHER**

### **I**

The Europeans checked into the White Nile Hotel in El Fasher. They rested in their rooms during the heat of the day, planning to visit the airline offices in the late afternoon. Both Sudan Airways and Ethiopian Airways made scheduled flights between El Fasher and Khartoum. It seemed doubtful that any space would be available during the time of the pilgrimage, but the attempt had to be made.

Doctor Eberhardt sat at his writing desk and opened a map showing the Sudan from Upper Nile Province north to the Egyptian border, and extending east from Darfur Province across the Red Sea to Arabia. Eberhardt had marked the map with red dots showing the sites of Sabaeen ruins in southern Arabia. He tapped the map with a pencil, first his destination, Meroe, and then Dobarra near Suakin. He frowned at the map for a long time, then put it away. His face was taut with annoyance.

Major Harkness had finished reading a week-old English newspaper. As usual, the world was filled with nothing but trouble. There was a revolution reported in Egypt; Farouk deposed, someone named Naguib in power. Deepening crisis over French rule in Tunisia. Border incidents in Sinai. Acts of terrorism in Kenya by a group calling itself "Mau-Mau." Korean truce talks still deadlocked.

Folding his newspaper carefully, Harkness lay down on his bed and closed his eyes. In a few minutes he was asleep.

Van Haarnin had fitted a 135 millimeter lens to his Leica. He sat in a chair by the window, watching the entrance of the hotel below.

McCue was studying a survey report on Jidda harbor. A letter dropped out of the report. It was postmarked Cape-town, and it had caught up to him in Dakar. He put the

letter back in the report and closed his eyes, but couldn't sleep.

Ribera and Echeverria shared a double room. They talked about Paraguay until Echeverria dozed off. Then Ribera took an Arabic grammar out of his luggage and tried to study it. He put it aside in a few minutes and opened a standard work on hunting in East Africa.

Charles Ott watched a lizard move across his wall, stalking a large fly with iridescent wings. As the lizard moved close enough to use its long, coiled tongue, the fly flew away.

"Tough luck, old man," Ott said to the lizard. He hung his lightweight jacket over a chair. From an inside breast pocket he removed a small, flat .32 caliber Beretta automatic. He removed the clip and the round in the chamber, clicked the trigger several times, then stripped the gun down. He cleaned the Beretta with a small brush, a cotton patch, and a bottle of oil, humming softly to himself as he worked. He wiped off the excess oil, reassembled the gun, tested the trigger pull, reloaded, and put the gun back in its goatskin holster.

He lay back on his bed and stared at the ceiling. He appeared to be deep in concentration; but within ten minutes the heat was making him drowsy. He put his jacket beside him on the bed, loosened his shoelaces, and went to sleep.

Prokopulous was also staying at the White Nile Hotel. He had no time for a siesta, since he had a great deal of work to do during the stopover at El Fasher. He left his room and went to the house where Harith was staying. He told Harith his ideas and plans, and Harith nodded. There was no sign of interest or worry on that dark, controlled face. Harith was letting Prokopulous do his worrying for him.

Prokopulous, who liked no one, decided that he detested Harith. It seemed to him that all Arabs, black or white, Moslem or Christian, had at least one quality in common: they liked to pretend that they were gods, superhuman in their patience and in their passion. They pretended this, but there was no real calm about them. They were more volatile than Latins, even when they were trying to be as steadfast as a rock. Like children, they exaggerated their rages and despairs. They swore by God and their sacred honor, and they never kept their word. Their courage was dubious, and their wisdom was even less sure. Only their cruelty

couldn't be doubted; they were unexcelled as torturers of dumb animals and helpless men.

This was Prokopulous's view of his employer. His concept of Europeans could be equally harsh. It all depended on who was employing him.

Harith, dressed in flowing white robes and the green turban of a hadji, gave his approval to Prokopulous's intricate schemes. He understood this Greek. You could do business with him, but you could never turn your back on him. He would do anything for money, but there wasn't enough money in the world to buy his loyalty. Fear alone could make him trustworthy; and fear, like love, had constantly to be nourished.

"I think your plan sounds excellent," Harith said. "And the man you mention may well be the American agent. But I would like more certainty before moving against him."

"What certainty can I bring you?" Prokopulous asked. "Will he have a card in his wallet marked 'Stephen Dain, Secret Service Agent'? Will he have a code book in his luggage, or a badge, or a letter from his chief in Washington?"

"Don't play the fool," Harith said. "I know there will be no direct evidence, but there may be some indication. I want to be sure that I don't get the wrong man."

"Your scruples do you honor," Prokopulous said, with a straight face.

Harith looked at him solemnly for several moments. Then he said, "The air of the high country has gone to your head, Mr. Prokopulous. It makes you gay—and stupid. It forces me to state the obvious. The death of one European traveling across Africa can be explained; the authorities will make out a report and that will be the end of it. But you suspect four men, and we cannot have four tragic mishaps between here and Khartoum. There would be delay, which I cannot afford. Do you see the situation, Mr. Prokopulous?"

"Yes, I see it."

"Then remember it. Gather all the information you can."

"And suppose I find nothing more?"

"Then strike as we have planned."

"Very well," Prokopulous said. "Soon the siesta ends, and the Europeans go to the airline office to find out if they can arrange a flight. Then, tonight . . ."

Harith smiled and nodded. Prokopulous smiled and gave a little bow. They took courteous leave of each other.

## II

In the late afternoon, the European travelers went to the building shared by Sudan and Ethiopian Airways. They found a large crowd lined up at the counters. There were ragged Arabs from northern Darfur, and recent converts from Bahr el Ghazal. There was a scattering of sheikhs and merchants from Dirra, Menawashei, and Gedid Ras el Fil. All of them wanted tickets to Mecca. It was August 8, fifteen days before the Faithful had to be in the courtyard of the Masjid-al-Haram in Mecca. If a man arrived one day after the twelfth day of the Moslem month of Dhu 'l-Hijja, his hadj was worthless. He could still perform the ummra, the little pilgrimage; but this could be done at any time of the year. It was no substitute for the basic religious obligation of the hadj.

By land, fifteen days was barely enough time in which to cross the thousand miles between El Fasher and Mecca. This was especially true during the rainy season, when no road could be depended on, when even the railroad to Port Sudan was sometimes washed out. For most Moslems, the hadj was performed only once in a lifetime; so the airline building was filled not only with the wealthy, but with any pilgrims who had saved or borrowed the price of a ticket to Jidda.

The Europeans were dismayed. The situation looked bad; but it would be worse in El Obeid, and still worse in Khartoum. Would they have to wait another fifteen days, until the last tardy pilgrim had been flown to Arabia? They told each other that it wasn't possible. They inched forward patiently on the line, sick of busses and trucks, of swollen rivers and burning land. Some of them were willing to take a ticket to any civilized city in Africa or Europe. Their chances didn't look good, but they stayed on the line, inching forward, preparing their requests and pleas.

Prokopulous put this time to good advantage. He wanted to go through the Europeans' rooms, and he arranged this in his usual competent fashion. After a little haggling, the Egyptian hotel manager accepted a three-pound gratuity, for which he loaned Prokopulous his passkey. The head bell-boy required ten shillings; and for half a crown more, he personally stood guard at the head of the stairs, where he could watch the street entrance and warn Prokopulous if any

of the Europeans returned unexpectedly. To use his time to best advantage, Prokopulous decided to search only the rooms of his principal suspects, beginning with Mr. van Haarnin.

The Dutchman's cameras had apparently gone with him to the airline building, but Prokopulous did find an extra telescopic lens. In the bottom of van Haarnin's trunk there was a heavy oiled box containing several dozen rounds for a .38 revolver. Concealed in a slit in the mattress was a tin box containing four tiny rolls of film. The film was too small even for van Haarnin's Leica. Prokopulous knew that it must fit an even smaller camera, one of the little spy cameras like the Minox. On general principles, Prokopulous exposed the film to the light, then put it back where he had found it. He moved into the hall.

The bellboy nodded that everything was all right, so Prokopulous went next into the room shared by Colonel Ribera and Captain Echeverria. He found a month-old Paraguayan newspaper, two decks of Argentinian playing cards, several paperback Spanish novels, and a letter postmarked Asunción, written in Spanish, from a woman named Nieves.

Echeverria's shoes came from Uruguay; Ribera's were British-made, and his uniforms had been tailored in Saville Row. There were three rifles of various calibers, all British-made. Thrown over a chair was the jacket which Ribera had worn the other day. It was British; the inside left breast pocket had been stretched out of shape. It could have been stretched by a gun. Prokopulous sniffed at the pocket and detected a faint trace of oil. Gun oil? Or hair oil?

He went through the rifle cases and found the cleaning kits. He examined the brushes and sniffed at the bottle of oil. The smell was the same as the faint odor in the jacket. Ribera carried a hand weapon.

A further search revealed nothing except a batch of twenty pornographic photographs hidden in the spine of a book on horsemanship. Prokopulous was something of an expert on pornographic pictures, and he studied these carefully. They weren't bad at all. He replaced them and moved on.

His next stop was the room of the American engineer. It was filled with worn luggage, and the luggage was filled with worn clothing. There was one good suit, made in Hong Kong, and a tweed jacket made in Scotland. Everything was packed with military neatness.

Prokopulous found three books on the table; they were in English, and they seemed to be about engineering. There was a report, also in English, about Jidda harbor. Prokop-

ulous couldn't decipher most of the technical words, but the report seemed to be about underwater obstructions. There was an aerial photograph of Jidda, also a map of the city and the harbor.

In the back of the report, Prokopulous found a letter. It was postmarked Capetown, and it was from a man who signed himself Gordon. This Gordon was apologizing to the engineer for marrying a woman named Doris. He hoped that it would not destroy their friendship. He also hoped that McCue would bear them no ill will, and would visit them in Santa Barbara whenever he could, since he would always be welcome.

Prokopulous went through McCue's luggage, his clothing, the bureau drawers, the mattress and pillow, and at last peered under the bed. There he saw two pairs of shoes set neatly side by side. He found nothing in them. One was a pair of lightweight boots, made in England. The other was a pair of heavy, scuffed work shoes. The shoes were unusually heavy. Prokopulous hefted one of them in his hand, pressed down on the heel, sole, side, and toe, then reached inside and pressed the toe again.

There could be no doubt of it; the region of the toe was protected by a curving piece of steel, which was hidden beneath the leather.

He decided to think about that later. Time was running short, and the Europeans might return soon. He left McCue's room and got a reassuring nod from the bellboy.

Dr. Eberhardt was not on his primary list of suspects, but his room was next to McCue's. Prokopulous went in for a fast look.

The first thing he saw was the doctor's map, with red dots in various parts of southern Arabia. At least three of the dots marked slave depots; he didn't know the meaning of the other dots.

Beside the map was a German-Arabic dictionary. In a padded wooden box there was some sort of telescopic instrument, of a kind Prokopulous had never seen before. It had been made in Frankfurt. Prokopulous found various papers in German, which he could not read. There was a leather map case, containing survey maps of the Sudan, Libya, Egypt, and Arabia. Compass readings had been penciled in for Egypt's Western desert, and for the Sudan's Northern and Nubian deserts. Notations had been made, in German, in a small, precise hand, near Jebel Oda and Gabatit in the Nubian mountains.

In Eberhardt's luggage there was a box containing a

compass, a sextant, and several other objects which looked like navigational instruments. There was also a portable radio with a home-made antenna loop, and an automatic pistol. The pistol was a Luger, quite old. It was well greased, and it was not loaded.

His last find was a flare gun and six flares.

Prokopulous found all of this very interesting. He wanted to search further, but he was interrupted by a loud whistle from the hall. Hastily he put the doctor's equipment back in order and left the room. The bellboy was waving at him and making faces; from the stairs, Prokopulous could hear European voices.

He moved quickly to the service stairs at the opposite end of the hallway. He went far enough up to be out of sight, and then he waited.

The Europeans were complaining about their bad luck at the airline building. There was no help for it, they would have to go on by bus to El Obeid, and then take the train to Khartoum. They agreed to meet for dinner in an hour, and one by one their doors opened and closed. At last the hallway was quiet.

Prokopulous sat on the stairs until the bellboy came. He gave him the passkey and another half crown, and waved him away. He was annoyed with himself. He had worked too slowly, not leaving enough time to search the room of one of his major suspects, the Rhodesian, Charles Ott. Perhaps he could do it when the Europeans went to dinner. But perhaps . . .

Prokopulous descended silently to the hallway. It was deserted; the Europeans were in their rooms. Prokopulous went to the head of the stairs. From the lobby, the head bellboy grinned at him. Prokopulous went back down the hall and stood in front of Ott's door. He waited for a moment, then knelt and looked through the keyhole. He felt a slight embarrassment at using such an old-fashioned technique. But, he reminded himself, the old ways were often the best ways, and valuable things could be seen through keyholes.

Ott was sitting on his bed, entirely visible except for the top of his head. His face seemed to have an expression of annoyance, perhaps of fear. His fingertips tapped impatiently against his knees. Prokopulous watched, barely breathing. It was fascinating to watch a man who thought he was unobserved.

Ott rubbed his forehead with his left hand, then tested the stubble on his chin, then rubbed his front teeth

vigorously. He looked down at his right hand, closed it into a fist, opened it again, examined his fingernails, and cleaned them with a matchstick.

He finished that, threw the matchstick away, bent down, and unlaced his shoes. He took his shoes off and wriggled his toes. There was a hole in the big toe of his left sock. He picked up his left shoe and stared at it for several moments, turning it in his hand like a piece of sculpture. He held it at arm's length, then pulled it close. He turned his head and glanced at the shoe out of the corner of his eyes, covertly, as if the shoe were a young maiden. He smiled at the shoe; and only Prokopulous's long experience at keyholes prevented him from thinking that Ott was insane.

Something about the shoe was evidently unsatisfactory. Ott sighed heavily and put it down. Then he picked it up again, glared at it with fierce concentration, and took a folding knife out of his pocket. For a moment Prokopulous thought he was going to stab the offending shoe. Instead, with great delicacy, he pried up the heel. There was a hollow space under the heel, and Ott took a small cloth sack from it. He opened the sack and shook out ten or twelve dull pebbles. Prokopulous had occasionally dealt with such pebbles himself. Even without seeing their special hiding place, Prokopulous would have recognized them as uncut, unpolished diamonds.

Ott looked at the stones for a long time, turning them over and over with a forefinger. Prokopulous, invisible and all-knowing, read the man's face and imagined his thoughts. Ott's eyes dreamed as he touched the stones; he was rich, he was powerful. Then the dream vanished and he was back in El Fasher, a sleepy provincial capital where his bad luck had taken him. Prokopulous could guess what had happened; diamond smuggling was common enough to have its typical story.

Ott was probably a South African who had been employed in the diamond industry. He had made preparations for his theft. At the right time he had acted, then crossed the border into Southern Rhodesia. He must have thought he could fly from Bulawayo to Beirut. Except for the hadj, he could have. But, like the other Europeans—all except Dain—he hadn't taken the hadj into account.

He didn't dare stay in Bulawayo. A diamond thief is followed remorselessly; murder is safer than diamond-stealing in South Africa. So Ott had moved northward in any way he could, coming finally to Fort Lamy. That put him in French territory, nearly three thousand miles from Kimberley or



Pretoria. But he was still in Africa, more conspicuous than ever, and only one or two days' flying time from arrest, extradition, and retribution. The police hadn't caught up to him yet; now was the time for the final flight to safety in Cairo or Beirut. But the last vital flight couldn't be booked.

Ott couldn't stay in Fort Lamy, he had to keep moving. Not south, back toward the pursuing law; not north, a lone Christian trying to cross Borkou and Tibesti and the great expanse of the Sahara; not even west to Dakar, still alone, struggling with inadequate transportation against the wave of Moslem humanity flowing toward the Red Sea. He couldn't be alone, unique, and therefore suspicious. He had to go west to Khartoum, where other Europeans were going. But how he must have hated entering British territory! And now he was in El Fasher, five hundred miles from Khartoum, fifteen hundred miles from Cairo. No wonder the dream had fled, no wonder a look of desperation had taken its place. Prokopulous could readily sympathize; this man had run very far, and he had a long way still to run.

Ott put the diamonds back in their cloth sack. He tied the mouth of the sack tightly, hesitated a moment, then shook his head and put the sack back into the hollow heel of his left shoe. Prokopulous also shook his head. The hollow heel was an old trick; it would never suffice against a suspicious customs official. But then, no other place was any better. What one man hides, another man can find.

He watched as Ott put his shoes back on. Then Prokopulous heard the sound of a chair scraping behind a door on the opposite side of the corridor. He straightened up quickly, smoothed out his jacket, and looked up and down the hallway. No door opened; but opposite him, the transom above the door was open. Prokopulous's feeling of invisibility vanished. He felt suddenly naked and vulnerable. His neck burned, his face was on fire. Had someone been watching him while he had been bent over the keyhole? A man who does not know he is observed is a ridiculous sight: Mr. Prokopulous hurried down the stairs, across the lobby, and into the street. He was sweating from anger and shame, and he was in a murderous mood.

Presently he regained his self-esteem. There was still a final arrangement to be made. After that, in an hour or two, a European would be dead—a man who might very well be Dain. Evidence was difficult to come by, and there could be no certainty in an affair like this. He had chosen as well as he could; and if the wrong man was killed, what then?

It wouldn't matter, Prokopulous told himself. A European

would be dead, and Harith would be satisfied. The payment was the important thing. To that payment he now planned to add Ott's cache of diamonds. The diamonds could be looked upon as his own private windfall.

### III

After dinner, Dr. Eberhardt returned to his room. Ribera went off in search of rumored amusements, accompanied by a sour-faced Echeverria. Major Harkness practiced a lonely game of billiards in the hotel's dimly lit recreation room. After a while he was joined by Ott, restless and ill at ease, playing a very poor game. Van Haarnin and McCue went for a walk in the bazaar.

Even in a city as small as El Fasher, the bazaar was an extensive maze of crowded passageways, blind courtyards, and dead-end streets. The narrow alleys twisted and writhed around each other like a tangle of snakes. It was a miniature of the great bazaar of Omdurman, a city within a city. Illuminated by the moon, by torches, and by an occasional electric light, it was almost picturesque. The narrow winding stone streets and the iron-barred courtyards hinted at medieval romance; but the cesspool smell shouted of unwashed humanity and inadequate sewage disposal. There were many fine faces to be seen in the bazaar—lean and tanned, dark and passionate. But the European eye couldn't avoid the twisted limbs of the crippled, and the scabbed eyes of the children. Even the strong young men sometimes carried the exotic growths of elephantiasis or the commonplace ravages of syphilis. To the European eye, the glamour of the intricate streets and shadowy minarets fell away. The bazaar, above all, seemed a vector of disease.

"It stinks here," McCue said.

"It's even worse in Omdurman," van Haarnin said.

"Yes, I know."

They continued to walk. They were foreign, therefore rich, therefore to be despised, envied, and supplicated. Nothing could relieve their alien quality, and nothing could stop the shopkeepers and the sidewalk salesmen from trying to sell them crude local brasswork, plastic beads from Cairo, wooden figurines from Djibouti, mass-produced camel seats from Damascus, Persian rugs from Alexandria, filigree stamped out in Tripoli, and silverwork made out of any metal with a whitish cast, as long as it was cheap. Pimps proudly touted their venereal girls, and strong beggars shoved aside weak

beggars in order to display the afflictions that gave them a livelihood. But van Haarnin and McCue gave no alms, and didn't even glance at the goods held under their noses or spread out in front of them as they walked. They were experienced travelers, and they resented being taken for tourists. All they desired was to be left alone. They knew that anonymity was impossible; to the people of the bazaar, their shoes alone shrieked wealth. Anonymity was too much to ask; but they did want to be left alone.

That might have been possible in Omdurman or Cairo. But El Fasher was too small a city, and too provincial, to let two stony-faced Europeans pass without trying to sell them something.

"What a hellhole," McCue said.

"Very bad," van Haarnin agreed. They stayed on the outer edge of the bazaar, near the police station and the administration buildings, not attempting to penetrate any deeper. They knew that the inner streets were like the outer ones; narrow and twisting, filled with the greedy, the starving, the deceitful, the diseased. They had seen enough. Already they were transforming the experience into a memory. They recorded the sights, ignored the mob, and talked as though they were alone.

"I could be wrong," van Haarnin said, "but I believe I met you briefly at a cocktail party in Capetown."

"It's possible," McCue said. "I was in Capetown last month. But I don't remember any cocktail party."

"Some other occasion, then," van Haarnin said. "I travel extensively in South Africa."

"Do you live there?"

"No. My home is in Holland, in Rotterdam. But I have extensive business interests in South Africa. Perhaps we met in Johannesburg?"

