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"On your guard!" cried the dervish. "They come!"



Because he loved
Onaida beyond all else,
John Vestall defied
the icy breath of
the Sarsar,
Wind of Death

Where None

"DO YOU believe in the *Djinn* then?" said John Vestall slowly. There was a challenge in his tone, and also a curious hesitation, as if he himself was of two minds on the subject.

Sheik Zeyd of the Beni Wassar bent his hawk's eyes downward and began to trace meaningless arabesques in the sand with his ivory camel-stick. His Arabic was

Terror flashed through John Vestall's mind as the demonic blade fell like a thunderbolt



By

ARTHUR T. JOLLIFFE

Could Live

flavored with a slight English accent.

"I do, *saidi*," he said, "and then again I do not. My Oxford education is, I suppose, the reason why, unlike Furtak here, I cannot believe in the creatures of our old mythology—actual malevolent beings such as the *afrits* and *ghuls* who are said to take any shape at will and work evil on men. But . . ."

"There is always a 'but,' O Sheik," said

Furtak. His face was gaunt, intent, brooding; the light of the little camel-dung fire stole beneath his heavy brows and glittered in his strange eyes.

Zeyd took no notice of the interruption. "But," he went on evenly, "I am a Bedouin still, despite what Oxford did to me. Say that the *Djinn* represent the forces of evil, say that they symbolize those impulses which make a man curse Allah or betray the salt of his friend, and I will tell you that I believe in them."

"Now by God!" said Furtak. His cigarette glowed brightly—strong evidence of his emotion. "It were better, *saidi*, that you had never been taught in the schools of the foreigners. The desert alone has been my teacher, and I am wiser than either of you. Allah is God, and Muhammad is His prophet—" Then, as the two other men bowed their heads in acknowledgment—"also there are angels, as the Koran says. Since this is so, there is likewise *Shaitan*, and the *Djinn* who are his ministers. Will you never believe an old man? Why, if you are so incredulous, do you then follow me to Djinnestan?"

"PEACE!" exclaimed Vestall sharply.

"We have had enough of these disputes. Have I not said I believe you? There is my dream . . . Mecca lies two hundred miles behind us; before us is still the desert—and God knows what! If you speak truth, four more camps will bring us to the proof of whether dreams and *Djinn* are delusions or not."

Furtak subsided, grumbling. Zeyd continued his idle tracing in the sand. A camel groaned nearby; the night wind came slipping across the dunes, fanning the dying fire into an opaline glow. And John Vestall went outside the tent to walk alone under the stars.

Yes, there was his dream. John Vestall knew that there were men who scoffed at dreams. As he had scoffed in a time when he knew less than he did now, when he had made one of Yale's pseudo-intelligentzia—clean, intolerant, cynical young men who took Nietzsche to their hearts and were impatient of religions and tradition. But since then he had learned much, and his head had bowed before the shrines of many mysteries.

His memories came flowing as smoothly as the sands under his feet. Voodoo worship in Haitian jungles, with himself standing awed as the *lois* descended from their shadowy spheres and took ecstatic possession of the Legba dancers; tinkle of sistrums in immemorial rites of Isis among the soaring columns of a hidden temple near Baalbek; black magic with the *dug-pas* of Tibet; strange devotions to Malik Taos with the Yezidee devil-worshippers; hours spent among the simple monks of Mount Athos; wild bacchanals on Olym-

pus where the great Bacchus was still adored with the thyrsus and the ivy; Druidical chants rising on dark midnights amid the weird monoliths of Stonehenge. Scenes such as these had become part of the warp and woof of his life's tapestry. He had sought them, he had trodden the jungles, the deserts, the icy mountain passes, in search of—what? The fulfillment of a dream. But what if that dream proved only an idle vision?

If so, then all things were dreams. The silent desert, the murmuring wind, the span-gled sky with the great Star of the Prophet glittering in the zenith—all were dreams and he himself a shadowy phantom.

He closed his eyes and gave himself up to contemplation. As always, *she* came to him, came to him as she had first done in his dingy London lodgings.

