

The Road
to
Bagdad

George Fort Gibbs
1938

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Title: The Road to Bagdad

Date of first publication: 1938

Author: George Fort Gibbs (1870-1942)

Date first posted: May 20, 2014

Date last updated: May 20, 2014

Faded Page eBook #20140529

This ebook was produced by: Alex White & the online Distributed Proofreaders Canada team at <http://www.pgdpCanada.net>

THE ROAD TO BAGDAD

By *GEORGE GIBBS*

THE VANISHING
IDOL

THE YELLOW
DIAMOND

OUT OF THE DARK
HONOR AMONG
WOMEN

FOUL WEATHER
OLD PHILADELPHIA

The Loyal Rebel (The
1770's)

Supercargo (The
1790's)

Autumn (The 1830's)
North Star (The
1850's)

THE FIRE WITHIN

MAD MARRIAGE

THE LOVE OF
MONSIEUR

HOW TO STAY
MARRIED

THE HOUSE OF
MOHUN

YOUTH

TRIUMPHANT

FIRES OF AMBITION

THE GOLDEN BOUGH

THE YELLOW DOVE

THE UP-GRADE
PIKE AND CUTLASS

MADCAP

TONY'S WIFE

THE BLACK STONE

THE BOLTED DOOR

PARADISE GARDEN
THE SILENT BATTLE

THE FLAMING
SWORD

THE FORBIDDEN
WAY

THE SECRET
WITNESS

THE MEDUSA
EMERALD

THE FLAME OF
COURAGE

THE SPLENDID
OUTCAST

THE SHORES OF
ROMANCE

THE CASTLE ROCK MYSTERY

SACKCLOTH AND SCARLET

THE LOVE OF MADEMOISELLE

THE MAKER OF OPPORTUNITIES
ANYTHING CAN HAPPEN
HUNTED
THE ROAD TO BAGDAD
AMERICAN SEA FIGHTS
IN SEARCH OF MADEMOISELLE
THE VAGRANT DUKE
THE JOYOUS CONSPIRATOR
THE ISLE OF ILLUSION

THE ROAD TO BAGDAD

by

GEORGE GIBBS

D. APPLETON-CENTURY COMPANY

Incorporated

NEW YORK 1938 LONDON

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PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

THE ROAD TO BAGDAD

CHAPTER I

· 1 ·

Captain Simpson's "Get Together" dinner the second night out was to answer many questions on board the *Orizaba*. For the number of travelers on the ship was small and, before the dinner was half over and the wine half drunk, confetti and paper caps made each person look as much of a fool as the next one and accomplished their purpose, turning a lot of offish and more or less sophisticated passengers into a select company of good fellows ready to mellow into friendship.

Amid a bedlam of whistles, tin horns, and toy drums, Camilla Dean struck a man at the Captain's table squarely in the back of the head with a yellow balloon and he responded by draping her with strings of colored paper. Names were exchanged, and cigarettes, and she found that he called himself Joseph Asad and that he was going to Syria, after a business trip to the United States. His manners and his English, she found, were excellent. He would do, she thought, to while away the voyage, provided Michael Gay, the American engineer who looked very stalwart, or the fellow they called Slim McManus, who looked very amusing, didn't pan out.

Every night after that there were cards and dancing and almost every night Joseph Asad and Camilla went out on deck to enjoy the pale wintry moon. He told her of his boyhood in Damascus, of his two years in a British university which he detested. More than anything he loved Syria, his native land, where his father was an important man. He had lived a great deal in the desert and knew the Middle East, apparently, as she knew the palm of her hand. He talked very well but was reticent about the problems of the Orient in which Camilla had recently become interested.

"Of course you must know all about the situation in Palestine," she suggested.

It was as though she had immediately chosen a subject taboo for he seemed to grow compact for a long moment, only watching the weaving wake of the moonlight on the water.

"What do you want me to tell you?"

"Just what the Arabs are going to do. Every day there are accounts of terrorism, rioting, shooting, bloodshed—"

"How should I know?"

"There's only one end to that sort of thing."

He had put on a sudden reserve again and would not make a further comment.

"I'm so disappointed in you," she said. "You have an air of knowing so much and you say so little." She glanced at him keenly. "You are very much less stupid

than you want me to think you are.”

It was not indeed a night for the discussion of politics between two persons, one of whom was a young woman, adventurous and romantic, and the other a young man, silent and mysterious. And the sudden appearance of Mrs. Kitty Trimble sweeping like a gale down the gangway with Michael Gay, Slim McManus, Nicholas Stephanov, and the Italian, Torelli, made a diversion which broke the spell.

Kitty Trimble was blondish, florid, with a slenderness that bulged here and there. She had been twice divorced and was looking for Number Three.

“Just down from the wireless room,” she announced. “More ships sunk on the coast of Spain—just where we’re going—”

“And so what?”

“And there’s a piratical sub nosing around the Balearics,” Slim drawled. “Won’t wear any colors. I hope the British get it—”

“Okay by me,” said Michael Gay.

“Too much to hope for—”

“And then in Palestine,” Gay added, “the ship’s bulletin to-morrow A. M. will report that Arab terrorists have shot and killed two British officials, one a commissioner.”

“You mustn’t believe all you read, my friend,” Torelli said. “They might have just been brigands.”

Kitty Trimble, Stephanov, and Slim moved away for a turn around the deck. Michael Gay and Torelli remained to break up the tête-à-tête.

Gay was bound for Beirut, bringing in the hold of the *Orizaba* a large bus of his own design which was to establish a new line of rapid communication across the desert between Damascus and Bagdad. It was to be a kind of trial trip but Gay, who was to drive, had so much confidence in his own machine that he had invited some of the passengers to take the journey with him.

“You know, I’ll be counting on you, Camilla. Straight across the Syrian desert.”

“Isn’t it rather risky in times like these?” Torelli’s soft voice ventured.

“I’d like a good crowd from the ship,” Gay went on. “I want my trial trip under full service conditions. Good advertising. I’ve talked to the tour director. I’m hoping his company will put it on the regular itinerary.”

“I see,” Asad laughed. “You want them all to see how the poor benighted heathen live.”

Torelli smoked in silence, his gaze on Camilla.

“It is a considerable danger if you take these lovely ladies as passengers,” he said. “Wouldn’t it be a mistake to run the risk of getting the United States mixed up

in Near Eastern affairs?”

“That’s up to the lovely ladies,” laughed Camilla.

“You add courage to your other charms, Miss Dean.”

· 2 ·

The idea of this trip to the City of the Arabian Nights had taken hold of the imagination of at least six of the tourists. Camilla Dean and her cousin Josephine Holloway, Kitty Trimble and Janet Priestly, a little school-teacher from Vincennes, Indiana, who had never been out of her own country and had now determined to drink deep of life while the drinking was good. Slim McManus thought it was right down his alley, as he was on his way to Basra and could fly to his destination in a few hours.

Slim amused Camilla a great deal. He was six feet four in height and when the seas were rough steadied himself by holding on to the ceiling beams of the saloon. He was always ready for a laugh or a quarrel. He seemed to take the troubles in the Near East lightly, as if they were of less consequence than a minor strike at the oil-wells. There was a fellowship between Michael and Slim based on their common love of adventure in strange lands. Michael Gay had worked on dams and irrigation projects in rough countries and Slim had been everything from a telegraph lineman to boss of a construction gang. He liked fighting immensely and was irked by the peace of the Atlantic crossing. He had fallen hard for Camilla and didn’t much care for Torelli who used the dark tones of his voice and the darker glances of his eyes when talking to the girl.

So when Camilla reported a conversation that she had overheard the night before, Slim was ready to believe the worst of any man he didn’t like. Three men had sat in deck chairs just outside the French windows of Camilla’s stateroom, she said, and conversed in lowered tones. Camilla, her light out, happened to be awake, and listened. She did not recognize the voices of the men, for they spoke in eager whispers, but they were so close to her window that she could hear distinctly what they said. Their talk concerned the escape of Osman Khali, the nominal leader of the Arabs in Palestine, from the Dome of the Rock where the British had placed him under guard. She heard a hoarse whisper denounce the British for the partition of Palestine which favored the Jews, and the other voices spoke of the destruction of the British Mandate in Palestine and Egypt.

“If Barker could only be gotten out of the way,” she heard one man say.

“Ah, yes. That is easy to say. But how—where?”

“Here on this ship,” the other voice replied. *“He comes aboard at Marseilles. He must be put out of the way before we reach Alexandria.”*

Then, Camilla said, people passed along the gangway, the conversation ceased, and the three men, as though suddenly aware of the open window, moved away and were heard no more.

What did it all mean? Camilla didn’t know, nor did Slim. Who was Barker? British, of course . . .

“Dirty doings at the cross-roads,” Slim said, wagging his head. “Barker is a big shot out here. We’ll have to do something about this, Camilla.”

It was therefore with some curiosity that they watched their new traveling companion come up the gangway from the sheds at Marseilles followed by two porters with heavy English traveling-bags. Unaware of the attention he had caused, Mr. Barker went at once to Captain Simpson’s suite below the bridge where he remained until the dinner gong, appearing at last at the Captain’s table dressed for the evening.

Ronald Barker was perhaps an inch under six feet, well proportioned with a slenderness that seemed to have come from constant exercise and activity. This impression was further enhanced by the darkness of his skin, a ruddy brown of sun-tan too frequently renewed to bleach easily. He had a good profile, cheek-bones high and clean-cut. He had a British accent but the informal manner of an American. They found out later that he had been born in New York of an American mother and had gone to Oxford on a Rhodes Scholarship. He gave the impression of great capability and strength in repose. If this was the man Camilla’s unknown shipmates were conspiring against, he seemed well able to look out for himself.

As though aware of the question in Camilla’s mind, Captain Simpson brought the traveler over to the table Camilla shared with her cousin, Josephine Holloway, where Slim and Michael had brought their coffee-cups. Mr. Barker had an appropriate phrase and a ready smile and Michael Gay understood in a moment that he knew his way about the world, especially about Syria and Palestine, even better than Gay did.

He was interested in Gay’s projects but not enthusiastic in his approval of them.

“There isn’t much that goes on in Arabia that England hasn’t heard about,” he said. “This machine of yours may be marvelous but it seems to me the time is not right for such an experiment.”

Asked what he meant, Mr. Barker said that the affairs of Syria and Palestine were too unsettled for new ventures in transportation.

“That’s what I tell Camilla, Mr. Barker,” Josie put in, “but she wants to take this trip to Bagdad and to drag me along with her.”

“The real spirit of adventure,” Barker said with a glance of admiration at Camilla. “Any one can sit in a deck chair or ride a camel to the Pyramids, can’t he, Miss Dean?”

“Do you think there will be real trouble in Arabia?” she asked him.

“No one but Allah knows and Allah will not tell. But if I were to give you the impression that it would be unwise to go you would only become more determined. Is that not so?”

“Perhaps we American girls are only born to make trouble for ourselves—”

“And for others,” added Slim, with a conciliatory grin.

CHAPTER II

· 1 ·

Slim and Michael Gay sat in the bar smoking. Slim was talking.

“I wonder what has called Ronald Barker back into the East so suddenly. I read just before sailing from New York that he had been for two weeks in London at the Foreign Office.”

“Oh, just this mess in Palestine probably,” Gay put in.

“But the mess in Palestine has been a mess for a long while. Must be something else—some special job he’s been sent out to do. It seems as if it might hook up with what Camilla heard—”

“Do you think she could have dreamed all that or invented the whole thing just for the hell of it?”

“No, she’s not a mischief-maker. This Barker has a lot of enemies and a few of them seem to be aboard ship with us. How they got here, God knows, but our friend had better look sharp.”

“Don’t you think we’d better tell the Captain? If there’s anything in the yarn—”

“That’s Camilla’s lookout. She seems already to be on pretty good terms with the fellow. Here they come now. Good chance to do your good deed for the day, two good deeds, give him a drink and save his life.”

But Camilla and Barker, declining Slim’s invitation, passed through the bar and went out on deck.

“Let *her* save his life,” Michael growled.

“Yeah. And you can give me his highball.”

They watched the other two go out and stand for a moment at the rail of the outside café.

“I guess you and I aren’t mysterious enough for her mood to-day, Michael.”

“Only aboard two days and she leaves us high and—”

“Not dry, Michael, thank God. . . .”

The shores of France were a mere stretch of mist in the moonlight when Ronald Barker and Camilla went out on deck. Captain Simpson had paid tribute to the pirates of the Mediterranean by steering a northerly course on the way to Naples.

The conversation that Camilla had overheard had added to her curiosity about her traveling companion. What was the reason these men wanted him to die? Why was he going to the East and what was his mission that aroused such animosity? Slim had insisted that one of the men must be Asad, if it wasn’t Torelli, but Camilla

assured him that she would have recognized the voice of either of them. There were many other potential enemies of Ronald Barker, of course—the Egyptian, an Armenian, several Syrians engaged in commercial pursuits.

Camilla thought it wise to lose no time in telling Ronald Barker of her eavesdropping adventure. He listened gravely, making no comment until she had finished when all he said was one word, murmured, “Already?”

It was put in the form of a question to himself which showed that he was aware of enemies and was ready to anticipate them.

“Have you spoken to any one else of this conversation?” he asked her then.

“Slim McManus and Michael Gay,” she replied frankly. “I was just bursting to tell somebody but I’ve sworn them to secrecy. It seemed as though you ought to hear before any one else did.”

“Thanks. Please don’t speak of it again. I’m able to take care of myself.”

“But if anything happened to you Captain Simpson would never forgive me.”

“Nothing will happen,” Barker said easily. “I’m used to being disliked and I’ll be on my guard.”

“Well, you can’t blame me. I’ve done what I could to help.”

He smiled. “Has any one else been talking about me?”

“Yes, practically everybody. Don’t you know that being silent and mysterious is just another way of advertising yourself from the roof-tops?”

“Ah! That’s bad. You see, I had expected to get into Egypt without being noticed.”

“I’m afraid it’s too late now. The news of your travels must have reached the ship before you did.”

Barker lighted Camilla’s cigarette and his own and then, shrugging, gave a short laugh.

“Oh, well, I don’t think there’s much damage done. I’m accustomed to losing myself. In Cairo I shall disappear—vanish into the world.”

“I don’t think that would be very polite of you after I’ve taken the trouble to save your life. . . .”

“Oh, I didn’t mean that I shouldn’t see you again. I thought maybe I could turn up from time to time, like a jinni in a bottle, invisible to everybody but you.”

Camilla laughed. “Of course that’s very nice, I don’t mind gin in bottles if it’s good gin. Are you sure you’re a good jinni?”

“I’ll try very hard to be good,” he said.

“I’d feel much happier if you’d tell me what it’s all about.”

“Oh, yes, of course. You want to know why people want to get me out of the

way?”

“Don’t you owe me that?”

“There’s a saying in Arabic that what you whisper to one woman all the world will hear.”

“Other people seem to know all about you.”

“What else have you heard?”

“Oh, just gossip, I suppose. If people don’t know anything they’ll invent something. So they say that you’re a secret agent of the British Government.”

“What else?”

“That you pop up in unexpected places bearing a palm leaf in one hand and an automatic in the other.”

“I’m sure you’re drawing on your imagination.”

“I am. But I’m awfully good at it, don’t you think?”

“A perfect wizard. What else is there to tell you?”

“Oh, just details, just the gory details.”

Barker laughed like a man who had discovered a new pleasure.

“You’re a rare one. You’ve got the whole thing pat. What else?”

“I think that’s about all. But wouldn’t it be much better if you told me the whole truth so that I won’t have to invent things and get them all mixed up. Won’t you tell me about yourself?”

“There’s not much to tell, except that I was born in New York, won a Rhodes Scholarship, that I came East just out of Oxford to study Arabic and Eastern problems and that I’ve been mixed up in them ever since. My friends out here know what I want to do. I understand the Arabians, I’ve lived with them for many years. I know the Jews, too—I’ve been helping with their colonization plans—but each nation thinks I’m a partizan of the other so both suspect me. Both nations claim Palestine as their own. Both are right. The Jews have wandered over Asia Minor for five thousand years. The Arabs—”

“Yes?”

“Well, they were in charge when General Allenby marched in. Of course, you know, when the British came to keep order and run things, the Jews were very cocky. The immigration, especially from Germany, began. They bought land, they threw away the primitive farm implements of the Arabs, cultivated the farms with modern American machinery and turned a desert into the fabled land of milk and honey, raised good crops of grain and oranges which they sold to all the world at good profit. That was when the real trouble began. The Arabs tried to get their property back. The Jews naturally refused, since they had made it four times as

valuable as when they had bought it. Instead of the Jew it is now the Arab who is a man without a country.”

“You put it very clearly. And now the Big Brother separates them by a corridor all the way to the sea.”

“A corridor that has too many doors, Miss Dean. And the peacemaker is very likely to get the worst of it.”

“I imagine the Big Brother will be able to look out for himself.”

“Not without giving one, perhaps both, of his little Brothers a spanking.”

“I can’t imagine you sitting on the side-lines to cheer . . .”

To that he made no reply as his own thoughts were elsewhere.

“What I can’t understand,” he said in a moment, “is how people aboard the ship found out that I was expected. You see,” he went on more deliberately, “east of Suez I am not generally known as Ronald Barker, but as something quite different.”

He paused and she waited but he said nothing more for a while. Evidently he thought that he had gratified her curiosity enough.

“The name of Barker was the one they used,” she said experimentally.

“It’s quite extraordinary, because I left England at a few hours’ notice and flew direct to Marseilles just in time to catch the *Orizaba*.”

“Only a wireless from London could have preceded you,” she suggested. “Your enemies must have received a message before the ship reached Marseilles.”

“Excellent. I shall have to give you a letter to Scotland Yard, or better still, take you on as my assistant in this particular job.” He laughed.

“How thrilling! Will you?”

“At any rate you can help me find from the Purser the list of those who came aboard at Marseilles.”

“Or better yet see what messages came to the ship by wireless.”

“I’ll have to get permission about private wireless messages.”

“I’m sure I’d better go with you. You’re not fit to be aboard this ship alone.”

“Perhaps you’re right again,” he said with a grin.

The conversation with Mr. Disston, the Purser, who examined the list of passengers for them, revealed little. The people who had come aboard at Marseilles were a party of three American tourists, a Spanish Assyriologist bound for Beirut, and an Armenian rug dealer of Paris and Damascus. The latter, the Purser said, was an old man named Temoyan, utterly respectable, who traveled on the *Orizaba* back

and forth twice a year.

“We’ll have a talk with Monsieur Temoyan,” Barker said.

“Won’t you let me in on the secret if you find anything in the wireless room?”

He laughed. “I’ve always said that the only requirements for a good detective or secret-service operator were a devouring curiosity and a considerable amount of impudence.”

“Which do you think I have the most of?”

“It’s difficult to say. You meet a man, a perfect stranger to you, who happens to possess important secrets that might amuse you, and succeed in getting him to tell you, almost at once, his life history and purposes.”

“Now, of course, you’re making fun of me. If you think I’m impudent, all you have to do is to send me about my business.”

“I haven’t the slightest intention of doing anything of the sort. You see, I’m so used to the deceptions of diplomacy and the wiles of Eastern potentates that it’s quite delightful to meet some one who says just what comes into her mind.”

“Even though it’s just the idle inquisitiveness of an American tourist.”

Curiously enough, though half-American born, Ronald Barker had not been back to the United States since winning his Rhodes Scholarship and he had nearly forgotten the refreshing frankness of his American cousins. He had been too busy in England to do much more than attend a few stodgy dinners where he met only Englishwomen, most of them the wives or sisters of elderly diplomats, who were not in the least exciting in the sense that Camilla Dean was.

He wanted to be polite to her, for the sheer force of her magnetic interest had made him say a lot of things he had had no intention of saying about himself. She had been a great help to him, put him on his guard against men who were bent on mischief, and he was very grateful to her. What sort of a girl was the real Camilla Dean? How little was she to be trusted? And how much? She had already done him a service. If she was disposed to be friendly she might help him again. On his way down from the wireless room he decided to take her still further into his confidence.

And so, when he joined her again on deck, he brought out the wireless messages.

“The East has taught me fatalism, Camilla Dean. I’m almost willing to believe you’re Kismet for me.”

“That’s very flattering. You haven’t been in England so long that you’ve forgotten how to say nice things. But you look rather puzzled, like a bloodhound on a wrong scent. They *do* look puzzled, don’t they?”

“Not more than I am. It seems as though I’d gone into a blind alley. I wonder if

you'd care to look at these wireless codes I've picked out."

"Thrilled!"

"This one is to the Spanish Assyriologist José Serrano and bears the London mark." He handed her a typed message and she moved to the light of the smoking-room window.

Dog. Orizaba. Saguache.

Three words, that was all.

"Can't make a thing out of it," he said. "Can you?"

Camilla puzzled. "Rather clever, if it means anything. Have you any ideas?"

"None. It's too short unless it's in twisting the letters."

She squinted at it up and down and sideways.

"No good. Do you know who Serrano is?"

"Yes. He was pointed out to me by my steward. Small man, stubby brown beard and bald head—walks with a stick."

"And the other message?"

"It's in French."

"To whom was it addressed?"

"A man named Mohammed Ali. But the queer thing about it is that there is no such person as Mohammed Ali aboard the *Orizaba*."

"That's a swell idea. Didn't the wireless man know to whom it was delivered?"

"That's the second queer thing about it. He tried one or two people but he didn't succeed in delivering it. He showed it to me just because it was queer."

He handed the message to her and she read, "*Koran embrassez royale antique khorassan*. What on earth can that mean? I can't make head nor tail of it. I can understand the words but put together they don't make sense, unless. . . . but what has kissing a Royal Antique rug to do with it?"

"Plagued if I know."

"Did you read it backward? No, that doesn't make sense. The first letters? K-E-R-A-K. That spells Kerak. That doesn't mean a thing to me either. Kerak. What's Kerak? It might be Arabic."

He tried to keep the look of interest out of his eyes but she did not miss it.

"You've discovered something. What is it?"

"Nothing. Nothing at all."

She peered at him keenly. "Better tell me what it's all about or I'll begin guessing all over again."

"Don't. You might tell me things I don't want to know."

She waited but he would not speak again.

“You’re talking in riddles now.”

“Yes, I’m obliged to.”

“I wish I could help you.”

“I can’t ask any more of you.”

“If you’re in danger—”

“Not more than usual. When a man begins to think of his own safety he’s useless in this business.”

“Kerak,” she said again, frowning. “Kerak. It’s a name that sticks in your mind. Something I’ve read recently. I remember now—here on the ship an article about Syria in a magazine. In the ship’s library. *El Kerak!* I have it! A bandit who roams east and south of the Lebanon Mountains, terrorizing the natives. Isn’t it curious that the name of this bandit should appear in this code wireless on the *Orizaba?*”

“Yes, rather,” said Barker carelessly.

“Have you ever met El Kerak, Mr. Barker?”

“Can’t say I have.”

“But you’ve heard of him, of course.”

“Oh, yes.”

“This article said he was a kind of oriental Robin Hood, little better than a thief and an assassin, but with moments of great generosity.”

“Did it say that?”

“It’s curious,” she gasped. “Wait a moment!” And before he had time for a word in reply she had darted into the companionway.

In the corner of the saloon were the bookcases and magazines. In a few moments she had found what she had come for, a copy of the *Geographic Magazine* for the month of July of the previous year. An article by an American newspaper man. She skimmed the pages rapidly. Pictures of the Lebanon Mountains, views of Damascus, camps of Bedouins . . . and then—here it was—El Kerak, a photograph of the Syrian bandit at the flap of his tent; another one, a better one, a candid shot in the full blaze of sunlight as he was mounting his horse, possibly taken without his knowledge. He wore the conventional flowing white robes and kaffiyeh, a small mustache and an incipient beard. She gave a gasp of surprise and rose, aware that Barker had followed her from the deck outside and now stood beside her chair.

“Mr. Barker, I’ve made a discovery. Please look. Pictures of Ronald Barker in masquerade. Excellent pictures and the likeness unmistakable—”

He took the magazine from her hand, turned over the pages and then,

“Astonishing resemblance, isn’t it?” he said, almost too carelessly this time.

“Very. So astonishing that it has given me a new claim to your confidence.”

It was genteel blackmail but she was sure he could not evade her. He found it difficult to hide his discomfiture and looked more like a puzzled bloodhound than ever.

“What’s the use?” she said with a laugh. “You’ve remarked that I was just impudent enough to be a successful sleuth. But it took more than impudence to help me. Luck solves more problems than skill. The mask is off. Admit it, Ronald Barker.”

He seemed really disturbed and she had a good deal of quiet pleasure from her triumph. He took the magazine from her fingers again, looked at the pictures, then, putting it under his arm, turned toward the door of the gangway.

“Come,” he said quietly. “Let’s go out on deck again. Do you mind?”

They reached the rail where they could continue their conversation beyond the reach of listeners.

“I suppose I might attempt to carry on but I’m afraid you’ve got the goods on me as we say in the U.S.A. The one on the horse, the close-up profile, is extraordinary.”

“You can’t blame the author for using good copy. People are always meddling, aren’t they?”

“I’m sorry you’ve found me out. You see, I’ve moved about in Syria and Palestine with the utmost freedom and now, possibly, I’ll have to find a new personality, a new identity.”

“I hope that won’t be necessary,” she said quietly. “We’ll end that story now.” She took the magazine from his fingers and dropped it into the sea. He glanced at her and then muttered the one word, “Thanks.”

“But you’ve got the story; I might as well tell you. They know more about El Kerak in Syria or Trans-Jordania. There’s a price set on his head by the French and by the British—”

“—which they will never have a chance to pay.”

“Exactly,” he finished.

There was a silence made more definite by the swish of foam and the rising wind.

“Well,” he said at last, “what are you going to do about it?”

“What *can* be done about it? Nothing. And what’s the answer to the mystery of the wireless about Kerak? It’s just a huge joke. Who is Mohammed Ali?”

“He might be any one. It’s a name as common in Mohammedan countries as

John Smith is in the United States.”

“And the wireless operator could tell you nothing?”

Barker shook his head. “He received the message and tried to deliver it, thinking it was a mistake. But Mahmoud Daoud, the only person with a similar Egyptian or Arabic name refused to receive it.”

“And the sender?”

“A certain James Robinson; address, Harwich Crescent, London, England. That ended the investigation.”

“Well, what’s the answer?”

“The answer is that you’re not the only one who knows my secret. The answer is that some one in London, perhaps some one aboard the *Orizaba*, knows who the bandit El Kerak is and who I am.”

