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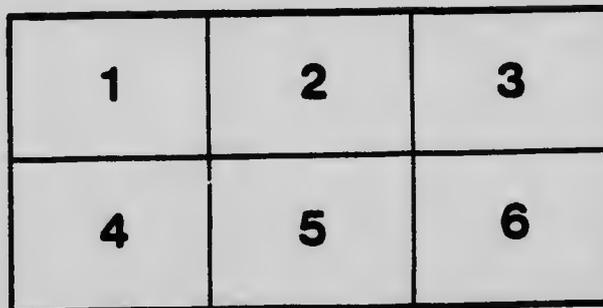
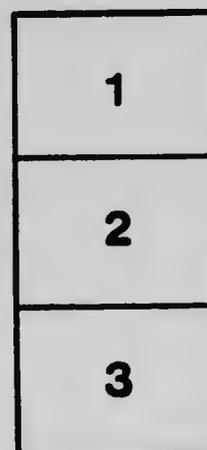
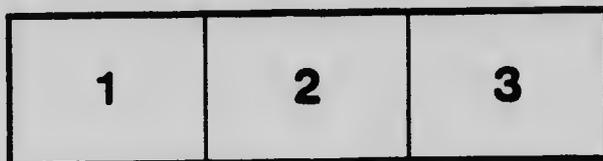
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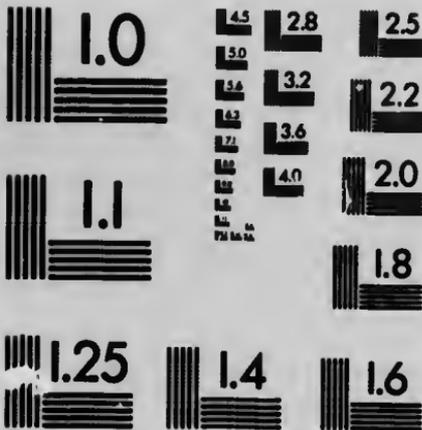
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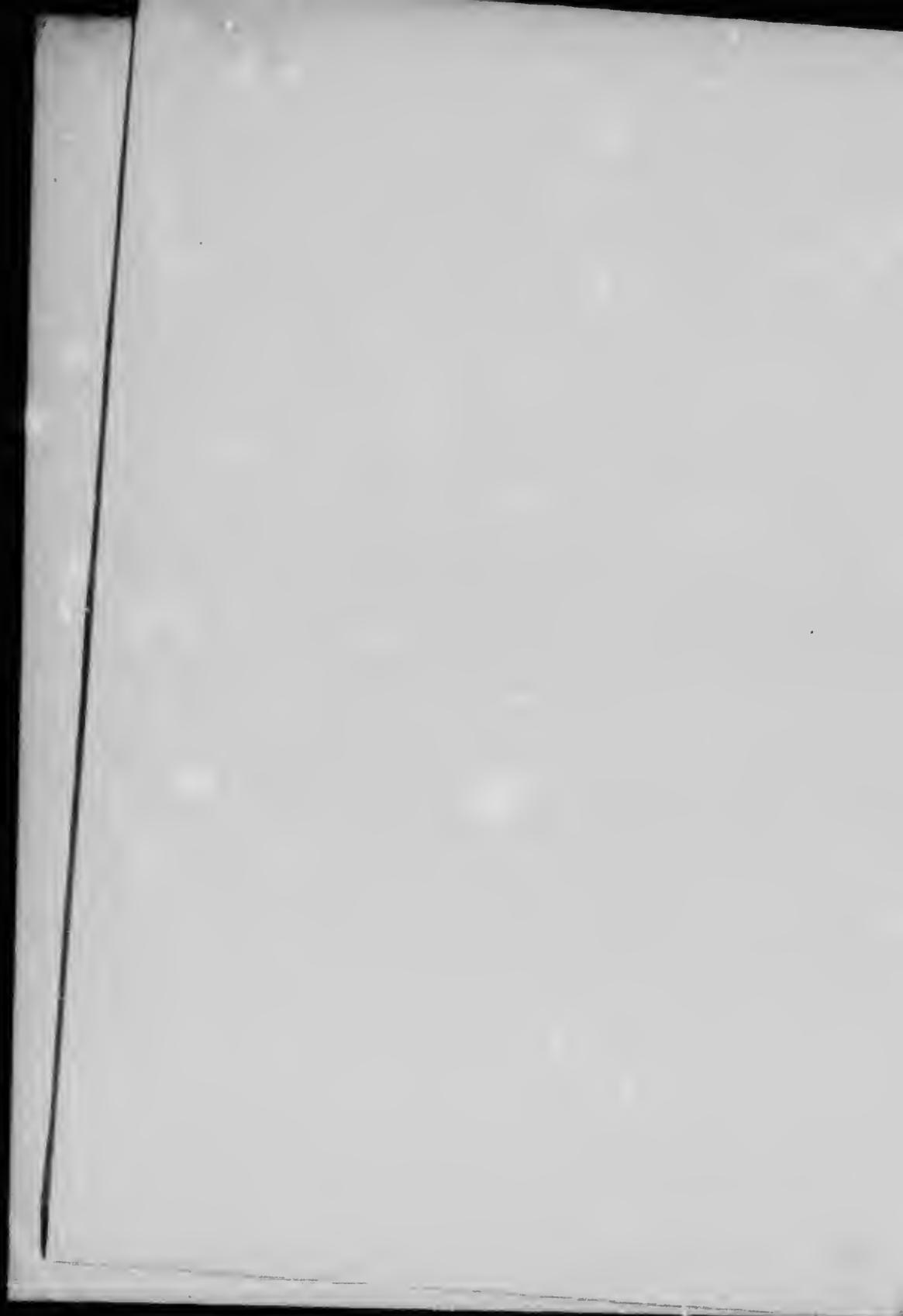
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*The*  
**BLACK STONE**

**By George Gibbs**

**The Black Stone**

**The Golden Bough**

**The Secret Witness**

**Paradise Garden**

**The Yellow Dove**

**The Flaming Sword**

**Madcap**

**The Silent Battle**

**The Maker of Opportunities**

**The Forbidden Way**

**The Bolted Door**

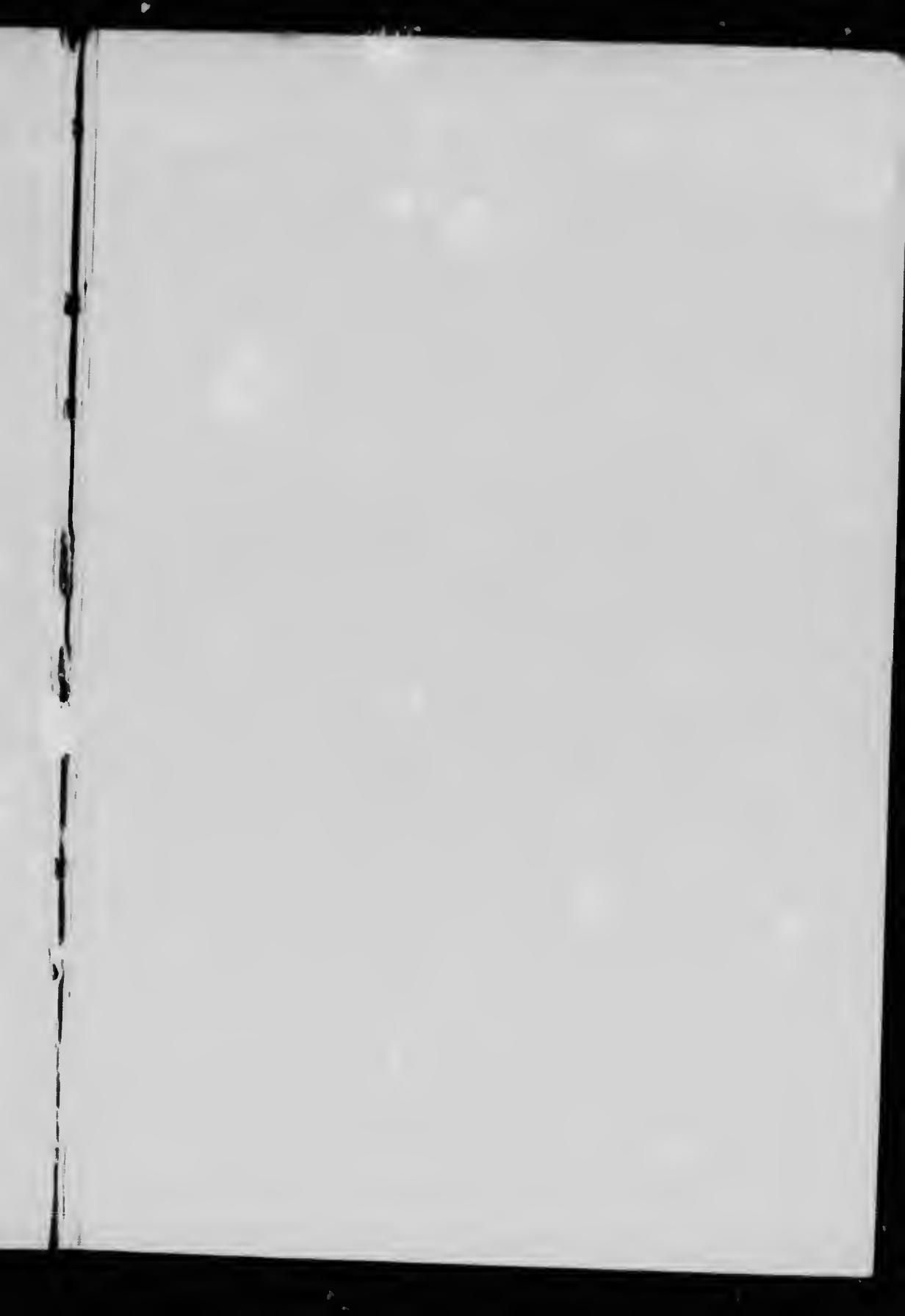
**Tony's Wife**

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**D. APPLETON AND COMPANY**

**Publishers**

**New York**





She looked very tiny perched upon her tall camel.

[Page 268]

*The*  
**BLACK STONE**

BY

**GEORGE GIBBS**

AUTHOR OF "THE GOLDEN BOUGH," "THE SECRET WITNESS,"  
"THE YELLOW DOVE," ETC.

ILLUSTRATED BY  
**GEORGE GIBBS**

TORONTO  
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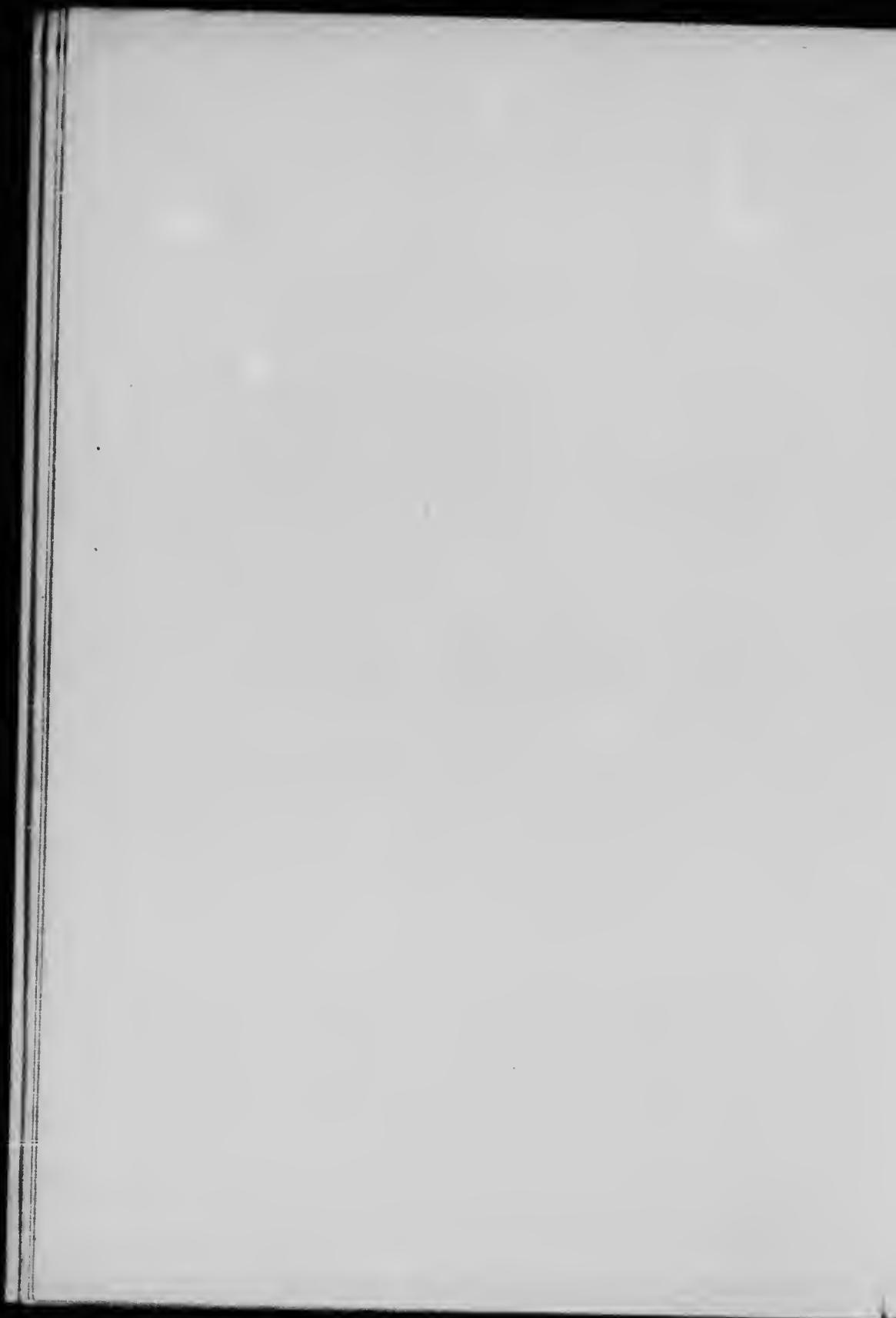
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# THE BLACK STONE

## CHAPTER I

### THE SLACKER

**A**LAN JESSUP was tired. This was not unusual, but he was always more tired in the morning because he had to face a new day in which everything palled him, from the solemn face of his man who drew the silken hangings in his bedroom and let in the garish sunlight, to the hour when, bored all evening at dinner or dance, he was driven home at last to the blessedness of sleep and unconsciousness.

Each of his homes was very like the other six in its atmosphere of magnificence and impersonality—whited sepulchers—expressions of architectural skill and artistic taste in various styles of which he knew little and cared less. He realized with a sigh that for all their magnificence, they were houses merely and in no sense homes. For how could a fellow have more than one home? And yet there they were, in all their superfluous splendor, the Fifth Avenue house, the Long Island palace, the Tuxedo cottage (of forty rooms), the Newport villa (copied from the Petit Trianon), the Adirondack camp (ten houses in all), and the Island in the St. Lawrence—to say nothing of fishing and hunting privileges galore, the yachts, steam and sail, launches, motor cars, garages, stables, horses, and so on, *ad nauseam*. . . .

## THE BLACK STONE

Jessup turned over in his bed and stared with unseeing eyes, at the pale sunlight outside the window which Dawson, his man, exhibited to him invitingly. But Jessup thought of all these many responsibilities, groaned and turned his face toward the wall. And there was Dawson—who seemed to bore him more than all the other things put together—Dawson the ineffable, the cheerfully solemn, the solemnly cheerful, Dawson who was always there, handing him things or taking things away from him, always buttoning or unbuttoning. Good Lord! Another day of Dawson!

"Will you use the apparatus first, sir, or the medicine ball this morning?"

The same question, with the same unctiousness, the same inflections. Jessup sat up slowly in bed and shrugged hopelessly. What did it matter? One had to keep in shape. He put one foot out of bed and Dawson deftly put on it one rubber-soled shoe and then the other.

"Is Flynn there?"

"Yes, sir. He's been waiting an hour, sir."

"My trunks and shirt," he groaned.

"Here, sir."

Jessup languidly removed his silk pajamas, got into his exercising clothes, and donning a heavy wrapper, made his way down the hall to the gymnasium where his trainer was waiting for him.

"Morning, Flynn," he yawned, "damned nuisance, this——"

"Can't get stale, Mr. Jessup."

The same idiotic phrases—the same——

The medicine ball, propelled by Mr. Stoney Flynn's powerful arm, shot at him and Jessup was forced to catch it against the midriff. The shock of it awoke him and his eyes sparkled. He sent it back, his muscles responding to

## THE SLACKER

their call, good muscles they were, not bulky, but long, fibrous, rippling smoothly under the firm white skin of his broad shoulders, not in the least the kind of development one would have expected to find under the silk pajamas of the gentleman who a few moments ago had been awakened with such difficulty.

Ten minutes of the medicine ball, ten at the chest-weights, and then three fast rounds of the gloves with the best middle-weight in New York, but all the while the same bored expression upon Mr. Jessup's face, except in a brief moment when he caught the rapid Flynn napping and shot home a neat one on the point of his jaw.

Then, sweating profusely from the work, Mr. Jessup submitted to the rub-down that followed, and took his shower with that air of resignation which was characteristic of him. Dawson awaited him gravely, still handing him things and taking things away from him, with the mien of one who performs a sacred rite in which every garment, every towel, every brush or spigot had its part, appointed by laws which might not be broken. The warm shower relaxed the quivering muscles of Mr. Jessup's body, the cold shower tightened them again, and he emerged upon the thick bath-mat, glowing from head to toe, rubbing himself vigorously, and at last came out into his dressing-room wearing a quilted gown to sit to his coffee and morning paper, his air of weariness and boredom (which never left him) somewhat belied by his appearance of extraordinary health and well-being. In the background hovered Dawson, laying things out, moving to and fro, awaiting the moment when his employer should turn in his chair away from the food and sigh, for this, as he knew, was the signal that meant that Mr. Jessup was face to face with the rigors of the new day. Rigors indeed! For Mr. Jessup must try to spend, to lose, to give, to be robbed of,

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one-three-hundred-and-sixty-fifth of his three millions a year. To Dawson, who had once lived with a young and profligate British duke, Mr. Jessup's weary air of abstraction was inexplicable in the face of a task which to the well-trained English gentleman's gentleman seemed simplicity itself. But to Alan Jessup all the world had entered into a conspiracy to throttle him with luxury. Those who didn't cater to him, robbed him, and those who didn't rob him, bored him, and that perhaps was the worst of all. The mere spending of money had become a dull pastime, and when one had nothing but money to spend, life was a sickening enough tragedy from beginning to end.

"Letters, Dawson."

The man placed them before him. Mr. Jessup groaned and opened the envelopes with a pearl-handled paper knife.

"Any messages?" he asked.

"Yes, sir. Miss Masterson rang up——"

"Ah," Mr. Jessup's eyes opened a trifle and he turned to the man. "What did she say, Dawson?"

"I didn't quite get it, Mr. Jessup, sir. Something about going to your aunt, sir."

"My aunt! I haven't any aunt, have I, Dawson?"

"No, sir. I think not, Mr. Jessup. And begging pardon, sir,—something about a sluggard."

"Ah, I see," Mr. Jessup smiled wanly. "You told Miss Masterson that I was asleep?"

"Exactly, sir. I had orders."

"Um-m. Any message?"

"Yes, sir. You were to give her a ring when you were quite ready to take on the duties of the day."

"Oh, I see. I'll dress now, Dawson."

He hesitated, then picked up the telephone instrument. And when he got his number,

"Miss Masterson, please," he said.

## THE SLACKER

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And then after a moment,

"That you, Connie? Morning."

\* \* \* \* \*

"Your message, yes. About ants and sluggards—You're quite right. I *am* one——"

\* \* \* \* \*

"Oh, I say. It makes the day so long. What's doing?"

\* \* \* \* \*

"To Oyster Bay? I suppose so. Lunch? *Yes*, with pleasure."

\* \* \* \* \*

And with a contemplative eye upon the trees of the park, Mr. Jessup hung up the receiver of the instrument.

"My gray flannel, Dawson," he said wearily. "And be sure to slip my checkbook into the pocket. Also please have Conway bring around the roadster. I'll drive myself."

"Very good, sir," said Dawson.

It was with a feeling of some relief that Mr. Jessup drove over the Blackwell's Island bridge on the way to Oyster Bay. He always kept the City house open and for two days had been in conference with the presidents of five corporations, the custodians of a part of his affairs. Hence the more than usual desperation of his boredom, the more than usual depth of his slumber. But it was good upon the road when he had left the city behind him. A shower in the morning had washed the day clean and the sun gleamed joyously on leaf and hedgerow. To another the prospect might have been inspiring, for Miss Constance Masterson was an extremely interesting and beautiful person, endowed with charms which made her desired of many. And indeed Alan Jessup was sure that he had rather be driving to lunch with Connie Masterson than doing anything else that he could think of. He was

## THE BLACK STONE

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tired of everything in the world but Connie. And Connie, as it seemed to him, showed symptoms of being tired of him. He couldn't blame her. She was quite full of energy, ambition, to do the many useful and purposeful things which he avoided doing. Indeed, it was strange that she had put up with him for so long. If he hadn't known how desperately honest she was, how exalted were her ideals of life, he might have thought that it was the money that had kept their *casual* engagement in a state of being. She used him unmercifully, and made him contribute with a lavish hand to all the charities in which she was interested, but he didn't mind giving, because he was sure that her judgment in such matters was much better than his own and that if Connie's charities didn't get his money, some one else would rob him of it. And besides, it was quite easy to make more. All that he had to do was to buy a few shares of stock (any stock in the market seemed to do), when, on the rumor that the Jessup millions were being thrown into the breach, the stock would immediately rise. This game had amused him for a time, but in the end he had made so much money out of his transactions that he had had to keep away from Wall Street altogether.

It was of all of these things that Mr. Jessup thought as he drove along the roads toward his destination, finally turning in at a stone gateway arched by an iron grille which delineated a rampant lion clutching at a spear. To the weary Jessup this lion had always seemed symbolical, not of the Masterson crest of which it was a part, but of the world which was continually embattled, for what? It was typical of Connie, too, who was always rampant about something. And now the European war.

But when she greeted him in the loggia of the wide cool house which overlooked the blue sheen of the sound, he was quite sure that she was worth all the lecturing she

## THE SLACKER

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cared to give him. And this morning, flushed and dewy, from the garden of perennials in which she had been working, she seemed a compact of all the beauties and virtues. Her golden brown hair seemed to be burnished with new luster from the sun and wind, her color, heightened by her exertions, the fragrant evidences of which filled her arms, was deeper than that of the flowers, more vital, more sparkling, and her eyes, the color of which had always puzzled him, now seemed more nearly like that of the mid-Atlantic under the trade-winds, flecked with sunlight, "sea green incorruptible," with the mystery of hallowed depths untouched. . . .

"So at last you've condescended," she flung at him mischievously. "The sluggard at last comes to the ant. Oh, isn't it a glorious morning, Alan? *Please* say it is, because I'm full of it. Its joy has got into the very narrow of my bones."

"Bully," said Jessup.

"Oh, Alan," she said with a shrug. "Can't you *feel* it?" She pinched his arm viciously.

"You must. You shall. It's part of *me*."

"By George. So are your fingers, Connie," he smiled, rubbing his arm and making an ineffectual effort to capture her hand.

"Won't you wake up?" she pleaded. "And be happy too?"

"I'm never so happy as when——"

"Don't say it that way," she broke in quickly, "more happy, most happy, exquisitely happy, just to be alive and at peace when the world, over there, is so full of misery."

"There isn't any happiness, without you, Connie."

"There you go again. Negative, always negative."

"I'm very positive about that," he laughed.

## THE BLACK STONE

"But I want you to be happy in spite of me, don't you understand? To see you glow just once with a real enthusiasm."

"Oh, I say, Connie."

"It's true—one deep gush of impulse."

"Impulse! Good Lord!"

She looked at him in a moment of soberness and then suddenly broke into laughter.

"Oh, Alan. You're a"—she paused for a word—"a pachyderm!"

"Because I won't gush."

She laughed again. "Imagine it," she said hopelessly and turned indoors. Then cheerfully, "But we're not going to quarrel. After all, you know, Alan dear, you're a very *nice* pachyderm." She indicated the lunch table. "We're going to be quite tête-à-tête. Mother and Jack have gone to town. You and I, alone in our glory. Isn't it thrilling?"

"Awfully."

She caught him by the arm and shook him.

"Thrill! Alan. Please thrill."

He caught her quickly before she could elude him and kissed her. She hadn't bargained for that but she had to admit that she had brought it on herself. She slipped away from him and went upstairs while Jessup went out upon the terrace to smoke a cigarette and wait for her.

"Pachyderm," he muttered. "Sluggard." And then sank into a wicker chair wearily and gazed off across the waters of the Sound. "Quite right. But then what can a fellow do? Oh, what's the use?" His thoughts trailed off lazily into nothingness.

He flicked his cigarette into the bushes and paced moodily up and down. He didn't mind a bit of fun, could stand for it as well as the next fellow, but hang it! Connie ought

## THE SLACKER

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to know that he couldn't change his spots to suit a whim. And then this war business—he shook his head. Enthusiasm! Impulse! It wasn't in the wood.

And while he waited, gloomily abstracted, Constance Masterson appeared, clad in something soft and white, and wearing a fetching hat which spoke eloquently of further plans for the afternoon. He followed her in to the lunch-table, content with the pleasure of the moment. It was very restful in the darkened dining-room, very cool and fragrant of the flowers of his hostess, which adorned the mantel. And Constance, too, opposite him, the warm colors of her fine head against the dark tones of the oak paneling, affected him most agreeably with a sense of well-being and contentment. There was a charm too in the intimacy of their seclusion which reminded him that it needed only a word from Constance Masterson to continue this pleasant arrangement indefinitely. But he was too prudent to urge her to a definite answer. He knew this mood. It wasn't favorable to sentiment or even to that grave formality and consideration which Alan showed her when he wanted her to know how deeply he cared for her.

"Really, Alan," she said, smiling gayly, "I think you're improving. You smiled twice over the bouillon, three times over the *entrée* and now you've actually laughed since the salad. If I could only believe that you really meant it."

"They say happiness was born a twin."

She leaned forward, her dark eyes suddenly focusing full upon him.

"And so were you, Alan Jessup, born a twin. You're two people in one."

"Jekyll and Hyde?"

"No. If you don't mind my saying so, my dear, your nature is too colorless for the brilliant virtues of the one

## THE BLACK STONE

---

or the somber villainies of the other. You're too indifferent ever to be Jekyll and too decent ever to be Hyde. What is it," she appealed at last rather whimsically, "that I do like in you, Alan?"

"God knows," he said with a hopeless shrug.

"I sometimes think if you'd stop being merely negative and *do* something, something big, something positive, good or bad, I don't care what, villainy even, that I could adore you. But you're so supine. The world riots gloriously all around you, alive with opportunities for action, and you let it pass you by, while you dream, dream."

"You mean that I should do something in the war? I do help a little, you know, Connie."

"By giving money that you don't need, because somebody asks you for it, and because it's easier to acquiesce than to refuse."

"But the money must help somebody. It's my money, so it's I who am helping."

"No, Alan," she said decisively. "It isn't you who are helping. Your checks are as impersonal as the paper they're written on. You are, like the checks themselves, merely a part of the machinery of exchange, like the pen, like the ink. Oh, Alan, can't you see what I mean? What does your check for the Belgians mean to you? Nothing. It's merely a check. You give it because I ask, that's all. I would rather have you do one fine thing that gave you trouble, I would rather have you make one personal sacrifice than give away the whole of a year's income."

"Sacrifice! How would that help the Belgians?"

"It mightn't help the Belgians. But it would help *you*. You're what matters, at least the you that I believe in, the hidden you that's deep inside of you, the Alan Jessup who never is guilty of a mean action and never glories in a great one."

## THE SLACKER

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"Oh, I suppose I'm a rotter, all right."

"Oh, no, you're not. I shall call you all the names I please but no one else shall, not even yourself."

"Thanks awfully," he sighed.

"If I could only see you do something you didn't want to do," she sighed.

"My dear Connie," he broke in warmly, "I'm always doing things I don't want to do. In fact, I never do anything else but things I don't want to do."

"Because you never want to do anything."

"Except to be with you."

She paused a moment and smiled at him, the mothering smile which always delighted and disturbed him.

"I've been doing a lot of thinking in the past week. I've been idle long enough."

"The war?"

"Yes. I can't sit here in peace and comfort and see an industrious, a heroic race wiped from the face of the earth. Don't you feel something of that, the pity, the horror of it?"

"Yes," he drawled. "I suppose I do."

She waited a moment and then went on.

"I wonder," she murmured, "what it is that you care about in me, Alan? I'm always prodding you, always finding fault with you, making you uncomfortable, when there are hundreds of nice girls."

"God forbid!" he broke in so suddenly and with such a comical air of dismay that she burst into laughter.

"But it's true, Alan. Hundreds of them. They'll let you alone, occupy your heart gracefully, fill your houses and yachts with gay parties."

"But I don't want to have my houses and yachts filled with gay parties. I only want to be let alone."

"But I'm always bothering."

"I want you to bother me, because it's a different kind

## THE BLACK STONE

---

of bother from any other bothers. At least you don't bore me with flattery or sicken me with insincerity."

"No," she smiled. "I don't flatter."

"And after all," he finished lamely, "you're always entirely right, you know."

"No, I'm not always right," she said decisively. "You're very sweet about it, Alan. You have a right to live your life in your own way. But don't you see that I want the intangible you to grow into something great, something noble." She broke off with a smiling appeal. "Won't you please, Alan? Won't you please do something that I can worship you for?"

The sudden gleam of whimsical earnestness in her eyes seemed to startle him and he stirred uneasily.

"Great! Noble! I?" and then helplessly, "Good Lord!"

"I mean it," she said more soberly. "Something great, something noble. We're standing on the edge of the inferno over there. People are dying, starving. America has got to help. You, I, all of us who have time and money."

"I—I think you might do something with me if you'd care to try," he ventured.

But she shook her head a little sadly.

"I don't dare to try, Alan. That's just the trouble. You've known how I've felt about you for six months and yet, there you are, as vague, as impalpable as ever."

"Hang it all, Connie! I've tried. It isn't in the wood. I can box, shoot, swim, but——" he shrugged and was silent.

And then after a moment:

"What could I do?"

"Haven't I told you that Belgium is gone, that France is hanging grimly on, ? that Belgium's fate will be hers?"

## *THE SLACKER*

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And you ask me what you could do! Oh, what's the use?" she sighed.

He waited a moment in silence and then,

"It isn't von Hengel? There isn't any one else, is there, Connie?" he asked gravely.

She rose from the luncheon table and threw out her arms in a gesture of abnegation.

"No. Not von Hengel, but hundreds of others, Alan; men who are doing things in the world, men who build, men who dream great dreams, who would give twenty years of life for the opportunities in your hands. And you pass them by, you don't even see them." She broke off and led the way into the hall, where she gathered up her white flannel coat.

"Come," she said, "it's time we were off."

And he followed her obediently.

## CHAPTER II

### COUP DE GRACE

**A**T the Piping Rock Club house an animated party was discussing the great news of the war, and Constance Masterson, who had not read the morning papers, threw herself joyously into the group, questioning eagerly. She was aware of Alan Jessup somewhere in the background, gloomily preoccupied with the ash of his cigarette, neutral, negative, weary.

A sudden lull in the conversation and a sound of warning from her nearest neighbor, while behind her she heard scraps of a conversation.

"It's von Hengel," said Charlie Dupree, a pronounced Anglomaniac. "What's he doing here?"

"Some deviltry, you can be sure," put in Jeffrey Van Dusen. "Sayville isn't many miles away."

"But the President has closed the station to German messages."

"Yes. But they'll find some way to get them through, damn them!"

"Or it may be something else, something worse."

"Oh, von Hengel's smooth, smooth. He speaks eight languages, they say, Arabic even."

"There's probably a reason for that."

"Come. Let's give him room. I'll breathe freer on the tennis courts."

Constance Masterson listened, but she watched the officer approach.

He was clean shaven, florid, and muscular, with the high

## COUP DE GRACE

cheek bones and smallish eyes suggestive of the Orient. He wore his civilian clothes with an air as though he were not used to them. He had visited the neighborhood frequently and had paid Miss Masterson much attention in New York and in Washington. She had known him before the war, had liked him a great deal, for a foreigner, and had even prevailed upon Alan Jessup to take him up, and Jessup had obeyed, less annoyed at Miss Masterson's attraction for him (which was natural) than at von Hengel's superabundant vitality and energy which frequently got on his nerves.

The German approached the group, which seemed to be disintegrating, swept off his cap, clicked his heels and smiled while Miss Masterson made room for him beside her.

"I'm not at all sure that I ought to be speaking to you, Graf von Hengel," she said with a smile.

"I have been very busy at Washington," he said apologetically, ignoring part of her remark. "There has been much to do. It is my loss, Fräulein."

He spoke English with an accent, but the construction of his sentences showed painstaking study.

He looked at her and showed his fine teeth in a smile. "You have perhaps too much been reading the newspapers. You must not believe everything that you see."

"We can hardly argue the matter," she replied coolly, "because we should never agree."

She touched a bell upon the table and smiled.

"You shall at least have some tea," she said. "We cannot deny hospitality to the enemy within our gates."

"The prisoner, Fräulein," said von Hengel in a lowered tone, meant only for Constance Masterson's ear. And then, "You cannot blame me personally for the actions of my government."

## THE BLACK STONE

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She shrugged. "Hardly. But I'd much rather you weren't a Prussian."

"Oh, I say, Connie," Jessup's voice broke in lazily, "Conrad can't help that any more than I can help being a New Yorker. And after all," he finished gloomily, "war is war, you know."

She glanced at him quickly but made no reply as she poured von Hengel's tea.

"Shall you be here long, Graf von Hengel?" she asked.

"No. Only until to-night."

"Oh! And then?"

"I shall leave America very soon."

A pause and then, slowly,

"That is too bad," she smiled. "I had hoped in another year to make a good American of you."

"Who knows what might have happened had it not been for the war! But now——"

He paused and waved his pink hands expressively.

"And now," said Miss Masterson coolly, "and now our friendship is over."

He turned his head as though he had not heard her correctly. And then, "You can't mean what you say."

"I do," she said quickly. "It is unfortunate. But I do mean it."

The words came from her impulsively as though with a sudden wrench. And only after she had uttered them did she realize how desperately in earnest she was. This was to be a day of decisions. She had realized for months the utter aimlessness of her life in the face of the European crisis, but it had remained for Conrad von Hengel and Alan Jessup to bring her inefficacy into focus. As she saw Alan talking easily with Mrs. Atherton a few yards away, she realized with a kind of shock that Alan Jessup was no

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other than he had been a month ago—a year ago—calm, kindly, weary and terribly bored, but always the gentleman. It was she who had changed and she had not known until this moment how much.

The moment was difficult for Captain von Hengel but Mrs. Atherton, with an air of proprietorship which could not be denied, rose and appropriated him.

"*Malbrouck s'en va-t-en guerre,*" she quoted. "Don't you hear the bugles, Alan?"

Jessup shrugged.

"Can't say that I do, or care to."

Von Hengel showed his fine teeth in a smile.

"They that live by peace, my dear Jessup," he paraphrased quickly, "may perish of peace."

Constance Masterson understood his meaning. Their terrible philosophy, and yet one exemplified here before her very eyes.

"Don't bother about us, old chap," said Jessup quite calmly. "You've got your hands full." And then, "You're going to town to-night. Can I take you in?"

"I should be delighted," said the Prussian. He hesitated a moment, and then, "I will meet you, here, at half-past ten."

Then moved off in the wake of his hostess, leaving Constance Masterson alone with Alan Jessup, who had taken up his coat and hat with a sudden air of alacrity which indicated a possible interest in the immediate future. But Constance Masterson did not move. She stood staring off down the road in the direction in which the machine had vanished. She seemed suddenly very much alone. Alan Jessup waited patiently.

"Come," she said at last. "We must be getting on."

After they reached the house, her mother and brother having returned from town, Constance went up to her room

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where she could think of her great decision. As yet it was not irrevocable. There was still time to change it, to go down again to Alan Jessup, to greet him with a smile and resume the old life as though nothing had happened. She took up the check that he had given her for the Belgian Relief Fund, five thousand dollars, looked at it, and then let it flutter from her fingers to the desk. Her lips compressed in a firm little line. She had made her decisions, this one and the greater one, and she would abide by them.

She went downstairs to dinner, and during the course of the meal announced quite coolly her intention to go to England and join the Duchess of Barchester's Red Cross Expedition. To her mother and her brother Jack, with whom she had spoken in a general way of the project, the matter was only news in the sense that her calmness seemed to indicate a new degree of certainty, and her tones to show an accent of finality they had never heard before. But to Alan Jessup, who was relishing an excellent paté, the announcement had all the quality of a bomb-shell. He started back from the table, his mouth open, staring at her. She knew just what he would say and of course he said it.

"Oh, I say, Connie, you can't mean it!"

"I do. I'm going as soon as I can make the proper arrangements."

"But I can't understand," he muttered. And then again as though bewildered, "I can't understand."

The general conversation upon the subject which followed did not shake her. Alan Jessup, after his first outburst, sat gloomily silent, as the real meaning of her announcement was slowly borne in upon him. And, after the coffee, he followed her out upon the terrace whither she led him for his *coup de grâce*, dimly aware now for the first time that she had weighed him in the balance and found him wanting.

## COUP DE GRACE

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"What made you think of this, Connie?" he asked.  
"Aren't you doing enough?"

She smiled at him through the moonlight.

"No, Alan," she said quietly.

"But what are you to do over there?"

"Nurse. I've studied."

"Then nurse here. There are hospitals and things. What have you to do, what have any of us to do, with this idiotic war in Europe? It's madness, lunacy."

She no longer smiled at him, but looked straight before her across the bay.

"Madness, yes, if you like. But it is not a madness that can be cured by silence or by apathy. Perhaps you do not read the future as I do. Who will stop the Germans if France and England don't?"

"The Atlantic, my dear."

"Ah, Alan, don't you see that that shouldn't make any difference? It's a question of principle. You miss that. Why, God knows," she said bitterly, "unless you *want* to miss it."

"I never borrow trouble, Connie."

"I know," she replied quietly. "I'm sorry. It might have helped you."

He didn't understand her words but he couldn't mistake the tones of her voice, which were quite dull and hopeless, and had in them the same note of finality that he had heard indoors. There was a long silence. And then,

"Of course you don't mind leaving me. It will be no use at all without you."

Some lingering echo of the tenderness she had always felt for him prompted her impulsively to give him another chance.

"You could go too, Alan. There is men's work to do,

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working with the Red Cross, driving an ambulance, or fighting."

He straightened in his chair suddenly.

"Oh, I couldn't do that. It wouldn't do, you know."

"Why not?" shortly.

"Oh, I couldn't do anything. I'd make a mess of it. And besides," he paused.

"Go on," she said.

"Well, oh, hang it all, Connie!"

He rose impatiently and walked up and down. "I don't believe in the thing. What's the use? Why can't they leave the world be? Everything's all right. We don't have to go mad because Europe does. We haven't anything to do with it. I can't see why you——"

"Well, then, Alan, I'll tell you." She had risen too and faced him at the terrace wall. She spoke quietly, without heat, but there was a deadly earnestness underlying what she said. "I'm going over there because I'm one of those who can go, because I'm young, strong, healthy, without ties."

He gasped at that but she didn't even notice him.

"Because I can't sit here and live a life of ease and idleness when a nation is fighting my battle for me; because I have enough of the Devil in me to hate the abomination that stretches its filthy hand across Europe to grasp, to enslave. Because I have, thank God, enough heart to know what suffering means, enough money to try to help that suffering, and willingness to make my bare hands do what money won't. These are my reasons for going over there." She stopped suddenly as she realized that every word she had uttered was an indictment of Alan Jessup. Then turned away, leaning over the wall and fingering a blossom on the vine.

## COUP DE GRACE

Alan Jessup tried to speak, failed and then, the words coming diffidently,

"No ties, Connie!" he muttered. "You mean——?"

"What I say, Alan," she said gently.

"That I, that you——"

He stopped helplessly. But the very gentleness of her tone seemed to give it an added purpose.

"Yes. That is what I mean, Alan. You and I. It is over. I don't want to be unkind. I want to save myself and you from disaster in years to come. We wouldn't get along, Alan. Perhaps it's my fault but I can't change my way of thinking about things. And you, you've got the right to live your life in your own way."

"I—I've disappointed you."

She straightened and gave him her hand.

"What is the use of explaining? It would only be painful to us both."

"There doesn't seem to be anything to explain," he said quietly. "I think I understand."

"Alan," she said after a moment, "try not to think too hardly of me. I don't want you to believe that I'm acting on impulse. The war has affected me deeply just recently, affected all my standards of judgment of life. The things that you and I might have agreed on a year ago have lost importance. And the important things to me, the only issues that are worth while, don't impress you at all."

She stopped suddenly, aware that her thoughts were leading her into the very sentiments she had planned to avoid. There was a long silence, and then,

"I'm an awful rotter," he muttered.

"No," she corrected, "you're not. You're precisely what you've always been. It is I who am to blame."

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"No, not you. But I—I haven't understood before. Curious."

Slowly she withdrew her hand and turned away.

"Alan, I'm going away very soon—next week. I've decided. But I want you and I to part as friends."

"Of course. You know that."

"And I think," she forced herself bitterly, "I think for the present we had better not meet again."

He turned and stared at her dim figure as though the reality of this disaster now for the first time appeared to him. Then he lowered his head.

"Of course, Connie," he said with difficulty, "as you please."

"Good-night, Alan, I—I'm very tired. Do you mind?"

He took her hand again and kissed it gently.

"Good-night, Connie," he whispered. "Sorry I'm such a rotter."

"Don't. But try, Alan, try to live, to live."

"I wish I could."

He saw her lean toward him, felt her lips lightly brush his forehead, heard her whisper a gentle "God bless you" and then she was gone.

## CHAPTER III

### THE "TURKANA"

**A**LAN JESSUP, bewildered, stood for a while looking at the spot by the terrace wall where she had been, then slowly went indoors. The house was empty, for Mrs. Masterson and Jack had gone up some moments earlier. He walked about for a moment aimlessly fingering the magazines on the library table, and then stumbled into the hall where he put on his hat and coat and went out. It wasn't worth while ringing for the servants. He didn't feel like seeing any one just then, so he made his way to the garage, found his car and in a moment was driving out of the gate beneath the rampant lion. He took the road toward the city, driving slowly, trying to think. He couldn't grasp the meaning of things. The conversation had lasted hardly half an hour, and yet it was quite extraordinary what a difference it had made in everything. He seemed to be driving further and further into the darkness of his thoughts. The remembrance of her lips upon his brow, like the faint fragrant brushing of a rose-leaf, seemed to dominate his memory, effacing even the cool even tones that had given him his *cong e*, the eager earnestness of the abnegation which was also his indictment.

But she had meant what she said. There wasn't the slightest doubt about that. She had turned him adrift and withdrawn herself, the only human being in the world for whom he cared, to cast in her lot with strangers and battle upon the side of the world, with a mere ideal. Again he couldn't understand. Of course Connie had a right to do

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what she chose, even to throwing him over. She had never promised to marry him—merely said that she hoped she could. But it was pretty rough to lose the only thing he had ever really wanted all because some silly ass four thousand miles away had killed an Archduke. But he couldn't blame Connie. She was always right about things. And then, he had to admit, from her point of view he really must be a rotter. What was the use? Nothing. Nothing to do around New York now. The thought of the endless round of inanities that faced him during the winter months to come gave him a sudden feeling of illness in the pit of his stomach. He writhed in his seat and put on a burst of speed which soothed him. He wouldn't do it. He wouldn't stay and face the thing. He would go away somewhere; shooting, Africa. He would make the arrangements in the morning. Go in on the East coast and come out, it didn't seem to make much difference to-night where he came out or even whether he came out at all.

The reflection of New York lights was creeping up into the moonlit sky when he suddenly remembered that he had promised to drive Conrad von Hengel to the city. Only ten o'clock. He turned the car and drove back rapidly in the direction from which he had come. He reached the club house, and after waiting twenty minutes von Hengel arrived. He appeared quite silently, afoot, from the direction of the woods, and his boots were covered with mud and his clothing mired and dusty. Jessup eyed him curiously.

"Am I late?" the German asked politely, but made no apologies. Jessup led the way to the machine, and presently was alone in the roadster with the German officer on the road to the city.

They were both silent for a while. And then, with an effort, Jessup seemed to awake.

## THE TURKANA

"Too bad you're going, Conrad. I think I'll be getting off, too."

Von Hengel turned his head slightly.

"You! You're going too? Where, my friend?"

"Shooting. Mombasa."

"Ah, Mombasa."

Von Hengel now turned his head furtively and then quickly looked away.

"Have you thought? There may be difficulties."

"Difficulties?"

"It might be unpleasant. Mombasa is near the line between British and German East Africa. The war, my friend."

The war again. Jessup groaned. Was it true that even on the other side of the world he wouldn't be able to escape it?

"The war, oh, yes, of course, the war." And then, with a shrug, "But I'll chance it."

Von Hengel turned his head again, this time examining Jessup's solemn profile curiously.

"Isn't this decision rather sudden?" asked von Hengel quietly.

"Er, yes, rather. Awfully tired, doing nothing."

"Ach, I see."

Another silence, longer than the first.

"You and I, my friend, we go to the other ends of the earth. It is too bad."

"I'm sorry. But it's good for me to go."

"Perhaps." And then quietly, "I think I understand."

Alan Jessup looked at von Hengel's face, its strong lines defined in the reflection of the lights from the dashboard. Something in the tones of his voice made Jessup look at him a second time.

"You understand? You mean——?"

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Von Hengel waited a moment in deep thought, before he replied.

"It is good, too, that I am going. We have been good friends, Alan. I shall tell you. It makes no difference now. I have asked Miss Masterson to be my wife, and she refused me."

"You, too."

Alan Jessup was not a man to discuss his personal affairs even with his intimates, but the words came from him before he was aware of them.

"Yes, I, too, my friend." And after a moment, "That was why I said that I thought I understood why you were going."

"Oh, I see."

Another and still longer silence during which Jessup drove rapidly, his eyes peering along the road toward the rapidly approaching lights of Jamaica. He was deeply embarrassed. He thought he knew von Hengel. His confession was a proof of friendship. And at last Jessup managed to speak.

"Sorry," he muttered.

"And I. It seems that we are companions in distress," von Hengel replied.

But Jessup was unaware that all the while von Hengel was watching him furtively from the tail of his eye.

It was Jessup's nature to feel more sorry for von Hengel than he did for himself. And after a while the silence grew more eloquent than speech would have been and so von Hengel questioned keenly about Jessup's shooting expedition.

"I'll go," he replied, "direct by way of Cairo. There's a chap in New York who can make the arrangements about the outfit."

"But the steamship routes are all disarranged."

## THE TURKANA

"I'll go in the *Turkana* and fly the Stars and Stripes. They'll hardly bother me."

"The *Turkana!*" said von Hengel quietly. There was a sudden note of interest in his voice and a quick flash in his eyes. "Your yacht. Of course," he said calmly. "I had forgotten."

"Simplest thing in the world."

Von Hengel was silent for a moment. And then, significantly,

"You are very fortunate, my friend," he said. "I wish I could bury my thoughts so easily."

"Sorry, old chap."

Von Hengel furtively examined Jessup's well-cut profile. The face of the American was now placid again and as ever quite free from guile. The *Turkana*. Cairo. The association of ideas invoked extraordinary possibilities for the German. But when von Hengel spoke again his voice was measured, its accents coolly appreciative.

"I envy you your opportunity. It will indeed be a wonderful voyage."

Jessup flashed around on him with a bright smile that seemed born of an inspiration.

"Come along then, old chap. Delighted."

Von Hengel covered his gratification with a slow smile.

"Don't tempt me. I might accept."

"I jolly well wish you would. Awful bore, sailing alone. Come now. What do you say?"

If Jessup had been suggesting to stop in at his club for a nightcap the proposal could not have been more casual nor more spontaneous. The mere fact that his invitation involved the navigation of a large part of the earth's circumference and a hospitality of months made little difference in the cordiality and sincerity of the offer. Conrad

## THE BLACK STONE

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von Hengel looked straight before him toward the dancing lights of the city.

"If I could!" he said quietly.

"Well, why not? More sense in shooting lions than Belgians. One's sport. The other's murder."

"I would like to go with you."

"I'm in earnest. Come along. You're too good a chap to waste in this idiotic misunderstanding in Europe."

The German glanced at him narrowly, and then,

"My heart isn't in it," he muttered, "but I must go where I'm sent."

"Your regiment?"

"Er—it's in East Africa," he replied rather suddenly.

"The very thing, then. Even if you don't hunt with me, there's the voyage out."

"I'm tempted. Will you give me a week or so? I must communicate with the Ambassador."

"Of course. I'll need papers, too. You're a brick, Conrad. You'll try, won't you?"

"Yes, I will try," replied von Hengel. "But there is one thing that will perhaps be necessary. I am a German subject. Your yacht may be searched by British war vessels. What then?"

"Hanged if I know."

"It would be necessary for me to hide my identity, perhaps."

"Go as far as you like. It's nothing to me. I'm taking no sides in this quarrel."

"Ach! Then I think perhaps it might be managed. I will see," he finished thoughtfully.

They had reached the city and presently Alan Jessup drew up at the door of Graf von Hengel's hotel.

But the arrangements which the German officer had thought might be made seemed to take a great deal of time.

## THE TURKANA

The Ambassador had consented but it was necessary to get the necessary approval from Berlin. The days grew into weeks, the weeks into a month, and still Jessup waited, because von Hengel from Washington wrote him again and again that the matter would soon be arranged. So Jessup, all his own arrangements having long since been completed, went up to the Tuxedo place and waited there. He was not a man to repudiate a promise or violate his own hospitality to a guest. He did not return to Piping Rock. Constance Masterson, he had heard, had sailed three weeks ago for England. To tell the truth, Jessup didn't want to go anywhere, even to Mombasa, but he felt that he was already committed to von Hengel.

At last, word came from Captain Hoagland that his guest had come aboard the *Turkana* in a river boat late at night, and Jessup made his way to New York upon the following day, finding the yacht off Forty-fifth Street and Captain von Hengel below in the stateroom which had been assigned to him. But there was another delay of a week more which von Hengel eagerly requested in order that some papers might be sent him. He also requested that for reasons of his own he might be permitted to remain aboard the *Turkana* until the messenger arrived. So Jessup with an appearance of good nature assented. It was, therefore, not until a week later that the *Turkana* moved from the upper reaches of the river and steamed majestically down the harbor. The requirements of clearance and inspection were speedily complied with for Graf von Hengel possessed a Swedish passport which bore his photograph and a strange name. Alan Jessup accepted the subterfuge carelessly, aware of the strength of his own position as a free American on his own vessel under his country's flag, and offered no opposition. After all what did it matter if von Hengel chose to lie? It wasn't his affair.

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And so at last they sat upon the after deck, aware of the joyous lift of the ground-swell beyond the Hook which announced that they were upon their way. At the beginning of a voyage Jessup always felt a trifle invigorated. The sights and smells of the sea, the sharp prow of his vessel cleaving a way into the infinity of water were always suggestive of something new, some possibility of adventure which would relieve the deadly monotony of his existence. Graf von Hengel smoked his cigar placidly, watching the receding lights with an air of contemplation, tactfully aware of the mood of his host, which chimed with his own, and unwilling to spoil the perfect hour. And so, having scarcely exchanged a thought, at six bells they turned in.

At the breakfast table where they took their morning coffee, Captain Hoagland joined them, his brows puzzled in thought.

"Mr. Jessup," he began breezily, "I would like to know, sir, just where we stand on this matter of Captain von Hengel."

Jessup languidly paused in the act of selecting a cigar from the tray offered him by the steward.

"What do you mean, Hoagland?" he asked carelessly. "Have a cigar."

Captain Hoagland took a cigar and bit into it quickly and watched the steward until he disappeared.

"Just this, sir. You know and I know that your guest here is not Mr. Adolf Niederstrohm, as his passport indicates, but Count von Hengel, a Captain in the German army."

Von Hengel bowed and smiled. Jessup shrugged.

"Well?" he asked.

"We came through American inspection all right," Hoag-

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land went on, "because this craft is pretty well known in New York, but it may not always be so easy."

"Why not?"

"Because other people may be more curious. I don't say we can't get by with it, for the paper *looks* all right, but what can we do, sir, if some English boat boards us and takes Captain von Hengel off? That's what I want to know."

"Oh, I say, Hoagland," said Jessup, with a sudden access of interest, "what makes you think they'll do that?"

"The war, sir."

"The war!" And then, with a sigh, "Oh, yes, the war."

"How can I prevent it, sir?" asked Hoagland.

Von Hengel smiled.

"I'm willing to take the risk. The passport is all right. It ought to be. It came from the Swedish Minister. As to my name, isn't Niederstrohm as good as any other?"

"Quite so," said Jessup lazily.

Captain Hoagland shrugged.

"Very good, sir. Just as you say. I only wanted to be sure of your wishes. But I believe in speaking out, sir. You understand, Mr. Jessup?"

"Yes, Hoagland, that's quite all right. But what makes you think——"

"Merely that there's a British cruiser abaft our port beam and she's crawling up rather fast."

Von Hengel rose quickly and went to a port-hole, but Alan Jessup merely touched the ash of his cigar into a receiver.

"Ah, a British cruiser! But she could hardly catch us if we——"

"No, sir. Perhaps not if we chose to show our heels, but I thought that——"

"What are we doing now?"

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"Eighteen, sir."

"Ah!" said Jessup with a yawn. "Make it twenty, Hoagland. I've never believed in the right of search."

Hoagland smiled and lighted his cigar.

"That won't prevent their searching us when they want to."

"If they can. Twenty, Hoagland," said Jessup, with a shrug. "And if that doesn't leave her, twenty-eight."

"Very good, sir," said Hoagland, at the door. "But as long as they've wireless we can't expect to slip through the entire British Navy."

"Perhaps not, but we might try," said Jessup languidly.

"Very good, sir," said Captain Hoagland, touching his cap and going out on deck.

Jessup was critically examining his finger nails when von Hengel turned from the port-hole toward the table.

"I thank you, my friend," said the German in his deep voice. "You are very good, but I think you need not fear on my account. The passport is all right."

"Yes," said Jessup quietly, "but *you* aren't. I dislike the practice of lying."

Von Hengel laughed. "I take that responsibility," he said at last.

"A responsibility I share. I've been thinking. I'd rather run for it."

"The wireless, my friend, can outpace the *Turkana*. You are perhaps making trouble for yourself."

Jessup shrugged and rose.

"Oh, don't mind me. By Jove!"

He reached the port-hole and gazed out at the pall of black smoke that was flying fan-wise down to leeward. The deck vibrated under their feet as the engine-room responded to the signal from the bridge. "This is going to be worth while." He put on a cap, went out on deck and

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with his binoculars focused the distant cruiser. From the wireless room forward came the tense snapping of messages. Captain Hoagland came aft again.

"It's His Britannic Majesty's ship *Comet*, sir," said Hoagland, "and he wants us to heave to."

Jessup grinned. "I'm sorry. Awf'ly sorry, but we can't wait. Tell him so, Hoagland."

"Very good, sir," said Hoagland, with a grin.

"And give her twenty-five, Hoagland."

"Aye, aye, sir."

More crackling of the wireless, a blacker fan of smoke, and the *Turkana* sent the foam flying over her whole length, while her wake churned like a mill-race. Alan Jessup and his guest walked forward and mounted the bridge, just as a deep reverberation came from the distant craft and a geyser of water suddenly shot into the air, a few hundred yards off the *Turkana's* bow.

"Ah," said Jessup. "Impolite beggar, what?"

Von Hengel smiled.

"This is what is known in International Law as the Freedom of the Seas," he said with a sneer.

Another geyser of water, a little behind the first one, and a sailor brought a slip of paper from the wireless room. Captain Hoagland read it with a frown.

"He repeats his request."

"Repeat my reply," said Jessup imperturbably. "And give her twenty-eight, Hoagland."

"Aye, aye, sir. Twenty-eight it is."

Jessup watched the race through his binoculars, at last really interested. The *Turkana* was an exceptionally speedy boat, but had never yet been forced to her limit. A stern chase was a long one and providing they stopped shooting—

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Another geyser, not a hundred yards away! Another shot ricocheting astern and splashing beyond.

"Silly ass!" muttered Jessup. "He'll be *hitting* us next."

He spoke in tones of quiet reprobation which conveyed a good-humored surprise and contempt for the whole performance.

Von Hengel stood beside him, swinging easily to the motion of the yacht.

"That would be too bad," he said in his deep tones, "but they cannot be aiming at us. The English are very bad at target practice. In Germany we laugh at their records. It is only because they are not aiming at us that we come so near to being hit."

"H-m," said Jessup.

The *Turkana* was now making fine speed of it and the last shots of the cruiser went short and wide. Jessup was conscious of a slight sense of disappointment that the incident was over. It was most interesting. For a moment his blood had actually tingled at the sense of danger. It was like a new game. He walked aft with Hoagland to the door of the wireless room and questioned.

"He's sending code now, sir," said the operator.

"Code? To whom?"

"Another warship, I'd say, sir."

"Oh," wearily. The excitement was over. The *Comet* was only a dirty smudge on the horizon. "You may reduce speed, Hoagland."

He threw himself into an easy chair aft and von Hengel joined him. In a moment the German took a tablet and pencil from his pocket and began slowly writing, consulting from time to time a small note book. Jessup had forgotten him and was watching in a dejected manner the distant horizon when the sound of his companion's voice aroused him from his reverie.

## THE TURKANA

"Would you mind, my friend?" asked von Hengel. "There is an important matter for von Bernstorff which I forgot. Could I use the wireless?"

"Of course," said Jessup hospitably. "Tell the operator to take your message," and then relapsed into his thoughts.

"Thanks, my dear Alan. You are very kind," said von Hengel with a white flash of his teeth as he smiled, and made his way to the wireless room, whence after a while came a renewed crackling of the instrument. Jessup felt like taking a nap, but the racket seemed to get on his nerves. Why couldn't von Hengel sit quiet and let the world be? Wonderful thing, the wireless, but it was all a mistake. One couldn't slip off to sea nowadays without taking the whole world along with him. He would have the plaguey thing dismantled. He got up and paced the deck for a while, where von Hengel joined him.

"Some trifling details of routine matter which I forgot," he explained.

"Sorry," said Jessup.

Captain von Hengel spent a good part of the day at a desk writing. His thoughts seemed abstracted and Jessup did not intrude. Toward night a message in code came for von Hengel which the operator had some difficulty in deciphering. The German read it with much interest and after sending a reply went below and turned in. But Jessup, who found his chair aft very comfortable, remained on deck to smoke a pipe.

There Captain Hoagland sought him.

"Ah, Hoagland, sit down and have a smoke."

"No, thanks, Mr. Jessup, but I'll sit a minute."

The man's deep voice rumbled in a troubled way.

"Something wrong aboard, Hoagland?"

The Captain's huge hands clasped the arm of the chair and moved it a little closer to Jessup's.

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"To tell the truth, sir, there is," he muttered. "I'm a plain man, accustomed to speak out. I'm no meddler with your affairs, sir, but while I'm captain of this craft I look to her safety and yours."

Jessup lazily opened one eye.

"You mean—er—the British cruiser?"

"Yes, sir," said Hoagland. "That and other things. If you must know the truth, I don't like the goings on of your guest, Captain von Hengel, sir."

Jessup sat up straight and stared at his captain.

"This is rather unusual, Captain Hoagland," he said reprovingly.

"Yes, sir, it is, and I'm sorry if you don't like it. But I've got to speak. America isn't in this war, at least not yet, sir. You're a neutral and I'm no Anglo-maniac, but I'm not one to see England get a shot in the back if I can help it."

"What do you mean?" asked Jessup, now leaning forward with a new interest.

"There's a German raider somewhere in the Atlantic, sir, and there's others in the Pacific coming around. I've got this straight. I tell you, sir, I don't fancy the *Turkana* or any one aboard of her sending messages to put British ships in danger."

"You think that Captain von Hengel——?"

"Those wireless messages he sent were picked up close at hand and the one he received didn't come from Sayville or Tuckerton. They came from ships afloat, sir, hard by, enemies of England."

"Really, you surprise me."

"It's the truth, sir. I'm no quitter. And I'll play any game straight with hands above the table, but I'm not for putting the *Turkana* in wrong with the British while I sail the seas if I can help it."

## THE TURKANA

"Most extraordinary!" said Jessup. "You really think——" He paused for lack of words.

"Mr. Jessup, we took a chance this morning. But England is in no mood to stand for any foolishness. A good many British ships have been sunk already. The *Comet* and a few others will follow, if your German guest has his way."

"You can't forget, Hoagland," said Jessup calmly, "that he is my guest."

"But that doesn't give him the privileges of the wireless room," said Hoagland warmly. "Now does it, sir?"

Jessup was silent for a moment.

"I can't deny——," he began. And then shaking out his pipe, "Aren't you rather exaggerating things, Hoagland?"

"I wish I was, sir," said the Captain with a short laugh. "You're bound for Cairo, aren't you, sir? That means Gibraltar. What kind of a talk can I make if the *Turkana* keeps on refusing to heave to?"

"I'm sure I don't know. It's easier to let 'em come aboard, isn't it? But then, Hoagland, you must admit that chase this morning was jolly, awf'ly jolly."

"I'm glad you think so, Mr. Jessup," dryly, "but I've no humor to be sunk on the first deep-sea cruise we've had in two years."

"Oh, I say, they wouldn't really sink us. We're not in this thing."

"We're nearer in it than I like, carrying German army captains who aren't above violating——"

Jessup rose.

"Captain Hoagland, Count von Hengel is my guest. I have offered to take him through to German East Africa. Perhaps I have made a mistake, but I will abide by it."

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As long as he is my guest he must be respected accordingly."

Hoagland rose respectfully. "Very good, sir. Then you approve of his sending wireless messages?"

"No. The wireless must get out of order."

"And at Gibraltar?"

Hoagland paused and turned back.

