

McGlusky O' the Legion

A. G. Hales
1927

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McGLUSKY O' THE LEGION

by
A. G. HALES



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This story of old McGlusky's doings in the Foreign Legion depicts the Scottish Anzac at his very best, in my opinion; and I think the millions in all parts of the world who have read the other McGlusky books will agree with me. McGlusky is now amongst the immortals. He has been translated into the German language, and is in circulation in that tongue all over Europe. Therefore I dedicate this latest chapter of his life to

CHARLES COCHRAN

the world's greatest entertainer and joy-giver, the man who never went back on a pal in fair weather or foul. A small tribute, but a sincere one, from

A. G. "SMILER" HALES.

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All the characters and incidents in this book are purely imaginary and have no reference to any living person.

McGLUSKY O' THE LEGION

CHAPTER I THE LEGION

“A’m no sayin’ ye will na bring the back o’ yr hand across ma mouth as ye threaten, ma mon, but if ye dae A’ll bend yr head back till ye can see God A’michty’s blue sky through the front o’ yr ain legs, so’s ye’ll no ken whether ye’re marchin’ forard or backward when the bugle blows. A’m a tenderfoot in the ways o’ the Foreign Legion o’ France, as ye say, ma frien’, but A’m no a tenderfoot in the way o’ armies o’ ither countries, an’ a soldier’s a soldier the wide world over: eef he’s a mon, he’s a mon, an’ tha’s a’ there is tae it; eef he’s a bully an’ a pimp—as A’m thinkin’ ye air yer ainsel’, though A’m no meanin’ tae be unfriendly, ye ken—then he’s a trouble maker an’ a trouble seeker, an’, ma buckie, he fin’s eet.”

The speaker was a grand looking man in the glory of manhood; long, lean, sinewy, a mass of bone and rippling muscle, with a face that looked a cross between that of the ancient Egyptian Rameses and a Red Indian chieftain: high of cheek-bone, with an eagle beak, with huge nostrils that spoke for unlimited supplies of fresh air to feed all the vital forces; his large mouth was an index of strength and weakness; he could be strong with men, this man, strong unto death, but with women—ah, my friends, that is a different story. God, how they can get under or over our guard; how easily they can fool us, just where and when we think we are strongest. Eh hue, what a world-old story it is, and one men never have learnt and never will learn: the story of the subtle power of the fragrance of a woman’s hair, the lure in a woman’s eyes, the magic in a woman’s whisper, the electric madness in the touch of a woman’s finger-tips, the beginning, often the ending, of a man’s career in the sensuous rustling of a woman’s gown amid the silken silences of a starlit night. Eh hue, what wise fools the strong men be who follow these things; to them, and to them only, the wine of life, the honey in the comb, the fragrance of the garden of the gods; to them also the hyssop and the gall, the wormwood and the bitter aloes, the mingled joy and pain, the mad, wild thrill of the desire accomplished at all costs, all hazards, and the cold, grey misery of the aftermath, punctuated by a woman’s smile of mockery, or

disdainful glance of indifference born of satiety.

The mouth of the legionary bespoke him one fashioned by fate to drink deeply of the cup that only women hold, and therein lay his weakness. The chin below the mouth bespoke him a lion amongst men; the brow above was the brow of a thinker, but there was something also in the general manufacture of the rugged face, either natural or acquired, that spoke for recklessness, both moral and physical, with more than a hint of truculence and aggressiveness; a strong, stubborn face, with the saving grace of sly humour in the wrinkles at the corners of the hard-set eyes, a queer mixture of human follies and frailties, strong points and weaknesses, but withal a man, but a man who might easily become a fanatic in any cause he espoused. The picturesque uniform of the French *Légion d'Afrique* suited him down to the ground; it seemed to add to his towering height and to his immense breadth of shoulder, and yet it emphasised the greyhound leanness of his flanks. He was like a lion that had had to travel far and hunt hard for its food, and there was something lionlike in the steady fixity of the eyes he turned upon the man he had been addressing. This person, Gaston Leveroux, was a man not new to the Legion, though not a veteran, a strongly-knit, agile fellow, whose sneering lips and sombrely insolent eyes bespoke him a man to whom a quarrel was as the salt of life, the sort of creature who would fall out with the bread he was biting because it was too hard or too soft, too easily come by or too hard to get; a living peg who would quarrel with a round hole because it was not square, or a square hole because it was not round. Just what cause he had had to pick the present encounter, no one but he himself knew. He had seen the new recruit come into the barrack-room, and possibly because of the quietly confident bearing of the new arrival, who had asked neither advice nor guidance of anyone, but had marched silently between the rows of beds until he came to the one over which on the whitewashed wall was branded the number which had been given to him when he had been outfitted with his uniform, and had then methodically proceeded to arrange the few things provided and permitted by the service on the small shelf above the head of the bed.

A group of legionaries had drawn near the new-comer, possibly with an idea of getting something for nothing out of the stranger, for in the Legion a raw recruit was considered fair game; it was his business to look out for himself, if he could not do so at the outset, he would soon learn, just as every wolf in a wolf-pack learns to guard its own bone. One of the little crowd had slyly possessed himself of the small cake of soap, a very precious possession in the Legion, which is rationed to each man, when he fancied the big new-comer was not on the *qui vive*. As the looter was turning to stroll nonchalantly away, a big sinewy hand had shot out, and fixed itself

upon the slack and baggy part of the looter's breeches, and by this unorthodox hold the purloiner was hoisted from the floor, his hands and feet hanging down.

"A'm na lettin' oot ma washin', A dae tha' mase'," the big fellow had purred softly.

A great shout of laughter had greeted the capture of the looter, who had promptly disgorged the stolen property, and retired, with a broad grin at his own discomfiture, but with no shame, for the despoiling of a raw recruit was looked upon as a perquisite of the more seasoned service men.

"A've cut ma weesdom teeth in sic matters," the new-comer had remarked with a sly twinkle in his eyes. "Ye ken A served ma apprenticeship in th' airmy o' the Anzacs, an' those muckies wad tak' the horse from unner ye wi'oot ye knowin' it, eef ye happened no tae be wide awake. A'm no slow in sic matters ma ainsel'," he added with a good-tempered chuckle. "A ken it's the law in a' armies tae watch as well as pray."

All would have ended good-naturedly enough if Gaston Leveroux had not butted in at this period.

"You'll learn a lot in the *Regiment d'Afrique* you never learnt in the Anzac army," he sneered.

"Maybe," was the mild rejoinder. "A'm here tae learn, but A've served in ither armies."

"Bah, you and your Anzacs, you think you won the Great War, don't you, eh?"

"No tha' iver I heard o'," smiled the new man. "We just did oor bit as weel as we were able, na mair, na less. We air no a fechtin' breed fir the sake o' fechtin'; we love the saft word tha' turneth away wrath, an' we dinna think every German is a bluidy murderer because we had a fecht wi' them."

The very mildness of the stranger seemed to enrage Gaston Leveroux. He was spoiling for trouble, and meant to have it.

"What name are we to know you by in the Legion?"

"Wha' name? Why, ma ain. I've na cause tae blush fir it. James, Archibald, Cameron McGlusky is ma full name, but," blandly, "ye ma' ca' me Jamie fir short; tha's wha' Lord Kitchener called ma every time A dined wi' him durin' the African War: it used tae be Jamie an' Herbert wi' him an' me," he added with twinkling eyes and a sly chuckle.

"You're a liar," snarled Gaston.

"Maybe A am," chortled McGlusky, "but ma freend, A'm no feelin' lonely on tha' account while ye air in th' viceenity."

It was then that Gaston voiced the threat that opens this history, and McGlusky

gave him his answer. The next moment Gaston struck, in fulfilment of his boast. The back of his hand rapped sharply against Mac's teeth, and a thin trickle of blood ran from the big recruit's lips down over his chin.

A silence that was portentous followed the blow, just such a silence as in nature precedes the bursting of a storm. In the French *Légion d'Afrique* a man who accepted a blow without at least attempting to retaliate was henceforth a pariah, the brand of the poltroon was upon him, and he was outcast of his kind, a leper. Cowardice was the one unforgiveable sin, and there were not many cowards in that wolf-pen whose ranks had been recruited from all the nations of the earth. It was the unwritten law that a man who had been struck had the right to challenge his insulter to a duel *à la mort* with either pistols or steel, or he could leap upon his adversary and fight him with fang and claw, using hands and feet, or butting with the skull. In such a *mêlée* there were no rules; if a combatant went down, his enemy could make of him a human football, or jump his vitals out, if he did not cry *peccavi* and admit himself vanquished. A man might be a great boxer, wrestler or *savate* artist, and yet be beaten by one who had no skill in those gentle pastimes. In some parts of America the same law applies; in the land of the Stars and Stripes it is known as a "rough house." Every Legionary present when Gaston struck his blow paused in whatever he was doing at the moment, to see what the big recruit would do; they knew Gaston for a good swordsman, a fine pistol shot, a master of *savate* and a terror in a rough-housing. The card players and domino experts, who were scattered all over the long, low-ceiled barrack-room, halted in their movements, as if an electric wire had paralysed them; hands that were in the act of shuffling a card pack or reaching out to draw in cards that had been dealt, became stationary in mid-air; fingers that had been extended claw-like to rake in the paltry stakes won at dominoes, remained still, like claws that had missed their grip; the laughter of winners, the oaths of losers remained unfinished on the lips. The group of men near the two central figures in the drama stood as if petrified, each in the pose in which the climax had found him, but every eye was fixed upon McGlusky, and the stillness was so still that it throbbed.

Slowly, like a man awaking from a dream, the big fellow raised one large paw and passed it over his mouth and chin, wiping away the crimson stain. Slowly he examined the red smear upon his palm, then a smile that would have been hard to fathom grew around his mouth; he looked from his hand to the face of Gaston, who had crouched a little, as if expecting a mad onslaught.

"A'm sorry. A did no expec' sic a welcome inta th' Legion." Again he examined the red smudge on his palm. "A cam' here hopin' tae be a *bon camarade* tae all A

foregathered wi'. Ye hae broken ma face an' bruised ma speerit, Gaston, but A'll forgie ye later."

A gasp of unutterable amazement swept the barrack-room. The speaker looked such a lion, and showed the spirit of a cow.

"Mother of God," croaked Pierre Lotti, the greatest thief and card-sharp, and the deadliest pistol shot in the Legion, "how did such a louse as that get into our uniform? Pah, the service has gone to the devil."

McGlusky heard the bitter words, but he only gazed at Pierre with an expression of mild reproach.

"Dinna judge ower harshly, *camarade*," he murmured. "A hae spent ma blood in ither pairts o' Africa, but this is the first o' mine shed here in Morocco."

"*Camarade*," hissed Pierre. "You are no *camarade* of mine. Put on a petticoat an' go and get a living on the streets; it is all you are fit for. Pouf—name of a motherless monkey, what *is* the service coming to?"

Then the card-sharp spat, for words would not ease his feelings. McGlusky smiled at him sadly.

"A'm one o' the world's misjudged," he almost whispered. "A cam' like an olive tree planted in a desert place, tae dae good an' bide in peace, but all men revile ma. Losh, it's gey hard tae be misun'erstood o' men all ma days." Then, turning to the fellow who had struck him, he said with a mournful cadence in his deep voice: "Mon Gaston, ye've the face o' a baboon that has seen its ain sins an' been frichted by the picture. A'm hopin' yr mither died in child-birth, before she saw wha' she had brocht into the world. A'm meanin' na disrespec' tae ye or yr minnie, though A'm theenkin' ye air as ugly on the inside as ye air on the out. Eef God made ye, He must hae done it in the dark. A'll put up a bit prayer fr ye the nicht."

Then with easy strength he brushed aside all who happened to be in his path, and made his way with long strides out of the barrack-room.

"By gar," gasped Pierre Lotti, "he come straight from the bug-house, that one. We all go mad before we in Afrique long, but that one he was mad before he start, yes, begosh."

The legionaries were still discussing McGlusky and his apparent want of sanity, when he suddenly returned to the barrack-room, carrying in his hand a large wooden horse-bucket with a rope handle. All present watched him, but Mac looked neither to the right nor left. When he reached his bed, he removed his blue tunic, and folding it neatly, he laid it on his bed, and tossed his peaked cap down beside it, and then rolled his shirt sleeves up to his shoulders, and took a hitch at his belt.

"Me," whispered Pierre Lotti, "if he come close enough to bite, I am going to

shoot him. He has the rabies, Messieurs; some mad dog has bitten him. I shoot—me.”

Having made his preparations, Mac placed the big wooden bucket in the middle of the room, and beckoned to Gaston Leveroux to advance.

“What for?” demanded Gaston, whose nerve had been somewhat shaken by McGlusky’s cool preparations and Pierre’s whispered remarks concerning rabies.

“Wha’ for?” replied Mac. “Did ye na strike ma across ma mooth wi’ yr han’?”

Gaston gave a surly grunt of acquiescence.

“Weel, A’m gaun tae stan’ ye on yr head in yon bucket, an’ squeeze ye doon till yr buttocks an’ yr brains meet. A dinna want,” he explained, turning to the crowd, “tae splash Gaston all ower the floor an’ the beddin’; it’s a mucky job cleanin’ up wha’s left o’ a mon after a fecht, so A brocht a wee bit bucket.”

“Begosh,” mumbled Pierre Lotti, edging towards the farther end of the room, “it ees Gaston who is mad to pick a fight with this man.”

“Ye dinna seem tae ma tae be boilin’ ower wi’ eagerness tae continue th’ argument ye staired, Gaston,” protested Mac plaintively. “A’m theenkin’ yr courage is a’ froth an’ bubble. Eef ye’ve na stomach fir a fecht, A’ll let ye off light. Get doon on yr han’s an’ knees, an’ lick ma shoon, an’ then bark like a dog an’ wag yr tail, an’ All kick ye ower an’ unner the tables tae th’ door; then we’ll say nae mair about it. A always like tae be frien’ly.”

It was then that Gaston plucked up courage. Sauntering jauntily towards McGlusky, he suddenly made a rush and a spring; one of his feet shot out like a whip-lash uncoiling itself, and the toe of the boot took Mac under the left ear, sending him sprawling backwards over the nearest truckle bed, and the room rocked with the laughter of the wolf-pack. Gaston swaggered about, a grin on his ugly mouth, a scowl upon his heavy black brows. He would have gone to the fallen man there and then, and jumped the life well out of him, only that he thought he had taken all the fight out of him; few men, as Gaston well knew, wanted to renew a combat after a terrific kick *à la savate* had landed under an ear, and he wanted the prestige of having settled this big fellow out of hand in five seconds; later he would make him eat out of his hand, and incidentally milk him of any money he might have in his possession.

“He say he put me head first in the wooden bucket, *ma foi*; me, Gaston Leveroux, the bully boy of the Legion.” He slapped his broad chest, and laughed. “His mother must have been a she-cat with no morals. To-morrow I beat him up good and hard, and then he shall clean my accoutrements. Long I have wanted a batman to polish my buttons an’ work the brush on my uniform, me.”

Mac was sitting up by this time, and was running his fingers through his hair, and looking round him with lacklustre eyes; his expression seemed to say: "Where am I, and what is it all about? Am I a casualty in a train accident, or have I got mixed up with a volcano?" He looked so unutterably sheepish in his bewilderment, that the rough blades of all nations who gazed upon him simply enjoyed him, and chuckled with grim good nature. They had despised him when they thought him a coward, but since he had tried to fight they changed their contempt to mere amusement. To Mac the room was all one big blur; the bed on which he sat seemed to go up and down, and the whitewashed walls would not keep still for a moment.

Gaston went to him and took him by the ear, and jerked him to his feet.

"Remove that bucket."

Mac looked in the direction indicated by Gaston's outstretched hand, and saw not one bucket but fifty, and all of them dancing.

"Which yin?" he demanded solemnly.

"The one you brought in, son of a pig with many fathers."

"A'm a bit wrang in ma head," murmured McGlusky, "but A'm no a pig. A'll trouble you tae leave go o' ma lug."

Gaston did let go, but the next moment he had swung his arm and dealt Mac such a buffet on the side of his jaw that the big fellow sprawled on all fours on the floor, where he remained, too weak and dazed to rise. It was then that Gaston's real nature disclosed itself. He had a man down, and utterly at his mercy. Standing behind McGlusky, he swung a leg and kicked, and kept on kicking with merciless ferocity until a reedy voice rose high and clear.

"Say, matey, that's abart enuff o' that, ain't hit? Lor' love me, you've blinkin' well kicked th' stuffin' out o' th' blighter's 'ind end up under 'is bally ears, you 'ave."

The protest came from a smallish man who had risen from a table where he had been card playing. Gaston cast a supercilious glance in the peace-maker's direction, and saw a soldier so thin that had he been canned he might have passed for a red herring sun-dried and salted down, a flat-chested, sloping-shouldered, wizened-faced specimen of humanity, whose uniform hung upon him as if it had been made for the wire frame of a man and left unfinished. His small head was upheld by a scrawny neck; he was bare-headed, and his sparse hair showed its sadly sandy complexion, as if apologizing for being where real hair should have grown. If ever a man's appearance heralded the fact that from his mother's dug to early manhood he had never known a full square meal of wholesome food, this individual's did: gutter-bred and gutter-nurtured was graven all over him for the world to see, but there was

spunk in his pale blue eyes, and a nasty twist to his thin, almost colourless lips, and an easy self-assurance in his manner that seemed to say that he had proved himself and held his own in rough company, ere ever he had seen Africa or worn a uniform. Gaston either held this person in contempt, or affected to do so.

“It is you that shoot out of your mouth, eh, Ring Rat? Keep your chin an’ your nose closer together when I amuse myself, me, Gaston Leveroux, or I tweest the neck of you like that, me.”

He made a motion as if wringing the neck of a fowl as he spoke, and a peculiar look crept into the little pale blue eyes of the Ring Rat, an expression of mingled cunning, cruelty and unutterable devilment.

“Love me,” he exclaimed in his reedy voice, that somehow seemed to have been starved with his body, “no one ain’t properly twisted my neck since Dick Burge did it wiff a punch that lef’ me as looney as that big stiff on the floor there; put me art fir nine hours, Dick did, but Gaston, you ain’t no Dick Burge, not by a ’ell of a ’eap. Now you ’op it, an’ I’ll get some o’ the boys to ’elp me put that big stiff on ’is little bed; ’e’s ’ad orl the kickin’ that’s good fir ’im.”

Without a word, Gaston hurled a kick at the Ring Rat’s stomach, a kick that, had it landed, would have been a meal and a half, and some over for breakfast, but the Ring Rat had evidently considered that his interference might bring forth some response of that nature. He was no tyro in the game of *savate* himself, and above all he knew Gaston and his pretty little ways, for the Ring Rat had already served two of his five years in the Legion, and a man who had got his livelihood from infancy in the slums of London could be trusted to learn a lot in two years, for a sharper, gamer, hardier lot of humans do not exist on this planet than the men of the slums of the old grey city by the Thames. The Ring Rat did not seem to hurry himself, but he had learnt the only trade he knew outside of soldiering in the Blackfriars boxing-halls, where he had won many a hard, stern fight, though, as he himself put it, he did his training pushing a coster’s barrow, and his diet was sixpennyworth of fish and ’taters per diem, and he slept in a cellar with nine other barrow-pushers, and his sumptuous bedding consisted of the clothing he wore and a few gunny sacks picked up in Covent Garden market, when the original owners were otherwise engaged. He had picked up a gold watch there one morning in the same unostentatious manner, and might have lived to be a successful financier had not a gentleman in a blue uniform observed his sudden accession to wealth in the shape of a gold watch, and the neat but unlawful way in which he had started on the way to high finance, a start, by the way, not at all uncommon, though many have the luck not to be caught. When the gentleman in blue raiment laid a not too gentle hand on the Ring Rat’s coat collar,

that ambitious personage promptly hooked the blue uniform in the tenderest part of his midriff, and then uppercut him under the chin, and left Covent Garden and his hired barrow without ceremony, but with much speed. For three months he was hunted as if he were a smallpox microbe, and thrice nothing saved him from capture but his utter lack of ceremony. Once it was a plain-clothes gentleman from Scotland Yard who tried to curtail his freedom. The Rat promptly snatched hold of the Scotland Yard man's coat lapels, and jerked the coat well down over the detective's arms, butted him on the chin with his head, ran down an alley, sauntered into a boarding-house, saying he was the representative of the gas company come to examine the meter, thus finding sanctuary till the hue and cry had passed on; then he had climbed through a skylight on to the roof, and had slept there until nightfall, when he made a most unostentatious journey to a railway station, climbed on to the roof of a railway carriage, and lay flat. Where the train was going he did not know or care, as long as it was going away from London, in which city he gravely doubted if he was as popular as a British-born subject ought to be, but seldom is. He dropped off that train *sans cérémonie* at a seaport, and for the first time in his life saw what was romantically, and most untruthfully, called "blue" water; it might have been blue once, if so, it had turned decidedly bilious, for it was about the colour of a fat bookmaker reading his income-tax, and planning how *not* to pay it. The Rat got a ride to France on a nice steamboat, in much the same manner as he had got his ride out of London, and somehow by the grace of God and the use of his sharp wits, he found his way to Paris, and in that city of sham gaiety, where hotel bills are of the longest and women's skirts of the shortest (perhaps the Paris hotel bills are high because skirts are also—there is generally a cause for an effect) the Rat joined the *Légion d'Afrique*, not because he could not annex a gold watch or two, but because when he had them he did not know enough French to pawn them; for that matter, he could not talk enough of the tongue of *La Belle France* to give the watches away, though he did give one to a gendarme who was following him suspiciously, and in return for his generosity the gendarme politely directed him to the recruiting office of the Legion, in fact, the gendarme went with him as far as the dingy little abode of the recruiting officer, and stood patiently at the door until he was sure the Rat could not come out again as a civilian; if he had done so, that gendarme, honest man, would not have dared to have disposed of the gold watch the mad Inglees nobleman (?) had presented to him. The Legion was badly in need of men, so no audible doubts were cast upon the Rat's statements to the recruiting officer when, in the vilest of slum English, he had described himself as the member of a "Hinglish ducal fambly, hout for a bit ov hadventure." The officer who signed him on (he made his impudent

ducal mark with a cross and a flourish) had grinned behind his hand, but he wanted tough fighting material for Africa, and he had had some of London's slum children before, and knew their worth.

"Take this rat away, and see he is well scrubbed and his hair cut *and* disinfected, before he gets into uniform," he had said to the Corporal, and that is how the legionary became possessed of his name of Rat.

Later, when it was discovered that he could box, the Legion itself added Ring to Rat, and the derelict was quite content.

When Gaston kicked, and the Ring Rat side-stepped like a dancing-master, the blood-lusting legionaries roared their applause, for to a man they were killers, and the sound of that roar was music in the Rat's ears; he had heard that kind of music often when he had dropped a man in the boxing arena, and he loved it. Smiling a snarling sort of smile, he pirouetted round Gaston, his skinny right arm cuddled against his flat chest, his left working in and out. Gaston kicked again, this time for the side of the head. The Rat ducked under it, and laughed, and then cast a few kind remarks concerning Gaston's mother and sisters in the powerfully built soldier's teeth; if any of the Rat's listeners had believed what he said, none of them would have gone to a nunnery to look for Gaston's female relatives. Gaston gave up kicking, and rushed in to wrestle; a left arm like a section of a gas-pipe, so thin and mean was it, shot out, and Gaston's rush was stopped in mid career, and his big, brutal head was jolted back.

"'Lor' love a duck, Gaston; you shouldn't do that; it ain't 'ealthy to run into a left 'and. Don't you know no better'n that? Fink you're a German tank running into barbed wire, eh?"

The Ring Rat was enjoying himself; all his movements had the uncanny grace of the well-tutored athlete, and his spirit scorned the other fellow's advantages of bulk and strength. His dancing, gliding feet took him in to administer punishment, and carried him out in good time to escape the heavy battering of the stronger man.

"You're the sort o' pie I like, Gaston," he jeered, as he surveyed Gaston's bleeding face after the latter had made half a dozen ineffectual rushes. "If," he continued, "you was an 'ash 'ouse, I'd send up my plate for two 'elpin's. Gawd, Gaston, you're a 'op picnic, an' a dawg fight, an' a girl cuddle in th' Old Kent Road all in one, you are, matey."

As he finished speaking, he stepped close in between Gaston's big, hairy arms, and made a few swift, magic passes with his two hands and arms; then he shot a swift, deadly, left-handed stab with the hand turned over, so that the knuckles were in advance, and those bony knuckles fell right on the big apple in Gaston's bull

throat. Only a boxer knows the murderous effect of such a blow. Down dropped Gaston's big square chin; his mouth was agape, his lower jaw hanging on its hinges, and as every anatomist knows, the back hinges of a man's jaws connect with the spinal column, and a jar on the jaw spells partial paralysis of brain and body. Dick Burge had served up just such treatment to the Rat once, and had followed it with a jolt to the chin, and when the Rat had awakened nine hours later Charley Mitchell, the master anatomist of the Magic Circle, had explained the situation to the bewildered Rat, adding:

"The next time you get it on the apple of the throat, drop before the right comes across," to which sage advice the Rat had remarked ruefully:

"Charley, there ain't goin' to be no next time wiff Dick; once is enough."

The Ring Rat saw Gaston's jaw sag after he had snapped a left jab on to the apple of the sturdy man's throat; for one fleeting second he balanced himself on his toes, then he chipped with his right hand, and just nipped the point of the sagging chin, and Gaston went limp all over; his eyes rolled in their sockets, until nothing was showing but the whites, then he let go and crumpled up like a pricked bladder.

"Struth," muttered the Ring Rat, as he strolled across the room to a group of his cronies, "Hi've 'ad a 'arder fight than that in London fir a gory purse by a thick 'un an' a 'alf, an' done my trainin' lickin' sardine tins fir the want o' somethin' solid tr put inside me. I fought Snowball who beat Carpentier, an' 'ad one feed between Sunday an' Wednesday night, an' that feed was a hegg an' a rasher ov 'am. The hegg was in the old age department before it came to London from Belgium, an' the 'en that laid it was entered in the anæmic stakes, an' was too sick to start; as fir the 'am, it had been on the discard 'eap an' been buried an' dug up because it was too strong to stay underground; it was the liveliest bit ov 'am I ever chased; it wouldn't stay on my plate, but tried to climb up my sleeve an' crawl down my back."

The fight between Gaston and the Ring Rat was all over before McGlusky the recruit had come to his senses sufficiently to know whether he was in Africa or Iceland. It was the Ring Rat who linked an arm in his, and led him stumblingly to his bed, on which he fell like a log, and drifted into a hideous semblance of slumber.

"Ee got it good, that big feller," the Rat confided to his especial coterie of cronies. "If Gaston's boot had landed 'arf a inch lower down, 'e would 'ave woke up where the 'arps sound th' reveille fir breakfast."

"Bah, that big man, I think he is a coward," sneered a hard-bitten Frenchman, who, as all the Legion knew, had joined up to escape a life sentence on Devil's Island, for being too generous with his knife.

"Maybe," replied the Rat. "You never can tell, but if 'e's a coward, I'm a bad

guesser. I've seen 'is sort before."

"Gaston beat him as easy as beatin' a mule, an' you beat Gaston like an Arab woman beatin' a carpet on the sand," sneered the Frenchman.

"Y-e-s, but them things don't always figger out as they look. The big stiff, who calls 'imself McGlusky, wasn't wise to *savate*, an' Gaston gave it to 'im good: 'e'll know better next time. I'll just go an' 'ave a look at 'im; 'e may need a little 'elp."

The Rat did go, and he did give quite a lot of help, for when he came away from McGlusky's bedside he had pretty nearly everything that was portable belonging to the recruit in his possession: pipe, tobacco, soap, razor, horn-handled pocket-knife, wrist watch and all the loose change the big recruit had on his person.

"Might as well take it," he chuckled. "If Hi don't, some o' these 'eathen foreigners will, an' I'd just 'ate to see a furriner get ahead of a Britisher. 'E's got to learn the ropes, anyway."

When the bugle sounded the reveille half an hour before dawn, McGlusky awoke with the rest, and sat up with a start, and looked around him with bewilderment. He had no remembrance of having gone to bed, nor could he for a moment or two remember where he was. He was still puzzling things out, when the thin voice of the Ring Rat cut in upon his consciousness.

"Get a move on, matey, or you'll get no grub. This ain't the 'Otel Cecil, an' you ain't in the Strand, an' there ain't no second 'elpin's at table 'ere—damn little to make a song abart in the way o' grub if you get orl your share. I'd give one ov me farver's heyes, I would, fir an 'addock or a 'errin'," added the whimsical voice plaintively.

Memory came back to McGlusky, and shame swept over him like a tidal wave. He could not remember the particulars, but he knew he had been beaten to a frazzle in the encounter with Gaston, and defeat never sat nicely upon him.

"A talked too dom much," he growled to his own soul. "It was the twa nips o' absinthe A had wi' th' Corporal afore A cam' inta barracks tha' did it; A didna ken th' dom stuff had sae much power in 't; A thocht A cud drink a bucket fu' o' it an' no feel it, an', Jamie McGlusky, it's made ye eat the dust o' humeeliation; it's the first an' the last absinthe fir ye, ye loon."

As he had slept in the greater part of his uniform, his toilet did not take him long. He searched for his soap, and found it had taken unto itself wings; his pocket comb had likewise removed itself. He had no illusions as to the mode of disappearance of his property.

"Losh," he muttered, "it's a gran' baptism ye've gied yersel' inta th' Legion, Jamie. Weel, weel, ye'll just hae tae suck wha' ye canna bite, an' buy at th' canteen

wha' th' blasties hae robbed ye o'. Lord send ye a patient speerit. The looters air chucklin' in their innards th' noo, but this is ainly the first lap in th' race." He began to search in his clothing for the money to pay at the canteen. "Gone," he muttered at last, "every bawbee gone, no' even a nickel left, an' A had seven golden Napoleons an' a han'ful' o' small change. God A'michty, th' fall o' Babylon was naething tae this. They've left me naething but the birthmark ma mither gied ma, an' they'd hae taken tha' eef they cud hae pawned it. Seven golden Napoleons an' a han'fu' o' loose change—a' that wealth gone like a dream tha' is told, an' the sun is risin' in the heavens as eef naething had happened oot o' the ordinar'. May th' Lord turn ma blood tae spittle eef A dinna go through this gang o' thieves till A leave them naething but their teeth."

He strode to the long narrow table, where the meagre breakfast was already being served out. Every soldier was grabbing his share, and anything else he could lay hands upon; it was every dog for his own bone, and like famished dogs, the lean, sun-dried men snatched snarlingly at the food, greedy eyes and itching fingers ready for any stray morsel, for *La Belle République* gives only just enough to its *Légion d'Afrique* to keep the desert pack fit. There was no seat for McGlusky; there would have been plenty of room if the men had sat close, but he had made an unimpressive beginning overnight, and was of no account, and a bad beginning in any walk of life, from licking stamps in an office to wooing a widow with half a million and a racing stud, takes a lot of sweat, fret and worry to make up later; it's the first step that so often marks the line that leads to failure or success. A big fellow was sitting right at the end of the table, and taking up two men's room with his elbows sprawling and his broad buttocks planted sideways; he was said to have thrown a bomb at Mussolini in Florence, and only escaped lynching by the sheer ferocity of his attacks on the crowd; how he had escaped and joined the Legion marked him as a good man to let alone. Mac was in the mood to have pared the hoofs of Satan himself; the thought of his vanished wealth was gnawing at his vitals.

"Shift yr hunkers, an' move up a wee bittie."

As he spoke, Mac gave the fellow's shoulders a by no means gentle jolt with his bony elbow. Bomb, as the brute was known in the Legion, looked half round, and deliberately spat on McGlusky's uniform. With a growl that was mastiff-like, Mac seized him, yanked him to his feet, swung him off his legs, and, picking the big body up as if it were a battering-ram, he charged at the wall of the room, and it was good for Bomb that the wall was built of clay, and not brick or stone. The fellow's head was big, and mostly bone, but even his thick skull could not stand being driven at express speed into a sun-dried sod wall. He went limp after the first butt, and Mac

dropped him, remarking:

“Man, eet’s a good job fir ye A dinna beat ye wi’ ill will; A’m no in th’ mood fir pranks th’ morn.”

Going back to the table, he seized what was nearest to him in the shape of food, and ate like a wolf that has made a kill, and no man there molested him.

After the meal, the Ring Rat, who had impudence enough to have started an argument with Satan about sin, loafed in his peculiar way to where McGlusky stood, searching vainly in his empty pockets for the wherewithal to have a smoke, and said:

“Got a pipe o’ bacca you can spare, matey?”

A superfluous question, seeing that Mac’s pipe, a seasoned briar, and all his tobacco were reclining in a hiding-place known only to the Rat.

“A have na.”

“Show you the way to the canteen.”

“Wha’ for?”

“Bless yr little ’eart, what’s canteens for, eh? You can buy any bloomin’ thing you want, Hi’m tellin’ you strite you can. Hit’s a real ’ome, this is. Hi never told a lie in me pink life.”

“A’ve got na siller.”

The Rat raised his thin eyebrows incredulously.

“Garn,” he ejaculated; then, with a sly wink: “You know yr way abart town, you do; you’re nobody’s mug, you ain’t, an’ you’re right to keep dark about ’avin’ money among these blighters; w’y, they’d rob a hegg ov its shell, they would, but you can trust me wiff yr shirt. Hi ain’t no lousy furriner; Hi’m Hinglish, same as you are.”

“A’m Scotch.”

“No-o.” The Rat looked the most surprised man that ever wore a uniform. “Garn, you’re kiddin’. If you was Scotch you’d ’ave a haccnt: you speak as good Hinglish as Hi do, ’struth you do.”

McGlusky did not feel flattered, and showed it.

“Lorst yr brass an’ yr ’andy things, an’ yr pipe an’ bacca? It’s them thievin’ furriners. Hi wouldn’t blame ’em fir runnin’ the rule over a civie, but hit ain’t *hesprit de corpse* ter go through a comrade, an’ ’im not knowin’ the ropes. Strike me pink, it’s enuff ter give a bloke what the Frenchies call *hongwee*.”

“*Hongwee*—wha’s that?” sniffed the big man.

“Well,” explained the Ring Rat, “hit’s what we call in Hingland that bloomin’ tired feelin’: when you don’t care wevver you live on th’ dole or do a ’onest night’s work wiff a skelington key an’ a jemmy in some toff’s flat in th’ West Hend. The

French ain't got no sense; hit takes a bloke a long time to make head or tail out o' their monkey chatter; they want heducatin', they do."

"Iphm," murmured Mac, looking the splinter of a man over carefully. Then, feeling the tobacco craving strong upon him, he remarked gruffly: "Ye hae'na a spare pipe an' a bit o' th' weed w' ye tha' ye cud len' ma until A draw some pay, eh?"

"Hi don't go much on the lendin' stakes; wot you lend don't often come back, matey. Hi learnt that much in London. If you lend a bloke yr toothpick, 'e hends hup by pinchin' yr dinner. But," with a sudden accession of patriotism, "Hi won't see a countryman do a perish. 'Ere's a pipe an' a couple o' fills o' what they call bacca in the Legion. Hit's 'arf camel dung an' 'arf 'orse 'air, an' 'arf chopped straw wiff the juice of cigar ends an' fags picked up in the gutter boiled in wiff it to give it a taste an' a haroma of bacca, but it's the bloomin' best a soldier o' the Legion can hafford on a carmine 'appeny a day; them Tommies in London ought to squeal abart *their* pay, an' they can go hout in good old 'Yde Park any old day, an' pick up cigar hends a hinch long."

The Rat produced the tobacco, and Mac snatched it greedily; he could do without food or drink at a pinch, but tobacco was as the breath of life to him. He sniffed his prize, and his expression was not one of beatitude.

"A've smelt worse smells," he grumbled, "in a sewer or a morgue, an' yince when A sat between twa poleeteecians in a railway carriage, but—" His big nose wrinkled up like the muzzle of a mastiff guarding a bone.

"Hit is niffy," acquiesced the Ring Rat, adding with his tired smile: "Hif you was to wash the feet ov a fox in that stuff, you cud go 'untin' wiffout 'ounds; you wouldn't need 'em, you could foller the scent yerself."

"Wheer's the pipe ye said ye'd lend ma?"

From somewhere in the hidden recesses of his uniform the Rat produced an ancient clay, with a stem an inch long; it was coal black, and so strong a man had to kneel on it when filling it and then hold it with both hands.

"This yr ain?" queried McGlusky.

"Hi took it from the pocket ov Paddy McShane, after 'e had 'anged his pore self. Paddy was a legionary, but 'e got *hongwee* so bad—fed hup, you know. 'E just 'ung his little self, an' I 'ad to cut 'im darn an' 'elp bury 'im, an' when Hi was goin' through 'is corpse to see if 'e 'ad left any relics Hi could send 'ome to his sainted mother in Cork, orl Hi could find on th' Irish blighter was that pipe."

"It was thoctfu' o' ye, ma laddie, tae theenk o' a comrade's mither. Did Paddy McShane tell ye she was in Cork?"

"Not 'arf 'e didn't," snorted the Ring Rat. "The larst time Hi 'eard 'im speak ov

'is muvver, 'e said she was in 'ell, or she orta be fr bringin' him into a world like this. 'E said that once 'e arsked 'er who 'is farver was, which is a question no bloke oughter arsk a muvver wot 'as 'ad to go out charin' fr a livin', an' she named the driver ov a car, which the Irish calls a jauntin' car, an' she named likewise a sailor, an' a soldier, an' a boardin'-'ouse runner, an' told 'im 'e cud take 'is choice, an' heven then 'e wasn't satisfied. Hi never bumped into nothink so 'ard to please as the Irish: they're never satisfied with nothink—wot?"

McGlusky, puffing at his little black pipe with its inch-long stem, listened sympathetically to Paddy McShane's fragmentary history, and wrinkled his hooked nose at it much as he had done at the Legion tobacco.

The Ring Rat was bent upon making a good impression upon this recruit who had greatly intrigued him by the manner in which he had used the head of the Bomb as a catapult at breakfast, if the early morning meal of the Legion could be dignified by such a title. Fixing his sharp ferret eyes upon McGlusky's face as he puffed at his pipe, the Rat remarked in his most wheedling fashion:

"Well, big 'un, wot do you fink ov the bacca?"

Mac took half a dozen more long puffs, and then said judicially:

"It's nae sae bad as it micht be, ma laddie; it tastes like dead goat that hae died at sea an' been washed ashore tae rot in the sun, an' it stinks in ma nostrils like a broken promise tha' hae fallen doon a drain, but eet micht hae been worse, eet micht hae been worse. A'll niver smell it or taste it wi'oot theenkin' o' yersel', Ring Rat."

As McGlusky moved away, the Cockney stood scratching his head with a puzzled expression upon his wizened features. At last he murmured:

"Luv me, Hi wonder if th' big blighter meant that as a compliment? Hif 'e did, I wonder where 'e'd go for 'is blinkin' hinsults?"

CHAPTER II

THE LAMB O' THE FOREIGN LEGION

McGlusky's first day in the hands of the drill sergeant taught him many things. Like most Anzacs, he imagined he knew what hard work was. As a pioneer prospector and gold-seeker in the waterless wastes of his own country, this Scots Australian had sampled life in its most rugged form, and had more than kept his end up. Campaigning in Africa, Egypt and China had also initiated him into phases of life that had not many feather-beds in it, but he found the *Légion d'Afrique* different from anything and everything he had experienced before. He had served under non-coms. who, whilst being strict and stern disciplinarians, were yet real men, splendid fellows, who worked a recruit until guts turned to gristle and gristle to bone, but did it all for the recruit's own ultimate good and for the glory of the regiment. Others he had obeyed who were only polecats, who shirked themselves and allowed men to shirk, who could put a silver plaster over their eyes, and some who were arrant toadies to the commissioned officers and undiluted pigs to the men, fellows who watered the rum rations down to half strength, and sold the residue for their own profit, and others who gave the credit of a brave deed done to some rotter, and passed over in silence the real hero, because the rotter had friends in high places: he had known a man get a V.C. who ought to have been strapped to a gun-wheel and flogged, whilst the gallant fellow who had dared death for duty's sake was falsely reported for shirking. In the ways of armies he was no tenderfoot, but a vista of new experiences opened up for him when he put on the blue coat, red breeches and peaked cap. He was a bit out of condition when he went out that first day, and had good cause to regret the fact. He fell in smartly enough, his big bony figure lance straight, his eyes and ears on the alert for orders. All the new recruits were treated as an awkward squad, though few of them had not passed through a drill sergeant's hands in the lands they came from. As they fell into ranks, the sergeant in charge of them walked from man to man, sniffing each soldier as if he were so much cat's meat of doubtful sweetness. When he had finished his first inspection, Sergeant Mechlin, known to the Legion by the sobriquet of the Goat, because he had a face with a tuft of hair on his chin that made him look the living replica of a he-animal of the goat species, and an infernally bad tempered one at that, passed his opinion of the new draft, and it was not complimentary.

"Offal," he sniffed. "Not the making of a real soldier in the whole batch. A

paper-legged, sour-bellied lot of gutter-sweepings. *Madre de Dios*, how can the Colonel expect even me to make anything of such pigs?" Then he roared in a voice that sounded as if it had been trained in a tube and squeezed through the belly of a bellicose bull: "Silence in the ranks, you sons of unmentionable mothers!"

Not a man had spoken or moved, but the Goat had a habit of inventing faults, as McGlusky was soon to discover. Once more the Goat inspected them, and then, throwing up his hands in a gesture of hopeless eloquence, he spat at them:

"*Ma foi*, what brought such scum as you here? Why could you not remain where you belonged, and live on the shame of your sisters?"

McGlusky's choleric temper rose red hot at this vile insult, and he growled to the man on his left, a grandly made German:

"By th' weddin' breeks o' ma sainted mither, eef A had yon sergeant in my twa han's a mile frae barracks, A wad ram him head first inta his ain horse, an' pull him oot o' its mooth by his moustaches."

The German, who was a good fellow and a fine soldier, as so many Germans are, looked at McGlusky's giant frame out of the corners of his eyes, and chuckled as he whispered in his broken English:

"Dot would be one dam fine journey for dot sergeant, but me I would be sorry for de horse."

Fortunately for the pair of them, the Goat had turned his back on the lines after he had tossed his uncalled-for insults at the men.

For hours after that he worked them, until even McGlusky's steel-knit limbs were all a-tremble with over-exertion. He marched them at the double, halted them with a bark that brought them to a standstill as stiff as ramrods, and then sent them off at a run with a young and active corporal as pacemaker. Right round the barrack square the corporal took them at a heart-breaking pace, and every man was in full kit. When they reached him, the Goat roared:

"Halt—right about face—fix bayonets—c-h-a-rge!"

The squad, gasping for breath after their rapid run in the burning glare of an African sun, obeyed the Goat's snarling orders to the best of their ability. They charged right across the square with bayonets held low and level, and there was not one who did not think he had done well, until the Goat came amongst them; then they learned that in his seasoned opinion they were only fit to fetch and carry for second-class daughters of the scarlet woman.

"S-o-l-d-i-ers," he jeered. "If I were Colonel instead of sergeant, I would drive you to the barrack gates an' kick you through them. S-o-l-d-iers—you are not fit to dig latrines for real soldiers."

"Yon mon's a leear; we didna dae sae bad," whispered McGlusky to the German.

"Ach, he is ter teufel, but do you nod speak; he is one that hears mit his eyes."

The German was right: the Goat had not heard, but he had seen the lips of the two men move, and in the Légion d'Afrique that was a punishable offence. With a roar the Goat was upon them.

"These jackals have too much wind; run it out of them."

He addressed his words to a fresh corporal, and his finger indicated the German and McGlusky.

Round and round that great barrack square the devil of a corporal, who carried nothing but his side arms, raced the two giants, loaded with pack mules, whilst out in the middle of the square the sergeant drilled and bullied the rest of the squad until they were choking with the dust and heat, and blinded by their own sweat. The fourth time round the square, the corporal fell out, pumped, and a lance-corporal took his place, until the two toiling men in full kit were plodding with staring eyes, white drawn lips and bursting lungs. McGlusky, man of many trails as he was, felt all the power going out of his steel and whiplash legs: his feet seemed to him to weigh a ton each. He glanced at the splendid young German giant running along beside him, saw froth at the corners of the hard-clenched mouth, saw also cast-iron courage printed on the man's face; then human nature having reached its limit, the young giant stumbled and fell flat on his face, and he lay where he fell. Mac half halted to render aid.

"Get on, you swine. Forward. March."

The lance-corporal gave that order, taking his cue from the Goat, for he knew the ordeal was intended to break the spirits of the two who were under punishment. The indomitable spirit of Mac rose within him; he would go on until his lungs burst, before he would crave quarter. Up went his big chin, and then for a few strides he fairly pranced as he ran, but his face was grey, his mouth wide agape; he looked like a man running from a lost battle to bear tidings of woe and disaster. Just as he got opposite the gates, two officers rode through and saw him. A quick glance told the senior officer that the running man had reached his limit, and a sharp command rang out from his lips:

"Halte-là!"

Like a steer that has been shot, McGlusky stopped in his tracks, reeling and gasping; then the stubborn will of the man asserted itself over the weakness of the flesh and the dizziness of the brain; with head held high and shoulders squared he faced round and stood to attention. There were only two horsemen in front of him,

but he could see fifty, like a man with a brain gorged with strong drink.

Major Ducroix sat in saddle and looked him over with eyes that were fierce and implacable. The Falcon, the men of the Legion had dubbed him, because of those eyes of his which missed nothing and misread but little. The Falcon half opened his mouth to put a question, but in that moment McGlusky, without a sound or a warning hint, crashed to the hard earth. A little half-smile crept round the slit in the Falcon's face which he called his mouth. Looking from McGlusky to the other side of the big parade ground where the German soldier still lay like a log, he slightly raised his eyebrows, and then, turning his face to his mounted companion, he said almost tonelessly:

"There are two down. Our good friend the Goat grows more worthy of his *nom de guerre* every day."

The first lieutenant thus addressed, shrugged his slender shoulders ever so slightly, and watched his superior's face; he, at all events, was not deceived by the toneless voice and impassive manner. The Falcon sat in saddle, tapping one of his riding-boots lightly with his riding-whip, watching McGlusky's prone figure the while.

On the arrival of the mounted officers the Goat had dispatched three or four men to pick up the German recruit; now he was crossing the parade-ground with four more at his heels to where the officers and McGlusky were, and it was worth noticing that the Goat was coming at the double. Reaching Mac's side: the Goat snarled:

"Pick up that malingerer and march him to the cells."

The men obeyed, but Mac could not march; he hung like a leaden thing in the arms that were crooked in his.

The Goat saluted the Major, and smiled ingratiatingly up into the impassive face that might have been modelled out of tanned leather for all the sign of anger or annoyance it displayed; then, jerking a thumb in the direction of McGlusky's retreating figure, the Goat said sneeringly:

"*Stratagème, mon officier.*"

Again the Falcon merely raised his eyebrows; he was evidently a person who did not pride himself upon his eloquence.

"A pair of *soudrilles, monsieur*," continued the Goat. "Cunning rascals, both; they would have contaminated the whole squad, but I took them in time, yes. They are only shamming now, both of them. Just a little run, once round the square, that was all I gave them, to teach them not to malingere."

He smiled as he lied, the good sergeant, and his officer read him like a printed book; it takes a really good liar to deceive an experienced officer.

"Is that so, *sergent*? Just one little run in full marching kit round the parade-ground? You are getting too soft-hearted with the men; do not let me have to complain of such slackness on your part again, *sergent*."

An expression of unbridled relief swept over the *sous-officier's* ugly face; for once he had fooled even the Falcon, and with two half-dead men as evidence against him; he was proud of himself, the good sergeant.

The easily deceived Major shook his bridle rein, and cantered across the parade-ground, followed by the first lieutenant. Drawing rein in front of a corporal who had the squad marking time, the Major said in his cold, dispassionate manner:

"Corporal, how many times did the two recruits run round the parade-ground? No lies!"

The last two words shot from his lips with something of the sound of boiling steam escaping from a vent.

The corporal was between the devil and a mad dog, and he knew it; he simply dared not lie, for he did not know how much the Major knew. His motto in life was *sauve qui peut*, and he acted upon it.

"Nine times, *monsieur*."

"Ah!"

That was all the Falcon said, and rode away. When the pair had dismounted, however, he tossed a command at the lieutenant.

"Tell the sergeant to report to me immediately—*tout de suite*."

A few moments passed, and then the Goat put in an appearance; he had heard nothing of the Major's inquiry concerning his truthfulness; all he had heard was the lieutenant's curt order:

"Report yourself immediately to the Major."

He was not easy in his mind, that good sergeant, but according to custom, he was determined to carry things off with a swagger, which is a very good substitute when you have nothing else to fall back upon.

The Falcon was writing a report when the Goat arrived, and did not even look up when the non-com. presented himself, which was chilling, to say the least of it, but the Goat had a fair share of nerve of his own, as he had proved when he had stood his trial in Paris seven years before for the cold-blooded murder of his mistress. On that occasion he had saved himself from being shaved by the guillotine by his cool nerve and his audacity; no one had doubted his guilt, but the ultimate proof was lacking. So he stood, pulling at the tuft of coarse hair on his chin, waiting for his officer to notice his existence. The Falcon finished his writing, carefully blotted the written sheets, then looked at the Goat.