At the moment he looked less like a distinguished member of the Foreign Staff than like a somewhat bewildered young man who had been told on out of school.

She had known this man scarcely more than two days but her absorption in his problem and in him had made her forget everything else. He was the most interesting man she had ever met in Europe or America and she had every desire to be of service to him. Asad, Slim, Michael already seemed immaterial. She wanted to do what she could to help him, to save him from the danger of discovery that he seemed to fear, more even than the threat against his life. She wanted to help him, to make herself of some value.

Was this the magic of the Mediterranean moon or something new and unusual that had come suddenly into her life?

The moon was shining with a greater intensity, cutting a clear white line around his profile, and he looked, she thought, very little like El Kerak now.

He turned inboard slowly and faced her with a gravity she had not been aware of before. There was something about this man that confronted her like an ordeal for good or bad that she must pass through. She realized that by opportunity and mischievous prying she had placed him in an awkward position, a situation that left him in her power. And yet as he faced her it seemed that it was she and not Ronald Barker who was at a disadvantage. He took her by the elbows and held her firmly. She did not resist him. Indeed, she could not. For there was both strength and gentleness in his grasp. He was, for the moment, no less the gentleman whose life she was trying to save than the bandit El Kerak whose secret she had discovered. She knew now that he regretted their conversations, regretted even meeting her in spite of the service she had done him. But she felt herself drawn closer to him—closer to him because of the service she had done him—irresistibly, while his voice sank a

note deeper.

“I have been a fool,” he said. “I have talked to you as I have never talked before to a woman, letting you guess secrets that are a part of my work in Syria. Why have I done this? Tell me . . .”

“I—I don’t know . . .” she said.

“Why did you make me talk? Don’t you realize that if you tell what you have heard you may ruin me?”

“I—I’ll never tell—”

“Do you care enough? Possibly your silence may mean saving my life?”

“Haven’t I proved it?”

“Not yet. I know nothing about you.”

“Nor I about you, but I will never betray you,” she whispered.

“You mean that?”

“I do. Your secrets are safe with me.”

“If you mean what you say, give me a pledge of your loyalty. Kiss me on the lips. It is the only thing that will do.”

His grasp seemed to grow gentler as well as firmer and she slowly yielded. It was a kiss that seemed to have a more poignant meaning than the mere spirit of a pledge or a threat, and she forgot for the moment in that dim corner of the deck where they stood that it was only the day before yesterday that she had met him. Slowly she drew back, her head bent in a sudden realization of what had happened to her. He made no effort to take her again, just stood, his arms at his sides.

She turned away for a moment to regain her composure and found that she was more shaken than she had thought.

“I—I—” she gasped, and then, as words failed her, thrust forth a hand—the hand of friendship. “I—I won’t betray you,” she said.

He had taken her hand quickly, but she broke away from him and moved, smiling, into the moonlight which seemed suddenly to make things clear to them both. It was the assurance of her smile that restored him to sanity. And her level brows and calm gaze seemed to convince him that she was not of those who kiss and tell.

“Don’t you understand,” she asked, “that I *couldn’t* betray you now?”

He was silent, aware of a fine moment.

“Thanks,” he said.

And that was all of the incident. Extraordinary for Camilla—a mixture of the madness of the East of which he was a part and a kiss of earnest assurance that made the affair and its results inevitable.

“And now,” she said, “it is time to turn in—”

“Until to-morrow.”

They walked aft just as the figure of Nicholas Stephanov, the friend of Joseph Asad, emerged from the shadow where he was pacing the deck and smoking a last cigarette.

At the companionway to her stateroom Ronald Barker left her. “Good night,” he said gently.

“Be careful,” she whispered.

He laughed lightly and disappeared in the shadows.

CHAPTER III

· 1 ·

Camilla went into her stateroom, closed and locked the door but did not switch on the light. Instinct, perhaps, or the atmosphere of intrigue in which she had passed the evening, gave her a feeling that she was involved in an affair that was best suited to the darkness. She sat on the edge of her bed, looking out of the French window and listening. Familiar sounds—the room steward fussing around with his dishes, the heavy tread of a deckhand of the mid-watch going the rounds, the ship's bell striking twice. She looked at her watch—one o'clock. She had never been able to understand why the bell should strike twice for one o'clock. The sounds of footsteps approached, passed, and vanished—all mysterious errands, it seemed, until she remembered they were only the night-owls on their way to and from the smoking-room before the bar closed. Murmurs and a hysterical giggle from a deck chair nearby where Janet Priestly, the school-teacher—who was seeking adventure for the first time in her life—sat with Vincent Torelli, learning to love in Italian.

Camilla heard Miss Priestly's final squeal of protest as she rose at last and went to her stateroom. There was singing in the bar, Slim's voice trying to do a sentimental ballad. Then a kind of half silence, the swish of water alongside, the sounds of the ship as she plodded steadily into the East, the East that Slim held in such contempt, the East that Ronald Barker had made so peculiarly his own.

She was not altogether satisfied with the results of her own astonishing adventure. She was a little bewildered still and could not think of the future with any assurance. By the future, she meant to-morrow and the next day. She wasn't at all certain that something oughtn't to be done at once about putting a guard over the cabin of her adventurous friend who seemed to go through life very lightly, with such a fine contempt of danger. His stateroom was not very far off, in the next companionway, and she looked out of her door more than once before a final glance up and down the decks.

Then the sound of whispering voices again, men's voices, the same voices that had alarmed her before, a bit farther away on the deck, beyond the shuffleboard where she could just see their shadows against one of the life-boats. . . .

Without planning, but moving instinctively, she got into her evening wrap again and went out into the corridor. Rallying her courage she ran along the gangway by Ronald Barker's cabin and peered out on deck. The shadows on the life-boat were still there but the voices were more muffled than before. She stepped out on deck

and approached the group. They turned their backs to her, huddled together, and looked out to sea. But their conversation stopped when she passed them going on to the forward end of the promenade. . . . When she returned they had disappeared. Just three harmless passengers having a last cigarette before turning in? Perhaps, but her anxiety refused to let her think so.

It was not until she went into the corridor again that she realized the risk she had taken on the deserted deck. And now, the danger over, her footsteps turned instinctively aft to the bar where Slim's singing of "Mandalay," though hideous, was masculine, friendly, and comforting.

The sight of her two friends gave her still more comfort, for Slim sat telling Michael Gay in lusty tones that "er petticoat was yaller and 'er little cap was green" while Michael tapped out the cadences on the table with a sympathetic digit.

Camilla stood for a long moment framed in the doorway before they saw her. Then they rose apologetically and asked her to join them. But social conversation was not in her mind.

"Slim, I want you to go up to the Captain with me," she said in a rush of words, without preamble. "You, too, Michael."

Explaining as they went, Camilla led the way up the after companion ladder to the upper deck and so forward to the Captain's quarters, a large cabin under the bridge, serving as an office with sleeping-room adjoining. Captain Simpson was just taking a nightcap with his first officer whose watch it was.

With her eyes sparkling and her breath coming rapidly she must have made a very pretty picture, for the two men bowed her in with her companions and offered a drink.

But Camilla was already telling her story in brief, broken sentences—of the conversation she had overheard a few nights ago and of the belief that Ronald Barker was not safe aboard the *Orizaba* without a guard over his stateroom at night. From smiling incredulity at her fears, they found her sincerity at last compelling.

"You'd better not let Mr. Barker know. I don't want him to think I'm meddling in his affairs."

"Well, it's my affair more than yours now, Miss Dean," Simpson said. "I've got orders from the Company to put Mr. Barker safely ashore at Alexandria and I'm going to do it. As for his knowing about this business, he ought to be tickled pink to have a good-looking girl like you so anxious for his safety."

Michael and Slim stood rather sheepishly while Simpson gave the orders.

He had hardly completed them when a muffled sound of shots and a clatter of broken glass came from somewhere below.

With the excitement of the group rushing out of the Captain's suite, there were other sounds, calls from men of the watch on deck, as Camilla, between Slim and Michael, ran down into the A-deck saloon where a few of the passengers in various degrees of negligée assembled, asking questions.

"Just some drunken idiot having target practice at one of our electric bulbs," Simpson said.

"Are you sure?" asked Janet Priestly, who had hoped that at least a murder would be added to this most marvelous of evenings. "Hasn't anybody been shot?" she added in a tone that sounded like disappointment.

"Everything's all right, Miss Priestly. You can go to bed and get your beauty-sleep. If anything else happens I'll see that somebody wakes you up."

Miss Priestly wrapped her dressing-gown tightly about her, dignity become embonpoint.

"This is a hell of a joint," she muttered. "I came out here expecting to see a murder and a real riot and all I get is just a drunk shooting at electric bulbs. Might as well be in the Loop in Chicago."

The excitement among the passengers diminished as Camilla went with Janet to talk things over. Slim and Michael followed the Captain down the corridor toward Ronald Barker's stateroom. He met them at the open door where some of his neighbors stood inquiring. "No damage, Mr. Barker?" the Captain asked.

"None at all. Some silly ass out on deck having target practice. Woke me up, just the way it did the rest of you."

"But it's your window that's broken, Mr. Barker."

Slim glanced out of the window and examined a piece of window glass on the carpet. It was a corrugated glass that would let in light but not vision.

"Funny thing, Mr. Barker," he said. "How do you account for the fact that splinters of the glass have fallen outboard on the deck, instead of inside the cabin?"

"So they have! Quite remarkable! You mean that some one must have fired from the *inside* of the stateroom."

"Sure thing," Slim said. "The impact of a heavy bullet—it would take some of the glass with it."

Captain Simpson sat on the bed, listening and watching.

"You'd better tell the whole story, Mr. Barker," he said quietly.

So, omitting Camilla's share in the adventure, Mr. Barker told what had happened. He had been warned of a possible attempt on his life aboard the *Orizaba*. He had not believed in his danger at first but after he had turned in he found himself thinking how easy it would be for some one on the outside to take a

pot-shot at him through the half-open French window and get away before the alarm. So he switched off the ceiling light, made as good an imitation as he could of a sleeping figure in his bed by stuffing coverlid and underclothing under the blankets, then turned the bed-light in its box so that it was dim and lay on the lounge hidden from the deck outside. Perhaps his informant had been mistaken. He was just getting drowsy when the silhouette of a head darkened the window. Then everything happened very rapidly. He wasn't sure that the silhouette meant mischief until he saw the glint of light on a gun barrel. He fired quickly, while the silhouette fired also, aiming at the huddle under the bed clothes.

"I didn't aim—I just thought I'd like to frighten him," Barker said, "and I must have hit the glass beside his head."

"That's a pity," the Captain said dryly. "You ought to have made a better job of it."

Barker went over to the bed and showed where two bullets had gone through the pillow and the neck-band of one of his best shirts. "Pretty close that," he said.

"Sure thing," Slim gasped. "And here's where the bullets went through the head of the bed. That guy must have been practising in a shooting-gallery."

"To-morrow we'll find the bullets and after that, maybe the gun itself."

Now that the affair was over Ronald Barker showed a disposition to drop the case. "I don't think he'll be likely to try it again, especially if you're going to post a watch outside."

"It's all my fault, Mr. Barker," Simpson went on apologetically. "Knowing about you I might have suspected something in a ship's company made up like this one is. But I'm going through it with a fine-tooth comb before we reach Naples."

· 2 ·

It seemed necessary in the morning for Camilla to get a new slant on the events of the previous day, so that her thoughts would make sense. An important fact seemed to emerge. She had been most earnestly embraced by a man she had met only two days before. Another important fact was that she seemed to have liked it. These thoughts were more extraordinary when Camilla reminded herself that she had never been what is so casually known as a "necker." The next important thought that came to her was the possibility—even the probability—that Ronald Barker might have thought that she was accustomed to being embraced by strange young men. That idea annoyed her exceedingly. She wondered a little at her new attitude of mind when last night she had been so willing to take everything Ronald Barker said for

granted. It was, she thought, that she was a little resentful at her docility—a little angry with herself because of the ease with which he had conquered her resistance.

She took her coffee in her room and after her bath found herself with a new point of view which refused to accept Mr. Barker at his face value.

And yet there was something to be said about the value of a face. Hers was distinctly worthwhile and Ronald Barker must have thought so. But whatever he had thought about her last night, whatever he thought this morning, she was sure she did not want to talk to him until she had a chance to look him over by daylight. Certainly she had no intention of hunting for him.

So she was glad when there was a clatter at the door and Josephine Holloway and Kitty Trimble rushed in. All night they had been ready to explode with curiosity, they said, for the story of Camilla's part in the affair was all over the ship, much distorted, making her a heroine of sorts.

"Well, toots, you certainly put one over on Asad," Josephine gurgled, "and Slim and Michael, to say nothing of all the eligible females on this ark."

"What I came in to find out," Kitty Trimble said, "is what you've got that I haven't got. You haven't even got the experience of a handsome grass-widow twice removed. And yet you walk off with the mystery man under my very eyes, lead him out into the moonlight which makes every woman beautiful so he can make love to you; and then, just to show him how indispensable you are to him, you save his life from a bunch of assassins."

"To say nothing of getting Michael and Slim ready to throw him overboard."

Kitty Trimble sat on the bed and took out her compact, demanding information.

"It's very unfair of you, Camilla—"

"There's nothing to tell except that he's half American, working for the British Government—very interesting and what you'd call a good egg—"

"But who was it wanted to kill him and why?"

"I don't know—"

"Didn't you try to find out?"

"Yes, I did, but he wouldn't talk."

"Why not?"

"You'll have to ask him."

Josie gave a sniff of impatience. "Seems to me you're awfully snooty about him. You warn the man and keep him from being shot and he doesn't even tell you—"

"It was none of my business—"

"Or ours, I guess you mean. Oh, well—"

A knock on the door and a steward entered.

“Captain’s compliments, Miss Dean, and if it’s convenient for you he would like to see you in his office at once.”

The other girls got up as the steward went out.

Camilla slipped into her coat and with a wave of her hand hurried out toward the gangway to the upper deck.

She was surprised to find a number of people, who almost filled the Captain’s cabin. Her glance passed over them quickly, passengers with whose faces she was familiar. There were Slim, Michael, Ronald Barker, the Russian—Stephanov, Asad, Torelli, and several other men. A steward, a member of the crew apparently just off duty, came in and stood near the desk where Simpson sat with the Purser, Mr. Disston.

“Captain Simpson asked you up here,” Barker whispered, “on the chance that you might recognize some of these men or their voices. It’s pretty hopeless, but he wants you just to sit in and listen while they talk.”

She nodded and took the chair he offered her.

The Captain addressed them all. “I invited you here because the room stewards have reported that none of you had turned in before half past one o’clock last evening. It was after that hour that a murder was attempted on this ship. Some one sneaked along A deck, in the darkness, and fired through the port of Mr. Barker’s stateroom. Mr. Barker, fortunately, had not turned in and the shots aimed at his bed went through the pillow where his head should have been. Mr. Barker fired at the intruder from the sofa where he was lying but in the dim light his shot went wild.”

Simpson went on, looking sternly at the faces of his visitors. “Now, the Captain of a ship,” he continued, “is also Chief of Police, Judge, Jury, and Public Prosecutor, with unlimited power to investigate and prevent sabotage or crime. I don’t accuse any person in this room of firing the shots but I’ve asked you here to testify as to what you were doing at that hour. In other words, I want alibis and plenty of them. Mr. Asad, you were on the promenade deck just before the occurrence. Will you stand up and tell me if you heard the shots, where you were, and what you did?”

Joseph Asad smiled cheerfully.

“Gladly. I had come in from a walk on deck where I passed Miss Dean and Mr. Barker. I stopped for a while in the saloon to find a book and then went down the main gangway of B deck and stood aft talking to the Chief Engineer who had just come out of his office to go below to the engine-room. It was while I was talking to the Chief that the shots were fired. Chief Zimmerman will, of course, verify this statement if you wish it. We could not tell where the shots came from but we went at once to the saloon on A deck where a number of other passengers were gathered. It

was there that I heard who had been shot at. Aside from this I know nothing about the affair.”

“You have no idea as to who might have attempted to murder Mr. Barker?”

“Not the least idea,” Asad finished.

Captain Simpson made a signal for Mr. Asad to be seated and called on Mr. José Serrano to testify. Mr. Serrano was a small man with a scrubby brown pointed beard, streaked with gray, which he stroked affectionately. His back was bent as though from an injury and he leaned upon a cane.

“Mr. Serrano, you are an Assyriologist?”

“Yes, sir,” he said, in excellent English. “I am on my way east to investigate some new discoveries in the Tigris-Euphrates valley.”

“Did you ever see Mr. Barker before you came aboard this ship?”

“No, sir.”

“Did you ever hear of him?”

“In a general way, yes. Mr. Ronald Barker is very well known in Egypt and Palestine. I read his monograph on some of the Cairene diggings. I am very glad to meet him in the flesh.”

“Can you imagine any reason why anybody on this ship should want to kill him?”

“I cannot.”

“Have you heard any conversations aboard the *Orizaba* which might suggest a motive for this crime?”

“I have not.”

“Have you any suggestions to offer which might lead to the criminal?”

“No, sir. None.”

“You received a wireless message yesterday, didn’t you, a code message which contained the words ‘dog’ and ‘Saguache’?”

“I did.”

“Would you mind translating?”

“Not at all. Saguache was the name of the man who sent the message. The word ‘dog’ is just a symbol. It clarified my plans of operation for my visit to the Tigris where a certain mound shaped like the head of a dog was to guide me.”

“All right, Mr. Serrano. Will you hold yourself in readiness to help me in this investigation by answering further questions, if necessary?”

“Of course, sir.”

The little Spaniard sat down, caressing his little beard in the patriarchal manner.

Captain Simpson consulted a paper in the Purser’s hand.

“Mr. Mark Aronberg.”

A tall young man with a long nose and pale face stood up beside the Captain's desk. He had a husky voice and regarded his inquisitor with heavily lidded eyes.

"You were on A deck last night just after one o'clock?"

"Yes, sir. I had been sitting aft by the smoking-room listening to the singing."

"What singing?"

"Mr. McManus, singing in the bar."

"Oh! Was any one with you?"

"Yes, Mr. David Levinstein."

"Did you hear any shots?"

"Yes, sir. Two or three shots very fast, just as we went down to B deck to go to bed."

"Did you pass any one on the stairway to B deck?"

"No, sir. I saw nobody until I came up to the saloon and joined the rest of the passengers."

"You heard nothing to make you suspect that an attack was to be made on Mr. Barker?"

"No, sir."

"Did you ever see Mr. Barker before?"

"Never."

"Or hear of him?"

"Not until he came aboard at Marseilles."

Mr. Levinstein confirmed his friend in every particular. They were traveling together. Their destination was Haifa.

"I want to tell you gentlemen," Simpson said, "that every person in this cabin, though not accused of any participation in this crime, is under suspicion. And I want to warn you all that any further attack on Mr. Barker will be dealt with in a drastic way." He consulted the Purser's list again. "Mr. Mahmoud Daoud."

Near the door a man got up. He was tall, his hair tightly curled and oiled, his complexion the color of a horse-chestnut and polished as highly. He had a fine aquiline nose and might have stepped from a carving on an Egyptian tomb.

"You are an Egyptian?"

"I am. My family have lived there always. My grandfather was a cousin of the late Khedive."

"Good enough credentials, Mr. Daoud. You are going to Cairo now?"

"I am."

"What is your business?"

"I am a merchant of antiques."

“You know of Mr. Barker?”

“Of course. Who in Cairo does not?”

“You are friendly to the British Government?”

“I am.”

“You have no cause to dislike Mr. Barker?”

“Why should I dislike him? He is very friendly to my people.”

“And you know nothing of the attempt on his life?”

“No, sir. Nothing. If I had known I should have warned him. I would be glad to help you, but I cannot.”

“Mr. Daoud,” Simpson went on, “a wireless message came to this ship since we left Marseilles. It was in code. Here is the message. The wireless operator thought it was intended for you.”

Mr. Daoud took the paper and glanced at it. “Yes, I saw it. Why should he think it was for me? My name is not Mohammed Ali.”

“He thought, Mr. Daoud, that perhaps a mistake had been made by the sender, Mr. James Robinson of Harwich Crescent, London—”

“Evidently, since it was delivered to me.”

“H’m. You never heard of Mr. Robinson?”

“No, sir.”

“Or Harwich Crescent?”

“No, sir.”

“I see. Well, you can sit down, Mr. Daoud.”

After a few more perfunctory questions of Slim McManus and Michael Gay, Captain Simpson dismissed all of his visitors except Camilla and Ronald Barker.

“Was it possible for you to recognize any of these men, Miss Dean, by their appearance or voices?”

“Not their appearance certainly. It was too dark. But I seemed to recall certain tones of voices.”

“Whose?”

“I’m not positive. All deep voices sound alike. No, I couldn’t attempt to identify them.”

“Mr. Barker, could you say that any of these men bore a resemblance to the man you fired at?”

“No, I couldn’t, sir.”

Simpson turned toward the door.

“Well, Mr. Disston, I think that’s about all we can do. Much obliged, Miss Dean.”

On the deck outside Camilla said to her companion, "Mr. Barker—"
"Ronnie," he corrected.

She flushed prettily. "Did you tell Captain Simpson of your theories in regard to those wireless messages?"

"There was no need to. I'm already in wireless communication with Cairo and London. I've found out what I wanted to know. By this time James Robinson of Harwich Crescent is watched by Scotland Yard."

CHAPTER IV

· 1 ·

She walked rapidly aft because she didn't want any talk that would recall their intimate moment last night. Everything was different in the garish sunlight of the morning. But his long stride caught up with her before she had gone far.

"Please don't go," she heard him say. "I still need your help."

She paused. His eyes, she discovered, were a bright blue as though accustomed to reflecting the sky. And like the tones of his voice there was an uncompromising frankness in them.

"If you're not bored, you can still help me."

She waited for him to go on.

"Of course, you may think I'm impertinent asking such a lot of such a short acquaintance"—he laughed—"but then we've done away with formalities, haven't we?"

"I rather think we have," she said dryly. "The half of you that's American doesn't believe in wasting much time."

"Things happen in this world not as we plan them but as Allah wills." He smiled. "Who am I to disregard the signs and portents? The East has its futilities but it also possesses infallible instincts for the truth."

"Please tell me what this all means."

"Merely that Fate, having thrown you in my way to save my life, doesn't want me to give up your protection."

"Protection?"

"Exactly. You're in a position to help me and the things I represent."

"And what, precisely, are the things you represent?"

"Generalizations are always false. If I said the ideals of our form of culture, Christianity, the hope of the white race—"

"Just stock phrases, Ronald Barker."

"If you say so, Camilla. But they're all you and I have to cling to in this unpleasantly riotous world."

They were quite alone on the upper deck. All the others had gone down the forward ladder. He leaned with his back against the hand-rail and looked at her. He seemed to find more pleasure in this than in the topic of their conversation—for he smiled in a friendly way that cleared her path of some of her inhibitions.

"What is it you want me to do, darling?" she asked him impertinently.

He studied her for a moment weighing the wisdom of an idea.

“Yesterday morning you and I were just shipboard acquaintances. Last night you placed me under lasting obligations. We swore an eternal friendship. Do you still believe in that?”

“Yes, I do—”

“I’ll give you a chance to prove it. I’m going to cancel my obligation to you by making another.”

“Please don’t speak in riddles. What do you want me to do?”

“Are you weakening?”

“Not in the least. If I think I can’t do what you ask, I’ll tell you.”

He lighted his cigarette.

“That’s fair enough.” He lowered his voice as he came closer to her. “Did you create a real obligation last night? The answer is the proof of your sincerity.”

She lowered her eyelids.

“I understand what you mean. I accept the responsibility if you do.”

He bowed his head in assent.

“Well, I’m going to trust you with my secret—with my reputation—possibly with my life. I hope you’re not frightened.”

“No.”

“It’s just this. Joseph Asad whose friendship you made on the Atlantic crossing from New York is not Joseph Asad, but Hassan Isar, a man known throughout the Near East for his devotion to the Moslem movement. He is the son of one of the most important sheiks in all Arabia, Arif-el-Arif, who is one of the richest men in Damascus. Joseph Asad has told you probably that he was in New York to attend to his business of Damascene inlays, silks, linens, and antiques, by which his father has added to the fortune from his flocks and herds. But Hassan Isar had another more important object in going to America. He went to Washington to visit two of the European embassies where he spent a great deal of time. He was after both money and influence for his cause, which means nothing less than an attempt to end the British Mandate in Palestine.”

“That’s all very surprising and interesting.”

“He thinks I don’t know this. I have reason to believe that Hassan Isar has had something to do with the escape of Osman Khali from the Mosque of Omar in Jerusalem. Osman Khali is the only descendant of the Prophet who can boast of a pure line. He is looked upon with the deepest reverence by all Moslem people. He is a symbol of their faith and as long as he is at large he is in a position to make trouble for us in Palestine and in Egypt. It was Osman Khali who incited the terrorism in

Palestine, the riots against the Jews and against the British who were trying to protect them. That's why we locked him up. It all happened when Asad was in America."

"Very clever. Nobody would suspect him."

"The Dome of the Rock is just like a rabbit-warren. Osman Khali went past the guards like a wraith and disappeared—vanished like smoke in the desert."

"Are you *sure* Joseph Asad was involved in that?"

"You don't know the Orientals as I do. It is when they seem to be most innocent that they are most deceptive. Hassan Isar for all his placid exterior is one of the cleverest and most dangerous men in Asia."

She moved suddenly as a thought came to her.

"Do you suspect him of the attempt to kill you?"

"I tried not to let him know. Of course, he knows my work in the British Service and he knows I'm an enemy of the Arabian plans to terrorize the Jews and to end, if possible, the British Mandate in Palestine. But he also knows that if he killed me he would be arrested as soon as the ship docked at Alexandria."

"Do you think he knows who did the shooting?"

Barker frowned. "His alibi was excellent but slightly pretentious."

"Who did it?"

"I can't accuse any one. When I do he'll have to be put in the brig until I'm safe ashore."

"Stephanov?"

He smiled. "You're not guessing so well to-day. Try and think of the wireless message that began with the word 'dog.'"

"And what of that?"

"Just that another word for 'dog' would be 'Barker,' wouldn't it?"

She gasped in amazement. "Serrano?"

He nodded.