"What is it, Hoagland?"

"I was thinking it might be simpler to show his papers if——"

"No." Jessup took a pace or two forward and returned. "I'm not going to lie, Hoagland. It's rather a bore, but it can't be helped. We'll keep him aboard until we land him."

"And if we sight another cruiser?"

"We must not sight one. I leave that to you."

## CHAPTER IV

### THE PIECE OF COAL

**I**T always seemed to make Jessup more weary when he heard unpleasant things, but the extraordinary revelations of Captain Hoagland gave him food for thought and kept him awake much later than his usual hour. It was difficult to believe that Conrad von Hengel would so abuse the hospitality of the *Turkana*, but Hoagland was a good fellow and quite the most honest person, always excepting Connie, that Jessup had ever known. And much as he disliked the measures he had taken, he turned in at last with a feeling that he had at least done what he could to correct an earlier mistake in judgment. But it annoyed him that he had made it, annoyed him still more that Conrad von Hengel should have thought him so complaisant a host as to permit so flagrant a violation of national neutrality.

The next few days seemed to clear the atmosphere. The breakage of the wireless instrument appeared to give the German officer a new idea of his status aboard the *Turkana*. No conversation upon the subject passed. Jessup merely expressed his regrets at the misfortune and von Hengel shrugged and was silent. But he understood from that moment the reason why the wireless was out of order, and as though suddenly awaking to his duty towards his host, left his cabin and became again most sociable. Jessup welcomed this change in his manner and paced the deck with him hour after hour, or sat aft reading and smoking a

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pipe, listening to von Hengel's grandiose plans for Pan Germanism, the splendor of which seemed to put the rest of the world into shadow. Most of the time Alan Jessup seemed to be asleep, but every little while he would open one eye and in his halting way inject so pertinent a question into the midst of Captain von Hengel's remarks that he showed himself not nearly so weary as he seemed. Then it was that von Hengel would frown and peer at him curiously as though at some new characteristic that he hadn't observed before. But in the next moment Alan Jessup would yawn terrifically and utter some helplessly inappropriate remark which reassured him as to Jessup's harmlessness.

Captain Hoagland obeyed orders not to sight other craft, and at times barely under headway and at others flying at full speed at the approach of a strange vessel, they crossed the Atlantic, making fine weather of it, sighting the tall headland of Cape St. Vincent with its covering of soft verdure.

Hoagland paced the deck restlessly at their approach of Gibraltar, for he disliked sailing under false colors and the status of the guest aft was still a grave question in his mind. But Captain von Hengel seemed to exhibit no uneasiness at the nearness of the famous British stronghold, and expressed himself as pleased that the first stage of the voyage was over, indeed even showing an eagerness to come to anchor and go ashore.

Alan Jessup opened both his eyes and sat bolt upright in surprise.

"Oh, I say," he said quickly, "you can't mean that you're going to try to bluff it through?"

Von Hengel laughed quietly.

"I shall not 'bluff' as you say, my dear Alan. It will not be necessary. I shall merely go ashore like you or any

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other. It will be very interesting. I have never been to Gibraltar. No one will harm me. The name of Adolf Niederstrohm will be sufficient. You shall see."

And to the astonishment of Jessup, no less than that of Captain Hoagland, when the *Turkana* came to anchor in the roads, the officer of the Port accepted without reservation the passport and letters of the German, giving him the necessary permits to go ashore and visit the Swedish consul with whom he had business. Jessup descended with his guest into the launch, aware of new doubts as to this deception. But no question regarding their guest had been put to Jessup or Hoagland, and from the technical viewpoint their skirts were clean, but as Jessup glanced up from the stern of the moving launch toward the bridge where Captain Hoagland stood with bent head and folded arms, looking after them, he was again distinctly uncomfortable and knew that Hoagland shared his feelings. But he shrugged away his incertitude, taking a languid pleasure in the panorama of the lively harbor, the ubiquitous destroyers, the coaling transports lined with men in khaki, the busy docks beyond the Mole, and the brilliant splashes of color in the town climbing up the hills from the waterfront.

"Half of the difficulties in the world, my dear Alan," said von Hengel's deep voice calmly, out of hearing of the man at the engine, "are those which our imaginations conceive. The other half do not exist at all. You see? Here I am quite safe. And you, quite comfortable."

"Um!" grunted Jessup uneasily.

They strolled up the narrow streets, past the rows of storage houses within the doors of which were glimpses of guns, ammunition, piles of packing-cases containing equipment, about which men were hurrying. Von Hengel glanced here and there, saying little, but to Alan Jessup

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it seemed that he missed nothing, either indoors or out. Presently they entered Church Street and strode along rather happily, for after ten days of confinement aboard ship, it was good to stretch one's legs. Jessup had thought of going to the Club to see if there was any one there that he knew, but after a few moments' deliberation decided to follow Conrad von Hengel. The German officer seemed to know where he was going and it was just this certitude and confidence that aroused Alan Jessup's curiosity. Although it was inconceivable that any injury could have yet been done by his guest to England's cause, Jessup felt a sense of responsibility slowly growing in importance, for the behavior of Mr. Adolf Niederstrohm, while on British soil. But if Jessup were really interested in his movements, Conrad von Hengel could scarcely have guessed it in his companion's careless mien and lagging step. Von Hengel glanced at him and smiled. It seemed as though the interest in the new scene which had promised variety had already worn off, and that the languid Jessup was again as world-weary as ever.

"Do you know where you're going, Conrad?" asked Jessup at last.

"Yes, my friend," said the German, "but I would be obliged if you would call me Adolf."

Jessup looked at him wearily.

"Hanged if I will. This is your party, not mine."

"Then will you oblige me by not calling me anything?" Jessup grunted.

"The Swedish consul is two blocks back," he said. "I saw his sign."

"Really. I must have missed it. We shall stop there on the way back. Ah!" he said, halting suddenly, "here we are, my friend."

Jessup followed him across the street toward an arch-

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way over a narrow entrance which bore the inscription, "Moghab—Antiquities." And entering, they were presently in a narrow court at the end of which was a door that von Hengel opened.

With the glare of the sunlight still in his eyes it was difficult for Jessup to see what sort of a place it was into which they had come, but presently he made out the shapes of ancient chests of furniture, armor, and of weapons of all descriptions piled in corners or nailed upon the wall. And from behind a table in a corner by a window a man wearing a black alpaca coat and flannel trousers arose and came forward to greet them. He was tall and thin, and his dark skin was seared with many wrinkles, a very old man, but alert and active, with a pair of small keen black eyes which looked his visitors over with a narrow scrutiny.

"I am Mr. Niederstrohm," said von Hengel easily. "I have heard that you have some Ben-Ghazi flintlocks for sale."

Was it mere fancy that made Jessup think that the eyes of the ancient Moghab sparkled with sudden intentness? He bowed with deference and murmured something Jessup couldn't hear. And then,

"Flintlocks! Ah, yes, Mr. Niederstrohm. Flintlocks from Ben-Ghazi, from Fezzan, and Beheira, from Tunisia and Tafilet. Fine flintlocks worth their weight in gold. Was it guns you wished or pistols?"

"Pistols," said von Hengel.

"Ah, then indeed I will show you of the finest."

Moghab moved to a chest beside the wall, and in doing so passed in front of Jessup who was aware of the old man's quick glance of appraisal. Jessup had taken out a cigarette and was leisurely fitting it into an amber holder, while he sleepily watched the proceedings. As the Moor brought the weapons out, Jessup moved nearer, listening

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to the old man's encomiums upon their beauties, the quality of the steel, the intricacies of the Mauresque filigree and the indubitable genuineness of the make. Von Hengel picked the weapons up one by one and examined them with a critical eye, questioning as to the price, over which he haggled for a while, finally selecting three of the pistols.

Moghab bowed. "If the other gentleman will sit in the chair yonder by the door, Mr. Niederstrohm can come into the room beyond while I pack them, so that he can see there is no mistake."

Jessup shrugged and sat. The visit had already begun to bore him exceedingly. The pistols were good enough in their way—not the "cozy-corner" variety at least, but hardly worth wasting an afternoon over. What the deuce von Hengel wanted with Moorish pistols in East Africa——! He gave it up, and presently fell half asleep in his chair, drowsily aware of the murmur of voices in the adjoining room, from which after a while the two men emerged, von Hengel carrying a rug fastened with a rug-strap, but from the size and weight of the bundle it was clear to Jessup that the pistols were within. Moghab followed him, rubbing his lean hands together and showing his gums from which as he grinned a yellow fang protruded.

"You will find none like them anywhere in the world, Mr. Niederstrohm. I hope that you will be pleased. I wish you good voyage."

In the street Jessup's curiosity got the better of him.

"Why the rug, Conrad? Surely——"

"It may save us trouble. There's no reason why we should answer questions. Now none will be asked."

"Oh, I see."

Jessup was a little amused at the "we." Rather cheeky of von Hengel to bring him into the thing. But it didn't matter, of course. Who would care how many Moorish



"Flintlocks! Ah, yes, Mr. Niederstrohm. Flintlocks from Ben-  
Ghazi"



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flintlocks were carried out of Gibraltar? It was just a trifle silly of von Hengel to be making such a mystery of his purchases.

As they passed the office of the Swedish consul Jessup called the German's attention to the sign.

But von Hengel passed on.

"It doesn't matter," he said coolly, "there was nothing to see him about." And he strode on toward the landing stage, Jessup following, aware of a rising impatience at this guest who seemed to take his host's acquiescence in everything for granted. For a moment it occurred to Jessup to leave von Hengel to his own devices and try to find the Club, but he changed his mind and went on to the landing. The sooner the German officer was off British soil, the better for the *Turkana*.

It was with some relief that Hoagland welcomed them at the gangway, though he eyed von Hengel's rug-strap curiously. Jessup caught his glance but made no comment.

"We will get under way, Hoagland, as soon as our coal is aboard," he muttered.

"Aye, aye, sir," said Hoagland.

The voyage down the Mediterranean was full of events, but none of serious consequence. They were boarded by British destroyers who passed them on unscathed, were held up for a few hours off Ras Addar by an Austrian submarine but in spite of these delays approached Alexandria in a little less than two weeks from the straits. Captain von Hengel was in excellent humor and barring a tendency in his more jubilant moods to magnify the possible achievements of Kultur, behaved in a most seemly fashion, asking no further favors of his host, who, having begun the voyage in a cloud of suspicion, ended by returning to an earlier estimate of his guest.

Even Captain Hoagland was mollified at the pleasant

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turn of affairs and though still expressing some doubt as to the passage of the Canal, accepted von Hengel upon his face value and listened when Jessup dozed, to the tales of world conquest which the German magnificently set before him. But there was one person aboard who didn't like Captain von Hengel,—Mr. Jessup's man, Dawson. He was too well trained to permit a word in disparagement of Jessup's guest to pass his lips, but Jessup was aware of the antipathy of the Englishman, which showed itself in a frigid mien whenever the German was near him, in a frown when von Hengel's back was turned and in a furtive search of von Hengel's stateroom under the guise of setting it in order. This voyage had not been much to Dawson's liking. The idea of valeting a gentleman in the heart of the African jungle was something beyond his experience. But he was fond of Mr. Jessup and all things, the evil as well as the good, some day have an end and so, since he was indispensable to Mr. Jessup's comfort, he had come. But if he could have had his way Captain von Hengel would long ago have been dropped overboard in mid-Atlantic.

They came to anchor on a cloudless night. At dinner Conrad von Hengel was in high spirits and was friendly and grateful to his host almost to the point of sentimentality. The *Turkana* had been a godsend to him, and the hospitality of his good friend Jessup was a real proof of his friendship, and indeed of the great nation of which he was a citizen. The voyage was now more than half over. He desired to drink Alan Jessup's health and to wish him success in all his ventures. Jessup, surprised from his imperturbability, drank solemnly, aware of von Hengel's desire to be more than usually pleasant and in spite of himself wondering furtively what favor this guest was preparing to ask of him.

It seemed sure that von Hengel, by the use of his Swed-

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ish passport, was planning a visit to Cairo, where it was said that the British forces were mobilizing for the Mesopotamia relief expedition, and as to this Alan Jessup had already made up his mind. For neutral though he was, in the sense of being one who had tried to think as little as possible upon a disagreeable subject, the events of the past few weeks had borne in upon him the astounding fact that the naval officers at Gibraltar, the crews of the destroyers the *Turkana* had encountered, all spoke the same language that Jessup did and that the Austrian submarine was quite obviously that of a foreign nation. The same train of thought had quite definitely and for the first time given Captain von Hengel a new status aboard the *Turkana*. Jessup had agreed to deliver him upon the East coast of Africa and as he always kept his word he would do it, but not if he or Hoagland or the crew of the yacht could prevent it, should von Hengel again set foot upon a British possession or Protectorate.

Perhaps something of what had been passing in Jessup's mind was known to the German captain. It is quite certain that they turned in with the usual farewells at the usual hour and that Jessup slept very soundly, but he was awakened at an unusually early hour by Captain Hoagland himself, who imparted the surprising information that Captain von Hengel had disappeared.

Jessup sat bolt upright in bed, forgetting even to yawn. "Gone! Are you sure?"

"Yes, sir. He's gone all right and the yawl which was moored at the gangway."

"And no one saw him?"

Captain Hoagland looked at Jessup. There was only one man on watch, Connors, who was asleep. He's below, sir, in the caboose, thinking it over."

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Jessup scrambled out of bed and felt around with his bare toes for his slippers.

"That's too bad, Hoagland. That's really too bad. I wouldn't have had this happen for——" And then, with a sudden air of alertness quite unusual with him, "Did he go alone? Are any men missing?"

"No, sir. They're all aboard. But the story has got around as to who he is. There's Britishers among 'em and they're not very sweet about it, sir."

"H-m. Did he take a bag with him?"

"I don't know, sir. It was dark and the man on watch——"

"I beg pardon, sir, but he took no bag, Mr. Jessup." Dawson, who had entered with Captain Hoagland, stood at the foot of the bed, and now spoke up quickly, the deference of his tones punctuated with sharp accents of decision.

"And how do you know?"

"I've taken the liberty of searching his stateroom, sir. The bag is there."

"Ah. Of course."

"He brought no trunk, sir. If you'll remember, Mr. Jessup, sir, I remarked upon the strangeness of a gentleman traveling so long a distance with nothing."

"Yes, yes," broke in Jessup with a frown. "And nothing is missing?"

"Yes, sir. There's something missing."

"What, Dawson?"

Dawson hesitated a moment, rubbing his chin.

"The Captain von Hengel brought aboard at Gibraltar, and what was concealed in it," he said at last.

Jessup looked at his man in astonishment. The homely familiar lines of his face, the solemn expression which for

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so many years had greeted his every awakening, seemed for some reason astonishingly novel and significant.

"What do you know about the rug brought aboard at Gibraltar?"

"Nothing, sir. I wish I did."

"Why do you think he has taken it ashore?"

"Because it's not among his effects, sir."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes, sir. I've looked carefully."

Dawson lowered his voice and cleared his throat uneasily. "Begging pardon, sir, during all of this week when he was not in his stateroom, the rug-strap and what it contained, sir, were kept locked in his bag."

"What it contained!" said Jessup in amazement. "Merely some Moorish flintlock pistols. I was with him when he bought them."

Dawson started forward. "Flintlocks! I think you must be mistaken, sir. He brought no flintlocks aboard the *Turkana*."

Captain Hoagland clearly shared Mr. Jessup's surprise and mystification.

"Flintlocks?" he muttered.

"How do you know all this, Dawson?" asked Jessup eagerly.

"Begging pardon, Mr. Jessup, I've watched him, sir."

"Watched him, Dawson?"

"I had an eye on him whenever he was below here, sir. And I took the liberty of taking a peep now and then through the keyhole."

"Ah, and what did you see?"

Dawson's bony fingers dovetailed a moment nervously and he cleared his throat before he spoke again.

"It was the night we sailed from Gibraltar, sir, that I looked first. All the evening the rug had been locked in

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his bag, sir. Through the keyhole I saw him unlock the bag, lift the bundle out, take off the strap, and unroll the rug. But there were no flintlocks in it, sir."

"What, then?"

"It was just that, puzzled me, sir. I couldn't make out just what it was and even now I'm not quite sure."

"But you say you saw——"

"It was something wrapped in a piece of paper, something the size of your two hands, heavy, roundish. He picked it up and held it and looked at it carefully, smiling a little, all the while picking at it with his fingers."

"Picking at *what?*"

Dawson cleared his throat again and fingered at the seam of his trousers.

"Well, sir, if you ask me, it looked to me, more than anything—er—like a piece of coal."

"Coal!" cried Hoagland.

"It was roundish but irregular, sir, as though the edges had been worn off quite smooth."

"Are you sure of this, Dawson?"

"Quite, sir. The light was very good."

"And what happened then?"

"Nothing, sir. Captain von Hengel started up suddenly and as I thought he might be opening the door I moved away."

Jessup, who had now lighted a cigarette, took a few paces across his cabin. "Coal!" he muttered, "most extraordinary!" And then, "You pursued these—er—investigations, Dawson?"

"Begging pardon, yes, sir. I examined his stateroom when he had left it on the following morning. The rug and rug-strap were upon his bed. But the object he had brought in them was locked in the bag. I know this because I lifted it and it was very heavy."

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"Ah, I see. It was heavy. The—er—piece of coal was inside."

"Yes, sir. I'm sure of it. But it wasn't coal exactly, sir, more like a black stone."

"Um, and now——"

"The bag weighs much lighter, sir. Doubtless now it would be possible to open it."

Jessup walked to and fro, his hands fingering at the cord of his dressing-gown.

"This shouldn't have happened, Hoagland. It's my fault. Perhaps there's no damage done, but I don't like the notion of this man ashore in Egypt."

"Nor I, sir," growled Hoagland, "but what the devil use could he find for a bit of black stone?"

"Why didn't you speak of this before, Dawson?" asked Jessup.

Dawson shuffled his feet a little awkwardly.

"Well, to tell the truth, Mr. Jessup, sir, what I did was a bit irregular. I'm no peeper or listener, sir, you'll know that, and I wasn't sure you'd want me doing it, him being your guest, but I was suspicious of Captain von Hengel—being a German and me an Englishman, and I've kept an extra eye on him. I hope you'll forgive me, Mr. Jessup."

"It's all right, Dawson," said Jessup. And then, with an air of authority that was new to him, "Go and search his stateroom thoroughly. If the bag is locked, break it open."

"Very good, sir. Thank you, sir."

And when Dawson went out Jessup paused and looked at Hoagland who, with frowning brows, stood by the table scratching his head.

"What do you make of it, Hoagland?"

"I don't know, sir. It looks queer. Maybe he'll be coming aboard later in the day."

But Jessup shook his head, decidedly.

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"No. He's not coming back, Hoagland. He's playing some game. He's used me rather nicely. But I can't help him any more, so he's quit. Pretty rotten, I call it, without a by your leave."

"But what's his game?"

Jessup shrugged and frowned.

"Something deep, Hoagland." Jessup broke off and walked in some agitation to a port-hole and peered out. "And it's I that have brought him here."

"But what good can he do for Germany in Egypt with a piece of coal?"

"I don't know. It's puzzling, very. But the Germans always have an excellent reason for anything they do. Awful nuisance, Hoagland. But I'm going ashore. You may call the gig for nine o'clock."

"What are you going to do, sir?"

"I'm going ashore."

"Do you want me to go with you?"

"No, thanks. I'm going alone."

## CHAPTER V

### THE BLACK STONE

**F**ROM the air of alacrity with which Mr. Jessup descended the companion ladder of the *Turkana* and entered his gig to be rowed ashore at Alexandria, it seemed that he was now really quite awake to the exigencies of the situation. He meant that not another hour should pass without informing the person in highest military authority in Egypt as to what had happened. Captain von Hengel had ceased to be the guest of the *Turkana* and was now merely a German officer foot-loose in an English garrison. By this act of information, Alan Jessup was washing his hands of him.

The gig passed under the stern of a British Hospital ship, the *Mercy*, and came up with the ship's launch just as it reached the landing stage. Walking hurriedly, Jessup made his way to the office of the commanding officer, where he placed the whole case before him. The General listened gravely and called in an aide to whom he immediately gave orders for an immediate search of the native quarter of the town. But the matter was deemed of such importance that the General referred it at once to the Head of the Intelligence Department at Cairo, with whom he was soon in communication over the wire. The result of this conference was Mr. Jessup's departure with Dawson for Cairo. The quick questions of this English officer with regard to the strange black object which Captain von Hengel had smuggled ashore, gave Alan Jessup a new sense of

## THE BLACK STONE

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importance in this mystery. Whatever General Armitage thought about the matter, he revealed nothing, but he was a man of long experience in the East and from his manner it was clear that he believed that von Hengel's game was something deeper than that of spying upon the British Egyptian Expeditionary forces. But what?

As Jessup made his way to the train for Cairo, Dawson following with a huge portmanteau, he puzzled deeply over the matter. Curiously enough, all thought of going on to Mombasa before this mystery was solved had left his mind. Whether he would or no, the war was already throwing its coils about him. In spite of himself, he seemed to be experiencing a constantly increasing interest in British affairs and a growing desire to safeguard them from any danger his own inadvertence might have caused. It was really most extraordinary how tremendously anxious he was to help a lot of people he had never seen before. But he owed them that. And they seemed to expect it of him. Of course he would do what he could.

In the Cairo train he found a place for Dawson and the portmanteau and was shown into an empty compartment by the dark-skinned guard. At least he had thought it empty until he looked around, when he saw a girl in the uniform of a British army nurse huddled in the opposite corner. He merely glanced at her, returning to his own thoughts, when just as the train started, he heard a clear and strangely familiar voice addressing him:

"Aren't you going to speak to me, Alan?"

He straightened and gazed at the girl, rising, somewhat bewildered and staring in a kind of daze at Constance Masterson.

"Er—by Jove, *you*, Connie?" he stammered, crossing the apartment to her, his brows taking a new tangle.

"I think so," she laughed.

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"Most extraordinary," he muttered. "You! What are you doing here?"

She laughed.

"I'm not quite sure. I feel like a 'tripper.' I couldn't go through the Canal without seeing Cairo, so I got leave for a few days."

"Leave?"

"From the *Mercy* in the harbor, the Duchess of Barchester's hospital ship. I came with her expedition, you know."

"By Jove! Of course."

She turned and inspected him with her motherly air.

"You're looking positively bursting with health, Alan. I don't believe you've missed me a bit."

"Oh, I say."

"You *do* look a little worried."

"Worried? Oh, yes, worried."

"That's too bad. You were going shooting, weren't you?"

She wasn't in the least malicious. She spoke in the most interested casual way as she had always spoken of his pursuits before the war had brought its shadow between them. His brows were knit deeper and he seemed to be thinking beyond her.

"We've got to stand together, you know," he said at last, aloud, in a manner totally irrelevant.

She glanced at him curiously.

"Who, Alan?" she asked.

"We—us. We can't be letting them get the best of us."

"Won't you explain?"

He started and turned toward her.

"Oh, we're really all one people, you know—the English, the Americans, I mean,—brothers—and—er—all that sort of thing."

"Of course," she said, smiling and watching him intently.

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"And the Prussians, they *are* beastly rotters; your friend, von Hengel——"

"What has happened?"

He was silent a moment, frowning at the tip of his boot, and then, after some hesitation, told her everything. She listened, putting in a question here and there, eagerly watching his face the while.

"It is very curious. I am sorry you brought him. I might have warned you, if——" She too was silent for a moment. And then, "Captain von Hengel was always too clever to be quite genuine," she said. "But a black stone," she murmured. "I don't understand."

"Nor I. But I mean to, if I have to follow him across Africa," he said very quietly.

There was a note in his voice, a deep note of resolution, such as she had never heard in it before, and she found herself regarding him with interest and curiosity.

He really meant what he said. But whether it was the violation of his hospitality by von Hengel or another motive she was quite sure that he felt very deeply. He was a good sportsman. Most things wearied him, or seemed to, but in yachting, tennis, golf, even when he was bored, there were many who would be willing to testify that he was no "quitter."

As though following his own train of thought, he went on jerkily.

"It's a good game. I'll play it, I think."

"And give up the shooting?"

"I've got to find Conrad, you know. It wouldn't be just the sporting thing to leave him foot-loose in Egypt after I'd brought him here."

He stopped and stared out of the window.

Constance watched his well-cut profile in a moment of silence. And then——

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"I agree with you, Alan," she said. "Conrad von Hengel is one of the cleverest men in the German army. He would never be in this part of the world unless a great mission brought him. His regiment is in France."

"France! He told me that it was in East Africa."

Constance frowned.

"You see. He lied. He had to come, of course."

Jessup's jaw set. "He used me."

He fiddled with his stick, and then, "Did he propose to you, Connie?" he blurted out.

She stared at him in a moment of incomprehension, and then, very quietly:

"No, he knew better than to do that."

Jessup stared at her and then looked out of the car window.

"Ah," he said.

"Why do you ask?"

"Merely because he told me you had refused him."

"I'm glad he took the will for the deed. But why did he say that?"

Jessup paused a moment and then, "I've been fearfully easy for him, a good thing. He played upon my sympathy, my friendship." He broke off angrily. "What a cad!"

"And what are you going to do?"

"Find him," he said quietly, "before he does any damage."

"That may be difficult."

"Nevertheless," he said firmly, "I shall try."

The train rumbled on. There was a long silence, sober and constrained on Jessup's part, curious and interested on Miss Masterson's. He seemed so absorbed in this new purpose as to almost exclude his companion, and all the train of recollections her presence must conjure. And yet he was within his rights, and as always quite friendly and

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considerate, pulling the blind to shield her from the sun, and inquiring with interest as to her work and the destination of the expedition. After a while they both relapsed into silence, looking out of the car window rather consciously, passing desultory comments once in a while upon the passing scenery. The past was taboo to both and yet, curiously enough, it was Constance Masterson who most felt the restriction.

Arrived at their destination, he saw her in a carriage to Shephard's hotel, where he also left Dawson and the port-manteau and hurried on to the Governorat. His arrival was expected and he was shown without delay into the sanctum of the Head of the Intelligence Department. Northby Pasha was tall, dark-skinned and lithe, with a polished jaw-bone and a narrow black eye. He was neither old nor young, but seemed an embodiment of the wisdom of the one and the virility of the other. From the moment of entering the room, Jessup felt the man's gaze upon him in keen appraisal, and took the seat the officer indicated to him, feeling much like a school-boy summoned before a head-master.

After the preliminary conversation in which Jessup told him who he was and how the *Turkana* happened to be in this part of the world, Colonel Northby questioned:

"The man who left your yacht is Conrad von Hengel?"

"Captain Conrad von Hengel, who was a military attaché of the German Embassy in Washington."

"Yes," said Northby dryly, "whose special mission in the United States was to arrange explosions in munitions factories——"

"You know——?"

"Yes, Mr. Jessup. His Majesty's Government informed your Secretary of State of this man's activities three months ago. Conrad von Hengel was quite the most active member

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of the Embassy staff at Washington. To learn that you have even inadvertently brought him to Egypt is a matter of intense, of vital interest to me. Would you mind telling me how he happened to come upon your yacht?"

"Not at all," said Jessup. "That is why I am here. Captain von Hengel was my guest. He told me his regiment was in German East Africa. And I said I'd take him there."

"H-m. That was hardly a friendly act to England. You didn't know he was on the German Headquarters Staff?"

"No. You see, he lied to me."

"Yes. He would. In the game he plays, lies are mere counters. Have you any reason to suspect that he knows you have reported his desertion?"

"No, I moved quickly when I had made up my mind."

"It is a pity, Mr. Jessup, that you didn't make it up before you reached Gibraltar."

Jessup looked out of the window.

"I'm sorry. I'm not used to distrusting my guests."

Northby Pasha smiled.

"You will please tell me exactly what happened at Gibraltar. Try to omit no detail. It is very important."

"Captain von Hengel possessed a Swedish passport bearing the name of Adolf Niederstrohm. I had grave doubts about his landing, but the Port Officer passed him without questions."

"Because he was looking for a Swiss—who was to come through Spain."

"The British Government suspected——?"

"The Government had wind of a political plot which centered at Gibraltar, but what it signified they did not then know. Nor did they know that Captain von Hengel was to have a part in it. You threw opportunity in his way and he

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took it instead of sailing, as planned, in a Dutch steamer. It was in this way that our agents lost sight of him."

"I know," groaned Jessup. "He asked me to keep silent. I did so. He was aboard the *Turkana* for a week before we sailed."

"Go on, Mr. Jessup."

Jessup frowned at the graven image of Ptah upon the desk and then, in a few words, he told his questioner what had happened at Gibraltar.

"Moghab, you say," broke in the officer before Jessup had gone far. "An old man, a seller of antiquities at the head of Church Street upon the left?"

"You know——?"

But Northby Pasha had pressed a button and was writing rapidly on a pad of paper. When his orderly entered he tore the slip from the pad and handed it to him. "Have this message sent to General Wythecombe at Gibraltar in code and without delay." And then, turning quickly to Jessup, he surprised him by asking a strange question:

"Could you tell me if the word Ben Ghazi was spoken by the Moor?"

"Ben Ghazi!" said the bewildered Jessup. "Why, Colonel Northby—I—I believe it was. It was among the names of the places from which the flintlock pistols had come."

"Ah, I thought so." He got up quickly and paced the floor, his brows knit in a hard tangle. "Go on, Mr. Jessup. He brought aboard the *Turkana* a rug in a strap which contained also what you supposed were some flintlock pistols. Rather an unnecessary proceeding," he said cynically.

"I suppose you'll think me rather dull, Colonel Northby. To tell the truth, I'm beginning to be quite willing to believe it myself."

Northby Pasha shrugged. "How soon after Captain von Hengel left your yacht was his absence discovered?"

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"A matter of some hours."

"And you found no trace of the object your man Dawson saw through the keyhole, or any papers, ancient papers written in the Arabic character?"

"None."

"According to your man's description the stone was like a piece of coal only smoother and not so shiny."

"That is correct. He will testify if you desire."

Northby Pasha stopped before the window with folded arms and peered out. For a long while he did not speak and Jessup watched him, trying to guess what was passing in his mind. At last Northby Pasha crossed slowly to his desk and sat.

"Mr. Jessup," he said, "it is fortunate that I know something about you. And your prompt action in advising the British authorities exonerates you, of course, from any complicity in the conspiracy of Captain von Hengel."

"Conspiracy!"

"The greatest ever conceived in the brain of mortal man. A conspiracy which involves nations and, more than you can imagine, the security of the British Empire."

Jessup's mouth had fallen open and he stared at Northby Pasha, his eyes shining; there was no disguising his interest and partisanship in this affair and his curiosity and contrition were written so clearly on his features that the officer could have no doubt as to their genuineness.

"Anything that I can do, Colonel Northby, anything in the world to atone for my stupidity, myself, my yacht, my means, anything within my power I will give gladly."

The officer smiled and brought forth a box of cigarettes. "Come, Mr. Jessup," he said with a more hospitable air, "let us not cry over our spilt milk. Perhaps this misfortune may be a blessing in disguise, for if we can catch Conrad von Hengel—!" He stopped, his lighted match in mid-air,

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and gazed at the image of Ptah. "If we can only catch him!"

"You have taken all precautions?"

"You may be sure of that. Every man of my force is watching. It will be a miracle if he slips through."

"Where can he go?"

Northby Pasha examined the ash of his cigarette reflectively. And then, deliberately, "I am not much of a talker about the affairs of my department, Mr. Jessup, but your manner and your anxiety to correct your earlier mistake have impressed me with a sense of your loyalty to the British Government."

"You *must* believe me, Colonel Northby."

"I do. I may need your help. I'm going to tell you what Captain von Hengel's presence here means. You will remember that what I say to you is of grave importance?"

"I am not talkative by nature."

Northby Pasha was silent a moment, regarding Jessup keenly with his sharp black eyes and then went on quickly.

"You have heard of the Black Stone of Mecca?"

Jessup started. "The Black Stone. Yes, I think so, it's set in a wall and the Johnnies kiss it, or something. But what?"

Northby Pasha waved his hand. "Allah's stone, the Moslems call it," he continued. "It's a sacred relic of the sanctuary of Mecca which existed as far back as the third century of the Christian era, before the Prophet even was born."

"But this——"

"One moment. In the fourth century of Islam, or about the tenth of the Christian era, the Carmathians, a Mohammedan sect from the eastward, captured Mecca, and took away the sacred relic, the Black Stone. They were dissenters from the ancient religion, pupils of Ahmed, son of

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the Persian Abdallah ibn Maimun, and the sacred relic was carried off into Persia."

"But the Black Stone at Mecca——"

Northby Pasha shrugged.

"Is merely a substitute brought back by the Carmathians, for the original stone was never returned to Mecca. We know of writings hidden in Cairo which admit the substitution, parchments jealously guarded from the people of Islam, for whom such a revelation would be in the nature of a disaster."

"Then you believe——"

"All things in order, Mr. Jessup. The Carmathian sect still exists and its doctrines are followed in Persia, in Syria, Arabia, in India, and are still propagated in the Island of Zanzibar. Several years ago a celebrated English student discovered that the original Black Stone of Mecca had been for many years carefully preserved in a safe place by a sheykh of an ancient family of Zanzibar, which had always followed the doctrines of Hamadan Quarimat from whom the Carmathians took their name. He worked in secret and succeeded at last in finding the hiding place of the sacred object. but, unfortunately, the Arabs got wind of his efforts and removed the Black Stone, carrying it off somewhere into the heart of the desert, where all trace of it was lost. Last year, since the war began, there came a rumor that the Moslems of Ben Ghazi and Fezzan in Northern Africa were being stirred to a fanatical religious fervor and those of us who are interested in Eastern politics were sure that the disturbance could only have been caused by the display of this relic. Englishmen were sent to the region but suddenly, as though a wind had blown across the desert, all was calm again. The Black Stone had dropped out of existence. What happened to it no one knows. But a month ago, a caravan came out of the heart

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of the desert to Beni Mora. It was a caravan from far to the south and east, whose members were unknown to the Arabs of that vicinity. There was a camel that bore a palanquin with a canopy or mahmal like that of the Kisweh, the sacred carpet. All this we know, but no more. There were circumstances attending the arrival of this caravan which gave rise to the belief that some holy object had been brought into Algiers." Northby Pasha rose and flicked his cigarette viciously out of the window. "It is my belief, Mr. Jessup, that the Black Stone of Mecca, of Zanzibar, and of Ben Ghazi and Beni Mora is the stone which the German Captain von Hengel brought to Alexandria in the cabin of your yacht."

"Incredible."

"I am convinced."

"But what object could von Hengel have in bringing the Black Stone ashore into Egypt?"

Northby Pasha smiled.

"When you have lived as long in the East as I have, your imagination will gain a greater flexibility. Can you not guess what effect the possession of such an object would have upon the people of Islam?"

"A fetich——?"

"Exactly. A fetich, a symbol, a talisman that they will follow across the face of the earth."

"Mesopotamia!" said Jessup.

"All Turkey, Arabia, Egypt, India—may be inflamed."

"Good God! And he, von Hengel——"

"Captain von Hengel—Germany holds the ace of trumps!"

Jessup sank into the chair from which in his excitement he had risen, as the magnitude of this impending disaster to British interests was borne in upon him.

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"And I," he muttered. "I will have been the cause of this calamity."

Northby Pasha shrugged.

"You see, I've been frank with you. It's very unfortunate that you have been involved in this affair. But for your comfort I will say that the plan was hatched by the General Staff in Berlin and that, had this Black Stone not come east with you, some one else would have brought it. The Germans were cleverer than we were, that's all. It's a relief, in a way, to know the plot that they were hatching, to have something to work on. And if we can find Conrad von Hengel——" He smiled, pausing significantly, and folded his arms grimly. "If we can find Conrad von Hengel and the Black Stone of Mecca, the Eastern ambitions of the German Emperor will end in the smoke of failure."

"We *must* find him."

"Must is a good word. I like your use of it. I have good reason to believe that Captain von Hengel will come to Cairo. There are some documents here that are necessary to his success, those I have spoken of. It would not be wise to tell you more of them than that they are a part of the secret treasures of the Mosque of Hasaneyn, named after Hoseyn, the saint of the heretical Persians. I needn't go into that, but perhaps you can guess the significance."

"By George! The Carmathians!"

"Exactly. But no more now. I will let you know if you can help, to-morrow. For the present I would like you to hold yourself at my disposal. You're at Shephard's, I believe?"

Northby Pasha dismissed him, but after he had gone he walked quickly to his desk and pressed a button, and to the orderly, "Tell Daoud Effendi to come here at once."

## CHAPTER VI

### AN ARABIAN NIGHT

**J**ESSUP left the Governorat in a very agitated state of mind. If the defection of his German guest had broken in upon the even tenor of his way, the discovery of the nature of his mission in the East had aroused the American to a pitch of interest beyond the range of his previous experience. He had begun this morning by thinking the whole incident merely unpleasant and had now ended in a wish, amounting almost to an obsession, to be the personal means of repairing the damage he had inadvertently done. Conrad von Hengel was on his way to Cairo, if not at this very moment within its gates, and with him was the Black Stone of Mecca, the mysterious object of the rug-strap which he had so cleverly secreted and hidden from all but the eyes of the suspicious Dawson. Good old Dawson! If it hadn't been for Dawson, von Hengel would have gotten clean away, with no one the wiser as to his momentous mission. But now his game was discovered and unless von Hengel got wind of Jessup's visit to the British authorities, he would be in ignorance of the danger he ran in coming to Cairo. What ancient writings were these, in the Mosque of Hasaneyn, as to the spurious Kaba Stone at Mecca? If von Hengel planned to come to Cairo in the hopes of getting them, he would be running his head into the lion's mouth.

Jessup was a lover of peace, but as he strode up the Sharia Mohammed Ali in the direction of the hotel, he

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clutched at his stick as though he would have liked his fingers to have been at Conrad von Hengel's throat. It was clear that Northby Pasha had not thought much of Alan Jessup's potentialities for action or help, for to the man of problems and anxieties, he looked, in his well-cut gray flannels, precisely what he was, a leisurely American millionaire, seeking surcease of boredom, and thereby blundering, through his indifference and stupidity, into the midst of a great international conspiracy. It was with many qualms of conscience that Alan Jessup thus defined himself, aware that this or something much like it was the British officer's estimate of him. But Jessup remembered gratefully that Northby Pasha had at least confided in him and had thought him worth forgiving.

When Jessup reached Shepherd's it was already dark. Dawson was awaiting him, evening clothes all laid out and bath drawn. But Jessup passed by these symbols of convention and read the note from Constance Masterson that had been left for him, which proposed a pilgrimage by night to the native quarter of the town. He made a hasty toilet without changing and went down to dinner, meeting her afterward on the terrace as she had requested.

"Oh, Alan, I was so afraid you were not coming. Did you know what day this is?"

"Er—Thursday," he said.

"It's the tenth day of Muharram," she remarked sagely.

"Is it, really?" he said politely. "How jolly!"

He hadn't the least idea what she was talking about, and she observed it, with a smile.

"I've been looking it up in Murray's—the anniversary of the death of the grandson of the Prophet. It's quite wonderful, they say, in the bazaar quarter, the Procession of the Ashoora—durweeshes and *Zikrs* and everything. We

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must see the sights." And then, noticing his abstracted air,

"Don't you want to go with me, Alan?"

"Er—oh, of course, if it's quite all right for you to go."

"All right—! Why shouldn't it be?"

"Rather rough for a girl, and—er—smelly."

"I won't mind. That is, of course," she added, "if there isn't something else you want to do."

"Oh, no. Have you engaged a dragoman? Where do we go?"

"To the Musky and then to the Khan El-Khalily, which fronts the Mosque of the Hasaneyn."

"Hasaneyn! By Jove!" Jessup flashed around, his eyes sparkling. Was it not the Mosque of Hasaneyn that Northby Pasha had spoken of, the repository of the Arabic parchments which had suddenly taken on so great an importance!

"Most interesting," said Jessup quietly. "Let's be off by all means."

Constance curiously noted the sudden change in his manner and followed him down the terrace to where the dragoman was awaiting them. The dragoman was a tall person who wore a frock coat and a tarbûsh, and led them with many bowings and scrapings to an arabeah drawn by a pair of white horses.

But Constance Masterson was not for slumming in the elegance of white Arab steeds with jingling silver chains and much to the apparent disgust of Mustapha, who must lose a fee, dismissed the driver and signified her intention to go afoot. And so they started off around the railing of the Esbekiyeh Gardens, past the gayly-lighted Continental Hotel and the Opera House, and in a few moments plunged into the mysterious shadows of the Musky. It was here that they were immediately aware of some unusual proceedings, for as they walked on into the darkness, the street

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being dimly lighted by the flares from the shop windows which were now blocked with people, they found their progress difficult. But Mustapha, their dragoman, proved to be resourceful and after warning them not to resent the remarks of individuals in the crowd, he managed to get them through to a stall, the proprietor of which he knew, where for a consideration they were permitted to stand upon chairs placed in the doorway.

Constance lost no detail of the strange scene, the charging of the native police on their splendid white horses into the crowd, keeping the center of the street cleared for the procession. But there was an undercurrent of excitement and mystery behind the raillery of the crowd as the people peered forth down the street in the direction from which the procession was to come, where a distant sound of drums and pipes already announced its approach, a kind of savage expectation of the sight and smell of human blood. There was something barbaric in the hoarse voices, something fantastic in the play of the yellow flares across the moving faces, glinting on tarbûsh and turban and picking out of the dim shadows above the shapes of the meshrebiya oriels in which here and there beyond half-opened grilles could be seen dark eager eyes peering down—everywhere mystery and its suggestion of things quaint, or sordid, or tragic. To eyes used not so long ago to the gray of London, the contrast was almost overpowering, and Constance Master-son clung to Alan Jessup's arm, as though that only were real.

Jessup stood without comment, his brows bent, apparently indifferent to the crowd which surged below him. But suddenly he bent aside toward the ear of his dragoman.

"Two men have followed us from the Esbekiyeh, Mustapha," he said. "Who are they?"

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Mustapha put on the air of innocence which is the stock in trade of all well-trained dragomans.

"Two men! The Effendi must be mistaken."

"No, I'm not mistaken. In the doorway yonder, one in a turban and galabeah, the other with the head-dress."

"Head-dress! No, sar," said Mustapha positively. "I have not seen him before."

"H-m," said Jessup soberly.

Constance Masterson had missed this by-play, for her eyes and ears were intent upon the distant end of the street, whence came a glare of flaming torches, the sounds of barbaric noises and slowly a cart appeared upon which were two cressets of blazing wood which sent shadows like the shapes of *jinn* and *elfrit* dancing along the walls. A fat man in the cart was speaking in a monotonous voice, about the martyrdom of Hoseyn. Mustapha explained that the fat man was the keeper of a rug stall in the Khan-el-Khali and also a "dam thief." This personal opinion so freely expressed brought Constance Masterson to earth and what had promised so much in the way of mysticism seemed likely to end in disillusion. But in a moment a new burst of color and of sound announced that her interest was yet to come. First a number of men bearing aloft flaming cressets followed by ten police troopers mounted on prancing white Arab horses, then a crowd of men in galabeahs, carrying meshals and flags of all colors inscribed with Arabic characters and insignia. The flames of the torches leapt high among the gorgeous banners which waved in the hands of their bearers as they marched onward, filling the eye with a riot of color in sharp contrast to the sedate lines of the faithful who followed, bearing lanterns and surrounding two riderless horses, the mounts of the two Imams, Hoseyn and Hassan, the sons of Ali, grandsons of the Prophet.

But it was the procession of half-naked men which fol-

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lowed that lent the final touch of the barbaric to the scene. Their heads, faces and chests were horribly gashed and they walked, some half bent with their weakness, others proudly erect and shouting hoarsely, "A-li! A-li! Hoseyn! Hoseyn!" while they beat their bloody breasts or flogged themselves or others with their cruel chains.

Constance sank back against Alan's arm with a short gasp of horror and then stared in a kind of fascination at the gruesome sight. It was too horrible to be even fantastic, yet too fantastic to be real. The martyrs passed, their garments growing darker and in their wake, upon a horse, there rode a child, with streaks of red upon its garments, who represented Hoseyn's son, Ali Akbar. Then more police and the procession ended.

Constance gasped in relief and clambered down from her step beside Alan and the dragoman. She covered her eyes with her fingers for a moment as though to obliterate the scene, but Alan stood calmly watching the passing mob, his gaze from time to time shifting to the doorway of the house opposite.

"You had better go back, Connie," said Jessup.

"N-no, I think not," she replied, "but it was most—er—appalling."

Mustapha smiled. "The Effendi must not be disturbed. The martyrs will not hurt themselves. And presently they will all have supper together in a restaurant in the Gamaliya."

Jessup had gotten down and helped Constance from her chair but as they went into the street and into the open spaces of the Souk-el-Kanto he glanced carelessly over his shoulder and then turned again to Mustapha.

"Those men are still following us, Mustapha," he said in a low tone.

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"They have a right to walk where they please, Effendi," said the man, with a shrug. "I can do nothing."

Jessup searched his face for a sign of complicity in this unusual proceeding, but he wore his Oriental placidity like a mask and merely smiled and bowed.

And so they went on toward the Khan-el-Khalily, Constance calling his attention to the colorful scene, and after a while, when Jessup looked around again, the two men who had followed had disappeared. In the Khan, which they reached presently, they seemed suddenly transported into the heart of the Orient. The few Europeans that they had seen in the Musky, intimidated or wearied, had returned to the Ismahliyah Quarter. They now walked into a page of the Arabian nights. And when Jessup, who had been in Cairo before, informed her that it was Cairo and not Bagdad which was the real scene of those surpassing tales, she awoke to a new enthusiasm which the procession of the Ashoora had somewhat abated. In the Khan they entered a fairyland of light, color and sound. Gay stripes of awning hung overhead, and the shops were draped with silks, cashmeres, embroideries of the greatest beauty and variety, which caught the glow from a hundred subdued and vari-colored lamps which lent an air of illusion. The shops were filled with the merchants and their friends in holiday attire, smoking shibûks or cigarettes and drinking sweet drinks flavored with almonds or roses. Here a teller of romances stood, relating some tale of ancient Arabia—perhaps that of the Royal Mendicants, or of Es-Sinibad of the Sea, while his hearers listened spellbound. Further on, a sound of drums and pipes, and a band of durweeshes passed, chanting benedictions to Hoseyn, to the cadence of their swaying bodies. Further on they stopped and performed a *Zikr*, a weird sort of dance and incantation, swaying, whirling, droning, crying, while those around

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them listened in silence or called out phrases from the Koran, while they swayed in unison.

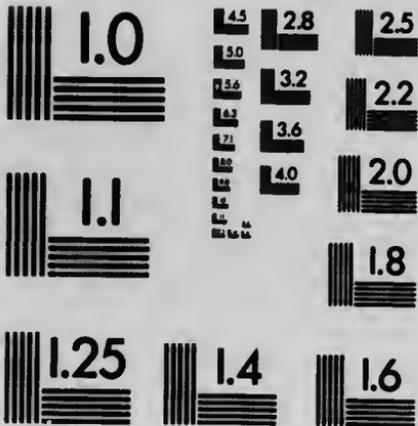
Not yet was she "east of Suez," but it seemed to Constance that here was the essence of the East, its mystery, its charm, its immutability, its imperviousness to the tooth of time. The years had passed over its head and left it unchanged from the day of Calif and Mameluke. It was getting into her blood. The part of her that was romantic, the part of her that the commonplaces of her station in life had stifled and suppressed, seemed suddenly to grow in perception and significance. She was becoming a part of all this mystery and illusive spell. It seemed suddenly to supply some new fuel for a spark that dwelt within her, some new motive to understand the world and listen understandingly to the heart-beats of those about her. She caught again at Alan's arm and looked up into his face. There was fire of some sort burning in him, too, for his brows were deeply knit and his eyes were dark as though with purpose. As he felt the touch of her arm he pressed it against him, but he did not look down at her. Here again she seemed to feel his abstraction. His touch assured her of his strength but his look was afar. If the adventure of their meeting in these strange surroundings had been the means of awakening her, the new and purposeful look she discovered on his face was born of an incentive in which she had little part.

Before them, crowds of people were massing in the direction of the mosque, and it was toward them that Jessup's look was turned. As they passed a corner they came to a booth where Karakush, the Egyptian Punch, was holding forth in strident tones. The sound of the shrill voice seemed to arouse her companion and they stopped a moment to listen, while Mustapha tried to explain in expurgated English the native sallies of wit. The people around them



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## THE BLACK STONE

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laughed, but as they had neared the mosque, they had seen the looks of some of the men in the crowd turned toward them in frowning inquiry, if not in actual disfavor. Mustapha explained that on this night at least the mosque was sacred to the faithful and that Christians were not welcome in its vicinity. But Jessup made no move to retrace his steps, standing near the booths, his gaze fixed upon the walls of the rather unpretentious edifice that contained the other elements of Conrad von Hengel's great conspiracy.

Even if Northby Pasha had confided further details as to the precious documents, the moment, of course, was not propitious for the investigation that Jessup had decided to make independently of the Governorat. But the sight of the edifice fascinated him and in a doorway on the fringe of the jostling crowds, now impatient and at times sinister as the hour of the ceremony approached, the two Americans stood, the protesting Mustapha at their elbow, a part of the excitement and turmoil and yet not of it.

"Alan," whispered his companion, "perhaps we had better be going back."

But he made no move.

"Wait," he muttered. "It's better here than to try to stem the current."

Dark faces passed them, durweeshes, sheykhs, Turks, women in their burkas, Bedawees, Arabs and Effendis in frock coats and tarbûshes. All seemed to be pressing toward the door of the Mosque of Hasaneyn. Jessup watched them curiously, envious of the rights he did not possess, for it seemed that even to enter this mosque to-night would be a step in the right direction.

Then suddenly the fingers of Constance on his arm tightened suddenly.

"Alan," she whispered in a tense voice. "Look! There! The Bedawee Sheykh!"

## *'AN ARABIAN NIGHT*

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Jessup's quick glance followed the direction she indicated. There, moving toward them, in the flicker of light and shadow, was the head-dress of a Fedawee and under it, the face stained a deep brown, were the high cheekbones and straight nose of Conrad von Hengel. A flash of light from a nearby lantern revealed him fully and at the same moment he caught sight of Jessup's gray flannels. One glance he gave and then, pushing violently while those around him swore in all tongues, he cut across the crowd away from the Americans, making for the corner of a nearby building, where a small street offered refuge.

Without losing sight of the eddy in the current where the head-dress of von Hengel bobbed, Jessup whispered quickly to Mustapha:

"Take her back to the hotel at once. Go, Connie."

His tone was peremptory and the note of it thrilled her. But she clung to his arm and followed him.

"Go, Connie," he ordered. "This is serious, a matter of life and death."

"That's why I'm coming, too," she gasped.

The crowd engulfed them, fought them, cursed them, while Mustapha, now shrieking warnings, struggled on behind, but Jessup's broad shoulders and hard elbows at last won across the street and they entered the dark alley down which at a distance they made out, over the heads of other people, the moving head-dress of the Sheykh.

"Go back, Connie," cried Jessup again. "I've got to make speed."

"We'll run then," she replied imperturbably, starting off at once at a rapid pace.

People turned to watch the mad foreigners in amazement, while Mustapha, still protesting, ran along behind them. The long robes of the man they were pursuing impeded his progress, for he did not go at top speed, and had Jessup

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been alone he might have been able to catch up with him. They saw him slip down another alley and followed out into the Sharia-el-Khan Gafar, in another crowd, a thinner one, across it, into another small street where they seemed to lose him. Jessup, meanwhile, intent upon his purpose of keeping Constance safe while holding his quarry in sight, had not dared to look behind him, but now in this quieter street he heard the sound of running footsteps and a quick glance showed him three other men coming on behind Mustapha. But it didn't matter who they were now, for he had another glimpse of the white head-dress of von Hengel, and saw him run up some steps which seemed to be at the rear of the mosque. And so, confiding his companion to the dragoman, he put on a burst of speed and reached the steps, catching a glimpse of a dimly lighted interior as the wooden door swung heavily shut just as he put his shoulder against it. He tried the latch, but a commotion of falling bolts warned him that he had failed.

Just then Constance Masterson, who had run faster than Mustapha, came running up, out of breath, and joined him.

"Alan," she whispered in alarm, "come away. It is dangerous. You will be killed."

"Von Hengel went in here. I saw him," he gasped. "He carried it, the Black Stone."

"Are you sure?"

"Positive. If he can get in I will." And with that he began hammering furiously upon the door with his stick. But he had scarcely struck it a blow, when Constance felt herself brushed aside as several men leapt past her, throwing themselves on Jessup's upraised arm, and wrenched the stick from his hands, dragging him down by sheer weight to the street below. The onslaught had surprised him, for his whole mind was bent on following von Hengel, but as

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the attack fell upon him, he struggled furiously. It was the only time that he could think of in which effort had really meant anything, and the next few moments were the busiest he had ever experienced. But the daily ministrations of Stoney Flynn were to bear their fruit. Jessup struck out at first wildly, until he had shaken them off, and then with rare precision as they came at him, a Cairene first on the point of the chin, a big fellow in a burnûs next in the pit of the stomach. There were no outcries. Even in the thick of the struggle Jessup seemed to be aware of this. His adversaries fought silently, and the only sounds were the impact of blows, the labored breathing of the men and the whispered commands in the native tongue of a slender fellow in turban and galabeah who seemed to have charge of the affair. And the silence seemed to give the struggle a greater significance.

Before Jessup could get his back to the wall, his own dragoman, Mustapha, who now seemed to be acting under the commands of the slender man, caught him from the rear, one arm around his throat, and by sheer weight bore him backward. Jessup struggled desperately to throw the dragoman off, but the innocent Mustapha seemed suddenly to have developed a grip of iron. And at last the three men came at him again from the front and he fell under their combined weight. He fought one arm free, but its wrist was caught by the slender fellow in the galabeah and a black automatic of large size appeared before his eyes.

"Don't be a fool, Mr. Jessup," said a cool voice in English. "Lie still and keep quiet."

And Jessup, more in surprise at hearing English spoken in so strange a situation than in actual fear of the weapon, obeyed.

"Keep perfect silence. You're in great danger," the Eng-

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lish voice whispered again. "Will you obey if I let you get up?"

"That depends," gasped Jessup, whose blood was up. "Who are you?"

"It doesn't matter who I am," whispered the other, signaling the others to get up, while he put his own weight more firmly on Jessup's chest. "You've violated the sanctuary of Hoseyn. The people inside would kill you if they knew. What did you want at the door of the Nazir?"

Jessup peered upward at the dark visage.

"A chap went in there. I wanted to see him."

"What chap? Who? Answer me. Quickly."

"Let me up, then."

"Will you promise to be quiet?"

"Yes, if you're not trying to rob me."

"No danger. I'm acting under instructions from Northby Pasha."

"You!" Jessup straightened and crawled to his feet.

"And these others?"

"They too. And now will you explain? Otherwise we will have to go on to the Governorat."

"Northby!" Jessup grinned sheepishly. "Why didn't you say so at first?"

"Why were you trying to get into the Mosque of Hasaneyn?"

Jessup peered at the man with the English voice. How much did he know, how little?

"Northby Pasha would approve of what I have done," said Jessup coolly.

"Hardly, unless——"

The man paused.

"Was it?"

"Von——" Jessup paused in uncertainty.

But the other finished the name for him.

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"Von Hengel!"

"Yes."

"Good God! Are you sure?"

"Yes. Miss Masterson, my companion, and I both recognized him."

Constance, who had helplessly watched the struggle from the shadow by the steps and had seen its pacific outcome, had now come forward. The man in the turban looked from one to the other and then at his companions, who now stood beside him in this strange conference.

"But how? The door——"

"It opened. He ran in. I caught a glimpse inside. There was a man there in a robe."

"It will be death for him, then, to-night."

Jessup smiled. "I think not. You don't know the beggar. It's part of his game. He's disguised. And speaks Arabic as well as you do. Besides that, he carried the thing I am looking for."

"The Stone!"

"Yes, I'm sure of it. Under his mantle. It's the thing Northby Pasha wants, my friend. If you're from the Governorat, you'd better help me to get it."

There was a pause of uncertainty as the man in the galabeah looked up and down the dark alley. At its end in the light of the street lamps could be seen the moving crowd, but no one had followed them, and at their side only a blank wall stared.

The man, as though coming to a sudden resolution, caught Jessup by the arm.

"I'm Daoud, of the Intelligence Department," he said.

"We'll have to move quickly, you and I. Come."

"And Miss Masterson?"

"She will please follow," said Daoud.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE MOSQUE OF HASANEYN

**H**E led the way at once, talking rapidly in the native tongue with the smaller of the two men who had accompanied him, who, after a moment, suddenly vanished into a small street and was swallowed in the night. What the immediate future held in store for them was problematical. For to Jessup the idea of bringing Constance Masterson into an affair of such uncertain quality was most unpleasant to contemplate. And he lost no time in telling her to return at once to Shephard's, whither she could be sent with Mustapha, who as a secret agent of Northby Pasha, could surely be relied upon. He was on the point of demanding this of the man called Daoud, when Constance intervened.

"I won't go, Alan," she said coolly. "And that's the end of it. I came of my own free will. I wouldn't have missed this night for a fortune."

"But there may be danger," he protested.

"Then it's my danger, too. Conrad von Hengel is my responsibility as well as yours. I introduced you. I brought you here. I saw him. I can identify him. I won't go back until you do."

Jessup frowned at her but said nothing more, hoping that some opportunity would be presented which would provide safety for his companion. She made the situation awkward, for to return to the hotel with her now meant the loss of an opportunity to atone for his mistake and prac-

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tically abandon every effort to reach von Hengel and the Black Stone which was here, now, somewhere within the walls of the Hasaneyn.

Urging haste, Daoud walked rapidly down the dark alley; Alan and Constance following, the stout man and Mustapha bringing up the rear. In this way they moved silently, the officer turning down another alley to the left into an open court, and then entering a passage-way, dark and evilly smelling, at the end of which he stopped before a door where he clapped his hands three times. They waited expectantly, and at last there was a commotion within and the door was opened just wide enough to show a turbaned head. As Daoud spoke a few words in a low tone of voice, the door was opened wide and they were all admitted into a guest-room or mandara of a size which showed a dwelling of a more pretentious character than that indicated by the passage through which they had come. There was no furniture, but the floor was covered with colorful rugs and deewans around three sides, furnished with cushions, showed an abode of some consequence. A lamp or two hanging from the dark red woodwork of the boarded ceiling shed a mellow but uncertain light around the apartment and revealed the personality of their host, a man of middle age, who answered the salutations of Daoud and Mustapha and looked from Alan to Constance while he listened to the abrupt, quickly spoken sentences of their conductor. As he heard, his brows tangled and then lifted in amazement, and at last he folded his arms upon his breast and remained a moment in an attitude of thought. Daoud spoke again peremptorily and that seemed to decide the matter. For with a wide gesture toward the deewan he moved across the room rapidly and vanished through a hanging.

Daoud, who appeared very much at his ease, took out a

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cigarette and lighted it at a brazier, meanwhile indicating again the deewan to Constance, who after a moment of hesitation sat and examined the secret service officer. He was alert and erect, and while his perfect command of English had given them a conception of his character, his appearance confirmed it. He was dark-skinned, with high cheek-bones and rather a broad nose. But his brows were fine and the eyes that burned below them were wide apart and alive with intelligence. He looked at Jessup and then, as though in answer to the questions in his eyes, spoke quickly.

"We can waste no time. We must enter the mosque."

"Ye., but how——?"

"I'm arranging that. This man, Ali Afdal, was once mueddin of the mosque. He is under some deep obligations to Northby Pasha. To-night he is about to repay them."

"He will help us?"

"Yes. A disguise for you, some stain upon the face and we may enter the mosque before the ceremonies are over. You shall identify this man and together——"

"And I, Effendi," Constance broke in quickly. "You cannot leave me here. Moslem women are permitted to enter the Hasaneyn on yo'm Ashoora. I have seen it in——"

"But there may be danger. We do not know."

"And if I am not afraid, what does it matter?"

"Don't be unreasonable, Connie," said Jessup. "We will return for you."

"I'm going, Alan, and that's flat."

She evidently meant what she said, and Daoud Effendi examined her with interest and appreciation. She was extremely handsome.

"It shall be as you desire, Madame," he said with a smile

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and a bow which savored more of court than mosque. "It shall be managed."

And with that he clapped his hands again three times, Ali appearing almost immediately, to whom Daoud gave his instructions.

"You will go to the harem," he said to Constance, "and they will dress you."

Constance looked at the dubious Jessup, smiling triumphantly, and followed their host toward the door.

"Make haste, Madame," said Daoud. "We must leave in ten minutes."

But when she had gone Jessup sank upon the deewan and lighted a cigarette. "I don't like this, Effendi," he said.

Daoud shrugged his shoulders and showed his white teeth in a smile. "What would you have, Mr. Jessup? Is it not true that in America your women always do just as they please?"

"But we are not in America," growled Jessup.

The return of Ali, with a bundle of garments, put an end to protests, and Jessup got into the burnûs and head-dress of a Bedawee Sheykh, while Ali, under Daoud's direction, stained his face and hands. He felt a good deal of a fool, like a *débutante* being made up for private theatricals, and in the heat of the room was already perspiring copiously. But when Daoud Effendi handed him an automatic and bade him put it into a pocket beneath his robes, he had a sense of the reality of the venture that lay before him. From somewhere in a distant part of the house came the sounds of feminine laughter and after a short time, while the three men sat smoking cigarettes and waiting impatiently, there was a clapping of hands in the distance and Ali went out, returning with a veiled female figure which made Jessup a low courtesy.

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"Peace be on you," it said.

Daoud Effendi smiled approvingly.

"On you be peace, and the mercy of God and his blessings," he replied.

Constance wore a modish skirt and her own high-heeled shoes, but over her head a long piece of drapery called the tarhhah, hanging nearly to the ground, and over the lower part of her face, the burka, fastened by a riband around the forehead, leaving only the eyes, their lids deeply painted with kohhl, showing above the veil.

