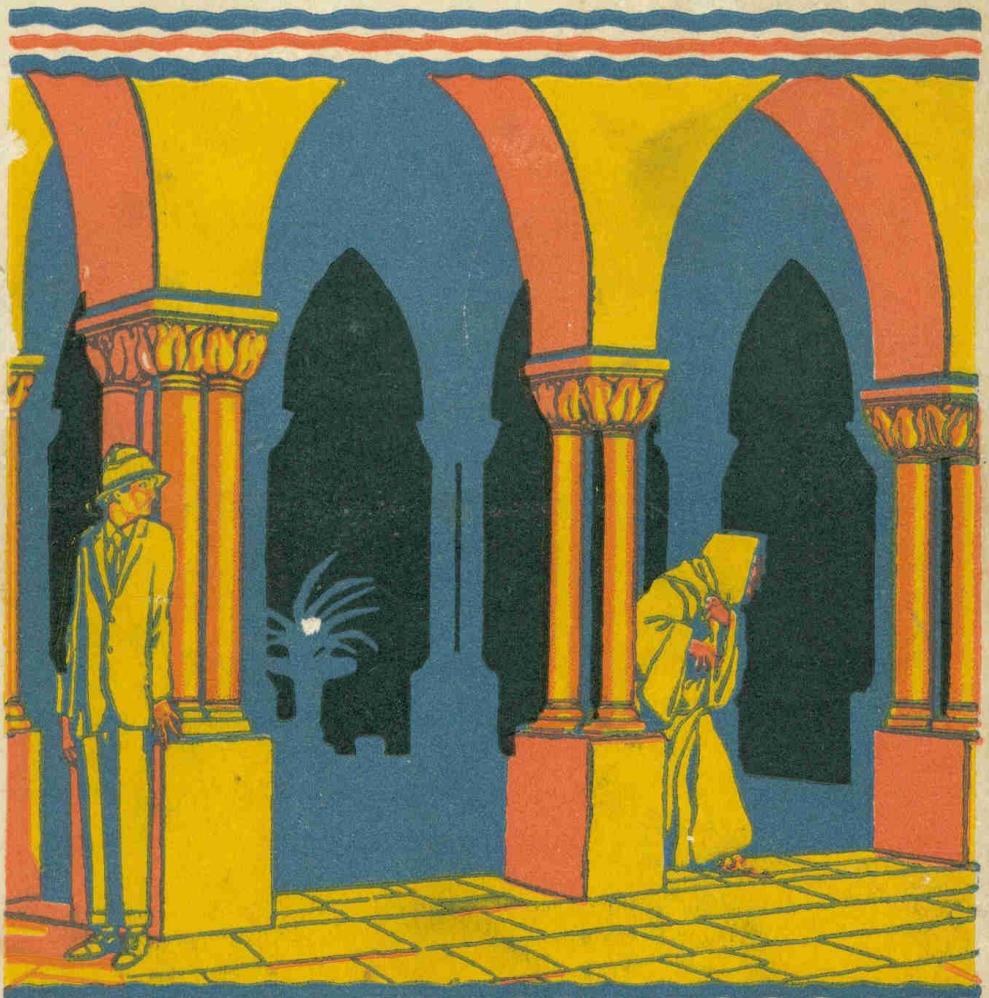


The TREASURE
OF THE PASS

By GURNEY SLADE



The CAPTAIN SERIES

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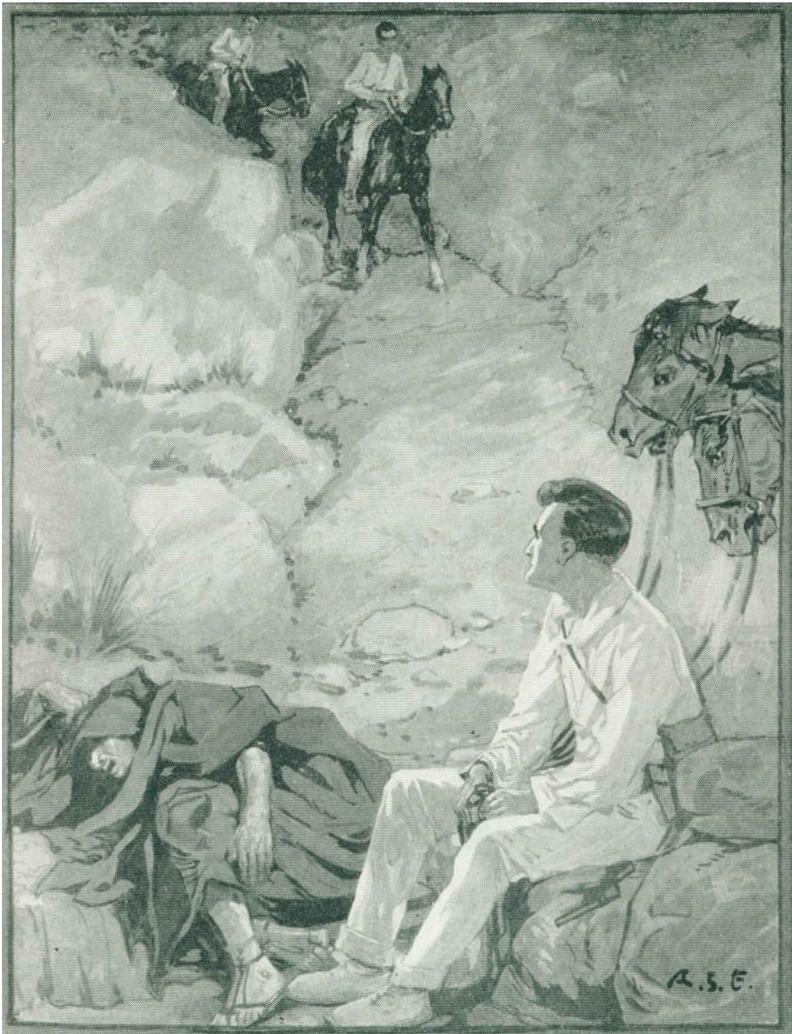
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At his feet the prostrate body of a man in the dress of a monk

THE TREASURE OF THE PASS

BY
GURNEY SLADE

THOMAS NELSON AND SONS, LTD.
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The Treasure of the Pass

CHAPTER I

THE MAJOR'S QUEST

On a bright October afternoon the S.S. *Khan Yunis* drew in to the Levant coast and dropped anchor about half a mile from the little port of Al Mina, hard by the ancient town of Tripoli. Immediately a swarm of native boats surrounded her, and presently a steward came aft to the group of English-speaking travellers who were standing by the rail looking at the snow-clad mountains of Lebanon, and handed a cablegram to Colonel Villers. That grey-haired soldier's brows went up a little as he tore it open and scanned the contents. Yorke, his eighteen-year-old son, looked at him rather anxiously.

"No bad news, I hope, father?" he said.

"No, not bad exactly, Yorke; but I'm afraid it will mean my returning home at once. My personal attendance is wanted at the War Office on a certain matter which only I can clear up."

"Blow!" Yorke exclaimed whole-heartedly. "And what about Roy and me?"

Colonel Villers pulled his moustache and looked meditatively at his son and nephew. They were of a type to inspire confidence. Yorke, who had just left Eton, stood six feet in his socks, had rowed in the College eight, and gave promise of a magnificent manhood. His cousin Roy, Canadian born, the son of Colonel Villers's sister, who had married an Alberta rancher, lacked an inch of Yorke's height, but nothing of his chest measurement, and there was much friendly rivalry between the two in matters of sport. Roy was due for McGill University and Yorke for Oxford, and they were putting in a few months touring the Mediterranean with the colonel as guide and tutor. They had shipped on the *Khan Yunis* at Port Said, intending to land at Tripoli and take a few days' trip through the Lebanons before working their way down overland through Damascus and Jerusalem. And now had come this upsetting telegram.

“Say, Uncle Herbert, don’t dandle us home with you,” begged Roy. “We can’t do any good at the War Office, you know.”