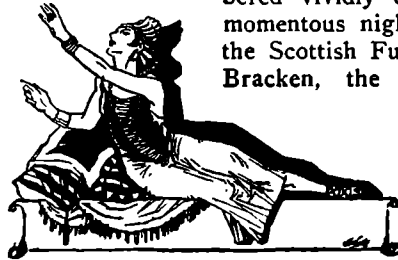
He thought of that time. He remembered vividly every incident of that momentous night. Major McNeill of the Scottish Fusiliers had been there; Bracken, the journalist; the Rath

girls. There had been talk, not the kind that stimulates the imagination—theaters, the war, the tariff—oh, a dozen inconsequen-

tial things. And after his visitors had gone he had read a dozen pages of Paine's "Age of Reason"—surely not the kind of book to induce mystical visions.

Then to bed; sleep; the awakening—if it could be so called. The room brighter than noon-day, but with none of its familiar furnishings visible. Instead, a vision of a cave, a huge domed hall aisled by ponderous pillars, and in that cave an altar, and on that altar a woman. And the woman! Surely not of this age, with her long black hair sweeping back from her ivory forehead, her delicately aquiline features, her tiny feet and hands with their gilded nails, the loveliness of her body glimpsed through shimmering folds of gauzy fabric.

ONLY a glimpse of all this, but in that glimpse John Vestall had lost his heart, and next day his feet had set him on that ten-year-old quest which had led him around the weary old world and back again. It drew him now to the wild interior of Arabia, the dusty trail, the pitiless sun, the nightly desert sky, lonely with stars.



Well . . . she had never left him; the vision had not faded. Never again had he seen that great cave-like place which had been revealed to him in his first dreaming. But always there was her face—it swam before him now in the darkness, ethereal, lovely, startlingly real. He watched the curve of those half-smiling lips, the mystery of the closed, painted eyelids.

Why did they not open? They never did. But John Vestall believed that some day her eyes would look upon him, and he knew that he would find them brighter than the desert stars.

He opened his eyes but the vision still persisted. The face receded swiftly, it blurred, its features became confused, but still he saw it, a beckoning taper lighting his way eastward. And as it disappeared, either in the black distance or in the dim recesses of his own brain, John Vestall knew with a solemn joy that he was nearing the end of his quest.

He turned on the high dune and faced the camp, saw the tiny watch-fire shining like a ruddy beacon.

"*Kismet!*" he whispered reverently.

No longer might he doubt that his Fates were at last leading him aright. He thought of Zeyd and the strange Furtak and laughed as he thought of the difference between men's souls. There was Zeyd, Arab, Bedouin, educated, polished like a hard jewel, whose contact with Western ways had stripped him of his inherited beliefs and left him adrift on a sea of blind science. Vestall suspected that the Sheik even entertained secret doubts of Muhammad and the Koran; no doubt he was contemptuous of Vestall's wild quest in his own heart. But the Bedouin had followed his friend.

VESTALL remembered that day, years ago, when he had saved Zeyd from the flashing scimitar of the Roualla while on *ghrazzu*—the camel-raid, thought of the blood-brotherhood they had afterward sworn. It had seemed like a passage from the Book of Ruth . . . "Whither thou goest I will go . . ." Zeyd with his skepticism! John Vestall laughed again, thinking of the incredulity of his British friends had they been told he was more superstitious than a "bloody Arab."

But Furtak! Ah, there was mystery for you! How, among all the pilgrims who swarmed about the Kaaba in Mecca,

had the little, wizened dervish singled him out? Vestall had thought his disguise impenetrable; had not Zeyd assured him that he looked more like a Bedouin than Zeyd himself? But Furtak had sidled up to Vestall in the press and had said, "O *Feringhi!*" and after that there was nothing left to do but follow him. The man had looked at Vestall over the table in the little cafe, and his black eyes had twinkled.

"You seek Onaida, *saidi?*" he had said.

Onaida . . . so that was her name!

And then the weird tale that the dervish had unfolded!

ONAIDA . . . daughter of Baaltis, Queen of Sheba . . . who had worshiped strange gods . . . whom Suleinan had cursed because of her sorceries . . . had placed her under the power of the *Djinn* whose master he was by virtue of the Forbidden Name of Allah and his Great Seal . . . she who had lain now in Djinnestan—abode of the demons—for three thousand years, waiting a deliverer . . . Vestall, who had loved her in that forgotten life . . . whom even now she was calling to her.