"Perhaps."

"Or Kimberley?"

"Might be," McCue said. "I was there for a few days."

"Fascinating place," van Haarnin said. "Did you see the diamond fields? What did you think of them?"

"Nice monuments to an unsound economy," McCue said.

"Then you don't like South Africa?"

"It's a beautiful country."

"Now I am sure you don't like South Africa. Are you a liberal? Did *apartheid* disturb you?"

The engineer looked sharply at van Haarnin. "I'm not going to be drawn into any arguments. Let's just say I hate to see a pleasant-looking country setting itself up for a blood bath."

"But everything ends in a blood bath," van Haarnin said. "The only question is, whose blood?"

"That's a great way to look at things," McCue said.

"It is a deplorable outlook," van Haarnin said agreeably. "A shame that it happens to be true."

Before McCue could reply, he found a man plucking at his sleeve. "Sir," the man said in English, "please, sir, very important."

The man wore the uniform of a bellboy from the White Nile Hotel. The engineer said, "What is it?"

"Telegram for you, immediate reply requested. The manager said find you."

"A telegram?" McCue said. "All right, give it to me."

"At hotel, sir. Telegram not paid for, you pay."

"Who is it from?"

"Manager not say. He just say important telegram for American engineer name McCue. And not paid for."

"Who the hell would be sending me a telegram here?" McCue asked. "Are you sure you don't know who it's from?"

"Don't know, only know telegram, very important, not paid for. I bring taxi for you, sir, you pay for that and telegram."

Nearly blocking one of the streets into the bazaar was a large black Citroën. McCue looked at it, then at the bellboy. "Where did the telegram come from?" he asked.

"Don't know, telegram at hotel."

"Could it be from your company?" van Haarnin asked.

"Sure it could. Or it could be from the President. How in hell do I know who'd try to reach me here with a telegram?"

"You come with me to taxi?" the bellboy asked.

"I'm coming," McCue said. "Can I give you a lift?" he asked van Haarnin.

"I don't ride in Arab taxis after dark," van Haarnin said. "Not even with two of us. Personally, I think this whole thing is a hoax."

"Probably. But it might be something important."

"You'd better stay out of that taxi."

"I won't get rolled," McCue said.

"There are worse things."

"Don't worry," McCue said, grinning and putting his right hand in his coat pocket. "They better not try any funny business."

"Still I wouldn't do it."

"Oh hell!" McCue said. "I've been in half of the louse-infested cities of the world. Do you know something?"

"What?"

"The toughest town I ever saw was East St. Louis. I'll

see you at the hotel." He turned to the bellboy. "Lead on, you devious assassin."

Van Haarnin watched as the engineer opened the back door of the Citroën, looked inside, then gestured the bellboy in before him. When McCue got in with his right side to the door, his right hand was still in his pocket. Van Haarnin shook his head and walked on.

The police station was fifty feet ahead of him, and two khaki-clad policemen were standing at the entrance. Van Haarnin thought for a moment, frowning, oblivious to the crowd of vendors pressing around him. Then he nodded his head vigorously and pushed his way through the crowd toward the police station.

Somebody hit him in the side, just under the ribs. Van Haarnin turned angrily, his hand going to his side. He was amazed to find a four-inch length of wood jutting from his jacket. He pulled it out; it was a handle, attached to a slender six-inch length of steel, a round blade half an inch thick at the haft, narrowing to a long darning-needle point. It was a utilitarian object designed solely for quiet murder; a creation lovingly fashioned from an old file and a piece of hard wood; a genuine hand-made artifact; a souvenir to remember forever. Somebody had stabbed him with it.

The crowd knew; they moved back even before van Haarnin felt the first rush of pain. The policemen knew something was wrong; they were running toward him, their Lee-Enfields at the ready. Feeling weak, van Haarnin went down to one knee. He found his revolver in his hand, but he couldn't remember drawing it. His side hurt very badly now. He had taken one little knife wound, not in the heart or lung or throat. But an expert had put the blade in, had hit him in the side and slid the knife home before van Haarnin knew what had happened. An expert had slipped that knife through his side and into his liver—quick and quiet, a mortal wound.

No more than a second or two had passed, but the murderer was safe. He could be any of fifty men in the crowd, an old-world craftsman who would never be caught. In a cold rage, van Haarnin turned in the direction from which he had been knifed. He gripped his revolver with both hands, braced it against his knee and started firing. The crowd screamed; the shrieks for mercy sounded like the shrieks for alms. To hell with them, van Haarnin thought—they all knew what was going on.

His first shot knocked down a middle-aged man with a patch over one eye. His second shot missed a cadaverous Arab and caught an old woman at the base of her spine. With

his third shot he got the cadaverous Arab. He thought, maybe that's the man.

His eyes were filming, but he saw a skinny old man drop a tray of brass jewelry, look uncertainly toward him, then stop to pick it up. Van Haarnin framed the man's head in his sights, but he didn't shoot. No murderer would be idiot enough to stop for a tray of trinkets.

His eyes were going very bad and he felt the revolver buck twice. Then somebody kicked the gun out of his hands. The cops, probably. He wanted to tell them that he still had one bullet left, that it was only fair to let him use it. But he couldn't seem to talk. Fifty feet from a police station, of all the damned things! He wished he hadn't shot the old woman. It had been an accident, he wanted to explain that to someone. He tried once more to speak, but then he lost his balance. He lost consciousness when he hit the ground.

#### IV

"The men are here," the police sergeant said.

"All right, show them in," Hastings told him. The sergeant saluted smartly and went out.

Leslie Hastings was the acting Chief of Police for El Fasher. He was a handsome, slender young man with curly blond hair and blue eyes. He had the anachronistic look of a subaltern in British India; he lacked only a downy mustache and a company of Ghurkas to make the picture complete. His superior had been hospitalized a month ago with multiple fractures resulting from a collision between his car and a bus without brakes. That had left Hastings in charge of the El Fasher Constabulary, and responsible for all breaches of law and order from Geneina to Emm Bel, and from Umm Lahai in the Sahara to Mumallah near the border of Bahr el Ghazal. The square of land he administered was about as large as Denmark. This didn't disturb him; the Sudan itself was ten times the area of Great Britain, and just a little smaller than western Europe. Hastings was twenty-seven years old.

The sergeant returned, ushering in the eight people who had known the deceased. Hastings had interviewed them briefly last night, shortly after van Haarnin's murder. He checked them off his list: Harkness, Ott, McCue, Eberhardt, Ribera, Echeverria, Prokopulous, Harith—from Great Britain, Southern Rhodesia, America, Germany, Paraguay, Greece,

and Saudi Arabia. An interesting lot. He asked to see their papers.

He checked their passports slowly, hoping that one of them would show signs of nervousness. But he noticed nothing significant, and their papers seemed to be in order. Still, he wondered about them. He'd never heard of a Major Harkness stationed six years at Malakal and two years at Wadi Halfa. Couldn't know all the brass, of course, but he'd check it. The German archeologist looked dotty, and he'd bet a month's pay that the Greek trader had a police record somewhere. The American engineer looked all right, and so did the Rhodesian. The two Paraguayans were probably toy soldiers, though the small one looked tough enough. And Mustapha Harith was believed to be a slaver. All in all, a cool-looking bunch. He had a little surprise for them, however. There might be some interesting reactions if he sprung it at the right moment.

"Thank you," Hastings said, returning the papers. "I think we can make this brief. Did any of you know Mr. van Haarnin at all well?"

There was silence for a moment. Then Major Harkness said, "I don't believe any of us did. To the best of my knowledge, we all met for the first time in Fort Lamy."

"That is correct," Ribera said. "We were traveling together to Khartoum."

Hastings waited, but no one added anything else. He said to the engineer, "Mr. McCue, I believe you were the last in this group to see Mr. van Haarnin alive."

"I probably was," McCue said. "We'd been walking together in the bazaar. As near as I can tell, he was killed shortly after I left him."

"Yes, sir. And why did you leave him?"

"A bellboy came for me," McCue said. "He'd brought a taxi, and he said there was a collect telegram waiting for me at the hotel. I offered van Haarnin a lift back."

"Why didn't he take it?"

"I guess he didn't feel like going back just then. He said he never rode in Arab taxis after dark, and he told me to watch out for myself."

"Did there seem to be some specific danger he was hinting at?"

"That wasn't the impression I got. It just sounded like a general sort of warning about the taxi."

"And you disregarded it."

"I wasn't particularly worried," McCue said. "I'm armed. Police Positive .38, with all necessary permits."

"That's a lot of gun," Hastings said.

"I don't think it's too much," McCue said. "A .32 hasn't got the stopping power. I'd say that a short-barreled .38 is just about right for the places my company sends me to."

"I see. And you felt it was necessary to have it in your pocket while crossing Africa?"

"I damned well did," McCue said. "What is this? Do you think I sneaked back and knifed van Haarnin?"

"Of course not. I'm simply trying to find out something about the people van Haarnin knew. We have no idea why he was killed."

"I suppose robbery was not possible," Dr. Eberhardt said tentatively.

"Under the circumstances, no. But getting back to guns, are any of you other gentlemen armed?"

Major Harkness nodded. "Service revolver."

Ribera said, "Aside from three hunting rifles, Echeverria and I each carry a .45 caliber automatic made by the Colt Company of the United States." He smiled at the engineer. "I think you would find that the .45 has considerably more stopping power than the .38, Mr. McCue."

"But less accuracy," McCue said.

Hastings intervened. "Is anyone else armed?"

Prokopulous glanced quickly at Ott and Eberhardt. They remained silent. No permits, Prokopulous thought. He himself disapproved of carrying arms.

"All right," Hastings said, after checking the gun permits. "Now, Mr. McCue, what happened in the taxi?"

"I was taken to the hotel," McCue said. "The manager didn't have any telegram for me, and he hadn't sent a bellboy or a taxi. I figured something was wrong, so I went back to the bazaar. Van Haarnin was dead by the time I got there."

"And you were unable to find the bellboy."

"That's right. Your sergeant lined up all the bellboys working at the hotel, and the man who'd come for me wasn't any of them. But maybe the driver of that black Citroën could tell you something."

"We questioned him earlier," Hastings said. "He's a licensed taxi driver. He remembers taking a bellboy to the bazaar, and then returning to the hotel with both of you. He says that the bellboy went around toward the rear of the hotel. His description of the man is hazy, but it fits what you told me."

"Great," McCue said. "All you have to do is find a short Arab with a fake bellboy's uniform."

"That's about it," Hastings said. "Now, I have a list of



where all of you were at the time of the murder. I'd just like to check it through again."

The eight men gave the same answers they had given last night. Hastings had already made a quick check of their stories. It seemed unlikely that any of them had personally killed van Haarnin.

"I think that pretty well sums it up," Hastings said. "None of you has any idea why van Haarnin was killed, or by whom?"

No one answered. Hastings said, "That's it, then. Thank you for your cooperation." As the travelers prepared to go, Hastings looked through some papers and said, "Oh, there is just one more thing. What line of work did Mr. van Haarnin say he was in?"

"He told me he had business interests in South Africa," McCue said.

"And some days earlier," Dr. Eberhardt said, "he mentioned that he was on vacation from Holland."

"I see," Hastings said. In a quiet voice he told them his little surprise. "I'm afraid that Mr. van Haarnin wasn't being altogether truthful with you. For one thing, his name wasn't van Haarnin. It was Bruno Dietz."

Hastings was watching closely, but he could see nothing beyond mild surprise on the travelers' faces.

"I don't suppose any of you ever heard of Mr. Bruno Dietz?" Hastings asked.

The travelers shook their heads. Hastings said, "This Mr. Dietz was not even a Dutch citizen, as he had claimed."

"How did you find out all this?" Ott asked.

"In the simplest possible way," Hastings said. "We searched his clothing. There was an identity card sewed into the collar of his jacket. It gave his name as Bruno Dietz, a South African, resident of Johannesburg. The Johannesburg police confirmed the name and description this morning."

"I don't get it," McCue said. "What was he running from?"

"Nothing at all," Hastings said. "The real question is, what was Dietz running after?"

"That's too cryptic for me," McCue said.

"The identity card," Hastings said, "stated that Mr. Dietz was a licensed private investigator, currently employed by the deBeers Company."

The travelers were silent. Hastings' surprise hadn't elicited anything. He said, "Doesn't ring any bells? Well, perhaps his employers will enlighten me further. Thank you again, gentlemen, and good day."

When the travelers had left, Hastings opened the report again on Dietz-van Haarnin.

A detective employed by deBeers; one immediately thought of diamonds. But deBeers was in a lot more than diamonds these days, just as Du Pont was in more than chemicals, and Krupp was in more than steel. What had detective Dietz been after? Something to do with a theft of diamonds, gold, or cash? Something complicated involving deBeers' special world of international high finance? Something to do with cartels? A theft of patents? A theft of unpatented industrial secrets?

He couldn't know unless deBeers told him. He couldn't even be sure of the man's real and immediate employer, since the gigantic deBeers organization owned or controlled companies in French, British, and Belgian Africa. Horizontal stratification; all their money wasn't in diamonds. They were also in palm oil, cotton, coffee, cobalt, zinc, and God knows what else. What kind of a job had Dietz been on, and for which company within the huge deBeers complex? Ask deBeers, even though they wouldn't be likely to tell much to the acting Chief of Police of El Fasher. He'd try, of course, but family secrets usually stayed in the family.

That left him with a European stabbed to death by person or persons unknown in front of his own police station. He wanted the murderer; and his chances were damned small of ever finding him.

Naturally, no one in the bazaar would admit to knowing anything. They hadn't seen the killer, they hadn't even been nearby when the murder took place. Why should they help an English policeman, especially since Dietz had fired into the crowd. He had killed an Arab and an old woman, and severely wounded a one-eyed man. A thorough mess. There'd probably be a wire from Khartoum any day now.

Hastings looked through the report again. Dietz had been killed with one thrust, as precise as a surgeon's stroke. Most stabbings were messier: multiple punctures, not always fatal. But this was the work of an absolutely first-rate knifeman. Not for robbery, not in the crowded bazaar. A hired killing. But hired by whom, and why? Something to do with stolen goods? Business? Revenge?

Start with the killer. A professional murderer is known by his handiwork. Where had this paragon with his narrow round knife come from? Not from El Fasher. Calls to El Obeid, Khartoum, and Omdurman hadn't turned up anything. But the *modus operandi* was unusual; there had to be records of similar murders somewhere. If any city police force had a rec-

ord of similar murders, they probably also had some idea of the identity of the murderer, even if they didn't have any proof. Given an identity, he had a chance. And if he could find the man anywhere in Darfur Province, anywhere in the Sudan, he'd sweat some truth out of him.

But where to begin? Anywhere in the world. Narrow that down to Africa and the Middle East. Temporarily cross out all of Africa south of the Congo. Next, on the basis of distance, cross out the countries east of Egypt. For the same reason, cross out Morocco and the western Maghreb. Cross out Arabia and Yemen because they won't tell you anything anyhow.

And that, Hastings told himself, is a hell of a lot of crossing out. But, aside from the Sudan, it leaves four countries: Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, and Egypt. And it leaves eleven important cities. Solely on the basis of proximity to El Fasher, the priority list would read: Cairo, Alexandria, and Port Said. Next came Benghazi and Tripoli. The Tunisian cities of Bizerte and Tunis had to be included. And least likely, but important because of their size, were the Algerian cities of Algiers, Constantine, Bone, and Oran. Eleven telegrams. Too bad there was no Interpol for Africa.

Hastings picked up a pencil and thought of the telegrams he had to send to eleven cities; the request for information to deBeers in South Africa; the explanatory letter to Khartoum. He put down the pencil and reached for the telephone.

First he was going to call Khartoum and check on Major Harkness. In the same call he was going to alert Customs to a possible diamond thief in the group, with special attention to the Greek trader, Prokopulous.

He rang for Khartoum. As soon as he finished this call, he was going to have a bath, then lunch, then siesta. In the evening he would draft those damned telegrams. Find Dietz's murderer: important, but just a bit impossible, Hastings told himself.

## V

On the morning of August 9th, just after the morning prayer, El Fasher's silence was broken by the asthmatic cough of a badly tuned truck engine. Seven other engines responded, like a group of old worshipers answering the muezzin's call to prayer. The trucks stood in single file under a lightening sky, their battered grills and sightless headlights pointing to the east, toward Mecca.

The pilgrims were climbing aboard the trucks. At the head of the column was Harith's Land Rover, its engine running in a smooth and disdainful manner. Harith sat at the wheel, waiting.

Prokopulous came and slid into the front seat. Since the interview with the police, he had managed to avoid Harith. But that could be done no longer, unless he wanted to drop the entire affair and lose the rewards which months of patient work should bring. Prokopulous was not prepared to give up yet; but he found it difficult to meet Harith's look.

"Welcome, Mr. Prokopulous," said Harith. "All night I have missed your company. And all night I have enumerated your astonishing virtues. Ah, Mr. Prokopulous, by the great cunning of your mind you were able to pierce all veils, to go directly to the heart of the mystery in a way denied to common men. You were able to stretch out your hand and point unerringly to the disguised Mr. Dain."

Prokopulous grinned weakly. "It seems I was mistaken."

"It seems you were mistaken!" Harith repeated, rolling his eyes heavenward. "Mistaken! It was, of course, a tiny error, like a money-changer giving ninety-nine piastres for the lira instead of a hundred. An unimportant little error like that, was it not?"

"Far more important than that," Prokopulous answered, his head hung low, his hands spread open to show helpless supplication. Because of Harith's sonorous tone and elaborate diction, Prokopulous knew he was in no danger. Past any doubt, Harith had spent the night in a state of murderous rage. But his anger had quieted during the long hours before dawn, and now he was permitting himself the luxury of an ironic speech. There was no danger when Harith made a speech; he was to be feared only when he was silent. The thing to do now was to allow Harith the full pleasure of his speech, the deep joy of his heavy-handed irony.

"Come now, we must not overvalue your tiny error," Harith said. "You must not feel ashamed if, after several weeks of close examination, you chose a South African detective instead of an American secret agent. After all, you came very close; you aimed for the hawk and shot the sparrow. And why should the death of one European disturb us? To be sure, the police are interested in why this man was killed. Doubtless they will now grant me certain attentions, they will honor me by scrutinizing my every move. Formerly a nobody, I have now become famous. What brought me this fortune? Clearly it is my adviser, a learned Greek, who can read the hearts of seven European travelers, separate the true

from the false, and then point unerringly—to the wrong man. This is the kind of adviser which God has seen fit to grant me.”

“I am the most miserable of men,” Prokopulous said, trying to put a sob into his voice. He wondered how much longer Harith would continue his speech. After all, there was business to attend to. He glanced at his watch, then looked down at his feet in an attitude of remorse.

“Infallible insight,” Harith continued, “is not the only virtue which my adviser possesses. He is also a judge of men. He selects as his instrument a superb murderer, an Arab from a distant city whose skill with the knife is unsurpassed. This man’s ability is so great that even a dull-witted European policeman cannot help noticing it, and wondering who this man is, and where he learned his trade, and whether other men have heard of him, and who employed him, and why. But these petty details do not disturb my adviser. He could never be content to arrange a simple, ordinary murder. He must employ a man who signs his name with his knife, and whose unmatched technique has singled him out and forced him to leave the great cities for the dull provincial town of El Fasher. *That* is the man my adviser chooses—in order to kill the wrong man. And I, blindest of the blind, am the man who chose my adviser!”

It was a very pretty speech, Prokopulous thought. A little labored in parts, a little too long, but very pretty. He could cheerfully listen for another hour—and Harith surely could talk for that much longer—but now the time was running short. Harith had had his pleasure; now it was time for business.

“I cannot deny a word you have said,” Prokopulous stated formally. “I chose the wrong European, even though I now know the right one. And I had no idea that my knifeman was such a perfectionist. But all men are fallible, Mustapha Harith, and with all my mistakes, you could find no better or truer servant.”

Harith grunted scornfully and seemed ready to launch another speech. Before he could begin, Prokopulous said, “Luckily, the European police are slow and stupid; they will never trace the killing to the killer, the killer to me, or me to you. Their attentions mean nothing. The only problem is the secret police agent, whom now I know.”

“As you knew him yesterday!” Harith said.

“I was mistaken then, but not now. The right man will die at the right time, this is sure. But now you must prepare yourself. I have offered transportation to the Europeans in

your name. Four will ride with us, and two will ride in the trucks."

"You have done what?" Harith shouted.

"Compose yourself," Prokopulous begged. "They are coming now."

"I underestimated you," Harith said. "Instead of leaving them stranded in El Fasher, you supply them with transportation to El Obeid. Through your efforts, my enemy rides beside me."

