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THE POWER OF THE DOG

By G. G. PENDARVES

“GREETING, *effendi!* I salute you in the name of Allah the Compassionate!”

Benson reined in his horse, as the Arab on the dusty brown camel approached. “You have no news?” he replied.

“None,” said Abou Koi. “It is true that an Englishman was at the oasis of Wad Eles; we found him there with many servants—digging foolishly in the sand! But it was not *thy* Englishman.”

The manager of the El Adrar mine frowned thoughtfully, staring out across the broad yellow plain. Up to the present, he had ruled his little community of natives and white men with marked success. He was straightforward in his methods, and although he had little sympathy with the subtle, devious ways of the Arabs—he was never unjust. He listened to them, often laughed at them, and gave them more rein than a weaker man would have thought wise.

Now, for the first time in his seven years of experience at El Adrar, he was faced with a problem which he could not solve. It was a month now since his head clerk, Stephen Adams, had vanished so unaccountably. It was a mystery—and above all things, Benson loathed a mystery!

“You are sure you have made no mistake?—you would recognize Adams *effendi* if you saw him?” Benson’s gaze returned to the dark, sun-ravaged face of the old Arab.

“Hath Allah afflicted me with blindness, that I should not know him? What man could mistake his face—with one eye as blue as the lake of Kef-el-dour itself, and the other black as Eblis!”

“No—you could hardly fail to recognize him,” admitted Benson. “Let us return to El Adrar now—I must see if the Bougie police have sent in their report yet.”

As they approached El Adrar—with its handful of flat-roofed houses, and its native huts clinging like birds’ nests to the rocky coast—Benson saw that an unusual crowd was gathered in the tiny market-square, and he rode up to ascertain the cause.

“It is Daouad!” Abou Koi informed him in an awed whisper.

Benson checked an angry exclamation. At every turn he came up against this name! Daouad the Wearer of the Veil, the worker of spells, the man whom Adams had named “dog” in a moment of provocation, and who had now avenged that insult in secret and terrible fashion, so the villagers said.

Always this everlasting Daouad! Benson was sick of the very sound of his name. There was not a shred of evidence to prove that Daouad had anything to do with Adams’ disappearance; on the contrary there was indisputable proof that he had *not*; and yet the whispered rumors grew, and grew.

On horseback, Benson could see over the heads of the jostling, excited crowd. In their midst stood the veiled figure of Daouad, from whom the people shrank in awe, leaving a wide ring about him. He held a long whip in his hand, and its wicked lash flicked out continually, like a snake's tongue, to urge on a wretched yellow dog rolling in the dust before him.

The animal was being unmercifully punished by a vicious black-and-white mongrel, and its tawny coat was red with blood. The end was a matter of minutes now, for the black-and-white had a firm grip on the other's throat, and the yellow dog's struggles had almost ceased.

Benson slipped down from his horse, and was about to push his way through the crowd, when he felt a hand on his sleeve. He turned to find Abou Koi at his elbow, speaking low and urgently. "It is an evil thing to come between Daouad and his pleasure! He will do thee some ill!"

Benson was accustomed to the unthinking cruelty of the Arabs, and, up to a point, found it politic not to interfere; but an impulse stronger than himself now urged him to rescue the yellow dog from its fate. He shook off the restraining hand and elbowed the natives aside, and in another minute stood with a revolver smoking in his hand, while the black-and-white mongrel rolled over with a bullet in its brain.

Daouad and the Englishman faced each other over its dead body, while the yellow dog panted for breath.

The Arab laughed scornfully: "The *effendi* is merciful! May he obtain mercy when his hour comes!" There was a threat in his insolent words, and a murmur of fear ran round the ring of spectators.

Benson was stung to most unwonted fury. "You're making a nuisance of yourself, Daouad! I won't have you here in El Adrar

frightening the women and children with your tales of devils and witchcraft! If I were a superstitious man, you would be in prison now for putting your spells on Adams *effendi*—but I won't flatter you by taking you so seriously. Let me hear no more of this foolishness!"

Without waiting for more, Benson turned on his heel, and beckoned to Abou Koi, who stood back with eyes full of fear.

"Bring the yellow dog to my stables," Benson ordered, and mounting his horse again, he rode through the village to his big white house by the sea.

HALF an hour later Abou Koi presented himself before the veranda where Benson lounged with a long drink at his elbow.

"Is the dog in my stables?" asked the latter.

"No, *effendi!* Daouad the Chief hath taken the animal to his own dwelling."

"What!" ejaculated Benson, his recent anger returning in a hot wave.