“Four years you have served under me.” That was all he said, and then leaned back in his chair, eyeing the Goat as if he had been part of the meagre furniture of the room. “Is my memory a good one, sergeant?”

“Four years and seven months, *monsieur*, and I have tried to please *monsieur*.”

“Yet you lied to me to-day.”

“But no, *monsieur*; I call the Blessed Virgin to witness, never have I dared to lie to you.”

“I must be getting old, sergeant, and past my usefulness; I thought I knew a lie when it was thrown in my teeth.”

“I swear by my patron Saint, *monsieur*——”

The Falcon held up one lean, sun-baked hand palm towards the non-com.

“You are a liar, *sergent*, and the oath of a liar is of no more use than his simple word.”

The sweat began to break out upon the Goat’s upper lip in big beads; he had told so many lies, and he did not know which one was coming home to him.

“If it is over the matter of the fodder for *monsieur*’s horse——” he began.

“No, it is not that, though I guessed you had cheated me.

“The contractor was a thief, *monsieur*. He——”

“They all are, *sergent*; so, for that matter, are most men. An honest man is the rarest work of God.”

“If *monsieur* is referring to the little matter of the wine and cigars, I swear by the soul of my mother who is in heaven——”

“Is your mother in heaven, *sergent*? If she is then the gates of mercy must be very wide. I was in Paris at the time of your trial, when you escaped the guillotine by a miracle, and it came out then that your sainted mother kept a house that was not frequented by—er—angels.” Suddenly the purring note left the Falcon’s voice, and in its place came the snap his soldiers knew, when ranks were breaking and the enemy were closing in. “You lied to me about the two men you did your best to kill to-day. If I report you to the Colonel, you will be broken to the ranks again, and be sent to the *régiment du diable*, and there are men in that regiment of the damned who do not love you, my sergeant; you would not sleep very soundly amongst them; broken *sous-officiers* who are sent to the *régiment du diable* have a trick of waking up with their throats cut, is it not so, eh?”

Under the most favourable circumstances, the Goat would not have been described as a handsome man, but now, with his face the colour of badly made tallow that has gone bad through long storage, he was the reverse of good looking. Saliva ran from the corners of his mouth and dribbled on to his peaked beard; his

long, yellow teeth showed between his lips; his arms hung limply by his sides. Again the Major spoke.

“In many ways you are a most useful man to the regiment. You have intelligence, when you care to use it, and you know your duties. It takes a long time to make a competent *sous-officier*, fit for the *Légion d’Afrique*. I am going to commit a breach of the regulations. You can go straight from here and report to the Colonel, if you think fit; it may cost me a step, but it will send you, sergeant, to the *régiment du diable*.”

Rising from his chair without haste, the Major picked up his riding-whip, and as the Goat knew, there was a thin, flexible length of steel running down inside the webbing of that whip. With a cutting stroke of that weapon, a rider could bring a weal as thick as a man’s finger all down the flank and under the belly of a horse, and a horse’s hide is tougher, far tougher, than the hide of a man. The Major drew the whip through his long flexible fingers; then, with a swift stroke, he made it whistle through the air; it may have been a musical whistle, but it brought no joy to the heart of the Goat.

“Close the door and lock it; it is good for the discipline of the men to see—er—episodes like this.”

The Goat obeyed, and then the Falcon flogged him. The whip did not mark the non-com.’s face, the Falcon took care of that, but there was little of the rest of his anatomy that remained unscathed, for he had received a merciless beating.

The sergeant fixed his bloodshot eyes upon the face of the officer, and there was unspoken murder in his baleful gaze, and the Falcon read and interpreted it.

“Yes, *mon ami*,” he remarked calmly; “I know all you are thinking and all you are registering in your soul you will do to me if and when your chance comes. No one knows better than do I that it was not an enemy bullet that sent Captain Aunjet to his account at the little affair at Gulgan Pass last spring; someone in the regiment put that bullet into him, and you are promising yourself you will do as much for me, eh? Well, I will take my chance. Perhaps,” he added, “you would like to do it now?” As he spoke, he lifted a heavy revolver from a shelf, and tossed it on the table near the Goat’s hand. “It is loaded in every chamber,” he purred, “and you are not a bad shot, *sergent*, though you might be better.”

The Goat’s hand shot out and clasped the ugly-looking weapon, and the Falcon almost imperceptibly braced himself, as if to meet the shock of the big soft-nosed bullet he knew rested right under the hammer of the big pistol. He was a brave man, that Major, and in those seconds his life hung on a spider’s thread. The Goat paused.

“Well?”

It was the Falcon’s voice, steady, low, dominating, that broke the stillness. The weapon slipped from the Goat’s fingers to the floor.

“Not here, eh? Some other time, perhaps, when you can kill and escape detection. You are easy to read, *mon ami*. Well, go now, and attend to duty, and see that the men under you do theirs; I will have no slacking; work them as they should be worked, but by God, if you kill good men for nothing, and I know it, I will give you a living death.”

When McGlusky got over the heart-breaking gruelling the Goat had given him, he went back to duty. It was on the eve of the same day, and his eyes were bloodshot as if he had been on a week’s carouse; his knees still trembled under him, and his hands shook as with the palsy. Fritz, the stalwart young German, could not resume duty for three days, and when he did arrive, he looked like a man who had passed through a fever, and there was a dazed expression in his eyes. Mac was cleaning his accoutrements that first night, when the man who had given him his first bit of trouble in the Legion came to him.

“So,” he jeered, “how you like the Legion now, eh, *recluta*?”

Mac made no reply, and the fellow thought his spirit had been broken.

“You fight with me,” continued the fellow, “an’ me I whip you like a dog; then you pay that son of a swine, the Rat, to fight me, eh?”

“A didna pay anyone tae fecht ye; A dae ma ain fechtin’, as ye’ll fin’ oot as soon as ma strength comes back. Ye kickit ma unner the lug, which A was na expectin’ a mon wad dae. Bide a wee—A’ll kick ye sae hard an’ sae often, A’ll make yr hair sprout like spring onions.”

The fellow snapped his fingers in Mac’s face.

“You are one big bag of wind, one big liar. You pay the Rat, else how is it he, who had no money, is now drunk and lying in the clink? The Rat had gold; he changed some of it at the café of Lisette, who was once a *vivandière*; with the *Chasseurs* she served, the little Lisette.”

“A’m no wantin’ tae hear aboot the wumman; A’m no th’ sort tha’ runs after th’ sluts.”

“The sluts?” almost roared the fellow. “You dare call the little Lisette a—a slut? *Ma foi*, there are twenty men in the *Chasseurs d’Afrique* who will run you through the brisket if you say that in her café. She is still the toast of the regiment, an’ still beautiful, an’ the most graceful dancer in Africa.”

“The toast o’ the regiment, eh?” sneered Mac. “A’ll wager ma teeth your little Lisette hae been mair than a toast. A chuck unner th’ chin an’ saxpence an’ a dram

is a' th' coortin' her sort needs. A'm na wumman's fule, but A'm a wee bittie interested in wha' ye say about th' Rat hae'in' gold tae change. Air ye sure about tha'?' A'd like somethin' mair than yr bare word, ma son, fr though A nivver gie pain tae any mon, A'm forced tae th' conclusion ye're a leear frae yr feet tae yr face, an' yr face wad hang ye in any decent company."

Possibly the fellow had been told something like that so many times in life, that hearing it once more did not offend him, for he only grinned.

"Ye mak' ma sick in ma wame," remarked Mac, with a baleful glare in his bloodshot eyes.

"You givea the gold to the Ring Rat: he beata me up."

"How much gold did ye say th' Rat had?" growled Mac.

"He breaka one golden Napoleon at the café of the little Lisette, an' he getta drunk lak hell, an' he wanta fight all the *Chasseurs d'Afrique* in the café an' he kees an' kees the little Lisette, an' he give her six more Napoleons to mind. All the soldiers trust the little Lisette with their money; she ees one *bon camarade*, Lisette. By an' bye, when the Rat come out of clink, he go to her, an' she give him back his gold. P'raps she keep a leetle for the kisses; that is only fair, eh? Lisette, she must live, eh?"

McGlusky was not listening to the latter part of this speech; he was glaring in front of him, and his mouth was working wordlessly. By and bye, however, he found speech.

"Th' son o' Belial, th' offspring o' th' w—— o' Babylon, th' lineal descendant o' th' impenitent thief, he were begotten by Judas, an' papped on th' milk frae th' dugs o' Sapphira, th' wife o' Ananias. Gin A come tae grups wi' him an' lock these twa arms aroon' him, A'll squeeze his conscience oot o' him. Seven golden Napoleons—seven—Napoleons! Whereabouts dae ye say is th' café o' th' hissy Lisette?"

"What you makea the noise for? To-morrow the Goat he tie your han's to the tail of a horse, an' he run you till the blood burst your lungs—see?"

"Dom th' Goat an' dom yersel'. It were seven golden Napoleons A had in ma claes when ye kickit ma unner ma lug, an' th' Ring Rat got th' lot, got a' th' immense wealth while A lay sleepin'. May th' Lord fergit ma, Jamie McGlusky, eef A dinna reclaim ma ain. Te' Lord kens A'm an honest mon. A worked like a galley slave tae get an' save tha' gold tae keep ma in a few wee sma' luxuries in th' Legion, till A had a chance tae loot some mair frae a heathen Arab, an' noo it's gied tae a hissy by a thief."

"Bah, why you talk the foolish talk? Lisette will not surrender it to you; if you

prove the Rat stole it, she will keep half an' give him half."

"She will na. A'll no' be rough wi' th' Jezebel; A'm a gentleman, an' na gentleman can be rough wi' a wumman theeng. A'll tie her toes tae her chin wi' her ain hair, an' carry her on ma arm like a basket o' beans, till she disgorges th' plun'er. Wae's me—eef eet had na been fr yer ainsel', ye kickin' cast-off frae a mule farm, A wad na hae supped a' this sorrow." Mac held the heavy belt he had been cleaning in his hand; as he rose, he gave the stiff leather a half turn round his palm, and swung it, and all the rage that was seething within him went into his arm. "Kick ma unner th' lug, will ye, ye spawn o' indecency? Tak' th' an' tha' a-n' th-a'." Three times he heavy buckle thudded on the meddler's carcass, and three times the barrack-room resounded to his yells. "Noo," bellowed Mac, "dinna tarry. A'll be losin' ma temper th' noo, an', ye beastie, eet's ma turn tae keeck."

The other fellow did not tarry for any appreciable length of time, but for all that he did not get out of range until the lift of McGlusky's boot gave him a start, which he felt he could have done without and then been satisfied.

As McGlusky lay upon his hard pallet that night, the men sleeping near him heard him growling like a dog guarding a bone, and every now and again they heard him grinding his teeth, and the sound was like gravel on glass.

"He's got a tile loose in his roof, that one; his sort kill first, and think of the firing-party and the back against the wall afterwards. Me, I am going to give him lots of room," whispered François Delemar, the drummer, to the man on the next pallet.

"Me too," answered his crony. "The big fellow is Scotch, and all the Scotch are mad when they take to fighting and drinking and running loose amongst the women."

"They're worse when they take to religion," retorted the drummer. "Remember that one we had with us in the spring campaign two years ago? He was a *bon camarade* until he got converted, then he was the devil; nothing would do him but he must convert the whole Legion; said he had a call from the Lord to turn us all from our sins; called himself the 'Broom o' th' Almichty,' with a mission to sweep the world clean. He would fight, that one, fight at the drop of a hat, to prove he had a mission for peace. We were all glad when little Jacques Raffino ran him through and gave him to God. I think this one who calls himself McGlusky will take to religion in the end; if he does, me I am go loco an' chase butterflies, an' swear they are angels, and get sent to the *régiment du diable*. It will be Tophet with the bottom burnt out in that regiment, but it will be better than life with a mad devil of a Scotchman with a mission."

All eyes were fixed surreptitiously upon McGlusky as he went on parade next morning. How would he face the Goat? That was the question that was agitating all

minds. Not a soul but the sergeant and the Falcon knew of the ordeal the Goat had gone through; had they done so, the stern, grim, unyielding discipline of the Legion would have been at an end. McGlusky was stiff, sore and aching, but had he known it, the Goat was in like case, being a mass of weals all over; he had slept in his clothes the previous night, so that none of his brother non-coms. should see the state of his lacerated body.

When Mac met the sergeant, he drew himself up and stood like a figure wrought of stone, but his eyes, which were still gorged with blood, sought the non-com.'s eyes, held them and hung on to them, and the Goat, who now hated this recruit with a devil's hate, glared back. If it had not been for the lesson the Falcon had given the Goat, that savage stare would have cost McGlusky dear. He had fully expected something in the way of punishment, but had determined, come what might, he would not quail or look submissive, for his spirit was not broken, it was steeled. The Goat broke the ominous silence.

"Fall in, you big baboon, and learn to keep silence in the ranks."

With head carried high, and big, square chin thrust out aggressively, Mac fell in, and a little ripple of astonishment ran along the ranks, and McGlusky went up a good many notches in the estimation of his comrades. Had he cringed to the Goat, they would have held him in contempt; had he run amok they would have counted him a fool. He had done just the right thing under the circumstances: he had carried himself like a soldier who had been unjustly punished, but knew his duty, and duty is the only word that counts in any army with all ranks.

For six weeks the awkward squad knew what work meant. The Colonel was a martinet; he expected every man under his command to be able to go through the most intricate movements in the drill in his sleep, if need be, and as the Colonel's wrath fell upon the commissioned officers when anything went wrong, they in their turn were unsparing with the *sous-officiers*, and the latter gave the men in the ranks no mercy. It was a great, big, splendid fighting machine, and had to be perfect in every cog. The Colonel always measured the strength of every regiment by its worst or weakest man, and he was right; a weak link is the measure of the strength of a chain, so the worst soldier had to be drilled up to the standard of the best, and the best was very high in the *Légion d'Afrique*. In those six weeks McGlusky was magnificent on parade: his pride in himself, in his strength, his powers of endurance, his adaptability to new circumstances and surroundings, and in his shrewd brain force was aroused. Always quick on the uptake, he absorbed instruction as sun-baked soil absorbs rain-water. Every nerve and sinew was keyed so high that he could at last almost anticipate an order before it came snapping from an officer's

mouth, but for all his good work he knew that the Goat had no use for him. That officer showed his dislike in ten thousand ways, on any and every possible occasion; he tried to catch McGlusky tripping—over-eagerness was as much a fault as dullness—and many a trap the Goat set for the big dour man, who day by day was growing more greyhound-like about the flanks, and more springy upon his toes. If at the end of that almost murderous six weeks the Goat had set Mac and the big, handsome young German legionary the same task he had set them on the first day, they would have jumped away and done it, and could at the finish have marched off the parade-ground whistling. The difference lay in the fact that they had been systematically worked up to a state of superb condition, whereas at the outset their stomachs, lungs, hearts and muscles were altogether unequal to such a tremendous strain. Even at the end of that period of purgatory they were not nearly up to the Legion's standard, but they were fit enough to be considered "soldiers"; only the long and terrible forced marches out in the desert, on half rations and quarter water supply could or would put the final polish on them, that, and a hunt on foot, over rocks and through thorn bush country at the pace a jogging horse cannot stand for long, in pursuit of fleet-footed, wily marauders who would run and dodge all day and snipe half the night.

But if Mac made a good impression on the commissioned officers on the training-ground, he did not make much headway in barracks amongst his comrades, nor did he seek so to do. During the first week the Ring Rat, by judicious bribing, had managed to get so good a report of himself to reach the lieutenant's ears, that he was allowed out of the clink to which he had been sentenced for drunkenness. Arriving in barracks, he at once sought out McGlusky, who was busy polishing his side-arms. The Rat had no idea that the big fellow had any suspicion of his guilt in connection with the missing seven Napoleons.

"Wot ho, matey! Blimey, you look as 'appy as an 'en wiff 'er first hegg. They told me in th' clink th' Goat 'ad busted yer pore 'eart."

The Cockney scamp embalmed these remarks with a smile that he meant to be ingratiating, but his wicked face looked like the face of a vicious terrier on a chain. Mac waved a dignified hand in his direction.

"Gang yr ways; ye dinna smell sweet in ma nostrils. Ye're na a mon, ye're a—a polecat. Awa' wi' ye, an' dinna again put yersel' between the wind an' ma nobeelity. Ye air an egg tha' hae' been half hatched an' then thrown on a midden tae gie it a flavour."

An expression of mingled astonishment and wounded friendship dawned upon the cadaverous face of the Ring Rat.

"You ain't 'arf a horator when you pulls the bung hout, big 'un; 'Yde Park or Trafalgar Square orter be your stampin'-ground. Wot's makin' you turn on yr friends, eh?"

"A've telt ye. Noo remove yersel'. Ye dinna smell any better than ye look, an' ye look wha' ye air, a pocket picker. Ye'd hold the can'le whiles yer ain mither was earnin' a shillin' at a whelk stall, an' ye'd—pinch th' shillin'."

Clip—clip. The Ring Rat had struck twice, and so quickly that eye could scarce follow the blows; each one sent Mac's head back with a jerk, but he did not go down; his cast-iron jaws could stand heavier artillery than the Ring Rat could bring into action. Stepping back, he shouted:

"Ye loosey thief! A'll no hit ye: A'll squeeze ye doon inta yer ain breeks an' boots, an' button what's left o' ye inta them, an' then kick ye till ye stick tae th' ceilin', or ye gie ma back ma wealth—seven golden Napoleons." His voice broke into a wail. "It's awfu' tae think o'—it's awfu'."

Light dawned upon the Ring Rat in that moment; he knew that someone had discovered his guilt, and had put McGlusky wise, but this did not bring the flush of shame to his peaked visage, he was too hardened a sinner for that.

"Well, old hayseed," he chortled, "wot abart it? Hi'm mindin' hit for yer, ain't Hi, takin' care ov it for th' good o' your poor little soul, keepin' you away from th' women an' the lush, ain't Hi? Luv me, Hi only want a black coat an' a 'igh collar to be a A1 philanthropist. Put yr 'ands hup, an' Hi'll punch yer big top-knot hoff."

Mac crouched suddenly, and as suddenly he sprang and, clutching the Rat in his big arms, he drew the thin, wiry figure close to his own brawny chest, and hugged like a bear.

In vain the Ring Rat jolted him on the jaw with both hands; Mac held him too close for the Rat to put much power into his punches. The Rat was dead game, but what can the gamest man do when a grizzly bear hugs him? The Rat tried to use his knee, but McGlusky knew that trick, and had a stop for it.

"Gouge him, Rat, gouge him," shrieked the drummer, but the advice was of no avail. The Rat's pear-shaped head, with its scanty hair, began to loll back between his shoulders; his thin lips drew apart from his dirty and discoloured teeth; his tongue came out a couple of inches as his spine bent under the inexorable pressure, until with a strangled sob his lean, slender body wilted.

"A' ma wealth—seven—golden—Napoleons." These words came gritting savagely through McGlusky's teeth. "An awesome lot o' siller, an' a' o' it sweated for."

Grabbing the now limp form in his big hands as he spoke, McGlusky seized the

Rat's breeches at the waistband, and putting a knee to the top of the Rat's shoulder, he began to pull and push, and such a terrific volume of strength did he put into the operation that the Rat's figure began to shrink by inches in length.

"A—said—A'd push—ye inta yr—boots an' breeks, an' ma certie—A wull—an' th' deil himsel' will na straighten ye oot again. Ye gied ma the han' o' friendship after ye'd robbed ma. Ye took me up to take me down. A'll no leave moisture enough in ye tae mak' spittle tae wet a sore eye."

All the time he was growling out his rage, he was pressing the weight and might of his giant frame on the doubled-up anatomy of the Rat.

Then the whole room fell upon McGlusky. It was like a wolf-pack gone hunger-mad, crowding upon a stag. They hit him with everything except the ceiling. His cold-blooded ferocity had at first over-awed them, and besides, the Rat was not a popular citizen with his comrades; his uncanny skill in purloining loose change or anything else he took a fancy to, had not endeared him to them, but to see him crushed remorselessly as McGlusky had crushed him, stirred some latent impulse of pity in the pack. The Rat had fought beside them out in the grey desert, and had displayed the unblenching courage of a paladin, a trait they all knew how to appreciate; he had always been cheerful under hardships, and had sung indecent songs to cheer them when footsore and weary they limped across the burning sands, and at night in bivouac he had told in his queer Cockney French stories that made them laugh, stories that, had he been under the jurisdiction of a bench of bishops, would have got him flogged to a frazzle. He was a born droll, that bit of gutter scum, and his idea of decency would have sent a dissipated tom-cat out of the marriage market into a home for celibates, but he could make them laugh even when they were on the edge of the desert madness, and were sombrely thinking of putting a bullet into some officer, and saving another for themselves.

He had one other trait that did not march with his evil qualities: more than once he had been known to share the last drop of lukewarm water in his kit bottle with some poor devil who had got a ragged slug of lead from an Arab gun in his body, which had turned his blood to fire with gun-shot fever, a form of fever which has to be experienced to be fully appreciated. It was told of the Rat in the Legion that on one occasion when moved by the devil of impudence which was his heritage, as it is the heritage of most of his class, he had wormed his way right up to the Colonel's bivouac and looted the C.O.'s water-bottle almost from under his hand, and had sneaked away in the darkness with his prize, which he shared with three wounded men. All the regiment knew that if he had been caught in the act, a pistol bullet would have been his on the spot. Yet when the Legion got safely back to headquarters, one

of the first things the Rat had done was to pinch from one of the three wounded men a small silver ship containing a charm against ill-luck, which the other soldier wore round his throat by a thin gold chain. When charged with the crime, he stoutly denied it, but added:

“Hi would ’a took it hif I’d ’ad a chanct, just ter keep th’ blinkin’ idjit from puttin’ ’is faif in idols.”

It was for those reasons that the whole room full of legionaires fell upon McGlusky and dealt with him after the manner of their kind.

The funniest thing connected with this episode was the Ring Rat’s attitude towards McGlusky afterwards. Commenting upon the disturbance the next day, the Bomb remarked to the Rat:

“*Ma foi*, heem, that big bull, he squeeze you up like one sardine, Ring Rat. Santa Maria, heem, he would have break all your bones eef we not give him the boot. Yes. What he want is one nice leetle push with the knife just above the hip, him—just about three inches of the steel an’ a half turn before it come out, yes, by damn.”

“I dunno abart that, matey,” grinned the Ring Rat. “Once I fought a Scotch tyke in Glasgow, wiv the mittens, you know, an’ I beat ’im so easy it was a shime to ’it ’im, but Hi ’ad to do it to get the spondulicks, so Hi took pity on ’im an’ pushed ’im through the ropes; ’e fell on his pore ’ead on the floor six feet below. We was usin’ the same dressin’-room, an’ as I was strollin’ round that dressin’-room, thinkin’ ov nuffink but the lovely chimes ov the church bells in London, I haccidentally got me ’and in the pocket ov the pants the Scotch wop ’ad left ’angin’ hup in the dressin’-room, an’ Hi near fell dead when Hi found ’arf a crown. Fink of a Scotchman leavin’ ’arf a crown lyin’ loose to take care ov its pore little self in a fightin’ man’s dressin’-room! No, hit wasn’t Jimmy Wilde’s ’arf-crown: th’ great Jimmy was Welsh, not Scotch—same fing, only more ov it. If it ’ad been Jimmy’s ’arf-dollar an’ ’e ’ad to leave it, ’e’d ’ave bored a ’ole through it an’ put it on a lock an’ chain; no one ever got ahead ov Jimmy. When that Scotch wop woke up an’ missed ’is money, ’e sailed into me wiff all the bally furniture in the place, an’ ’e ’ad ’arf the population ov Glasgow to ’elp ’im. Hif,” sighed the Ring Rat reminiscently, “hif it ’ad been a dollar an’ a ’arf, ’e’d ’ave ’ad *all* Scotland, includin’ th’ police force an’ th’ fire brigades. There’s four things you mustn’t meddle wiff when you’re dealin’ wiff a Scotchman: one’s whisky, the other’s a woman, the next two are religion an’ money. When a Scotchman wants to fink ’ard abart Gord, ’e borrsers a sovereign an’ looks at it, an’ then his ’eaven opens, an’ it’s time for everyone else to get a hike on an’ quit. So I’m not sore wiff McGlusky; ’e’s Scotch an’ ’e only acted up to ’is lights, an’ ’e ain’t goin’ to get no little bit o’ steel pushed into ’im just above the ’ip by me. Hi

takes wot Hi can lay me hooks upon when the angels sends it, an' Hi puts hup wiff wot Hi cawn't dodge when th' devils brings it, an' hif that big bloke ain't the devil, 'e'll do fine fr a pattern fr a new one."

During the time the recruits were going through their preliminary training they had not been permitted to pass the barrack gates; this was no great hardship, for when night came they had all been too dog weary to want to do anything but rest, but when they became full-fledged soldiers their drill, though still terribly stiff, was not quite so hard as it had been, and the lure of the town was upon them. The very first night they got their permits, McGlusky and Fritzel, the German, marched out, moving in step with just the right amount of swagger to justify their gay and gallant uniforms. Fritzel was about the only man Mac was on speaking terms with; his fierce, unbendable temper had estranged everyone else. Half a dozen times the Ring Rat, who seemed to have taken an uncanny fancy to the big fellow whom he had despoiled, tried to make up to the Scot, but every time he approached with the olive branch extended, Mac had either aimed a vicious kick at him, or had hurled anything that was portable and handy at the Cockney's ever-shifting head.

"Hi likes 'im, crucify me hif Hi don't," the Rat had confided to the drummer. "There's no 'arf water, 'arf milk abart 'im. Hi'll steal 'is 'eart yet."

To which the drummer, who had sampled half the prisons in France for burglary, had answered with a wicked grin:

"You'd steal a squeak from a mouse, *camarade*, if you could sell it for a drink," to which the impenitent one had answered:

"Wy not, cully? Wot's th' good ov a squeak to anyone, anyway? Too many squeakers in this dam' ole world. Parsons squeak abart 'ell, an' hif there wasn't no 'ell, they'd be hout ov a job, anyhow; lawyers squeak about lor, an' get a bloke 'time' that a lot o' lawyers oughter be doin' their little sweet selves; reformers squeak abart 'onesty an' a noble soul, an' give a 'ungry bloke a trac' an' a lot ov hadvice about 'ow ter go strite, an' leave 'im shiverin' an' 'ungry enough ter fight a dog fer a bone an' then go 'ome to 'ot buttered muffins, an' a scrumptious little plump woman in snow white frilly things like th' froth on a pint, an' she squeaks to 'im abart 'is self-sacrifice in th' cause o' darntrodden 'umanity. To 'ell wiff squeaks! Wot Hi likes abart this big Scotch baboon is there hain't no squeak in 'im: 'e'll fight till 'is 'ands break, an' then 'e'll bite, an' don't you fergit it, you cross between a French poodle an' a darncin' master: that McGlusky is th' stuff th' British hempire was made hout ov, an' th' British hempire 'as licked 'arf the world an'—an' pinched near everythink worth pinchin', an' when you've pinched enough, you get respectable an' everyone that wants ter borrar something loves yer. See?"

CHAPTER III

MCGLUSKY SEES LIFE

As McGlusky and Fritzel swaggered along the narrow streets of the African town, in all the bravery of their new crimson and blue uniforms, they attracted not a little attention on account of the magnificence of their physique. Fritzel of Germany was perhaps the better-looking man of the pair from a woman's point of view; his face was fresher, his limbs more rounded, his gait more springy, but an old campaigner would have passed him by for his comrade, every line of whose figure spoke for rugged power and almost tireless effort. The quaint little shops, with their mixed jumble of wares, interested both men, and they often paused to admire or wonder at what the windows displayed. Cleanliness was evidently not the acme of virtue amongst the shopkeepers, for that matter it was not the predominant vice of the majority of the customers, if one might judge by the odours that hung upon the heavy air. Women were there aplenty; there always seems to be a superabundance of things feminine in African cities, towns and villages. Some of Fritzel's remarks, as he scanned the she-element, were pungent enough to break a stick, but for the most part Mac contented himself with a more or less disdainful sniff. Black women, brown women, yellow women, ivory-white women jostled each other, and in a good many instances jostled the two fine legionaries as well, but of pink and white women they saw none. Courtesans were as common as crows, and about as bashful, and the badinage they threw at the two fine males made Fritzel's hair crinkle, and that German had not been reared upon Siegel's Syrup and molasses.

"A wonner hoo much th' shameless yins wad bother aboot me an' yersel', Fritzel, eef they kenned a' the money A possess is five hapence, an' yer ain bank accoont a hapenny less?" snorted Mac.

"*Ach*," grinned Fritzel, "the uniform counts for something, *Kamerad*."

"Aye, fir a bit gab an' a moothfu' o' indecent remarks. A'm no a ten'erfoot in th' ways o' th' scarlet sisterhood, ma laddie; a wooden-legged hump-back wi' yin eye an' a face honey-combed wi' smallpox would beat us both tae the post wi' yin o' them, eef he had his pockets well lined wi' siller."

"*Ach, Kamerad*, the world it has sour you. Women are women the world over, dot is drue; a grey uniform an' a fine shape vill bring dem round der corner on der run. Me, I wear the uniform of de Uhlans once, an' I know; a click of de heels on der bavement, a wink of de eye, a chuck under der chin, an' a k-e-e-s, a long, slow

kees, mit der glossy head lyin' in der hollow of a soldier's arm, an' pouf, de fortress it surrender at discretion, yes."

"A'm theenkin' ye've a lot tae learn aboot hens," growled Mac. "Man, it's when ye want them ye canna get them, an' it's when they want ye, an' ye dinna want them, tha' ye can."

Just then a gloriously built young negress, whose whole outfit would not have made a butterfly-net, squeezed herself hard up against McGlusky, and, tall though she was, had to look up to catch his eyes. The two legionaries were admiring the contents of a snuff, tobacco, scent, pipe and cigarette shop window, and surreptitiously feeling their wealth of halfpennies in their breeches pockets as they did so. The ebony goddess, who was nude down to her hips, and what Mac described as scrumptiously arrayed in a not too deep strip of scarlet below, had a fat little piccaninny tucked under her right arm; the piccaninny was busy draining a full meal from one of her great round breasts, the other bosom in all the perfection of its nude fullness, was pushed against Mac's arm, whilst a pair of wicked black eyes gloated on the Scot's face.

"A'm no in need o' refreshment the noo," grumbled the big fellow, pushing the amorous young negress none too gently away. "Besides," he added, "A'm a teetotaller an' an anti-black an' white artist."

The splendid young negress did not understand a word of this speech, but she did understand the gesture, and knew that her advances had been scornfully repulsed, and the things she said to McGlusky made the female flies swarming on the sweets on the next stall dig themselves in to hide their blushes. Mac turned quickly to get out of earshot, and as he did so, he felt a hand buried to the wrist in his breeches pocket, the selfsame pocket where his wealth of halfpennies lay. Swiftly his own big hand dropped and closed upon a skinny brown wrist.

"By heck," he rumbled, as his eyes fell upon the frightened face of an Arab boy, "A seem tae draw thieves tae me as th' bleat o' a billy-goat draws a nanny. A dinna theenk A look a saffie, an' A dinna like thievin', yet A never travel far but yin fin's ma. Th' mon who wrote tha' a crow always gangs tae a crow was a leear or a fule."

The wretched youth who had been captured red-handed began to wail piteously, for legionaries as a rule dealt out their own law, and it was a pitiless code. A shrivelled-up old woman, with a filthy veil, pushed forward and flopped on her knees, then raised her hands beseechingly. In the name of Allah, the All-Merciful, would the strong man show mercy? Neither she nor her son had broken bread these many days. Something in the quavering voice, and something, too, in the pinched face of the captured boy, struck a spark in Mac's heart; he looked at Fritzel, and the

German, with a sort of shamefaced laugh, remarked:

“She speak dam bad French, that old bundle of bones, eh, Mac?”

“Seems tae sound a bit mair like the truth than a lot A’ve heard since A cam’ here,” mumbled McGlusky. He paused reflectively, whilst the crowd looked on amazed; they were not accustomed to such dilatory tactics on the part of legionaries. “So ye’ve na broken bread these many days, hae ye no?” He let got his captive’s hand. “Here, wumman, tak’ this, an’ dinna mak’ a beast o’ yersel’ by owerborgin’.” He tossed two halfpennies to the beldame. “There’s a long dreenk gone bang,” he snarled to the German.

Fritzel stood watching him, with puckered brow and smiling lip.

“Dot beats der band, McGlusky. Vot funny leedle tiffil ride on your shoulder, eh?” Then the good-natured fellow grinned broadly, and he also tossed two halfpennies into the crone’s lap. “Dere; go get drunk or buy a man,” he cried, in a rough effort to cover what he considered his weakness.

“Get drunk or buy some soap,” chorded Mac, and the pair of queer blades pushed their broad-shouldered way through the crowd that had gathered.

As they did so, a man swathed in a black burnous, the neck-piece of which came well up over his chin, followed close in their steps. He was a very tall personage, who walked with a decided stoop, a thing not common amongst that people of upright carriage. His high turban was black, but had a green band across its front, and this came so low down over his forehead that between it and the band of his burnous very little of his face was visible. As the German and the Scot swung along, Mac grumbled:

“Eef we gang at this rate, Fritzel, squanderin’ oor wealth, we’ll nae quench oor thirst th’ day.”

“By the viskers of my old colonel, you air funny, Mac. Wealth, eh? Eet was only two pennies of your barbarous country’s way of counting. Wealth—ho, ho!”

“Fritzel, you are one dom fine first-class fool. Everything in this world is comparative. Twa pennies tae a mon wi’ feefty poonds in his pocket is just naething, but twa pennies oot o’ th’ leetle we hae got is a—heck o’ a lot o’ money. Th’ scream o’ an eagle is naething in a storm, but th’ wee bit squeak o’ a sparrow is a big noise on a still nicht.”

They were turning a corner as McGlusky eased himself of this bit of home-made philosophy, and they almost ran into the Ring Rat.

“Burn my little fingers an’ toes,” exclaimed the Cockney, “hif Hi ain’t been ’untin’ fer you, McGlusky. Hi ain’t been too wot yer might call hanxious ter find you, Fritzel, though blimey you ain’t ’arf bad fer a German, but still you *are* a German,

an' th' blinkin' Germans blew my pore ole muvver inter ninety-four little bits one night wen they was bombin' London."

"Ye're a terrible leear, besides bein' iher things, Rat," snarled McGlusky. "How many mithers did ye hae? Ye told me o' twa, an' yin o' them was drowned in th' Thames, tryin' tae save wha' ye called 'a biby's doll,' an' th' iher perished through givin' a quart o' her blood to a surgeon to save a wounded soldier. Ye're the prince o' leears!"

"Oh, vem two?" remarked the unabashed Rat. "Them two was step-muvvers; the one the Germans done in was ver goods. A bloke carn't 'ave more'n one muvver; abart farvers—well, I ain't no good at arifmetic. Come an' 'ave a little tiddley; Hi got th' spoilins ter pay fer it."

"A'm no proud," answered McGlusky, drawing himself up to the full of his height, "but A'll hae blisters on ma whiskers afore A'll insult ma mooth by drinkin' wi' ye, Rat."

"Garn! Tork sense! A drink's a drink, hain't it, wevver you 'ave it hout ov a bedroom jug or anyfink else?"

Mac shook his leonine head.

"Na, na," said he, "yours is th' sophistry o' th' unclean, th' pheelosophy o' th' muck-rakers. Man, ye're neither crust nor dough; A canna chew ye nor spit ye oot; ye dinna smell sweet in ma nostrils; ye stink afore God an' man like a—a—a bogus company promoter, an' a skunk in fu' smell is a posy tae tha'."

"Lor' luv me, yer hain't 'arf surkarstic," grumbled the Rat, as he stepped aside and made room for the two fine big men to pass on the narrow footway. "Cawn't say as 'ow Hi couldn't take a 'int that Hi wasn't wanted," he flung after them, as they strode onward.

There was a strange look in the London gutter-snipe's eyes as he watched McGlusky out of sight, the look of a dog that has been beaten by a man it would have loved to follow and serve.

"E's 'ard," muttered the Rat, "'ard as 'ell. Wisht Hi'd kep' my 'ooks off 'is bit o' gilt. P'raps," he added hopefully, "'e'll need me yet. 'E's in fer a rosy ole time in th' Legion."

It was into the café of the little Lisette that Mac and Fritzel turned when they were tired of wandering around. Soldiers in plenty were there, but the gorgeous scarlet crimson-and-blue of the *Chasseurs d'Afrique* predominated. The little Lisette had originally been a *vivandière* of that very famous regiment of horse, and the troopers still claimed her, but there were many other arms of the French army represented there, for she did a big trade, though her profits were of necessity

limited, for French pay is small. A gorgeous Spahi was the centre of interest when Mac and Fritz entered. The Spahi, with his crimson cloak thrown back, was in the centre of the floor, doing conjuring tricks with a pair of pistols: he whirled them in the air with a twist of his wrists, turned his back, caught the pistols as they came down, with a forefinger inside the trigger guard, spun them on his fingers as a boy spins a top, whilst hands and pistols were still behind his back, and then, without seeming to move, the pistols were back in their places in his belt again. It was all so magically quick that the eyes of the onlookers could scarce follow his movements. A brother Spahi stepped out of a crowd at the far end of the long, low-ceiled room. Holding his feet a couple of inches apart, he put a playing-card between the toes of his boots, so that the ace of hearts showed face forward to the Spahi who had been juggling with the pistols. Straightening his slender, shapely figure, the man with the cards held up between his two extended thumbs the ace of diamonds; his arms were pressed against the sides of his face, the balls of his two thumbs rested upon the top of his head; the white surface of the card with the red diamond in the centre was towards the Spahi with the pistols, and the latter grinned good-humouredly as he saw his comrade's challenge.

"*Sacré*," exclaimed a swarthy *Chasseur*, "eef the shot miss an' fly low, eet will split that other fellow's skull."

The juggler with the pistols did not seem to have any qualms. Turning his back to his comrade, he tossed the pair of pistols now high, now low, making them whirl and spin, as if they obeyed his will rather than his touch, then wheeling and dropping to one knee, a pistol in each hand, he fired twice, one shot following so swiftly upon the other that they sounded as if an electric wire had touched both triggers at the same time, yet one bullet had gone through the ace in the Spahi's hands, the other had perforated the ace between the toes of his boots. It was great shooting, and the room rang with the applause of the onlookers.

Little Lisette, who knew her children in all their moods, ran to the Spahi who had done the shooting, drew his handsome, wicked face down with the palms of her hands, and kissed him on his voluptuous red lips; he, because he was a male, and therefore a fool where such a woman was concerned, tried to wind an arm around the lissom little waist, intending to make the one salute a dozen, but a twirl of her hips, a shove of one small hand against the Spahi's throat, and the little Lisette was dancing away from him on the tips of her toes. Not for nothing had she gone through the gruelling training of a ballet dancer.

"Yon hen," confided McGlusky to Fritz, "is no a' feathers an' squeak; she hae the deil in her frae fin'er-tips tae toes. She can play wi' this wolf-pack like blin'

puppies, but ye can tak' it frae me, ma laddie, somewhere in th' world there is yin mon who can play wi' her an' twiddle her roon' his fin'er an' thumb like a piece o' auld wife's thread; tha' kin' o' wumman always meets oop wi' tha' kin' o' mon sooner or later, an' as a rule he gies her Tophet wi' th' tongs red hot, an' th' mair he ill-treats her, the closer she'll cling tae him."

"Not that little one," smiled big, good-natured Fritz. "I think she is nod the clingin' sort. *Mein Gott*, I think she de sort dot carry a leedle knife in her stocking, an' she use heem if she ver jealous."

"Iphm—yes, mon, eef she is jealous, but no eef the mon beats her; she wad tak' a skelpin' frae th' mon she were in love wi', an' no raise a squeal, A'm theenkin', but she'd hit him wi' everything excep' th' ten commandments eef she were jealous o' anither wench."

"She is one dam fine leedle *Fräulein*. I dinks I dry to spark mit her."

"Come oot o' it an' cool yer blood in the air," growled Mac. "Ye're too good a mon tae be a moothwipe fr sic a besom. A'd tak' shame tae masel' tae fall for th' like o' little Lisette, an' maist likely she's a shoe-string fr some officer o' *Chasseurs*, an' eef she is, you'll be puttin' mair in yr pack than any private o' th' *Légion d'Afrique* can carry. Eef we pool oor wealth, ma buckie, we can hae just yin bottle o' th' muck they ca' wine; we'll drink tha', an' then shake a leg."

In answer to McGlusky's beckoning finger, little Lisette herself came and took the order.

"Ah, *mon brave*," she cried in her pretty way, "you are new here, is it not, so I have not seen you before? A face—Mother of God, I never forget a face, especially if it is as handsome as yours, *monsieur*."

She gave Fritz a glance so arch and alluring, that the stalwart young fellow unconsciously threw a chest, and his handsome blue eyes filled with the man-fire that women know. From Fritz to McGlusky the little Lisette turned, and she gave Mac the full battery of her fine eyes.

"Eet's wine A'm needin', no a sunstroke," growled the big fellow roughly. "A ken fine ye can raise tha' fire in yr eyes fr any fule body who will fall fr it. Go bring me the liquor, an' save yr googly glances fr th' cock-sparrows in th' *Chasseurs*."

Lisette was startled, likewise she was ruffled; few men had ever spoken to her in that strain; she bridled, and a crimson spot burned on each cheek. Placing both her small hands upon her hips, and taking care that her fingers were so placed that each finger displayed the rings with which her hands were so lavishly decorated, she brought her high wooden heels together with a click, a military trick she had learnt when she was a *vivandière*. Her rather thin lips curled contemptuously, and the

sparkle in her eyes was not now in the least amorous. She looked a pretty little spitfire, ready for trouble. Mac noticed then for the first time that she wore suspended from her belt a neat holster, from the top of which protruded the highly ornamented butt of a very useful looking revolver. Jerking a thumb to denote this weapon, he remarked, as if taking the world in general into his confidence:

“Iphm—a hen wi’ spurs, eh?”

Lisette, who was known through all the brigades as one of the very deadliest snap-shots with a pistol in Africa, caught the contempt in the tone of the speaker’s voice, and her white, even teeth fairly clicked as they came together in anger. A moment later she laughed, threw up her hand in a mocking salute, and stood rigidly to attention.

“Ten thousand pardons, *mon Général*,” she lisped. “I was a fool not to have recognized you at a glance. It has pleased you to come to my poor café in the disguise of a private of the *Légion d’Afrique*.”

Mac met her raillery with a steady, unflinching stare, for he was not forgetting she was holding the better part of the gold stolen from him by the Ring Rat. Bending his big head ever so slightly, he seemed to accept both her apology and pretended recognition.

“A’m glad,” he purred, “ye recognize a gentleman when ye see yin, though A wad na ha’ expectit sic discernment frae a café trollop—na meanin’ any disrespec’, ye ken; ye canna help yr breedin’ any mair than a cross-eyed mon can help squintin’.”

All eyes and ears in the café were with them by this time, and many black and glowering looks were directed towards McGlusky, a fact which, instead of daunting him, seemed to make him quite cheerful.

“*Monsieur* is a gentleman,” cooed Lisette. “*Monsieur’s* so charming manners prove it. Was *Monsieur’s* hair cropped by the barber of *la Légion*, or”—with an arch look and a little forefinger shaken reprovingly in Mac’s face—“was the cropping done by the barber in the gaol *Monsieur* escaped from?”

“Na, na,” murmured Mac, “ma hair were cropped th’ nicht a thief stole ma money, an’ gied it tae yer ainsel’ tae mind. A wench who lives by soldiers should na plunder frae soldiers, ye besom——”

“*Monsieur* is a liar and a coward to insult a woman.”

The speaker was that same gorgeous Spahi who had been giving the pistol-shooting exhibition; he had advanced noiselessly from one side, and now thrust his handsome face towards Mac, who still lounged lazily in his seat.

For a moment a smile broad as a mother’s blessing grew on the big Scottish

face; then Mac's voice, soft as buttermilk mixed with candy, came in accents that would not have shamed an unkissed curate.

"A'm a lamb fallen among ravishin' wolves; ma' th' Almichty na forget His lamb th' noo."

One of his big, clumsy-looking hands shot to the Spahi's belt, the other, with a movement like lightning from a summer cloud, fastened upon the nape of the Spahi's neck; fingers and thumb dug with the bitter power of an engineer's screw-jack into the muscles and sinews of the corded, sun-scorched neck, and the Spahi's mouth flew agape, and as if all that was happening were being done by machinery, the muzzle of the Spahi's own pistol was being rammed half-way down his throat.

"A'll gie ye just twa secon's tae unsay th' words ye hae said," purred McGlusky, "or, Spahi, A'll blow th' words sae far doon inta yr guts, ye'll fin' 'em badly mixed oop wi' yr breakfast."

"Vait a bit, *mon camarade*, vait one leedle minute," cried Fritz. "Don't shoot. How der tiffel *can* der Spahi speak mit his mouth full ov pistol!"

"Ye air richt, Fritz; A had na thocht o' tha'. A'll gie th' poppy-an'-peony-coloured deil every chance. He'll unsay wha' he said, muzzle tae muzzle, his mooth an' his pistols." Withdrawing the ugly blue steel barrel none too gently from between the Spahi's teeth, Mac growled: "Noo, dom ye, say it here or say it in Tophet, but say it ye shall."

The Spahi said it; most men would have done so with two savage eyes glaring down upon them and a big finger crooked round the trigger of a pistol with the muzzle not two inches from front teeth.

"A accept yr apology in th' speerit in which ye gie it. A ken it were the lure o' wumman tha' made ye butt in like a he-goat wi' an immoral appetite. Dinna fash—ye're no th' first son o' a she-ass tha' hae gone tha' gait; A hae done th' same masel' in ma time."

He let go of the Spahi's neck, and the soldier in the scarlet cloak stepped back a pace, looking as vindictive as a muzzled monkey, but there was unmistakable fear of this big man whose movements were so lightning quick in his glittering black eyes. The sympathy of the crowd, however, was with the Spahi, who had championed the cause of *la belle* Lisette. Fritz rose; he was unarmed, but he was game. With a deft movement the young German legionary plucked Lisette's pistol from its holster.

"The so-beautiful *Fräulein* will pardon," he said with a flash of his big white teeth in her direction, "but a soldier stands by his comrade, hein, dot vos so, eh?"

He ranged up alongside McGlusky, laughter in his fearless blue eyes, his yellow-haired head held high, and Lisette, who loved brave men, stood there bathing him in

glances which would not have given her a passport to any cloister. She was wicked, core through, that little Lisette, and what was more, she did not care who knew it.

Twenty hands were gripping weapons, twenty pairs of eyes were glowering upon the two legionaries, and in that tense moment a spark would have fired that magazine of unbridled passion, for Jamie McGlusky was not the only man in that uniformed crowd who carried mad, reckless blood in his veins. A word, a sign from Lisette, and weapons would have been out, and the *Légion d'Afrique* would have surely lost two great soldiers, for two cannot fight twenty such as those.

Suddenly an unpleasant voice, thin, sneering, utterly devoid of melody, cracked the straining silence.

"'Arf a mo', *companeros*, 'arf a mo'! The first man to dror a wepping looks right inter this."

Every face turned instantly to where the Ring Rat lounged in his slovenly way just inside the café door. All the drill sergeants and all the military tailors in the universe could not have made the Rat look a smart, up-to-date soldier; as he used to say himself, he was "loose at the 'ips, sloppy at the shoulders an' slack at the ribs, like a bloomin' sawdust doll wiv 'arf the stuffin' art of it." He held a pistol in his right hand, and he held it steady, and his eyes were like the eyes of a cat in their quickness, as they flashed from face to face. His first utterance checked the homicidal mania that was rapidly developing in the crowd; his next electrified them:

"A nice bloomin' lot ov tykes you har, ter call yerselves sojers—gettin' out on th' kill an' wor, blinkin' wor an' lots ov it, right on top ov hus."

There was no mistaking his earnestness; his voice rang with it.

For a moment there was silence, then: "War—war—where—when?" burst in a wolf chorus from every throat, and the great double-bass voice of McGlusky drowned all others as the one word tore from his chest:

"Warr!"

"Sounds 'omey that do," chuckled the Rat, as the resonant Scottish burr vibrated upon his ear-drums. "'Ark," the Rat shouted. "You blinkin' swine, 'ark to th' kettledrummers ov our scallywag reg'ment beatin' th' tattoo. 'Struth, hit's th' call to glory an' a 'apenny a day, an' take yer choice ov bein' gutted wiff a crooked knife or 'aving yr fice busted wiff a spear, but hit's wor, wor, wor!"

The effect on the crowd was maniacal. *Chasseurs d'Afrique*, in scarlet, gold and blue, Spahis, with long crimson cloaks afloat, Foreign Legionaries, in crimson breeches and blue coats, all linked hands, and forming a circle, with the little Lisette in the centre, they danced like madmen round and round the room; chairs were sent spinning, tables were overturned, glasses were shattered on the floor. Little Lisette

lifted up her voice and started the Marseillaise, and all the rest joined in. Again came the swift crackle of the kettledrums, sounding like the spiteful fire of musketry. Then the dancing ceased; hands were unlocked; like hounds trained for such an hour and such a sound, the soldiers stood, straining, nerve and muscle a-quiver, the blood-lust running through their veins like fire. McGlusky, with his big nostrils dilating, his head thrown far back, his eyes cruel as the eyes of a hawk about to swoop, stood in the centre of the throng. Suddenly his gaze fell upon the little Lisette, and he who had boasted to Fritzel of his scorn of women, sprang at the slender, wanton thing, and, taking her shamelessly in his arms before them all, he crushed her so savagely to his chest that she writhed, and bit his face in between her kisses, and he crushed her mouth to his, and laughed, though she bit his lips till the blood dripped. Then out into the narrow street they poured, marching at the double, and swaggering, almost prancing as they went, and the native population gave them the full of the causeway, and it was the Ring Rat who marched on McGlusky's left hand, with Fritzel on his right, whilst the devilish kettledrums kept throb-throb-throbbing.