"Suppose you left without them?" Prokopulous asked. "Ten minutes after you departed, Dain would reveal himself to the chief of police. A special car or truck would be made ready. And then your enemy would ride *behind* you instead of beside you."

Harith thought about it. At last, grudgingly, he said, "Perhaps you are right. But still we must—"

"We will," Prokopulous said. The Europeans had reached the Land Rover. Prokopulous said to them, in English, "Mr. Harith and I both bid you welcome. We leave immediately."

"This is really very decent of Mr. Harith," said Major Harkness.

"Thank you," Prokopulous said. "He only regrets that he cannot carry all of you in his personal vehicle."

"No need to apologize," Ott said, his voice cheerful for the first time since Fort Lamy. "We've already chosen up. Dr. Eberhardt and Captain Echeverria are the losers. They'll have to sweat it out in the trucks."

"There is no need for that, gentlemen," a man said, stepping dramatically out of the shadows. He was a tall Arab, bronzed and hawk-nosed, his face dotted with old smallpox scars.

"I have my personal transportation," he said. "It is an old Mercedes—very old, I regret to say—parked just fifty yards from here. Since I am also journeying to El Obeid, I will be happy to accommodate the two gentlemen."

"That is extremely kind of you," Dr. Eberhardt said. "We are very lucky to have you drop out of the air like this."

"Not quite out of the air," the Arab said. "I was north of here, in Oum Chaloum. One day I was struck by a great desire to visit El Obeid, and by an even greater desire to see my good friend, Mustapha ibn Harith."

Harith had already gotten out of the Land Rover. He put his arms around the Arab and kissed him on both cheeks. "This is truly a great occasion!" Harith said. "To have you traveling in my company—that is more than I dared hope for!"

Turning to the Europeans, he said, "Gentlemen, allow me to present my honored friend, Saleh Mohammed el Tikheimi, of the illustrious tribe of the Ateiba."

It was full daylight now, time for the caravan to start. As Harith got back into the Land Rover, el Tikheimi said, "You must be my guest in El Obeid, Mustapha ibn Harith. You have no idea how hard I looked for you, and how I missed you by mere hours in Abeche and Geneina."

"My friend, I am very glad you have found me," Harith said. "But if you had not, then I would have taken the search upon myself. I would have found you."

El Tikheimi led the two Europeans to his Mercedes. Within minutes, the caravan had begun the trip to El Obeid.

**August 11, 1952—EL OBEID; THE FIRST  
DAY OF DHU 'L-HIJJA**

**I**

The railroad to Khartoum begins in El Obeid. An hour after they arrived, Harith and his assistants transferred the four hundred pilgrims from the trucks to the train. Harith arranged provisions, sent his trucks back to Fort Lamy, and wrote several telegrams to confirm his transportation past Khartoum. When he had finished this, he found himself the victim of a gnawing anxiety. It was an unusual sensation for him; if he had not been a good Moslem, he might have tried to drown it in a bottle of wine. As it was, he sat in the railroad station, smoking furiously, trying to think out the intricacies of his situation.

He was surrounded by enemies, and he was cursed with bad luck. It was not enough to have this American agent sticking to him like his own skin; now he had the accursed Saleh Mohammed el Tikheimi as well. And overlying everything else was the fact that this was the first day of Dhu 'l-Hijja. In former years, he had always had his pilgrims in Khartoum by now, with plenty of time to reach Mecca before the all-important 12th day. But the French police had delayed him in Fort Lamy, the rains had delayed him in Darfur, and now he was in El Obeid, two hundred miles from Khartoum.

There was still time, he told himself. Mecca was less than nine hundred miles away, no more than nine days' journey by train and dhow. There was time, Harith told himself; but the anxiety remained.

El Obeid to Khartoum, and a change of trains. Another change at Atbara. Still another change at Sallom. Then a change at Suakin from train to dhow. Four changes, and very little time to allow for trouble on the route. What if a train were delayed for a day or two? Would the pilgrims go on?

They will go on, Harith told himself. I can convince them. But he wasn't convinced himself.



Well, it was in God's hands, and the journey would go as God willed it. Now was the time to think about the schemes laid against him. First, what was Dain's plan?

No arrest could be made in Africa; Harith or any other man had the right to assist a party of pilgrims. In Arabia, then? But what could Dain do in Saudi Arabia? The officials and the police would not help him; they grew fat from slavery.

Suppose, somehow, Dain bribed the owners of the dhows? Suppose they went further south, to Maidi in the Yemen. What then?

There would still be no difficulty for Harith. The Yemenis also profited from the slave trade. And even though Harith was not so well known in Yemen, he did have a few friends in San'a and Hodeida. A Yemeni official would never arrest him. Instead, he would arrest Dain.

That left only Aden, a British protectorate, at least five days' sailing from Suakin. But even in British Aden, what proof of slavery would Dain have?

Proof? Harith suddenly knew the answer. *False* proof, that was what Dain would have. Some of the pilgrims could be bribed; they could swear that they had been offered into slavery, that silver had changed hands, that delivery was to have taken place in an hour—just before the arrival of the British police! And the captain of the dhow would probably be bribed also, and Mustapha Harith would be held captive until the boat landed in Aden!

Harith could think of nothing else that would satisfy the law of the Europeans so well. And even knowing the plan, he saw that it was still good. It would be expensive and difficult to stop; but Dain's most likely plan could be stopped.

Then there was el Tikheimi, an enemy, a business rival, a dog who considered himself a wolf. Already the dog had crept out to feast on the carcass of the lion; but perhaps the dog had come too soon, perhaps the lion was only sleeping.

El Tikheimi had to be killed as soon as the opportunity presented itself.

And what about Prokopulous? Could he trust Prokopulous? Could any man trust him? Could Prokopulous trust himself? To ask those questions was to answer them. Trust Prokopulous: then wade into the river and ask the crocodile to help you catch fish.

But Prokopulous loved money, he was loyal to money, he worshiped money. As long as Prokopulous's eyes were fixed

on the prospect of Harith's reward, he could be of some use. He would be faithful until he was paid; but one second later he would have to die.

So many men to kill, Harith thought with regret. Murder was always bad for business. Blood called for more blood; if you started by shedding a drop, you finished by shedding a gallon. But in this case, his enemies had forced murder on him. They were making him kill in order to save his business.

It was nearly twelve hours until the train would depart. He had a great deal to do in that time. There were more telegrams to send, and a telephone call to make to Sagar, his assistant in Atbara. A delicate piece of work had to be explained. Easy enough to say; but would the loyal, thick-headed Sagar understand, would he be able to do what was required? By God, Harith thought, the clever servant is able but treacherous; the stupid servant is loyal but unable.

Harith stood up and left the station. There was no help for it, he would have to rely on Sagar. But first, he had to meet Prokopulous in Khallaf's café. There was still a use for the Greek, and a job for him to perform. As long as Prokopulous obeyed orders, he had value as a cat's-paw.

## II

In Khallaf's café, a violent argument was raging between the proprietor and four Bedouin from the Northern desert. Each Bedouin had an ancient Martini-Henry rifle slung over his shoulder, and each man looked ready and extremely willing to use it. The proprietor was short, fat, and unarmed; he looked angry enough to attack the four Bedouin barehanded. The argument was about the price of four glasses of tea.

These Bedouin came to El Obeid every year or so, to sell camels and sheep, buy ammunition, and watch the contests between the Nuba wrestlers, the bracelet-fighters and the stick-fighters. After the contests they always had a glass of tea in Khallaf's café, and they always paid one piastre and two milliemes for a tea service. But this year Khallaf had raised the price to one piastre and four milliemes, thus changing it from nearly three and a half cents to nearly four cents. The four Bedouin naturally suspected that the fat little city Arab was trying to put something over on them. The price itself was not as important as the implied insult.

It was not even as important as Khallaf's unwarranted breaking of the traditional price for a tea service.

Unmoved by these arguments, Khallaf stoutly insisted upon his right to raise or lower his prices as he saw fit. He maintained that no one but a suspicious, uneducated man from the desert would find a personal insult in a change that affected everyone. And he pointed out how it was usually the untrustworthy man who was first to declare others untrustworthy.

The Bedouin fingered their rifles and shouted their retorts. A white-bearded old Arab hobbled up to act as peacemaker, then decided to listen to the argument for a little longer. The angry words raged louder. They were nearly drowned out by the blare of the radio, tuned to Cairo and broadcasting a speech by Colonel Naguib at maximum volume.

Harith and Prokopulous, each sipping a cup of coffee, were well pleased with the café. They both knew that a loud noise was the best protection for a whispered secret. Khallaf's was the noisiest café in the entire shrieking bedlam of El Obeid, therefore the most popular, and therefore the best place to exchange confidential information.

Their talk had gone easily and well. Without too much difficulty they had come to an agreement on the next move to be made, how and where it would be made, against whom, what the price would be, and what the reward would be after the deed was accomplished. They praised each other's insight and unmatched cunning. They looked each other fondly in the face, and they saw nothing good. Harith's grave expression never changed, while Prokopulous's mobile features could portray any emotion except the one he felt. They had kept their secrets and subtly displayed their mistrust. Because of this, each could recognize an enemy in the other; but each had discounted his enemy's ability in advance.

When they left, the white-bearded old Arab had finally begun his attempt at reconciling the four angry Bedouin and the angry proprietor. The old man spoke in measured tones, and the Bedouin listened in silence. They stood erect and motionless, their faces thoughtful. They listened, but they were determined not to pay an extra two milliemes for tea, and bad tea at that.

### III

"Now this," said Major Harkness, "is something you mustn't miss. This is really worth seeing."

Harkness had undergone a change as soon as he had entered El Obeid. He hadn't been interested in the Chad, and Darfur Province just hadn't been his sort of place. But El Obeid, in the center of Kordofan Province—well, that was practically next door to Upper Nile Province where he had been stationed. Six years had been a long time to spend in that beautiful, exasperating land, given over now to the politicians of Cairo and Khartoum, lost forever to Harkness. Six years had been long enough to turn an army post into a home; and El Obeid was the closest he would come to that home, to Malakal and Doleib Hill, to the White Nile just above the Sudd, to the Dinka and Nuer villages. He was posted to Aden now, and after that, who could say where? He would probably never come again to Upper Nile Province, or even to Kordofan. It gave him a queer feeling. At the moment he felt a real affection for El Obeid. It wasn't at all a bad sort of place, he told himself.

"I don't know if I feel up to much sightseeing," Ott said.

"My dear fellow," Harkness said, "the Nuba are having a festival. You mustn't miss it. Really, you owe it to yourself."

The Europeans were standing together in El Obeid's marketplace. Earlier in the day it had rained; now the sun was out, turning the city into a huge and malevolent steam bath. They were tired and dispirited, drained by the Sahara sun and leached by the steady rains. Ribera's roving glance was dulled; not even the bare-breasted Nuba girls could arouse in him more than a feeble licentious flicker. Dr. Eberhardt had begun mumbling to himself. Echeverria looked like an overworked pack-mule, his brown face showing nothing except a desire to drop in his tracks and go to sleep. McCue looked more irritable than usual. Ott was haggard, his face had a yellowish cast, and his hands trembled when he lit a cigarette. Only Major Harkness had changed for the better. The other Europeans found him insufferable.

"Right over here," Harkness said. "I think we can see everything from here."

Without much interest, the Europeans followed him. They came to a square of land on the western side of the market. It was about the size of a soccer field, and the earth had been stamped to the consistency of rock. There were about seventy Negroes within the square, and a large crowd of Negroes and Arabs were watching them.

"It is a dance of some sort?" Ribera asked.

"D'you think I'd drag you here to watch a dance?" Harkness asked indignantly. "It's a fight."

"I do not think I am very interested in fights," Dr. Eberhardt said.

"You'll be interested in this," Harkness told him. "The Nuba are the best athletes in Africa. This part is the wrestling."

The Europeans watched, but nothing much seemed to be happening. The fighters shuffled around each other, occasionally emitting an ear-splitting yell. They were magnificently built, most of them over six feet tall and heavily muscled. Their bodies were covered with a powdery white ash, giving them a corpse-like appearance. Some of the fighters were naked, and some wore a sketchy loincloth. A few had brass ornaments tied to their waists with strips of fur. One or two had plaited arm and ankle bracelets. They roared at each other, advanced and retreated, one arm outflung and the other in guard position, moving slowly, looking for an advantage. At last a pair of wrestlers came together, their arms locked, their thigh muscles braced. Other wrestlers closed. A cloud of dust rose from the hard-packed earth. A man was thrown, the crowd cheered, more dust rose.

"Why do they wear that white ash?" Ribera asked.

"That's to let the other fellow get a good grip on them," Harkness said. "Do you see those men with the brass bells around their waist? Those bells are only worn by champion wrestlers."

"What about the men with the arm and ankle bands?" Ott asked.

Harkness looked closely and wrinkled his forehead. "Well, frankly, I don't know what that means. But it probably means something."

More wrestlers had been thrown now, and the dust rose thicker than ever. The crowd was roaring, but hardly anything could be seen except ghostly figures moving through a dun-colored cloud.

"Marvelous athletes," Major Harkness said. "The Nuba tribes provide superb soldiers, too. Those wrestlers are mostly Korongo. Do you see those men standing to one side? Those are the stick-fighters, mostly Masakin. I suppose they'll go on next. You'll be amazed; you'd swear they'd been trained in a European fencing school."

"How long does this continue?" Echeverria asked.

"Well, that's hard to say," Harkness said. "Look, over there at the far side are the bracelet-fighters. Kau and Fungor, I believe. Very primitive. They put on a tremendous spectacle. I've seen them take wounds that would kill a European

outright; but these people heal fantastically. There, some of the stick-fighters have begun!"

The air had grown cooler. A fresh breeze had set in from the west, dissipating the dust. Some of the stick-fighters were indeed fighting.

"Amazing, isn't it?" Harkness said. "Like a gladiatorial contest."

The Europeans nodded out of politeness.

"Now the thing to watch for—" Harkness began, but he was interrupted by Ott. The Rhodesian's face was more yellow than ever. He said, "I think I'm sick."

Ott turned to go, and would have fallen if Echeverria hadn't caught him. With Eberhardt's help, Echeverria managed to get him to his feet. Eberhardt put a hand on Ott's forehead, then looked carefully at his face. "I think it is malaria," he said. "But I am not a medical doctor. He should see a medical doctor at once."

"It doesn't feel like malaria," Ott said, his voice shaky.

"That was merely my guess," Eberhardt told him. "In this part of the world one can catch jaundice, dysentery, sleeping sickness, cholera—"

"All right, all right," Ott said. "I've got some damned thing, that's for sure. Can't keep my damned legs under me. Would a couple of you help me find a doctor? Is there a doctor in this hole?"

"There was when I passed through last year," Eberhardt said. "He was staying at the Commissioner's house. Come, we'll find a taxi."

He and Echeverria carried Ott away from the crowd. They didn't find a taxi, but an Arab in a Ford truck stopped for them.

Ribera, McCue, and Harkness stood irresolutely on the edge of the crowd. The fresh breeze had died and there was a light splattering of rain.

"I do hope the man's all right," Harkness said.

"He'll be fine if they find a doctor," McCue said. "It's hard for a Westerner to keep healthy in these tropical climates."

"I've lived in these climates for fifteen years," Harkness said. "Never had a bit of sickness except for an occasional headache."

"Well," McCue said, "I've had dysentery more often than I can count."

Ribera said, "I also do not like this climate, and I am superstitious about disease. I am going now to a café and fortify my body with alcohol. Would anyone care to join me?"

Harkness shook his head, and McCue said, "I wouldn't even wash in the kind of rotgut you'll find here."

Ribera bowed slightly and left.

McCue watched the stick-fighters for a few minutes. Then he said, "To hell with this, I'm going for a walk. Join me?"

"I don't think so," Harkness said. "You really shouldn't leave now. You'll miss the best part of the fights."

"That's exactly what I plan to do," McCue said, and left.

Alone, Major Harkness scratched his chin and wondered why on earth the other travelers weren't interested in a sight like the Nuba fights. You could go clear around the world without seeing something like this. They were probably guided-tour types.

He turned back to the fights. Two champion stick-fighters were contesting, and Harkness watched them with deep interest. He'd been a fairly good saber man himself in his youth; nothing like the Hungarians, of course, but good enough for a place on a British tournament team.

#### IV

The Arab truck driver brought Eberhardt, Echeverria, and Ott to the home of the Commissioner. Fortunately for Ott, the doctor had just returned from a tour of northern Kordofan. He was a small, deft, cold-eyed man. He made his examination and tests in silence.

"All right," the doctor said after he was finished. "We don't have a regular hospital, but I suppose I can find a bed for you here. I'll send for some pajamas."

"What is it?" Ott asked. "What have I got?"

"Serum hepatitis," the doctor told him.

Eberhardt nodded. "I thought perhaps it was the jaundice."

"Hepatitis?" Ott said. "I'll be damned. Look, Doc, can you just give me a shot or something for it?"

"I can give you nothing for it," the doctor said. "There's nothing that will help. You require plenty of food and absolute rest. Stretch out on that couch, I'm going to take your shoes off."

"Leave my shoes alone," Ott said. "I'll rest when I reach Beirut."

"Perhaps I haven't made myself clear," the doctor said. "You have an extremely serious disease. Without proper care, hepatitis is frequently fatal. But given a chance, your body will cure itself. To give it that chance, however, you must

have complete rest, starting immediately. You must not stand or even walk across this room. Do you understand now?"

"How long do I need this rest?" Ott asked.

"Perhaps only a month or two," the doctor said. "Now please permit me to remove your shirt and shoes."

"Get away from me!" Ott said. "I'm not taking off anything. I'll rest in Beirut. Just give me a shot or something. I'm leaving tonight on the train for Khartoum."

"A shot or something won't help," the doctor said. "An airplane trip to Beirut would be dangerous enough in your present condition. But the train . . . Have you ever ridden the train from El Obeid to Khartoum?"

"No."

"Obviously not. If you insist on taking it, you'll probably be dead before the train passes Wad Medani."

"I'm a lot tougher than you think," Ott said. He turned to Eberhardt and Echeverria. "Will you help me to the train?"

Both men looked embarrassed and uncertain. Echeverria said, finally, "I have had this hepatitis. I am sorry, you must do what the doctor orders."

Eberhardt said, "Yes, you must stay here."

Ott glared at the men and tried to stand up. The doctor came over to restrain him. Just then the door opened and Prokopulous entered, sweating and out of breath.

"My friend!" he said to Ott. "I met Mr. McCue and he told me you were ill. What is it? Is there anything I can do?"

The doctor explained about the hepatitis and Ott's need for complete rest. Ott acknowledged the need, but said that he was going to be on the Khartoum train even if he had to crawl to the station on his hands and knees.

Prokopulous said, "Doctor, I too have seen this disease. You are right, he needs immediate rest. But what is there to do? The man wants to rest in his own city, in Beirut. Can you tie him to the bed here?"

"The train ride might kill him."

"And yet, if he is determined to go, what can we do? In his present state of mind, it might kill him to remain in El Obeid, is that not so? The train to Khartoum is not pleasant; but perhaps, if his friends were to watch over him, make sure of his privacy and comfort, guard him from any exertion—"

"I'm going on that train," Ott said.

"You see?" Prokopulous said. "He is determined. Nothing short of force will stop him."

"Damned right," Ott said.

"But I will personally administer to him," Prokopulous



said. "I am sure the other Europeans will assist me. Is that not so, gentlemen? Thank you, I knew it would be so. Doctor, I will do everything in my power to see that he is comfortable and at rest."

"All right, Mr. Ott, have it your own way," the doctor said angrily. "I can't force you to stay in bed. But I still consider it suicide. Can't you at least wait a few weeks and then take a plane out of here?"

"No, I can't wait," Ott said.

"You're an absolute idiot," the doctor told him. "The very best I can do is try to arrange a priority seat on the first available flight from Khartoum to Beirut. The service is frequent, so perhaps they can fly you out within a day or two of your arrival."

"Doc, thank you very much," Ott said.

"No trouble at all," the doctor said bitterly. "You understand, of course, that you lose your priority if you reach Khartoum dead. They'll bury you in the cemetery outside of Khartoum North. I hope you have enough money to take care of the burial charges."

"That's a hell of a thing to say," Ott said.

"I'm trying to get it through your thick damned skull that you need rest right here, now, immediately, in El Obeid. You're a young man. A month or so isn't much to give for another thirty years of life. Why all the rush? Is it that important to reach Beirut?"

"It's that important," Ott said. "I'm sorry, but it is. How much do I owe you, Doctor?"

"You don't owe me a thing," the doctor said. "Would you like to rest here until train time? Or would you rather go sightseeing and kill yourself immediately?"

