

Oriental STORIES

WINTER ISSUE
25c
All Stories Complete

THE DRAGOMAN'S JEST

By
OTIS ADELBERT KLINE
and
E. HOFFMANN PRICE



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Contents of Winter Issue, 1932

Cover Design	J. Allen St. John	
The Dragoman's Jest	E. Hoffman Price & Otis A. Kline	4
<i>Arabia—a jest that turned into deadly earnest</i>		
The Dancer of Djogyakarta	Warren Hastings Miller	31
<i>Java—A Moslem girl calls upon the Hindoo gods to save her from the lust of white men</i>		
The Mystic Rose	Hung Long Tom	40
<i>Verse</i>		
Tsang, Accessory	James W. Bennett	41
<i>Shanghai—kidnapping and murder—Chinese motion pictures—and a Chinese detective</i>		
Honor of a Horse-Thief	S. B. H. Hurst	66
<i>Afghanistan—the brilliant exploits of a Durani clansman—a fascinating action-adventure story</i>		
The Sowers of the Thunder	Robert E. Howard	80
<i>Palestine—a mighty tale of Balbars the Panther, most spectacular figure of the Crusades</i>		
Broken Honor	H. E. W. Gay	106
<i>Malay Archipelago—a white exile is put to a heart-breaking test</i>		
The Dance of Yesha	Grace Keon	116
<i>India—a coward sat on the throne of kings and prayed that he might never yawn</i>		
El Hamel, the Lost One	G. G. Pendarves	119
<i>North African desert—the tale of a Tonaregg woman's loyalty to her fallen shekk</i>		
The Snake Strikes	Lieutenant Edgar Gardiner	132
<i>India—a red-blooded tale of outlawry and border raids</i>		
The Souk		137
<i>A chat with the readers</i>		

"With a final effort he closed with the Hawk, half dragging him from his saddle in a desperate embrace. Then he drew and thrust with his jambiyah."



The Dragoman's Jest

By OTIS ADELBERT KLINE and
E. HOFFMANN PRICE

The exciting story of a jest that turned into deadly earnest—a tale of a beautiful woman, desert warfare, and the slave-train of the bandit ibn Sakr

"**A**YWAH! Aywah! Aywah!" de-claimed Silat sonorously, as he sorted the pebbles and bits of dirt from the beans of Abyssinian coffee that in Jerusalem was palmed off as the true berry from al Yemen. "There he goes, *ya sabibi!* Hamed Effendi. Strutting in his silks. Hamed Effendi. He's entirely forgotten that he ever was Hamed

the Dragoman, Hamed who led tourists into my *lokanda* and wheedled them into buying him coffee and stuffing a pipe for him while he regaled them with outrageous tales. May Allah bear witness, the truth is not in him! And when he had drunk and gorged himself, he led them into the *souk* to be plundered by the dealers in spurious *antikas*."



Silat's mutterings mingled with the crackling of the beans as they smoked and reddened in the iron ladle in which he roasted them over the glowing charcoal.

"And the first thing we know, he'll be Hamed Bey—while I still grind coffee, and bring the sweet, and take the full."

Silat tossed the roasted beans into the brazen mortar, and with ringing strokes beat them to powder.

"*Wallahi!* In this very *qahawat*, and before my eyes, Hamed looted the infidel. And still I pound these accursed beans while Hamed strolls by with silver-mounted sword, and graciously emerges

from his pious meditations long enough to offer the peace, and pass on."

And thus and thus, day after day, the tale of grief: until in the end, after uncounted cups of coffee, and pipes loaded with the best *Djabali* (liberally adulterated, of course, with *Suryani*) I picked up the ultimate fragment of the tale of Hamed and the orphan, Sitti Nefeyda.

Hamed the Dragoman—not Hamed Effendi, with curled beard and embroidered *djellab*, but Hamed the predatory interpreter and tourist's guide—ushered his client into Silat's *qahawat*. The more coffee the infidel drank, the longer it would take to "do" Jerusalem, and the

larger would be the commissions Hamed would receive from the merchants who sold the tourist antique Damascene simitars forged in Birmingham, and Persian prayer rugs woven in Italy on power looms.

"Here, *ya sidi*, is coffee which is indeed coffee. *Wallahi!* Perfect coffee, perfectly prepared. The true coffee from al Yemen, the home of Balkhis Malikat. The Queen of the Morning. The beloved of Suleiman! *Aywah!* From the red walls of Marrakesh to the golden domes of Samarcand——"

And then, to Silat: "Ho, Silat! Coffee for my lord! And roast the beans freshly before our eyes, O father of calamities!"

"But," ventured the client, finally getting a word into Hamed's eventual and necessary pause for breath, "we'll have to hurry if we're going to see the Kubbat es Sakhras."

"My lord," assured Hamed, "we have ample time. And one can not leave El Khuds, the Holy, without having tasted the famous coffee of Silat."

The victim resigned himself to his doom, and invited Hamed to have one himself. They always did.

Hamed thanked the Presence with a thousand politenesses. Then again to Silat: "Did you hear, *ya bu?* Then bring Carter Effendi some assorted pastries also!"

For a beginner, Howard I. Carter, of Detroit, did passably well in the resplendent native costume he had assumed several days previously, in response to Hamed's suggestion that such would be the most effective way of gaining insight into the customs of the Moslems, and absorbing the charm of Palestine's loveliest city. But while under Hamed's coaching, Carter at first glance was an acceptable Kurd from Kurdistan, his conversation-manual Arabic did not prove equal to the dragoman's

vocabulary or velocity of speech. Still, he understood the gesture, and spared himself the vanity of protest.

"The pastries of Jerusalem are famed the world over, *ya sidi!* The sublime pastries of Silat—*Aywah!* They are rose leaves and moonbeams dipped in honey and kissed by angels."

AS SILAT roasted the coffee, Hamed pondered on the strange ways of the *Feringhi*, those idolaters, pork-eaters, and lavish squanderers of inexhaustible wealth. Hamed recollected with pleasure the quality of his client's European clothing; and with more satisfaction recalled to mind the incredible sums Carter had spent, under Hamed's guidance, for the gorgeous costume he now wore.

"*Subhanullah!*" he ejaculated. "This is indeed the very man. I praise the One True God who brought me this man of all men, wealthy as a sultan, and aflame with curiosity about the life of the oppressed *Muslimen.*"

Silat was beating a ringing, brazen rhythm with his massive pestle, pulverizing the roasted beans of coffee.

"*Billabi!* Have you ever seen any one who could beat time thus with a pestle? And whirl it to the ceiling and catch it again without missing a stroke? By Allah, and he makes music with it!"

Arabian customs were crowding Carter faster than he could assimilate them.

"These cakes are too damned sweet," he remarked as he thrust aside the pastry shells drenched with syrup and stuffed with dates cooked in clarified butter. And this pointed thought he expressed in English; for the manual had not a word to cover the situation.

"O pig and son of forty pigs!" raged Hamed. "Did you hear, *ya Silat?* Your cakes are too sweet for my lord."

He stuffed the offending pastries into

his own mouth, smacked his lips, wiped the crumbs from his beard, and essayed the inspiration that food always brought to Hamed; for food was the gift of Allah, and Hamed remembered the famine-haunted, thirsty marches of the old days before he returned from Hayl to Jerusalem to plunder tourists.

"*Ya sidi*," began Hamed, "there is one noteworthy sight you have not——"

"Yes," admitted Carter, "I always did want to see the Kubbat es Sakhrh."

"*Billabi!* Of course," agreed Hamed. "The sacred Dome of the Rock, revered by the pious. But since you can now pass as a native—as long as you refrain from conversations too involved—I will show you a sight that would give eyes to the blind. Such as no *Inglese* tourist ever saw."

Carter tried his coffee and found it scalding.

"Hell's bells!"

This in faultless English; and then to Hamed: "And what will this great sight be?"

"My lord," explained Hamed, "I know the chief eunuch of the city palace of the Shareef Abd ul Krim——"

"Not so good," objected Carter. "I saw a eunuch in Stamboul. Interesting, but not impressive by any means. Can't say I'd want to take enough time to inspect another one."

"But, my lord, *this* eunuch——"

"Doubtless," suggested Carter solemnly, "can wiggle his ears."

"All things are possible to Allah," admitted Hamed. "But particularly this eunuch is in charge of the *hareem* of the Shareef."

"Splendid job," assented Carter. "But somewhat annoying qualifying for it, I fancy."

Carter resumed his coffee, now passing well cooled.

Hamed stuffed another *sanboosik* into his mouth, licked the syrup from his fingers, and resumed the attack.

"*Ya sidi*, the Shareef has three of his wives in this palace. One is from Tcherkess, and one from Gurjestan, and one——"

"I rather envy the beggar," confessed Carter with just a trace of enthusiasm. "But what——"

"My lord, the other day I overheard—*Astagfir 'ullah!*—I crave pardon of God, but I could not help overhear you say that a glimpse of an unveiled beauty——"

"Instead of one of those hags who coyly drop their veils and show a face that would stop a baggage camel. Quite so, Hamed. I did say that, while waiting at the consulate."

"For a very small present," continued Hamed, "he would permit us to see the unveiled ladies of the Shareef's *hareem* as they disport themselves in the master's garden, by the great fountain . . . and perhaps even in the sparkling waters thereof. . . . There is a side door which Aieed will leave ajar. . . . Think, my lord! Three ladies of the *hareem* of a prince——"

"Doubtless named Salima, Zubeyda and Fatima," scoffed Carter. "Save that for some one else, Hamed. They have a game like that in Paris."

"By Allah and by my life, *ya sidi!*" protested Hamed.

"Come, come, now," chided Carter mockingly. "Just because Jerusalem is . . . Listen! What the devil's that?"

Above the buzz and chatter and bartering of the *souk* came a shouting and a confusion of voices, and the tinkle of camel bells.

"Make way, O uncle!"