It was a case of ordered chaos in barracks: everything seemed upside down, and everyone appeared to be in everybody else's way, and yet things got themselves done with magical quickness. McGlusky did his own work and ten other men's as well, hauling here, lifting there, carrying burdens that any two of the others shied at. The officers soon noticed him, and registered approval in their minds, and he who had been so used to giving orders in his many experiences of camp life as a pioneer, unconsciously fell into the old habit of command.

"Lend a han' there, ye sapless de'il; fir why air ye stan'in' gapin' like a sawney?" he once remarked to the Bomb, who was a first-class shirker, and that warrior replied by consigning Mac to the back premises of Gehenna, adding with a sneer:

"What made-a you-a a *sous-officier*, you snout of a pig, eh?"

The Bomb was standing at the top of the steep flight of narrow stairs that led to the ground floor as he spoke. Mac, who was carrying a great bundle of canvas tarpaulin which was to be cut up and used as gun covering, did not deign to reply verbally to the Bomb's insult; the huge roll he carried was taxing all his strength, so he heaved it high above his head and tossed it on top of the Bomb, who went head first down the steep stairs with the roll of canvas on top of him, as if he had been shot out of a siege gun. The Falcon, who was directing operations, saw and heard all that passed, and he turned quickly away with a grin on his usually so stern face that would have made his fortune on the films. Ten seconds later he remarked sharply to McGlusky:

"Where is the legionary you call the Bomb? Was he not detailed for duty with

this squad?"

"A'm no knowin' fir certain, *monsieur*; A'm theenkin' he went doon th' stairs wi' a wee bit somethin' on his mind."

As the Bomb had two broken ribs and a gash on his forehead when he was dragged from under the load Mac had tossed on him, he probably had.

Another great worker was the Ring Rat, for, in spite of his flat chest and mean appearance, he had some hidden fund of vitality that kept him on his feet when men big enough to eat him caved in.

The men were snarling and quarrelsome long before their task was done, but for all that they were strangely elated, for the war demon was in the air, and it was for war most of them had joined the Legion. The Rat had all the instincts of a killer; he had drunk blood in the desert, and lusted for more. Let the clergy say what they will, the white races are all barbarians still, and an inch below their hides they are as they were in the Stone Age, and the same clergy that deny this, are not they the first to pound their pulpits and shout for war in a national crisis? The Rat did not belong to the clergy, but he was aglow with the fever of strife. Once when big Olaf, the Scandinavian, bumped against the Rat that night, and forgot to apologise because he too was war drunk, the Rat rasped out a name for him that William Shakespeare was fond of applying to a certain grade of female of the Elizabethan period. Big Olaf, up to whose armpits the Rat's head would scarce have reached, threatened to kick a hole in the Rat's stomach, which was a gentle pastime big Olaf was rather partial to. The Rat replied:

"Garn, square-'ead; Hi can't 'it yer on th' chin wivout a step ladder, but Hi'll knock yer blinkin' knee caps off, strike me tulip-coloured hif I don't."

McGlusky, coming upon the scene, had broken up the pleasant little party by picking up a metal washstand by its iron legs, and introducing this novel weapon to the side of the Scandinavian's head; he had then turned upon the Rat, remarking:

"A'm mair than shamed by ye. Hae ye na sense o' th' deegnity o' th' regimen' tae be bickerin' like an aul wife, wi' warr rollin' in on us? Canna ye bide peaceable wi' yr comrades?"

"Lor blimey," gasped the Rat to the grinning Fritzel, "'e takes th' cike, 'e do, layin' a bloke hout wiff a iron washstand an' callin' it peace! Hi'm goin' to watch 'im when 'e's in haction in earnest, I am. I fink 'e'd dig 'is farver up, grave clothes an' all, to 'it a henemy wiff."

The men toiled until well past midnight, and then were given two hours for sleep, and they all dropped down and slept in their uniforms, and slept like dogs that have been overdriven, yet when the bugles' shrill clamour woke the echoes, they leapt up

fresh and ready, for of such is the gospel of the merciless drilling they had received. There were a few slackers who yawned and groused and voiced their misery; there always are such in every army, and their name is “mud.”

When Mac drew his stool up to the table, he nearly fell backwards, for beside his tin plate with its usual quantum of messy slops, lay a large well-baked roll of bread, with real butter sandwiched down its middle; his little dipper of sugarless hot coffee stood near.

“Wha’s this?”

As Mac held up his buttered treasure, greedy, envious eyes all down the long table were fixed upon it.

“Looks as hif a hangel ’ad been watchin’ hover you in yer sleep, matey,” volunteered the Rat.

“Dommed eef A can unnerstan’ it,” muttered Mac.

“Hif Hi was you Hi wouldn’t try, Hi’d heat it.”

“Sometimes,” growled Mac, “ye talk mair sense than yin wad theenk th’ Almichty gied ye. A wull,” was the big man’s ungracious reply, as he bit into his treasure trove.

At just about the same moment the Colonel was cursing in pointed military idioms that particular batman of his, whose duty it was to look after the Colonel’s breakfast. He was an abstemious liver, but allowed himself one luxury in the shape of a specially prepared and specially baked and buttered roll of large dimensions. This roll was always made of whole meal wheaten flour, oaten flour, barley flour and maize flour, from a recipe given him by a Swedish savant, who was and is considered the greatest food expert on the planet. The savant had said to the soldier: “Eat of this food, and eschew rich foods, and it will prolong life, strengthen you for love, for work with brain or muscle, or for war,” and the Colonel, who had tested the food in all those respects, swore by it. Now his beautiful roll had vanished on the very morning when he needed it most, and there was no time to make and bake another for that meal.

“Son of a she-goat without morals,” he raved at the trembling batman, “confess you have stolen my bread. The baker delivered it to you with his own hands, and saw you open it and place in its inside the thick slab of butter that was to melt into the so nicely baked crumb between the golden-brown crusts. Confess, or I will run a scorpion down your throat to rot out your insides, misshapen son of a mistaken mother, who thought she was bringing a man child into the world, when she was delivered of a piebald excrescence like yourself, that ought to wear a label and live in a zoo. Half-Arab, half-ape, was your grandfather; what your mother mated with,

unless it was a hyena, only the *bon Dieu* knows.”

The coffee-coloured batman smote his chest, and pulled his hair and abased himself in the dust. Let the Colonel open him up with a knife, and see for himself if he had devoured the treasure. Was not he the officer’s dog, his foot-mat, his faithful slave, who had served him without fault these many years? Who was he to steal from the hand that fed him? Was not the good Colonel his father and his mother?

Remembering the full-flavoured description he himself had just given of the batman’s progenitors, the Colonel did not feel flattered, so he eased his feelings by kicking the delinquent in several parts of his anatomy.

“When did you last see my so delicious roll, you, who were made from the ash of the pit and a mule’s spittle?”

“It was on a napkin on a tray of wood by the opening to this tent, O saver of nations and shield of the oppressed.”

The shield of the oppressed took him by his side whiskers and shook his head until his teeth rattled, spluttering spittle in his face all the time, like an infuriated he-cat interrupted in a courtship by a cross-grained terrier.

“Verily it is the truth,” wailed the batman. “Is not thy servant known in the market places as a man who has never lied nor cheated?”

This was a beautiful boast, for, as the Colonel knew, the batman was known near and far as a prince of liars, in a land where the truth is so seldom heard that it sounds like a voice from the dead when it happens to whisper.

“How came you, who are paid for such work, unclean one, to lose sight of my morning bread for a moment?”

“It came to pass this way, O survivor of the gods.” The Colonel kicked him on the shins, but without abating his eloquence. “It was the water for thy morning bath; there was none near to help me carry the bath, so I called to a legionary who was passing to help me, and he helped, and then went his way; it was the legionary they call the Rat, a good man and honest, else would not I have asked his aid. He touched not thy bread, O descendant of Cæsar; only for a moment was he near it, and was not I watching him?”

Well did the Colonel know the Rat’s reputation.

“Accursed son of an accursed mother,” he snarled. “The Ring Rat would steal the apple out of thy throat, and you be none the wiser. For a week he shall eat straw, for a week on the march, straw.”

And McGlusky, munching his big buttered roll in his quarters, did not give the Rat even a thought of gratitude for his enterprise.

CHAPTER IV

MCGLUSKY'S VISION

"A'd no describe masel' as a hater o' wummin, but, ma certie, Fritzel, eef yon hens air wha' they ca' wummin in these pairts, A'm a Benedict."

Fritzel of Germany grinned understandingly.

"I don' dink er man break der gommendments here, McGlusky, unless he vos ver' dronk. Der women, dey haf faces like er wart hog, an' de girls dey haf no legs, only two pieces of dried stick to walk on. Ach, I vonder who write all dose lies we read in books about der Eastern lofliness! If dese Fräuleins haf any lofliness, dey hide it ver' cleverly, an'!"—with another broad grin, followed by a chuckle—"dey don' wear enough to hide ver' mooch."

"Ide *much!*" broke in the Ring Rat. "Look at that little bit o' goods standin' by the mud 'ut cleanin' a cookin' pot by wipin' it round inside wif'er blinkin' finger, an' then washin' 'er finger by puttin' it in 'er mouth; she ain't 'idin' much, matey; an' 'airpin an' a 'apenny would make 'er the belle o' this ball. Hi don't mind 'ow they dress; Hi've seen a lot o' girls before Hi came to Hafrica, who only wore enough duds to make you see 'ow little they 'ad on. Hit's not the duds o' these she-cats that 'urts me: they're so dashed nutty, there's 'arf a acre ov smell to every bloomin' one of 'em."

"They're no posies," interpolated Mac, wrinkling his big nose, "an' they're no beauties, an' they've na mair modesty than a tinker's dog. A've lost a' my appetite fr wummin fr many a year noo; they're ainly a thorn in th' flesh fr a God-fearin' mon at th' best o' times. Lets awa' ower th' hills, an' look for something decent; perhaps we'll see a coo or twa, or maybe some ewes an' lambs. A'm a lover o' nature, ye ken, but no this sort o' nature. A'm no an auld mon, but A'm a wee bittie older than ye air, an' A've had mair expeerience o' th' world; eet's a dom wicked world, tak' it by an' large, an' maist o' th' wickedness in it is caused by the wummin; a mon's a puir daftie who lets yin o' them lead him inta trouble; they fill th' gaols an' th' hospitals an' th' cemeteries. When a thocht o' yin o' them comes inta ma head these days, A just say 'Oot o' it, ye besom; get thee ahint ma, Satan.' The yin great fau't A hae wi' th' Bible," he added after a pause, as they clambered up the hill, "is tha' Satan is made man-shape in th' book. Eef A were writin' a Bible, A'd hae Satan a hen; something wi' th' lure o' th' ages in its eyes, wi' a leetle red mooth drippin' honey, an' a neck like a meellion snowdrops rolled into a column, fit tae carry a wee

head crooned wi' curls, an' a pair o' wee ears like sea-shells set tae music. A'd gie it a body nae too short an' no too tall, an' a waist sae scrumptious yr arm wad gang oot tae curl roon' it, even eef ye were on yr deathbed, an' bosoms like two pomegranates, just burstin' wi' ripeness, an'——"

"Ere, Hi say, 'old on, Mac," exclaimed the Rat. "Wot yo're word-paintin' ain't any devil, hit's a shore enuff hangel. Hif you put that inter yore Bible, Hi'm goin' to be a devil-worshipper. You ain't made a picture of a hangel, not 'arf. Wot more cud a pore bloke want, eh, an' cud 'e get anyfink better in 'eaven?"

"Ye've na gumption, Rat," snapped the big fellow. "Eef ye had eyes tae see, ye'd ken there's a wumman like th' yin A've describit standin' at th' mooth o' every slide tha' leads doon into th' pit, an' she's holdin' th' gate open fir men. A'm through wi' th' hussies; yince they were a sair temptation tae ma, but A've ootgrown ma weakness. A wad na gie a pinch o' secon'-hand snuff fir th' best lookin' yin between Iceland an' hell."

Fritzel and the Rat looked at each other in amazement, wondering what bug was biting this full-blooded man, who had been imposing his ruthless personality upon them and upon all the Legion, ever since they had left barracks near the sea, and started out on the war-path in the desert.

It had been no picnic from the commencement, for the C.O.'s intention had been to strike terror into the enemy by a series of rapidly executed movements. The brigade of *Chasseurs d'Afrique*, mounted upon "salted" African horses bred in the desert and trained by long and careful handling to go without water for abnormal periods of time, had been flung forward far on the left front. A picked camel corps had been advanced on the right front. The *Légion d'Afrique*, all foot-men, had marched in the centre of this great living fan. Each unit was in touch with the other, but so far apart that they seemed like three separate expeditions, and each had plenty to do, for a Jihad or holy war was in progress, and fanaticism was at its flood. From the very first the *Légion d'Afrique* had been put upon its mettle. The order had gone forth that they, who travelled afoot, each man shouldering a pack so great that pack-mules shied at them as they passed, should travel at a pace that would keep them very nearly, if not quite, in line with the horsemen and camel-men. It was a mere mouthful of food, wolfed down before the dawn, then the hoisting of crushing packs, and the buckling of straps that bit into shoulders bloody and bruised and torn from the work of the day before; the crisp command that brooked neither excuse nor delay; the rattle of the kettledrums; the squeal of the fifes; the nice little remarks of the non-coms., which generally had to do with lop-eared mothers who had brought bow-legged, slab-sided, gutsless children, without a pedigree, into the

world, and then the swift, sure and unerring inspection of the ranks by the Falcon and his brother officers. If faults were to be found, they found 'em, for to a man they knew their jobs, and woe to the slacker or the delinquent of any kind; such got what was coming to them, and got it *pronto*, but the Falcon did not *make* faults for the pleasure of punishing them, neither did any other commissioned officer whilst the Falcon was in evidence. It was whispered in the ranks—and the *bon Dieu* only knows how the rankers of the Legion nearly always got hold of the truth concerning an officer's pedigree—that the Falcon, had he lived in France a generation earlier, would have been a duke and a Marshal of France by hereditary right. Men said openly by the bivouac fires that the Falcon's stock sprang straight from the loins of that Duc d'Enghien whom the first Napoleon gave to a firing platoon for reasons of state. In a sense the legionaries did not care a damn whether the Falcon came from the loins of a duke or a dustman; he knew his job, and they knew he knew it. After the brief inspection, which was in the main confined to the state of the weapons, came the snap of a command, the roll of the kettledrums, and *marche—marche*—"quick" *marche*. The damnable dust might rise up and half-choke them—swallow it, you dogs, or spit it out, but *marche—marche*, and be damned to you. The sun might blister, and feet on the burning pebbles underfoot might bleed, but *en avant* was ever the cry, and forward it was. A regiment ceases to be human when it gets on the move; it becomes a machine, and the machine crushes and grinds like the mills of God. Individuals may seethe with revolt, and gibber about a bullet in the back or a thrust of a bayonet in a *mêlée*, but the spirit of the regiment always prevails, and the name of the regimental spirit is discipline. The atom goes under and is trodden underfoot, but the mass moves on.

Came a time when the camels on the right flank and the horses on the left flank began to flag; water was scarce; fodder without water put little heart into the beasts. That was the moment which the clever, ever-retreating enemy had been waiting for. Then the Falcon, acting as the mouthpiece of the C.O., swooped down upon the *Légion d'Afrique*, his fierce eyes ablaze. He saw the gaunt men with belts drawn in until the wearers were wasp-waisted; dry-lipped, bright-eyed, with the brightness of blood that burned in their veins. He did not parley with them and tell them they were heroes; only windy demagogues cadging for votes ever do that, and they ought to be sealed up at both ends with cobbler's wax and be dropped from a church steeple, for their "hero" chatter is hot air, designed solely for self-profit and self-advancement. The Falcon ordered a kit inspection on parade, and threw away every ounce that could be spared from every kit, and every belt was pulled up an extra hole—the poorest kind of a quick lunch on the market—and then, as the Legion

stood ready, the Falcon spoke. He, lean as any greyhound, had dismounted and sent his charger to the rear, and stood at the head of the column. His voice snapped out:

“The *Légion d’Afrique* is, as it has ever been, the foot cavalry of the army of France in Africa. *En avant* at the double, *mes enfants*.”

He wheeled as he spoke, and broke into a sharp fox-trot, not the ball-room variety of fox-trot, but the deadly, space-devouring trot with measured stride that proves a man or kills him. When the Falcon halted his trot, and fell into the swinging marching stride, many a long mile lay behind the Legion. It was an emergency march, and the legionaries were being tested, as a good blade is tested, almost to the breaking point. Again the trot came on, again it was broken and again resumed, until the sun had dipped, and then, but not till then, the Falcon moved away from the van, stepping as smartly as if he had been leading a cotillon, though his men guessed that his sinews were drawn as tightly as bow-strings.

The Goat, who had been in that gruelling day’s work, was not clarified or refined by the sweat that had pumped out of every pore in his lean hide; he became the very essence of goat, and damnably vicious and vindictive goat at that. Fritzel of Germany, who had borne himself like a soldier and a man throughout that awful day, happened to catch the malevolent attentions of the Goat: a word, a perhaps not too alert reply—for big Fritzel was bone weary—and then the back of the Goat’s hand across the German’s handsome face. A hoarse guttural sound rumbled in the German’s throat; he held himself back from his spring like a young bull ready to rush, and in that moment McGlusky’s voice came to his ears, and to the ears of the Goat.

“Dinna throw yr life awa’ fir a cooard, Fritzel.”

Over the German face that had turned grey with fury, crept a smile. The eyes of the two big men met, and in that moment Fritzel the German was McGlusky’s man, body, brain and soul. The Goat, whose powers were almost limitless on a march in war time, feigned not to hear McGlusky’s remark; he had seen a lot of the Scotchman since the day they had left barracks, and what he had observed had led him to the belief that this gaunt pagan would stop at nothing if roused; he did not fight as other men fought, when trouble was forced upon him.

At the three wells, where camp had been pitched on the tenth night, Mustapha Ali, a brawny Turkish legionary, had seized McGlusky’s water bottle, and refused to deliver it to its rightful owner.

“Ye misbegotten follower o’ th’ prophet Mahomet,” Mac had growled at him. “A’ll split ye asun’er eef ye dinna gie ma back ma watter.”

In reply the Turk had snatched up an iron-shod swingle-bar belonging to one of the unharnessed mule teams, and had aimed a blow at Mac’s head that would have

decapitated him on the spot, had he not ducked under the swinging weapon. Getting in close, Mac had taken Mustapha's beard in his two hands, and parted it down the middle; then his right hand tore to the north whilst his left wrenched south, until to the onlookers it seemed as if Mustapha's head must be wrenched asunder. The roars of the Turk were like the roaring of many camels; he was a game man and a strong, as most of his breed are, but in the Scotch Anzac he had met his master. He tried to use his knees, tried also to gouge and bite, but those inexorable hands with whiskers as levers were pulling him apart. Mac said later to Fritz and the Rat:

"A didna want tae hurt th' buckie; he is a good soldier, an' A were na cross wi' him; eef A had been in an ill mood, A wad hae hurtit him sair, for A'm no gentle when A'm roused."

When he had thrown Mustapha from him, bleeding at jaws and chin and spitting foam and blood, the Turk had foolishly rushed back into the fray, a big gutting knife in his right hand. Mac had steadied his rush with a fearful right-handed drive under the heart, then stooping with almost incredible swiftness for so big a man, he had seized Mustapha by the ankles, jerked him on to his head, and, holding him perpendicularly with his feet in the air, Mac had snarled:

"Tak' a knife tae ma, wad ye? Losh, mon, A'll split ye asun'er like a forked radish, an' open ye up tae see wha's eenside ye."

He was busy on this gentle task, putting all his mighty strength into it, when Mustapha's yells brought the Falcon hot foot to the scene. Drawing his sword, the officer drove the heavy steel basket hilt under McGlusky's left ear, laying him prone; he then kicked Mustapha back to his place in the lines, and went nonchalantly about his other duties.

Of trivial incidents of this kind there had been many during the marching and fighting, and Mac seemed to flourish upon them. He did not bear the Falcon the faintest ill will for that blow under the ear with the sword hilt, for, as he remarked to the Rat:

"Th' Falcon ainly did his dooty; A'd ha' done th' same had A been in his place. A've done it many a time when A were drivin' dog teams in Alaska, an' twa good huskies were fechtin' tae kill. A like th' mon fr kennin' his dooty an' daein' it wi'oot fuss an' palaver, an' A'm no sorry he didna let ma split Mustapha frae stern tae stem—it wad hae been a waeful' waste o' a good legionary."

By some freak of human nature, that incident had added Mustapha, the surly Turk, to McGlusky's list of close admirers. The Turk was wont to exclaim afterwards:

"Me, Mustapha Ali, I one ver' strong man; I trow de mule dat bite me, an'

poonch de mule's ribs in, but McGlusky—"Mustapha would make an illuminative gesture with arms and big, hairy hands. "Some day he walk into Eblis, an' bring out de gates of Sheitan's temple on his shoulder. He one ver' damn strong man, an' fear—he is not know heem. Eef Sheitan him wear wheeskers, McGlusky he breeng heem out of Eblis too."

All these things were known to the Goat, and, being wise in his way, he had long determined to pick his own time and opportunity to settle scores with the Scot.

That first day at "foot cavalry" work was but the precursor of many more, and as time wore on the men got used to it, and soon they led the van in the centre, whilst horse and camel men on either flank fell a little to the rear, and the brunt of the fighting fell on the Legion also. It was merciless war that was waged on both sides; it was a battle of tigers against vultures, and the tigers did not have it all their own way, for the tribesmen were past masters in ambushes: they manœuvred their retreats in such style that very often what looked like a rout of their forces was in reality only a cleverly designed trap. Running like so many frightened hares, they would dive headlong into shallow gullies covered with thorn scrub and strewn with big boulders of rock; once in amongst such cover, they would disappear as surely as if they had never existed, and the legionaries would have to go in after them and rout them out at the bayonet's point, and drive them on in front, for it would never do to permit such a crafty foe to worm a way to the rear and hang on with their harassing tactics. Many of the tribesmen only had the old-world, long-barrelled, muzzle-loading Arab muskets, but great numbers had modern rifles supplied by the great factories of Europe and other countries as well. Once after such a scrap, the Rat brought a couple of up-to-date rifles into camp, and showed them to McGlusky with one of his whimsical grins.

"Looks a bit 'omey, them rifles, don't they, big 'un?"

"What air they, and wheer did ye get 'em?"

The Rat jerked his pear-shaped head in the direction of some scrub and rocks the Legion had just cleared.

"Got 'em in there. My section was pokin' abart among th' blinkin' thorns an' we was all stragglin' like little lorst lambs, corse we cudden't keep no kind o' formation wif lumps o' rock buckin' up 'ere there an' everywhere—'ow cud we? Then hup jumps Mr. Fuzzy, abart a 'undred of 'im, blarst 'is stinkin' soul, an' they give it to hus 'ot at abart pistol range, an' we 'adn't seen a blinkin' sign ov 'em; vey 'ad been layin' doggo be'ind them rocks, waitin' to hinvite hus to the party. Carl the wrestler won't wrestle no more; 'e's in 'eaven by now, Carl is, if there's a beer shop in them 'appy regions; 'e wasn't a bad bloke, if 'e did put 'is money in 'is mouth when 'e

went to sleep in barracks; 'e's sleepin' sound enough now, pore bloke, an' 'e ain't got 'is money in 'is mouth; I know, for Hi looked."

"You're meanin' Carl is dead, eh?"

"Deader'n a 'addock in a lodgin' 'ouse. So'd you be, Mac, if you'd got wot 'e got. Carl was on my left front, abart two foot away, when a Fuzzy got right up outer the gravel at 'is feet, an' pushed a bloomin' gas pipe right into Carl's midsummer 'ouse, ter be poetical, or inter his guts ter be correc', an' that gas pipe blew an 'ole in Carl you cud put yer fist in. 'E didn't mean to miss, not 'arf 'e didn't, that Fuzzy, neither did Hi: my bay'net went right inter the middle ov 'is bow-bells, an' 'e let hout a screech an' clawed 'old of my bay'net as Hi pulled it hout ov 'im to put it into his twin brother who was comin' at me wiv another loaded gas pipe. 'E didn't 'ave no luck, that twin, because Hi side-stepped just as 'is gas pipe went orf, same as Hi used ter side-step when Hi was boxin', only quicker. Hi didn't want a 'ole in *my* bow-bells as big as the one pore old Carl 'ad got. Hi poked my bay'net inter the middle ov the twin's fice; 'e wasn't an 'andsome bloke before Hi did it, but 'is muvver wouldn't 'ave known 'im afterwards. Then we got busy, orl of us, pickin' them Fuzzies hout from be'ind rocks wiv the bay'net. Hit wasn't like pickin' winkles hout ov their shells wiv a pin neither, because them Fuzzies ain't winkles not by a bloomin' long chalk. We lorst fourteen good fightin' men besides big Carl in there. One litle brown brother jumped hup from nowhere right on to the Goat's back, an' jerked the Goat's 'ead right back, an' was drorin' a long knife right acrost 'is wind-pipe; I fink 'e would 'ave took the Goat's 'ead right orf, only Hi pushed my pistol into 'is ear an' suspended th' operations. Funny fins you do in a scrap, eh, matey? There was me, opin' an' prayin' fer weeks th' Lord wud let a Arab knife slit that blinkin' Goat, an' when the Lord got busy doin' the very fing Hi wanted Him ter do, I 'ad to butt in an' save the Goat, oo is the blunt end ov a pig, an' a stale hoyster an' a kickin' camuel all rolled into one, an' a snarlin' son ov a she-dog on top ov that. Hit was the sight ov the uniform th' Goat was wearin' wot did it: 'e was one ov hus, one ov th' regiment, though 'is muvver must 'ave been monkey married an' spendin' 'er 'oneymoon on a muck 'eap when she found 'im. Orl Hi got from the Goat fer blowin' the lid orf the 'ead ov that Fuzzy was a mouf-full ov curses fir bein' slow. Me, slow! W'y, matey, Hi was 'oppin' abart on me toes like I was the night Dick Burge was chasin' me to get me in a corner ov the Ring an' send me to dreamland. Hi 'ad 'arf a mind to touch th' trigger ov me rifle an' send the Goat to look fir a second 'and pair ov hangel wings. Hi cud 'a done it heasy, an' none be the wiser, fir th' thorn bushes was 'igher than our 'ead's just there, and no one alive near enough to tork abart it, but the uniform wouldn't let me."

“Ye’re a leear,” growled McGlusky. “It were the wee sma’ spark o’ manliness ye hae in ye tha’ wad na let ye dae it. In some ways, Ring Rat, ye air second cousin tae a skunk; eef ye were a Holy Roman by releegion, ye’d steal th’ gold filin’s frae between th’ teeth o’ th’ priest who were hearin’ yr dyin’ confession—ye cud na help yersel’—but in some ither ways ye mak’ me blush fir ma ain shortcomin’s; ye’ve got bigness in ye—in spots—an’, ma certie, ye air a first-class fechtin’ mon, though ye dinna look it, ye slab-sided, hatchet-faced, skimp-limbed runt. Eef A had a deeveesion like ye, A’d clean oop Africa like an old barn floor.”

Some men might have resented that speech, but into the Ring Rat’s face came a flush of honest pride. He sidled close to the big fellow’s side, and kept step with him as they marched to bivouac, for the fighting was over for that day.

As they squatted by their little fire of camel-dung and thorn roots, Mac, after vainly searching in every crevice of his clothes for even a shred of something to smoke, gazed dolefully at his blackened pipe.

“Dom th’ lousy commissariat department o’ th’ army,” he growled. “Eet’s seven days th’ noo since A tasted or smelt tobacco, an’ us fechtin’ an’ forced marchin’ a’ th’ time. Th’ cravin’s gnawin’ at ma stomach like a dog gnawin’ a last week’s knuckle-bone. Eef there were a canteen wi’ in ten miles o’ us, A’d break bounds an’ reesk a coort martial, tired as A am.”

“Dot vas how I feel in my insides,” muttered Fritz. “De fightin’, dot vas goot, by heck, dot vas; why we come, hein de force march, dot vas all in de game; de vatter vot we drink, eet was hot, an’ it stinks. I no gomplain, but no dobacco—by de breeches o’ de burgomaster o’ Cologne, dot vas der teffil.”

“Three officers from the *Chasseurs d’Afrique* just rode in to ’eadquarters; they looked like bloomin’ peacocks, wif their gold an’ blue an’ crimson togs; they was orl smokin’ meerschaum pipes too, an’ blowin’ horf enough terbaccer ter larst hus fir a week. Hi got a whiff ov it, Hi did; luv me, hit will ’aunt me; it was real terbaccer too, same as th’ ’igh kickers used ter smoke at the ’Orse Guards in London. Wisht Hi was there now.”

“Gang tae Tophet,” snapped McGlusky. “Wha’ dae ye want tae stir a mon’s innards for wi’ yr fule talk about ‘real’ terbacco? A’d sell ma granny’s smock fir a pipefu’ th’ noo.”

A moody silence fell on the group, and remained unbroken for quite a while.

“A’m won’erin’ eef we boiled all oor pipes doon an’ poured th’ juice on a han’ful o’ camel’s hair, eef we cud get a sma’ moothfu’ o’ smoke apiece?”

It was McGlusky who made this unique suggestion.

“Gosh,” gurgled the Rat, “that’s abart th’ sunset limit. Hi’d sooner smoke a nice

juicy bit o' dead Fuzzy, hif we cud get 'im before 'e got 'igh."

A minute later the one-time waif of the London streets rose and began to saunter off.

"Wha's bitin' ye? Where air ye trekkin' tae?" demanded Mac.

"Me?" The Rat stretched himself and yawned. "Hi've 'ad a—a vision, Mac."

"Hae ye so? Then A ken weel where it cam frae. Dinna get up tae any o' yr fule ploys; th' sentries wull fire on sicht th' nicht."

"Betcher 'arf a thick 'un they won't see me."

"They'll hear ye eef they dinna see ye."

"Will vey? Hi've got through a blinkin' skylight from a pal's shoulders, wiv th' electric glim shinin' right on th' skylight, an' a cop standin' not twenty yards awi, searchin' his little self fir bugs an' dreamin' luscious dreams ov th' 'ousemaid in th' mansion hopposite comin' to meet 'im wiv a nice baked juicy happple-tart 'id under 'er apron."

"Ye'd maybe get six months fir that in London, eef ye were caught, buckie; ye'll get six bullets in yr wame frae a firin' platoon th' morn's morn eef ye're caught lootin' frae camp th' nicht. Besides, eet's—eet's na honest; eet's a—a disgrace tae th' uniform ye're plannin'."

"Aw," growled the Rat, "to 'ell wiv them 'igh-toned remarks! Wouldn't any ov the Chassers go through hus if they got the chanst, eh?"

"Weel," replied Mac, "since ye put it tha' way, A ken they wad, an' eef y're hell bent on plun'er, mind ye dinna get caught."

The Rat made a noise that was meant to express his contempt, and then rasped out:

"Hit's easy, this 'ere job his. Hi'd take them Chasser hoficers' spurs off an' polish 'em an' put 'em on again wivout them gettin' wise to it."

He drifted away in the starlight, and, passing on unmolested to the Colonel's headquarters, found a number of friendly Arabs looking after the three horses of the *Chasseurs* officers. His uniform was passport enough for him to mingle with the horse-holders and examine the horses before the officers came from the C.O.'s tent. He did not waste his time. In under each saddle he slipped a sharp pebble, just where it would bite into the horses' backs when the riders mounted; even without a man in the saddle, the mettled animals did not like the sharp pebbles, flinching and pawing the ground as soon as they felt the irritation.

"Hi loves an 'orse, they're so bally useful," murmured the London scallywag to the night in general and his own sinful soul in particular. "A man wot don't love an 'orse hain't Hinglish."

The three *Chasseurs* officers came out at last, and promptly made their way to their steeds. The night ride would, they knew, be chilly, as most desert nights are, they buttoned their long riding-cloaks up to their chins, filled their pipes, pushed the big pouches laden with tobacco into the cavernous pockets of their cloaks, where they would be easy to get at, and then, being careful soldiers, each took a pull at his girths, a process that made the horses prance, and the Rat went nippily from one to the other to help. When they swung to saddle, they had no time to examine their pockets, even if such a thought had entered their heads; the horses gave them each a man's job, plunging and trying hard to unseat them.

"*Sacré mon Dieu*, what ails the damn animals?" growled out one, after a few minutes of equine devilment had passed.

"It's the cold night wind that has made them wicked," responded a comrade. "Those sons of sin we left to hold them have let them stand, instead of walking them up and down."

They rode away, and the Rat, without in any way unduly heralding his presence, stole off as soft of foot as any night prowler. He thought he was unseen, but the Goat, who had been on duty in the vicinity, caught sight of him as he was slinking away like a fox.

"Ah, *monsieur* the Rat," he muttered, "for why you, who ought to be tired enough to-night to stay by your bivouac, hang round these officers, eh? A rat can always smell pickings," he sniggered, and promptly followed the slinking form of the pickpocket with steps as soft as the Rat's own. The Goat had not been a successful burglar in Paris for nothing.

Halting some twenty yards from his own bivouac, the Rat deftly turned the tobacco pouches he had looted inside out, and transferred the tobacco to his capacious pockets; then kneeling, he scooped a shallow hole in the sand, buried the pouches, meaning to retrieve them the following day, then carefully smoothing over the *cache*, he crawfished his way to his bivouac.

Scarce had he left his *cache* ere the Goat was kneeling at the spot, rooting up the spoil, and grinning amiably to himself. When he found three completely empty pouches, a good deal of the amiability went out of his grin. The pouches were good, and he could sell them later when the Legion returned to its headquarters, but he knew they had not been empty when the Rat had annexed them. He had hoped to find something of greater value, perhaps a purse well lined, for some of the *Chasseurs* officers were wealthy men. He was disappointed and angry.

"May the devil frizzle his soul, the dirty thief," he snarled viciously. "He has robbed me of a good smoke, and perhaps of some money he did not plant. He is

one damn disgrace to the Legion. Three tobacco-pouches from three officers of a crack regiment—bah, by the whiskers of a cross-eyed cat, a child could have done better; any gamin of the gutters of Paris would have got more. The dog's heart must have failed him." He stood thinking, and then his goat-beard fairly bristling, he smote himself upon the chest. "By the drums of the dead regiment, I see it all. Ah, ha, *monsieur* the Rat, you have not fool me; no, by the shirt-tail of the pagan prophet, it take a better man than you to pull the camel's hair over the eyes of the man who fool all the police of Paris. You hide in the sand what you no want to keep; the rest it is on you, an' me I have it, or?"—he made a diabolical grimace—"a firing party for a thief who steal from an *officier*, yes."

The Rat had joined his bivouac mates. Mac and Fritzelt looked expectantly at him as he dropped loosely to earth.

"Weel?"

The one expectant word came from McGlusky.

"No bloomin' luck."

Mac, who had drawn forth his old pipe hopefully, sighed.

"A'm glad o' it," he grunted dismally. "Eet wad ha' been a deescredit tae a' o' us eef Proveedence had put temptation in yr way, an' ye had yielded tae eet."

The Rat drew forth his pipe, loaded it from the loot in his pocket, pressed the aromatic weed hard down in the bowl, and lighting up with a fire stick, began to draw deeply into his lungs the fragrant smoke. Mac's eyes began to bulge. For a few seconds he sat pulling in the aroma on the breeze, his cavernous nostrils dilating in the process.

"Ye spawn o' a cross between a sea serpent an' an immoral she-salmon. Eef ye had na luck, where did ye get tha' weed? Eet's—eet's real tobacco."

"Yep," remarked the Rat placidly, "hit's th' real, Mackie. Hi was goin' to hoffer you some, but——"

The Rat took his pipe from his mouth, and wagged it impishly.

"Weel, dom ye, why did ye no?"

"Hi didn't want ter tempt yer to disgrace yer uniform, Mac."

"A've been theenkin' ower th' matter, ma buckie, an' there air times when takin' a theeng tha' is na richtfully yer ain is no stealin'; eet's wha' ye micht wi' a stretch o' eemagination ca' contraband o' war. Noo fill ma pipe, for A canna stan' th' cravin' any mair. Eef ye dinna, A'll fill yr belly wi' sand, an' kick it oot o' yr ears."

Producing all the tobacco he had looted, the Rat divided it into three parts, keeping one little heap for himself; the other two piles he handed to Fritzelt and McGlusky, and soon the campaigners were in a soldier's heaven.

The Goat, after he had made up his mind concerning the Rat and the loot, started to prowl from one bivouac to another in search of his quarry; it was the perfume of excellent tobacco on the night air that at last led him to the man he sought.

"Ah," he exclaimed with a tittering little laugh, "it is so I find you, eh?"

He had touched the Rat with the toe of his boot as he spoke. A badly smothered oath came from McGlusky, a low growl from Fritzel, and something that might have been but was not, the beginning of a prayer from the Rat.

"Get up an' come with me to the tent of the C.O. You are under arrest." The words were addressed to the Rat. "Sharp now."

The Goat had drawn his service revolver. The Rat rose; he knew there would be no forgiveness for robbery from an officer in the presence of the enemy, and he had it in his mind that if he were going west, he would take the Goat for company.

"Wot's ther charge, sergeant?"

"Robbery."

"Hi'm as hinnercent has a blind puppy. Th' only bloomin' fing Hi done wrong ter-day was blowin' the 'ead orf the Fuzzy wot was goin' to hoperate on your windpipe wif a butcher's knife, sergeant."

The Goat, who was utterly and absolutely soulless, only grinned at this reminder.

"Step in front of me, and step sharp."

"Arf a mo', sergeant; may as well bring me kit wiff me, eh?"

The Rat cast a swift glance at his side-arms and rifle as he spoke; if he could only get hold of his sword-bayonet, a backward stab in the dark might help to even matters with the sergeant, but the Goat was taking no chances.

"Leave your kit. *You* will not need those things any more."

"No, Hi sponse not. You've got heverythink framed against me orl right, you blarsted Goat." Then pulling himself together, he said with devil-may-care recklessness: "So-long, you blokes. Hif you get a chanst ter-morrer or any old day, do a bit o' goat shootin' fir me."

Then he marched, with the sergeant's pistol pushed hard between his blade-bones.

Fritzel made a rumbling noise that came from his stomach, and his right hand slid along to where his weapons lay, and came back with his naked sword-bayonet in his grip.

"*Ach, himmel*, der Rat vas von leedle teffil, but dat Goat vas too dam rotten for der vulture-meat."

He rose, and Mac sprang up beside him.

"A hear voices on th' win's o' th' nicht," he whispered eerily. "Eet's th' voice o' th' Lord o' battles."

"Eet is der voice o' der dam Goat threatenin' he vill shoot der Rat," interpolated Fritz.

"Na, na; A've heerd th' voice mair than yince in ma sinfu' life, an' eet is sayin' 'Rise oop an' destroy; just yin big clump unner th' lug wi' yr naked han', Jamie, in th' name o' justice,' an' by ma breek, A'll dae it. Th' Rat were a thief, but Jamie McGlusky, who shared th' spoil, were na better, an'—an' A'm theenkin' th' Lord wants th' Goat th' nicht, or He'd no let ma hear th' voice."

He ceased speaking, and set his long legs in motion, and as he travelled he was swinging his right arm, as if working up its dynamic force, and as he went, the amazed Fritz heard him murmur softly:

"A feel a gran' ooplifin' o' th' speerit, tae think th' God ov ma feythurs hae noe forgotten ma in spite o' a' my backslidin'. Eet's na much tae kill sic a skunk as th' Goat in a cause o'—o' justice. A'd dae mair than kill th' Goat, A'd eat him."

The pair almost ran on to the sergeant and the Rat in the dim starlight, for the *sous-officier* had halted his prisoner and was interrogating him.

"How mooch you steal from the three *Chasseurs*, eh? How mooch money? Speak, queeck, you brother of a pig."

"Ow much money? Blimey, Hi never got a sou."

"Liar, brother of a jackal, you try to rob *me*? Unclean one, your mother never had a nose."

"Never mind me muvver's nose, sergeant. Hi didn't get a blinkin' sou. Orl Hi got was the bacca Hi——"

"Son of the impenitent thief, I will give you one more chance. Hand over to me what you stole, blackguard that you are, or I march you to the C.O. and produce the tobacco-pouches as evidence, and it will be a platoon for you at break o' day."

The Rat had dimly made out the figures of his two bivouac mates, standing close behind the Goat, and he knew instinctively by the unwritten freemasonry of the Legion that they had come to deal faithfully with the persecuting sergeant. The Rat was game; he was also the very embodiment of cheek.

"Hi can't give you wot Hi 'aven't got, can Hi? You can 'ave 'arf the bacca Hi 'ave, an' you can keep the three pouches. Farver in eving, wot more can a pore bloke do? You better tike the bacca an' let me go, sergeant, strike me you 'ad; one o' them two pals o' mine will sure bust th' crust o' yr pore 'ead before you're a week older hif yer don't."

"Pouf! That for your comrades! Them? I will attend to them later."

The Goat snapped his fingers contemptuously as he spoke, and Fritzel drew back his sword-bayonet to make a lunge, but Mac shouldered him on one side, and reaching one of his long arms over the Goat's shoulder, he took him by the wrist and wrenched so savagely that the revolver was jerked to the sand. Mac's other hand was clasped over the Goat's mouth, and one of his knobbly knees was pressed into the middle of the Goat's spine. The sergeant, though only a medium-sized person, was strong, wiry and in superb condition, but in McGlusky's hands he was as useless as a slip of a schoolgirl.

"Fink Hi'd better tap 'im on the 'ead wiff 'is own little gun; then we can scoop a 'ole in the sand an' bury 'im face darnwards, an' smooth th' plice over. We'll be marchin' art o' 'ere in the mornin', an' when 'e's missed the C.O. will fink 'e's deserted, eh?"

The Rat spoke with a tremor in his voice, for desert war had made a barbarian of him, as it does of most men who sample it for long. The cold sweat broke out all over the Goat; he knew he had forfeited all claim to mercy; he tried to bleat a plea for pity, but the hand clasped over his lips was glued to his face like a suction pipe.

"A'm no likin' yr plan, Rat," whispered McGlusky. "Yin o' th' camp dogs may come sniffin' at th' grave, an' claw awa' th' sand. Th' Goat's a murderin' hound, an' we're ainly gi'en him justice, th' justice o' th' desert, but we want na cruelty, an' buryin' him alive wad be cruel. A'll just gie him a clump unner th' lug wi' ma naked fist, an' then snap his spine wi' ma knee. He'll na feel it ower-much, an' justice should aye be peetifu'. We can carry his body tae the mule lines an' leave eet there. When they fin' him th' morn's morn, they wull theenk his endin' cam' by th' han' o' Providence helped by th' hoofs o' a mule. A'll gie him a cloomp noo, an'——"

Mac never dealt that "cloomp," for the air was rent with yells that rose on all sides. The enemy was upon them; semi-naked, copper-coloured figures, stabbing spears in either hand, were pouring in and over the Legion's camp. Mac picked the Goat up in his two arms, and hurled him at a bronze figure that was leaping forward, axe in one hand, spear in the other. The steel bit into the Goat, but not fatally, and before the nomad of the wilds could strike again Mac had seized him by both his thin legs and almost sundered him.

"Eet's no the mode, but eet wull serve," he snarled as he flung the nomad's body down and seized the axe.

He forgot he was only Jamie McGlusky, private o' the Legion; the war-lust was on him, and all his old inborn instincts of leadership awoke. He saw the legionaries battling in broken disarray, and his bull-like voice rose above all other sounds:

"Ta me, ma men, tae me. Close up yer ranks an' beat th' deils back."

He whirled into the nearest mass of squirming, struggling, stabbing men, followed by the Rat and Fritzel, who had snatched spears from the fallen, and to him the scattered legionaries rallied, as soldiers will always rally to a born fighting leader. Soon discipline told its inevitable story. The Legion came to itself and knitted together like machinery, and then the nomads, fanatically brave, but undisciplined, felt the Legion's vengeance. As soon as order was restored, the issue was never in doubt; the men settled down like the cogs in the wheels of a great machine, and drove back wave after wave of yelling humanity, and the dawn found them masters of the sternly fought field, and when the muster roll had been called, the C.O. embraced McGlusky in front of all the men, and pinned upon his great chest the *Croix de Guerre*, remarking:

"*Mon brave*, it is soldiers like you who are always up and alert, attending to duty, that are the pride of the Legion."

Mac never batted an eyelid, not even when he saw the grins on the faces of the Rat and Fritzel.

"A were just daein' ma dooty, *mon Colonel*," he replied modestly, and he added: "Wha' A were daein' awa' frae ma bivouac when th' attack cam' were no ainly a dooty, but a—a pleasure," and the Colonel patted him on the shoulder in fatherly fashion, and commended him for his spirit.

Just what the Goat said about it when the surgeon's assistant told him of the incident, would have shocked the fine old C.O. had he heard it, but it would not have rubbed the self-satisfied smirk off the face of McGlusky, who had long coveted the *Croix de Guerre*, and felt he had earned it.

All these things, and many more, had happened to the Legion before they had reached the big Arab village far inland, where the charms (?) of the women and girls had so disappointed both Fritzel and the Rat.

CHAPTER V

LOVE COMES TO MCGLUSKY

The Goat being still on the sick list, and McGlusky standing high in favour with his officers, the big fellow was finding life in the Legion a good deal more endurable than at one time had seemed possible. Quite a reasonable amount of freedom of movement was accorded the men in the village, and so Mac and his two companions decided to push on over the hills that skirted two sides of the thickly inhabited quarter, and as they went they continued the discussion concerning things feminine that had intrigued them.

“Me,” remarked the Rat, “Hi ain’t wot yer might call er sentimental cove; if Hi ’ad an ’ome Hi’d like a woman in it; they’re ’andy, they are; a woman can wash a bloke’s shirt wile ’e stops in bed till it dries, an’ that’s wot Hi calls ’andy; they can sew on buttons an’ fings, an’ cook th’ grub wen there’s any ter cook, an’ they can ’elp ter pass th’ time in lots o’ ways hif you keeps ’em in their plice. Hi don’t see no sense in talkin’ a lot o’ mush to ’em abart luv. Wot *is* luv wen you sort it art an’ get right darn ter th’ ashfelt? Luv is jes’ grub an’ dresses an’ ’ats. Hif yer luv ’em, yer give ’em them fings wen you can get ’em; hif yer don’t, they jes’ gives you a ’int that they’re goin’ orf wiv some bloke wot will, an’ small blame to ’em. Luv wot is all kop an’ no blew ain’t arf a fake. Hi ’ad a nice little wife once, leastwys she called ’erself my wife, an’ no one didn’t dispute it. ’Er farver was a bone an’ rag collector, an’ as a side-line ’e collected anyfing else ’e could get ’is ’ooks into, an’ ’e used ter send the kid out ter sell anyfing special that ’e got ’old of; that’s ’ow Hi got to know ’er; she ’ad been pawnin’ a necklace wot got right up orf a dressin’-table an’ walked through a winder into a back yard where ’er old man was collectin’ rags an’ bones, an’ the ole blighter sent the kid art to pawn it. She ’ad a fice like them you see in pictures of hangels: fluffy ’air, an’ lots ov it, an’ it looked like honey wiv a lamp shining on it; ’er eyes was like two bunches o’ wiolets wiv th’ dew on ’em, an’ ’er fice wen it was clean was jes’ like milk an’ red roses, like you see in Covent Garding at the hend o’ June, an’ ’er mouth—well, Hi used ter lie an’ dream abart ’er mouth wen th’ cell door closed on me o’ nights wen Hi was doin’ time. Hi was in the pawnbroker’s shop doin’ a bit o’ business on me own that mornin’ the kid was pawnin’ the necklace ’er farver ’ad found (?), wen in walks a quiet, innercent-lookin’ guy, an’ as soon as I seen ’im finks Hi to meself: ‘The hair houtside is an ’ell of a lot ’ealthier than in this pawnshop.’ Hi knew ’im for the nippiest detective in

London. So Hi shook the ring Hi'd come to pawn darn me trouser-leg an' pushed it under a rug, an' was bloomin' glad ter be rid of hit. Hi was jes' saunterin' art, wen Hi 'eard th' kid give a yelp, an' at the same time Hi 'eard the click of a 'andcuff, an' Hi knew she was pinched, so Hi stopped, an' somethin' in th' kid's fice made me feel as hif the 'addock Hi'd 'ad fer breakfast 'ad died of immoral proceedins. She wouldn't tell where she got the necklace, an' the 'demon' told 'er she'd be put awy fer a long stretch hif she didn't. Then somethin' went wrong wif me ole topknot; hit must ha' been that 'addock, but Hi steps hup an' sez: 'Oh, *nix* on th' long stretch fer th' kid; she's the biby in this case; she don't know nothin' abart it. Hi give it to 'er to sell, an' told 'er Hi'd give 'er 'arf a dollar hif she mide a good bargain.' 'An' where did *you* get the necklace?' arks the 'demon' in 'is narsty quiet voice. 'Me?' Hi sez. 'Well, Hi might as well tell the truth, seein' Hi never tole a lie in me life: a primmy donnah as is singin' 'Amlet in Grand Hopera give it to me to remember 'er by.' 'E took th' bracelets orf the kid's wrists an' put 'em on mine, an' they gave me three months 'ard fer that."