But there was no time to exchange comment, and Ali Afdal, in a moment, led them out into the dark passage by which they had entered, and moving rapidly they made their way in the direction of the mosque. By the air of assurance with which Daoud Effendi had given his orders and now conducted him, Alan Jessup was reasonably certain that his affair was in capable hands, and as they neared the shadow of the edifice, Daoud told him that with the aid of Ali they would be enabled to enter by the private door of the Nazir and then move among the crowds within the portico and sanctuary until they found their man, having access not only to the Ckoobbeh or tomb of Hoseyn's head, but to other portions of the mosque as well. Daoud cautioned the Americans to speak no word of English and instructed them in the form of salutations, if addressed. Word had already been sent to Northby Pasha and if none of his plans miscarried and Captain von Hengel were still within the mosque, there was an excellent chance of capturing both him and the Black Stone when the ceremonies were over and before any damage could be done.

Before they reached the door of the Nazir, Daoud halted the party and Ali Afdal went forward up the few steps, where he stood a moment, fiddling with the dubbeh, and at last the door swung open and admitted him. Jessup was

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now tremendously interested and more than a little excited, for by this door scarcely more than half an hour before the spurious Sheykh had entered, and he had resolved if they again came face to face, von Hengel would pay his obligation to Jessup with interest. And the stake for which the German was gaming made it seem pretty certain that there would be a ruction of sorts. Jessup was for rushing in at once, but Daoud restrained him until the ex-~~posed~~ ~~man~~ ~~Adin~~ appeared and beckoned, announcing that the coast ~~was~~ clear.

They entered a dark vestibule lighted by hanging metal lamps, of elaborate workmanship, in which dim fires burned. The place was unfurnished save for a few mats upon the floor, and after Ali had made fast the door Daoud cautioned the Americans to remove their shoes and leave them, and then moved forward through a narrow archway down a passage toward a brighter light beyond.

They were aware now of a deep murmur of voices, of an oppressive heat and the mingled odors of strange perfumes and the heaviness which came from a hall, closely packed with perspiring bodies of people. Daoud turned down a passageway to the left, whispering to Jessup meanwhile to keep his eyes open, and presently they emerged into the portico and upon the margin of the crowd.

Constance was right. Wherever she had learned it, the Hasaneyn on the y'om Ashoorah was crowded with women. Most sacred of all mosques in Cairo, on this day of the Moliammedan year, is invaded by all conditions of the Faithful. It is even said that no man goes to the Mosque of Hasaneyn on the day of the y'om Ashoorah but for the sake of the women. But whether this dispensation or some other was responsible for the throng, they were packed in the great hall like sardines and the probability of finding the man they were seeking seemed small indeed.

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"Like looking for a needle in a haystack," muttered Jessup.

"Patience," said Daoud.

When they reached a certain place the secret service man gave instructions to Constance to remain with Mustapha near a pillar in the leewan, while he and Jessup moved here and there amongst the people, looking for the head-dress that Jessup had described. It was with mingled feelings that Constance saw them depart, but a look of command from Daoud and one of warning from Alan, and she obeyed. For a moment her thoughts followed them as her eyes sought among the throng the face of von Hengel, but in a moment she found herself watching with absorbed interest the proceedings in the center of the great hall, toward which all eyes seemed to be focused.

A number of Durweeshes had suddenly risen as though through the stone flagging and were driving the crowd back with sticks until Constance was pressed almost to suffocation, but she struggled valiantly and managed to keep her place by the column as well as to see what was to happen.

Some of the men wore the ordinary turban and dress of Egypt, others the Turkish padded bonnet, still others the high cap shaped like a sugar loaf. A circle formed, they began to perform their *Zikr*, exclaiming over and over again, "Allah! Allah!" and at each exclamation bowing the head and body and taking a step to the right, the whole ring moving around, slowly at first, then more rapidly while the cries of "Allah!" redoubled in rapidity and vehemence. One man, springing, as the others seemed to have done, from the earth, appeared suddenly in the center of the moving circle and began to whirl, more and more rapidly, his arms extended, his feet flying, until his dress stood straight out from his body like an open umbrella. The Durweeshes in the outer circle were now springing

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to the right instead of stepping, and another circle within the outer one was formed, a smaller one, each man placing his hands on the shoulders of those next to him, the bowing and leaping and the cries of "Allah!" being now rapid and furious.

Through her burka Constance breathed with difficulty. The air was like that in a vapor bath, but none of those nearest her, women or men, seemed to be aware of the stifling heat or pressure. There was a suppressed air of excitement and expectation and underneath the mad commotion of the *Zikr* was the drone of a thousand voices, hushed but poignant with fervor or passion. Constance gasped for breath, but she felt no weakness. Instead, she seemed born with a new strength to see and understand all that was passing about her. It was the same thing that she had experienced there, before, in the street with Alan, the sense of feeling the heartbeats of those next her (literally indeed) of drinking to the dregs on this night at least the cup of human life and experience. She had become a primitive, sharing with the crowd the mad fervor of the dancing men, the belief in the *jinn* of the *ashr*, and the gold of the Enchanted Trough. She was of all time. It seemed that she had witnessed all this before in some previous incarnation.

The East was flowing through her veins, making her a part of itself, a mere instinct with the primitive passions of love, hate, fear predominant, obliterating the cool and orderly processes of reasoning.

A diversion now occurred. Some of the Durweeshes ceased dancing and sat, each of them playing on a large *tar* or kind of tambourine without the pieces of tinkling metal, others on kettle-drums, and these sounds, beginning slowly in a cadence, increasing rapidly, were something like what she imagined the beating of tom-toms must be. The noises in the throats of the Durweeshes were savage, too,

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and in a moment there was another kind of dance from some newcomers, more wildly abandoned than the other dance, which by contrast seemed almost stately. Each durweesh seemed to be performing the antics of a madman, moving his body up and down, gesticulating wildly, jumping, screaming, each trying to excel the other in a kind of fantastic orgy of buffoonery. Constance could have laughed, but she dared not, for the passion that underlay this exhibition showed that it was no laughing matter with them. And presently she had a proof of their fervor. One of the men, a dark, spare individual of middle age, who had excelled the others in the extravagance of his performance, rushed toward the center of the ring formed by his brothers beating *tars*, where there had been placed a sort of chafing-dish of copper filled with red-hot charcoal. The Durweesh leaned forward quickly and in his fingers seized a piece of live charcoal, which he put into his mouth. Then he took another—and another, until his mouth was full. Constance shuddered in horror, but saw him chew these coals, opening his mouth wider every moment. Each time he inhaled the coals appeared almost at white heat, the inside of his mouth glowing like a furnace, and when he exhaled sparks flew in a fountain of fire. In consternation she saw him actually chew and swallow the coal and then resume his dancing. Another Durweesh ate glass, then suddenly, as though in a frenzy, sprang up to a long rafter of wood which extended across an arch above the columns of the leewan and ran along it. When in the middle, above the heads of the crowd, he halted suddenly, bared an arm and, wetting a finger in his mouth, struck his bare arm with it, causing blood to flow. Constance saw this with her own eyes, for he was less than twenty feet away. And then she saw him with another stroke of the same finger

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stanch the flowing blood. It was all eerie, unnatural, diabolic.

The Durweesh dropped down, the *tars* stopped beating, but the mad cries echoed in her ears long after they had ceased and were merged at last into the thinner music of two faqrs, who were dancing near her to the jangling of a tambourine—*megazeeb*, or idiots, Mustapha whispered.

Constance leaned against the column bewildered. What did it mean? Was it all over? The crowd was beginning to stream out toward the portals and now pressed her back against the pillar where Mustapha beside her with his great bulk tried to stem the tide. She experienced a sense of disappointment that the end of the performance should come so soon, also a relaxation of nerves and muscles like that one has at the end of an exciting play, when one returns to the lights of Broadway and the commonplaces of daily life. And yet here about her the East still flowed, the dark-skinned mystics who had danced, their lips unstained from their terrible ordeal, old men with the fervor of fanaticism glowing in their eyes, Turks, Persians, whose dark glances flashed at Constance as though to pierce the secrets of her burka and mantle. There were women of all conditions, the wives of dignitaries and fellaheen, making the most of this night of excitement and liberation, their dark eyes, darker even than nature through their kohl-painted lids, flashing with fire as they peered to left and right, as though still under the spell of some mastering passion.

As the moments passed and the crowd became less dense, Constance grew nervous. What could have happened? Where were Alan and the Effendi? And where von Hengel? And then, suddenly, as though in answer to her question, she saw him in the lewan, behind the row of pillars by which she stood, and near the outer wall of the mosque,

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talking earnestly to an old man with a gray beard, and moving slowly toward the door by which Ali had led them.

She caught Mustapha by the arm.

"Sh—" she whispered. "I have seen him. Yonder! Remain here until they come. I will return."

And scarcely realizing the dangers to which she might be subjected, and moving entirely on impulse, she left the uncertain Mustapha, who began in a protest, and then, realizing that any discussion would make them conspicuous, finished by assenting. To Constance, it made no matter whether he assented or not, for whatever happened, having caught sight of Conrad von Hengel, she did not intend to lose him. So, walking with the utmost deliberation, she followed to the door behind the pillars where she paused a moment, half concealed, to peer into the corridor beyond where the receding shapes of von Hengel and his companion were dimly outlined against the darkness. Then she followed. What she was to do in case she was questioned she had not planned, for beyond the salutation in which she had been rehearsed she knew no word of Arabic, and while her disguise, she knew, was complete, a difficult situation might arise from which only silence and flight might extricate her. In the meanwhile, she meant to learn all she could without being observed, and moved silently along the dark corridor toward the dimly-lighted vestibule into which Ali had first ushered them, her stockinged feet making no sound on the smooth flagging and the darkness here effectually concealing her. Before she reached the arch at the further end of the passage she paused, for she heard the sound of the voices of the two men, now deep in conversation and apparently oblivious of all else but the topic discussed. Constance stole forward again and saw them. She could not of course understand what they said, but the man with the gray beard halted a moment as though

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coming to a decision and then led the way to a hanging upon the further side of the vestibule, revealing a small door, which he unbolted, and then with a bow invited the spurious Bedawee to enter.

Constance paused, her heart now beating furiously in indecision, and wondering whether to try to follow through the hanging or to retreat to the pillar and the faithful Mustapha, and there await the coming of Alan and the Effendi. But something impelled her forward, and she emerged into the vestibule of the door of the Nazir, and after a quick look about, which showed her that the room was empty, she crossed on tip-toe to the hanging and furtively drew it aside. The door was not entirely closed, the old man with the gray beard evidently believing the hanging to be sufficient concealment. Her fingers trembling as she touched it, Constance pushed the door open a few inches wider, until she could get her head through it, at the same time dropping the hanging into place behind her. With this act, it seemed that she was committed irrevocably to the task she had set herself. With greater assurance now she pushed the door until it was opened wide enough to admit her body, and eagerly peered into the darkness. Another passageway, shorter and narrower than the other and at its end an opening with a hanging revealing another apartment, with a glimpse of a deewan and lights. She waited and listened to the sound of the voices which was now renewed, it seemed, in greater freedom of utterance. Then she moved forward a few paces, and reached a spot where, hidden by the hanging, she could peer through the slit at the edge of the archway at the two figures now squatting upon mats by a small table upon which was a lamp and papers. She saw von Hengel take from beneath his robes a piece of parchment which he handed to the other to read, and the

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old man took it with a sober mien, and began reading it. Von Hengel sat silent, watching him.

She did not dare to breathe. It seemed as though the very beating of her heart must penetrate the silence of this solemn conclave. Behind her somewhere was the murmur of the crowd, of tambourines and cymbals playing, but distant, like the drone of insects' wings, and by their detachment only serving to make the silence of the room of mystery more profound. Once the parchment in the hands of the old man crackled harshly and the sound of it startled her. But he read on steadily until the end, when he said a few words below his breath, and then, half rising, suddenly faced the wall behind him and assumed an attitude of prayer, kneeling, and then bowed his body three times, until his forehead touched the mat, at each prostration muttering a phrase containing the name of Allah. Von Hengel devoutly followed his example and then they straightened in silence and remained motionless for a moment, von Hengel waiting as though upon a final decision.

At last the old man signaled the other to rise and, setting the example, walked quickly across the room toward the archway where Constance was hiding. Were they coming back through the passage-way? She did not dare to wait, and fled hurriedly by the way she had come to the further door, slipping through, but remaining a moment concealed from the vestibule by the outer curtain. A moment of uncertainty. Behind her von Hengel and the old man were standing near the door as though finishing their conversation, preparatory to following her. And outside the hanging in the vestibule she distinctly heard quite near her the sounds of other voices. Her courage faltered. It was clear that the part of the mosque which she had entered was sacred ground, at least sacred from the step of a woman, who under the law of Islam has no rights, the

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She did not dare to breathe. It seemed as though the very beating of her heart must penetrate the silence of the solemn conclave.



## THE MOSQUE OF HASANEYN

more sacred from the profane steps of a Christian masquerader. What would happen to her if she were discovered? What unknown and secret punishment would be too horrible for one who could be so far guilty of violation of the Moslem law?

And as she listened, now terrified at her temerity, the voices in the vestibule came to her more clearly, a phrase in English, half whispered in a voice that she knew, and with a gasp of joy she drew aside the hanging and faced the inquiet Alan, who was just upon the point of seeking the tomb of Hoseyn at the point of an automatic. He did not know her until she whispered his name, but she was aware of the looks of horror in the faces of Ali and Mustapha at seeing her emerge from behind the hanging.

"You saw him?" whispered Daoud Effendi.

She nodded. "In there with an old man with a white beard."

"The Nazir."

"They talked. The old man read a parchment and then they prayed."

"And then?"

"They got up suddenly and came toward me. I was frightened and fled."

Ali came forward solemnly and pointed an accusing finger at Constance.

"Effendi, she has violated the law. I did not know, or I should not have permitted——"

"T—sh, Ali Afdal. It is justifiable. It is he yonder who with lies seeks to violate the law, to mislead——"

"But no debt to Northby Pasha is worth the value of my soul, my weleeds and my hooreeyehs in Paradise," he wailed.

"Be quiet, thou," Daoud commanded. "Go, thou, with us."

## THE BLACK STONE

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"No, master."

"Then begone!"

"And you, Mustapha," he said, turning to the dragoman.

"Ameen. I, too, master," he gasped, "the Sanctuary! The tomb of Hoseyn! I, too, will be gone to wait yonder, outside. But as Allah is my witness, I have served Northby Pasha faithfully."

"Go, then," commanded Daoud, "both of you. But as you value your lives, keep silence." He followed them with his glance to the door and saw them silently depart. "Dogs," he muttered, "let them go. We can better attend to this business alone."

And then to Constance, "What made you think the men inside were about to follow you?"

"They merely moved across the room. I was afraid they would see me. But they cannot have gone far. It was but a few moments ago."

But Alan had turned to the hanging and was lifting its edge. "Come, Effendi, we've waited long enough."

Daoud nodded. "But Madame had best remain."

"No, no," whispered Constance. "I can't. I am frightened here. I will follow."

Daoud showed his white teeth in a smile and shrugged with a fatalistic air.

"As it pleases you," he added, "but I would advise you to keep to the rear."

He followed Alan through the hanging and into the dark hallway beyond. Their shoeless feet made no sounds upon the flagging and they reached the archway at the further end where the American paused and peered through the curtain. Silence within the apartment. One of Jessup's hands moved under his burnûs while the other quickly thrust aside the hanging as he put his head and shoulders

## THE MOSQUE OF HASANEYN

through the opening and then after a pause softly entered, the Effendi just behind him.

The room was empty save for the deewan, the lamp, the two mats and the table. Daoud noiselessly moved around the room, his quick glances searching its darkest corners.

"The room of the Nazir," he muttered. "They have gone on to the Ckoobeh, which is beyond. There must be another entrance here somewhere."

But Jessup had already found it behind another hanging in the opposite corner and was standing, with warning hand outstretched, listening. The Effendi came forward quickly and they silently lifted the curtain while Constance, more alarmed than ever for Alan's safety as well as for her own, followed them into the darkness beyond.

There was a pallid glow at the end of this corridor which, as they neared it, showed a lofty room or rotunda. The Effendi, his fingers on Jessup's arm, went slowly forward until they came to the end of the shadow of the arch, where they halted and listened. Constance could see beyond them an oblong shape covered with an embroidery of silk, and surrounded by a kind of circular screen, meant to keep this holy of holies sacred from the touch of heedless fingers. And in the dim light from a lantern above which cast a cool greenish radiance over the monument and the white walls of the tomb, she had to admit that the sepulchre was impressive. But suddenly Daoud raised his hand in token of warning and they heard voices speaking, voices which echoed with hollow resonance against the vaulted roof high overhead. The tones of one voice were solemnly intoned, as though in the performance of a rite, and the voice which answered the first was Conrad von Hengel's. There were other voices, but mere murmurs of two other men, perhaps three. The Effendi was listening intently but of course Alan and Constance understood noth-

## THE BLACK STONE

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ing of what was said. They watched the eager face of their companion, sure that what was happening upon the other side of the screen was the very thing they had come to prevent. The Nazir knew the secret of the Mosque of Hasaneyn, the real history of the Kaba-Stone; and the documents which had been brought to him were confirmation of it. Nothing else could account for the air of excitement in the Effendi.

Alan ventured a whisper, "Is it——?"

But Daoud silenced him with a quick gesture, nodding at the same time.

More solemn intoning, "*Allá hoo Akbar*," "God is most great," "There is no God but God," in which all of the voices joined. And then Conrad von Hengel's deep tones speaking calmly while the others listened, breaking in from time to time in deep emotion, with fragments of rekahs and prayers. At last von Hengel paused again as though to give importance to his utterance and solemnly spoke a phrase.

Alan, who had been reading the Effendi's face eagerly, saw him move slightly forward. He gestured to Constance to go back down the corridor and crept quickly forward behind Daoud along the screen. The moment was tense with possibilities. But if Alan had thought the Effendi had planned to take control of the situation after the manner of a New York policeman, he was to be disappointed, for Daoud chose the much more subtle and Oriental way. He rose to his full height, Alan following his example, and then recited the *Fathhah* or opening verse of the Koran, and followed it in an air of rapt devotion with the prayer to Hoseyn and Aboo Só ood, the King of Saints.

The men kneeling upon the floor paused in their devotions to look up at him, the faces of the two bearded Imams placid and unchangeable, that of the Nazir frowningly cu-

## THE MOSQUE OF HASANEYN

rious, while von Hengel turned, showing a brief flash of fury at the interruption. And the cause of his discomfiture was not far to seek, for upon the flagging between the four men, on a white mat, was a darkish piece of rock about the size of a man's two fists.

Alan was already fingering the automatic beneath his robes, but the Effendi spoke on calmly in Arabic, addressing all of his remarks to the man with the gray beard, who nodded once or twice, and then prostrated himself again. In the meanwhile Alan felt von Hengel's frowning gaze searching his features keenly, saw him bend forward and quickly seize the Black Stone and put it under his gown, rising quickly and retreating toward the other side of the screen, as Alan sprang past the Effendi and over the very head of the surprised Nazir.

"Drop it, Conrad," he cried in English, "the jig is up," and leveled his weapon at his quondam guest.

"Jessup!"

The cry was wrenched from the German's throat in sheer amazement. But he managed to control his features and in reply bowed his head solemnly. But Daoud, who had rushed around the screen from the opposite direction, ran toward him.

Von Hengel's burnûs seemed suddenly to stream fire and the solemn arches of the vault resounded with a deafening detonation. Alan brought his automatic up in line with von Hengel's breast, when something heavy struck him, felling him to the flagging. He struggled upward a moment to look into the fanatical eyes of one of the Imams and then sank to the floor, unconscious.

## CHAPTER VIII

### NORTHBY PASHA TAKES A HAND

**N**ORTHBY PASHA was thorough. All the intricacies of this interesting problem had been tried out by means of familiar equations and between the hour of the first report from Alexandria until the departure of Mr. Jessup from the Governorat he had formulated a plan more or less definite to entrap Captain Conrad von Hengel. This consisted in part in watching the railroad stations, the main roads and the placing of a large part of the force of his available men into the native quarter of the town. The documents in the Mosque of Hasaneyn were of course to play a part in von Hengel's plan to have the Black Stone acknowledged here in Cairo as the original Kaba Stone of Mecca. With this accomplished and a number of followers obtained among the wardens of the mosques of the city anything, even a new Nationalist revolt in Egypt, might be accomplished. But Northby Pasha had not counted upon the extraordinary rapidity of von Hengel's movements. He had not thought that the German could have gotten into the city before he had laid his snares to catch him. And even given that hypothesis, the Hasaneyn was the most carefully guarded mosque in Cairo, its warden most jealous of its traditions and sacred character. Unless in some manner von Hengel could have already gotten into communication with Abd Er-Rahhman, it would be some days before the German officer could reach the Nazir and by that time all the rami-

## NORTHBY PASHA TAKES A HAND

fications of the Intelligence Bureau would be upon the watch to nip the plot in the bud and to catch red-handed the arch conspirator and take his precious emblem.

Northby Pasha had already been prepared for Alan Jessup. The American was a colorless person with more money than brains, and in this crisis, somewhat alarmed at the damage his careless hospitality may have done, had run for cover and immunity. But the interview with Jessup had somewhat changed the officer's point of view. When he had first come into the Governorat, he seemed quite supine and more than half asleep. But as the interview had proceeded, Mr. Jessup had seemed to show a livelier interest in the revelations of the Intelligence Officer. And his show of contrition and his desire to atone for a dangerous situation largely of his making, if not entirely genuine, were admirably dissembled. It was with an object that he had taken Alan Jessup so completely into his confidence. If the man were sincere, his presence in Cairo was essential to the capture of von Hengel, for no other person, except an American girl Jessup mentioned, could identify the man. And if, as Northby Pasha more than half suspected, Mr. Jessup were less stupid than he appeared, he could be made useful. But if, under Mr. Jessup's leisurely guise, there were some motive which had not yet appeared, the full confidences of their interview would soon make the Police Officer aware of it. At any rate, he was a stranger in Cairo and until tried out in Northby Pasha's alembic, was an object of suspicion, and so, following his usual custom in leaving nothing to chance, he had detailed several of his best men to follow Mr. Jessup to Shepherd's hotel with instructions to keep him in sight until the hour of an appointed interview upon the morrow.

Thus it was that the arrival of Daoud's assistant, Osman

## THE BLACK STONE

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Khali, late that night, out of breath from running, caused some commotion at the Governorat, and resulted in an audience with Northby Pasha, who in amazement and some inward compunctions as to his own belated part in the affair, listened to what the messenger had to say as to Mr. Jessup's extraordinary attack upon the door of the Nazir and the explanation of it.

Now fully aware of the importance of the message, Northby Pasha questioned quickly, telephoning while he questioned, to the end that by the time Osman Khali had fully finished his recital, orders had been given to summon all his available men to go at once to the Mosque of Hasaneyn. And while he waited a few moments for the mobilization of his forces, he paced the floor impatiently, aware that the adjectives he had this very afternoon been applying to the easy-going American could now with more justice be applied to himself. The American had not wasted any moments. It almost seemed as though Kismet had played into his hands.

But there was no time to be wasted in speculation. Von Hengel was there in the Hasaneyn. There too was the Black Stone of Mecca waiting only to be seized and brought to the strong-box of the Governorat. But the more he thought of the situation the more difficult it seemed to grow. For though the power of his office through the Sirdar was great in all temporal matters, great too was the power of Islam in all matters that pertained to its religion. The Mosque of Hasaneyn was sacred from the intrusion of those not of the Moslem faith. Daoud and Jessup had entered in disguise, hoping to achieve by diplomacy and stealth what would have been impossible otherwise. What had they accomplished? It was a dangerous venture for the American, who had rushed in where others more versed in the customs of the East would not have dared. And

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the fact that one of his best men, Daoud, had counseled this course, showed the desperateness of the expedient. After all it was no more desperate a venture than von Hengel had taken. There was only one thing left for Northby to do, surround the Hasaneyn, block all exits and then send a number of his men of the Moslem faith in to bring out the Nazir. And only if this course brought no results would he proceed to extreme measures. What these were to be, he had no present notion, but he meant to get the Kaba Stone and Daoud and Jessup safely out, if he had to call in British troops to do it.

Of all these things he thought as he rode past the great Mosque of El-Azhar, the temple and shrine of the learning of Islam, at the head of a detachment of mounted police, very smart looking in their blue uniforms and turbans, Moslems all, yet devoted to this man of white skin and Christian faith who had helped them to make Egypt what she was. He passed many people going away from the mosque and knew that the ceremonies were over. But Northby Pasha felt certain that the business which von Hengel had in hand would be transacted when the Nazir and the two Imams had finished their prayers and readings in the sanctuary. Never had he so desired to enter the sacred mosque. His men were privileged, of course, but there was not one of them who could be trusted with this mission. Years of dealing with Eastern problems made him realize that none of them would tolerate a violation of the sanctuary of Hasaneyn by a Christian on the night of the Ashoora. So he laid his plans quickly and silently, disposing his men at all the entrances to the building, telling them that a Christian bent on mischief to the cause of the Faithful had entered the building, and giving them instructions to arrest any one who attempted to pass the lines. Then, with a few chosen men known for their

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heterodoxy, he went afoot up the dark street which led to the door of the Nazir.

Here the first ray of light was shed upon the venture of Daoud and Jessup, for Ali met him with loud exclamations, plucking at his beard in the scriptural manner and telling him what had happened in the mosque, before he and Mustapha had chosen to depart.

"Excellency," he wailed, "I did what I could. A Bedawee's clothing and a woman's. But I could not stay. The woman entered the sanctuary in the garments of my daughter. May Allah forgive me and the garments, for it was not they that sinned."

"Peace, Ali," commanded Northby. "You have done well." And then, sternly, "No one has emerged by this door?"

"No one, Excellency," he protested. "I have not moved. At least no one but the bow-wab and his wife, who went this way when the crowd had disappeared."

"And Daoud Effendi?"

"He has not come out here—nor the others."

"You are sure?"

"Yes, Excellency."

"And Mustapha?"

"He is at the main door on the Mashhad."

"Dog! If you have lied to me you shall go to the Kadi to-morrow."

"Master, as Allah is merciful and compassionate, by the Prophet, I swear!"

Northby Pasha was thoughtfully regarding the closed door of the Nazir, his brow frowning. He did not like the look of things. Daoud should have come out before this. What was happening? What had happened inside? This was not a matter to be left to others. It was either to send Moslem officers to search the mosque and take a pos-

## NORTHBY PASHA TAKES A HAND

sible chance between their loyalty to him or their allegiance to their religion, or to risk a storm which might follow his actions, and go in himself. He decided quickly, giving instructions to his men to withdraw out of sight and hearing to the two ends of the street, where they were to stand and to let no one pass, nor to approach again the door of the Nazir without his permission. When this was done, he calmly took off his coat and hat and put them on the ground, addressing Ali sternly.

"Your galabeah, turban, burnûs, quickly, Ali."

"Master, you, too!"

"Obey!"

Ali looked at him, startled, and then slowly began to disrobe.

"Quickly!"

"You will go too, Excellency?"

"Yes. And if I find that which I seek, all your sins will be forgiven you. But if you do not keep silence, if you speak of what I am to do, if as much as a thin trickle of water from a flat goat-skin passes your lips, you shall go to the Kadi to-morrow."

"Master," said Ali, trembling, "you may count upon my silence."

"Stay thou here, then, and watch. Not to those others even yonder."

"I swear."

Northby Pasha pulled the head covering over his brows and pointed to the door.

"Open the door, then."

Ali fumbled at the bolt which finally yielded and the Englishman entered, closing the door behind him. Silence. He waited a moment, listening and trying to decide which way to go. From the crowds that he had passed along the streets it was clear that the leewan and hall of the

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mosque must now be deserted. But he went down a passageway and verified the assumption. Then returning, he lifted a hanging and listened a moment at the door beyond it. He heard sounds now, and tried to distinguish them, sounds like distant voices raised in clamor or lamentation, and closer to him another sound like the groan of some one in pain. He had taken the precaution to remove his shoes in the vestibule and stole forward along the passage silently, coming up short against a dark figure which lay against the wall, just within the shadow of the light from the room beyond. He bent over and touched the man. It was Daoud Effendi, wounded, and weak from loss of blood, but still conscious.

"Effendi! What has happened?" whispered Northby.

"Von Hengel," groaned Daoud.

"He shot you?"

"Yes, and came through here. I tried to follow."

"And the American?"

"He fell, yonder, by the tomb. The Imam, Khateeb——"

Daoud struggled upward but suddenly relaxed and sank to the flagging silently.

Northby Pasha glanced backward and forward quickly, then relinquished the recumbent figure, and weapon in hand strode toward the room of the Nazir. As he emerged into the light, he drew the burnûs of Ali's garb lower over his brow and after a quick glance passed across the empty room and directly toward the passageway beyond, which he entered quickly and went along toward the Tomb of Hoseyn, where he now clearly heard the sounds of the lamenting voices. He wasted no time along the passage and came out, automatic in hand, alongside the circular bronze screen, and face to face with the Nazir and the two Imams. Stretched upon the flagging near the outer wall lay a prostrate figure, the burnûs of the spurious Bedawee Sheykh

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thrown back from the face and revealing the American, Jessup.

Standing nearby, his frenzied expression as he gazed at the helpless figure of the intruder indicating only too clearly the meaning of the long curved sword in his hands, stood the black-bearded Khateeb. The Nazir and the other Imam paused in their terrible act of devotion and sacrifice and the wailing ceased in a gasp, as they saw the leveled weapon and heard the crisp accents of command. The Arabic of Northby Pasha was more eloquent even than his weapon.

"Stop! I command you, or by the head of the Imam, son of Ali, whose servant thou art, I will make a different sacrifice here."

The Khateeb with the sword, after one startled motion backward, rushed forward at Northby, his sword flashing dangerously, but the Englishman fired and he fell, the scimiter clattering down just at Northby's feet.

The other two men had risen, their eyes starting in horror at this new sacrilege, but they made no motion and stood quivering before the ominous shadowed eyes of this new intruder which seemed to hold them helpless.

"Thou, too, Abd-er-Rahhman, shalt go, and who will then take the tale of thy wealth, but the Kadi whom thou hatest?"

The ancient Nazir pulled at his beard in terror.

"Who, who art thou?"

"No matter what or who I am. It is enough that I know, Abd-er-Rahhman, that Infidels have brought you false counsels and false symbols. Ah! You understand! There is but one God and Mohammed is his Prophet, as there is but one Kaba Stone, Abd-er-Rahhman. May Allah, the All Merciful, the Compassionate, forgive you!"

The Nazir had fallen to his knees and was whispering incoherently.

## THE BLACK STONE

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"Come," said Northby sharply, and indicating the figure of the American. "Carry this man forth as I direct, at once."

As in a daze they obeyed, the one at Jëssup's head, the other at his feet, and preceding Northby, whose weapon still threatened, they carried the prostrate man down the corridor past the figure of Daoud and out at last into the vestibule, where at Northby's direction they put him down by the door. Then, still obedient, they brought out the half conscious Daoud.

"Now," said Northby, with a quick gesture of his weapon in the direction from which they had come, "Go!"

They gazed at him again in a moment of uncertainty and obeyed. Northby waited until sure that they would not return and then quickly went to the outside door and opened it, calling Ali Afdal, and with the mueddin's help, in a few moments the two men had been removed to the doorway of a house a short distance up the dark street.

"You have heard nothing, seen nothing, Ali. These men were hurt within this house. It is understood?"

"Yes, Excellency."

He took a silver whistle from his pocket.

"The bow-wab and his wife, which way did they go?"

"Excellency?"

"Which way?"

"I did not, I am uncertain, I think, yes, I am sure toward the Mashhad."

Northby groaned inwardly. His own stupidity as much as Ali's was responsible for the German's escape, but there was nothing to do now but try to repair damages. Two shrill blasts upon his whistle and his men came briskly from both directions, both horse and foot.

"Daoud Effendi is injured, and another. Summon an arabeah. We go to the hospital," he ordered to his lieu-

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tenant. "A man will go ahead to warn them that we are coming. As for the others, search the Khan for two Franks, with stained faces, a man in Bedawee robes and a woman in native dress. You will report to me hourly."

The officer saluted and departed at a quick trot, followed by his men. And in a short while the carriage arrived, into which the injured men were put and driven hurriedly to the Kasr-en-Nil barracks.

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If certain persons in New York, familiar only with the bored figure of Mr. Jessup, strolling wearily to and from his club, or sitting idly in the Club window, had called him a "numb-skull," they were merely exercising an inalienable right of free speech, which belongs to the envious as well as to the charitable. Certain it is that recovery from the terrific blow upon the head by the frenzied Khateeb was proof that his skull was fashioned of something less vulnerable than mere flesh and bone. It is true that he had a slight concussion of the brain, and that for some days he suffered from an abominable headache, but by the time he reached the military hospital he had already recovered consciousness and was able before being put to 'bed to answer the fervid questions of Northby Pasha. Daoud Effendi was less fortunate, for one of von Hengel's bullets had gone into his leg and it was to be a matter of some days before he could be back in line of duty.

But the abduction of Constance Masterson by von Hengel, for there was now no reason to doubt the fact, seemed to awake Alan Jessup to a sense of the disaster which had befallen and in spite of his injuries, he fought hard to be permitted to go out upon the following day and try to pick up the thread of his adventure where it had been so rudely broken. And so it took the combined persuasive efforts of Northby and the doctors to keep him quiet for forty-

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eight hours, while Northby reported that everything in the power of the Police Department was being done to find the lost trail. Nothing definite had been accomplished, perhaps, but a clue or two had been found and there was a hope that by the time the American was up and about there would be something more tangible to report. To make the matter more serious, from Northby's point of view, the Duchess of Barchester had come down from Alexandria in person to make inquiries and to stimulate the Governorat to further efforts. Indeed, the Sirdar himself had called the Intelligence Officer to the Palace and the reputation of Northby Pasha was now at stake.

Alan Jessup in his bed at the Military Hospital knew nothing of the high agencies that were working in Constance Masterson's behalf and squirmed impatiently, aware of his own responsibility in permitting the girl to be endangered. Connie had always done precisely as she pleased as far as Alan was concerned, but the disastrous result of his leniency gave him the true measure of his own weakness and inefficiency.

He seemed to realize with a sort of physical shock the careless way in which he had looked upon life. This was the first time that he had ever had a definite aim, something difficult to accomplish. He had been really awake for a few hours, thrilled and joyous even (as Constance had once wished him to be) with the prospect of doing a great service to some one for some great end, merely for the sake of doing it. Fortune had helped him. Kismet had played into his hands even, and he had failed, not only failed of his great object to capture von Hengel and the Kaba Stone, but lost Constance as well and subjected her to nameless dangers.

As he thought of his opportunity, of the hesitating finger on the trigger of his automatic, he knew that in this, as in

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the other great affairs of life, he had been a failure. His moment had come again and he had failed it. His face grew hot, his fever rose and the surgeons thought that he was sicker than he was.

But the fact of the matter was that the blow on Alan Jessup's head was performing the same office that the medicine ball of Mr. Stoney Flynn had done. It was awakening him, but with this difference from the assault of the medicine ball. Where the blows of his trainer had served the purpose of thoroughly arousing him from a night of slumber, the blow of the Khateeb was awakening him from the slumber of a lifetime. With still another difference, that where the blows of Flynn were given in play, this one had been struck in anger and in earnest. Alan Jessup could not remember the time when he had ever been angry about anything. He had been provoked, mildly stimulated or amused, but nothing had ever interested him enough to be angry over. But he was angry now, thoroughly angry and aroused, and if ever the plaguey doctors would let him up, he was going to find Connie and follow von Hengel if it took him to Mecca. His sense of responsibility about Connie sickened him. Of course there was nothing between them any more. He had begun to understand why it was that Connie wanted to be rid of him. But the mere fact that she had given him his *cong * seemed to make his indebtedness the greater. Where had von Hengel taken her? And why had he risked discovery of his whereabouts by hanging a woman, like a millstone, around his neck? There were two answers to that. One, that von Hengel realized that Connie knew too much, the other that he loved her, and true to the Prussian ideal, had chosen force where mere sentiment would not have availed him. D—n the fellow! He was shrewd, quick, strong and desperate, without compunctions of any sort, a dangerous antagonist for

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one of a different philosophy. But Alan Jessup was learning—the affair of the pistols, the blow on the head, and now Connie.

Jessup turned uneasily in his bed to greet the solemn prosaic face of his man Dawson, who, with change of linen and clothing, had at last been admitted to his employer. Jessup grinned at him sheepishly, but he was very glad to see him. There was something Gibraltar-like in the placidity of Dawson, which was, at the most, very slightly disturbed by the extraordinary sequence of events which had resulted in Mr. Jessup's undoing.

His quiet gaze sought Jessup's bandaged head.

"Rather a mess, Dawson, what?" said Jessup.

"Yes, sir. Quite so, sir, a mess. But you're coming on very nicely, they tell me, sir."

"They're letting me out to-morrow. Any word from Hoagland?"

"Yes, sir. He wired for instructions. I wired back that you were in the hospital, sir. But to stay aboard the *Turkana* and keep Connelly under close confinement until he heard from you. I hope I have done right, sir."

Jessup sat up in bed and examined his visitor curiously. If Dawson had handed him a white cravat for his dinner-jacket, he could not have been more astonishing. Jessup was not quite sure that his ears were not deceiving him.

"You did *what*, Dawson?"

Quite calmly, Dawson repeated.

"But why?"

"Because, sir, I was quite sure that you were unable to give any orders yourself."

"But how did you know that I would approve of these instructions?"

"I didn't, sir. But there was nothing else to do."

"What do you mean?"

## NORTHBY PASHA TAKES A HAND

"Merely, sir," Dawson went on with a still more surprising air of conviction, "because it is the only lead left, sir. I've been to the Governorat twice, sir, at the request of Northby Pasha, and every clue he has followed has led up a blind alley. I thought perhaps, sir, when you were up and about that you might like to take a hand in things yourself."

Jessup examined the man in still greater incredulity. For years he had considered him as a piece of well trained mechanism, as a convenient clothes-rack, a bath-drawer and curtain-puller. That there were possibilities of initiative beyond the mere routine of his monotonous existence, had never occurred to Jessup. Even yet he could not understand.

"You think that there was complicity between Captain von Hengel and Connelly?"

"Yes, sir. I do, sir."

"Why?"

"Well, sir, since you ask me, I can't exactly say, sir, except that I thought the manner of Captain von Hengel's escape most suspicious, sir."

And then, as Jessup made no reply,

"I hope I haven't done wrong, sir."

"No, Dawson, no. It's all right. Quite all right. Besides, we've got to leave no stone unturned."

"No, sir. Not even the Black Stone, sir," said Dawson seriously.

Jessup frowned.

"You have told Northby Pasha of your suspicions?"

"No, sir. I thought perhaps that you yourself might wish to——"

"Quite right, Dawson," gasped Jessup suddenly. "I do. I will, to-morrow."

## CHAPTER IX

### CONNELLY RECANTS

THE mere fact that he now had a definite incentive did more for Alan Jessup than any physic in the Kasr-en-Nil hospital could have accomplished. It was with an unusual alacrity that he got out of bed upon the following morning and attired himself in the garments that Dawson had brought. And at ten o'clock, though still a little weak and uncertain as to his legs, he got into the train for Alexandria with his valet. Before leaving, however, he dispatched a brief note to the Governorat, telling Northby Pasha that he was merely running up to the *Turkana* for a few hours and that he would return upon the morrow.

He tried to shrug aside the persistent thought that this was a mere wild goose chase, born of a queer concept of the brain of his prosaic servitor, but upon the train the phlegmatic confidence of Dawson restored a hope that something would come of this hurried visit. After all, hadn't it been Dawson's imagination which had led to the discovery of the great conspiracy? At least no harm could come, and if this plan to find a new clue failed, Alan would be no worse off than before, surely no worse off than Northby with all the Intelligence Department of Lower Egypt at his disposal, which as yet had accomplished precisely nothing.

Captain Hoagland was at the railroad station, and conducted them in an arabeah to the boat landing, whither

## CONNELLY RECANTS

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they were taken at once in the yacht's launch aboard the *Turkana*. The Duchess of Barchester's Hospital Ship, *The Mercy*, still lay at anchor, but there were signs of activity about her, which indicated that in the urgencies of war, the disappearance of one integer of her complement was to be set upon the debit account and so forgotten. To Alan Jessup, there was something uncompromisingly heartless in this activity which could so soon forget the young American girl who had unselfishly thrown in her lot with these strangers and followed them on their pilgrimage to the end of the earth. Connie's disappearance at first caused a desperate depression in Alan Jessup, followed by a solemn purpose, no less desperate, to find her and avenge himself upon her abductor and his own false friend. Connie was the only creature he had ever cared for and their brief meeting, so disastrous, had blown again into a glow the dull embers of his unfortunate affection. He loved her more than ever, of course, but he had taken care not to burden her with any vestiges of sentiment, for in the seven weeks of absence he had managed to bring about a quiet acquiescence in his misfortune. He had made sure that Connie should never know how much he had suffered and resolved that he would never again broach a subject which she had ended in such a sudden and summary fashion. The incident had been ended. He was a good sport. He knew when he was beaten.

But now, with the burden of failure so heavily upon him, he seemed for the first time really to gain a true conception of his actual worth in the great game of life at which he had been frittering. It *was* a game, the greatest game of all, and he had played it like a quitter, like that one sort of creature he had always affected most to despise—the poor sportsman. All this Connie had told him, all this he had known and merely shrugged aside, unaware

## THE BLACK STONE

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that his indifference and apathy in all the vital things of life were to bring about the loss of the only woman he had ever loved. In the two days that had passed Alan Jessup had had some moments of self communion and abasement. He had passed through a kind of fiery ordeal, from which he had emerged as from his injury, a little groggy mentally as well as physically, but newly born into a terrible earnestness of purpose, which set the past aside and leaped at the chance of new endeavor.

He had badly misjudged Conrad von Hengel but even now it was difficult to believe that the German would do physical harm to Constance Masterson, for whom he had so often professed a warm affection. Alan Jessup was sure that Constance was safe, somewhere, hidden away until von Hengel could carry out his plans without her interference. And if this theory held true, it was Alan's business to find her, stopping at nothing in the attainment of his object.

He had grasped at the thin thread of Dawson's clue, like a man in a maze seeking a way out, and on the train from Cairo had planned a definite mode of action with regard to the imprisoned Connelly which in the security of his cabin, he confided to Captain Hoagland, whose eyes sparkled with interest. He had been talking with the men. Perhaps something would come of this.

So it was that, a short while after his arrival aboard the *Turkana*, Connelly was summoned to face the owner. Before the man came in Jessup took a place at the head of the table, his back to the light, an automatic pistol carefully displayed and a pad and pencil near his right hand. If the power vested in ship-masters of the United States were of any value here he meant that Hoagland should use them to the utmost. Also he meant to use as much of his long dormant intelligence as he could summon to

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extract from Connelly every item of information that he possessed.

The man shuffled in between Hoagland and the boatswain, rather stiff and rather weary of his long confinement, blinking at the light of day and wearing a much abused and surly air. But Alan Jessup did not miss the quick glance which swept the table of the cabin and took in the air of formality with which the owner had surrounded himself.

But the first passages between the two men only led to a repetition of the statement already heard. Connelly knew nothing. He was on watch on deck. He had fallen asleep. The night before he had had a pain in the stomach and had not slept. He was sorry. It would not occur again.

"You're quite right, Connelly," said Mr. Jessup dryly, "it won't occur again."

Connelly said nothing to that and only shuffled from one foot to the other and looked at the deck.

Pursuing the plan he had thought out, and following the many threads of evidence Captain Hoagland had provided, Jessup went on:

"Connelly, our records show that you were born in the south of Ireland. Men aboard the *Turkana* have said that you were in sympathy with the Sinn Fein movement and that you have uttered remarks derogatory to the British Empire."

"I'm a naturalized American citizen, Mr. Jessup," said Connelly after a pause. "I've got a right to think and speak as I like."

"U-m, yes. But it has gotten you into a lot of trouble."

"I can't see, sor——"

"Perhaps I can enlighten you," put in Jessup very politely. "The mere fact of your falling asleep during your turn in the watch on deck in harbor, may in itself seem a

## THE BLACK STONE

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trivial offense. But you'll notice that the circumstance of your falling asleep at the exact moment when Captain von Hengel secretly takes the yawl of the *Turkana* and goes ashore makes you an object of suspicion."

"I don't understand," muttered the man. "I've taken my punishment."

"Some of your punishment, Connelly, a little of it, because there's a good deal more to come, how much, depends largely upon yourself."

"What d'ye mean, sor?" asked the man with a puzzled frown.

"Merely this. Captain von Hengel is a German spy landed through your help in a British Garrison."

"How did I know that, sor?" broke in Connelly heatedly. "You brought him here."

"Precisely," put in Jessup coolly. "And I meant to take him away. It was you who let him go ashore."

"I'm sorry."

"Unfortunately, the fact that you're sorry has very little weight with the British Government, which is in no mood to be trifled with. I'll be quite frank with you, Connelly. The Intelligence Department of the British Base has sent me here to bring you to Cairo, as an accessory to the plans of Captain Conrad von Hengel." As Jessup played this card he struck a light for his pipe which he had been leisurely filling for a moment or two. But he watched Connelly's eyes narrowly over the flaming match. In the light that streamed through the window, he saw the pupils of Connelly's eyes dilate suddenly, and then as suddenly become dull again. It was little enough, but it was encouraging. Connelly shuffled his feet and glowered sullenly.

"I don't know anything about Captain von Hengel," he said.

## CONNELLY RECANTS

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Jessup puffed vigorously at his pipe for a moment or two. And then:

"That's rather curious, Connelly," he drawled, "because the Intelligence Department thinks differently."

The man shrugged. "I know nothing!" he repeated doggedly.

Jessup smiled. "If you persist in refusing to help *me*, I'm afraid I can't help *you*. I want to help you, you know, Connelly, to try to keep you out of this trouble, which is really more serious than you suppose. Captain Hoagland has full jurisdiction over this craft and while you're on the *Turkana* you're on territory of the United States. But if through me, or Captain Hoagland, or you the *Turkana* violates the neutrality of the United States by aiding and abetting the enemies of England, the affair becomes a national one in which your country and mine are involved. Do I make myself clear?"

"Yes, sor," muttered Connelly.

"Very good. That being true, you may be very sure that I would not dare to try to save you when at this very moment the *Turkana* lies under the guns of one of His Majesty's destroyers, which are prepared to fire into us, if we make the slightest attempt to move from our anchorage."

Connelly swaggered and laughed.

"Do you mean to say that the Government of the United States would stand for that?"

Jessup smiled pleasantly at the sea-rack. "Unfortunately for us this is not a time when England can afford to stand on ceremony. She will act first and apologize afterwards."

Jessup got up, walked to the window-port and then turned quickly.

"See here, Connelly, I'm trying to help you. I don't want to see a man of my crew shot against a mud-wall.

## THE BLACK STONE

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But that's just what is going to happen to you, if you don't answer my questions truthfully."

Connelly wavered a moment but his answer was still sullen. "I don't know anything about Captain von Hengel," he growled again.

Jessup sat at his table, frowning slightly. "H-m," he said. "That's too bad."

"You can't hook this thing on to me, Mr. Jessup," went on Connelly with an air of defiance that was still respectful. "I don't know anything about him. Who brought him here? Who went ashore with him at the Straits? Why, *you* did. If he was up to mischief and you didn't know it, that was your fault, not mine. And the whole British Army couldn't wish it on me."

The man's coolness was admirable, so admirable that Jessup for a moment lost hope of success in this venture. But at this moment which seemed to tremble on the brink of failure, from the door leading into the saloon, Dawson silently entered bearing in his arms an oblong box which he carefully deposited on the table.

"The ditty-box of Mr. Connelly which you requested," he said to Jessup in his colorless voice.

Jessup, aware that he had made no such request, glanced at the ditty-box and then at Dawson, concealing his amazement with difficulty.

"Shall I open it, sir?" asked Dawson, quietly.

And just as a glimmering of Dawson's object came to Jessup, Connelly's confidence broke.

"That's my property, Mr. Jessup. A seaman's rights——"

"Rights! Hell!" roared Hoagland striding forward. And in a moment the box was opened, disclosing five neatly folded and quite new twenty-pound notes stuck in a corner. Hoagland drew them forth triumphantly.

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"Money!" he growled. "And he was trimmed clean as a marling-spike when he came aboard."

"H-m," said Jessup.

Connelly was glaring first at the complacent Dawson and then at the notes in Captain Hoagland's hand. He had lost his swagger now.

"My savings, sor, I'll swear to it," he said in a desperate effort to justify himself.

But Jessup now had all the encouragement he needed for his finishing stroke.

"It won't do, Connelly," he said with a shake of his head, as he laid his pipe on the table with an air of finality. "It won't do. The evidence seems fairly complete. I've only produced it to convince you that it's not worth while protesting. It wasn't your trick on deck the night Captain von Hengel got away. You substituted for another man. It was your job to help the German, and you did it. I wanted to get you out of this. I hoped you could prove your innocence even against the word of Captain von Hengel himself."

As Jessup paused for his effect on the prisoner, Connelly's eyes spread wide and he stared at Jessup, now obviously very much alarmed.

"Von Hengel, his word? You mean——?"

"Merely that Captain von Hengel was captured last night in Cairo by Northby Pasha of the Intelligence Department." Jessup lied quite coolly.

Connelly fidgeted from one foot to the other, his face gray and his brow covered with sweat, and then he glanced over his shoulder as though seeking to make a dash for freedom, but the hand of the boatswain which was dropped on his shoulder, and the threatening figure of Captain Hoagland which stood between him and the door, made him aware of the futility of his plan. A further moment of

## THE BLACK STONE

indecision—between defiance and concession, and then the Irishman's resistance broke.

"They can't take me off this ship, they can't prove nothin'. You won't let 'em, sor?" he pleaded at last.

Jessup kept countenance admirably.

"Unfortunately, Connelly," he said with a stern and injured air, "the *Turkana* has violated American neutrality in letting Captain von Hengel ashore. I have made a statement to the British Intelligence Office at Cairo and have been exonerated, but Captain von Hengel's confession involves you very unpleasantly in spite of your protestations of innocence of the matter. I'm afraid I must comply with Colonel Northby's request to turn you over to the military authorities."

"I'm an American citizen."

"American! Hell!" growled Hoagland.

Jessup rose with an air of dismissal.

"I can't take the responsibility," he said. And then to Hoagland, "Put this man in irons and call away the launch in half an hour, Captain Hoagland."

"Very good, sir."

Connelly didn't move. He was on the verge of a confession, but Jessup deliberately turned his back and walked to the port when the man uttered his name.

"Mr. Jessup."

"Well, Connelly."

"You can't let them shoot me, sor. That's what it means if I'm taken ashore."

"I'm afraid so, Connelly. I wanted to help you, but you lied to me."

"I'll speak, sor, here to you, if——"

"I'm afraid it's too late, but if there are any circumstances——"

"I'll tell the whole truth, sor, so help me God."

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Jessup turned with a languid air of interest.

"U-m. You know some facts that will aid in the trial of Captain von Hengel?"

"Yes, sor. I think I can help, if you'll get me out of this."

"Ah. Then you *did* know what his purpose was."

"Something, yes, sor, not all. And if I tell what I know?"

Connelly paused expectantly.

"M-m. I *might* have some influence. Mind you, I promise nothing, but I've volunteered to help the Intelligence Department and what I say may have some weight."

"Then I'll speak," he paused and looked around at the others, "but what I say is for you alone."

Jessup's level gaze sought Connelly's eyes. He was wildly impatient to hear the Irishman's revelations, for thanks to Dawson and the tell-tale ditty-box, it seemed that here might be the clue for which Northby was scouring Cairo.

"Very well," he said easily, taking up the automatic carelessly, loosening the clip and locking it again. "I'll hear what you have to say. But no tricks, understand?"

Jessup made a sign to the others who retired somewhat dubiously, and went outside the door. And when they were gone,

"You may sit down, Connelly, in the chair upon my right. So. Now proceed. You lied, of course, when I first questioned you?"

"Well, sor, it's this way. I was born an Irishman and when you say I've no love for England, you spake the truth. I've got some folks in the ould country and it's no love they have for tyrants that for years have bled their pockets and now want to bleed the blood from their veins."

"We'll cut that, Connelly," said Jessup with a sudden

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asperity that even surprised himself. Connelly glanced at him in a puzzled way and then shrugged.

"As you plaze, sor. We'll cut it then, though there's somethin' to be said."

"How did Captain von Hengel happen to learn of your opinions on the war?" Jessup broke in.

"It was after the chase by the *Comet*, sor. Feelin' bitter-like, I may have let out a word or two in Captain von Hengel's hearin'. He noticed me and often passed the time o' day when it was my trick at the wheel, or on deck, aft, but no one noticed, sor, because he only spoke when no one else was around. But I understood. He was England's enemy and I was too and that made us friends."

"Go on."

"One thing led to another, sor. We met often at night for a few moments. He would come on deck and we'd talk aft. No one saw us. He wanted me to help him and I agreed to do what I could."

"U-m," said Jessup. "Then you didn't have a pain—er—in the stomach?"

"No, sor," he confessed. "I didn't. I lied about that, too, sor. But I had no idea of doing *you* hurt, sor."

"You didn't. You've only hurt yourself. And if I don't try to save you, it's going to be a firing squad and a wall for you."

"For God's sake, Mr. Jessup, you'll do what you can, sor?" he asked anxiously.

Jessup took up his pipe with a contemplative air and slowly reached for the box of matches. He struck one and puffed at the tobacco thoughtfully, but for a long while he said nothing. Connelly waited, writhing nervously in his chair.

"Tell me the rest of this story, all of it, and tell the

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truth—for if you lie again I'll find you out. What was the agreement you had with Captain von Hengel?"

"First, to help him ashore, sor, with—with——"

"With the Black Stone," put in Jessup. "Go on."

Connelly looked up at Jessup eagerly and then shrugged.

"You know it all, sor. Then it makes no difference——"

"Go on. And after Captain von Hengel escaped—er—you were to join him?"

"Yes, sor. He thought he could use me. He was to pay me well. I was to meet him in a house in Cairo and join his expedition——"

"What house in Cairo?" asked Jessup suddenly.

"The house of the Sheykh Hassan Isar. He's the high muck-a-muck of the Oolama, the Bishop or you might say the Pope, sor, of the whole bloomin' crew."

"I see," said Jessup controlling his excitement with difficulty, "and you were to go to the house of Hassan Isar and meet Captain von Hengel—when?"

"In three days, sor, to-day as a matter of fact."

"Of course," said Jessup coolly. "But as Captain von Hengel is now taken, there would not be much use of your going to that house."

"No, sor. I can see that."

"And how were you going to help Captain von Hengel after that?"

"I was to be in his personal guard, when we started on the expedition with the Black Stone."

"And where were you going?"

"How do I know, sor? One name is like another out here."

"You're not lying?"

"I swear it, sor."

"H-m! Hassan Isar, I think you said——"

## THE BLACK STONE

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"He's the head guy in the big mosque, the university——"

"El-Ahzar?"

"That's it, sor."

"And how were you to get into that house?"

"I was to get a costume, in the shop of Abou Hilal in the Khan-el-Khalily."

"How do you remember these names so well?"

"They were written on a piece of paper to be sure. Here, sor."

He handed Jessup a soiled envelope on which the names were written in Conrad von Hengel's careful script. There seemed little doubt now that the fellow was telling the truth. Jessup carelessly threw the slip of paper on the table as though it were no longer a matter of importance.

"That will be all for the present, Connelly," he said easily. "I'll see what I can do for you ashore. But in the meanwhile I'll have to keep you under guard." And raising his voice he called Captain Hoagland and directed that Connelly be again taken to the "brig" below.

When the men went out, Jessup picked up the slip of paper and scrutinized it triumphantly. The coil was straightening. Here was one of the gods in Conrad von Hengel's machine, Hassan Isar, head of the El-Ahzar, his go-between with the Nazir of the Mosque of Hasaneyn, and perhaps by this time with other Nazirs, a member of the Oolama or Council of Sheykhs and because of his position as head of the Great University of Islam, a person of great erudition and consequence, but not above purchase with German gold!

Jessup grinned cheerfully at the soiled paper for a moment and then went to the door into the saloon and called Dawson.

"We've got it, Dawson," he said.

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"Got what, sir?" asked Dawson, calmly.

"The clue, Dawson, the lead we've been looking for."

"Really sir? That's very fortunate."

"That was a stroke of genius about the ditty-box, Dawson."

"Was it, sir? Thank you, sir."

And then after a pause in which Dawson looked at his watch, "At what time does the next train leave for Cairo?"

"At five, sir."

"We have some moments to spare. Get out some old clothes—for you and for me. We take no luggage. And please tell Captain Hoagland to come here at once."

"Yes, sir. Thank you, sir."

Jessup watched the unassuming figure as the man vanished through the door. "All these years and I——" he broke off and then shook his head in self-deprecation.

## CHAPTER X

### THE HOUSE OF HASSAN

**I**T was after dusk when Jessup and Dawson got down from the train at the Central Station in Cairo. They did not take a carriage but strode off and were soon lost among the crowds in the Boulevard Clot Bey.

Much to Captain Hoagland's disappointment Jessup had decided to make the new venture with Dawson, whose achievements in getting upon the trail of Conrad von Hengel had given him a new value in his employer's eyes. As to his personal courage, Jessup knew nothing, but when the venture which lay before Jessup in seeking out the House of the Sheykh of the Oolama was broached to Dawson, a look quite eager came into his face and when Jessup asked if he would like to go his usual gravity broke in a placid smile and he gave vent to a warm expression of gratitude for the favor granted. He was quite aware of the relations that had existed between Miss Masterson and Mr. Jessup, and Constance, who was always pleasant to servants, had been a frequent visitor to Mr. Jessup's houses and yachts, so that Dawson had learned to esteem her highly. The breach between them, which Dawson suspected as the cause of his employer's venture forth into the world, had made him most unhappy, for he had long thought it unfortunate for a man of Mr. Jessup's means and position to be living singly, when every consideration seemed to point to a successful married life. It was true that he, Dawson, had made one or two unfortunate ex-

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periments in that direction and that women were an uncertain quantity, but Miss Masterson was a very fine young lady and quite the person to make Mr. Jessup happy. He was sure of it. To think that she was at this moment at the mercy of this Captain von Hengel, who was beyond doubt a German villain and capable therefore of any atrocity, was enough to make any man eager to try to save her.

Jessup strode rapidly around the Esbekiyeh Gardens, Dawson struggling to keep pace with him as they made their way toward the Musky in the direction of the native quarter. At first Jessup had been tempted to go to the Governorat and seek out Northby Pasha, laying his information before him and asking his assistance. But two considerations restrained him. He felt a sense of personal responsibility for this calamity which had come about through his own indifference and stupidity and wished therefore to be the means of setting things right. And with Connie a prisoner, in all probability in this very house, to which they were going, the impulse to take the affair into his own hands was too strong to be resisted. To his own mind, which reasoned with singular, if egoistic directness, his own quarrel with von Hengel now took precedence. There was, too, a slight feeling of superiority over the skillful Northby in having, through the surprising Dawson, discovered the clue which the Governorat had sought so vainly. If Conrad von Hengel was within the house of Hassan Isar, he meant to gain access, find Connie and bring the arch conspirator to justice. The finger on the trigger would not hesitate now and he would shoot to kill. He had confided these intimate plans to Dawson in the train and Dawson had nodded a respectful acquiescence.

"Of course, sir. Kill him. It is the only thing to do."

Had he said, "Of course, sir, the green cravat, it goes very well with the brown flannels," he could not have

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spoken in tones more matter of fact. Jessup had examined him with a smile and thought of the man's wasted years as a valet. Dawson should at least have been president of a corporation. The man grew more calm, more confident with each increase of difficulty, faced each new problem with placid determination. Jessup began to feel more satisfied with his plan in attempting the affair with Dawson than if he had had the whole of Northby's police at his back.

But before leaving Alexandria, Jessup had fortified himself in various ways. He had armed both Dawson and himself with automatics and ammunition. At first he had had some doubts as to Dawson's knowledge of fire-arms, but when the man confided that he had once been in the British Army and showed an immediate familiarity with the weapon handed him, Jessup smiled his satisfaction, realizing that if Dawson had lived in his service in New York for fifty years, he could never have known him so well as now. Jessup had also taken the precaution of bringing money, much money, in English sovereigns, disposed in belts about his person and Dawson's. If von Hengel found bribe money useful, there were two who could play at that game. Jessup had always had a kind of good-natured contempt for the huge fortune to which he had fallen heir. It was, of course, necessary that he should have it because it had been left to him, and to nobody else, but it had always been a deep source of annoyance because it gave him grave responsibilities which bored him to extinction. But he was beginning to realize that here at least in this land of Baksheesh it might have its uses. His own much-abused money was quite as good as Conrad von Hengel's, perhaps a little better.

It was therefore with an air of considerable confidence that he entered with Dawson the shop of Abou Hilal in

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the Sharia el-Akkadin. It was past the hour for trading but they found the man they were seeking and upon their entrance he emerged from behind a pile of cheap hosiery and demanded their business.

Abou Hilal was small, with a large hook nose, narrow eyes with granulated lids, and high cheek bones and his yellow face was deeply pitted with the scars of smallpox. He looked at his visitors suspiciously, as though at a loss to place them in any class or condition with which he was familiar.

Immediately putting into practice his new theory, Jessup at once produced two gold sovereigns which he displayed ostentatiously, and then deposited upon a vacant table under Abou's startled eyes, proclaiming quietly that his name was Connelly and that he had come in accordance with a pre-arranged plan to procure certain disguises which Abou had agreed to furnish.

Abou looked from one to the other, meanwhile slowly advancing his long fingers toward the golden coins, but Jessup's hand reached them first.

"The costumes!" said Jessup.

"Costumes!" exclaimed Abou in excellent English. "There was to be but one garment, Effendi, but one garment."

Jessup indicated the money. "Are there not two coins?" he said dryly, making a move toward his pocket. But Abou caught at his wrist. "Wait!" he broke in with a quick change of tone. "I will see." And moved toward a door at one side of the stall, indicating that his visitors should follow.