"To the right, *ya bint!*"

"Take care, *ya aulad!*"

Grooms and footmen trotted down the

narrow street, thrusting and beating aside the crowd that milled up and down its length the entire day.

"Noted citizens putting on pomp," explained Hamed. "Dignitary going abroad in ancient fashion."

"Make way, *ya bini!*" clamored the voice of a footman. And: "Stand aside and praise God, *ya hu!*" shrieked another.

Here was a touch of color. Real color, in the Moslem quarter. Hamed had been right, after all, in recommending native costume. Old Islam was revived for a moment: for dignitaries these days wear frock coats and gardenias, and drive about in motor cars.

Two silkily groomed white camels all gorgeously caparisoned were bearing between them a resplendent litter, canopied and draped and glittering. The curtains were drawn aside. Sitting back among the cushions was a slim, veiled girl, attended by a female slave whose age was exceeded only by her ugliness.

The girl murmured a few words into the ear of the maid, who nodded in assent, and then screeched at the groom who led the foremost camel. The procession halted, and a footman dashed into the shop.

"*Ya Silat,*" he announced, "our lady wants a parcel of sweetmeats, particularly *lakoum* and *bakalawat.*"

"Alas," deplored Silat, "we have no *bakalawat.*"

In spite of Carter's indifference to veiled beauties just a moment ago, he stared brazenly at the girl in the litter. The gauzy *yashmak* barely dimmed, much less concealed her features.

"The devil take the Sharceef's wives," he said to Hamed. "*There* is something more to my taste."

The footman returned to the litter with the evil tidings.

"*Mafeesh bakalawat, ya sitti!*"

Carter could not understand her reply; but her voice was a rippling silkiness that belied her swift gesture of impatience. Happy gesture! For one of her many flashing rings caught the filmy veil and half tore it aside, just for an instant Carter looked full into the smoldering eyes with their *kohl*-blackened lids and long lashes.

"Christ!" gasped Carter.

"Beware, *effendi!*" hissed Hamed, nudging him violently. "You'll stare yourself into trouble. Look aside."

But Carter's determination to stare an eyeful was thwarted by the swift readjustment of the veil.

The cackling voice of the *khadimat* jarred rudely on Carter's ears.

The footman returned to take what sweets Silat had in stock.

"Who is she?" queried Carter, as the procession resumed the march.

"God alone is wise, all-knowing," replied Hamed.

"Too bad you're not! Find out!" commanded Carter.

Hamed dashed down the street to overtake the procession.

Carter drank his stone-cold coffee, grounds and all, as he arranged pieces of *lakoum* first in columns, and then in lines across the copper tray before him. . . .

"Well, what luck?" queried Carter, as Hamed returned, all out of breath.

"*Sitti Nefeyda,*" replied Hamed. "A noble and wealthy lady just recently from India. Up in the north, near the Afghan country. Of Pathan descent. Though they say her mother was Gurjestani. Shall we now visit the Kubbat es Sakhrat?"

"Be damned to the Kubbat! Save that for tomorrow."

As Hamed paid the reckoning for his client's coffee and food, he stroked his beard, and smiled more with his eyes than with his lips.

"There is no God but the One True God," reflected Hamed. "And He has been very good to Hamed this day. . . ."

"HAMED," began Carter by way of greeting the next morning when the dragoman reported to outline the day's schedule of places to go and things to do, "how much of a present must I give some one's chief eunuch to get another peep at that gorgeous girl?"

"*Aslahak allah, ya sabibi!*" exclaimed Hamed. "May Allah set you right, O master! But is this your morning's jest?"

"No. I'm serious. Anything short of my head, I don't care what it costs. Get to work and arrange it!"

"*Subhan allah!*" ejaculated Hamed. "I exalt the One God! And when have I heard a more liberal speech?"

Then, to Carter: "Impossible! Remember you are not in *Feringhistan* where women go unveiled, and talk to whom-ever they fancy. But there is one thing in your favor."

"Well then, order a pipe and coffee, and I'll listen to the morsel of hope."

"*Ya-a-a-a Silat!*" yelled Hamed in a voice that would carry across a battlefield. "*Abhwil!*"

With a gesture he indicated that two were to be served.

"She is an orphan. The daughter of a Pathan and a Gurjestani woman. Alone in the world, but closely guarded by her childhood nurse, that old woman as ugly as Shaitan the Damned. You saw her sitting with Sitti Nefeyda in the litter. She told the groom in Arabic what the lady desired. You see, the lovely Nefeyda speaks just a smattering of Arabic. Her native language is Pushtu, or Gujarati, or some such villainous jargon they speak in the north of India. She's shy about airing her ignorance in public, so she gives her orders to her guardian, who translates them."

"Thus far," Carter protested, "the advantages are positively overwhelming. I see no point in her ignorance of Arabic being almost equal to mine. By actual count, I know something like eighty-three words of your sonorous tongue. By the way, Hamed, this pipe is terrible. Did he stuff it with hair and leather scraps? But listen: are you sure she's alone in the world, and not encumbered with relatives?"

"Yes, by Allah, and sinfully wealthy," assured Hamed.

"That is no particular merit. But what would you call wealthy?" demanded Carter.

"Well, once in Anayzah," began Hamed after a moment of study, "I stole two hundred *tomans* of gold from an *'Ajami* pilgrim, may God not bless the heretic! And for many days thereafter I felt wealthy, even after I had to give the upright *Kazi* a hundred and forty *tomans* to have the *'Ajami* flogged for bringing false accusation against an orthodox *Muslim*."

"And how much is a *toman*?" wondered Carter. "With *piasters* and *paras* and *riyals*, and Lord knows what——"

Hamed began an intricate reckoning, accompanied with much muttering.

"A *toman*," he announced at last, "is a Persian coin worth about two American dollars, or maybe nine *Inglesi* shillings."

"Hamed, I will make you several times wealthy if you can arrange for me to meet this girl on some pretext or other."

Carter produced a pleasantly bulky sheaf of notes. Hamed barely suppressed a gasp when he saw their denomination.

"If she has no relatives, and is a stranger in town," continued Carter, "my reception will depend somewhat on her own personal reactions. And you, Hamed, are a clever fellow. You might devise . . ."

Carter peeled several notes from the sheaf.

"This is a present for you, Hamed. Later on——"

"*Billahi!* Yes, it might be done," admitted Hamed, after frowning reflection and beard-stroking, and a heroic effort to seem unmoved by the lordly slips of engraved paper he idly fingered, and finally stuffed into his wallet.

Carter, fired by the spirit of adventure and high romance, drew fiercely at his *narghileh*, until its bubbling achieved the tempo of an express train. At rare intervals he got a faint wisp of smoke for his effort.

"The devil with your *sharib dukhan*—did I say it right?—drinking smoke!" Carter located a cigarette, and lit it from the chunk of glowing charcoal which Hamed offered. And Hamed took the discarded pipe stem, drew gently once or twice, and slowly exhaled a spreading cloud of fragrant fumes.

"*Ya sidi,*" he observed, "it is all in applying one's energy properly."

"Well, it's a terrible way to get a smoke!" retorted Carter. "But I'll have to master it. Give me the pipe."

"My lord," grinned the dragoman, "I was not speaking of smoking. I had in mind the task which you set for me, and the lordly present which I am to receive, should Allah prosper our venture. You carry off your native costume nicely enough, when you have a guide to keep you out of trouble. And neither she nor her servants will have reason to suspect that you are not the Kurdish emir you claim to be."

"Emir? Let's see, that is a sort of prince, isn't it?" queried Carter.

"*Aywah!* You would not be a Kurdish camel-driver, would you? Her *Muslim* environment and rearing will not revolt quite so much at a *tête-à-tête* with an emir.

As I remember it, you met her father in 'Ajam several years ago. And now you will call to pay your respects. You will be grieved to learn of his untimely death. The rest I leave to you."

"Not bad, not half bad," reflected Carter. "Say, this is good for a line! Pardon me, miss, but I think it was your father who was such a great friend of mine in Kurdistan! Hamed, turn that into faultless Arabic for me."

"Not yet. First learn to explain to her that you speak only Kurdish. But now we must go to the goldsmith's *souk* and select a few presents——"

"But I am calling on her father, of whose untimely death I have not heard——"

"Even so. Then we will buy a sword, and a gold brocaded robe."

And Hamed, followed by the Emir Carter, sought the swordsmith's and the dealers in brocades.

"**L**AILAT," queried Sitti Nefeyda of her ancient attendant, as she surveyed her freshly hennaed finger tips, "is every *shaykb* of the 'Aarab the color of an old saddle, and lean as a snake, and wrinkled as a mummy?"

"You have seen them, *ya sitti*. Hounds of the desert they call themselves. Birds of prey. Lean vultures. Bandits and sons of pillage. The rumor of your wealth has reached them in the desert, and they are seeking your hand."

"But tell me," resumed Sitti Nefeyda, "isn't that handsome fellow—I mean the one we saw at Silat's coffee shop the other day—a *shaykb*?"

"*Shaykb*?" Lailat's toothless grin gaped like a saber slash. "*Shaykb*? Don't let that come to his ears. He is an emir from Kurdistan. Visiting Jerusalem to seek the hand of the daughter of the Shareef Abd us Samad. They say that he is directly descended—but God alone is wise, all-

knowing!—from Salah ud Din Yusuf bin Ayyub, called Saladin by the *Feringhi*."

"And what did you say he was doing in Jerusalem?" challenged Sitti Nefeyda.

She had understood perfectly the first time.

"*Ya sitti*, he seeks the hand of the daughter of the Shareef Abd us Samad."

"And that double-tongued Hamed is sending these white-bearded, unsavory bandits of the desert to court me, with an emir in town. A handsome prince——"

"You spoke to Hamed of *shaykhs*, not emirs. Anyway, Hamed is only serving his master faithfully. The emir speaks nothing but Kurdish, and needs a dragoman who speaks *'Aarabi*."

"Really, Lailat, is the Shareef's daughter beautiful?"

"Who can say? But her father is a descendant of the Prophet, on whom be peace!"