McGlusky paused in his walk, and gave his rifle strap a hitch, then looked down in the gutter waif's funny face.

"Weel," he remarked, "A've called ye some hard names since we've foregathered thegither, but dom ma sinfu' soul, Rat, eef A dinna theenk ye'd ha' been a better mon than Jamie McGlusky eef ye'd had a chance in life. A'd gie ye ma *Croix de Guerre* eef they'd let ye wear eet. Noo tell ma mair about little flower face. Did she——"

"She was orl right, Mac. She was a perfec' little lidy; never wiped 'er nose on 'er sleeve nor nothink like that—a perfec' little lidy, she were. She cud ha' gone an' been 'ousekeeper to a fat ole retired fishmonger oo lived near the National Sportin' Club; 'e told 'er 'e'd dress 'er in silks, an' she'd 'ave no work ter do, an' 'ave a pug dawg ov 'er own, an' 'e tried to 'ug 'er, 'e did, the fat swine, an' she was as slender as a slip o' rosemary, an' 'im, 'e 'adn't seen 'is toes fer ten years; orl 'is fat was in the front, like 'er bow-winder. She stuck to 'er old farver until 'e was 'ung; then she come to me, an' said: 'Tike me hif you want me; no man hain't ever——' Hi jes' stopped 'er mouth wiv kisses, an' we started 'ousekeepin' there an' then. Hi 'ad a 'ome at that time, a hattick in Leather Lane; it wasn't a hattick wen she was there, hit was 'evin."

"For why did they hang her father? Even eef he did pinch things, that is na a hangin' matter," exclaimed Mac, who seemed deeply interested in the one-time waif's story.

"Ambition ruined 'im, same has it did Napoleon," was the serious reply. "'E

wanted to hextend 'is business, so 'e started burglin' flats. One night 'e took a 'orseshoe in a stockin' wiff 'im fer luck, an' the bloke wot owned the flat came 'ome just as 'e was leavin' wiff the silver——”

“Weel, wha' happened?”

“My girl's farver parted that gent's 'air wiv the 'orseshoe, that's wot 'appened, an' th' Judge wouldn't believe 'im when 'e said 'e only did it for luck—they're awful stony-'earted, some of them judges.”

“Did wee flower-face stick tae ye, buckie?”

“Fer two years she did, then Hi 'ad a awful winter: no one seemed to carry anyfing worth 'avin' in their pockets. Hi was crazy desprit, Hi was; Hi dam' near went to work. My girl got shabby clothes an' not enough ter eat, neither did Hi. Then a feller from America saw 'er, an' said she 'ad jes' the fice fir a film star, an' so she 'ad.”

“Ye dinna mean tae say he took her away frae ye?”

“Hi don't fink 'e 'ad to do any takin'; she jes' went. Don't blame 'er,” added the Rat. “Hif Hi 'ad a girl wot told me she loved me, an' hevery cold wet night, when Hi went 'ome an' arsked 'er for grub, hif she jes' said: ‘'ere, dear, 'ere's a 'elpin' ov luv,’ Hi'd sye: ‘Chuck th' luv, Hi'm goin' where Hi can get some solids, Hi am.’”

“Eet's a waesome world in many ways, ma buckie,” remarked Mac, who seemed in one of his sententious moods. “Eef A had been in th' place o' th' Power who made this world an' gied it tae us, A wad nae ha' made wumman o' sic importance in th' plan o' theengs; they ken richt weel th' worl' canna gang on wi'oot them; even a she-cat kens tha' eef there air na mair kittens there wull be na cats, an' wummin an' cats air verra much alike in mair ways than yin, but maist o' a' in regard tae kittens: they baith squall till they get 'em, squall when they've got 'em, an' scratch tae get rid o' them, fir na sooner does a wumman's dauchter grow old enough tae be a man-trap, than the mither prinks an' pranks her oot in a' the war-paint she can scrape up, an' she sets her on the trail o' some puir deil o' a mon. They're a' savages, th' wummin, a hair's-breadth unner their hides. They're a' oot after some male saffie's scalp.”

“Dot don' sound goot to me. I like der *fräuleins* an' I like der *fraus*, ven dey are not so fat you can't get two arms round 'em. A leedle von mit a vaist dot fit into my arm as easy as der rifle fits, dot is for mine, me Fritzel,” chuckled the handsome, fair-faced lad from the vine-clad hills near the Rhine.

“Ye're a daffie,” sneered Mac. “A like a fecht, an' a pipe, an' a dram, an' a good comrade tae share ma bivouac. Tae Tophet wi' th' she-tribe. Gie *ma* a worl'

where there is nae sic theeng as a wumman; eet wad be a lovely worl', a gran' worl'. A've mad' up my mind aboot th' shes; A'd no climb yonner hill tae hae the kissin' o' a queen."

Just then they turned an elbow of a rise, and came upon a group of native sons and daughters of the soil, who were clustered around an old man and a girl, both of whom were dressed in European costume.

"Wha's yon?" McGlusky's voice snapped out in sharp and sudden surprise, for of all things on earth a white girl was the very last that might be expected to be met with in that hotbed of Mahomedan fanaticism.

The group on the grassy plateau were as much surprised to see the legionaries so far away from the military camp as the latter were to see them. Instantly the Arabs of both sexes began to hustle the white man and the maid towards the mouth of a cave near by. The girl, who was small and slender, flung up her arms, and cried aloud in French:

"Help, *messieurs*, help!"

Her male companion in misery hit and clawed at the Arabs who were hustling him.

"*En avant!*" roared McGlusky. "Losh, there's a white wench doon there in trouble."

He was bounding down the hillside towards the grassy plateau, his clubbed rifle in his hands, even as he yelled his order, and Fritzel and the Rat were rushing at his heels like stag-hounds in the wake of a leader of a pack. They were a long, long way from their own comrades, those three men, and anything might happen to them in the seclusion of those hills and gullies, but they never gave their own peril a thought. McGlusky had set the tune, and his equally reckless comrades danced to it. A fellow whose face was awfully disfigured by old pock-marks, discharged an ancient pistol with a mouth like a small culvert at Mac, and peppered various parts of the legionary's anatomy with a scatter of slugs. That scatter of scrap-iron might have stopped some men; it did not stop Mac, but it brought profanity out of him in a sort of hurricane blast. He swung the butt of his rifle on to the side of the pock-marked face, causing the disfigured one to go to earth like a rabbit diving for its burrow; better for him if he had been a rabbit, for as he fell Mac swung one of his long legs, on the end of which was a heavy army boot, which took the son of Islam in the spot where his lunch ought to have been, with force enough to turn him into an archer's bow.

"Get oop, ye cooard," yelled McGlusky. "Get oop an' fecht. A'll teach ye tae turn a scrap-iron depot on ta ma. Fecht, dom ye, fecht, an' gie a mon a chance tae

get his ain back.”

With each utterance he drove in a fresh kick that would have done credit to a mule in perfect training. Needless to say the recipient did not get up; even if he had been armour-plated he could not have taken what he had received and risen; if he could have done so, he would surely have risen and run.

“Ye puir, spunkless, backbaneless saurian, ye ill-digested cross between a lizard an’ a lost hope! A’ll teach ye tae mak’ holes in ma wi’ a pepper-box. Dae ye tak’ ma fir a mon or a—a sawdust doll?”

Whilst Mac was dealing in his own inimitable fashion with the leader of the gang, the Rat and Fritzl had been busy with the other Arabs, or with all of them who had not fled into the caves with which the hill-sides were honey-combed. Fritzl’s bayonet was red, and the Rat’s pistol was smoking.

When the short-lived fray was over, Mac turned to look at the white folk he and his comrades had rescued, and saw a man well stricken in years, and a maid, slender and beautiful as the blush of dawn, just such a maid as Miriam must have been when she danced to the music of her own timbrels before the hosts of Israel at the time of the crossing of the Red Sea. Her hair was like midnight, with the sheen of the stars in its depths; her eyes were pools of passion, whose depths were as yet unstirred; her neck and throat an alabaster column, which carried her head as a banner is carried into battle. The slightly Semitic curve of her nose, the arched loveliness of her generous mouth, the spotless gleam of her teeth, the mixture of dusky redness and ivory whiteness of her complexion, all bespoke a strong strain of the best blood. In her little ears big rings of gold of a workmanship as old as Babylon itself reflected back the sunlight. Her arms were bare to the shoulders, and their symmetry would have made a Grecian sculptor her slave on the spot; neck and bosom also were bare to the breezes and to the eyes of men; the bosoms, exposed by the rents in the single garment she wore on the upper part of her body, were only half formed, for her years were few, but their swelling loveliness was a masterpiece of nature’s craftsmanship: they were twin jewels in the crown of her sensuous beauty. Her kirtle scarce reached her knees, and was of rich material, with a bodyground of azure blue, with stripes of crimson; the kirtle was secured to her waist by a broad leathern belt with buckles of silver as big as a child’s hands. By the way the kirtle clung to the shapely limbs, it could be readily guessed it was the only garment she wore. On her feet were sandals, prettily turned up at the toes, after the Syrian fashion.

Mac looked, and was lost. Gone at a glance was his vaunted distaste of women; his masculine vaunt that no feminine thing had power to stir him vanished into thin air, like gossamer clouds before the gusty winds of swiftly stirred passion.

“Ma wumman!”

That was all he said in those first moments, as he strode towards her, his big chin thrust out, his eyes ablaze, but not with the tender lights o’ heaven, his lips a wee bittie apart, as if he would breathe in the girlish beauty in front of him, and absorb her into himself, his two great hands thrust out, with fingers slightly crooked. A prehistoric cave-man, who had somehow gotten into a gay uniform, and found himself looking for the first time on the first woman in creation, might have looked as he did in that moment so pregnant with surprise.

“M-a—w-u-m-m-a-n!”

The Rat, who was watching McGlusky, turned to Fritzel and whispered:

“You got any shares in that girl, Fritz?”

The big, handsome German grinned.

“He say we three are brothers in arms till this campaign it is over.”

“E did,” sniggered the Rat, “an’ ’e said wot loot we got ’old of we’d share. That’s wot Hi meant when Hi arsked if you ’ad any shares in that girl. She’s loot, ain’t she?”

“Ja,” responded the German. “Women are loot in this kind o’ warfare.”

“Well,” chuckled the Rat, “Hi’m makin’ you a present of any shares Hi’ve got in that wench. Hi wouldn’t touch the ’em of ’er garment, not if she arsked me ter be ’er lidy’s maid, not after Hi’ve seen ’im lookin’ at ’er like that. The ole blighter said ’e’d swore off women fer the rest ov ’is natural. Look at ’im now. ’E’d eat art ov ’er ’and. ’E’s like a racin’ stallion Hi saw once at Epsom: a splendid big ’orse, gallop like big guns, an’ quiet as a calf, till it saw a filly, an’ then it bit ’arf the ’and off its groom an’ busted its saddle-girths, an’ kicked ’ell out of another ’orse that wasn’t doin’ nothin’ except admirin’ th’ scenery, an’ all because a filly ’ad looked at ’im an’ nickered, an’ give ’im the glad hey in a way fillies know how, wevver they’ve got four legs or two.”

“*Ach, Gott in Himmel,*” sniggered Fritzel, “to me he look like a big wild bull that haf heard the love-call of a leedle white heifer. Eef dot heifer vas mine, I say to mine self: ‘Fritzel, you haf ver’ much important beesness in der nex’ paddock over der hill mit er big tree in it, *ja*.’ No, by Jinks, I don’ vant some shares in dot girl. Vot is der goot of some shares in a wench to er dead men, eh? And,” added the German, “der man dot try to make er claim on dot wench mit McGlusky standin’ round is goin’ ter be dead enough to please a buryin’ squad mitout an inquest, so, mine friendt, you go sold dem shares to der Goat; dot animal is beginning to get about again.”

Mac had moved close to the maid, prancing as a Highland piper prances when

he's walking round the haggis, and the whisky is well in under his belt.

"How in th' name o' a' tha's holy dae ye coom tae be in th' han's o' sic rabble?" he demanded.

He mixed his French up badly with Scotch, but the girl, who was quick of wit, understood him well enough to grasp his meaning, and in a voice that simply throbbed with melody she told him she and the old man, her father, had been captured far from the village where she then was, by an Arab raiding-party. Her father, she said, was a Welsh merchant in a small way of business; nearly all his life had been passed in Northern Africa; he went from village to village, picking up native curios of all kinds to send to the big cities of Europe, and so he gained something more than a mere livelihood. On one of his business trips to Europe he had met and married a beautiful Moorish Jewess, who in the fulness of time became the girl's mother.

"For why did the Arabs tak' yer feyther, eef he were an honest trader, lassie?"

"It was a raiding-party that fell in with us; none of the villagers who knew him would have hurt him."

"Wha' dae they intend tae dae wi' him—an' you?"

"They are holding him to ransom. They think he is a rich man, but he is not, and none of the merchants to whom the Arabs have sent demanding a price will pay what is asked."

"An' you? Wha' wull they dae wi' you?"

"Sell me to the first rich sheik or Emir who wants a new toy for his harem."

"An' you, wha' dae ye theenk o' sic a fate?"

The beautiful little creature shrugged her slenderly modelled shoulders, and made a gesture with her long, lean, slender hands that was eloquent of utter helplessness.

"What can a maid do when she falls into the hands of men? It is her Kismet. She must submit, or be beaten like a dog, beaten with many stripes. All my life I have heard of such things. I could drive the steel in between my bosoms, but life is sweet, and I am young."

"Did ye hae a lover in th' days o' yer freedom? Dinna lee. Tell ma the truth, as—as ye hope tae be Mrs. Jamie McGlusky *pro tem*."

Such a hope could not have entered the girl's mind, seeing she had never even heard the name before, but Mac's male egoism overlooked such a small matter as that.

"Tell ma."

There was a rasp in the big fellow's voice that brooked no denial.

A flicker of a smile played round the arched lips of the maid, lips that were

slightly dusky, on account of the Moorish strain in her blood, but they were none the less alluring, sensuous and passion-laden on that account, for the Moorish blood is of a hot brew.

"I might have had many lovers, if I would," she answered, "for, from the days when I was eleven years old, and wise for my years, men of many nationalities told me lies with their eyes and with their lips, and with quick warm pressure of the hands, but my Moorish mother had made me wise in the ways of men, saying all men are liars where a maid is concerned: they cannot help it; they are males, and it is born in their blood; they do not mean to be false; they would be true if they could, but every male thing is polygamous by nature and instinct. The camel, that is a beast of burden, is polygamous, so is the lion, though it is a hunter and a fighter, the jackal, too, that preys on what it finds—all are alike, and so are men, black, brown or white."

"A'm no. A believe in yin wumman."

The girl's big Moorish eyes, that had so much shrewdness in their depths, fixed themselves upon the big, strong, virile face of the speaker, and noted the insolent mouth, with the woman craving etched into every line of the shapely lips.

"O-ne wo-ma-n," she murmured. "Yes, *monsieur*, one woman at a time."

For a second or two Mac was abashed, then the male in him asserted itself.

"Ye are young an' unco' bonny, an' ye air desert bred. Where did ye learn th' weesdom o' th' serpent?"

"It came to me with my mother's milk, as such things come to all my sex. Men learn on the highway of life; we are born with such knowledge."

"Dae ye want tae gang inta th' harem o' a sheik or an Emir?"

With a sudden uplifting of her eyelids the girl enveloped McGlusky in a gaze that drowned him, a gaze that ran through him, over him, all round him. Out went her two long, strong hands in a gesture that commanded his allegiance, and yet appealed to his chivalry.

"I would sooner go with a soldier of France, to share his bivouac, to tend his wounds, to suffer hunger and thirst, yes, even if he beat me as a dog is beaten, when drunken with the accursed absinthe, but I must be his woman, only his, not a woman of the regiment."

Mac's gorilla-like hands closed upon hers; he drew her towards him; one of his huge arms wove itself round the lissome waist, and the Rat used to swear afterwards that he heard the girl's ribs crackle under the pressure, and he would add in his own picturesque vernacular:

"Hi would sooner 'ave a sleep-producin' wallop from Dick Burge than one love

'ug from that big bull bison wiff th' love fever on 'im."

For a moment or two Mac held his prize close; then he swung her round, and his voice came from the depths of his hairy chest, like a lion's growl:

"M-a w-umm-an, hell canna melt th' bond tha' binds us."

At that moment the Rat flung his rifle to his shoulder and fired, apparently at a boulder on the hill near by, and a figure in a dirty white jelleba sprang into the air, clutching a long desert gun in one hand; the other hand was tearing at his chest.

"'Ell mightn't bust th' blinkin' bonds wot knots you an' yer noo hussy, McGlusky," droned the Rat, "but hif Hi 'adn't 'ad heyees in me 'ead, that corfee-coloured gent's gun would ha' done th' partin' orl right. 'E was aimin' dead at your middle part. Now, wot abart it? Are you goin' on wiv th' love muck, or goin' back ter billets?"

"We wull gang back tae oor quarters, an' A'll gie th' C.O. th' truth o' oor rescue o' these twa white folk."

"Fink the C.O. will let you keep that little bit o' skirt orl to your own cheek, McGlusky? An' if 'e did, do you fink th' hofficers would let you 'ave 'er? Hif you do, big feller, there's somethin' wrong wiv your think-box. Hi been in the Legion longer than you 'ave."

"A've made ma plans, Rat, an' not yin o' them wull dare lay a han' on her."

The Rat shrugged his skimpy shoulders.

"Hi fink you've dug your own grave ter-day, big feller, dug it in a woman's heyees. Damn the women. We was gettin' on like a 'appy fambly till this one blew in."

"This is the way o' it," commented McGlusky. "A'll tak' th' girl an' her feyther to th' C.O., an' A'll say tae him: '*Monsieur*, th' girl an' th' auld man air Breetish subjects, an' they claim the hospitality an' protection o' the flag o' France.' He'll no dare deny that tae them."

"You've got something in that big topknot o' yours after orl, Mac. Hi never thort o' that. But wot abart you an' the wench?"

"Speak wi' mair respec', ye gutter rat, when ye speak aboot ma wumman, or A'll rub yr nose agin yonner rock till it's as flat as a tombstone. A hae a plan fir th' lassie. She'll just volunteer tae be a *vivandière*, an' join th' Legion, an' be yin o' us, but mine in particular."

"One 'ell ov a lot you'll get ov' 'er after she joins hup, you big bone'ead."

"A'll buckle a pistol on yin hip o' her, an' teach her how to use it, an' A'll buckle a ten-inch blade on her ither hip, an' tell her tae drive it hame tae th' hilt in th' guts o' any mon who tries tae mishan'le her, an' A'm theenkin' she'll dae it. Ye ken

th' law o' th' Legion: a *vivandière* can gie hersel' where she wull fr love or siller, but na mon may force her; eef he tries, whether he be officer or private, the *vivandière* can protect hersel' wi' steel or lead. A'll explain a' tha' tae ma lassie. There's hot blood in her, Moorish blood; she'll defend her honour, or A'm a water-spout."

"She's 'ot enough," scoffed the Rat, "'ot as 'ell. It's in 'er heyes an' round 'er mouth, an' in the wy she wobbles th' bottom ov 'er back when she walks, an' in 'er voice when she speaks to you, you big gorilla. It ain't in 'er voice when she speaks to Fritz, an' 'e 'as a 'andsome fice, Fritz 'as."

"Wha's wrang wi' *my* face?"

"Nothin' wrong wiv your fice, Mac, not when you looks at hit from be'ind."

"A'd like tae put ma fist inta yr mooth, ye——"

"Garn, ye cudden't 'it me wiv a shot-gun, unless you got 'old ov me, an' Hi'm takin' care you don't do that. Wot do you want ter mike trouble wiv me for, anyway? Yo're goin' to 'ave all the trouble in life you'll want, big un, now you've adopted a *vivandière*. The hofficers will mike heyes at 'er, an' if she meets 'em 'arf wy they'll go the limit, an' then you'll butt in, an' yore little funeral will be the day after; an' hif she don't toe the 'arfwy mark, they'll make 'er drink ov the cup ov a 'undred sorrers, as the blinkin' Arabs say, an' you'll be rammin' that big bone 'ead o' yours in ter pertect 'er, an' you'll get yours, you will. Hi'm in fer a nice time, Hi am, lookin' after yer, me an' Fritz an' Mustapha Ali, th' blinkin' Turk. That girl cudden't 'elp makin' men go looney over 'er; she don't mean it, but she's got a wiggle an' a waggle when she walks, wot seems ter sy: 'Come an' chase me, boys,' an' when they chases 'er she'll turn an' look 'aughty at 'em wiv them big heyes ov 'ers, an' then—well, it all depends upon the man. She's took a shine to you, Mac, an' to you she'll be all fire an'—an' brimstone, an'—an' blushes, an' bitin', an' rows an' sob-stuff 'nough ter make yer sick. Hi'd tike a strap to 'er, Hi would, before Hi'd 'ad 'er a week, but she's your circus an' you're the clown."

"A theenk A ken hoo tae han'le a wumman," responded Mac sententiously. "They're a' dead easy tae manage, eef ye hae th' gift o' it, an' th' meesterious magic o' attraction fr th' sex. Just wha' eet is attracts 'em tae ma ainsel' A dinna ken, but A've always drawn them, na matter where A've been, East or West. Why, buckie, th' last time A were in Birmingham, A were goin' up th' station stairs tae th' street, when A felt a wee sma' han' fa' on ma shoulder, an' swingin' roon' A lookit doon richt inta th' bonny face o' a sweet young matron. A kenned she were a wife by her weddin'-ring. She were a perfec' stranger tae me an' masel' tae her, an' A kenned she'd made a mistake, for she drew back blushin' an' yammerin'. She had

come up ahint ma, ye ken, an' had no seen ma face. 'Och, sirr,' sez she confused like, an' speakin' in the sweetest Irish brogue, 'Oi've made a mistake, but fàith, Oi cudden't help it, sorr, fr yr neck is th' livin' image av me husband's behind.' An'," added McGlusky, "A've never been able frae tha' day tae this tae mak' oot whether she was payin' ma a compliment or givin' ma a backhander fr ma vanity."

When Fritzel, the Rat and McGlusky marched into the Legion's camp with the prisoners they had rescued, and Mac had told the story he had prepared, quite a sensation was caused, and when it was known that the lass had volunteered to serve as a *vivandière*, the sensation soared to giddy heights, for the girl's vivid, semi-Eastern beauty set all tongues wagging.

"She is fit for the harem of a sultan," was the terse comment of Mustapha Ali, and he ought to have known, for he had been a soldier in a sultan's guard before he fell into disgrace and had to fly his country, for leaving a secret door unbarred which led from the waters of the Bosphorus to a sultan's harem.

Everyone agreed with Mustapha Ali's dictum, for when the girl appeared in her new uniform, made especially for her by the Legion's tailor, she looked, as the wicked old Colonel himself remarked, *ravissante*. Officers, *sous-officiers* and men went down before her charms like sawdust dolls, and she was promptly christened *La belle Anglaise*, though anything more un-English looking never trod the earth. Moorish she looked, with the Welsh strain in her, but maddeningly, alluringly, provokingly lovely. In her semi-military panoply she moved with just enough swagger to accentuate what the Rat persisted in calling the wiggle-waggle of the bottom of her back, and soon McGlusky grew red-eyed with fierce jealousy, and not without cause.

CHAPTER VI

LA BELLE ANGLAISE

The coming of the beautiful *vivandière*, *la belle Anglaise*, seemed to transform the *Légion d'Afrique* in more ways than one. The vast majority of the men were downright wicked as far as women were concerned—for that matter most men are, the wide world over. The majority of the rank and file were scapegraces, where they were not actually criminal, ne'er-do-weels, bad lots, but many of them were devilish fine looking fellows, with just that touch of hell-rakishness about them that appeals so strongly to women, for every woman is an outlaw at heart. There is not much difference between a duchess and a dairymaid, if you give them both a bath; they have all got one trait in common. The legionaries with one accord voted *la belle Anglaise* an acquisition to the army, and every mother's son of them threw out his chest and cocked his peaked cap when she was near. She became a "toast" in the lines; the men no longer drank to the flag, or to their patron saints, they drained their glasses with many weird oaths to *la belle Anglaise*. Even little brown-skinned Ikito Hiroshi, the Jap legionary who had been compelled to run for his life from the land of the chrysanthemum for throwing bombs during a revolution, fell under her spell, and no men on this old planet hold women in smaller esteem than the ordinary Japanese. So badly bitten was Ikito Hiroshi by the magnetism and beauty of *la belle Anglaise*, that when Ibsen, the Laplander, who was an ice-man and a throwback to the Stone Age, refused to lift his glass at the canteen when the *vivandière's* health was proposed, the Jap had tossed the contents of his own glass into the Laplander's face, crying "*bachictari chikjsho inu*," which means in the tongue of Japan, "May you be under a curse, you fool, you beast, you dog." Whereupon the Laplander, who was a man of iron, had grabbed the little brown brother, and, whirling him round his head, had hurled him face foremost into the midst of the bottles on the canteen shelves, a breach of decorum which had caused old Nicotine, the soldier in charge of the canteen, to lay the hairy Laplander out with a stone jar, skilfully applied to the base of the Laplander's ear. It was wolf law applied to a wolf pack in the Legion, and from that law there was no appeal, except to the duello.

If the rank and file looked upon the *vivandière*, and found her glowing seductive beauty good, so did the officers of all ranks. Even the *blasé* C.O. would twirl his white moustaches to a fierce point, and try to step around with the sprightly jauntiness of youth, and of all her customers he was the best when she appeared

with her little keg of spirits slung gracefully from one of her shoulders by its leathern strap with the big buckle, which she always kept polished until it looked like a mirror. It was strange how thirsty the C.O. became in those days, and how often he would invite the beautiful *vivandière* into his big cool tent, to enable him to sip his liquor in comfort. Swift grins would pass amongst the men on such occasions, and sly winks, and pregnant glances amongst the officers, but *la belle Anglaise* always came from those interviews looking cool, self-possessed and unruffled, whilst the C.O. would reappear crimson-faced and scowling, with a snarl upon his lips and a baleful gleam in his wicked eyes. At such periods his officers took his orders on the wing, and obeyed them on the jump; the C.O. was about as nice to work with at such times as a rattlesnake that has inadvertently wriggled its way on to an ant-heap. Some of the jests that were bandied amongst the men when they were off duty were pungent and aromatic enough to have taken the music out of convent bells. Said Jean Croisset one evening:

“By gar, de leetle one, she play a deep game, an’ she play him well; yes, by the shoe strings of de prophet, she ver’ cunnin’. She mak’ ole bristles kees her leetle shoes, though he is C.O. of the Legion. By an’ by he win, of course, when he mak’ the price big ’nuff, but not yet. The leetle one, she play heem like I play a trout in the days before I was a soldier. Then he grow tired of her, when the bloom it is rub off the peach; an old dog, he soon grow tired of a new road; then maybe it will be our turn; the fag end of the officer’s cigar must be good enough for the legionary. By the sacred frog, dat is de way of it——”

A big hand reached out and took Jean Croisset by the chin; another hand, twin to the first one, took him by the nose; there was a wrench, and Jean’s jaws were pulled asunder until they gaped cavernously; then a big, strong, leonine face was thrust close to Jean’s, and a low, deep, savage voice snarled:

“Yer mither should ha’ been washed oot wi’ a fire hose afore she brought sic a skunk as yersel’ inta th’ world, Jean Croisset. Noo A’ll gie ye the ainly punishment a man can gie a beastie tha’ misca’s a lassie. A canna hit ye, an’ A wull na kick ye, y’re no worth it.”

As McGlusky ceased speaking, he made an awful raucous sickening sound in his throat, and then spat clean between Jean’s extended jaws, and then he clamped Jean’s jaws together so hard that the teeth clicked like spikes of steel. The Frenchman struggled like a maniac, struggled until the veins on his neck swelled up like cords, and his face grew purple, but he could not shake off the gripping hands that had tamed and cowed many a wild horse in other lands.

“Dinna waggle yr head aboot or A’ll tweest yr neck as a boy tweests a string

roon' a peg-top. Wha' A hae gied ye, A gied ye ta keep, ye wumman slan'erer, an' A'll gie th' same tae any mon who misca's ma wumman."

This was the first time McGlusky had voiced his claim of proprietorship in *la belle Anglaise*, and the news of his boast ran through the Legion like fire through a field of ripened grain.

"Damn the fellow's cheek," said the Falcon, when the story reached his ears, for, like all the other officers, the stern, unyielding Major had capitulated to the lassie's beauty and *diablerie*. "He's one rattling fine soldier, that big barbarian," the Falcon had added, "but he will get his comb cut if he thinks he can ride rough-shod over our *vivandière*. He did the right thing when he treated that *crasse* Jean Croisset as he did by turning him into a spittoon, but, *ma foi*, the little one she is not for him."

On parade next day the Falcon snapped out orders to McGlusky in a voice full of hostility, and when troops were dismissed, the Falcon said to the big fellow:

"You are going the right way to get the woollen epaulettes quicker than any man ever got them in the Legion; don't be a pig and throw your chances away, soldier."

"A'm no graspin' yr meanin', *monsieur*," replied Mac, who had no idea of any fault committed by him.

"Spend your leave as the rest of the soldiers of the Legion spend it: go and run loose amongst the Arab women in the town, and do not cast your eyes above your station."

As the Falcon shot this advice at the soldier, his eyes turned meaningly towards the *vivandière*, who was exchanging banter with a number of officers who were purchasing a dram or two from her. She looked so saucy, and yet so utterly bewitching in her gay uniform, with her little keg of spirits slung from one shoulder, and her cap cocked jauntily, that Mac for a moment or two could not take his eyes off her. When he did turn his face towards the Falcon, his eyes had a red glare in them.

"Speakin' wi' all respec', *monsieur*," he growled, drawing himself up stiffly, "A'm a soldier o' France, an' no a slave frae a slave-pen. As fir me runnin' loose amang th' Arab wenches, A'll na dae it. They're na wummin; fir the maist part they air goats: A say it wi' apologies tae th' goat tribe."

"Go to the devil your own way, you fool. I know your complaint. Only let me tell you if you take the bit in your teeth as you rightly and properly did with Jean Croisset, and lift a hand to an officer, you will be shot down in your tracks, or sabred on the spot. Don't forget that."

That was one of McGlusky's unlucky days, for scarce had the Falcon taken

himself off ere the Goat, who by this time was convalescent, came to the big fellow.

“So,” sniggered the sergeant, “*la belle Anglaise* is your woman, is she? Name of a polecat that has died of keeping late hours and bad company, you will not die for want of conceit in yourself, you offal! How dare you raise your booby eyes to a woman who has all the officers in the Legion following her for a lift of her eyelids, you, a private in the Legion? Even in your own God-forsaken country, what were you? A——”

The Goat, whose forte was not politeness, made use of an expression that made Mac’s back hair bristle.

“Eef,” he snarled, “eet were no fir yr *sous-officier*’s stripes, A’d push yin eye in wi’ ma thumb an’ pull the ither oot wi’ ma finger. A’ve too much respect’ fir yr rank in th’ army tae offer ye an insult, ye puir-speerited son o’ a male pimp an’ a penny-in-the-slot slut fae th’ gutter. As fir ma ain folk, A’m as weel bred as any mon in the French airmy: ma mither’s fifth cousin was a niece three times removed frae a deestant relative o’ a descendant o’ Robert Bruce, yince king o’ Scotlan’.”

For this bit of outspoken family history McGluskys got nine days’ cells on black bread and water, that, as he said afterwards, stank so abominably that it kept him company all the time, and prevented him from feeling lonesome in his solitary confinement. As no tobacco was allowed a prisoner in solitary confinement, Mac would have fared badly, had it not been for *la belle Anglaise*. Every night she used to go and flirt outrageously with the sentry on guard over McGluskys, and she never failed to slip cigarettes and matches into Mac’s big paw through the bars of his cell. It was the Goat who got wind of this outrageous breach of discipline, for he was always on the prowl, but the Rat was watching the Goat, for though the London wail had never warmed towards *la belle Anglaise*, he was keen to be of service to anyone who was trying to aid his big comrade.

“That ’arf goat, ’arf yeller dog ’as been treadin’ on your skirt tail ter-night, an’ ’e’s sure ter mike trouble,” the Rat commented to *la belle Anglaise*. “Did you slip any little souveneer ov your mushy sentiments into Mac’s cell ter-night, anyfing in the way ov terbacca, eh?”

“A packet of real cigarettes,” replied the girl.

“Where did you pinch ’em, eh?”

“I did not steal them; the C.O. gave them to me to smoke myself, I told him I loved them.”

“Ho, yer did, did yer?” grinned the Rat. “The C.O. give you ’is best brand ov smokes an’ you gives it to a pris’ner. Well, the C.O. will think you’re a nice ’ussy, ’e will. Hi would hif Hi was in ’is plice. ’E’ll be makin’ hobervations ov a ’ightly

immoral nature wen 'e 'ears abart it from that carmine Goat, burn 'is narsty soul—Hi means th' Goat's, not the C.O.'s; old bristles hain't a bad old cockbird, but," added the Rat with a leer of unadulterated wickedness, "Hi'm thinkin' you've gorn an' done it this time, sissy."

"Done what?"

"Put yore little 'oof in it, you 'ave. You've busted an 'ole in one of the strictest milingitary regulations, an' the C.O. will carpet you, you can betcher Sunday shirt on that. But," he added with another wicked leer and a chuckle, "Hi expec' th' ole cockbird will hoffer to let you orf on—er—on conditions ov war."

"What conditions?"

"W'y, hunconditional surrender—that is hif you hain't surrendered to 'is nibs up ter date. 'Ave you?"

"No, I have not," flashed out the girl hotly, "and I never will, besides I don't know what you mean."

"N-e-v-e-r," drawled the Rat. "Well, Lord luv a duck, 'never's' abart the longest street Hi hever got my 'oof into."

"I don't believe the C.O. will make any such offer to me; the C.O.'s a gentleman."

"Vey orl are," sniggered the Rat, "but a gennelman ain't much different from a bloke wiv a winkle barrer, when 'e's mashed on a tart wiv heyas as big as horanges an' as wicked as the hinside ov a hyena. A gennelman's a man, hain't 'e, just man, an' wot's a man when 'e's gone in the top-knot over a woman? 'E's 'arf wild cat an' 'arf alligator; 'e just wants 'er worse'n a blind puppy wants milk, an' 'e's goin' ter get 'er, that's orl there is abart it. Everythink that's goin' ter stop 'im looks wrong, an' everythink that's goin' ter 'elp 'im get 'er looks right, an' hif the C.O. gets you, McGlusky's goin' ter get the C.O., an' orl because that ole Goat goes buttin' in where 'e ain't no business buttin'. The first time Hi find a dawg in this 'ere Arab town wot 'as th' rabies, an' lots of 'em 'as it, Hi'm goin' ter pinch that dawg an' make a present ov it to the Goat; hif it bites 'im, it will either settle the Goat or cure th' dawg."

Loafing about inside the lines that night, the Rat found himself close to the Goat's bivouac. He stood well back from the firelight, and watched with the patience of a cat. After a while the sergeant knocked the ashes out of the bowl of the big wooden pipe he had been smoking and, laying it beside him, stretched himself out upon his back, wrapped in his greatcoat. The Rat's eyes glued themselves upon the sergeant's immense pipe.

"Hi fink Gawd must ha sent me 'ere ter-night," he murmured. "Hi fink G-a-wd

must be wantin' that Goat real bad abart now, an'—an'—we can spare 'im from the Legion."

He crept away, more like a shadow moving than a man in motion, and when he came back in the same stealthy manner he had in his hand a very long light reed, on the end of which was a cunning contrivance made of wire, the sort of thing a skilled burglar can make in a few minutes. Wriggling close enough on his stomach to reach the sergeant's big wooden pipe with the wire loop on the end of the reed, the Rat drew the pipe carefully towards him, inch by inch, until he had it in his hands, then once more he melted away into the night.

Close to his bivouac a squad of engineers were quartered, and the Rat had made friends with them mainly because they used the latest and most powerful explosives known to modern science. He had once remarked to Fritzel that what *he* wished someone would invent was a substance that would blow open the thickest doors of a bank's safe, and do it without making any noise.

"Pickin' pockets," he had added, "is a hart, but the rewards hain't often worth the trouble an' the risk, but bank safe burglin' is 'igh Toby. If you gets caught, you gets a long stretch; if you gets awy wif it, you makes a 'aul worth 'avin'."

True to his predatory instincts, he had "pinched" some explosive material from the Engineers, and now his fertile, monkey-like brain had found a use for it. He filled the Goat's pipe—and the bowl was big—more than half-full of explosive, on top he placed some tobacco, and then crept back to the Goat's bivouac, and dexterously engineered the loaded pipe back to the side of the sleeping sergeant. He then withdrew himself to a discreet distance, and lay with the unlimited patience of a professional night prowler to wait upon events. For two hours the sergeant slept like a cherub—most scoundrels do sleep as peacefully as babes; it is only in good little books that the villain slumbers with an unquiet conscience; it is the poor devil who tries to play the game of life squarely who has troubled dreams and nightmares—and the Rat watched.

Meanwhile in his prison cell McGlusky was chewing the cud of bitter reflection; he had nothing else to chew or to smoke, for the Goat in his capacity of sergeant had called upon him almost as soon as *la belle Anglaise* had left, after slipping him a generous supply of cigarettes. The Goat had caused McGlusky to be searched, and had looted the spoil, as the Rat had surmised he would do. The reason the Goat had not gone direct to the C.O. with his evidence was that he had it in his mind to drive an evil bargain with the lovely *vivandière* on his own account. McGlusky's thoughts were not sweet: he was a prisoner, and the girl he had grown to love was in the power of the most evil man in the Legion. The thought drove the big fellow almost

insane. He had loved many women, as all adventurers do, in a kiss-and-come-again fashion, but this time the real thing had come to him, and he was powerless to protect the maid whom he had christened in his own wayward soul “ma wee white flower.” He thought of her mouth, as he lay writhing in his cell like a caged lion—the mouth he had kissed, and even the memory of those hot kisses thrilled him to the point of craziness; he thought of her eyes that shone like stars through the soft stillness of a sultry night, the eyes he loved, the eyes that would, he knew, haunt him to his grave. He went over it all again and again, to his own torment. Why had he loved her, why had he nearly crushed her in his iron grip when fate at odd intervals had thrown them together, since she, at his instigation, had become a *vivandière* in the Legion? Why? He knew why. This was the first time in all his sinful, wayward, reckless life that his big, half-savage heart had known love that bites deeper than steel can bite or bullet burn. East and west, women, beautiful and bewitching, had found something in his masterful virility that stirred their passions, and made them throw themselves in his way, and when they pleased his fancy, he had taken his toll of them, and in his own way he had been good to them, but the wounds they made had left no scars. He thought of many of them that black night: there was the wee mite in the Mongolian desert, who had crept from the shadow of the temple walls to nestle in his arms, at the risk of her own life and his. In his reckless way he had gladly accepted the risk, and had picked the sweet fruit. Then his memory drifted off to an island in the Southern Seas, where the palm trees waved in the languorous breezes, and the brown-skinned girls bathed in the milk-white surf, and dried themselves on the sand in the sun, and danced the Hulu dance to the music of native guitars, or braided their glossy ringlets with wild flowers picked from amidst the feathery ferns. Of one in particular he thought, the daughter of a dusky queen, who had nursed him back to life when his pearling schooner, picked up by a storm, had been driven bows on through a thundering splatter of fury-driven foam, through rending rocks and ripping coral-crustured reefs, and he had been spewed up by the sea, more dead than alive. Slender as a lily-stem, she had been, that sweet brown princess, with the dew-laden eyes, and lips that were moist to cling and hot enough to burn. He had not sought her; she had looked at his nude body as it was when the sea had flung him forth, and counted him a man amongst men; her heart she placed in the hollow of his hand, and for a season he had lived the lotus life. They came before his mental vision, those women of many lands, where he had taken honey from the comb when it was offered him, and now he knew the taste of gall, as all men must who find love their lord, not their slave. Something within him told him that this lassie, the *vivandière*, was not to him what those others had been. Would she be as true as

so many of those others had been, to whom he had been so fickle? He tried to buoy himself up with the memory of their first meeting, when, speaking on the impulse of the moment, she had said: "I will be your woman, to march where you march, bivouac where you bivouac, to bind your wounds when the Arab steel bites." But so far she had been no more to him than to any other man, and she was now the pet of an army.

"Ma wee white flower." He ground the pretty pet name from between his teeth. "A love her sae much," he growled, "A cud strangle her wi' these twa han's, eef A felt sure she wad play ma false."

Then the pagan poet within him awoke, and he murmured bitterly:

Noo fare ye weel; A ask for no regrets.

A woman wins a heart; she breaks it and—forgets.

He did not realize it at the moment, but he had enunciated one of the bitterest of world-old truths. He was also learning another grim truth—that as a man sows, so must he reap. His little white flower was dancing upon his heart-strings, paying him for the dancing his own feet had done; he was face to face with the immutable law of compensation, perhaps the only law from which there is no escape in this world or the next.

Picking up the little lamp his gaoler had left, he held it to the palm of his right hand, and looked at it long and steadily. Right across his big palm a single line was drawn as clearly as if it had been cut in by a knife blade; it was the head line and the heart line, which had blended into one, the most unlucky sign a human hand can carry. Years before, when in London, he had run against a world-famous seer, who read a man's fate from the markings of his hand. Emperors, kings and queens, warriors and statesmen, all vied one with the other to do the seer reverence. Something about McGlusky's personality had won the seer's interest, and he read the adventurer's hand for him.

"I am sorry for you," he said, pointing to the deep, cleanly cut single line across the right palm, "deeply and truly sorry."

"Why?"

"Because that line tells me your life story. You are doomed to be a world rover from the cradle to the grave, finding no rest for the soles of your feet, winning much, but never the thing you want. The thing you do want will for ever flee from you. Women have been and will be yours, but one day you will see one and go mad, and you will *not* win her; she will be to you the price all the others have paid."

McGlusky had smiled sardonically at the seer. He did not smile now, as the

lamp-light flickered on the fate line running across his hand.

“Eet’s dom strange,” he muttered, “every yin thing A set ma soul on winnin’ A lost, an’ the successes A didna care a curse aboot cam’ tae ma like chickens runnin’ tae a feedin’ bowl. A remember hoo hard A worked an’ th’ perils A faced tae mak’ a wee bit fortune in ma youth, so tha’ th’ auld folk micht hae some comfort afore they died, but though A wrought an’ fought like ten men, A cudna succeed, an’ th’ auld folk died in poverty, wae’s me. An’ the grass was na green on their graves afore A blundered inta a fortune, when A were no carin’ a dom, as long as A had enough tae pay ma way. Losh,” he added after a spell of silence, “A burnt holes in tha’ fortune in mighty quick time; wha’ wi’ race-horses tha’ cud na dae much mair than hobble, an’ wummin’ tha’ were fast enough tae catch a crow on th’ wing, A soon busted ma bank, an’ A didna care a dom, because th’ siller didna come tae ma when maist A wanted it. It were the same in warfare. A wad hae gied ma sinfu’ soul tae wear th’ Victoria Cross, an’ twice A won it, won it fairly an’ honestly, an’ twice A were robbed o’ it: yince A saw th’ cross A had won gied tae a cooard, a mon who had na spunk enough tae look a blin’ puppy in th’ eye; an’ noo A’m wearin’ th’ *Croix de Guerre* an’ the Military Medal, though A’d no set ma heart on either. Fate in ma ain case is like tae th’ mon who sent a cradle as a birthday present tae th’ auld maid. Dom th’ fates—an’ yet in a’ things connected wi’ danger A’ve th’ luck o’ a five-legged pig: A cud fa’ off a housetop inta a barrel fu’ o’ last month’s leavin’s frae a cook-house, an’ climb oot again smellin’ like violets.”

He sank back upon his one blanket, and blew out the little lamp, and tried to sleep, and not so far away from him the Goat was sleeping, whilst the Rat watched.

By and by the Goat moved, sat up, yawned and stretched himself, then rising, he gathered up a few handfuls of dried camel chips, and flung them on to his dying fire. Having attended to this duty, he reached out a hand and picked up his pipe, and began groping for a fire stick.

“Farver in ’eving,” murmured the Rat. “Hif ’e don’t blow ’is topknot hoff, they can feed me on minced mule. Pore ole Goat, ’e’s goin’ ter get the shock of ’is little life: ’is old ’ead is goin’ to be ’arf wy to ’eving before ’e ’as time ter say ‘Oh ’ell.’”

The sergeant found his lighted stick at last; raising it to his big pipe, he sucked hard, and blew out the smoke in eddying clouds. The top of the bowl of the pipe glowed redly, and the Goat looked happy.

“Wait ’arf a mo’,” gurgled the Rat, “you’ll be gettin’ a little surprise present from someone wot loves you.”

Suddenly there came a big spurt of yellow flame from the pipe, a puff of white smoke and a detonation that brought fifty men sleeping near by to their feet, but the

Goat was not one of them: he lay upon his back, both hands clasped over his face, his heels digging wildly into the sandy soil; curses rattled off his tongue like gravel down a gully. In ten seconds a dozen men had hold of him, pinning him down until the surgeon could be summoned, and then a dimly burning lantern showed the Goat's face sadly disfigured. One eye had been blown in, and nearly all his front teeth blown out, whilst lips and nose had not escaped scathless.

"Puts 'im orf th' hactive list fir some time, pore old bloke," exclaimed the Rat sympathetically. "Hi wonder wot 'it 'im? Hit wasn't no blinkin' Arab bullet, an' hit wasn't no magazine explosive bullet neither; must ha' been a shootin' star wot fell on 'im, pore ole Goat."

A good many other soldiers besides the Rat wondered what it was that hit the sergeant; opinions differed greatly as to the nature of the projectile, but every soldier agreed that whatever it was, there had not been enough of it, for a more devoutly detested *sous-officier* had never existed in *la Légion*.

The *vivandière* had been one of the first to arrive upon the scene, and as usual, late as it was, she carried her little keg of spirits; the C.O. would pay, she knew, for a dram given to a wounded man. As she knelt over the Goat, and took his head in the hollow of her left arm, whilst she administered a draught of brandy to him, she could not help a devout feeling of thankfulness that the accident (?) had happened to this man of all others. The Goat might have been thankful also, but the language he was using did not betray it. Being ever ready to offer assistance, especially if it afforded a chance for him to improve the shining hour, the Rat volunteered to hold the *vivandière*'s little brandy keg, and he held it so carefully that the nozzle of the little tap got between his lips, whilst the barrel itself was upended. The girl rose from her kneeling position, and saw what the Rat was doing.

"Thief!" she exclaimed, snatching her treasure from him, and then administering an open-handed slap on one of his ears. "I come to help a wounded man, you steal my good liquor—thief—dirty dog!"

"You hain't 'arf wrong, you hain't," exclaimed the Rat in an aggrieved voice. "Hi wasn't stealin'; Hi wos just drinkin' the 'ealth ov the pore ole Goat, an' 'opin' 'e might live ter sell matches at street corners in Paris, when 'e's passed hout ov the Legion as *non possumus*."

"*Non possumus*—what is that?" demanded the *vivandière*.

"Dunno fir sure; Hi fink it's Latin, but Hi dunno much abart Latin; vey teach you a lot o' fings in Wormwood Scrubs, but Latin hain't one of 'em. Hi fink *non possumus* means in Hinglish 'Not worf a damn,' so hif you'll lend me your brandy keg again, Hi'll drink the pore old Goat's 'ealth once more. It 'elps a wounded man

a lot to know someone wiff a kind 'eart is finkin' ov 'im."

"Where were you when this thing happened to the sergeant?" demanded a low, crisp voice, a voice that carried in its every note the unmistakable tones of command.

Swift as a cornered weasel the Rat turned and looked into the menacing eyes of the Falcon, close to whom stood Fritz of Germany.

"Me *monsieur*?"

"Yes, you. Answer, and speak the truth for once, if you can."

"Hit 'urts, *monsieur*, 'urts like 'ell to 'ave me word doubted by a hofficer Hi've fought under so long. Hi never told a lie in me bally life, Hi——"

"You never told a bigger one than that. Where were you?"

Then Fritz of Germany came to the rescue of his Cockney comrade, who stood in grave danger of getting into water too deep for him to wade out of.

"*Monsieur—pardon——*"

"Well?"

The one word ripped out of the stern lips of the Falcon.

"I was an officer in the army of Germany."

"W-e-ll?"

"Officers of the army of Germany do not lie, not to save their lives, *monsieur*."

"What of it?"

"Only this, *monsieur*: I was sleeping in my bivouac when the sergeant was wounded."

"Yes?"

"This soldier, who is my comrade, was sleeping beside me."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes, *monsieur*, for when I heard the noise of the explosion I wakened him, and we came here side by side."