"I'll rest here," Ott said. "And thank you again."

"I will stay with him," Prokopulous said. "Will you gentlemen return in time for us to help Mr. Ott to the train?"

Echeverria and Eberhardt nodded. Echeverria said, "I'm going to find a drink. Eberhardt?"

"Yes, I think I would also like a drink," Eberhardt said. They left. The doctor gave Ott a final disapproving look and left the room.

Ott closed his eyes. He felt dizzy, weak, and sick at his stomach, but not discouraged. This hepatitis thing was a bad break, but he couldn't stay in El Obeid. If he lay on his back here for a month, there'd be South African detectives waiting for him as soon as he stepped out the door. They'd

have the extradition papers all drawn up by then. As soon as he could walk, they'd clap the manacles on him and put him on a plane for Johannesburg.

But his bad luck was bringing along some good luck. At Khartoum he'd get a priority seat on a Beirut-bound airplane. The customs men probably wouldn't even bother to search his luggage, much less his person. He'd be safe in Beirut, safe and rich. All he had to do was live through the three days' train ride to Khartoum.

He felt movement and opened his eyes. Prokopulous was arranging an extra pillow behind his head.

"I thought this might be more comfortable," Prokopulous said.

"It is, thanks. I don't know why you're letting yourself in for all this bother."

"In these distant corners of the world we Europeans must look out for each other. It is as simple as that."

"Well, thanks, I really do appreciate it."

"I am happy to do anything I can," Prokopulous said. He looked at his watch. "We still have five hours until train time. Wouldn't you be more comfortable with your shoes off?"

Ott and Prokopulous looked at each other. After a moment, Prokopulous turned away and lighted a cigarette.

"I feel more comfortable with my shoes on," Ott said.

"Just as you please."

"That doctor's around still, isn't he?" Ott asked.

"I believe he is."

"I believe so too. Right now I'm going to take a little nap."

Ott closed his eyes. He thought, so that's how it is. I wonder how that sneaky little bastard found out about the diamonds. He's going to take care of me all right. Sure he is. And this is going to be one hell of a train ride.

His body felt as heavy as lead. That damned body of his was trying to kill him or send him to prison. But Khartoum was just three days away, and Beirut was only a few air-hours beyond that. He folded his arms across his chest, the fingers of his right hand touching the butt of the flat Beretta in its shoulder holster. Across the room, Prokopulous was thumbing through an old magazine.

## V

Colonel Ribera decided that no one café in El Obeid

looked cleaner than any other. Therefore he entered a large, crowded place near the center of the city, on the theory that a popular café was unlikely to poison its patrons. Inside, he found a table and asked the waiter for a glass of wine. The waiter simply stared at him, and Ribera realized that he had spoken in Spanish. He repeated his request in English.

The waiter continued to stare, a puzzled look on his face. The Arab customers looked at Ribera with deep curiosity and began to discuss what the foreigner could possibly want. The waiter asked Ribera, in loud, clear Arabic, what he wanted. Ribera replied in English, then in Spanish. The customers pressed closer to his table, trying to think of ways to help.

Ribera searched through his pockets and found an English-Arabic phrase book. The Arabic for "wine" was not given, but there was a phrase meaning, "What is there to drink here?" Ribera decided to try it.

"Shu fi haun lishshirb?" he asked. This, his book told him, was in the Syrian dialect. The same phrase was also given in the Egyptian dialect, and, when his question brought no answer, Ribera tried that.

"E hene lishshurb?"

Nobody seemed to understand him. The waiter and the customers were silent for a few moments, then began to argue violently about what the foreigner had said. Some maintained that he was looking for a place to buy a water jar; others felt that he wanted a drink of some kind. Accordingly, the waiter told him the name of every drink in the house, and also where to buy a water jar. This brought no response from the foreigner.

Turning to his phrase book, Ribera found a section entitled "In the Café." Here he found a list of expressions: "Let us go into the café." "Captain! I am all in a heat, and I will take something refreshing." "Boy! Bring us two cups of coffee!" "I will drink only lemonade." "I want a bowl of barley water." "A glass of water!" "Have you any English beer?"

No mention of wine or whiskey was given for the Victorian travelers who must have used this phrase book. Ribera decided to settle for beer.

He said, "Jiblna kanninit bira inglizi'yi."

When this brought no response, Ribera made a gesture of drinking, then patted his stomach and rolled his eyes. The waiter nodded vigorously and hurried away. The crowd stayed around Ribera's table, discussing the foreigner's

strange antics and wondering what language he was trying to read in the little book.

The waiter returned with a cup of coffee.

Ribera looked at it stonily, then nodded, drank it down, and gestured for another. The waiter hurried away. The crowd watched the foreigner's movements, commented on his clothes and his manner of drinking coffee. Ribera sat for a while in silence, his face a dull red, surrounded by thirty interested onlookers. Then he said to the crowd in Spanish: "Does anybody speak Spanish here?"

There was no reply. Ribera smiled and said, "In that case, gentlemen, I am free to tell you that you are a pack of mangy bastards, without even the manners of a herd of pigs, which you closely resemble."

Seeing Ribera's friendly smile, the customers smiled back.

"Furthermore," Ribera said, his voice warm and pleasant, "you all have lice in your beards, your wives are syphilitic, and you yourselves are the misbegotten sons of whores."

The crowd could tell from his tone that the foreigner was making some sort of complimentary speech. They smiled more broadly, nodded to each other, and decided that foreigners weren't such bad fellows after all. Ribera was able to drink his second cup of coffee in peace.

## VI

McCue walked slowly through the crowded market. Clawed brown hands reached toward him, waving, pointing, pleading, demanding. Beggars pulled back their rags and displayed the suppurating sores and lesions of their occupation. A legless beggar-woman pushed her blind child into McCue's path with wooden bowl outstretched. McCue side-stepped and walked on more quickly. He didn't dare give money to the child; if he gave to one, how could he refuse the others? He didn't dare believe in the misery around him; to believe would require too much from him, it would require impossibilities.

He turned toward the railroad station, away from another crowd of beggars. The way to the station led past a row of open stalls piled high with unidentifiable vegetables and fly-blown meat. He moved into a narrow alley. Ahead he could see the station; already the noise of the market was fading.

He heard a shuffling footstep behind him and turned. A tall Negro was coming up quickly. The man looked like one of those Nuba fighters that Major Harkness had pointed out.

He wore only a loincloth, and his physique was heroic. Gray ash covered his skin, and he wore an odd-looking ornament on his right wrist. As the man came closer, McCue saw that it was a bracelet, made of two circles of brass about an inch apart. The brass circles were several inches thick, and they were lashed to a wooden foundation. They appeared to be very sharp. This man, McCue thought, must be one of the bracelet-fighters that Harkness had spoken about.

He moved against a wall to let the man go by. The bracelet-fighter came close, preceded by a reek of millet beer. Then he turned, grinning, and his braceleted right hand rose swiftly and lashed out at the top of McCue's head.

McCue managed to duck the blow. He looked around quickly, but there was no help in sight. The two ends of the alley beckoned invitingly, but the bracelet-fighter was facing him now, legs flexed, left arm outstretched, backing McCue against the mud wall of the alley. McCue jabbed hard into the man's stomach, but the Nuba accepted the blow and swung his right arm. McCue blocked; the man's arm felt like a piece of oak. The bracelet-fighter swung again. McCue tried to grab the right hand, and succeeded in holding it for a moment. Then the Nuba wrenched free and chopped quickly. The double-edged bracelet missed McCue's rolling head and caught him on the right shoulder, cutting deeply.

The bracelet-fighter shuffled forward. McCue leaned against the wall and kicked hard at the man's groin. The Nuba turned and took the kick on his thigh. His right arm was back in position, crooked over his head. His left arm reached out. McCue cursed the lack of room. He slid along the wall, needing only a little distance to make a dash for the safety of the market or the railroad station. But the Nuba moved with him and lashed out again with his right arm, grazing the top of McCue's head.

McCue's anger overcame his prudence. Blood was dripping into his eyes, and the Nuba was reaching out with his left hand, trying to close. McCue backed away, then suddenly stepped toward the bracelet-fighter. He caught the man's left hand in both of his, caught the man's index finger and bent it back until it broke. The Nuba seemed more astonished than hurt. He swung while McCue was breaking his finger, scoring a deep graze on the side of the neck. McCue stepped back and kicked with ferocious precision; the Nuba turned to protect his groin, but McCue's kick was to the kneecap. The Nuba limped back, and McCue's next blow was with the stiffened fingers of his right hand, straight into the base of the man's throat.

The Nuba fell, strangling. McCue drew back for the final deadly groin-kick, then managed to restrain himself. The bracelet-fighter was helpless, writhing on the ground in agony. Men were running into the alley now from both directions. In the distance, McCue could hear a shrill police whistle. The alley was filling with men. They were shouting angry questions at him, and they had begun to edge forward. McCue saw a flash of steel in the crowd. He reached into his pocket and gripped the butt of his .38, but he didn't draw it. That would start a riot faster than anything else. He would only draw it when he had to fire. He hoped the police would arrive before that.

## VII

The train to Khartoum left El Obeid station shortly after midnight on August 12th, the second day of Dhu 'l-Hijja. The Europeans were traveling in what passed for first class. The pilgrims had a special car to themselves, in which they were packed to the point of suffocation. Harith had a private drawing room. He invited el Tikheimi to join him there, on the theory that the enemy in sight is not the enemy to be feared. El Tikheimi, whose thinking ran along similar lines, spent a great deal of time in Harith's drawing room. The two antagonists tried to outdo each other in courtesy, and they gossiped together like old women.

The bonds of hatred pulled them together more strongly than the bonds of love could ever have done. Aside from this, they had many things in common. They were of the same country, spoke the same language, and were engaged in the same business. They knew many people in common, and they had both lived in Mecca, Medina, Jidda, and San'a. They shared similar experiences and attitudes. They delighted in pessimistic wit and paradox. They were unanimous in their hatred of Christians and Jews, Europeans in general, Israel, Russia and America, Egypt and Iraq, Druses and Tuaregs, Ismailiya Moslems and Shiite Moslems. Their mutual prejudices gave them a sense of comradeship; they could recognize each other's excellent perceptions and intuitions. Their wary rivalry forced them to pay careful attention to each other. In this way they became friends, a state which they accepted with melancholy amusement. Their momentary friendship, sprung from hatred, would end in blood. They knew this, and found it a delicious and ironic paradox. They

continued to talk inexhaustibly as the train rolled over the flat desert country toward Kosti on the White Nile.

At great effort and expense, the Europeans had managed to find a private drawing room for the sick Mr. Ott. They didn't begrudge the labor; Ott gave them something to do in the stifling boredom of the train. They took great pains to find palatable food for him, and they reminded him that he needed absolute rest and quiet, and a great deal of sleep.

But perversely, Ott refused to follow this common-sense advice. He insisted that the Europeans stay with him. Although he was growing too weak to talk much, he said he that he didn't like to be alone. He wanted to see faces and hear conversation. Because of this, two or three travelers were usually in Ott's drawing room, talking or reading. When they left, Prokopulous would frequently draw them aside and explain that all this activity was doing Mr. Ott no good. The man needed to be alone, whether he knew it or not. For the sake of his health, Prokopulous asked them to visit Ott less often.

The Europeans thought that Prokopulous was right. But they remembered Ott's whispered pleas for company, and decided that *they* would want company if they were in his condition. Also, it was more pleasant in Ott's private room than in the crowded first class. So they continued to visit him in spite of Prokopulous's earnest pleas and warnings.

The first time McCue came, Ott was startled to see the bandages on the engineer's head and neck. He wanted to know what had happened.

"A damned drunken fool of a native tried to beat me up," McCue said. "The police came along in time. That was all there was to it."

Major Harkness was also in Ott's room. He had learned a little more of the incident at the El Obeid police station, and for him, it raised some interesting questions. In all his years in the Sudan, he had rarely heard of a trained bracelet-fighter attacking anyone except in a formal contest. Drunkenness was no answer; the man must have been bribed. But who would want McCue killed?

Equally interesting to Harkness were the details of the fight. McCue had managed to duck or roll with every blow, suffering only superficial injuries from his highly skilled assailant. He had gone over to the offensive almost immediately, had broken the Nuba's left index finger, shattered his left kneecap, and nearly killed him by strangulation with a

finger-thrust in the throat. Judo? Savate? The details aroused Harkness's soldiering instincts. McCue might have been a Ranger in the American army; in any event, he had been trained for dangerous anti-personnel work.

Harkness tried to learn more, but McCue maintained his usual surly silence. He seemed to get pleasure from unnecessary mystification. Finally he left Ott's room, and after a while Harkness also left.

Alone with Ott, Prokopulous gently closed the door. Then he turned to the bed where the sick man, fully clothed and covered with three blankets, lay with his eyes closed. Prokopulous watched Ott's waxy yellow face and the even rise and fall of his chest. He moved quietly to the side of the bed.

Ott's eyes snapped open. There was a small movement of the blankets, and Prokopulous saw the blued-steel barrel of a revolver pointing at his chest.

"Something you want, you lousy little thief?" Ott asked.

"Perhaps I am a thief," Prokopulous said calmly. "If so, you and I are in the same occupation."

"Maybe we are," Ott said. "But I've got a gun here and you just might force me to use it. Why don't you get out and stay out?"

"Since you are speaking so frankly," Prokopulous said, "I might as well allow myself the same indulgence. It has come to my attention, Mr. Ott, that you are carrying a dozen or so unpolished diamonds in the hollowed-out heel of your shoe. Your mode of transportation leads me to believe that you acquired them by dishonest means. It also occurs to me that in your present weakened state, you stand in need of a loyal partner."

"Get out of here," Ott said.

"I can assure you," Prokopulous went on, "that my terms are not unreasonable. I ask only an equal share in the stones. For this I will guarantee to get you safely past any customs officials, into any city in the world, and into a first-rate hospital where your sickness can be cared for."

"I believe that last," Ott said. "You'll get me into a hospital all right. On a slab. Fifty-fifty? Prokopulous, I wouldn't trust you as far as I could throw you."

"But you *must* trust me," Prokopulous said. "I know your secret. What if I denounced you to the police? What if I sent an anonymous letter to the customs officials at the Egyptian frontier?"

Ott was silent for a moment. He looked at Prokopulous,



his face hard and his eyes glittering. "You can do that, Prokopulous, and the police would arrest me. I couldn't stop you. All I could do then would be to denounce *you* to the police."

Prokopulous was genuinely astonished. "Denounce me? For what?"

"The murder of van Haarnin in El Fasher."

"You must be delirious," Prokopulous said. "First, I did not do it. Second, I have a witness for the time of the murder."

"So what?" Ott said. "It doesn't matter if you killed van Haarnin or not. What matters is that the police want the killer. Now here's how it works. The police arrest me as a diamond smuggler, and I tell them to get hold of you, my accomplice. The cops'll bring you in for questioning before you can get out of the Sudan. If by some chance you duck them, they'll keep an eye out for you in Europe and the Middle East. They'll bring you in, Prokopulous, because they'll be very interested in my story."

"They might question me," Prokopulous said, "but they couldn't possibly hold me."

"No? I admit to having performed the robbery, and I tell them you're my accomplice. I tell them that we met by previous arrangement in Fort Lamy. Your job was to take care of the travel details and to keep an eye out for a deBeers detective. For this I paid you four diamonds. But you did your job too well, you killed Detective Dietz. I didn't do it; I've got the hotel manager and Major Harkness as witnesses. I was playing billiards. But who do you have for a witness? Harith—a man with a reputation as a slaver—that's your witness. D'you think he'll even bother to appear in court for you?"

"Very ingenious," Prokopulous said. "But the case is full of flaws. There is nothing to show that I received four diamonds from you, and the deBeers people will know exactly how many are missing. They will find them all on your person."

"Wrong again," Ott said, propping himself up on one elbow. "D'you think I'm carrying everything I took? Not me! Just in case I was arrested, I cached away four stones. I figured if I got caught, I could make a deal and stay out of prison. If not, I could pick up the stones after I served my term. The four stones aren't in South Africa; they're close enough to Fort Lamy for you to have hidden them."

Ott lay back on the pillow and grinned. "It's a pretty circumstantial case, I'll grant you that. A lot of it is tenuous.

But so what? The Sudanese and the South Africans are going to want van Haarnin's killer very badly. They're going to run your record through Interpol and see if there's anything on you in Europe. I think they'll find something. And I think they'll decide you can be made to fit the crime pretty well."

"This is ridiculous!" Prokopulous said. "The police and the courts do not work that way!"

"Don't they?"

"Well . . . There are miscarriages of justice—"

"Come off it," Ott said. "You're a crook, and that means you've probably got a record somewhere. With my detailed confession, why shouldn't the police hang the murder on you and close the file?"

"It is remotely possible," Prokopulous admitted, his voice shaky. "But why must we threaten each other in this way, Mr. Ott? Perhaps my request for a half was unreasonable. Let it be a third, then. We must make an accommodation, we know too much about each other."

"No deal," Ott said.

"Talk sensibly," Prokopulous begged. "Remember, I hold prison over your head."

"And I hold a murder sentence over your head. You're trumped. Now get the hell out of here."

"Very well," Prokopulous said. "Perhaps you will feel like talking later. There is still a long way to go before we reach Khartoum. You are a sick man; the doctor warned you of the dangers of the journey."

"Get out!"

"I will visit you later," Prokopulous said. "You really should get some sleep, Mr. Ott. This constant vigilance must be bad for your health."

Prokopulous bowed and left the compartment. Ott stared at the closed door for several minutes. The conversation with Prokopulous had drained his strength badly. He'd scared the little bastard, though; he'd bluffed him. But Prokopulous wasn't the kind to let a fortune in diamonds slip away. The little rat would begin thinking again, waiting for a chance to finish the job that hepatitis had begun.

Ott shoved the revolver into his belt and dragged himself out of bed. He felt shockingly weak, and for a moment he thought he was going to faint. Then, carefully putting his weight against the side of the compartment, he made his way to the door. There was a key in the keyhole and Ott turned it, then tried the door. It opened; the lock didn't work.

He managed to get back into bed. He pulled the blankets

over him and took the gun out of his belt. His eyelids were heavy. He had to have a plan, he had to find a way of protecting himself. Prokopulous would be back.

## VIII

By the morning of August 13th, the third day of Dhu 7-Hijja, the train had reached Kosti on the White Nile and was speeding eastward past the cotton fields of the Gezira. At noon the train passed Sennar Dam on the Blue Nile, and turned north toward Wad Medani and Khartoum.

The dry, ferocious desert heat left the Europeans with little urge for conversation. Only Prokopulous, the veteran of more desert journeys than most Arabs, seemed unaffected. He moved from the first-class compartment to Harith's drawing room, then back to first class, then to Ott's compartment to see how the sick man was doing. He reported to the Europeans that Ott was worse than ever, and only semi-conscious. They all remembered the prediction of the doctor in El Obeid: that Ott wouldn't live past Wad Medani. In this sun-blasted countryside, the doctor's words took on the aspect of a curse. His casual prediction seemed a sure token of doom, a fatality impossible to change. Predestined death fitted naturally into the arid landscape.

The train reached Wad Medani in the coolness of evening and stopped for half an hour. The Europeans, like most of the other passengers, were grateful for the chance to get out and stretch their legs. When they had gone, Prokopulous went quickly to Ott's compartment.

He moved to the bed and looked down at the man's sleeping face, yellow and lined with blond stubble. With great gentleness, Prokopulous drew back the blankets. Beneath them he saw a revolver in Ott's hand. He pulled it away, and Ott did not awaken. He put the revolver on the bedstand, out of the man's reach, then he sighed and rubbed his hands lightly together.

Prokopulous was no killer—not directly. He was squeamish about committing murder, preferring it to be done through intermediaries. But no intermediary could be trusted for this. He wanted the diamonds, and he couldn't risk Ott's talking to the police. Therefore Ott had to die. Suffocation would be best; a gentle suffocation with Ott's own pillow. Done properly, it ought to look like the natural conclusion of his disease. Hadn't the doctor said he would die before Wad Medani?

Prokopulous lifted Ott's head and removed the pillow. He saw a small cloth bag beside Ott's head. He hesitated for a moment, then put down the pillow and opened the bag.

Within it were two diamonds and a hastily scrawled note. The note read:

"Prokopulous, you won't find anything in my shoes. Hidden. Take you an hour or more to find. Here's 2, no risk you being caught. More later."

Prokopulous pulled at his lower lip. He understood what Ott had done. Unable to protect himself any longer, he had exerted his final energies in hiding all the stones except two, and in writing this note. He had gambled that Prokopulous would take two diamonds in the hope of more later, rather than commit murder and try to find where the rest of the stones were hidden.