"I've had word about him from the Home Office. His profession of Assyriology is just a blind, a hobby. I'm trying to find out if he knows Hassan Isar. He's really a dangerous anarchist and they had a lot of trouble getting him out of England. England doesn't like anarchists. So you see for the present I'm going to watch Serrano. I'm going to leave Asad to you."

"To me!"

Ronald Barker nodded and brought out cigarettes and lighter.

"Don't you appreciate the flattery of this assignment? Every agent of the British Government in Palestine is looking for Osman Khali. They've gone over Palestine

and Syria and they can't find him. He has moved on into Arabia. Do you follow me?"

She smiled. "I think I'm a little ahead of you. You want me to find out from Hassan Isar where Osman Khali is hiding."

"If it isn't too much trouble—"

He spoke in the easy tones of one thanking another for the light of a cigarette.

"No trouble at all," she said. "You just want me to vamp the cleverest man in Asia so that he'll tell me what you want to know. I wonder if you realize how much you're asking. I wonder if your experience last night has given you a new idea of my capabilities."

"Miss Dean! How unkind—"

"Camilla to you, Ronnie," she said with a laugh. "Have you thought how distasteful this commission might be to me if I really cared—for you."

"Now you're cruel—"

"Or do you think my caring for you ought to be all the more reason why I should do what you want?"

She smiled at his discomfiture. She had him definitely up in the air where he hung for a moment until she chose to bring him down.

"I suppose I've brought all this on myself," he muttered ruefully.

"Anything, my dear, so long as you don't apologize for necking me in the moonlight last night."

"Oh, I say, Camilla . . ."

But she had fled down the companion ladder and away from him.

· 2 ·

Mrs. Trimble had reached the age when she had to try very hard to hold her men by her rather sumptuous charms when younger ladies matched their wits to her. She was slipping in spite of her money and she knew it; forgetful of past successes, which had been many, she resented each new reminder of approaching middle age.

The arrival of Ronald Barker had given her renewed hope that all was not lost, until Camilla appropriated him. From the vantage point of her seat beside Ronald Barker at the Captain's table Kitty Trimble had a chance to study him at close range and she found him desirable. But Barker, treating her with the politeness he might have given a maiden aunt, ignored her advances and suddenly devoted himself to Josephine Holloway, who seemed to have displaced her cousin Camilla in his regard.

Of course, Kitty Trimble couldn't understand this. Had she slipped so far that a man of the world like Ronald Barker who knew something of women should choose a Quakerish little ingenue like Josie Holloway in preference to her own robust and palpable charms? By the time the ship had passed the snow-capped Apennines and headed later out of Naples she was smoldering like Vesuvius but giving no sign. To Josie Holloway she showed a placid front while she watched Camilla and Asad, always together now, carrying on what seemed to be a very desperate flirtation up and down the decks, in the smoking-room over cocktails, to which Asad did not even invite her.

Kitty Trimble wondered with dismay whether she was losing her sense of proportion and joined the group of Janet Priestly, Michael, Slim, "Doc" Wilkinson and his wife, who at least gave her the kind of tribute she demanded. And then, in odd moments, she cultivated the acquaintance of Asad's friend, Nicholas Stephanov, who spoke very freely of the importance of Asad's position in Syria and of his father's palace in Damascus. She had no need to call his attention to the flirtation of Asad and Camilla Dean which was a topic of conversation from one end of the decks to the other.

"Joseph has the reputation of being very susceptible to women," Kitty Trimble said.

"That's true," laughed Stephanov. "He's not content to wait for his houris in Paradise."

"Well, Camilla Dean is no houri, she's just dynamite, my friend. You'd better tell Joseph to watch his step."

"It's no affair of mine to watch his steps. He wouldn't permit me to meddle in his affairs."

"Even if they might threaten the safety of his plans?"

"Why do you say that?"

"Oh, nothing. Just to make conversation. There are things that can't be explained." She paused. "I was just thinking of Ronald Barker. Do you know anything about him?"

"Just that he is an agent of the British Government with a roving commission in Egypt and Palestine."

"That shouldn't make Joseph very fond of him."

"They are both playing a game."

"In which Camilla Dean has a part?"

Stephanov turned to her suddenly. "What kind of a part?"

Kitty Trimble smiled indulgently. "She is a woman and all women are

meddlesome.”

“You know her better than I do.”

“Yes. And better than Joseph Asad does.”

Having dropped her poison in his ear, she gave a laugh, and turned to go in to dress for dinner.

· 3 ·

Stromboli was putting on a show as they approached the Straits of Messina, and Camilla and Asad stood at the rail watching the cone of rock shoot its fireworks into the plume of smoke above. The sight of the volcano was excuse enough, if they needed one, to remain on deck until two in the morning. Their relationship had grown closer apparently with the hours, closer than Stephanov had dreamed of, for Asad had now apparently fallen again completely under the spell of Camilla’s attractions. Camilla had let herself drift with the tide, interested in the game that she was playing and quite conscious of the dangers she might run.

Why had she undertaken this job? In a moment of pique? Or hadn’t it been really a generous response to Ronald Barker’s confidence in her, a spirit of adventure in a game that had something more than a mere shipboard flirtation as an object—the fate of a nation perhaps. A little of each of them, she admitted, added to a purely feminine taste for conquest. . . .

She had little difficulty in putting the thought of Ronald Barker out of Asad’s mind, for after the affair of the shooting, Camilla had been careful not to be seen with Barker in any moment of intimate conversation.

She had to admit that Joseph Asad attracted her like a dark spirit in a dream—and his admiration which had turned quickly to passion had given her a sense of power she had never possessed and made her aware of him as a person to be reckoned with. At certain moments it took all her skill to keep him at arm’s length. And when he offered marriage she defended herself by the expedient of asking him how many wives he already had.

Instead of being dismayed he took her question in all seriousness.

“Two,” he said gravely. “They live at my place in Damascus, but if you’ll marry me I’ll let them go.”

She found herself smiling. It was so much like a comic opera or Hollywood wooing.

“What would you do with them? Put them in casks and drop them into the Mediterranean?”

“Divorce,” he said shortly. “I have money. Those things are managed in the East even better than you manage them in America.”

“And when another came along you would drop me in the Mediterranean, too?”
He refused to fall in with her ironic mood.

“I am very desperately in earnest,” he said. “You are the one woman I want. I am a modern, a modern Mohammedan. You will sit beside me and have a part in all my plans—”

“To bring war to Jew and Gentile?”

“If I married a Gentile it would make things different. Instead of war you might help me to bring peace to all of Palestine and Syria.”

She was sure he believed what he said at the moment and in the sincerity of his gesture.

“You make your offer very attractive. Every woman likes to have influence in great affairs,” she said slowly and then paused. “I like you, Joe, but—er—it’s too much to decide in a moment.”

“There’s plenty of time. You are going into Syria, to Damascus and Bagdad and in the bus with this wild American, Michael Gay. You must let me go with you to be your guide, to act as your host. I’ve told you it would be unwise for you to go with him but if you insist—”

She laughed. “If I spent my life only doing wise things what a dull time I would have. I wouldn’t be here talking to you at two in the morning, for instance.”

“You’re quite safe with me. Instead of going with this stupid party, it would give you a much better idea of the desert if you’d let me arrange a caravan—”

“For just you and me?”

“Why not? You too are modern.”

“Not quite modern enough for that. How would I know that you wouldn’t carry me off to some Bedouin encampment and make me marry you according to Moslem custom whether I wanted to or not?” She laughed again. “Or hold me for ransom? I’m afraid you’re going too fast, Joe.”

“To a man in love life moves slowly.”

“And yet patience is a virtue even among your own people.”

“I’ll promise to be patient. I will even go with your stupid friends in Michael Gay’s bus to Bagdad.” He frowned and turned toward her. “Why do you want to go to Bagdad?”

“Who wouldn’t? It’s a story-book city, the city of Haroun-al-Raschid, of the Thousand and One Nights, and the Flying Carpet that takes people mysteriously from one place to another without leaving a trace. Perhaps the mysterious son of the

Prophet—what’s his name?—Osman—Osman Khali escaped that way from Jerusalem—”

Her cast was unsuccessful for her big trout did not rise. Asad only lowered his eyelids for a moment.

“Anything is possible in the East,” he said with a frown. And then with a flash of something like impatience, “Why do you want to go to Bagdad?” he repeated. She caught a look like a shadow, moving behind his eyes. Only a woman would have seen it but it meant something that would never have occurred to a man. Camilla was accustomed to divining things by inspiration with more or less accuracy. And yet it seemed that the shadow back of Asad’s eyes meant something he did not wish to convey. She realized that she had gone too far in the mention of Osman’s name and yet Asad’s suddenly aroused suspicion might prove the means of solving her problem. She took out her compact, the woman’s refuge in moments of uncertainty, and powdered her nose.

“Why should I want to go to Jerusalem?” she asked casually.

He said nothing in reply and in a moment led the way to the gangway to her cabin.

“Did you mean it when you said you’d go with us to Bagdad?” she asked then.

“I will tell you before we reach Alexandria,” he muttered, and left her.

Had some one aroused his suspicions or had she given her game away? Had she ruined her chance of finding out what Ronald Barker wanted to know? Asad was, she was forced to admit, a very clever and difficult person. For he had guessed that she was unduly curious about the descendant of the Prophet. But Camilla had also guessed that Osman Khali was hidden in Bagdad and that Hassan Isar knew where.

CHAPTER V

· 1 ·

Camilla's fears that she might have aroused Asad's suspicions were not diminished by the fact that instead of hunting her up the next day as usual she saw him late in the afternoon as she passed the door of the smoking-room in earnest conversation with Mrs. Trimble.

Ronald Barker sat reading or chatting with Josie Holloway and Camilla resented what seemed his indifference or a cold-blooded determination to let nothing interfere with his intention to get all the information he could from Camilla, no matter how much it cost her.

So taking the hint she went to a quiet corner aft where the deck-steward wrapped her in her blanket and brought her tea. As the man straightened he put a folded slip of paper into her fingers.

She read: "Captain's cabin at seven for cocktails. Meanwhile try Mosque of Kazemain, Bagdad."

There was no need for explanation. She put the slip of paper in her bag as Joseph Asad approached and took the steamer chair next to hers, ready to resume their almost too personal conversation of the night before. Asad still wore the frown of uncertainty, only a deeper one.

"I've laid my cards on the table," he said, in his tragic comic-opera voice, "and what do I get in return? Nothing but a few smiles and a stolen kiss in the dark. If you don't think I have a chance I want you to tell me so."

"You're in a little too much of a hurry, Joe."

"Shouldn't love be always in a hurry? I want you more than any woman in the world and you only tell me I'm in a hurry. I'll give you anything. I'm rich. My father also will give you what I ask him to."

It was all too brutally frank for Camilla's occidental idea of a good time.

"What do you mean?" she asked, with a note of impatience. "I've promised you nothing. I've given you no right to demand anything from me."

He glowered at her as he lowered his voice.

"I don't believe in wasting words," he said. "What has made you so curious about Osman Khali?"

"I haven't the slightest idea what you're talking about. Has Kitty Trimble been putting ideas into your head?"

"A jealous woman is sometimes very useful in matters of diplomacy."

Camilla plunged.

“You’ve already given your game away,” she said.

“What do you mean?”

“Your eyes, Joe. I’ve told you they were very expressive.”

“I don’t understand.”

“You wouldn’t. They’ve told me many things about your real motives toward me—also your real motives about other things. Why should you have been so disturbed,” she went on coolly, “when I mentioned Osman Khali’s name?”

“I wasn’t aware—”

“Why do you constantly come back to the name of Osman Khali?”

“Because of your curiosity—”

“About Bagdad?”

This time her cast was more successful. Asad frowned and closed his eyes and she knew he did it to cover the spark that kindled in them. He was, after all, not quite equal to the game as she played it.

“Osman Khali has fled to Bagdad, hasn’t he?” she asked sweetly.

Asad bent forward his hands clasping his knees, his voice a snarl of discontent.

“Has Ronald Barker been talking to you about Osman Khali?”

“Of course, everybody has. His escape from Jerusalem is the talk of the ship. I asked him if he knew anything about it. He didn’t. Do you know where Osman Khali has gone, Joe?”

Her smile disarmed him.

“If I did do you think I’d tell you?”

“If I asked you to—”

“What is Osman Khali to you?”

“Oh, just a symbol. You said you’d give me anything I asked for. Suppose I made the descendant of the Prophet the symbol of your promise, one of the things I wanted, one of the conditions of our friendship?”

“Don’t talk nonsense—”

“Suppose I said I’d set my heart on meeting Osman, wherever he is.”

“Impossible.”

“There you go! The first thing I ask you for you refuse me.”

“Where Osman Khali hides is no affair of yours. Besides—” Asad laughed—“no matter where he is, he can be moved to another hiding-place if he receives a warning.”

She looked at him narrowly. “You admit that you had something to do with moving him from the Dome of the Rock at Jerusalem.”

He wouldn't reply and by the sudden firmness of his jaw she knew that their conversation about the descendant of the Prophet was finished.

"Have you nothing else to say to me, Joe?" she asked him.

"Yes. I shall ask the same question of you many times until you give me the right answer."

"I don't mind. Your company is pleasant. If you're interested, I'm going to Alexandria, Cairo, will cross the canal at El Kantara, Jerusalem—ask Willing, the tour director. I'm sure he'd be glad to have you."

"And ride in a bus with a lot of trippers? Now you're having more fun with me."

"You mean that you're going to desert me at Alexandria?"

"No. Nor Cairo. If you'll let me arrange a caravan for you—"

"If I get bored with tripping I'll think about it—"

"All right."

"I'll make a final decision before we reach Damascus."

He frowned and bent his head. Camilla rose. "And now I must go and dress for dinner. Au revoir."

· 2 ·

It seemed probable that Ronald Barker had procured the invitation for cocktails from Captain Simpson in order that they might meet unobserved and uninterrupted. It grew dark while she dressed and when she made her way up the after stairway she saw people going down to dinner, for the gong had already sounded. She watched for her opportunity and reached the boat-deck, going forward to the door of the Captain's cabin, knocking timidly. Captain Simpson, a cocktail-shaker in one hand, opened the door himself, greeting her warmly. Ronald Barker had not yet arrived, so she sat on the leather divan and listened to the gratifying clink of cracked ice against metal, which is different from any other sound in the world.

"I can't imagine what's keeping him," Simpson said, "and I don't propose to let a perfectly good Martini die in the shaker. In the meanwhile, just between ourselves—here's confusion to Ronald Barker's enemies."

She couldn't refuse that and was looking over her glass at the Captain as a commotion came from the deck outside—the sound of blows and a sudden crash. Simpson rushed into the gangway and out on deck where in dim silhouette against the nearest life-boat Camilla could see two struggling figures. She caught a gleam on the blade of a knife and saw it stop in the air as it was caught and held. Then a blow from Ronald Barker as the man fell, the knife clattering to the deck. He tried to

scramble to his feet but Simpson caught him by the ankle and Barker fell on him. By this time one of the men on the bridge had rushed down and they held the man helpless.

The whole affair had only taken seconds and no one on the decks below had been aroused.

“Keep this quiet, Captain, please,” Barker said.

“Do you know who he is?”

“Haven’t the slightest idea. Never saw him before in my life.”

A man of the watch on deck brought a searchlight, flashed it into the man’s face, revealing his oily sweater and dungarees.

“Well, of all the—! I’m sorry, Mr. Barker,” Simpson said. “It’s one of my own crew. He’ll do a stretch for this.”

All the fight was out of him and they slipped handcuffs over his wrists. They tried to make him talk but he only stared at them dully, breathing hard. His name was Ayub, they said, a Turk who had signed on at Piræus last voyage. As they led the man below the Captain picked up the knife, a murderous affair with a carved blade, something like a creese.

“There’s blood on it,” he gasped. “Did he get you somewhere, Mr. Barker?”

“Oh, just in the shoulder when I threw my arm up to catch it. It’s nothing at all.”

They led Barker into the office where they took off his coat and cut the sleeve of his shirt.

“You see, he came up behind me. I saw his shadow from the gangway light just in time and twisted quickly, dropping to one side, so that his blow missed me completely. I must have hit him then and slowed him up, because when he came at me again I was ready for him.”

“You’re mighty lucky, sir. The ship’s doctor will be here in a minute. I’m sorry it had to happen on my ship. He’s a new man. We were short-handed after the ship strike in New York and we had to do the best we could. I hope you won’t hold it too much against the *Orizaba*.”

“Forget that, sir,” Barker said. “What I want to know is what he’s got against me.”

“Green shirter, maybe, or just terrorist like the other.”

“I’ll have a talk with him down below, if you don’t mind. And if you’ll keep him locked up until after I go ashore at Alexandria to-morrow, I’d prefer not to make charges against him.”

“I’ll keep him locked up all right and use my own judgment as to what we’ll do with him.”

Camilla sat in the office while Dr. Alessandroni bathed and cleansed the wound—a surface cut that bled a great deal but was not at all dangerous. A bandage, a little stiffness for a few days, and the arm would be as good as new. The cocktails were useful now, for Camilla had gone white and they all needed a bracer.

“It does seem as though they intended to make good their threat,” Camilla said. “Can’t something be done, Captain, to prevent anything more like this?”

“Certainly it can. Mr. Barker will stay right here in my office and use my stateroom with guards at windows and doors until we dock to-morrow.”

“That won’t be necessary, sir.”

“We’ll have to find out what’s back of all this. Have you any ideas yourself? Is there any one else aboard you might suspect?”

“I’d prefer not to talk at random. The trouble with my job is that I’m very much liked or very much disliked. There’s no middle ground. It’s this escape of Osman Khali that’s stirred them up.”

“Well, you can tell me as much as you please later. For the present I’m going to have your dinner and Miss Dean’s served here. That will suit you, won’t it?”

· 3 ·

“I’d like to say, before you tell me anything,” Barker began, “that I didn’t realize when I asked you to talk to Hassan Isar what a thankless task I’d given you.”

“It wasn’t so bad,” she said lightly.

“Was he unpleasant?”

“Not unnecessarily so. You see, he wants to marry me.”

Barker frowned. “But he has a number of wives already.”

“Only two—very small ones. It might be worse if he had a dozen.”

“Please be serious.”

“He said he’d drop the others into the Mediterranean if I liked.”

“I’m terribly sorry I let you in for this.”

“You needn’t be. I’ve had a very good time. I think I’ve made some progress, too. How did you guess that Osman was at Bagdad?”

“I had a message that he had been seen on the Damascus road going east.”

“And the Mosque of Kazemain?”

“I guessed that. It’s the largest Moslem shrine.”

“Well, I think that’s where he is. Asad was very much disturbed when I spoke of Bagdad. I managed to lead him on.”

“I don’t know how I can thank you for acting so discreetly.”

“You needn’t thank me for anything. Everybody seems to know you’re out here to try to stop the terrorizing in Palestine and Arabia.”

“But Hassan Isar is the only one who has guessed *how* I hope to do it.”

“Then there’s only one thing left,” she said with a smile, “to drop him over the side before we reach Alexandria. I might have a few heart-throbs but I’ll get over them.”

He laughed. “I’ve always thought I was unfortunate to be denied the stratagems and devices of the East. I can’t fight them with their own weapons, you see. Twice I’ve been nearly murdered on this ship and I have to sit and take it.”

“You once said you thought Asad had nothing to do with those attempts on your life. Do you still think so?”

“I’m not so sure. If he had, he’s been very clever about it.”

“And Serrano and Ayub?”

“I’d like to talk to Ayub. I’ll have something to say to Serrano too. I’ll get Simpson to help me put Serrano through the third degree and find out if Asad had anything to do with that shooting. I could ship Serrano to England from Alexandria. I’m sure he wouldn’t like that.”

Camilla realized that they had been discussing political affairs when something else was on her mind as well as his.

“Camilla,” he said, as the steward went out and they lighted cigarettes, “you know that all this is very important to my political career, but there’s one thing more important to it than that. My meeting with you has been rather unusual. Three or four days and yet I’ve known you always. I want to be sure that what you said to me the other night wasn’t just an idle impulse of yours—”

“How about you? Do you realize that I don’t know a thing about you? You might have as many wives as Asad—”

He made no response to her smile.

“I have no wife. And will never have unless she shall be you.”

She was taken off guard by his earnestness. “Isn’t this terribly sudden? What do you know about *me*?”

“That you have courage, loyalty—a high sense of honor—”

“Is that all you require of a wife?”

“Yes.”

“And my frivolity—?”

“I adore it. It’s just the child in you refusing to become a woman.”

“How nice of you! You may kiss me, Ronnie.”

But he didn’t, for there was a knock on the door and the steward appeared,

bringing the coffee. And after that the Captain came causing them to draw suddenly apart.

“Don’t mind me,” he said. “All I can say is that for a man with only one arm you’re doing pretty well.”

“I’m quite all right, sir, thank you.”

“I came to ask you what you want me to do?”

“Can you get Ayub to talk?”

“We’ve tried everything but thumb-screws.”

“I think he’s just a fanatic.”

“Better drop it, then.”

“Has the wireless operator been able to identify Mohammed Ali?” It was Camilla’s voice, rather insistent on a thread of the investigation that had not been followed.

“He still says he thinks it must be Mr. Mahmoud Daoud.”

“Why?”

“Because he insists Daoud opened the envelop and glanced at the message before he discovered it wasn’t for him.”

“I’ll follow that up when I reach Cairo.”

The Captain went out and the steward took the coffee service.

“If Daoud knows you’re El Kerak you ought to know he knows it,” Camilla said.

Barker frowned through his cigarette smoke.

“Of course he’ll deny it. The Cairenes are the most polished liars in the world. I may find a way to make him talk, I’ve been expecting to get a full report from Scotland Yard on Mr. James Robinson of Harwich Crescent. But I can’t understand how James Robinson of London can have identified me with El Kerak.”

“Do you suppose that newspaper man who wrote the article in the *Geographic*. . . ?”

“I hadn’t thought of him because I didn’t suppose he had any way of knowing my real identity.”

“It’s strange,” she said quietly, “and it seems to me very important. You see,” she added with a smile, “I’m rather jealous of the fact that I’m the only person west of Suez who knows the real story of the infamous bandit.”

“I hope to God you are.”

“I’m sure you’re not really as infamous as they say you are.”

He grinned at her in a way far from infamous. “I try not to be any more infamous than I can help. I’ve had a melancholy pleasure in exterminating some of the most

despicable characters in the Near East. That's the only way I can prevent my neighbors from thinking I'm a perfectly respectable citizen."

"Robin Hood? That's what they call you."

"Nothing nearly as romantic as that. It's all pretty sordid and pretty rotten. Killing to be done and all that. Of course, it's war in miniature—specialized war. I've a big following—a few tribes who believe in me and will fight for me until death"—he broke off—"There I go talking again."

"Please go on. And Hassan Isar and his tribes—and Arif-el-Arif?"

"They're my enemies. Sworn enemies. My tribes come from beyond the Lebanon Mountains—most of them care nothing for religion. Copts, Jews, half-hearted Moslems—oh, they're a pretty sorry lot when you see them en masse. Many of them call themselves Christians, but they're not averse to attacking a caravan and making off with everything of value. You can understand it's difficult to keep a mob like that in order."

Camilla's eyes were ablaze with interest.

"And the tribes of Hassan Isar—of Arif-el-Arif?"

"Fanatical Moslems bent on restoring Palestine to the Arabs, on driving the British into the sea. And Hassan Isar who calls himself Joseph Asad, in spite of his mild exterior and beautiful manners, is the most fanatical of them all."

Camilla started up in recollection of recent contacts with her friend Joseph.

"You see," Barker went on, "that was why I was so disturbed by the wireless to Mohammed Ali. I was afraid that if Joseph Asad found out who I am, my goose would be cooked in Asia. I couldn't go back into Arabia even among my own tribesmen."

"How terrible!"

"But I'm hoping for the best. When I get to Cairo, I'll find a way to learn just how much Mahmoud knows. If he knows too much there will be a way to keep him quiet. I'll be on familiar ground in Cairo and able to look out for myself—"

"And in Alexandria?"

He took her hand and held it for a long moment.

"In Alexandria I shall simply cease to exist—"

"What do you mean?"

"I'm going to pass out of the picture for Joseph Asad, for Mahmoud, and that sneaking little Spanish viper, Serrano—so that they won't be able to find me."

"And where do I come in?"

He smiled almost like Asad but not quite. "Do you remember what I said to you once about the jinni in the bottle who could appear and disappear at will? Well,

that's what I'm going to be after I set my feet on the dock at Alexandria to-morrow. I shall vanish in the crowd and no one will be able to find me."

"Do you think I deserve this?"

"Except you, Camilla," he added quietly. "I will be at your elbow when you least expect me."

"And what about Asad? I'm not quite sure of Asad. He wants to go with me wherever I go, to Cairo, to Jerusalem, with the crowd in Michael Gay's bus even."

"There's safety in numbers."

"Yes. But he wants to arrange a caravan to go out into the desert. That might be more exciting."

"You mean just you and Asad?"

"Something like that."

He took her hand and held it.

"I wouldn't do that, Camilla."

"The idea attracts me," she said with a grin. "Especially if you're going to desert me—"

"Oh, I say. Don't do that—"

"Do you have to disappear just now, when you and I—"

"I have to go. I have no choice—"

"I suppose my feelings don't matter. You've built yourself up for me as a hero of sorts and made me care for you and then after I've given you the kind of assurance you want, you propose to drop me in the streets of Alexandria to find my way through Egypt to Jerusalem alone."

"Please don't, Camilla. I've told you everything. I've got this job to finish and after that I'll do anything you want me to do. Won't you trust me—believe in me?"

She made no direct answer, but went on in a moment coolly,

"And I suppose you want me to go on watching Asad?"

"No, not now after his proposal—"

"I'm sure he has behaved very well with me."

"I think you couldn't count on him if you went off with him on a caravan into the desert."

"Really, Ronnie, are you trying to make the idea attractive?"

"No. I abominate it. If you care for me you won't take the risk."

"And if you care for me you'd stick around and make the thing impossible."

"Please be reasonable. I know I have no right to ask anything of you."

"Not unless you give me the right to ask you to stay."

"I can't stay. I may be in Cairo to-morrow—and then called to Syria by the end

of the week.”

She snubbed out her cigarette in a receiver and said quietly, “So this is good-bye.”

He glanced at her once quizzically, then took her in his arms.

“You’re a cruel little devil,” he said, “but devastatingly sweet.”

She kissed him as he wished.

“You’re a dear,” she said, “and I’ll never care for anybody else unless”—and then she put a sting in the tail of her speech—“unless you stay away from me so long that Asad runs off with me.”