The room to which they were led seemed to be a combination of storehouse and lodging room. Abou went to a chest in one corner and after taking out a number of garments, glancing from time to time toward the silent

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figures of his visitors, carried them to a table in a corner, holding them up one after another and examining them again.

Then with a quick keen glance at Jessup, he lowered his hands again and spoke.

"I do not understand, Effendi. It was to be one garment, a disguise——"

"And now I want two," broke in Jessup impatiently, "that's simple enough."

"Yes, but——" Abou hesitated. "Two sovereigns are very little for such service," he went on. "How do I know what you wish to do? The police——"

"Very good," said Jessup. "Make haste. Disguise us completely and you shall have four sovereigns."

Abou asked no more questions and as they disrobed he noticed the money belts about them and heard the click of coins. After that, his skill and alacrity knew no bounds. To the end that within an hour Jessup and Dawson emerged into the street, their darkened faces hidden under the shadows of voluminous head-dresses, and made their way toward the house of the Sheykh of the Oolama to which (for another consideration) Abou carefully directed them.

The eloquence of his money had never before been so impressive to Jessup. Before it all difficulties seemed to be smoothed away.

"How much money have we, Dawson?" he asked.

"One thousand, seven hundred and forty-five pounds, seven and sixpence, sir."

"H-m. Excellent! I have no doubt that we shall make good use of it."

Smoking cigarettes and conversing in low tones, they made their way past the Mosque of El-Azhar and a moment later entered a maze of small passages. But their directions were explicit and with the name on their lips

## THE HOUSE OF HASSAN

it was not difficult to find the Sharia Hosh Kadam. Then they stopped to get their bearings and identify the house to which they had been directed. There was a door which bore an inscription in Arabic and the arch above it was covered with a tracery of Arabesques. They walked slowly down the deserted street and finally identified the house without difficulty. Jessup had decided that Dawson should be left below in the court while Jessup went on if possible into the mandara, remaining within call, concealed if possible, until Jessup needed him.

There were difficulties ahead. Jessup had foreseen them but he had gone on with his venture because go he must. Except for the few perfunctory phrases that he had picked up here and there, he knew nothing of Arabic and conversation with a view to information under such circumstances was difficult. But he was counting on the magic of the name of Connelly with the bow-wab, if there were one, and after he had gained admittance to the building, he must trust to luck and instinct. As they returned toward the door, Dawson thrust a number of coins into his hands.

"Use them, Mr. Jessup," he whispered. "They say you could buy the Khedive himself with a ten pound note."

Jessup smiled and halted before the door. He was in the act of raising his hand toward the iron knocker when he noticed that the door was not entirely closed. So he pushed against it and in a moment they were in a vaulted passage dimly illuminated by a lamp set beyond an angle in the wall beyond. But as they turned the angle which hid the courtyard beyond, they came upon a long stone seat called the mastabah, from which a sleepy porter arose. In a low tone Jessup greeted him with the usual salutation and the man returned it.

Jessup pointed to his breast with his forefinger and mut-

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tered the name of Connelly, then gestured toward the court and spoke the name of Hassan Isar. But the man still stared stupidly until Jessup produced a few sovereigns, which he showed the bow-wab in the light from the lamp and then handed them to him. This seemed to clear the atmosphere at once and leaving Dawson on the mastabah, Jessup followed the man into the spacious court past a splashing fountain and to another door at one side. So far, so well. But what the deuce was going to happen now Jessup didn't know. He was going to get into the house and once within it he wasn't going to leave without getting what he had come for. The bow-wab entered a door and jingling the coins in his fingers, indicated that Jessup should follow, and so Jessup entered the mandara and glanced eagerly around. The room was of stately proportions, the floor of the durkah of marble mosaic and the ceiling handsomely decorated. Jessup removed his slippers in accordance with custom and quickly picked out a strategic position at an end of the leewan, which commanded the entire apartment and with his head lowered far enough to conceal his features, watched the hanging fall into place behind the departing door keeper. What he was going to say to Hassan Isar, Jessup at the present moment hadn't the remotest idea. If the Sheykh spoke no English there was going to be some difficulty in carrying on a conversation. But if, as he hoped, Conrad von Hengel should come out to meet him, Jessup was going to overpower him if he could before the German realized who he was. He heard the sound of voices in a room at a distance and after a moment the bow-wab emerged, muttered something, and disappeared into the courtyard. More sounds of voices, the murmur of bass voices of men and from another direction, suddenly, an unnecessary reminder of the double duty he must perform, the light laughter of

## THE HOUSE OF HASSAN

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a woman, somewhere past curtains and wooden screens in the mysterious region of upstairs.

But the voice of the woman was not that of Constance Masterson. It was full throated and loud and contrary to the example and teachings of the Prophet who counseled restraint even in laughter. Meanwhile, as no one came to the mandara to meet him, Jessup took note of all his surroundings, the doors, windows, and figured out the probable location of the stairway to the harem and other parts of the house on this side of the courtyard. He glanced out through the oriel beside him at Dawson sitting on the mastabah solemnly smoking with the bow-wab, but keeping a watchful eye on the door through which Jessup had entered and an attentive ear for the first sound of a disturbance, for this was the signal which meant that Dawson was to put the porter out of the business and then rush indoors to Jessup's assistance.

More moments passed and Jessup still sat alone. He became a little restless. What if von Hengel had gotten wind of his plans! Impossible. He reassured himself quite calmly. The last Conrad von Hengel had seen of him was when he had been struck down in the sanctuary of the Mosque of Hasaneyn. Jessup must be the last person that he would expect to find in the house of Hassan Isar. The disguise he wore was complete. He was of about the same build as Connelly and could simulate his voice. And there was not the least chance of his being recognized in this house except by von Hengel. And if von Hengel came near enough to recognize him——!

He listened intently, his hearing strained to catch the slightest sound. There were other voices now somewhere above him scarcely audible, a man's and a woman's, in controversy, but he made nothing of it. The sounds recurred and he listened again. He made out the soft shuffle of bare

## THE BLACK STONE

feet on marble, and the staccato tap of shoes. And yet he could not be certain. The conversation ceased, began again and then stopped altogether but in its place another sound, the rapid moving of footsteps, a deep sigh and then silence. He was beginning to believe that in his eagerness his imagination had played him a trick.

But he rose with the idea that it was about time to start on an independent scouting expedition through the house when the Sheykh of El-Azhar silently appeared. Jessup, his ears still on the alert for the sounds upstairs, rose and gave him greeting and the Sheykh made response. Jessup then pointed to his breast and uttered Connelly's name, in the same breath mentioning that of von Hengel.

Hassan Isar came forward sedately and motioned to Jessup to be seated upon the deewan, speaking at once in excellent English.

"The person you seek, is, I regret to say, at the moment, busy. I am requested to ask you to wait." And then shrewdly, "You have had no difficulties?"

"No," muttered Jessup. "I deserted this morning. They suspected nothing. But they may now."

"You were not pursued then?"

"Not so far as I know. But I knew I'd be safe here."

The Sheykh examined him through half closed eyes.

"Ah, yes. I hope so. But we can only reckon the danger by the splendor of our mission."

Jessup hesitated a moment. "He's got it? Here?" he asked.

"The Kaba is in safe keeping," said Hassan calmly.

"That is good. And we leave soon?"

"At once. It is very lucky that you have arrived tonight. The Sheykh Omar plans to leave within the hour."

"Ah," said Alan carelessly. "I'm glad to get away. I'll be shot if they catch me."

## THE HOUSE OF HASSAN

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"There will be no danger."

The Sheykh paused at the recurrence of the low murmur of voices from the room above and Alan looked up in the direction from which they now seemed to come. There was a wooden grille just above the door through which the Sheykh had entered, partly concealed by a silken hanging, but through the opening he seemed to see dim shadows moving. The voices were whispering now, tensely, straining, but as before no word could be distinguished.

Sheykh Hassan marked his visitor's eager expression and smiled.

"It is nothing, Effendi. Where one has women in one's house, peace sometimes flies out at the window."

Alan smiled and nodded to conceal his interest in those sounds, sure that if von Hengel didn't come down in a very few moments, he was going up the stairs that he could just see in the hallway beyond and try to find him.

"Women are the devil, ain't they, Sheykh?" he ventured.

The Sheykh smiled sagely. "The Prophet was wise when he said——"

A smothered cry broke the quiet of the room. Both men leaped to their feet. At the same moment a stream of fire darted from the wooden screen above and Alan felt his head-dress twitched suddenly as though some one had given it a pull. As he sprang for the doorway the Sheykh tried to intercept him, but he gave the old man a push that sent him whirling upon the deewan. At the same moment he heard again a stifled feminine voice calling his name.

## CHAPTER XI

### PRISONER

**C**ROUCHED close to the flagging in the passage outside the tomb in the Mosque of Hasaneyn, Constance Masterson waited and listened in an agony of incertitude to the conversation in Arabic of Daoud Ffendi with the Nazir and Imams. She heard the drone of their prayers, distinguished the sound of von Hengel's voice and heard the sudden cry of Alan Jessup as he called to the startled German. The deafening explosion of fire arms in the echoing tomb frightened her and she crawled back toward the entrance to the room of the Nazir, her gaze turned back in alternate fear and hope toward the pallid glow beyond the arch. There was a fearful cry, the impact of a blow, the sound of a falling body, then silence and a murky silhouette appeared in the opening and grew rapidly larger as it came toward her. Hope revived her.

"Alan!" she whispered joyfully. "Alan!" She could not believe that he had failed.

But von Hengel caught her by the shoulders and hurried her out into the room of the Nazir where he roughly tore away the burka over her face disclosing her identity.

"Herr Gott! *You, Fräulein!*" He paused in a moment of indecision midway between a frown and a smile and while she watched him, aware that there was no possibility of escape from him if he chose to coerce her, he glanced for a moment toward the archway, then smiled. "It is most extraordinary. You too! I regret that it will be necessary for you to go with me at once."

## PRISONER

Constance was gaining her courage rapidly. She could not forget that this was merely the blonde, cherubic, Conrad von Hengel, amiable companion of many a gay party at the Willard or at Sherry's, her partner at cotillion or tennis at Chevy Chase or Piping Rock. The Bedawee head-dress and stained face no longer frightened her.

"And if I refuse?" she said with some show of spirit.

"You won't," he said grimly, his expression changing.

"Will you come with me? Or shall I leave you to the mercy of the Khateeb whose sanctuary you have profaned? He will kill you. With me you have a chance——"

"Alan——?" she whispered, her face ghastly with fear.

"Dead," he muttered, "and the other also." And she saw for the first time the blue-black barrel of the automatic he still held in his hand. "Come," he ordered, seizing her by the wrist, "I have no time to lose."

She followed him, half-led, half-dragged, down the other passage way and out into the vestibule of the door of the Nazir where he paused again a moment, releasing her.

"This is a desperate venture. You have no business here. Come with me willingly, make no outcry and you will be safe. Otherwise——"

"What will you do?"

"Take you to the Khateeb," he said coolly.

"It's a choice of evils," she said impudently. "Lead on, I'll follow."

And so, slipping his weapon into his pocket, he disengaged his right hand, his left as she noticed being hidden beneath the folds of his robe. Then he opened the door of the vestibule and descended the steps into the dim alley-way. Ali Afdal stood in the shadow of the opposite wall alone. To him von Hengel spoke a few words in Arabic and then led his companion to the right into the darkness, where they were presently lost in a maze of dark

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alleys ever growing more tangled. If the thought of escape had occurred to her a moment before, the opportunity had now passed, for von Hengel walked close beside her, uttering a word of warning as they emerged into a wider and better lighted thoroughfare. There was a sound of horse hoofs on cobbles at some distance to their right and she caught a glimpse of men in blue uniforms on white horses slowly moving in the general direction from which she had come.

"Make no sound," her companion ordered shortly. "Cross the street to the alley there."

Frightened now at his tone, Constance obeyed and in a moment they were moving on again in the obscurity of another narrow street, where from the ease and comfort of von Hengel's manner she knew that her opportunity had passed. Indeed her companion, needless to say without asking permission, had lighted a cigarette while he walked and gave every appearance of intense satisfaction. His face in the glow of the match was disquieting. The blonde mustache missing, there were lines around the corners of von Hengel's mouth that she had never seen before. The cheerful and reassuring memories of Sherry's and Piping Rock seemed suddenly to fade and merge into others more grim and forbidding, tales of the French border, of Louvain and Liège.

She followed him through the dark streets, aware of his peremptory accents when she faltered through timidity and weakness. The hour was now late and the few people they passed paid them no notice, for the burka that von Hengel had torn from her face had been at his order put on again. The way seemed interminable as they went deeper and deeper into the native quarter of the city, but her companion seemed to be sure of his direction and after half an hour stopped before a door with a heavy iron

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knocker which he struck five times and was instantly admitted by a waiting porter. Bewildered as she was and terrified at the prospect of the nameless dangers that seemed to confront her, she followed blindly where von Hengel led, aware of a small courtyard with a fountain and a door which they passed, entering a room of large dimensions, evidently a part of the abode of some one of consequence. Von Hengel made a motion toward the deewan, and then vanished through hangings at one side. She obeyed his gesture, ready to relax and at the point of tears, but summoning her strength sat stiffly, dry-eyed, gazing straight before her at the opposite doorway which seemed to hold the enigma of her immediate future. From somewhere within came the sounds of voices at first masculine and then feminine and at last the hangings parted and a black woman, with one hand holding a drapery over the lower part of her face, entered the room and made a gesture to Constance to follow her. There was nothing for it but to obey, for, as she had reasoned, retreat past the porter was now impossible, and so she followed into a dark hall and up a flight of stairs into what was apparently the harem or that part of the dwelling where the women of the household were kept secluded.

Upstairs there was a hall paved with marble from which radiated several passages and rooms into the largest of which the slave-girl who had now lowered her drapery and disclosed an ebony-colored face, now directed her. With a vision intensified by her fears, her glance took in every detail of this apartment, its lofty roof, the lantern above with its ingenious pattern of lattice work, the leewan with its deewans and cushions, the cupboards with curious carved panels and the siceif which ran around the room between the openings of scroll work upon which were arranged a number of china vessels for use as well as orna-

## THE BLACK STONE

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ment. There was an oriel or meshrebiya window at the upper end of the apartment through the windows of which Constance seemed to hear the subdued breathing of a sleeping city. She looked around the room and toward the corridor but no female figure appeared. The black girl poured water from an earthen bottle into a brass cup, like a finger bowl, and handed it to her; then brought a covered glass cup and set it upon a tabouret. Then she made a motion toward the smaller of the deewans speaking a few words that Constance could not understand and left her alone to sleep.

The events of the night, its excitements and terrors had kept her going on her nerves and this moment of immunity made her aware of an unpleasant feeling of physical weakness to which she was unaccustomed. She was very weary and, loosening her garments, tried to relax. But her mind was too active, too full of terrifying visions to make the thought of slumber possible. She drank a little of the sherbet and after a while found herself slowly regaining something of her courage and initiative. The buoyancy of her youth and optimism came to her rescue. She could not believe that Alan was dead. Conrad von Hengel had dealt upon her fear and credulity. She would not believe it. The thought was monstrous. He had been injured perhaps—but she knew that the men of Northby Pasha would surround the Mosque of Hasaneyn and rescue both Daoud and Alan. The brief glimpse of the blue uniforms which she had caught when fleeing with von Hengel had given her the courage to believe as she did. Alan had been injured, perhaps, and unable to save her from von Hengel, but he would not die. She knew that. Alan couldn't die now, just as he was beginning to be awake to the real meaning of life and his great possibilities for good in the great crisis that had come upon the world. He was awake.

## PRISONER

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She had seen the keen look in his eyes in which a new flame seemed to burn. The two months that had passed since she had given him his *congé* had made a transformation in Alan. She had known it in the train to Cairo and again in the Khan-El-Khalily. He had suddenly appeared to her in a new light, the same Alan in all the essentials that she had cared for, considerate, gentle, steady and honorable, but born into a realization of the gravity of life, and a resolute purpose to undo a wrong. He typified somehow their own great nation which was awakening slowly to the full measure of its responsibilities in the great crisis of civilization, and it had taken the deeds of a Prussian to arouse him.

She had thought much about Alan since she had left him in such a sudden and cruel fashion. He had hardly deserved his punishment. He was merely the creature of his environment and there had been many times in the last few weeks when she would have liked to have told him that she was sorry. To-night she had tried to show him something of what was in her heart, but he had not seen, it had not seemed indeed as if he had wished to see. He had been abstracted, wrapt in his new purpose to achieve the capture of Conrad von Hengel, and he had not seemed to remember what had been between them or even to care that she remembered it. And yet in her heart she felt that she had deserved his indifference. She had been cruelly abrupt in her dismissal of him. She should have known then as she knew now that he was merely what his money had made him, but that the Alan Jessup that she had cared for, the real Alan beneath the bored and weary exterior, would go to any lengths required by his sense of justice or honor. To-night she had even longed for an opportunity to show him that she knew him in his true colors, but events had moved too swiftly. And now——!

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She clenched her fingers over her eyes and tried to believe that it was not too late. She knew that she loved him, that she had loved him always, and the danger of losing him now assailed her like the pang of an angry conscience. It did not seem to matter a great deal what was to happen to her, if before it happened she could see Alan again and tell him what a terrible mistake she had made. Death! She would not believe it. And then her overwrought nerves broke with the stress of their tension and she sank upon the deewan racked with sobs, her cheeks wet with the merciful tears. And after a while she slept.

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She awoke suddenly with an uncomfortable feeling of oppression. The light in the huge room was dim, but as she turned on her couch and raised her head, she found herself facing two females, each in various stages of undress. They were tittering and staring at her in amusement and no little curiosity. But their attitudes were not unfriendly. One of them sat upon the deewan opposite her, quite young and handsome, and the other, a much older woman, stood at her feet gazing down at her, arms akimbo, waiting for her to awaken. The eyes of both women, soft, dark eyes, much the finest features in their faces, were deeply shaded with kohl, and the palms of their hands and their finger and toe nails were stained a bright orange color. The older woman who stood beside the deewan had a round tattoo mark on her chin and another like a falling arrow upon her forehead.

Constance straightened and sat up trying to summon her scattered wits and adjust her mind to meet this situation. If her fellow prisoners were antagonistic they gave no sign of it. And then, as Constance smiled pleasantly from one to the other and wondered what was going to happen next, the older woman spoke quite clearly in English.

## PRISONER

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"You have slept well, mees?"

"Yes," said Constance with a smile. "Thank you very much.

"You would like, perhaps, a bath?"

"If I could——"

The woman, whom the other called Zeyneb, spoke a few short words in Arabic to the black girl who stood in the background, and then went and helped her to prepare the bath.

The younger woman on the opposite deewan remained as before, regarding her, smiling in so friendly a way that Constance felt sure that she had made a friend. The girl was quite pretty and garbed in stays and a French frock would have made an excellent appearance on the terrace of Sheppard's hotel. And while she looked at her, Constance wondered where she came from and in what part of the world she belonged. She was surely not an Egyptian or a Habasheeyeh, like the slave-girl who had come to draw her bath. She seemed to represent a type with which Constance was more familiar and looked not unlike some of the girls in one of Constance's pet charities down on the East Side in New York. Greek, Circassian or Georgian? She could not decide. But all the while the two girls smiled at each other, the conviction growing in the mind of the American girl that some strange freak of fortune had thrown this girl into these surroundings. It was not that she did not seem contented, for there were no marks of pain or unhappiness upon her face, but her expression was that of sodden indifference, of the fatalism which lives in the present, obliterating the past—careless of the future. Amneh was of Islam, for later in the day, at the duhr, or noon hour, of prayer, she prostrated herself and said her rekahs.

The girl interested Constance intensely, but at the present moment her own difficulties scarcely left room for the af-

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fairs of others, and after a cup of coffee, which seemed to revive both her health and spirits, she went into the oriel window with the intention of sitting alone and gazing down into the sunlit street below. But before she could seat herself Zeyneb caught her by the arm not too gently and told her that she must not approach the windows either to the court-yard or street. And so, if there had been any doubt in her mind as to her status in the harem, it was now removed. She was a prisoner. The touch of the woman's hand upon her arm had made her angry, but she bit her lip and refrained from a reply. She saw the soft eyes of Amneh watching her in sympathy, and after a moment she sank upon the deewan beside the girl and gave herself up to her rather hopeless meditations. She felt Amneh's soft palm steal into her hand, and their fingers intertwined. Constance had not been mistaken. There was a bond of sympathy between them which needed little encouragement.

"I—am—sorree," Amneh's soft voice whispered. And then in a whisper, "*Tu parles français, mademoiselle!*"

Constance turned her face toward her companion in surprise and delight.

"Yes," she said quickly. "And you, where did you learn French?"

"In Paris, mademoiselle, in a boarding school."

"Paris! You are, then——"

"An Armenian, mademoiselle."

"But your name—Amneh. How did you come here?"

The girl shrugged with the same air of fatalism and indifference.

"What matters a name—or an identity—here? Cairo absorbs and forgets. I eat, I sleep, I smoke. What more does one require?"

Constance glanced toward the other woman, who had moved out into the corridor, and then spoke in a low voice.

## PRISONER

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"An Armenian. If you are a Christian, why do you then say the prayers of Islam?"

The girl drew a short breath from the coral mouthpiece of her shibuk and sighed.

"What does it matter? God is the same everywhere. It pleases my master. Christ will forgive."

The same note of carelessness and indifference. But beneath her words Constance thought that she detected the sullen fire of a hope deferred. There were vestiges of character, too, beneath the yielding softness of her features.

"You do not belong here, Amneh. Will you tell me how it happened?"

Their glances met and Amneh smiled.

"Yes. You shall know, mademoiselle, if it interests you. I returned to Armenia from Paris just at the beginning of the war. My mother and father lived in Bitlis and—and the man I was to marry. My father was a merchant and rich. He had friends in Constantinople and thought himself secure. But when the Turks came he was to learn the truth. They took all his money, burned his house and then killed him and my mother before my eyes. Then they carried me away." She paused a moment while an echo of her terror glowed in her eyes. Constance's fingers closed over hers again.

"And the man you were—to marry?" she asked

"They killed him when he tried to save me," she replied. No expression of anguish or emotion could have been more expressive of the horrors through which Amneh had passed than the hard even tones of this reply. It was a voice without a soul. Constance was at loss for a word and so merely pressed the hand of her companion in an eloquent silence. Amneh closed her eyes a moment. "After that," she went on calmly, "they sold me into slavery. I was pretty. I brought a high price. I came to Egypt. I was

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lucky. The Sheykh Hassan bought me. There were others who went to Constantinople and to Mosul . . . and others up the Nile to the traders of the Habasheeyehs——” She stopped to shudder and then shrug. “And here I am. Last year Hassan Is. r married me. I am his wife. I am very lucky.”

All of this in the same soulless tone. Even by contrast to it the sudden shudder had seemed almost artificial.

But the bitterness of this creature's misfortunes was sinking deep into the heart of the American girl. It was merely the tale of thousands of others east as well as west, and yet the unvarnished telling of it was more dramatic and convincing than anything Constance had ever heard. And the terrible details which Amneh had omitted seemed to stand forth one by one before the American girl's eyes in graphic pictures. Death had surely been better than what had happened to Amneh, but her soft southern beauty which should have broken gave no sign of the ordeal through which she had passed, except in the suddenly tightening lines at brow and lip, when she finished her story.

Constance sat silent in a moment of terror at the possibility that something of Amneh's experience might yet be her own. But the thought seemed impossible. The Kaah where they sat was a part of the orderly house of a Moslem high in family and in rank. And outside in the bright sunshine she heard the hum of the drowsy city, the cries of the sellers of lupins and limes, and the rattle of an arabeah over the cobbles of a thoroughfare near by. Somewhere near were Englishmen, Northby Pasha with his police and Alan. Her heart caught a beat, yes, Alan was near, too, hurt, perhaps badly, but near, and he would be well and seek her presently, and find her. . . .

“And you are happy now, Amneh?” she asked at the end of her fit of abstraction.

## PRISONER

"I am not unhappy," the girl replied calmly. "The Sheykh Hassan is a good man. I am both daughter and wife to him and—" She straightened abruptly with a triumphant glance at the woman Zeyneb, who sat at a messeg of walnut and mother-of-pearl, embroidering a head-veil. "Wife—" she said with a show of white teeth, "and favorite!"

Amneh took a light for her shibuk and smoked in a moment of silence. And then:

"Oh, mademoiselle," she said, "it is good to see again a white face. But how did you come here? We are not expected to ask questions, but I am very curious."

Constance paused. How much should she tell? How little? She was singularly attracted to this pretty creature, both by the bonds of her sympathy and the claims of her own need. And so, with a glance at Zeyneb, in whom she had instinctively recognized an enemy, Constance asked:

"She need not know?"

Amneh shrugged contemptuously. "You need fear nothing from me."

And so Constance rapidly told her all that had happened, beginning with her friendship for von Hengel in America, and Alan's, down to the discovery of the Kaba Stone in the Mosque of Hasaneyn and the calamitous results of the adventure.

Amneh listened, at first indifferently, but as Constance went on she saw that she had captured the girl's interest and imagination. For, as the story developed, her eyes sparkled and then, with her gaze fixed on Constance's face, her lips slightly parted, she became entirely absorbed, putting in a quick question here and there and giving every indication of an entire and partisan interest. Indeed, so abstracted were they from their immediate surroundings that they did not notice the figure of Zeyneb which stood

## THE BLACK STONE

almost beside them and suddenly broke in upon the conversation with a gush of Arabic invective. Of course Constance could not know what she said, but the manner of Amneh was most reassuring. For the Armenian girl rose from her elbow and shot one short shrill sentence at the woman, which seemed effectually to subdue her. And, after a few sullen sentences in reply, she followed the direction of Amneh's pointing finger and retired to the other end of the kaah and her embroidery frame.

Amneh watched her a moment through relentless half-closed eyes until the woman was seated, and then turned to Constance.

"*Elle est si bête,*" she muttered.

Nothing could have better conveyed the power of this new favorite than the complete air of confidence with which Amneh resumed their conversation.

"And she will not speak?" asked Constance anxiously.

"If she does, Hassan Isar shall divorce her," she replied cruelly.

This was how the worm had turned. She used the little power that had been given her upon the poor creature she had displaced. Constance was beginning to wonder how she could use this power to her own advantage.

"And it is the one that is called the Sheykh Omar Khalil who is Conrad von Hengel?" she asked of Constance quietly.

"You have seen him?"

"Through the window screen into the mandara from the room beyond. And he is a German, you say?"

"A captain in the Prussian Army——"

"A German," said Amneh. And then, as though thinking aloud, "It is they who by a word could have prevented the slaughter of my people," she murmured softly.

But in the very softness of her speech was a new accent,

## **PRISONER**

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as though it was the voice of some hidden vestige of her dead soul that spoke. And her dark eyes, as she gazed past Constance, seemed suddenly to blaze with the reflection of a hidden fire. Constance did not reply, for she seemed to feel that the moment was very significant to them both.

After a while Amneh turned to Constance with a smile.

"Tell me more of this valiant American, Monsieur Alan. You say he is very rich?" she asked.

## CHAPTER XII

### THE ALTERNATIVE

**T**HE day passed quietly with no sign of von Hengel or the Sheykh, and Constance improved her opportunities to make a friend of Amneh. It was not difficult, for already they seemed to have been drawn toward each other by the common bonds of their youth and misfortune. Zeyneb bothered them no more, but sat apart at her embroidery frame, or superintended the work of Kha-deegeh, the black slave, in setting the rooms in order and in preparing the meals which they ate squatted upon the floor around a small silver tray upon a tabourette. It was not until after the evening meal that the visit of the Sheykh was announced. There was a clapping of hands downstairs in the mandara, which seemed to be the signal for rather elaborate feminine preparations, Amneh putting on her kurs and safa and slipping into a rather gorgeous crimson saltah or jacket, and a gibbeh of purple velvet, and disposed herself upon a deewan in the sadr or upper end of the room to await the arrival of her lord. Constance, herself somewhat uncertain as to her own status in this household, found the opportunity to note the extreme care with which the favorite put on her apparel and keenly watched the conduct of both women as the Sheykh appeared. He stood at the entrance of the kaah removing his slippers and pronouncing the words which Constance had already learned and the women gave appropriate reply, Zeyneb softly, seizing his right hand and raising it to her

## THE ALTERNATIVE

forehead. But even as she did so, his gaze passed to Amneh beyond her, who had half risen and was showing her white teeth in a smile.

"On you be peace, and the mercy of God and His blessings," she murmured.

Sheykh Hassan bowed sedately to Constance, but passed her by and went at once to Amneh's side, seating himself in the center of the deewan, thus giving her the place of honor at his right. They conversed for a few moments in Arabic. And then the Sheykh addressed the American girl in English.

"I hope, Madame, that you have been well cared for."

"I have nothing to complain of," she said steadily, "but the loss of my liberty."

"I am very sorry," he replied gravely. "That is a matter over which at present I have no control. The Sheykh Omar, who is my guest, will tell you that this is so."

"Sheykh Omar, as you call him," said Constance with more contempt than wisdom, "has no control over me."

"That is as may be," said Hassan oracularly. "It is a matter which only concerns you and him. He awaits you in the guest room, yonder beyond the stair."

He pointed with his long arm in the direction beyond the hall and then clapped his hands, a signal answered at once by the Khadeegeh, to whom he spoke a sentence.

Constance glanced at Amneh, who seemed to understand what had passed, and in her eyes Constance read that she must obey. Indeed, there seemed nothing else to do, and so she followed the slave out of the harem past a heavy hanging and down a short passage to a door where the girl, her face now veiled with the hem of her robe, stood aside and gestured to Constance to go in.

Von Hengel rose from the deewan as she entered and came forward briskly.

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"Fräulein," he muttered, "you must know that I am sorry."

Her lip curled contemptuously, but she took the seat he indicated, and sat for a moment silent, partly in fear and partly in anger, determined at least that she would first hear what he had to say to her.

"It is most unfortunate," he went on, "that Alan Jessup should have been so imprudent as to risk your precious life in this mad venture. As to myself, you must already be aware of the deep esteem in which I hold you. There were many things that I learned in America, one of them, the real glory of its womanhood——"

"To what end is this conversation, Captain von Hengel?" she broke in abruptly.

"To convince you that any damages to your feelings or your comfort are the outcome of a situation which you yourself have created."

"You mean," she replied coolly, "that you dare to take advantage of the helplessness of a woman. It is quite in accord with your national character."

"I am sorry you said that. We are at war. All means are fair. Like Alan, you were a spoke in my wheel. You had to be removed."

He noticed the sudden look of dismay in her eyes at the mention of Jessup's name and followed his advantage. "But I am disposed to be generous, if not merely for a woman's sake, in memory of the kindly relations that have always existed between us. I do not wish you to suffer in mind or body or even to be greatly inconvenienced, and so I may tell you that Alan is not dead. He was removed to a hospital last night by Northby Pasha, and I believe is now doing well."

She was grateful for that news and her gasp of relief did not escape him.

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"You see, I am not so bad as I've been painted. But I'm playing a great game in Egypt, Fräulein, and I am playing it alone. So I cannot be altogether scrupulous in the means which I employ. But my deep and enduring affection for you——"

"Is this necessary, Captain von Hengel?" she questioned abruptly.

"It is, Fräulein," he said coolly, "because I wish you to know that I plan to save you every unpleasantness. It is with that purpose that I have called you here to speak with me."

"I am no slave to run at your beck and call. As there is a law—you shall suffer——"

"There is no law for any German to-day," he put in warmly, "but the law of might. Every other consideration has passed——"

"And with it all decency, all honor——"

He held up his hand, and as she paused from sheer excess of anger, he went on:

"Fräulein, you are choosing the wrong course. You have not had time to deliberate. I wish to be your friend, even if circumstances seem to make us enemies——"

"A friend such as you were to Alan Jessup," she said contemptuously. "A dog that bites the hand that feeds it."

If she had expected to see him angry his manner still more inflamed her. His fists tightened for a moment and his brows tangled, but he merely reached for a cigarette and a smile grew at his lips.

"You shall not anger me, Fräulein," he said suavely. "I owe you too much."

"Then pay it now and let me go," she stormed.

"I regret that that is impossible."

"Why?"

"You know too much, Fräulein. And, besides, I could

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not bear to part with you until I am sure that we are friends again."

"You'll wait long for that."

"I'm not so sure," he said with a quick glance, while he lighted his cigarette. "You must admit that last night I was the means of saving you from a dreadful fate, death perhaps, or something even worse. And now, while I keep you safe from the consequences of your temerity, you do nothing but abuse me. It is not fair, Fräulein Constance. *Nicht wahr?*"

He looked at her over the smoke of his cigarette and she thought that he was merely amusing himself with her. She was not accustomed to restraint and she felt sure that she had never hated any one in her life until now.

"You are a beast," she said, rising and turning helplessly toward the door.

Von Hengel rose also with his most ceremonious manner.

"I beg that you will be seated, Fräulein. Where should you go? Not to the harem, since the Sheykh is there for his evening hour in the bosom of his family. If you will bear with me some moments longer, perhaps I can convince you that I am not all vile."

She sank upon the deewan again in helpless despair. She knew now that in her newly discovered fear and hatred of this man she had behaved like a school-girl, giving vent to all her pent emotions. There was a finer game to play here, the game von Hengel was playing now. Alan was safe and soon would come to her. In the meanwhile, she must find patience and wait, whatever was to happen, learning meanwhile what she could.

"Appearances are against you, Conrad von Hengel," she gasped.

"Perhaps," he replied. "I cannot expect you to think me without sin against you. But my necessity knew no

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law. If you will have the patience to listen for a moment I will tell you why you misjudge me."

Constance bent her head over her clasped hands in token of assent.

"The object of my mission is known to you. How Alan Jessup could have discovered it I have no means of learning, for Alan—" he paused and smiled, "Alan has never been one to set the world on fire."

"It is always a mistake to underestimate," she said dryly.

"Alan has surprised me," he went on. "I may say he has delighted me also, because a triumph won over intelligence is the only sort worth while."

"You are very sure of yourself."

"I am. Or I should not be here. But it was necessary to talk with you."

Her look questioned.

"It is my desire to save you from the result of your imprudences. By all the rules of the game, I should have left you last night to your fate——"

"My rescue by Northby Pasha?" she suggested.

She scored one there and von Hengel smiled.

"I am afraid that Northby Pasha would never have found you," he said calmly. "The Khatib is a fanatic, the walls of the Hasaneyn are silent. You must give me credit for an act of compassion. But I will admit a motive of self-interest, too."

"Naturally."

He paused a moment before he went on.

"In a day or two, Fräulein, I am starting east with the Kaba Stone. I shall not go alone. Descendants of the Prophet go with me, Sheriffs and Sheykhs who stand high in Islam. In three months all the Mohammedan peoples of the world will be in arms against the British. Egypt will revolt, Arabia, Persia, India and the Turkish army,

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already fighting bravely before Jerusalem and upon the Tigris under German officers, will be armed with a terrible fanaticism which their sacred stone will bring."

"You dream——"

"You shall see. I am very sure of my dream—and of you. To show you how sure, I will tell you what will happen. Already here in Cairo the seed has been sown. A seed is enough. In a week the Kaba Stone will cross the Red Sea, where it will be lost in the Arabian desert. When it comes out again a million men will follow it. Armed men, Fräulein, with excellent German rifles and equipment, under German leaders. And then——" He had risen and stood before her, his outflung arms suddenly falling in an expressive gesture. "And then the British Armies will be thrown into the sea."

Something of the fanaticism of which he boasted for Islam was in his own eyes and gestures. His robes became him and Constance could not deny a moment of admiration for his own faith in himself and his hazardous undertaking. Perhaps she showed it for a second. But she could not forget that this was merely Conrad von Hengel, to whom she had taught the one-step and who had danced with such clumsiness one night at Willard's that her toes had paid penalty. And so she only smiled up at him amusedly.

"You are a born actor, Sheykh Omar Hilal. I should never have suspected it."

He glared and made a sudden movement toward her.

"You are a very brave woman, Fräulein," he said in a choked voice. And she realized that she had made a mistake. No Prussian can endure ridicule. She returned his somber look with a smile.

"I am afraid I don't understand," she replied.

"Then listen," he said brutally, now thoroughly angry.

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"We'll put pretences aside, the thin amenities of existence by which you Americans set such store. I will speak the truth. You are securely imprisoned in this house, as far from rescue by the British authorities as though I had taken you to the heart of the Arabian desert. You are my prisoner, mine, to do with as I choose, a prisoner of war in a Moslem country. Do you realize what that means?"

A quick recollection of that look she had seen in Amneh's eyes came to her and her gaze sought von Hengel's face. His lips were distorted with passion, disclosing ugly facts which had been hidden under the nicely trained blonde mustache. But she did not lose her courage.

"My nation is not yet at war with yours," she protested.

"But *you* are at war, Fräulein Masterson, a nurse, a soldier in the service of the British Government," he said harshly.

He marked the shade that passed across her face and lost no time in following his advantage. "Your happiness, your security, depends on me. I have spent five years in Constantinople. You did not know that I am of Moslem faith. You are a Christian and my prisoner of war. You are my slave. I can make you my wife to-morrow, and divorce you when I choose."

He had come close to her and seized her by the wrist. It was not a gentle clasp and she shrank away from him with a gasp of horror, while she struggled to free herself. But in a moment he released her and straightened with a laugh and a shrug as he recovered control of his temper.

"*Quatsch!*" he muttered to himself.

She had fallen prone upon the deewan and cowered there, staring at him, one hand nursing her injured wrist. The transformation had been so sudden. She could not believe that her thrust at his self-esteem had been the cause of it. He had resumed his cigarette and stood with

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folded arms staring down at her. The house was silent. A hush as of death seemed to have fallen on all the world. Only his quick breathing and her own and in the distance the faint familiar sound of the whistle of a locomotive. Somehow, that homely note seemed to arouse her courage again. Honest men and women, brave men, English men, were there just beyond the windows, Christians, like herself, men who believed in gentleness in strength and mercy in power. Alan . . .

"Now, perhaps you understand what I mean," she heard his voice saying calmly.

He had frightened her for a moment, frightened her terribly, at the vision he invoked, but the strength that he had used upon her was only the strength of his outraged dignity, nothing else. She felt it in the touch of his hand. As he made no move to approach her again, the other danger seemed remote. And the words he now spoke still further reassured her.

He laughed lightly and sank upon the deewan opposite.

"Fräulein, I have spoiled everything. I have a quick temper. I am sorry. I do not understand women. Forgive me. I am not really bad, only tempestuous. There was a time in America, not very long ago, when I thought that you liked me a little. I would not harm you, not in the way I have suggested. I am sorry to have frightened you. There! Will you forgive me?"

A sound came from her throat, but she was watching him keenly all the while.

"I lost my temper. It was foolish. You made mock of me. It is the way of you Americans. But it is out of place with one who has a mission like mine, to conquer half the world for German arms, to succeed by a ruse in accomplishing what all the chancelleries of Europe have matched their dice for these forty years. And I shall suc-

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ceed, Fräulein. The trump is in my own hand. And you may be sure that I know how to play it. The German army will humble France, the navy England. Many lives have been spent and will be spent to gain that end. But the East is mine. Alone—single-handed—I will win it for the Hohenzollern."

He paused in a moment of silent gratulation and communion. She had often heard him in this braggart mood when he had spoken of the Divine Mission of the Germanic race, but to-night all barriers were down. He was superman, self-revealed, the walls had no ears and his audience was his prisoner.

"The rewards for such an achievement, Fräulein, are perhaps beyond your conception. Majestät is not ungenerous. I shall be a Prince—the bâton of a Field Marshal, who knows? It takes little imagination. You may perhaps one day be proud of the humble Graf."

Whither was he leading? She had known him to be a creature of moods, but the rapidity of his transitions to-night bewildered her. In her heart she had learned more to fear than to disdain, more to disdain than to despise. For if he dreamed, he dreamed grandly and death had no terrors for him. She was dumb with uncertainty and yet she knew that she must speak, that she must try to repair the errors of her alternate fear and over-confidence. He was rather magnificent in a way, but this momentary magniloquence was not to be trusted. And so at last she ventured:

"The world may not be conquered so easily, Conrad von Hengel."

He showed his teeth in a smile.

"You shall see. It does not take cleverness to discover how dangerous my secret is when all the forces of the Egyptian police are let loose to circumvent me. But they

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cannot succeed. My plans are too well laid. In a week I shall be beyond all danger. In a month I will have an army at my back."

He paused again a moment.

"Fräulein, I must come to the object of this interview," he said with sudden gravity. "For yourself there are two alternatives. One, to stay here a prisoner in this house when I am gone. The other to go with me yonder to my great destiny!"

She shrank imperceptibly within herself, but she had learned her lesson and gave no sign of her dismay at this alternative.

"If you stay here, I cannot be responsible for you. You know the secret of the Kaba Stone and the Sheykh Hassan's share in this conspiracy against the power of Christendom. It is your death or his. I want you to go with me, Fräulein—into the East of the rising sun and the glory of achievement. I prefer that you should go willingly, because I want you to share with me the honors of my undertaking. There will be danger, but you do not fear that." He lowered his voice a note. "Sometimes in America I have thought that you cared for me a little. *Nicht wahr?* I would have spoken in New York had I not seen that you were much disturbed over the war. Alan you refused. Why?"

She glanced up in surprise at this statement. He had risen and stood close beside her, peering down.

"Was it not because he was one who did not take a man's part in the great affairs of the world—because he lacked vision—because he did not dare greatly as the man of such a woman as you must do? Was not that why you refused him?"

"Who—who told you that?" she stammered.

"Alan himself."

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"Oh," she muttered, in dismay.

He fell to his knees beside her and touched her fingers gently. With an intuition that she must listen and endure she did not withdraw them.

"Listen, Fräulein. A moment ago you angered me. I forgot myself. God knows I would not injure you even if my life depended upon it. See. You are in my power—now—at this moment, and I do not use a finger to coerce you. But I am not a man to waste words. I love you, Fräulein. It has always been so. You have a mind. You think. You are beautiful and you are not afraid. You were born to mate with a man who had a great mission in the world. I ask nothing of you but that you go with me—willingly. I expect nothing of you but your allegiance. I will give you my great friendship and you shall see that it is worth something. Perhaps some day you will not regret it—perhaps a time will come when you will forget your fears and care for me again a little. Is it not so?"

As her fingers remained cold in his he released them and rose. Though every word he uttered made her fear him the more, she remained motionless, staring beyond him, as though in doubt, at the moon through the lattice. She had been served well for her petulance, but she had learned something. His egotism, as always, was enormous, his knowledge of women based on Prussian standards; but could she not use them to her own ends? At least for the present she must tolerate him and dissimulate.

"Ach, I have been too sudden with you. You are much upset. It is a great deal to think of, to decide in a few moments."

"I—I am very tired to-night, Captain von Hengel," she murmured.

"Of course," he said in a soothing voice. "You are tired.

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It is very thoughtless of me. You shall go to sleep and to-morrow you will think about it, *nicht wahr?*"

"Yes," she said mechanically. "I—I will think about it. You—you rather have taken my breath away, Captain von Hengel."

"And now I give it back to you," he said, moving toward the door. "You shall return to the harem and be in peace."

He clapped his hands in signal to the harem and then, as she rose, bowed over her fingers. "You will try to forgive me. I am a brute—a beast, as you say. But I have many worries,—the fate of nations. I have not permitted women to interest me. But you, Fräulein——"

Kahdeegeh at this moment entered, and stood at the doorway, silent.

"You forgive me, Fräulein?" he muttered again.

She nodded, let him press his lips to her fingers, and followed the black girl out of the door.

## CHAPTER XIII

### CONSTANCE CHOOSES

**T**HE gray light of dawn was filtering in through the meshrebiya oriel before Constance in sheer exhaustion fell asleep. And sleep had brought no answer to her problems. Imprisonment here—as alternative to Conrad von Hengel! At first glance it had not seemed difficult to choose, for any imprisonment seemed less vile than the arrangement he proposed. But what did imprisonment in this house of Hassan Isar mean? It frightened her to think how greatly she was in the power of her enemies. All through the night she had been aware of Kahdeegh or another awake and watchful. There seemed no possibility of escape. And to make matters worse, it seemed as though the girl Amneh, upon whose friendship she had set such store, had avoided her when she returned to the harem after the departure of the Sheykh. Without Amneh her situation seemed very hopeless.

The revelations of the German had both shocked and amazed her. It seemed as though the robes he wore had translated him by some magic into the age of medievalism of which they were a part, obliterating all that she remembered that was fine in him, and leaving only that which was unsentient and unspiritual.

The insult of his proposal was scarcely less than the insult of his mere presence, and yet she felt now in spite of herself, as she had felt in New York, that Conrad von Hengel was a creature not to be despised. He had indeed

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so far succeeded in his plans and the confidence that he felt in their ultimate success had been shown in the freedom with which he had spoken of them. And yet, somehow, she knew that she must try to find some weak strand in the mesh of the net in which she had been taken. Amneh? Perhaps. But there were Zeyneb and Kahdegeh, and many others to be reckoned with. The alternative of going with von Hengel on the expedition and later finding some means of notifying Northby Pasha of her whereabouts and the whereabouts of the Black Stone occurred to her, but the hazard was too obvious. She had no money or any means of bribing those whom she might make her friends. She would be completely in the Prussian officer's power and far from those from whom she might hope for aid. The promises of friendship that he had made did not deceive her. Here in this house, whatever the dangers at the hands of Sheykh Hassan or his friends, she was at least near help, if she could find the means of invoking it. She must stay and through the girl Amneh do what she could to get a message to the Governorat.

She had awakened after a troubled sleep and now sat upon the edge of her mattress, which had been laid for her by the slave-girl. Zeyneb was already in the kaah, and Amneh was just emerging from her sleeping-room. If Constance had thought the manner of Amneh last night indifferent to her, the girl's greetings quickly removed that impression, for after a glance toward Zeyneb she came forward.

"I am your friend," she said softly. "I will try to help you." And then in a whisper, "But I must now be very careful."

And with that crumb of comfort for Constance, went on to perform her ablutions.

Later in the morning an opportunity for intimate con-

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versation occurred, for Zeyneb went out of the harem and only Kahdeegh remained. And so Amneh led the American girl into the kaah, where they could sit alone.

"Sheykh Hassan has given explicit orders regarding you. But you may well believe that I do not wish you to share my fate. I like you, Mademoiselle, and will help you if I can, but as you see, you are watched by others who get their orders direct from the Sheykh. I do not dare to disobey them. I do not dare even to let these others know that I am too friendly with you. Zeyneb is afraid of me, but if I disobeyed the commands of my lord and master, it is I who should be afraid."

"It is terrible, Amneh," said Constance soberly, "that you, once a free woman and a Christian, should be no more than a slave. Do you never wish for your freedom—to go and come as you wish?"

"Oh, perhaps. I did at first. I was like a wild bird that had been taken. I tried to poison myself. I failed. And after that I grew careless—indifferent. The spell of Islam fell upon me."

"But it is not too late to find a place in the world of free men and women. You are young and very beautiful."

Amneh's eyes sparkled and her teeth showed in a joyous smile.

"You think so? That is good. Every woman wishes that others should think her beautiful." And then her face grew sober again. "But as to my going forth into the world—that is impossible."

"Why?" asked Constance in a half whisper. "It is your right. You were stolen and sold into slavery—an act of force. And if an act of force should release you——"

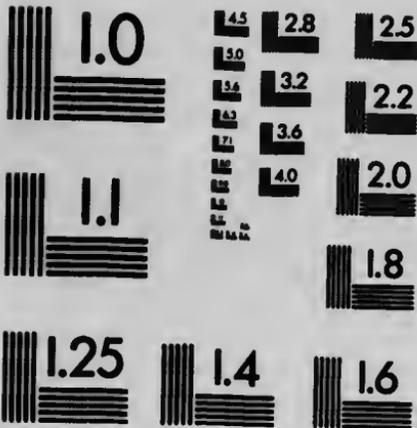
Amneh shook her head.

"But who should release me? And why? And where should I go? Have I not told you that I am not unhappy?"



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## THE BLACK STONE

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"Neither are the dead, they say," said Constance quietly, "if they have lived in righteousness."

"You mean," asked the girl slowly, "that to be as I am is worse than being dead? Sometimes I think so. But I have grown indifferent and so long as I am in comfort——" she broke off suddenly and put her hands before her eyes. "I—I fear the world, Mademoiselle—for to me it has been filled with horrors."

Constance, after a glance into the corridor, threw an arm around Amneh's shoulders.

"You poor child," she murmured. "You have suffered much. I understand. But all the world is not filled with horrors such as you have seen. The nations of freedom have risen up to punish those who commit the crimes from which you have suffered. It is true. Here, just at your door, England struggles, and beyond the seas America watches and waits. They are your friends. And I—Amneh, I, too, am your friend. Do you not believe it?"

"Yes, I believe it. But you can do no good. I am beyond the pale. What does it matter?"

She shrugged and turned half away. But Constance caught her by the hand.

"Awake, Amneh," she whispered earnestly, "awake! It is your soul that has been asleep, drugged with this life of sloth and fatalism. There is a life for you yonder, beyond these walls. I can find it for you if you'll listen and help."

Amneh turned her head and in her eyes Constance saw renewed for a second the faint glow that she had noticed yesterday. And then as suddenly her heavy lids fell and she shook her head.

"It is too late," she murmured.

"No. Your soul listens—it wakens whether you want

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it to or not. You say that you are not unhappy here. That is because you are afraid to tempt life further."

"I dare not. Apostasy—! They would kill me. It has been done."

"They must find you first——"

"No. I cannot. I cannot go. I have accepted this fate. Kismet! I must abide. But you—Mademoiselle. I shall perhaps be able——"

At this point Kahdeegeh came into the corridor and the conversation stopped. And it was not until later in the day that it was resumed. But, in the meanwhile, Constance had watched the girl narrowly. She seemed abstracted and nervous, smoking her shibûk, or pacing the floor, from time to time glancing at Constance with a question in her eyes. At last, when another opportunity presented, Amneh came and sat upon the deewan in the kaah beside the American girl.

"Tell me something of Monsieur Alan," she said eagerly.

Constance smiled. "He is gentle, brave and beautiful."

"That he must be brave—I do know, for no man rushes into danger without courage. But to be gentle also—and beautiful. You love him, Mademoiselle?"

Constance's face grew grave.

"I have known him all my life," she evaded.

"It is good to have friends. I, too—once——"

"You shall have them again. Alan shall save you from this—this fate to which you are resigned. Even now he is searching for me. I know it. He was hurt, but he will recover and find a way to reach me—and you, Amneh. You must go then—back to those of your own blood."

"Alas! There are none."

"Then you shall make new ties and win back the self-respect that they have robbed you of."

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Amneh frowned and then an abstracted look came into her eyes.

"My self-respect," she repeated. "It is that—it must be that which has gone."

"Pride, perhaps, would have been a better word. But what does it matter? When you go out of here you shall lift up your eyes to the God of your fathers as a free-woman and a Christian."

Amneh clutched her hand suddenly, almost fiercely, as the faint glow in the ashes of her hopes, suddenly reviving, caught fire.

"You think that is possible?" she questioned eagerly.

"I know it. All the West is aflame with a desire for retribution on those who have made the helpless suffer. It is Alan's cause and mine. He is very rich, beyond your dreams, and money has the power of armies here in Egypt."

"Yes. That is true. Money. It is the land of Backsheesh—" she broke off, and the hopeless look came into her face again. "But I cannot—I cannot betray my lord and master."

"The world has changed. The years pass Egypt by. No woman to-day need own a lord or a master. You were a slave. The Sheykh Hassan married you according to the Mohammedan custom. But to you, a Christian, what marriage was that?"

"And yet—" Amneh paused as though intending to go on, but, changing her mind, asked suddenly, "What is it that you wish me to do, Mademoiselle?"

The girl was wavering. Constance smiled to herself.

"To go out of this house—in disguise—to the Governorat—to Northby Pasha, with a note which I will write. You will stay there secretly until Alan comes for you. He will provide."

"And you?"

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"I will wait here and see what happens."

"You mean that you will tell them that the Black Stone is hidden here, that they may come and take it?"

Constance nodded.

"The Prussian would kill you if he discovered—and me."

"You will be beyond his reach. I must take the chance."

"But I would not dare. I do not know the way," she gasped. "I'm afraid that you must think me cowardly. And besides," she finished weakly, "the Sheykh Hassan has been good to me."

"No harm can come to the Sheykh," whispered Constance. "He has done nothing yet to injure the cause of England. Conrad von Hengel is using him to further his own ends. It is better that he should be taken now before harm is done. I beg you to think deeply, if not for your own sake, for the cause the free nations of the world are fighting for, the oppressed. Germany acquiesced in the horrors of Armenia when a word from her Emperor would have stopped them. Will you, like him, acquiesce in a conspiracy against the armies of England, which might result in their ruin? It is in your hand to save the power of civilization and Christianity from the fanaticism of Islam. If the horrors that you have suffered have left their mark upon you, think of what may happen to others even less fortunate than yourself. Freedom and happiness are on the one hand—sloth, slavery, disgrace and perhaps worse upon the other."

Amneh bent forward and backward, wringing her hands. "What shall I do," she murmured, "what *can* I do?"

"Listen, Amneh," Constance went on feverishly, "the Black Stone is hidden—somewhere in this house. It came with Captain von Hengel from the Mosque of Hasaneyn. Even if the Englishmen should come to this place, there

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would still perhaps be time for the Prussian to escape with it. If you could first find where it is concealed——”

“That would be impossible. Perhaps in the guest-chamber, perhaps in the closet of Sheykh Hassan—I know not. You frighten me with these desperate proposals. I do not wish to die—not yet—for I am still young and life owes me much.”

“You will not gain it here. Whatever happens now you could never be happy if you let this opportunity pass you by. For if you had had no conscience, you would not have suffered the pangs of lost respect. Awake, Amneh. For the weapon of vengeance is at your hand.”

Constance had the dominant will, the stronger mind, and with a desperate purpose played upon the girl’s fears and emotions until she seemed to sway like a young tree in a storm, and used, somewhat wildly, every argument that came into her mind to arouse the girl into a spirit of revolt against the injustice that had been done to her. And while she spoke she watched Amneh anxiously, sure in one moment that she had vanquished her fears, in the next that the habits of luxury and peace were already too strong for her. But at last, with what seemed to be a sudden look of resolution, Amneh stirred and rose.

“No more now, Mademoiselle. I must think. You have aroused me. You are strong. I would like to do your bidding, but——” she stopped with a gasp. “I will speak with you later,” and so, with a quick smile, Amneh rose and went to her own room.

But the seeds that Constance dropped had not fallen on barren ground. Amneh was aroused to the point of acquiescence. But the plan was changed. And that night, after the hour of prayer, she consented to escape with Constance to the Governorat. All things seemed to favor their plans. The Sheykh would not come to the harem to-night.

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He was to be busy at the Mosque of El-Azhar and Zeyneb and Kahdeegeh should be disposed of. There was a private door from the harem, which led by a stairway seldom used directly into the street. The key was in Zeyneb's possession. Once her decision made, Amneh seemed to take a thoroughly Oriental delight in the intrigue. At the evening meal Zeyneb and Kahdeegeh were given sleeping powders in their coffee, and by the hour when darkness fell were both soundly asleep, the one in the kaah, the other on her mat in the corridor.

The key secured from Zeyneb's belt, and Amneh attired in her black tarhhah and burka, they unlocked the door and descended the steps toward the street. They came upon another door in the darkness, which Constance had to unlock, for Amneh was so tremulous with the excitement of the venture that she could not fit the wooden key into the dubbeh. But Constance, her blood coursing swiftly at the easy success of her embassy with the Armenian girl, fitted the pins into their appointed places and at last felt the bolt give slightly to her efforts. But through disuse it had become stiff in its groove, and as it shot suddenly back the sound seemed to reverberate from one end of the building to the other. Horror-stricken at this disaster, they waited a moment, fearing that the sound must be surely heard and their escape be discovered, but in a moment, reassured, Constance softly opened the door and peered out in the dimly lighted street.

But she had no sooner done so than a dark hand was thrust into the aperture and the door was pushed open. Constance started back in dismay before the white-robed figure which faced her and jabbered at her furiously in Arabic. She could not see the face of the man, but she knew that he was huge, that his voice was gruff and that the nebbot he held upraised in his hand was meant for

## THE BLACK STONE

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her defenseless shoulders. She started back, clutching in the darkness at Amneh's hand. But her companion had given a short cry and fled up the stairs and into the harem, and Constance, with one swift glance of terror over her shoulder at the menacing bow-wab, followed up the stairs as quickly as her trembling knees would permit.

The very ease with which her plans had been accomplished should have warned her. Even if the old Sheykh had proved unwary, she should have realized that a man who could plan the recrudescence of a Kaba Stone would neglect no such detail as an unbarred gate to freedom. How could she have hoped to elude a brain like that of Conrad von Hengel—a man who thought only in terms of the efficiency which had made him what he was, efficiency's chosen agent in the great conspiracy of the war in the East? Constance fled through the upper door into the corridor, breathlessly shut and bolted it behind her and sank in a state of abject misery upon the deewan beside Amneh, who had thrown herself prone upon her face and was now moaning in anguish at the terrible consequences of their failure. Nothing that Constance could summon in the way of encouragement seemed to affect her. Not only the great plan failed, but also she would now lose the favor of the Sheykh and the hated Zeyneb perhaps be called in her place. In her terror and failure she had become a child. The great issues that Constance had described, the freedom that Constance had dangled before her eyes, the visions invoked, were lost in the disillusionment of the moment. To Constance the situation became again increasingly desperate, but she had a moment of pity in which to condole with this pretty creature whose ebbing pride she had aroused for a moment—so fruitlessly.

In her own desperation it even occurred to Constance to seize the jeweled dagger upon the shelf at her hand and

## CONSTANCE CHOOSES

go down into the court-yard and try to pass the other man at the mastabah. She had even taken the weapon into her hands and half unsheathed it from its hilt, but at the sight of the chill blue steel of the blade she lost courage and set the dagger aside. In a moment she took it up again thoughtfully, and after a moment thrust it inside her blouse and under her waistband.

Then she turned to Amneh again as a thought came to her.

"Amneh, do not fear, child. No harm shall come to you because of this."

Her tone was so confident that Amneh raised a tearful face in curiosity.

"No one knows that you were with me—that you planned to go. There are no witnesses. It was dark in the corridor. The watchman at the door did not see. And the other witnesses—see! They sleep."

"That is true," said Amneh hopefully, as easily reassured as frightened.

"Go. Remove all traces of your preparations and then, like them, feign sleep. I must take the consequences of this failure. You shall tell them you were drugged. There is no need for you to suffer."

Amneh sprang up and threw her arms around the neck of the American girl.

"You will not tell?" she asked eagerly.

"No. Why should I? Besides—I have not lost hope. We shall succeed later."

Amneh looked at her dubiously, but in a moment obeyed her and disappeared into her own apartment, while Constance, newly impressed with the retributive consequences of her attempt to escape, sat hopelessly, her hands clasped about her knees, staring at the lamp and listening to the heavy breathing of Zeyneb.

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There was a sound of shuffling footsteps on the stone flagging of the corridor and a black woman entered, another whom she had not seen. Without a word the woman handed her a slip of paper and then silently retired. Wondering, Constance turned the paper over and read:

"It is useless. You cannot succeed. I pray you to be careful, or I cannot answer for your safety. To-morrow I hope for my answer. Will you not be kind to me? Good night. C. von H."

For a long while Constance sat, her hands clasped about her knees, the slip of paper in her fingers, staring into space. There was no hope. She was helpless. The courage, the hope of escape or rescue, faded with the gleam of the sputtering lamp and at last she sank upon the deewan and lay quiet.

If the sunlight of the morning brought new strength and courage, it brought no new hope. Instead of opportunity, she realized that the cordon was being drawn more closely about her. Before she had awakened, the story of her attempt to escape had already passed through the house, and Zeyneb was always sitting near, with Kahdeegh close by in the corridor. If Amneh was suspected of having a share in the escape, there was nothing in the manner of Zeyneb to indicate the fact. But the Armenian girl, arousing with difficulty, as though from deep slumber, avoided Constance and simulated an air of suspicion and enmity, which Constance understood. But this attitude did nothing to cheer the prisoner, who now felt that the only prop to her failing hopes had been withdrawn. And that unless rescue came from without she was now entirely at the mercy of Conrad von Hengel.

She tried, throughout the interminable day, to analyze the conversation she had had with von Hengel. There were features of their new relationship of captor and cap-

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tive that were not quite clear to her. Von Hengel was playing a desperate game. The slightest miscarriage of his plans meant his elimination from the Eastern problem and his death as a spy. Alan and she had crossed him. He had tried to kill Alan. Why hadn't he killed her? It would have been easy there in the silence and darkness of the corridor of the mosque. Why had he spared her then? If the quality of his mercy had been strained, she could not deny, in view of the menace to his success, that he had been merciful. There had always been something in the keenness of her intelligence that had attracted him to her. He had often told her that she was like no woman he had ever known. He had been on the point of proposing marriage to her more than once, but she had managed with some skill each time to evade him. She had never had much sympathy with the Prussian idea. But love—of a sort—surely, sentiment of a kind, he must have had for her. The remaining vestiges of this attachment—(he had called it friendship)—had doubtless so far saved her life. But she had no hope that any love that he had had for her could weigh for a moment in the balance, against his stroke for Germany. To the Prussian, questions of sentiment or of sex would be ruthlessly set aside. If considerations affecting the safety of himself or of the Kaba Stone required removal she believed that he would still be capable of killing her out of hand. She knew that until his plans were consummated and he was safely beyond the Red Sea, she was an impediment to his success, an object of danger and of suspicion. Why had he spared her unless he cared for her? He had asked her to go with him. Had all that was decent in her revolted at the idea of leaving her a prisoner to the mercies of an aroused fanaticism? The alternative to that, the real reason he had asked her to go. . . !