"Ask me not how I know, *saidi,*" the dervish had said. "Perhaps the stars told me; perhaps I too lived in those days."

John Vestall recalled it all, and the wind rustled the sand and whispered a promise in his ears. He looked campward again toward the twinkling eye of the distant fire. He was a dreamer following a dream.

But in the desert dreams came true. In the desert all things were possible.

John Vestall stopped his beautiful white *hujun*, cream of Zeyd's racing camels, and waited for his companions to catch up with him. All morning they had ridden across tawny dunes, and now from the eminence which had been their objective they faced still more of the graceful hills stretched away league on league to a horizon veiled with flying sand. Something was puzzling John Vestall. For hours deep meditation had ridden with him pilion-wise on his high-cantled saddle, but an alien thought had at last forced its way through his preoccupation. There was something strange about this day's ride, something—wrong. What was it? There was the sand, the dazzling sun, the wind. . . .

Ah, that was it—the wind!

John Vestall drew his dark *abba* more closely about him and shivered. Then he turned to the somber dervish at his side.

**He was a dreamer following a dream. But in the desert dreams
come true. In the desert all things were possible**

"How is this, Furtak?" he said wonderingly. "It is high noon, but the wind is piercing."

But Furtak said nothing, and as they plunged down the eastern side of the dune John Vestall found this new phenomenon occupying his attention to the exclusion of all else.

THEY were in the middle of the ghastly Arabian desert. It was summer; the sun blazed; the sands drove under the lash of the wind of the waste; but this wind which seemingly blew straight westward from the red-hot Oman coast was *cold*—cold as the blasts that swoop down from the shining peaks of the icy Himalayas! "Djinnestan!" said Zeyd with a short laugh.

"Even so, *saidi*," replied the dervish.

John Vestall said nothing, but a vague sense of disappointment filled his heart as he looked out over the scene before him. He knew not what he had expected, but certainly it had been more than this sight of an expanse of smooth sand, barren and lifeless, blood-red in the sunset glow. In the distance rose the flanks of precipitous buttes.

Furtak evidently sensed Vestall's state of mind.

"It is not what you thought to find, O *Feringhi*?"

"Hardly."

The dervish smiled.

"You will find more," he said. "At least you will admit that we seem to be near the realm of supernatural things. The *sarsar* blows colder than ever."

"The *sarsar*. What is that?"

"It is the wind of death, *saidi*," said Furtak solemnly. "That which has its birth in the lowermost halls of Eblis; that which spreads pestilence and destruction abroad over all the earth; that which is the natural atmosphere of all evil things."

Zeyd laughed again, but his laughter sounded somewhat forced. The dervish was right. John Vestall had ceased to wonder about the phenomenon of the icy wind through which they had ridden for four weary days. Unable to explain it,

he had dismissed it as a matter of little importance. But now the insistent sweep of the gale reminded him again of its anomaly. He turned eagerly to the dervish, but before he could speak Zeyd forestalled him.

"You must be either mad or a fool, dervish," said the sheik. "Who now believes in the old tales of the caliphs? If this is your 'wind of death' we should have all been dead long ago."

Furtak was unruffled.

"The tales of the caliphs," said he, "are not the only ones to mention the *sarsar*. It is only the name which is unfamiliar. Read in the books of the *Feringhi*, read of those men who have come face to face with the spirits of those who have died an evil death. One and all have affirmed that the apparition of a specter is always attended by an icy atmosphere that freezes the very marrow of the bones. Is this not so, O Master?"

John Vestall nodded; he had heard of that circumstance. But Zeyd's skepticism was unshaken.

"My second objection still remains unanswered," he said haughtily.

"O you of no faith!" snapped the dervish, "—you would not believe even though a *Djinni* should appear before your very eyes. We live—true, but that is because the breath of the *sarsar* is mingled with the pure winds of Allah's heaven. No man, though, can breathe of the *sarsar's* real essence."

"Where does it come from?" asked Vestall. He was tired of these disputes between the dervish and the Bedouin.