He weighed the two stones in his hand, wanting more. But already Ott's trick had cost him valuable time. Some of the passengers were boarding again. What if he were caught in the act of smothering Ott? What if he left some clue for the Khartoum police to trace?

Prokopulous made up his mind. He broke open Ott's revolver, emptied it of bullets, and put the gun back on the bed. He stuffed the diamonds, the note, and the cloth bag into his pocket. He put his hand over Ott's heart, found that it was still beating, and left the compartment. Two diamonds were better than no diamonds at all; and there was still a chance that more of the diamonds would come into his possession between Wad Medani and Khartoum.

In the corridor he ran into Eberhardt. "Doctor," Prokopulous said, "I think that Mr. Ott is feeling worse."

"He should have stayed in El Obeid," Eberhardt said.

"Of course. But I think he is very sick now. Will you look at him and see what you can do?"

Eberhardt grumbled that he was not a medical doctor, but he followed Prokopulous into Ott's room. He pulled back the covers and saw the revolver.

"He cannot fight hepatitis with that," Eberhardt said. He took Ott's wrist and felt for the pulse. Echeverria and Harkness came into the compartment.

"He is still alive," Eberhardt said. "He is unconscious, but his pulse is strong. I know very little about this disease. I do not know what Mr. Ott's chances are."

"At least he is still alive," Prokopulous said. He followed the other Europeans out of Ott's room into the first-class compartment. He felt elated. If he had smothered Ott and tired to search his room, Eberhardt or one of the others

might have caught him at it. But this way, he had obtained two diamonds in perfect safety. Best of all, he had witnesses that Ott was still alive during the time he had been in his compartment. He had acted for the best, he had taken the cleverest way. There was still time and distance ahead, and perhaps more diamonds to be gained without effort or risk.

A cloud of black smoke drifted through the first-class compartment. The train moved and slowly picked up speed. Wad Medani was left behind. The next stop, about a hundred miles away, was Khartoum.

The train speeded through the night, into a gray dawn. The Europeans slept fitfully; in the ashen light, their faces seemed to be made of soft, eroding rock. Prokopulous awoke and watched his fellow travelers for a while. Then he went for another visit to Mr. Ott, the dispenser of diamonds.

Ott didn't appear to have moved during the night. When Prokopulous drew back the covers, he didn't find any more diamonds.

The sun came out, striking the train windows with the first threat of the day's heat. The movement of people had begun in the corridor outside. Through the window, Prokopulous could see farmyards near the fertile shore of the Blue Nile.

He rearranged Ott's blankets and left the compartment. He had missed his opportunity. He should have killed Ott last night, killed him and searched his compartment. Nothing more could be done now, for the train was entering Khartoum.

**August 15, 1952——KHARTOUM; THE FIFTH  
DAY OF DHU 'L-HIJJA**

**I**

At Khartoum, Ott was taken from the train and put into an ambulance. Prokopulous helped him and rode in the ambulance with him. There was a doctor who talked about the Khartoum hospital, but Ott refused to go there. Then he lost consciousness for a while. When he recovered, he found that he was being carried up the steps into an airplane. He was taken to the rear and laid on a couch. A stewardess came over and fastened his safety belt, then tucked a blanket around him.

"Where are we going?" Ott asked.

"Cairo," the stewardess said, "then Beirut."

"What about my luggage?"

"It's being loaded with the other passengers' luggage."

Ott could hardly believe it. But then he heard the sound of engines and felt the movement of the airplane. In a few minutes they were in the air. Through the window he could see the vast brown and yellow desert, cut in half by the dark line of the Nile. They were flying over the Northern desert to Egypt. He had made it, he was free!

"You really must try to rest," the stewardess said.

"Yes," Ott said. "I could do with some sleep."

"I'll take your shoes off."

"Don't bother, I'd rather leave them on." But she had already moved to the rear of the couch and pulled back the blanket. Now she looked up at him.

"That's odd. Your shoes *are* off."

"My shoes? Where are they?"

The stewardess couldn't find them. She said, "Perhaps an attendant took them off in the ambulance and forgot about them. It isn't anything to worry about."

Prokopulous, Ott thought. The scheming little bastard had taken the shoes off him while he was unconscious. Thought he might have been lying about hiding the stones somewhere else, thought he mightn't have had the strength to hide them. Nice try, Prokopulous, but a clean miss.

He closed his eyes, feasting on the plane's movement. Then it struck him; what else had Prokopulous taken? What about his luggage? Had his clothes been searched?

He wanted to find out immediately, but he couldn't stay awake any longer. His consciousness slid away, leaving him in a nightmare of terror and doubt.

## II

At Khartoum station, the travelers had nearly two hours to wait before the train left for Atbara. From Atbara, one section would continue north to Wadi Halfa on the Egyptian border; a second section would turn east to Port Sudan and Suakin on the Red Sea. The Europeans tried again to get air space, more out of a sense of form than any real hope. Their efforts were useless. The airplanes were more densely crowded than ever. It was late afternoon of the fifth day of Dhu 'l-Hijja, only seven days before all hadjis had to be in Mecca. The traffic was still increasing. It was the biggest year of the hadj in memory, and pilgrims were coming from as far away as China and Indonesia. Half of Africa seemed to be on the move, choking the cities and ports from Cairo to Mombasa. Except for a few essential air links to Europe and America, the airlines were flying a non-stop shuttle service to Jidda. Even with the U.S. Air Force lending a hand, there were not enough carriers to handle the flood of tourists.

"We're lucky to be able to stay on the train," Major Harkness told his fellow Europeans.

"Do you call that luck?" McCue said. "I'll be damned glad when I've reached Jidda."

"No you won't," Harkness said. "If it's like this here, can you imagine what Jidda's like?"

"I can imagine it," McCue said sourly. "It'll still beat the train."

"By the way," Harkness said, "does anyone know if Ott got on the airplane all right?"

"I believe he did," Ribera said. "Mr. Prokopulous went along to make sure he would have no trouble."

"That was decent of him," Harkness said.

Dr. Eberhardt said, "Would any of you gentlemen care to do a little sightseeing with me? The Museum of Sudanese Archeology is not far by cab."

"I've already seen it," Harkness said.

"I have not seen it," Ribera said, "and I am not going

to. I require a bath, twelve hours' sleep, and a decent meal before I am capable of looking at anything."

"Seconded," McCue said. "I'm so damned filthy and tired, I wouldn't walk fifty feet if you told me the Taj Mahal was outside."

"I agree," said Echeverria.

"I merely thought I would suggest it," Dr. Eberhardt said. "The Museum of Sudanese Archeology is extremely interesting."

"To hell with it!" McCue said. "It's too hot for sight-seeing."

"I think," Echeverria said, "perhaps we should go back to our compartment before someone else takes it."

The five Europeans walked listlessly to the train. Prokopulous caught up to them in the corridor.

"Did they let Ott on the plane?" Harkness asked.

"Yes, of course they did," Prokopulous said. "I personally saw him aboard. At this moment, Mr. Ott is probably flying over the Egyptian border."

"Amazing what you can do with a little hepatitis," McCue said.

They came to their compartment. Inside, they found a British lieutenant of police and two Sudanese constables.

"Good afternoon, gentlemen," the lieutenant of police said. "I couldn't find you in the station, so I thought I'd wait for you here. Could I see your passports, please?"

"What on earth for?" Harkness asked. "Everything was checked at Geneina."

"Sorry, sir, I'm simply following orders."

Major Harkness grunted and handed over his passport. The others did likewise. The lieutenant sat down and examined each passport carefully, then gave them back.

"Thank you, gentlemen," the lieutenant said. "I hope I haven't inconvenienced you. Mr. Prokopulous, I'm afraid you'll have to accompany me to police headquarters."

"What for?" Prokopulous asked.

"We can talk about that at headquarters."

"But I'll miss the train," Prokopulous said. "You can't expect me to miss my train just to answer some foolish questions."

"I'm sorry, sir, it can't be helped."

"It's ridiculous," Prokopulous said. "I refuse to go."

The lieutenant looked unhappy. "Then I'll have to put you under arrest."

"My passport is in order," Prokopulous said. "What is the charge against me?"



"I think we can discuss that more conveniently at the station."

"No!" Prokopulous shouted. "I have a right to know what I'm being arrested for."

"Very well," the lieutenant said. "I have a warrant for your arrest on the charge of stealing precious gems and smuggling them out of the Union of South Africa."

"But that's absurd," Prokopulous said. "I have no gems in my possession, and I've never even been in South Africa."

The lieutenant's patience had come to an end. "Let's go," he said, and nodded to the Sudanese constables. They moved toward Prokopulous.

"You don't have to use force," Prokopulous said. "I'm coming. But I can sue for false arrest."

"Yes, sir," the lieutenant said indifferently. He nodded to the Europeans and left the compartment. The Sudanese constables followed with Prokopulous between them.

After they had gone, Echeverria said, "That man had the look of a thief. I knew it the first moment I saw him."

"It is all very strange," Ribera said. "One by one, our companions of the road are leaving us."

"Look!" Dr. Eberhardt said. "The train has begun to move."

The motion was almost imperceptible at first. But then, slowly picking up speed, the train moved out of Khartoum station, beginning its trip to Atbara, Port Sudan, and Suakin.

### III

The train went on steadily all night and most of the following day. An hour before sunset on August 16th, the sixth day of Dhu 'l-Hijja, it reached the dusty station house in Atbara. Dr. Eberhardt's old suitcases and creaking wicker baskets were taken off and piled on the siding. The Europeans kept Eberhardt company until the train was ready to go.

For the last time, Eberhardt thought of throwing caution to the winds, canceling his contract with the Beckermann expedition in Meroe, getting back on the train and going to Suakin and the ruins of Dobara, to the possibilities of great fame or great failure. Meroe or Dobara? He couldn't make up his mind. But if Beckermann had somehow not received his last telegram, had not sent transportation, then perhaps . . .

He saw a black dot on the western road. It came closer and resolved into a heavy-duty truck.

"That is my transportation," Eberhardt said sadly.

"We shall miss you," Ribera said. "Of the seven who left Fort Lamy together, only four of us are left now."

"I also regret the parting," Eberhardt said. "But you four will continue together to the Arabian peninsula."

"Inshallah!" Echeverria said, grinning.

"That's right," Major Harkness said. "That's the thing to say on a journey like this. Inshallah! If it pleases God!"

They all shook hands with Eberhardt. The truck came into the station. A European was driving, and there were two Sudanese laborers in the back. The Europeans waved to Eberhardt, who waved back. There was a preliminary hoot from the train's whistle. Near the front of the train, Harith had momentarily left his four hundred pilgrims. He was deep in conversation with a local Arab from Atbara.

Harith listened to the words of his assistant in silence. The loyal Sagar was finished, and his face wore a look of hopeful anxiety. But Harith didn't speak. He was still annoyed about Prokopulous.

Although he had detested the Greek, he had never underestimated his value. Prokopulous had been his one link to the incomprehensible Europeans. Now that link was severed, and danger was everywhere. The most immediate danger was murder at the hands of el Tikheimi. But behind that danger was another, perhaps a greater danger. He still did not know which of the Europeans was Stephen Dain, or what Dain planned to do. Prokopulous might know, but he was in the Khartoum police station. It was impossible to release him in time to help. The hours and days marched on, and the 12th of Dhu 'l-Hijja approached. There could be no stopping for Prokopulous; but the greedy, lying Greek would have been useful.

The train whistle hooted sharply. Sagar said again, "Master, I did everything you required of me."

"Yes," Harith said, "you did what I told you to do; but you didn't find out what I wanted to know."

"It was impossible to find out! I myself went to the port of Suakin. I listened to the nakhodas of the dhows talk, I heard them gossip about men and events in Africa and Arabia. But not one man spoke your name, or el Tikheimi's, or the name Dain, or any of the other names you told me to listen for."

"Of course you heard nothing," Harith said. "All men in these parts know that you are my servant and my right hand. When you are around, prudent men do not speak about me,

or about my friends or enemies. You are a fool, Sagar. When I told you to find out what men were saying in Suakin, I didn't mean for you to go there yourself. You should have sent someone to listen, someone not associated with me."

"But how could I have guessed that?" Sagar cried. "And how, without instructions, could I have entrusted so important a piece of work to anyone but myself?"

"You are a fool," Harith said with a sigh. "My life and fortune rest in the hands of fools."

"I could not read your mind," Sagar said, his voice growing sullen. "I did what seemed best; there was nothing else I could do. Besides—what about the other instructions you gave me? Didn't I carry them out to perfection?"

"Yes, there you did well," Harith said. "You did better than I expected. You are a loyal man, Sagar, and loyalty is worth more than rubies. It cannot be helped if your wits aren't as sharp as I would desire."

"Then I *did* do the other part well!" Sagar cried. "I knew it! Master, in your service no task is too difficult for me. I need only to be told precisely what to do."

"That is all you need to be told," Harith said, smiling. "Precisely what to do, down to the smallest detail."

"Of course!" Sagar said happily. "Only tell me what my actions should be, Mustapha ibn Harith, and I will perform them unflinchingly."

The train whistle hooted sharply three times. Harith said formally, "You are a good and a loyal man, Sagar, and my dearly beloved brother. I beg you to accept this token of my esteem."

Harith held out a wallet he had prepared to pay for Sagar's services. Sagar backed away, holding up both hands.

"No, Mustapha ibn Harith! What I did was out of love for you, not for money."

Harith had to urge the wallet on him three times before Sagar, his face joyous, finally accepted. There was just enough time to clasp the loyal servant in his arms and utter another few words of praise. Then the train started to move, and Harith released Sagar and climbed aboard.

Standing in the vestibule, Harith could look to the west and see the truck carrying away the European named Eberhardt. The train swung east, picking up speed on the last part of its journey to Sallom, Port Sudan, and Suakin. There were four Europeans now; and in one of the coaches there was el Tikheimi. He had no clever Prokopulous to whisper complicated lies into his ear. Instead, he could look back and see the stocky figure of Sagar, a motionless white statue

against the brown expanse of desert, a servant both loyal and honest, and as valueless as loyalty and honesty when cleverness was required.

#### IV

The train should have covered the distance between Atbara and Sallom Junction in a little over a day. The timetable said so, and the Europeans regarded this as a factual statement. Only the Africans and Arabs read the timetable for what it was: a message of hope, a poem of desire. They knew that *Inshallah!* should have been stamped in red letters across the black print. They knew that prayers were in order at the beginning of any journey.

In Europe, there was little need for the travelers' rite of invocation and submission. But nature in Africa was untamed and childishly unpredictable. Sometimes it played at docility, but more often it played at havoc. The necessity of an interested and interceding god was very evident in a land which periodically shrugged the miserable mud villages off its hide, or dried them into tinder and burned them down, or flooded them, or blew them into the nearest river. Over the vast continent nature worked its prodigies unchecked. Through its perversity, nature insisted upon personification. It worked in sudden coups, out of playfulness rather than malice.

During the night of August 17th, nature experimented with a strong, unseasonable southerly wind. By morning, anyone could see the results. The southerly wind had temporarily reshaped the Nubian desert. It had shifted the sand dunes of Kassala Province, piling them high almost to the foot of *Jebel Abadab*; and it had covered the railroad tracks near *Haiya Junction*, burying the last low section before the train could climb into the mountains.

The passengers were called out to clear the tracks. Even the Europeans lent a hand, laboring under an unbelievable white sun. Important men like *Harith* and *el Tikheimi* scorned menial labor. They watched and made jokes about the Europeans. The Sudanese engineer and his firemen selected a shady spot and went to sleep. The four hundred pilgrims worked, stared at the unfamiliar landscape, and decided they didn't like it. They were beginning to wonder how they would ever get home.

Eight hours of work by six hundred men cleared the rails into *Haiya Junction*. Now the train could climb into the

mountains. It descended to Sallom Junction on August 18th, the eighth day of Dhu 'l-Hijja.

Here again there was a parting of the ways. The four Europeans were going on to Port Sudan. From there, Harkness, Ribera, and Echeverria would take a Red Sea steamer to Aden, and McCue would cross directly to Jidda. El Tikheimi was also going to Port Sudan. Harith, traveling by way of Suakin, herded his pilgrims onto the shuttle train.

When the two trains were fully loaded, a delay was announced. Both engineers were missing, and were believed to be drunk somewhere in Sallom. The Europeans stayed in their leather first-class seats, surrounded by incandescent iron, too tired to seek comfort in the town, too irritated even to complain. Harith and el Tikheimi used their time to take a stroll.

A parting of enemies was as momentous as a parting of friends; therefore they walked through Sallom, reminisced, and tried to probe each other's intentions. They found much to talk about, but learned little. Out of politeness and self-regard they always answered each other's questions; but out of caution they always lied, or smothered their replies in paradox. Through labyrinthine digressions, each tried without success to trap the other into an unguarded admission.

They came to the end of the town. Windrows of sand stretched across the streets, and sand was piled loosely against the low mud huts. Without transition, they had stepped into a stark and unequivocal wilderness. Directly in front of them, the dunes crept between crags of black rock and interlaced the low basalt cliffs. Boulders were strewn thickly across the parched ground, and some of them were larger than a truck. In the distance, successive ranges of mountains marched away in colors of black, gray, and blue.

Harith and el Tikheimi looked across the blasted earth for several seconds. Then Harith said, "This is the place for an Arab. This is the place of freedom."

"Yes," el Tikheimi said, "here a man can breathe."

They nodded in agreement, and each knew how greatly he lied. They were city Arabs. Harith had spent his youth and early manhood in Mecca, and el Tikheimi had grown up in Hodeida. What they loved was noise, entertainment, crowds; but what they wanted to love was the stingy, silent desert with its hint of ancient nomadic virtues and fiery independence.

They stood together in silent and deceitful communion. Waves of heat shimmered from the black basalt cliffs. A man's voice was shouting something from the town.

He came running toward them, his face streaked with dust and sweat, his narrow chest heaving with exhaustion. They saw that he was one of Harith's assistants.

"What is it?" Harith asked sharply.

"The hadjis, master, it is the hadjis!"

El Tikheimi stood to one side and watched, grinning. Harith seized his assistant by the shoulders. "What about the hadjis?"

"They became frightened when the train didn't move. Someone said you had deserted them in this wilderness, and someone else said they could never reach Mecca by the twelfth of Dhu 'l-Hijja. Then they all left the train, and I tried to stop them, but—"

"Show me where they went!" Harith roared. He turned and ran back toward the town, pulling the exhausted assistant with him.

El Tikheimi didn't stop laughing until Harith was out of sight. Then he wiped his eyes and grinned. He hoped that Harith would choke on his own rage. He hoped that the pilgrims had already boarded the train back to Khartoum. He would always remember, with pleasure, that venomous look on Harith's face.

He turned to stroll back into town. Before he had taken a step, he heard the sharp flat crack of a rifle behind him.

El Tikheimi responded instantly, with a speed that had taken him through a dozen raids and counter-raids. He flung himself flat on the ground and to the right. Long ago he had learned that a sniper firing from behind usually aimed for a spine shot or for a heart shot to the left of the spine.

This one had been trying for a heart shot, and the bullet grazed el Tikheimi's left side, nearly a clean miss. El Tikheimi rolled frantically to the right. Bullets followed him, kicking up little plumes of sand where he had just been. He rolled toward a boulder he could use for shelter, and the sniper hastily corrected his aim. First he overshot, ricocheting off the boulder. Then he hit, and there was a tinkle as an empty clip was ejected. El Tikheimi grunted as he rolled to the safety of the boulder. The sniper, aiming at a rolling foreshortened figure, had gauged his trajectory wrong. A higher shot would have gone through el Tikheimi's spine. Instead, the bullet had struck his raised right leg, passing completely through the thigh.

El Tikheimi examined the wound and found that the bullet hadn't touched bone. It hadn't even cut through the deep muscles. It had plowed a U-shaped furrow across the top of his thigh. It was a surface wound, but it would be very pain-

ful soon, and his leg would be stiff within half an hour. It had already begun to bleed heavily.

First things came first. El Tikheimi pulled out his own weapon, a long-barreled .38 Smith & Wesson revolver. He fired one shot in the general direction of the sniper, to announce that he was armed and to discourage the man from rushing him. Then he tore off his light cotton undershirt, ripped it in two and used one half as packing to stop the flow of blood. With the other half he bound the wound tightly. He could still flex his leg, and the wound didn't bleed through the bandage. That was good; he wouldn't leave a blood spoor.

The graze on his side wasn't worth bandaging. He picked up his revolver and tried to make a plan.

The town of Sallom began about fifty yards behind him. But to reach the town he would have to run in the open on a stiffening leg. The sniper was a poor shot, but not that bad. Retreat was cut off.