“I quite realize that, Roy. The thing is, what mischief will you get up to if I leave you to do the trip alone?” The colonel shook his head at them, and turned to a sun-tanned, hook-nosed man, an Australian, with whom they had fraternized a good deal on the voyage up. “Here, Major Todd, you are going up to the Lebanons, I believe. How would you like to burden yourself with the company of these two large infants?”

“Nothing I would like better,” replied the Australian readily. “But I won’t take it on, though. It wouldn’t be fair on them.” His tone was serious, and the colonel looked at him quickly.

“I don’t quite understand, major.”

“Well, in a nutshell, it’s this, colonel: my trip up there”—he pointed to the mountains—“isn’t going to be a joy ride. Between ourselves, I’ve had two tough men on my tracks ever since I left Sydney, and for all I know they may be among that lot there,” and he nodded to the gang of native third-class passengers clustered forward. “Disguised, of course,” he added.

Yorke and Roy exchanged glances. There was evidently adventure in the air, and it smelt good to them.

“It looks as if we must go, now that Major Todd has told us this,” said Yorke guilefully. “We couldn’t possibly let him go up there on his own, father.”

“Of what use is the Empire if an Australian can’t depend on an Englishman and a Canadian in time of trouble?” Roy chipped in hopefully. “It’s a case of duty calling, Uncle Herbert.”

Both the elder men smiled, and Major Todd said, “If you have time, and would like to come below, I will tell you the story——”

“I must confess to a lively curiosity,” admitted the colonel, and they followed the Australian down to the little smoke-scented saloon, and seated themselves on the faded plush seats round one of the tables. Major Todd drew out his cigar-case, and offered the colonel a weed. Then, taking one himself, he bit off the end, lit it with a patent lighter, and beat away the cloud of smoke with his hand.

“I’m telling you this in confidence,” he said quietly, leaning his elbows on the table, “and”—he looked at each face in turn—“I know I can rely on you. I’ll start from the beginning and make the story as short as possible.

During the war I was, as you know, in the Australian cavalry, and during the last year of hostilities I had a batman of the name of Jarvice, whose one aim and object, after seeing to my comfort, was to get something for nothing. Well, one day early in the spring of 1918 it fell to my regiment to take part in a raid on Es Salt, behind the enemy lines. My squadron happened to be the first to ascend a breakneck path up the mountains of Moab. We had our scouts out ahead of us, and half-way up the track I came across the body of an officer and two men whom they had shot. I did not stop, but just turned to make a remark to Jarvice, and as I did so I saw him stoop and take something from the officer's hand. War is war, and I made no comment; but towards the end of the day I noticed that Jarvice was wearing a diamond ring of very antique design, and I told him that a ring like that was better in a trooper's pocket than on a trooper's finger. He agreed, and took it off and put it in his pocket-book, and I never saw it again."

Major Todd paused, flicked the ash from his cigar, and resumed:

"Some months after the Armistice my regiment was camped on the beach at Tripoli yonder, and with two or three brother officers I got leave for a few days to ride up into the Lebanons and view the famous cedars. We took our batmen with us, and stayed at a hotel in the little mountain village of Buderri. Near that village there is a great gorge abounding in precipices, and, to cut the story short, down one of those precipices fell my batman Jarvice on the morning of the last day of our stay. Yes, cognac was the cause of it. Two of us went over the cliff on ropes, and we found him lying on a rocky ridge close to a small cave. He was quite dead, and there and then we held a hasty consultation as to the best thing to do. We could think of nothing better than burying him in the cave. The natives would not have thanked us for bringing him to the top, for ground is at a premium in the Lebanons, where every inch is jealously cultivated; and even if we had succeeded in purchasing a burial site, the odds were that they would have dragged him out again after we had gone. So, having first relieved him of his identity disc and few personal belongings, we carried him into the cave, and sealed the entrance with a big stone. It was only when we were half-way down to the coast again that I discovered that I had left the pocket-book on the ledge outside the cave. It was not worth going back for, we thought, and we went on to Tripoli, made our report at headquarters, and in due course went on board the transport for Australia. I won't bore you with an account of my doings in my native country. Suffice to say that I am a sheep-farmer, and that the part of the country in which my station is situated suffered heavily from lack of rain. Things went from bad to worse with me, and early this year I was glad to get a few hundred pounds for what remained of my