"And that hound of a Hamed is helping him! The emir has the keenest eyes. I swear he was staring right through my veil."

"Such a heavy veil!" mocked Lailat. "Which of course you had to fumble and drop for a moment. And then——"

"And then Hamed nudged him, and muttered something, and almost bodily turned him to face away."

"Hamed knows that this place is not as free as Kurdistan, and thought to save his patron possible embarrassment later on."

"And of course had to pick on me as an example."

"It is just possible, *ya sitti*," suggested the old negress, "that the emir had so far no occasion to stare at any one in Jerusalem."

"Well," reflected Nefeyda, as she critically inspected her image in the mirror held before her, and approved of the *kobl*-blackened eyelids, "there is of course

something in that. Still, I think Hamed is a cheat and a double-dealer."

"But, *sitti*," protested the maid, "you bargained only for a *shaykh*. And this fellow is an emir. A high-handed, haughty, stubborn fellow who isn't to be led about by the nose. If you only knew these Kurds. . . ." sighed Lailat reminiscently.

"I'm not so sure of that," countered Nefeyda. "That oily Hamed taking over that poor fellow's affairs. A mountaineer, not speaking a word of *Aarabi*——"

"These Kurds," resumed Lailat, as she selected from her mistress' jewel-box a massive necklace of barbaric silver and uncut emeralds, "are very well able to take care of themselves."

Nefeyda rejected the emerald necklace in favor of a collar of greenish gold and cool sapphires, tried it on, and found it not entirely to her taste.

"Lailat," she began, as she discarded the sapphires and retrieved the emeralds and massive silver necklace, "I wonder if this Kurdish prince could be induced to remember that his father and my lately deceased father were great friends . . . oh, almost anywhere . . . in Turkestan, or Tcherkess, or some place. Then he'd call here, and I'd have a chance to tell him that my revered parent recently died. And the emir will express his sympathy. And I'll burst into tears. And somehow, I think the emir will be less insistent on the daughter of a Shareef. Go at once to that thief of a Hamed and see what you can do. No, bring him here, and I'll tell him myself——"

"*Ya sitti*," suggested Lailat, "maybe I'd better see Hamed."

"Very well," agreed Sitti Nefeyda. "And don't let him refuse."

"All dragomans are thieves," explained the old woman, "and if he could rob you of enough *Inglesi* pounds, he'd

knock his patron unconscious and drag him into your presence."

And so saying, she left Sitti Nefeyda to complete her task of adornment.

"IT WILL all be very simple," assured Hamed for the hundredth time in the past two days of intensive coaching. "Remember, she doesn't speak as much Arabic as you do. And in physique and coloring, you'll pass very well as a Kurd. She's probably never seen a Kurd, and even if she has, she's not seen enough of them to know you're not the real article."

"But how in the world will I start?" demanded Carter, this also for the several hundredth time.

"*Ya sidi*, you will be facing a woman, not a tiger. And no amount of broken language and stumbling phrases will handicap you, if only enough admiration speaks from your eyes. What! Have the women of *Feringhistan* been so distant and unapproachable?"

"Well, not entirely," admitted Carter. "But—well, this is different. And every pace we take toward her house, I lose another phrase I thought I had letter perfect."

"Well . . . then I'll interpret. I know a smattering of Pushtu—that's the language she speaks to the old woman, and I found that I can still pick my way along with it, though it has been a long time . . . so just say anything, and I'll improvise for you.

"Here we are now, *ya sidi*."

Hamed reined in his splendidly caparisoned mare, took the reins of Carter's mount, and turned both beasts over to the groom.

"Strange," remarked Hamed, "this gateway is open. Where's the porter?"

Hamed assaulted the massive brazen knocker. There was no response.

"Ho, there! Wake up, O father of calamity! Announce us to the house, O

son of a disease! The Emir Ahmad Khan!"
No answer.

"Strange indeed. Let's go in as far as the *majlis*."

Carter, resplendent in his Kurdish trappings and glittering simitar, followed Hamed in silence.

"*Dest'oor!*" bellowed Hamed. "By your leave!"

And Hamed stalked down the narrow hallway, around a turn to the left, and into the spacious *majlis*.

"Allah and again, by Allah!" he shouted. "O porter, announce the Emir Ahmad Khan!"

A voice answered from behind the great silken tapestry at the extreme end of the *majlis*; a gagged, muffled voice.

"In the name of Allah, help, *effendi*, help!"

"Well now, and what's all this?" demanded Hamed, as he dragged the porter, bound and loosely gagged, from behind the tapestry, where he had lain, buried in a heap of cushions. "*Wallahi!* Is this any way to receive guests?"

"My lord," explained the porter, "our lady has been kidnapped."

"What?"

"Even so, by the One True God! Shaykh Ali and a handful of ruffians——"

And the negro stuttered out his tale of entry by strategy, and the swift overpowering of the entire household before any alarm could be raised.

"What's the trouble?" demanded Carter. "What——"

And then he stopped short, remembering his coaching.

"Go ahead and speak *Inglesti*," replied Hamed. "There is no one in the house but the porter."

"No one in the house?"

"Yes. She's been kidnapped. Shaykh Ali is carrying her off. Undoubtedly to his headquarters at the oasis of Djebel Akhdar."

"Then report it to the authorities at once!" commanded Carter.

"Save your breath," retorted Hamed. "Both civil and military authorities know better than to cross Shaykh Ali."

"Then we'll equip an expedition of our own."

"There is neither might nor majesty save in God, the Great, the Powerful!" ejaculated Hamed piously. "Where could I get men to follow us? Even if we were so foolhardy as to pursue Shaykh Ali to his own territory."

"Go out and try," demanded Carter. "I'll pay them richly. Round up a crew of cutthroats to follow us. And I'll give you a thousand pounds *Inglesi* if we rescue her from that bandit."

"Very well, my lord," assented Hamed. "I'll do my best. Will you ride with us?"

"I'll head the column. Only hurry up about it! Get men, horses, and arms. And equipment for me."

Carter produced a great roll of bills. "Get busy at once!"

"But *sidi*, desert warfare——"

"I can stand the desert if you can. As to warfare . . . I'm no stranger to that."

SITTI NEFEBYDA emerged from the heap of silken cushions piled up on a Persian carpet in a corner of the great black hair pavilion and yawned luxuriously.

"You needn't bother with that fan, Lailat."

The old negress set aside the fan of peacock plumes.

"I simply can't wait for the emir's rescue party. It's going to be just too thrilling," mused Nefeyda. "But I almost hate to leave this lovely oasis. It's so picturesque and peaceful. . . . Hamed does arrange things so competently. But are you sure he'll make the rescue convincing?"

The negress grinned.

"*Billahi!* Leave that to Hamed. Those

Kurds love a good fight. The Sultan's army couldn't keep him from raiding the camp and rescuing you."

"Oh, I know that. But he's so terribly keen, he may find out it's all stage setting. And that would just spoil everything——"

"Don't worry," reassured the negress. "Those Kurds are great fighters, but they're overgrown boys. Simple fellows."

"Oh, it's just going to be gorgeous," exulted Sitti Nefeyda. "And he's the handsomest creature I ever saw. And a *prince!* But that was a terrible ride out here. I hope I never see another camel as long as I live. . . . I'm aching all over. . . ."

Sitti Nefeyda sank back among her cushions.

"I do hope no one gets hurt in this sham battle," she murmured drowsily. "Every one has been so thoughtful and considerate. . . ."

Her last waking recollection was Lailat's amused cackle to the effect that those Kurds were wretched marksmen, and that none of her abductors would suffer from more than the stench of burnt powder.

SHAYKH ALI'S men lounged about their tiny guard fires, gaming, quarrelling, and chanting their interminable, preposterous tales. Shaykh Ali himself went from group to group, giving them their final instructions.

"Little brothers of Shaitan," he began, "Hamed and that infidel masquerader will ride up some time late in the third watch with much shooting and shouting. That will be your signal.

"You, Yusuf and Nuh, will seize the lady and her slave——"

"Ho there, Mahmud, Allah curse you, but is that litter all in readiness——"

"Well then, Yusuf, remember to grab the lady and start off, but don't ride too fast, or you'll get lost and the infidel

can't rescue her. And, Satan rip you open, don't resist too vigorously and hurt the infidel.

"You, Khalil, see that your men fire rapidly, but well in the air. Let five or six of them mount their horses and ride, circling about with much shouting. Plenty of confusion, or the infidel will feel cheated, Allah confound him!"

"*Aywah!*" assented Shaykh Ali's lieutenants. "We understand perfectly. You want a first-class *gbazzu*, as it was in the old days, with much burning of powder—Look over there, *ya sidi!*"

The speaker indicated a dark blot in the distance.

Shaykh Ali stared across the moonlit, rolling *kbala*. The dark blot was moving rapidly. He could distinguish camels.

"Hamed is early. Well, no matter. To your posts!" commanded Shaykh Ali. "And remember, wait for them to fire."

"*Billahi!*" he ejaculated, as the blot drew nearer, and spread fanwise. "Hamed has a whole army . . . and he was to ride in from the south, not the east . . . probably that pig of an infidel took charge of the show. . . ."

Shaykh Ali could now distinguish the individual camels, incredibly swift for such ungainly beasts. Emerging from the intervals between them, he saw horsemen, and the frosty glitter of lance-heads, and the gleam of arms.

"God, and again, by God!" marvelled Shaykh Ali. "Those fellows ride well for the dregs of the *souk*."

Then he plainly heard the drumming of hoofs, and clank and jingle of arms and accouterments, but neither firing nor shouting. Then a light dawned on Shaykh Ali.

"Mahmud! Yusuf! Nuhh!" he roared. "Mount up and ride! It's not Hamed. They're *barami!*"

But it was too late for flight. The tips of the rushing crescent had com-

pleted the enveloping movement. A wave of rifle and pistol fire crackled swiftly along the line of advancing horsemen, raking the encampment with a hail of slugs and bullets which, while too high for damage, whistled and screeched savagely. Then the shouting: each of the *barami* bellowing his name and titles as he charged into the clump of pavilions. Out of the center swooped the chief himself, crouched low in the saddle of his silver-white horse.