"Master, I was afraid," replied the other simply. "Thou, with the magic of a white man, canst withstand Daouad and the devil that dwelleth in him, but with me it is not so."

"Then I must go myself and get the dog," replied Benson, after a long pause.

Abou Koi shrank back, holding his hand before his face, and wailed. "Thou too—thou too wilt vanish as did Adams *effendi!* Daouad will——"

"I tell you Daouad had nothing whatever to do with Adams *effendi!*" interrupted Benson impatiently. "That, I have proved. Daouad was up in the hills at Beni Gaza that day. And it was here, in this village, that Adams *effendi* vanished. He was seen approaching the village by the bridge, and walking along the road

where it lies in the shadow of the eucalyptus trees!"

"Yea!" answered Abou Koi. "And beyond those trees doth Daouad dwell!"

"But Daouad was not there that day—and I had the house and gardens searched before he returned from Beni Gaza."

"Daouad *was* there that day," returned Abou Koi solemnly. "What if he was seen at Beni Gaza in that hour! Hath he not power to clothe a devil like to himself—and appear thus where he will?"

"Then I suppose you believe that both Daouad and Adams effendi were in the house when I searched it?"

"Master, I do believe it. They were there, but Daouad caused your eyes to be blind, that you might not see!"

"That is damned nonsense!" said Benson, striding across the veranda.

IT WAS more than a question of rescuing a miserable yellow cur, reflected Benson, as he walked up the village street—where swift blue dusk fell softly, lit by braziers of glowing charcoal and the firefly gleam of the smokers' pipes. Yes—it was a challenge to Daouad! The man had defied him by keeping the dog, and Benson intended to humble this insolent chief in the eyes of the credulous villagers.

As he neared Daouad's dwelling, and was about to enter the belt of dense shadow thrown by the trees across the dusty road, a long-drawn howling rose and fell, with an indescribably mournful cadence. Benson was surprized at the stab of fear he felt, and squared his shoulders impatiently.

"It's infectious—this talk of ghosts and devils," he murmured. "I'll be as foolish as any ignorant beggar in El Adrar soon!"

Again that wailing inhuman sound—and the eucalyptus trees rustled

trembling leaves in warning, as it died away.

Then as Benson looked ahead, he tasted fear again, so sharp and poignant that his joints seemed turned to water. A few yards away, on the little bridge beyond the trees, stood the tall veiled figure of Daouad—apparently risen from the ground!

The Englishman rallied all his common sense to his aid. "He's been expecting me, of course," he thought, "and he's going to try a few of his conjuring tricks."

Deliberately he took out a cigarette, and lit it with steady hands.

"Well, Daouad!" he said to the motionless figure. "I've come for that dog."

"The dog is my dog," came the deep answering voice.

"You can dispute that, if you like, before the magistrate next week. You don't know how to treat an animal, and I claim it. If you don't hand it over at once, I'll have you arrested!"

"Thou, too, art afraid then!"

"Not of an Arab dog!"

"Dog! That word again to me!"

The veiled figure approached, and Benson caught the glitter of the dark eyes, between hood and *littrem*.*

"Look, white man! Look and see the power of the dog!"

Benson felt a swift wind fan his face, and his eyes smarted as though staring at the midday sun. The aromatic gloom of the eucalyptus trees vanished, and in its place he saw a vast stretch of gray desert, from whose sandy floor heat rose in visible waves, to meet the white glare of the sky above. Across the desert a dark moving mass of horsemen passed with tossing spears. A great army—and at their head, the proudest and most kingly of all that splendid tribe—rode Daouad the Chief!

* Blue veil worn over nose and mouth.

"The servants of the dog!" A voice sounded faintly in Benson's ear.

The desert darkened swiftly, and under a red moon Benson saw a world of tents and the gleam of campfires—stretching over the sands to far-distant boundaries.

But his horror-stricken gaze was focused on something in the foreground of the picture. Something hardly human, that crawled blind and writhing in the shifting sands, while Daouad spurned it with sandaled foot and urged his slaves to further torture.

As Benson stared spellbound, the chief snatched a flaming brand from a brazier at his side, and beckoned with imperious hand. Powerless to resist, Benson stumbled forward until he was face to face with Daouad's victim. From its twisted, blackened features, two eyes met his—the eyes of one in hell—but unmistakable to Benson! For one was blue as the Lake of Kef-el-dour and the other black as Eblis!

Daouad laughed insolently as he saw that Benson understood—then, with a fierce gesture, thrust the blazing brand into his victim's face.