stock. That did not worry me very much, for the war had taught me philosophy, but when my only sister fell ill and had to undergo several expensive operations without the wherewithal to meet the bills, I began to look round for something remunerative. And then I saw an advertisement in one of the papers offering ten thousand pounds reward for the recovery of a ring that was believed to have been taken from the body of a dead Austrian officer in the Pass of Jisr Ed Damieh in Moab on the occasion of Allenby's second raid into the mountains. The description of the ring tallied exactly with the one I had seen Jarvice slip into his pocket-book, and then it came to me suddenly that we had left that pocket-book lying on a ledge four hundred feet down the Buderu gorge. When we had buried Jarvice I had not given a thought to the contents of his pocket-book. Every soldier had one, and they were very much alike—a few photographs and letters, and perhaps a pound or two in Egyptian notes. But in Sydney, reading that ad., I felt my heart give a little bound. On a ledge in the Buderu gorge lay in all probability ten thousand pounds waiting for me to pick up, for none of the villagers go in for cliff climbing as a hobby, and even if one had happened to go down to the ledge and found the ring, I should most probably be able to trace it and buy it back for a couple of hundred pounds. That was about its value in the ordinary way, I should imagine.”

“Yes,” agreed the colonel, “about that, I think.”

The three looked at him in surprise, so assured was his tone.

“I happen to know a little about that ring,” he explained, with a smile. “A friend of mine is acquainted with the family who are advertising for it. It is the Austrian family of Vallas. The present head of the family, who has married an American heiress recently, was brother of the officer from whom the ring was taken. It is in the nature of an heirloom, having been given to one of the Vallas family by Louis XIV. The amount of the reward was fixed by the American side of the family, which may account for its magnitude.”

“Well, I'm glad to know that,” said Major Todd. “The advertisement simply gave the solicitor's address. Well, to go on with the yarn. I decided to come to Tripoli and try my luck. But a week before I sailed, two men called on me at my hotel in Sydney—two men, one of extremely unprepossessing appearance—who gave their names as Messrs. Ike Jacobs and George Steele. They introduced themselves as friends of my late batman, and could I tell them exactly how it was he came by his death. It struck me at once that they were on the same game as myself, and I was rather short with them. I said that he had fallen down a precipice somewhere north of Damascus, and that as far as I knew he had been buried where he fell. But as bad luck would

have it, my trunk labelled P. & O. Port Said was standing in the middle of the room, and resting on it were some pamphlets on Syria and Lebanon which I had had from a tourist agency. I saw suspicion in their eyes as they looked at the trunk. They did not stay long, for they could see that I intended to give nothing away. But they travelled to Port Said on the same steamer with me, and they got off at Port Said, and it's my belief that they have travelled up here on the Khan Yunis. Steele has the look of a man who is acquainted with the East, and I should say he is no stranger to the art of disguising."

"And what exactly do you imagine their idea to be?" asked the colonel.

"I should say that they mean me to do the work, and when I've got the ring they will try swooping down and relieving me of it. . . . That is when the trouble will start," the Australian added quietly. "So you see, I'm no fit company for your two boys at present, colonel."

Colonel Villers pulled his moustache as he remarked, "I can't agree with you on that point, major. I think you'd better take them as a bodyguard."

"Nothing else to be done, father," Yorke agreed.

"A clear call to duty," added Roy, beaming with satisfaction. "Yorke and I will hold off Ike and George while Major Todd lifts the ring and collars the reward."

"Now look here," said the Australian, and it was evident that he was moved, "I can see you've made up your minds to come up and give me a hand, so I won't argue. But what I insist on is that if we get the ring you must take equal shares in the reward."

Both boys made a gesture of dissent, and the colonel said, "Please don't make that a condition, major. Yorke and Roy are both children of very wealthy parents, and in three years' time both will have more money than they can possibly need. But with you, as you have just told us, things are quite different. Primarily, you came out here to help your sister, who is ill. Is that not so?"