Shaykh Ali's men were knocking each other down in their mad scramble to take to horse, to mount their camels. No time for burning powder. To face a mock charge of bazar loafers was not quite the same as facing the flickering steel of the advancing bandits.

Well, they might escape with their lives after all, and march back to Jerusalem on foot. . . .

Shaykh Ali, hands high over his head, ran to meet the chief.

"*Ana dakbilak, ya sidi!*" he shouted. "Under your protection, my lord!"

The chief reined his mare back to her haunches, and roared a command that rang loud and clear above the clamor and confusion. The uproar subsided.

"You have our protection, *ya hu!*" he replied to Shaykh Ali's declaration of surrender. "We will take the girl, the animals, and your arms. Your lives you keep. I, ibn Sakr, have spoken!"

"To the Lord of the Daybreak I betake me for refuge from the evils of creation!" quoted Shaykh Ali piously, as he was relieved of his simitar and pistols and stripped of his *djellab*. "Of all evil nights, to meet the Hawk and his *barami!*"

And Sitti Nefeyda, aroused from her sleep, was all a-thrill at the rescue. . . .

FOR three days and nights, Carter's patience had been tried to the breaking-point. At the rate they were going, Sitti

Nefeyda's abductors would be half-way across Arabia.

"Patience, my lord, patience," Hamed would expostulate. "We are going by a circuitous route to intercept Shaykh Ali. We must time our arrival to catch him just as he is breaking camp, so that we can attack when they are least prepared to resist. They will outnumber us, and we must depend on surprize. Allah alone——"

"Be damned to Allah!" snorted Carter. "Unless they're mounted on wooden horses, we'll never overtake them."

And thus and thus, hour after hour, scorching, searing heat by day, and frosty chill by night.

They had marched from three hours before dawn. It was now close to midnight. The troop halted at Hamed's signal.

"Thank God for a rest!" sighed Carter wearily.

"No, *sidi*. We will now mount our led horses. We are near the oasls of Djebel Akhdar. We must now reconnoiter, and be ready to assault the camp as soon as the opportunity presents itself."

Hamed pointed toward a dark blotch in the distance.

"That is the oasis."

"Then bring on my horse, and let's have at them," commanded Carter. "Make this beast kneel, Hamed. He can't understand the way I pronounce '*ikh! ikh!*'"

In response to Hamed's command, the camel knelt. Carter painfully dismounted, stretched himself, and more painfully dragged himself to the back of his horse.

"There should be a special hell for all camels, and for the first man who saddled a camel," growled Carter. And then he shouted, "*Ya Asad! Ya Hassan!*"

Hamed and his troop stared amazedly at this calling into the darkness.

"On your heels, *ya sidi!*" replied a voice from the right.

"What's this?" demanded Hamed, as two racing-camels drew up and halted, facing Carter, who had wheeled his horse toward the newcomers.

"Two young fellows I engaged while you were equipping this party," explained Carter. "They followed in our trace, with orders to join us just before the skirmish started."

And then: "What the devil is that?"

Carter pointed at a semicircle of flashes that spurted out of the moonlit half-darkness to the right of the oasis. The crescent of intermittent flashes moved rapidly toward the camp of Shaykh Ali. And then, clearly across the desert silence came the rattle of musketry, one ragged volley after another.

Hamed wheeled his horse about.

"Where you going?" demanded Carter.

"Back to El Khuds. We are too late. A band of *harami* is raiding the camp."

"*Harami?*"

"Yes. Outlaws. Bandits."

Carter seized the bridle of Hamed's horse.

"Stand fast! Where do you get this going back to Jerusalem?"

His hand dropped to his embroidered belt, and came up, not with the silver mounted horse-pistol of Kurdish masquerade, but a .45 Colt automatic.

"Stop, damn your hide. You, there——"

The roar of the automatic was followed by a howl.

"Keep those fellows right here, or I'll let daylight through a couple more. And you first, Hamed. Asad! Hassan! Cover these birds!"

The *bejira* to Jerusalem stopped then and there.

"*Wallah, sidi*, we were going back for

reinforcements. Listen to the fighting."

From the oasis came the rattle of rifle and pistol, and the shouts of attacker and attacked.

"We've not a chance, my lord," protested Hamed. "There must be a hundred of them. Hawks of the desert. It may even be *the Hawk*. Saoud ibn Sakr, the most savage bandit in Arabia——"

And then Hamed realized that the muzzle of the .45 was more terrible than the prospect of facing ibn Sakr, and that there was truth in the sentence that Carter was pronouncing:

"If you ride with me, you may live through it. They took Shaykh Ali by surprise, and we'll do as much for them. But one more word of retreat, and down you go. With a few of your playmates."

Asad and Hassan grinned sourly. Seasoned, hard-bitten fighters that Carter had marshalled into service while Hamed was equipping the holiday rescue party, it mattered little to them whether they closed in with the Hawk or with Hamed's troop.

Carter released the cheek strap of Hamed's mount, and wheeled his own horse about.

"About face, and forward march!"

None save Hamed understood the words; but the gesture they comprehended.

"By Allah!" they murmured, "who ever heard of a *Feringhi* like this?"

"I for one will follow this mad infidel!"

"There may be rich looting!" suggested another.

Thus, for the moment, Carter had solved the problem of leadership. Neither gold nor force will command the steadfastness of the Arab; but a reckless madman of a leader they will follow to a finish.

Carter drew the cavalry saber he had substituted for the curved, gaudy simitar Hamed had selected for him in the *souk*,

and motioned to Hamed to ride at his side.

"In your younger days, you used to ride on raids. I will lead the charge. But I want your ideas on the lay of the land."

"Then let us ride down this *wadi* which leads out again unto the plain a few hundred paces from the camp. The *barami* are now busy looting the camp. The true 'Aarab would loot if the judgment day were but an eye-wink's distance."

"Very well," assented Carter. "Asad! Hassan!"

"Harkening and obedience, *ya sidi!*" answered Carter's personal guard as they drew up to his side.

"Are your guns in order?"

"Perfectly, my lord."

"How many shells have you?"

"Twenty."

"Then let them off as fast as you can. But drop them short of the camp. And you, Hassan, open fire with the automatic rifle. Well up, and not right into the camp. And don't throw a fit when your gun begins shooting stars. Those bullets in your clips are tracers that burst into flames as you fire them."

"We understand, *ya sidi!* We are to keep the *barami* amused while you close in with your swords."

"Very good," assented Carter. Bear in mind that your fire must not endanger Sitti Nefeyda. We'll ride in and make it hand to hand."

"By God, by God, by the Very God!" swore Hamed, as Hassan and Asad left the column. "What manner of doings is this?"

"Hamed, I had all confidence in your ability," explained Carter with a broad grin, "but I wanted nothing left to chance. These two fellows served with Lawrence against the Turks. They were part of his personal bodyguard of selected ruffians and daredevils."

"Where——"

"A certain consul told me. Never mind who," countered Carter.

HAMED led the way down the steep sides of the *wadi* to its stony bottom, dry save only during the very rare rains of the desert.

"Lord, what a mad formation!" reflected Carter, as he followed in Hamed's trace. "I start out to pick up a bit of Arabic and get acquainted with local customs, and now I'm leading a raid to rescue a girl I never spoke a word to . . . but by the Rod, if this doesn't cost me my head, I'll have a few words with her on the way back . . . let's see . . . *ana abeb-ik* . . . no, that's rushing things a bit . . . but damn it . . . I *am* in love with that lovely armful . . . but . . . what in blazes were those preliminary remarks Hamed taught me? . . ."

At the outlet, where the *wadi* opened into the rolling plain some quarter of a mile from the oasis, Hamed halted. Carter glanced at his wrist watch. Five minutes by its luminous dial elapsed.

"Better give Asad a little more time to get into position . . ."

Five more minutes. . . .

Carter drew from his saddle-bags a Véry pistol, extended it arm's length over his head, and fired. A few seconds after its dull report a green star flared high overhead.

The next second was age-long; and even longer the succeeding two.

Carter shivered. If Asad weren't in position——

Then far from the other side of the oasis came a hoarse cough. Another, and another; a pause, and three more, each crowding its predecessor.

Carter pictured Asad dropping Stokes bombs down the muzzle of a mortar that resembled nothing more than it did a short length of three-inch pipe thrust into the ground at an angle of sixty degrees;

O. S.—2

Asad dropping a fresh bomb almost the instant the one preceding had cleared the muzzle. Instinctively he glanced up, before he realized the vanity of seeking to see the bombs tumbling and keyholing crazily in their trajectories as they approached its apex, and then as crazily beginning their downward course with its ever increasing velocity——

A great flash, and a heavy report. Another, and another. In the desert silence, those three-inch Stokes bombs were magnified to the volume of siege artillery fire. It was incredible that one lone gunner could keep up such a terrific cannonade.

"As foragers, and give 'em hell!" shouted Carter, holding his saber at the port, and leaning forward in the saddle.

Hamed rode at his side, three paces removed.

The column took up the gallop, formed a ragged line, with Carter at its center, and charged toward the oasis.

As they rode, Hassan's automatic rifle opened fire. First short bursts of five or six, and then a steady chattering, interrupted only when an empty clip was replaced with a fresh clip of twenty. The tracer bullets burst into green and red flame as they left the muzzle of the automatic, marking their course in vivid streaks; and being consumed in flight, their balance was upset, so that they dipped and corkscrewed and twisted in their path, an insane hailstorm of fire.

The camp was a madhouse. By the light of a pavilion set on fire by the tracers, Carter saw a tall figure on a white horse dashing about, rallying his men to the defense.

And then a Stokes bomb burst fairly in the encampment. Asad was firing wildly.

"Christ!" groaned Carter. "Those fools will kill her!"