## **THE BLACK STONE**

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The night fell and with it a settled despondency that saw no alleviation. She had no hope of Alan now. She seemed to be growing indifferent—like Amueh. Alan had discussed her with Conrad von Hengel—had told him that she had refused him. She would rather have had another last memory of Alan than that. The joyous visions she had had of Alan faded. The imminent figure of von Hengel seemed to loom large in her mind, rather strangely, rather brutally, rather magnificently, excluding everything else. She had fought him with her woman's weapons, but even now she confessed to herself that he had dominated—still dominated her. But if she had power over him, too! . . .

## CHAPTER XIV

### THE ROOM OF THE SCREEN

**S**HE was growing accustomed to the quiet of the harem, the dim lights, the droning passage of the drowsy hours, the allures of ease and the calm negation of all achievement, all spirituality. It almost seemed now as though she had always been here, and her mind, weary of thinking, relaxed with her body and yielded at last to lethargy. She seemed to understand Amneh better now. Under her waistband she felt the jeweled hilt of the dagger pressing against her side. She was very tired, but dimly she seemed to remember the purpose for which she had taken it and knew that she would use it when the time came. What was to happen? She did not know and for the time did not seem to care. The odor of musk and ambergris once so distasteful to her was no longer unpleasant and seemed a part of the spell that had fallen upon her. She grew more drowsy without reluctance. She seemed to be sinking into some substance deliciously soft and cool, pretty lights like fireflies of various colors danced before her eyes in the darkness, and seemed to lead her on to follow them. She yielded and sank back, then started up as something hurt her side. It was the dagger in her waistband. The sudden pain helped her in her struggle back to consciousness and with an effort she sat upright, trying to focus her gaze. It passed around the room, finally settling upon the sherbet cup beside her. She gazed at it in a moment of comprehension, and then, assuring herself that no one was looking, took off the lid and raised the

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kulleh to her nostrils. There was a faint, rather sickly odor that she had not noticed before and she guessed why she had become so drowsy. But she knew enough to empty the stuff under the deewan and put the cup back into its place, and then to pour herself out a cup of the coffee which stood steaming on a brazier near by. The shock of her discovery had now awakened her and the black syrup-like coffee in a moment restored her to her senses.

Zeyneb had drugged her—but at whose orders? The Sheykh's? She fell into a fit of trembling terror which lasted for some moments, and then her courage returned to her. This could not have been a revenge of Zeyneb's unless she had received her orders. And whose orders unless those of Conrad von Hengel? Last night he had written that he would see her and all day she had waited, expectant, dreading the interview until the strain of nervous tension had suddenly relaxed. Von Hengel, deciding that it would be impossible to persuade her to accompany him willingly upon his expedition, had chosen this means to take her away into the desert while she slept, trusting to her helplessness and his own powers of persuasion to overcome her scruples. There seemed no other reply to her questions. And this conclusion which she reached, after a moment of analysis, seemed at once to have a galvanic effect in awakening her to a sense of immediate and subtle danger. She thanked God that for some reason she had forgotten to finish her kulleh of sherbet. If she had done so, she would now have been unconscious and completely in von Hengel's power. She was certain that her awakening had not been observed, and after a quick glance around the kaah, and into the corridor, sank again into a recumbent position, her thoughts working rapidly. For the present at least it was safer to simulate drowsiness. She must let them carry her out of the harem, if that was their plan. Somehow, her

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opportunity must come. And yet she was afraid—terribly afraid—of von Hengel's cleverness. How could she hope to outwit such a man as he had proved to be?

She waited, her lids half-closed, and after a while she saw Zeyneb silently enter the corridor and peer at her for a long moment. Constance did not move. Zeyneb smiled and in a little while reappeared with Kahdeegh and the other black slave-girl. Constance closed her eyes now and breathed deeply, all her muscles relaxed. While she could not see them, she heard their voices in whispers alongside of her and felt the breath of one of them leaning over, examining her carefully, while Zeyneb picked up the sherbet kulleh and laughed. A few more words were spoken by Zeyneb, and Constance felt hands move under her armpits as she was lifted into an upright position. She stirred, sighed, seemed to make an effort to open her eyes and then let her head fall sideways upon the shoulder of Kahdeegh. In a moment the three of them were carrying her out of the harem down a hallway, past a hanging and into another room, where they laid her upon a deewan and presently left her.

The room was dimly lighted and in a moment Constance ventured to open her eyes and gaze about her. This was not the guest chamber in which she had met von Hengel the day before yesterday. In this room there was an oriel at one end; opposite the deewan upon which she lay was a wooden screen which seemed to separate the room from the mandara, for somewhere, not far away, it seemed below her, she heard the sound of masculine voices, those of the Sheykh and Conrad von Hengel. She raised her head and shoulders and peered around, wondering whether there wouldn't be a chance of escape by the oriel window—when the voices suddenly ceased and there was a sound of soft footsteps on a stair. And so, quickly, she lowered her head

## THE BLACK STONE

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to the deewan and again simulated sleep. For a moment her heart beat wildly and it seemed almost impossible that she could keep up the deception, but the dimness of the room aided her, and she remained motionless, while the footsteps came to the door, where they paused a moment and then noiselessly a man entered. Though she did not dare open her eyes, she knew that it was von Hengel. She could see his white burnûs as he came forward, pale amid the shadows, and felt the nearness of his body as he leaned over her. Then, while terror paralyzed her, an extraordinary thing happened, for she felt his fingers touch hers gently, while in a whisper the tenderness of which was unmistakable, he muttered the word "*Liebchen*."

She was so surprised at the genuineness of his tone that for a moment she hung on the word breathless, unable to believe her ears. Then, aware that he was watching her intently, sighed deeply, turned away and seemed to sleep more heavily.

"*Liebchen!*" The clue was all that she needed and the sense of her own power over Conrad von Hengel gave her new courage and new initiative. Even now, when the success or failure of his great venture hung upon her elimination, he dared to be tender. She could not deny that the gentleness of his touch and the deep tones of his voice had thrilled her. She was feminine enough to identify this note with the one he had uttered the other night, the note that had recurred to her again and again in her bewilderment and in her fear of him. He loved. He had spoken the truth when he had said that he had wanted her. Subtle was the flattery of this softly spoken word. She was even ready to believe now that he had been honest when he had offered her his friendship in this extraordinary pilgrimage which was to end in the disaster of England and a bâton of a Field Marshal for himself. The gospel of success was

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not too firmly rooted to exclude the still small voices of the spirit. She knew now that for her own sake he was not willing to take the risk of leaving her here to the mercy of his Arab friends, and that at least for the present she was quite safe from bodily hurt. She lay quite still and listened to the soft pad of his bare feet up and down beside her couch. What was to happen next? The whispered word had given her a sense of her power over him and she wondered how she was to use it.

In a moment the sound of the footfalls stopped just beside her and she knew that he was leaning forward over her. Suddenly the glare of a pocket torch swept her face and she knew that his eyes were keenly scrutinizing her. She tried to simulate sleep, but felt his finger deftly raise the upper lid of one of her eyes as he studied its iris. In a moment she knew that the deception had been discovered.

"Ach, Fräulein," he exclaimed, "as I supposed You are indeed far too clever for these animals that I had put in charge of you." And as she lay as before, in a futile attempt to keep up the illusion, "Come. A dilated pupil indicates wakefulness. You might as well sit up and we will talk this thing out."

And so, looking rather sheepish, Constance shrugged and obeyed.

"Is poison to be your next weapon, Conrad von Hengel?" she asked coolly.

He smiled at her gravely, ignoring the question.

"I should have known that you were not so easily conquered. First the attempt at escape and then this. What did you hope to accomplish by this ruse, Fräulein?"

"My freedom."

"How?"

"I didn't know. But I thought it safer to retain possession of my wits."

## THE BLACK STONE

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"Safer? You only make it more difficult for me."

"Naturally. But you'll admit that to be my privilege."

Her reply seemed to please him, for he laughed rather gayly.

"You are a woman—the apotheosis of womanhood."

"Is it not well to aspire, if I am to sit with gods?"

But her irony only seemed to delight him more.

"You may not know how truly you speak. The gods shall welcome us both."

"Us?" she inquired.

"Yes," he said quite calmly, "for we go within an hour into the desert."

"Oh."

"That is why I said your awakening increased my difficulties. Asleep you would have passed noiselessly out of the Bab-el-Wizeer upon a well-gaited camel. Awake——" he paused.

"I may make trouble," she finished for him.

"I hope not. But indeed," he went on, "as you may have discovered from my precautions, I am not in a position to take chances."

"Nor am I," she replied. "You'll admit that my interest in this expedition can hardly be compared to yours."

He glanced at her quickly and then, after taking a pace or two, sat beside her on the deewan, crossing one knee over the other and clasping them both in his hands. But he made no move to approach her.

"Constance," he muttered, as though to himself. "You are well named. You do not easily change. You are faithful—true to your convictions——"

"And to myself——" she broke in.

"Yes. You would not be what you are without that. But the situation in which you find yourself is difficult—chiefly through your own imprudence. You are a danger

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—a menace to the success of the plans of the General Staff of the German Empire. As I have told you, you must be eliminated. Imprisonment here will mean eventually your death or something worse. I have chosen for you the easiest way, the only way. Ach, Fräulein, if you had only remained asleep!"

"And now that I am awake, what are you going to do?" she asked him.

"The fact of your being awake must make no difference in my arrangements," he said soberly.

"You mean then to take me by force if I do not go willingly?"

"I hope that you will go without resistance."

"You could hardly respect me if I did that."

"What can you do? Your cries would be impotent. In a second I could smother them with my hand——"

"You would——"

"Or with my kisses, Constance! Do not drive me to extremes. I swear to you that if you will go with me quietly, you shall be treated like a princess. I will be your servant, wait upon you and serve you with deference. I am your friend. Have I not shown my friendship? I could have killed you. In duty to my Government I should have killed you—should kill you now if you resist me." He rose and paced the floor heavily. And then, with an air of decision, "But I have little time in which to argue. I must go very soon and you are to go with me."

"And if I choose to remain?" she asked firmly.

"The time for that consideration has passed. It is not possible," he muttered. "Will you go with me or not?"

She hesitated, not because she had not already made her decision, but because of a new curiosity.

"I suppose I must be grateful for your consideration," she said slowly, "at least until the present moment. If it

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has been in your power to do away with me my few days of grace are your gift to one who was once a friend. I thank you. But even if I had learned to care for you, it would take more than admiration, more than affection, to lead me to throw myself into this mad venture of yours. If I go with you, you must take me and by force." She rose and faced him, her back to the wall. She seemed newly endowed with courage and determination, the color had come into her cheeks and her eyes flashed defiantly—like one who knew power and meant to use it.

Von Hengel took a pace or two toward her and then paused.

"You are glorious, Fräulein. I have never seen a woman such as you. Were you less glorious, I should go to you and take you—there as you stand."

He came a step nearer and paused.

"I must give you your chance and my chance of your respect. It is that I care for, can't you see? The other night you enraged me with your mockery. But even so I could not injure you. You only made me love you the more——"

"Love—?" she said contemptuously.

"It is true. Why otherwise do you think I should have spared you? In America it was the same. I would have told you, but the war came—opportunity for this my great mission. I was silent, but you must know now. I do not dare to leave you here, because you know too much. You would be removed from this house—and the vengeance of the keepers of the mosque would be inevitable. Come with me, Constance, to safety. In a week, perhaps even in a few days, if you do not wish to go on, I will release you."

He had come close to her and had taken her by the hand. She drew away from him.

"Impossible," she said.

## THE ROOM OF THE SCREEN

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He dropped her hand suddenly and turned away.

"You insist on cruelty then."

She laughed at him.

"It is a fine love that can threaten torture. What do you know of love, Conrad von Hengel?"

The taunt inflamed him, and the tenderness of which he had spoken suddenly flamed in passion.

"This—" he turned toward her, caught her in his arms. She struggled furiously. He kissed her full upon the mouth and she struck him. He caught one of her hands and held her wrist, but her other hand found the hilt of the dagger and raised it to strike, but he caught the gleam of the weapon and quickly disarmed her.

"You have chosen," he muttered. "You would have killed me. Now you cannot blame me if I have my way."

She was silent, still struggling in his arms, but he held her easily until her efforts grew less and less and she relaxed, panting, against the wall.

As their struggle ceased, outside the room in the hallway they heard the sound of voices and a clapping of hands. Von Hengel turned, releasing her, and with a quick glance toward the oriel window went to the door, where he spoke for a few moments with some one outside. Constance, in terror and dismay, sank upon the cushions in the oriel beside her and buried her head in her arms, fingering meanwhile at her injured wrists. In a daze at what had so suddenly happened, she wondered what the end was to be. The reaction had set in. She was trembling from head to foot.

In a moment, when she managed to raise her head, Conrad von Hengel had turned back into the room and was peering down through the lattice work at something or some one outside. She heard masculine voices talking now in quiet tones downstairs, the voice of the Sheykh and another. She saw von Hengel start, stare again and then

## THE BLACK STONE

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put his hand inside his burnûs, where for a moment it remained. In her curiosity she sat up and watched him. He seemed to have forgotten her existence, and when he withdrew the hand from his burnûs she saw that it held an automatic pistol. She shuddered a little at the sight of the cold blue barrel and hid her face in her hands. It was to be death, then. And yet she could not believe——

She raised her head abruptly at the sound of his footsteps and sat up, her face white with terror, staring at him. Conrad von Hengel walked past her and peered eagerly out of the meshrebiyeh window and then turned inward toward her. His lips were compressed and his blue eyes sparkled with a strange fire.

"Please get up, Fräulein," he said quietly, "and be very quiet."

He even put out a hand to help her to her feet, but her gaze in terror turned to the weapon in his hand, and scarcely knowing what she was doing, she obeyed him. But her courage rose in one splendid effort.

"You are a coward," she said distinctly. But while he heard her words, their meaning seemed to have escaped him.

"Be quiet," he said, taking her by the arm. "Come."

"Coward!" she repeated.

Her meaning seemed to pierce his abstraction, but he only smiled. "Not you, Fräulein—another, in the mandara below."

What could he mean? He led her to the wooden grille, and then, with a sudden movement, put his left arm around her neck and pressed the sleeve of his burnûs tightly over her lips while he bent forward, whispering quickly at her ear.

"Make no outcry. It will be useless. I want you to promise to go with me without resistance."

## THE ROOM OF THE SCREEN

She managed to indicate her refusal in a last effort.

"You must, Fräulein. You must agree to go. I give you every opportunity for safety—for yourself and for him."

A new bewilderment while she stared at him. And then, as a gleam of comprehension came into her eyes, he nodded.

"Alan," he whispered, quickly, indicating with his weapon. "He is there—below in the mandara, disguised." And then, after a significant pause, "Promise me that you will go with me quietly. It will be enough. I will believe you. We will go out at once by a rear door. Promise—quickly—and I will not shoot."

She lay back against his shoulder, white, staring, her lips trying to speak.

"I do not believe you," she managed.

"Look then." He supported her weight to the wooden screen and tightened the cloth upon her lips. "Look then," he whispered.

And eager to prove this impossible thing, she stared through the openings in the wooden scroll. A man in a Bedawee costume sat talking with the Sheykh. She heard his voice and even while she looked he raised his chin a little, and she saw that what von Hengel had said was true. She could not mistake him. It was Alan.

The fear that she had had for her own safety a moment ago was lost in the new terror for Alan. He had come here to save her—Alan!

Von Hengel was whispering at her ear again.

"My answer—quickly. Consent to marry me. It is all that is needed—a nod of the head——"

And as she paused to gain a moment of time, she felt his arm close tightly around her throat as he raised his automatic into line with the largest of the openings.

"You would not——" she cried chokingly.

## THE BLACK STONE

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"Consent!"

He must have read her refusal in her eyes, for with a frown he raised his weapon again and aimed through the opening. She made a frantic effort just as the shots crashed out and, twisting, struck at his right hand with her disengaged hand, managing at the same time a half-stifled cry,—Alan's name. She caught just a glimpse of von Hengel's face as he twisted suddenly toward her, the weapon at her breast. Its expression was desperately calm and his eyes in the brief glance that passed between them were full of meanings. At this moment of uncertainty other shots sounded outside in the court-yard. The muzzle of von Hengel's automatic paused at Constance's breast, then passed. For, instead of shooting, von Hengel turned away.

"I hope you may not regret, Fräulein," he said. "Good-by."

And while she stared at him in wonder he sprang quickly toward the oriel and vanished behind a hanging beside it just as Alan Jessup, with weapon drawn, stormed into the room.

"Constance!" One arm supported her, but he made no move to kiss her upturned face. His eager gaze was elsewhere. "Where has he gone?" he muttered, staring past her.

"The hanging—beside the oriel," she gasped:

Without a word he supported her quickly to the deewan and then dashed for the curtain she indicated.

But it was too late. He ran through a short corridor down a flight of stone steps and into another room, where a door which let out into the darkness of the night showed the way the German had fled. Alan ran out, risking von Hengel's shot, into a small street, from which a number of small alleys radiated like the spokes of a wheel. He stopped and listened for the sound of retreating footsteps,

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He must have read the refusal in her eyes, for with a frown he raised his weapon again and aimed through the opening.



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but without success. The few seconds given Constance had been too long. He ran a short way down each alley, listening and peering to right and left—then hurriedly returned to the larger street. They were all deserted and silent as the grave. Conrad von Hengel had disappeared.

Fearing a ruse and now thoroughly alarmed as he thought again of Constance, Alan returned to the house and, bolting the door, ran up the stairs and into the room where he had left her. She was sitting, still bewildered, upon the edge of the deewan and just as he reached her there was another commotion on the stairs leading to the mandara, the sound of a voice and two quick shots from an automatic and then the crash of a falling body. Alan passed Constance and rushed out. It was Dawson, shooting from the top of the stair.

"I had to do it, Mr. Jessup, sir," he explained calmly. "He was poking at me with a stick, sir."

"Are you hurt, Dawson?"

"Just a thump on the head. I'm all right."

"And the fellow in the court-yard——?"

"Two of them, sir. One of them was most unpleasant. He's under the stone bench in the passage. The other one ran."

"And the Sheykh?"

"The Sheykh, sir?"

"Downstairs—stay here and watch Miss Constance. She's in there."

Alan went down the steps, at the bottom of which lay the wounded porter, and searched the lower floor and court-yard. The Sheykh, too, had flown. Alan took the precaution to bolt the door into the street also, and then hurried up the stairs again. Constance and Dawson awaited him upon the landing.

"Have you seen any one, Dawson?" he asked quickly.

## THE BLACK STONE

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"Not a soul, sir. I think we've made a clean job of it."

"So has von Hengel, Dawson," he muttered. "He got away."

"Too bad, sir."

"But thank God, we've got *you*, Constance," said Alan, taking her hand awkwardly. "I came as soon as I found the way. You're not hurt?"

She seemed bewildered. "No—only—only frightened a little."

He released her hand as a new thought came to him.

"What's behind these hangings?" he asked of her.

"The harem," she replied.

"We'd better have a look, Dawson."

"Oh, yes, sir. The harem—much better, sir."

And so they entered. Zeyneb and the two slave-girls were crouched upon the floor of the kaah, too terrified even to scream. Amneh had fallen upon a deewan, but as Constance spoke her name she raised her head. And while Alan and Dawson searched the place thoroughly for signs of the Sheykh or the Kaba Stone, Constance reassured her that all was well with her, and when Alan returned to the kaah, Amneh had stopped trembling, sat up and looked at him.

"She must go with us, Alan," Constance explained. "She was taken prisoner in Armenia—a Christian and a slave."

"U-m. Of course, my dear. By all means. Awf'lly sorry. You'll come, won't you—er——"

"Her name is Amneh," said Constance.

"Amneh—delighted. We'll get her to the Governorat and explain—and then to the *Turkana*."

Amneh smiled up at him timidly.

"Your tarhhah and burka, Amneh," said Constance quickly.

"Yes. We must be off at once."

cut-off

## CHAPTER XV

### THE GOLD RESERVE

THEY passed through the courtyard and into the passage-way past the mastabah, where they paused a moment while Dawson went forward and unbolted the door into the street. There was a commotion outside, a noise of excited voices all jabbering at once, for the porter who had run away from the pistol of Dawson had now returned with a number of his friends and seemed bent on making trouble.

Amneh shrank back into the shadows and caught at the arm of the American girl.

"They will kill us," she gasped. But Dawson, the incomparable, gave confidence at once, for he opened wide the door and stepped out brandishing his weapon before the eyes of the trouble-maker, who gave ground at once, and, as Dawson advanced, led his herd of followers at a fine pace for the next corner, beyond which they stood howling, afraid to advance.

"They won't trouble us, sir," said Dawson calmly, "but we'd better get off at once."

So they went out, Alan leading the way with Constance and Amneh, while Dawson brought up the rear, still brandishing his pistol, while he objurgated the Arabs in his mildest tones; and when the party reached the corner they found two streets, both dark and both tortuous, leading through the heart of the native quarter.

"Which way now, sir?" asked Dawson cheerfully.

## THE BLACK STONE

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"Hanged if I know. Nuisance not having a light."

But just then, high and shrill, behind them and to their right, a thin clear voice sounded from a madneh near by. It was a mueddin calling the Oola—"La-i-la-ha-il-al-lah—There is no God but God." Alan glanced around up at the starry heavens and recognized the silhouette of the minaret of El-Azhar.

"Right you are, Dawson. Straight ahead."

And so they went on, the frightened Amneh clinging to the arm of Constance and Alan now taking up the rear—to guard against surprise. But the precaution was unnecessary, for in a short while the sound of the commotion before the door of the house of Hassan had sunk to a mere murmur, and a moment later they heard it no more. Presently, almost before they were aware, they emerged into a broad and well-lighted street, which they followed for a few moments, coming out upon an open square beyond which Alan recognized the familiar outlines of the building of the Governorat and police.

Alan drew a sigh of relief and, with a last glance behind him, hurried the women across the park. The hour was late, but lights were burning and he knew that Northby Pasha slept in the building, so when he sent in his name he was admitted immediately. A few words explained his situation and an arabeah and a guard of police was at once provided to convey Constance and Amneh, with Dawson, to Shepherd's. Alan, who had much to recount, remained with Colonel Northby, who listened with astonishment to the amazing tales of his adventures. He heard him through to the end, putting in a short query here, a comment there, until the escape of the German officer was reached, when he rose and paced the floor violently.

"The man is in league with the devil. Hassan Isar of all men!"

## THE GOLD RESERVE

"And he has gone with von Hengel—fled—at least it seems so, for an organized attack would have routed us out. You see, sir. They must have thought that *you* were outside."

"Where I *should* have been," muttered Northby. "You'll excuse me, Mr. Jessup," he went on with some warmth, "but this was my affair. You should have advised me——"

"There wasn't time," said Alan with an attempt at self-justification. "I had to move quickly. I thought von Hengel might get wind of any police efforts," he finished lamely.

"You might at least have given us the chance."

"I *had* given you a chance, sir. You had three days," said Alan with some spirit.

Northby paced the room rapidly for a few moments, and then rang a bell.

"How long has it been since von Hengel escaped?"

"Less than an hour, I should say."

"Do you think he has left the city?"

"I would have done so in his place."

"Have you any idea where he has gone?"

"None. But Connelly spoke of an expedition."

"Ah. He will move East then."

Here a young English officer entered.

"You will order the camel company to mobilize at once. We have a line on von Hengel. Advise the guards at all the city gates that the man we're after will probably try to get past them, if he has not already succeeded. The Sheykh Hassan Isar is to be arrested on sight."

"Hassan Isar!" The young Englishman's lips were attenuated in a thin whistle.

"And any others," added Northby, "who may be in his company. The camel corps will scout toward Zagazig and Ismailia. You will also communicate with Port Said."

## THE BLACK STONE

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"Very good, sir." And the young Englishman quickly departed.

"I'm sorry you couldn't have taken me into your confidence, Mr. Jessup," said Northby, returning to his subject with a frown. "You've made the job difficult."

"I?" said Alan, his usually even temper bristling a little at Northby's tone.

"Yes. So long as von Hengel stayed in Cairo he couldn't do mischief, for the Nationalist movement is dead as a herring here, but out in the desert—across the canal, in Arabia with the Kaba Stone, a Holy War is on the cards——"

"You hadn't found him, Colonel Northby. You wouldn't have stopped him," said Jessup coolly, "because he had planned to go to-night."

"How do you know this?"

"Because Hassan Isar told me. Now at least you have some facts. And you'll be obliged to admit," he finished dryly, "that you were quite at a loss an hour ago."

Northby Pasha scowled at the image of Ptah.

"At least Miss Masterson is safe," added Alan quietly.

Northby Pasha brought his hand down on the desk with a crash.

"Miss Masterson! My God, Mr. Jessup, what's a woman more or less beside the success or failure of British arms? The Kaba Stone has slipped through your fingers."

"And yours——"

"You've bungled the thing."

"I've at least done something."

"D—n it all——"

Northby paused. Alan had risen and the two men stood facing each other. Both had been disappointed, but Northby's had been the greater responsibility. Suddenly

## THE GOLD RESERVE

the tension snapped and Northby laughed and held out his hand.

"This won't do. I'm sorry. I was hasty. I thought you might have told me. It's my job, you know."

Alan took his hand willingly enough.

"H-m. I suppose I might have told you. But then, my quarrel with von Hengel came before yours."

"England's quarrel supersedes both."

Alan took a pace or two beside the desk.

"Yes, England's. You're right. I'm sorry I didn't succeed. But I did try, you know. I'd set my heart on bringing that Stone here to the Governorat to-night. I've failed. But I think I'd like you to know that I'm not through yet."

"What do you mean?"

Instead of replying, Alan asked a question.

"Colonel Northby," he asked suddenly, "have you any notion how much gold is in the Egyptian National Bank?"

Northby frowned and smiled at the same time, while he tried to gauge Alan's meaning.

"All gold has been withdrawn from circulation."

"Exactly. And that makes it all the more valuable to the native eye."

"But what——?"

"I don't know whether you know it or not, Colonel Northby, but I'm really quite well off at home. In fact, according to Egyptian standards, you might say I'm pretty rich."

Northby inhaled his cigarette-smoke and examined Alan with a new interest. The American's discovery of the secret of the house of Hassan Isar was an achievement of no mean order, but it was difficult for the police officer to reconcile it with the placid demeanor and quiet tones of his visitor. And indeed in his native garb and stained face, he

## THE BLACK STONE

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was no more impressive than he had been on the occasion of his previous visit. Whither was the man leading?

"Why do you ask about the gold in the National Bank?" he asked curiously.

Alan smiled at the statue of the inscrutable Ptah.

"Because if it's possible to do so I propose to buy it."

"You——?"

"At a good premium, of course."

Northby smiled incredulously. "The gold reserve of the National Bank is two million pounds sterling."

"Ah, good. That should be ample for my purpose, I'd say."

"And your purpose is—what?" asked Northby shortly.

"To finance myself to find the Black Stone."

"Are you mad?"

"I don't think so. I want to go on."

"In what way?"

"To buy all those who can help me. It's quite simple. In the last hour I've been thinking about it a great deal. Dawson put the idea in my head."

"Who is Dawson?"

"My man. He was here a while ago. Excellent chap. I've had him five years. He's most ingenious. It was Dawson, you know, who got the facts out of Connelly."

"Ah, I see. And you and—er—your man Dawson propose to buy the whole of Islam?"

"As much of it as may be necessary for our purpose."

Northby was incredulous, tempted even to laugh aside the idea as the emanation of the brain of a good-humored lunatic, and the mention of Dawson seemed to add the final touch of the fantastic. But he saw that his visitor was quite serious, that the expression of eagerness in his eyes belied the quiet tones and placid exterior. And so he asked soberly:

## THE GOLD RESERVE

"And how do you propose to secure this gold?"

"Through my own note of hand upon the indorsement of my bankers in New York," said Alan easily. "You may perhaps have heard of them—J. L. Caldwell & Co. They are the fiscal agents of the British Government."

"Ah. And who is to make this arrangement for you? It will take the highest influences in Egypt."

"Who? Why you, sir," said Alan cheerfully, "through the Sirdar if necessary."

"Me? Oh, I say, Mr. Jessup. This is a bit thick, you know."

"Two million pounds—that's only ten million dollars. If I choose to spend it—it's only a matter of a few years' income. Really, if you could arrange the matter, I'd be very much obliged. I've got plenty. And in a case like this, it seems to me——"

"Wait a moment!"

Northby Pasha had risen, his hands to his head, and was rushing violently about the room. "Wait! I'm fuddled with this madness. You want *me* to get you the gold of the National Bank—! To get the Sirdar to use his influences with Khalek, the Minister of Finance!"

"I could get it quite easily in New York. It will be shipped on here at once."

"And where will you put this gold? What will you do with it?"

"I propose to take it aboard the *Turkana*. The yacht will be my base."

"And the gold——?"

"I shall sprinkle it judiciously upon the sands of Arabia."

"Arabia?" asked Northby shrewdly.

"In the path of the Kaba Stone, wherever that may lead——"

## THE BLACK STONE

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Northby sank again into his chair, the perspiration streaming from his brow. Phrases failed him.

"My word!" he gasped, weakly.

Alan waited politely a moment or two for Northby to go on, but as he only sat and stared, frowning at the image of Ptah, he ventured:

"There really shouldn't be the slightest difficulty. I'm very well known in New York. My identity can be easily established through the American consul. A wire or two will establish my credit. Of course, the sum is rather large——"

"Large!" sputtered Northby. "Mr. Jessup, if I didn't know something of your responsibility—if you hadn't already given me clear evidences of your sanity—I should say that the blow of the Khateeb upon your head had robbed you of your wits, but——"

"I'm quite sane, I assure you, sir, and very much in earnest!"

"By Jove! Backsheesh—! And you'd give it away?"

"No. We have an expression in America—'Money talks.' I have an idea that two millions of pounds in gold will be even more eloquent than Conrad von Hengel." Alan got up and shook out the folds of his voluminous draperies. "I don't ask you to decide to-night, Colonel Northby. Think it over. It's a good plan. I believe in it. It will lead the way to the Kaba Stone like an arrow. With a man like Daoud to help me——"

"Daoud?"

"He should be out in a week, I think. I shall also want two four-inch rifles for the *Turkana*, some Enfields and a few machine guns."

Alan glanced at the clock and extended his hand to the bewildered police officer. "Two o'clock! I owe you an apology for the late hour. I'm going on to the hotel, where

## THE GOLD RESERVE

you can reach me in the morning. But don't waste any time making a decision, will you? Every hour is valuable. I'm under your orders, of course, but I hope you'll see things my way. Good night."

"One minute, Mr. Jessup."

Alan paused at the door.

"You're sure you're quite sane?"

"Positive."

"And you think my men will not catch up with the Kaba Stone this side of Suez?"

Alan shrugged, but aware of the implied compliment in the question.

"I've learned some respect for Conrad von Hengel."

"And so have I." Northby paused. "And may I add, some little for yourself."

"Thanks."

"News may reach me to-night. But come here to-morrow at twelve, Mr. Jessup, and I'll tell you what I'll do," he finished. "Good night."

Alan walked down the Sharia Mohammed Ali toward Shephard's Hotel, mildly elated over the effect of his proposal upon the police officer. Whatever happened, he was at least sure that from incredulity Northby Pasha had progressed to consideration and that there was more than a fighting chance that he would win the Englishman to his side. But Alan's resources did not end with Northby. There were other agencies in Egypt that he meant to employ if Northby failed him. For once convinced in his own mind that his plan—conceived not an hour ago—was not impracticable, Alan surveyed the prospect with pleasure, and a purpose to carry the thing through at any cost. But the strain of the last day or two had robbed him of some staying power and by the time he reached the hotel, he was tired out, mind and body. He could think no more.

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Dawson awaited him, a rejuvenated Dawson, bathed and bleached, attired again in his conventional black.

"Glad you arrived safely, Mr. Jessup, sir. Your bath has been drawn an hour, sir."

"Thanks. Sorry you waited up. Miss Constance has been comfortably provided for, and—er—the Armenian young lady?"

"Yes, sir. Quite comfortable, sir."

"She sent no message?"

"None, sir." And then, "If you'll permit—a bit of lemon will take the stain off nicely."

He permitted Dawson to perform his offices and afterwards went to bed and was instantly asleep.

\* \* \* \* \*

When he awoke, which was about nine o'clock, his first question was as to messages from Constance, but as none had been received he dressed and went down upon the terrace. Not finding her he made some inquiries, discovering that Constance had gone out to make some purchases, but that the young lady who had arrived in native costume was still in her room. The question in the eyes of the *maitre d'hotel* Alan ignored and went out upon the terrace for a pipe of tobacco. But he was hardly seated with an old copy of the *Times* when an arabeah arrived and Constance descended, her arms full of boxes and bundles. He went down the double flight of steps to meet her, and she greeted him happily.

"What on earth——?" he began.

"For Amneh," she explained. "You shall see a transformation. It's the best disguise."

"Is she still frightened?"

"A little." And then with a laugh, "But I've told her that you would take care of her."

"Me! Oh, I say——"

## THE GOLD RESERVE

"You can't refuse this, Alan. And it seems your specialty—rescuing damsels in distress—I haven't thanked you yet. Dawson told me something of how you did it. It was very wonderful of you."

In the meanwhile they had reached the office, where a servant relieved Alan of his bundles.

"But this—er—Miss Amneh. What shall I do with her?"

"I don't know just yet. I'll see. And her name is terrific. Gooloyan, or something like that. I'm going to call her Amneh. And please be nice to her. I'm sure you will when you see her in these wonderful frocks."

"You're coming down soon? I want to talk to you."

"Do you? I thought last night you didn't care what happened to me."

"Oh, I say, Connie——"

She smiled at him, dimpling adorably, and turned back.

"And Alan——"

His look questioned.

"You won't mind paying for these things, will you? The man is here with the bill."

"H-m—er—by George——" he stopped as her face grew serious. "That is—er—no. Of course not. I'll see to it at once. And you'll come down soon——?"

"Perhaps——" she flung over her shoulder at him and disappeared with her packages.

Alan went back to his seat on the terrace, his pipe and his *Times*, but not to read, though the columns of the paper were bursting with details of the new Jerusalem campaign.

Amneh Gooloyan! It was all very well for Constance to show a decent gratitude for this girl's friendship in a trying situation, quite proper even for Constance to save a Christian victim of Turkish vileness; but to turn her over to *him*, to pay for her hats and clothing, to take her under

## THE BLACK STONE

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his wing—to adopt her so to speak out of hand—that was, in the language of Northby, “a bit thick.” He had other affairs. If his plans worked out, he wouldn’t have any time to spare for vagrant ladies in distress. Of course it wouldn’t do to have her taken again and Northby, perhaps, would see to that, but he couldn’t have her tagging around Egypt after *him*. Something would have to be done. But the word of Connie was law, now as ever, and he knew that if she had asked him to recite the Koran for her, he was sure that he would try.

How wonderful she looked this morning! A little tired still, perhaps, but the same old Connie, that always gave him the same old thrill. He caught his breath and sighed. He had thought that in a different scene, with other interests and employments, he would be able to forget her. But there she was again—all spirit and charm, the only girl in the world that he had ever loved or could again. And the old pain began gnawing at his heart. . . . But he would never let her know . . . never speak of the old relation again. It could only be painful to her and to him. He would bury his thoughts in the hunt for the Kaba Stone. No sentiment. No tender looks. Just friendship. She would understand. And resolutely turning his thoughts away from her, Alan began thinking of the Kaba Stone and Conrad von Hengel, trying by the few items of information he possessed to lay out a plan should he succeed in getting enough money to put it into operation. Port Said first, and then Suez—von Hengel would *have* to cross the canal somewhere——”

He waited half an hour—an hour, and then glanced at his watch—eleven-thirty. And he had an appointment with Northby at twelve. What on earth were Constance and the Armenian lady doing? Clothes—of course. . . . But he couldn’t wait. So, leaving word with Dawson that he had

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been obliged to go out, and that he would return for luncheon, he went to the Governorat.

Northby Pasha was in his office, at his desk, just where Alan had left him, giving every evidence of a night of vigil and thought. There had been no news of von Hengel. There had been reports from the guards at the city gates, and from the police-boats upon the river. Every caravan road, North and East, had been watched, every foot-passenger examined. There had been no sign of a man disguised in a bedawee costume, and indeed the traffic of the night had been much lighter than usual. Of the Sheykh Hassan Isar there had been no sign.

"In spite of our failure to find any trace of the fugitive, I have not been idle, Mr. Jessup," said Northby quietly. "I've been thinking over your proposal, and while I believe it to be visionary, I have no right to put any impediments in your way. If you choose to spend your money in the way that you suggest, it's your affair. But the possibility that you may succeed—a small one at best—makes it my duty to aid you in every way, for England needs every friend she has in the world just now. Indeed, in aiding you, I aid myself, because I can see now that this movement of von Hengel's, unless halted very soon, may spread widely and cause much trouble. It has already been reported through German propaganda that Emperor William is the Grand Caliph of the European Mohammedans, and that he went to war to free them from Christian oppression. With the Kaba Stone and documents proving its authenticity in the possession of an agent of the General Staff, there is no telling where the movement will end. I do not attempt to conceal my alarm. The danger is very real. And every man that can be trusted should be put on England's side."

Northby spoke with great deliberation and seriousness, and Alan noted with pleasure the change in his demeanor.

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"You've shown skill, Mr. Jessup—and I believe in you."

"Thanks——"

"You're what the world knows as a lucky man. I believe in luck. No man in the Intelligence Department can afford not to believe in it. And I've decided to back you to my limit—to help you all I can."

He took up a paper from the desk. "Here is a commission from the Sirdar, granted under the stress of unusual conditions, as a Lieutenant in the Intelligence Department of the British Army."

"By George!" Alan took the paper and scanned it. "That's awf'ly good of you."

"That commission is issued for this particular service and is revoked or terminated at its conclusion. I don't propose to hamper you with instructions. You will report to me as you think advisable. I will help you with men, with materials, and advice, if you need it; but I'm willing to have you move alone if you prefer."

"And the money?" asked Alan.

Northby frowned.

"There are difficulties. The Minister of Finance, the officials of the National Bank, are Mohammedans. No matter how excellent the security, they could not be expected to favor the use of this gold for this purpose. It has been necessary to invent an excuse for its temporary withdrawal until a shipment of specie arrives from London."

"I see you've been working. You have made inquiries?"

"London has been cabled—also New York. The loan will be financed by the British Government. Khalet Pasha agrees. There only remain the details."

"You haven't wasted any time. I want to thank you."

The police officer smiled. "The boot is on the other leg. You don't regret your offer?"

"No," said Alan innocently. "Why should I? I've been

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trying to spend my income for years, but it's always getting ahead of me. You see," he added triumphantly, "I'm killing two birds with one stone."

"If you only kill the right bird—with the right Stone!" muttered Northby.

"I'm going to try. The Sirdar, then, approves?"

"He can do nothing else. I was in conference with him at the War Office until morning. Provided we get the proper guarantees——" he broke off suddenly. "Are you personally known to the American consul?"

"Yes. Radcliffe—New Yorker——"

"Who else?"

"The British Consul General—I meant to look him up—and a chap in the Kasr-en-Nil. What's his name?—Er—Colonel Sandwith of the First Leicestershires—came to see me in the hospital. Bully chap—used to be military attaché at Washington. Then there's Hoagland, my captain, of course, and all the crew——"

Colonel Northby smiled. "That ought to be sufficient. But it's going to take a few days, perhaps a week, maybe longer. There should be another cable later——"

"And the four-inch rifles and machine guns—and a few Enfields?"

Northby laughed.

"The Sirdar will manage that with the admiral of the Port of Alexandria." Northby rose and then turned toward Alan thoughtfully. "You know, you've taken on something of a job, Mr. Jessup. If von Hengel can elude the cordon I've thrown about him, he's gifted with supernatural skill. There isn't a square mile between here and the canal that isn't going to be searched. But if he does get through, you're up against a million miles of desert." He sat again. "You don't know any more than you've told me?" he asked keenly.

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"Nothing. That's what makes the problem interesting. I'll do a lot of guessing—and then there's Dawson, you know," Alan finished.

Northby stared at him dubiously and then frowned as though the last remark had suddenly branded the whole affair as a monumental piece of foolishness. Then, as Alan still sat smiling at him quite cheerfully, Northby seemed to change his mind and smiled, too.

"Mr. Jessup," he said, thrusting out a hand, "I like you. This is either to be reckoned among the wisest moves of my administration or the most idiotic. But the thing is whimsical. And it's more than amusing, because it's practical. I've lived too long in the East not to know the value of Baksheesh."

"I only hope we'll have enough. I suppose," Alan drawled, "that if I needed more gold, I could come and get it?"

Northby shrugged and smiled, then walked with him to the door, ignoring the question.

"You'd better rest to-day. I will communicate with you later."

## CHAPTER XVI

### THE MASTERPIECE

**A**FTER luncheon, which Alan ate alone, he sent word to Constance that he had been detained longer than he had expected to be and that he would await their pleasure in the shade of the hotel garden.

And there, after a while, they found him. Alan, suddenly interrupted in his reading, started up in amazement at the transformation that had been made in the Armenian girl. Her black hair had been trained over her ears in the prevailing mode, and the shadows of the summer hat which she wore well down over her eyes failed to hide the piquant loveliness of her dark beauty. Her dress too was of white embroidered stuff, and, through some miracle accomplished upstairs, fitted her without flaw. In spite of a timidity at being seen, which manifested itself in furtive glances here and there from her rather long, lustrous eyes, she carried herself well and her gloved hands hid the stains of henna which no amount of rubbing could remove.

Alan started up, staring at this unexpected vision, feeling for some reason unaccountably awkward in his new relationship of guardian to this astonishing creature. Constance, in her white duck, looking inexpressibly cool as well as triumphant in her achievement, surveyed the girl with much the pride of an artist at his latest masterpiece and presented her to Alan.

"How do you do?" he asked politely in his execrable French.

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"Very well, monsieur," she replied, as she took the seat he offered her, "but I am still a great deal frightened."

"That is a pity, for nobody can hurt you here——"

"But if I were recognized by some one."

Constance laughed. "It's hardly possible, in that get up," she said gayly. "You look like Fifth Avenue and the Rue de la Paix, all rolled into one."

"It has been almost two years since any man but one has looked upon my face."

"That also is a pity," said Alan gallantly. "I am very fortunate to be among the first."

Amneh looked up at him timidly, and then, as though suddenly made aware of the fact that he was not dangerous, flashed a dark glance at him. So this was Monsieur Alan, who was gentle and also very rich. He *was* good to look at, and the creases in his white flannel trousers were very beautiful. As they talked, she stole more than one glance at him.

"Well," said Constance, "what are we going to do about it? This is lotus eating. We're sitting here like tourists planning a winter on the Nile, while the fates of all three of us are trembling in the balance. To begin with, Amneh must get out of Cairo. There's no immediate danger perhaps, but there's no telling what may happen in this city of the Arabian nights. I've had quite enough thrills to last me a lifetime. Amneh really should be taken to America."

"By all means," said Alan. "But who is going to take her?" And then in English, "My dear Connie, I'm going East on—a—on a very dubious mission——"

"You——?"

"I'm going to try to find the Kaba Stone and Conrad von Hengel."

Constance was silent, while with mingled feelings she

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searched Alan's face. He meant what he said. This adventure was not ended for him. The look of abstraction that she had seen in his eyes was there again, the look of purpose that she had always wanted to see in them, which now excluded her from his thoughts.

"Ah, I see," she said quietly.

"Something can be managed, of course. Northby will find a place for her. It shall be arranged. A steamer for England—a note to a friend in London——"

"You are speaking of me," Amneh broke in suddenly in French, an expression of anguish in her large eyes. "I understand a little. You are thinking of sending me away—alone. You do not want me, Monsieur Alan. It is true, is it not?"

"My dear young lady," said Alan, disturbed, "it is only that I have just been—that I expect——"

He faltered, then stopped and looked at Amneh in dismay. For the Armenian girl, without further ado, had put her head down upon her knees and burst into tears, thereby spoiling her immaculate linen. With a rueful glance at Alan, and more than a little disturbed at the possible effacement of her masterpiece, Constance put an arm around Amneh's shoulders and attempted to assuage her streaming tears. And at last, by dint of much coaxing, during which Alan wandered uncomfortably up and down nearby, Amneh emerged, very mussed and woe-begone, her gaze on Alan appealingly.

"I am sorry that I have come," she sobbed. "Now I am merely a burden to every one."

In the face of woman's tears, Alan was helpless. He came to her side while she still sobbed and patted her gently on the back, muttering, "There's a good girl—so—" and "It's all right, you know—perfectly all right." He didn't know what was all right—in fact, his inner consciousness

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assured him unerringly that everything was all wrong. And these phrases did not seem to mend matters, for the sobs continued and at last, with a signal to Alan to remain, Constance led the girl into the hotel and up to their rooms.

Here was a pretty kettle of fish! A weeping female—apparently a permanent part of his retinue. Of course the girl would have to be gotten rid of in some way. Why Constance insisted on bringing her out of the House of Hassan where she seemed quite happy and comfortable in the harem Alan couldn't see. Devilish pretty girl she was. Ripping eyes. Too bad! But he couldn't be taking any Armenian girls on the *Turkana* now. That wasn't just his line. The thing was quite out of the question.

He strolled about restlessly and it was half an hour before Constance returned, reporting that the tears had stopped and that a cigarette had somewhat improved the situation.

"Poor thing," said Constance as she sat, "she has ruined a perfectly good frock—such a nice frock it was—from the Maison Barbot. I wonder why you had to make her cry, Alan?"

"I? Oh, I say, Connie!"

"You might have broken it to her gently," she said reproachfully.

"I'm sorry. But she can't go on the *Turkana*, you know. I'm moving in a few days—just waiting for final arrangements."

He paused a moment for her comment, but she sat, her head lowered, her gaze straight before her and said nothing. So Alan, plunging on desperately, told her all that had happened in Northby's office, with the great plans that he had made to try to find von Hengel. She listened calmly,

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aware of his enthusiasm and interest in his project, which completely eliminated her.

"It seems, my dear Alan," she remarked when he had concluded, "that you have become a man of great affairs."

He only glanced at her, oblivious of the ironical note in her voice.

"It is a great affair, Connie. I'm in it heart and soul, whatever happens, until the end. The only wonder is that I've never done anything like it before."

She smiled as though to herself.

"But isn't two million pounds—ten million dollars, rather a large sum of money to throw away on such a fantasy?"

"Fantasy!" he turned, wide-eyed, and looked at her.

"Why, Connie, you can't understand. It's the greatest sporting proposition the world ever saw—a gamble of mere money against the lives of British soldiers—thousands of 'em!"

"But you don't seem to have any definite plan," she said with a shrug.

He looked at her ruefully, really much chagrined at her lack of enthusiasm. "By Jove," he stammered, "I thought—I hoped—it seemed to me—that you at least would approve of my doing something worth while——"

His tone was so abject that she softened.

"It is very nice of you to put yourself out in this way. I was only wondering how long your fortune would stand the strain."

"Oh, is that it?" he laughed. "Three years' income won't really hurt me much. As a fact, it's rather a relief to get it out of the way. Besides I may not use it all. But then, in such a cause——"

He stopped and gazed across the canai toward Boolak, the fire in his eyes responding to the glow of the reflected lights under the trees. He was already wrapt in his proj-

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ect, and for the moment seemed to have forgotten her presence beside him. There was a long silence. Then,

"And I, I suppose, must go back to the *Mercy*," he heard her saying.

"The *Mercy*. Oh, yes, of course," he said with an effort. "She was still in port yesterday afternoon, but it looked as though she was getting ready to move."

He missed the quality of her smile which drew down one end of her lips rather pathetically.

"You seem very anxious to be rid of me."

"I?" He glanced around at her in surprise. "Why, Connie—I—I don't see——"

"No, you don't, Alan," she said quietly, "you don't see. You never did see very clearly."

He frowned in a puzzled way at the bowl of his pipe. And then,

"I seem to see very clearly now, at least," he replied. "You've enlisted in the British Overseas Hospital Service and I—I, too, am a part of the British Army. You've got to go at once or you'll miss your ship."

She smiled again, her eyes full upon him.

"And yet," she went on clearly, "if you hadn't rescued me from the house of the Sheykh, the *Mercy* would have sailed without me."

Alan got up and fidgeted about in a solemn sort of a way.

"By Jove, er—so she would, Connie. Lucky I found you, wasn't it?"

"Was it?" she asked coolly.

He met her gaze for the fragment of a second and then knocked with his pipe against his heel. This was one of the moods he had never been able to understand in Connie. And then, as though to make the denseness of his

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mental condition more complete, she asked in her half-humorous, half-serious way,

"What did you rescue me for, Alan? You know it wasn't half bad in the house of Hassan Isar. It was very—er—restful. And Captain von Hengel was very kind." She clasped her hands over her knees, and leaning forward, toward Alan, her gaze on his averted profile, went on quite seriously: "Conrad was very nice to me, Alan. He's quite wonderful in a way. You know, I used to like him a lot. Sometimes I even thought——" she gave a short sigh and paused. "After all he's a pretty big man and fearfully clever. He hopes to have the bâton of a Field Marshal from Emperor William, if he makes this coup——"

"And you——?" Alan stopped short and stared at her in surprise.

"And after all, you know I might do a great deal worse. Our nationalities—our political opinions differ, but then, wars don't last forever——"

"Connie!"

"He wanted me to go into the desert with him, Alan," she went on evenly, as though unaware of the interruption. "He would have had a well-gaited camel for me and I was to be treated like a princess. He was soon to have a great army at his back, and the Turks as well as the Arabs were to fight with the fury of fanaticism as they followed the Kaba Stone where he would lead with it into battle. If he succeeded, the bâton of a Field Marshal—like von Hindenburg—and at least a Duchy as recompense!"

"The rotter——!"

"Oh! Of course we were to have been married first—according to the Mohammedan custom. It's very simple. I only had to say 'I consent to be thy wife.' You know Conrad is Mohammedan—he's made the pilgrimage to

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Mecca and all the rest of it. It was all very simple—and when he wants to be, Conrad can be the most fascinating of men.”

By this time Alan was pacing with short steps up and down in front of her, his square jaw working unpleasantly.

“And you mean to say,” he broke in hotly, “that you listened to that rot—that you let that bounder speak to you in such a way? A Prussian at war with the ideals for which all Christendom is fighting. You, Connie! My God!”

The flame of his anger burnt her delightfully, and the fire in his eyes gave her the true measure of his transformation. This was no longer Alan Jessup, the weary, the bored, the unimaginative, but a man she had loved in spite of his deficiencies, suddenly grown glorious. But she realized in a moment that she had gone too far—that the new Alan had suddenly risen in her estimation and in his own a step above the kind of trifling deception to which she had descended.

“I did not say that I consented,” she said in a low tone, backing water very gently, “indeed, the mere fact that you found me there is proof enough of my answer——”

“But you listened to him,” he said steadily.

“I couldn’t very well help it, as a prisoner, could I? He might have had me garroted.”

But her humor fell on barren ground and she knew it.

“He made love to you, there in that house—of course it’s none of my affair,” he broke off quietly, “who makes love to you or where. But the privileges of an old friendship give me the right to tell you that the opinions you’ve just expressed are not only disloyal to the service you’re in but to your own ideals and—I may add—my own.”

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While he was speaking she had begun smiling and as he finished she laughed outright.

"Alan!" she said. "You'll be the death of me."

He stared at her a moment.

"I'm afraid I don't appreciate this kind of humor," he drawled.

"As if I meant it!" she said more soberly. "You must know me better than that."

"I'm beginning to think," he said with dignity, "that I don't know you at all."

She threw out her arms toward him, with a sudden mothering instinct

"Oh, Alan, do stop prancing about and come and sit here beside me. I want you to. Please!"

He glanced at her a moment and then obeyed.

"I didn't mean what I said. I was just trying you. I think you've hurt me a little. Do you realize that you haven't once told me how glad you were that you found me safe?"

"That went without saying, I think."

"But it wouldn't have harmed you to have told me so."

"I *am* glad," he said with some dignity, "you say you were all right. But this talk about von Hengel doesn't make me think you were. You couldn't have made that story out of the whole cloth. He did ask you to go with him?"

She was sure now that she had made a mistake.

"Why should *you* care?" she asked, parrying neatly.

"Your affairs are none of my business, but Conrad von Hengel's are. If he gave you his confidence, I think it's your duty to tell me, if you know, in which direction he has gone."

He seemed to elude her with a skill that more than equaled her own. But her pride forbade that she should

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know it was his very simplicity which had accomplished this effect, and showed how fixed were his aims and what a little part she now had in them. Could it be that Alan no longer cared for her? But at the risk of a loss of some dignity she chose a means to approach him.

"What should I care what becomes of Conrad von Hengel?" she asked softly. "He is nothing to me, Alan, and never could be. You should know that—even with a Duchy or a Field Marshal's bâton. Is it unwomanly in me to say that—that I—I care more—I've always cared more for you—than any one else in the world?"

Alan smiled at his tobacco pouch which he had taken out and his hand trembled ever so slightly as he paused in the act of filling his pipe again.

"That's awf'ly nice of you, Connie," he said gratefully. "We *have* been good pals, haven't we?"

He was completely oblivious. But the calmness of his renunciation of such an opportunity, even if born of innocence or misunderstanding, affected her like a cold douche. Not once, during their talk, had she detected the slightest sign of the sentiments he had once expressed for her. He was different. Hers was the uncertainty. She could go no farther. Modesty forbade. And before she could recover from the shock of his unconcern, he returned quite calmly to his previous question.

"You don't know where von Hengel is going, do you, Connie?"

To Alan's surprise, she rose quickly, and while he stared in surprise, lighted match in mid-air,

"And if I knew do you suppose I'd tell you?" she flung at him.

He started up beside her, the extinguished match falling between them. He noticed for the first time that her face

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was scarlet and that even while he looked it grew palid again.

"Connie, I don't understand——" he began.

But she cut him short.

"Do you *ever* understand?" she caught her breath and then went on. "You have said that my affairs were none of yours. Then don't pry into them. Conrad von Hengel, at least, knew how to show appreciation. And as to where he has gone—that's my affair—and his."

And with that, she flaunted quickly around and went rapidly in the direction of the hotel, leaving Alan staring after her, his jaw fallen in perplexity and bewilderment. As she had said, he couldn't understand, and he seemed to be less near understanding her now than he had ever been in his life. Could it be, as she evidently intended him to suppose, that there was something between Conrad von Hengel and herself? And yet a moment ago she had told him of the warmth of her friendship for him! What had he done? What had he said to change her? Slowly he turned, his unlighted pipe thrust grimly between his teeth, and paced slowly the length of the garden walk, trying to ponder a solution of the feminine riddle—without success. She had said that she cared for him more than any one else, and then had suddenly behaved in this extraordinary manner. It was like the day at Oyster Bay when they lunched together—then she had told him much the same thing—and had followed it by giving him his *congé*! What had he done then? What had he done now to deserve this amazing change of front? In the old days he had thought that anything that Connie did was right—because he was a "rotter." But now when he thought he might be doing just the things she would have wanted him to do, she had poked fun at his plan and finally left him cooling his heels in the garden. It was pretty rough of

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her. And he *had* wanted her sympathy and encouragement.

An hour of meditation did not seem to mend matters, and his feelings still somewhat outraged, he finally returned to the hotel, and went up to his rooms. There he found a note which had just come from Northby advising him of further progress in their plans. Indeed, the prospects seemed so excellent that he advised Alan to return immediately to Alexandria and superintend the placing of the deck-rifles upon the *Turkana*, instructions with regard to which had already been issued. If things went as Northby planned the gold would be available within two days. He also suggested that as the evening train left Cairo within three hours, there was just time to meet the American Consul, the British Consul General, and Colonel Sandwith at the Governorat. The meeting had been arranged for five o'clock, and Northby hoped that nothing would prevent his keeping the appointment. Alan sent Dawson at once with a note of acknowledgment and himself began packing his valise, while he tried to think of what to do about Connie and the Armenian young lady. And at last, about the time that Dawson returned, he completed a carefully thought out note to Connie and sent it to her rooms.

DEAR CONNIE: It's really too bad that I always seem to be offending you. I'm sorry. I've always wanted to please you, but I don't seem to know how. Perhaps we have misunderstood each other and that should not be with those who have been friends for so many years. I am leaving Cairo on the six o'clock train for Alexandria, where I go under orders to prepare the *Turkana* for immediate service. I do not know what your plans are, but I pray that you will permit me to be of use to you if I can. As for Amneh, I think it would be safer if she went on to Alexandria where lodgings can be found for her until Northby Pasha can arrange to have her shipped out of the

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country. If you plan to return to the *Mercy*, I hope you will permit me to escort you to Alexandria at the above hour. If this meets with your approval, I will make the arrangements for your departure. Will you answer this before three?

As ever,

Faithfully yours,

ALAN.

And just at three the reply came.

As I have little money left, I must rely upon your generosity. Amneh wanted to return to the house of Sheykh Hassan, but that is not to be thought of, so I have been obliged to tell her that we all go to the *Turkana*. I hope you don't mind. Perhaps in the train you may be able to reason with her. I am sorry to have been the means of bringing so much upon you, especially since—as you say—the spell of our ancient friendship seems to have passed with time and distance. I hope not to trouble you further, Alan.

The note was signed with her initials and altogether made Alan very unhappy. And fearing to trust himself again to a pen, he merely sent a verbal message by Dawson, that he would be at the station at quarter to six and that Dawson would conduct the two ladies thither in an arabeah.

His business at the Governorat including his proper identification and a rather grudging agreement on Northby's part to provide security for Amneh, having been concluded satisfactorily, Alan went to the railroad station where his traveling companions were awaiting him.

Amneh wore a dark dress and was heavily veiled, looking rather smart and even distinguished. Constance, whose face Alan's gaze sought at once, smiled at him and permitted him, to hand her into the carriage which they were to occupy.

But just as Amneh was about to step into the train

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two men in native costume rushed forward and one of them caught the Armenian girl by the arm. The other was expostulating with the guard. The train had begun to move, but the fellow would not let go of the arm of the now frightened girl, so Alan struck him once, a neatly timed blow on the jaw, and he dropped. The other man came running with a crowd but Alan drew an automatic quickly and they came to a stand. So he lifted Amneh bodily into the carriage and shut the door, keeping guard with his automatic. The affair had happened quickly and the train moved on and in a moment the danger had passed. Alan sat opposite the two girls with a laugh. "Stupid sort of a game," he muttered.

Amneh was frightened but Alan's composure quickly restored her confidence. "They wanted me, Monsieur Alan," she gasped.

"They won't get you," he replied. And she thanked him with her soft eyes.

Constance, somewhat alarmed, was shaken from her poise. But he soon saw that all was not well with him and Connie—who was too polite by half. After the train rolled out of the station he felt the gaze of the girl Amneh fixed upon him. He smiled at her pleasantly and comforted her in his bad French. She answered him by monosyllables and a fleeting smile and then resumed her wistful gazing. Her look made Alan uncomfortable, for he was beginning to feel very sorry for her. There was a child-like ingenuousness in her pretty face and a pathos in her recent fright and attitude of dependence upon his mercies, that seemed to put a new complexion upon the plans he had made for her, which from her point of view must seem inconsiderate and unfeeling. He felt something of this, too, in the attitude of Constance Masterson, who indicated by her manner of polite acquiescence in all his ar-

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rangements, that like Amneh she too was obeying his instructions, not because she wanted to, but because she had no choice in the matter.

Alan tried conversation and failed. Constance having recovered from the shock of the encounter at the station watched the fellahin working in the rice-fields and Amneh, silently, pathetically, continued to gaze. And at last the Armenian girl spoke.

"It is terrible that I should be such a care. They seek me—those others. I am sorry, Monsieur Alan, to be an inconvenience to you. But I am very much frightened, I want so much to go away from this dreadful land of Egypt—on the ship—at once. I promise that I shall not disturb you or your boat—what you call—the *Turkana*."

Alan glanced at Constance helplessly, but she continued to gaze out of the car window, evidently enjoying his discomfiture and intending that he should wriggle out of his predicament—the best way he could. Alan sat staring at the coat-rack above him, his mouth open, in dismay at the thought of the explanations which lay before him. He was sure that the Armenian young lady was going to cry again—positive of it—and unless Connie helped him there would be no end to the deluge before they reached their destination. But there was no help for it and so he ventured with a gasp.

"It's not that I don't want you on the *Turkana*, my dear Amneh. Under other circumstances, I should be delighted. Lots of room, and all that sort of thing. But I've got to go—on a special mission—er—to find von Hengel—the Sheykh Omar you know—and I don't think you'd really like it. Besides"—as the brilliant idea flashed upon him—"you might get sea-sick."

But Amneh, still regarding him, neither wept nor pleaded and to his surprise only smiled gently.

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"I do not suffer from sea-sickness," she said quietly.

"Oh, don't you? I'm glad. I mean—— But you understand, don't you, Amneh?"

He was conscious of Connie's glance as she listened.

"Oh, yes, I understand," said Amneh gravely. "You want me to stay at Alexandria until the next steamer to London when I shall sail alone to your friends."

"That's it, precisely," said Alan brightening perceptibly at the sensible statement. "We will take you to the Hotel Khedivial—which is near the railroad station—and there you will wait a few days in ease and quiet, until you are put aboard the steamer by a friend of mine."

"I understand," she said slowly. "I must do as I am told."

"That's it. In London you will stay at a small hotel, until I send for you, and then, my dear, you shall come to America."

"Yes. *C'est bon, ça*. I should like to go to America."

And then, while he wondered, somewhat bewildered at the ease with which the thing had been accomplished,

"It is not because you do not like *me*, Monsieur Alan," she asked wistfully, "that you do not want me upon the *Turkana*?"

She was so helpless, so appealing, that before he knew it, he leaned forward and caught her by the hand.

"Bless your heart, child! Of course not."

And then warmed by the enthusiasm of his unforeseen success, "I wish I *could* have you, you know. It really would be very charming. But then, the *convenances*! It would not be quite the right thing, you see."

"Oh, I understand," said Amneh quietly; "you are thinking of me?"

"Precisely—it wouldn't exactly do, you know."

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Amneh was silent a moment, still regarding him with the eyes of a child.

"Mademoiselle has said that you were kind, Monsieur Alan; I know it now. What you do will be always right."

And while Constance resumed her gaze out of the window, Amneh sank back in her seat and relapsed into silence.