ALLAH alone in heaven and Eblis alone on earth know the place of its birth," replied Furtak. "Generated in the very bowels of the earth, it works its fatal way up through subterranean halls to the naked rocks of Djinnestan whence it is diffused through all the world. Not far from here there is a cave——"

"A cave!" Vestall was all attention.

"I know what you are thinking, *saidi*. Yes, it is the cave of your vision. See—barely seven hours' ride from here."

Vestall's eager eyes followed the dervish's gaunt finger. Searching along the base of the frowning hills they at last caught sight of a shadow, blacker than other shadows, low down at the foot of a gigantic butte.

"There," said Furtak, "is the entrance to that place which is called Djinnestan. This waste of sand is only debatable ground."

"Let us hasten," cried John Vestall. His coldness had vanished. He was all afire now that the end of his quest was in plain sight. Onaida! . . . before the new day dawned he would know the truth of his visions. He tapped his beast with the camel-stick, but the dervish laid a re-

short arc barely three feet long on the side that faced toward the darkening east. A small brazier of smoking incense stood in the very center of the circle. Zeyd squatted by his *hujun* watching these preparations contemptuously.

"DRAW your saber, *saidi*," said the dervish to Vestall, "and station yourself in the little gap of the circle. On you falls the burden of its defense. Not for your life must you step beyond the limits of the circle; not for your life must you allow anything to enter."

"What is this?" growled the Bedouin. "If there is fighting to be done do you think that a Beni Wassar will sit idle?"

"Draw your saber, *saidi*," said the dervish. "Not for your life must you step beyond the limits of the circle; not for your life must you allow anything to enter"

straining hand with firmness upon his arm.

"Not so fast, *saidi*. There is danger."

"Danger?"

"Truly. Do you think, even though the time has expired and the hour of *her* deliverance is at hand, that the *Djinn* will willingly give up their prey? They will do their best to dispute our passage. Once in the cave's mouth we are safe, but between that place and this are many miles."

"*Wellah!*" scorned Zeyd. "How this fellow talks! There is nothing between us and those hills but an empty plain."

But John Vestall was not scornful. He got down from his *hujun* and again addressed the dervish.

"Do what seems best to you," he said.

THE dervish had already opened his large wallet. From it he took a little horn box, filled with an aromatic powder.

"We must meet them here, *saidi*," he said, "between the dunes and the plain where our strength and theirs is equally balanced. We must give them no advantage. I know the *Djinn*."

"What are you going to do?" asked John Vestall curiously.

"Protect us against attack from every side," replied Furtak. Soon he had completed his strange task. Around the men and camels he had traced a large circle in the sand, a circle broken only by a

"Here you cannot help, O Sheik," said Furtak curtly as Vestall took up his position, blade in hand. "How can you fight that which you are not able to see?"

Zeyd spat in disgust but nevertheless he made no further move. Vestall saw the dervish walk toward the brazier and crouch down in the sand. There was an ominous tenseness in the air. Darkness had fallen rapidly; only in the west was the sky lightened by a few lurid bars of crimson; the icy breath of the *sarsar* blew more strongly. Was it imagination, or did John Vestall actually hear far in the east a trampling as of mighty feet?

"On guard!" cried the dervish. "They come!"

Blackness rushed upon the little group with the swoop of the wind. In a moment only the flickering heart of the brazier could be seen. But John Vestall knew that all around was a silent assemblage of invisible shapes. The ebon night pulsed with evil presences.

The *Djinn* were come. John Vestall gripped his saber and waited.

Behind him he heard a low, wild chant in a tongue which he did not understand. It was the dervish. Then something else diverted the American's attention. There was a shuffling in the darkness somewhere off to his right, then a tremendous thudding followed by a sharp crack as if

some one had fired a pistol. With a thump a heavy body fell upon the sand.

"On guard!" came again from the dervish. Then the chanting rose again more wildly than ever.

From the darkness in front of John Vestall's straining eyes a shape began to take outline.

Unbelievably malevolent, fiery eyes stared through the murk toward him. He saw the dim suggestion of a huge, misshapen body, of long, shadowy arms that gripped something, raised it on high. It caught the red gleam of the brazier and John Vestall saw that it was a sword. It descended. . . .

