

The Dragoman

Kāra made no reply, but swung the saddle across the animal's back and tried to strap the girth. The old man twined his thin legs around those of the donkey and reached up a hand to pull the saddle away.

"It is Hatatcha's brute of a grandson!" cried Nikko, struggling to resist. "No other would try to rob me of my dear Mammek. Desist, or I will call the dragoman, who arrived this morning!"

For answer Kāra dealt him a kick in his stomach and he doubled up with a moan and rolled upon the ground. Then the royal one led Mammek out of the door and lightly leaped upon the donkey's back.

"Oo-ah!" he cried, digging his heels into the animal's flanks; and away trotted Mammek, meek but energetic.

There was no path in the direction he went and the desert sands seemed interminable. Kāra sat sidewise upon the donkey and sucked his sugar-cane, keeping the beast at a trot at the same time. An hour passed, and another. Finally a heap of rocky boulders arose just ahead of him, with a group of date palms at its foot. The heap grew bigger as he approached, and resolved itself into a small mountain, seared by deep fissures in the rocks. But there was verdure within the fissures, and several goats lay underneath the trees. Kāra rode past them and up to the foot of the mountain, where there was an overhanging entrance to a cave.

Throwing himself from the donkey, he ran into the cave and knelt at a spring which welled sparkling and cool from the rocks. Mammek followed and thrust his