The sniper fired again. He had shifted position, and his bullet chipped granite three feet above el Tikheimi's head. El Tikheimi snapped back a shot and retreated around the boulder. He was being forced further from the town, but now he knew approximately where the man was hidden.

From the rifle's sound, the sniper was probably seventy to a hundred yards away. Because of the rate of fire, the sniper's weapon was probably a semi-automatic like the American Garand. It gave him a decisive advantage over el Tikheimi's revolver. The man simply had to keep his distance, hidden in the crags and boulders, out of effective pistol range.

Three shots cracked across the boulder, the nearest about five feet away. The sniper had shifted ground again, circling to get a field of fire. El Tikheimi backed around the boulder. He decided that there was something strange about the sniper. There were several strange things.

The man had missed his first shot. No Bedouin would have missed; he would have grown up with his old Martini-Henry or Springfield, and he would have known its ways at any distance, under any circumstances. Windage or heat refraction wouldn't have deceived a trained marksman. He would have made that first shot his best shot.

This man, it seemed, was not a trained rifleman. He had never spent the years of loving practice one needs to master the rifle. It was not his best weapon. There was further evidence of this in the type of rifle he was using. Semi-automatics were new in Africa, and no trained man would give up his reliable old bolt-action rifle for a Garand. Certainly

he would never do so in such a delicate enterprise as an ambush.

But that was not the entire picture, and it would be wrong to dismiss this sniper as a bungling amateur. He had fired off the semi-automatic's clip with speed and sureness. He was circling aggressively, trying to create an opportunity. He was no novice; but what kind of man was he, and what weapon was he accustomed to?

Suddenly el Tikheimi had the answer. This man was probably a former soldier or riot policeman. The weapon he was accustomed to was the submachine gun. His inexcusable first shot, his manner of firing off the entire clip, all led to that conclusion. Even more revealing was the way he had fired. A trained rifleman leads a moving target; a machine-gunner often will follow the target, counting on his shorter arc and high rate of fire to catch up.

Very good, el Tikheimi thought. He has a rifle, but he shoots like a machine-gunner. Now we will see.

In the shelter of the boulder, el Tikheimi took off his khafiya and draped it over the rocks. Looking up, he caught a glint of light from a rifle barrel. He snapped out two shots and the rifle was hastily withdrawn. He reloaded and adjusted the khafiya. From seventy yards, it would look like a man lying prone behind the boulder. The sniper couldn't see it yet, but his tactics had been to circle clockwise. If he kept that up, he would see an edge of the khafiya in less than five minutes. Then he would probably fire a shot, circle some more, and then fire a full clip.

El Tikheimi hoped he would do that. He crawled to the left, counterclockwise, silent as a lizard, keeping under cover. His furrowed thigh was throbbing painfully now, but he was in a state of exhilaration. He was stalking the sniper, moving around and behind him, coming close enough to use his revolver.

Thirty yards from the man's last location he heard two shots ricochet off the boulder where he had left his khafiya. He tried to move more quickly, before his ruse was discovered. He climbed for twenty yards, and then his leg buckled under him. He put the muzzle of the revolver in his mouth and crawled, using both hands and one leg. Ten yards now? Where was the sniper?

Then el Tikheimi dragged himself over a lip of rock and saw the man, turned away from him toward the deceptive khafiya. There were two empty clips on the ground beside the sniper, and he was wedged securely into the rocks.



He was about thirty feet away. El Tikheimi took the revolver from his mouth, gripped it in both hands, and sighted on the center of the man's spine. Then he changed his mind and shifted his aim. He held his breath and gently squeezed the trigger. The revolver bucked, and came back to position.

The bullet caught the sniper high in the right shoulder, smashing bone. The rifle was knocked away. It clattered down the rocks and fell into the sand. The man watched it fall and el Tikheimi watched the man. At last the sniper turned. He was bleeding freely, and both hands were at his side, empty.

"Bad luck," el Tikheimi called out cheerfully. The man didn't answer. He had a heavy, sullen face, and his gaze was fixed on the ground. He stood as erect as he could, like a prisoner trying to face execution with a show of bravery.

"Very bad luck," el Tikheimi said. "Do you know what the Sudanese police will give you for attempted murder? Twenty years in prison at the least."

The man looked at el Tikheimi for the first time. There was a faint flicker of hope on his face. "Are you taking me in to the police?" he asked.

"Of course," el Tikheimi said. "What else would I do with you?"

"Ah, God," the man moaned, "I am truly sorry I tried to kill you!"

"Yes," el Tikheimi said, "I think that you are sorry now."

"I am, I am!" the sniper said. "But how could I know what quality of man you were? How could I guess that you were the most skilled of the skilled, a genius of arms and ambush, a shadow moving across the ground?"

"You are too kind," el Tikheimi said. "But why did you want to kill me? Do you hate me?"

"I do not hate you!" the man cried. "I do not even know you! I was hired, master, hired by a dungheap who gave me much money and promised more, and who said it would be easier to kill you than to brush away a fly! Master, my life is in your hands; but if you would give me the chance, I would kill that man—"

"What is his name?" el Tikheimi asked.

"He is called Sagar, and he lives in Atbara. He told me that he wanted revenge. But I know that he is nothing but a mouth for his master, Mustapha ibn Harith."

"I know that, too," el Tikheimi said. "All men know that."

"Master, let me kill Harith for you!"

"That is a very tempting offer. But killing Harith is something more than brushing away a fly."

"I can do it!" the man cried. "I swear before God I can kill him, and I swear before God that I will do it. Master, I swear this upon my hope of Paradise!"

"You swear very nicely," el Tikheimi said. "And I think, in spite of your clumsiness, that you know something about killing. I think perhaps you were a policeman."

"How did you guess? What you say is true, I was a policeman and I know about killing."

"You were not born in the Sudan?"

"No, master. I was born in Beni Suef, in Egypt, and I went to the Police Academy in Cairo. I was promoted into the Special Security Police, and there I became a sergeant. But when King Farouk was overthrown, I had to leave the country."

"Regimes rise and fall," el Tikheimi said lightly. "The Special Security Police? Then you must be accustomed to the revolver."

"No, master," the man said proudly. "True, we carried revolvers, but our real weapon was the Schmeisser or the Sten. Sir, I was an artist of the machine gun."

"I had thought so," el Tikheimi said, "but I wanted to find out for certain. You fired your rifle like a machine-gunner; now you can die like a machine-gunner."

"Master, please, I beg you—"

El Tikheimi fired at the man's face, but the sniper was going down on his knees and the bullet only creased his scalp. El Tikheimi fired once more, and this time he hit the man just above the left eye.

He reloaded and put the revolver inside his shirt. His thigh wound was very painful now, and the flesh around it was inflamed and tender to the touch. Could it be infected so soon? Surely not. He had the scars of worse wounds than this, and none of them had become infected so soon. Still, gangrene was always possible if a gunshot wound was not treated. He should see a doctor at once.

But Harith, that wily black fox, was now far ahead of him. Harith! What a mind that man had! Harith must have worked out every detail of the ambush with loving care: the sniper concealed in the desert, the friendly walk past the edge of town, and then the assistant, running as though his life depended upon it, gasping out his lies about the fleeing hadjis. That had given Harith an excuse to run back into Sallom; and it had given the sniper a clear, unmistakable figure to shoot at.

He had to admire Harith. The plan had left nothing to chance. Only the frailty of a human instrument had caused it to fail. The sniper might have been good enough to machine-

gune defenceless mobs, but he hadn't been good enough to kill a real fighting man.

And now—if God was willing—he would put an end to this long game with Harith. He turned and limped down the rocks toward town.

Harith was not the only one who could make cunning plans. El Tikheimi had his own scheme; but the sniper had delayed him. An hour and a mile were crucial now. He couldn't stop to see a doctor, the gouge in his thigh would have to wait. It would probably be all right. But even if it weren't all right, even if it festered, the wound would still have to wait.

## v

It was August 19, 1952, the ninth day of Dhu 'l-Hijja. Harith stood on the main dock in Suakin and watched his assistants herd the pilgrims aboard the dhow that was to take them to Arabia. He was annoyed and apprehensive. It seemed to him that a malignant spirit was at work to disrupt all his plans and to give aid to his enemies. His agents in Sallom and Port Sudan had reported, and the news was uniformly bad.

The Europeans had arrived in Port Sudan and had departed within the day. They had found transportation on a Red Sea freighter bound for Jidda, Hodeida, and Aden. One of those four men was the secret police agent; but they had all stayed together in Port Sudan and no move had been possible against them. Nothing could be done now until he met the one who was Dain in Arabia.

Much worse was the news that el Tikheimi had escaped the ambush at Sallom. Although he had been wounded, he had been able to kill the ambusher. Now he was reported to have reached Port Sudan. He had entered the town, but Harith's agents had been unable to trace him after that. Had he gone north, to Muhammad Quol? Would he wait in Port Sudan for Harith's return? Or would he cross over to Arabia and raise his followers for a raid?

It was impossible to say. Both Dain and el Tikheimi were somewhere nearby, invisible and quick as the wind, moving against him in ways he could not know, according to schemes he could not penetrate.

Gloomily he watched his pilgrims boarding the dhow. It was an ocean-going ship from Kuwait, of nearly two hundred tons, high in the stern and carrying two masts. It was too

deep to come up to the dock, so the pilgrims were being rowed out in sewn boats. Most of them were already aboard, and soon he also would have to go. But once again he asked himself if he shouldn't stay in the safety of Africa. He could leave the pilgrims to whoever claimed them and go far away from here, to Mombasa or Zanzibar, to Mogadiscio or Dar-es-Salaam. His luck had gone bad, and no man could fight against bad luck. As for the merchants of Mecca—well, let them find their own slaves.

Suddenly Harith realized why things were as they were, and why his enemies were potent and he was not. It was because they were free and he was not free. He had become a conservative, successful old trader. It was necessary for him to take his pilgrims along well-traveled roads, and to move by a fixed timetable. But no such necessities hindered his enemies. Dain was free to idle away two months in Teneriffe, just to await the beginning of the hadj from West Africa. El Tikheimi, with no business to safeguard as yet, was free to move when and where he pleased. They were as free as young leopards, whereas he had changed over the years from a raider into a merchant. Now the tricks of the raiders could be used against him, and he should not leave Africa.

But even as he thought it, he shook his head. Stay in Africa—for what? With what? He would be penniless in Africa, he would lose the fruits of a lifetime's labor. Would he take a job as a shopkeeper's assistant or a butcher's apprentice? Never, by God, never!

He went down the dock to a boat and got in. He reminded himself that the last word had not been written. He had not killed his enemies; but his enemies had not killed him. They had their plans, but he had his. Free raiders could be killed, in spite of all their strength and subtlety. That was something to remember.

He reached the dhow and climbed to the deck. The last of the pilgrims came aboard. Above the noise of four hundred men rose the shrill orders of the captain. Harith went to the high steering deck in the stern. From here he could see the sailors taking in the anchors and freeing the sails. The strong south wind filled the sails and the dhow leaned gently over and gathered way. The helmsman wrestled with the steering-sweep, and the dhow pointed to the northeast.

Within a hour, the African coastline faded to a low, indistinct line of brown and green. The crew of the dhow were bringing the ship into some semblance of order, and the

hadjis were settling down. The captain went to his cabin. Harith waited a few moments, then followed him.

The little cabin smelled of fish oil and spices. The captain was a short, slim, middle-aged Kuwaiti. He had put on spectacles in order to study his account books.

"Welcome, Musatpha ibn Harith," he said. "I am almost finished with these damned accounts. I will have the cook make coffee for us."

"Are the accounts bad?"

"Everything concerning ships is bad."

The captain tried to explain, although he was sure that no landsman could understand his misfortunes. He had sailed to Mukalla early in the first month of the northeast monsoon, partially loaded with spices, ghee, cotton cloth, and toys from Japan. He had planned to take on a large shipment of Hadhramaut honey for a buyer in Mogadiscio. But there had been hardly any honey available, and the profitable transaction had to be forgotten. The next disappointment had come in Mogadiscio, where the trading had been poor and he had barely cleared expenses for his long journey. When his cargo was finally disposed of, he had reloaded with mangrove poles, taken on a load of pilgrims, and set sail for Jidda. But north of the Dahlak Archipelago he had been rammed by a clumsy drunken fool in a Persian dhow, his foremast had been broken, and the side of his ship had been holed at the waterline. He had managed to get into Suakin, and had spent two unprofitable months there making repairs. When he was finished, the time of the northeast monsoon had ended. The southwest wind had come, bringing bad weather and frequent storms, robbing him of a quick passage back to Kuwait. The crew was dissatisfied and the owners would be very unhappy. These were the misfortunes he had encountered so far this year—and the year was not yet over.

"You have surely had bad luck," Harith said.

"By God, I have! And who knows what is to come next?"

"Perhaps I can tell you," Harith said.

The captain took off his spectacles and squinted at Harith. "What do you mean?"

"Your next misfortune, captain, is that you must sail to Dauqa instead of Lith."

"But you chartered me for Lith."

"I have changed my mind."

The captain shook his head vigorously. "Dauqa is a dangerous port, and the waters around it are thick with sand bars and coral reefs. I am not going to sail my ship there."

"But you are," Harith said. "I say that you must."

"You chartered me to Lith!" the captain said. "I would never have agreed to take you to Dauqa. You need a little boat to enter a place like that, not a sea-going dhow."

"Still, you will take me to Dauqa." Harith slipped a hand into his shirt. When he withdrew it he was holding an automatic.

The captain stared at the gun in amazement. Then he shouted, "Harith, you have gone crazy!"

"No," Harith said, "this change in plans is necessary. There are good reasons why I must not land at Lith as in former years. You must take me to Dauqa."

The captain seemed to be more enraged by the automatic than frightened by it. He said, "Suppose I won't? You would kill me, I suppose?"

"Yes."

"And who would sail the ship?"

"Your mate."

"The mate is a son of the owner's family and an idiot. He doesn't even know the Persian Gulf ports yet, much less the Arabian ports. He would never be able to get into Dauqa. He would smash the ship on a reef. Can your pilgrims swim a mile or two? Did you know that there are more sharks in the Red Sea than anywhere else in the world?"

"I know nothing of ships or the sea," Harith said. "I only know that Dauqa is a port a hundred or so miles south of Jidda, and that I am going there."

"You won't get there alive," the captain said.

"I think you can take me there safely," Harith said. "If you refuse, I will have to kill you and order your mate to take me there. I have no choice. What do you wish to do, captain?"

The captain glared furiously and said, "Suppose I agreed, and suppose God allowed me to enter Dauqa? You would kill me as soon as the anchor is down."

"I swear before God that I would not kill you," Harith said. "I would reward you."

The captain shook his head in disbelief. Harith said, "You have heard of me?"

"I have heard of you," the captain said grudgingly.

"Then you should know that I don't kill a man who does what I ask of him. I reward a man who aids me in an hour of peril. Have you heard those things about me?"

"Yes, I have heard talk like that. But why can't you go to Lith or Jidda? Even if I could take you to Dauqa, how would you bring your pilgrims to Mecca by the appointed day?"

"My reasons are important," Harith said. "As for my pilgrims, they will reach Mecca in good time."

"You might have trouble if you disappoint them."

"Then it will be my trouble. What are you going to do, captain?"

"I will try to take you to Dauqa," the captain said. "But I swear before God, I do now know if this ship can make it. The passage through the reefs is dangerous, and the ship draws too much water."

"I trust in your skills," Harith said. "I trust you to make a safe passage, and a swift one."

The captain shrugged his shoulders. "Our passage to Dauqa is in God's hands."

"That is true. But captain—there is one last thing to say."

"Well, say it."

"My assistants are well-armed, alert, and very suspicious. Your sailors could not overcome them by surprise. And my assistants know what Dauqa looks like as well as I do. There would be killing if you forswore yourself and brought the ship to Jidda or Lith."

"All right!" the captain shouted. "You are a clever man, Mustapha ibn Harith, and you have made these plans with care. But don't threaten me again unless you want to sail this accursed ship by yourself."

"There will be no more threats," Harith promised. "Everything has been said. If only your sailors—"

"My sailors will do as I tell them," the captain said. "If necessary they'll follow me onto a coral reef, which is where we will probably end. Come, you can listen to me give your insane order to the helmsman."

Harith put away his automatic and followed the captain to the deck. The assistants were scattered around, waiting. Harith smiled at them to show that all was well. Then he went to the stern deck with the captain.

"Steer for Dauqa," the captain told the helmsman. "And don't gape at me, you young donkey."

The helmsman was a turbaned Somali. He said, "Dauqa? But captain, the reefs—"

"Shut up, you misbegotten bastard!" the captain roared. "Have I been a sailor and a captain for twenty years in order to be instructed in my craft by a dogfaced moron? Has an angel suddenly taught you more than I know about the ports and reefs of Arabia? Steer for Dauqa, idiot!"

The helmsman, his face impassive, leaned against the steering-oar. The captain watched, a little of his self-esteem regained by his explosion at the helmsman.

The dhow came off its northeasterly course to a more easterly setting. Some of the sailors looked up, but went back to work when the captain shouted at them. The pilgrims didn't notice anything.

Harith looked out across the wrinkled hide of the sea. Near the ship, the water was dark blue; farther out, the sun had touched the wave crests with flashes of gold. In the distance, the ocean seemed to have been beaten out of silver, merging imperceptibly with the luminous silver-white sky. Arabia lay beyond that brilliance. Arabia's black cliffs were just beyond this flowing appearance of silver and gold.

Harith felt content and at peace. He was sailing to his destiny, which the Hand of God had already written. But neither he nor any other man could know what that destiny was, or what God had written. That remained a mystery, and in it lay his hope.



**August 22, 1952—DAUQA; THE TWELFTH  
DAY OF DHU 'L-HIJJA**

**I**

Under a scorched white morning sky the pilgrims filed onto the worn stone dock at Dauqa. Harith's assistants were carrying their guns openly now. They told the pilgrims that this was necessary in case of raiders. The pilgrims did not protest. Among the four hundred, not one had a weapon. They had trusted Harith across a thousand miles of Africa and across the Red Sea. They trusted him still; but they were uneasy about the guns.

During the earlier part of their journey, Chad and the Sudan had seemed the most outlandish and incomprehensible places they could imagine. But only now, in Arabia, were they able to realize the extent of their former ignorance. Arabia felt immeasurably stranger and more menacing than anything they had seen before. Now, instead of talking about their individual villages in Nigeria, the Cameroons, or the Congo, they spoke of Africa itself. The entire continent seemed familiar, intimate, and dear as they stepped onto the holy and alien soil of Arabia.

On the dock at Dauqa the hadjis whispered together; but they didn't speak of the fears which the guns inspired. They had risked too much, come too far, and trusted too well to afford misgivings at the sight of a few guns. They didn't want to put words to their dread. They couldn't believe that Harith might be treacherous, and that they might be dupes. Each man wrestled alone with his doubts and tried to assure himself that nothing was wrong.

The dhow had been a mile offshore by sunset of the previous day. It had anchored in the shallows, and by first light it was under way again. The captain had prayed and cursed his way through sandbars and reefs, conning his ship in an agony of fear. Lookouts at bow and masthead looked down through the clear water and shrieked warnings of the dark reefs and shoals. The captain wept and twisted his agile ship between danger to starboard and disaster to port. Twice the

dhow scraped coral and the captain ground his teeth. Then, miraculously, the dhow glided into the safety of Dauqa's small deep-water harbor. When his ship was tied up, the captain retired to his cabin in a state of nervous exhaustion.

In a little while he realized what a great and remarkable feat he had accomplished. Alone among the captains of the world, he had taken a deep-water dhow into Dauqa. All the landmarks of the intricate channel were impressed indelibly on his mind—and he was the only deep-water sailor who possessed this knowledge! At the moment, his secret lore was of no practical value. But it proved something he had long suspected: that he was the finest and most skilled captain in the world.

After thinking about this, he returned to the deck and watched the last of the hadjis disembark. When Harith held out the promised reward, the captain shook his head.

"It is not necessary," he told Harith. "In truth, it made no difference to me where I took you. Jidda, Lith, Dauqa, Al Qunficha—I can take my ship into any port I please. All these ports, the little ones and the big ones, are the same to me. I only like to know where I am going beforehand—for the sake of the owners."

Harith insisted upon giving the reward, and the captain, glowing with pride, refused more times than was necessary. At last he accepted, saying, "I take it only because it pleases you. But all these little ports are very much alike to a competent ship's captain."

Harith thanked the captain and congratulated him on his skill. Then he went down the dock and joined the hadjis.