Another shell, and another burst, this

time midway between the camp and Carter's line. Shell fragments whizzed past Carter. A horse dropped, rolling and kicking in the sand, hurling its rider headlong. Something struck Carter a paralyzing blow in the shoulder, nearly driving him out of the saddle. A flow of blood drenched him from shoulder to hip. His men were frantically fighting their horses, seeking to turn them and retreat.

"Forward, you idiots!" shrieked Carter. "Get inside the shell-fire!"

He laid about him with the flat of his saber. But in vain. His crowd of riff-raff, utterly demoralized by the misdirected bombardment, were scattering out in every direction except forward.

A hundred yards to go. An erratic fire crackled from the camp, although in camp as well as among Carter's troop, it was *sauve qui peut*. But though the Hawk was having his difficulties, he mustered a handful of stout followers.

"Give 'em hell, Hamed!" roared Carter. "Asad's nearly out of shells!"

But the blue and red tracers zipped and zigzagged and corkscrewed through the encampment. Fortunately, Hassan maintained his elevation well, and the shots went high.

"With you, *sidi*!" cried Hamed.

Boom! Boom! Boom! Three shells a split second apart. Flame and blinding dust and screaming fragments. And in the smoke, and rain of dropping pieces of shells, they charged full into the Hawk's troopers. Carter struck with a sweeping *moulinet* at the first head in reach.

"One!" he exulted. "Next!"

He ducked just as the pistol of the next adversary, arm's length distant, coughed an ounce slug through the folds of his *kufiyah*. The black powder stung his cheeks, and stifled him. But he lunged, gave him the point, and felt his blade sink home. Turning in the saddle,

and rotating his wrist, he wrenched his blade free in passing, and wheeled about.

Hamed had his hands full, cutting and parrying with his simitar, holding his own against a trio.

"By God, the old thief can fight!" growled Carter.

He lashed out with his blade, and cleared a saddle. Then, hacking and slashing, parrying with his saber and traversing with his horse, Carter worked his way through the *mêlée* to Hamed's side. The enemy gave way.

"Charge again, Hamed. Hot at 'em, or we're done for!"

"In the pavilion in front of us, *sidi*! I saw her!"

He wiped the blood from his forehead.

Then they saw the Hawk on his white mare, behind his troop, and towering above them. He ceased stroking his beard, and barked a command.

At that instant, Carter and Hamed charged, demoralizing the rush of the Hawk's troopers. Boot to boot it was now. A milling, murderous whirlpool. Hamed went down beneath the butt of a *jezail*, recovered, and discarding his simitar, stabbed and cut with his curved, shorter *jambiyah*.

Hack—slash—stab. . . .

In a momentary pause—even in that fierce mill of slaughter there were pauses—Carter glanced toward the pavilion. Sitti Nefeyda!

And then he faced the fresh, cool, unwearyed Hawk. The bombardment had ceased. Saoud ibn Sakr was lord of the evening. Carter's strategy had defeated itself. Two against that network of blades. . . .

Carter's weary arm responded too slowly to the Hawk's flickering cut, and the blade broke through his parry. But the blow that should have shorn Carter from shoulder to hip struck flatwise, and numbed his arm to the finger tips. His

saber dropped from his deadened fingers.

"Be damned to it! Here's a finish——"

He spurred his horse forward, getting inside the Hawk's guard before he could strike again. With a final effort, he closed with the Hawk, half dragging him from the saddle in a desperate embrace. Then he drew and thrust with his *jam-biyar*.

The blade snapped. For the Hawk's plumage included a light, tough coat of mail beneath his *djellab*.

And the butt of a pistol smacked soundly against Carter's head. A blinding flash shot with streaks of intolerable brightness; and then abysmal blackness into which Carter felt himself plunging . . . everlasting, bottomless darkness. . . .

"I CAN'T be dead," was Carter's first thought. "Neither in heaven nor in hell do they have camels."

"Steady, master," cautioned a voice. "That was a pretty fight, but you're barely hanging together."

Hamed's voice. So Hamed had survived. . . .

"Where are we?"

"Lashed to a baggage camel, *sidi*. Bound for God knows where."

Their captors were busy with the all-important mission of getting back to ibn Sakr's territory far to the south: and thus Carter and Hamed were lashed to the back of a baggage camel, along with odd bales and bundles which the Hawk's *harami* had salvaged from the fire and confusion of the skirmish. Nor did it occur to any one that the transportation of their mauled and wounded prisoners could have been accomplished with much less discomfort to the captives and without hampering the march southward.

And therefore, shortly after the sun rose, Carter modified his first theorem to the effect that there were no camels either

in heaven or hell, and thus expressed himself to Hamed.

"Be calm, *sidi*," cautioned Hamed in reply. "When we halt tonight, they will unbind us and give us food and water. And when you must speak *Inglesti*, be careful that no one overhears you. You have quite a few days to spend with these fellows, and while they'll find out sooner or later that you're an unbelieving infidel, you might as well profit as much as you can by the kindness they accord those they think are true Moslems."

"Kindness?" wondered Carter.

"Yes. Instead of having left you at the oasis to perish of exposure and wounds and starvation, or hitching you with a bit of rope to the tail of the last camel of the caravan, they are carrying you. Very few slaves ever go to the market on camel back."

"Very few *what*?"

"Very few slaves, *ya sidi*."

"Impossible!" scoffed Carter. "Slavery was prohibited by the Powers years ago. British gunboats all over the world have stamped out slavery. And they've not the guts to sell an American citizen into slavery."

"My lord," replied Hamed, "ibn Sakr has an oversupply of those guts, as you so quaintly put it. And a hundred years ago, the Basha of Tripoli sold numerous American citizens and British and other subjects into slavery without hesitation. As for gunboats, I have never in all my forty years of wandering seen one in this part of the desert. Gunboats don't sail in the Nefud, and the long arm of His Britannic Majesty is weak and palsied when it reaches out toward the fringe of the Abode of Emptiness.

"*Aywah!* We, all of us, are bound straight for the slave caravan routes. We may be taken to al Madinat, or we may meet some trader and be sold on the way.

Anyway, I counsel you to learn 'Aarabi as fast as you can, and become a True Believer before you reach the hands of a small dealer or your ultimate owner. In the meanwhile, I will try to continue palming you off as a Kurd."

Carter caught occasional glimpses of his captors, and of the Hawk himself, making a round of inspection, and each look drove home the truth of Hamed's incredible words. He had refrained from inquiry as to the ultimate fate of Sitti Nefeyda. A vain question, in a land where the sanctity of the *hareem* and inviolability of the veil would hide identity and prevent any attempt at rescue.

And who would rescue her? An orphan from the north of India. His own chances of escape were infinitely better, hopelessly slim as they were.

The desert-born found this part of Arabia a hardship at this season. What chance of escape for Carter, even if given food and water and a camel? With no experience in riding the perverse beasts, and no knowledge of the obscure trails and hidden waterholes of the desert, his doom would be sealed from the start.

Self-preservation demanded staying with the caravan. Death patrolled the line of march, a hundred paces from the flanks of the little train of baggage camels, fast *theluls*, and richly caparisoned, high-bred mares that minced along, with empty saddles that would wait for a tenant until contact with the enemy.

Yet Carter would die a thousand deaths if he did not escape: and for the sake of Sitti Nefeyda, as many more.

And thus and thus, so that the misery of his mind masked the misery of his body, whose wounds and thirst and bruises and hunger were no wise assuaged by the terrific flame of the day and rolling gait of the roughest paced camel in all of Asia.

As for Sitti Nefeyda: they had ac-

corded her better treatment than Carter, since she was a more fragile and more precious bit of merchandise. Nevertheless, the swift transition from the luxury of the city to the flaming ferocity of a forced march across desert Arabia was a scorching torment. She had disdained the coarse, dirty woolen *djellab* in whose folds her captors had muffled her; but old Lailat's counsel prevailed.

"Sitti, your light silks won't protect you from the sun. It's not pretty, and probably it has many tenants besides yourself, but you'd better make the most of it."

The glare of the sun, reflected from the hard-baked ground, smote her cheeks like the blast of a furnace, and seared her eyes. Evasion of the terrific glow was impossible. Even when in desperation she closed her eyes, the savage whiteness of the sun searched her brain to the innermost cell.

"You'll get used to it before the end of the march," consoled Lailat. "The emir and Hamed are——"

"Oh, I'm so glad he got out of that dreadful fight alive!"

"Alive, *sitti*, and not much more than alive. He and Hamed are tied to a baggage camel, along with other odds and ends ibn Sakr picked up."

Nefeyda shuddered, and for a moment forgot her own misery.

"What's going to happen to us?"

"God alone is wise, All-Knowing," evaded Lailat.

Lailat knew from experience the whole grim sequence of forced marches across the desert, followed by the slave market; but she let her mistress deal with the present day's evils without adding to them any knowledge of the slave pen, and the sellers and the sold.

"I'm dreadfully thirsty. Do you suppose one of the men would give me a drink?"

"No, *sitti*. There's not a drop of water

in the caravan. We left the oasis in too much of a hurry. They are pressing their camels to the limit to reach Bir el Ahhmar some time tonight."

"Some time *tonight*?"

"Yes. Among the 'Aarab, it is considered needless to take water on such a short march. Anyway, it is only a day."

"But I'm perishing for a drink."

"No. No one ever perished in so short a time. Though you may wish you were dead before the day is over."

And then the caravan left the hard, flat ground and wound its way across wastes of shifting sands that murmured and rustled and whispered as it drifted in the fierce, deadly hot wind. The glare was trebled, so that the heat of the forenoon seemed but a coolness in comparison.

NEFEYDA knew that the sun would never set. But in the end, it did dip below the horizon; yet the camels continued their relentless gait. Nefeyda was beyond all misery. It made little difference now if the march continued unbroken to al Madinat.

Late that evening ibn Sakr signalled for a halt. In the darkness Nefeyda could distinguish a clump of tall palms. She saw the camel men letting waterskins down into the well, and drawing them up, filled and dripping.