IN MOMENTS such as this the human brain is transcended; its consciousness reels through illimitable voids of time. The demonic blade fell like a thunderbolt but while it swooped John Vestall thought of many things. Terror flashed through his mind; the appalling thought that he could not raise his own sword in time to ward off that murderous stroke. He thought of flight. He heard with painful distinctness the fierce chant of the dervish. Then he thought of Onaida. His mind steadied itself; his blade swept up.

All this in that space of time it had taken for the other weapon to fall. . . .

Steel clashed on steel. Vestall experienced a numbing shock. But his parry had been successful. He set himself to meet a similar attack.

But it did not come.

Force had failed. Instantly John Vestall became aware that the Thing outside the circle was now attacking him with all the strength of its mighty will.

He was fainting. . . .

Time was shattered and went slithering down into the fragments of the broken, forgotten eons. He had stood there for centuries gazing into those flaming orbs, resisting with all the power of his soul his almost uncontrollable impulse to retreat.

Just one step . . . one little backward step. . . .

It would be so easy.

But just as the last remnant of John Vestall's will flickered down into defeat before that of his formidable adversary, just as one nerveless foot began to drag backward through the sand, he heard a mighty shout from the rear. The wild

chanting of the dervish suddenly ceased.

"Thou hast won!"

It was even as he had said. The clutching fingers that had wound themselves benumbingly about John Vestall's brain withdrew themselves, the malignant eyes faded away into the darkness. And then light sprang up as Furtak began to throw carefully hoarded sticks into his brazier.

John Vestall saw that the space without the circle was empty now of all but the stars and the whispering sand. He sank down upon his knees.

"You have won!" cried the dervish. His arms went about Vestall's fainting form.

"Another moment and I—should have yielded," gasped the American.

"But you won. . . ."

"What trickery is this?" It was the voice of Zeyd.

"Trickery, Zeyd? Did you not see the eyes—of the Djinni?"

"I saw nothing."

"Of course not," said Furtak. His voice was grim. "O Sheik, you have not the vision. But what do you say of the *hujun*?"

John Vestall looked too. Half in and half out of the protective circle lay the carcass of his own white camel, its neck twisted at a grotesque angle, its skull smashed to a gory red pulp.

"Are you not glad, O Zeyd," said the dervish maliciously, "that *you* did not stray outside the circle?"

But to this the Bedouin made no answer.

SOMEWHERE in that desert John Vestall had become separated from his companions. For hours he had walked through the black night clinging to Zeyd's stirrup, disdaining the latter's entreaties for him to ride. He wanted to think and action spurred his thought. But the wind had come booming down, icily cold, and had pelted the party with flying sand that stung like needles. Even the stars had been obscured. And then Vestall had stumbled over some obstacle, had lost his grip on Zeyd's stirrup, and in a moment had gone whirling away over and over in the grasp of that relentless blast that raved at him and buffeted him until he was utterly confused. Not even his shouting could help him; his cries were scarcely audible to his own ears.

So he had staggered on against the wind. At least he had that to guide him. Keep

on eastward and he would come in time to that dark wall of rock he had seen from the edge of the dunes. He fought his way onward until in the dim east he saw the first glow of dawn spring into being above the shadow of ponderous cliffs.

He was very near now, he believed, to that cave.

But his strength was rapidly failing him, and at last he fell in the sand. The wind snatched at his garments savagely.

He could not have lain there for more than a few minutes for when he opened his eyes again he saw that the pale dawn was still low in the eastern sky. Some one was shaking him by the shoulder.

He looked up stupidly. It was Furtak the dervish, kneeling at his side.

"Come, *saidi*," said the man. "Only a few steps farther."

Then he rose and felt some one else take his other arm.

That was the Bedouin. His eyes held a strange expression, that of a man who has looked on unbelievable things.

"You found the cave?" asked John Vestall.

"Yes," replied Zeyd.

And so walking between them Vestall managed to cover the short distance that lay ahead of him. At last his outstretched hand touched the coldness of solid rock.

"Around this spur," spoke the dervish.

"MY FRIEND," said Zeyd earnestly, "I entreat you by our love to turn back."

"But the cave is there?"

"Yes, *saidi*."

"Then I go on," cried Vestall.