CHAPTER VI

· 1 ·

It seemed strange to Camilla for a pilot in a tarboosh and what seemed like an old-fashioned frock-coat to clamber up the side of a ship. It also seemed strange to her that Kitty Trimble should be laying her attractions so suddenly before Mahmoud Daoud whose father had been a nephew of the Khedive. Perhaps since Asad had deserted her, she wanted to show Camilla that there were other fish in the sea. Slim suggested that Mahmoud was just adding her to his collection of antiques.

Camilla and Slim stood watching the rather soiled groups of porters on the dock below that waited to unload the *Orizaba*—a legion of taffy-colored natives or Nubians in long and extremely filthy white night-shirts tied with red sashes about the middle; other natives in neat blue uniforms with brass buttons and tarbooshes; fellows in white turbans and sack suits selling leather bags or boxes of sweetmeats; beggars making noises that sounded like “golly—golly—golly” while they squatted on the flagstones and did tricks to conjure coins from the pockets of those who lined the rail above.

The tourists had plunged at once into the very essence of the East, the country of Asad and Mahmoud Daoud, the land that Ronald Barker had adopted. The red tarboosh that Asad had put on seemed already to have a new significance here, and Camilla saw that in his contacts with the customs and immigration officials he was treated with salutations and ceremonious gestures of respect.

Camilla and Slim said their farewells to Michael Gay who was to remain aboard the ship and see his bus safely landed at Beirut, and made their way down the gang-plank to the dock.

Although Camilla and Ronald Barker had made their farewells last night and had even agreed it would be unwise to be seen together again, she had to admit her disappointment that he had not appeared at lunch or offered to meet her somewhere ashore in the intricate maze that was Alexandria. But waiting automobiles received the tourists and whirled them through the narrow streets, past the reeking bazaars, where the visitors were besieged by swarms of filthy urchins with granulated eyelids whose upturned palms and constant treble appealed for bakshish.

In the train the tour director had placed Camilla and Josie in the compartment with Asad, Kitty Trimble, Mahmoud, and Slim McManus, a very lively party where the budding flirtations of the *Orizaba* had a chance to flower in a different atmosphere. At tea-time Asad, who was now in his element, ordered Turkish coffee

almost as heavy as molasses and almost as sweet. He pointed out the mud villages and domed cemeteries of his country cousins, explained the workings of the pumps as the patient oxen plodded their arduous rounds, making Mother Nile perform the miracle of running uphill into the irrigation ditches, to a land as level as Holland and as green, with the encroaching desert ready to engulf it the moment the patient plodding ceased.

The roads seethed like yeast with small caravans moving back and forth, the head of the family striding in the lead, his wife and children following, sitting three or four in a row on the donkey's back or striding after him; camels and donkeys, in the fields, hitched side by side to primitive wooden plows. In the glow of the sunset the irrigation ditches ran blood. Camilla shivered a little, as she remembered what had already happened aboard the *Orizaba*. What was Egypt to hold for Ronald Barker?

And then Cairo the mysterious sprawled flat under the starlight; a station as modern as the Grand Central, electric lights, taxicabs passing caravans of camels from over the river, donkeys hidden under loads of sweet-smelling clover or drawing carts loaded with vegetables or wicker baskets of cackling chickens; strange, dark faces peering in at the windows; glimpses of oriental color through open doorways, acrid smells and subtle stinks. Then suddenly the terraces and carpeted stairway of Shepheard's with its genuflecting dragomen and long perspective of vaulted lobby and corridors, the meeting place of East and West. More Nubians in night-shirts, red sashes, and tarbooshes showing their rooms and bringing up their bags from the taxis under the omniscient eye of Edgar Willing. Asad hovered over Camilla like a protective deity, uttering brief, effective ejaculations in Arabic to the Nubians which made them move with a sudden briskness to which they were unaccustomed.

It was Asad's intention, apparently, to make himself indispensable to Camilla, and she accepted his attentions, trying to forget the conditions his hospitality might impose.

They dined well on special dishes of Asad's choosing and then the following morning Mustapha Ali, the best dragoman in Cairo, took them all out to see the relics of Tutankhamen at the museum and showed them through the bazaars. Then at night out to the Pyramids by moonlight in a string of taxis. In the vehicle Asad's heavy eyes watched Camilla with an almost proprietary interest and she permitted him to hold her hand. He was more devoted to her than ever and she had lost none of her confidence in her ability to keep him under control.

"What were your relations with Ronald Barker?" he asked her as they left the procession of loaded camels and donkeys in the city proper and rolled along the avenue of palms and villas toward their destination. "Had you met him or heard of

him before he came aboard the *Orizaba*?”

“Never. He was just a pleasant shipboard acquaintance,” she said carelessly and then added, “a short interlude in our friendship, yours and mine, Joe.”

“Did he speak to you of me?”

If she had to lie, now was the necessity to do it boldly.

“No. He was very much absorbed in his own affairs.”

“Did he tell you why he had come to Egypt?”

“I gathered it had something to do with the troubles in Palestine.”

“He is going to Palestine now?”

“I don’t know. I said good-by to him last night.”

“He must have been very grateful to you for helping to save his life.”

“He said he was,” and then she thought it about time to end the catechism. “Do you know anything about that shooting, Joe?” she asked. “Who did it and why?”

“I know nothing about it.”

It was, of course, what she had expected him to say.

“Did you know that last night a man named Ayub tried to stab Mr. Barker in the back?”

Asad’s chin jerked up almost imperceptibly.

“Really! They kept that pretty quiet.”

“Mr. Barker was very lucky, they say. He seems to have many enemies among your people.”

Asad shrugged his heavy shoulders.

“What could you expect?”

“Not assassination, Joe.”

“It is the eastern way of ending matters quickly. Who is Ayub?”

“A member of the crew.”

She felt somehow that the indolence of his questions meant less than the keen flash of interest in his eyes that he could not conceal.

“What do you know of José Serrano?” she asked him then.

“I know nothing about him—I saw him in the Captain’s room—Do you know him?”

She couldn’t parry and thrust with Asad if he professed ignorance of everything. It was like fighting in the dark. But she agreed with Ronnie that these attempts on his life all had one origin and one incentive, and Asad knew more than he was willing to tell. She was getting nowhere and she knew it. She must choose, like Asad, the oriental way of saying little and listening much.

They climbed the hill to Cheops and, after the usual expressions of awe and

rapture, went down the rocky road to the Sphinx, which would be posing for them by the time they reached it, with the moon at just the exact angle to show the monstrous effigy at its worst and at its best.

Mustapha Ali, with the air of mystery that made his job expensive, advised them all to keep together under the protection of his men; for frequently, he said, inquisitive tourists wandered off into the sand and were seen no more.

“Hooey,” Slim said, spitting in the general direction of the Pyramid of Cheops.

Nevertheless, the desert called to Camilla as it might have called any one sick of the insane screeching and growling of the cities, with their unclean enmities and affections. Here where the Sphinx looked down over the centuries, was a quietness that she had never known and, she was sure, could never know again. The distant note of a loon from the Nile valley or the howl of a hyena from beyond the sand-hills only seemed to make the silence more majestic. And she could understand the lure of the Desert—“Allah’s Garden,” as they called it, where peace was as only peace on earth could be found. The voices of her companions impinged on ears that she had attuned to silence and she wandered off, eluding Asad who was occupied with Josie, finding her way beyond the shadow of the nearest tombs and out upon a mound of rocks where she could face the desert and fill her unquiet spirit with solitude and silence. She thought that Asad was a part of all this, and the caravan that he had suggested seemed more desirable than ever. What danger could she run with a man who loved her as he did? At the moment Ronnie Barker was very far away. He had promised to be near when she needed him, but he had given her no sign.

The figure of a native startled her by appearing among the rocks beside her. His kaffiyeh was pulled down over his eyes, meeting the scarf wrapped around his neck, from which emerged a familiar voice.

“Haven’t you wandered too far, Camilla?”

She gave a quick glance around at her friends who had gone toward the Sphinx. Apparently her absence had not been noticed.

“Oh, Ronnie,” she said joyfully. “I thought I’d never be seeing you again.”

He laughed as he took her in his arms and she saw that his face was stained and dirty and that only his voice was familiar.

“The jinni in the bottle,” he said. “You wanted me and so I came.”

“I did. Where do you come from? Where have you been?”

“Camel-driving. Don’t I look it? But I had to see you before I went to Jerusalem.”

“When do you go?”

“I’m flying to-morrow. I’ve had some news to-day.”

“Anything I ought to know?”

“Yes. Ayub has confessed.”

“Is Asad implicated?”

He nodded slowly. “I came to tell you that. Has he behaved himself?”

“The soul of discretion.”

“He wants to win you that way if he can. Do you think you can manage him?”

“Sure of it.”

“Don’t trust him too far—”

“Or too near,” she laughed.

“You’re not afraid of him?”

“Not in the least.”

Sounds of voices calling her name from the path below.

“You must go now. I’ll manage to see you in Jerusalem. Did you learn anything?”

“No. But I’m beginning to guess again.”

“Excellent. Won’t you tell me?”

“Not yet.”

Again the sound of voices.

“Good-by,” Ronnie said and disappeared.

“Coming,” Camilla cried, waving her hand and moving over the rocks toward the Sphinx, Asad climbing the rocks to meet her.

“Don’t you realize that’s a very dangerous thing to do?” he grumbled.

“No,” she said cheerfully. “I’ve been communing with Kismet.”

“These fellows around the Pyramids are very unreliable,” he said. “There are lawless tribes less than half a mile away from here. Don’t you realize that it would be the easiest thing in the world to carry you off where you’d never be heard from again?”

Ronnie had flown to Jerusalem and Asad had gone to the Kasr-ed-Doubara to attend to “important business.” Josie and Janet had gone shopping and Camilla intended to improve her time on a mission that she had planned since yesterday. A conversation with Mustapha conducted in reportorial fashion by Camilla had given her an idea about Mahmoud, the grandnephew of the Khedive, who, in his commercial pursuits, she found, used many aliases in looking for stock. It was with a

thrill of delight that she learned that one of his pseudonyms was the prosaic one of Mohammed Ali, the name of his uncle who was a cousin of the dragoman, Mustapha.

She found Slim wandering in the lobby, ordered a taxi, and told the driver to go to the antique shop of Mahmoud Daoud just off the Mouski. Slim did not know where he was going or why. But he was delighted to have his innings with Camilla. “Whither thou goest I go, Camilla, even unto the ends of the Mouski,” he said.

But the Mouski was apparently just around the corner and Mahmoud’s an unpretentious place. Its name was great among the taxi-drivers who received fat fees for bringing tourists from the hotels. Camilla was met at once by a suave young man in perfectly fitting morning-coat, spats, and a Parisian manner. She asked for Mahmoud but the young man who proclaimed himself a cousin of the proprietor reported that Mahmoud, having just returned from America, was very busily engaged at the moment with a lady in his private office at the rear of the shop and could not be seen immediately.

So Camilla and Slim browsed around to see if there was anything she wanted.

Slim was incorrigible and at once put two old Persian armlets in his pocket without the slightest idea of paying for them. Meanwhile other persons entered the shop and, the young man leaving them, Camilla succeeded in getting Slim to give up his plunder.

“What’s the big idea, Camilla?” he asked ruefully. “When you’ve lived in the East as long as I have you’ll know you’ve got to take things whenever you can get ’em, to make up for the things they get away from you.”

“But it’s dishonest, Slim—”

“Not in the East, dearie. Nothing is dishonest in the East. Where every one is dishonest no one is dishonest. They don’t think any more of stealing here than you do of powdering your nose. In fact they think you’re mentally deficient if you don’t take things when you can. Let me take ’em, Camilla.”

But she was obdurate and watched him whenever they passed a table of smaller curios.

“Shucks, Camilla! Half the fun of shopping in the East is getting the best of the other fellow. It’s a game with everybody to keep from losing money. Now with these armlets we might have made a profit on the day.”

As they approached the rear of the store and examined some old Persian luster-ware, the voice of Kitty Trimble came clearly from an open door.

“In a *Geographic Magazine* on the ship, Mahmoud. When I went back to look for it, the magazine had disappeared.”

And then a low murmur of Mahmoud's voice, indistinguishable as Camilla moved away just in time to see Slim put a small amber box into his trouser pocket. She was so absorbed in what she had heard that she almost neglected to rescue the amber box, at last deciding to put Slim on a teakwood bench and hold his hand, which was the only way to keep it from taking things.

"Camilla, there's the loveliest scarab on this table right at my elbow—"

"Sh, Slim. Do you know that Kitty Trimble is in there with Mahmoud?" she whispered.

"Do tell," Slim said. "More dirty doings. . . . What do you suppose. . . ?"

"I can't tell you. But I've found out what I came here for. I've got to buy something and go."

"Why buy it when you can snatch it?"

"Please don't, Slim."

"Oh, all right," he said disgustedly. "But shopping with you is no fun at all."

Camilla found Mahmoud's cousin, and buying a small slave bracelet went out of the shop, Slim slowly trailing. "I didn't know you liked slave bracelets," he said, when the taxi was on its way to the hotel. "Here's one for your other arm, Camilla," he added proudly.

"Slim! It has turquoises set in it."

"Yep, and small diamonds. It's prettier than the one you bought."

"Slim, we'll have to go back!"

"And have me arrested for shop-lifting? That wouldn't be nice." He dropped something into her palm. It was the scarab that had been at his elbow on the table.

"I can't take it, Slim. I'll have to send them back."

"Shucks, Camilla! They've flimflammed me out of enough dough in this burg in the last few years to buy that shop twice over. Forget it, will you, dearie?"

"We've got to go back to-night and make some excuse."

"What excuse have *you* got to make? I snatched 'em, didn't I?"

He was hopeless. What could be done with such a man? She could return them anonymously, of course . . . and this she decided to do.

She was very anxious to see Ronnie and confirm the fact that the wireless code message had been for Mahmoud, who was Mohammed Ali, and no one else; that Mahmoud knew Ronnie was El Kerak, and that his secrets in Syria were no longer safe. Camilla now knew that he was connected with the crimes, possibly Asad's

agent or intermediary. She wondered about Asad's important business at the Kasred-Doubara. Nothing for Ronnie's good. Perhaps messages to Jerusalem where he might be assassinated by Arab terrorists when he landed or wireless code messages to Arif-el-Arif to organize superior forces and annihilate the men of El Kerak before he could reach them. She felt singularly helpless and must have shown her anxiety to Slim who ordered two old-fashioned when they reached the hotel, and then a side-car for himself when the deep wrinkle between her eyes refused to disappear.

"Camilla," he said, "you know I love you. . . . I can't bear to see you bothered. If it's Asad, I'll just feed him to the alligators."

She smiled. "No, Slim, that won't be necessary."

"Well, is it because I snitched those things?"

"It's something I can't tell you now. Something to do with Kitty Trimble."

"Oh."

He was willing to let the matter rest there so she thanked him and went up to her room.

It was difficult to know what was going to happen and Camilla realized that she must at the earliest moment let Ronnie know of her discovery. She wanted to warn him. But how? A telegram to the British High Commissioner at Jerusalem? But what could she say that would not be revealed to all the world? And secrecy in Ronnie's affairs, she realized, was more desirable than anything else.

She had hoped to have a message from him before he left and was forced to be content with a brief laconic note: "King David Hotel, Jerusalem, Wednesday. Ronnie."

How British of him! And yet she could not help comparing his repression with the florid wooing of her more dangerous suitor.

CHAPTER VII

· 1 ·

The most fascinating city in the world, the object of her Eastern pilgrimage, was now unimportant to Camilla beside the impulse to get to Jerusalem and Ronald Barker at the earliest moment. The Citadel, the Tombs of the Mamelukes, the Green Mosque, were just tombs and mosques to her and she excused herself to Edgar Willing, packed her bag, and waited in the lobby for the time when they would take the afternoon train to Jerusalem. Slim joined her, of course, because, as he said, he had been so fed up with tombs and mosques that he got a pain even thinking about them and he didn't get any pain at all thinking about Camilla.

He ordered a coffee instead of a cocktail because Camilla ordered one and they sat watching the people come and go like the strutters of Peacock Alley, keeping an eye for the returning tourists from the Green Mosque. Three persons entered the hotel in earnest conversation—Asad, Kitty Trimble, and Mahmoud and, without seeing Camilla and Slim, went into the café. Where had these three met? How? And why? And what witches' caldron would they brew? To Camilla it seemed like an unfortunate conjunction and surely no good could come to Ronald Barker.

Slim watched them suspiciously as they disappeared behind a screen.

"I bet that woman's spit would sizzle a hole through an iceberg," he said cheerfully.

Camilla laughed.

"That's one way of putting it. Kitty Trimble has no use for Ronald Barker or for me—"

"Does that bother you any? I'd rather have a dame like that hate me than love me any day."

Slim always comforted her a little.

"It's Ronnie Barker I'm thinking about. I don't like to see one of our own people get the worst of it."

She was thoughtful for a moment. "It's just that Asad and Mahmoud know a thing or two that might make trouble for Ronnie. I can't tell you anything more than that."

"I'd like to help you if I could," Slim said.

"I know you would. Ronnie's asked me to help him find out something and I said I'd try—"

"Okey. Maybe I've guessed what it is. You see Mark Aronberg on the ship was

talking—you know, that fellow with the long nose—he seemed to know everything. Barker was okey with him and he hoped he'd find out where Osman Khali went."

"Did he have any information about that?"

"No. The descendant of the Prophet just disappeared in a cloud of smoke, the Arabs say. He might be right in Jerusalem for all I know or on a flying carpet waiting for a good spot to land."

Slim flicked his cigarette accurately into a Japanese vase. "Well, it's no business of mine. All I know is that you or Barker can call on me for help if you need it. I like Ronald Barker, he's half American and a regular guy. I don't like that bird, Asad. He has curling eyelashes."

"So have you, darling," Camilla said. "Didn't you know it?"

"Hell, no!" He took a glance in the mirror alongside of them. "My God! I believe you're right," he gasped.

"That goes to show you can't be too careful what you say about people."

"Well, anyway I don't pose as a sheik," he muttered sulkily. "And I'm not a gigolo. I think you've fallen for that guy, Camilla. It beats me how you dames fall for a whole lot of guys at once. I used to think I was in the running—then came Asad—then Barker. It seems to me it might clear the air a bit if you'd tell me just how we all stand."

She smiled.

"I like Ronnie a lot, I love Joe a little, but I adore you, Slim."

Slim flushed, snubbed out his cigarette in a dish. "Say, quit your kidding, Camilla."

"Then don't ask impertinent questions. And if you'll promise not to tell anybody I'll let you into a secret. I don't love Joe enough for anybody to worry about—"

"Say, that's good news—"

"He frightens me a little—"

"How frightens you—?"

"Well, he wants to marry me and he has a harem already."

"The son of a gun! How does he frighten you?"

"Well, I guess it's just his temperament, Slim."

"Or temperature. If he makes any cracks at you and you tell me I'll take a crack at him."

"Thanks. That's what I hoped you'd say, darling." She paused and examined the toe of her slipper. "You see, Slim, we're getting out into Joe Asad's country now. He's well known to the Samaritans—"

"Not good Samaritans either—"

“The only good Samaritan was in the Bible and he’s dead.”

“So will Asad be if he tries any funny business.”

“And across the Jordan in Syria he’s the head man of a lot of fighting tribes.”

“A big shot, eh?”

“A very big shot—”

“We’ve had some big shots in the U.S.A., but they always end in Alcatraz or the cemetery. There’s a lot of Arab cemeteries over here and we’ll give him a grave with an extra large cupola.”

“I encouraged Asad to go on the tour with me, Slim. I’d rather have him where I can keep an eye on him—at least until I hear from Ronnie at the King David Hotel —”

“And then—?”

“We’ll have to let nature take its course.”

Slim grinned. “For instance, if I fed him a nice Mickey Finn at dinner on the train and dumped him into the canal at El Kantara—”

“Please be serious.”

“I never was more serious in my life, I don’t like that guy.”

“You’ve got to hide your feelings. You might get us all into trouble.”

“Okey. I don’t say I won’t try.”

Camilla finished her coffee and rose.

“I want you to act as if butter wouldn’t melt in your mouth—”

“Yeh. The last time I tried that I nearly choked to death.”

“And be especially nice to Joe. Understand?”

“You don’t want me to kiss him, do you, Camilla?”

At this moment Edgar Willing entered the corridor shepherding his flock, sending the tourists at once to their rooms to have their baggage ready for the porters and themselves for the taxis to the station.

Asad and Kitty Trimble joined Camilla and Slim.

“Too bad I couldn’t do the honors of Cairo,” he said. “I’ve been so busy—”

“Yes,” Camilla replied with a smile at Kitty, “I noticed that.”

“And Mahmoud gave me the loveliest piece of jade, darling,” said Kitty. “Isn’t it beautiful?” she exhibited a necklace. “Cairo is just the sweetest place, don’t you think so, Camilla?”

In the conversation that followed Camilla couldn’t resist the impression that Kitty was playing the friendship racket with the impetus of some new suggestion. She had never “darlinged” Camilla so exuberantly before. But it was a game that two could play. Slim stood on the side-lines grinning. It seemed to him that more than ever

Camilla would have to watch her step—especially as Joe arranged that Camilla and Kitty Trimble should dine with him on the train. But Slim invited himself to that party. He had made up his mind not to let Camilla out of his sight.

· 2 ·

It seemed extraordinary to see an ocean liner, all her lights glowing, rise suddenly out of the midst of the desert, until Asad told her that they had reached the Suez ferry at Kantara where they changed to the French train that was to take them on to Jerusalem. They were east of Suez now “where the best was like the worst.” As they left the canal and the rickety train plunged along the crooked rails of Allenby’s famous route into the darkness, the inquietude that Camilla had been aware of since last she had seen Ronald Barker seemed to grow with the miles. What was the best that she was to find on this pilgrimage into an unknown land and what the worst, for her and for Ronnie? She knew that she would see him sometime to-morrow—that was the best. She knew also that Asad would try to persuade her to remain in Damascus and marry him. That was absurd and certainly the worst thing that could happen to her. But she knew that having entered into the game in Ronald Barker’s behalf—in a jesting spirit—she had been obliged to carry on almost beyond her depth before she had been aware of it. She was committed now. The shipboard flirtation of a few days had, by the nature of events, become an adventure in which she was as deeply involved as he. It was no piece of luck for him or for her that she had put him on guard against one of the assassins but a part of a pattern which seemed to weave his life definitely with hers. She did not regret it now and danger made their ties so much the closer.

She stood in the corridor of the train with Asad watching the landscape go jerking past towns with biblical names inscribed in three languages on the platforms. Rafa, Gaza, Ascalon—a phrase came to her: “tell it not in Gath, publish it not in the streets of Ascalon,” the land of deception and intrigue since the beginning of history. Asad was a part of all that—she felt it to-night as he made love to her and told her again of his father’s palace in Damascus. What were his motives in going out of his way to join this tourist pilgrimage which he detested? What kind of an attachment was this that made him forget the obligations of Hassan Isar in the holy war he intended to wage? Or had he forgotten them? His business in Jerusalem was as important as Ronald Barker’s, his obligation for the safety of Osman Khali as great as Ronald Barker’s obligation to put the man in an English prison where he could not threaten the safety of the British Mandate in Egypt and Palestine.

It was the kind of attachment which meant one thing in Syria but another in America, and the coquetry that had led her into these two affairs had now announced its results. She was keen for Ronnie and to help him she was committed to Asad—until Ronnie could find the man he was looking for. And she played the game that night upon the train. Delilah had nothing that Camilla didn't try, while Slim bobbed out of his compartment like an unquiet spirit, or sat in the seat of the guard at the end of the corridor, smoking cigarette after cigarette. She did adore Slim, just as she would have adored a St. Bernard whose shaggy coat had saved her from drowning. And she felt unaccountably secure with Slim.

From the railroad station at Jerusalem to a modern hotel in bright colors with a porte-cochère and bell-boys in fake Turkish costumes. At the desk she found what she was looking for—a note from Ronnie—but she did not open it until she reached her own room.

“Come to the stall of Amaziah in David Street. Next to the oranges on the right side, going East from the Jaffa gate. Bring a guide and ask for Ali Afdal.”

That was all—direct and to the point. No signature—not even an initial. She glanced at her wristwatch. Ten o'clock. She took Slim into her confidence and he volunteered at once. He said he didn't need a guide. He knew the dump. Asad had disappeared, probably on one of his mysterious missions to some mosque or high Arabian dignitary. For this she was thankful, taking coffee with Slim and hurrying off in a taxi after making sure they were not observed or followed.

At David's Tower they dismissed the taxi and went on foot into a narrow street little more than an alley, a dark street of shadows striped with sunlight, with narrow archways leading into dark passages, others leading to little courtyards with glimpses of palms and bright sunlight beyond the gloom. A frightened cat darted across their path and disappeared between the iron gratings of a window. A furtive cat, like these people, aloof and suspicious. Downhill they went, brushing elbows with the passers-by, stepping at times into doorways to avoid the donkeys with their loads of millet, vegetables, or fodder which sometimes reached from wall to wall. Strange-looking people here—Ashkenazim Jews in velvet gabardines and large fur-rimmed hats; Greek priests with square beards and high round headgear on their way from the Church of the Holy Sepulcher; Franciscan friars, old men, in cloaks and caps; pale, spectacled Jews with curls of hair loose on their foreheads; in the doorways, Arabs, sucking sleepily on their hookas, lifting their heavy eyelids to look at this girl from another world. David Street was a street of steps and cobbles and no motor-car ever climbed it. Here was the center of Jerusalem, the heart of its ancient civilization where the new entered only on sufferance.

On the right down the hill was a pool of bright sunlight where Camilla saw a pile of oranges spread for customers. This was the place, she was sure. She laid restraining fingers on Slim's arm, asking him to wait in a tobacconist's shop while she went forward. An old Jew sat in the mouth of the stall, a Jew in a skullcap thumbing the pages of a book. He looked up as she stopped before him and spoke the name "Amaziah" as he uncrooked his back and then crooked it again in a courteous bow.

When she mentioned the name of Ali Afdal his face broke into a hundred wrinkles and became what he intended to be a smile. And then he made a gesture, "Ali Afdal—yes," pointing to a door beside him, an ancient wooden door letting into a wall that seemed to protect a garden.