A hush fell upon the three men, which lasted quite a little time, then the Falcon suddenly turned his electric torch full upon Fritz's face, bathing it in a glow of white light. Fritz stood the strain stoically. The Falcon snapped off his light, and without a word turned on his heels with a smart military click, and merged into the shadows. A few seconds later the Rat whispered:

"Hi fink 'e 'ad some doubts abart yore little fairy tale, matey, 'struth Hi do."

"Me," rumbled Fritz, "I don't; dot officer he know I am one dam liar, an' he think you try to mak' dot Goat a dead Goat, hein? I haf never told der lies like dot before, but you are my gomrade, ach, an' two times you haf save my life."

"Hi fergives yer fir tellin' the lies, Fritz; Hi'd 'ave been tempted ter break me

own spotless record hif Hi'd been in yore place. Th' truth is like a cop in uniform: there's a time to run after it, an' a time to run awy from hit, an' blimey, ter-night was runnin' away time. Nar come an' sing me ter sleep; my conscience is troublin' me," and the unrepentant little tough sauntered away, whistling "Chase me, Girls."

Outside her little tent *la belle Anglaise*, who had not felt like turning in again to sleep after the injury to the Goat had broken in upon her slumbers, was exchanging swift-lipped badinage with the Falcon, who had paused to purchase a dram from her portable canteen, and remained to improve the starlit hour. Small wonder if the girl's head was being turned, when the best men in the most famous Legion on earth were at her beck and call; small wonder that the personality of McGlusky had begun to lose some of its grip upon her; he had seemed so big, so important, in the hour when he had leapt like a lion to rescue her from bondage, so virile, so masterful, but as time passed, and she read his love for her in his eyes, his actions, in his every attitude, and knew that he was hers body, soul and brain, the feminine instinct, which makes all women, pagan or Christian, civilized or uncivilized, black, brown, yellow, white or coffee-coloured, value lightly the fruit that falls into their sweet, false mouths, began to awaken, and the big soldier of fortune was every hour becoming less a force in her life; she still liked him, perhaps in the same spirit that an Indian warrior likes a scalp that he has taken. Mac had spoken perhaps more truly than he knew when, writhing in torment of spirit in his prison cell, he had said:

Noo fare ye weel; A ask for no regrets.

A woman wins a heart; she breaks it and—forgets.

CHAPTER VII

THE CHASSEUR D'AFRIQUE

Monsieur Perigod d'Alençon was a captain in the *Chasseurs d'Afrique*. He looked really magnificent in any kind of dress, for he was a man favoured of the gods; built like a gladiator of old Rome, he would have attracted attention anywhere; even if dressed in the common garb of a working man, people would have turned twice to gaze at him, but when arrayed in the magnificent crimson, blue and gold uniform of the *Chasseurs*, he was something that no woman, peeress or peasant—or princess either for that matter—could look upon unmoved. He had a face to match the superb symmetry of his body, this man, a face as wicked as the devil, and that, of course, would have been an added incentive for women to want him. There was no finer cavalryman in the army of Africa than he; when he was in the saddle, he and his horse were one, and as he was wealthy he always had a charger fit for an emperor to ride. No one knew just why he had secured his exchange from a crack cavalry regiment in Paris to the *Chasseurs d'Afrique*—possibly because he was weary of being a tame lion in the gay city, a ladies' lion, some of the real campaigners called him, but none of them permitted him to hear the jibe, for he was swift to take offence, and his answer to an affront, however slight, was the sending of his seconds to the offender. There were plenty of better swordsmen in the fencing schools of Paris, many better pistol shots—in practice, but in a duel no man had ever worsted him. When the buttons were off the blades, he seemed to develop an uncanny fighting force; he broke every recognized rule of fence; he did, in a duel, just the opposite of what the highly trained masters of sword-play did themselves, or expected him to do, but he always walked off the field and left his opponent on the grass, and after all, it is the ending, not the action of a fight that matters.

"D'Alençon cannot fence," once remarked a great *maître d'armes*.

"No," answered the soldier he was addressing, "he most certainly cannot, but," he added, "he can beat all those who can."

The day after the queer accident (?) to the Goat, the *Chasseurs d'Afrique* rode into the Arab town where the Foreign Legion had been so long quartered, and took up their station there, for the word had gone forth that from this spot a big sweeping offensive movement was to be put in motion against the tribesmen who had been raiding outposts and wiping out all the so-called civilizing works that the French had for a decade been patiently laying down, with a view to making the whole country an

annexe of France, much as the British did to the Zulus and other warrior tribes in another part of Africa. The tribesmen of the desert wastes were ungrateful enough to resent this action of the French, and to call it land piracy and armed robbery, and out of this difference of opinion came the spilling of much blood—not by any means a new state of affairs: it has been going on ever since Abraham drove his flocks and herds on to the fat lands of the Midianites and uprooted their landmarks; it is going on in China to-day, for the stealing of territory by armed force from weak nations has never been so common in the world's known history as in the Christian (?) era.

D'Alençon rode in to the Arab town with his regiment, and, looking down from his saddle upon the big assembly of Arab girls and women, turned up his handsome nose in unutterable disgust and disappointment.

"*Mon Dieu*," he exclaimed to his lieutenant, "an *apache* of Paris would not throw a shirt-stud at one of these animals. The *Père Dieu* ought to have put tails on them all. I have seen better amongst the baboons."

"These," laughed the lieutenant, who was an old African campaigner, "are only the scum, the sweepings; they are the cave dwellers; they live in holes in the rocks in the hills like jackals. There are girls who are dreams of loveliness in the harems of the Sheiks and Emirs. Some I have seen whose heads would not reach within a handspan of your armpit, and so slender you would count them mere children until you looked into their eyes; *mon Dieu*, what eyes—big and grey, with just a suspicion of violet behind the grey. Their mouths with curving lips, have that touch of cruelty in them that saves them from being angels, and will not let you believe they are devils."

"All beautiful women are devils at heart," mocked d'Alençon, adding: "The man who takes his money to the angel market comes home a bankrupt."

"*Ma foi*, you ought to know," responded the old campaigner. "Men say you have kissed more lovely women than any other man on earth."

"Kisses—pah!" mocked d'Alençon. "I have bought some, borrowed some, stolen more, but bought, borrowed or stolen, they are mostly Judas kisses. Every woman is a great actress on the stage of love; they can simulate passion so well that their lips can burn your blood and melt the marrow in a man's bones, and make the fool think *he* is lord of their bodies, brains and souls, and all the time they are only acting, winning a cheap sensation, getting a passing thrill. So well can they act that sometimes for an hour they can even fool themselves, and then the sensuous tremor of their magnetic bodies puts *them* in paradise and the clod they are playing with in purgatory, but always, an hour later, they are laughing silently to what in women does duty for their souls. Believe me, *mon camarade*, the ice is never very far away

from their hearts, and is always near their clever brains.”

He broke off his remarks, and, twirling his handsome blond moustache, he gaily hummed a verse of a song that would not have gained him admission to any monastery in the girdle of the world, and the tattoo of his war charger’s hoofs beat like a rhythmic major note through the mellow melody of his musical voice. In the pause that followed, the old campaigner remarked:

“There *are* good women in the world, in spite of all you say, d’Alençon.”

“*Peste*, who said there were none? All I say is God save me from one of them. The flesh is of the devil, my friend. A good woman would either drive me mad, or I should drive her distracted: in either case there would be one maniac in our menage. I like the wicked ones, even though I know nine-tenths of their seeming wickedness is only acting *in excelsis*. Do you know, old *camarade*, if I had my time again, I don’t think I should be a soldier; I—” he stopped, and a gleam of white teeth showed under his yellow moustache in an amazingly wicked smile—“I think I should be a priest, if I had life over again.”

“*Jesu Maria*,” commented the old campaigner, “what a lovely priest you would have made! Bah, the world would have smelt the brimstone under your cassock.”

“None the less,” jeered d’Alençon, “I should have become a Father Confessor. Just think of the joy of listening to the fair penitents confessing how they fooled men by simulating passion they never felt, and never had the depth of character to feel. The penance I would give all my fair penitents would be—marriage.”

“In God’s name, why, d’Alençon? What could the poor devils do to deserve that?”

The *beau sabreur* laughed outright at the tragic face and voice of the old campaigner.

“You’ve hit it, *camarade*. You see the punishment, eh? Every woman, if she dared bare her soul a month after the honeymoon, would want to sleep on the roof and put her husband in the coal cellar. Wedding-bells are the funeral-bells of romance, and—*Sacré mon Dieu*, look at that!”

The old campaigner looked, and saw the lovely face and lissome little figure of the *vivandière* of the *Légion d’Afrique*, standing in the glare of the sun close to the barrack gates, the plain, ugly, white-washed wall acting as a background to her brilliant uniform. Beside the girl stood a snow-white mule that had been sired by an Arab stallion of pure descent, a kingly steed that had fallen from grace by mating with a white jenny donkey. The little mule was an exquisitely proportioned animal, perfectly trained and docile; it was the gift of the C.O. to *la belle Anglaise*, one gift out of many which had failed to lead to the desired result. The animal carried a nice

saddle and bridle, and the *vivandière* had learnt to ride it, and ride well; it would have been strange if she had not quickly become a skilful rider, for she had had tutors enough. All the officers in the *Légion d'Afrique* were skilled riders, though they served in a foot regiment; it was part of their training that they should be experts in the saddle, in case of an emergency arising, and each and every one of them had volunteered to give her lessons; she, being woman-wise, accepted their help, and she had smiled many a time within that clever little body of hers, as she noted how extraordinarily clumsy those expert horsemen became when it came to their lot to lift her into or out of the saddle; the way in which they would cause her to overbalance, so that they might have the felicity of gathering her petite figure into their arms, to prevent her from falling, and the extraordinary time it would take them to free her from their saving (?) embraces, was not lost upon her. Even when she was installed in the saddle, it seemed to take her tutors an exorbitant time to adjust her little feet in the stirrups, and to smooth and pat down her riding gear; surely never in all the history of feminine equestrians had there been an outfit so full of creases, real or imaginary, that needed so many smoothing touches from brown hands that could grip a sword hilt surely enough, and yet appeared to have such an incomprehensible habit of straying and bungling when a nice slip of a girl's riding gear was concerned. It was no better with the *sous-officiers*; those seasoned veterans of many years fell to the girl's lure, and made just the same kinds of fools of themselves, pawing and petting her, and casting fierce glances at each other when one butted in on what another thought was his preserve for the time being.

McGlusky had held a good deal aloof, though he was, if they had only known it, the finest horseman and the best riding instructor in all the army of Africa, but his pride would not let him jostle in a crowd to serve a woman, not even a woman who held his heart-strings in her hands. Once he had surprised her by taking both her hands in his, and looking deeply into the lines written by fate upon them.

"Ye air a wee thing," he said on that occasion, "but though yr hands look sma' they air no; yr fingers air too long fir yr han's tae be sma'. Eef A were buyin' gloves fir ye in Bond Street, London, A'd order six an' three-quarters, an' A'd no be far oot in ma guess. Ye've the makin's o' a big wumman in ye, eef ye dinna throw yersel' awa'. Eef A were yr man, A wad mak' anither Sarah Bernhardt o' ye. Yr fin'ers mark ye oot fir a genius, but ye want a mon who is a mon tae bring th' best tha's in ye oot, an' mak' ye a poower in th' world; ye were no meant by nature tae suckle babes an' chronicle sma' beer."

All this was Greek to the wee beauty; she did not realize the bigness of the rough fellow, who had put his sinful soul into her long, thin hands with the artistic fingers.

He did not flatter her nor fawn upon her, as did the others, but told her plainly he would see her grilling in Tophet and grill there himself, before he would be a door-mat for her to wipe her little feet upon. She had not understood him from the first: to her he was just a rough soldier of fortune, lusting for the carnal uses of her flesh; he could have taken her in the first days of their acquaintance, when his personality dominated her, had he been the man she counted him, but he had spared her, hoping to make her love him with the love that is marrow-deep; then the others had intervened, turning her head with their attentions and flatteries, until hourly he was fading out of the picture. In some ways she was a bigger woman than he was a man, for she was an actress born, and a great one. What Bernhardt and Rejane did upon the stage, she did hourly in real life, for it was consummate acting on her part that made officers and men of *La Légion* her slaves. She had the trick of the swiftly raised and more swiftly lowered eyelids, the subtle side glance, full of wordless wickedness, that made men think she was theirs, if only opportunity served, but, great actress as she was, she took good care that opportunity and the woman never met. Sometimes she gave kisses, and her marvellously mobile lips could tell a million wordless lies in a few seconds, simply by clinging—breaking, and clinging again. The fools who got those kisses went from the tryst unsated, for with her it was always *mañana*, the morrow that never comes, but each of them felt that he, and he alone, was the holder of the golden key of her heart. In such a way she had kissed Bergun, the fierce Provencal *maître d'armes*, and Bergun had gone from the tryst walking on air, on air that was as light as her laughter as she tripped cheerily away.

“By Gar, I keel that big fellow McGluskys to-night eef he say the leetle one she is his. She is mine, Bergun’s the *maître d'armes*, the man who has left thirty good men gasping their lives out on the grass.”

So, with peaked cap tilted well back, and the high collar of his military tunic undone at the throat, to let his hot blood course freely, Bergun had marched into the Arab town, humming an air he had picked up when serving in the French Foreign Legion in China. He had learnt it from the lips of a scarlet woman with a golden-yellow skin in Tonkin; he did not know the words, because the scarlet damsel sang in Chinese, but the music told Bergun it was no cloister hymn, and because it was wicked in its every throbbing note and in its pulsing rhythm, he had remembered it—men always do remember those things. By some strange fatality, Bergun had marched into a so-called café in the Arab town, where sat Jonck Arblerst, reputed, in spite of the name the Legion knew him by, to be a Dane. Fair of face, yellow-haired and yellow-bearded was Jonck, a broad-shouldered, deep-chested, blue-eyed son of Sheitan, a great quaffer of strong liquor from mighty tankards, when he

could get it, a man who would fight at the drop of a hat, and fight to kill. He, too, had touched the lips of the *vivandière* in the starlight only three nights before. He would have gone farther than the kissing, by fraud or force, for Jonck was a Corsair born out of season, and what he could not win by the whispered word he would take by the brute strength that was in him, but the *vivandière*, who had merely humoured him out of the spirit of devilment that was in her, had slipped the point of her long Moorish poignard to the apple of his throat, and had laughed in his face when he freed her.

Jonck was just telling a group of his cronies of this adventure, when Bergun entered. The Provencal listened; his thick red lips were yet moist with the *vivandière's* kisses. Putting both his hands palm downwards on the table, Bergun hissed:

“You—say—you hold the leetle one—in your—arms—you?”

Jonck laughed his big, boisterous laugh.

“Me? Yes, I hold her—look.”

He pointed to the still fresh wound on the apple of his throat the Moorish poignard had made, as proof of his boast.

“L-i-a-r.”

Bergun, the *maître d'armes*, sent the one word out in a snarl of concentrated fury and intentional insult; then, snatching up the big earthenware tankard from which the Dane had been drinking, Bergun hurled it, contents and all, into the boaster's face. The rest sprang up and gave the two war-wolves the floor. In a moment their knives were out, and by the dim yellow light of the dirty, evil-smelling oil lamps, they fought it out, the rest lolling against the walls, smoking and looking on.

They buried Bergun the next morning, and at noon a military court sat for ten minutes to try Jonck, the Dane, and at sundown they put him against the whitewashed wall, with a firing party in front of him. In the vivid moonlight the *vivandière* went and knelt by his grave, over which she had strewn a great cluster of African wild flowers, scentless but of vivid hue, and as she knelt she wept and sobbed, wept almost as bitterly as she had done on that morning when the military barber of *La Légion* had shorn off her glorious wealth of hair so that she might look like a boy in her *vivandière's* uniform. Very like a beautiful boy she appeared as she knelt sobbing by the grave of Jonck the Dane, and the spirit of Jonck must have looked at her kneeling there from his place on one of the corner stones of Tophet, where most assuredly he had taken up residence, for Jonck had been bad, bad to the bone. If he did so look, he must have laughed one of his full-throated laughs, knowing he had died for a woman who did not care a dustman's damn for him.

Monsieur Perigod d'Alençon knew nothing of all these things, as he sat on his beautiful thoroughbred, which he used as a war charger, with the full blaze of an African sunset falling upon his warrior's frame in its splendid setting of gold and crimson and blue, as represented by his *Chasseurs* uniform. Well might his soldiers call him d'Alençon the Magnificent. All he knew was that a girl who looked like a boy, with cropped black hair, was standing beside a white mule in a silver-embossed saddle and bridle.

"Who is she?"

D'Alençon licked his full red lips that had become suddenly hot as he spoke.

"That," replied the veteran of half a score of African campaigns, "is *la belle Anglaise*, the *vivandière* of the *Légion d'Afrique*, the pet and torment of the biggest bunch of devils that ever wore a uniform. You, *monsieur*, have dallied with many women more beautiful."

"Y-e-s, but—" His eyes went back to the strange, clever little face, under the peaked military cap. "Ye-s, but——"

"*Sapristi*, has she bewitched you too?" was the gruff response. "Me, I shot a man in a duel for her, and I had only seen her three times and spoken to her twice, when you sent me over with despatches for the C.O. of *La Légion*. She has wine in her blood, d'Alençon, that little one."

"So have I," laughed d'Alençon the Magnificent, "and, my *camarade*, wine goes to wine as crows go to crows." He gave the signal that halted his men. "Take charge of the troopers," said he shortly; "see they are properly billeted. As for me, I am thirsty; I would see what sort of liquor the *vivandière* carries in her cask."

"Aye," murmured the old campaigner, "and you will try and see what kind of moonshine lies behind the violet-grey eyes of the *petite* Welsh Moorish maid, for maid she is, I'll swear my sinful soul away on that, and woman winner though you are, d'Alençon the Magnificent, perhaps you will live to wish you had never looked into those misty, wonder-laden eyes that see through us all so placidly and give nothing of herself away. She has a dead soul, that little one, or a soul so great that we cannot fathom it. Damn the little slut, she has spoilt my sleep these months past, and I know she has never given me a second thought—bah."

With an eloquent shrug of self-contempt, the much-bemedalled warrior set about his duties, and made his men jump in their boots.

D'Alençon rode his bronze beauty to where the *vivandière* stood, for she had moved with her mule just inside the barrack gates, waiting for him; she had seen his glances and quick gestures, and knew he would come, just as Eve knew Adam would come, when she had let him have a peep at the forbidden fruit. D'Alençon

stooped from his saddle with all the superb grace which was his to command, for he was a consummate courtier as well as a very gallant warrior; he was wise in the ways of women, and knew that the humblest lassie loves deference from a man—they all do, and it is their right to receive it; only the males who belong to the kingdom of the gutter deny it them. She smiled up at him, and he noticed the contour of her mouth, its warmth, its sweet daintiness, its strange suggestion of sensitiveness which, however, could not hide the surging passion that lay beneath. He started when his eyes met hers, for in those violet-grey eyes of hers the two strains she had sprung from were in evidence: the Welsh sadness and the Moorish subtlety; she might be a dreamer of dreams, but she was never more wide awake than when she was dreaming. Blasé man of the world though he was, those eyes intrigued him from the moment he looked into them. He knew she was no common woman; she had charm, which is a priceless gift, ten thousand times more potent for good or evil than mere facial beauty, and above and beyond all she had individuality; she was a distinct unit, as apart from the mass of her sex. She seemed even in those first moments of meeting to exude magnetic force, not mere sex force, though that she had in superabundance, but the indefinable thing we call personality, and yet she was so small, her limbs so slender that she looked like a toy soldier. D'Alençon, gay, debonair, a master of persiflage, sat in saddle, bantering her, whilst he toyed with the little drinking horn she had handed him. He whispered a toast, and sipped his liquor, and even as he drank his fine eyes were busy saying things that have been said by men to women since ever the first lie was forged on the anvil of desire by the hammer of opportunity, and she gave him back glance for glance, unspoken acceptance for unspoken suggestion, and she was more than his match, for she had all the ages of femininity behind her, all the weapons in her armoury. Where had she learnt it all? Whence came the power to play such a game with such a man? Men talk and write freely of the gods and their powers, forgetting that if there be gods, there must as a natural corollary be goddesses, who fashion and sharpen the weapons of women for the eternal battle of life, the battle that has never ceased since earth and sea were sundered, and never will cease until the world is rolled up like a scroll, and *finis* is written upon all things that are governed by sex.

So the two strangely assorted people, the untutored girl, with the burning sun of North Africa in her blood and being, and the polished man of the western world, played at the world-old comedy and tragedy of human passion, whilst at a grated window of a military prisoner's cell not far away on the left, a grim-faced man looked out and saw it all, saw the swift uplifting of girlish eyelids, the slow, heavy, languorous droop of eloquent eyelashes, the quick smiles that twisted two red lips,

the pretty gestures of a pair of shapely hands, with long, tapering fingers, and the thousand and one devices of a girl-woman bent on a conquest worth while, saw, too, the half-insolent, half-confident tricks and gestures of the magnificent male animal stooping to conquer, and as he saw, McGlusky o' the Legion looked like a caged tiger. His inborn wrath was terrible, but his face was as steady, his gaze as fixed as that of a Bengal monarch of the jungle, holding its wrath within bounds behind the bars of a cage. His hands, hanging by his sides, were clenched until the nails of his fingers bit right through the thick calloused skin of his palms. Once his great chest heaved, as if it would burst, and from his dry lips escaped a whisper:

"Ma wumman!"

That was all, but his fierce, calm gaze was not concentrated upon the girl-woman, but upon the man.

D'Alençon must have felt the fixed look, for as he gathered up his reins, he turned his handsome head and looked straight at the iron-barred window, and he and McGlusky drank each other's eyes, and into the gay *Chasseur's* soul flashed a premonition of coming danger; he tried to shake the thought off with a laugh; how could a common soldier of *La Légion* prove a menace to him, a man high in rank, higher still in influence and wealth? Still the thought stayed, and bit into his brain; the lionlike face he had seen at the prison bars was not one that could easily be forgotten. Still he was not the type of man to permit personal danger to turn him aside from any path he had marked out for himself, and he had set his sinful heart upon winning and wearing *la belle Anglaise*. He flattered himself he had made a big impression upon the girl, and he felt sure she was one who had taken many masculine impressions in her time, young as she was, childlike though she looked, and in his diagnosis of her character he was wrong: of the supreme ordeal of passion she knew nothing; she had never crossed the Rubicon; she had just played with men, her intuitive feminine sense telling her how easy they were to toy with. McGlusky could have taken her by storm at the outset, because he was one who had flown with the eagles all his life, and had from boyhood to manhood's splendour been a doer of great deeds—not for money, not for the frothy reputation that pressmen build around a man of action, but simply because his wings were wide, and he had to fly high, whether he would or no. Mac had disdained his opportunities with the girl because he wanted to give her a chance to find herself in the crucible of temptation, and it looked as if he had asked too much of the gods; his bitter experience of life in many lands ought to have told him that the gods are mostly on the side of those who have the most to give, especially where beautiful women are concerned; even a nun loves a cardinal's red hat better than the shaven pate of a lay brother, and all women

are twins between their toes and their chins.

When McGlusky came out of clink he seemed a different sort of person: he had been a queer mixture before his sentence, volcanic in temper, but quick to forget a quarrel; he had always, too, displayed a peculiar brand of sardonic humour, which had made him as ready to mock at himself as at anything else on earth, but on regaining his freedom he did not seem to have brought with him into the outer world the dancing devils that had of old time lurked in the corners of his eyes, and there was a bitter edge to his speech. Always he had given a soldierly deference to good and capable officers like the Falcon, knowing that such deference was their due; on his return to duty he seemed to have lost his respect for rank, and whilst breaking no law, written or unwritten, his attitude conveyed an air of hostility that was unmistakable. He was smarter in regard to his duties, and always had he been one of the smartest in *La Légion*. In regard to his uniform and his accoutrements he became almost painfully particular. Of old time a word of well-won praise from the Falcon or the C.O. had always brought a glad look into his eyes; now when such words came they were met with a cold, ugly stare, that seemed to say: "To Tophet with your praise; I'm no seeking or desiring it."

Through some instinctive channel the Falcon knew it was not the mere matter of imprisonment that had wrought this radical change in the fine soldier, and he cast about him to find the real cause, for he knew the value of such a soldier as McGlusky in the ranks, for in every line of every regiment there is always one private soldier who acts as a sort of keystone to an arch in time of action; such men are worth many men, often they are worth many officers; they can steady a breaking line in time of stress, and prevent a panic; they can set the pace in a bayonet charge, and they can prevent their comrades from getting out of hand; they are the king-pins of the ranks, and officers of experience know their value. It was not until one day, when the Falcon saw d'Alençon of the *Chasseurs* flirting with the *vivandière*, whilst McGlusky looked on, that the Falcon got an inkling of the real cause of the big man's change of demeanour. The cold, quiet, concentrated fury in McGlusky's face was a revelation. The Falcon was not himself feeling too kindly towards the gay *Chasseur*, who, ever since his arrival at headquarters, had seemed to carry all before him with the *vivandière*; the Falcon's nose, like the noses of his brother officers, had been rudely snubbed, for d'Alençon had a way with him with women, that somehow seemed irresistible. He and the *vivandière* appeared to be eternally together, either by accident or design; if the meetings were accidental, then the gods of chance must have had a soft spot in their usually adamant hearts for the gay *Chasseur*. With the inconstancy of male human nature, the Falcon allowed his

sympathies to go right out to McGlusky; he remembered how the big fellow had rescued the girl when she was a prisoner with the Arabs, and how he had brought her in and caused her to be enrolled as a *vivandière* in *La Légion*, and as far as d'Alençon was concerned, the Falcon thought it was a rotten injustice that the gallant *Chasseur* officer should come between the maid and the big legionary who loved her so madly. What the Falcon forgot was that he and any one of the officers would have done just what the brilliant cavalryman was doing, and a good deal more, if the *vivandière* would have met them half-way. Men are like that, *messieurs*, the world over, in uniform or in mufti: for what they do themselves, or are ready to do, they can always frame an excuse that looks good in their eyes, but the misdeeds of the other fellow are anathema. What a cad the *other* fellow always is, eh?

A good many others besides the Falcon witnessed the flirting of the *vivandière* and the rage of McGlusky; amongst the number were Fritzel of Germany and the Rat.

"Hi wisht it was me she was 'avin' on a bit o' string, instead o' the big feller," mused the Rat. "Hi wouldn't 'arf tike a twist out ov her, the slut. Wot she wants is leadin' by th' bally hair into a nice 'igh attic where she could squall 'er rose-pink 'ead orf hif she wanted to, an' no one to 'ear 'er."

"Vy would she vant ter do dot in der attic, Rat?"

"She'd want to orl right, fer Hi'd tike my belt to 'er, an' Hi'd tan 'er, Hi would, not where it shows, but where it 'urts. Hif you treat a wench proper she'll come on 'er marrer bones an' feed hout ov yer 'and, but hif you lets 'em 'ave their 'eads, they'll run loose. A nice little belt wiv a nice little buckle on the hend ov it, laid on to 'em where there's plenty ov cushion stuff to mike the belt sting is the fing ter mike a woman respec' yer, an' hif you lays it on proper they loves you fer doin' it."

"McGlusky would nod do dot," answered Fritzel with conviction.

"Im?" The Rat's voice was full of unutterable things. "Im? 'E's like a bloke Hi once 'eard a prison chaplain gassin' about, a Spanish bloke who went abart on 'orseback armed wiv a prop-stick, tryin' to knock windmills over."

"Hein, I know him," smiled Fritzel. "You mean Don Quixote. Yes, our big comrade is like him; he dry to set der world right, an' der world don' vant to be set right, but our comrade he is von ver' dam' fine man. Me, I wish dot *vivandière* go to blazes, but she not go, she pull him through the gratin's of hell mit her eyelishes. *Ja*, dot vos so."

"Lor', call me a dicky-bird hif that hain't our dear ole pal the Goat speakin' to McGlusky at this blessed minute; the pore ole bloke 'as 'arf 'is fice in bandages. Hi wonder wot's 'is little gime, speakin' ter the big feller. Hi'm goin' ter butt in on that

interview, Hi am. Mac was in clink when the Goat met wiff 'is haccident at the 'ands of Providence, an' the Goat 'as been in 'orspital hever since."

Just as the Rat got to the pair who had so long been enemies, McGlusky was remarking to the wounded sergeant in his low, deep voice:

"Ye say ye had yin eye blown oot an' maist o' yr teeth blown in, an' yin ear torn off yr face, sergeant? Weel, weel; little things like that air sent tae try us. Dinna greet ower eet; eet micht ha been worse, ye've still yin ear an' yin eye. A'm no a leear, so A will na say A'm sorry fr ye, for ye mad' ma life a hell."

"Ho, ho," chuckled the sergeant. "I hear all the chatter of the Legion. You say once I made your life a hell, now the Legion say it is the *vivandière* makes life perdition for you, *monsieur*. When we get back to the base I will get my discharge, an' I will marry your *vivandière*. I have a little nest-egg saved from the loot of other campaigns; we will go to Paris when we are married, an' I will open a house. *Sapristi*, yes, and we will make much money."

"A'll no hurt a wounded mon," growled Mac, "but eef ye air wi'in reach o' ma twa han's in twa minutes, A'll push yer yin eye inside yer head ter look fer yr brains, push it in wi' ma thumb, an' A'll mak' ye feel like a worm wi' whiskers on it."

"Come awy from it, Mac," interpolated the Rat. "Hit's off the active list now, this Goat is; don't mind wot hit says to yer; hit's orf its noddle, an' we only keeps it arahnd fr somethin' ter laff at."

The Goat spat viciously at the Rat.

"Spawn of a ten-cent scarlet woman," he howled. "It was no Arab explosive bullet that smashed my face in the night: it was you, you offspring of the nameless one."

In frantic rage the Goat frothed at the mouth, gibbering and mowing, for his instinct told him to whose diabolic cunning he owed his maiming.

"Don't tike it too much to 'eart, ole sport," crooned the Rat in dulcet tones of mock sympathy. "Me blinkin' 'eart haches for yer. You wasn't a 'andsome man afore Gawd dropped that fallin' star on yer dial, an' yo're hugly enough now ter mike a love-sick woman 'ide 'er 'ead under a 'ayrick, fer fear ov lookin' at yer, struth you are, you dirty yaller dog ov a spy, you who give your comrades awy to 'eadquarters just to keep your dirty job. It was you gave my pal Dutch Aitkins awy over a bit ov loot, because 'e wouldn't go you 'alves, an' Dutch Aitkins was shot, 'e was. McGlusky jest told yer 'e'd poke yr one good heye in wiv 'is thumb; if 'e does, Hi'll poke it back from the houtside. You're a back number now, damn you; you're hoff the hactive list, an' Hi'm goin' ter mike you wish you was dead, Hi am. Goat—you hain't no goat—you're a cross between a baboon an' a coyote, an'

when Hi'm givin' you that pedigree Hi'm payin' you a compliment you don't deserve. Hi ain't *all* hangel myself, but Hi'd fice a firm' squad before Hi'd betray a pal."

"Haud yr blether, ye London Rat," snapped McGlusky. "Ye'll be sayin' something unkind in a minute, an' him a disabled mon."

CHAPTER VIII

A SOLDIER AND A MAN

All arms, excepting those on vedette duty, were tucked away, soundly sleeping. The day and the evening had been just the same as the preceding days and evenings: not a thing had happened to make even the most experienced legionary guess that the C.O. was planning a *coup*; no one knew better than this veteran warrior how necessary it was to keep his own counsel if he hoped to spring a surprise upon the ever-alert foe; every Arab, male and female, juvenile or adult, in the vicinity was a spy, and the faintest ripple of excitement, the tiniest show of preparation, would be noted, and would be sent flying outward to the enemy forces. So the C.O. laid his plans and instead of consulting his staff, gave every officer a free leg.

That same freedom came very close to stern trouble between the Falcon and d'Alençon of the *Chasseurs*. The ostensible cause of friction on that particular evening began over an argument concerning the merits of a horse, and later on the wound reopened over some remark passed by d'Alençon concerning a certain religious house in Paris. The Falcon in each case had taken a view diametrically opposed to d'Alençon, did it, too, in such a way that the merest tyro in such matters could plainly see he was pricking for a rupture of good relations. The brilliant *Chasseur* was every whit as ready for trouble, and the peas were almost in the soup. Everyone knew that both the horse and the religious house were mere camouflage: the real reason of the smouldering enmity was *la belle Anglaise*, the beautiful little *vivandière*. When two fools and a woman make a triangle, the centre must be trouble. There was no open brawl, of course; both men were gentlemen; they spoke coolly and with studied politeness, each carefully avoiding the faintest semblance of a remark that might be construed into a reference to any woman; they handled their wine-glasses with fingers that had not a tremor in them, but their very nonchalance was ominous to the watchers; their smiles when they looked one at the other were as frosty as a December dawn in the Seine. There were *Chasseurs* and *Légion d'Afrique* officers in about equal numbers present, and all knew that the two men who were fencing with words were the two most deadly men amongst the officers in the French army of Africa. As is usually the case under such circumstances, each officer present became a silent but sincere partisan of the uniform he wore. Just when the tension had reached a point where an open rupture was almost inevitable, an orderly came with an imperative order from the C.O. to

d'Alençon, and he, being a soldier before all else, rose promptly to follow the orderly to the C.O.'s quarters. He paused just long enough to remark with a smile that was the merest curl of his lips:

"I shall be delighted to renew this discussion, Major, at the first possible opportunity."

To which the Falcon, rising and bowing punctiliously, replied in a nonchalant drawl:

"Your convenience will suit me to a nicety, Captain d'Alençon"—simple and polite words enough in themselves, but redolent of coming trouble to the practised ears that heard them.

Whatever d'Alençon's business was with the C.O., it prevented him from any further continuation of the debatable subjects that evening, and everyone, including the Falcon, knew this was neither the wish nor the fault of the captain of *Chasseurs*.

Two hours after midnight, the C.O. rose silently from the little rough table in the almost bare barrack-like room in which he always worked, and issued his orders almost in whispers. No lights broke the darkness of an African night, no bugle sounded. The men sleeping on their rough cots were awakened without noise, and cautioned that their every movement was to be soundless.

"Struth," whispered the Rat to McGlusky, "this reminds me ov old times, when Hi was in the burglin' business in little ole London—feels 'omey, this does."

"Ach," remarked Fritz, "dis yob in silence an' in der dark brings back der days on der Somme, when Germany fight der world; ach yes, 'Over der top,' whispers der platoon officer, 'an' get der bayonet in your guts or giff der bayonet to der allies.' *Ja*, it bring back old times. Me, I can smell blood in this yob."

"Smell blood?" retorted McGlusky. "Aye, it's in the air. We'll be spillin' it before sun-up, an' maybe oor ain will be chokin' us."

Silent as ghosts the men fell in. The Falcon came along the Legion's ranks, and now and then got rid of a sibilant whisper.

"Cavalry comin' wiv us on this little picnic, Mac. 'Ark to the 'orses pawin' wiv their blinkin' 'oofs, an' 'ear them champin' their bally bits. Betcher me bloomin' shirt we're goin' ter do things in style this time, an' Hi'm blinkin' glad, Hi am. Hi'm fair achin' fer a scrap."

"Ye air goin' tae get it. Hark, the guns are movin' now an' every wheel is muffled."

"Wonder wot the bloomin' job is? Hi 'opes Hi'll bump into a blinkin' Hemir when the muss starts."

"A what?"

“A bloomin’ Hemir, a sort of toff sheik. Pablo Franque, the Greek who was wiff me in one raid, got a Hemir, an’ ’e ’ad a big jewel in ’is blanky turban, an’ a big gold ring wiv a sparkler in it on his fumb. Pablo Franque got both, though ’e ’ad to cut the fumb off to get the ring. Pablo deserted as soon as we got back to the base, an’ got safe back to Greece wiv his loot. Now if Hi get a Hemir, Hi’ll——”

“You’re meanin’ an Emir, air ye?”

“Same fing, Mac, only we says it different.”

“A would na cut a man’s thumb aff fr th’ sake o’ a lousy jewel. Eef A meet an Emir in fair fecht, A’ll kill him eef A can, or he’ll kill me, but A’d no maim an’ mangle th’ dead. Eef A cud pull th’ ring off his hand A’m no sayin’ A’d no dae it, fr eet’s sinfu’ tae waste wealth.”

“Waste nothin’,” murmured the Rat. “Me, Hi’ll cut my Hemir’s bloomin’ ’ead off, if Hi can’t get the jool no other way. Wot’s the use ov jools to a dead bloke, anyway? Besides, hif we left an ’ead wiff a big jool on it lyin’ on a battle-ground, the pore bloke wot owned it might not be able to rest dead, ’e’d come back an’ ’aunt that battlefield. Hi would.”

Out into the whispering silences of the African night stole the French troops, bent upon striking terror into the hearts of an army of tribesmen that had been secretly assembling just beyond the crimson hills that girdled the Arab town where the French had made their headquarters for the time being. The C.O. rode in the van, and close to him were three native guides, who, for a price, were leading the French by the quickest and safest route towards the native army. By the side of the leading guide strode the stern-browed Falcon; his left wrist was strapped to the right wrist of the guide, who had been completely disarmed; in the Falcon’s right hand gleamed a long razor-edged Spanish stiletto. At the outset of the march, the Falcon had whispered in perfect Arabic in the guide’s ear:

“At the first sign of treachery, *mon ami*, this blade goes up to the hilt in your throat.”

The guide had looked first at the long blade, then into the eyes of the man who spoke; if he had had any doubts concerning his fate if anything went wrong, prior to that moment, he had none after the Falcon’s warning, but the price he had been paid was a big one, and he was a fatalist, and he accepted the gamble.

Other officers walked in similar fashion by the rest of the guides, for the French army takes no chances that can be avoided. The C.O. was taking chances enough, considering the odds against him, but he knew what the desperate men of *La Légion* could do against odds. *La belle Anglaise*, on her little white mule, rode at the rear of *La Légion*; for one thing, she was safer there than back in the Arab town; if the

Legion was beaten, she could die; if she had remained in the town, and defeat came to the French flag, her fate at the hands of the rabble would be unmentionable.

There was just a faint suspicion of dawn in the air when the head of the French column debouched from the hills, and the C.O. heaved a great sigh of relief; his one fear had been that the enemy might get wind of his adventure, and attack him in the narrow defiles, where he could not manœuvre his troops and make the best use of their marvellous military skill and matchless discipline. The enemy's camp lay before him in a great straggling, disarrayed collection of black tents; great store of camels and horses, goats and sheep were there, and at sight of this collection the C.O. knew that his venture, from a military point of view, was a sound one, for it was evidently a great base from which, at no distant date, the Arabs would attack him, and in warfare it is ever the better policy to take the initiative and make the enemy fight upon the lines you want him to fight upon. Forward went the guns at a headlong rush to take up their positions; the infantry broke into the famous lope stride, like the lope of a pack of wolves on a hot scent: for just such a moment as this had they been trained in their murderous desert marches. The Falcon was at the head of *La Légion*, and he covered the ground like a Marathon runner. McGlusky, the Rat, Fritzel and the big Turk were directly behind the Falcon, and he knew it, and if he had been given his choice of all the world he would not have exchanged those four men for any four living. The cavalry halted and dismounted, to ease and freshen their horses; their hour was not yet, and their officers knew it. The French had the upslope of the hills behind them, a precious advantage, for it meant that the enemy, horse and foot, would have to charge up hill, whilst the French could charge downwards.

Soon the big Arab camp was alive with excited humanity; for once the desert men had been caught napping. The guns began to bark with wicked venom, the red and yellow splashes of flame showing where the shells were bursting in the thick of the enemy, and to the savage roar of the guns soon was added the equally wicked snarl of the rifles of *La Légion*. The men, true to tradition, were manœuvring beautifully, and each soldier keen for the fray. The desert men were not long idle. Out from the black tents poured their riflemen like ants from ant-hills; down on the sand they laid themselves, and began volleying in the intermittent, spasmodic fashion common to their kind; had they only possessed the trained skill of the French troops, they would have wiped the Legion out; they had courage enough, and the weight of numbers was with them, but training tells in warfare. The gunners got the range with magical speed, and soon the shells were bursting wherever the desert men were lying thickest, and the carnage was dreadful. *Le Légion's* ranks were also being gapped,

for the big slugs of lead the desert men were firing made ghastly wounds. McGlusky, who always seemed to be a law unto himself when fighting, was down upon his stomach; with one hand he had drawn a good-sized lump of rock towards himself, and behind this he sheltered his head and face, remarking:

“Eef yin o’ those sand-groppers plunks a bit lead inta ma skull, A’ll be a dead mon, an’ a dead mon is no much use in a fecht. A’m theenkin’ we hae bitten aff mair than we can chew this time, an’ France wull need every live mon she can get an’ keep.”

A moment later he turned upon the Rat, who was squatting cross-legged and shooting at double express speed, and as he fired, the unregenerate son of London slums was humming a ditty that would not have passed muster as a hymn in Hades; it was a wicked thing he sang, concerning a red-headed wench, with morals to match her hair; the ditty was so warm in parts, that even the buck grasshoppers in the scanty herbage near by blushed and legged it out of earshot.

“Wha’ air ye yellin’ for?” demanded Mac.

“Oo’s yellin’?” retorted the Rat. “Hi’m singin’, Hi am.”

“Air ye? Then, ma buckie, ye want a wheelbarrow accompaniment. Get off yer hams, an’ lie doon an’ shoot; eef ye dinna A’ll pull yr nose sae far roon’ ye’d be able tae buckle it tae yr back shirt-stud—eef ye had yin. Wha’ th’ blazes were ye trained for, eef ye no hae sense enough tae tak’ cover? Lie doon, ye gommeril, or A’ll rise up an’ kick ye in th’ wame.”

“Hi’m fightin’ Fuzzies, Hi am, not crazy Scotch Anzacs. You keep yore blinkin’ kickin’ fer the Fuzzies—’ere they come.”

The Rat spoke truth, the Fuzzies were coming. The horde of wild brown men, armed mostly with spears, who had been hanging on the rear of the Arab army, had been flung forward by the mad Mullah who commanded them; they were naked, except for a mere loincloth; their only weapons were their spears, and a knife in each loin-belt, but they were brave and swift, those dirty, lean, mad Mussulmans. They rushed forward without formation of any kind, just like a mob of stampeded buck, with a wolf-pack hanging on their flanks. In place of discipline they had fanaticism: every mother’s son of them believed that if he got killed by the French infidels in that wild foray, he would go straight to that mystic bourne styled Paradise, and wake up within the celestial gates with half a dozen houris waiting to wive with him: fat houris, thin houris, plump ones, slender ones—each warrior had been promised by the Mullah an assorted lot. Funny bounders male humans are: even in death their thoughts, hopes, joys, delights are bound up in the women; in the white world of the West, an angel is always a “she”—the Lord only knows why. An angel may be a

she, but a “she” is not always an angel, not by miles of the Milky Way. The Mullah, who led the charge of the Fuzzies, was mounted upon a nice little brown Arab horse; he wore the green turban and veil of his religious rank; he was as brave as he was fanatical, that Mullah, and led his rabble well.

The Falcon knew that mob would come on to the death. He turned his lean face to his men, and snapped out an order for steady volley firing.

“Aye,” snarled McGlusky, “it wull be volleys th’ noo, but it wull be bayonets at th’ feenish,” and bayonets it was, later on.

As the dervishes advanced, jumping over rocks, ducking as shells whistled over them, running and leaping, yelling and brandishing their weapons, the reckless Legionaries, jesting grimly one with the other, poured in the lead that laid out whole lines of foemen. The Rat, whose face was grimy and dirty, kept pleading almost piteously to McGlusky:

“Hi say, Mac, don’t you go an’ bust a ’ole in my Hemir—that’s ’im on the little ’orse. ’E looks lousy wiv rings an’ jools, to me, ’e does. Don’t you bust ’im; Hi’ll plug ’im soon as ’e gets nice an’ ’andy, an’ then Hi’ll run me ’ands over ’im an’ get wot ’e’s got. Hi’ll divvy up fair wiv you an’ Fritz an’ th’ Turk, strike me daffodil colour if Hi don’t.”

“A dinna believe in lootin’ th’ dead, but, ma mannie, eef ye dae loot tha’ buckie ye ca’ an Emir, an’ dinna gie ma my share, A’ll tweest yr face richt doon behin’ ye. Noo plug yr Emir, fir it wull be fix bayonets in th’ twinkling o’ an’ eyelash.”

The Rat sighted his rifle, and touched the trigger, and the green-turbaned horseman went headlong over his horse’s croup.

“That’s one pore blighter removed from the temptation of earthly riches; well, ’e’ll be ’appy by an’ by,” murmured the Rat. “Riches is a ’orrible temptation to a religious bloke,” he added.

The next second the Falcon’s voice rang above the din of battle:

“Fix bayonets, *La Légion!*”

It was beautiful, even in that grim setting, to see how every man’s hand went to his bayonet at the word of command, beautiful to see how the burnished steel leapt forth to sparkle in the rays of the early morning sun, as the deadly weapons were driven home to each rifle.

McGlusky was the first to leap forward as the word came to charge; his great bulk was bent well forward, to give the full of his weight to the steel, and then the Legion went onward with a rush to meet the brown wave rolling brokenly towards the French lines. The issue was never in doubt for a moment; it could not be; untrained valour could never stand in front of a living wall of steel that had never a

break in it, excepting when a man coughed and fell, and those gaps were closed with machine-like precision. The dervishes broke, and turned to flee, and that was the moment the cavalry had been waiting for. Like living flame the gay *Chasseurs* swept forward, the mettled chargers spurning the hot soil with pounding hoofs, until the adjacent world seemed to shake. In amongst the brown men thundered the *Chasseurs*, every sword blade at the "point"; then the sudden dipping of sword arms, and the death-dealing thrusts went home, and if Allah collected all who fell, the harvest must have been plentiful and the houris must have been kept pretty busy selecting their heavenly husbands, for your true Mussulman is not a believer in the doctrine of no marrying or giving in marriage beyond the grave, and he is probably as near the truth as his Christian (?) detractors. As the Rat once remarked when in philosophic mood to McGlusky: "A woman who couldn't mate in 'eving might go to 'ell for me, fer mating is orl the 'eving there is on earth, an' every woman carries 'er little bit of 'eving round wiff 'er, 'struth she does."

The gay and gallant *Chasseurs* did not have a picnic, for the Fuzzies had their own way of fighting. They could not stand up to that glorious rush of mounted men who, leaning far forward in the saddle, pricked them in the throat, severing windpipe from lungs, or thrust through the heart, and brought the steel away again, to thrust once more, until the dead men cumbered the ground, but the Fuzzies, the lean, brown, sinewy, almost naked men, had their own methods: they dropped right under the muzzles of the charging, ramping, snorting horses, and, lying prone, they hamstrung with the steel, where and how they could, and in this way they brought many a fiery charger to earth, and when a horse fell the Fuzzies rose and drove the steel home into the bodies of the gay riders, and mostly they made sure that their work was done, and well done. Behind the cavalry came the *Légion d'Afrique*, bayonets levelled, cleaning up, and they cleaned.

Away down in the Arab camp the sheiks and Emirs were mustering horsemen and camel-men, big-hearted fighters, who would do all that primitive men could do. The gunners of the French knew all about them, and dropped their shells with almost devilish precision amidst the mustering horse and camel corps, breaking up their formations, and causing confusion, for your trained artilleryman has a devilish precision for such work as this: it is his trade.

Carried away by the *élan* of the hour, *la belle Anglaise* had galloped her pretty mule in the wake of that regiment of *Chasseurs* that was led by d'Alençon into action; she had snatched her pistols from holsters, and with reins in her pretty teeth, the little vixen rode in the wake of war, shooting with the strange coolness that comes to women in times of direst peril, for not in love alone are they variable: they

can shudder at a drop of blood from a pricked finger in time of peace, and perhaps faint, if there is someone near whose arms they like ready to catch them, but in war they can be she-cats, cold, cruel, calculating and merciless, for are not they the eternal riddle written on the sands of time, the things men never fathom or understand? *La belle Anglaise*, riding in the thick of that shouting, storming, yelling hell, was as cool as the most veteran soldier, and the shooting she did was a credit to the Falcon, who had taught her.

Things were going so well with the French that the C.O. was just pluming himself upon the success of his strategy, when a rush of horse came on one flank, followed almost instantly by the rush of the Arab camel corps; naked dervishes were running beside both horses and camels, clinging to stirrups, and whenever the mounted men made a gap, the yelling foot-men followed it up with their short jabbing spears. Wherever the Legion was broken, the men came together again in sections, and formed hollow squares, and, standing steady as rocks, they poured in devastating volleys. All the terrible grilling drill they had been forced to endure was justified that day. Even in that stricken hour the daredevils from almost every land under the sun, tossed jests and gibes along the ranks.

“Sy good-bye ter me muvver for me, Mac, hif you meet ’er,” jeered the Rat, after one hot rally. “Hif she’s alive, you’ll find me sainted muvver ’an’in’ on to th’ bar at the ’Orns ’Otel in Kennington Road, hif she hain’t too full ter ’ang onter anyfing.”

“Dinna fash aboot yer minnie,” guffawed Mac. “Ye’ll fin’ her hangin’ on to a coal-scuttle, waitin’ tae gie ye a warm-up where ye air boond for, ye deil.”

“Don’t want no coal; Hi want hice, Hi do—so’ll you, you big stiff.”