The Australian nodded. "That's right, colonel. If it were not for her, the ring could stay for ever on that Buderu ledge as far as I am concerned. I can always make a living in Australia."

"Exactly. You are here to help a sister in distress. Surely you will let a young Englishman and a young Canadian extend their aid also to a lady in distress without dwelling too insistently upon the subject of remuneration?"

“Since you put it that way, colonel, I can say no more. I accept your offer gratefully. I couldn’t wish for better company, I’m sure.” And Major Todd shook hands warmly with all three.

Colonel Villers rose.

“Now you two boys,” he said, with mock sternness, “come along to my cabin. I must be catching the next boat back to Port Said, and I shall have to give you plenty of money and advice before I leave. . . . By the way, major, how do you intend getting up to Buderri? By car?”

“If we can get one, which I very much doubt,” was the reply. “I expect we shall have to rely on the native horseflesh. I suppose you boys ride?”

“Yorke has hunted with the Pytchley, and Roy, I believe, has some reputation in his native Alberta as a rider of really bad animals. I don’t think you will need to tie either of them on, major. . . . Come along, boys, and get your marching orders.”

CHAPTER II

REZZAY'S HOTEL

Major Todd's prognostication proved correct, Tripoli's three cars were unavailable the next day for a trip into the mountains, and it was on horseback that they left their rather dubious hotel in the main street and struck through the olive-clad plain to the foothills of the ranges. They had hired the steeds from a baggy-trousered Lebanese at the rate of ten shillings a day each, and both sides were well satisfied with the bargain. They were sturdy, sure-footed little animals, used to heavy burdens, and that, as Yorke remarked, was just as well.

By midday they were clear of the plain and were riding up the lower slopes, where presently they halted to partake of ham and eggs and coffee at a stone caravanserai. Far away on the horizon they could see the smoke of the steamer which was taking Colonel Villers back to Port Said.

"Good old pater," said Yorke appreciatively. "No fuss, no anything with him when he left. Just handed us the money and said, 'Keep your end up, boys.'"

"I wouldn't change him for any other uncle in the world," said Roy; "he's such a thoroughgoing sportsman." He gazed keenly at the white road winding snake-like through the green of the olive plantations. "Can't see anything of Ike and George, major. Perhaps they've decided that the game isn't good enough."

Major Todd shook his head.

"I wish I could think so, Roy, but I have a very strong presentiment that we shall fall foul of them sooner or later. Well, if you've finished, shall we get on?" He signalled to a Lebanese, who removed the nosebags from the horses and led them out from the shade of an olive tree. They mounted and set off again.

The road was a good one, cut in countless zigzags through the terraced lands of the mountain peasantry. The air was heavy with the scent of ilex, and castles and cloisters of grey stone perched on seemingly inaccessible crags lent an air of crusader-like romanticism to the scene. Passing through the zone of dwarf hard-leaved oaks, they came presently to the loftier region of the pines, and later to the levels where the cypress and cedar grew in

profusion. Here great waterfalls came tumbling down the rocky clefts, and the air became chill as the sun sank below the peaks. Occasionally they passed a loose-trousered mountaineer driving an ass laden with a precious freight of olive oil, and now and again they would see women, balancing heavy jars of water on their heads, ascending and descending precipitous paths to unseen villages and wells. But as they approached the region of the snows, these passers-by became more rare.

“Whew!” said Roy, as a sudden bend in the road brought them to the side of a great gorge. “Some hole! Don’t think I’d care to wander about there on a dark night unless I knew the country pretty well. Gee! if it doesn’t remind me of the Rockies!”

“That’s the Buderer gorge,” said the major. “This road follows it for miles now.”

Scenting rest and food, the horses increased their pace voluntarily, and in another half an hour the riders saw lights twinkling ahead.

“Buderer,” announced the major; “and that other patch across the ravine is Rasharbi. They’re only three hundred yards apart, but if you want to get from one to the other you’ve got to go four miles round the end of the gorge. If this was America they’d have a rope bridge across, but life up here has changed very little in the last thousand years, I should say.”