The journey seemed interminable. Alan made one or two futile attempts to engage Constance in conversation, but when darkness fell she seemed to sink into slumber and he sat grieved and rebuffed in his opposite seat, finally closing his eyes, to think of his great plan and to try to forget the unfortunate misunderstanding with the woman he loved. Once or twice when he opened his eyes, he found the gaze of Amneh still fixed upon his face—but he saw that her eyes were no longer frightened and so he smiled at her and she at him. She really was very pretty—and so dependent on the whim of the world!

At Alexandria as they were dismounting from the train Alan was on his guard and Dawson and Hoagland, who met them, made rather a formidable barrier from any attempt at a capture. Two men followed their arabeahs around the corner, afoot, but Dawson and Hoagland jumped out and ran at them and the fellows took to their heels. But the thought that Amneh was pursued added to the burden of Alan's responsibilities. He saw Constance and Amneh comfortably placed in their rooms at the hotel. The *Mercy*, they found, was to sail late that night for Busra, joining the forces of the Mesopotamian expedition, so Constance decided to stay in the Hotel Khedivial until Amneh was safely installed and securely hidden in her rooms with men to watch. Alan arranged that with the management and Constance gave Alan her hand at parting and thanked him coolly. He asked her forgive-

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ness for anything she didn't like—she granted it, and then turned away. Amneh stood at the door.

"If I was captured again, Monsieur Alan!" she whispered. "You are *sure* that it is not because you don't like *me*, that you don't take me on the *Turkana*?" she repeated. "That it is on my account that you do not take me?"

He took her hand and kissed it gently.

"I'm sorry," he said, "but you must trust in my judgment. Good-by and God bless you."

"Good-by, Monsieur Alan," she said plaintively.

As he went out of the door Alan turned back for a last look at Constance but she had disappeared into an inner room. It seemed in that moment that he would have given all of his millions for a smile from her. He couldn't understand. . . . Women were strange creatures. . . .

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He had a further confirmation of this conclusion when, seated on deck with Hoagland that night discussing his plans for the recovery of the Black Stone into which his Captain had entered with avidity, a note was brought aboard the *Turkana* and handed to him. It was addressed hurriedly in Connie's hand.

ALAN,

Amneh has disappeared from the hotel—leaving no word. I'm afraid they have taken her. I must go aboard the *Mercy* at once or she will sail without me. Neglect no means to find Amneh, Alan. It is a terrible responsibility. But I can do nothing. My boat leaves the mole in ten minutes.

Good-bye,

CONNIE.

P.S.—I was beastly to you. Forgive me. Try the Red Sea.

C.

## CHAPTER XVII

### VENUS FROM THE WAVES

TWO days had passed and the search for Amneh, conducted diligently between important intervals of military preparation, had revealed nothing. The Armenian girl had vanished. Alan was very sorry for her and he could not dismiss a sense of guilt in the matter, for she was too pretty and too inexperienced to remain safe for long in a land of such complete wickedness; and his wish to fulfill the injunction of Connie to find her at all costs under the weight of the kind of responsibility suggested, seemed like the last duty of a dead romance. So Alan had gone ashore and personally searched for her throughout the native quarter, offering large sums of money to the person or persons who would bring her to light—but without avail. And so it was with mingled feelings that, his preparations for sailing about completed, Alan gazed toward the lights of the city and wondered what else he could do before to-morrow to fulfill Connie's last request. For before noon the shipment of gold, guarded by British soldiers, would be brought aboard the *Turkana*. Also Daoud would come. The *Turkana* was to move immediately down to Port Said and thence into the Canal, forming a movable base for any expeditions Alan must make into the interior. The concluding paragraph of the note from Connie had made him very happy and the concluding phrase very hopeful. Von Hengel had told her something but whether the information meant anything or

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not was difficult just now to determine. "Try the Red Sea"—had a feminine indefiniteness and indicated a woeful deficiency in geographical learning on Connie's part—which Alan more than half suspected—or else merely a lack of knowledge or even a suggestion of a false clue which would be worst of all. But as the information seemed to tally with the few crumbs that he had gathered here and there and supported the theory that the Black Stone must move to the Eastward, Alan had decided to sail at once and trust the rest to luck.

The sky blazed with stars and the after deck awning had been rolled back so that Alan might enjoy them. Forward somewhere could be heard the voice of the delighted Hoagland training the men of the *Turkana* in squad evolutions. With the exception of Connelly, who had been put ashore, the sailormen had been keen about the new expedition and were entering into the training with an enthusiasm which knew no abating. Many of them had been in the Navy of the United States and were familiar with the use of the rifle; and the training of the remainder was to go on steadily during the progress of the yacht along the coast. They knew too in a general way the kind of work that was to be expected of them and looked forward to a brush with the Arabs with rare delight. The men from the British Navy yard had made a quick job of installing the four inch rifles, the cool muzzle of one of which projected aft just by Alan's head. The work of the gun crews had proved reassuring and already Alan felt a strong thrill of desire to be off and along some sandy coast where he could try some practice with them.

Life was now surging violently in Alan. His perfect health, born of years of consistent training of muscle and tissue, seemed to be seeking some outlet, some justification. He felt quite sure that he wanted to fight, to put into use

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the one purposeful thing that he had accomplished in all his wasted years. He liked blows—to give and take them—they had always been the only things that kept him awake. If the thought of Connie's unkindness had made him unhappy, his other prospects delighted him. If it hadn't been for his failure to find poor Amneh— And yet, from his investigations at the Khedivial there seemed no chance that any one had approached her rooms. It seemed as though she had fled, in very terror. . . . Poor Amneh!

The light out near the breakwater winked solemnly, illuminating the quiet harbor, across which Alan could hear distinctly the distant sounds of a hotel orchestra in the town, mingled with the rattle of an arabeah along a cobbled street. In the Palace of Ras-et-Teen, just opposite, lights flickered out and suddenly, the crew of the *Turkana* having gone below, a complete silence seemed to fall, in which he could hear the gentle lap of water against the launch at the boom. All was very peaceful, and awaiting his evening interview and smoke with Hoagland, Alan dozed in his deck chair. But in a moment something awakened him again and he started up, listening to a soft plashing of oars nearby, and the low murmur of voices. A native boat was approaching the gangway. He got up and went forward, joining the man of the watch on deck who was already warning the boat away. But at the top of the ladder Alan stood peering down at the figure in the stern of the craft, who had already espied him.

"Monsieur Alan!" cried a voice in childish treble, "Monsieur Alan! I am come!"

With mingled feelings of dismay and relief Alan went down and helped Amneh to the boarding grating and so up the ladder to the deck. There was nothing else to be done.

In the light of the salon whither he led her, Amneh

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appeared to be very weary and somewhat bedraggled, but he brought her to a comfortable chair and made her sit. Hoagland stuck his head in at the door in amazement, but Alan waved him away, ringing for the steward who brought refreshments.

"You are angry, Monsieur Alan?" she asked timidly, when they were alone.

How could he be angry when he had put in the better part of the last forty-eight hours looking for her? And his reply reassured her.

"I am sorry, Monsieur Alan," she said, smiling at him with her child's eyes. "I ran away and hid. You said that it was not because you did not like me that I could not go."

"I do like you, Amneh—of course."

"You said also, Monsieur Alan, that it was upon my own account that you did not take me, is it not so?"

Alan nodded.

"That it was because of *me*,—because of the *convenances*, because it would hurt my—my reputation——?"

"Yes—er—partly that——"

Amneh had drawn the long pins out of her large hat, and now tossed it upon a chair with the air of one who has made a splendid resolution. Then she smiled at him, showing her pretty teeth.

"*Eh bien*," she said with a shrug of finality, "I have no reputation."

And as Alan remained silent in sheer dismay,

"I do not care," she went on. "What does it matter? Who cares what becomes of me except *you*, Monsieur Alan?"

"But, Amneh——"

"I could not go all alone to London. It would be too terrible. I should die——"

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"But, Amneh——"

"Monsieur Alan, I am come to be with you. Made-moiselle said that you were kind and I have seen it for myself. You would do nothing to make me suffer from terror of cold Englishmen whom I do not know."

"But, Amneh——"

"I shall kill myself if you send me away to England. I could not survive the loneliness. I have suffered much, Monsieur Alan. Be kind to me and let me stay. Your face is trying to look severe, but it cannot, because your heart is too great. I knew that it would be so, and therefore I hid until I could come out to you to-night and plead with you for my happiness. You will not send me away, Monsieur Alan?"

She had fallen upon her knees at his feet, her hands clutching at his arms, her face raised appealingly to his. Slowly he raised her and led her to the divan that ran the length of the room, where he sat beside her. He understood now the reason for her sudden acquiescence in his plans the other day, and the reason that she had not wept, for all the while she had been planning this. There was something admirable in her determination. . . .

"But Amneh," he repeated, "the *Turkana* is going upon a mission of great danger. We may be shot at and people may be killed."

But his remonstrance did not alarm her.

"Ah, I feel safe here with you. You are so strong. But even death would be better than going to England—alone," she gasped.

All the while she was caressing the hand that held hers, patting it gently, in confiding affection. Her head was now bowed and her dark hair had fallen in disorder about her shoulders. She was like a child in trouble over a lost plaything. Alan felt himself suddenly weakening in his

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resolve, and to gain obduracy rose and hunted for a pipe.

"Amneh," he said shortly, "the Omar Khalil is a desperate man. And so am I. With the Kaba Stone, he proposes to raise new armies to fight the British. I propose to prevent him——"

"I will help, Monsieur Alan."

"From here the *Turkana* goes through the canal—into the Red Sea—and may never come back——"

"I will help, Monsieur Alan. I do not like Omar Khalil. He speaks with a false tongue."

"Ah!" Alan paused as a thought came to him.

And then, "Amneh," he asked, "the Sheykh Hassan Isar was not unkind to you? He gave you jewels, pretty things to wear? You love him?"

Amneh shrugged and averted her head.

"He was good to me—but I have no regrets. He bought me. I was his slave. I had forgotten that there was such a thing as freedom."

She raised her head suddenly and looked into his eyes. "Why do you ask, Monsieur Alan?"

"Because if you are still a friend of Hassan Isar you are an enemy of mine—for Omar Khalil, whom I seek, is his friend——"

"If a man is an enemy of yours, Monsieur Alan," she said with a frown, "I should hate him, even if he had been my lord and master."

Alan smiled at this renunciation, which, however derogatory to Hassan Isar, was very flattering to himself.

"The Sheykh Hassan has gone with Omar Khalil——?"

"Monsieur Alan," she broke in suddenly, "I think that was the plan."

"Then you know something?" asked Alan excitedly.

"Why should I not, since much that passed was told in my hearing?"

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"Speak then. Where has Omar Khalil gone with the Kaba Stone?"

"Wait." Amneh put her hand to her head a moment.

"By the caravan route, south," she said at last, with positiveness.

"Are you sure? There's no mistake? How did you learn this?"

"I heard them speaking often, in the guest chamber, which is only separated from the kaah by a screen of lattice work."

"And you listened?"

"I did not try to listen. I merely heard. It passed from one ear to the other. I did not think it was important."

"It is important, Amneh," said Alan, puffing on his pipe furiously, and trying to be calm, "it's what I've got to know. And where were Omar and these other men going to the southward?"

"Let me think."

"Think, Amneh. The success of my whole venture depends upon it."

She pondered a moment and then raised her head, smiling deliciously.

"And if I think correctly, you will let me go with you, Monsieur Alan?"

"Yes," he blurted out savagely, "anything!"

"Well then, Monsieur Alan," she said, triumphantly, "they spoke of a place called—what—Sua—Suakeen——"

"Suakin!"

"Yes, and taking a boat across the Sea."

"To Jiddah?"

With trembling fingers Alan had gotten out a table chart

of the sea which he ran his finger hurriedly;

and then he pointed to a spot

on the chart, "the port of Mecca."

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"That is it. I have heard them say. I remember perfectly."

"You're sure?"

"Yes, Monsieur Alan, if the plan is not changed now."

He looked at her in a moment of indecision. He felt very much like kissing her, not because she was so inviting, but because she was the bearer of such tidings. But he had to remember that she had wrenched a promise from him, and was to go upon the *Turkana*. So he caught at her hand and pressed it and quickly turning to the door called Dawson.

"You are tired, Amneh. You must be shown at once to your cabin."

"And I am to go with you upon the *Turkana*?"

"Assuredly. Have I not said so?"

Dawson appeared, was given instructions, and in a moment Amneh, following in his steps, was led below.

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This decision on the part of the owner created some commotion, for Alan Jessup had always been one to observe the nicest conventions with regard to his guests upon the *Turkana*. But Alan was not one to retract his given word. The order was given and by morning every one on board, from Captain Hoagland down to the humblest stoker, understood that Amneh was Mr. Jessup's guest and under all circumstances must be treated with the same consideration as the owner himself. Alan took Hoagland into his confidence as to the revelations of the Armenian girl, and that excellent man showed every mark of satisfaction. Dawson, too, was informed while he was giving his employer a much needed shave. But the razor passed quite smoothly over Alan's Adam's apple and was wiped upon a slip of tissue before Dawson replied.

"Very good, sir. I was almost about to remark, ex-

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cellent, sir," he said calmly. "Were you going to head him off, sir, so to speak, or follow on——"

"We'll do what we can, Dawson, if that bullion ever gets aboard."

It came aboard, according to schedule, in iron-bound boxes, wrapped in brown paper, marked, "Cartridges—Enfields,"—for it had not been thought wise to reveal even to the men of the *Turkana* the value of their precious cargo—and was stowed below in the strong room, just abaft Alan's own cabin, near which Northby's man Daoud, who seemed to be quite on the mend, was also installed. Hoagland was in the secret, also Rawlings, the mate, and Dawson, whose respect for his master was somewhat tempered by the impending shower of perfectly good English sovereigns among a lot of filthy heathen.

They sailed at once and after luncheon, at which Amneh appeared in a filmy shirt-waist and duck skirt (for she had brought a large valise containing Connie's purchases), there was a council of war at the large table in the saloon.

Hoagland was there to figure out distances and time, Daoud to consider strategical questions, Amneh to provide clues and Dawson to wait upon them and listen. To Alan, Dawson had suddenly become invested with a peculiar adaptability. Alan was now aware that if a situation required it, Dawson was quite capable of wading happily with his employer through slaughter at one moment and in another of removing from Alan's puttees the sanguine traces of the encounter. Also, he had a mind. He was as necessary to the council as Daoud himself. The large table was covered with maps and charts over which they were all bending.

"You are sure, Amneh, that the name was Jiddah?"

She nodded. "It was repeated many times," she said.

"You see, Hoagland, there doesn't seem to be much doubt

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of it—unless of course the release of the young lady would have made him change his plans.”

“But she says von Hengel didn’t know she heard,” put in Daoud.

“We’d be safe in moving on that theory then, sir,” added Hoagland.

“Let’s get down to the facts. Captain von Hengel has had the better part of four days and nights to get away, with his Sheykhs and Sherifs. They have slipped through. There’s no doubt about that. If they had gone east toward Suez, Northby’s men would have caught some of them. Obviously, then, they have gone south. If von Hengel’s aim is to work north from Mecca, and that seems to have been the original plan, he would under ordinary circumstances have taken the southern caravan route of the Pilgrims, meaning perhaps to cross the Red Sea at Suakin. But if they all went by camel how did they get away from Cairo unobserved?”

“There’s the railroad, sir,” said Dawson, with surprising suddenness, his gaze intent upon the map.

Daoud smiled. “It isn’t possible that they would have dared to cross the Nile.”

“There are boats, aren’t there, sir?” asked Dawson calmly.

“I presume so,” said Alan with a smile.

“The Boolak-ed-Daknoor would be carefully watched,” said Daoud dryly.

But Amneh, who had been listening intently, suddenly left off gazing at Alan and spoke quickly. “That name, too, was mentioned, Monsieur Alan,” she said.

“It’s possible,” and then to Daoud, “Are there many trains, Effendi?”

“One only—in the early morning. But Mr. Jessup, the

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railway would be carefully scrutinized. I would say that he wouldn't have dared."

"But you'll admit if he reached the upper reaches of the Nile there would be a good chance of his party reaching the coast?"

Daoud shrugged. "Perhaps. But I wouldn't count on it."

"There's one thing we *can* count on, and that is that he hasn't crossed the Canal. Everything points to his going south. I'm moving on that assumption. It's pretty nearly pure guess-work, where he is just now, but if we can head him off," and he glanced at Dawson, "or better still, if we can catch him on the sea——"

"We could sink him nicely——"

"Aye," growled Hoagland, "with the Stone for a sinker. Give my gun crews a chance——"

Alan laughed. "That would be too easy. But we've got to figure this thing out on all theories in miles and minutes."

And so, all afternoon, they talked, while the *Turkana* churned her way toward the entrance of the Canal, the impassive Daoud at last converted to the plan to move down the Egyptian coast, stopping at the larger villages to investigate. A wireless was sent to Northoy, advising a redoubled vigilance at the stations of the Upper Egypt Line. Alan believed in his luck but with a whimsical insistence also believed in the Delphic divination of his extraordinary servitor. To the *Mercy* Alan also sent a wireless, through the Government station at Port Said, addressed to Connie.

"Amneh safe. Very happy," which though possibly ambiguous to others, he thought ought to be perfectly intelligible to the recipient.

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They reached and passed Port Said in the early morning hours, and orders having been sent from Cairo to facilitate their voyage, began the passage of the Canal at once. Hoagland was now constantly on the bridge and in the chart room for the Red Sea was an infamous region of rocks and shoals, unless one kept with circumspection to the route of the steamship lines down its longitudinal center. Hoagland didn't fancy the idea of these landings along the Egyptian coast, and when a day later they passed the straits of Jubal, he gave a gasp of relief. He was grateful for Alan's order for half speed, which permitted careful soundings as they turned in to the westward, where they moved along as closely as possible to the shore, scanning the coast with powerful glasses for signs of villages, and landing boats from time to time to investigate. It was just here, off Jeftun, upon a falling tide, that the *Turkana* ran neatly upon an uncharted shoal of sand and there remained in spite of all immediate efforts to remove her. The weather fortunately was calm, the wind blowing off-shore, but soundings announced that it would be necessary to remain in patience until the next tide. Alan fumed, Hoagland swore, exhibiting six fathoms of water on the accursed chart. Daoud paced the deck smoking innumerable cigarettes, while Amneh curled herself up in the shade aft and watched Alan. But there was nothing for it but to wait.

A full week had already passed since von Hengel's escape. With good luck he might already have reached the coast somewhere, and taken boat for the Arabian shore. If he was making for Suakin, there would be still ample time to cut him off. But Daoud inclined to a different theory. Why cross the Nubian desert, a matter of three hundred miles or so from the river, when he could cut through to the coast, a much lesser distance further north?

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Amneh had grown indefinite. She now remembered the names of many other towns equally well—they seemed all to have been mentioned by the conspirators in the guest room. She was not certain. Perhaps Omā Khalil had other plans. Her vacillation was most irritating, but she seemed unaware of it, quite content in her rug and cigarette aft, giving smile for question and pathos for reproof to the end that Alan had no heart to find fault with her. She had no more sense of responsibility than a Maltese kitten.

On the next high tide, Hoagland gave the *Turkana* full speed astern. She moved a little and then seemed to settle more firmly. The matter was getting serious. That night and all the next day Hoagland struggled but at last from sheer weariness gave the effort up to rest his men. To make matters worse, one of the crew had badly smashed his hand and arm in the kedging operations and two others were down with a fever from working out in the open boats in the broiling sun. Alan, who was chafing under the delay, was for sending out an S. O. S., but Hoagland wouldn't agree. His pride was even hurt at the suggestion. But in the early morning, nothing apparently having been accomplished, Alan formed a resolution and made his way to the wireless room with the intention of putting it into practice.

"Message to Officer of Port, Suez," he began, when the instrument as though in reply began snapping.

"Message coming through now, sir," said the operator, "for you, sir."

Alan waited impatiently. And the operator showed signs of excitement.

"What is it?"

Alan read the slip of paper handed him.

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*Sheykh Hassan captured Assiut.*

Assiut! The railroad! Dawson had been right!

The instrument was still crashing. He read the slips eagerly, as they were handed to him, while Daoud and Hoagland, who had been aroused by the commotion, hurried along the companionway.

*Von Hengel caravan left Kineh Tuesday for Kosseir.*

"Last Tuesday!" groaned Hoagland in a hollow voice. "And it's Monday now——"

"Wait," said Alan calmly, "there's more——"

And he read out the last slip.

*British soldiers pursuing—but delay—cut off passage by sea if possible. Thanks for information.*

Alan smiled a little. "That last is for Dawson, I think," he said with a glance at Daoud.

"Cut off passage by sea!" roared Hoagland in despair. "And us' squatting on this —— sand bank for forty-eight hours."

"We've got to get off in some way," said Alan coolly. "An S. O. S.——"

"My God!" Hoagland turned away with the aspect of a broken and beaten man. "We'll have just one more try at it, sir, by the bow. There's three fathoms of water not half-a-cable away."

Alan smiled. But he sent his wireless to the Port of Suez, and another to Northby describing his situation. In an hour a reassuring reply came.

## VENUS FROM THE WAVES

*Hospital ship "Mercy" en route Busra ordered to stand by. Should reach you to-night.*

Alan gasped a sigh of relief. The *Mercy!* The *Turkana* had passed her during the night—at Port Said, his own mission having the priority of importance. Alan sought out Hoagland who was busy forward getting two new kedge anchors out. He read the message sadly.

"Of course you've got the right to do it, but it hurts my pride, sir. If that — chart—!" He stopped and turned away with a groan.

Daoud laughed slyly. "We had better get off when we can. It was about here that the Egyptians were whelmed in the Hill of Waters in their pursuit of the Israelites. It is an unlucky spot. When the *Elfrit* of the storm flaps his sable wing——"

"Hell!" roared Hoagland, who caught the drift of the remark. He wanted to say more but a look from his employer stopped him.

Alan went below to study the chart with Daoud. He had now no hopes that Hoagland's efforts would be successful. Another day to wait! It was maddening. A brief study of the maps showed that if a ship was at Kosseir, von Hengel would have had ample time to embark. And Kosseir was not more than fifty miles from where the *Turkana* lay at that very moment!

"You know Kosseir?" he asked of Daoud. "Would there be a ship there?"

"Most probably—a Pilgrim ship—or others. There is a traffic in dates with Arabia."

"H-m."

Amneh came softly in and peered over Alan's shoulder, waiting for a chance to speak.

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"I am sorry I have been of so little use, Monsieur Alan," she said when Daoud rose.

"It doesn't matter," replied Alan easily, "we're getting on quite nicely." And then, as he happened to think of Northby's message, "Amneh," he said soberly, "the Sheykh Hassan Isar has been captured at Assiut, by British soldiers."

He studied her carefully. She looked startled for a moment, and then sank softly into the chair beside him. "The Sheykh—captured!" she murmured. And then with a timid look up into Alan's face, she smiled, as she said quietly,

"It is better that it is so. Now we need have no fear of him."

If he hadn't been sensible of her close proximity, the lustrous eyes turned up to his, the touch of her fingers upon his arm, the slight exhalation from her clothing of some subtle perfume, he would not perhaps have been aware of the inclusive pronoun. And the little gasp of relief that accompanied the remark, a gasp that seemed more like a sigh, made him aware of the fact that Amneh might possibly have gathered a conception of their relationship which differed from his own. But she had seemed so contented, so adorably childlike. . . . Perhaps he was mistaken.

"Is it that you do not care for me, Monsieur Alan?" she asked in her gentle voice. "Not once, since we left Alexandria, have you sat with me thus or held my hand. You are so kind, Monsieur Alan, I had hoped——"

He lay his hand over hers and patted it gently.

"I have had much to do, Amneh—much to think about——"

"But, Monsieur Alan, just a look from your eyes, a touch of your hand, and I am content——"

She was so dependent and he was so very sorry for her! Between the alternatives of injuring her feelings by mov-

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ing away (which would be awkward) and yielding to a natural impulse (which was graceful), he seemed to have no choice. So he put his arm around her and kissed her gently upon the cheek. Alan, after all, was only human.

She moved a little in his arm and turned her head away, but she sighed again very gently.

"Thanks, Monsieur Alan," she whispered. "It is what I desired." And then very gently released herself. "I know now that you do not despise me."

Alan laughed.

"And why should I despise you?" he asked.

"Because—because, Monsieur Alan——"

She paused painfully and would not go on.

"You have done me a great service, Amneh. Should I not be grateful?"

She looked at him wistfully. "For that—yes, Monsieur, if it pleases you."

Alan took out his pipe, which he did in all moments of uncertainty, and filled it slowly.

"You are not already tired of the *Turkana*, and the sand shoal, Amneh?"

"Tired? Oh, no."

"To-night I think we shall go. The *Mercy* will tow us off."

She stood and looked at him a moment, and he tried to divine what she was thinking of, for a tiny frown of perplexity had come between her brows.

"The *Mercy!* Mademoiselle!" she muttered, and then, while he wondered, fluttered gently out of the cabin.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### THE LONG TRAIL

**T**HE *Mercy* came, and true to her appellation, with the help of the yacht's own steam, hauled the *Turkana* off into deep water at the high tide. Also, hearing of the injured and sick in Hoagland's crew, her Captain sent over a doctor and a nurse. Alan had hoped she was going to be Connie. She was.

"I find that I can do you double service, Mr. Jessup," said the breezy chief medico, as he clambered over the side, "assuage your wounds—and bring you an old friend."

Alan grinned. The doctor didn't know how nearly his phrases were synonymous.

"Awf'ly glad."

He shook Connie's hand and led the way forward to the sick bay.

"Compound fracture! Jolly nasty bash, that! Might worry through without amputation. We'll see."

He was busy at once, Constance helping; and completing the work of the morphia Hoagland had already given, after a while the man was asleep. The fever patients were treated next. Nothing very serious when compared to the other man, but needing care. "Strange, Mr. Jessup, on a venture like yours, you wouldn't take a doctor," he finished.

"Doctor!" Alan laughed. "To tell the truth, I never thought of one."

"That's the psychology of healthy men—but it's pure idiocy in this latitude. Somebody in Egypt ought to have thought of it for you. I haven't a man that I could spare,

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but——” He paused again, “you know you ought to have medical help—I wonder——”

“What were you thinking of?”

“Merely that your wounded man will need attention for a week or more. He might take a bad turn. Septicæmia, and then, if you had a brush with the Turks! Sheer lunacy!”

“I’m sure,” said Constance Masterson’s voice very coolly, “I should be very glad to stay, if it could be managed.”

Alan thrilled gently.

“The very thing,” said the medico with alacrity, “and when you go back, Mr. Jessup, you might run Miss Masterson up to Joffa. We can spare one nurse from the Tigris, if she can join the Jerusalem forces.”

“That can be managed,” said Alan, “many thanks.”

He exchanged a quick glance with Connie, whose expression seemed suddenly to have become very kind. The doctor gave careful instructions, and then, shaking Alan’s hand cordially, went over to the *Mercy*, sending back after a while medicines and Connie’s steamer trunk.

It was now four bells—two o’clock. They stood at the rail watching the *Mercy* majestically get under way and presently the slow vibrations of the propeller of the yacht advised them that Hoagland was wasting no time in losing the proximity of the scene of their misfortunes—to Alan now a blessing in disguise. Connie, aboard the *Turkana!* The thing was unbelievable. And yet there she was beside him, her white shirt waist actually brushing his sleeve.

And then, at the double strokes of the bell, as though suddenly recalling herself to her duty below, she gave Alan her hand and bade him good-night.

“I—I can’t tell you how glad I am——” he stammered.

“I am glad, too, Alan,” she repeated softly.

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He led her to the companion and then, turning, gave orders for her trunk to be moved below to—

He stopped aghast. Connie's stateroom! Amneh had it! In his delight at seeing Connie he had forgotten to mention a word of Amneh, who was curled up sound asleep below, unaware of the events that had happened over her very head. He laughed and turned back. Connie was a good sport. She wouldn't mind. So he gave his orders and went below to bed.

He was dead tired, and slept later than usually, but the sudden stoppage of the propellers awakened him. He dressed quickly and went on deck, for the *Turbana* was already at anchor. He sought the exhausted Hoagland on the bridge, to find that they were a few miles north of Kosseir in the lee of a bight of land, and that Daoud had gone ashore half an hour ago with some armed men in the launch to investigate. And as Alan showed symptoms of impatience, "He's merely scouting. He wore his disguise. He'll keep under cover, and come back to report. It's a job he could do better than you, sir."

Alan still fumed but took the glass from Hoagland, who showed him where the launch had landed above the town.

"The crew of the launch is still aboard. The Effendi went on alone. I saw him."

There was nothing for it but to await Daoud's return, so Alan went below, sending word forward by Dawson that if Miss Masterson was ready, breakfast awaited her. At this moment Amneh came into the room and crept demurely into her accustomed seat beside him, giving him her most radiant smile as morning greeting. He poured her coffee himself with a cryptic air.

"I have a surprise for you, Amneh," he said with a smile.

"For me, Monsieur Alan?" asked the girl, with a puzzled look.

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"For you—for me also—something that will make us both very contented."

Amneh regarded him gravely.

"That which makes you contented, Monsieur Alan," she said, "makes also content for me."

She leaned forward confidently and caught him by the hand. It was at this moment that the door behind Alan silently opened and Constance Masterson appeared. Alan saw Amneh start back from the table—staring over his shoulder, her brows slightly raised in astonishment and unease. Alan turned quickly and rose.

"Ah, good-morning, Connie——"

But she stood for a moment as though frozen into immobility, the color fading from her face, as she looked from the one to the other.

"I did not know——" she began, and then paused.

"I forgot to tell you last night, Connie," said the oblivious Alan cheerfully. "Amneh came aboard just before we sailed."

"Oh, yes—of course," said Constance, regaining her poise and coming slowly forward.

Amneh, too, seemed quite equal to the occasion, for, after a moment of hesitation, she crossed quickly to Constance and kissed her.

"Mademoiselle!" she cried.

"Awf'ly jolly. Amneh has been so lonely. How are your men this morning? Won't you sit here?"

Cheerfully, and with an air of doing service to a queen, Alan indicated and then pushed out her chair. Silently, Constance sat while the steward and Dawson noiselessly provided.

"By Jove! It's good to see you—so lucky—so nice of you to volunteer, Connie. Might never have happened if it hadn't been for that blessed sand-bank. And the best of

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it is, we've struck the trail of the Black Stone. By Jove! It's a fact! Daoud's gone ashore now to investigate. We may head 'em off here at Kosseir or else take 'em in the middle of the Red Sea. It was Dawson that guessed again. (Here Dawson, handing Constance the eggs, flushed pleasantly.) Good old Dawson—got Cassandra beaten by a mile. The Sheykhs went by rail up the river and cut across. It was the luckiest thing——”

Alan had begun these remarks, unusually lengthy for him, in a tone of the utmost buoyancy and optimism, sure that all was now right with the world. He had gone on talking, carried, so to speak, by the momentum of his first impulse until slowly aware of the inappetency of his audience, he floundered about a while hopelessly and suddenly stopped, staring from one to the other in utter amazement. Connie was trifling with her coffee-cup, her gaze upon Amneh. Amneh's look was downcast upon her eggs, while she nibbled reflectively at her biscuit. What was the matter? Alan too relapsed into silence and began eating hurriedly.

Constance smiled and then spoke in a colorless voice.

“The men are doing well. The fever is not dangerous. If Williams passes the day comfortably the chance of infection is past.”

“H-m. I'm glad. Good man, Williams—one of the gun crew.”

Why that seemed important now Alan didn't really know. But it was something to say. Amneh, who had swallowed her cup of coffee, seemed to revive suddenly.

“Mademoiselle, it is very lucky for us—especially since but for our misfortune you would even now be on your way to the distant East.”

“It is quite unnecessary for me to say,” put in Constance rather dryly, “that I'm grateful for the sand-bank.” She

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rose and excused herself coolly. "I must get back to the sick bay. Would you mind, Alan, having my food sent there in the future?"

And, while he stood aghast, she went through the door, which she carefully closed behind her. Amneh, too, had risen and Alan turned toward her with a mute question in his eyes. Amneh gazed at the portal gravely.

"Mademoiselle does not feel herself very well this morning," she said quietly.

Alan did not reply. What on earth had happened? Amneh? The thought was absurd. And yet there seemed no other answer. Amneh was. . . . He couldn't have prevented the child from coming aboard. And she was safer here than anywhere else. Besides, he had given her his promise now. Connie was getting on his nerves a little. He would see her and explain. . . . Of course everything would come out all right. . . . Everything did in the end. . . . Then suddenly loomed absurdly the recollection of yesterday's kiss.

"It is that she doesn't like me. I know it," he heard Amneh saying. And then, appealingly, "You will not send me ashore, Monsieur Alan?"

"Why shouldn't she like you, Amneh? She did a few days ago."

"I know. But a woman is never mistaken in these things." And then again, "You will not send me ashore, Monsieur Alan?" she asked plaintively.

"Of course not," he replied with a laugh. "Haven't I given you my word?"

And then Alan, seizing his cap, and forgetting to finish his breakfast, went quickly on deck to lose the lesser problem in the greater. In an hour they saw the launch put out from shore and Daoud come on board. He wore the Bedawee kufiyah or voluminous head-dress, and kamis, or

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cotton shirt, over which was thrown a long-skirted coat of camel's hair, all furnished from the supplies of the *Turkana*, which was equipped for this emergency. As he threw back his head-dress when he came over the side Alan marked with dismay the expression of disappointment in his features.

"They have sailed," he said in his deep voice.

"When?"

"Two days ago."

"Not possibly."

"Figure it out, and you'll see."

"Where were they bound?"

"I could not find out. It will require money. That's why I returned."

"Two days!" Hoagland groaned. "And a fair breeze from the westward——"

Alan deliberated quickly. "There's no use crying over it. And there's no further necessity for concealment. We'll steam directly into the harbor, Captain Hoagland. And kindly give me the key to the strong-room."

"Aye, aye, sir," said Hoagland with alacrity.

Before the noon hour, Alan and Daoud were ashore at the custom house, their pockets full of British sovereigns, standing before a weedy-looking Arab, the Amir-el-Bahr, or Port Captain, who, they had been told, was the possessor of information. The trio were well met. The Amir was in need of money. Alan and Daoud desired to part with it. He had chartered his own ship and *rais*, but of course as for telling where the Sheykhs had gone—that was another matter. It cost Alan in the end twenty of his gold pieces, but he had found out what he wanted to know—at least he thought he had, for the Amir told him that von Hengel's party had sailed for Yambu-el-Bahr.

But Daoud chose to be skeptical.

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"By the beard of the Prophet, I swear it, Effendi," said the Arab, grasping the coins that Alan handed him.

"*Elsamak*," said Alan, upon whom the beard of the Prophet had made an impression.

"And I say, Effendi," he added to Daoud, "just tell the beggar, will you, that if he has lied to me I'll come back here in a week and blow his dirty little custom house out of the water."

Daoud translated, but the Amir didn't turn a hair.

"*Inshallah!* It is the truth," he repeated. So Alan turned on his heel, followed by the clink of coin and all the blessings of the Compassionate and Merciful, and made his way aboard. There was no time to spare. Yambu was something more than three hundred miles away. A good sambuk, such as its owner described, could make the journey in less than two days with a fair wind—such indeed as had been blowing off the Egyptian shore for a week. But there was still a chance of heading the party off, so Hoagland, feeling deep water under him once more, let the *Turkana* out of her leash and she responded, leaping to the southwest. That afternoon they espied latine sails and got a baghlah and two sambuks under their guns. But none of them was the craft they sought, much to the chagrin of the mate and his gun crew, who had visions of splendid practice close at hand.

Constance failed to appear at the luncheon table, and Alan tried to see her, but she refused him admittance. And it was not until late that night that she came on deck for a breath of air, he joined her immediately, blundering in his hopeful way against the feminine aura.

"So glad you came up," he said gently. "I was sorry I hadn't explained. I had to take Amneh, you know. There was no other way out. She simply wouldn't stay ashore."

"So I perceive," said Constance. And then, coolly, "I'm

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glad you realize that you've placed me in an impossible position."

"Oh, I say, Connie. How?"

She turned away from him with a shrug, but he followed her. "Oh, I say, Connie," he repeated vacuously. And she faced him.

"Of course I didn't know when I volunteered for this service the kind of freedom you had given Amneh. It's a pity you couldn't have told me last night. Another nurse might not have been handicapped as I am by a sense of the situation. But I'm not a fool, and I refuse to accept the position in which you've placed me. I'm here to do my duty, and I must do it as well as I can, but I insist that you let me go my own way, and permit me at least the privacy to which I have a right."

He heard her through to the end, aware of her pale face and eyes shining like stars in the darkness. There had never been a moment when she had seemed more desirable than now, even in her foolishness and inefficacy. But he understood precisely what she meant, and deep down in him somewhere came welling up a righteous indignation at the injustice of this feminine creature that he loved.

"You mean that I—that Amneh——" he paused for a word.

"I mean that—that you are beneath contempt," she said, and, turning quickly, walked away and disappeared in the darkness forward. He made no attempt to follow her. He was stunned for a moment,—amazed,—but more angry than either. He had never been really angry in his life, and the thought that it was Connie who was arousing him, made him suddenly hunt for his pipe and tobacco. The thing was not possible. . . . But she was unreasonable . . . wouldn't even hear him out . . . listen to explanations. . . . Poor Amneh! He couldn't stand for that sort of

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thing, you know—injustice. Amneh had had it pretty hard—without this. He paced the deck aft for a long while, and then, a look of some determination in his face, went forward. The lights of a steamer were moving northward somewhere on the *Turkana's* port quarter. A deep frown drew down Alan's brows. Like many mild men, he was slow to anger, but slower still to swing back to the normal. For a moment he had thought of telling Hoagland to signal the vessel and give Connie the chance to go back to Suez, if she wished it. But he thought better of it in the end, and after a few commonplaces with Hoagland joined Daoud in the chart-room, where they planned soberly until the small hours of the morning.

But both of them felt that the hour of great events was at hand. Daoud knew something of Yambu, the port of incapable captains. He had been there some years before in search of the *rais* of a Nile freight boat who had killed a man—and had arrested him. Daoud counseled caution on approaching the place. If the *Turkana* didn't come up with the sambuk before dawn, it would be wiser to take an easterly course and hide in a harbor he knew a few miles north of their destination. This strategy had proved effective yesterday and vigilance was doubly necessary now, for if von Hengel ever caught a glimpse from shore of the familiar lines of the *Turkana*, he would flee into the heights of the Radhwah, the Mountains of Paradise, and then farewell to their chances of getting him this side of Medineh. It was interesting that von Hengel had chosen the neighborhood of Medineh instead of that of Mecca for his proselytizing. Aside from the fact that Medineh was nearer the British base, there would be other considerations, both political and religious, to sway him. The rivalry of the two Holy Cities was of course well known, and the recrudescence of a genuine Kaba Stone would be managed

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with less difficulty near the tomb of the Prophet than in the immediate vicinity of the home of the spurious stone.

Daoud's counsel was wise and Alan gave orders accordingly, to the end that in the morning, no sails having been sighted, they reached the Arabian coast and, moving slowly southward, cast anchor during the afternoon in a spacious harbor, well protected. The shore looked inhospitable enough, a yellowish brown soil, ribbed with rocks, between which here and there grew tufts of camel grass and an occasional acacia tree. The few houses were squat mud hovels, homes of the keepers of a small shrine, the white-washed dome of which was visible near by. Alan and Daoud went ashore in the launch, well disguised, their belts full of gold. It was ten miles to Yambu, and the weight of their equipment was heavy, but they found two moth-eaten dromedaries in the village which they hired, leaving money in earnest of their return. Daoud conducted the negotiations, and Alan, in the capacity of a dignitary, stood apart, the lower part of his face hidden in the voluminous kufiyah, following a custom—the *lisam* of the Bedawee—as a protection against both sand and simoon. The subterfuge served him well and gave him confidence. His nationality was not discovered, for the number of silver-mounted weapons stuck in his belt proclaimed him a person of consequence from whom conversation was a matter of condescension.

The dromedaries were slow and suited Daoud's plans nicely, for it was dark before they entered Yambu and dismounted before a coffee-house in the *suk* or market-place. It was not long before they were seated within the building, a long structure open at the sides, the roof of thatched date leaves supported by heavy poles. Inside was a raised platform of wood upon which sat the customers, cross-legged, smoking their pipes and engaged in conversation. This

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sort of a job suited Daoud Effendi like a glove, and it was not long before he was engaged in conversation with his nearest neighbor, the Sherif of a tribe from up Medineh way, who had come down with a camel-train of goods which were to be shipped to Suez.

Abdullah Sadi was tall and very slender, but he carried himself with an air of authority. Indeed, from the attention given his remarks, one would gather that he was a person of some note in the neighborhood. So good an impression did Daoud make upon him that the Sherif even insisted upon paying for the coffee. As Christians were of course looked upon with suspicion in this neighborhood, Alan's incognito was preserved by the simple expedient of saying that he was a Sulaymani, a Pilgrim from the East, who spoke no Arabic. Daoud kept his ears open and even Alan was aware of an undercurrent of excitement among the coffee drinkers. Even as they sat, a religious procession passed in the street outside. Men were beating drums and playing on hautboys and a crowd of men and women following, bearing meshals. Daoud questioned and the conversation was given to Alan afterward.

"Is it a moolid, Sherif Sadi?"

Sadi smiled and then grew grave at once.

"Curious things are happening in El-Hejaz," he muttered. "Early this morning a sambuk arrived, bearing strangers who have been received by the governor. They come from Cairo, learned men from El-Azhar, bearing a message to Medineh."

"And what is their message, what their mission?"

"Who knows? But it is said they are of the Oolama. Whatever their mission, these people will listen. The governor has called upon the Nizam which escorts them in safety."

"Escorts them—where?"

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"Upon their pilgrimage to the Holy City."

"Ah. They have already left, then?"

"Not yet. To-morrow night, they say. To-night there are prayers in the mosque, where I shall go presently."

"Would it not be possible for me to accompany you?"

"Assuredly, Effendi, and the Sheykh—" indicating Alan.

"The Sheykh Abbas is weary," Daoud broke in. "He will prefer to retire at once, if a sleeping place may be found for him."

Alan saw the two men get up and followed their example, moving toward the street. In a moment Daoud found the opportunity to tell Alan what had happened, advising him to go to the wakalah near by, where there were empty rooms, and await his return. To this plan Alan assented grudgingly, realizing at last that his disguise was far from perfect and that if a curiosity developed as to his identity, he might be stoned by the fanatic Believers. So he watched them move away in the direction in which the procession had gone and strolled out into the bazaar, the friendly shadows of which were better suited to his situation.

His feet more than once turned toward the mosque, the madneh of which he could see rising at the edge of the town, and every impulse urged him there. But he had learned prudence. The mere fact that he had come straight upon the trail of the Stone was luck enough for the present. There wouldn't be any bungling of the job this time. And so after a while he found his way to the wakalah, and assured of his own safety, lay down on a mat by a window, through which a cooling breeze from the sea entered the room.

Outside all was quiet again. The moon had risen and shed its pale beams over the flat roofs of the town, beautifying with its soft effulgence what must by daylight be

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unspeakably squalid and ugly. Now and then a dog barked near by, and he heard its call taken up in one part of the town and then another. But of human beings in the streets there was no sound—the bazaars were silent, and even the man who had shown him to his room had seemed impatient to be away. All Yambu was at the mosque at the foot of the hills, where Daoud and Sadi had gone, and, leaning out of his window the better to enjoy the air, Alan seemed to hear across the distance the low murmur of a multitude of voices. He moved indoors impatiently again and lay on his mat, for his heart was in the mosque, but he had the most implicit confidence in Daoud and he knew that here, beyond the reach of help, he must play his game with a careful hand.

In spite of his interest in the proceedings he realized that he was very tired and relaxed with a smile, his thoughts turning for a moment to the *Turkana*, Constance and Amneh; he had been trying hard to think the situation something of a joke. But it wasn't a joke, and he knew it. Connie had changed a lot out here in the East. Perhaps it was the hot weather. Devilish hot place, Yambu—even at night.

He was awakened by a loud commotion in the street and sprang up suddenly to the window. Below him, lighted by their flaming torches, a crowd moved, shouting and praying. The scene reminded him of the night of the Ashoora in Cairo, with the difference that here there were no bystanders. There were many women in the throng, who punctuated the hoarse murmurs of the men with shrill staccato cries, like those he had heard at marriage processions. The breeze from the sea had died away and the hot dust that came up to him was laden with many odors. How long had these people been in the mosque? What

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had happened? The performance had been well staged, if one was to judge by its audience.

And while he peered out, in unwilling admiration for the skill of the man who had planned this thing, the door behind him was softly opened and Daoud entered. He peered around the room cautiously for a moment and then came forward to Alan's shoulder.

"It's time we were going, Mr. Jessup," he whispered. "We've got a lot to do."

"You saw——?"

"Not von Hengel himself. He's too clever for that—Sheykh Ali Agha—the keenest in all the Oolama. I'd rather Northby Pasha had caught him than Hassan."

"What did he do?"

But Daoud was already moving toward the door.

"I'll tell you on the way, sir. We must be off at once."

And so, leaving a few piastres for their host, Daoud led the way to the compound where they had put their dromedaries. Alan did not dare to question, for the streets were filled with people, so he followed on in the footsteps of the Egyptian, aware that Daoud was moving with a definite purpose. What that purpose was became more of a mystery when they reached the compound, for there already mounted on a fine camel awaiting them was a white-robed figure which Alan had no difficulty in recognizing as the Sherif Sadi. In a moment they were mounted and silently followed the soft-footed camel of their leader up the hills and into the moonlight.

## CHAPTER XIX

### MASQUERADE

**T**HE road wound up over the hills and then dipped sharply toward the sea, following the coast-line northward in the direction of the spot where the *Turkana* was anchored.

When they had gone half a mile or so Daoud fell back beside Alan and explained the meaning of this night's pilgrimage. Sadi, Daoud explained, was a Sherif of one of the largest of the tribes of the Beni Harb, the Beni Amur of the Masruh, a roaming people with ten or fifteen thousand warriors. As to his religious principles, Daoud repeated them in his own words:

"We pray not—because we must drink the water of ablution; we give no alms—because we ask them; we fast not the Ramazan month because we starve throughout the year; and we do no pilgrimages, because the World is the House of Allah.' That's his creed, Mr. Jessup," Daoud went on—"The 'World is the House of Allah.' This tribe owes no allegiance to the Sultan, nor to the forms of Islam, so, you see, the ceremony in the Mosque of Yambu means nothing to him. I am his friend. We have spoken of these things. He does not believe in the honeyed phrases of Omar Hilal or in the virtue of the Black Stone."

"Good," said Alan. "And where are we going?"

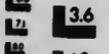
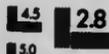
"He is returning to a place toward Medineh. I said that we would ride with him a part of the way."

"And then?"



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Daoud paused significantly. "He is very poor," he finished.

"I see. Let us get down and talk further."

So when they came to an elevation which overlooked the sea the three men dismounted and sat smoking. Below them in the valley of Yambu voices still murmured, and behind them, among the rocks, the animals mouthed the camel grass. Elsewhere silence, except for the distant whisper of the sea.

"Abdullah Sadi," said Daoud addressing the Sherif, "an arrogant nation beyond the waters seeks to rule the world. And so she sends her sons abroad to corrupt its people. The Sheykh Ali Agha is only the tongue of another less honest than he, a Nemsowee, a German named von Hengel, who calls himself the Sheykh Omar Hilal. They seek to make all Islam rise to fight the battles of the oppressor. The Kaba Stone is a lie, like their vows to Allah."

Sadi's face was expressionless and his gaze was on the peak of Jebel Radhwah.

"I will tell you the truth, Abdullah Sadi," continued Daoud earnestly. "I am here in the interests of the free peoples of the world whose home is the House of Allah. Beyond the seas upon the other side of space great nations have arisen—free nations, who serve Allah in their own way, to fight the Nemsowee. These men die upon the field of battle for their belief in the sacredness of their cause. In Beyrut near El-Kuds they are fighting against the soldiers of the Sultan of Turkey, who are led by officers of the oppressor."

Sadi shrugged. "That is nothing to me," he said. "Men fight. It is their nature."

"That is true. But you of El Hejaz fight only in a just cause—for your honor, for the Sar,\* or for your freedom

\*Blood vengeance.

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to drive your herds whither you please. But what becomes of your freedom if men armed with cannon come among you and drive you into the barrens of El Akhaf like dust before the simoon? And what becomes of your honor, if your people follow in the path of liars?"

"They will not follow. Allah guides."

"Those others yonder," continued Daoud, pointing toward the distant madneh of the mosque, "you have seen. They will follow this false prophet who seeks to raise armies of your warriors to fall upon the soldiers of the free peoples at El-Kuds——"

"It may not be——" The Sherif Sadi had straightened and was now listening intently. "It may not be—not the Beni Amur," he said soberly.

"Who shall stop this Ali Agha and the veiled Sheykh who commands him? From Yambu, they go to Medineh, gathering warriors to their Mahmal with their lies in the very face of Allah in his Holy City."

"Allah will forbid."

"Allah brings rain into the desert, clouds to veil the sun, green for the herds, but liars he permits to prosper like the yellow flower of the acacia tree. Thou hast seen it, here—there—everywhere."

Abdullah Sadi rose and paced to and fro, his long robes clutched about him, a splendid figure. Daoud did not speak and at last the Sherif stood before his interlocutor.

"I like you, Daoud Effendi," he said in his deep voice. "You have said many wise words. But the time has come for plain speaking. Who are you?"

"I have said that I will speak the truth. I am from Egypt, the servant of the Ingleezee which leads in the fight for freedom. My friend is no Sulaymani, but Jessup, Effendi, an Amerikani, who gives much money that the House of Allah may be at peace."

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"Ah—Amerikani—I have heard. And what shall you do?"

"We have come here to steal away the power of these false prophets and make them as broken reeds in our hands."

"Ah—but how?"

"Merely that we shall take this false Kaba Stone and break it into a thousand pieces."

"You will do this—you two—alone—and single-handed?"

Daoud straightened and pushed aside his aba and kamis, disclosing his leather money belt.

"We are not alone, Abdullah Sadi," he said quietly. "We have many friends who are near. Also we have power greater than soft speeches in the mouths of liars. Look!"

And as Sadi leaned forward Daoud let fall a stream of coin—one handful—another, until all the moonlit sand before him was carpeted with gold. Sadi bent forward, peering—then peered again closer, kneeling at last and lifting many of the sovereigns in his fingers.

"Gold," he muttered in a choked voice.

"Gold," repeated Daoud. "The gold of a freeman given that the House of Allah may still be free."

Sadi looked at Alan, who had shaken off his hot head-dress and now sat pleasantly revealed, his eyes smiling in a friendly way at the perturbed Sherif.

"As Allah is good, whence comes this gold? There is more. Your belts are full of it."

"There is more," said Daoud. "Enough, Abdullah Sadi, to bear twenty camels to the ground."

The man straightened in a bewildered way, two of the gold pieces sticking in his fingers. "You wish that I should help, Effendi? That I should be of service to you?"

"Not service, nor to us. Not a favor, Abdullah Sadi, for such gifts come only from Allah—but the justice of

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El-Hejaz upon impostors. It is of Honor we ask it, in the name of Freedom. Will you help?"

"*Inshallah! Ana areed.* I will," he said with sudden eagerness.

"It is good. We shall see."

They talked long and reached an agreement. Dawn streaked the sky behind Jebel Radhwah before they rose and went their ways—Abdullah Sadi with mad cries to his swift camel, flying over the hills to the eastward, and Daoud and Alan Jessup down a path which would lead to the *Turkana*.

"A hundred pounds," said Alan. "You should have given twice that."

"No," said Daoud quietly. "If we had given too much, he would not come back. This is an earnest of more to come."

"You are sure that he will keep his word?"

"His honor is at stake—" Daoud laughed, "but three sovereigns stuck in his fingers to bind the bargain."

"I did not see."

"I know the Bedawee, Mr. Jessup. Trust to his honor and you are safe—to his honesty and he will steal the hair of your head. But honor tempered with cupidity—" and Daoud laughed—"the Bedawee will follow to the ends of the earth."

They reached the haven just at sunrise. Their approach was quickly detected by the watch on deck and a boat at once put off for them. Daoud, who had had no sleep, at once went to bed, but after a shower-bath Alan was ready for the great business of the day.

The plan in brief was to accomplish their mission if possible without bloodshed. Daoud was to leave early in the afternoon for Yambu in disguise and mingle with the departing caravan, reporting to Jessup and Dawson who, leaving the yacht at nightfall, were to meet him at an ap-

## THE BLACK STONE

pointed place, then going forward together to the first encampment of von Hengel and his crew. By thus isolating all the conspirators it was hoped that the Black Stone and the documents as to its authenticity would be found and recovered, and von Hengel and the Sherifs brought aboard the yacht. Hoagland and twenty men were to follow a few hours later, all disguised in Arab clothing, and all bearing Enfields and automatic pistols, which they were to use only in the urge of necessity. Dawson was to meet them and direct them upon the path of the marching caravan.

As a sign that Abdullah Sadi was so far true to his word, many camels arrived in the course of the afternoon, and now stood patiently tethered together close by the hovel of the keeper of the Shrine, whom Alan had bought, body and soul, for two gold pieces. Also he bought the camel men with a sovereign apiece, and already they worshiped him. Forward, on the *Turkana*, carnival reigned, for twenty men were being "made up" for the party. All details having been arranged before leaving Alexandria, the men submitted as their faces, arms and legs were stained, while they doffed neat sailor togs and put on kamis and kufiyah. Many were the yells of derision and loud the laughter at the sallies of the masqueraders.

"Oh, boy," cried a New Yorker, "if Secon' Aven' could on'y see me now!"

"Gawd," laughed another. "An' Mike Sweeny in pajamas! If dem bougeys ever pipes you off, dey won't stop runnin' dis side o' Bombay."

"Ain't I de swell guy?" yelled Mike. "Rameses ain't got nothin' on me."

"No, nor Cleopatra neither. But wait till ye git a-hawse of a camel, dearie—de mid-Atlantic in a blow won't be nothin' to it."

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"S'elp me," growled a Londoner, "'ow can a blokey fight with this 'ere 'airy thing a-ticklin' of 'is legs?"

"Tuck it up, me son, so. Now you look like de Midnight Follies——"

"Aye. An' f'ael like Wenus in—in a bloomin' bear-skin. Come 'ere, Sarah Burnhart, an' swing on to this top-pin'-lift."

Hoagland sacrificed, with a sigh, a perfectly good mustache which was too bristly for the purposes of the evening, but he wouldn't have given up this party for the whiskers of Mohammed himself.

The only ones who didn't share in the merriment were Rawlings, the mate, and members of the gun's crews, who were to be left behind to protect the retreat.

Alan, who had listened to this colloquy from the shadow of a near-by ventilator, laughed as he went below for a wink of sleep. At the door into the saloon, he met Constance Masterson coming out.

"You've determined on this mad venture?" she asked him.

"Of course," he said pleasantly. And then, "I hope you have everything that you require."

"It's madness, what you're doing——" she broke in—"to go ashore in this enemy country with twenty men—against thousands. If you won't consider your own safety, I pray you to consider theirs."

Alan laughed. "The men! I couldn't stop them now if I wanted to. If you don't believe it, go forward and look."

But she grew grave at once.

"I—I am incapable of—of looking after many wounded——"

"Let's hope there won't be any."

"Then you're determined?"

"Quite," he said pleasantly.

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She examined him, wide-eyed for a moment, and he returned her look with a level gaze, very politely but with a calm purpose and air of command that was not to be denied. Then she turned slowly and went away. She did not understand—could not accustom herself to this cool and very determined person who had once been Alan Jes-sup.

Daoud could foresee certain tactical advantages in having a woman with them—especially one like Amneh, who could listen and understand. With a woman in their party they were less likely to be objects of suspicion, should there be any scouting, against a surprise. There would be little danger to a veiled woman unless she were discovered in some overt act of enmity, and, if Daoud's plans failed, she had only to mount a camel, which would be left in a safe place, and return to the *Turkana*. The two men did not notice that Amneh was at their sides listening to this conversation. But suddenly they heard her soft voice at their elbows—

"Do you desire me to go, Monsieur Alan?" she asked.

Alan smiled. "It is as you please," he replied. "You know the face of Omar Hilal. Perhaps that would help. But there may be danger."

"You wish me with you, Monsieur Alan?"

"I wish merely for your peace of mind. If you wish I wish you to stay aboard the *Turkana*."

Amneh was thoughtful for a moment.

"I wish to go, Monsieur Alan," she said quietly.

And so it was arranged. Amneh was to accompany Alan at sunset, and, much to Dawson's disgust, it was decided that the valet should act as a scout or advance party for Hoagland and the men, who would not leave the ship until midnight. Amneh fortunately still possessed her burka and tarhhah, and of course would be completely disguised. But

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it was with some compunctions that Alan joined her on deck just at sunset. She had seemed willing enough to go, but in the interval before he had fallen asleep, Alan wondered whether he had any right to permit this girl to go ashore subject to possible danger or injury. She had served her purpose well, giving him the clue that had led to the Kaba Stone, and he had requited her with kindness. But he had noted the symptoms of dog-like devotion for himself with some uneasiness. He could not be unaware of the gentleness of her gaze, the occasional touch of her soft fingers seeking his own and her unquestioning subservience to his wishes. She had heard him say that she might be of some use to him ashore. Therefore she came, in spite of her natural timidity born of the terrors through which she had passed.

And there was Connie. She had behaved pretty badly, but she couldn't have helped noticing in her brief flights between the sick bay and the deck, the pretty little childish airs of familiarity that Amneh had adopted. Alan was well aware that they might have created a false impression. He was aware also that Connie now passed Amneh with averted head and that her manner toward himself could scarcely have been more distant if he had treated her with the utmost of inconsideration. Only once she had addressed him directly since their newest misunderstanding, and that was when she had appealed to him not to embark on this expedition. But with a clear conscience and a recollection of her intolerance he had already steeled himself against her displeasure and never varied in the calm politeness of his greetings. Their ancient affair was ended of course, and so far as he could see, it had already been over for a long while. But standing with Amneh at the head of the ladder while they awaited the launch, he was aware of Connie in the background. It seemed as though she always happened

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up at the most inopportune moments. But he went toward her gravely.

"If there is anything you need, Connie," he said quietly, "you know the *Turkana* is yours."

"Thanks," she replied calmly, resuming her gaze upon the waters.

But Amneh did not move. She was busily engaged in rearranging the folds of her head-dress, and when Alan approached, without turning her head descended with him to the launch, in which they embarked.

As the launch drove in toward the landing-place, Alan noticed for the first time a man in native costume who had been poking about with a stick among the stones just at the high-tide mark, and questioned the coxswain.

"Oh, that's your man Dawson, sir. He has been ashore for an hour or more."

"What's he doing there?"

"Don't know, sir. Seems as if he might be looking for something."

The launch ran smoothly up on the shale and they saw that it was indeed Dawson who now awaited Alan, his placid features relaxed in a grin. On his side he carried something hanging in the bight of a handkerchief.

"What on earth are you doing ashore, Dawson?" asked Alan as they disembarked.

"Well, sir, I've found it."

"Found what?" asked his mystified employer.

"The Black Stone, sir—or another so much like it, that it might be its twin brother—it's in here." And opening the handkerchief, with some pride he displayed his treasure.

Alan examined the thing, a darkish piece of rock about the size of a man's two fists put together and worn smooth by the constant action of the waves.

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"But what on earth are you going to do with this?" asked Alan.

Dawson put the rock with great care into the bulge of the handkerchief before he replied.

"I thought, sir," he said deliberately, "that if the chance came, you might slip this piece of stone into the place of the other."

"Slip it—?" Dawson's idea came to Alan slowly. But lately he had gotten the habit of considering Dawson's suggestions with the greatest of respect. So he frowned, thinking seriously.

"You might not get the chance, sir," put in the valet quietly, "but I thought it wouldn't do any harm to take it along. It doesn't weigh much. Feel it, sir."

Alan obeyed. It didn't.

"You see, sir, if you hung the handkerchief to your belt, it might not be observed beneath your robes."

Alan stared at Dawson and then at the handkerchief, while Amneh examined the object with little cries of excitement.

"You say it's like the other?" Alan asked again.

"As like as two peas in a pod, sir—" Dawson broke off. "It's only a supposition, sir—begging your pardon, but it might be done."

Alan was already untying the knot in the handkerchief.

"I'll do it, Dawson," he decided. "As you say, it can do no harm."

"If you will permit me, sir. Just a moment."

Alan submitted while Dawson hung the handkerchief to his belt upon the left side beneath his kamis, where it was quite hidden under the folds of his aba.

Alan took a pace or two and turned. "Very good, Dawson," he said. "Awf'ly thoughtful of you. Can't do any harm at all. May do some good. Good-by."

## THE BLACK STONE

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And as Dawson made his way to the waiting launch, Alan and Amneh turned and went up the slope towards the houses, where the camel men helped them upon their beasts, and in a few moments they were on their way. The spurious black stone swayed to and fro against Alan's flank with the motions of the camel, but it did not discommode him. Inventive genius, Dawson. Who would ever have thought—? But then there *might* be a chance.

As they reached the first turn in the road Alan glanced at the *Turkana* and noted the white-robed figure of Connie peering at them over the rail. Amneh followed his look and smiled.

"Mademoiselle is jealous of me," she said with a little childish giggle.

Jealous! Connie! Of Amneh? Impossible!

"What makes you say that, child?" he asked in a tone of some asperity.

"Because it is the truth." And then with a sigh as she looked over her shoulder at him, "She is very foolish."