There were olive-trees in the garden and stone pedestals of what had once been a temple. As she entered a figure rose from a bench and greeted her—an Arab, she thought, and was about to ask him where Ali Afdal was when the Arab behind his stains and robes was suddenly Ronald Barker himself.

He embraced her eagerly, explaining that he had remained in native costume since she had seen him last, for he had heard in Cairo that there were other Arabs in Jerusalem determined to destroy him.

"It's much safer," he explained. "I can't afford to take any chances now especially since this last assassination and riot in Nazareth which took place yesterday."

She told him of Asad's visit to the Kasr-ed-Doubara, of her visit to Mahmoud's antique shop and what she had heard there, that Mahmoud or Mohammed Ali was part of Asad's plot, their indifference to each other part of a studied plan of campaign, and that Mahmoud's informant in London had found out who El Kerak was through some one in Ronnie's official family.

"It's worse than I thought," he muttered, shaking his head. "But I've plugged that leak in London—an Englishman with a grievance."

"You see, Asad knows all about your activities in Syria and among his own people. He must have found out from Mahmoud about the wireless even before Kitty Trimble saw those photographs in the *Geographic*."

"The whole thing might as well have been published in the *London Times*." Ronnie grinned ruefully. "Asad's crowd has been too clever for me. But at least I can now move with my eyes open. Did Asad ask you any questions about me?"

"Yes, lots. But he didn't get the right answers."

"Did he make love to you?"

"Of course. I've been giving him a line."

"Do you think he suspects that I—that you and I—?"

“I don’t think so. I’ve done my best to deceive him.”

He held her away from him examining her as though her experience might have left some visible mark upon her face. Then he kissed her again.

“Where is Asad now?” he asked.

“I don’t know. He disappeared from the railway station in a taxi. I haven’t seen him since.”

“Who brought you here?”

“Slim.”

“Where is he now?”

“Just a few steps away in the tobacconist’s, watching. He’s been a real friend to you and to me.”

“Do you think you were followed?”

“We took every precaution.”

CHAPTER VIII

· 1 ·

Ronnie took out a native cigarette. "I won't offer you one of these," he said. "They're filthy weeds made of poppy grindings and camel dung."

"No, thanks."

They had been talking in lowered tones, but as she sat beside him he now spoke almost in a whisper.

"Camilla, I'm going into a situation of considerable difficulty. I think it's safer for you not to be connected with me in any way. If I had my wish I'd prefer to send you by train down to Haifa."

"Nonsense, Ronnie. I'm perfectly capable of protecting myself."

"I'm not sure of that. I could provide you with a police escort wherever you go but the sight of our constabulary stirs up trouble. I've promised the Commissioner to avoid dangerous contacts and to try not to start anything."

She smiled.

"You mean I'm a dangerous contact."

"I'm the living proof of that."

She smiled and shrugged. "Then you think I can no longer help you?"

"I didn't say that." He had taken her fingers.

She paused a moment and then said decisively: "I'm not going down to Haifa, Ronnie, on account of Hassan. And it's ridiculous to suppose that harm can come to a touring party from the United States—"

"It happened last year at Tiberias. These fanatics are more reckless than ever. And with a leader like Hassan Isar across the Jordan and in Syria—there's no telling what they might do."

"You're trying to frighten me."

"No, just playing the part of prudence."

"And what about Osman Khali?"

"I'm going on to search for him alone, Camilla."

She waited a long moment as though considering a final decision.

"You mean," she said, "you want to drop me now like a hot potato?"

"I'm just trying to prevent anything happening that might make an international incident."

She was awake now to the seriousness of his tone and manner.

"What makes you think something will happen to our party?"

“Many things. Since the British took charge, the Arabs dislike Americans, too. The French Foreign Legion doesn’t interfere with them so long as they break no laws. I know all about the French major. He’s stationed at Baalbek—a very amiable gentleman who reads Voltaire and quite properly doesn’t believe in looking for trouble unless it’s brought to him on a silver platter.”

“Hassan is hardly the kind to do that.”

Ronald Barker drew away from her as a thought came to him. “What makes you think Hassan doesn’t suspect you of any interest in me and my job? Don’t you realize that even if there were nothing between us Kitty Trimble would have done her best to make him suspicious?”

“That’s possible. But I’ve a good deal of confidence in my ability to make him think what I want him to. He’s just Joe Asad to me.”

He flicked the ash from his cigarette.

“I have faith in your power of persuasion but I can’t let you take the risk—”

“But, Ronnie, don’t you remember you said I was Kismet for you?”

“Things are different now. You’re not aboard an American ship. You’ll have no proper protection in Syria unless I give it and I can’t afford the publicity now.”

She glanced up quickly as she misinterpreted his meaning.

“I’m terribly disappointed in you. I didn’t think you’d let me down like this.”

“I’m not letting you down—”

She frowned, then got up and poked at the paving viciously with her parasol.

“Suppose I told you I was going to carry on in spite of you?”

“In what way?”

“Well, now that Hassan knows you’re El Kerak your hands are tied. It’s just possible that you can’t find out as much as I can.”

“That’s too dangerous to prove.”

“No more dangerous than it ever was.”

“Camilla, you’ve got to understand that Syria isn’t Egypt or even Palestine. Syria has a French Mandate. The French are rather jittery since that flare-up down at Beirut. They’re not anxious to stir up trouble with a powerful sheik like Arif—or his son, Hassan. Arif has great influence with the desert people. The French want to keep his friendship—”

“But what difference will that make so long as *I* keep the friendship of Hassan?” she asked significantly.

Ronnie Barker paced the flagstones, aware of a note of defiance in her voice. He glanced up at her with an expression she had not seen on his face.

“I thoroughly believe,” he said with great deliberation, “that your affair with

Hassan gives you a great deal of pleasure, as well as excitement, that his attention flatters you, that danger intrigues you—”

“Really?”

“It’s true. You like being near the edge of disaster. In the United States girls are accustomed to having their own way, to ruling their men by flattery, and they play the game to win. But in Turkish countries it’s not the same thing. A woman is less than a man. A girl can’t play with men in Moslem countries as she does in the United States.”

“Perhaps you think I’ve been playing with you,” she said. “Perhaps,” she went on more warmly, “you’ve lived so long in Moslem countries that you’ve imbibed some of this Moslem philosophy—”

“Please, Camilla! I don’t want to quarrel. I’m just trying to prevent you from doing a foolish thing—”

“It’s no more foolish than it was last week.”

“Yes. Conditions have changed. I can’t permit you to go any further in this affair with Hassan.”

She frowned angrily.

“Permit! I don’t like that word, Ronnie Barker. You don’t want my friendship with Hassan Isar. Well”—she shrugged—“I do want it. Even if I’d never met you I’d want it. I like Hassan Isar. He is a romantic figure that would appeal to any woman—”

“Romantic! You’re only trying to make me angry.”

“No. I’m very fond of Hassan. He’s always kind and considerate, I began by trying to do you a service. Now I intend to cultivate Hassan’s friendship whether I do you a service or not.”

“Camilla! . . .”

· 2 ·

He paused abruptly and she never learned what he was going to say. For sounds of commotion came through the door of Amaziah’s fruit stall, voices raised in anger and the sounds of blows.

Ronnie ran to the door and peered out at a scene of wreckage and turmoil, where Arabs, Jews, and blacks surged around the tall figure of Slim McManus who, bareheaded, was pushing and striking right and left at the antagonists, one of whom had clambered on his back in the hope of pulling him to the ground. But Slim seemed very much in his element and a smile of half-satisfaction was on his lips as he twisted

and struck in two directions at once. Finally, as Ronald Barker rushed past the frightened Amaziah and his scattered oranges, a momentary diversion took place as two British constables in neat blue uniforms came hurrying down the steps. By this time Slim was wiping the blood from his face, ready to aim a blow at the figure who rushed out of Amaziah's doorway toward him.

"Steady on there, Slim," came Ali Afdal's voice in English. "I'm Ronald Barker . . ."

Slim was so astonished at this familiar voice emerging from a native costume that he stood staring unable to say a word.

One of the constables put his hand on Ali Afdal's shoulder.

"What's happened here, my man? What's all the row about?" he asked of Slim.

"Let me explain," Ali Afdal said.

"Who are you?"

"A man of peace, come to buy oranges of Amaziah—"

"Oranges!" wailed the Jew who had been down on his knees on the cobbles trying to retrieve his scattered fruit. "My beautiful oranges!"

Meanwhile a larger crowd had gathered again at the right of the constables, peering from every window and doorway, voices and hands raised in angry protest. It was the sort of situation that in the two previous weeks had led to riots and one killing, the sort of a situation that Barker had been expressly ordered to avoid.

"Let me go," whispered Ali Afdal to the constable in English and added something that made the man comply at once.

"My oranges!" wailed Amaziah again.

Slim grinned. "Keep your shirt on, toots," he said, taking out his wallet. "I'll buy your oranges, if you'll stop making a noise." He handed the man a pound note and the wailing ceased.

"You're American?" the constable asked. "What are you doing here?"

"Just seeing the sights. I brought a lady to buy some fruit. When the scrap started she just slipped in back of the fruit stall here."

"What started the trouble?"

"Well, you might say it was a young man in a white linen suit and a tarboosh."

"What did he do?"

"Well—ah—you might say he tried to get familiar with the young lady I was with and I may have jostled him a bit. That's what upset the oranges and made all the row."

"Where is he now?"

Slim peered over the heads of the crowd. "Seems to have gone."

“Do you know who he was?”

“Never saw him before. But I can’t have any one insult my girl-friend. You wouldn’t stand for that, now would you, constable?”

The constable pulled at his small mustache and agreed that he wouldn’t.

“Well, you’d better take your girl-friend back to the hotel and we’ll forget it.”

“Thanks, old man. I’ll do the same for you some day.” Slim looked around for Ali Afdal but he, also, had disappeared.

Amaziah was bowing and scraping his thanks and Slim went past him into the garden to Camilla. He was not surprised to find Ronald Barker with her.

“I listened,” Camilla said. “You didn’t tell the truth, of course.”

“Not more than necessary.”

“I wouldn’t have had this happen to you for a good deal, Slim,” Barker said.

“You will, when you know what happened. I was in the tobacco store buying some of this stinking stuff to smoke when who should I see coming down the street, just as natural as you please, but our old friend Mahmoud Daoud of the *Orizaba*.”

“Mahmoud!” gasped the girl. “He wasn’t with us on the train.”

“Another flying carpet, I guess. He was just snooping around, but I knew in a minute that he was laying for Camilla.”

“For me! Why?”

“Well, I might say that he was keen enough to guess that after what happened on the *Orizaba* Ronald Barker might not be far off. When he stopped at the orange stall and took a step past Amaziah I knew he was up to mischief, so I just came out and caught him by the arm. I must have pinched him too hard and startled him some, for he twisted out of my grasp. I thought he was going to crack me one, so I cracked him first and he dropped down like a setting hen in Pop Amaziah’s oranges. Well, that started the circus. He must have had a boy-friend with him for somebody began piling into me from behind. Then as Mahmoud got out of the oranges he pulled a gun—nasty little short-coupled automatic—I reckon he was going to use that on you, Barker, if he found you—but I got a grip on his wrist and sent it flying. Meanwhile, his boy-friend was hammering at my head with something—”

“Did you see who it was?”

“No. He never gave me a chance. But I know he wore a tarboosh like Mahmoud and had a mustache.”

“It wasn’t Asad?”

“No. It might have been that little fellow in Mahmoud’s shop, but I couldn’t be certain. They sure got away fast when the constables came.”

“Well, you know I can never thank you enough, Slim,” Ronnie said.

“Thank Camilla,” Slim said dryly. “Anything I do for you I do for her.”

“Of course. I understand.”

“Okey, Camilla. Whatever you say. But I’m willing to call it a day if you are. There’s a goose egg on the back of my head that will take some reducing. Of course, if you’d like to stay around here I can come back for you after a while,” he said generously. He took one glance at them. “I’ll just wait outside,” he said.

Camilla moved after Slim.

· 3 ·

Ronald Barker took a few paces toward the door and intercepted her.

“One moment, Camilla,” he said. “I can’t let you go without trying to make you understand fully what this situation is.”

“I think I understand it now.”

“Not quite. I don’t mind you putting a wrong interpretation on my words or on my actions. You have the right to misunderstand me if you insist on doing it—”

“Insist—?”

“That’s the impression I get—”

“The impression you insist on getting,” she countered.

“We can’t waste words now, minutes are valuable. What I want you to comprehend is that the appearance of Mahmoud Daoud here this morning so close on your path and mine shows that both he and Hassan know that you have been working in my interest and against his.”

“Perhaps they’re mistaken.”

He frowned and made no effort to conceal his impatience.

“Let’s say then ‘that you *were* working in my interest.’”

“And so what—?”

“Just that any hope you may have had of deceiving him will have to be abandoned. Hassan knows by this time that you’ve been deceiving him, that you intend to deceive him again.”

“Perhaps I don’t intend to deceive him.”

“And I want to tell you again,” he went on coolly, “that when you go on into Syria you may be beyond my help. I’ve told you the kind of man Hassan Isar is. He flatters you and you want to believe it. He has a bad record—I warn you now again solemnly against him.”

She didn’t like his tone or the severity of his look.

“Thanks,” she said and moved again toward the door.

Words had passed between them that couldn't be recalled.

"Is that all you have to say?" he asked.

"I—I think so."

"Then it's good-by, Camilla?"

"Good-by, Ronnie—good-by—I—I—" She stood weakly for a moment and then went out with a rush.

Ronald Barker stood staring at the door through which she had gone. Then he lighted a cigarette, smoking it for a moment furiously. At last coming to a sudden decision, he went to the door and spoke to Amaziah, turned back, crossing the flagstones rapidly and silently, and slipped out of the garden at a little door which led into a narrow alley, where he disappeared.

CHAPTER IX

· 1 ·

How had this quarrel happened? Now that it was all over it seemed as though it was all a dreadful mistake. Where had it begun and why? Camilla had a general idea that she had been impatient at his sudden air of command and his definiteness about Hassan. She tried not to think of Ronald Barker for a while and gave her attention to Slim who complained of a headache. They found a taxi at the head of the street and after a visit to a drug-store, drove directly to the hotel. Here she excused herself from the morning round of sight-seeing and, pleading indisposition, ordered coffee sent to her room and to Slim's.

She was still aware of a dull resentment at Ronnie's new attitude which seemed to eliminate all the kindly moments that had gone before. What had he said? That he couldn't "permit" her to go any farther with her affair with Hassan! That word "permit" had touched off the fuse. He seemed to have forgotten that her affair with Hassan had been definitely planned by them both with the idea of doing Ronnie a service. And now that she had succeeded in gaining Hassan's confidence he chose to put a new light on her motives and to forbid her carrying on. That wasn't fair of him. He seemed to have discovered some new kind of villainy in Hassan's attentions, some new kind of danger in this visit to Syria which had not existed before.

Jealousy—at the sudden discovery that Hassan possessed romantic attractions for Camilla that Ronnie had never considered in his plans. It was all too bad. She was sorry now that she had lost her poise—for after all, wasn't his jealousy a part of his devotion to her? She had tried to provoke him but he had been provoking, too. He had been most provoking at the end when he hadn't caught her, as she was going out of the door of the garden, and taken her in his arms. There had been plenty of time for that while Slim waited outside. That's what poor old Slim had gone outside for and Ronnie had been stupid not to see it. . . . Ronnie, stupid and stiff-necked, gave her a new picture of how absurd he might be when he tried. It was the half of him that was British, she was sure. It was too much to suppose that Ronnie could have been generous and self-effacing like Slim, who took blows in her defense and asked nothing. Good old Slim! There was a very warm spot in her heart for Slim when she thought of how much he gave her and how little she could possibly give him in return. For in spite of all that had happened it was Ronnie of course, Ronnie—not Slim or Hassan—who mattered. She liked his soberness, and his quaint idea of humor. She liked the courage and skill of his battle for the preservation of the

ideals of all Christendom in the East. She had not forgotten how high those ideals were, with regard to herself—the slender silver cord of his ideal of womanhood which had so quickly bound them together.

She did not know when she was going to see him again, for she was aware that she had nothing to hope for now from the “jinni in the bottle.”

He had been angry and disappointed—more angry even than she was—and now that her anger had cooled she could see her own conduct in a proper perspective, hear her own phrases with their unpleasant inflections. She wished them unsaid and would have given a great deal for half an hour with Ronnie to straighten out the misunderstanding. But there seemed no immediate prospect of his communicating with her. Perhaps she was not to see him again in Palestine or elsewhere. That thought clutched her heart for a moment, leaving her cold and inert.

And then a thought came to her out of her contrition—an inspiration that would clear her conscience and make all things right with Ronnie. She would find Osman Khali, herself—betray the hiding-place of the descendant of the Prophet, if she could find it, and destroy Osman’s religious leadership which was becoming so dangerous to the British plans.

Of course, she must see Hassan at once, for if she was to return with the party on the *Orizaba* she would have a little less than a week to carry out her plans. But with Hassan suspicious of her motives the game would now be doubly difficult. How could she even attempt to get the information she wanted unless she could manage in some way to cajole Hassan into believing in her loyalty?

The feat seemed impossible.

But as Camilla recalled her last conversation with the Syrian on the train she gained courage. Hassan’s passion for her was a tremendous asset. It had kindled rapidly but, unlike the love of Ronnie and the affection of Slim, there was a danger of its burning out before she could use it. He had it under control but it was a dangerous plaything, more than dangerous if she couldn’t convince him that she was sincere. In what mood could she expect to find him since the defeat of Mahmoud’s attempt on Ronnie’s life? And what had become of Mahmoud?

She had the answer to one of these questions when the phone rang and Hassan Isar’s voice inquired for her.

“All right, Joe—just a headache—so I didn’t go to Bethlehem with Josie and the others this morning. I’ve been there before. Yes, I’d like to see you. . . . Lunch here at one? Delighted. I’ll be down in twenty minutes.”

The smiling visage of Hassan Isar as she met him in the lobby downstairs quickly dispelled the thought that she had anything to fear from him. The maître d’hôtel

showed them to a quiet corner where he ordered her a cocktail and then a very good lunch.

“I suppose I might as well tell you, Camilla, that my name is not Joseph Asad. In Syria it’s Hassan Isar. Across the Jordan they call me that.” He added then narrowly, “You knew it, didn’t you?”

There was nothing to be gained by evasion.

“Yes,” she said, “Ronald Barker told me.”

“I’m glad we’re all frank and aboveboard.”

He went on quickly. “You’re driving to Damascus with the other tourists, in a few days, I understand?”

“I expect to. But Mr. Willing tells us it will be necessary to have a British escort —”

“Such nonsense, Camilla,” he laughed. “Americans are as safe driving the Damascus road as if they were on Fifth Avenue. The poor Arabs! They get the blame for everything. A British escort! The British like to put on a show. They enlisted in England a lot of rosy-cheeked boys for Palestine and they’ve got to give them something to do to keep them out of trouble. So they send them along the roads with their pop-guns to make a good impression of having the situation well in hand.”

“Don’t you think that’s wise?”

“It would be, but, you see, there isn’t any ‘situation’ to keep in hand. A few mischievous children—more often Jews than Arabs—throw pebbles at the constables. There was never a time when a small boy didn’t hate a cop. Instead of treating the pebble-throwing as a mischievous prank the police bring out their quick-firing guns and armored trucks when all the boys need is a good spanking. I have no patience with offended British dignity. It is so ponderously absurd. I would laugh if it hadn’t become a serious matter to everybody who wants to live in peace out here in the Middle East.”

“But British officers are killed and British constables. Surely you don’t claim that little boys with pebbles do that!”

“No. The little boys have papas who come out of their houses when the boys shout and throw larger pebbles until somebody is hurt. In America your judge gives them a reprimand, a few days in jail—there are ways of managing situations like that. You don’t call on the army to do it. I refuse to permit you to get alarmed about travel in my country. Across the Jordan you’ll find a very peaceful, very gentle people watching their herds of sheep and goats and attending to their own affairs in spite of the bad name the British are trying to give them.”

“Don’t think I’m frightened. I’ve never hesitated for a moment and I’m very anxious to see your lovely country, Joe.”

“Hassan,” he corrected.

“I think I’ll call you Joe, Hassan.”

“Call me anything you like. If you’ll only think as much of Syria as I do you won’t be disappointed. I want you to know the real Syria that can’t be seen from a motor-bus. That’s what I asked you to lunch to talk about—didn’t you suspect it?—a caravan—a train of camels with baggage and servants and everything that you could desire. You’ll be surprised how comfortable you’ll be. I want you to see the desert under these conditions, in the starlight.”

“It sounds fascinating. But I’m afraid—”

“Of what are you afraid? In America it’s nothing for a girl to drive with a man until three o’clock in the morning.”

“This is slightly different. Gossip travels fast. Doesn’t my reputation mean anything to you?”

“I’ve offered to make you my wife—”

“One of them—”

“My only wife. That can be quickly arranged.”

“I don’t want anything quickly arranged. I can’t change my whole life, my mode of living, my nationality, just in a moment. You see I have friends and relatives who would be scandalized. I can’t do anything in a hurry. You forget that all my life I’ve been planning to be married in a church with six pink bridesmaids and boys in top-hats, spats, and gardenias—”

“Now you’re making fun of me.”

“No, I won’t be hurried, Joe. A girl gets married only once and she wants to get everything out of it that there is.”

He frowned at his coffee-cup and spoke slowly.

“None of these things you’re used to should matter to you if you cared for me as you said you did the other night on the train. Or was that just a convenient falsehood? Oh, it doesn’t matter to me if you lied that night—a lie to a man is a woman’s privilege—especially if she thinks she cares for another man.”

“Who gave you this idea? Kitty Trimble?”

“Yes, she says you’re in love with Ronald Barker.”

“You believe her?”

“What else can I believe?”

He gave her an unpleasant smile and shrugged.

“Merely that you met Ronald Barker this morning—secretly, in David Street

when you thought I wouldn't know." The unpleasant smile became a grin and then a more unpleasant laugh. "How foolish of you to try to fool me. You thought you outwitted me on the boat, but I knew what was happening. It amused you very much to lead me on and make me think you loved me, to make me look like a fool. Well, it amused me to see how far you would go before you knew you had failed. You like intrigue, Camilla. But then, you see, so do I. And I wouldn't care the snap of my fingers for a woman who couldn't match her wits with mine. I like it when you try to deceive me. That's the reason I've grown bored with the women of my own race. They're too stupid, too lazy, and too self-satisfied. You are different, Camilla. You have a brain and you know how to use it. It doesn't matter that you don't use it as I use mine. And I don't care how much you have tried to deceive me. I want you whether you deceive me or not. I want you more because I am not quite sure of you. To live with you would be a state of constant pleasant uncertainty and excitement. That's what I would like. The joy of conquest in the end will be so much the greater. I have no fear of Ronald Barker. He is too cool, too calculating, for one of your sort—too British to suit your pattern, which is my pattern of everything a woman should be."

"Thanks," she gasped, breathless and a little alarmed at his omniscience.

He smiled again. "You see I'm more honest than you are, I lay all my cards on the table. I want you at any cost."

She rolled her handkerchief and then unrolled it.

"No man can ever be sure of the woman he loves," he went on. "If I were sure of you you would lose half your charm."

"Then don't be sure of me, Joe. I don't want you to be sure of me."

"That's why I'm asking you to go with me alone in the desert—"

"I don't understand—"

"Because I know you'll refuse me at first and then change your mind."

She took refuge in her compact and lipstick.

"Then if you're so certain of me why take all the trouble of being deceived?"

"Because it amuses me to be expectant—to enjoy the doubts and fears of anticipation—"

One of the Turkish-looking flunkies that stood around the revolving door of the lobby now approached him with a sealed note which her companion tore open and read. She watched him eagerly, saw the frown quickly gather on his brow as he muttered some Arabic phrase beneath his breath.

"What is it?" she asked. "Something has bothered you."

He pushed back his chair, still frowning. "Yes, Camilla, I—I'm sorry to be

obliged to leave you but I—I've been sent for and I must go at once. If you'll excuse me—?"

He rose, bowed, and went out, while she followed him slowly. At the revolving door she saw him meet a man attired in a tarboosh and European clothing, and hurry off in a taxi.

· 2 ·

She would have given a great deal to know the contents of that note. She was sure that it had something to do with Ronnie. She was a little bewildered by the attitude of her luncheon companion who had come out into the open as Hassan Isar, discarding the name she was accustomed to, discarding all subterfuge as to his own relations with Ronald Barker, whom he disliked in the oriental manner, which meant that he intended to get the best of Ronnie by any means in his power. Camilla could not resist the impression that under his polished exterior there was something of the gangster in Hassan. He had reassured her as to his feelings toward her but the threat behind his passion remained to frighten her. She tried to smile away her fears as she thought of him again as a comic-opera villain, but the assurance that she had possessed under the protection of the American flag did not seem so positive now.

She found Edgar Willing wandering in the corridor by the hatracks.

"I don't know what's happened to this cruise," he moaned. "Beautiful weather and something wrong with everybody. Bethlehem this morning was a pain in the neck. You disappeared, Camilla, so did Slim. Janet went off with Torelli. Mrs. Trimble moved out of the picture, and Doc Williamson got a stomach-ache and his wife had to sit with him. And now the Holy Sepulcher is all shot. I suppose the Dome of the Rock will be on ice by to-morrow morning and the Wailing Wall will tumble down or something. What's the use? You come four thousand miles to see Jerusalem, pay out a lot of good money, and then all lie down on the job. Is that a considerate way to treat a hard-working tour director? I ask you . . ."

Camilla had been to Bethlehem but she would like to go to the Holy Sepulcher again if he could get his crowd together. Kitty Trimble came in through the revolving doors like a squirrel in a cage and collapsed on the divan beside Camilla. She seemed very nervous and disturbed, demanding that Camilla should drink with her. Camilla did not want to drink but agreed to sit in the café while Mrs. Trimble gathered Dutch courage to recover from what seemed to be a kind of nervous panic.

When she had drunk she appealed to Camilla. "You won't let them do anything with me, will you, darling?" she asked.

Camilla hadn't the least idea what she was talking about and said so.

"I mean they might take me in and trump up some charges of conspiracy against me. You'll have to speak to Ronald Barker—he's so powerful in Egypt and Palestine. We seem so far from the American flag with all these shootings and bombings taking place every day. Poor Mahmoud! Two policemen took him off in a taxi."

"When did all this happen?" Camilla asked.

"About two hours ago. I've been so frightened ever since. I came back here and then I went out again to try to quiet my nerves and—and here I am."