Staggering around the corner of the cliff he found himself before the mouth of a cave.

And . . . it was the cave of his vision. Gloomy and vast in his sight lay the

hall of the columns, no dream now but ponderous reality, its farther recesses obscured by the weird blue luminosity that pervaded the place and seemed to hang, a quivering, intangible curtain, across the entrance. The terrible cold almost caused John Vestall to faint again. But he saw every detail, the polished floor, the vaulted ceiling, the low stone altar. And on the altar lay the woman for whose sake he had wandered across the centuries and the spinning world.

SHE was more beautiful in John Vestall's eyes than ten thousand dreams.

"Onaida!" he cried, "Onaida!"

Impetuously he started forward but the iron arm of the dervish dragged him back.

"Wait!"

"Wait? Why must I wait? Why *should* I wait? It is she! . . . Onaida! Zeyd—Furtak—do you not see?"

The dervish nodded, but the cool voice of the Bedouin was like a chill on John Vestall's enthusiasm.

"See? See what? I see no woman."

"There, Zeyd—there on the altar!"

"You have lost your wits, my friend," said the sheik calmly. "I

can see nothing on that altar but a skeleton—a pile of dry bones."

"What!"

"Nothing more, *saidi*. Do not let yourself be deceived any longer. You have been hypnotized by this old villain. Truly there is nothing but a skeleton in that cave. I can trust my eyes."

John Vestall stared at him. Could it be that the Bedouin was right? Had his own mind gone wandering down the dim aisles of madness and illusion? But—there she lay, infinitely desirable in all her lovely panoply of flesh and blood.

"You have not the vision, O Sheik," said the dervish to Zeyd.



Sheik Zeyd's eyes gazed incredulously upon the withered thing that had been his hand

"Vision!" Furtak spat out scornfully.

"You will not believe in what he sees?"

"My eyes tell me what to believe."

"Nor even in the *sarsar*?"

"A curse on your *sarsar*! What is it?—a cold wind, nothing more. There are a dozen natural explanations for such a thing."

At the words the long-suffering patience of the dervish seemed to give way. His eyes blazed wrathfully. But his voice was low; it purred curiously.

"No matter what else you are, O Sheik, you are a brave man. Then *prove* your unbelief with your courage. Thrust your hand into the cave—only your hand, my friend—into the pure exhalation of the wind of death. Perhaps your sense of touch will convince you where your sight will not."

THE sheik's eyes glittered contemptuously. Not deigning to reply he drew back the sleeve of his *abba* and without a moment's hesitation thrust his left hand into the whirling atmosphere of the cavern. "*Allah!*"

There was a sharp cry, a sudden movement, and Sheik Zeyd of the Beni Was-sar leaped back from the cave mouth, face distorted with pain, eyes gazing incredulously upon the withered thing that had been his hand.

It was shriveled, black, dry, and the fingers were clawed like the talons of a vulture. . . .

"Now do you believe?" cried Furtak exultantly.

But Zeyd said nothing. There was fear in his heart. He looked at his blasted hand and then at those dry bones in the cave. They seemed to mock him."

The dervish turned to Vestall.

"You see, *saidi*," said he, "that it is death to enter that place."

John Vestall was silent. This weird occurrence had shocked him greatly.

"How, if I die," he said at length, "shall I deliver her?"

The dervish's face was grave.

"Would you turn back," he asked, "if I told you that your death was the price of her deliverance? It is her soul that must be delivered—released from the thrall-dom of enchantment that has imprisoned it in her body for so many hundreds of years. You would die . . . but you would release her soul."

"And then?"

"I know not, *saidi*. And if I did—there are things of which one is not permitted to speak. But what is death? Surely nothing for a brave man to fear. And life—the shifting of sands in the desert's emptiness . . . I tell you this, O *Feringhi*—your souls will go forth together. She belongs to you. Will you fail her?"

"No," said John Vestall softly.

He was tired of his quest, tired of the desert, unutterably weary of all things which he had known.

Onaida waited for him. . . .

"Farewell, Furtak," he said, holding out his hand. "I have not the words to thank you—"

The dervish met his clasp.

"There is no need, *saidi*," said he. "I have but performed the will of Allah. Farewell."