Fritzel was singing something in German, with a plaintive minor note running through it, but this did not prevent him pushing his bayonet so industriously that even his hands were slippery with blood. His heart might have been in the far-off Rhineland; there certainly were a good many Fuzzies who wished his body and his bayonet were there also. The big Turk kept on quoting slabs of text from the Koran, interspersed with odd bits of language he had picked up when a prisoner at Gallipoli with the “diggers” from Australia, and even in the heat of battle Mac could not help noticing that the Australian flowers of speech did not fit in like pieces of mosaic with the pious invocations from the Koran. There was no better fighter in the ranks than that big Turk, and whether praying or swearing, he kept both the bayonet and the butt going like a piece of machinery.

The Falcon went down just in front of the little square where McGlusky’s section were helping to fill Paradise. Mac leapt to his officer, strode across his body, and lifting up his voice in a great bull-like roar, he beat off those who were trying to

jab their spears into the fallen man. The Rat, cool as if he were bent upon the gentle task of burgling a safe in a West End of London flat, emptied his magazine into the rabble in front of him, and then ejaculating in his serio-comic fashion: "Sorry, blokes, but Hi can't count hup to more'n five," he slid forward, and dragged the Falcon from behind McGlusky's long legs, and landed the wounded Major back in the lines. It was a superb piece of work, done with dauntless heroism, and the Rat felt fully rewarded as the Falcon muttered:

"Bravo, *camarade*; you are one damn good man, even if you did pinch my watch three years ago."

"Hi honly pinched it to get hit mended for you, *monsieur*," the Rat had grinned, and then went back into the *mêlée*.

The battle was again swinging round in favour of France, when from the hills behind them came a horde from the town where the Legion had so lately been quartered. This unexpected and unforeseen rush broke through *La Légion's* rear ranks, and created what would have been a panic amongst less seasoned troops. A bushy-bearded tribesman levelled Fritz of Germany on his face with a great mace, and was stooping to finish the job with a twelve-inch knife.

"Arf a mo', matey," chirruped the Rat. "Fritzel wants 'is little topknot fer a 'at-rack, an' Gawd wants you fer a hornament."

The Rat pushed his rifle's muzzle as close as possible to the tribesman's whiskers, and touched the trigger. The desert warrior might have looked like an ornament when he reached Paradise; he most certainly did not look one as he lay at the feet of the Rat.

The cavalry had been busy with the enemy cavalry, and in spite of the odds, the superb *Chasseurs* had run through the enemy. Again and again they had charged the Arab horse, and the Arabs had "accepted the files," which in civilian parlance means they had not closed up and fought the *Chasseurs* man to man and steel to steel, but had weakened and opened their ranks, and let the *Chasseurs* ride through them, emptying saddles as they went, with wicked thrusts and sparkling downward stroke, and still more fateful backward sabre stroke. Having disposed of the mounted forces of the enemy, both camel and horsemen, the *Chasseurs* came riding their leg-weary horses back to help the *Légion d'Afrique*, and into the surging masses of spearmen they came.

It was whilst this mixed battle was raging that McGlusky saw d'Alençon's charger go down screaming in its agony, for the noble brute had been hamstrung by a kneeling dervish. The gay captain could not clear himself from his fallen steed that had gone to its knees and muzzle, and foes were all round him. Standing upon the

earth, with both feet still in his stirrups, d'Alençon prepared to sell his life as dearly as possible. He was magnificent in that moment: rake, *roué*, despoiler of women though he had been, yet the real stuff of manhood was in his bones; he knew how to die; as for the rest—who knows?—perhaps the women he had dallied with had been as eager as he, perhaps more so; they often have a way of getting all the sympathy and none of the blame.

McGlusky was very busy on his own account when he first saw d'Alençon's charger fall, but he and Fritzel and the Rat, aided by the giant Turk, soon cleared their front, and the Falcon was on his feet again, a revolver in each hand, and well able to keep his end up. The Rat had seen d'Alençon's plight, and now he called to McGlusky as he wiped the blood and sweat from his brow with his forearm:

"Sy, matey, hit's good night to that big stiff o' the *Chasseurs*, an' a damn good job too."

Mac was pulling the fresh air into his great lungs after his superhuman exertions. He glanced to where d'Alençon still waged his unequal war, and the old light leapt to his eyes, and the old spirit to his lion heart.

"Dom th' blastie," he growled, "dom him body an' soul, but A maun save him. Foller ma."

"No, matey, let 'im get wot's comin' to 'im, 'e ain't 'arf deserved it. Let 'im go to 'ell like a dawg."

The Rat was a good hater; so was McGlusky, but they looked at life from different angles.

"Stay where ye air, eef y're a cooard; foller ma eef ye're a mon."

That was all the big fellow said, and he plunged forward to the rescue of the officer he hated worse than he had ever hated any man in all his stormy life. The other three followed in his wake like shadows, and between them they snatched d'Alençon from the jaws of death.

When the battle was over, and the enemy flung in all directions, the gay captain of *Chasseurs*, with his beautiful uniform stained with his own and foemen's blood, and rent in many places, came with one arm in a sling and a bandage round his brow, to look for *la belle Anglaise*, for with him it was a woman first always. He found her flushed and glorious in the midst of *La Légion*, the heroine of the hour; the semi-savage soldiery were pressing round her almost idolatrously; she had had her baptism of battle, and had acquitted herself like a true *vivandière*. She was in that moment like a solitary bitch-wolf in the midst of a dog-wolf pack, any one of whom would have slashed with death-dealing fangs to own her, but all held at bay, though some in the reek of battle fumes slavered at the jaws, and saw her through bloodshot

eyes, for men who have just passed through battle are always sex-mad. To her came d'Alençon in the pride of his glorious manhood, with the red stains of war still damp upon him, and he took her from amongst them, as Napoleon once snatched a crown from the hands of priests and placed it on his brow, saying: "'Tis mine, and I take it." She went with him half willingly, half reluctantly, for the homage of the Legion was running in her veins like old wine of great vintage, and every woman born of woman is greedy of adulation, though ninety per cent of them will cheat over the price, or pay where the payment is least desired.

McGlusky had not gone willingly near the *vivandière*, but fate, the cruellest and grimmest of all jesters, had thrown him and his comrades close to her on the reforming of the Legion, when the muster roll was called.

"Garn an' speak to 'er nar, while she's 'ot wiff war wine; she's seen you fightin', an' she's a fighter 'erself, wothever else she is. Go an' mike good, you big lump o' damn foolishness," had been the advice of the worldly-wise Rat, who had an elemental knowledge of women that went deeper than all the lore of books or philosophic study.

"The back o' ma han' across yr mooth, ye spewed-oot, ower-ripe fruit o' a sewer, eef ye dinna haud yr blether," had been McGlusky's hoarse rejoinder.

Every bone in his big body ached for this wee woman, every nerve within him was raw for her. If he had been given his choice in that mad moment either to have been made a Marshal of France or to have had her with her lissome little body clinging willingly and lovingly to him, with her mouth pressed hotly to his own, he would not have hesitated for a moment: the Marshal's baton would have been flicked contemptuously aside, and the little slender woman-figure would have been crushed in his arms. He would have thrown dice with the devil for the possession of her, but he would not go cringing to her like a spaniel. Why should he? The best of them are not worth that.

As the *vivandière* moved away with d'Alençon in the direction of the cavalry tents, a snarl broke out and ran along the ranks of *La Légion*. D'Alençon heard it, and being what he was, he understood. He half halted, and turning his handsome head, he smiled sardonically. In that second or two of time Mac went through Hades, hip deep in its horrors; his big strong fingers fumbled with his cartridges, whilst his bloodshot eyes never left d'Alençon's face.

"Too late, matey," jeered the Rat, snatching Mac's rifle from his hand. "You 'ad yore chance wiv th' slut, an' missed it. Nar watch 'em walk off together, th' bitch you saved from death, or from bein' a little love-plaster for a bloomin' Hemir, or a corfee-coloured sheik, an' the muvver of 'arf a dozen whitey-brown brats; look at

'er goin' awy wiff th' man *you* saved from 'avin' 'is little liver skewered wiv a dozen spears. You hain't got nuffink in yore big 'ead excep' wot a monkey might find wiv a small tooth comb."

Mac looked down into the cheeky face, and into his fierce eyes crept a look that spoke for real mateship at its birth, and he spoke gently:

"Considerin' ye air wha' ye air, Rat—a by-produc' o' a human muck-heap, spoilt before yr birth by th' poisoned blood o' him tha' begat ye an' her tha' brocht ye forth, an' doubly damned by yr environment on arrival on this planet, ye're no a bad pal; ye've th' makin's o' wha' in ma ain country they ca' a 'mate.'!"

The Rat looked with twinkling eyes into the stern face that somehow had grown dearer to him than any man's face had ever been.

"You ain't no plain speaker, big un, not 'arf you ain't. Hi don't know when you 'urts most, when you pys a blinkin' compliment, or when you spreads out a hinsult, but big un, Hi do know you are as slow as a silk-worm over the love stuff. When you was savin' that Chasser Johnny, an' usin' the baynit an' the butt on them devils of dervishes, you looked splendiferous, Gawd's truth you did, an' the little 'arf Welsh 'arf Moorish bitch was sittin' hup on 'er white mule watchin' you, an' 'er heyes was open to their bloomin' biggest, an' 'er mouth was 'arf hopen, an' the front ov 'er back was risin' an' fallin' as if she was bustin' fer breath—bussims Hi thinks they calls that part ov a woman in books; it's th' part of 'em where you lys yer 'ead w'en yore courtin' 'em in the starlight on ole Westminster Bridge, an' there ain't no cop sneakin' abart ter tell yer yer'll 'ave ter py income-tax hif yer keeps yer 'ead there too long, an' 'e gives yer a shove wiv 'is shoulder ter mike yer move awy w'ile 'e 'as a word on 'is own wiv yore 'ussey."

"Weel, ye long-winded gutter-grub, wha' o' it?"

"Honly this, Mac: as Hi was remarkin', a blinkin' silk-worm is a race-'orse to you. Hi dunno much about Moorish girls, but Hi do know a bit bout the Welsh sort; Hi trained at a plice called Rhos-on-Sea fer four or five o' my biggest fights, an' Hi took a lot o' notice o' th' Welsh wenches. Lovely heyes they got—grey, mostly, wiv new viles damp wiv dew behind th' grey, an' they can work them heyes till they look like hangels weepin' fr th' wickedness ov the world; they can put all the sadness of the shadders of the mountains into 'em, an' they can work hup a slow, sweet come-on'-tike-a-bite-out-o'-me-neck smile, an' the smile an' the wistful heyes mike yer feel you could go ter 'ell for 'em, or fight for 'em, or die for 'em, an' orl the time 'arf a hinch hunder the surface o' their nice white skins, they ain't got no more real feelin' than a tomato has got taste; they're just natural born hactresses, wiv abart as much soul as you cud dig out ov a milk puddin'."

“Weel, ye windy blastie, A’m theenkin’ ye’re tryin’ tae describe wha’ arm-chair theenkers ca’ th’ emotional temperament which taks th’ place, an’ does duty fir th’ real thing.”

“That’s abart it, Mac. Well, fir once *la belle Anglaise*, our *vivandière*, forgot ter be Welsh an’ became Moorish, for, by Gawd, she was eatin’ you wiv ’er heyes w’en you was savin’ th’ dandy *Chasseur*, Lord blight ’im—an’, big un, ’er ’eart was in ’er heyes. Hif you’d gone strite to ’er then, she’d ’ave shared blankets wiv you in bivouac, or—H’im—a—hass.”

The Rat wagged an impressive finger at the big blood- and sweat-begrimed man, who was looking so intently into his face.

“P’raps y’re richt, buckie, an’ p’raps y’re wrong. The deil, a deacon an’ a dozen lay lawyers cudna read th’ real workin’s o’ a wumman’s mind frae her face. They’re sae dommed clever wi’ their actin’, they can fool themselves inta believin’ in their foolin’; every yin o’ them is an Oriental at heart, an’ na white mon ever unnerstan’s the Orient. Anyway, A wadna tak’ *la belle Anglaise*, or any wumman unner th’ sun, on th’ impulse o’ a moment. Wha’ wud be the use? Th’ next impulse nicht mak’ her change her front, an’ A’m no th’ sort tae measure ma mating wi’ changing moods. Eef she wants ter be a toy fir yon peacock o’ th’ *Chasseurs*, let her gang her gait; A’m no a doormat fir any wench’s pretty foot. Noo, buckie, rustle roon an’ eef ye canna come by a flask o’ liquor by fair means, use th’ gifts th’ gods gied ye, an’ pinch yin, fir A’m feelin’ all burnt up inside masel’.”

The Rat, thus commanded by the one man who had known how to touch his heartstrings, went joyously out on the loot, chuckling to his own impish soul over Mac’s change of view in regard to what was virtually bare-faced robbery.

As Mac was standing alone, brooding grimly over the tricks that fate seemed ever to serve up to him, robbing him of the one thing his soul yearned for, d’Alençon came towards him, the beautiful little *vivandière* having gone to ply her calling of liquor dispensing to the troops—at a price. At sight of the big Legionary, the *Chasseur* officer quickened his pace, for his wounds, though painful, were not of a nature to cripple him. Thanks for personal service rendered very seldom passed between officers and men in the French army of Africa, but d’Alençon had a big streak in him, in spite of his many failings.

“Ha,” he exclaimed, with one of his swift and spontaneous smiles, that made so many men and women, too, like him, “You are the Legionary who came to my rescue when my horse was down and my last hope had pretty well left me. It was a gallant thing, *camarade*, and you can count me your friend and your debtor.”

He held out his unwounded arm and hand, with the frank gesture of a

campaigner who knew, but did not heed the gap that divided a captain of a crack corps from a mere soldier of *La Légion d'Afrique*. Mac seemed in that instant to make his feet take root in the soil; his whole figure grew rigid, excepting his right arm: that went up as his hand went to his peaked cap in military salute; he appeared not to see the officer's outstretched hand.

"I offer you my hand as between comrades; I owe you my life."

D'Alençon's voice was level but vibrant, as he spoke.

"Tak' yr han' awa'; A'll no touch it."

If a glove had been slashed across the officer's face, he could not have been more startled. His brows came together in a deep frown; his chin shot forward, and the two men, big, athletic, splendid, looked into each other's souls through the medium of the eyes.

"You refuse my hand—why?"

The query came in tones that told how McGlusky's bitter words had gone right home.

"Because eet is no clean."

"For that insult to my uniform I could shoot you where you stand, Legionary, and be within my right as an officer."

"A didna insult yr uniform, *monsieur*; th' uniform is beyond reproach."

D'Alençon nearly strangled in his efforts to curb his rage; at last: "You saved my life at peril of your own," he gasped.

"A hae done as much fir a yaller daug 'ere to-day."

"If you were an officer, I would call you out and kill you."

Then McGlusky laughed, the low, brutal laughter of a man who means to drive home an insult.

"Eet wad tak' a *mon* tae kill McGlusky o' th' Legion; nae lady's lap-daug cud turn tha' trick, ye wumman spoiler." Then his fiercely held passion broke its ill-held bonds. "A saved yr life, ye dommed peacock, an' ye hae stole ma wumman. Ye wad nae hae her for an hoor, eef A cud get ye in front o' ma fir just a wee while. Ye air no a cooard in battle, an' A'll no disgrace ma manhood by leein' an' callin' ye one, but ye've th' speerit o' a louse tha' hae been born in the hind feathers o' a backyard hen, an' been raised unner a wart-hog. A canna say mair, fir fear o' bein' deesrespec'fu' tae yr uniform."

What might have followed this gentle speech of the big fellow to his superior officer not even the angels could say, for the officers of the French army in Africa were very much a law unto themselves, but at that vital moment the dainty little *vivandière* came upon the scene. Her feminine very close to a death grapple, and

she sensed the real cause, just as a glorious doe on the mountain side senses the reason instincts told her that these two splendid human bulls were why, when two princely bucks face each other with red eyes and levelled antlers, determined to kill or be killed for the sake of lording it over her. If the truth must be known, the witching wee thing wanted both men, one as her slave, the other—well, she hardly knew what she wanted of him. He was a wonderful lover, that gay *Chasseur*—as long as she kept him without the gates of her citadel, but if her hour of woman's weakness came upon her, and she capitulated and gave the keys of the maiden fortress into his keeping, what then? Ah, *messieurs*, that is a question every *demoiselle* would do well to pause and ponder over, for there is as much difference between a male lover sated and a lover expectant, as between Pedro drunk and Pedro sober. The *vivandière* went to the two men, tripping prettily, light o' foot as any gazelle, and her face was one big sweet smile, with some features hidden away amid the radiance. A little word, accompanied by a pretty *moue* and a playful tap of her fingers for d'Alençon, a perky, free, familiar nod of her little head for McGlusky, a tilt of her spirit barrel, and a dram in her horncup, and then: "Drink to our victory, *messieurs*," and the generous liquor held out to the big Legionary.

"A'm no needin' eet, but A'm thankin' ye a' th' same," was Mac's ungracious answer. "An' besides, A've ma dooties tae attend tae."

He stood very straight, saluted the officer, ignored the little beauty, and moved away, and as he went they heard him cheerily whistling, "Green grow the rushes ho," and for once he whistled in tune.

"*Sacré mon Dieu*," muttered d'Alençon, "there goes one devil of a fine fellow. He knows how to fight, he knows how to speak his mind to a man, and he knows how to put a wench in her place."

None the less, it was the arm of d'Alençon that was round the little supple waist of the *vivandière* out under the stars that night, whilst Mac sat by his bivouac fire poring with knitted brows over a big leather-bound Bible, that had once belonged to Oom Paul Kruger, the wonderful South African patriot.

"Struth," snarled the Rat, when he and Fritzel discovered what book it was Mac was so intently studying. "Hi'm goin' ter pinch that book, Fritzel, Hi am, first bloomin' op that 'appens."

"Why, if it giff him gomfort?"

"Might give 'im comfort, Fritz, but hit's damn little comfort any of hus will get if 'e goes an' converts 'is little self. When a blinkin' Scotch buccaneer finds 'is pore soul, 'e's abart as nice ter live wiff as three muvvers-in-lor who 'ave just discovered they've one son-in-lor between 'em."

Mac closed the book, and looked long into the fire with reflective gaze. Suddenly he murmured:

“Th’ auld book is a gran’ book; eet puzzles ma a wee bittie, though.” He stroked his chin, then: “Th’ book says all men air leears, an’ tha’s true, but A canna unnerstan’ why th’ book does na say th’ same aboot wummin, but eet does na. Iphm—A’ll hae tae gie tha’ ma maist earnest conseederation.” He thumbbed the book again, opening it at haphazard. “Iphm—th’ book says David were a mon after God’s ain heart, an’ he had seven hunner an’ twenty-five wives. A’d no mind his job eef A had th’ pickin’ an’ choosin’ o’ th’ wummin—seven hunner an’ twenty-five wives—a hunner a day, an’ twenty-five ower fir Sundays. Atweel, Dauvid must ha’ had a gran’ consteetution, but hoo th’ deil did th’ gommeril manage tae kiss ’em all good nicht, unless he did eet by telephone? A’d rather hae just yin like—like oor *vivandière*, an’ attend tae her kissin’ in th’ good auld way, than hae hunners o’ them an’ dae eet by machinery.”

“The bug’s got ’im, got ’im bad,” almost groaned the Rat. “Hit may lead ’im to ’eaven; it’ll be ’ell fer hus.”

CHAPTER IX

MCGLUSKY THE CONVERTER

For about six weeks after the big battle, the Legion was kept in hurricane action; small detached parties of troops were flung out in all directions to break up gatherings of the tribes, and at such work as this the desperate men of *La Légion* stood unbeatable in the whole world, as indeed they should have stood, for were not they the pick of all countries? As far as valour was concerned, France and Frenchmen got the credit, but the blood that was spilt so freely was never brewed in France, except in isolated cases. With superb insolence little parties of legionaries marched out into the unknown, and fought like devils; their rations were such as a British navy would turn his nose up at, and the pay was a halfpenny a day, English money. Often the water they carried with them stank to heaven, and there was only just enough of that to keep life in them. So many parties had to be sent out that the supply of non-coms, could not meet the demand, and fresh *sous-officiers* had to be created. McGlusky was the first man to be lifted from the ranks. When the Falcon announced this fact to him, Mac astounded that officer by remarking:

“A’m no carin’ a dom about it, *monsieur*; A’ve done wi’ th’ poms an’ vanities o’ life. A’d as soon stay in th’ ranks an’ obey some ither mon as wear th’ woollen epaulets.”

“Why, *mon brave*?”

“Weel, *monsieur*, A had a veesion th’ ither nicht, an’ A heard th’ voice o’ th’ Lord sayin’ tae ma: ‘Gie ower yr swash-bucklin’ an’ drinkin’, gie ower lustin’ after wummin, fir many o’ them air but illegetimate dauchters o’ th’ Scarlet Wumman o’ Babylon; their smiles air ainly a snare; they hae nae warm love in them, an’ they gang their ain gait an’ then wipe their mooths wi’ th’ back o’ their han’s, an’ say: “Why should I blush? I hae done na wrong; eet was th’ mon who brought th’ fruit o’ desire tae ma, on a shovel, an’ A did eat.” They air a’ actresses; Jamie McGlusky, gie them a miss in baulk an’ walk wide o’ them. Your meession in life, Jamie, is tae convert yr comrades o’ th’ Legion tae th’ narrer way.’”

The Falcon, who had had much experience of many forms of madness amongst legionaries, gazed at Mac from under knitted brows. Some of the very best *sous-officiers* he had ever had, had been possessed of a devil of madness in some shape or form. He remembered Carlo Esparazo, one time sergeant-major in *La Légion*, Carlo, who had left a name that was immortal in the annals of the Legion, and yet

Carlo was quite mad, and used to think at times that he was not a man at all, but a he-goat. Had he not on one occasion gone down upon all fours, baa-ing like an enraged he-goat, when on parade, and had he not finished up that day by galloping on all fours right between the bandy legs of a Marshal of France, upsetting the great man and laying him flat upon his back, and when the Marshal got up and attempted to draw his sabre, had not Carlo risen up as a he-goat rises on its hind legs and butted the Marshal in the midriff with his head, knocking not only the wind out of the Marshal, but a goodly portion of his breakfast as well? Remembering all these things, and being badly in need of a good *sous-officier*, the Falcon, after due consideration, had remarked to McGlusky:

“Name of the bug that bites, what do I care about your visions? You are promoted, so go out with five-and-twenty men to the hills of Kedar, and convert as many of our live enemies as you can into dead ones. You are just crazy enough, you big Scotchman, to try something big and carry it through.”

“Since ye force th’ woollen epaulets upon ma, A’ll wear ’em,” retorted Mac ungraciously. “A’ll ren’er unto Cæsar wha’ is Cæsar’s, an’ ren’er unto th’ Lord wha’ is th’ Lord’s. A’ll beat hell out o’ th’ heathen, eef they’ll stan’ an’ fecht ma. A’ll convert those o’ ma men tha’ air left alive.”

So in the fullness of time Mac went with his handful of men into the rough and rugged depths of the Hills of Kedar, where an army of sane men might have hesitated to penetrate. He stormed into enemy strongholds, and drove the tribesmen in front of him, as a lion drives jackals, and when he had a victory—and he had many—he would shout to his bunch of blackguard heroes:

“Noo gang inta th’ village an’ put th’ fechtin’ men who wull na surren’er tae th’ sword, but dinna hurtit an old body or a wean; as fir th’ wummin, hae they no been th’ spoils o’ war frae th’ beginnin’ o’ time, an’ A’m theenkin’ p’raps tha’s why wummin air always ready to whoop fir war when there’s trouble in th’ air.”

He was a popular officer on account of those orders, but when he followed them by attempting to enforce a weird sort of religious drill which he himself evolved, serious trouble arose between him and his men. He mustered them for prayers, but they would not pray, so he prayed for them, and some of the things that got into his petitions would have startled the head of a wholesale outfitting emporium. The men grinned when they heard him asking the Almighty for everything dear to the hearts of fighting men, from small-tooth combs to plug tobacco, and when he finished up by declaring that “eef a mon hae faith he can remove a mountain,” they drooped an eyelid and awaited results, and when nothing happened they scoffed openly, and this brought about much trouble, for, in spite of his newly acquired religion, Mac was not

the type of leader to stand insolence from his followers. 'Tis true, he was only a *sous-officier*, but when far away from the main column with his handful of uniformed desperadoes, he was as omnipotent as a General, and at times could be quite as autocratic as Cæsar.

In Mac's company there was a Basque, a man who had fought and adventured over three parts of the world; a more recklessly brave fellow the earth could not produce; he had a girth of chest that made even McGlusky look slender by comparison, and his neck was like the trunk of a young cedar. A hairy man was this bow-legged Basque, and as surly as he was hairy; he made no friends in the Legion, nor did he desire to do so; he was not wilfully quarrelsome with his comrades, but he would not step an eighth of an inch aside from a quarrel, and when he fought, he fought to maim or kill. Of science in any of the arts, he knew nothing, and disdained to learn; he could neither box nor wrestle, nor apply *savate*; his methods were those of the wild desert stallion, that is a killer by instinct. He would pound with his iron fists, like a blacksmith welding iron, or kick like a bull moose, and when he got a grip on a man, he simply did his little best to wrench the part he gripped asunder from its parent trunk, and the Basque was not particular what part he got hold of; if he did manage to get his pet hold, he would growl: "Now, by gar, I make you jump." What the other fellow used to remark during the operation must be left to the imagination; if imagination fails to work, let the reader go and sit on the cogs of a steam winch in active operation. The Basque's ferocity, strength and courage usually carried him through successfully; when, however, these failed, his hand was ever ready to drop to his knife, and it was hinted very broadly that he had evened more than one score by means of a stray bullet or a knife-thrust during engagements with the enemy. Not a nice man to have trouble with, this brutal Basque, but of one man he stood in awe, and that one was the Rat. When one came to compare the physique of the two men, this feeling on the part of the Basque was scarcely understandable. The respect for the London outcast had risen this way: the Rat had purloined the Basque's soap, a very precious possession in that land of grimy sand and burning heat, and the hairy animal had threatened to wring his neck if he did not disgorge. As a matter of professional etiquette, the Rat had indignantly denied the theft, terminological inexactitudes not being confined to eminent statesmen. The enraged Basque had thereupon proceeded to put his threat into execution, and everyone had expected either the Rat would run or be annihilated, the only serene person present being the Rat. As the Basque plunged forward, the Rat fainted swiftly with his pipe-stem left arm for the wind; the Basque drew back his body, and advanced his head; swiftly as a bird leaving a bough the Rat had stepped close in,

and his right hand came up from the hip with speed and power, and his bony knuckles landed beautifully under the Basque's massive chin, lifting him bodily from his feet, and depositing him squarely on his back. After reclining in this posture more or less gracefully for a minute or two, the Basque lifted himself to a sitting position, whereupon the Rat, with one hand in his breeches pocket, sauntered carelessly forward, and swinging his right leg, planted the toe of his army boot under the Basque's ear, that being all in the rules according to the code of a roughhouse in the Legion. Later the Rat explained to the crowd:

"Hi didn't want 'im to get hup again, an' get 'is little self 'urt, so Hi passed 'im one wiff me shoe leather fer luck."

A week or two later, the Basque, picking a moment when he thought the Rat was off his guard, opened hostilities again, this time in a café. He might as well have tried to catch a weasel asleep, for the Rat was never off guard, and nothing, no matter how sudden, could flurry him; his lifelong training in dodging Scotland Yard had made watchfulness second nature, and coolness a natural asset. This time he met the Basque's rush with a straight left-handed jab, with the hand turned over, so that the bony knuckles were foremost; those knuckles and the Basque's throat-apple met, and the bull-like man was stopped in his tracks, as if he had run into a crowbar. His eyes bulged, his tongue shot out of his gaping mouth, and in that fateful second the Rat, launching his body weight from the toes, swung his right fist on to the point of the chin, and once more a partial eclipse took possession of the Basque's brain, and in order that the good work should not be left incomplete, the Rat proceeded to jump with both feet in the midriff of the prostrate giant. On the third occasion it was the Basque who again reopened hostilities, this time at the back of barracks, where, fortunately for the Rat, he had ample space to move in. For several minutes he was kept very busy side-stepping, dodging and ducking, no one knowing better than he what his fate would be if he were caught in a clinch. The Basque tried very hard to get hold of him: he might as well have tried to catch and hold an eel in the slime of a pond. At last the Rat was standing with his back to the barrack wall, where, to all outward seeming, he had been driven by his Herculean foe. A yell went up from those who had backed the Basque:

"Smash him—smash him now!"

The Basque hurtled forward, like a jilted rhinoceros bent upon exterminating a rival, and in the moment of impact the wiry, quick-footed London waif moved with all the *sang-froid* imaginable a pace to one side, and, as he remarked a month later:

"That blinkin' Basque would be goin' yet, hif 'e 'adn't busted into the barrick wall wiff 'is pore 'ead. I dunno," he added, "'ow 'e hever beats hanybody; 'e's

dead heasy, the Basque is.”

The Basque certainly was easy for that scientific marvel of a man, whose make-up was mostly skin, bone and sinew, but none of the others found him so.

That the Basque hated McGlusky every man in the little contingent of desperate men knew, for the Basque made no secret of his feelings.

“He talka religion, that mad *sous-officier*,” the Basque would sneer. “Bah, his religion is not in a Bible, it ees in a petticoat. Lota men geta that kinda religion: if the woman shea say yes, he is same as us; eef shea say no, he go up on his hind laig, an’ say the love-a of woman is a sin. He-a one damn beeg hypocrite, our *sous-officier*; he want-a one leetle bit o’ fruit, an’ he no get it, so he keek his teeth with his tongue, an’ swear all the ‘she’ fruit is rotten. Me, I tak’ what I can get, an’ I no preach.”

One particular night by the camp fire, the Basque opened the flood-gates of his soul.

“Our *sous-officier*, McGlusky, he come-a from Australia; he what-a they call one of the ‘diggers.’ Me, I hate ’em all. I was go Australia one time after the Great War, then I go New Guinea, because mooch gold it is find there, yes, an’ New Guinea was full-a of ‘diggers.’ I make a mate of one; he was damn fine prospector; he know all the ropes, yes; he game, that digger: once I see him swim a creek that-a was full-a of alligators. I lak-a him. We find-a mooch gold; he stick true to me over the gold, an’ he stick-a true when the leetle black devils that live in the tall timber an’ hunt for heads of men come-a on our trail an’ hunt us for our heads; he fight-a lak blazes, an’ he strong lak-a me, an’ he more tireless; he work-a an’ fight all day an’ watch-a half the night. He one gran’ mate—so far. We getta down to the coast at last with our gold; those mountains damn bad alla the time, rise straight up like-a wall, an’ the jungle bad, an’ the snakes an’ the creeks full of alligators, an’ I getta the malaria, so my teeth all go loose an’ my jaws chatter, yes, by gar, I no can keep them still, an’ my bones go like water, an’ the leetle black devils shootin’ poisoned arrows at us. Yes, eet was some trip that one, an’ he no leave be; he carry me on hees back, he strong like a horse, yes, an’ me I love heem. At the coast I meet a leetle girl; she come from Argentina, she part Spanish, part Indian, an’ ver’ beautiful. I marry her; she my wife; no jump over the broomstick marriage, but proper priest marriage, yes, an’ I happy, me. She kees, an’ kees an’ kees half the long nights through, an’ she swear by Christo she be true, always true, an’ my digger mate he laugh-a at me out of the eyes of him, an’ one night I go to stick my knife in heem because he say: ‘True—hell—every woman is a —— at heart,’ an’ I not like that, because me I am in love. Then me I haf to go away to Sydney, an’ no can get a passage for my wife, so I leave her for one, two-tree month, an’ she swear she

count the hours till me I come back, an' she swear she no kees, kees, kees any man, an' me I believe her. When I come back, my mate, the digger, he gone, an' my wife, my leetle Spanish-Indian girl, she gone too. Me, I hunt the world for them, but I never find them; he too damn clevar—so I hate all Aussies, all diggers, me.”

“So,” remarked the Rat, “that’s wy you ’ates our *sous-officier* McGlusky, eh?”

“That why,” was the Basque’s response.

“You’re a real haboriginal hanimal, you are. Wot in the nime ov Mike ’ad McGlusky to do wiv yore little bit o’ skirt, eh? ’E didn’t jump the moon wiv ’er, did ’e?”

“McGlusky ’e is ver’ like the man who was my mate, big, raw-boned, strong, an’ he is a ‘digger,’ an’ some day I get him, me, sure.”

“Like ’ell you will, Basque. You can’t fight ’im square an’ orl, not wiff your dukes, or in a rough ’ouse, no, nor wiff knives neither.”

“All-a the same, some day I get-a him, because he is a ‘digger.’”

“Will you? You’re a bloomin’ cross between a ’ippopotamus an’ a barn-door howl, you are. Nar, listen ’ere: Hi’m goin’ ter watch *you*, see, an’ hif when we’re in haction wiff these fuzzy gents you uses a knife in McGlusky’s back, or lets a bloomin’ bullet stray inter ’im, Hi’m goin’ ter send a slug o’ lead nicely inter the ’ole in yer hear, you can betcher sweet life abart that, ole son. Hi once ’eard a prison doctor bloke say in a lecture that hif ’e poked a skewer ’ard enough inter the ’ole in one hear it would come right hout o’ the ’ole in the other hear, an’ that’s wot my slug o’ lead is goin’ ter do to you hif you serves hup anything dirty to McGlusky, an’ hif you ain’t nice an’ dead by that time, ’Amid the Turk says ’e knows one or two nice Turkish tricks ’e’ll serve hup to you that will make you wisht you was. Hif Mac ’ad been th’ digger bloke wot ’opped it wiff your ’arf-bred Spanish-Indian donah, it’d be different, but ’e hain’t. ’E’s got girl trouble enough ov ’is own, an’ hif ’e likes ter mix petticoats hup wiv ’is bloomin’ religion, wot ’as that got ter do wiv you, you big ’ulking hugly cross between a sea-serpent an’ a sailor’s dog? Nar, wot abart it, Basque?”

The Basque’s only reply was a grunt, but those who sat round noticed that he filled the ear that was on the Rat’s side with a chunk of wool collected from a camel’s pack saddle.

After each successful raid McGlusky returned to the main column, and made himself such an unmitigated nuisance as a reformer of men, that the C.O. soon had him out on the war-path again. Always when with the column he held himself aloof from the *vivandière*, whose reputation by this time was not as white as wool, owing to her close companionship with the splendid dare-devil d’Alençon, but if he

shunned the lovely little woman thing with all his might, she did not shun him. Had he been wise in the ways of women, he would have known that he could have chosen no better way to attract her than by adopting his aloof demeanour; his cold disdain attracted her as a naked candle flame on a dusky night will attract the midnight moths, which will flutter closer and closer in ever narrowing circles, until their wings are singed. So it was with the little beauty: used as she was to the unbridled adulation of the red-blooded men by whom she was hourly surrounded, she felt the defection of this one man who had once loved her to the verge of insanity, and as McGlusky was very much of a hero in the *Corps d'Afrique* by this time, on account of his reckless daring and clever military brain, which made him admired as much as his reforming tactics made him detested, she wanted him once more in leading-strings. East and West and Down Under they are like that, these women things: they are greedy as the devil; if they have more fruit than they can eat, they resent a dish getting out of their reach, even if it be one they have refused to partake of; that is why the men of the Old East, who are woman-wise, say the female things have no souls, and give them no place in their hereafter. *La Belle Anglaise*, who, by virtue of her occupation, was free of all army quarters, never missed an opportunity to place herself in McGlusky's way; she would send him swift smiles, that were honey laden, her red lips gleamed moistly, her white teeth flashing between the red lines that ramparted her mouth, whilst the adorable dimples on cheeks and chin would make the big fellow see red. Once when handsome Fritz the German had caught the girl looking at McGlusky like that, he had grumbled to the Rat:

"Dot *Fräulein*, she is reincarnate; in some odder world she vos der teffel's own mistress. Eef she play mit me like dot, hein, I grab her, an' de heel o' my han' go over her mouth, an'—well den, de ole C.O. he haf me shot, but by jinks, I stan' for de shootin', *ja*."

The Rat chewed on his vile tobacco until he had digested Fritz's remarks, then he drawled:

"Garn—you blinkin' square'eads are reared on po'try an' Rhine wine. Hi know; Hi 'ad some ov both w'en Hi was wiff the harmy ov occupation after th' big war. Hi liked th' Rhine wine best, Hi did. Wot this 'ussy wants is a dose ov Heast end o' London treatment. Hif she come at me wiv them dancin' dimples an' them chase-me-Charley smiles, Hi'd sy a few strite fings to 'er, Hi would, an' hif she just laffed an' started to tak 'er 'ook, Hi'd put an 'arf Nelson 'old on 'er neck, an' lay 'er over me knee, an' Hi'd slap 'er good an' 'ard, slap 'er w'ere 'er army pants fit tightest, an' then Hi'd sy 'Get on wiv it, or get art.' Wimmin are all savages at 'eart. Hif McGlusky was ter try that, 'e'd 'ave 'er stringin' 'er little self round 'is bloomin'

neck like er necklace ov beads. They don't want po'try, they hain't got no 'earts; they don't want votes fer wimmin; wot they needs is a bally good spankin' in th' right plice, not 'ard enough ter 'urt real bad, but 'ard enough ter make th' blood tingle in th' right plices. But don't you sy that to Mac, Fritz, or 'e'll dot you one, an' you hain't quick enough ter get out ov the wy ov it, an' 'e 'its like a kickin' mewel. Ah, don't you count too much on 'is religion; 'e's the funniest kind ov a reformin' blighter Hi ever see; 'e mixes hup Bible an' Koran texts wiv punches, as Gawd mixes hup sunshine wiv rain. 'Is religion's in 'is 'ead, but 'is fightin' is in 'is 'eart, an' it's damn near as uncertain as the Hinglish wevver; you don't know wevver you're goin' ter get a prayer or a punch; Hi've seen some blokes wot got both, an' they said they liked the punches best."

The *vivandière's* seductive smiles made life very sultry for McGlusky, for he yearned for this one woman with all the power of his volcanic nature, but when the girl, finding that her smiles did not cause him to surrender, altered her tactics, and made her eyes her main batteries of offence, then indeed was he in imminent peril, or, as the Rat eloquently put it, "e blinkin' near came unstitched." The *vivandière* laid aside her Moorish vivacity, and brought the other half of her breeding into operation, the Welsh half. Like almost all girls of Welsh strain, she could use her eyes in a man hunt; she knew by inherited instinct how to drape her eyes with the witching sadness, like the shadows behind the sunlight on the Welsh hills; poetry, pain, pleading, can all go into those eyes, and seem to tell of a heart in anguish, whilst in reality the fair, or dark, owner of the eyes may be wondering if it will be mutton cutlets or leek soup for lunch.

"She is clever as a she-Satan, dot von; she eat der big feller mit her eyes; he go soft all over, *ja*," was Fritz's comment.

"She's a carmine wonder at the heye shootin' hact, an' that's a fact," agreed the Rat. "Worked some of it orf on me, as hif she wanted me to 'elp 'eal 'er bleedin' 'eart by softenin' Mac towards 'er, th' slut—got me goin' too, she did fr a bit, made me feel funny all down me blinkin' back, just like yer feel when y're 'arf full o' gin an' some bloke wiv a silvery tenor voice is singin' 'The Maiden's Prayer,' or some uvver 'og-wash stuff wiv a sob in it. Hi saw 'ow it was workin' on th' big feller; Hi was feelin' wet an' windy meself, but hit was smokin' 'ot fer 'im. Hi'll tell you, Fritz, 'e finks religion's took th' place ov that bit o' fluff in 'is 'eart, but 'e loves 'er more'n a London gutter kid loves jam roll. Hif 'e could honly mike 'isself believe she was strite, like she was when 'e found 'er with the Arabs, 'e'd fall fer 'er again like a Jew boy on a veal pie after a black fast. She's a 'oneycomb, an' a rose garden, an'—an' fresh water comin' art ov an 'ose pipe to 'im, 'struth she is, an' Hi don't

want 'im to fall fer 'er again, an' Hi ain't goin' ter let 'im. Life's been 'ell wiv the hatches battened down fer us since she knocked 'im orf 'is perch."

"You don' meddle mit dot yob, Rat; dot *Fräulein* got der dice loaded; she got McGlusky sure, an' you make him not your friend mit interferin'."

"Hi'm goin' ter mix in this, an' damn th' consequences," was the stubborn reply, and a week later the Rat fulfilled his threat, for he saw the *vivandière's* eyes were turning Mac's bones to gristle, and the Rat knew many things that his big comrade did not know, for he had taken to watching d'Alençon's tent in the lines of the gay *Chasseurs* o' nights.

One evening the *vivandière* had so far melted McGlusky's resolve not to gaze upon forbidden fruit in the guise of women, that in a moment of passionate yearning he had taken both her shapely hands in his, and had drawn her to him whilst she purred against his big chest.

"Eef," the big, strong man had faltered, "A were sure ye had na sold yersel' tae the lusts o' th' flesh, A'd mak' ye Mrs. Jamie McGlusky, an' hold ye against th' world, but because A love ye as A dae, A wad na hae ye in wantonness, nor wad A tak' ye eef ye'd been anither's toy; A cud na lend th' theeng A loved tae ither's uses; A'd rather put ma gun tae yr breast, an' then tae ma ain head, A wad tha'," and he thought he meant it.

She had cooed to him when, vowing she was as virginal as at her birth, and he, being a man in love, believed, and went about his duties treading upon air. That evening he did not attempt to scatter any of the seeds of reformation, for this old world seemed a good enough place to him; instead of preaching, he sat with a short stub of pencil, writing poetry, and because he had no other book to write it in, he wrote it on the fly-leaf of his old Bible.

A cup of water and a broken crust,
If shared by you, with love to whisper grace,
Would make me captain of my soul,
Your heart my throne, my heaven in your face.

The Rat on the prowl, read those lines whilst McGlusky was relieving guard. He grinned a sardonic grin, and remarked:

"Hif Hi'm goin' to hact, the sooner Hi hact, the better; 'e'll be as crazy as a 'ungry bug in an iron bedstead w'en 'e knows wot Hi know—struth 'e won't want no 'love ter whisper grace' then, 'e won't; 'e'll do all th' whisperin' on 'is little own. Hi wonder she 'ad th' sunset cheek to fool 'im; she must ha' known 'e'd find 'er hout in the hend; them clever ones always mike some fool mistake. Blimey, Hi don't

fink she meant ter marry 'im, or be 'is conkerbine; she just wanted ter mike 'im grovel to 'er an' eat hout ov 'er 'and, because 'e's a he-man."

Just as the moon was dropping out of sight, making the desert country look ghostly like the graveyard of a nation, the Rat, who had all along kept up his intimacy with McGluskly, in spite of the latter's advance in rank, suggested a stroll to the big fellow, and to this Mac agreed willingly, for he was restless with his newly found bliss romping in his veins. As they mooned about Mac was whistling a droving tune, that could never have been found in any hymn-book; it had been composed in the old Australian days by a Queensland bullock driver, and the words that accompanied the melody had, it was said, started more than one bush fire in the land of sin, sweat and sorrow. Suddenly Mac noted that the Rat had led him into the lines of the *Chasseurs*, and right in front stood d'Alençon's bell-shaped tent. He had just made this discovery when a light flickered into evidence in the tent, and the shadow of a tall man was silhouetted on the canvas; so plain and distinct was the picture that both the watching men knew beyond question that the shadow was that of d'Alençon; they saw him fumble with his tobacco pouch, saw him fill and light his pipe, and this latter action caused the Rat to murmur:

"Did you hever get a good look at the chasser hofficer's pipe, Mac?"

"A've no noticed eet in particular."

"Hi 'ave. Hit's a meerschaum, not a bloomin' dud, but th' real fink. Must ha' cost 'im fifty o' the best, an' 'e's coloured it a treat; hit oughta be in a museum. Hif Hi fall acrosst it by haccident, 'e's goin' ter go in mournin' fr that smoker."

"Ye're a dom thief richt doon in th' heart o' ye."

The Rat chuckled complacently.

"Hi ain't no rainbow trout, an' that's a fac', matey, but most men are thieves in some bloomin' wy or anuvver: one steals a woman, anuvver prigs a 'orse, third bloke steals a title—anywy 'e steals the money wot buys th' title—an' so on, right from the cove wot pushes a banana barrer to the grafter wot pushes dud comp'ny shares on to the soft-toothed guys wot is called th' public. Hit all depends on wevver they're caught, or wevver they gets awy wiv it. Hi was called a henterprisin' young 'opeful by one blinkin' London noospiper before Hi was caught hoperatin' on a meat merchant's safe wiv a skelington key in one 'and an' a burgular's jemmy in the other; then the sime piper said Hi was a outrageous young blackguard, an' a menace to society. Hif Hi'd got awy wiv the meat merchant's boodle an' bought shares in that blinkin' piper, they'd ha called me a chip off th' old block, an' one ov the pillars ov th' state, an'——"

"Wha's yon?"

McGlusky's voice, low and hoarse and a wee bit shaky, broke in abruptly on the Rat's exposition of his philosophy. One of his big fingers indicated another figure that had appeared on the canvas of d'Alençon's tent, a little figure clad in the uniform of a *vivandière* of *La Légion*.

"Looks like a blinkin' drummer-boy," replied the Rat mendaciously.

The *dénouement* he had expected was imminent, and it was his rôle not to precipitate the crisis. He was far too artful to seem to recognize *la belle Anglaise*, so he promptly adopted a drummer-boy as a substitute, but the shadows on the canvas gave him the lie as he guessed they would. The little figure on the tent wall ran forward with arms outstretched, to be met by two outflung arms belonging to the bigger figure; then the lesser and the greater mingled into one, as arms encircled pulsing bodies. The Rat whispered:

"E seems ter be 'avin' a almighty warm welcome—fer a drummer-boy. Struth, Hi wouldn't like a 'ug like that fer a double dose ov Scotch an' soda, but th' bloomin' kid seems ter like hit; see 'ow 'is little 'ead goes back on the big Chasser's harm, an' see, Mac, 'ow the big Chasser's fice goes darn to the little hupturned fice. Hif the Chasser hain't bitin' like blazes, 'e's kissin' like 'ell. Well, 'e can 'ave *my* share—Hi never did 'ave no use fer drummer-boys. These French boobs do 'ave queer tastes; one of 'em wanted ter kiss me once, because Hi stopped a runaway gun carriage from goin' hover 'im, but Hi give 'im a 'arf arm dig in the 'dust-bin' that shook orl th' kissin' business hout ov 'im. Hi——"

"Hae ye no eyes, ye loon? Eet's no a drummer-boy, eet's—eet's th' *vivandière*."

The blended rage and pain in the big fellow's voice went right through the seasoned callousness of the Rat, hardened though he was, for he loved the giant of a man with all the soul there was in him.

"Lord, matey, so hit his."

That was all he said, and then he snuggled close up to McGlusky, and hugged the big arm that was nearest him. He knew that Mac had to be disillusioned in regard to the *vivandière*, for the longer the awakening was kept back, the greater the shock would be, but the vindictive glances he threw in the direction of d'Alençon's tent, and the suggestive manner in which his hand wandered to the butt of his pistol, showed the trend of his thoughts.

"Hif hit was *my* girl," he muttered, "there'd be a gun haccident abart now an' a Chasser uniform wix a 'ole in hit." Then, with a snort of disgust: "Look at 'im—'e hain't 'arf bitin' 'er neck."

"Kissin', y're meanin'."

The words came like a mastiff's growl from Mac.

"Sime fing. When they're wantin' somethin' salubrious the 'arder you bite 'em the more vey whinney."

The light in the tent went out; no sound broke the stillness, except the sound of deep-drawn, half-strangled breaths, as Mac battled with his boiling blood. The minutes passed—ten, twenty, thirty—and Mac stood like a stone man, every muscle tense, his big fists clenched until his finger-tips bruised his calloused palms. The Rat, who like all great athletes, knew the value of slackened muscles, stood easily, all his queer body semi-limp, but every nerve keyed for instant action. A light flickered into view again in the tent, and two figures were again silhouetted on the canvas. This time both had their backs to the pair of watching, waiting men. The tall figure in the tent threw a careless arm over the shoulders of the lesser figure, as the pair strolled to the tent's exit.

"The bitin' hact's hover, matey; 'e's walkin' beside 'er as time as a 'en wot lays away from 'ome an' don't want ter cackle abart it. She'll do the bitin' nar, see hif she don't, th' b——"

As if she had heard and accepted the challenge, the *vivandière* turned with an impulsive movement right at the tent's exit, and flung her arms around the *Chasseur's* neck.

"Clingin' vine hact nar," jeered the Rat, "but 'e don't seem great on th' cling, do 'e—wot?"

McGlusky made no answer. Again the light left the tent, and the two who had been inside stepped out into the silvery radiance of a starlit African night. As they moved off in the direction of the *vivandière's* quarters in the lines of the *Légion d'Afrique*, McGlusky made a forward movement. The Rat clutched one of his arms.

"Arf a mo', matey. Wot's the little gime? Hi'm goin' ter tike a 'and in it, wotever it is, but Hi don't want ter go it blind."

"Ye air no in this; it's ma ain play, an' A'll play it on ma lone."

"Like 'ell you do. Hif Hi ain't in on the muffins, Hi ain't in on the lobster. Get me, eh?"

Mac made an impatient gesture, and moved forward slowly in the direction the man and woman had taken. The Rat, undisturbed by the snubbing silence of his companion, went with him, though no one knew better than he that if trouble followed between McGlusky and the *Chasseurs* officer, he would stand a good chance of sharing what punishment might befall the big fellow.