The horses now broke into a trot, and in a short time they entered the main street of Buderer. It was composed of small square, flat-roofed houses, and from the upper windows of one or two were suspended signboards, which jutted out over the roadway. Beneath one of these, bearing the insignia “Rezzay’s Hotel,” they halted.

“I wonder if the old chap’s still there?” murmured the Australian, and he cried out, “Rezzay! Hi, Rezzay!”

In response to the hail, the blinds of one of the windows were drawn aside, and a face peered out at them.

“Rezzay, sure enough,” the major told the boys, and then he shouted again, “Hi, Rezzay, come down and open the door. Here are three guests for you!”

The blinds were replaced. They heard footsteps on the stairs, and then a short, thickset man appeared as the door was flung open.

“You remember me, Rezzay?” said Major Todd, riding forward so that the light fell on his face.

The proprietor peered at him keenly, and then his somewhat surly features relaxed a little. "The major," he said. "Yes, the Major Todd."

"That's right, Rezzay. Now can you put my two friends and me up to-night? We've ridden from Tripoli."

The proprietor smiled a little wryly.

"Yes, my house is not so packed that I can't find room for three. As a matter of fact, I have had no guests since the army left the plain. If you will wait a moment I will show you the way to the stable." He re-entered the house and came out again bearing a hurricane lamp and a huge rusty key. Preceding them, he walked some twenty yards down the street, halted at a tumbledown shed, and opened the door.

"Same old place," said the Australian, dismounting, and leading in his horse. "This is where we put our nags last time we came here. Dark as pitch, and cleaned out once a year. My horse was cooped up here for three days once, and when he got out, he bolted with one of the village lads on his back. Remember that, Rezzay?"

"They talk of it in the village still," replied the proprietor, emptying some fodder from a sack into three of the bins. "One of the Australians jumped on another horse and rode twelve miles bareback in pursuit."

Unsaddling, they rubbed down the horses, saw that they had plenty of food for the night, and returned on foot to the hotel, where Rezzay showed them their rooms. An hour later, summoned by a bell, they entered the primitive dining-room of the establishment, and sat down to a meal of mountain goat, potatoes, bread and cheese, and coffee. When they had finished, a slatternly domestic appeared, cleared away the debris, put more charcoal in the brazier, and left them to themselves.

"Sporting old card, Rezzay," said Yorke, warming his hands over the glowing embers, and gazing round at the weapons and trophies of the chase which ornamented the walls. "Jove, do look at that old flintlock, though. It must have come out of the Ark."

"I think there's a yarn about that gun." Major Todd bit the end off a cigar, and lit it at the fire. "I can't remember exactly what it was, but I think some one got shot. . . . Ah, here's Rezzay. I say, Rezzay, what's the yarn about that old gun?"

"It stopped a feud," the proprietor replied. He looked at them inquiringly. "Would you wish to hear the story, or would you rather smoke and look at the peaks through the windows?"

For answer they drew a stool near to the brazier, and begged him to sit down and go ahead.

“You may have noticed that little village on the opposite side of the ravine,” Rezzay began, when he had lit the cigar which the major offered him.

“Rasharbi,” the Australian nodded. “Yes, I pointed that out to my friends.”

“Well, when my grandfather was a young man, there was a feud between Rasharbi and Buderu. But if the men wished to shoot each other, they had to go down the road to a spot where the ravine narrowed sufficiently for them to shoot across it; and for dagger-fights, they had to go still farther, to the place where the two roads meet. You know that spot, Major Todd?”

“Yes, I know it.” The major turned to the boys. “This ravine is shaped like a hairpin,” he explained, “with the road running practically round the edge, so when the men of the villages wanted to trade or fight, they had to go round to the narrow end of the hairpin to do it.”

“As a rule the young men preferred to lie in ambush in places where their guns would carry across the ravine,” Rezzay went on. “But one day my grandfather journeyed down to Damascus and returned with this English gun that you see on the wall. It cost him very much money, but that he did not grudge, for he was a far-seeing man. He brought it up here at nightfall, and at dawn the next morning he opened his bedroom window and shot a man standing in the street of Rasharbi.”