John Vestall turned to the silent Zeyd.

"And you, my friend—farewell."

The Bedouin's wild eyes searched the American's face.

"I cannot dissuade you?"

John Vestall shook his head. He knew Zeyd. There would be no entreaties, no hysterical parting.

"No. I must go to her."

Was it a tear that Vestall saw shining on the sheik's brown face? But Zeyd's voice was cool, unemotional as always.

"Farewell, *saidi*," he said.

"*'Isma'llah hawalayna.*"

"Farewell—" again. Then at last the Bedouin's calm deserted him. His voice broke harshly.

"Oh, my brother. . . ." he said, and buried his face in his robe.

John Vestall stepped resolutely into the mouth of the cave.

INSTANTLY he felt a sharp agony as the icy breath of the *sarsar* engulfed him—a wave of exquisite torture that made his eyeballs turn inward and choked the breath in his throat. But suddenly the spasm passed and a comfortable warmth seemed to envelop him. He looked up. As if a veil had fallen from his eyes he saw the confines of the cavern become distinct and clear. The incarnate beauty on the altar drew his soul.

In a moment John Vestall stood by her side. He saw her bosom rise and fall. He looked down on the face, on those closed eyelids, purple with *surmeh*, fringed with velvet lashes. Strangely he recalled an ancient nursery tale. There had been a

sleeping princess . . . a prince who came to waken her with a kiss. . . .

John Vestall smiled.

He turned his head for a moment; he saw the forms of Zeyd and Furtak as through a blue mist wan against the entrance to the cave. The sheik's face was still covered by his *abba* but Furtak was watching intently.

There was a smile on the dervish's face too.

John Vestall turned again. His face bent over Onaida's—over her sleeping lips. Tenderly he kissed them. They were warm, vibrant with life. She stirred faintly. Then her eyes opened. They were so beautiful. . . . He watched them spell-bound. At last Onaida spoke:

"Come!" she said.

The smile deepened on John Vestall's face as he felt the warmth of her arms. He forgot his surroundings. He knew that all earthly things were slipping away from him.

Slipping like the drifting sands of the lonely desert.

But he cared no longer for earthly things.

FOR a long time Zeyd stood there in the dry sand but at last a hand fell upon his shoulder and a voice pierced the turmoil of his mind.

"*Saidi*." It was the dervish.

Zeyd looked up. He was dry-eyed now.

"Well?"

"He has found her."

Once more Zeyd looked into the cave. There was the altar, and on it that same grim travesty of life mocked him still. By it lay John Vestall, one arm embracing the grisly breast. But from the sleeve of the black *abba* protruded glistening bones. The hood enveloped the face of a skull.

There were two skeletons now upon the stone.

Sheik Zeyd of the Beni Wassar looked

at them and then his glance fell upon his own withered hand. Finally his eyes sought the dervish's.

"Who are you?" he said slowly.

"I am only Furtak the dervish," said the other, and Zeyd knew that he would get no other answer.

"And now?"

"We part, *saidi*."

"Where do you go, O Furtak?"

"On—into the desert, *saidi*. I belong there."

"But what of me?"

YOU will return to Mecca. And this time, O Sheik, I think that you will make your pilgrimage without so much doubt and scorn in your heart. Now you know. . . ."

"What?"

"*La illaha illa allah*—there is no god but Allah—"

But the face of Zeyd was proud. He would not show his emotion to any man—no; not even the dervish.

"Farewell, O Furtak," he said abruptly.

"Farewell. . . ."

From the cave mouth Zeyd sat watching the figure of the dervish until he and his camel melted into the lilac shadow of the northern cliffs. Then he turned his own face westward. He shrugged his shoulders as he mounted his own *hujun* but there was no disrespect in the gesture. He rode all day, unconscious of fatigue.

The sun had set when he at last dismounted. He stood thinking deeply for some time, then he took off his *abba* and spread it upon the clean sand. Strange occupation for Zeyd the skeptical! He knelt on the cloth and faced toward Mecca, the Holy City.

It was not until then that he completed the dervish's sentence.

"—*Wa Muhammad cr-rassoul allahi*," he said very softly.

In his eyes was a light that had not been there before.