The *vivandière* went into her tent; d'Alençon, evidently unprepared for sleep, strolled out through the lines, never dreaming of the figures following behind him. He

paused in his walk, put his meerschaum pipe into his mouth, and lit a fusee. As the big spurt of flame broke out, it illuminated his whole face, and the polished bowl of his beautiful pipe. In that moment McGlusky's right hand dropped to his hip and came up again with the magical quickness of the practised gun-man; the snapping whip-crack sound of a "gun" in action broke the brooding stillness of the African night, and d'Alençon's treasured pipe flew to a score of fragments, the amber stem remaining fixed between his teeth.

"Missed 'im, by Gawd," droned the Rat, his own gun leaping to his practised hand.

"A hit wha' A aimed at. Noo gang yr ways; A'm no needin' any help."

"Fink Hi'm a bloomin' grass-'opper, ter 'op it hevery time the wind blows 'ot? Garn!"

"Go, or A'll—A'll strike ye."

Something in the big fellow's voice, not in the threat, made the Rat halt.

"It's ma an' yon mon alone, dae ye ken, mon tae mon, an' na reveille fir mair than yin o' us th' morn's morn."

The Rat understood then, and he gave the hand nearest him a grip, and melted away.

D'Alençon had made out the figures of two men in the starlight; he now came striding towards McGlusky, for he was without fear: his courage was his greatest virtue, perhaps his only one.

"Did you fire at me?"

"A didna."

"Someone fired. Do you know who it was?"

"Eet was masel' tha' fired, but A didna fire at ye, A fired at yr pipe."

"You mad devil."

"There were method in ma madness. A wanted ye tae ken A had ye at ma mercy."

"I came out of my tent empty-handed, or I should have shot you, you dog."

"Wi' a' respec' tae yr uniform, *monsieur*, ye're a leear. Ye did na coom empty-handed; ye had a wumman's honour in yr han'."

D'Alençon laughed.

"So that's it, is it?"

Mac struck him straight and hard right in the middle of the laugh, and sent him reeling.

"A cud ha' shot ye doon, an' none wad hae been th' wiser, but A wanted tae fecht ye, tae whip ye, tae smash th' handsomeness oot o' yr deil's face, an' rend ye

wi' ma twa han's, an' A wanted ye tae ken why. Noo eef ye raise a yell tha' wull alarm th' sentries awa' behind us, A'll club ma gun an' beat ye blind, an' then A'll go ower ye wi' ma boots till A put yr knees oop where yr ears ought tae be, an' A'll kick yr ears doon on ter yr knees, an' fasten 'em there wi' yr golden beard, but eef ye'll come awa' wi' ma a bit further frae th' lines, A'll fecht ye fair, fecht ye *à la mort*."

The blow that had driven d'Alençon backwards had roused all the devil in him; if he had been armed, he would have shot McGlusky down on the spot, or cut him down with his sabre, but he was a naked man as far as weapons were concerned, and knew the *sous-officier* had him at a disadvantage, knew, too, that he would be smashed and maimed before help could reach him, if he shouted; he was aware that many a deed done to officers that were credited to prowling tribesmen, were in reality the work of Legionaries run amok. Added to this, he had a good conceit of his own personal prowess; had he not taken lessons in *le boxe* from Georges Carpentier, and from Malines, the Graeco-Roman wrestler of France; was he not big and strong, and swift and game?

"Come."

As he uttered the one word, he strode off, facing outward from the camp, and Mac strode three paces in the rear, humming piously:

"The gate's ajar, the gate's ajar;
Eet is na closed fir' me;
A am thy eenstrument, O Lord,
Tae set a' sinners free—free—free."

D'Alençon halted and swung round.

"This will do; we are far from the lines."

"Aye, it wull dae fine; ye hae halted verra near th' trenches dug fir' latrines; A can smell them, though at first A thocht it were yr reputation A cud smell, ye dommed wumman-spoiler." Mac drew his heavy weapon from its holster as he spoke, and threw it far behind him. "Noo, ye rat, eet's mon tae mon *à la mort*."

D'Alençon rushed to grips, and Mac welcomed him. The pair got to holds and tore at each other's muscle-plated bodies with all their strength. The white scintillating stars looked down on the savage strife as they have looked down for æons of time on life and death struggles on African soil, where change never comes. A lion away in the near distance roared sullenly at intervals, as if scenting the sweating bodies or the blood, but neither man heard; they were lions themselves, straining for the kill; one was fighting for his life, the other for the hate a woman had

awakened in him, and as he strained and struggled he thought of nothing but the pictures he had seen silhouetted on the canvas screen of a military tent: he saw a little slender figure leap to a man's arms, saw the kissing and the long-drawn embracing, and he did his best to rend the Frenchman asunder. D'Alençon had more than once paid a heavy price in blood in civilized duelling for his various amours, but never did he pay so high as on that night. All the cruel, merciless tricks that Japanese and Chinese wrestlers had taught him in his wandering life, McGlusky brought into play. Once, as they stood apart for a moment, gasping for air, Mac loosed a satanic chuckle.

"Wummin may love ye after this nicht, but eet's dom leetle joy they'll get oot o' yersel', ye spawn o' th' mither o' monkeys."

D'Alençon was an enormously strong man in the pink of condition, and for a long time he kept his end up, manhandling McGlusky even as Mac was manhandling him, but he had not the Scottish Anzac's enormous vitality of staying power, neither had he, nor any Frenchman, the deadly determination to conquer that was the other man's national heritage. He began to weaken at last, and his courage to some extent ebbed with his strength. It was precisely the opposite with the Scotch Anzac: the greater the drain upon his resources, the more his "will to win" rose to meet the emergency. Came a time when d'Alençon was but a puppet in the hands of his adversary; then Mac drew off and looked at the reeking, battered wreck of manhood in front of him.

"Ye're beat tae the wide world, ye skunk, an' weel ye ken eet."

A great sob rose from the heaving chest of the Frenchman, who now had barely strength to raise an arm, for his joints had been nearly sundered by those Asiatic holds and screws and wrenches the other had worked off upon him.

"A'm a gentle mon by nature; A dinna like tae gie pain."

A moan that was not an assent to McGlusky's assertion came from d'Alençon; he had been under the impression for some time past that McGlusky's chief mission in life was to serve out pain, a mission he had lived up to if d'Alençon was any judge.

"We air fechtin' this fecht tae a feenish; eet is *à la mort*, but A hae bowels o' compassion wi' in ma; A'll gie ye grace tae kneel an' say a wee bit prayer."

If d'Alençon had prayed for anything just then, he would have prayed for a Gatling gun. A few minutes more of McGlusky's savage handling, and d'Alençon dropped like a dead man. Mac looked sternly down upon his awful handiwork, but his grim face never softened.

"Ye stole ma wumman, an' tha' wi' men o' ma sort is th' sin unforgivable, but

noo y're sped, A'll say a wee bit prayer fir yr soul, ye dommed double-dyed polecat." Then he knelt and prayed: "God forgie this mon, for A canna, an' A wull na. Eef A meet him in Tophet, as maist likely A wull, for they wull put ma against th' wall fir this nicht's work, weel, A'll gie him anither scrap among the cinders, for—he —stole—ma—wumman. Amen."

"A'm theenkin' noo A hae prayed fir his rotten soul, A may as weel bury his body in th' ainly grave a wrecker o' wummin is fit tae fill." He took the carcass of his foe in his mighty arms, flung it across his shoulder, and walking to the trench, he paused. "Ashes tae ashes, muck tae muck," he growled. "Gang tae yr place," and he tossed the body into the evil-smelling place.

When he reached his own quarters, the faithful Rat was wide awake, and waiting for him.

"Struth," gasped the London waif, roused for once out of his usual phelgm, "wot kind ov a scrap 'ave you been 'avin'? Did the captin's regiment get 'old of you hafter Hi left?"

"Na, it were just yin mon."

The Rat cursed with fluency, grace and completeness.

"Dinna curse him; eet's yr dooty tae pray fir th' dead."

"Is hit? Then Hi ain't on dooty ter-night, Mac."

Even this cheerful view of the event could not dispel the religious gloom that settled on the soul of the big fellow, and finding that the *Légion d'Afrique* to a man refused his ministrations, he turned his attentions to the Arabs, and set himself to convert them.

"E's like orl them bloomin' reformers an' missionaries Hi've hever met," remarked the one-time light of the prize ring. "'E dunno hit's 'imself that wants reformin', an' not the 'eathen. Wy in 'ell 'e can't enjoy 'is little self, an' let the rest o' the world go abart hits own business in hits own wy, Hi dunno. 'E's got heverythink 'ere the 'eart of a bloke could desire: plenty ov scrappin' an' lashins ov hens—not much ter look at, most of 'em, but a soldier ov fortune like 'im an' me an' you, Fritz, we 'as to do most of our courtin' after dark, an' one woman's mighty like anuvver woman in the night time; hif yer plug yer nose wiff cotton-wool, yer can't tell wevver y're kissin' a hen Adonis or a Arab slut, struth yer carn't, so wot's the odds? You can mike yerself believe hanythink if yer try 'ard enough."

Fritz of Germany, hardened sinner that he was, chuckled gleefully over the Rat's philosophy.

"In der white world," he remarked, "it is der clothes dot make most of der difference, but out here, vell me, I vas mit myself in der Arab town last night, an' der

girls in hundreds vas make der dance to der music of der drums, an' dey dance mostly der high keek, an' der spin round; dey all wear veils over dere faces, dose girls, but de rest o' dere clothes—"Fritzel threw himself back, and laughed his big, boyish laugh, that had the ripple of many tankards of foaming Munich beer in its cadences. "Dose odder clothes, dey vas home on der wash line, if dey haf any to wash; a penny bunch of forget-me-nots, split up between three o' dem, would haf made a suit, an' dere vas McGlusky lookin' on, an' nursin' his big chin in hees fist, an' glowerin' at th' wenches as dey dance oop to him an' snap dere fingers an' thumbs in his face, an' dance away again. *Ja*, he vas dere, lookin' as sour as a barrel full o' winter apples. You know de way of de Arab wenches, Rat: de dance right oop to you, an' de leedle run away, an' de squeak, an' de beckoning finger, an' de gleam of der white teeth, an' de sparkle of black eyes, an' den de melt away into de shadows, where if you follow dem braps you get lofe, an' braps you get der knife bedween der shoulder blades. *Ja*, voman is voman der world over; you shake der box an' trow der dice; braps you vin der leedle bit o' heaven, braps you vin a ticket to Tophet, *ja*, it is all a game dot haf been play since der world vas yong, eet vill be play until de world go bust. Der mans vas der fool always, an' he don' know it, *ja*, but der vomans she know she is no man's fool."

"You got some sense in yore noddle, Fritzel, you 'ave; Hi wisht McGlusky 'ad 'arf as much. 'E said 'e 'ated women, an' first fing 'e falls fer th' *vivandière*, an' goes as loco as a dog on a chain, w'en a lidy dog is runnin' free on the 'ills artside, an' yappin' to 'im ter come an' look at th' moon."

"Vere is McGlusky to-night, Rat? Is he run after th' leedle devil of a *vivandière*? Hein, she haf him like a nut bedween her thumb an' fingers; by an' by she crack him, *ja*, dat vas so."

"'E says 'e's through wiff'er, 'e does. 'E wrote 'er some ov wot 'e calls po'try ter-night, an' give it to me to 'and to 'er; 'e calls hit 'McGlusky's Farewell'—farewell nothing. Hi didn't give hit to the lidy; Hi read hit, an' then went awy to be sick. She ain't goin' ter see that blinkin' drivell; wouldn't she laugh at 'im hup 'er sleeve hif she did—not 'arf. 'Ere it is; hif you can read it an' not 'ave a pain, you must 'ave a stummick like a bloomin' camuel."

Fritzel took McGlusky's poem, and, bending close over the flickering flame of the bivouac fire, read:

McGlusky's Farewell

I looked into your eyes that shone like stars
From the sweet stillness of a cloudless night,
And the rough pathway of my broken life
Blushed rosily with hope and love and light.
You looked, to me, the daintiest little thing
The gods had fashioned out of potter's clay;
So now I throw this flower upon love's shrine,
And pass sad-hearted on my lonely way.
The curse etched in by fate upon my life,
That I should never win the thing I sought,
Sits like a shadow on my weary soul,
The fruit of sad experience, dearly bought.
So now farewell; I ask for no regrets.
A woman wins a heart, she breaks it, and—forgets.

“Wot yer fink ov it, square-’ead, eh?”

Fritzel got up.

“Vait till I been seeck, den I told you.” He came back after a few minutes, wiping the moisture from his eyes with the frayed cuff of his tunic sleeve. “As boetry,” he said sententiously, “eef eet vas set to der broper sort o’ music an’ blayed to a mule team goin’ up hill, it vould make dem pull like hell, for fear dere vas more to follow. Eef I vas write some boedry like dot to a girl in Germany, she borrow der family rolling-pin from her mudder, an’ vait behind der door to giff me der glad goot-bye, *ja*—but mine Gott, he mean it, an’ it vas drue.”

CHAPTER X

A TROUBLED TIME

The day following that on which McGlusky wrote his farewell to the *vivandière*, active hostilities were reopened against the tribesmen; flying columns were sent out in all directions, consisting as a rule of detachments of infantry and squads of cavalry mixed. A legionary marched beside a *chasseur*, adopting the world-old tactics of the foe, who, when bent on a lightning raid, sent mounted Bedouins with wild, nearly nude spearmen, who could and did race beside the mounted men, clinging with one claw-like hand to a stirrup iron; not only did they travel in that fashion to cover distance rapidly, but they hung on when the battle signal was given, and raced the horses, until almost in touch with the foe; then the footmen let go, and dropped back for the horsemen to make gaps in the ranks of the enemy with their long lances, and the weight of horseflesh, and whenever a gap was made, the footmen would rush like wolves in between the broken ranks, and make deadly work with their short, heavy stabbing spears and knives. The C.O. of the French forces had adopted the native methods of warfare, only the legionaries carried their rifles and bayonets, and instead of retreating when the cavalry failed to make good, they simply opened out and let the *Chasseurs* fall back, then they closed up their ranks and volleyed at close range, and then charged home with the bayonet, at which work they were well-nigh irresistible.

With the maniac fever of disappointed love and unrequited desire in his veins, Mac was ripe to the verge of rotteness for just such work; no man in the little army stood the strain of the awful marches as well as did he; his long, sinewy legs simply refused to go weary. Other men went mad under the eternal strain, mixed with hot sand dust, ceaseless heat, flies and bugs, lice and insufficient water. One legionary, an Englishman, stumbled out of the ranks one noonday, and stood coughing; blood and froth showed upon his cracked lips. A lieutenant of *Chasseurs* struck the man brutally with the flat of his sword, hissing:

“Get back to the ranks, you *canaille*.”

The man ripped his bayonet from its scabbard, and, leaping and thrusting upward, sent the steel up the officer’s stomach into his lungs, and laughed the laugh of the insane as the lieutenant toppled backwards over his charger’s croup. The Falcon, who was near by, drew his pistol, and shot the legionary through the brain. Another day, a Belgian legionary suddenly flung down his rifle and, dropping on all

fours, began to howl like a wolf; then, still upon all fours, he plunged about, snapping at the legs of men and horses, and he came very near creating a panic, even the veteran legionaries going in dread of this form of dementia. A *Chasseur*, leaning from his saddle, cut the maniac down with his heavy sabre, and his body was left for the kites to bury.

At this stage the Falcon was a pillar of strength to his men; he was not demonstrative in his acts of kindness, but he helped whenever his help could be of service, and the men realized his worth. The Basque, one terrible afternoon, kept turning his bloodshot eyes in the Falcon's direction, and there was that in his looks that made Fritzel whisper to the Rat:

"Dot damn Basque, him fed up; it vill be 'Kaiser does not vant to lost a dog' mit him ver' soon."

"Wot's th' big bum up to nar? 'E's got pimples in 'is 'eart, 'e 'as." Then, directing his attention to the burly Spaniard, he drawled: "Wot's bitin' yer nar, Basque?"

The swarthy Hercules scraped some of the clinging slime and froth and sand dust from his tongue with the edge of his long knife, then:

"Eet ees der damn sun, an' de stink an' de t'irst; we haf no watter, an' de bugs, an' de lice, an'—oh, Santa Christo—de heat."

"Well, wot abart it? Wot yer gousin' for? Hain't you gitten yer share, eh? Hif you hain't, you can 'ave 'arf my little lot."

The Basque scowled, and then:

"By St. Miguel, the smell of all these eet make-a me seeck in the belly." He swung an arm to indicate all the marching men by whom he was surrounded. "They dirty as mooch as hell; they sweat like monkeys in a Brazilian trade boat; they stink laka the devil; they breed-a th' lice from their own bodies as dey march."

"Well, sonny, most o' that hindictment is true; Hi've smelt sweeter fings w'en Hi've dossed in a farmer's pig-pen, but, you big hugely greaser, you're no 'oneysuckle 'edge in full bloom yerself, if you fink you are, you walk backwards a bit an' smell yerself. Wy, a 'ound would foller yer scent through a bloomin' waterfall."

"Eet ees de fault of der cursed officers; dey should 'ave planned better as dis; damn dem, damn dem all."

"Ho, cheese it, you big bundle ov 'ay. You tork as hif you 'ad orl th' lice in Hafrica on yr 'ide, an' you hain't: Hi've got free or four married couples ov th' best grey-backs in this 'ere desert camped in th' small ov me back this blinkin' minute, right under the pack, just where Hi carn't 'it or scratch, an' they're layin' in winter

supplies an' a stock fr their famblies, an' Hi'll bet me breeches the Falcon 'as got 'is share too. Hi 'eard 'im arsk a Chasser officer a while back to 'it 'im between th' blade bones wiff a 'orse's curry-comb, an' see hif 'e could stun a few ov 'em, but 'e said hit wiv a laugh; 'e ain't no grouser, 'e hain't. Hi sor one on 'is neck, Hi did, an' hit was so big Hi fort hit was a blinkin' bi-r-d."

"The Falcon—him!" A rumble of curses came from the throat of the Basque. "By the sign of the Judas tree, I would spill lead into him; he drive—drive—drive all-a the time. May th' little hogs in Sheoul eat hees liver. W'y he no halt-a us? No-a, he march-a us till we all-a dead men."

"Yo're a nice cup o' tea, you bar," sneered the Rat. "Nar, you write this darn inside th' soap-box you call yore 'ead: hif you spill any lead into the Falcon, Hi'll spill a bit inter you; hit will go in hunder yor jore, an' come hout on the crust o' yor pore top-knot. You don't know a hoffer an' a gennelman w'en you sees one; Hi do. Me muvver was a lidy; she 'ad a pitch orl 'er own w'en she was young, right at the haristocratic hend ov Piccadilly corner."

"Silence in th' r-a-n-ks!" bellowed McGlusky at this juncture, and the Rat, with a wink at Fritzel, had perforce to cut his family reminiscences short.

Came a day when the vedettes riding far in advance came in on the run, to report the enemy in force, bent evidently on making a stand.

"That's th' best noos Hi've 'ad since me farver died an' lef' me a mortgage in 'is will," chortled the Rat.

"We'll hae some real fechtin' th' noo, eef wha' th' vedettes tell ma is true," chimed in McGlusky, with something like the old ring in his voice. "A'm tellt," he added, "tha' th' Emir Said Rasuli ees in command o' th' enemy, an' A've heard o' him as the brainiest fechtin' mon in these pairts, a warrior wi' a warrior's heart in him as well as a brain, an' eet's said he never moves about wi'oot carryin' great treasure wi' him."

"Yo're surprisin' me, Mac," chimed in the Rat, with a wink at Fritzel. "Hi 'ad a idea you wanted to convert these 'eathen, not to kill 'em, an' not to loot their boodle."

"Ye thocht richt fr yince then, ye scrag end o' man mutton. A'm na takin' carnal pleasure in th' killin', but eef eet comes in th' way o' ma dooty tae kill, A'll no gang back on ma aith as a soldier. Wasna Joshua o' old time a soldier, an' didna th' Lord command him tae dae his dooty, an' put th' enemy tae th' sword, an' wha' was richt for Joshua wad be richt fr Jamie McGlusky."

Fritzel and the Rat chuckled inwardly, but kept very serious faces outwardly.

"Iphm—Hi ain't strong on Joshua 'istory; they didn't give hus much o' that at

Heton w'en Hi was there."

"Eton," growled Mac, "when were you at Eton? Ye're a leear, bone an' boots an' breeks."

"Hi ain't. Hi was at Heton twice: once ter teach some cubs 'ow to use their dooks, an' once ter show 'em 'ow Hi cud use mine. Hi went in by the front door th' first time, but Hi hentered by a back winder wivout even a banjo accompaniment the second trip. Hi got a 'at full o' cups an' medals, an' some loose change, an' left as modest an' unnoticed as Hi got in. Me modesty 'as been me greatest charm orl me pore little life, mateys; Hi always did try to 'ide me little light hunder a bushel, leastways under me coat, so that night Hi left Heton Hi folded hup me little tent like the Harabs, an' Hi 'opped it."

"Apairt frae yr soldierin' y're just a dom wastrel."

"Yo're 'urtin' me feelin's nar, Mac. Hi'm not a wastrel. Hi've moved in 'igh society in me time, Hi 'ave; wy, Hi know free or four ov th' best judges in Hingland personal, Hi do; the very larst one Hi 'ad a hinterview wiv, 'e said ter me in court: 'Wot 'ave you got ter sy fir yerself?' an' Hi sez: 'Hi'm a bit flurried, me lord; give me a little time.' An' 'e smiled surkastic an', sez 'e: '*Hi will*,' an' blimey, 'e did—'e give me free years. Nex' time Hi arsk a judge fir time, Hi'll do it on th' telephone."

"Weel, p'raps ye'll get eternity in th' fechtin' tha's comin'."

"Hi 'opes not, matey, leastways not huntill Hi gets a chanst at them jools an' gold o' th' Hemir Rasuli. *You* won't be wantin' to 'andle any o' that loot, Mac, it'd be agin yor pore conscience."

"Ah weel," commented McGlusky, after some consideration, "A'm no sae sure on tha' point; war's war, ye ken, an' loot's loot; eet's na robbery. A'd scorn tae be a robber."

"So would Hi," murmured the Rat, a remark that made Fritzel let loose one of his hearty explosive bursts of laughter.

"Eet's a nice point in reelegious doctrine," continued Mac argumentatively. "Is eet no written 'He tha' ees na with ma is against ma,' an' eef th' Emir is against us, a' that he has ees against us, an' ees eet na weel within th' law tae tak' a' tha' is against us for oor ain use, an' put eet tae a good purpose, no tae spend eet in brawlin' or dreenkin' or on scarlet wummin, or sic-like ungodly practices? A *theenk* A'd tak' Rasuli's bit treasure eef th' Lord threw eet in ma way, an' A dinna theenk eet wad be agin ma conscience as a humble soldier o' fortune. A'll hae a wee bit prayer on th' matter th' nicht, an' get ma cards marked fir ma."

"Me," drawled the Rat, "Hi'd build a 'orspital wiv my share, an' hif a scarlet 'ussy cime near *me*, Hi'd say: 'Tike orf them crimson togs, an' go an' get yr golding

locks shingled or—or bobbed.’I”

The news the vedettes had brought in proved to be true: the tribesmen had come to a stand in strong force, and had chosen their position with uncommon skill. The Legion had bad country to cross to attack them, whilst, as usual, the nomads had made sure of good country for a retreat, in case they were defeated. When the Christians got within striking distance, the troops were halted to let the horses of the *Chasseurs* refresh themselves, and to give the infantry time to rest a bit after the toilsome march, and hardy as they were, they needed it. Mac, surrounded as usual by his old comrades, was surveying the enemy position through his field-glasses.

“Wot do yer mike ov it, big un?” demanded the Rat. “Hit don’t look so orful ’ard ter me. We’ve rooted th’ blighters hout ov worse plices.”

“Eet’s no so simple as eet looks, sonny; th’ verra simpleecity o’ it is maist sure tae be a trap. Old Rasuli kens as many tricks as a dog-fox. Wha’ we can see looks simple; eet’s wha’ we canna see air th’ theengs tha’ may put th’ burrs in oor breeks, but this much is as sure as ye canna get milk frae a duck: we’ve got tae use shock tactics; we’ll hae tae gang right tae them, an’ bust ’em up wi’ th’ bayonet an’ th’ butt.”

Mac’s summing up of the position soon proved to be correct, for the Falcon came to his own men and took up his old familiar place in the van, and his orders rattled out like a Gatling gun in full blast.

“The ole bird seems quite ’appy; lor’ love a duck, ’ow ’e do enjoy a ’and-to-’and scrap,” remarked the Rat irreverently, “the ole bird” being his nomenclature for the Falcon, who was of all the officers the very last man to permit a freedom, a fact which did not weigh a feather’s weight with the London scallywag. “Hi likes that bloke, Hi do,” he added a few moments later; “im an’ me ’ave shared terbaccer more’n once,” a statement that made Fritzel guffaw, for the German knew it was true, knew also that the Falcon had never been a free agent in the matter, thanks to the uncanny dexterity of the Rat’s long, thin and dexterous fingers.

When the order came to advance, everything was done on the jump. The cavalry thrown forward in widely extended order left big gaps between the horses; into these gaps dashed the legionaries with bayonets fixed, and each man grabbed a stirrup, two legionaries being in between each pair of horsemen. The bugles sent forth their eager note, piercing, challenging, defiant; the well-trained horses sprang away, as if they revelled in the onset. In front of them the foe had massed; old-world drums were throbbing, brown feet were stamping, madly churning the sand into dust clouds that soon half hid the Emir’s host; battle flags and pious standards of gaudy colours fluttered lazily in the heavy air; half-mad Dervish fanatics, nude to the loins,

were running and leaping along the Emir's line of battle, gashing their muscular chests with long, hooked knives, that soon had them smeared with blood; savage, half-human shouts and yells pealed out in a mighty chorus, mingled with deeply intoned appeals to Allah to smite the infidels and overwhelm them with disaster. It was war, as the desert places had known it before Abraham tended his flocks and herds under the same sun in another part of the continent. Spears gleamed, swords flashed, and soon came the spatter of lead from weapons of every make and shape manufactured since gunpowder was invented. Here and there a modern weapon carried its bullet as far as the oncoming Legion, in the first few volleys, but most of the early lead fell short, and kicked up spurts of sand far in front of the men who were fighting under the banner of France.

"They hain't got the chanst ov a lidy ov heasy virtue at a christenin', Mac," yelled the Rat, as he raced, clinging to a *Chasseur's* stirrup.

"Bide a wee," roared the big fellow.

When within thirty horse-lengths of the coffee-coloured mob, the bugler by the side of the cavalry commander loosed a bugle note so wild, so piercing, that every battle charger knew it for what it was. Home went the spurs, the hard-reined steeds leapt forward snorting; the infantry let go their holds on stirrup leathers, and came almost to a halt, and it looked as if a massacre must follow, for such a mob could never withstand a charge made by the flower of the *Chasseurs*, with every horse and every man in the pink of campaigning condition, but in that moment the seeming mob wheeled and fled like deer away into narrow guts in the low hills on either side. They sped with the speed of hares, like men who had been well drilled for such a task, and right in front of the charging *Chasseurs* appeared a strong wall of stakes and prickly pear trees and savage thorn bushes, all lashed together with raw hide. It was the frontal wall of an immense zareba, which had been screened from the view of the French by the living mob; beyond the zareba wall was a long, deep trench, with spears driven deeply into the soil, their glittering points twinkling skyward. Woe to the horse that bounded over the zareba wall; it would only leap to be impaled on the deadly spears beyond, and on the far side of those impaling spears stood rows of old Rasuli's picked warriors, battle-axe in hand, ready to lop off the head of any rider. In between the cactus leaves of the zareba wall, rifle barrels were thrust as closely as men could stand shoulder to shoulder, and as the screening parties fled, the rifles spoke at pistol range to the trapped *Chasseurs*. Horses and men went down, as pine trees fall when a cyclone sweeps over forest-covered uplands; saddles were emptied in a mad whirl of flying death; men shouted and war horses neighed or screamed, whilst in the gut of the hills the erstwhile screening party of

nomads crouched, fondling the steel that would mutilate, disembowel and destroy every wounded *Chasseur* if the defeat became a rout.

It was then that the Falcon showed the mettle of his manhood; his voice rose almost like a woman's shrill cry:

"La Légion—La Légion! Close up your ranks, shoulder to shoulder, men."

He made a gallant picture, standing there in the full blaze of an African sun, his bared blade in his right hand, his pistol in his left, the warrior light in his blazing eyes. Never would he give the order to retreat, and leave the wounded *Chasseurs* to the hacking knives. To him with a whoop and a yell went a mean-looking, scrawny figure in the uniform of the famous Legion, a uniform that only fitted where it happened to touch the slouching figure, but it covered the heart of a war god: the Rat, the refuse of a city's slum, went plunging to his chief, amid a storm of lead.

"Wot ho, guv'nor, we'll give 'em hextra 'ell fer this," he cried, as he sprang over a fallen horse and dead *Chasseur*, and stood by the Falcon's side, and the stern-lipped, handsome aristocrat flashed him a smile, for in that moment he recognized in the blackguard of the regiment a soldier and a man.

McGlusky, flanked by Fritz and the Turk, came thundering forward, their bayonets levelled, for Mac, ever swift of brain in an emergency, had seen what was the only thing to be done. The Rat joined them, as they swept past, and right to the zareba wall they went, thrusting their bayonets through, and firing as they thrust.

"*Mon Dieu*, what a man," almost laughed the Falcon; then he concentrated all his volcanic force on the task of beating back the screening parties of the enemy, who were advancing from both sides, whilst at the same time sending forward enough of his men to follow McGlusky's example and attack the zareba.

Clawing, hewing, pulling, they got enough of the zareba wall down to admit a few men at a time, and it was Mac who led the storming party through the gap.

"Mind yr little Mary on one ov them blinkin' spears in ver trench, Mac," was the Rat's advice, as he saw the big fellow about to jump.

Mac leapt, and cleared the spiked trench like a lion, only to find himself hotly engaged by the Emir's axe-men. Then the Rat, apparently unmindful of his own "Little Mary," shot over with Fritz of Germany so close behind, and the Turk with him, that Mac's peril of being surrounded was soon wiped out. As the legionaries poured into the dearly bought zareba, the wily old Emir led his men out at the other end, to the safe line of pre-prepared retreat; he had lost that battle ground, but what did that patch of country matter to him? He had all North Africa to fight in, whilst, as he well knew, the appalling losses to the two crack corps of the French army in Africa, the world-famous *Chasseurs* and the *Légion d'Afrique*, would take years

to make up.

When the battle flag of the Legion was hoisted in triumph in the centre of the zareba, the central figure was McGlusky, with his three bosom comrades grouped round him. They all looked gory and dirty and torn and tattered, but the Falcon with a soldier's eyes saw below the surface, as he came and flung a few crisp, soldierlike sentences of praise to them.

"Lor' love a duck," remarked the Rat, as he wiped blood and sweat from his face with his forearm, "this hain't been a fight—not 'arf. Wot wouldn't Hi give fer a pint at th' bar ov th' old Helephant an' Castle at this carmine minnit? A pint—Hi cud mop hup a bloomin' barrel."

As if in answer to this pious prayer, the *vivandière* on her little white mule, with her brandy keg slung from her shoulder, came riding up to them. She proffered her horn drinking-cup to Mac, with a smile that had wonder and admiration in it. He drew back, but his gaze at the cup and the barrel was one of ecstasy.

"Tike hit, you big sop'ead; this ain't th' time to bear no malice."

Mac wavered, for the raging thirst that follows hand-to-hand battle was upon him. The girl looked at him appealingly, longingly, lovingly, the Welsh gift of using her dangerous eyes dangerously coming to her aid, until the strong man, who in all his wild life had never wavered or weakened in battle or in time of stress, felt the sinews of his soul slacken, and the old passionate desire tugged at his heart-strings, for the mad want of a woman always comes to a real fighter after a fight. She, quick as women ever are to note her advantage, pushed the cup into his hand, the fiery liquor bubbling to the brim. Again their eyes met, and the woman thing knew she was fighting a winning battle; her Welsh blood wakened to the strain of the moment; her eyes, that seemed the windows of her soul—though of real soul she seemed to have none—fastened upon the eyes of the man whose glorious courage had put new heart into a half defeated army, and set him afire. Pathos, pain and witching desire were all expressed in their glances; her eyes said so much, yet in real truth might have meant so little. A deep student of human nature, looking on, would have condemned her utterly as a worthless play actress on the rugged stage of life, toying with the fiercest and most deadly of all human emotions, but such an one would have been wrong; she was, after all, but a little, lovely thing, playing up to the heritage of her blood; she could no more help seeming to be shallow, false and insincere than a song-bird can help using its joyous gift of song. Suddenly, with the liquor at his eager lips, the scales fell from the man's eyes, and in that moment he thought he saw what she called her soul, and a wave of self-contempt swept over him; his savage mouth curled in cold scorn of her and of his own weakness; then he laughed, and the little

woman in front of him turned white to the lips; she knew in that moment what the man had read in her; his jealous jaundiced eyes had probed the secret chambers of her being, until the spirit of her seemed to stand naked and ashamed to the bitter mockery of a man's disillusioned eyes.

"A'm no wantin' th' liquor fr masel'," he exclaimed mockingly, "eet's fr ma dawg; A dinna see th' tyke anywhere." He wheeled, and thrust the horn cup into the hand of the big Basque, whose threats against himself he knew all about, and had scorned. "A dinna want th' stuff masel', ma dawg is na here, an' wad na tak' eet eef he were; tak' eet, ye cur coyote, an' tak' a' tha' eet micht mean—A'm no wantin' tha' either."

The big, bullying Basque hesitated. Mac's hand shot to his sword bayonet; all round him were men whom he knew would die for him.

"Dreenk, ye boastin' blastie, or pull yr steel."

The Basque drank.

The *vivandière*, lovelier, perhaps, in her rage than she had ever looked before, vaulted on to her little white mule, and rode hurriedly away. Mac followed her with his bloodshot eyes. All the men, excepting Fritzel, the Rat and the Turk, fell back from McGlusky, for they recognized the mood that was upon him.

"Yince," muttered Mac thickly, "A thocht wi' a' ma soul an' strength A loved her, Rat."

"So yer did," was the waif's uncompromising answer.

"A cud na win her when she were worth haein'."

"You hain't got th' sense ov a 'en scratchin' fr worms in a dry sand-'eap, you hain't, Mac, not w'ere wimmin are concerned. Yore fault is yo're too damn honest wiff 'em, an' wimmin don't hunderstand honesty; they're orl fire-bugs, hevery blinkin' one ov 'em; they'll burn th' 'ouse ov love fr th' sake ov th' insurance."

"A'm no takin' yr meanin'."

"Ho, hain't yer? Well, look at vis little bit ov skirt, pretty enough ter be in th' front row ov a leg show at th' old Hempire gaff in London, she is; she was in love wiff you hup to 'er cheek-bones w'en you first met 'er. Wy? Because hup to then you were th' biggest man an' greatest she 'ad hever rubbed noses wiff."

"A didna rub her nose."

"No, you damn fool, that's w'ere you mide your blinkin' horror. Hi would 'ave, so wud most men, an' hif you 'ad, the first bloom on th' peach wud ha' been yours. Hi 'eard 'er as good as promise you that, but you let 'er go an' mix wiv men oo 'ad more dollars than you 'ad dimes, an' they looked bigger an' better than you to 'er. Love's a blinkin' fine fing, matey, but wimmin likes theirs gilt-hedged; hit's 'uman

natur—anywise hit's she-male 'uman natur, an' mighty small blime to th' 'ens. They orl like th' best outer life, an', matey, money will buy th' best. Hi 'elped ter bust a bank oncet, an' my share ov th' swag oughter kep' me honest an' respectable fr me natural. Hi was finkin' ov retirin' from me perfession an' becomin' a nice little country gentleman—quite heasy ter do hif you've got the beans: wear Hoxford bags, turn yr pants hup at th' bottom, as if it was always rainin' in London, an' cultivate a Cambridge bend in th' back an' a Heton haccent—them things an' a few good 'orses does th' trick hevery time; no questions asked ov th' bloke wot can put dahn th' good red money hevery time. Instead ov henterin' meself fr the 'onest an' respectable stakes, an' becomin' a pillar ov th' State, Hi started 'ousekeepin' wiv a view ter matrimony, as th' noospiper adverts say, wiff a grass widder age twenty-two, so she said, though she knew enough fr a 'undred an' eight. She cud spend money faster'n water can run down-'ill, she could, an' we 'ad a great time; she struck troo as steel near orl me 'ard-earned wealth was gone, then she said though it near broke 'er pore 'eart, we must part, an' she parted, an' fer a time Hi felt like a 'en wot lays awy from 'ome. Then Hi got a shock that knocked orl the love-stuff out o' me 'ead an' 'eart, fr my lovin' lidy 'ad 'eard th' bank Hi 'ad 'elped to skin was still willin' ter pay a big reward for hany information that would jug them honest speculators oo 'ad gone through their safe—meanin' us. She went after that reward, an' got it, she did, an' my two pals got a nice quiet 'ome wivout taxes ter pay fr four years. Hi 'ad a dream Hi wasn't wanted in dear old Hingland just abart that time, an' Hi went as a missionary to the 'eathen in China, an' stayed there till th' bank trouble blew hover. Hi'd ha' stayed there, because Hi did good business removin' valuable hidols from th' temples—mostly after dark—but wot th' Chinks call justice began nosin' arahnd after me wiv a hexecutioner's sword abart as big as a ploughshare. Hi got 'omesick, an' left th' pagans to their 'eathen ways. That's orl.

"Weel," interjected Mac, "wha' hae yr story tae do wi' love, eh?"

"Not much," replied the Rat, scratching his head reminiscently, "not much ter do wiv love, but a 'ell ov a lot ter do wiv wimmin, an' love an' wimmin mix abart as well as hoil an' water, unless you stir th' blinkin' mixture wiv a golden spoon. Torkin' abart them kind ov spoons, Mac, your little Welsh-Moorish wench kind ov ha' clung to yer like bark to a bough hif you'd only 'ad a spoon o' that sort; you'd never 'ave found 'er out, she's too clever, an' you'd ha' been a 'appy fool to th' hend."

When the muster roll was called after the fight for the zareba, the C.O. looked very blue; never before had his forces received such a mauling at the hands of the enemy. The *Légion d'Afrique* had suffered terribly, but the gay and gallant *Chasseurs d'Afrique* had been decimated; the horses had escaped to a great

extent, because the Emir's men, planted snugly behind the wall of the zareba, had had leisure to aim at the riders at such short range. Soon it became known that the C.O. would accept temporary volunteers from the ranks of the *Légion d'Afrique* to take the places of the fallen *Chasseurs*, the principal qualifications being an ability to ride.

"A'm goin' tae volunteer fir cavalry service," announced McGlusky to his own especial coterie of comrades one evening. "A'm weary o' footslogging, an' A want a change."

"Me, I gome mit you," promptly announced Fritzel. "Me, I vas a heavy dragoon in de Prussian army, till dey unhorsed us in de great war."

"Tha's good enough, Fritz; A ken something aboot Prussian training," responded Mac.

The big Turk rose and stretched himself.

"Can ye ride?" demanded Mac.

The Turk smiled grimly.

"In the war of Turkey against Bulgaria I was a sergeant-major of horse."

"Iphm—then ye hae na much tae learn, fir A ken th' Sultan's cavalry. Noo, Rat, na lies—can ye sit a horse?"

"Me?" The Rat's elevated eyebrows denoted his surprise at such a question. "Did you hever 'ear ov th' seventh 'Ussars, big feller?"

"Th' seventh Hussars? Aye, a' th' world kens them."

"Iphm—well once, owin' to th' state ov me 'ealth, Hi didn't want ter meet hanybody wot knew me; hevery time hanyone touched me on th' shoulder me bloomin' 'eart bounced hup in me froat like a frog tryin' ter jump hout ov a well, so Hi decided ter get hout ov civvies an' inter a uniform, so Hi'd 'listed in th' 'Ussars, an' Hi 'ad a year wiv them, an' Hi learnt ter ride."

"Ye must ha' had mair than a year eef ye had any time at all, ye leein' maggot o' a mon."

"Wrong, Mac. Hi 'listed fir seving years, but got fed hup in abart a year, an' then fings got gettin' lorst from th' hofficers' quarters, an' there was th' devil an' orl ter py. One dy, Hi was near th' Colonel's lidy; she was very deep-chested abart the waist-line, an' she wore a lovely ticker wiv three rows ov gold chain ter keep it in hits plice. Hi 'appened ter stumble agen 'er, caught me spur in 'er frock or somethin' or other, an' w'en Hi was goin' ter turn in that night Hi near fell dead, struth Hi did."

"What ailed ye, mon?"

"Nothin' aled me, Mac, but by some haccident th' lidy's watch wiv abart 'arf a yard o' gold chain 'ad been an fell right inter me tunic pocket. Lumme, Hi was nearly

broken-hearted for fear they'd suspect me of 'avin' 'elped ter bring abart th' haccident."

"Did they suspect ye?"

"Hi dunno, Mac; Hi honly know they kicked me art ov th' regiment, which was wot Hi wanted 'em ter do. Hit's th' suspiciousness ov 'uman natur wot mikes life 'ard fir a pore bloke. Hi honly 'ad one real friend in the seventh 'Ussars who'd sy a good word fir me, an' that was th' ridin'-master, Sergeant-Major 'Awkins, th' best rider in Hingland. 'E said 'e was sorry to lose me; 'e said Hi could stick to a saddle better'n hany man 'e'd hever trained, an' 'e added that Hi stuck to hevery damn fing Hi got me 'ands on. 'E was a real pal, 'Awkins wos."

When Mac and his three comrades put in their application for mounted service in the *Chasseurs*, there was only one objector, and that was the Falcon.

"The four best men in the *Légion d'Afrique*," said he to the C.O. of the forces. "*Ma foi*, I'd rather part with any twenty men than those four."

"Well," replied the C.O., "you can have them back when we return to the base, but at present I'm in need of good men in the *Chasseurs*."

The army tailors rigged the four out in gay crimson, gold and blue, and even the Rat cut a good figure, though one of the tailors remarked that he would as soon try to fit a uniform on to the sun-dried carcass of a mountain goat, as to make the slab-sided, flat-chested, angular Cockney look presentable on parade.

"Garn, ye French poultice in pants; Hi hain't 'arf as bad as Hi look, an' you hain't 'arf as smart as yer fink. Hi hain't rude, but Hi'm surkarstic, Hi am, you son ov fourteen farvers an' th' right one a mewel."

Then, in order to prove the French tailor was not as smart as he thought he was, the Rat, by some sleight of hand known only to himself, ran the rule over him before he left the tailoring department, and eased the Frenchman of pretty nearly everything of value he possessed.

"Man Rat," exclaimed McGlusky with an admiring grin, as he bit into a plug of the tailor's tobacco the Rat had handed him, "how dae ye dae it? A were watchin' ye, an' A didna see ye dae a theeng, excep' brush agen th' buckie twa or three times."

"Do it?" jeered the Rat. "'E was heasy, 'e was. Hi'd ha' 'ad 'is teeth an' 'is trousers, an' 'e'd ha' been none th' wiser, honly Hi didn't want ter 'urt 'is feelin's. Them Frenchies wants a year or two in London to get heducated, then they'd 'ave more sense an' less conceit; they don't fink they're 'it,' not 'arf they don't."

The riding-master of the *Chasseurs* opened the ball for the four recruits by trying to make merry at McGlusky's expense, and invited all that was left of the

dandy regiment to see him do it. He brought out every bad horse, and then fell back on the worst of the battery mules, and McGlusky rode them all, and asked for more, whilst the men grinned delightedly at the R.M.'s discomfiture. Mac sat like a rock, and never touched leather, until the sweating, swearing R.M. sullenly passed him as A.1. It was the same when it came to drilling: the four had been too well grounded in the work in their various countries to give the drill sergeant any excuse to bully them. The French drill was slightly different from that they had been trained in, but the fundamentals were the same, and the rest they soon picked up, and when they were afoot it was amusing to note how easily and rapidly they all dropped into the old cavalry swagger. In Mac's case this was even more noticeable than in the rest; the feel of a good horse under him had awakened memories that made him carry himself like a swashbuckler, until the Rat remarked:

"Love a duck, 'e do walk as hif th' crimson desert was too narrer ter 'old 'im."

Of the *vivandière* they now saw a great deal, for on her pretty white mule she patronized the *Chasseurs* quite a lot, though ever since the night when McGlusky had evened his score with d'Alençon, that warrior had kept aloof from the girl, and she, as if she knew or suspected what had happened, avoided him. D'Alençon had changed in every way since that evening: his gaiety and debonair ways had departed, perhaps because his self-esteem had been rudely knocked away.

"E don't seem 'arf so popular wiv 'is little self nar," was the Rat's summing up of the change in d'Alençon, who, however, had nothing to do with McGlusky's group, as he belonged to another *Chasseur* regiment.

He must have known that Mac had become a cavalryman, because it was the talk of the whole force at the time, but he made no sign; even when he and Mac passed each other on the impromptu parade-ground, d'Alençon never made a sign that the big swashbuckler in crimson, gold and blue was not an utter stranger to him. The Rat, indeed, was a little bit afraid that it would be Mac who might reopen hostilities, and the Rat, who seemed quite happy in his new rôle, did not want trouble in that quarter, and to that end he volunteered some sage advice to the big fellow.

"Don't yer go an' run yr big bone-'ead into a ant-'ill by mikin' hany trouble wiv d'Alençon," he said. "E seems tryin' ter fergit that bloomin' night w'en you gave 'im a barf in the latrine; you be diplermatic, Mac, an' wotever yer do don't yer sy 'wiolets' to 'im. Hi smelt 'im that blessed night, an' some'ow Hi fink th' *vivandière* must ha' smelt 'im too, an' Hi'll bet 'e can smell 'isself yet. Lor' love me, hit was nutty. They say 'e's gone bull-savage wiv 'is men hever since, an' among th' hofficers 'e's honly on speakin' terms wiv 'isself, an' is ready ter duel at th' drop of a 'at. That pretty little devil put pigeon in 'is pie, she did. She don't seem to bring no

luck to nobody but 'erself. Hi wonder, Mac, if fings was as crooked that night in the tent as we fought vey wos."

"A'm no carin' tae hear aboot th'—th' leddy," exclaimed McGlusky with dignity.

"H'm—lidy—well, just ter oblige yer, Mac, Hi'll pertend ter know oo yer mean, but Hif she's a lidy, she's like Cæsar's wife, she is."

"Wha' dae ye ken o' Cæsar's wife, ye spawn o' a London kennel?"

"Hi didn't know th' lidy, Mac, but Hi 'eard a bloke on the 'alls sy oncet she was 'all fings to all men, an' give the most to the bloke wiv the most money.' That's orl Hi know abart Mrs. Cæsar, an' abart orl Hi want ter know. They are right enough hif you make 'em grow looney on you, an' they are wrong enough hif you grows looney on them."

"Teach you that when you were at Eton?" sneered Mac.

"Heton nuffink," chortled the Rat. "Hi got me real heducation in the greatest huniversity on hearth, Hi did, th' huniversity ov th' pivement, w're you meets heverythink from princes to plug-uglys."

The next day the Rat nearly fell out of his saddle on parade, for who should come cantering up but the *vivandière* on her snow-white mule. An officer of Spahis, who had been attached to the *Chasseurs*, had died of wounds, and the *vivandière* had annexed the defunct Spahi's brilliant scarlet military cloak, and having cut it down to suit her figure, she now wore it because it suited her brilliant beauty.

"Love a duck," gasped the Rat to Mac, who was riding in the ranks next to him, "the little devil is hout in 'er troo colours at larst; she's yore scarlet wumman orl right."

"She's no my wumman," growled McGlusky savagely, but his eyes followed the charming figure in scarlet with a hunger so fierce the wonder was they did not scorch her.

CHAPTER XI

THE LURE OF WOMAN

The reason for the rebuilding of the *Chasseurs* regiment lay in the fact that enemy forces were known to be swarming on all sides on the back trail which the French would have to take to reach their base on the coast. The only way to deal with these bands was to send mounted men out with guns, and attack them incessantly, whilst the legionaries marched homeward in steady and orderly array. They had to return like a little army that had successfully accomplished its mission; it was to take the shape of a well-planned return home, not a retreat, for the moral effect of a defeat admitted by the world-famous Legion would set all North Africa ablaze. When the moment came for the commencement of the backward march, *La Légion* broke camp like conquerors, with standards flaunting and bands playing, and every legionary wore his peaked cap at an angle of forty-five; they strutted jauntily and laughed and jested in the ranks, as devil-may-care a set of fighting men as ever went to war. On the flanks of *La Légion* rode detachments of cavalry, and they too "rode easy," smoking their pipes in the ranks, and behaving generally like a gay, dare-hell bunch. Every man, horse or foot, knew that the old warrior, Emir Rasuli, was out against them, and for his war-like strategy they all had a most profound respect; he had thinned their ranks too often for them to hold him lightly.

"Hi'm told," remarked the Rat, as he lounged in saddle between Mac and Fritzel, "that this 'ere Hemir Rasuli 'as got a 'undred and sixty-four wives an' near as many corkscrews."