“H’m,” said Roy. “Bit of the Wild West touch about your grandad, Mr. Rezzay. And what happened then?”

“Rasharbi was as a village of the dead that day. Not a man, woman, or child dared stir out of doors, and that evening there came a deputation from Rasharbi, asking that the feud should stop for ever. A gun had come into the mountains that would carry across the ravine between the two villages, and they could not contend against that. They offered many goats and many sacks of potatoes to the men of Buderu.”

“And of which your Wild West grandpa had his full cut, I’ll bet,” Roy commented.

“Life is hard in the mountains, gentlemen, and I have heard that my grandfather did very well out of the offerings. There is friendship between the villages now, and marriages are frequent.”

“You speak English very well,” Yorke remarked.

Rezzay looked pleased at the compliment.

“I have been a policeman in New York,” he told them. “I did very well in the way of money there. But the mountains called me, and I came back. There are no mountains in New York.”

“There’s the Singer building, though,” said Roy. “I should think that was pretty nearly as high as this Lebanon range.”

Rezzay smiled indulgently. “It was not only the call of the mountains that brought me back; it was what you call social position. In America I was merely a policeman among thousands of policemen. Here I am the grandson of the man that stopped the feud. You understand?”

They told him that they understood, and Rezzay asked them what they would like for breakfast.

“It’s not a question much of what we’d like, unless Buderer has changed a lot since I was last here,” said the major. “What we’re going to get is mountain goat, potatoes, and coffee, isn’t it?”

“I must admit that you are right, sir. The asking is a formality.”

“Well, we’ll go through with the formality. Yorke, what would you like for breakfast?”

“Why, since you ask me, major, there’s nothing I so much fancy as a little mountain goat, well cooked, with potatoes and coffee.”

“And you, Roy?”

“Goat,” was the prompt reply; “a slice of brisk mountain goat, with coffee and potatoes to follow.”

“As for me, Rezzay, I’ll have plain goat *avec pomme de terre et café*. You speak French?”

“No, but it does not matter.” Rezzay entered gravely into the jest. “I presume you would like your coffee and potatoes served with the goat? Thank you. At eight o’clock, then. Good-night, gentlemen. If you should want anything, just call ‘Rezzay!’ There are no bells in my house.”

When their host had gone, the three sat chatting until Major Todd had finished his cigar, and then they went to their rooms. Yorke and Roy were sharing a fairly roomy apartment at the back of the house, and the major had a single room overlooking the road. Pleasantly tired after their long day, the

boys were soon in bed and asleep. They were awakened at six in the morning by the major, who tapped at their door, and entered dressed in his pyjamas. He was carrying a lighted candle, for the dawn had not yet broken, and this he set down on the chest of drawers. The boys rubbed their sleepy eyes, raised themselves on their elbows, and stared at him.

“Don’t tell me the mountain goat’s ready yet, major,” said Roy. “Why, we can’t see to eat it.”

“No, it’s only six,” replied the Australian. “All the same I want you to get up. My two Sydney friends are on my trail. They passed through the village last night.”

Both boys leapt out of bed and began to dress rapidly, the while they asked eager questions.

“Yes,” said the major, “they passed through at twelve last night on horseback. I heard the noise of hoofs and I went to the window. I heard Jacobs make a remark to his friend, and I recognized his voice at once. I slipped on a few things and went out through the window after them. They did not stop in Buderu, but went on round the hairpin bend, and I did not follow them any farther. They were most probably making for Rasharbi. I’ve been thinking the matter over since, and it seems to me that Rasharbi would be an ideal place from their point of view for watching our operations, and so I suggest that we wake Rezzay, get him to find us some rope, and have a shot at finding that pocket-book at once, before Ike and George have a chance of levelling field-glasses or rifles at us. Are you agreed?”