"Water, thank God!"

Water it was. Warm, brackish, foul-smelling and contaminated by the animals of some previous caravan, and full of green scum. The camels had drunk their fill at the oasis the day before, and refused to touch the evil syrup.

Nefeyda gulped it eagerly, choked at its vileness, and drank again. When she relinquished the flagon, the old negress clutched it.

"*Bismillahi!*" she ejaculated with unflinching Moslem piety, and drank.

"I don't know how I ever drank that filthy stuff!" exclaimed Nefeyda.

"It isn't like the *sharbat* I used to make of shaved ice in the city," admitted Lailat with a sour cackle.

The camel-drivers had gathered bits of mimosa and dry camel dung, and were kindling a fire. Some were mixing meal and water to make the evening's bread. Others were milking their camels.

"I wonder if I could have some of that milk," wondered Nefeyda.

"Probably not," replied Lailat, "but I'll ask. '*Atini laban, ya sabibi!*'"

The camel-driver shook his head.

"*Mafeesh laban.*"

And then he offered it to ibn Sakr's richly caparisoned silver-white mare, who drank it from a tinned copper pot.

"Oh, the beast! Giving that animal the milk!" raged Nefeyda.

"*Sitti*, were you his only wife, he would still give his mare first choice of the milk. She is *asil*. Perhaps of the original Khamasa. It is the custom of the desert. Each mare has her foster mother, a female camel whose milk nourishes her in this barren waste. Anyway, camel's milk would upset your stomach if you've never drunk it before. Learning to like it is not pleasant."

And then on the other side of the encampment she saw a kneeling camel being unloaded. Carter and Hamed were unceremoniously to the ground. What she saw in Carter's face, drawn, and grimy, and blood-streaked and scarred, made her own day a pleasure jaunt in comparison.

"Oh, good lord, and they had him lashed to that beast like a tent-pole! When you said they were tied to camels, I thought they were sitting up like us."

"Those Kurds are stout fellows, *sitti*. And they might have made him walk.

Or left him there, wounded and alone."

One of the *harami* brought cakes of freshly baked bread, and a handful of dates soaked in clarified butter. Another offered them coffee, night-black and bitter, and reeking from the foul water of which it had been brewed.

"Eat, *sitti*. *Inshallah!* there will be another day."

HAMED easily persuaded ibn Sakr to unbind their hands and feet.

"*Wallah, ya shaykh*, we are wounded and weak and unarmed. How could we fight or escape? And give us some molasses so that we can dress our wounds."

"Granted," acquiesced ibn Sakr after a moment's reflection.

Whereupon Hamed applied first aid in the desert manner: cauterizing their wounds with the molasses which he had brought to a smoking heat over the coffee-fire. Carter was too near the edge of exhaustion even to wince at this rough surgery.

"None of those cuts are deep, *sidi*. In a week you'll be as good as new. And now repeat after me the *Fatiha*."

"What's that?"

"The first *sura* of the Koran. It is the prayer of *el Islam*."

"What's the idea?" queried Carter.

"The sooner you become a *Muslim*, the better. When we reach the slave market, we'll part company, and if you grasp quickly the points of *el Islam*, it will be all the better for you."

"Be damned to Islam and your prophet also!" exploded Carter. "With what I've seen of pious Mohammedans——"

"*Sidi*," reproved Hamed, "was it the fault of *el Islam*, or the Prophet, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, that you saw fit to stare at a strange woman, and seek her acquaintance? Who urged you to come to her rescue? Who insisted upon your attacking ibn Sakr and

his *harami*? It was you, and not *el Islam* that offered me a thousand *Inglese* pounds reward.

"And, knowing that all things are ordained by Allah, the Wise, the All-Knowing, I, also a prisoner in the hands of *harami*, make no complaint.

"*Wallah, sidi*, our faith is easy to take. Do you believe that there is but one God, who begets not and was not begotten?"

"*We-l-l . . .* but you pray to Allah, don't you?" suggested Carter, ignorant, as most *Feringhi* are, of the meaning of the Moslem appellation of the deity.

"Allah signifies '*The God, the Very God, the One True God!*' "

"Fair enough," granted Carter.

"And Mohammed is his apostle."

"Nothing doing!"

"You *Nasrani* are narrow-minded, *sidi*. We of *el Islam* believe not only that Mohammed, God bless him and give him peace, was the apostle of God, but also that 'Isa, the *Nasrani* prophet, and all the other Prophets of the Book were envoys of the One True God. We believe more than you do, not less. Say it, *sidi*: '*La Allah ila Allah wa Muhammad er rasool Al-lahi!*' "

Carter repeated the formula.

"Now you have nothing to do but to express your intention of becoming a true believer, and to repeat those words before witnesses. These are the five pillars of *el Islam*: belief in the Unity and Oneness of God; prayer five times daily, except when exempted, as on the march; acceptance of Mohammed as *er rasool*, the Apostle of Allah; giving of alms to the extent of one part in forty of your wealth; and making the *hajj*, or pilgrimage to Mekka, once in a lifetime, if you can.

"Now listen to the *Fatiha*, and learn it.

"*El hamdu lilabi rabbi l'alameen.*

Rahmani raheem. Maliki yaum ideen. Yaka naboodu wa yaka nastaynu." . . .

And Hamed recited from beginning to end the sonorous first *sura* of the Koran, which in no language has its equal in richness.

When Carter had mastered his lesson, Hamed continued: "Repeat this often to yourself. It will serve you well, perhaps, when we part company and you are alone among the *Muslimeen*."

LONG before dawn the caravan resumed the march. And day after day it pressed onward toward the south. Carter caught but passing glimpses of Nefeyda and her black servant. Hamed laughed and jested with his captors, telling them monstrous tales of romance and adventure, and recited long selections from *Alf Layl wa Layl*, The Thousand Nights and a Night, to the infinite delight of the *harami*. He wheedled them out of coffee and tobacco at the evening halts, and helped them unsaddle the camels, and groomed ibn Sakr's aristocratic mare.

Carter's identity as a Kurd who spoke no Arabic, but who, while not quite orthodox, was nevertheless a *Muslim* after a fashion, was well established: for the pious Hamed vouched for his belief in the Unity. And being wounded, Carter was not expected to make the genuflections of prayer, and thus betray himself.

"*Ya shaykh*," he would say, "we two are fighting men, as you may bear witness. Neither of us will bring you much in the market, for who would buy me, an old man, and him, a fierce Kurd? *Wallah*, look at him, and tell me who would not prefer a docile negro to a wild man like this who rides into a hedge of swords without second thought. By your beard, *ya shaykh*, had there been another like us, we would have scattered your men all over the *kbala*!

"Rather let us ride with you. I am

Hamed, of whom you may in times past have heard, over along the border of the Djowf. And he is an impoverished emir, who left Kurdistan for the sake of his health and the Turks, may God not bless them!"

Ibn Sakr would smile the shadow of a smile, and stroke his beard.

"Put in a word for Nefeyda," Carter urged, one day.

"For a grown man, who ever saw such idiocy!" Hamed retorted. "On your life, let no one think that you ever saw her. For her sake as well as your own."

Carter saw the point and held his peace. From day to day he added to his smattering of Arabic, mastered with fair success the stumbling-blocks of the language, such as the pronunciation of *'ayn*, and *ghayn*, *qaf* and *hbbé*, and finally ventured to bandy words with his captors.

"*Wallah*, but that is fine! When we part, you will do nicely."

And the next morning, several marches from Khaibar, Carter realized that Hamed's words had had such an immediate application as to savor not at all of prophecy.

Hamed and a fast *thelul*, next to ibn Sakr's choice beast the finest camel in the troop, were missing. The wind had wiped out every trace of any trail that he might have left.

"Well," reflected Carter, "I don't blame him. I wouldn't have left without her. And we couldn't have taken her with us."

The march bordered on the Nefudh, the great desert of central Arabia.

Sitti Nefeyda was becoming inured to the hardships of the march. But by an evil form of compensation, the truth of her ultimate fate had dawned on her. The very wildness and unreality of it made her consider it as the devious windings of a tale told in the *souk*. She

ceased even to regret the mad whim which had taken her from the shelter of the city to the oasis to bait a Kurdish emir.

ONE night they approached the encampment of one who turned out to be a *shaykh* friendly to ibn Sakr.

"Thank heaven we'll eat tonight, Lailat!" exulted Nefcyda as she saw the preparations for a lordly feast. Sheep were being slain, and great quantities of rice prepared. And later, the savor of roasting coffee enriched the air, and blended with the aroma of spices and the whole sheep that simmered in a large cauldron. Food, after weeks of starvation rations of the *Bedawi*.

Ibn Sakr was still undecided as to the final disposition of Carter. A heretic 'Ajami, of course, only half a true believer who bungled the ritual of prayer, and was guilty of countless gaucheries . . . but what would one expect of such a barbarian, from 'Ajam? Hamed, that oily scoundrel, was not only a true *Muslim*, but an exceptionally pious and learned one, and he had vouched for the faith of the emir. And *Billabi*, what a fighter that Kurd was! . . .

Thus, when the feast was called, and the guests politely pretended not to have heard the first summons, and their host had repeated the invitation to ibn Sakr, Carter was included among those who took seats on the ground about the great copper tray along whose edge was a parapet of rice, high and broad, yet not sufficient to imprison all the gravy, and the towering heap of mutton.

Sitti Nefeyda from the women's half of the black hair pavilion had watched the preliminaries with starved eagerness. Then she saw that there was no tray of food for the *hareem*.

"*Bismillabi!*" pronounced the *shaykh*. "In the name of Allah!"

Following his example, the twenty

crowded about the tray likewise pronounced the Name, and plunged wrist-deep into the feast, tearing, rending, and stuffing fragments of meat into their mouths as fast as dexterous hands could manage; deftly rolling the rice into little balls which were thrust home with a swift flick of the finger. Of conversation there was not a trace. Speech in the presence of the bounty of Allah would be blasphemous; though at times there was a blessing called down on the host when with his own hands he dug out and thrust into the mouth of a favored guest some choice morsel.