"Have something else to drink."

She did and felt better. "If I were you I'd go up to my room and wait until Mr. Willing wants us to start off again."

"I—I couldn't. I'm so afraid the police will pick me up for something. Do you think they will, Camilla?"

"I'm sure I don't know. What had Mahmoud been doing?" Camilla asked.

"They didn't say. Poor Mahmoud! I wonder what they'll do to him."

"That depends," Camilla said coolly, "upon what he's been doing to them."

"I—I don't know. He seemed very much disturbed. I had an engagement to meet him but he didn't show up. I just happened to see him arrested as he was coming to meet me. I—I'm really awfully worried about him, Camilla."

"Where do you think the police took him?" Camilla asked.

"I—I don't know—to the lock-up probably—oh," she gasped, "I thought I wanted adventure but I wish I'd never come to this terrible country. . . ."

Camilla succeeded at last in getting her into the lift and went to the desk to wait for a message from Slim or Ronnie.

Ronnie sent no word but Slim appeared just before Edgar Willing summoned his tourists. The scar on Slim's forehead had a piece of court-plaster on it and he said the lump at the back of his head had been reduced so that he could now put his hat on.

Camilla told him about Kitty Trimble's extraordinary nervous collapse and Slim only grinned.

"Serves her right," he said. "She's been making mischief ever since she came on this cruise."

"But she's panicky. Thinks she's going to be put in jail or something."

And she told Slim what Kitty Trimble had said. As Slim listened his long thin lips twisted up on one side.

"I think she won't bother you much after this, Camilla," he said dryly.

She searched his expression for a meaning.

“I believe you’re back of this, Slim,” she said. “Aren’t you?”

“Not far back of it. I just told how Mahmoud had tried to kill Ronald Barker this morning and that the police had evidence that Kitty knew more about it than she wanted to tell.”

Camilla laughed.

“Do you know where Mahmoud is, Slim?”

“I do. He’s in the jug at the office of the High Commissioner with two Tommies outside the door. I’ve just come from there. They asked me a lot of questions.”

“And did you tell what happened?”

“You just bet I did and a little more beside to pay for the lotion at the drug-store.”

“And where is Ronald Barker, Slim?”

Slim grinned and took out his cigarettes. “I don’t know, Camilla, unless it’s wherever Ali Afdal is.”

CHAPTER X

· 1 ·

Hassan's sudden disappearance from the King David Hotel had meant, according to Slim's theory, that the Syrian had gone to visit the Mayor of Jerusalem, the Supreme Moslem Council, or some other high political or religious dignitary in the hope of releasing Mahmoud from prison. As far as Slim knew, no evidence more damaging than his own had been offered against Mahmoud, whose attack on Ali Afdal had been frustrated by his own prompt interference. The identity of Ali Afdal had not been revealed. There had been a gun, but no shots had been fired. Mahmoud remained in prison to await the evidence of Amaziah or other persons who had been witnesses of the brawl.

It was Slim's opinion that unless further friction developed as a result of the incident Mahmoud would probably be released and sent back to Egypt under a suspended sentence. This would be in accordance with the British practice of treating such cases with the utmost leniency.

This conclusion had been confirmed when Hassan Isar came to the King David Hotel in time to arrange to accompany Camilla, Slim, and Josie on the drive to Damascus. Ronnie had not again appeared, but with an air of great assurance, Slim had made himself a member of Camilla's party and she had not objected. Indeed, now that Ronnie was gone, she didn't know what she would have done without him. It was quite certain that Hassan regarded him with a bilious eye but Slim smiled pleasantly although he knew that Hassan was aware of the part Slim had played in the affair of Mahmoud and would have liked to dispose of Slim in some subtle and secret manner. But Slim only grinned at the profile of their Syrian chauffeur and smoked innumerable cigarettes, while Camilla smiled sweetly upon both of her escorts. Josie didn't seem to know what it was all about, or what her rôle was to be except to keep peace in the limousine and give evidence of great enjoyment of the drive in spite of the uncertainty as to the rioters who might block their way.

The road, contrary to Hassan's statement, did not seem to be as safe as Fifth Avenue, for rough stone forts and barricades were everywhere and the broken road showed where conflicts between the Arabs and the British had taken place. In spite of Hassan's continued amusement at the "rosy-cheeked" boys with their "pop-guns," Camilla was glad to have had the protection of the motor-lorries and machine-guns, especially in Nazareth where there had been a fight just before their train of automobiles arrived and afterward at Tiberias where several Arabs were

arrested and carted off to the lock-up. But the tourists were not molested and ate their lunch of St. Peter's fish at the Tiberias hotel on the Lake of Galilee.

Before the train of automobiles was ready to continue the journey Slim discovered Hassan and Kitty Trimble in earnest and secret conversation in a shadowed corner of the portico.

"That dame is a born conspirator, Camilla," he said. "I don't know what mischief she's up to now, but I wouldn't put her past anything short of murder. Slow poison—boiling in oil—that's what they used to do out here with conspirators in Caligula's time."

Camilla smiled. "Kitty is a coward, Slim; nobody need be afraid of a coward."

"Unless she's cornered. There's no telling what a woman will do, if she's ornery enough."

Lunch finished, with a great tooting of horns as a salute to their departing military escort, the train of automobiles went around the head of the lake to the River Jordan, a sullen little creek which they crossed on an iron bridge that looked as though it might collapse at any moment.

"You are now in my country," Hassan said after a while, with an air of proprietorship. "You are in Syria," he continued, "you will partake of my hospitality."

Slim didn't show much enthusiasm because he was paying his own way to the tourist agency and because he was quite certain that, however polite, Hassan still wished he was in Jericho. Slim thought afterward that, if he had followed his natural inclination, much of the trouble that followed might have been avoided. But when he told Camilla that this natural inclination was to "crack Hassan one" and take his chances for the future, she was glad that he had shown so much restraint. Even Josie admitted that there was a difference in Hassan's manner after they crossed the Jordan—almost indefinite at first, then a swagger of importance that was almost a command.

At the French customs he was treated with an air of consideration which still further increased his air of superiority. The automobiles were halted in line to renew their supplies of gas, while a small group of Bedouins came from their goatskin tents on the near-by hills.

Hassan got down from the car and spoke a few words in Arabic to one of the group and a younger man set off running up the hill toward the camp as if he had springs in his legs.

"Gipsies," Hassan explained. "I will have them play and dance for you."

A few chords on a guitar—a sudden wild rhythm . . . and then a girl, young,

beautiful, but very dirty, sprang forward. She was small and childlike and this took something from the suggestiveness of the performance, a dance done entirely with the body. Hassan kept the rhythm by clapping his hands and when she stopped exhausted he laughed coarsely.

“What do you know of freedom like this?” he demanded. “Is there a girl in your night-clubs who does the Arab dance as well as that?”

“If there was,” Slim said dryly, “the cops would take her for a ride.”

A young man on an Arab pony came galloping down the hill, pulling his animal to its haunches. Hassan spoke to the horseman in lowered tones. Then the rider made a gesture and galloped up the hill and away again.

“How extraordinary,” Josie said. “Where on earth has he gone in such a hurry?”

“To send a wire by Western Union,” Slim put in dryly.

After a while as the train of automobiles approached a village, Hassan spoke in lowered tones in Arabic to the chauffeur who drove more slowly where a group of men stood by the roadside. They were a picturesque lot of comic-opera brigands, Camilla thought, only their costumes were very dirty like those of a road company that had been out a long time. But when Hassan got down and spoke to them, an air of excitement was communicated at once from one group to another. An old man came from a doorway whispering hoarsely, while others ran from house to house speaking to the inhabitants.

“I feel like Paul Revere’s ride,” Josie said. “What does it all mean, Slim?”

“These are the original cross-roads where the dirty doings come from,” he muttered.

When Hassan returned to the car, he explained. “There is no telegraph here. It is from travelers that they get the only news from the outside world. I brought them word of a great gathering of the faithful at the Mosque of Omayad in Damascus. Many of them will make a pilgrimage there at once.”

At Kunetra, a larger town, the car stopped again for a moment while Hassan spoke to an old man in a white apron in an open doorway—a few words only but they seemed enough to make the old man’s tongue wag and his eyes flash as he turned quickly and entered the house.

“He’s the sheik of the tribe that lives here. He used to ride the hills and fight. Now he just keeps a dirty inn and stands in the doorway, while his son has fallen so far from grace that he gets drunk on French brandy. But they are old friends of mine, Camilla. As a boy I used to come here in spring and fall for the shooting . . .”

“I guess the shooting ought to be pretty good around here in the spring and fall,” Slim said cryptically. “Not so bad winter and summer either,” he added.

They drove over the flank of a hill covered with anemones and entered the Oasis of Damascus at nightfall, to the accompaniment of rushing water from the streams along the roadside that came from the melting snows of Mount Hermon, past the barracks of soldiers, and were suddenly in a city of surfaced roads, tinkling little French tram-cars, electric lights, and handsome buildings which bore the unmistakable French imprint. Then to a public square and a modern hotel where French and English were spoken and well-trained servants carried their baggage to their rooms.

Here Hassan left the party to go to his father's house in the Boulevard not far away.

· 2 ·

Ronald Barker had told Camilla that all one needed to be a successful investigator was a devouring curiosity and a considerable amount of impudence. She awoke to the call of the muezzin from a near-by minaret and resolved at once that she would give the entire morning to the satisfaction of that curiosity. After coffee she went down to the bazaar attached to the hotel, and bought a lounging robe of Damascene silk which she needed and a few trinkets to help out her costume for the evening, for she and Josie had been invited to see the town and dine with Arif-el-Arif at his fine palace in the Boulevard Djemal Pasha. The proprietor of the bazaar was a young Armenian named Kevorkian and she permitted him to charge her high prices, while she used arts she had found effective with young men of his sort in gaining his confidence.

The keeper of a bazaar in Damascus or elsewhere is a repository of information and gossip, and this young man welcomed the opportunity of practising his English upon his charming customer.

No, he had not seen Osman Khali but he knew that he had been in Damascus several weeks ago for there had been a demonstration of the Faithful in front of the palace of Arif-el-Arif where the descendant of the Prophet had spent a few days. This was interesting information to Camilla. No one knew where Osman had gone but it was said that he had gone to Bagdad where he would be concealed until the hue and cry in Jerusalem had subsided. Mr. Kevorkian did not know where Osman was hidden in Bagdad—gossip said in the Mosque of Kazemain up the river, but there seemed to be no certainty about that. For his part Kevorkian, who was a Christian, would be glad to see Osman Khali arrested by the British and put away again so that all this excitement in Palestine and Syria could end and business go on

as usual. Of course, Kevorkian did not choose to meddle in religious affairs in Damascus which were not good for the soul.

Would Miss Dean like to see some lovely embroideries, an inlaid cigarette box, or a gold compact—very reasonable . . . ?

Camilla examined the gold compact and temporized.

Was Mr. Kevorkian sure that he could not give her any information that might lead her to Osman Khali?

Kevorkian was sorry but he had heard nothing.

Then Camilla asked him,

“What did Osman Khali do while he was in Damascus?”

“He was very quiet, staying in the palace of Arif-el-Arif, only appearing for a moment on the terrace to greet the crowd that had gathered in the Boulevard.”

“Did he go into the bazaars?”

“I don’t know—wait a moment.” Kevorkian shook his head slowly and then quickly looked up at her. An idea had just popped into his head. He had heard last week, from the man who made his bracelets and candelabra, about a golden perfume bottle for which Abayad, the antique dealer, had made the case. It was the sheik’s habit to present valuable gifts to his distinguished guests. Perhaps . . . it was just a chance. If Mr. Abayad would show her the perfume bottle she might induce him to talk about it. Of course that might not help her but anything was worth trying.

She bought the gold compact Kevorkian offered and had it sent to her room, then, without leaving word with any of her party as to where she was going, took a taxi to the address Kevorkian gave her.

It was near the lower end of Straight Street, a ramshackle building of frame, wandering drunkenly over almost an entire block. To Mr. Abayad she stated her mission. She was furnishing a room in New York in the Eastern manner and desired to purchase brass jars, hanging lamps, candelabra, and Damascene silks for a Turkish corner. She was, she said, an intense admirer of the eastern philosophy of life and very eager to see what Mr. Abayad had on display.

Mr. Abayad, with an exaggerated perfection of precise diction, showed her around the place which was a museum of interesting pieces, chebouks, candelabra, brass bowls, some of them frankly manufactured for sale to tourists and others precious family pieces which were not for sale. In his private office where the more precious curios were kept he exhibited swinging lights and the drawings of some objects which had just been completed.

After a moment of hesitation Mr. Abayad unlocked a cabinet and brought out an oblong ebony box, inlaid with silver, containing a curious golden scent bottle in its

silk-lined interior. A small golden peacock, with a long neck which unscrewed, disclosed a rod which entered an aperture containing the liquid perfume. A scent bottle, Mr. Abayad told her, that had once belonged to Omar's daughter, Haisa, who was the widow of the Prophet, a marvelous antique, sacred from its associations and thoroughly authenticated. It had been recently disclosed in Egypt where it was called a Kum Kum and had been bought by his client for a prodigious sum of money.

She gazed at it entranced. "I would like perhaps to have a copy in silver if it would not cost too much."

"Of course, madame, I have other scent bottles but none like this."

Mr. Abayad put the object back into its case. "I am sorry, but this antique may not be reproduced. It is being sent away to-day."

"Where does it go?" she asked frankly. "Who has bought it?"

Mr. Abayad closed the lid of the box firmly and locked it.

"I regret that I cannot tell you," he said, more coldly now, and put the scent bottle in the cabinet from which he had taken it. It was clear that the conversation about it was concluded.

"Thank you, Mr. Abayad. I will look at some other things if you will show them to me."

She tried to get a glimpse of the inscription on the container in which he put the oblong box but it was written in Arabic.

That was the end of her pilgrimage which had seemed to promise so much and had achieved so little.

CHAPTER XI

· 1 ·

And now Camilla stood upon the terrace of the palace of Arif-el-Arif. The sheik had called upon her early in the afternoon in all the terrifying formality of tarboosh and white linens. Arif-el-Arif, Camilla was obliged to admit, was a fine figure of a man, looking like a discolored general in the British Army, an impression made more definite by the extreme whiteness of his seagull mustache and his flashing black eyes. He spoke very good English and offered coffee very strong and black, which Camilla much needed but was sure would keep her awake for a week.

Under the protection of the sheik she and Josie had seen old Damascus at its best—or worst—for there was little to choose, a shabby place of broken-down khans and narrow cobbled alleys full of refuse, including a dead cat or two. They praised the Boulevard and Government House to please the old man who spoke of everything with an air of great pride—the pride of possession almost, for wherever he went he received the tribute of smile and salaam. They had seen the great Mosque of Omayad, the tomb of Saladin, and had driven along the Barada River in state, turning at last into the Boulevard Djemal Pasha where their car stopped before an impressive-looking building of white stone.

“You are very welcome to my poor house, mesdemoiselles,” Arif had said as they dismounted. “It gives me great pleasure to entertain you in accordance with the customs of my country. But if you are not happy to sit on divans and cushions in the eastern fashion you may have sofas and chairs that have been made in Paris. . . .”

They had seen all the rooms on the lower floor with their overstuffed furniture, examined the paintings, the Persian water-colors, the Japanese prints, the collections of old ivory and jade, while Camilla had kept her eyes open for the ebony box that Abayad had shown her. They had dined in a magnificent salon furnished in ebony and red damask. It was a palace that one might have expected to find on the Champs-Élysées, its furnishings redolent of the late Empire. They had been served by men in conventional black who moved silently with huge platters of food, speaking not at all. Hassan did not appear until the coffee was served.

Now that the ice was broken it seemed that Camilla’s doubts as to the visit had been unnecessary, for Arif had treated them with the utmost consideration and it was difficult for Camilla to believe that he was anything but a typical boulevardier, with a taste for sound wine, good tobacco, and a glance for the ladies. Josie, who had gone Turkish for the moment, sat with Arif cross-legged on cushions and smoked

cigarettes made in Beirut especially to Arif's order for his lady-friends, while Camilla and Hassan had gone out on the terrace to look at the stars.

They had emerged from the atmosphere of rich food, spices, sandalwood, and the smell of latakia in the chebouk of Arif into the dry desert air, that smelled of sand, baked earth, and the odor of almond blossoms. In the moonlight the domes of the mosques were globules of mother-of-pearl, the minarets, spindles of glass. The river flowed silently between its retaining walls not far away and the sounds of voices, the tinkle of the bells on the little tram-cars, the wail of a distant orchestra playing jazz translated into French, all mingled to make the scene different from anything Camilla could remember. Exotic, was, of course, the word that came into her mind, tempered by the sweet odor of the anemones on the slopes of Mount Hermon, the hawthorn and myrtle, pomegranate of the gardens near-by. But of course it was Hassan, leaning against the balustrade beside her, who suddenly typified the East as no other person had done, though she couldn't quite eliminate the idea of the Hollywood villain that she had once associated with him. It was difficult at times to believe that this was Joseph Asad, her deck companion of the *Orizaba* whom she had struck in the back of the head with a toy balloon. It was easier tonight to remember him as the conspirator in the war against Ronald Barker and the British Mandate in Palestine. There still seemed something spurious about him but it was easier to think of him as the lover who wanted to marry her and install her in all this tinsel magnificence.

It was the first moment they had been alone since leaving Jerusalem, a moment that she had wished for and dreaded. She knew that Hassan was on his guard against her and that she would have to play her game more skilfully than before. He did not talk of his own household or of his own house which was not far away but began speaking at once of his father and of the brilliant future that had been planned for him. Camilla knew that he was going to renew the topic that she had eluded so many times.

He told her that both of Arif's wives—one of whom was Hassan's mother—were dead and that the old man lived in the great house alone with the servants, except when he drove in his automobile to visit his tribes and to direct the planting of crops or to send his wool or goats to market. Much of his time was spent in Paris where Hassan often joined him. He lived the life of a grand seigneur. He was very wealthy. He liked Camilla and would like very much for Hassan to marry her.

Camilla said nothing, only listened to the distant sounds of the city and sniffed the familiar breezes that came from the desert, aware that, in the back of her head, was a thought that in this great house in the Boulevard Djemal Pasha were customs both

dirty and oriental.

“Well,” he said, “what have you to say?”

She felt that evading him was of little use.

“What do you want me to say?”

Hassan frowned at the patch of moonlight now dimpling the river.

“I don’t think it matters a great deal what you say now,” he muttered. “It’s what you *do* that matters. My father has shown you his hospitality. I wanted you to see how we live here in Damascus. My own house is not far away. Very soon Arif goes to Paris to live permanently and I will look after all his affairs and then this house will be mine. Do you like it? Is there anything more that I can give you?”

“I—it is all very flattering,” she said slowly, trying to analyze her repugnance to that other house and its occupants. “But I don’t want magnificence like that—I wouldn’t know what to do with it.”

“But you needn’t live here unless you want to. We could travel in Europe—America—a place at Monte Carlo—”

“But you don’t understand. My tastes are very simple. I don’t care for rich food and a lot of service and I have enough money of my own to be very comfortable.”

He seemed to be puzzled by that. All American girls he had known were ambitious for just what he had offered. He tried to smile.

“Of course you understand that I am asking you to marry me. It is not the first time. But you haven’t answered definitely yet. That was, of course, on account of Ronald Barker. You tried to hide your feelings from me—”

“Ronald Barker and I have quarreled,” she said coolly.

He twisted toward her sharply.

“Is this the truth or another equivocation?”

“Ronald Barker and I have quarreled. I have no expectation of seeing him again.”

“Interesting if true—”

“You don’t believe me?”

“I’ve believed you once or twice and found that you’d betrayed me. You’re very clever. So clever that I’m sure you might be useful to me.”

“How?”

“In deceiving my enemies—as you’ve deceived me. I have many of them. They will keep you busy.”

“I’d rather be busy in other ways.”

“Such as helping Ronald Barker take away the lands of my people.”

“No, I’m not in favor of that. Neither am I in favor of the murderous methods

your people are using to gain their ends.”

“Would you want me to stand by and see them shot down by the British soldiers without raising a hand to defend them? You know what is happening. For one Jew or British soldier who is killed, you may count ten Arabs. That can’t go on. The balance must be made equal. I’ve told you something of what I would like to do. As I once said, if you married me you might restore peace to Jew and Gentile. I’m giving you that opportunity. I would like to have you help me show my people the way to the prosperity and happiness of other days, to build again with you a new dynasty, a new nation on the ruins of the old. And I want you to share that triumph with me. My people have always defended their faith with their blood. That is why for so many centuries we were a great nation. You saw the tomb of the great Saladin to-day—the man whose green turban drove the Christians out of Palestine—and you have seen what we have become—a nation of weaklings without a leader.”

“And you would like to revive the Holy Wars—to be their leader like Saladin?”

“God knows I would—like Saladin, just like Saladin. I would like you to help me to bring peace—”

“But with a sword?”

“Yes, if necessary—”

“And drive all foreigners out of Palestine and Syria—put all Christians to death perhaps.” She laughed. “This is a strange way to make love to a Christian woman, Hassan Isar.”

“At least I’m honest.” He laughed.

“But I’m no Saladin. Like my own people I’ve grown weak with easy living. I’ve fallen in love with an unbeliever. I wouldn’t kill her except with kindness.”

He was very much in earnest and his deep voice was suddenly vibrant with emotion. Something could be done with a passion like this and yet she felt singularly helpless. It was too great an undertaking he asked of her.

“I—I’m sorry, Hassan,” was all that she could say.

“You mean,” he asked, “that you refuse me?”

She made no reply.

He waited another moment.

“It’s a showdown this time, Camilla,” he said.

“I’m sorry,” she repeated frowning, “but I can’t marry you, Hassan.”

He didn’t seem able to believe her and stared into space a long moment. He was a man used to having his way with women. Perhaps it was because he had known in his heart he would never be able to possess her that he desired her the more ardently when she repulsed him. He twisted around, his elbow on the balustrade, and there

was a sudden harsh note in his voice that she had not heard to-night.

“So this is what it all comes to—just trifling, just trifling—letting me make love to you, making love to me—giving me hope, leading me on—”

He straightened and faced her. His fists were clenched and she thought for a moment that he was going to strike her. The dominant passion was anger and she saw that he was struggling for self-control. With an effort he subdued his voice. “Hospitality is a sacred duty here in my country,” he said. “He who puts his hand on the tent-pole of a Bedouin or tastes his bread and salt is safe under his protection. You are safe with me. You have done our friendship a great wrong by deceiving me. Oh, you needn’t be frightened,” he said. “You think you are deceiving me again.” He laughed. “You’ll never deceive me again. Perhaps it will surprise you to know that you’ve never deceived me. I’ve carried on. I’ve let you carry on, hoping I might win in spite of you—that I could bribe you with luxury, with the promises of power. I ought to have known you weren’t to be bought even if I told you what you came here to find out.” He laughed. “You’ll never get what you came here for, you’ll never find out where Osman Khali is hidden. Never. He is safe from Ronald Barker and the rest of the dogs who are on his trail. He is still the symbol of the faith about whom all of my people will rally until their enemies are driven into the sea.”

He paused for lack of breath in the effort to control his emotions, then laughed again as though at the ineffectual result of all this conversation. But she knew it was Hassan who had won and that no matter how hard she tried she would never be able to deceive him again. He had once said he liked her because she was able to deceive him, but she knew that she had reached the end of her efforts. She had failed—failed miserably in what she had set out to do. He had spoken of Bedouin hospitality even to his enemies and she remembered now that when the enemy had departed from the hospitality of the Bedouin tent the enmity recurred more violently than ever. She was certain now that, by her final refusal of him after all her encouragement, she had made a deadly enemy of Hassan Isar.

She laid her fingers on his arm, trying to speak, but no words would come. The situation was too momentous for the ordinary phrases or gestures. She was sick of equivocations. She would not lie to him now even if she thought she could deceive him.

“I—I’m sorry, Hassan,” was all she could say.

He smiled at that and indicated the way indoors.

Josie and Arif were waiting for them. Josie was wandering around the room, examining everything. Josie was bored, for Arif, weary of his tales of the Turkish and British wars, had fallen asleep. He was full of food and wine, which he drank by a dispensation “for his health,” and had fallen among the cushions in the corner of the divan, the mouthpiece of his chebouk sagging from his lips and its tube trailing over his expansive lap in a curve like the tail of a dejected dog.

Camilla’s eyes missed nothing. The oblong package on the taboret by the divan had not been there when she and Hassan had gone out on the terrace. With a quick glance at Arif and Josie, Hassan went at once to the taboret and picked up the package, putting it under his arm.

Arif awoke, slowly, gasping like a grampus.

“Parbleu, mademoiselle, forgive me a thousand times!”

“It is time we were going, Josie,” Camilla said.

“Oh, yes, but I have fallen asleep. You will forgive the failings of an old man?” He stretched his legs and scrambled down from the divan with difficulty while Hassan stood glum and silent with an expression of very unfilial disgust.

“You will forgive me, mesdemoiselles? I have been a very poor host. I have outraged my most sacred laws of hospitality. But I shall atone. I shall atone at once, by giving you both little gifts to remember me pleasantly by. Will you excuse me a moment?”

He went into the other room. Hassan glanced keenly from one girl to the other.

“If you will excuse me, Camilla, I will order the car at once,” he said, and went quickly out of the room.

There was just a moment for Camilla to whisper, “When was that package brought into the room?”

“A servant brought it a few moments ago.”

“Did you have a chance to examine it?”

Josie looked up a little startled at the earnestness in Camilla’s voice, then nodded uncertainly.

“Yes, I did. Curiosity, I guess—”

“For God’s sake, try to remember what was written on it, Josie. Impress it on your memory now, don’t forget—”

Arif blustered into the room, fully awake and smiling. In his hands were two golden objects and he extended them on his fingers toward the two girls—two bracelets of twisted gold.

“A mere trifle,” he said, still gasping from his efforts, “just a remembrance of our friendship in the hope you’ll forgive my inhospitality.”

“How lovely! You’re forgiven anything you ask. Isn’t he, Camilla?”

“Of course. And we have to thank you for a most enjoyable day and evening. Shall we see you again?”

“Not at once, ladies. For I take the road to Beirut to-morrow.”

“Sorry we’re leaving so soon. But we’ll always remember this day as one of the most enjoyable of our lives. Won’t we, Camilla?”