Again that fiery wind fanned Benson's face; he saw the desert no longer—but only the little bridge, and the silver trunks of the eucalyptus trees, and the tall veiled figure of Daouad blotting out the moonlight before him.

He drew a deep breath, shaken to the very soul by that sudden opening of the gates of hell, yet he stood his ground stubbornly.

"Try again, Daouad!" he said, steadying his voice by an immense effort of will. "A very neat trick, I admit, but——"

"Yet you feared greatly, white man!" said the chief, pointing to the other's hands. Benson involuntarily glanced down, and saw the palms of them marked deep with the indents

of his own fingernails. He bit his lip at the betrayal—but his eyes were steady as he confronted Daouad.

"I admit that you took me by surprise," he answered lightly. "However, as it is only a conjuring trick——"

Daouad smiled evilly. "It was a true vision you beheld. Did he not call me dog?"

"If I believed that," replied Benson, his words stumbling and indistinct, because of a sudden dryness of his mouth, "you should be hanged before dawn breaks, for the dog you are!"

The Arab's eyes blazed, and he lifted one hand in a threatening gesture. Benson drew his revolver and covered him instantly.

"Enough of this fooling!" he snapped. "I want that yellow dog—and at once!"

Daouad came a few paces nearer. "Shoot, white man! Try your magic against mine!" was the insolent reply.

In a white heat of rage, Benson drew the trigger, and—nothing happened.

"By Eblis!" mocked the Arab. "Said I not thou wert afraid? So lost in fear and wonder of my magic, that I have drawn thy sting without thy knowledge."

Benson could not repress a gasp. It was true—the devil had indeed removed his cartridges, while he himself had stood, fuddled and afraid, like any ignorant native.

"Your trick!" he said quietly, his strong face set in its grimmest lines, "You are a clever rogue—too clever altogether for El Adrar! And now that you have done your little turn, and satisfied yourself that you can impose on a white man—we may consider the show is ended."

"For you—yes! The show is ended!"

Benson controlled a shiver. There was a sinister ring he did not like in Daouad's slow words.

"You shall learn the power of the dog," went on the Arab. "You shall learn—as did that other one!"

WITH a sudden movement Benson flung himself forward on that tall veiled figure—but he clutched the empty air and fell, choking and gasping, his eyes and mouth full of hot sand. Utterly bewildered, he got to his knees, to find himself once more under that low-hung moon in the wilderness, among the tents and campfires of Daouad the Chief.

And then naked terror seized him. For again Daouad stood before the great brazier—his torturers in a ring about him—and within that circle of evil grinning faces he himself was hemmed.

"Deliver my soul from the power of the dog!" The words beat like a tattoo in Benson's brain. He knew now, too late to save himself, that such power was real—a blasting, devastating power that could destroy him, body and soul.

The chief pointed to him, and Benson strove desperately that he might not grovel before his enemy.

A pock-marked Arab tore the Englishman's coat from his back with slaving eagerness, and cruel fingers were at the collar of his shirt, when a swift, lean shape darted across the ring, and sprang at Daouad's throat.

"The yellow dog!" burst from Benson's dry lips, as he heard a choking, terrible cry, and the vast floor of the desert seemed to rise up around him. . . . Then he saw clearly again he was under the eucalyptus trees

once more, his coat flung on the ground beside him, his shirt torn open at the throat; and before him, on the bridge, in the white moonlight, Daouad strove to fling off that savage, tawny shape hanging at his throat!

Inch by inch the Arab staggered back until he reeled against the light handrail of the bridge. It bent and broke with a report which rang out like a pistol shot, and man and dog fell into the deep water below.

Benson dragged himself forward, and peered down. He saw the two locked together, sink and rise, and sink again. Then, after a long interval, both rose once more to the surface, and began to float slowly down the stream.

He watched and saw how they drifted apart at last—Daouad was carried on in midstream, while the dog was drawn into the shallows and lay washing gently to and fro among the long reeds by the bank.

A quick impulse stirred Benson. He must at least give the animal a decent burial—not leave it like a drowned rat there in the water! Had it not been for the yellow dog—! He shivered, and ran quickly down to the river's brink and drew the dog to land. The dead body was wet and heavy, and Benson staggered as he carried it up to the road.

He put out a hand to shut his eyes—those staring glassy eyes! But he did not shut them—his hand fell to his side, and violent, nauseating horror, too great for brain and body to bear, overwhelmed him; and he pitched forward on his face in the road.

One eye of the yellow dog was blue as the lake of Kef-el-dour, the other black as Eblis.