Under the direction of the assistants, the hadjis were formed into a column four abreast. The assistants stood at either side of the column, and one man guarded the rear. Harith went to the head of the column and told the pilgrims that trucks were waiting for them at the edge of the town. A few townspeople had come out, and two Saudi guards stood nearby. They wore white robes fastened with an embroidered leather strap over the left shoulder. Their rifles were slung over their right shoulders, and each man had an embroidered pouch for ammunition. They were bare-headed, and they both wore American Air Force sunglasses. They grinned as the hadjis moved past them.

Harith led his pilgrims up Dauqa's sharply tilted main street. The town was squeezed between the narrow coast and the sheer granite cliffs of the Jabal Hijaz. Stone houses lined the street, their rough-hewn walls hinting at an incred-

ible permanence. But the air of permanence was an illusion; the close-packed houses leaned against each other for support, clinging together desperately to keep from tumbling down the steep, rutted road into the sea. Their narrow black windows watched as the hadjis struggled up the merciless slope.

At the top, they came to a level cross street. More Saudi guards lounged in the comfortless shade of the doorways. Fifty feet ahead was a stone guardhouse. Harith led his pilgrims toward it.

He knew that the moment of greatest danger was behind him. The place for el Tikheimi to have made an ambush was back on the narrow climbing street. Harith had entered it as prepared as possible, surrounded by the hadjis, his senses alert, a gun in his hand, his assistants armed and ready. Still, he had known that nothing would help much against a really good ambush.

Now that risk was gone. He was safe, and tomorrow he would no longer be tied to this herd of pilgrims. Tomorrow he would be free to move and stay where he wished, his promises fulfilled and his obligations discharged. Tomorrow he would be free, and he would stay free of the wheedling Meccan merchants until he had settled matters with el Tikheimi.

That narrow street had been el Tikheimi's chance. But what about Dain's chance? Would a Christian be stupid enough to think he could arrest a Moslem in Saudi Arabia? No, no man could be that stupid. Was Dain waiting in Africa for Harith's return? If so, there was nothing he could prove before a European court.

Harith put his automatic out of sight as he came up to the guardhouse. The moves were easy now, made smooth by long practice. The guards would examine his papers, then ask for the papers of the hadjis. But the hadjis had no papers; they had come illegally into Saudi Arabia. The soldiers would take them to prison, and a judge would fine them. When they were unable to pay, the judge would declare their rights and privileges forfeited. Under Saudi law, illegal immigrants could be sold into slavery to satisfy judgments against them. Harith would pay their fines, and would become their first owner. Then, with an escort of Saudi guards, he would transport his slaves to Riadyh or Mecca, wherever the market was best this year. But first he would fulfill his promises to the merchants of Mecca, giving them the pick of the girls and the young boys.

At the guardhouse, a Saudi soldier leaned out and took

Harith's papers. He studied them, shrugged, and handed them to another Saudi soldier. Harith knew what was expected. He reached into his pouch and selected four silver coins as a gift-offering. The first soldier left the guardhouse.

Harith opened his hand, showing the gleam of silver. A graceful speech was on his lips. Before he could speak, the soldier in the guardhouse turned his face so that Harith could see him. Harith recognized the man. It was Echeverria, the silent little Paraguayan.

Harith went for his automatic. He almost had it clear before the second soldier smashed a rifle butt into his wrist. The automatic fell into the dust. Harith dived for it, and the soldier slammed the rifle butt into the small of his back. Harith fell and squirmed along the ground like a beetle, still reaching for the gun. The Saudi kicked it away and laughed when Harith kept on crawling toward it. The soldier let him get within a foot of the automatic, then he brought down the rifle butt against the back of Harith's neck. Harith collapsed with his face in the dust. The soldier waited to see if there was to be any more sport, but Harith didn't move. The soldier spat on him and picked up the automatic.

## II

When he recovered consciousness, Harith found that he was in a bare, dimly lit hut. There was a pulsing ache in the back of his head, and his lower spine felt bruised. But at the moment, his injuries didn't concern him. He was trying to understand what had happened, and how, and why.

Looking up, he saw the short Paraguayan captain sitting in a corner of the hut with a gun in his lap. Echeverria called through the door, "He has recovered."

"You are the police agent Dain?" Harith asked in Arabic.

"Certainly not," Echeverria said. "You already know my true name."

"Then you are of South America?"

"Yes."

"But you speak Arabic; now you even look like an Arab."

"My mother was Syrian," Echeverria said.

"This is beyond my understanding," Harith said.

"Soon you will understand everything," Echeverria promised him.

The door opened. Colonel Ribera entered the hut, nodded to Echeverria, and looked at Harith.

"You are Dain," Harith said, and repeated his statement in French.

"That's right, I am Stephen Dain."

"And we are still in Arabia?"

"We're in a hut just above Dauqa. You've been unconscious for about half an hour."

Harith said, "I have broken no law in Arabia."

"Haven't you?"

"No. In any event, the Saudi officials will not convict me of anything."

"We know all about that," Echeverria said.

"Then do you plan to smuggle me back to Africa?"

"No," Dain said.

Harith was silent for a while. He didn't want to ask the ultimate question: What will you do with me? He could guess the answer. They would let him stay in Arabia, they would let him stay with a bullet through the back of his head. But as soon as he decided that, he became uncertain. If they planned to kill him, why hadn't they done so already? There could be only one answer; before killing him, they wanted to question him.

"I suppose you want the names of my business associates," Harith said.

"We already have them," Dain said.

"Then what do you want to know?"

"Nothing."

Harith couldn't understand this. If they did not wish to question him, why was he still alive? What was he being saved for? That was part of the ultimate answer. It would all be clear when he asked: What will you do with me? But he didn't want to ask yet, he didn't want to know. There were other things he wanted to know first.

"How were you able to capture me like this in Arabia? How did you know where I would land? How did you get the use of Saudi soldiers? And what about the other Europeans—were they a part of this? And also tell me what I did wrong to enable you to succeed."

"Not so fast," Dain said. "I can't answer all of that in one sentence."

"Then tell me first what I did wrong."

"You did nothing wrong," Dain said, "except to continue doing what you had been doing."

"I thought that was it," Harith said. "I should have stopped at the proper time. But that is the greatest of human weaknesses—not knowing when to stop. I continued, and you made your plan against me. What was this plan?"

"There was nothing very complicated about it," Dain said. "When I was offered this assignment, I read everything I could find about slavery and the law. Then I understood how clever your operation was, and how difficult it would be to stop it. Frankly, I didn't want to take the case. I considered it more a political matter than a criminal one. Still, I accepted the assignment. Some very exaggerated reports about you had reached Washington, and I was ordered to spare no effort or expense in stopping you, and to proceed by any means in my power."

"You certainly spared no expense," Harith said. "To begin your job, you took a two months' vacation in Teneriffe."

"That wasn't strictly a vacation," Dain said. "For one thing, I was waiting for the beginning of the hadj from West Africa. For another, I was studying Spanish."

Harith looked astonished. Then he burst into laughter. "Spanish! You were studying for your role as Colonel Ribera!"

"Some kind of disguise seemed necessary," Dain said, "particularly when I heard what had happened to other police agents who followed you."

"A disguise was necessary," Harith acknowledged. "But even so, I should have guessed who you were. I knew from Prokopulous that you had gone to Teneriffe. Spanish is the language there; and behold, two Spanish-speaking gentlemen come to Fort Lamy. I should have guessed, but I did not consider the possibility of *two* agents traveling with me."

"I had requested the aid of Captain Echeverria," Dain said. "I knew that he spoke Arabic, which I do not speak, and I also knew his value as a police officer. But more important, Echeverria and I acted as bodyguards for each other. We wanted to avoid the sort of accident that happened to van Haarnin, and almost happened to McCue."

"It is true, you were never separated," Harith said. "But a policeman with a bodyguard—that is funny."

"Very funny," Echeverria said. "But necessary."

"Agreed," Harith said. He thought for a moment. "I knew from Prokopulous that Dain met a man one night on a beach in Teneriffe. That man flew to Capetown the following morning. Captain, you were that man?"

Echeverria nodded.

"I thought that your trip to Capetown was for the purpose of joining Dain later along the route."

"No," Dain said. "Echeverria went to Capetown for an

entirely different reason. He was there only a day, and then he joined me in Dakar."

"Very well," Harith said. "Now tell me about the other Europeans."

"There's nothing to tell. I'd never met any of them before. To the best of my knowledge, they didn't know anything about this. Van Haarnin and Ott complicated matters, but they also served as a distraction."

"It would have turned out differently if there had been fewer Europeans."

Dain shook his head. "I checked with the French authorities before I came to Fort Lamy. If there hadn't been enough genuine travelers going to Khartoum and points east, I would have hired some. I considered hiring a few anyhow, just to make things more confusing for you."

"By God! You are very free with your government's money," Harith said.

"You sound like a taxpayer," Dain said. "But you're right, I am free with other people's money. My government gave me a job to do. I spent what I had to spend in order to do that job."

"That sounds very good," Harith said. "I would not want to be your employer, but perhaps the American government knows better. Now tell me the rest."

"I think you know most of it already," Dain said. "The French authorities were most cooperative about delaying your departure. That put the pressure of time on you. Echeverria and I traveled across Africa with you to make sure you wouldn't reroute by way of Ethiopia or Eritrea. We didn't think you would, but we stayed near just in case. Our constant presence also served to keep you off balance. We didn't want you thinking too clearly, Harith."

"I had no need of *you* to confuse my thoughts," Harith said. "For that, I had the services of Mr. Prokopulous."

"Prokopulous worked for you better than you think," Dain said. "He was an unknown factor to us when we entered Fort Lamy. Eventually we traced him back to El Gezira. By then it was obvious that a part of our plan was compromised, though we didn't know how much. For a little while we even considered calling the whole thing off. It was lucky for us that you didn't trust Prokopulous very much."

"He was an unknown factor for me as well as for you," Harith said. "He knew part of your plan, but not enough. Why did you wait until Khartoum to have him arrested?"

"I had nothing to do with his arrest," Dain said. "It surprised me as much as it did you."

Harith gave a shrug of disbelief. "No matter. How did you know I would come to this port?"

"I didn't, but I was able to make an educated guess. I had a dhow follow you several miles offshore. The captain marked your course and it led roughly here. Courses can be changed, naturally, so I had to find out where else you might go. Jidda was out. It's the best port on this coast, but there are too many Europeans there, and too many non-Arab Moslems. Jidda hasn't been used as a major slaving port since the end of the Second World War."

"Correct. But what about the other ports of the Hejaz and the Tihama coasts? What about the ports of Yemen and the Hadhramaut? There must be a thousand miles of coastline between northern and southern Arabia."

"More than a thousand miles," Dain said. "But your choice of ports was limited. First I ruled out everything north of Jidda. The ports to the north are impossible for a large dhow until you reach Aiuna, seven hundred miles from Suakin. Also, the prevailing Red Sea winds blow from the north as far as the latitude of Jidda. You would have had many weeks of hard sailing if you had decided upon Aiuna. I didn't think you would."

"What about the ports to the south?"

"That was more of a problem," Dain said. "Still, I could make a selection of sorts. From Dauqa to Mecca is about a hundred and fifty miles overland. If you went further south, to Hodeida, you would add another three hundred overland miles onto your trip to Mecca. That would be four hundred and fifty miles all told, a long distance over bad roads. I didn't think you would bother going into the Yemen at all. So I paid attention only to the Arabian coastline between Lith and Qizan. Along that two hundred and fifty miles of coast, there are only four possible ports for a sea-going dhow. Those ports are Lith, Dauqa, Al Qunficha, and Qizan. I had men in all four ports. But the only two places where I really expected you were Lith and Dauqa."

"As it happened, you were right," Harith said. "But what if I had not done the reasonable and expected thing? What if I had gone to Hodeida, or sailed around the Hadhramaut coast to Mukalla or Rivan?"

"Then I wouldn't have caught you," Dain said. "Not this year, anyhow. But luckily for me, you took the reasonable way. You came to Dauqa."

"I came because I couldn't believe you would have any



power in Saudi Arabia. I still find it hard to believe. I don't understand how you had the opportunity to bribe Saudi soldiers."

"Those men weren't Saudi soldiers," Dain said. "You should know, Mustapha ibn Harith, that almost all of King Saud's army is in Jidda, Mecca, and Medina during the time of the hadj. Or have you never gone on the hadj?"

"I have!" Harith said angrily. "But that was many years ago. . . . If they weren't Saudi soldiers, who were the men who captured me?"

A shadow had fallen across the doorway, and Harith knew that a man was listening outside. The shadow moved, and the man entered the hut.

Harith, his face expressionless, looked at the man and knew there was no need to ask the ultimate question. Now he knew what was going to happen to him, and why it hadn't happened yet. Now he knew everything—too late, much too late.

The man walked to the center of the hut. "Good day, Mustapha ibn Harith," he said.

"Good day, Saleh Mohammed el Tikheimi," Harith replied.

El Tikheimi grinned at him, then turned to Dain and Echeverria. "My friends, forgive me for taking so long. Your message reached me only two hours ago, and it is a hard ride here from Lith. Have you learned anything worthwhile from this camel dung? Have you finished your conversation yet?"

"We haven't quite finished," Dain said.

"Well, do so," el Tikheimi said. "But you must do it quickly. All the arrangements have been made in accordance with our pledged agreement. There is no time to waste."

"That is understood," Dain replied. He turned to Harith. "Do you have any last questions?"

### III

Harith was silent for a moment. In front of him, el Tikheimi was grinning like a wolf. Echeverria sat in the corner, holding a rifle and looking like a statue carved out of dark wood. Dain stood erect and solemn, and Harith found it difficult to remember that this was the same man who had traveled with him across Africa. Colonel Ribera had vanished, taking with him his easy humorous conversation, his interest in hunting, his hints of leachery, and his casually

aristocratic air. In his place was a stranger who called himself Dain, a man without Ribera's ease and bearing, and without Ribera's conspicuous little failings. Perhaps Ribera was the man Dain would like to have been? Perhaps, Harith thought, perhaps.

He asked, "How did you find el Tikheimi? How did you get his cooperation?"

"Finding him was easy enough," Dain said. "Every interested government has a dossier on known or suspected slavers. I obtained the dossiers, and I picked el Tikheimi because he seemed clever, ambitious, and faithful to his promises. I sent him a cable from Teneriffe. He agreed to meet Echeverria in Capetown and listen to a business proposition."

"What could you offer him?" Harith asked. "How could you satisfy his ambitions?"

"I could give him *you*," Dain said. "And I could give him your slave route across the lower Sahara."

Harith was dazed for a moment. Then he asked, "Have I heard right? You, a police agent, would take a slave route from one man and give it to another man?"

"That's what I promised him," Dain said, "and that's what he's got. El Tikheimi liked the idea. The trap was laid for you in Arabia before you even left Fort Lamy. We hadn't counted on that ambush in Sallom, though."

"You might have killed me there," el Tikheimi said, "if you had had the sense to hire a man instead of a cross-eyed Egyptian ape."

"I used what was available," Harith said. "It is a problem you may encounter, el Tikheimi." He turned to Dain. "I can understand why el Tikheimi accepted your offer. As you said, he is clever, ambitious, and he knows how to keep a promise. But you, Mr. Dain—I cannot understand you."

Dain didn't answer. Harith said, "You are a man of the law. But in order to capture me, you join in partnership with another slaver. Not only are you his partner in capturing me, but you are also his partner in slavery. This seems unbelievable to me. Or am I wrong, do you have some trick?"

"I have no tricks," Dain said. "El Tikheimi keeps his promises and I keep mine."

"Then you are truly damned!" Harith said. "You have forsworn your oath to the law. You have disposed of Harith, whom some men called the greatest of the slavers. But what have you put in the place of Harith? El Tikheimi! The clever, the ambitious, the faithful el Tikheimi! And what will el Tikheimi do?"

"Shall I kick this pig in the mouth?" el Tikheimi asked.

"No," Dain said. "Let him answer his own question."

"I will answer it," Harith said. "For many years I preached the hadj in Africa. I brought my slaves across Africa in peace, delivering them from starvation and ignorance to masters who would cherish them like sons. I did this without violence. But el Tikheimi cannot preach the hadj. He must get his slaves in the traditional way—by raiding. Is that not so, el Tikheimi?"

El Tikheimi grinned and nodded.

"He will raid," Harith said, "and he will take the men, women, and children he can use. He will kill the old, the diseased, and the crippled, and burn their villages. He will chain his slaves and march them to the Red Sea, traveling by night and hiding by day. He will go by the old routes through the deserts of the Sahara, Libya, and Nubia. And how many slaves will survive that trip? How many will live to be stuffed into the little slaver dhows? I can tell you; perhaps one man out of four will survive. As for the rest, the Sudanese Desert Patrol will find their bones scattered across the desert. That is the man you have put in my place. Now tell me truthfully, Mr. Dain—do you still believe you have done a good thing?"

"Yes," Dain said. "I think so. You give your slaves a better ride, but they still end up in the same place. You preach in the name of Islam, offering religious fulfillment but giving physical bondage. At least el Tikheimi doesn't pretend he's doing his slaves a favor."

"Excellent!" Harith shouted. "You detest slavery, but you become partners with a slaver!"

"My choice was very simple," Dain said. "I can't put down the slave trade between Africa and Arabia. All I can do is strike at one slaver out of the two hundred or so in northern Africa. I struck at you, using el Tikheimi and giving him your route. But did I really give el Tikheimi anything? With you gone, he would have moved into your route anyhow. Or if not el Tikheimi, then any one of two hundred other slavers. The trade exists, and the removal of one man only creates a space for another man. The only question at present is, which man?"

Dain paused for a moment, then went on. "Harith, you brought your hadjis across Africa in accordance with African law. Then in Arabia, you enslaved them in accordance with Saudi law. To my way of thinking, that made you an extremely dangerous man—far more so than any raider. When the countries below the Sahara wish to rid themselves of slavery,

they'll hunt down el Tikheimi like a wild beast. But how would they hunt you down?"

"How indeed?" Harith said. "At least you are right about one thing; I am more dangerous than el Tikheimi."

"Enough talk," el Tikheimi said. "There is no more time. With all due respect, Mr. Dain, you must speak to your conscience alone, and not here with Harith."

"That's true enough," Dain said.

"Furthermore," el Tikheimi said, "the police in Africa won't hunt me down like a wild beast. They may find the job a little more difficult than that—especially when they learn that I carry a gun and don't climb trees." He took a revolver from his belt and beckoned to Harith. "Come, my dear Mustapha, come with me."

Harith stood up. El Tikheimi motioned him to the door, and Harith walked slowly toward it. As he passed Dain, he said, "You talked well enough before. But what about this? Is this in accordance with your American laws?"

"It isn't," Dain said. "But I'm not in America now, or in Europe or Africa. I'm in Saudi Arabia, and I think it only right to be bound by the laws here."

"I don't understand," Harith said.

"You will," el Tikheimi said. "Mr. Dain is a great defender of the law, and he drives a hard bargain. He even made me agree to send your latest group of pilgrims back to Africa. You will have justice, Mustapha. Outside, move!"

When they were gone, Dain and Echeverria sat together in silence. At last Echeverria said, "Let's get out of here."

"What's the matter?"

"Nothing. I just think we should get on the dhow before that butcher changes his mind."

"El Tikheimi will keep his promises," Dain said. "But you're right, let's get out of here."

When they reached the harbor, el Tikheimi's men had begun herding the pilgrims back onto the dhow. The hadjis moved with slow reluctance. To be sent back to Africa now meant they might never see holy Mecca—for who could tell when a man like Harith would appear again? Some of them wanted to stay; but on all sides of them, pushing, swearing, and threatening, forcing them aboard, were el Tikheimi's armed men. They looked like a pack of hungry wolves who had been enchanted into keeping guard over sheep.

## **August 23, 1952 to July 1, 1953—SOME TEMPORARY DISPOSITIONS**

After turning the pilgrims over to the Khartoum authorities for repatriation, Dain was laid low by a mild case of dysentery. Upon recovery, he and Echeverria flew to Washington. They were a long time getting there, however, since they made a three-month stopover in Spain. In answer to various official cables, Dain wired that he was making out his report while the facts were clear in his mind. Echeverria sent much the same answer to his own government. He had many friends and relations in Spain whom he wanted Dain to meet, so the report was put together in Madrid, Barcelona, Cartagena, Málaga, Sevilla, and Jerez de la Frontera. When the cables from Washington changed from querulous to furious, Dain and Echeverria returned to America.