Hassan came from an inner door while a servant announced that the automobile was waiting to convey the ladies to their hotel. Hassan helped them into their wraps and silently showed them into the car. His Arab hospitality, it appeared, was suffering under too great a strain, for he did not offer to accompany them to their hotel—just stood bowing with a ceremonious politeness, uttering an adieu that seemed almost ironic as the car rolled away.

Camilla did not dare to question Josie until they reached their rooms when she closed the door whispering quickly.

“Did you read the address on the package while Arif was asleep?”

Josie nodded.

“It was in Arabic or Syriac or something—”

“You mean there wasn’t—?”

“Yes,” Josie nodded, “part of it was in French.”

“You remember?”

“Yes. ‘To EL SAIED AHMAL—something or other—AFFANDI.’”

“But the address—”

“That was easier. Kufah on the Tigris—Bagdad.”

“Are you certain? You’ve found out something I wanted to know. Write it down, Josie, at once, and let me have a copy.”

“But I don’t understand.”

“You don’t have to, darling.”

“But why are you so mysterious? And what did you do to Hassan that he didn’t even say good-by? Aren’t you going to see him to-morrow?”

“He wants to marry me. I don’t want him to. I guess that’s the answer, Josie.”

Josie smiled.

“I think that won’t hurt Slim’s feelings very much.”

CHAPTER XII

· 1 ·

After the excitement of the day and the strong coffee of Arif, Camilla decided that sleep was impossible. She lay, her eyes wide open, staring at the flickering reflection of the street lights on her ceiling, completely at the mercy of her imagination.

She had believed when she found her way to the curio shop of Mr. Abayad that the gods were on her side, for what could be a more appropriate gift to the descendant of the Prophet than a scent bottle that had belonged to the Prophet's widow herself? But there was always a chance that the oblong package on the taboret in the smoking-room of the sheik had not contained the little golden peacock that meant so much in her search for Osman Khali. Who was "Saied Ahmal Affandi" to whom it was addressed? And granted that "Ahmal Affandi" was a friend of Osman Khali and that Osman lived at Kufah on the Tigris at Bagdad, how was Camilla to convey the name and address to Ronald Barker if he persisted in being the jinni who refused to come out of his bottle? The thought came to her to find the British consular agent at Damascus and put the whole case in his charge. But after consideration she realized that this was not what Ronnie would have wanted her to do, especially as there seemed no certainty that she was on a true scent. And there was also the pride in her achievement and the wish to accomplish the arrest in Bagdad if possible.

And if she couldn't find out where Ronald Barker had gone what was she to do? Must she go to Kufah on the Tigris at Bagdad and try to find Osman? And if she succeeded in finding him what was she to do with him? Tell him that she was a young American girl who very much wanted him to be given into the custody of the British? That was a laugh. She began to see untold trouble in the way of an American doing anything in a French Mandate or a Turkish city with a fugitive demanded by the British Government. Of course, Ronnie would have found some way of circumventing this difficulty—such as, perhaps, using hijacking methods and kidnaping the distinguished gentleman. Camilla was sure that she wanted to see Ronnie more than she had ever wanted to see him before, that he was the only man who could get things straightened out. She was not at all sure that she was through with Hassan Isar whose relationship she had converted in a few short moments from friendship to enmity, an enmity which, in accordance with the Arab code, was more deadly because it had emerged from friendship. How stupid of her not to have

played the game for a while longer, to have promised him anything to hold the situation as it was. She realized that a revulsion of feeling had swept over her at the intimate touch with the soiled tinsel magnificence of the Boulevard Djemal Pasha, the thought of the house near-by where Hassan's wives were kept, the odor of stale oriental perfumes and the sight of the baked meats and sickening comfitures of which she had eaten. She couldn't marry all this. She couldn't marry Hassan if he promised her all the treasures of the East. She was suddenly sick of dissimulation and deception, too. She could not lie any more even to help Ronnie. This purely feminine decision was based on an impulse as definite as it was uncontrollable.

From her window she could see the minarets of the near-by mosque, surrounded by its rows of globular tombs. She put on her newly purchased dressing-gown, went out on the portico, and sat watching the sky turn from purple to green and then to gold. Upon the nearest minaret a muezzin appeared, his green turban responsive to the flame of the East, as he gave the morning call to prayer, springing from side to side like a monkey on a stick and uttering his incantations in a thin falsetto that seemed to pierce the skies. This was Hassan's East, the call to Hassan's gods, and her thoughts turned to him automatically again.

What was Hassan going to do? He had made no plans for a future meeting in their last talk which had ended so abruptly at the automobile without even an au revoir. He had told her once that he might be persuaded to go with her on Michael Gay's bus to Bagdad but he had said nothing about it last night when he had known that Michael was to arrive to-day. It did not seem improbable, after what had happened, that he would refuse to accompany her or indeed to see her to-day. . . . Perhaps it was better this way, better not to see Hassan again. If she had treated him badly the account between them was not yet even, for she could not forget the attempts that had been made on Ronnie's life. She did not count the anarchist Serrano whom Ronnie had threatened to deport to England but she was not sure that Serrano hadn't had a part in Hassan's great conspiracy. It was all too complicated to think about at daybreak after a sleepless night and at last she went into her room, falling at once to sleep.

It was almost eleven when Josie called her to the window at the front of the hotel where a great crowd of tourists, French soldiers from the barracks near-by, street merchants, and small boys surrounded Michael Gay and his bus which had just arrived from Beirut. From Josie's window it seemed completely to fill the courtyard from which other vehicles were almost excluded. The police had the crowd well in hand but the curiosity as to the vehicle and its purpose was enormous. She examined the crowd and made out the tall figure of Slim, fending off people from Michael as he

descended after his dusty night on the road. Other members of Mr. Willing's party moved to and fro commenting on the American bus with great enthusiasm. And any doubt that Camilla might have had as to her choice of going to Beirut as Ronald Barker might have wished or going on to Bagdad with Michael Gay was at once dispelled. Downstairs, she found the party from the *Orizaba* talking with Michael. The roads from Beirut were good, of course, except for the turns over the Lebanon and Anti-Lebanon ranges, but he had made them without serious trouble and after some minor repairs to the machine by his Syrian machinist, Michael was all set to make the run east to-morrow morning over the northern edge of the Syrian desert to the Euphrates. This was a name to conjure with and Janet Priestly, who was an ace on geography, began bubbling over at once. Torelli made some scurrilous remarks about the Garden of Eden which Janet promptly resented. She was a Fundamentalist, she said, as far as the Garden of Eden was concerned, except for the snake which hadn't any business being there, and she wasn't going to hear any dirty jokes poked at it while she was around.

Mail came to the desk but none of it was for Camilla—no word that night or the next day from Ronald Barker. Not even a card from Hassan. That incident, it seemed, was finished.

· 2 ·

Camilla's idea of the Syrian desert was a place like the Sahara, all hummocks of yellow sand with not even a stone to break the monotony. The Syrian desert she found was made of dirt and stones with a stunted tree here and there and majestic hills and rocks that barred the way to their destination. But the road which seemed to have a will of its own found its way around all obstructions, taking the line of least resistance, made by a careful survey of the terrain by generations of travelers. This was the main caravan route to India and the East, the route of Marco Polo in his expeditions to Jenghis Khan, and as the signs of habitation grew fewer when they left the plain of Damascus, there was a thrill in the journey, like that of a voyage over an uncharted sea.

Mr. Willing, having tourist business in Damascus, turned the party over to Michael, who drove, seated beside his Syrian chauffeur and guide. The Syrian's name was Zaagi and he spoke English and French, telling tales of the country they were passing through and of the tribes that inhabited them. From time to time they passed caravans of moth-eaten camels and dromedaries on the road to Palmyra. But more interesting were the tribesmen, in kaffiyeh and kumbaz, riding spirited horses

which pranced and pirouetted as the great bus thundered past and the riders shot their rifles into the air, the bullets whizzing close to the bus while they shouted and laughed in amusement at the tourists. These were a part of the great Anazeh tribe, Zaagi said, the tribe to which Arif belonged.

“I’d hate to meet that crowd on a dark night without a machine-gun, a few bombs and some tear-gas,” Slim said.

But the chauffeur only smiled the superior smile of the Syrian which is more superior than any smile in the world.

“Machine-guns! Bah, monsieur, would you shoot with machine-guns at a lot of children. It is their way. They are just having a good time.”

“Sure! But the next bunch may not think they’re having a good time enough. I’d feel more comfortable if we had some rifles and ammunition in case they gang up on us.”

Zaagi laughed again. He seemed to find a great deal of pleasure in Slim’s remarks.

Michael drove carefully and, when a herd of camels blocked the way, waited patiently until they had passed. A sharp-featured fellow stuck his nose in at Kitty Trimble’s window and made an ugly face at her so that she screamed in terror. If Hassan had been in the party he would have prevented any unpleasantness like that. She wanted Michael to turn the car and go back to Damascus, but Janet and Josie laughed at her.

Camilla confessed to herself a slight uneasiness over the indifferent airs of the guide, Zaagi. But he had come well recommended from the most respectable garage in Beirut, and bore credentials from the French Government.

“Besides,” Michael added in explanation, “he brought me an excellent letter from Hassan Isar.”

“Hassan!” Slim’s mouth sagged open. “I guess that makes it unanimous. Say, Camilla,” he muttered, “I don’t like that Zaagi guy a little bit. If he runs us into any trouble, he’ll be the first one to go. . . .”

Slim was rather proud of his big automatic which he carried in a shoulder-holster and exhibited childishly. Michael had a gun, too, and Janet Priestly carried a little twenty-two Smith and Wesson in her handbag, “only to be used in case of Torelli,” she had explained. That was all, so far as Slim knew, of the armament of Michael’s bus.

Zaagi was driving now and Michael joined them in one of the rear seats. Michael was more interested in the performance of his great engine of transportation than in any social or diplomatic question. The road they took was unlike the hard-surfaced

and graded highways from Jerusalem or Beirut. Caravan travel had ironed out some of the rough spots but it was still merely a trail over the desert, which took careful driving to avoid the rocks that were hidden under the dust in unexpected places.

“I made this wheel-base as short as I could,” Michael explained, “but it’s hard to keep the body off the ground. We’ve got to choose our terrain carefully, leaving the road when necessary, to make the riding easy.”

It seemed to Camilla that they had been off the road ever since Zaagi had been driving but she accepted Michael’s explanation cheerfully.

“Are you sure this guy knows where he’s going?” Slim asked eyeing the country dubiously.

They seemed now to be in the very heart of the desert, for the herds of camels and asses that they had noticed nearer Damascus were no longer to be seen; nor were there any signs of caravans or groups of horsemen as before. Just the undulating of the horizon, with here and there the serrated edges of rock piercing the distant sky.

When the speed of the bus was reduced, as now seemed necessary most of the time, the heat was intense and the tourists were all perspiring freely.

“You ain’t seen nothing yet,” Slim said as Josie complained.

“How hot is Bagdad?”

“A hundred and fifteen when it’s cool—and a hundred and forty when it decides to get warm—”

“Good God!” gasped Doc Williamson, “and me with a blood pressure . . . !”

But they were all game except Kitty, who had subsided in her seat, her face mottled and her eyes bulging, gasping feebly from time to time that she wanted to return to Damascus. Michael, exhibiting a map, said he hoped to reach Palmyra in the afternoon but if they didn’t make better time it might be later. He explained that it didn’t matter where they stopped for the night as they were taking their hotel with them, and there was plenty of water and provisions for everybody.

“It’s quite exciting,” Josie said.

“The grandest picnic I ever went on,” sighed Janet happily.

It was increasingly exciting as the great bus seemed to be having difficulties of its own; lurching and tilting unpleasantly like a ship in an angry sea. There was, so far as they could see, no sign now of road or trail, and they were passing over virgin soil that had not even been trodden by the hoofs of camels.

“Your chauffeur seems to have lost his way,” Doc Williamson said sharply to Michael. “My wife feels very queer.”

“It—it’s like crossing the Channel,” Mrs. Williamson gasped feebly.

“Say,” said Slim, who had followed Michael forward to the chauffeur’s bench, “this gink doesn’t know where he’s going. For God’s sake look what we’re coming to—”

They had reached the top of a precipitous slope covered with angry-looking basalt rocks which seemed to end in a chaos of minor precipices.

“Put your brakes on, man!” Slim roared.

Zaagi obliged grudgingly, giving Slim a sickly smile that was still superior.

“I come a shorter way, monsieur,” Zaagi explained. “It will be all right in a minute.”

“Get back to the road,” Michael commanded, with a sudden realization that the bus had somehow gotten into a difficult position. “I’m not going to smash this bus on her trial trip.”

Zaagi moved one shoulder slightly and, putting on power, seemed to be finding a way between the jutting stones that would bring them back to safety, when miraculously there appeared out of nowhere, among the rocks in front, beside and behind them, groups of mounted Bedouins galloping to the car, gesticulating with their rifles, and shouting incomprehensively. They all seemed to be smallish men with piercing dark glances from deeply set eyes which searched the bus eagerly as though with an undisguised purpose of mischief. Most of them were bare of foot and carried modern high-power rifles which moved unpleasantly from window to window.

“Give them bakshish,” Kitty Trimble screamed, “and tell them to go away.”

“What does all this mean, Zaagi?” Michael demanded.

“I don’t know, monsieur. It is a branch of the Anazeh and they come to welcome us to their country.”

“You lying scoundrel!” Michael growled. “Ask them what they want—”

Zaagi opened the door and there was a short colloquy. When the conversation was ended Zaagi turned with simulated despair.

“They ask tribute for passing through their lands,” he said.

“Tribute! What the hell do you mean?”

“It is the custom of the country, they say.”

A man in a red pelisse who seemed to be the leader of the group now raised a hand commanding attention. He was taller than the others, wore a small brown beard and, judged by the standards of his people, was handsome of face and well formed in figure. Unlike his companions he wore long red boots such as the tourists had seen in the bazaars of Damascus. He sat his horse well in an attitude of dignified attention, speaking at last to Zaagi in a lowered tone.

“He says,” Zaagi translated, “that he wishes to examine your luggage and

requests that you all step down while he does so.”

“I’m damned if we do,” Michael replied.

“Tell him to go to hell,” Slim roared.

There was a moment of silence while the sheik sat gravely with an air of great dignity and patience, smiling at last as though in commiseration of their unreasonable attitude. When he spoke it was with a sterner expression.

“He says,” Zaagi interpreted, “that it will be much better if you do what he asks. He will perhaps detain you a very few minutes.”

The situation crystallized almost immediately as Michael took Zaagi by the collar of his tunic and threw him out from behind the wheel, falling into his seat and turning on the power. Zaagi put a hand into his shirt and drew out a knife which he swung with a dangerous motion toward Michael. But Slim fired quickly and Zaagi dropped, rolling at the feet of an Arab who had come up the steps. That was the beginning of the trouble. Michael was trying to get the car in gear when somebody shot at him. Slim’s automatic came into line again and fired several times. The sounds of firing now came from all directions, Michael had been hit in the shoulder and crumpled over the wheel but he fired a final shot at a man clambering up the steps toward him while glass clattered and Janet Priestly’s tiny revolver sounded like the yapping of a fox terrier above the roar of the heavy rifles. Camilla, still bewildered by the sudden conflict, rushed forward to pick up Slim’s gun from the floor of the bus, when she was seized violently and carried bodily outside.

It was lively while it lasted, and fatal at least to poor Slim who had fallen prone, bleeding badly from a wound in his chest. Michael Gay still sagged over the wheel, a bullet in his shoulder, and Janet looked at her little empty pistol disgustedly and let them hustle her out to the ground. Doc Williamson, who was unarmed, obediently followed the directions of the bandits. Torelli was giving aromatic spirits of ammonia to Kitty Trimble who had fainted.

That was the picture that came to Camilla as she stood outside the bus beside the man in the scarlet pelisse and watched the Bedouins bring out the luggage. She saw Michael stagger up, nursing his useless left arm, and bend over the figure of Slim who had not moved since he had fallen.

“Michael!” she called in agony. “Is he—?”

Michael slowly moved his head.

The man in the red pelisse made a gesture toward a horse that had been led

forward and indicated that Camilla should get into the saddle. But she did not move. She was still too bewildered to know what it was all about. She saw Janet and Josie cut away Michael's shirt and bind his shoulder and tried to join them when her guardian caught her by the arm and restrained her. As in a nightmare she saw two Arabs carry poor Slim outside where they laid him. Doc Williamson and his wife sat stupidly on a rock as though waiting for the bus to start. Torelli who was uninjured still ministered to Kitty Trimble who sat silent beside them but trembled violently.

Camilla was aware of the man in the red pelisse urging her again toward the horse, and as she did not try to help him two men lifted her bodily and put her in the saddle. They were evidently acting under instructions not to hurt her and though she was crying with rage at them and pity for poor Slim, Michael and the rest of her companions, she was aware that they had lifted her as gently as they could and treated her with some consideration. She was sure that it was useless for her to struggle, so she submitted, permitting them to lead the horse away from the group and over the hill to a flat plain which seemed limitless in every direction, except toward the mountains which they were leaving behind them.

There was no chance of escape. Two men rode with her, one on each side. She spoke to one of them in English, then in French, asking where they were going but she got no reply—unless his forbidding silence could be considered one. She tried the man on the other side with the same result.

It was then that the sheik in the scarlet pelisse who had been riding behind her rode up and took the bridle of her horse from the man on her right who drew rein and took up the rear.

"I regret, mademoiselle," he said at last, in execrable French, "that I was obliged to make you come with me against your will. But you will not be hurt or treated badly if you do as I command . . ."

"But what of my friends who are still alive! What of the bus with no one to drive it?"

He made a deprecatory gesture.

"It was bad that the big man should kill my companions. If he had not shot them no harm would have come. Helas! He will shoot no more—"

"You haven't heard the end of this," she said angrily as her courage returned. "There must be some law, even in this God-forsaken country—"

"Pardon, mademoiselle," he said, with polite incomprehension.

"You'll pay for this," she continued, "when I see Arif-el-Arif or Hassan Isar."

The sheik's solemn countenance relaxed.

"That shall be as you wish, mademoiselle."

“Well, I demand that you take me back to my friends. The French Government will not tolerate this outrage. I am an American citizen and insist that you let me go at once.”

The sheik moved one shoulder and a hand in a gesture of incomprehension. And that, she discovered, was to be his method when he did not wish to reply.

The whole affair was over so quickly that there had been no time to reason or to plan. Less than an hour ago they had been traveling safely and happily, a group of tourists bound for Bagdad on Michael's unfortunate new venture; and now poor Slim was dead, Michael wounded, and Josie, Janet, Kitty, and Mrs. Williamson in the hands of the bandits she had heard so much about. Their clothing, jewels and money were gone and the car probably incapacitated. Alone of all the men, Vincent Torelli was left capable of restoring order and bringing the victims to safety. How capable was he? He had never shown any talents except the arts of the gigolo which he had practised on Janet and Kitty.

As Camilla's thoughts gained lucidity, the idea emerged that this ambush had been carefully planned without Michael's knowledge and that Zaagi, the dead chauffeur, was a part of the conspiracy. No mere chance could have directed their misfortunes so unerringly. But who had planned it? Surely not Zaagi, himself, for Zaagi was a second-rate villain, incapable of a venture as bold as this.

“Where are you taking me?” she asked again. “Who is the man who planned this crime? And why do you take me instead of the others?”

Again the slight gesture of incomprehension. Her courage that had come up with a rush a moment ago now ebbed as quickly. There seemed no hope for her, less hope even than for the other survivors of the disaster. She noticed for the first time that her suitcase swung from the saddle of one of her captors. How . . . why. . . . This led to a whole line of new conjectures. . . . Wherever they were taking her, her imprisonment was probably permanent. . . . Hope leaped in her heart. Ronnie! Was it possible that these men were the wild followers of El Kerak? If that were true perhaps they were leading her to his camp. She relinquished that idea almost at once because it was too good to be true. Ronnie's men, bandits though they were, would hardly attack Michael's bus and kill American travelers. Unless, of course, they did it without Ronnie's knowledge. Hope came and went again. In a moment she succeeded in getting the man in the scarlet pelisse to admit that he had given orders to his followers not to molest the survivors and that the wounded man and the uninjured one might succeed in getting the bus back to Damascus. . . . She told the sheik that she was very weary and asked him how long it would be before they reached their camp. He looked at the distant mountains. An hour perhaps—perhaps

longer.

CHAPTER XIII

· 1 ·

It was toward the middle of the afternoon that Camilla's captor rose in his stirrups and pointed to a hill that rose above the surrounding plain. As they drew near she saw at its base the black, goatskin tents of a Bedouin encampment. Horses, camels, and dromedaries were tethered to ropes pegged along the ground. A few elephants would have made it look like an old-fashioned American country circus.

"We shall rest there," the sheik said politely.

She made no comment and rode forward, trying to find new courage for the new adventure, whatever it was. Palm-trees grew near the hill and extended out into the desert beyond. At the flap of the largest tent she was invited to dismount, but to her chagrin she had to be lifted to the ground.

Then with the assistance of a girl who had now appeared she sank upon a divan in the tent and, with difficulty, relaxed her aching limbs. In spite of her weariness her mind was intensely alive as she tried to imagine what was now in store for her. Egyptian tapestries hung upon the walls of the tent and the floor was covered with several thicknesses of Persian rugs but the furniture was cheap wooden stuff as though it might have come out of a third-rate department store, and the canvas camp-chairs were worth about a dollar in American money.

The girl brought water to drink and a bowl to bathe the dust from her face, then stood by, as impassive as the riders who had brought her here. The girl's eyes, the only good feature in her face, were large, dark, lustrous, and uninquiring. She wore a tiara of gold coins around her forehead and her hair hung in braids down her back. Her lips were dyed a vivid scarlet and there were small tattoo-marks in nose and chin. Camilla noticed all these things with a dull curiosity that seemed to triumph over the events of the morning, wondering what part this encampment and this girl were to play in her own immediate future.

Apparently Camilla was to be treated with politeness, for after a while the Bedouin girl brought a dish of lentil soup, a red pottage of the same recipe, probably, for which Esau sold his birthright. This did much to restore her mind and body. As she sipped the soup she asked questions but the girl gave signs of incomprehension, her slow bovine gaze completing the conviction of ignorance and stupidity. Then, as though to atone for her mental deficiencies, she carefully arranged the pillows on the divan and by childish pantomime suggested that Camilla should go to sleep.

And now while she tried to think of poor Josie, Janet, and Mrs. Williamson, and to wonder what might be done to help them she sank back in utter exhaustion. . . . Poor Slim! He was in her last waking thought. Slim had been the cause of the bloodshed and had paid heavily for his impulse. . . .

It was quite dark when she awoke, dark and cool. She pulled the silken robe over her and wondered how long she had been asleep; then remembered that it didn't really matter what time it was. Of course escape was impossible and even if she had ever considered it, the distant sounds that now came to her—the sharp yelps from a pack of jackals fighting over a dead animal somewhere, the howl of a wolf or the distant wailing laugh of hyenas—would soon have driven the thought of escape from her head. . . . But after a while these sounds diminished, became a part of the night itself, and with the moaning of the wind, the quivering of the tent-flaps made a desert symphony that soothed her to sleep again.

In the morning the Bedouin girl, whose name Camilla never learned, came into the tent with Camilla's dressing-case, a larger basin of water, towels, and soap, and placed them on the table. And when she had bathed and taken coffee, Camilla found a cigarette and smoked. As she did so, her mind clearing rapidly, the thought of Hassan came to her again. Hassan and not Ronnie. Hassan more ominous than ever after what had happened. Who else but Hassan would have selected her from among her companions and brought her here into this far-off place? She remembered with clearer comprehension the slow smile of her captor when the name of Hassan Isar had been mentioned. Hassan had planned this abduction just as he had planned the conspiracy against Ronnie. She was sure of it now and she was frightened. Her insincerity and disloyalty to Hassan now came to haunt her. Whatever Hassan's sins against Ronnie, he had committed none against Camilla. From the beginning he had been true to his passion and would have done anything she asked. She had betrayed him again and again, and now her transgressions were finding her out. If it was Hassan who had made her a prisoner she had little to hope for and she was willing to admit that whatever happened to her would be nothing less than she deserved. Ronnie had said that Hassan was politically powerful in this country; otherwise, she now realized, his men would not have dared to hold up Michael's bus and kill Slim.

Just after sunset there was a sound of a rifle-shot in the distance, an answering shot near-by, and an immediate commotion outside. The Bedouin girl rushed from the kitchen and the brigand who had captured Camilla yesterday passed before the flap of the tent in the sunlight and leaped on his horse. She wanted to run outside but the Bedouin girl interposed, pointing to a camp-chair that she had brought forward

by the table. She gave a series of grunts which Camilla interpreted to mean that she was not permitted to leave the tent.

And yet in spite of her knowledge that she had brought all this upon herself she could not feel that Hassan Isar would dare molest her on his own terms. Wasn't he the same man who had offered to divorce his wives and marry her? Hadn't he been her host again and again? Hadn't he told her why he preferred her to all other women? And wasn't the reason why he preferred her because she could deceive him as she had always done? Wasn't this abduction merely his own way of making their caravan into the desert an accomplished fact in spite of her opposition?

His entrance at the flap of the tent against the glow was not in the least alarming. He was dressed in native costume, the costume of a comic-opera hero which had seemed so Gilbert-and-Sullivanish. But since the death and destruction of yesterday these men and their costumes had taken a different character. And Hassan, when he greeted her, seemed less the tragicomedian than ever before.

"Of course you know that if it hadn't been for your friend Slim, nothing would have happened yesterday."

His voice was deep but mild and she gained courage. "Nothing, of course," she said, "but the hold-up of an American bus and the abduction of an American girl traveling in it."

"Granted. I intended to bring you here no matter what happened."

"And how are you going to answer for it?"

"I don't intend to answer at all. I'm not supposed to know anything about the hold-up or about you. It was done by the accomplished but nameless gentleman who brought you here—who, I am sure, treated you with every civility."

"I've nothing to complain of from him."

"Saving all your fury for me? Well, my shoulders can bear it."

"My fury doesn't matter. But my government will have a word to say when it knows the truth."

"Who will tell?"

"Dr. Williamson, Torelli, Janet, Josie—"

"And how will they learn that I had anything to do with it?"

"They will find out."

"How?"

"I will tell them—"

"When?"

"After you let me go."

He laughed jovially. Apparently he had determined to get as much pleasure out

of the situation as possible. And his laughter frightened her more than any threats could have done.