"Near as many *what*?" demanded Mac.

"Corkscrews."

"Ye are meanin' concubines, A'm theenkin'."

"Sime fing, only vey sy it one wy at 'Arrow an' anuver wy at Heton," chirruped the Rat. "W'en Hi was at Heton we called 'em corkscrews; at Hoxford they called 'em konkubines—wot's in a nime, anywy? It means a woman wot 'as orl th' comforts of a 'ome an' none ov th' responsibilities ov th' marriage service. Hif Hi was a Harab lidy, Hi fink Hi'd raver be on th' conk' than on th' marry. 'Ow old Rasuli manages ter get arahnd among orl them she-cats beats me 'oller; 'e must be a 'ardy ole sport. Hi wouldn't mind bein' a hofficer in 'is guard; there must be some nice pickin's: wot wiv Mrs. Rasuli one 'undred an' sixty-four an' Miss Rasuli abart th' sime number, a man wud 'ave ter be slower'n a silk-worm hif 'e didn't get some

fruit brought ter 'im on a plite."

That the Emir Rasuli had many wives and more concubines was true enough, but he did not bring his harem on the war trail with him. He kept the French forces busy all the time, and when they were not actually fighting they were guessing, and in those months the *Chasseurs* rode until they were saddle sore. Even McGlusky grew peevish, man of iron though he was, for all day and every day it was mount and ride, and ride and fight, and then it was dismount, throw your bridles over your shoulder and lead the leg-weary horses, and as the sand underfoot was of the soft and shifting variety, the life the *Chasseurs* led was Tophet-like and unrelenting.

"Wisht my muvver 'ad married a camel, an' Hi'd been born wiv split pads instead ov feet," grouched the Rat one noon.

He had good cause to grouse; he had been marching for hours over sand and gravel that was as hot as if it had been roasted in an oven, and to add to his pleasures he had practically to drag a dead-beat horse along all the time. The soles of his feet were a mass of blisters and blood boils, but it was a case of go on or perish. As he was, so were nearly all his comrades, yet the fortitude they displayed was amazing; it would have been so easy to lie down and die, but not one of them weakened; they had a job to do, and they did it.

"Ho fer th' green lanes ov old Hingland," wailed the Rat, bursting into what he termed song at one bivouac. Mac promptly hit him in the stomach with the hilt of his cavalry sword, and Fritz sandbagged him. "Wot's wrong wiv me song?" snarled the Cockney. "Hif Hi cud run inter one o' them green lines, Hi'd prig it an' roll hit up an' bring hit awy wiv me. It fair mikes me sick ter fink ov th' green grass in Kent in th' 'oppin' season. Wisht Hi was a kid again, catchin' tadpoles in th' brooks, or a tadpole catchin' flies—hanyfink ter get awy from this bloomin' sun an' sand."

"Name of a Saint, *can't* you keep that horse-collar of a mouth of yours closed about grass an' runnin' water an' tadpoles?" stormed a veteran lieutenant, who had risen from the ranks. "Half the men are loco now, and the other half will be so soon if you set them thinking of brooks and villages hidden away amongst shady trees. I have had that madness in my time, me, an' I know: you can hear the ripple of the shallow water against the stones, and the sighing of the cool breezes through the leafy boughs, an' the shouts of the village *gamins* as they catch the little fishes in nets made of old bags, and the drip, drip, drip of the water falling from the lips of the cows that have drunk their fill, and the plomp-splash-plomp of the white bodies of the big boys plunging into the big deep pool just below the mill——"

"Ere, 'old on, lieutenant—Hi got a dig in me belly wiff a sword 'ilt fr singin' a line ov a song; you're mikin' a picture hout ov words nar that's mikin' me 'air stand

on hend. Hi'll be goin' loco hif you don't stop."

The grizzled lieutenant had stopped, but his big bulging eyes were fixed on vacancy, and his outstretched fingers were working like the talons of a vulture: he was seeing his native village away in fair Provence, and hearing the mill-wheels slap-slap-slap in the clear water of the stream where he had bathed as a boy; he was getting old and worn-out, that grizzled cavalryman, and the terrific heat and forced marching had him beaten until his brain was turning, and the Rat's song had broken the balance. All at once his apathy left him; he rose to his feet, tore off cap and tunic, sword belt and well-tried sword, and, putting his hands palms clasped out in front of him, as boys do, he dived face forward into the burning sand, and began kicking out with his legs, and ploughing the sand with hands and arms, shouting, laughing, cursing in his madness. "Splash-splash-splash," he kept yelling, and when McGlusky and Fritzel and the Rat and a dozen others flung themselves upon him to hold him down, the madman, frothing at the mouth, bit at them, and demanded to be freed. The *vivandière*, who had been on this raid, came running up, looking dusty and worn and dishevelled, but somehow real womanly; it was she who forced luke-warm water and weak brandy down the poor fellow's throat, though a moment later in his madness he struck at her face, and yelled obscenities at her, mistaking her in his lunacy for the village girl who had been his ruin. The military surgeon came upon the scene, and made an examination; then with serious face he had a few words with the C.O.

"This has been coming on a long time," said he. "I have had him under observation for months."

He gave the grizzled lieutenant's disease its scientific name. The C.O. swore softly under his breath.

"As bad as that?" he demanded.

"Quite hopeless. The man's brain has worn out under the strain of duty in this sink of Hades; he has not a month to live, in any case, and every hour will be a purgatory; he will be violent all the time and dangerous. Better give me the order, *monsieur*. I liked him, and would save him if there were a chance, but there's no possible chance: he has turned from a man and a good soldier into a wild beast; like that he will die."

"I wish to God he had fallen in battle, surgeon."

"So do I; so would he have had it, but in this devil of a desert the fates order things their own way; we humans don't count any more than a grain of sand in the wind; in cities we fancy we are things of importance, but out here—" The surgeon made a gesture that was all-embracing; he had had much experience, and he knew.

The C.O. pulled thoughtfully at his goatee beard for a second or two, then:

“A bullet I suppose, eh, surgeon?”

From an inside pocket in his tunic, the medicine man drew a small case covered with green Morocco leather; touching a spring, he laid bare a couple of syringes in silver cases.

“This,” said he, “is quicker, more painless and surer.”

“Damn the things; I hate the sight of them. It’s not a proper ending for a soldier, but—*mon Dieu*—” He drew his fine old figure up taut and stiff. “*A la mort*,” he said sharply, with a motion of one hand towards the raving, struggling figure of the lieutenant.

When the surgeon knelt by the madman’s head, he had one of his syringes in his right hand; he touched the man’s tongue with the point of the instrument, and rose, and before he had reached an upright position, the figure on the sand had ceased to struggle; a dead soldier of France lay there. McGlusky, Fritz, the Rat and the other helpers rose to their feet; every man’s right hand went to the peak of his cap in the last salute.

As the men drew away, the Rat muttered solemnly:

“Struth, Hi always knowed Hi wasn’t no linnet, but Hi never fort me singin’ cud do a fmg like that. Hit’s cussin’ fir me nex’ time Hi wants ter hease me ’eart.”

“Na, na, eet was no yr singin’,” growled Mac sympathetically, “though tha’ is bad enough tae bring a coo tae th’ straw three months before her time. Th’ words o’ yr song just touched a chord in th’ poor deil’s memory, an’ memory broke th’ thin thread on which his reason hung. Ye meant weel, Rat, but th’ nex’ time ye feel like singin’ scrape a hole in th’ sand, an’ put yr head in eet.”

A feeling of black depression fell upon the regiment over the lieutenant’s death; had he fallen in hand-to-hand fight with the foe, the hard-bitten troopers would have treated his passing lightly enough, as something all in the day’s work, but the method of his going left a stark horror upon them. Mac, Fritz, the big Turk and the Rat took it out of themselves by slipping out of the lines that night with their carbines, sniping snipers. They just lay flat on the sand, waiting till something moved in the starlight; then one of them fired. After a bit this dangerous work palled upon them; it was too slow.

“A’m no o’ a bluid-thirsty deesposeetion, as ye a’ ken,” said McGlusky at last, “but,” he added, “oot there beyon’ yon wee bit hillock, there’s a posse o’ coffee-coloured cusses who wad be none th’ waur fir a bit stirrin’ up. A’m feelin’ a wee bit han’-tae’-han’ smitin’ in th’ name o’ th’ Lord, wad dae ma good, an’ micht eenterest yon bunch o’ fuzzies. A’ll just slink roon’ on ma richt till A get behind them,

an' fa' upon them. Ye bide here an' wait till ye hear ma yell as A go among them, then leg it tae ma, an'——”

“Wait, nuffin’,” snarled the Rat. “Hi can crorl on me belly as well as you, big un, an' Hi'm comin' wiff yer. Don't hargue agin it, Mac, or Hi'll wet me finger an' stick it in th' sand, an' poke it in yr heye.”

Mac emitted a snort of indignant disgust.

“Ye wad, wad ye, ye son o' an uncircumcised Jew? Eef ye did, A'd push yr spurs op yr ain nose, an' mak' ye write yr name wi 'em.”

It was level-headed, even-tempered Fritzel who solved the difficulty.

“Me an' der Turk vill crawl roun' der fuzzies on der left front; you an' der leedle Rat crawl round on her right, an' bedween us we make dem tink hell's on der bubble roun' dat leedle hill where dey hide, *ja*.”

The big Turk said nothing; he very seldom did say anything; he just started to crawl away on the left.

“That's orl right, then,” chirruped the Rat. “Hit honly wanted a few kind remarks, an' wot yr call diplomacy ter settle fings. Come on, Mac; Hi'll give yer 'arf a lap in a mile on this belly-racin' gime.”

The surprise was complete. The utterly reckless quartette, who individually and collectively set about as much value on their lives as a hen mosquito seems to set on her eggs, had done the one thing the desert men had never expected they would do, by crawling round them and attacking from the rear. Had the white men made a desperate rush at them from the front they would not have been surprised; they were used to that sort of thing from the daredevil men they had so long and so often fought. It was McGlusky who gave the signal to charge; his lion-like roar awoke the echoes near and far; it also awoke a strong, urgent and irresistible desire in the hearts of the sharp-shooting squad of fuzzies to remove themselves without ceremony to other positions. Holding his carbine by the muzzle, the big fellow hurtled forward, the butt of his weapon circling round his head. He missed the skull of the first fuzzy he struck at, but that made no difference to the fuzzy, for the heavy butt fell across his shoulders, and crushed him like an over-ripe water melon.

“Hae at ye, ye deils, stan' an' fecht, ye meeserable cooards.”

Possibly the desert men did not understand a single word of that chaste invitation; if they did, there was no sign of acquiescence in their actions; they dived away to the left, and met Fritzel and the Turk charging like a pair of bulls, with carbines clubbed. The Turk was shouting texts from the Koran, that did not in the least soften the blows his massive arms were thundering home. Fritzel was chanting a German battle hymn, and even in an hour like that his voluminous voice sounded

wondrous mellow and musical, for Fritzel was a singer, but if his voice was mellow, the yells of those he smote were not. The fuzzies, thinking themselves surrounded, turned to fight, and they fought like wild cats. The Rat was here, there and everywhere, cool as an ice-house, and getting cooler the hotter the fight became. Somehow he seemed to hover over McGluskly like a guardian angel, for the heart of the waif had long been in the giant soldier of fortune's keeping; bad in many ways the waif might be, and was, but he was loyal in his love. Mac was performing like a raving Dervish; he would change his grip, and drive the muzzle of his carbine into the teeth of a dusky foe, and his form of dentistry left the recipient with no appetite for more.

"Tak' eet, ye son o' a dawg's dauchter; tak' eet, an' lick yr lips fr mair," he would bellow, and as the affrighted devil would drop his weapons and flee, Mac would bound after him and swing a leg and kick; then his comrades would hear him roar: "Awa' tae th' stars wi' ye; dom ye, ye'll nae come doon in Africa." Wherever the fuzzy came down, he did not come back—he would have been a fool if he had.

More than once a spear or a knife would have settled Mac's gentle career as far as this planet was concerned, if the Rat's pistols had not barked at the right moment. Once, as he was striding over a dusky form on the ground, the fuzzy rose up on his hams to slash Mac on the inside of his thigh, an old trick of the desert. Came a whip-like crack of a pistol, and the nomad's knife fell from his hand, and he slid from his hams to his elbows, and then on to his face. Mac paused, surprised; he had thought the man he had been stepping over was a dead man.

"Yo're harskin' ter be 'amstrung, you are, you big blighter. Wy don't yer fight wiv yr 'ead as well as wiv yr 'ands? Look art, 'ere's anuvver cinder from 'ell comin'."

A fuzzy, running amok, was charging, stabbing knife in hand, straight at McGluskly. At the right moment Mac, balancing himself on one leg, straightened the other, and the rushing desert creature drove his midriff right into the big flat foot of the white man, and the shock steadied him, and sent him reeling on to his haunches; before he could recover his balance, McGluskly leapt to him, bent, and snatching him by the ankles, whirled him round and round his head, and then let go his hold. The fuzzy shot out into space, and when he landed upon all fours, he promptly rose and sped outward and onward.

"Hif 'e keeps that gait hup, 'e'll be hout of Hafrica by mornin'," chuckled the Rat, who was methodically reloading his pistols.

The scrimmage was over, and the four comrades had time to take stock of their own hurts. The Rat had one ear that looked as if a hyena had tried to lunch off it.

“Hi ’ad a fick ear,” he explained. “Dick Burge give it to me—never charged me nuffin’ fer it, jest give it to me ter remember ’im by—awful generous Dick was wiv souveneers like them, an’ jest now a fuzzy rushed me wiv a knife; Hi got ’old ov ’is wrist, an’ ’e got ’old ov me ear wiv ’is teeth, an’ ’e worried that ear till ’e made it like a bit ov rag, before Hi cud get a ’and free an’ shoot ’im in th’ stummick an’ ’e stabbed me in th’ thigh as ’e was fallin’.”

Fritzel had his handsome face slashed right across, and in addition had a nasty gash in his left forearm. The Turk had come off worst of all: he had one eye gone.

“Was hit pulled hout or pushed in?” demanded the Rat.

The Turk said he did not know, and did not care; all that concerned him was its absence. He also had a scalp wound that would have been all-sufficient for most men, but he made light of it.

McGlusky had half a dozen spear stabs in various parts of his anatomy, and a deep gash across his forehead.

“A theenk,” he said, as he tied up his wounds with strips torn from his shirt, “A theenk we’ve no had a bad nicht’s outin’. A wumman yince said tae me: ‘McGlusky, monotony ees th’ mither o’ a nicht oot.’ Weel, we’ve had yin, though no’ th’ sort o’ nicht the besom who said eet were theenkin’ o’, or else A didna judge her richtly. A’m no mindin’ this scratch on ma forehead, nor these spear stabs in front, but A got yin, a slash wi’ a knife on ma buttock, tha’ wull mak’ ma stan’ in ma stirrups fr a week or twa. Th’ blastie tha’ gied eet ma must hae been th’ butcher o’ his tribe, an’ used tae cuttin’ rump steaks. A whirled roon’ on him, an’ took his chin an’ th’ top o’ his head in ma twa han’s, an’ A rent his jaws asun’er—no’ on account o’ th’ pain, ye ken, but because o’ th’ indeegnity. He may ha’ thocht A were runnin’ awa’ frae him, an’ A were, but A were runnin’ at anither deil who was creepin’ up on Fritzel.”

The quartette got no praise for that night’s work; instead the C.O. took them to pieces, and gave them no end of a tongue-lashing.

“By the hide of a dog, I’ve more than half a mind to shoot a couple of you, as an example. It’s the sort of thing we expect of raw recruits, not from seasoned soldiers. I want every man I’ve got, want three times as many as I have, in fact, and you go out on a risk for the love of a fight. Damn you, I’ll have you beaten with whips if it happens again. Now go and get your wounds properly attended to, and remember, you legionary scallywags, you are only rifle or knife and spear fodder.”

As they left the C.O.’s presence, the Rat remarked plaintively:

“Anuvver little biby born ter die afore it cud squeak. Hi fort Hi might get th’ medal militaire for that scrap. Wisht Hi ’ad me blinkin’ ear back, Hi do. Life ain’t ’arf a myst’ry: w’en a cove pinches somethink ’e gets hit in th’ neck, w’en ’e loses

somethink—a hear or a heye—’e gets it in th’ collar too. Life hain’t got a fair deal in it, ’cept fer mugs wiv money.”

It was the *vivandière* who volunteered to help the surgeon in the impromptu hospital, when the immortal four went in for wound dressing. The Turk took his lot philosophically.

“Always found plenty of trouble,” he remarked, “when I had two eyes; now I’ve only got one, p’raps I’ll only find half as much.”

The Rat was a trifle fussy when the surgeon wanted to cut away the rags of his ear. He seemed to be abnormally proud of the fact that the once great Dick Burge had given it him.

“Got it from a hartist, an’ lorst it to a carmine fuzzy,” he complained, but beyond this sort of thing, the *vivandière* as assistant nurse, had no abnormal trouble. But when the surgeon wanted to stitch up the gaping wound at the bottom of Mac’s back, and called the *vivandière* to help him, Mac behaved like a schoolboy.

“Can ye no borrow a pair o’ blacksmith’s pincers an’ hand th’ flesh the gither, whiles ye stitch it?” he demanded.

The surgeon grinned.

“I could,” he answered, “but what is wrong with the *vivandière*’s fingers? She is very handy.”

“A’m no wantin’ th’ wumman; A’ve done wi’ them fr ever an’ aye. Besides, eet’s no decent. Dae ye theenk A’ve na manhood? Eet’s no a place fr a soldier tae get a wound; A’ve had plenty in ma time, but they’ve a’ been in front. Oot an’ awa’, lassie,” he exclaimed angrily, as the girl stooped over to sponge the savage gash, “eef ye’ve na modesty, A have.”

“He is as mad, this one, as the old lieutenant was,” remarked the surgeon. “Does he think a *vivandière* on active service is as squeamish as a school-miss, eh?”

“E knows she ain’t,” crooned the Rat, with one of his diabolical chuckles. “E’s been ’ead hover ’eels in love wiv ’er, an’ is nar, honly ’e finks ’e haint’.”

From that day onward the little French army had to battle hard for its very existence. Graves dotted the line of retreat, sometimes in single mounds, sometimes in groups. The Emir Rasuli was getting his own back with a vengeance, for *La Légion* and the peerless *Chasseurs* were desert fighters who could not be replaced; France might pour in the very flower of her European armies, but they could not take the places of these dead men, who had garnered such a wealth of experience in regard to nomadic warfare. Rasuli kept checking the retreat, for by this time it was obvious to all that it was not a mere home march to the big French base, but a retreat, a magnificent one, but none the less a retreat in grim earnest. The Emir meant

to destroy this fine force, and to this end he kept the fighting going night and day, until there came an hour when the officer in charge of the artillery announced to the C.O. that not three rounds of ammunition per gun remained.

“Shall we use that up and blow up the guns? *They* must never fall into the enemy’s hands,” he said, his face grey to the lips.

“No; keep the ammunition for a final coup, and hang on to the guns till hell cracks. The luck of the Legion has never failed yet. Keep sending the guns forward, and keep threatening with them; we are not so far from Dai Mogul, and we have a strong force there; we must get word to them somehow, and no odds will stop them from attempting a rescue. The honour of France is at stake. Pass the word around amongst the *Chasseurs* that I need volunteers for a desperate ride; I must have six men at least, who fear neither death nor the devil. I will send them off to try and reach Dai Mogul; they must ride separately and at intervals, and the man who gets through shall have a commission—my word on that; I don’t care who or what he is, or has been.”

“Only six volunteers, *monsieur*? *Mon Dieu*, I think sixty might go, and then the odds against one getting through would be a million to one. The enemy swarm on our front and flanks like locusts; our riders, brave and clever as they are, will not have the chance of an oyster in hell.”

“I know, but it must be tried. Pass the word.”

“Love a duck, but this hain’t ’arf a job the C.O. ’as hofferred hus, mateys,” was the remark of the Rat, when the demand for volunteers reached his ears. “Get to Dai Mogul to bring art a rescue? Struth, might as well try ter get to ’evening on a broomstick, but Hi s’pose hit’s hup to hus, eh?”

The one-time waif of the slums of London, now burned brick-dust red, waved his hand around the spot, where the four had made their bivouac.

“A’m no wantin’ tae hurt yr feelin’s, Rat, but ye’d be na mair use on a job like this than a nanny-goat in a cathedral choir.”

“W’y not, you big bone-’ead?”

“It will mean night ridin’, an’ night ridin’ means steerin’ a course by th’ stars, an’ ye dinna ken yin star frae anither. Ye’re ceety born an’ ceety bred, an’ this is a job fi men o’ th’ open spaces. Ye’ve mair spunk tae yer inches than any mon, black, brown, white or snuff-coloured A’ve ever met wi’, but this is a task ye canna tackle.”

There were men in the Legion who thought they had heard the Rat drift into language before that eventful night, but when he let himself go in reply to McGlusky’s veto, they were forced to admit that all his previous efforts were merely practice

stunts, in comparison. But his language availed him nothing; he was not amongst the selected, because the C.O. endorsed all that McGlusky said. Fritzel of Germany was in like case; both Mac and the C.O. turned him down for the same reasons that had barred the Rat.

The big Turk was in different case: he knew the stars, and could steer a course by the sun, but Mac waved him on one side, saying to the C.O.:

“He’s a gran’ fechter, an’ staunch tae th’ bone, but he’s a slow thinker, an’ th’ men fir this ride must hae th’ brains o’ swallows; they must veer awa’ fra danger wi’ th’ speed o’ a bi-rrd on th’ wing, an’ th’ big Turk is na built tha’ way. He wants someyin wi’ him tae dae his theenkin’ fir him, an’ lead him an’ check him; he’d see red before he was oot twa hours, an’ stan’ an’ fecht, an’ tha’ wad no get him anywhere, except inta a hole in th’ ground.”

The fine Turk took his disappointment philosophically enough, but the vice-like grip of his saddle flap of a hand when he bade McGlusky good-bye was full of petrified eloquence.

The six volunteers selected were all men who had lived in the open, men who could steer a course or alter a course by stars or sun, and they were that stern night the envy of all the others, though all knew that few of them would see the rising and the setting of another sun, but of such stuff are the legionaries made. The Frenchmen amongst them did most of the swaggering; the wild stuff amongst the residue treated the job as part of the day’s work. Dutch Alec, who had lived most of his days in Nigeria, and had killed more lions before he had a hair on his face than any man who was styled in the Press “a famous hunter,” remarked in his placid way to the Rat, after he had seen to his saddle girths:

“Dis goin’ ter be one tam beeg ride, Rat. Eef we was goin’ two by two, I weesh you was goin’ mit me, *ja*, but you no goot in der open. Me, I was slim. B’raps I fool dose *schelms* de Arabs, b’raps dey get me; dey slim, dey know de open fight.”

“Dang ’em an’ their fightin’. Hi hain’t a hinfant at a scrap.”

“No,” nodded Dutch Alec, “you all right at der scrap, Rat; eet is de ridin’ straight by instinct dot drouble you. Dot feller, McGlusky, he got a gompas in his brain; he ride night or day like de crow fly, an’ he ride, an’ dodge, an’ turn back, an’ ride on again, an’ criss-cross, an’ run in a circle, an’ never lose his bearin’s. Only one man haf I see like him—Christian de Wet, the Boer.”

“Well, Hi’m no good at that gime, an’ Hi’m styin’ ’ome ter mind th’ bybies.”

Dutch Alec drew something from the inside of his shirt; it looked like a wallet. Holding it out to the Rat with a grin, he said:

“Rat, you one tam tief; you prig der door knocker off a church eef you wanted

it, eh?"

"Prig th' church hif Hi wanted hit bad. Wot abart it, Dutchy?"

"You know my girl back at der base, Rat?"

"Yes; not 'arf a bad little bit ov skirt, honly she's pigeon-toed w'en she darnces, but Hi'd raver 'ave 'em pigeon-toed than knock-kneed—knock-kneed ones cramps yer style w'en y're waltzin'."

"Giff her dis wallet eef you get through, an' I get a hole in de ground, Rat."

"Thort you said Hi was a thief?"

"So you are. *Ja*, you prig der studs out of de shirt of de death angel when he comes for you, *ja*, but you not steal my leedle girl's wallet."

"Right ho," exclaimed the Rat, holding out his hand for the Dutchman's little bit of treasure. "Hif Hi gets through she gets this. So-long, an' bloomin' good luck to yer, if yer are a square-'ead."

That was the kind of poetry the scallywags talked as they prepared to ride forth to die. "Sainted muvvers" and sob stuff never does figure very largely in the real lives of men who throw dice with the devil for a slice of luck in this rough-edged old world.

McGlusky had slipped out of camp as soon as night set in; his legs were across the C.O.'s own favourite Arab mare, for the C.O. was pinning his faith to the big plain-speaking nomadic fellow, whose countless deeds of skill and daring had hypnotized the Legion. He was strangely armed for a cavalryman, for besides his sword and pistols he carried slung over his back a legionary's rifle, and his cartridges were many. Mac knew the value of a rifle in the hands of a big game hunter such as he had been; in a ride for life, against many foes, he counted on that rifle stopping many an eager rush by Arab posses on the day that was to dawn. When he had got only a little way outside the Legion's lines, he half-fancied he heard something that seemed to be following him, but the sound died away; again and again he had the same presentiment as the night wore on, but detected nothing. With almost uncanny skill he sensed and avoided danger, now riding at speed, now slowing down to almost a walk, swerving away to the right here, buckling to the left farther on, his eyes, ears, every sense keyed high, for he was riding to save the Legion and all that the Legion stood for. No Red Indian scout ever wormed his way through enemy positions with greater skill and daring, mixed with caution, than did McGlusky that night. A score of times he was on the edge of disaster, and only his cool head and chilled steel nerve saved him. More than once he drew the Arab mare suddenly to her haunches, and, slipping out of saddle, he wound his arms around the mare's muzzle, to keep her from whinnying, whilst groups of Arabs crossed in front of him,

bent on foraging duty or scouting. It was just as he had passed through such an ordeal and was about to climb into saddle again, that he felt the mare start and quiver, and saw her swing her head round. Before he could take his foot from stirrup, the mare whinnied, and the next second came from close behind an unmistakable nicker.

“Eet’s a mon ridin’ a stallion,” muttered Mac. “Eef there’s na mair than yin, he’ll be chasin’ rabbits in th’ parks o’ Paradise in aboot ten secon’s frae noo, instead o’ trailin’ a Legionary scout, th’ lop-eared blastie.”

With magical quickness he made up his mind on his plan of action. Deftly he halted his mare, by simply lifting her off foreleg and dropping it in the loop of his reins; this would hold her, and yet give him a chance to get away quickly when the coming encounter was over. Slipping back a few yards on his own trail, he crouched, for the horseman was almost upon him. The animal the night-prowler was riding shied slightly as it cantered up to the spot where Mac was bent double, like a panther about to spring; he had counted on the animal doing this, for he was half-horse himself, through a lifetime amongst the equine tribe. He could just make out the form of a rider lying well over his mount’s neck. McGlusk, feeling his life and his mission depended upon the success of his efforts, leapt for the horse’s back; his hands grasped the rear of the saddle, and his leg swung over; the next moment the rider, though taken absolutely by surprise, half-turned, and Mac felt a knife point stab into his face.

“Wad ye, ye hell spawn?”

As he spoke, both his arms went round the rider’s body; the stallion reared and plunged. The body Mac had seized in ruthless strength was so small and slender that half Mac’s mighty hug was wasted, but there was enough power in what he did get home to wring a low wailing cry from his prisoner.

“Oh, Mc-G-I-u-sky!”

So astounded was the big legionary that he let both arms fall from the slim boyish figure, and then he set about the task of mastering the frightened stallion; this in his iron hands was soon accomplished, and then Mac, feeling as savage as a wounded bear, slid to the ground and, taking the slender little figure of his captive in his arms, swung the light weight like a bundle of thistledown to earth.

“Wha’ in th’ name o’ a red rabbit are ye daein’ here?”

“I—I followed you from camp.”

“Hoo did ye follow ma in th’ dark, an’ me no ken eet?”

There was a strong note of chagrin in the big fellow’s voice, for the ability of anyone to follow him reflected upon his skill and craft.

"I knew you were going to ride the C.O.'s mare."

"Weel?"

"I looted d'Alençon's desert stallion; it was bred wild, and a wild desert stallion will follow a mare by scent, as a dog will follow a jackal. I got close when you started, and let the stallion get the scent of the mare; then I pulled back, for fear you should hear me and send me back. You can't now; the Arabs would get me if you did."

There was almost a note of triumph in the voice of the *vivandière*. Mac swore, low-toned, but in bitter earnest.

"A kened A'd find livin' whuskers on a wooden god before A'd find sense in a wumman. Why are ye here?"

"I wanted—to be with you."

The young voice faltered.

"Th' mon who said a jack rabbit in love were th' maddest theeng on earth were a leear, or he didna ken wummin. But," he added, "y're here, an' eet's goin' tae cost both o' us oor lives, an' spoil ma plans tae save th' Legion. Dom ye, A cud maist strangle ye fir that."

With a low, bitter cry the girl thrust her face close, and grasping the man's big hands, she pressed them to her soft, full throat.

"Strangle me—strangle me, but—kiss me first."

The big hands she held suddenly went weak.

"A'd kiss ye," he growled hoarsely, "eef ye were p-u-re."

Swift as lightning from a cloud came the riposte from her lips:

"Are *you* pure?"

Mac gasped. He had been hit between the joints of his harness.

"Na, by heck, A'm no, an' never hae A been since A became a world wan'erer, but a man an' a wumman are different."

"We're not. You are the givers, we are the receivers; all else is equal. Kiss me, kiss me once."

"A wull, in th' sacred name o' justice, fir ye hae stated a great truth, in th' name o' justice, no in love, fir ma bluid will no be wumman-warm again."

He was so sure of himself, this egoistic giant, and yet he had forgotten all about his peril, all about his mission. He bent from his towering height, and, winding his arms round her, crushed her slowly against his heart, and the cold steel-blue stars above, that had seen so much of human weakness, winked as they moved in their courses. He was hurting the girl, though he did not know it; she did, but she did not heed; the harder he squeezed her, the closer she clung; her arms around his neck

drew his big leonine face down to hers, and her lips found his, and in that moment all the world stood still for McGlusky, so eagerly, so fiercely did his lips crush home to hers; he almost drew the life out of her, and in her heart a little laugh was bubbling. "If," she wondered, "this is a kiss of justice, what will his love kisses be like?" And the stars winked at each other again as they read the woman's thought, for well the all-wise stars know that far back in the ages women had ruled this earth planet, and men had only been something handy to have about the place, and the stars know that the wheel of time is fast revolving to bring about the old-time state of things, when families will merge into communities and communities into nations, with the male merely a secondary force in the scale of things, a luxury or a necessity, to be used and turned out to grass again. McGlusky, who had boasted his blood would never again burn to the lure of woman, was bent like a willow bough to the will of a wee lassie, a giant meshed in a net finer than a spider's silver threads, stronger than steel.

After the first rush of feeling was over, memory awoke in McGlusky. He shivered as if a cold blast had blown through him; how many had held this child-woman in their arms, like he was holding her. At the thought, his teeth came together and grated as they had often grated when the steel had bit him. He pushed her clinging form away and held her at arm's length, and she, being woman-wise, knew the thoughts that stirred him.

"A dinna ken whether A love or—or hate ye."

"Why?"

"Ye threw me ower an—" he choked like a man whose throat is filled with the hot sand dust that the feet of men and horses stir up in battle under a burning sun. "Ye threw me ower like a daug that has grown useless."

The girl laughed bitterly.

"Why say these things, we who are about to die? But you speak no truth. I did not throw you away; when you made me a *vivandière* you put me into temptation."

"The Gods fergie ma, but tha' ees true. A thocht ye had strength o' soul an' ye had nane. Ye gied yersel' tae th' richest o' th' officers, hell hae them a'!"

"Yet you will ride to-night to save them," mocked the young voice.

"A ride tae save th' Legion, tae be true tae th' flag A serve unner. A'm Jamie McGlusky."

"You lie about those others."

"Wha's tha', wumman. Death is a' around us, dinna soil yer soul by shamin' th' truth noo."

"Death!" There was a world of scorn in the girlish voice. "Did I fear death when

I rode to follow you? They said in camp you were going out to die, nothing could save you, and I pictured you lying wounded, helpless, alone, waiting for death, and I came to be near you.”

“Why?”

“Because you are the man I love, have always loved!”

“God!” The word came from McGlusky’s soul in a gasp, then: “Wha’ air wummin made o’? Even wi’ enemies a’ aroun’ us ye daur tae trick ma, tae fool ma, tae lie tae ma.” Then Jamie McGlusky got what had so long been coming to him, got it from the sweetest lips on earth, the lips of a girl.

“You judge me by yourself,” she answered, “as you have been all your life, so you judge me to be. Women have smiled at you and caressed you, and you have gone to them gladly, you who boast of your strength! You have been a weakling, a poor plaything, a toy thing for a woman to wipe her mouth upon—you.”

In that moment the gods must have drawn a circle in the sand around McGlusky and the girl, perhaps in order that the man might get the wages he had earned by his doubting, by the evil thoughts of his heart. Arab posses rode past like dim shadows and did not see the pair in the hollow in the undulating plains. The gods must indeed have pulled the wool over the Arab eyes.

“Their weere many officers who mad’ love tae ye,” said McGlusky thickly.

“All of them!” snapped the girl. “All of them, old and young, and I played one against the other. Their numbers meant my safety. I was alone amongst a wolf pack of men. I played the officers against the *sous-officiers*, and the *sous-officiers* against the privates, and not one of them ever——”

“Wha’ aboot d’ Alençon!” burst in McGlusky. “A stood outside his tent.”

“I know you did, you and the Rat. I saw you both before I went to d’ Alençon.”

“For why did ye gang tae tha’ deil’s tent tha’ nicht?”

“You had been brutal to me before your comrades and d’ Alençon had dared me to come to his tent, so I went.”

“Well, A ken ye went, there was a light in the tent an’ A saw your shadow on the canvas, yours and his. A saw him fon’le ye, kiss ye!”

“You refused my kisses.”

“I saw him holdin’ ye tae his heart, and then A saw th’ licht go out in th’ tent an _____”

“Yes, and when the light went out in the tent my pistol, the one you gave me, was in my hand, and its muzzle was pressed into d’ Alençon’s side and my finger was on the trigger, and so he let me go. It has been like that before with more than one officer and more than one Legionary.”

As McGlusky listened he knew the truth was being told him, and a great shame of self fell upon him, but he had one more question to ask, and he asked it.

“For why did ye no come tae ma tae be ma love, as ye swore ye wad th’ day A saved ye frae th’ Arabs?”

“You fool!” The words were flung in his teeth mercilessly. “You fool! I was playing for your life. If I had come to you, how long would you have been alive? You would have been put in the forefront of every battle until death found you, for of all those who wanted me the C.O. was the most to be feared. You—dear—fool.”

Two arms went round the girl, arms that were trembling in spite of their strength, and so she was held, her cheek upon his chest, his face buried in her hair. They did not talk. They just stood there, spirit melting into spirit, soul into soul, a perfect dual personality, and the stars watched o’er a happy maid and a man whose self-righteousness was humbled into the dust.

The dawn found the pair in the saddle, and the most desperate ride that was ever ridden began. Again and again the stallion, with the girl’s light weight in the saddle, could have fled to safety by sheer speed, but the *vivandière* held him back.

“Ride fir Dai Mogul, an’ carry th’ news tae th’ garrison there,” Mac exhorted her time after time, but she looked back at him and laughed.

“No—no—no, to-night you kiss—kiss an’ kiss me in Dai Mogul, or the desert things sharpen their teeth on us both.”

The day was far spent when they reached a low range of hills, beyond which lay Dai Mogul. Their horses were spent, stumbling as they moved wearily. Behind them came a dozen Bedouins, travelling fast on fresh horses.

“A’m haltin’ here, ma wumman; ride on an’ gie a cry tae yonner garrison.”

The girl threw him a laugh, and slid from saddle. Taking his horse by its bridle, she led it with her own behind the hill, whilst he, now that the danger was right upon them, grew cooler and cooler; his movements were so measured, a looker-on might have thought him slow, but he was not. He soon built himself a low “change” of loose stone; lying behind this, he sighted carefully and touched his trigger. A Bedouin, coming at a flying gallop, lurched over his horse’s shoulder, and pitched like a bundle of last week’s washing on to the sand.

“Yin,” muttered Mac. “Earth’s na poorer, heaven’s na reecher, but hell’s gettin’ a wee bittie mair populated.”

He fired again, and this time the man he aimed at slid out of saddle, and hung dangling by one foot from his stirrup.

“Eet’s no pleasant fir ye, ma frien’, but A’m no theenkin’ y’re feelin’ eet; ye got eet in th’ wame.”

He was now McGlusky, the world-famous big game shot, and he wasted no shells.

The Bedouins were now not only crouching low, but were clinging more on their horses' flanks than on their backs.

"A hate tae dae eet, but—" Bang—a horse stumbled and went to earth on knees and muzzle; a moment later another horse paused, half-reared, and went over on its flank, crushing its rider beneath its body.

That was enough for the Bedouins; the heart for the game was all out of them; the remnant veered away as sea-gulls veer, and rode to put as much distance as they could between themselves and this deadly marksman, whom they had hoped to make an easy prey.

An hour later Mac and the *vivandière* rode into Dai Mogul, side by side, upon horses that could not raise a trot. A swift word from Mac to a sun-baked veteran officer, a sharp snapping command, a ringing of bugles, and a swift scurrying of men and guns, and the big garrison of Dai Mogul was preparing for a ride to the rescue of the Legion.

"You're half-dead, but you'll have to guide us back to your comrades," came crisply from the commander to Mac.

"Ha'f dead, ma? Na. Ma horse is, but a wee bittie food an' drink or twa, an' a fresh horse, an' A'll be wi' ye. Ma name's McGlusky."

The officer smiled, and saluted the iron man in front of him.

"Bravo, *La Légion*," he said. "You are the men who never fail."

They hosed McGlusky down, as if he were a horse, and he came out of it sparkling and fresh; he was of the old Anzac stock. Then a couple of kindly fellows caught hold of the boyish-looking *vivandière*, volunteering to undress "him" (?) for a bath.

"Han's off, ye deils," yelled McGlusky, charging down upon them. "Han's off ma wu-m-m-an or A'll skelp ye."

The soldiers fled laughing; the girl stood blushing with the front of her tunic torn open and her sex revealed.

"Oh!" she almost sobbed as Mac helped her adjust her tunic. "To-night we ride to the rescue so you cannot kees me as we promised out in the desert, but when we save *La Légion*, ah, *mon Dieu*, then you shall kees me, kees me, my m-a-n."

And all that the grim soldier of fortune could say as he towered above her like a lion, eating her with love-hungry eyes, was—"Ma wu-m-a-n."

Scarcely had McGlusky claimed his woman in his own impetuous full-blooded fashion ere the bugle rang out the "boot and saddle," an order dear to every real

soldier's heart, and the relief force was soon upon its way, with Mac acting as guide and the *vivandière* riding not far from his bridle hand. The expedition travelled fast, but not too fast. A very wise veteran officer was in command, one who knew the ways of the desert nomads too well to run his horses off their feet whilst there was a chance of severe fighting in the near future.

In the camp that was made when night fell, the strictest discipline obtained, for surprise packets were quite on the cards. The only two who had real liberty of action were McGlusky and the half-Welsh, half-Moorish girl.

"You have earned a free leg, you two," the veteran leader had exclaimed jocosely with a broad wink at Mac, which, so far from pleasing the fiery-tempered Anzac, seemed to raise his ire, and as he feared neither the devil nor a commanding officer, he ventilated his temper for the fool believed in women in spite of all the experience he had the world over, but this much must be said in his defence, this was his first experience of Welsh blood in feminine guise. So he rose on his toes and said in his most truculent fashion:

"*Monsieur* mistakes masel an' th' lassie. A need na mair freedom o' action than a man needs who has done his duty by his comrades. As fir th' lassie, she is pure as th' dawn, she wad trust ma anywheer unner any circumstances; I hae her ain word fir it, an' she'll hae nae cause ta rue her trust."

"She's a woman," smiled the veteran, "and being a woman she would say those things simply because they are pretty things to say, no matter if she believed them or not."

The officer, who had some knowledge of the sex, smiled behind his hand as Mac, full to the brim of his big heart, turned and walked away.

It was a glorious night, the skies were velvet black, countless myriads of stars shone down like white diamonds, and it seemed to Mac that all the beauty of the sentinel stars were reflected in his sweetheart's eyes.

"Gad," he growled once, "how A love ye."

He had been holding the little slender figure in the circle of his iron arms, his lips had been draining hers, and she, nothing loath, had clung to him, her lips pulsing to his own, her small body almost weaving into his, for in her abandonment she could, when it suited her, outvie even the harem women of the Arabs in passionate movement, and she drove McGlusky mad, but he believed in her goodness and curbed the devil within him, for he thought she had a big brave soul, a soul above mercenary motives or gross desires; to him she was just an untrammelled child of nature, and he would have sold his soul for her.

He did not sleep much that night when she had left him; he lay awake long hours,

planning a future for her and for himself, and she was the pivot of all his thoughts, but she slept cosily enough wrapped up in her soldier's blanket, slept like a cat that has found its reincarnate self in a little slim woman's body.

On the last night of the march, when the relief force was well-nigh at its goal, Mac and the girl walked apart from the troops. His arm was around her miniature waist in a hug like a steel band, yet hugged he never so tightly but she seemed to want to grow closer to him, as if to make of them twain a dual personality. The caressings she showered upon him in their pausings fitted in with the mystical beauty of the sensuous Eastern night, and he could only gasp: "Ma wumman, ma wumman, A wad melt ma body in hell tae gie ye soap tae wash yr dainty feet."

The time for their nightly parting drew near. She put her lips to his to make him as potter's clay, this big, hard, strong man whom the bitter, brave Anzacs who had bled at Gallipoli had styled "the gamest man in Europe," and he answered her lure.

"My big, handsome lover," she whispered, "it is true you will marry me. Ah, I cannot believe that—no, it is too good to be true."

"A'll wed ye, an' guard ye, an' when A'm free o' the Legion A'll work fir ye. A ken a place in 'Frisco wheer men know ma, an' A'll gang theer an' strive fir wealth fir ye, an' A'm na weaklin'."

She put one little hand up over his mouth—it seemed a little hand to him, though had he known it, it was big enough and greedy enough to have squeezed his game heart dry of its life blood for money.

"Don't talk to me of having to work for wealth at 'Frisco, I know better." She chuckled as she spoke, adding: "Oh yes, I know. The Rat told me on that night before you left the main camp on this mad ride."

"Wha' did th' Rat tell ye?"

She snuggled closer to him, purring. "The Rat told me you had gold and silver mines in your native Anzac land; he said you were a prince there in riches, and only came here because you loved the danger. It is so, is it not, my warrior?"

"The Rat's a leear. A've na gold or siller mines the noo. Yince, long ago, A had baith, noo A've naething but th' uniform A stand up in. Damn the Rat, th' blastie is aye bletherin'."

The lips McGlusky kissed in parting were strangely cold and pulseless. Gone was the Moorish fire, only the Welsh cunning remained to back up the mean little spirit.

She rode bravely into the main camp next day by his side, and saucily she flung kisses both to officers and men as the rescued Legionaries crowded round, rending the air with their cheers. And McGlusky, proud of himself, as he had a right to be,

was prouder of her—his wumman, who had burnt his lips with her lips, sowing seeds that were to destroy the bigness of his soul.

At noon the following day the C.O., in the presence of all the troops, placed upon McGlusky's shoulder the epaulets that proclaimed him a commissioned officer of the Foreign *Légion d'Afrique*, and the whole of Africa did not seem big enough to Mac to hold his pride. He was standing half an hour after his promotion talking to the Rat, Fritzel, and a few of his dearest and closest comrades a couple of hundred yards behind the lines, not far from a little forest of cactus trees, for veritable trees they are in that part of Africa, big, fleshy-leaved, hideous things that have little to recommend them. They were all proud of him, those fine fighters, and none of them envied him the success he had won; it is only the curs of both sexes who speak slightly of the fine deeds that stout-hearted men do. Suddenly a figure emerged from a sort of pathway in the cactus jungle, a figure with a marred face.

"Bless my anointed 'eart hif it hain't our dear ole friend the Goat comin' to congratulate you, McGlusky."

The Rat was right, it was the Goat, and his ever evil face wore a grin that made it look satanic.

Straight to McGlusky the fellow came, and touching the big man on the arm he said: "*Oui, monsieur*, you are happy to-day, but follow me, only a little way, and *monsieur's* measure of happiness shall be filled to the brim. *Monsieur* has been lucky in war, let me show him how happy he is in love."

"Tak' it away, eet mak's ma sick in ma wame," said the big man with a gesture of disgust.

"Ha, ha, ha! ho, ho, ho!" chuckled the Goat. "*Monsieur* is afraid. Perhaps *monsieur* knows already and is willing to be a—a pimp."

Mac spat at the creature. "Eef ye weere a mon an' no a maimed creature," he growled, "A wad put th' heels o' yr boots in yr ears an' pull 'em out through yr nose, feet an' a'."

Again the Goat chuckled in a semi-hellish, elfin way. "Come!" That was all he said, and walked towards the path through the cactus jungle he had come by.

Frowning heavily, Mac followed this animal of ill omen, and the rest followed Mac. Suddenly the Goat paused and put one finger on his maimed lips to indicate silence. The rest halted, and the Goat, with a grin that had Satan in excelsis beaten to a frazzle, pointed across a barrier of foliage to a little open glade surrounded on all sides by the leafy screen. Mac and his followers looked, and to their amazement saw, standing at ease smoking a small rank cigar, the well-known face and figure of the Falcon.

“Wha’ in th’ name o’ Gehenna is he daein’ here,” murmured Mac.

The Goat heard the remark, and doubled up with silent laughter, his hands upon his knees, his sinewy body writhing.

“A’ll kick ye in th’ wame an’ send yin half o’ ye towards th’ dawn an’ yin half tae th’ gates o’ darkness eef ye dinna stop yr hell antics,” growled Mac, swinging a leg, which, however, dropped motionless as a figure emerged from a wild animal trail on the far side of the little clearing, and ran trippingly with arms outstretched towards the Falcon.

“He, he, he, he, ho! *Your* woman,” gurgled the Goat.

Mac took the nape of the fellow’s neck in one of his big hands. “Mak’ anither sound an’ A’ll push yr head doon between yr knees an’ pull it up atween th’ back o’ yr blade bones, ye hyena,” he snarled.

The Goat was only about half witted, but the half that was working bade him keep silence.

Mac looked again over the hedge. The *vivandière* his wumman, was clasped close in the embrace of the Falcon, her lips were clinging to his, her lean little body seemed to writhe into that of the smart, soldierly man to whom her arms clung.

Mac gasped. “Ma certie,” he whispered. “A’m haein’ a daylight nightmare; eet canna be real. Na wumman, even eef she had th’ brath o’ hell in her veins, could be sae false.”

Then the Falcon began to speak. “It is true you love me a little bit, I am a tiny bit in your heart, eh, my wee white flower?”

“You always have been, always from the first,” she lied.

The man went mad, as men do when women lie to them like that; he almost broke her in twain. Then sanity came for a minute.

“What of McGlusky?” he demanded. “Is he nothing to you?”

“H-i-m! pouff! The big fool man, I did but use him to camouflage my other meetings with you, to throw dust in the eyes of those others; it is you, you who have my heart, my soul, my—all.”

“Wake ma up, some yin,” whispered Mac. “A’m hearin’ again almost th’ varry words she whispered in ma lug last nicht when she thought A weere a mon o’ wealth, an’ no a poor deil oot o’ luck.”

The Falcon held the heartless little jade away from him by placing his hands upon her shoulders. “I love you,” he said, “I want you. I am leaving the Legion, my time of service is over. I am rich, I will take you to Paris, to Vienna, to all the gay cities of the world; you shall have horses, and cars, and jewels, and dresses fit for a princess to wear—you, my wom-a-n.”

She broke his restraining hands away and clung to him, eating him with lips and eyes, and cooing to him in words that made the Rat whisper:

“Call me a pink camelia an’ a bunch o’ wiolets thrown in hif she ain’t a hartist.”

For a moment McGlusky’s face grew very terrible, his hand dropped to his hilt and the blade came half out of its scabbard, then suddenly his whole demeanour changed, the scales seemed to drop from his eyes, he saw the woman as she was, and realized how little he had lost in losing her. The saving grace of sardonic humour that was in him bubbled to the surface, his keen eyes twinkled, and he bubbled with mirth. Then he let forth a bellow of laughter, his sword went back in its scabbard with a clash, and he strode out into the open, followed by his henchmen. The tears of genuine mirth trickled down his cheeks, his swash-buckling gait made him swagger even whilst the laughter shook his lean flanks. Flinging out his sword arm recklessly he cried:

“Tak’ th’ wumman, tak’ her, Falcon, an’ gran’ luck may ye hae o’ her, eef ye dinna gain mair than A hae lost th’ deil hae gied ye a blind man’s bargain.”

Then with a rollicking salute and another Homeric peal of mirth, he wheeled and left them wondering.

THE END

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TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been fixed.

Inconsistency in hyphenation has been retained.

[The end of *McGlusky o' the Legion* by A. G. (Alfred Greenwood) Hales]