Alan became discreetly silent, aware of a sense of shock at this astonishing piece of information. And in spite of the fact,—surprising enough, too,—he was aware of the nearness of this companion, of her sex and of her pulsing youth and its pitiful experience. He was very sorry for her. She looked very tiny perched upon her tall camel and her eyes seemed darker than usual when she gazed at him, for she had not yet put on her face-veil. She carried herself well, for this was not the first time that she had

The sun dipped its red rim below the sea and the monstrous shadows of their beasts which had danced grotesquely among the rocks and sand-dunes before them suddenly grew dimmer and at last disappeared. Above them the sky was a deep sapphire, across which like the spokes of a gigantic

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wheel shot fires of pink and orange as the retreating sun, embattled with the coming of the night, still sent forth its darts in challenge for the morrow. Before them above the "Mountains of Paradise" a purple flush was mantling the sky against which the tawny rocks were picked like cuttings of paper. For a few moments the zodiacal light glimmered, then failed. Darkness fell rapidly and the stars came into being all at once as if at a sudden signal from the Master.

Alan turned and looked at the distant yacht, floating majestically, a thing of beauty and orderly repose. She wore no colors, and the dark muzzles of her new rifles, projecting forward and aft, gave her a singularly business-like appearance. He smiled again as he thought of the comments of his sailor-masqueraders. They were a good lot and would not fail him.

Alan turned his camel and joined his companion. Their path now stretched straight before them toward the mountains where it joined the Yambu road, the spot where Daoud was to meet them. For a while Alan was silent, thinking of his plans for the night, still aware of the plaintive little note of Amneh's last speech. "She is very foolish." He glanced at Amneh, who rode easily, a part of the beauty of the scene.

She breathed deeply and her bosom rose and fell as she drank deep draughts of the air of freedom. She seemed even for the moment to have forgotten Alan, but she caught the glance that he turned toward her.

"The Mountains of Paradise, Monsieur Alan. It is thither we ride, thou and I."

And now he realized a part of her childish charm. She was an Oriental, with all its mystery, imagery and illusion.

"We do not ride so far, Amneh," said Alan gently. "The Mountains of Paradise are many miles away."

## THE BLACK STONE

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"But just to ride toward them with thee, Monsieur Alan. It is enough," she said with a sigh.

"We shall ride often then, thou and I," he said with a smile, unconsciously adopting her vernacular.

She flashed a glance at him, but already he was deep again in his meditations.

Their road gently ascended a kind of wadi or small valley, in which was a dry watercourse, bordered by the ledges of rocks now strewn more profusely, small jutting crags in the bed of the stream which made the footing of the camels precarious, large boulders cast in a chaos of confusion as though in some mad orgy of a playful giant. But Amneh seemed to have no fear of the darkness, and when the moon rose, sailing high above the flank of Jebel Radhwah, the sands shone pale yellow again and the rocks were painted with silver.

Where the wadi widened, Alan drew his camel alongside of Amneh's and explained to her what he hoped to accomplish and what her part in the affair could be, pointing out to her as they climbed the landmarks of their road so that if they became separated she could find her way to the *Turkana* alone. Even then she was not frightened and listened attentively, marking the lines to their left which were to be her guide.

"At the summit of these hills," he finished, "we should be somewhere near the Medineh road. I'm sure we have made no mistake."

And in a moment, emerging from a depression in the ground which still showed that they had not left the trail, they emerged upon a plateau which Abdullah Sadi had carefully described, where they stopped to rest their laboring beasts and survey the scene beyond. To their left the foothills of the Radhwah, Amneh's "Mountains of Para-

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dise," to their right a rolling desert backed by a low range of hills. Before them—

"What's that sound, Amneh?" said Alan leaning over and touching her arm. "Listen."

From a distance came a low murmur like the buzzing of a swarm of bees, and from time to time, repeated with some regularity like the call of the bee-keeper, a faint persistent note, tapping at their ears.

"Drums," said Alan. "See—there they go."

Thin at first, like a vapor rising from the sea, then growing in bulk as it ascended to the heavens, a huge shape appeared, assuming strange forms and spreading until the face of the moon turned a pale gold.

"Dust," added Alan. "There must be thousands of them; we must get on."

And, prodding his camel, he led the way forward.

"Daoud Effendi?" she asked.

"Should be waiting near a village of huts upon this road."

And then, as he glanced back at her, "You are not frightened, Amneh?"

She smiled softly. "Why should I be frightened, Monsieur Alan, since you are here?"

They pressed on beside the hills to their left. At times the sounds of the moving multitude seemed startlingly close, and then faded behind the hills, but soon as they drew nearer the main road, the amber cloud spread over them and the moon from copper color became a dull red and then slowly expired. The smell of the dust was in their nostrils, and now faint yet distinct upon the air came the note of individual voices, the creaking of leather thongs, the rattle of litters and the thud of many feet. And in a moment, coming again to a slight elevation, they marked the pale shapes of houses and saw beyond them the straggling end of the ghostly procession. They reached the vil-

## THE BLACK STONE

lage, from which, it seemed, with one accord, the inhabitants had deserted. There they paused for a moment, and Daoud, riding his dromedary, joined them almost instantly.

"They have passed," he said in a low tone, "and suspect nothing. Omar Hilal and Ali Agha ride upon horses at the head of the caravan. I have seen them. All is well with you, Mr. Jessup?"

Alan nodded and peered at his watch. "Our men should be leaving the *Turkana* pretty soon," he said.

"Good. The Mahmal encamps at two o'clock in the Wadi Sakhan, not three miles from here. There are two villages near. There will be a night prayer to hold the multitude."

"How many men have they?"

"A thousand easily, some mounted, besides the Nizam of fifty men."

"And the rest."

"Women, children—the halt and the blind, the rich, the poor, from all the country around in litters, afoot, on horses, camels, donkeys or anything that will carry them."

"H-m."

"Ali Agha exhorts them, the Sherifs and descendants of the Prophet pray, but the Sheykh Omar, his head-dress *lisam*, veils his face from the people."

"H-m," muttered Alan again softly. "Jolly well right of him." And then with a glance at Amneh, "Shall we go on?"

Daoud nodded. "Dawson will come forward here. I have left a mark upon the boulder at the cross-roads, but the signs of travel are as plain as day. He will follow and await the signal. The place I think is most propitious. A wadi! It shows they suspect nothing."

"You've had word from the Sherif?"

"A message awaited me at the wahkala. He rides fast and far—with a Bedawee one may not know."

At a word from Daoud, Amneh adjusted her face-veil

## MASQUERADE

and they went on in the trail of the pilgrims. Ahead of them, winding over the hills like some dusky antediluvian reptile, the strange procession squirmed. They caught up with and passed the stragglers, men and women hobbling painfully or sitting groaning or praying by the roadside—beggars who sprang up as they passed and caught at their ankles, shrieking for alms; weary women, unveiled, with babies at their breasts, gazing with lusterless eyes, children asleep by the roadside, and here and there a weary seiya, whose camel, driven into the fore of the procession, had outstripped him.

But as they drew nearer the main body of the caravan, its procedure was more orderly, the character of its company more substantial—staid merchants and their wives, householders, herders, seafaring men, proud Sheykhs, traders and officials of the Ottoman Empire in their tarbûshes, robes and sashes. Many of the men seemed to be armed with their native firearms, which, according to the custom, were stuck ostentatiously in their belts. And many afoot as well as upon camel-back carried their neboots, long heavy staves in the use of which, Daoud told Alan, these people were most proficient. Nearer the head of the procession, which they approached without undue haste, weapons were more in evidence, and near the Mahmal, an embroidered canopy on four poles mounted upon a camel and provided by the officers of the Mosque of Yambu, rode the Nizam, or irregular infantry of this part of the Ottoman Empire, armed with modern rifles. Alan counted them carefully—fifty-three men under a captain, who rode before the Mahmal among the Sheykhs and Sherifs. And even as Alan rode, following the trail into the entrance of the wadi, other pilgrims joined the procession, in haste, leaving their mattresses and slumber-mats at the summons of the couriers of

## **THE BLACK STONE**

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Ali Agha. Allah called. A miracle was about to happen in El-Hejaz.

The procession wound into the gorge down which a small stream flowed until the Mahmal came into a kind of natural amphitheater of rocks and trees, near a spring of water, when the soldiers rode down the entire length of the caravan calling a halt, and the procession stopped. Alan's party was in the very midst of the horde of people, and they dismounted and sat at one side. There was much crowding and shouting, but the soldiers and Sheykhs rode here and there until a semblance of order was restored, giving evidence of an actuating brain somewhere in this human ant-hill. Alan, upon the alert, caught a glimpse of von Hengel, his face still covered, seated upon his camel on a slight eminence near the Mahmal, giving directions in a low tone to the Sheykhs gathered about him, who at his word moved quickly among the throng. It was a rabble indeed, but Alan had not been slow to observe that underneath its motley coverings the same blood ran hot with fervor warmed by the dull fires of fanaticism suddenly fanned into flame. He felt it in the air of expectation, in the peering eyes turned toward the Mahmal, heard it in the murmured prayers of those at his side, and saw it in the silent obedience to those in authority. The Kaba Stone had begun to roll toward Jerusalem.

## CHAPTER XX

### CONNIE RECANTS

**I**T is not given to a mere man to divine from what hidden sources woman gathers her deft skill at rapid divination of motives of persons both male and female. And when two feminine instincts thrust forth with their invisible blades, it is time for him to take to the side-lines. From sister of mercy Constance Masterson had seen fit to drop her heavenly prerogatives and arm herself with her thin impalpable weapon of offense; while Amneh, aware of a false position, threw out the feminine antennæ and awaited the onslaught.

The entrance of Miss Masterson into the cabin of the *Turkana* at the precise moment when Amneh, still unconscious of her presence, touched Alan's hand in the confiding way she had, was immediate signal for the beginning of hostilities. Alan, blissfully ignorant of the invisible thrust and parry about his very ears, had plunged blissfully into his conversation and coffee, and only when Constance flashed her displeasure unmistakably was he aware of happenings beyond his masculine ken. He had fled in full abeyance of a situation he had not been able to understand. Amneh had gone aft and smoked a cigar, a tiny pucker at her brows while she watched Alan. Constance, her pretty lips drawn into a thin line, sought her patients in the sick bay and covered her retreat by carefully locking the door and devoting herself assiduously to her duties.

Indeed there is much to be said in Connie's favor. Im-

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agine, if you can, being the possessor of a hopeless ideal, an ideal that you love for itself alone merely because it is an ideal and impossible, and then suddenly seeing that impossibility slowly emerge into the realms of doubt and then quite suddenly into a somewhat magnificent reality. Some such emotions must have passed through the mind of the gentleman who built his Frankenstein out of inorganic substances and saw it suddenly imbued with mortal life. In a few short weeks, Alan had grown from mere clay into something very nearly verging upon the heroic. He had always been her possession—hers only—and the fact that this transformation had taken place since the hour when she had relinquished him seemed to have made no difference in her conceptions of possessive interest.

Imagine also, if you please, the sudden impression upon a mind thus adjusted, when Constance beheld the pretty refugee, whom she had supposed to be well upon her way to England, sitting *tête-à-tête* over the breakfast table and actually holding her hero's hands while she looked up into his face with a gaze which reflected nothing less than adoration. Amneh! From a refugee, worthy of all the efforts that Constance and Alan had expended upon her, she became at a bound a designing minx, a renegade of harems and the pretty plaything of Alan's heroic pilgrimage. The thing was obvious and in the shock of her discovery, Constance wanted only to bury herself and hide the evidences of this blow to her self-esteem which she was sure must be visible in her discomfiture. She did not stop to reason, did not wish to reason, and the thought of questioning Alan as to Amneh was impossible. She had never known anything of Alan's life away from her, but she had been sure that he was not *this* sort of a man!

In her unreasoning repugnance at her situation as she imagined it, she forgot that she had no claim upon Alan

## CONNIE RECANTS

whatever, that she had come aboard the *Turkana* of her own volition, and that the Armenian girl (or any other woman for that matter) had as much right upon the yacht, if Alan chose to invite her, as she. And as these ideas slowly emerged from the tangled corners of her mind, they only served to make her more bitter against Alan and more bitter against herself because she had chosen, like Amneh, to adore him.

But this was the truth, and it had come to her in Egypt. Who could help adoring a man one had always loved, when he went through fire to save her and didn't even take a kiss in recompense? In the old days he had frequently wanted some physical evidences of her rather desultory attachment, and Connie had given them grudgingly—a kiss at parting, a soft handclasp in the moonlight when nature conspired to make all things—even Alan's deficiencies—less unlovely. But his indifference since they had met in Egypt, his absorption in his pursuit of the Black Stone, had seemed by some strange paradox which she could not exactly understand, to make her own devotion grow by the little it fed on.

But now—! What could she have but bitterness and hatred of all things? If chivalry had ever meant anything to Alan, if it meant anything to him now, there had been time to warn her when she had come from the *Mercy*—to tell her that her presence aboard the *Turkana* would lead to a situation that must be intolerable. But he had said no word, given no sign, even as they stood at the rail in the moonlight and watched the *Mercy* depart, that this other woman was aboard. Were moral insensibility and brutality a part of Alan's new condition? He had not been fair with her. And yet, what could she do? She had her work and must go on with it. Other hospital work, born of this insane adventure, would follow and she must go on with that, too. The thought of it seemed impossible. But grad-

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ually out of her thoughts reason seemed to come, and she regained her poise, hardening herself for the interview with Alan that she knew must come.

We have seen what happened in that interview. The pendulum had seemed to swing back the full length of its arc to hatred of this man she loved. But of course poor Alan could not understand. He had never understood Connie very well—or any other woman—and her intolerance had made him really angry for the first time in his life. Meanwhile the Armenian girl sat aft and smoked Alan's cigarettes, smiling brazenly. And Alan paced the deck, giving her smile for smile as though Constance had ceased to exist. It was all too horrible for words. The nurse of the *Turkana* came seldom upon the upper deck for her airing and when she did she flaunted past Amneh, her chin in the air. It was childish perhaps, but it was very human. Constance, you see, had never been in love with anybody but Alan, nor ever would be in love with anybody again.

But when the *Turkana* came to anchor on the Arabian coast and the sounds of activity overhead proclaimed that something important was happening, Connie's curiosity got the better of her. With some misgivings, she saw Alan and Daoud go ashore and ride to Yambu. Also, having passed a restless night, she saw them return. She wanted to question Alan as to what was going to happen, but pride forbade. She marked, from a distance, the masquerade of the men and learned by the eagerness of her fever patients, who were convalescent, how much depended upon this expedition. But she did not speak to Alan until just before the moment of departure when he stood at the gangway with the Armenian minx who was apparently to be a partner of his adventures. His attitude when he had taken his departure from Constance was kindly, but she asked none of it with Amneh standing there. So she had given

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him a short answer and let him go, aware of a pain at her heart that he should be so insensible and a fear of the loneliness aboard with Alan away.

There would be more danger, of course. It was a desperate venture that he was going on, into the very heart of an enemy country, in pursuit of a chimera. . . . But she envied Amneh.

She watched for a while the road up which the two camels had gone and then saw the launch returning. She felt very much alone and wanted to talk to somebody. Captain Hoagland passed her, rubbing his blue lip and smiling, but she couldn't talk to him—not about Alan. She watched the launch come alongside the landing-grating and saw Alan's man Dawson, attired in his outlandish garb, come over the side. "Good old Dawson," as Alan had always called him, the one tie with the past that Constance now had on this far side of the world. She smiled at him and Dawson grinned respectfully. So she went over to him and they walked aft together.

Constance felt in some doubt as to the interview she meant to have with Dawson. Its topic was hardly one to be discussed with the personal servant of the delinquent, or indeed with any one else, but she had always liked Dawson, and Dawson, she felt sure, would have done her bidding as though it had been his employer's. His homely, impassive face, already stained for his venture, seemed to invite confidences, so when they reached the gangway, she motioned to the after deck and he followed her to the rail, his small eyes watching her with a mild and kindly curiosity. She broke the ice, as a salve to her pride, by a question which had nothing whatever to do with what she wanted to know.

"Mr. Jessup has found out the whereabouts of the Black Stone, Dawson?"

## THE BLACK STONE

"Oh, yes, Miss Constance. The caravan leaves Yambu at sunset. Mr. Jessup and Mr. Daoud will join it."

"And the men?"

"They leave after midnight. It's going to be something in the nature of a surprise for Captain von Hengel, I'd say, Miss."

"And—er—Miss Amneh? Isn't it rather a dangerous errand for her?" she asked quietly.

"Yes, you might say so, Miss Constance, in a manner of speaking, and then again you mightn't. You see, she speaks the language and wears the face veil. It was Mr. Daoud's idea for her to go among the women and listen. And then, you see, she has seen Ali Agha and the German captain."

"But if she were killed——!"

"That would really be too bad, I'd say, Miss. Mr. Jessup values her very highly——"

"Values her——" gasped Connie.

"Oh, yes, Miss Constance," put in Dawson. "She's a very pretty young lady and most unfortunate. I think Mr. Jessup is very appreciative of her."

"Appreciative!" said Constance, striving to control her voice and aware that her pride had sunk to the lowest depths of ignominy.

"Oh, yes, Miss," said Dawson coolly. "You see, it's been a very good thing that Miss Amneh came aboard, because it was her information that put us—beg pardon, Miss—that put Mr. Jessup on the right track."

"Ah!—she came aboard, you say?"

"Yes, Miss—late at night—when Mr. Jessup had just about given up hope of finding her. He was very down in the mouth as the saying is—not finding her, after your message. Spent a day and two nights—without sleep—in the native quarter—throwing his money away like water.

## CONNIE REGANTS

And then after it all she just comes aboard as nice as you please in a native boat, and here she's been ever since."

"I see. But why did he bring her on this cruise?"

Dawson shifted his elbow the fraction of an inch along the rail and glanced at Miss Masterson's profile quickly.

"Well, Miss Constance," he said slowly, "you see he might have been afraid to leave her ashore. She's so like a child—so ignorant of the world. I think, Miss, that he may have wanted to please you in bringing her out safe."

"To please me? Surely you're mistaken."

But Dawson was shaking his head sagely.

"Oh, no, I'm not, Miss, begging your pardon. I—I——"

Dawson paused and fumbled his fingers awkwardly.

"What is it, Dawson?" she asked eagerly. "Go on."

"Thank you, Miss, but I—I think I'd better not. I'm only Mr. Jessup's man, Miss Constance. And what I think of his unhappiness, of course, means nothing to you."

"His unhappiness! Tell me what you mean. I insist."

Dawson hung his head a moment and traced a pattern on the deck with his great toe.

"Tell me, Dawson. I command you."

"Well, you see, Miss Constance, it's this way. A gentleman's man has eyes, ears, a 'cart like any other creature. He can't help feelin' and listenin' and seein' what's goin' on about him. Mr. Jessup's been very good to me. There ain't a man I'd be prouder to shave and look after, even if he was Royal."

"Loyalty is a fine trait, Dawson," said Constance, as he paused.

"It ain't loyalty only, Miss," said Dawson staunchly. "It's love. And beggin' your pardon, Miss, when a man loves another, he don't want to see him suffer." Dawson stopped again and resumed the design upon the deck. "I'd better not go on, Miss. I know my place and——"

## THE BLACK STONE

"Go on, please," said Constance softly. "Please."

"Well, then—the result of my secin' and hearin', Miss Constance," said Dawson haltingly, "is that Mr. Jessup ain't the same as 'e was since Hoyster Bay, Miss."

Constance paled a little and her heart gave a strange leap, but her voice was well under control as she questioned with a smile.

"I couldn't just tell you what's the matter, Miss. Mr. Jessup is not one to talk. But I know it just the same. This morning when he came aboard, he wrote a long letter addressed to you——"

"To me, Dawson? Where is it?"

"Below in his desk——"

Constance started up.

"Get it for me at once," she said.

But Dawson did not move.

"I'm sorry, Miss Constance, but I can't do that."

"Why not?"

"Because the orders were to deliver the note to you only in case 'e didn't come back."

The color in her face failed a little as she looked out into the dusk. Then she turned and sought the placid face of the man and when she spoke her tone was low and earnest.

"I must see that letter, Dawson."

"Beggin' pardon, Miss Constance, I couldn't do that. It would cost me my place."

"I'll be responsible for that! Come. Take me down at once."

"But if Mr. Jessup should come back——"

"I pray God he does. Have you the key to the desk, Dawson?"

"Yes, Miss Constance, but——"

## CONNIE RECANTS

"Get it for me. Where is it?"

"In 'is shaving case, Miss, but——"

But Constance was already moving rapidly toward the companion-way. Dawson followed her with his eyes, but it was only when she had disappeared that he permitted his solemn features to relax in a grin.

"And a good job," he muttered, "if I lose my place for it."

Constance lost no time in invading the privacy of Alan's stateroom, confronting her own picture in a gold frame upon his dressing-table. With fingers that trembled among the intimate objects of Alan's daily use she found the key and opened the desk. The letter lay on the blotter, addressed in her name in the familiar handwriting. She tore it open quickly and sank upon the bed near the electric light.

DEAR CONNIE: Just a line or two to try and straighten us out—you and I. You always thought I was an awful rotter and I'm quite sure now that I was, but not the sort of a rotter to do the things you think I've done—I know that there can never be anything more between us and I haven't bothered you again—have I? I think, Connie, I've got a lot of pride I never knew anything about—had it concealed somewhere all these long years. You always said I was a good loser and I know I am now. It takes a pretty good loser to lose what I did and keep a straight face about it.

Connie dear, I was pretty angry at your suspicion of Amneh and me—(angry at *you*, Connie!) but I got over it nicely and if I don't manage to come out top notch with von H., try to be nice to her. She's as helpless as a Pekingese pup—only she's a woman and that makes things worse.

And remember, Connie, I've never wanted anybody but you and I never can want anybody but you. But you'll never know until you read this and then it won't matter. So you see I *am* a good loser after all.

## THE BLACK STONE

Good-bye, dear. Beastly sort of note to write—but I really wanted you to know.

As ever,  
ALAN.

Connie read the note through twice and then suddenly a sob welled up from some hidden depth and engulfed her with tenderness. Tears came, soft merciful tears to break the spell of her intolerance and blindness and cleanse her for a new vision. She straightened, wiping her eyes, read the note again, then rose, confronted by her woebegone image in Alan's mirror. She stared at it a moment in pity and contempt. "You little fool," she muttered savagely between her set teeth—"you paltry, selfish little beast—"

Then, turning swiftly, went out of the room, and without bothering to wipe her eyes went straight to Captain Hoagland's cabin. He turned to the door, one-half of his face stained with grease-paint, and remained for a moment in some alarm staring at her.

"Miss Masterson!" he muttered. "What's the matter?"

"Nothing," she stammered. "That is—nothing much. Merely that I'm going with the expedition ashore," she finished quietly.

"You! Why I don't——"

"Captain Hoagland," she broke in, forestalling him, "there's no use objecting. I've made up my mind. It's my duty——"

"Duty——"

"There's going to be fighting. I'm a nurse. I'm going out there with you, where I belong——"

"But there may be danger——"

"And do you think you can keep me from my share in it? There's no use arguing——"

"But——"

## CONNIE RECANTS

It was not long before Captain Hoagland felt the futility of argument. And in its other aspect her proposal was not without value. Somebody *might* be hurt if Mr. Jessup didn't succeed before his men came up, and of course a first-aid kit and somebody who knew how to use it was not to be despised.

So it was arranged. Dawson rummaged about in the *Turkana's* theatrical wardrobe and found something that fitted her and when the crew disembarked she went ashore, her bandages and instruments in a bag which was slung to the pommel of the saddle of her camel. Adventure beckoned, but more significant, yonder somewhere beyond the rocks and sands was Alan who "had never wanted anybody but her and never could want anybody else." The fact that Amneh had gone forward with him didn't seem to matter now. She knew what Alan was—the soul of chivalry—kind and gentle to this helpless little "Pekingese pup" because it was his nature to be tender to any being who was helpless and in distress. As to Amneh—why shouldn't she adore him? She would be blind if she didn't.

Thus you will note the cleansing grace of humility and tears. All that Connie seemed to care about now was to reach Alan and ask his forgiveness for her heedlessness, jealousy and suspicion that had held her aloof and made her seem in his eyes the paltry thing that she was. But his steadfastness, his love for her, had even surmounted that! And he had gone on during all these weeks, silent, patient, hopeless of the happiness that she had had it in her power to grant by a spoken word or a written one. To take his dismissal like a man without complaint—like the good sportsman that he was—that he had always been—this was Alan. Why hadn't she known there in the hotel garden that it was the fear of hoping again for her that wouldn't let him believe, or let him see the love that was in her eyes? Dear

## THE BLACK STONE

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adorable, artless Arcadian! And she had feared further to lower her pride by an honest confession to this man whom she had sent away to his suffering alone! She swallowed a sob that came welling up again, but no one seemed to notice. She was a very small, very unimportant integer of this company faring forth into the moonlit desert. In spite of the many jokes that passed among the men as they mounted their unfamiliar beasts in their strange costumes, she could see that they were all well aware of the seriousness of their mission, but as always with youth and strength, adventure fascinated. She could feel it too, the call of the silent desert which hid the mystery they were to solve. And something else was borne to her on the sultry air, hot from the illimitable waste of sand and rock. She had experienced it for the first time on that night in Cairo with Alan beside her, and again in the Mosque of Hasaneyn among the fanatic crowd—the thrill of swift blood coursing through her veins, the essence of the East, elemental and uncompounded. Her identity was lost, absorbed in the vastness of space, and the sentient night.

The moment passed, leaving her cool and alert. Perhaps she would be too late. Perhaps Alan had run into danger and already—Conrad von Hengel! What sort of a match was simple chivalrous Alan for a man with neither conscience nor scruple. Perhaps already . . .

She stifled the fear that had risen in her and her blood grew warm again with the thought of action. She touched the handle of the automatic in her belt and was thankful that Alan had once taught her to shoot at the target in the orchard. Captain Hoagland need not fear. She would not be a burden to them. But the ride seemed to drag on interminably. Impatiently she rode past the sailor who was escorting her and joined Captain Hoagland and Dawson, who had ridden upon a slight elevation and were surveying

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the road which lay before them. It was decided that the main body of the men should dismount here for a short rest while Captain Hoagland and Dawson went on as far as the village to reconnoiter. Hoagland wanted her to remain, but she insisted on going on with them. This dawdling along the road and awaiting the approach of the dawn was getting on her nerves. Her impulse to go forward, it seemed, was stronger than theirs.

Under his burnûs Dawson watched her narrowly, his lips working into a slow smile. Like Hoagland, he hadn't been sure of the propriety of her coming with them until aware that she had set her mind on it. Hoagland shook his head when she explained that she was joining the reconnoitering party and rode off without a word, but when he turned his head he found that she was just behind him riding with Dawson.

"It seems as though we'd been out for hours, Dawson," she was saying. "How long is it until dawn?"

"A good two hours, I'd say, Miss Constance."

"But why need we wait? It seems terrible to be lagging here when even now Mr. Jessup may be needing help."

"Don't worry, Miss," returned Dawson easily. "Mr. Jessup will come through safe enough."

She had learned something of Alan's new faith in his valet's prescience and the quiet tone comforted her greatly.

"What is to be done now, Dawson?" she asked after a moment.

"When we reach a village somewhere hereabout, I'm going on alone, Miss——"

"Dawson——" she began impetuously.

"Beggin' your pardon, Miss Constance," he cut in firmly. "Mr. Jessup would like, I think, for you to stay with Captain Hoagland. It's no work that you can do. I'm going on afoot——"

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"But I can go afoot, too."

"Not with me, you can't, Miss—beggin' your pardon," he said respectfully. "I'm only Mr. Jessup's man, Miss, and it's not seemly for me to be givin' orders to the likes of you. But—this is a man's job, Miss—a man's job—and if you please, you're to stay behind."

She looked at him curiously. His tone was very calm and respectful without modulation and didn't rise the fraction of a shade above the monotone which was its custom, but she could see that he was very much in earnest and that he intended to be obeyed. He turned toward her and smiled pleasantly and the swift reply that was on her lips remained unspoken. His words were a command. Had he uttered them on the decks of the *Turkans* she would have known what to do. Here in the desert she only looked at him a moment and then bowed her head in acquiescence. Where she had succeeded in defying Captain Hoagland, Dawson, the valet, was master. And when they reached the tiny village, he proceeded to put their plan into practice, and leaving his camel with Captain Hoagland went up the caravan trail and was lost in the shadows of the night.

Constance sat upon her camel gazing off in the direction Dawson had gone, and the inaction weighed upon her heavily. Any danger into which they might run could be no worse than this period of waiting—for what? Captain Hoagland told her that this was the rendezvous and that if luck was with Mr. Jessup, he or Daoud Effendi might be returning at any moment. If not, then when the men came up they must all go on. What the plan would be would depend much on Dawson, to whom Mr. Jessup had assigned the task of following up the caravan and reporting the location of the camp to Hoagland. Her questions answered briefly, they both relapsed into silence and listened. In the distance, the howl of some animal, a stray dog from the

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caravan perhaps, or a hyena, Hoagland ventured. Otherwise silence, complete, the more profound because of the interruption.

"Are you sure we're right?" she asked after a long period of unendurable suspense.

"Look," said Hoagland, pointing to the innumerable footprints in the sandy road. "They've gone yonder, maybe up the gulch there near the heap of rocks. Don't you see fires burning, Miss?"

She thought she did, but then as her eyes became more assured of the direction and the moon paled in the West, she was sure of it. The bivouac was there, just under the great mass of rocks, the first of the jagged offshoots of Jebel Radhwah. Alan was there among them, under the very gaze of his terrible enemy, von Hengel. She sat upon her camel, her gaze on the distant fires of the Moslem fanatics, and silently prayed to her God and Alan's that he might be returned to her unscathed. How long she sat there alongside the quiet, watchful Hoagland she did not know, but suddenly she saw Hoagland straighten in his saddle and drop his cigarette, listening intently.

"What is it, Captain Hoagland?" she whispered, straining her ears to catch the slightest sound.

"There. Didn't you hear it?" he muttered excitedly.

"What——"

"Shots—two of 'em. Listen."

She did. And clear upon the night air they heard three more in rapid succession. And still Captain Hoagland sat upon his camel, waiting. The man seemed suddenly to have been turned into a stone image.

"We must—go on, Captain Hoagland," she gasped. "Mr. Jessup may need help."

"We can do nothing, just you and I. We'll wait, please,"

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he said quietly, "for the men. They should not be far away. Listen again."

Unwillingly she obeyed him. Another sound had risen, a murmur like the sound of surf upon a distant shore, rising and falling, and then more shots, desultory and scattering.

"Oh, this is intolerable," wailed Constance piteously. "We must do something—at once."

But Captain Hoagland didn't reply. He had turned in his saddle and was listening to the soft pad of camels in the road behind them along which they had come.

"Here they come, Miss," he muttered. "We shall be moving presently."

And in a moment the crew of the *Turkana* came streaming up the road and spread out into the deserted village street. There was some excitement among them, for they, too, had heard the shots and were all for moving forward at the double quick. But Hoagland kept them well in hand.

"You'll obey orders same as aboard," he said briskly. "Skirmish line—twenty yards apart and advance slowly, dressing to the right. Command to dismount will be passed along—groups of six with one man to guard the camels. Understand? Fall in. Count off. Deploy to the left. . . . Forward march."

They obeyed, their loaded Enfields hung by the slings to the right side of the saddle-horns, grim, ghostly figures in the moonlight, slowly moving forward, and Constance felt that the situation had passed on into stronger hands than hers. She heard the subdued remarks of this strange company and wondered if they realized the seriousness of their undertaking.

"Get ep, ye goat of Harlem," muttered one.

"For four bells—when ye want ahead shtrong," said the irrepressible Casey. "Pull his tail, me son."

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"'S craft steers wid a port helm—avast there, ye brute! Starboard it is!"

"Clck!" uttered London persuasively, and then with a plaintive voice: "'Es got 'is bloomin' 'ead in the sand. Come along now—hostrich!"

But they got under way at last and moved silently in the direction of the distant clumps of rocks, but had only gone a half mile or so when in the distance Hoagland saw a dim shape moving directly toward them. He quietly passed the word along to halt and the men waited until the figure reached them. It was Daoud Effendi, out of breath with running. Daoud Effendi had had to run for his life. They had fired at him, but he had gotten away scot-free. When he recovered his breath, he lighted a cigarette and he and Hoagland held a council of war. Until Mr. Jessup and Dawson returned they would seek cover of rocks and bushes. The men were disappointed that the fight might be denied them after all their preparations, but they obeyed and settled down to await further events.

Ten—fifteen minutes passed and Alan Jessup did not appear. Even Daoud on Dawson's camel showed signs of inquietude. He had explained Alan's wild plan, but he had not been able to remain to observe what had followed. For Mr. Jessup to mingle in the crowd and then quietly to slink off with his treasure seemed to Daoud the simplest possible achievement; but when twenty minutes elapsed and there was no sign of him, Daoud became puzzled and very uncertain. What could have delayed him unless—

Suddenly they all stiffened in their saddles and listened. Clearly borne upon the still night air there came a sullen murmur growing in volume—the roar of many angry voices.

"What has happened?" stammered Constance in terror. "It sounds like——"

"Forward, march!"

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Captain Hoagland's voice cut the silence about them like the swish of a sword blade.

"To the left, Captain," directed Daoud, now quite cool again. "If we attack we must take the ridge of rocks at that side. There's scattering cover half a mile away. I'll close in with two men to the right on the other side and create a diversion."

The orders were passed along, Captain Hoagland with Constance approaching by the direct road. As the moon sank lower and finally fell behind the profile of the western hills, darkness fell over the desert, but not silence, for the roar of many voices rose again, while Constance shuddered as she thought of the possible meaning of it all. Alan—alone among the fanatic thousands! . . . Now the sounds were no longer heard and save for the shuffling pad of their camels in the sand, the desert was wrapped in silence as before. But to Constance the stillness was burdened with a new and terrible meaning . . . the great spaces spoke to her of infinity, mute, relentless, which knew all, absorbed all.

She went on by Hoagland's side, straining her eyes into the darkness ahead. They passed no one upon the caravan road, all feet, it seemed, having been turned toward Medineh. The sky was now lightening in the East, and as she knew, if Alan did not come out safely before dawn the attack was to begin at once. She questioned when Captain Hoagland passed the word along the line to find cover and halt.

"I'm waiting for Dawson, Miss," he said shortly.

They waited again interminably while their leader sat immovable watching the dusky reaches before him and the paling East. At last she could stand the suspense no longer and when Captain Hoagland moved down to their left wing to give some final orders, she silently dismounted and,

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tethering her camel to a stunted bush, she moved forward alone and afoot into the darkness. There was no room in her heart for fear—not this fear for her own body, for the other fear—for Alan—had driven out all thought of self. She only knew that she could not stay there frozen to her saddle waiting—waiting.

She stole forward, slowly at first, moving toward a slight depression in the land which seemed to lead in the desired direction. What she meant to do she did not know, but the exertion soothed her. At least she was doing something. Her feet rushed on of their own volition ever nearer, deeper and deeper into the depression of ground where the going was harder. Once she stumbled and fell at full length, but she was not hurt and, getting to her feet, stumbled onward again. At last she paused bewildered, half mad with uncertainty and terror, and clung to a small tree while she tried to regain her breath, staring into the dim shadows of the ravine in the direction in which she was to go. And suddenly her eyes focused on a moving shape—two moving shapes moving toward her silently in the darkness. Who were they? Arab sentries sent upon their rounds to guard against surprise? She drew back into a cleft in the side of the ravine and peered out, her automatic in her fingers. The taller shape was that of a man, and close behind him, a smaller figure—a woman. They came out into a clear space of sand and Constance saw them more clearly. The woman was Amneh. She knew her first by her walk and then saw her face in the starlight. And the man—

“Alan!” she called, rushing forward to meet them.

“Alan! Alan!”

But the figure in the burnûs caught her and put a heavy hand over her lips.

“Sh—Miss. It isn't Mr. Jessup. It's Dawson.”

## CHAPTER XXI

### IN THE WADI

**C**AMP fires sprang into being miraculously, and an odor of coffee filled the air, Alan's party partaking of the hospitality of a stout and pious lady from Yambu, whom Daoud and Alan had assisted, with some difficulty, in descending from her litter. Alan played his game carefully, sitting apart in his capacity of Sulaymani, permitting Daoud and Amneh to assume the burdens of their quest. The stout lady, if devout, was voluble, and Daoud and Amneh listened with attention. Her lord was Sheykh of the leather trade and high in the councils of the Nazir of the mosque. Allah was great. The Holy City would rejoice with them that that which had been lost was regained. Perhaps a new Kaba would be built at Medineh which as the tomb of the Prophet (whose Name was Blessèd) was the proper abiding place of such Holy emblems as these which had been brought. It was not for her to say, for she was but a woman, with opinions of no value, but what was ordered by these Holy Men who had been sent by Allah, must also be the command of Allah himself.

All the while she talked Alan watched, missing nothing, but chiefly were his eyes turned toward the Mahmal, where the Kaba Stone reposed, guarded by its Sheykhs and soldiers, among whom the veiled Omar sat with Ali Agha beside him, upon a rock, in attitudes of saintly repose.

Alan could not but admire the ease with which he seemed to dominate those about him, the rapidity with which he

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had organized the pilgrimage and the apparent promise of the undertaking. And although von Hengel seemed to be quite at his ease, as though anticipating no attack, it was clearly to be seen by the disposition of his men that an instinctive precaution born of his military training had made him guard against surprise. Alan noted the two soldiers placed upon the rocks, and at the foot and the head of the defile which led through the gorge to the plains above. Daoud noted the sentries and wondered whether it would not be wiser if he or Alan returned to establish communication with their friends. But after a moment when he found the opportunity to make the suggestion to Alan the latter shook his head.

"The darkness will help. Our men are disguised. And are not new adherents coming constantly? I think we'll leave that to Dawson."

Daoud shook his head dubiously.

"But we've got to move quickly, Effendi. With the light of day we'll be discovered," whispered Alan.

The meager meal disposed of, the shibûk smoked and ablutions made, there was a movement among those nearest to the Mahmal and Ali Agha mounted a boulder and faced toward Mecca, the Sheykh Omar just behind him. A deep murmur ran through the crowd, thrilling it from end to end, as they whispered audibly, "*Allahu Akbar*—" "God is most Great," while they watched the figure upon the cliff, in silhouette against the amber sky, raise his open hands to the sides of his face, touching the lobes of his ears with the ends of his thumbs. Then lowering his hands below his girdle, his head bent toward the ground, he began the *Fathhah*, or opening chapter of the Koran, and the voice of the multitude rose as one as they followed him in the prayer. Alan, imitating the others, managed to keep one eye upon von Hengel, who seemed in his mysteriousness

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and dignity to possess all the attributes of saintship. Next, the multitude bent forward, hands on knees, murmuring, straightened again and then fell to their knees, at last bending thrice with all foreheads touching the ground. The moment would have been most propitious for a sudden onslaught upon the Mahmal, and Alan improved the moment by a sidelong study of the situation.

When the prayers were finished, Ali Agha turned to deliver his sermon from his impromptu pulpit, while the Sheykh Omar, the man of mystery, sat at his feet in an attitude of rapt devotion. Below them was the Mahmal, removed from its camel and guarded by two soldiers. Near it a meshal was lighted. In the general movement forward to hear more readily, Alan, Daoud and Amneh pushed quite near the sacred canopy, and the three of them sat just at the feet of the guard, so close indeed that with a gruff word of command he pushed Alan back with the stock of his gun. Alan in his eagerness to be close to the Kaba Stone had moved with some imprudence. A warning look from the eyes of the *Effendi* and he sank to the ground and listened to the words of the speaker. His situation was most irritating for there, almost within the reach of his arm, was the object of his quest. But he was helpless. Any imprudence now and he would have been torn to pieces by the fanatical multitude. And so he sat, his head bent, with "one dropping, and one auspicious eye" turned longingly toward the shadows of the Mahmal. His time was not yet.

The exhortation, which Alan could not understand, was ended after a while, but the audience showed every mark of the deep significance of the occasion, rising at last at the word of command and reverently forming two long lines, with heads bowed, in a procession past the Stone, the cov-

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ering of which had been removed so that all might see and touch their lips to the sacred object.

Then Alan had an inspiration—the second he had ever had in his life—and in his characteristic way he acted upon it at once. The thought was exquisite, but the expedient desperate, for the time before daylight was short. Something had to be done and soon. He caught the Effendi suddenly by the arm and whispered a few words at his ear. Daoud looked aghast, paled, frowned and then stared straight before him at the wall of rocks, thinking desperately while Alan awaited his decision. And then turned toward Alan with a smile and bowed his head.

"I'll do it, if you wish," he muttered. "But you're taking your life in your hands. It's a death I wouldn't care for."

"H-m, I'll chance it," replied Alan. "The horses of the Sheykh are at the head of the gorge. Mount with Amneh. And ride Hell for leather to Hoagland."

Alan seldom used impolite language. That he did upon this occasion is the measure of his earnestness. Daoud caught him a grip of the hand and then, leading the bewildered Amneh, disappeared into the crowd.

Alan was alone with his great idea in the midst of two thousand fanatics, quiet enough now in their act of devotion, but capable, as he knew, of any violence at the slightest symptom of apostasy or unbelief. So Alan bowed his head for a few moments and stood apart, on a slight hill of sand, while he watched Daoud and Amneh follow the skirt of the crowd and then suddenly disappear among the acacia trees just midway between the two guards upon the rocks, who, plainly visible from below, sat smoking their cigarettes and gazing afar. Alan waited until he saw a dim figure emerge above the line of the shrubbery, when Daoud slowly raised one arm above his head. Amneh had

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disappeared. Alan, standing alone in the moonlight, was plainly visible, and according to arrangement bent forward once to the ground and then, straightening, walked with great deliberation and took his place in the line. Across the few hundred feet that separated them he seemed to feel Daoud's gaze upon him, but to make certain, turned again. And again in the dusk above the trees he saw the arm slowly move. Alan bent forward again as though to the latch of his shoe, and then straightened, aware now that there wasn't the slightest difficulty in identifying him in the torchlight, even from a distance, for he stood head and shoulders above those who were nearest him.

As the procession moved forward reverently, in single file, and his great moment approached, Alan was only conscious of an intense desire to smoke, and of a feeling of boredom at the delay. But he had already hauled his handkerchief up clear of his belt and carried his burden beneath his robes in the crook of his arm. The line reminded him of a Broadway ticket office on the first night of a good show. Slower though, fearfully slow. There would be a copper in the lobby of the theater to make 'em move faster. One kiss for the Kaba every six seconds. At least five hundred people ahead of him now, ten a minute. Six hundred in an hour, five-sixths of an hour in line. He took an interest in this mental exercise. It passed the time. Carefully he watched the movements of the pilgrims as they bent over the Stone. Some of them leaned forward with both hands on the pillow upon which it was placed, others merely bent from the waist, their arms at their sides. Two soldiers stood leaning on their Mauser rifles, watching. Half an hour passed. The number of Pilgrims before him was rapidly diminishing—a hundred—fifty—ten. Alan shifted his left arm a little and opened a trifle wider the front of his kamis. He moved forward,

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glancing just once toward the acacia trees and then faced the Stone smiling. There would be no mistake. Before him now were but two persons—a small crooked man, a woman——

Just as the woman preceding Alan straightened and he stepped quickly into her place, the deathly silence of the Wadi was shattered by the sounds of two shots from the direction of the rocks. The multitude gave a gasp as every head turned to look. Then came three more shots in rapid succession and bullets sang above the Mahmal. Hoarse cries rose above the shrieks of women, and one of the soldiers by the Kaba Stone fired blindly in the direction of the flashes.

The confusion around the Kaba Stone lasted perhaps less than ten seconds when Ali Agha, his skirts flying, leaped toward the sacred emblem, and the soldiers stood again at guard. The tall figure, interrupted in his devotions, had straightened slowly, his eyes closed, with every mark of devotion, and with bent head and hands folded before him, slowly moved away and was lost in the crowd, which was now surging this way and that, shouting and praying. The guards upon the cliffs were leaping and firing and a squad of the Nizam under their leader were pushing toward the spot from which the sounds had come. But the most commanding figure in all the throng was the Sheykh Omar Hilal, the man of mystery, who had suddenly sprung into a galvanic activity. He stood upon a high rock shouting and directing, and at his commands men gave one look and obeyed. Order miraculously came out of chaos, the Nizam and Sheykhs, their weapons ready, ran up the rocks and clambered along the top of the defile. The people grew quiet. The attack of the Harami, if attack there was, had been driven off.

Alan had noted all these things and seeking a place for

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himself near a large boulder in the sand, sank down as though in one of the attitudes of prayer. He *was* praying, really, for the safety of Daoud and Amneh, but while he prayed, he was accomplishing something definite, something extremely practical. To be exact, he was "digging in." Under the folds of his aba his long fingers without perceptible motion were clawing the soft sand, digging a hole at least a foot deep into which he slipped the Black Stone, and carefully covered it over with sand. His head was bowed and he would have felt like grinning if he had been sure that Daoud and Amneh had gotten clean away. But the interment nicely completed, he raised his head and looked around. The Nizam by twos and threes were coming down the rocks, shaking their heads and reporting to von Hengel. And suddenly, a dark figure appeared and sank, palpitant, beside him.

"—I have been—so frightened, Monsieur Alan."

"Sh— Whisper! What has happened?"

"Since I would not go to my camel, the Effendi hid me in a hole in the rocks behind the trees. Then mounted the cliff—"

"You should have gone," he muttered. And then, "What has become of him?"

"I don't know. I watched you. And when the soldiers ran by me, I came."

It was ridiculously simple. "Thank God you're safe," muttered Alan. "Do you think the Effendi got away?"

"I don't know. When the shots were fired I heard him running up the rocks."

"He's off then. They'll never catch Daoud."

"But you, Monsieur Alan. You are in great danger here."

"I have something else to accomplish, Amneh," he whispered. And then, "I want to find out where the sacred

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parchments are. Go thou to the fat wife of the Sheykh of the leather trade, and question—but not to arouse suspicion.”

“And leave you here alone, Monsieur Alan?”

“I will come to you—later. You are safe with her. Go, Amneh, for daylight will be soon and then there will be great danger.”

“But I——”

“Obey, child,” he said softly, “it is my command.”

Slowly she rose and joined the stout wife of the leather Sheykh, while Alan remained for a while in an attitude of deep contemplation. But he missed nothing of what went on. The line of Moslems kissing the stone, broken for a moment by the interruption, was resumed and he watched them with mingled feelings. None of the Pilgrims could be aware of the substitution, because none of them knew one black stone from another. And neither von Hengel nor Ali Agha had as yet examined the object. What if they all went on using Dawson's substitute until the end of time without knowing the difference? That was precisely what had happened at Mecca. Rather bitterly Alan began to wonder whether he was to have all his labor for his pains while he sat like a Cochin hen on this extraordinary egg that he had hatched which might after all prove only to be an ugly duckling. He fell to blaming Dawson. It *was* rather stupid of Dawson to think that it would make any difference. What did these benighted creatures care what they kissed as long as they kissed something. Awf'ly stupid! Now if Dawson had only thought of some way to get those papers—the documents of attestation that went with the blooming rock. . . .

Alan Jessup straightened and stared toward the scene of religious activity. Ali Agha had come down from his rock pulpit; for the line of Pilgrims was nearly ended. Alan

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saw him bend over the pillow and stone, heard his muttered exclamation; then saw the soldier fetch the meshal, the glare of which was thrown upon the pillow. Suddenly a cry went up to Heaven, such a cry of anguish as Alan had never heard before, a cry that was taken up, before von Hengel had the opportunity to prevent it, by all those nearest and spread like lightning down its radii to the outskirts of the crowd. He did not understand the words that were uttered, but he knew their meaning. "The Kaba Stone is gone! Gone! A false stone has been put in its place. Oh, woe unto us! May Allah the Compassionate and Merciful look softly upon us in our anguish. Allah! Allah!"

Ali Agha was like a man bereft of his senses, and cried out continuously, his arms upraised. Alan saw von Hengel try to restrain him, first by command, then—by threat and at last by persuasion. Then with his own arms he thrust the excited crowd back, away from the miserable creature, and talked pleadingly with him. Alan knew what von Hengel's arguments would be. Silence, secrecy, the carrying out of the plan at all costs, for anything else meant ruin to his own intrigue. If not the real stone, this stone must do. Alan read von Hengel's meaning in the attitudes of the two men, and the upraised arms of the Sheykh commanding silence. It was a tremendous moment for those who understood its meaning.

But Ali Agha was a man of force and character. He had come upon this Pilgrimage because Allah had demanded it of him, because Allah had told him the Black Stone that the Sheykh Omar Halil had brought was the genuine Kaba Stone stolen from Mecca many centuries ago. And now it was lost. A substitute such as this! By the blessed name of the Prophet, he would not! Death were better here and now than this deception. And so he wailed, shrieked and

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cried for the curse of Allah upon those who had committed this sacrilege. And the crowd took up his plaint as if by the mere volume of their voices, they could induce Allah to listen. But from the high heavens came no sign, though the arms of Ali Agha shook with anguish and terror as he plucked at his beard in the biblical manner, still calling vainly upon his Lord.

Alan, having smoothed out to his satisfaction the last grain of sand, above the Stone, rose in a leisurely fashion and joined the thickest of the throng. Here until daylight at least he believed himself to be safe, and here he meant to stay until his men came and the principal part of the evening's performance took place. His job was to keep an eye on von Hengel and to catch him if he tried to get away. In the meanwhile Amneh might hear something about the documents. Alan would have given all of the ten millions of the *Turkana* to have been able to lay hands on them at that moment. If he could only manage to get Conrad von Hengel aside for a moment. If the rotter would only give him the chance.

And then, as suddenly as the commotion had arisen, silence fell upon the multitude. Ali Agha had stopped wailing and stood in his pulpit, facing them, finding a new calm, a new earnestness in the words that he was to speak. But his black eyes burned like coals and the sweat gathered on his brow.

Alan could not know what it was that he said, but the silence of the throng was burdened with meaning for each man in it turned and looked at his neighbor with mistrust and suspicion. Then as though at a signal pandemonium broke loose. Each man, threatening, tore at the clothes of his neighbor, all of them shrieking like Kilkenny cats. Two men and a woman came at Alan, but he spread his arms out calmly and let them search, meanwhile muttering

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"Sulaymani—Sulaymani," that they might understand why it was that he did not converse with them. But of course their quest was futile and they moved on to the next person and ended by tearing at each other. Alan blessed the moments that he had sat upon the sand, burying his egg. If the scuffling beggars didn't unearth the thing!

But he was beginning to feel uncomfortable, for out of this madness he saw method was coming. Von Hengel had given three sharp commands. And immediately the Nizam and the Sheykhs drew their weapons and rushed out to the furthest limits of the crowd, herding the Pilgrims like sheep toward the center of the amphitheater. Alan found himself wishing that he had fled after burying the Stone, for the sincerity of Sheykh Ali Agha showed him that in stealing it Alan had already dealt a disastrous blow to Conrad von Hengel's strategy. But he had come to watch Conrad von Hengel, and to get the documents if he could, and he had hoped through Amneh and the voluble leather-Sheykh lady to find where they were kept before the men of the *Turkana* arrived and the real shooting began. Even now it was a matter of pride with him not to be beaten in the last and most dangerous stage of the game. He still believed in his luck, as Northby did, still believed that no matter what happened, he would be able to come through successfully. Already the Kaba Stone was his again, it seemed by a miracle and yet, after all—how simple it had been! He had done Dawson an injustice. With Dawson here now to suggest something in this predicament he might—. He searched the line of road and cliff eagerly for a sign, but he knew that it would be an hour or more before he could look for help from outside. And even then what could his twenty men do against so many unless the Sherif Sadi came along?

But he *was* in a predicament and he realized its serious-

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ness presently, trying to make himself small by bending his knees, for von Hengel, putting Ali Agha aside, stood forward, peering down at the Pilgrims, and seemed to search their faces one by one, while he spoke to them in their own tongue.

"Brothers! Pilgrims of the Holy Stone! We have been betrayed. There is one among us who has dared to trifle with this Holy relic. Allah grant that it has not departed from amongst us. For the roads have been watched and no one save the one who fired the shots can have fled away, for the moon is bright upon the desert and our soldiers keep watch. But those shots, my brothers, were fired with a purpose. There was no attack of the Harami. Even they would not have dared on such a pilgrimage as yours, upon which the blessings of the Most High have been showered."

He paused a moment to let the murmur of prayer subside. Then he leaned forward, pointing toward the cliffs from which Daoud Effendi's shots had come.

"Those shots were born of the fires of Shaytan, my brothers, for they were a signal to one in our midst—a note of alarm to throw us into a panic while the Kaba Stone was stolen."

A sound like the braying of a pack of hungry wolves went up from the assembled mob, which seethed with fury, and the speaker quieted them with difficulty.

"Who has taken the Kaba Stone? I will tell you, Faithful of Allah. It was the one who kissed the Stone as the shots were fired."

A single cry nearby went up, followed by another roar of fury. Alan felt that his face was getting red. He didn't remember ever having been self-conscious before, but he felt so now—even embarrassed. Also he was very uncomfortable, for the Pilgrims were packed together like

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sardines and two of his neighbors had an odor of being too long in the box.

"Who was it," von Hengel's voice went on with a tragic calmness, "that kissed the Sacred Stone when the shots were fired? Who saw? Who remembers the one who stood at the Kaba Stone before the shots were fired. Was he short or tall—?"

"A tall Sheykh," cried a voice, "I saw him. He was before me in the Tawaf."

"And I," cried another voice. "I saw him too. A Sheykh—a very tall Sheykh."

Alan didn't know what they were saying, but as many persons near him were now turning hideous frowning faces in his direction, he seemed quite sure that the inquiry was narrowing. He tried to diminish his height, but he still remained above those nearest him. He saw Conrad von Hengel's gaze wander over the faces of the crowd and then suddenly fix itself on his. His kufiyah was down over his forehead and from beneath it he tried to look unconcerned, but von Hengel still stared and then Alan saw his eyes suddenly dilate in recognition.

Alan was trapped. He knew it now. The slightest movement to escape would be fatal—to remain, equally so. And still the eyes that glared at him grew in numbers, eyes that showed white all around the pupils, animal eyes—the wild eyes of beasts that have not been born to captivity. They began crowding him a little and one lame fellow prodded him in the short ribs with a crutch.

"Oh, I say," muttered Alan in spite of himself. And then quickly grunted "Sulaymani" as Daoud had instructed.

"A tall Sheykh!" von Hengel cried. "There are not many tall Sheykhs such as this one." And then, pointing his finger straight at Alan, commanded loudly, "In the name of the Prophet, stand forth, then, thou tall Sheykh."

## IN THE WADI

The crowd of Pilgrims in front of Alan fell away as though in fear of a plague, closed in again, then swayed back.

"Sulaymani," cried Alan hoarsely.

But Ali Agha here suddenly came to life and rushing forward shrieked some unintelligible question—in the Afghan vernacular it might have been,—for all Alan knew.

"Sulaymani," cried Alan again.

"An impostor! An unbeliever! A Christian!"

The words were taken up by the maddened throng and fists, claws, neboots and pistols were brandished under Alan's nose. They were getting too close for comfort, but Alan stood grinning and muttering his fatuous pass word. Then suddenly some one behind him snatched the kufiyah bodily from his head, revealing the line of the clean white muscular neck where the stain stopped. A howl of fury and they closed on him. Alan thrust with his shoulders right and left until he found room to use his arms and then he let them out like flails. A man went down—another, and he had more room—another. He had almost drawn his automatic when the crowd closed in again and smothered him by sheer weight of numbers and he fell.

But von Hengel sprang down from the rock and fought his way into the mass.

"Dogs," he cried. "Let him up. Would you destroy the only clue to the Kaba Stone? Let be, I say—in the name of Allah!"

And seizing the neboot of the man nearest him, he set about him, belaboring the shoulders of the combatants, dragging them off the struggling Jessup, whom he finally reached, bruised and bloody, but grinning cheerfully.

"Christian! Unbeliever!" cried the wolves, and tried to close in again, until von Hengel drew his automatic and swore that he would kill the first dog who touched the

## THE BLACK STONE

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prisoner. And so at last, cowed but still furious, the crowd held back until the Nizam came with their bayonets fixed and held the crowd at bay.

Alan shrugged and mechanically dusted at what would ordinarily have been the knees of immaculate trousers, and followed von Hengel to the rock where the speakers had stood.

Conrad von Hengel's lips curled triumphantly as he disarmed him. "Clever, Alan," he muttered in English, "but you've ventured once too often."

There was no reply needed, so Alan made none. Some of the soldiers brought thongs and they bound him hand and foot and laid him like a mummy upon the rocks. Meanwhile, Ali Agha, whose eyeballs still shone white in the torchlight, approached and kicked the prisoner in the ribs, while the crowd howled with fury. But von Hengel led Ali Agha aside and held up a stately arm for attention.

"Patience, my brothers!" he called. "Allah, whose greatness is over the Earth and Heavens, has listened to our prayers with compassion, and delivered into our hands the unbeliever who has done this sacrilege. It is a miracle."

"Kill him! Kill the Christian dog!"

Alan knew enough Arabic to understand what they said and their fury told him what they meant. Rather curiously he noted that those in the front rank nearest him pushed their very breasts against the bayonets of the Nizam, until dark blotches showed upon their white garments.

Von Hengel raised his arm again and the soldiers pushed the crowd back again with the barrels of their rifles.

"Would you kill this Christian dog, and lose the Kaba Stone forever? Think a moment. He is yours by right and under the law, for it is so written. But I, Sheykh Omar Hilal, of Yuntah and Kurun, who have brought the Stone

## IN THE WADI

to you, by the will of Allah, demand that you be at peace. This man must speak. He must tell us where he has put the Kaba Stone."

"Let him speak then—throw the Christian to us that we may make him speak."

"No," thundered von Hengel. "To me he shall speak—to me only, who am the guardian of the Sacred Stone. If he will not——" von Hengel paused significantly, "I will give him to you to do with as you please."

Another commotion ensued, less violent than the first, but von Hengel waved his arms, the soldiers shoved, and at last the throng gave ground and broke up into groups, scattered over the sand, and stood still gesticulating wildly, while they cast baleful looks in Alan's direction.

His situation seemed indeed quite hopeless for Ali Agha and some of the Sherifs and Sheykhs had lined up before him, staring venomously. They wouldn't have been a pretty lot to look at even under more favorable conditions, but Alan was quite sure that he had never seen such a villainous looking lot of cut-throats in the whole course of his existence. The scene at Yambu yesterday with its strutting Sheykhs and Mussulmans and their protruding weapons and their fierce mustachios, was amusingly like opera-bouffe and more than once he had smiled at the atmosphere of the mock-tragic in which these people lived. But he had to confess, as he lay there, that the beggars that were staring at him seemed undeniably in earnest. Cruelly they fingered the hilts of their jambiyahs, each of them believing, as Alan was aware, that the personal reward of killing this Christian desecrator and blasphemer was a high place in Paradise with many weleeds and hooreeyehs. His chance of escape seemed rather hopeless. What von Hengel was going to do now, he could not imagine. Try

## **THE BLACK STONE**

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and pump him about the whereabouts of the Kaba Stone, perhaps, offering him freedom if he revealed its hiding place. That, Alan would not tell, because he now knew enough of von Hengel and of the character of the mob of Pilgrims to believe that their promises were not worth considering, and that they meant to kill him whether he revealed his secret or not. As he lay there, he glanced about him at the spot on which he lay. The rock was almost flat on top and shelved down by ledges to the base of the amphitheater, fifteen feet below. But upon the other side it fell away sheer into a rocky cleft sixty or seventy feet deep, thickly carpeted with underbrush. This tiny gorge, below the level of the camping ground, cut sharply to the left and joined the wadi at its lower end. The thought of rolling over the edge occurred to him, but a glance along the line of rocks visible just beyond showed him that it meant sure death if he tried it. And he soon saw that delectable possibility removed when von Hengel himself brought ropes and fastened him securely to a projecting crag beside him. This chance destroyed, Alan resigned himself to the inevitable.

Von Hengel harangued the Sheykhs for a while, and Alan was much relieved when they removed their fingers from their poignards and retired some distance away, and ordering their shebuks, sat and began smoking. Indeed he was also gratified to see that the people in the amphitheater below had disintegrated into groups around their camp fires, and were now eating food and drinking their coffee. The Sheykh Omar Hilal again had assumed command of the situation.

Alan watched him keenly for a moment or two, as he paced up and down the rock, stopping from time to time and peering keenly out across the desert. Once he mounted the rock beside Alan to gain a greater height, but evidently

## *IN THE WADI*

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satisfied with the result of his observations, climbed down again, and lighted a cigarette. But his face had worn a worried look, which he tried to conceal under a cool smile of triumph, as he seated himself tailor-fashion just opposite Alan's head and began to question him.

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## CHAPTER XXII

### THE KARRÁS

VON HENGEL'S look was shrewd and before he spoke he scanned the desert keenly on all sides. The discovery of Alan Jessup here had set new trains of thought hurrying through his agile brain. Who had come to Arabia with Alan Jessup? What further forces were back of him? What menace was to be anticipated and prepared for? It was quite impossible for any pursuit from Egypt to cross the Red Sea and reach Arabia so soon as this. The capture of the Sheykh Hassan on the river had been made by a small guard of British soldiers whom von Hengel had had some difficulty in eluding, but by good fortune camels had been few and those of his own caravan had been fast. But the fact remained that here was Alan Jessup, and where the American had been able to come others could follow. A wireless to a British war-ship would bring her speedily to Yambu. In his heart he cursed the leisurely Hassan Isar who had insisted on remaining to pray in the mosque at Assiut, when he should have already been well upon his way to the sea. But how had Alan Jessup succeeded in getting on his trail so quickly unless by a wireless from the British base at Cairo? And how unless in the *Turkana*? And if in the *Turkana*, were British soldiers with him?

In the few moments before von Hengel spoke Alan could see that he was deeply puzzled and suspicious but there was no sign of anxiety in his easy, somewhat bantering tone.

## THE KARRÁS

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"My congratulations, Alan," he began with a laugh. "It's really too bad that your effort is to be wasted."

Alan made no reply and only smiled in his weary way.

"I suppose it must be fairly obvious," von Hengel went on, "that your temerity has gotten you into a desperate situation. I've done what I could for the moment, though I can't tell how long in daylight I'll be able to keep these people at bay. But as you see I have some influence with them and if you'll meet me only half way I think I can save your life."