She was silent.

“Come, Camilla. Let’s wait and quarrel after dinner. I hope the meal will be a good one.” He clapped his hands three times and a tall Nubian appeared, wearing the linen cap of a chef. He bowed as Hassan spoke and then the Bedouin girl returned setting the table with a fine linen cloth and proper silver and porcelain furnishings.

“I think you’ll be glad to have good news of your friends,” Hassan said. “The great adventure of your friend Michael having ended in disaster, he thought it best to return to Damascus. He was not badly hurt, just a bullet through the flesh of his shoulder. Torelli drove, I’m told, and managed very well. Your cousin Josie is worried about you, of course, and I have no way of reassuring her. Miss Priestly is very happy to be back at the hotel with Torelli and Kitty Trimble is on her way to Beirut.”

“And you think you can keep a story like this quiet?”

“It will be a nine days’ wonder and then forgotten.”

“Not with the body of Slim as evidence.”

“There will be no body of Slim,” he said. “The *corpus delicti*. When there’s no body there’s no crime. Poor Slim has merely disappeared.”

“How horrible of you!” she gasped, putting her face into her hands.

“Me? I have had nothing to do with it.”

“You should be punished terribly for this. And if I live—”

“You don’t know what you’ll do if you live. Don’t threaten. . . . They tell me it was Slim who made the trouble. He’ll make no more.”

She sat silent, wondering how she could have tolerated Hassan for so long. He went out to bathe his face and hands, leaving her in a misery of uncertainty. If she had had Janet’s little gun she was sure that she would have found the courage to use it, on Hassan or on herself. There now seemed no hope for her in any direction . . . none of her old weapons would do. Her quiver was exhausted . . . she was done . . . finished. . . .

A man came quickly from the dusk of the inner side of the tent beyond the perimeter of light. It seemed almost as though he had come through the wall. She recognized him now. He was one of the three men who had ridden with her after the

hold-up. She cowered away from him but he held up his hand, speaking quickly in broken French.

“Mademoiselle,” he whispered, “I belong to the tribes of El Kerak. He asked me to give you this yesterday but there was no opportunity until now,” and he handed her a soiled slip of paper. She glanced at it quickly and read the brief message.

“The jinni is out of the bottle.”

It was unsigned but a great thrill shot through her as she realized that Ronnie was again near and would help her. She turned to the messenger.

“When?” she asked the messenger.

“Soon,” he replied and, dropping to his knees, suddenly disappeared.

Except for the soiled slip of paper in her fingers she might have thought he had never been. She moved quickly to the flap of the tent and as she appeared the guard outside rose and faced her with a forbidding gesture. It was extraordinary that no one had noticed the stranger as he came and went. Hassan apparently was still in his dressing-tent. The Syrian girl was not to be seen. Hakim sat cross-legged on his rug by the fire.

There seemed no chance that there could have been any mistake, for the name of El Kerak was a guarantee of the honesty of the messenger. Of course the explanation was, she decided, that Ronnie’s messenger was, at least temporarily, a part of Hassan’s outfit.

She turned slowly, trying to obliterate the signs of hope and joy that must have appeared on her face as Hassan reëntered the tent. But he noticed nothing and, refreshed and hungry, was smiling like a man not only amused but very well satisfied with himself. He had permitted her to deceive him as much as she pleased in order that his present triumph should be the more enjoyable. The lamps that had been lighted gave a different atmosphere to the interior of the tent.

“And now,” he said, “we shall be cosy and quite *en famille*. I made plans for this visit some days ago when I hoped to get you to accept my invitation, and sent some food from Tadmora. We shall have an *omelette aux fines herbes*, native bread, broiled chicken, potatoes *au gratin*, goat’s cheese, and soda biscuits which my good friend Hakim will cook to a turn—then a bottle of Stora wine from the slopes of Lebanon at Baalbek, figs, raisins, and coffee. What more could the soul of woman desire?”

“I—I couldn’t eat,” she said, “I’m not hungry.”

“After I’ve taken all this trouble? Nonsense! You must eat of my bread and salt, my dear, according to the Arabian custom, if only to show that you’re not angry.”

“Why waste words?” she said, forcing a smile. “I refused the invitation to go with you on a caravan because I distrusted you. It seems that I was right——”

“But here we are whether you distrusted me or not. And don’t you think it would be wiser if you made the best of it?”

“There is no best of it—only the worst,” she said with a bitterness intended to hide her hope of Ronnie.

“Well, at least now we understand each other. For the first time you’re actually honest with me. I don’t mind saying it’s rather refreshing. But I didn’t think you’d be such a poor loser. I thought at least you were a good sport——”

“Your ideas of a sport and mine may be different.”

“Perhaps. . . . Will you have wing and breast of squab chicken, or a second joint? It smells very good——”

“No, thank you.”

“But I can’t let you starve. Eggs then——”

She made no reply. He helped her and began eating hungrily.

“You see, my dear,” he went on after a moment, “I’ve done everything in the world I could think of to please you and all I’ve had in return is hypocrisy and intrigue. I’ve been genuinely in love with you from the first moment I saw you. I thought you might have cared a little then. You said you did and I believed you. I was a fool. I thought you were different, but you were just a play-girl after all. And still I kept on loving you—more and more. Your kisses in the dark were Judas kisses to try to find out my secrets. I knew they were Judas kisses but I wanted them just the same. I tried to forget that it is the habit of American girls to kiss and forget——”

“Please!”

“No, you shall listen to me now as a Mohammedan woman listens to her lord, with attention and respect. I offered you marriage, as fine a match as you’ll find in all Syria. And you refused me. That was your privilege. You played the game according to your own code and I am playing it according to mine—a savage code if you like but consistent with my plan of life. You may not like it but it is honest and it is mine. When I returned to Damascus with you the first thing I did was to divorce my two wives——”

“Divorce them!”

He smiled. “It’s much simpler than it is in Reno and far less trying on the nerves. I just went to each of them and said, ‘Thou art divorced,’ and I was a free man.”

“The cruelty of it!”

“Cruelty that was kindness to them and to me—just as Reno is kind to those in

your country when love has passed them by.”

“It is horrible——”

“What’s the difference? At Reno you lie and cheat and conspire to beat the law. We make our laws so simple that we don’t need to lie and cheat to break them. Marriage is even less complex. The bride has no part in it, the groom does it all—a feast, dancing, a procession—then presto! you are married. Among the desert people the man carries off his bride who is supposed to weep and try to scratch his eyes out. That won’t be difficult for you of course.”

He laughed at her.

“Thank God, you’re not my husband.”

“Under the Mohammedan law your vows have already made you my wife.”

“My vows?”

“Yes, my dear, on the train to Jerusalem when you hoped to get me to tell you about Osman Khali.”

He ate the last of his omelette with relish.

“So you see, you didn’t need your pink bridesmaids and your young gentlemen in morning-coats, spats, and gardenias to make you married. How much simpler we barbarians are!”

She stared in wonder at his continued impudence. What did it all mean? Did he believe what he said or was he just trying this new means of intimidating her?

She gave him a wry sort of a smile.

“And do you really think you can make me believe all this?”

“I’m afraid you’ll have to.”

Hakim came in and poured the coffee.

“Are you sure you won’t have some more eggs? Better change your mind. If you and I are going to fight, you’ll need all the strength you can get. Have a cigarette then? These are Arif’s from Beirut.”

He smoked, inhaling deeply, and gazed at her through the haze. He was far too courteous to be trusted. As he lighted her cigarette their fingers touched and he suddenly rose, passing around the table and catching her by the shoulders. She sprang up and tried to get away from him but he held her by one hand and arm.

“Let’s have an end to this foolishness,” he muttered with the air of a man who has come to a decision.

“Let me go—you’re hurting me,” she said.

But he still held her.

She struggled furiously and he gave a short laugh. “Am I so distasteful to you as all that?”

He turned and lighted a second cigarette, while she tried to think of some expedient, unusual and desperate. . . . It came to her quickly like an inspiration—a thought that might endanger Ronnie’s plans and her own. And yet——

“Hassan,” she said quickly, “what would you say if I told you that Ronald Barker will soon find the hiding-place of Osman Khali?”

He looked up at her puzzled, but his attention was diverted. Then he smiled easily.

“I would say that it is not true.”

“Even if I mentioned the house of Saied Ahmal Affandi——”

Her information was still untried, a shot in the dark, but it struck him somewhere and she knew she had made no mistake for he twisted toward her quickly.

“Where did you hear that name?”

“At Kufah on the Tigris, at Bagdad,” she added.

He caught her by the wrist and hurt her more than he had hurt her before but she didn’t mind it so much.

“Where did you get this nonsense?” he asked roughly.

“You once told me I was clever——”

“But not as clever as this!” His sudden anxiety was playing the game right into her hands. “Tell me the truth.”

She only smiled at him. The more furious she made him now the better.

“Go on—speak! Who told you about Ahmal Affandi? And how can the Englishman, Ronald Barker, find out?”

She smiled again. “The information is on the way to him. He will know it to-night . . .” She smiled at him again, amazed at her own ingenuity.

“By God!” he raged. “You’ll suffer for this!”

He rushed to the flap of the tent, clapping his hands and shouting in Syriac. The encampment was in a commotion at once, men shouting from one tent to another, lanterns flashing, and through it all Hassan striding like a demon. And then when she wondered what was to happen next it happened quickly—the sound of a rifle-shot at a distance—another—horses whinnying, camels squealing, then more rifles-shots closer at hand and a turmoil of shouting and angry men. Through it all she heard the name of El Kerak uttered first in surprise, and then fear.

Hassan had rushed out of the tent but a hand caught hers. “Trust me,” said a voice in French which she recognized as Ronnie’s messenger, “and follow.” Together they bent under the wall of the tent and in a moment were out in the darkness with walls of goatskin around them. Beyond were men trying to take each other’s lives. She heard Hassan’s voice, then Ronald Barker’s, as the two men met.

Camilla tore her hand away from the grasp of her guide and ran out into the open just in time to see a man in Arabian robes rush toward Hassan, his automatic blazing spitefully.

The surprise was effective. The tribesmen of El Kerak, having shot the lookout on the tower, had dashed suddenly around the two sides of the hill, converging on Hassan's bewildered followers who had rushed from their tents half awake and fought until they found themselves surrounded. With the fall of Hassan the battle was over, for his surviving warriors found what horses they could and dashed away into the darkness.

CHAPTER XIV

· 1 ·

After a while he found her and took her into his arms.

“Camilla! Are you all right?”

“Yes, yes—just a little bewildered, that’s all. Oh, Ronnie, I’m so glad—I think I’ve never been gladder in my life.”

“I couldn’t get here before. The fellow on watch just wouldn’t go to sleep and at last he had to be shot, otherwise there wouldn’t have been such a row. Did you get my message?”

“Only a moment ago, at least I think it was only a moment. Everything happened so quickly. Tell me, how did you know where I was?”

“I had a warning before the hold-up, yesterday. I found out that Zaagi was one of the Anazeh tribesmen and a partizan of Hassan Isar’s, so I wasn’t far away. You see I’ve had Yusef—that was my messenger—in Hassan’s outfit for more than a year. That’s how we knew so much about him. That’s why I warned you not to go with Michael Gay. Hassan’s ways are well known in Syria. I tried to convince you _____”

She put her arms around his neck more closely. “I’ve been an awful fool—I deserved everything that has happened to me. I ought to have known your advice was the best. But I hoped I could succeed in helping you even against your will.”

“It was a terrible chance you took, Camilla.”

“I realize that, but we needn’t speak of Hassan now.”

Ronnie released her for a moment and turned to examine a white figure stretched upon the ground not far away. She saw Ronnie bend over.

“He fired at me twice and missed!” he said breathlessly as he straightened. “Bad luck for him—good luck for me. I wasn’t destined to be killed by Hassan. Perhaps after what has already happened, he knew it.”

“Thank God, Ronnie. I had almost given up hope. He wanted to marry me—said that under the Moslem law we were already married——”

“And you believed him?”

She shook her head.

Ronnie stared at the figure of the Syrian. He seemed about to reply to her but changed his mind. Instead he said, “*De nihil mortuis*,” and then shrugged into silence. That, it seemed, was to be Hassan’s requiem. Camilla bowed her head for a moment.

“You can afford to be generous now,” she whispered. “You see, that figure in white might be you, Ronnie.”

“It was a fair fight,” he muttered. “He asked for it. . . .”

El Kerak’s men were now swarming all over the encampment, taking down the tents and poles and piling everything upon the camels. Camilla watched them for a moment as Yusef emerged with her traveling case.

“What is happening?” she asked.

“The spoils of war. It’s the custom. We must leave at once, before Hassan’s followers return with more men. To-morrow I’m going to send you to Beirut. News travels fast in the desert, as fast as a horse can gallop.”

“And what about Osman Khali?”

He frowned. “The affair of Osman will have to wait until you’re safe.”

“Ronnie!” she gasped, as she realized that she had neglected to tell him the thing he most wanted to know, that they had both been working so hard to find out. She had grasped his arm so violently that he turned in amazement. “Ronnie! Osman!”

He stared at her in incomprehension.

“I’ve found out where he is. I’ve found out all about it.”

“How? Where is he?”

“His address is in the care of Saied Ahmal Affandi at Kufah.”

He looked so incredulous at this important information that she was inclined to be angry. So she shook his arm again.

“Don’t you understand, Ronnie? At Kufah on the Tigris——”

“Why, yes, Ahmal lives at Kufah. He’s another descendant of the Prophet—but how did you find this out?”

She told him and then smiled.

“You once said a little luck, a little ingenuity and a lot of impudence make a good detective. And I’ve had them all.”

There was a moment of silence. In the distance she heard again the sounds that had frightened her the night before, of jackals yelping with hunger. And she understood why the sounds were closer. The same thought that had crossed her mind had come to Ronnie, who called a man and spoke a few words in Syriac. There were four dead. The Anazeh had carried off their wounded.

But the grave-diggers were saved their trouble, for before Ronnie was ready to leave the camp, a sheik—it was the one with the long red boots—came alone, asking permission to take charge of Hassan’s dead. And the last thing Camilla remembered was the sheik standing guard by the body of Hassan, waiting for his men to appear.

Camilla rode in silence beside Ronnie for a way. "It seems a pity not to give him a decent burial," she said, "to give Slim a decent burial——"

"We might arrange that later. But they might not think the burial I'd give the Syrians would be decent. They will attend to that in their own way."

Ronnie touched his horse lightly with his heel.

"We have no time for philosophy or for sentiment now, Camilla. We outnumbered Hassan's men but it will not be for long. The Anazeh are like the sands of the desert. Unless we ride fast they will be down on us like a swarm of flies."

"Where are we going?"

"To my camp on the Jebel Hauran where we are fortified. It's twenty miles south of here. Are you game to ride it? We must reach there before dawn."

"You needn't think of me. I've ridden always."

"Good girl. I think we'll make it."

"And your men with the camels and tents?"

"They'll lose themselves among the rocks while Hassan's men are attending to their dead."

As Ronnie had said, there was no time for sentiment—only a brief touch of fingers, a glance of eyes as they rode toward the moon.

"You know the Saied Ahmal?" she asked, as they gave their weary horses a walk.

"I've seen him—as I said, another descendant of the Prophet. I wonder why I never thought of him before. I've got to pay him a visit."

"We," she corrected. "I'm going with you, Ronnie."

He smiled with a fondness she had begun to comprehend.

"You're simply incorrigible."

"But how are we going to get there? Ride all the way?"

"Hardly. Do you realize that that would take two weeks?"

"No, I didn't."

"A plane, my dear, the one I flew from Jerusalem. This is a land of great distances. Barring mishaps we should be in Bagdad this afternoon."

"Wonderful man! The magic carpet of Ronnie-al-Rashid."

From time to time, as they reached an elevation, he turned in his saddle to look backward. But there were no signs of immediate pursuit. Evidently the death of Hassan Isar had put a temporary damper on their warlike operations.

"But if they are so many, aren't your men afraid?"

"The Anazeh don't often cross the line of the Jebel Hauran. We have already taught them several lessons."

Rosy signals had already been sent up from the horizon before Jebel Hauran showed its exact proportions—a great hill aspiring to be a mountain rising out of a grove of palm-trees. Men came reconnoitering. El Kerak's men, she found, and in half an hour they were in an encampment very like Hassan's, but much larger and set in a cleft of the mountain which had grown bigger as they approached it and commanded a view in all directions. Here, she realized at once, were the headquarters of El Kerak, Ronald Barker's home in the desert, for there seemed to be an air of permanence in the set-up of the tents. Then the sweet sound of running water close by, and at the foot of the hill Ronnie's plane, tethered to pegs in the ground at which it tugged impatiently.

He made her lie in a hammock outside his tent while he saw to the preparation of the plane for immediate departure. And then breakfast—a solid breakfast of eggs, native bread made into toast, and coffee.

“Are you still game?” he asked her. “Or hadn't I better send you back to Beirut with some of my men?”

She grinned at him. “If I wouldn't go before when you asked me why should I go now? As a good sportsman——”

“You want to be in at the death? Righto! It's your hunt now as well as mine.”

Ronnie had decided to take Yusef with them and he entered the cockpit full of joy at the venture. Yusef was supposed to be a Christian but his only religion was to follow El Kerak and obey his orders.

Camilla realized as they climbed the air that she had been less with Ronnie than with Hassan, and that here at last was Ronnie as she had always thought of him, whether she was with him or not, sure, determined, cool, commanding, no longer the fantastic creature of the many disguises but a real individual of flesh and blood, to whom, in spirit as well as fact she had given all her friendship and all her affection. There had never been any other. With Ronnie beside her, that purposeful look in his eyes, it was Hassan who was now fantastic and unreal. She had wept a tear or two as she remembered his many kindnesses, but had dried them quickly when she remembered what had happened last night. There was no room after that for anything but happiness about Ronnie's safety and her own, and the joy of being able to have a part with him in this momentous mission to Bagdad, whatever came of it.

One event had followed another so quickly that the remainder of her pilgrimage to Bagdad, beginning with the exaltation of her swift flight in Ronnie's plane was

more like fancy than reality. And as she tried to remember what had happened, she saw a series of pictures, recalled a series of conversations, like the shifting colors of a kaleidoscope. The Syrian desert, unrolling like a tapestry beneath them, thrilling her with an alarming sense of the spaciousness of the earth, an infinite variety of patches of green that were oases; other patches, like ink-spots that were the tents of the Bedouins; crawling worms of caravans that twisted and turned among the hillocks, each with its plume of dust that drifted down the wind to become the haze of the horizon.

Fragments of most important conversations with Ronnie:

“. . . We'll just drop in on Ahmal for tea. You're to be Miss Florence Bell, a niece of Gertrude Bell, the mystery woman of the East—Oriental Secretary to the High Commissioner during the War, the woman who put King Feisal upon the throne of Iraq. Her name is an open sesame to any house in Bagdad. She gave her life to the cause of the Arabs and was well known to Ahmal Affandi. You are going to call on Ahmal to get information about Arab relics your aunt knew about. I shall be—er—Hussain, your dragoman and interpreter. Ahmal won't know either of us from Adam and Eve, but he'll see us just the same on account of Aunt Gertrude. I'll do the talking. You won't need to talk. Our friend Osman Khali will, I think, remain in the background and we'll have to smoke him out.”

After refueling at Hit, she remembered that they had climbed higher and higher and were soon halfway between two silver threads that wove their way along the tapestry until they disappeared in the haze where Bagdad was.

A dozen dead civilizations spread beneath them while Ronnie's plane, alive with the youth of the present, passed them carelessly by.

It seemed only a moment before the four tall minarets and the dome of the Kazemain came into sight against the distant background of the city, a shorter while again, before the nose of the plane tilted down and the earth seemed to come up to meet them with alarming rapidity.

“There's Kufah near-by, Camilla, and here is where we land.”

He did it skilfully in a flat place alongside the river which seemed to be a landing-field. A few thank-you-ma'ams rather joyous than dangerous, and the plane taxied to a stop and then, after one deep breath, as though in relief, was silent.

The pictures became very definite now—mud houses and a plane or two under a roof of thatch, Yusef getting out with Ronnie and talking to a man who seemed to

be in charge of the place.

She remembered that Ronnie said something that made the keeper of the airport begin salaaming at once, and then, when Ronnie gave him money, led them around the huts to a model-T Ford of an early vintage in which Ronnie presently drove them along a good road toward a grove of orange-trees which surrounded a house on a hill. There was a pretty little garden at the side where a man in white was sitting in a camp-chair under the trees. When Ronnie came up the path with Camilla, mentioning the name of Gertrude Bell, the man in the camp-chair seemed to uncoil himself and attain a great height, making salutations like a dancing cobra. He was well over six feet and his face was black with age, his beard scarlet with the stains of henna, while on his head a great green turban framed his head majestically like a crown. With the name of Gertrude Bell still upon his lips, he gave Camilla a toothless smile and led the way into the house and to a divan at the farther end of the room where another man sat reading and smoking a narghile.

He was a little man with a round pot-belly, a scraggly gray beard, and watery gray eyes set in pouches of purplish flesh, partially concealed by spectacles which rested lightly on his little pointed hooked nose. He relinquished his water-pipe with evident regret and rose salaaming to Camilla while Ahmal made the introductions.

This insignificant person, she found, was Osman Khali, the man whom all the trouble was about, the only true descendant of the Prophet with a pure line, the mufti of Jerusalem, the symbol of the Moslem faith, and the leader of modern thought throughout the Eastern world. She couldn't help thinking that, if he were the descendant of the Prophet, the Prophet had descended a very long way. There were stains of food upon his robe and he had a manner as hesitant as that of an underpaid teacher of languages in a girls' seminary. Ronnie and Ahmal repeated Gertrude Bell's name and Osman Khali mumbled it pleasantly after them as though it were part of an English lesson that he was learning.

There wasn't much time to spare and, having discovered that the two ancient men were alone in the house, Ronnie quickly pushed Osman Khali down upon the divan and wrapped his head in his white robe in which he gasped and sputtered ineffectually while his hands clawed vacancy. The Saied Ahmal, taken completely by surprise, stared helplessly at Osman and Ronnie and didn't awake to the necessities of the situation until Yusef, who had been waiting for this moment, had blocked the doorway. But the old man was game and struck at Yusef with his bony fist, then, at the sight of a pistol sank feebly beside Osman on the divan.

"It's really a pity," Ronnie said, as he tied Osman's arms with a rope that Yusef had brought, then tied the arms and legs of Ahmal, "for they are two very

respectable old gentlemen.”

By this time Osman was stricken with terror at the sight of Yusef’s gun and gave them no trouble whatever, yielding to Ronnie’s persuasions as his hands were tied behind him. They needed his legs for purposes of locomotion.

“We are very sorry, Affandi,” Ronnie said quietly, “that it was necessary for us to make this visit, but the presence of Osman Khali is most earnestly demanded in Jerusalem. If he gives us no trouble he will be treated with the utmost respect and consideration. As for yourself, Saied Ahmal, you will doubtless be released before we have been gone more than a few moments.”

He thought it too ironical to wish that Allah be with them and so he merely bowed and walked out of the room with Camilla, peering before them for signs of enemies, while Yusef came leading the descendant of the Prophet to the Ford. No one was in sight at the moment and Osman was so terrified at the sight of Yusef’s gun poking at his ribs that he sat quite peacefully while Ronnie drove away.

“I’m not much used to—to hijacking,” Camilla gasped feebly. “What will happen when we get to the landing-field?”

“That,” Ronnie said, “is in the lap of the gods.”

“But suppose,” she insisted, “that the man there tries to prevent our flying away?”

“That might create a difficult situation,” he replied calmly. “But there’s always a way out.”

The way out was temporarily difficult for as they sped back toward the landing-field they were aware of a commotion from the garden where Ahmal, who had succeeded in releasing himself, was yelling and waving his arms so that his robes flapped in the air like the wings of some gigantic bird. The noise that he made was extraordinary and they saw people come running out of the fields from all directions.

Ronnie drove the little car out on the flying-field near his plane and helped Osman and Camilla up into the cabin. By this time the cries of Ahmal and his friends had reached the flying port and its keeper came running out to see what the noise was all about. As the plane began to move, a suspicion of what was happening seemed to come to him for he rushed out and took hold of the wing of the plane. But when Yusef fired a shot past his head, he relinquished his hold, stumbled, and fell into the sand. The plane gathered momentum and before Ahmal could reach them they were already off the ground and clearing the huts and palm-trees. Shots were fired but Ronnie only laughed while he gave his plane the “gun,” soared over the minarets of Kazemain, and squared away for the West.

He was afraid to stop at Hit for he knew the wireless would soon be busy and

Moslem planes searching the sky. So, after a satisfactory glance at his gages, he made directly west for Jebel Hauran. The little man in the cabin gave him no trouble and, after being slightly airsick, relinquished himself with a spirit of resignation to whatever was to be his fate. Yusef had untied the rope and contented himself with keeping an eye on the prisoner who, as night fell, went mercifully to sleep.

But according to Ronnie the party was not to be a complete success until the descendant of the Prophet could be securely placed behind bars in a British prison where no one would know his identity.

CHAPTER XV

And so Camilla's pilgrimage successfully ended. They stopped at the camp at Jebel Hauran for a short rest and sleep and then they took off again for the distant mountains to the West where in a few hours she would be in touch with Josie and her friends in America.

"Is it to be Jerusalem?" she asked.

He nodded. "Jerusalem and then perhaps the fortress at Acre. My job's done. The camp at Jebel Hauran is to be broken up before the Anazeh can sweep down upon it. El Kerak, the sheik and robber baron, passes out of the picture and becomes again the name of a village. Syria will see me no more. I'll fold my tents like the Arabs and silently steal away."

"The death of Hassan Isar will make a commotion?"

"Naturally. I won't be coming East of the Lebanons for a while unless I find another identity. I'm afraid my usefulness for England in the East is gone."

"I suppose you'll think I'm selfish when I say I'm glad."

His glance questioned.

"Just that there are other purposes, other utilities for a man of your talents, I might say another identity—"

"What?"

"Why not your own? Hasn't it occurred to you that you've taken enough risks for England for a while—that you've a right to become Ronald Barker himself, a man with two countries instead of a man without one?"

"It would be safer for a while," he said quietly, as he watched the saw-tooth peaks of the mountains of Moab come out of the haze and beyond them the sea that showed the way to his country and to hers.

THE END

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been fixed.

Inconsistency in hyphenation has been retained.

[The end of *The Road to Bagdad* by George Fort Gibbs]