Echeverria spent only a few days in Washington before flying on to Asunción. Dain was not so fortunate. As he had feared, his report had to be reorganized and rewritten in accordance with the standard format and presentation laid down by the Central Intelligence Agency in 1946. Then it had to be typed in triplicate, with separate evaluation sheets attached. After that, Dain had to appear before various officials of the State Department to give information, later classified as secret, concerning the political outlook and probable future of the Chad, the Sudan, and Saudi Arabia. As an experienced government worker, Dain had anticipated this. He prepared for it by reading several books and some State Department papers on the countries through which he had passed. State was satisfied, and Dain put in a request for vacation time and another request for an operational transfer. The vacation time was disallowed, but the transfer, marked Temporary like all of Dain's transfers, was approved. By March of 1953, Dain was out of Washington and back at work.

Tim McCue completed his harbor plans for Jidda and was transferred to a flood-control project in upper Burma. Here he fell in love with a British-educated Burmese girl. In

spite of her family's strong objections, he married her on May 23, 1953.

McCue took his bride to Japan for a honeymoon, then requested a transfer to the company's administrative offices in Hong Kong. The couple set up housekeeping in Kowloon in late June of 1953.

Major Harkness found that the Aden Protected States were every bit as interesting as the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan. By March, 1953, he was trying to settle a grim, three-cornered little war between two feuding tribes of northern Aden and one tribe of southern Yemenis. From time to time, the Yemenis would cross the unmarked border and help one or the other feuding tribe. It was never clear which side they favored, or if they favored either. It was equally unclear whether the Yemenis fought for loot, or glory, or for the sheer enjoyment of fighting. And it was impossible to find out what the feud was about.

When diplomacy failed, Harkness waded in with his troops. He used the simple formula of attacking all combatants. By his successful tactics and modern weapons, he defeated the three tribes. In the last days of battle, in the mountains near Wadi Habauna, Harkness caught a bullet just above the heart. A surgeon in Aden managed to save his life and invalidated him back to England in early June. Harkness kept the bullet, a big hand-molded lump of lead. It made an interesting paperweight, and it was his only souvenir of nine years' service abroad.

Colonel Frank Parris continued for a while to command the bomber base at El Gezira in Libya. His reputation with Intelligence Section in Tripoli was enhanced; he was said to be responsible for wiping out all but the most nominal slavery in the countries bordering on the Sahara. But his reputation with Finance Section was still dubious, since there were still a dozen or so trucks missing, as well as a few hundred Springfields and Garands, and a few thousand rounds of ammunition. Parris read the handwriting on the wall and decided that the peacetime army was not for him. He resigned with an honorable discharge, several medals, and a pension. He returned to his childhood home in Los Angeles, where he opened a used-car lot. He seemed to have a special aptitude for this kind of work; by July 1st, 1953, he was doing very well indeed.

At Meroe, Dr. Eberhardt worked diligently with the Beckermann expedition. He was known to his fellow workers as a

sober, dependable, rather humorless man, not especially brilliant or imaginative, but respected for his thoroughness. Beckermann stated that the man had no temperament; he was proven wrong in April, 1953, when Dr. Eberhardt suffered a complete nervous breakdown.

Some said it was due to the climate, and others said that you could never tell about the quiet ones. But a few remembered that Eberhardt had been reading a recent archeological report just before his collapse. The report told about the activities of a young Canadian archeologist named Byrnes—a man with more luck than skill. This Byrnes had gone to the Sudanese city of Saukin on a hunch, and had uncovered the ruins of the fabled city of Dobarra—just as Schliemann had uncovered Troy. This discovery, some felt, might have contributed to Eberhardt's collapse; they remembered that he had been interested in Sabaeen ruins.

Back in Europe, Eberhardt recovered his health sufficiently to accept a teaching position at the University of Bonn. He swore that he would never engage in field work again.

El Tikheimi lost no time in establishing himself on Harith's old route. His daring raids into Upper Volta and the French Sudan became overnight legends. No less famous were his lightning attacks on defenseless villages in northern Nigeria, Chad, and Darfur Province. Police and army units stirred fitfully and began drawing up a plan of attack. The plan was never used, for el Tikheimi was killed in an ambush in June of 1953. His murderer was a clever and ambitious young Tuareg from Agades, who reorganized the sub-Saharan slave trade closer to his heart's desire. The police and army units began to make new plans; but they hoped that somebody would save them the trouble by ambushing the ambusher.

Leslie Hastings, the acting police chief of El Fasher, continued his search for the murderer of van Haarnin. He received no information from deBeers, and the replies from the major cities of Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, and Egypt were negative. Hastings turned to the south, with immediate results. The Zanzibar police reported several killings performed with the same faultless technique as had been used on van Haarnin. They believed them to be the work of a hired assassin, a specialist in his trade. Their most probable suspect was a short, red-haired, pock-marked, Iraqi named Mohammed Mijbil. A warrant for his arrest had been issued, but not served. Mijbil could not be found.

Over the next months, Hastings found traces of Mijbil's handiwork in the police files of Dar-es-Salaam, Mombasa, Entebbe, and Wau. After that, he had come to El Fasher, killed, and left. The trail began again in Marrakesh, led to Rabat, and ended. Hastings never found out what, if anything, had happened to Mohammed Mijbil, whether he had stayed in Morocco or gone on to fresh opportunities elsewhere.

Hastings wired everything he had learned to the Khartoum police. He had done all he could, and the matter was now up to Khartoum. Hastings closed the van Haarnin file and turned to other matters.

Months earlier, acting to some extent on Hastings' first tip, but also on information in their own files, the Khartoum police had arrested Prokopulous on suspicion of diamond smuggling. They took apart his possessions, ripped every seam of his clothing, and finally X-rayed him to see if he had swallowed the stones. They didn't find a thing. They kept him in a cell for a week, and then, very sadly, they released him.

Prokopulous had lost two diamonds and the chance of making a great deal of money out of Harith. Accepting his losses as well as he could, he took the railroad to Wadi Halfa, crossed into Egypt by Nile steamer as far as Aswan, then picked up the train again to Cairo.

He had washed his hands of the entire affair, and by March he was back in Benghazi. But before he left Cairo, he mailed two anonymous letters, one to the Khartoum police and the other to the Beirut police. In these letters he told everything he knew about Ott's theft from deBeers. For months afterwards, Prokopulous felt a warm glow whenever he thought of those letters.

The Khartoum police became very interested in Charles Ott. There had been an anonymous letter about him, and a team of South African detectives had come all the way from Johannesburg to inquire about him. Also—tentatively—an old, bald washerwoman from Omdurman had been identified as his accomplice.

The washerwoman had lived in abject poverty for as long as anyone could remember. Then one day she blossomed into sudden prosperity, gave up her job, bought a small house, and remarried. Her change of fortune was the subject of a great deal of gossip, so much so that a policeman began wondering where and how she had acquired her money. He asked her, and received evasive answers. An inspector questioned her



next, and she told him that a relative had left everything to her. She couldn't remember the name of the relative, however.

Her purchase of the house was traced; it led back through a real estate broker, a money-changer, and a diamond merchant. Under intensive questioning, the diamond merchant said that she had brought him two rough diamonds, which he had resold to another merchant. The trail led through four merchants, each wealthier than the last. It ended when a fifth diamond merchant, a Syrian from Aleppo, could not be found.

The washerwoman was taken to the police station and questioned. She changed her story again. She had found the diamonds, picking them out of the gutter near the Khartoum police station. At first she had thought they were just pretty, worthless pebbles, good-luck stones perhaps, which someone had lost. Then she began wondering if they weren't worth something. After all, wasn't anything worth something? Following this reasoning, she had gone to the most ignorant jewel-buyer in Omdurman's suq es saighs, showed him the stones, and said they were diamonds. She herself didn't believe it, but the jewel-buyer believed, and paid her a great deal of money.

The police were never able to disprove her preposterous story. They released her, but kept a watch on her house and her activities for several months. They wanted to see if she found any more diamonds in gutters.

Now they wanted very much to talk to Mr. Ott. But there were some difficulties involved.

Charles Ott knew that he should change planes in Cairo and go to Athens, Rome, Istanbul, Marseille, Paris, or London. The trouble was, which city should he go to? He was terribly weak, and running a high fever most of the time. He found himself unable to concentrate, unable to weigh the safety or danger of the various cities of Europe. Sometimes he couldn't even remember their names; he could only remember Beirut. That city, which he had originally conceived of more as a convenient excuse than a real destination, was the only thing that stayed fixed in his mind. Thinking of Beirut, he had the faint sensation of a goal to be reached, a safe haven, and a cure for his disease. Therefore he went to Beirut.

He maintained a vague sort of consciousness until he was past customs. Then he went into a coma and was rushed to a hospital. The doctors said that it was a miracle he was

still alive. Aside from hepatitis, he had also caught pneumonia. The doctors agreed that this was only to be expected. They did everything they could for him, and the most optimistic among them gave him a week at the outside.

Ott rose gallantly to the challenge. As he had confounded the great deBeers corporation, so he turned the tables on the eminent medical specialists. He hung on. He refused to die. He lay in his hospital bed like a shrouded yellow corpse, his eyes filmed over and his chest barely moving, a needle in his arm and an oxygen tent close by. He wouldn't die, but he couldn't seem to live. In sickness as in health, Ott was an individualist.

He was still alive two weeks later when the police of Khartoum and Beirut received anonymous letters concerning him. He was still alive a week after that, when the South African government made an official inquiry about him. But even though alive, he was not questioned. He still had not recovered consciousness.

The Lebanese police found all but two of the missing diamonds sewn into the cuffs of his trousers. This information was sent to Khartoum and Pretoria. Khartoum decided to charge Ott with smuggling. They requested extradition, if and when Ott recovered.

The request might have been granted, but there was a prior extradition request from the Union of South Africa. A Lebanese official told the South African representative that, upon proper identification, the alleged stolen diamonds would be handed over; but the alleged thief, Charles Ott, would *not* be handed over. Extradition was refused, and he cited the relevant statutes. Having done this, the official went home and lectured his wife on the evils of *apartheid*.

The next morning, he thought about Khartoum's request for extradition. Since he had turned down South Africa, he decided to be impartial and turn down the Sudan as well.

Ott knew nothing about this. He didn't know that the diamonds were gone, and he didn't know that he was safe from arrest. He was still unconscious.

A month later he made a slight recovery, and the hospital found that it had a pauper on its hands. It poked and probed and found that Ott had a father and two brothers on a farm near Bloemfontein. By threatening to put the patient in a charity ward, they got the family to pay his bill.

By March, Ott seemed to be recovering nicely. He was in the charity ward by then, since his family could not or would not continue paying. But Ott recovered even faster in the

charity ward. By May he could walk around a little, and the doctors were predicting that he would be out by June.

Instead, he caught pneumonia again. He was barely alive in July, and his chances didn't look good. But not one doctor would hazard a prediction. Ott had fooled them before, and they suspected that he would live to fool them again.

In mid-August, after having waited eight months in Omdurman for some word of Harith, Auda reached the end of his patience. He left the Sudan and wandered south into Eritrea. He was depressed and furious, and he sometimes thought of giving up his search and returning to Ishan. But he couldn't bring himself to do it.

In Asmara he found work as a woodcutter, and there he heard his first news of Harith. Someone had told someone else that the holy Mustapha had been rewarded by King Saud, had been given a palace in Riadyh, and had sworn to spend the rest of his life in prayers and contemplation.

Auda didn't believe it. He left Asmara and walked sixty miles to Eritrea's seaport of Massawa. There he heard a different story, told by a man who swore he had heard it from a man who had been witness to the actual events.

It seemed that Harith had met with the greatest of misfortunes in the Arabian city of Dauqa. The saintly man had been captured by godless enemies, among them the archfiend Saleh Mohammed el Tikheimi. A helpless captive, there seemed no hope for The Benefactor.

But God had not forgotten His own! Kinsmen of Harith had come riding out of the east on swift camels, rescuing The Benefactor and fleeing for their lives. El Tikheimi and his men had pursued with relentless fury. The rescuers retreated into the Rub' al Khali, the dreaded Empty Quarter, where even the Bedouin prefer not to go.

God's hand must have been on them, for they escaped not only their enemies, but the terrible desert itself. Upon the advice of his kinsmen, Harith continued to Oman, then to Bahrein, and finally to the island of Dhorai in the Persian Gulf. There, safe from el Tikheimi's wrath, he took up permanent residence, bought a rich house filled with every luxury, and became prominent in the pearling industry. It is thus that God rewards the faithful!

Auda walked to the outskirts of Massawa to be by himself. His rage and grief were indescribable. He cursed the blind God in the heavens, and he cursed the stupidity of men. He

cursed the implacable hand of destiny, and he cursed the land, sea, and air, and everything that walked, swam, or flew. Heaven and earth seemed to mock him. Freeborn, he had been enslaved; and the man who had enslaved him had been given the joys of this world and the promise of the world to come. Even the trees seemed to laugh, and Auda drew his knife, tested its point with his thumb, then put the point against the side of his throat.

But he did not drive the knife in. He was exhausted after so much cursing, and more than a little afraid. He plunged his knife into the ground, wiped off the blade, and replaced it in his loincloth. He sat for a long time, until some of his rage had passed and he could think again.

There was only one thing for him to do. He would go to this island of Dhorai and confront Harith in the midst of his prosperity. Yes, he would burst in on him in his garden, at evening. The women would scatter like butterflies, and Harith would know that the hand of man would strike even if the Hand of God would not. Auda's knife would stab and stab again. He would kill Harith, and Harith's friends would doubtless kill him.

Auda sat in the twilight and thought about his plan. He found it good. He even thought it excellent that Harith was rich, respected, and at peace; death would be more shocking then, like lightning out of a blue sky. He would go to Dhorai at once.

It was almost three months before Auda had an opportunity to leave Massawa. Few dhows ventured into the Gulf of Aden during the time of the southwest monsoon, and those few had full crews. But in early December the northeast monsoon came, and the dhows began to sail again between Africa, Arabia, and the Persian Gulf ports. Auda found a captain who was shorthanded, and who, because of Auda's inexperience at sea, allowed him to work in return for food and a place to sleep on deck.

The voyage was interminable. The captain hugged the coast of southern Arabia, putting into any port where he might sell a double handful of figs. After Aden, he called at Shuqra, Akwar, Haura, Maqdaha, and Mukalla. He remained two weeks at Riyan, then amazed his crew by sailing without a stop to Aldazir in Oman. Here he lingered, contemplating a grand voyage across the Arabian Sea to India, while Auda contemplated leaving the ship. But at last the captain sailed into the Persian Gulf, taking advantage of a favorable wind

and pausing only briefly at Muscat, Dhadna, Sharja, Doha, and Bahrein.

He reached his furthest destination, the pearling island of Dhorai, in late March. From here he planned to turn south, refit in Kuwait, and sail back to Africa, to Massawa or Assab, or perhaps to Djibouti or Dar-es-Salaam. Since Auda had become skilled during four months at sea, the captain graciously offered to sign him on again at half a seaman's wage.

Auda was tempted. If he returned with the dhow, he would be able to get off somewhere in East Africa. He would still be many months from Ishan, but at least he would be able to walk on land, steadily and without interruption. Sometimes he might have to stop and work for a while, and sometimes he might find a ride in a truck. But eventually he would reach his home.

He wanted to accept the captain's offer, but he knew why he had sailed to Dhorai. He would probably be killed after he had killed Harith. Even knowing this, he couldn't bring himself to say no outright. He told the captain that he would sail with him if God was willing, and the captain took that as a sign of assent. Then Auda went into the city of Dhorai.

He walked through endless streets, asking men where he could find the house of the wealthy and pious Mustapha ibn Harith. He had invented a story in case anyone asked what he wanted with Harith, but no one asked. They had never heard of Harith.

It seemed impossible—but there it was! Man after man shook his head and declared that he had never heard the name. With terror, Auda began to suspect that the man's story in Massawa had been all lies, that his journey had been for nothing, and that Harith might be anywhere under the sun. With a sagging step he went back to the docks.

Most of the pearling fleet was in, and the merchants had come down to look at the day's catch. They haggled and swore by their beards, but Auda couldn't find Harith among them. At last he asked a pearling captain.

"Mustapha ibn Harith, you say?" the captain asked, a strange look in his eyes.

"Yes," Auda replied. "I seek the rich and pious Mustapha ibn Harith—to ask his blessing."

"Of course," the captain said. "You will find that wealthy and well-beloved man on the dock, just a little past the tenth boat."

Auda walked to the tenth boat. In front of it, like the others, a group of merchants were haggling with the cap-

tain. Auda put his right hand on his ribs, just above the hilt of his knife, and walked forward.

He looked among the merchants, trying to act like a man who enjoys hearing a good argument. But Harith was not one of the merchants, nor was he the captain. Auda turned to go, and his heart almost flew out of his mouth. For there was Mustapha ibn Harith, sitting on the dock less than five feet from him.

Auda stared at his old enemy. Harith's features were unchanged. But other things about him had changed.

Harith no longer wore rich robes. Instead, he had on nothing but a loincloth. His head was shaven, and he looked very thin. He wore something around his neck. At first, Auda thought it was an amulet. Then he realized that it was a nose-plug.

He understood then that Mustapha ibn Harith was a pearl diver, and that he sat among other pearl divers. And finally he understood that Harith the enslaver was himself a slave.

Recovering himself, Auda walked away from the divers. He found one of the ship's mates and asked him about Harith.

"That one?" the mate said. "I am told he was sold in the Saudi town of Dauqa. He was sold to a group of Omanis."

"Why?"

"Who can tell?" the mate said. "Some say he violated Saudi law; he brought men into Dauqa illegally, was caught and fined, and when he could not pay the fine he was sold into slavery to satisfy the judgment. Others say that enemies captured him and sold him. Personally, I don't think it is very important. The man is only a slave."

"Yes, he is only a slave," Auda said. "But I knew him once. Tell me, what kind of slave has he been? Has he given you trouble?"

"At first I thought I would have to kill him," the mate said. "He had never been trained properly. The Omani buyers took him to Hasana and sold him. He was a bad slave, so he was sold again to a Bahreini. He was still a bad slave, so he was sold here. All those owners had not been able to change his rebellious ways. It took men like my captain and me to teach him respect and obedience. Even so, he almost died before learning."

"But he didn't die," Auda said. "He chose to live."

"That's right, he chose to live, and now he's as docile as you would want. He's only a fair diver—he started too late to learn the trade well—but he works hard and I have no

complaint. He's strong, you see, and he should be good for another five years."

"And then?"

The mate shrugged his shoulders. Auda nodded, his hand still on his ribs above the knife. He couldn't take his eyes from Harith. He said, "He looks very thin."

"That must be," the mate said. "A diver can't eat much, otherwise he wouldn't be able to dive."

"I should have remembered," Auda said. He thanked the mate and walked back to Harith. He stood in front of him, and his legs were trembling. After a moment, Harith raised his head.

"Do you know me?" Auda asked.

Harith studied his face for a while in silence. Then he said, "No, I don't. Should I know you?"

From his expression, Auda knew he was telling the truth. And after all, why should he who had enslaved thousands remember the face of one man?

"There is no reason for you to remember me," Auda said. "As a matter of fact, I thought you were someone else."

He turned quickly and left. That evening he rejoined his dhow, and three days later he was at sea. It was only then, when the island of Dhorai was out of sight, that he thought of Harith.

Auda thought: This was the better way to take revenge. I was a slave and now he is a slave, more wretched than the wretchedest, with nothing but five tortured years ahead of him before he dies or is discarded by his master to starve in the streets. Yes, that is the best revenge, and I am glad I didn't kill him.

Auda smiled and looked out to sea. But then he thought: No, that is not the best revenge. It is better to live in any condition than to die. Even the most wretched beggar clings to his life. By God, it is worse being dead, and therefore I should have killed him. I looked at the cleverness of the revenge of slavery; it was so beautiful that I did not see how false it was, and it deceived me utterly. Who knows what the Hand of God has written? Who can say whether Harith will live five years or fifty years, whether he will starve in Dhorai or escape his bonds as I did, or be rescued by his friends? No man can say! The only sure revenge is death, driven home by the knife. And I let my moment of revenge pass me by.

Auda looked back in anguish across the empty horizon to Dhorai. He told himself that he must leave this ship at the

first port, return to Dhorai, do what he had originally intended.

Then his senses cleared and he became very calm. He said to himself: I will not go back to Dhorai. Had I been meant to kill Harith I would have done so then, when I had the chance. Since I did not do so, I must trust in the justice of God. But however that justice goes, Harith's fate and my fate are no longer intertwined. Now I am free of him, and I am going back home to Ishan.

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# STEPHEN DAIN, INTERNATIONAL DETECTIVE, TACKLES HIS DEADLIEST ASSIGNMENT

in the forbidden cities of  
the mysterious south Sahara  
where traders deal in human  
beings—the Live Gold of  
the Arab flesh markets!