As von Hengel paused, Alan drawled,

"Thanks, Conrad. Awf'ly good of you."

Von Hengel examined his captor keenly, now quite certain of many months of misjudgment. Alan was grinning in a very genuine sort of way as though fully aware of his captor's power to save him and quite amenable to any suggestion which would lead to that eventuality. But von Hengel had learned to become wary of that grin. And he couldn't forget that although Alan was his prisoner, he was himself as helpless in his own great mission as Alan, if the captive didn't reveal the whereabouts of the Black Stone. So he adopted an easy tone, reminiscent of friendship.

"It seems a poor return for all your hospitality, Alan, to be compelled to be your jailer. It's very distasteful. But Kismet wills it so. The only thing is to try to let you out as easily as I can."

"Awf'ly good of you," mumbled Alan again. "Awf'ly."

"But of course you've got to be reasonable. You have the Kaba Stone, but *they*," and he indicated the multitude, "they've got *you*. And they're bound to kill you, if you don't give it up."

"I haven't got the Stone," said Alan cheerfully enough. "I couldn't have swallowed it, you see."

## THE BLACK STONE

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Von Hengel's brows drew together for a moment.

"I advise you," he said slowly, "that you're taking the wrong course."

"Am I?"

"I want to give you your chance, it's the only one you'll have, I can assure you. Tell me where the Kaba Stone is and I'll promise to let you go."

Alan laughed.

"Oh, I say. That's rather a large order, isn't it?"

"What do you mean?"

"Merely that the beggars will kill me anyway."

"No," said the German positively. "I give you my word on it."

Alan remained silent a moment, thinking deeply, and then,

"What's the use, Conrad?" he asked.

Von Hengel started up.

"You mean that you won't agree?"

"Something like that," said the prisoner reflectively. "You couldn't save me from these Johnnies even if you wanted to. They're bound to kill me if I can't fetch the Kaba Stone, and they'd have religious scruples against letting me go if I did. So what's the difference? I'm a goner any way you look at it. But I'd rather be a goner with the Kaba Stone than without it. That's what I came for, you know," he finished languidly.

Von Hengel concealed his anger with difficulty, aware that Alan was just the sort of fatuous idiot to carry the thing through to the end. But he had to admit that his reasoning was excellent.

"Haven't I said that I would help you to get away? Tell me what I want to know and I'll loosen your bonds so that you can slip away when my back is turned."

"I'd rather not, thanks."

## THE KARRÁS

Von Hengel's face grew darker in the moonlight and he flicked his cigarette furiously away.

"That's final?" he asked.

"I should say so, unless——" Alan paused.

"Unless what?"

Alan tried to settle himself more comfortably in his bonds. "Unless you'll trade with me even."

"Trade with you? What?"

"The parchments—the Karrás of the Mosque of Hasaneyn."

Alan noted the slight involuntary movement of the Prussian's fingers toward the front of his kamis and found out what he wanted to know. He had them there! Not Ali Agha but von Hengel had them in his shirt.

The German laughed. "And what would you do with them?"

"Take them aboard the *Turkana* and give you the Kaba Stone."

The look on von Hengel's face grew keen, then cleared quickly.

"Ah, yes, the *Turkana*. Of course. And where is she now?"

"In the harbor at Damghah, not fifteen miles from here."

"The *Turkana*—of course—and what else?"

Alan's face wore a look of inquiry.

"What else——?"

"A British destroyer, perhaps—or a man-of-war."

Alan laughed. "A British destroyer. Oh, I say."

"It's quite possible."

"Then she has come in since I left the coast."

"She is coming——?"

"I'm sure I don't know. I'm not in the confidence of the Admiralty."

## THE BLACK STONE

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Von Hengel glanced westward and then peered for a long moment toward the mass of rock at the head of the gorge.

"You're speaking the truth?" he asked keenly.

Alan smiled.

"Did you ever know me to do anything else?"

Von Hengel sank lower upon his haunches, his eyes searching Alan's face. Its expression had not changed and its eyes returned the German's eager look with calmness.

"Who took the Kaba Stone to the *Turkana*?"

"I didn't say any one had taken it there, did I?"

"You said——"

"Merely that I would give you the Kaba Stone if you gave me the Karrás."

Von Hengel turned away again to search the dim vistas of the desert. And then he smiled quietly.

"You'll pardon me, Alan, if I say that I don't believe you."

"That's your privilege."

The calmness of his prisoner now angered him.

"You think," he said with growing warmth, "that I will not kill you because in your death, all trace of the Kaba Stone will be lost. But I'm in no position to stand on ceremony just now. You've provoked me more than once and I'm getting to the end of my patience——"

"And your tether?" put in Alan sweetly.

Von Hengel swore a round German oath under his breath and rose.

"You shall see. I think I fully understand your game. But you haven't enough men, my friend. The chance of a rescue is small." He broke off and gazed out over the desert in the direction of the sea. "If that's the plan, we'll prepare for it."

And with a final glance at Alan he looked about him,

## THE KARRÁS

peering up at the rocky promontory which dominated the gorge above and the desert beyond. Then, he went over to the camp fire of the Sheykhs, where he aroused one of them and gave him some instructions, pointing to the prisoner and then toward the desert below. Alan saw the man come toward him while von Hengel, moving majestically away in the character of Omar Hilal, climbed among the shrubbery at the foot of the cliff.

Perhaps Alan had said too much. Von Hengel was going to climb up to have a look around to view Damghah harbor at a distance and perhaps to discover the approach of Alan's men who by this time could not be far away. If they came on in a body, their white abas and burnûses would be as distinct as if in the sunlight from the top of this high crag. And what had been intended as a surprise attack might very well become an ambush with the tables turned. The thought that he had thrown his men into danger, perhaps needlessly, was to Alan more torturing than the pain of his wrists as the thongs ate into his raw flesh. He struggled quietly as the Sheikh who was to guard him approached, but he could not budge them. The way that they were fastened was an excellent example of efficiency. And as the Sheikh came near and sat a few paces away Alan desisted and lay quiet. The Arab was a tall man, the tallest and most villainous looking of the crowd that a while ago had surrounded him; and he fingered his dagger with an unction which was very suggestive of unpleasantness to come. The man wanted his hooreeyehs in Paradise and he wanted many of them. To be the jailer of such a prisoner as this was an honor not to be lightly considered. The Sheikh Omar was soft-hearted. Death swift and sudden should be the fate of such a Desecrator, such a Dog of an Unbeliever as this. "Seventy-two wives of the girls of Paradise" and thou-

## THE BLACK STONE

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sands of weleeds, they should be his, if he killed. He half unsheathed his dagger, then very slowly returned it. Alas! Perhaps the Sheykh Omar knew best. He would await what was to happen. But even then it would be his own jambiyah which should deal the fatal blow. In the meanwhile, if the Desecrator and Blasphemer moved so much as a hair's breadth or struggled to release himself, that would be enough of an excuse.

All of these thoughts Alan read or thought he read in the man's eyes and he took pains to remain perfectly still in order that he might be alive as long as possible. The Sheykh was mumbling all the while, watching the horizon and making the most hideous faces for the mere satanic pleasure to be derived from the captive's discomfort. But Alan, having satisfied himself that so long as he remained quiet, he was in no immediate danger from his guard, composed his features and seemed to close his eyes. But through his eyelashes he was still keenly observant. He saw that the setting moon was paling just at the edge of the rocks upon the opposite side of the wadi, and that the east was lightening. Less than an hour to dawn. He still had a chance, a faint one, if the tall rascal near him didn't suddenly change his mind and despatch him in a sudden fit of religious fervor. Alan tried to plan what he would do at the sound of the first shots, struggle to a sitting posture, leaping free of the crag that bound him and hurling himself like a catapult at the Sheykh, hoping to throw him over the edge of the cliff near which he sat. The thing seemed impossible and yet he meant to try it. He might as well be killed for a sheep as a lamb.

Slowly he watched the pale rim of the moon descend against the ragged edge of the rocks and then suddenly drop out of sight. Except for the camp-fires, which glowed here and there, the wadi was in darkness. And confident

## THE KARRÁS

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that the hour of the *Subh* would deliver the prisoner into their hands, the Pilgrims had relaxed into attitudes of repose, all indeed but Alan's guard, who still sat intently regarding him, his brows thatched, his keen eyes blazing with watchfulness and resentment. Alan under lowered lids tried to peer upward toward the mass of rocks von Hengel had climbed but could see no sign of him.

The grayness in the east now brought into silhouette the long flank of Jebel Radhwah, Amneh's mountains of Paradise. Poor little thing! She had seen him captured and had possibly slunk away in terror at the calamitous results of his venture. He only hoped that she would get back, some way. And Daoud. What on earth had happened to Daoud? They hadn't caught him, Alan was sure of that. Perhaps——

Alan closed his eyes for a moment and then for some reason instantly opened them. Behind the sitting Sheykh a shadow was rising from the gully—a dim, unreal bulk, absolutely noiseless, which presently resolved itself into a head, shoulders and a pair of arms, groping upward. With an effort Alan closed his eyes again trying not to look, but beneath his lashes saw that the Sheykh still leaned forward, staring and mumbling, oblivious of the grim shape that encompassed him; saw the groping arms and hands suddenly close around the Sheykh's throat and mouth, garroting him silently and dragging him backward by sheer strength to the edge of the abyss over which the two figures slid and vanished. The occurrence was almost uncanny. Alan listened for the sound of falling bodies, but only heard a kind of choking cough and after that, silence. Less than a hundred feet away the Sheykhs, by the embers of their fire, still lay in slumber. Alan struggled desperately to release himself. Who had done this thing? Not Amneh. Daoud? He had worked his thong clear of the rock when

## THE BLACK STONE

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he felt his hands suddenly become free,—his ankles; and rolling over silently, heard a whisper at his elbow just at the edge of the chasm. He could distinguish nothing of the dim figure before him sliding down upon the ledge below, but he followed as quickly as his stiffened limbs would allow, reaching a group near the prostrate figure of the Sheykh who lay very still.

"There's no time to spare, Mr. Jessup, sir," whispered a familiar voice. "It's a terrible chance you took. If it hadn't been for Miss Amneh here, sir——"

Amneh! Alongside of him, clinging desperately to his arm, the fingers of her other hand still clutching the knife that had released him, she huddled against the rock, her face pallid as the dawn it reflected.

"I had to, Monsieur Alan," she gasped, "they would have killed you."

"I found her, sir," whispered Dawson, "down the wadi, cryin' her eyes out, and she brought me in here. Be careful, sir. The ledge just below is slippery. So, now, Miss, while I lift you down."

Still bewildered, but realizing that every moment counted, Alan descended quickly, helping Amneh down, carrying her part of the way in his arms while she clung to him in terror, murmuring strange foreign words at his ear while Dawson followed noiselessly, an automatic in his hand, guarding against pursuit. Now that victory, at least a temporary one, had perched so suddenly, so surprisingly, upon his banners, Alan planned what he should do next. A moment ago he would have given all he possessed for the very chance of escape that had been offered him, but when he reached the bottom of the ravine and no sound yet came from the cliff which they had descended, he gazed up the line of the gully toward the rocks at its end which seemed a part of the bulk of the cliff which guarded the upper

## THE KARRA'S

gorge. The spot where they stood was deep in shadow, carpeted with soft sand in which small trees and clumps of vegetation were striving for existence.

"The men are coming, Dawson?" Alan whispered.

"Soon, sir, I should say. I was ahead with Captain Hoagland. He's waiting for them in the village."

"There may be time to head them off."

"Head 'em off, sir?"

"Captain von Hengel has just climbed those rocks to watch. If he sees them."

"Oh, I understand, sir."

Alan looked down the shadows of the ravine.

"Where does this gully lead, Dawson?" he asked.

"Into the desert, sir, about half a mile above the caravan road."

"Then you can get Miss Amneh out safely?"

"I should say so, sir, unless they slip around."

"Then go, at once. Lose no time and warn Hoagland. They'll be about our ears like hornets in a minute."

"And you, Monsieur Alan?" whispered Amneh, terrified.

Alan smiled down at her gayly.

"I'll come soon. Go with Dawson. You're the bravest girl in the world."

"You will venture again?"

"There's something I've got to do, Amneh. I'll come through safely, don't worry."

"They will kill you this time."

"Not while my legs hold out. I've learned prudence. I shall run."

"Oh, God!" She clung to his shoulders weeping silently, and he bent over and kissed her on the brow and handed her gently to Dawson, who stood watching his employer.

## THE BLACK STONE

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"If I might be so bold, Mr. Jessup, sir, I think you'd better be coming along with us. Miss Constance is there."

Constance! Alan paused a moment of indecision and then firmly,

"I can't, Dawson, not just yet."

"If you'll pardon me, sir, there's such a thing as trusting luck too far."

Alan caught his man by the hand joyously.

Good old Dawson! Don't worry. I'll be back all right. Go! please, that's a good chap."

But Dawson still hesitated.

"It's *him* you're after? If I might, if Miss Amneh could slip down alone."

But Alan wouldn't hear of it and with a final word which was almost in tones of command to them both, Alan watched them slowly move away down the ravine among the underbrush. And then, listening intently for the slightest sound on the rocks above him, he moved quickly up the ravine toward the mass of rocks which loomed above him.

A curious thing had happened to Alan. With the chance of his freedom from the danger through which he had passed all the zest seemed to go out of life. Out there in the hands of the frantic mob, giving blow for blow, Alan had felt himself rising to splendid heights, that he had gone down at last beneath the weight of numbers did not seem to matter. He had tasted life, plumbing his own capacity to endure. Up there upon the rocks bound hand and foot he had lived too a whole span in an hour. There was something very gorgeous about the imminence of death. What was beyond? To have died like a stuck pig, that wouldn't have been pleasant, but now, with free arms and legs again, he would give an account of himself and if he went beyond, he would go gayly. The danger of the further

## THE KARRÁS

venture attracted him strangely. He couldn't remember when he had ever been so keen on anything in his life before. Constance! Why had she come? It was dangerous.

But he couldn't think of Connie now, with complete success in sight.

He had been successful already, up to a certain point, but the beggars *might* kick up the sand in their scuffling. There was something else he had to do and do quickly before the daylight came. And so he moved along at the bottom of the gully, stopping from time to time to listen for the sudden cry in the night which would make his mission more perilous. But there was no sound. Overhead, a change like mother of pearl crept over the sky, pale, slightly opalescent, dimming the stars. It was lighter in the ravine, which grew narrower as he approached its upper end. The night was fleeing swiftly as though pursued by its pitiless enemy, the sun. But there was still time to climb the mass of rocks which stood like some Titanic donjon above the crags which surrounded it, for the German had climbed there, and the German had the Karrás of the Mosque of Hasaneyn. Alan couldn't think of anything else, not even of Connie. It was somewhere in his clothing, for had he not seen that tell-tale unconscious movement of von Hengel's fingers when he had spoken of it?

He was now two hundred yards beyond the scene of his imprisonment and the ravine had narrowed to the width of a mere ditch, but it was already climbing up among the rocks. He followed the natural conformation, keeping out of sight of the amphitheater when he could, at last gaining around to the further side of the crag, when he climbed more quickly. Already a thin violet streak stretched the length of Jebel Radhwah and the rocks above him were painted in pale smudges of ghostly light. It was hard climb-

## THE BLACK STONE

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ing, pulling one's self up the fissures and taking advantage of every hand and foot-hold. It was harder to climb on this side than upon the one von Hengel had chosen, where the ascent was more gradual, but he had to make the best of it. Only once he paused, breathless and somewhat aghast at the thought that he had no weapon. He had been so anxious to come to hand-grips with the Prussian that he had completely overlooked the fact that von Hengel was armed and would probably get a shot at him before Alan could come to close quarters. Neither he nor Dawson had thought of a weapon in the brief moment of conference, and of course Dawson would need it, with Amneh. But that couldn't be helped now. He would have to go on up there where Conrad von Hengel was awaiting the coming of the light to inspect the sands below. A hundred feet he climbed, two hundred, and had now reached a shelf where the going was easier. There he lay a moment to regain his breath and listen. Silence still. The wadi was hidden from him by the bulk of the rock but he knew that all must be as before. How long had it been since Dawson had released him? Five minutes, ten, half an hour? He couldn't remember. He only knew that he had climbed furiously and that not yet in the wadi had the hour of the *Subh* arrived.

Alan peered anxiously at the grim profile of the rocks above him. It wouldn't do to have von Hengel lean over and see him there. Von Hengel shot well and he couldn't have missed. So creeping close to the wall of rocks, his knees bruised and his fingers torn, Alan went upward again. But he had to be cautious now for the slightest sound, the slightest slip among the crevices would be fatal. He wasn't far from the top. He remembered from the shape of the crag, that there seemed to be a flattish place at the top, but irregular and broken, like an old tooth worn

## THE KARRÁS

with service. He hauled himself up cautiously and peered up the fissure where he had climbed; then gaining confidence, mounted again with great pains until his eyes were on a level with the dark contour of the nearest crag. Stunted, thorny bushes grew here and there in the fissures and loose boulders lay about in profusion, but nowhere could he see the object of his search. Slowly he raised his head, then his shoulders, looking carefully this way and that, and then drew his body up and crouching, crept forward behind a small pinnacle of rock, where he waited another moment before continuing his investigations.

From this high eyrie dawn seemed to be coming up with a rush but the wadi below was still bathed in shadow and among the weary Pilgrims there was as yet no call to prayer. Luckily for him; for he knew that when the Sheykhs awoke the alarm would be sounded and the place would seethe like an ant-hill. The sentries that von Hengei had placed here and there were merged into the rock. In the quick glance he took around, he could see the mists already rolling down the valleys toward the sea to the westward. It would not be long now, he had to move quickly.

He bent over and peered out again among the welter of rocks until he found the object of his search. The Prussian stood, leaning slightly forward, one hand upon a projecting rock, gazing intently over the desert below, the highest elevations of which were now gently stained with a rosy glow. Alan quickly followed his glance. In the distance the line of the sea was visible, and, a faint smudge in the harbor of Damghan, he could see the spars of the *Turkana* arising from the mists. But as von Hengel turned his gaze downward into the desert again, he seemed to stare more intently and Alan saw what had engaged his attention, a number of moving camels, looking not unlike

## THE BLACK STONE

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strange insects from this height, slowly converging at a distance of a mile or more upon the caravan of the Pilgrims. Alan saw von Hengel look again, then quickly turn toward the northward, examining the desert in all directions. What he saw Alan did not discover, for he sprang forward barefooted, noiselessly, springing behind one rock and then another, and when von Hengel turned Alan was almost upon him.

The moment of surprise, the fragment of a second for recognition were almost enough for Alan to reach him, but not quite. In the west Alan had seen men draw and fire as rapidly as von Hengel but their aim had been better. For the shot went wide and though the man sprang backward, the impulse of Alan's initiative brought him into close quarters before von Hengel could aim again. Another shot just grazed his shoulder as Alan caught the hand that held the weapon and the automatic fell clattering upon the rocks.

Perhaps von Hengel felt himself fully capable of attending to this affair without a weapon or perhaps in the sudden surprise of the onslaught the automatic had been torn from his grasp, but he found himself to his astonishment immediately upon the defensive. He was slightly less tall than Alan, but he outweighed him at least twenty pounds and had great pride in his own strength and endurance. In America he had carried a little extra flesh, but the weeks in the desert had brought him down to the essentials of bone and muscle and built upon the principle of the arch, with massive legs, slightly bowed, with long, heavily boned arms, hanging from shoulders slightly sloping, he was indeed an antagonist to be respected. But of Alan he knew nothing. To him the American was merely a very wealthy person, inclined to patronize boat-races, who played a fair game of tennis and very excellent golf. Alan Jessup hadn't

## THE KARRÁS

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been in the habit of discussing his morning training any more than he had been in the habit of discussing his morning bath. In the last few weeks von Hengel had begun to suspect that Alan had potentialities hitherto unobserved, but the speed of his assault and the strength in his long arms advised him that here indeed was a foeman of his metal. Together they swayed, both barefoot among the rocks, each instinctively avoiding the edge of the precipice, each trying to trip the other and von Hengel trying to reach the dagger that was in his belt. But Alan was wary of that and caught the hand that attempted to draw it, so that in the struggle it became loose and fell.

Without weapons they were now upon quite equal terms, except that von Hengel's weight put Alan at some little disadvantage at close quarters. But he kept his feet gamely and managing to free his right arm landed heavily on the German's short-ribs. The smile with which von Hengel had begun the encounter had faded and a look of fury had taken its place. His gorilla-like arms struck viciously, but Alan kept close and the blows rained fruitlessly on his head and shoulders, while his long arms clutched desperately, driving the breath from the German's body. But man for man von Hengel had the greater strength and with his added weight managed to force the American toward the edge of the rocks, hoping to pry his arms loose and shove him backward. Alan guessed his intention and with an effort suddenly broke one arm free and shot his fist upward, catching the German under the chin. That staggered him for a moment, and Alan sprang clear.

Both men were breathing so hard that speech was impossible, even had either of them desired it. Above their heavy breathing each was now conscious of other sounds that came up clearly from the wadi below, the wild cries of the multitude aroused by the sounds of the shots, and

## THE BLACK STONE

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the cries of the Sheykhs as they discovered the body of their lost brother. To Alan that meant capture if he didn't kill von Hengel. To von Hengel it meant a speedy rescue if he could keep Alan at bay. It was plain that von Hengel did not mean to underestimate his adversary and he defended himself in the Prussian manner by rushing at once, hoping to force the American back and so strike his head against a rock. But the careful ministrations of Stoney Flynn proved of some value here, for as the German rushed, Alan, by excellent foot work, stepped aside and caught von Hengel a fearful blow in the body. His lip twitched with pain but he still came on. Alan staggered him again and again, but he managed to get a grip of Alan's garment and they came to close quarters, Alan striking with both hands with great precision. Even in the act of grasping, von Hengel seemed to sway and the American sprang back quickly and swinging with his free right arm, struck just beside the ear. Like a falling tower, von Hengel seemed to break in the middle and topple down.

But Alan was taking no chances. Falling upon his adversary before he had a chance to recover, he caught his wrists and sat upon his stomach while he went through his garments to find what he had come for. In a pouch at his belt, somewhat mussed but quite safe, Alan found the Karrás of the Mosque of Hasaneyn. He couldn't restrain a gasp of triumph. He slipped the thing in his belt and made it fast; then found the German's cartridges and put them into a pocket while he looked around for the automatic which had fallen somewhere in the scuffle. He couldn't spend the rest of his life sitting on von Hengel's stomach, and the sounds in the wadi below were growing louder, entering the gorge near the base of the crag. In a moment the Arabs would be climbing up. Alan was bothered. To kill a man in a fair fight was one thing—but to strangle him



Like a falling tower von Hengel seemed to break in the middle and topple down.



## THE KARRÁS

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or beat him to death while he lay helpless was not in his line. But he knew that every moment of delay was fatal. There was nothing to bind the man with. The kamis was a flimsy thing and the aba resisted all his efforts to tear it. He had no knife; with von Hengel's dagger he might cut his aba into strips. Alan took the chance, and springing up quickly made for the spot where the automatic had fallen. With that weapon in his possession he could hold von Hengel up and with strips from the heavy aba bind him at his leisure.

He found the weapon and turned quickly. But von Hengel was already on his feet springing for the cover of the nearest rock. Alan shouted a command and fired. Von Hengel seemed to stumble and fall. But when Alan reached the place, the German had leaped into a fissure at the edge of the chasm and slipped down into the path by which he had descended. Just one glimpse Alan had of him leaping from rock to rock and fired again when von Hengel disappeared.

"Silly ass!" muttered Alan in tones of self-reproach. "Now you've done it. They'll all be swarming up here like flies in a minute. Might have known he was only playing possum."

But he reloaded his weapon with great care and made the rounds of the top of the crag, a surface not over a hundred feet across, then stared over on the side by which he had climbed and wondered how he had done it. He could manage them there one by one as their heads and bodies showed. But the side on which von Hengel had disappeared was easier to climb, with footholds pretty well defined. They would come up that way if they came in numbers and he would have to do the quickest shooting he had ever done in his life if he expected to hold them long.

Then a new idea came to him and running quickly here

## *THE BLACK STONE*

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and there he gathered all the rocks that he could lift into a pile at the head of the defile. The Karrás was in his belt and he patted it affectionately and then stared down into the desert where the line of camels had come nearer. He saw them ride in to groups and then saw men afoot rushing for the rocks upon the other side of the wadi, firing as they came.

## CHAPTER XXIII

### DAWSON'S POINT OF VIEW

**D**AWSON was very much disturbed. Mr. Jessup's decision to climb the rocks after the German captain and send his valet back to the rear with the Armenian young lady was not much to his liking, especially as, since the affair with the Arab Sheykh (in which Dawson had to admit she had done her part with extraordinary bravery) Amneh began to show grave signs of feminine weakness. But he helped her down the ravine, encouraging her with words she couldn't understand and hastening her footsteps by pushing her elbow. The discovery of Miss Constance there alone, far from her friends, had shocked him still more. For what he wanted most to do just now was to follow in his employer's footsteps and render whatever aid he could against the Prussian. With a qualm, he remembered too late that Mr. Jessup was unarmed and even after his orders to go back to Captain Hoagland, he wondered whether he hadn't better let them find their own way alone and return.

Miss Masterson wanted to know where Mr. Jessup was, so he informed her. There wasn't any use trying to spare anybody's feelings now.

"I told him, Miss," he muttered, "that there's such a thing as trying your luck too far, but 'e wouldn't listen. There's nothin' for it but to take you back and then go and 'elp him."

"I want to go with you, Dawson."

## THE BLACK STONE

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"No, Miss, asking pardon, you'll go nowheres but with the main body. It was foolish of Captain Hoagland to let you come along. But it's with him you belong and with him Mr. Jessup would wish you to stay. Hurry, if you please, Miss, and we'll find your camel."

Trembling between anger and tears, Constance hurried on beside him. They had only gone a little way when from high up in the air behind them there came the sound of two shots. Constance paused but Dawson caught the two girls by the elbows and pushed them along before him.

"We must run, Miss," he said, "they'll all break loose now."

And they did. Behind them they heard the calls of the startled sentries, the sudden commotion of the frightened mob and the mad cries of the Sheykhs on the rocks as they awakened and found that their prisoner was missing.

The stars had paled overhead and were merging into the light of the dawn, so that the way was plainly visible and Dawson made the most of his opportunities, and when they had gotten half a mile away and there was no sound of pursuit, he climbed the slope of the wadi. He looked all around him and then came down quickly.

"Captain Hoagland's men are over there," he said to Constance, pointing, "they're coming this way and you're to join them at once."

"And you?"

"I'm going to help Mr. Jessup, Miss, on the cliff. Tell Captain Hoagland."

"Dawson!" she shouted.

But he had already darted off in the opposite direction toward Jebel Radhwah, running.

Dawson had one very clear idea in his mind, and only one, and that was to reach the cliffs where Mr. Jessup was embattled with Captain von Hengel as speedily as pos-

## DAWSON'S POINT OF VIEW

sible, for there seemed little doubt now that the shots that he had heard up there had been fired at his employer. And in his heart of hearts, Dawson feared—without a weapon. It was very unpleasant to think about. He meant to climb those rocks. But how? To run up the gorge from which he had just escaped with Miss Constance and the Armenian young lady would be putting his head nicely into a noose. It was getting too light overhead to risk discovery by mingling with the crowd. There was only one way open—to run well to the right and make a long *détour*, coming out around the upper side of the gorge. He knew that it would take time, but he started on a steady trot, swinging wide of the now turbulent wadi, coming out into the open and making for a cleft in the sand which cut in, in the desired direction. A bullet sang by his head—another—from his right, it seemed, but he only ran the more swiftly on. And at last he reached cover almost doubling on his tracks and moving in toward the cliff.

His breath was almost gone as he approached the ridges of rock that formed a bulwark at its base, but he did not hesitate and clambered upward, immediately, stopping for a moment in a cleft to regain his wind and to get a general view of the situation. Though the masses of rock now obscured most of the wadi from his vision, beyond it he could see the orderly row of men advancing. How few they seemed in number! It wasn't common sense, but it was very beautiful. Shots were being fired now and a panic seemed to have fallen over the Pilgrims in the wadi, many of whom were fleeing in a disorder of maddened horses and camels and flying dust out into the desert at the lower end of the wadi. But nearer and on the rocks to the southward of him, the Nizam and Sheykhs in some confusion were forming for battle; and around the base of the mass of rocks a gathering crowd was clamoring. It was from the

## THE BLACK STONE

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height that the shots had come, their gestures seemed to indicate. The prisoner must be there. But where was the Sheykh Omar? Dawson, hiding and climbing by turns, mounted slowly, fifty feet, a hundred, when he paused at the sounds of cries below him, to look down. He expected to be shot like a squirrel on a bough and hung for a moment in great uncertainty between heaven and earth, by his toes and finger tips, for there was no fissure here in which to conceal himself. But after a moment, when no bullets came from below, he smiled to himself and made a further effort to reach a ledge on which he had set his eye. For the moment, he had forgotten his attire. The blighters below thought that he was one of them. And when he reached the ledge he leaned over and pointed upward and two or three men summoned courage to follow him in the perilous climb. There was a loose rock near his foot and carelessly, while reaching upward for a new hand hold, he kicked it down, quite by accident, toward the fellow who was nearest him. He did not stop to see whether it struck him or not, but he heard cries and was sure that the men who followed would proceed with greater caution.

About him on all sides, above the shrieks of the terrified pilgrims and the cries of the fighting men, he heard the sounds of shots, the short snap of the native weapons and small arms and the deep bark of the highly powered Enfields. Then a bullet came with an ugly "whang," stinging his face and neck with rock-dust and splinters. That shot didn't come from below. And out in the desert near the way by which he had come he saw three men running forward from rock to rock, firing as they ran. It was most unpleasant not to be able to return the fire. But he was glad a moment later that it hadn't been possible, for the heathens below him had dropped among the bushes and their fellows were taking to their heels. Another bullet,

## *DAWSON'S POINT OF VIEW*

from an Enfield, he was sure, spat beside him, farther away this time, but still too close for comfort. He waved his arm to the men in the desert, whom he now knew to be his friends, and then, taking the chances, clambered upward again.

He didn't know what he would find. But Mr. Jessup must be up there still or the Arabs wouldn't be trying to climb. And Captain von Hengel? As he climbed, Dawson grew hopeful. He would shoot the Prussian if he could. If Mr. Jessup had managed to close with him there had been a fight up here, such a fight as he would have wished to see. Dawson looked upward and climbed the remaining distance quickly and was just about to haul himself up to the top level when his head-dress spun around and a shot echoed close beside him. He ducked behind a rock just as another bullet sped past, ducked joyfully, for he knew that Captain von Hengel wouldn't be firing at the head-dress of an Arab. It was his employer, Mr. Jessup, who was shooting, and shooting close.

"Mr. Jessup! Mr. Jessup!" he called at the top of his lungs. "It's me, sir, Dawson."

And then, poking his head out cautiously, saw his employer divested of his head-dress and abate rise, grinning, from among the rocks. Dawson climbed quickly and in a moment had reached the top. Alan rushed forward and caught him by the hand.

"I might have killed you, Dawson. How on earth——?"

"Merely that there's two of us now, sir," he said cheerfully.

"Amneh, Miss Constance?"

"With Captain Hoagland."

The brief colloquy had been too long, for a dark face showed above the edge of the rocks on the opposite side. Their enemies were climbing now in numbers. A bullet

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whizzed past but they ducked forward, firing at two men who had reached the top. Alan emptied his clip at them and one man fell, but the other, his empty gun raised, rushed at Dawson who shot him neatly, dodging the fall of the clattering rifle. Another head appeared, another, they were coming faster now, but Dawson's weapon accounted for another, while Alan, rushing forward, hove the largest of his pile of rocks into their midst. It caught the first man squarely in the midriff and with a grunt he toppled backward, carrying another man with him.

That took some of the steam out of the attack for the moment. A glance over the edge showed no one in sight.

"We could hold this place for a year, sir," cried Dawson, with a laugh, as he coolly reloaded his weapon, "if they don't bring on artillery."

Dawson's laugh was a revelation. Alan had never seen it before. It disclosed the vacancy of a missing tooth at the side and was inexpressibly human.

Alan having reloaded was working like a beaver piling stones. Dawson imitated his example, rolling them quite to the edge, where they would be easier to handle.

"And Captain von Hengel, sir?" asked Dawson between breaths.

Alan pointed over the edge in the abyss.

"A moment ago. He slipped away while I was hunting his pistol. You see I had him down. I couldn't kill him like that."

"Pity you didn't, sir. You 'ad 'im down, you say, sir? (Dawson only dropped his aitches like this when very much absorbed.) You closed with 'im?"

"He rushed me but I managed to slip aside and land——"

"On 'is jaw? Footwork," he grinned again. "It must 'ave been pretty to see, sir." Dawson had brought forward a final rock, and then peered over. "Look out, sir!" he

## DAWSON'S POINT OF VIEW

cried, putting a shoulder to the rock at the same time. Alan leaped sideways but he felt a stinging pain in his right shoulder and his weapon fell from his fingers.

Von Hengel, his head tied with a bloody bandage, daring both weapons and rocks, came leaping up the fissure. Dawson's rock grazed his shoulder. Alan was groping for his fallen weapon with his left hand when von Hengel raised his arm again, but Dawson fired first—point blank, then fired again. The Prussian stood for a moment as though bewildered, his arms falling to his sides and then swaying on the edge of the rocks, toppled backward and, sliding over the brink, disappeared from view.

"Thanks, Dawson," said Alan calmly. There was a red spot on his kamis spreading down breast and arm.

"You're hurt, sir?"

"Through the shoulder. It's nothing." And then quickly, "Just run around the edge, will you, Dawson, and see that the other sides are clear. I'll watch here."

Dawson gave him a quick glance and obeyed and when he came back Alan had taken his kamis off and was trying to tear it into strips.

"Everything right around there?"

"Yes, sir," said Dawson, binding the wound with strips of his shirt. "They'll come this way, when they get courage enough."

"We'll hold 'em, Dawson. You've bowled over their King pin."

"Are you all right, sir?"

"Never better. Don't worry. There's another fight in me yet."

By way of example he kicked a rock over the edge and then peered out. Down near the foot of the steep two men were supporting the figure of von Hengel. But even as

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Alan looked he fought free of the men who held him and gave some hoarse commands, his finger pointing upward.

"My word, sir!" muttered Dawson, "'e's all of a man. As many lives as a cat. I could 'a' sworn——"

His words trailed off as they watched von Hengel stagger to his feet and hoarsely direct the fighting around him. Then saw his arms gesticulate and men started running, a dozen or so to direct the attack upon the ridge of rocks that had been taken by Captain Hoagland and his men. The firing was practically continuous but in the wadi white figures lay prone or squirmed like worms out of harm's way. With dismay Alan saw that there were other figures lying on the rocks too.

Connie! In the excitement Alan had forgotten her.

"Dawson!" he asked, "Miss Masterson——she is there?"

"Yes, sir," the man replied. "She *would* come." And then, peering eagerly, "Isn't that 'er, sir, in the cleft of rocks, bindin' the chap's arm?"

It was. Her head-dress had fallen back over her shoulders—her hair—he recognized her instantly.

"Good God!" he muttered.

The situation was serious. Some of von Hengel's men had rushed through the gorge and, mounting the higher rocks, were now sending an enfilading fire down upon the group of sailors. Hoagland saw the new menace and with three or four men was moving forward from rock to rock, firing at every head that showed itself. But Alan saw one of the men fall, and he and Dawson both emptied their clips down upon the attacking Arabs. The flanking fire distracted them but still they came on, reloading. Dawson, who was nearer the edge, called out to Alan,

"Look out, sir. They're coming now for sure."

A rattle of Mausers and the bullet sang along the edge of the rocks. As the attacking party, numbering a dozen

## *DAWSON'S POINT OF VIEW*

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or more, clambered up the path, Alan began shoving rocks over, but Dawson held up a warning hand.

"Wait, sir, if you please, Mr. Jessup, until they're higher up. Then we'll let them have 'em, all at once."

Alan grinned. Dawson was super-man. If they ever got out of this Alan swore that he should be President of his largest Trust Company.

When the valet raised his hand, they both hove at the heaviest rocks, one after another, which went bounding down the cliffs.

Alan peeped above the edge of the rocks in spite of the flying bullets. Dawson was patting his thigh and leaping up and down like a madman.

"A strike, sir, a strike! They've gone clean."

Two fellows were running down into the cover of the underbrush and Dawson fired at them for luck.

Alan was moving around by the valet's side to peer over when he saw Dawson suddenly stop dancing and straighten to his full height, staring eagerly to the left. Then a wild light sprang into his gray eyes.

"'ourray!" he cried, rushing to the edge and pointing.

Out in the desert to the southward was a great cloud of dust, its top painted with all the rosy colors of the golden morning, and down at the lower end of the wadi, a swiftly moving apex of white figures on camels coming forward with long strides.

"The Arabs! Your allies haven't disappointed you, sir."

"Abdullah Sadi! The Beni Amur!" gasped Alan.

They streamed in two long golden tides upon each side of the rock Hoagland and his men were defending, the front of the wave hissing fire and smoke, and were in the very midst of von Hengel's fighting men before they knew what the thing was all about, the attackers smiting them hip and thigh, firing as they came, then loading and firing again.

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On the rocks opposite, the white figures clambering up to attack, halted and stared in terror at the newcomers. And then Alan saw Captain Hoagland and eight or ten men, stripped to their drawers and undershirts, rise from their refuge and fall upon the remnant that remained, with bayonets and clubbed rifles, driving them down the cliffs upon the lances of the camel riders, who finished off the stragglers and then rode on, following the tall figure of Abdullah Sadi, whose white garment streamed straight out behind him in the wind.

Through the gorge they drove the Nizam and Sheykhs and out into the desert beyond while Alan and Dawson clambered down, firing into the retreating mass. As Abdullah Sadi rode by, Alan held up a hand in greeting, but he swept on with his men, the lust of battle in his eyes, while Alan and Dawson, through the dust and welter of defeat, crossed the wadi and clambered up the rocks.

The Beni Amur had come just in time. Four of Captain Hoagland's men lay where they had fallen, one dead and three badly injured. As Alan approached Hoagland himself, bloody but undaunted, rose ponderously from a rock and wiped the sweat from his forehead, with an eloquent forefinger.

"Well, sir, that *was* a fight, twenty to one or thereabouts, and not an inch did they get."

"Glory be!" yelled Casey beside him, "that I've lived to see the day. Three naygurs an' a Shriek—one wid de bayonet."

Alan looked gravely at the figures of his wounded men lying near.

"It's lucky for us that the Beni Amur came. You couldn't have held out much longer. Where's Miss Masterson?"

"Safe, sir. She *would* come."

Alan's expression of anxiety relaxed.

## DAWSON'S POINT OF VIEW

"And you, Mr. Jessup," Hoagland said, noticing the wounded shoulder, "you're hurt."

"Not dangerously." And then, with a smile, "But I got what I came for."

"Then it was worth it, but it was hot, sir, while it lasted. That was a neat trick you turned with the rocks. Where's von Hengel, sir?"

"He slipped away, unless the Beni Amur got him."

"That's bad," muttered Hoagland with a shake of the head. "Hadn't I better send out a patrol?"

But Alan shook his head.

"No. Poor devil. I'm afraid he won't get far. He was game, Hoagland. It's a pity——"

Alan paused and then quickly raised his head.

"Where's Miss Masterson?" he asked.

"Yonder behind the rocks, with Miss Amneh. She was hit in the first volley when we charged."

"Hit! Dangerously?"

"I'm afraid so, sir. A chance shot, she was behind us. We didn't know it until we took the ridge. Miss Masterson dragged her up here herself. How she did it God knows. We were so busy we couldn't see. And didn't know it until afterwards."

Alan ran forward in the direction indicated. Constance was bending forward over a very small figure which lay prone in the shelter of a boulder.

"Connie!"

She turned a swift eloquent glance over her shoulder and then bowed her head again over the injured girl. Some of the men had brought water from the spring and Constance was bathing the bared breast where, constantly recurring, a small red blot appeared.

"Is she——?" he began, then without waiting for the answer which he already knew, fell on his knees beside her,

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taking one of her hands. Amneh's eyes were closed and her face was the color of gray agate—blue veined. But at the sound of Alan's voice and the touch of his fingers, she opened her eyes and smiled.

"Monsieur Alan," she gasped faintly. "I—I shall not, go to, England."

He bent forward quickly, trying hopelessly to think of words that might comfort her.

"Monsieur Alan!"

"What is it, Amneh?"

But Constance, reading the signs in Amneh's ashen face, had dipped her fingers into water and upon Amneh's brow made the sign of the Cross.

And even while she did so, Amneh choked and whispered again more faintly.

"Monsieur Alan, kiss me, Monsieur Alan."

He bent forward tenderly, obeying, but his lips touched only that which was consecrated to the God of her fathers.

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"Don't, Connie," murmured Alan, after a moment, as he raised her to her feet, "you've done what you could."

"To think that I——" she broke off with a sob, and turned quickly, the tears streaming down her cheeks, and picking up her bandages, fell upon her knees beside a man who had been shot just above the knee. But Alan knew what her meaning was. Only death can bring moments like these.

Dawson and the steward, who had once been a hospital apprentice, helped her in her work while Alan stood by helplessly and watched. Constance had wanted to treat him but he had laughed her off. His shoulder hurt him to be sure, but the bullet had bored clean through and its dressing would be a simple matter. Two other fellows were badly hurt, one shot through the fleshy part of the chest and the other in the neck. The man they called

## DAWSON'S POINT OF VIEW

London lay at one side, his draperies tumbled about him. Somebody has pulled the kufiah over his face.

Daoud arrived, jubilant and eager for news. Neither he nor his men had gotten a scratch. With some pride Alan drew the Karrás from his belt and handed it to him and the expression on the Egyptian's face was eloquent of the achievement.

"And the Black Stone, Mr. Jessup? Where is it?" he asked suddenly.

A blank look came into Alan's face and he stared around in the general direction of the wadi.

"Hanged if I know, Effendi," he said with a shrug, "in the wadi, somewhere."

"You lost it?" asked Daoud, uncomprehendingly.

"I buried it in the sand, but I'm blessed if I know just where."

Daoud stared down into the wadi.

"We ought to find it, sir."

"Why?"

"In case——" the Effendi paused and smiled. "I see. If only you know that, and I. If it's only hidden deep enough."

"One stone is like another stone in the desert, Effendi," said Alan. "But if you like, you can have a look. It was somewhere in the center, I think, in the sand."

And Daoud moved down the surface of the rocks thoughtfully, smoking a cigarette, while Alan turned to the immediate business of helping Hoagland to put things to rights while they awaited the return of Abdullah and his conquering legions. The sun was climbing the sky and with great care they moved the wounded down into the shadow of the rocks. There they buried their dead, Amneh and "London," and marked their graves with heaps of stones. Alan was very quiet and Connie, now very pallid from

## THE BLACK STONE

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weariness and pity, tended the wounded with a devotion that seemed very wonderful to Alan. She had not faltered. She bathed his shoulder in clear cool water from the spring, anointed it with iodine and cotton and then bandaged him skillfully.

"Alan, dear," she whispered. "I have suffered so."

"God bless you, Connie. You're a brick. I don't know what we'd have done without you."

He didn't see yet what she meant and his gaze even while she worked over him was watching the gorge for the return of the Arabs. He seemed determined not to see. She only smiled faintly, but her eyes glowed with a new light. She would tell him—but not now. It seemed impossible for her, with Amneh lying there. But Dawson hovered in the background and she caught him grinning in a fatherly way. Less than an hour ago she had been furious at Dawson, but she found herself returning the signal of understanding. They had a secret.

## CHAPTER XXIV.

### MOON-MADNESS

WITH the return of Abdullah Sadi, who reported that the enemy was scattered and in full flight over the desert, preparations were begun to return to the *Turkana*; for the sun was rising in the sky giving promise of a day of terrific heat which would have made the sufferings of the injured men unbearable.

The abandoned litters of the fleeing Pilgrims were fastened to camels and after a breakfast of coffee, tack and bacon, which had been brought from the yacht, the caravan started for the sea, guarded by a detachment of Sadi's warriors, one of whom was sent ahead on a fast camel to have preparations made to receive the wounded.

Daoud Effendi, who had been kicking about aimlessly in the sand, at last gave up his quest, and came forward to where Alan and the Sherif, smoking their cigarettes, were awaiting him.

"You are *sure* you buried it, Mr. Jessup?" he asked.

Alan nodded.

"Deep?"

"I tried to. You'd better let it lie. God knows how much blood has been shed for the stone before this."

Daoud squatted on his haunches and glanced at Abdullah Sadi, who sat listening uncomprehendingly.

"You don't want to tell where it is hidden, Mr. Jessup," Daoud said at last.

"You're right, Effendi," replied Alan.

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"Could you find it yourself?"

"I don't know," drawled the American with a smile. "I might." And then after a pause during which Daoud regarded him soberly, "But what's the use? Lost, it can never do any more harm. Found—more blood may pay its price."

"That may be," said Daoud evenly. "But so long as the blood of England does not pay."

Alan shook his head slowly.

"No good can ever come out of bad, Effendi. That was a Prussian trick, to trade upon their love for their God. England may think it necessary," he finished, rising slowly, "but I don't."

"Then you won't tell?"

"No. Nor will you when you think it over." He clapped the Egyptian on the shoulder in a friendly way. "We've dished the great conspiracy, Effendi. You and I and—er—Dawson. There will never be another in the East, just like this one. The Black Stone is lost, irretrievably, and we have the Karrás."

"And what shall we say to Northby Pasha?"

Alan grinned comfortably.

"I rather think that Northby Pasha will accept my explanation."

Daoud showed his teeth in a smile and shrugged.

"Oh, very well. But I'd rather have you do the explaining."

"I will," laughed Alan.

He had sent Connie ahead with Hoagland and Dawson, because of the wounded, but he wanted to get her away from the scene of the combat as soon as possible for the dead were not pleasant to look at. Abdullah's men were coming up from time to time to report, piling the captured arms nearby, smiling cheerfully and regarding Alan

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with an interest and curiosity that had some deeper significance than mere friendliness.

"It's the gold, Mr. Jessup," replied Daoud when he questioned. "I think you've bewitched them."

"Yes, but what's going to happen down Yambu way, when the news reaches there?"

Daoud translated to the Sherif who smoked a moment in silence before he replied.

"Perhaps there will be more fighting," he said with a shrug, "but that matters nothing when one's cause is just."

The sentiment was less convincing than the surmise, but rendered into Daoud's cool English phrases, it conveyed a question. Alan answered it promptly.

"The Sherif Abdullah Sadi has rendered me great service—so great that the obligation is one that can never be repaid only in thankfulness and gratitude," Daoud translated. "But if the Sherif Abdullah will come with his men of the Beni Amur to the ship in the harbor of Damghah, much gold will be given to him and to them."

The Sherif's eyes sparkled with cupidity and then he bowed his head and waved a careless hand. "Friendship, honor, justice—these are more to the men of the Beni Amur than mere gold," he said rather grandly, "but three camel loads will be enough."

"Three camel loads," repeated Alan coolly.

"He has done us a real service, Mr. Jessup," said Daoud in a careless aside, "but he means to have his payment just the same."

"We won't quarrel over it," said Alan with a smile, "but I see he hasn't let me very far out of his sight."

At this moment one of the Arabs came up and spoke to the Sherif, and Daoud immediately rose.

"They have found a wounded Sheykh who wishes to speak with you, Mr. Jessup."

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"Von Hengel?"

"It must be," said Daoud with a frown.

Alan rose, and with Abdullah close beside him, followed the Arab toward the upper end of the wadi, where among the bushes at the foot of the cliffs they found him, bleeding from a dozen wounds, and propped against a rock, in the spot to which he had crawled to die.

"Careful, Mr. Jessup," whispered Daoud.

But Alan went forward and stood beside him.

The man was done for, at the point of death, his hands unarmed; all that was chivalrous in Alan awoke at the plight of this man, once his friend, who, whatever his shortcomings, at least had proved a valiant enemy. So he spoke to him kindly.

"Too bad, Conrad, old chap, that you had to lose."

"I wanted to tell you something, Alan," he began hoarsely. "I—I wanted to tell you." The hand at his breast went inside of his kamis and quickly came out with an automatic in it. But Daoud fired first—a stream of fire into von Hengel's breast.

"Prussian dog!" he muttered. "I thought as much."

Alan stared speechless for a moment at the body and then turned away.

"Thanks, Effendi," he said. "I owe you one."

You see, as Northby Pasha had said, Alan was a lucky man.

The Arabs buried the dead, left the wounded where they lay, and mounted their camels.

"It will not do to wait longer, Effendi," said the Sherif with an air of finality. "Reinforcements may come at any moment from Yambu. We must be on our way to Damghah."

So Alan and Daoud, reading his meaning in his tone,

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turned their backs on the scene of the encounter and began the journey to the *Turkana*.

Alan had every reason in the world to be happy like Daoud, who smoked innumerable cigarettes on the way and carried on a patter of conversation with Abdullah Sadi. But then, Daoud was by nature light hearted. Alan wasn't. Two hours ago upon the cliffs fighting Conrad von Hengel he had been gloriously happy and the preceding day and night, with their suspense and promise of danger, had been among the pleasantest he had ever spent in his life. But now with the sacred documents in his belt, the Black Stone definitely lost, von Hengel's conspiracy knocked into a cocked hat and the arch enemy removed, the old feeling of weariness was coming over him again, weariness and disappointment. He had admired von Hengel in times past, because he was so many things that Alan was not, because he had so many admirable qualities that Alan lacked; and he thought that even in spite of all that had happened in the past month, he had admired him most for the fight that he had made there on the rocks. But the finale of the adventure had been a disillusion and a disappointment. How much better if he had died the game fighter that he was than to have marred his exit by such treachery.

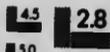
And then, Amneh. It was rotten luck that she had had to go, just with victory in sight. Weak, feminine to her finger-tips, and the very creature of terror, she had summoned courage in spite of her frailty to guide Dawson to his rescue and take a brave part in it. He could never forget that, never. And then she was very sweet to him, seemed to like him such a lot, and depend upon him. He could have made something of her, he had thought, at least he could have restored her self-respect and made her happy. The world owed her that.

And then, his own future, what could that amount to now



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(ANSI and ISO TEST CHART No. 2)



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## THE BLACK STONE

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that this most interesting experience was over? The same dull round of the prosaic, the useless and the commonplace, could he ever go back to them now? The thought of Trust Companies and Boards of Directors palled him terribly. He wouldn't go back. There must be something else, some other work that he could do for Northby Pasha or some one else, to help vanquish the race of perverted supermen of which Conrad von Hengel had been so typical, so conspicuous an example.

And so riding with rather dejected mien he reached Damghah. The launch was at the beach and Hoagland was waiting. He invited Sadi Abdullah aboard that the money might be paid to him. But the Sherif shook his head and spoke to Daoud.

"Here upon the sands, Effendi, if it pleases you. Tell them to bring what was promised."

Alan understood and gave the orders to Hoagland with a laugh. But the captain showed a horrified expression.

"Three camel loads! My God, Mr. Jessup. Those damn things can carry a ton."

"Hardly," said the owner thoughtfully, "but Daoud promised. We wouldn't be here if it hadn't been for Abdullah."

"Three tons of gold! Don't do it, sir. They'll only begin fighting for it among themselves."

"I don't really need it, Hoagland. And I brought it for this purpose, you know."

"Come now, sir," whispered the Captain. "Our new guns command this beach. We can sweep it as clean as the palm of your hand. Just come aboard the launch, you and Mr. Daoud."

"No," broke in Alan wearily. "No more bloodshed. Bring three chests of the gold ashore, at once if you please, Hoagland."

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He sank upon the sand while the launch put out for the *Turkana*. He could see the gun crews forward and aft and he knew that they only waited word from Hoagland to create a diversion during which the owner could escape aboard. But Alan was really very tired, physically and mentally, and wanted the incident ended. And besides, Abdullah Sadi had kept his word. He would keep his.

Alan stayed ashore until the chests were unloaded from the launch. It was a great night for the Beni Amur. They lighted fires and camped upon the beach while Abdullah Sadi made a distribution of their reward. Alan went aboard and sought out Connie and her injured men. But the worried expression on her face, which even excluded the joy that Alan's return had brought into it, was dispelled when the wireless operator who had been instructed to keep calling reported the approach of H. M. S. *Rainbow*, which would arrive before morning. Alan helped her with her work as he could, but Connie was exhausted and when the mate and one of his men relieved her, she turned in and slept.

With the exception of the mate and his gun's crews who had taken no part in the engagement, they were a very tired and very happy ship's company, and found their hammocks, grease paint and all, while the watch on deck sat along the rail and kept a lookout on the men of the Beni Amur. Sounds of shots were heard among the rocks and the guns were gotten ready for action, but nothing happened and in the morning, at dawn, the men of the Beni Amur had gone.

With the morning came the *Rainbow* and a Navy doctor, when boxes were set and wounds treated and within two days the *Turkana* steamed northward. Nothing had been heard from Yambu and Alan had little curiosity. As

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for the spiritual health of the Pilgrims—they would have to find a new fetish.

With the return to the old life of ease and routine, came a renewal of Alan's resolution to find his way quietly back to Northby and seek some new mission in which his yacht and his luck could be of some service. Failing that, he would return to England and offer his services there unless his own country should go into the war. The *Rainbow* brought news that it was not believed the United States could long remain neutral. It was his cause now, and it had been the poor little Armenian waif that had shown him why, for what had happened in Armenia had also happened in Belgium and in France. He understood.

He was sitting aft with Connie watching the rocks that marked the entrance to Damghah harbor slowly recede and become merged into the purple dusk. Connie was stretched out in a *chaise longue*, her gaze following his. Alan was smoking a pipe, but his face was set in sober lines. His was not the figure of the successful man, but she noticed that whatever his feelings to-night, he no longer wore the bored and weary air that had always marked him. His pose indicated an attitude of mind more of somberness slightly touched with melancholy. He had spoken no word to her of his own affairs, for they had both been very busy since their return from the fateful wadi. But the time now seemed ripe for confidences, if there were to be any, and from time to time she glanced at him, unwilling to break the silence of the exquisite tropical night, preferring for the moment to take alone the joy that was hers and soon to be Alan's also. How strong he was, how lean and capable looking—and how much he loved her! Against her breast where it had been concealed since the moment she had read it, lay Alan's death message. Her eyes watched with tender keenness the dear Arcadian. He had been so

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occupied that he hadn't even thought of asking Dawson for the key to the desk which was missing from its accustomed place in his shaving case.

"Alan dear," she began, breaking the ice gently, "just to be alive to-night is good fortune enough after El Hejaz."

"Yes, Connie."

"I don't know how I ever passed through that night and morning. I tremble yet when I think of what you did."

"And you," he said, "it was madness for you to go."

"I had to go, Alan. It was the only proof that I could give that I *could* think of some one beside myself, that I wasn't a falterer and a quitter."

"But suppose that you had been killed like Amneh."

"Would you have cared?"

Alan glanced at her and then looked quickly away.

"Cared? Well, rather," he said quietly.

Constance studied him with level gaze, but her sensitive ear had caught the slight break in his voice meant to be so indifferent. Her lips were placid, but she was permeated with invisible smiles. She knew.

"And you, Alan dear. When I heard those shots, and the roar of the angry crowds, I thought that something terrible had happened to you."

"It was rather touch and go for a while," he muttered. "If it hadn't been for Dawson——" he stopped, and then, affectionately, "Good old Dawson!" he finished.

"Good old Dawson," she echoed. "I really think I love Dawson, Alan. Though that night I could have killed him."

"Why?"

"For making me do what he wanted me to do."

Alan chuckled. "Oh, he did? That's the first time anybody ever did that."

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"Really," said Constance, with a laugh, "you're as impertinent as he was."

"Am I? I didn't mean to be, you know. But Connie, er, you know, you *are*—er—a little——"

"What, Alan?" demurely.

"Er—well—Oh, hang it all, you want your own way—er—don't you?"

She looked away from him, but when she turned her head again, her expression was quite sober.

"I—I suppose I do. At least I did. But I think I'm very much changed, Alan dear."

"Oh, are you?"

"Yes. I have never been face to face with life before—or death. I think I know better the true meaning of my own value, the smallness of it, the true meaning of self-sacrifice."

"Yes," he put in quietly, "I think I understand that too."

"Yours, Alan," she said quickly, "to go out against odds like that, against a man like that, with never a thought for your own safety. Suppose that you had been killed, Alan!"

"But I wasn't."

"But suppose that you *had* died, Alan, just suppose that you *had*. I never would have seen you again to be able to tell you. Why, where are you going?"

It was no wonder that she was surprised. In the very midst of her remarks Alan had risen suddenly and was staring very fixedly at vacancy.

"By Jove!" she heard him gasp.

"What is it, Alan?"

"Er—nothing. You'll excuse me a moment, won't you, Connie?"

And he strode off hurriedly and disappeared down the gangway.

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Constance followed him with her gaze, an amused look in her eyes, one hand at her breast where Alan's letter lay. She waited a while, expectant, and then got up and walked slowly aft, selecting a sequestered spot in the lee of the after gun in the moonlight. She had been thinking fondly of this moment for two days and her sense of beauty insisted on the picturesque. The wake of the *Turkana* streamed molten silver toward the land of El-Hejaz, pushing it away from her, as a dark, dread region which could have no part in the realm of light and dreams into which she and Alan were sailing. After a while she heard his footsteps on the deck behind her, and saw him pacing to and fro in a puzzled way.

"I'm here, Alan," she called.

He came at once and leaned upon the rail beside her, filling his pipe thoughtfully.

"What was it, Alan?" she asked. "Had you forgotten something?"

"Er—yes, the key of my desk. It seems I've lost it."

"What were you looking for?"

"Er—nothing, a paper. I'll get the thing open to-morrow."

"Was it important, Alan, dear?" she asked sweetly.

"Yes, rather. But it had no interest for any one but myself."

"Oh! Not even for me?"

"For you! Er—of course not—not for you, Connie. Just private papers. It doesn't matter." And then heavily, "Jolly fine moon to-night, isn't it?"

"Yes, Alan dear, the finest moon, the sweetest moon, the maddest moon that ever was." She laughed and laid her fingers on his arm. "Do you believe in moon-madness, Alan?" she asked.

"Moon-madness! Oh, I say."

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"Because I think I'm going mad from sheer happiness."

"What on earth?"

But with a change of mien she interrupted:

"Is Dawson somewhere about?"

"Why, yes, Connie."

"Would you mind calling him?"

"Not at all."

And wonderingly he walked forward and passed the word down for the valet.

"You're sure you feel quite well, Connie?" he asked when he joined her again.

Her laughter disconcerted him.

Dawson appeared, attired again in his solemn black, pleasantly subservient.

"Would you mind, Dawson, bringing me the key tied with pink ribbon which you'll find upon my dressing-table?"

Dawson's expression did not vary by a jot.

"Not at all, Miss Constance. A key with a pink ribbon, I think you said? Thank you, Miss," and he disappeared.

Alan watched him depart, his brow puzzled. A pink ribbon and a key? What did she want with a key? What key?

He glanced at her face, which was turned eagerly to his in the moonlight. It was a very lovely face. He had looked upon it many times before in the moonlight, tenderly, wistfully, longingly, and hopelessly. He knew that looking at it now would only make the old pain the more poignant on the morrow. He knew that he ought to look away, at the sea, the sky, the moon, anywhere but at the face, but instead, he seemed to keep on looking at it in spite of himself. It *was* such a lovely face, and to-night there were shadows at the eyes and lips, new shadows, that he had never seen before, which somehow seemed significant of the

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dangers through which they had passed. But the key! What did Constance want with a key here?

With an effort he turned away, afraid to believe the look that he saw in her eyes. It had never been there before. But she laid her hand over his and compelled him to look at her again.

"Alan dear," she said softly, "I've wanted so much to tell you all that is in my heart. It has been there a long while, Alan, since Oyster Bay. Yes, I've missed you terribly. I didn't know it until I had sent you away."

"Connie!"

"Yes, dear. It's true. I tried to show you there in the garden at Shephard's, but you *wouldn't* see, and then I lost courage. I was afraid that you had changed, I couldn't say more."

"Oh, I say——"

"Something in me rebelled, my modesty, my pride, I don't know, and I became dumb."

"I've been a fool."

"My punishment, Alan. I deserved it for ever letting you go, but I don't care for modesty, for pride, now. There's something greater than either and you've shown it to me; I want to humble myself to you, give myself to you, for I know that your soul is finer than mine."

"Don't talk rubbish, Connie."

"It's the truth, I can never forgive myself for thinking that you and Amneh——"

"Sh—Connie, dear."

He caught her in his strong arms and held her for a moment without words. If physical tokens were what he had wanted of her, she gave them to him now; her lips—no longer adolescent but trembling with the vows of womanhood. For a long moment they stood in the flood of tropic moonlight, lost in the mazes of their madness. They did not

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hear the discreet cough just behind them. It was repeated more loudly and they drew apart, looking at Dawson. In his hand he held a pink ribbon from which a key dangled.

"Ahem! The key you sent me for, Miss Constance."

"Ah, of course. Thank you, Dawson." And she took it.

"Is that all, Miss?"

"Yes, that will be all, Dawson," she said smiling.

Dawson inclined his head slightly.

"Thank you, Miss," he said soberly.

Connie took the key in her fingers and handed it to Alan.

"The key to your desk, Alan, and to your heart. Dawson gave it to me."

"My note!" he exclaimed. "You read it!"

"It was addressed to me, wasn't it?"

"Yes, but——"

"You *won't* discharge Dawson, will you, Alan?"

He waited a moment and then broke into a laugh, a joyous ringing laugh, deep from his brown throat, and then caught her in his arms again.

"Discharge Dawson? Oh, I say, Connie. A genius, that's what Dawson is."

"A good genius, yours and mine," she whispered.

"Good old Dawson," said Alan.

\* \* \* \* \*

Down below in Mr. Jessup's stateroom Dawson was carefully turning back Mr. Jessup's bed and taking things out of the closet and putting them back again.

"Now, what 'as become of them new pink pajamas?" he muttered.

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