In a surprizingly short time, the twenty had gorged themselves.

The coffee slave made his round; and the next relay gathered about the tray.

"Oh . . . how disgusting!"

Nefcyda had never before seen the desert-born confronted with a full meal. It was not thus in Jerusalem.

Finally, the ragged remains were carried in for the *hareem* to eat.

But hunger overcame outraged pride, and Sitti Nefeyda ate the scraps of the banquet, and found them good.

"You are among the 'Aarab," said old Lailat. "And you fare no worse than the wives of this powerful *shaykh*. It will be better when some emir or shareef buys you, and then you will live in luxury as you did in the city."

EVEN in al Madinat the slave traffic is conducted very quietly; and thus ibn Sakr entered the city by night with his captives, and all the loot of a season's raiding.

Trading in slaves was not the Hawk's customary activity. The captives taken in successful raids against the desert tribes were returned and a ransom received, all in accordance with the code of the desert. But these prisoners, chance baggage acquired at the close of his tour, belonged

to no tribe: and the Hawk knew that the city dwellers were ignorant of the polite customs of *khala* warfare, so that he could not send them home, and have sent in return a suitable ransom. Thus the slave market was the only outlet for Carter and Nefeyda.

He might have kept Nefeyda to add to his *hareem*; but the desert-born has a high contempt for the city dweller. And Sitti Nefeyda would be an inconvenient luxury in the *beyt us shaar*, the black tent of the Bedawi. Carter—the Emir Ahmad—was a stout fighter and a strong man, and well able to ride with him on raids; but ibn Sakr was conservative. And his little band of selected cutthroats was in a way a closed corporation. Thus for Carter, as well as for Nefeyda, the slave market in the court of a great, ruined house in al Madinat.

To Nefeyda, the slave market, a terrible fact, had become an incredible fantasy. It was but another shifting scene of an outrageous dream. To be put through her paces like a choice horse at an auction; to be stared at, and pawed, and examined like a bolt of brocade in the *souk*; and to be given to the highest bidder, after hours of haggling and bargaining, of flowery praises by the vender countered by broad deprecations by the purchaser. She would awaken and find herself in Jerusalem, and far away from this nightmare of Africans, male and female . . . no, they weren't all Africans. Here was an Armenian girl, a Christian . . . and here, a golden-haired woman from Tcherkess . . . costly merchandise, these women from Tcherkess . . . and she wondered who would take the amber-skinned beauty from Turkestan. . . .

Carter was haunted by the thought of escape; haunted day and night until in the end it had rocked his mind like the incessant beating of a tom-tom, or the endless drip-drip-drip of the Chinese

water torture. A thousand plans, and each in the end vain. . . .

The guard of the camels nodded at his post . . . how simple then to throttle the sentry watching Nefeyda . . . but what would happen while he saddled a camel . . . in what direction to ride . . . with what arms fight off pursuit? . . . Plans made and discarded at every waking moment; and here, in the slave market, he was no nearer the solution, and their doom stared them full in the face.

Yet Carter still planned.

Three long, swift leaps, strike down and disarm the sentry. Muffle Nefeyda in his *djellab*. Dash out into the streets of al Madinat. To what purpose? Infinite chances for himself. But handicapped with Nefeyda—

Charging into a hedge of swords at that far-off oasis was child's play. But this planning for an opportunity that always proved false when it arrived—

Here they would separate. She would go to the *hareem* of some emir or shar-eef, lost forever behind the anonymity of a veil. And he . . . well, it made no difference, since such a multitude of fates would await him, while but one was in store for Nefeyda. The wild fancy of adventurous spirit in Jerusalem had flamed into a consuming obsession. In all the long marches across the desert he had spoken not a word to Nefeyda; yet if in the end he lost her, his soul would die many years before his body. What had begun as a touch of color to garnish a Mediterranean tour had become a purpose in life.

Carter stared a farewell look at Nefeyda, on the other side of the court, among the female slaves. She stood there like a sleep-walker, gorgeous in her finery, lovely and expressionless, dazed by meeting these first evidences of her fate.

Whenever any one passed the sentries at the entrance of the court, Carter

saw Nefeyda's prospective purchaser.

The sentries were lounging about a tiny fire, brewing coffee, and smoking their long, straight-stemmed *chibouks*. Their belts bristled with pistols and keen, curved *jambiyahs* and *kanjars*, useless arms, guarding cowed and spiritless slaves, worn out by long hard marches and starvation.

Lailat had left her mistress to circulate among the negro slaves grouped about the courtyard. The old negress paused to chat with a Nubian girl in the guttural, clucking language of her native Africa. As she turned, to pass on, Carter stared full at Lailat, caught her eye for an instant, lifted one eyebrow, and resumed tracing meaningless lines on the paving . . . and studying the coping of the dry fountain in the center of the court. The mortar had fallen loose from the stones. He listlessly strolled to its edge.

The old negress ambled past him; halted, retraced a step.

"A bit of *tunbak*, *ya sidi*," she whined.

"*Mafeesh tunbak*, *ya ajuz*!" he growled. And then, in a low voice, "Tell *el sitt* that she must watch me closely, and escape when I start a disturbance."

"Just a little pinch of tobacco, my lord?" she repeated, as she nodded her understanding of his whispered words in broken Arabic.

"Here, old woman, take all of my tobacco," replied Carter, and thrust at her a pouch, containing not tobacco, but coins which his captors had overlooked in the grand looting at the oasis. And then he whispered: "Borrow a pipe from the guard for *el sitt*, and I will do the rest. You can take care of her once you pass the guards. There's a little money in the pouch."

The negress waddled back to Sitti Nefeyda.

"Here is tobacco, *ya sitti*. Now I will borrow a pipe."

So saying, she approached the sentries.

"Lend me a pipe for my mistress, *ya shaykh!*"

"And who is your mistress, mother of blackness?" laughed a tall, bearded fellow in striped kaftan and large, pompous turban.

"The lady from Gurjestan, *ya sabib*. And here is *bakhsbeesh* for you."

At that instant Carter, poised at the end of his third swift, silent striding leap, brought down the loose fountain coping stone on the turbanned head, and in the next instant hurled it straight to the chin of the sentry who, facing Carter, leaped to his feet with a yell.

Carter sank to his knee, unsheathed the simitar of the first fallen, rose to a crouched posture of guard, and met the rush. A pistol cracked. A *kanjar* raked across his chest. Carter's simitar flickered, steel to steel, as with deadly swiftmess he beat off the first wave.

"Two down, and six to go! Hell's fire, girl, run for it!" he roared.

He stretched out in a full lunge, passing under the shearing simitar sweep that would have decapitated him, and with an upward cut disembowelled the foremost of his opponents and recovered, coming on guard in *terce*. They paused, awed by the ferocity of his assault.

Carter poised himself on guard for an instant; and then, drunk with enemy blood, leaped full into the squad, flailing his blade in terrible arcs.

From without the courtyard came the clank of arms, and the tread of running feet. A detachment of the guard——

At close quarters Carter's simitar was useless. He dropped it, wrenched a *jambiyah* from a descending hand, and with his knee floored his opponent. The milling mass was too compact for effective action; but above the tumult, Carter could hear howls and gasps as he drove home a thrust, or slashed whatever body or

limb presented itself when his knife hand was free.

But by sheer weight they were overpowering him.

"Ho, there, dogs and sons of dogs!" roared a voice that rang clear above the shouts and curses of the *mêlée*. Strong hands dragged the sentries from their prisoner.

"Quiet, sons of a disease! Touch him, and your heads will answer for it!"

CARTER, emerging from the confusion, half blinded with blood, slashed and beaten, wove about unsteadily on his feet. A red-bearded, magnificently apparelled dignitary with sword in one hand and pistol in the other confronted Carter's guards. His followers, having dragged the guard aside long enough for the Redbeard's words to sink home, took their places behind their chief.

"O cut-off ones, what is this rioting?" demanded the Redbeard in lordly tones. He holstered his pistol, sheathed his sword, and folded his arms imperiously.

"*Ya sidi*, this slave attacked and killed two of us. And when we sought to subdue him, he disarmed one of us and was cutting us to pieces."

"*Wallah*, my lord, you saved our lives!"

"He is a very *shaitan*!"

"He is a Kurd, one of those accursed 'Ajami!"

"Well," demanded the Presence, "whose slave is he?"

"The slave of ibn Sakr. And this girl"—he indicated Nefcyda, struggling in vain with two guards—"this girl belongs to ibn Sakr, and the old black woman, the slave of a slave, also."

"So . . . to ibn Sakr," pondered the lordly Flamebeard. "Call ibn Sakr at once! I will answer for his slaves, and for all other slaves in the court."

"But, *sidi*——"

"Silence, dog! Must I speak twice?

Will I not answer for the slaves?"

And then, to Carter: "Strong man, who are you?"

"A Kurd from Kurdistan!" replied Carter.

Carter had for some time forgotten to boast of American citizenship.

"*Wallahi*! Judging from your speech you do come from some *kafir* land . . . h-m-m-m . . . you handle a sword well . . .

"Yes, I will buy you for my troop of *memelukes*. *Mashallah*! Did you assault these eight ruffians with nothing but a paving block?" queried the unknown lord, as he noted the gray of brain and the red of blood on the marble slab.

"*Nahm, ya sidi*," assented Carter. "And then I drew his sword as he fell——"

"As I well notice. And this girl was to escape while you created a disturbance. Allah, by Allah, and again by Allah! If I bought you for your valor and her for her beauty, I would be cut to pieces before sunrise. O Kurd, swear to serve me faithfully, and I will buy you, and though a slave, you will have under you many slaves. And swear by the triple oath not to dispute or plot against my possession of the girl——"

Ibn Sakr stalked into the Presence.

"Ho, there, Redbeard, and were you speaking of buying this lion of a Kurd? This valiant fighter——"

"*Aywah*! And the girl also, O Hawk!"

"And what if I do not choose to sell him? I may keep him to ride with my troop, after all. He is too fierce to grind meal, or water palm trees, or keep your accounts. But as a fighting man, he is worth his weight in gold. Look what he did to these old women!"

Ibn Sakr kicked a body, half shorn asunder, that lay in an ever-spreading pool of blood.

"You should let me have him cheaply,

O Hawk! For all this slaughter he must either die, or else his owner must pay blood indemnity, and dearly."

"O Redbeard, a thousand *riyals*, and not less for a peerless fighting man like this. *Wallahi!* What a *memeluke* he would make!"

"The red beard, *ya Sakr*, is that of Khalil ibn Suleiman el Idrisi, an Afghan of the Afghans! I will not give more than a hundred *riyals*, since the blood indemnity for these four slaughtered dogs will ruin me."

"Not less than nine hundred and fifty, and I will use my influence with the emir to pare down the indemnity to a minimum, O Khalil."

"Grasping Bedawi! Hounds of the *khala!* Extortioner, I will give you a thousand *dinars* of gold for him, and the girl, and her slave."

"The girl alone is worth more than two thousand. Allah hates penury, O Khalil!"

"Then he must hate thee, *ya Sakr!* Look at the wench, O Hawk! Not unpleasing, but lean and straight like your starved *bareem* of the desert . . . and devoid of hips. . . ."

"With your *bareem* of Somali baggage, you are blind to elegance and grace when you see it. She is like a gazelle, Khalil!"

"Fifteen hundred for the three, O Hawk!"

"Nineteen hundred and my blessing," insisted ibn Sakr.

Khalil of the red beard raised his arms high overhead, fists clenched.

"O robber, eighteen hundred is too much, and I am a poor man."

"O miser, may God be miserly with thee, eighteen hundred is not enough . . . and what will the emir say when he sees this slaughter?"

Khalil drew from his belt a pouch heavy as only gold can be.

"I will speak to the emir, O Hawk.

Here is a purse of five hundred *dinars*, all of true weight, and Shaitan rip thee open! The balance I will give you tomorrow."

"Ho, Qasim!" commanded the Hawk, "shackle them all three, and bring them with us."

The bargain having been concluded, the adversaries left the courtyard, exchanging a thousand politenesses, with Carter, Nefeyda, and Lailat following.

"We will call on the Kazi in the morning and have a bill of sale drawn up," said Khalil. "Pass by my house and I will give you the balance due."

"It is not necessary," protested ibn Sakr courteously. "Take the slaves to thy house, and meet me in the morning before the *Kazi*."

"But I insist on giving you the rest of the *dinars* this very evening."

"Then let us also seek the *Kazi*."

CARTER was shackled and chained to a ring in the wall of the court of Khalil's house, and left to nurse his rage and wounds while the Afghan and ibn Sakr sought the *Kazi*, and then some *qahawat* to sip coffee and exchange ponderous compliments while the learned notary drew up a bill of sale. And then of course the clipped and short weight, and worn, and defaced *dinars* had to be sorted from the purse.

Carter strained vainly at his shackles.

"Well, here I am looking like some one who's fought ten rounds with a buzzsaw," muttered Carter. "From bad to worse. Polished off more men single-handed since I left Jerusalem than I did with artillery fire during the whole war. And now she's in the hands of that red-bearded ruffian . . . damn him, why didn't he at least let me kill a few more of them while they were finishing me, and I'd be through following strange women into

stranger jams? . . . Good God, but I'm thirsty. . . ."

Nefeyda and her servant were imprisoned in the *majlis* of Khalil's house, empty, it seemed, save for the prisoners. In his princely way, he had doubtless engaged a whole house as temporary headquarters while in al Madinat.

The small, arched windows of the high-vaulted room were barred; and the bolt of the door had clanked grimly into its seat as the attendants of Khalil had left Nefeyda in her prison. The room was rich in the barren luxury of the Orient. An ancient rug from the dusty plains of Feraghan shimmered in the moonlight that streamed through the window openings, and marked an archway on its worn, silky nap. And on the low divan that flanked the wall were long, narrow runners of Kurdish weave, heaped with cushions. The walls were unbroken, save for arched recesses which served to contain the accessories of a reception hall. In one were manuscripts, and writing-instruments. In another, burnished brazen coffee-pots, ranging in size from a tiny vessel just large enough to prepare two eggshell-sized *fenajeen* to one that would serve a troop of horse. In yet another niche were several richly embellished water pipes, with coiled stems, and silver tongs. The coffee hearth was in the corner furthest from the entrance.

Sold. And to an Afghan with a beard dyed red as flame!

Nefeyda's tears carried her to the verge of hysteria. Lailat sought in vain to restrain the high-pitched laughter of her mistress.

"It could have been worse, *sitti*. The Afghans are brave fellows, and generous in their way. You may even become the first lady of the *bareem*."

But this, it seemed, was not the proper approach. Nefeyda emerged from the cushions in which she had buried her

face, and still alternating sobs with terrible merriment, paced up and down the narrow, long room. Then as she passed the coffee hearth, the long heavy pestle that reposed in its marble mortar caught her eye. She stooped and picked it up, and caressed its smooth, worn surface.

"He'll be back tonight . . . and I'll wait for him. . . ."

She crouched at the barred door, resisting Lailat's every effort to wheedle her into surrendering the pestle.

Some one even now was approaching the door, lifting the bar.

Nefeyda's smile of welcome was unpleasant.

"*Dest'oor!*" came a voice from without. "By your permission!"

The hinges creaked.

Lailat seized Nefeyda's wrist just in time.

"Don't! It's Hamed!" she screamed, wrenching the pestle from her mistress. "Listen, *sitti!* It's Hamed!"

And Hamed it was; grave, courtly Hamed the Dragoman.

"I have returned," he began, "to ransom you from Khalil of the Red Beard, who bought you not four hours ago."

Over and over he repeated his speech. And finally its meaning dawned on Nefeyda. Lailat caught her just as she sank to the Feraghan carpet.

"Then he won't come back?"

"No, and I will arrange for the release of the Emir Ahmad. Where is he, Lailat?"

"Chained in the courtyard, *ya sabibi*. Approach him carefully. He killed several of his guards early this evening, so be sure he recognizes you before you get within arm's reach."

Leaving Lailat to attend her mistress, Hamed sought the courtyard.

"*Es salaam aleikoum, sidi!*" he saluted.

"Peace be damned!" growled Carter.

And then he recognized Hamed.

"I have arranged to buy you from Khalil. You, and Sitti Nefeyda and her servant also. If you will be pleased to sign an order on the American Express Company for the exorbitant sum that avaricious dog of an Afghan extorted—

"And then there is the blood indemnity for those guards you slaughtered. *Wallabi!* and I don't blame you either, but of course it was needless, seeing that I arrived in time. But what is done, is done. There is neither might nor majesty save in Allah, the Great, the Powerful," concluded Hamed piously, as he paused for breath, and fumbled at his belt for a wallet.

"Here you are, *sidi*. I rode hard and fast across the desert to Medain Salihh, and then by rail to Amman, riding thence to Jerusalem, where I entered your quarters and got your letters of credit on the express company."

"But Khalil won't take express checks or a letter of credit," protested Carter.

"Of course not, *ya sidi*. I have paid him in *dinars* of gold which I borrowed from a Yahudi money-lender. That sink of iniquity, God curse him, demanded thirty percent interest for a thirty-day loan, saying that my venture was so hazardous that he could take no less.

"Ho, Saoud!"

A negro armed with a hammer and chisel appeared in the arched entrance.

"Strike off my lord's shackles," commanded Hamed. "And you, 'Ali, bring a reed and ink."

The negro deftly sheared the shackle bolt, and released Carter.

"And now that your hands are free, *ya sidi*, be pleased to countersign these checks, so that I may get a release from the money-lender who holds my interest in you and Sitti Nefeyda as security for the loan. And then you will be free indeed, my lord . . . she is waiting for you

in the *majlis*. *Wallabi! Yallabi! Billabi!* If old Hamed were only an Emir from Kurdistan!"

"AND thus," I commented, as Silat again brought the sweet and took the full, "Sitti Nefeyda married the pretended emir?"

"*Aywab!* Even so; for in the desert it seems they had mastered enough 'Aarabi so that he could propose and she accept."

"But just a moment, Silat," I objected. "Do you mean to tell me she didn't discover the imposture and learn that she had married a *kafir* instead of a true believer?"

"No, *sidi*, she didn't."

Silat's toothless grin spread from ear to ear.

"You see," he continued, "Sitti Nefeyda was actually Madeleine Perkins, of Keokuk, Iowa, a *pashalik* in your country, I think. She was wealthy and independent, after the fashion of heiresses in your land, and so she humored her fancy for meeting a wealthy *shaykh* of the 'Aarab, and sharing his life of romance, and luxury, and splendor!

"Hamed, seeing a chance for a jest—Hamed is a fun-loving fellow, my lord, as you know—groomed up several bazar loafers, as well as a few real *shaykhs* who came to town, picking always old, hard-bitten hounds of the desert that could not possibly please her, waiting all the while for one like the heaven-sent *Sidi* Carter.

"The kidnapping appealed to Sitti Nefeyda Perkins as colorful and a chance of arousing the emir's interest. It also gave Hamed a chance at double pay, acting as matrimonial agent for both masqueraders. It was I who suggested the idea of two impostors meeting each other. . . ."

(Please turn to page 144)

The Dragoman's Jest

(Continued from page 30)

"Well," said I, "fortunately Carter was wealthy. Doubtless Hamed had to pay a high price to Khalil of the red beard for his newly purchased slaves——"

And Silat laughed aloud at this.

"*Sidi*," he finally managed to say, "the red-bearded Afghan was none other than Hamed himself; and the price he actually paid ibn Sakr was nothing compared with the ransom he extracted from Carter."

O. S.—9