“*Rather.*”

“Then I’ll leave you to wash and dress while I go and break the news to Rezzay. The man’s a philosopher, I’m glad to say. Otherwise he might cut up a bit rough at having to supply three hundred feet of rope at a few minutes’ notice on such a chilly autumn morning.”

CHAPTER III

THE SECRET OF THE RAVINE

An hour later, laden with three hundred feet of rope, knotted at every yard, which Rezzay had been induced to borrow from a friend's outhouse, the three left the hotel, crossed the street, dived through an open space between two cottages, and, crossing a strip of cultivated ground, gained the jumble of rocks and boulders which fringed the edge of the ravine.

Seen thus in the grey light of the dawn it presented an awe-inspiring spectacle, and even the hardy mountaineers of the Lebanon had made no attempt to wring sustenance from such a barren spot. Girt about with the great peaks, it looked like a veritable vent-hole of the Inferno. Here and there a small cedar fought valiantly for life on a rocky ledge, and stunted pines and bushes made dark patches against the lifeless grey of the rocks a full thousand feet down the precipitous sides; but of animal life there was no sign. There was no temptation for even the most famished mountain goat to visit the Buderer gorge.

The major led the way down a steep track to a flat rock strewn with boulders. "It was from here that Jarvice fell," he said, "and if he hadn't landed on that ledge, he would have gone the full two thousand feet before bringing up."

The boys crawled to the edge and looked over.

"Some place," said Roy. "I didn't know they could do anything like this outside of the American continent." He drew back, and gazed up at Rasharbi, perched on the edge of the opposite cliff. "I wonder if Ike and George have got their field-glasses on us."

"Possibly. Well, we won't waste time." The major looped one end of the rope round a big smooth boulder and made it fast. "Now what I want you boys to do is to see that neither the rope nor the boulder slips. Better sit on it, I think. That's right." He flung the other end of the rope out into the ravine, and then, taking off his coat and shoes, he lowered himself over the edge. When only his head was visible, he nodded to the boys and smiled. "If anything happens, rope slips or anything like that, and I don't come up again, I shouldn't hang about this district, boys. It isn't too healthy. Thanks very much for your help. Ta-ta!" He disappeared.

"I like Major Todd," said Yorke thoughtfully.

"Proper white man," Roy agreed. "I wish we could do more. But he told us to sit on the rock, so the only thing to do is to obey orders."

But it was an anxious period of waiting that ensued, and when half an hour had passed without any sign from below, they had difficulty in concealing their alarm; but at last the major's head appeared above the edge, and both vented their feelings in a shout of joy.

"Hard work that," said the Australian, heaving himself on to the flat rock and wiping his dripping forehead. "Good thing I've had plenty of gymnasium practice."

"Did you get the book?" asked Yorke eagerly.

"I did, but the ring wasn't in it."

The boys' faces fell.

"Well, if that isn't the hardest cheese!" cried Roy.

The Australian shrugged his shoulders. "A man gets harder knocks than that in the course of his life." He pulled a rusty, weather-worn leather pocket-book from the front of his shirt. "Here it is. I thought I might as well bring it up, though I could see at a glance that the ring wasn't in it." He sat down on the boulder, and the boys peered over his shoulder as he opened the pocket-book. He drew out first two flattened, musty cigarettes and an old leave pass for Tripoli bearing his own signature, and laid them on the rock. Next came a small sheaf of photographs—snapshots taken with a variety of cameras, depicting various scenes on the march and in Jerusalem, Damascus, Cairo, Port Said, and Tripoli. The major glanced quickly through them and laid them down. Then he turned to the other side of the wallet. This contained money—a little over ten pounds in faded Egyptian notes—and a couple of letters bearing the heading of the Australian General Hospital at Port Said, addressed to Jarvice, and evidently written by a regimental friend. "Nothing much there," said the major, scanning them, and then he pulled out the flap of leather which guarded the spare pocket, and pulled out a scrap of paper. "Another old leave pass, I expect," he said, unfolding it. And then he leant forward suddenly as his eye fell on the heading. "Hullo, what's this?"

The sheet was a small one torn from a writing-pad, and the script was in indelible pencil by an uneducated hand. "Stuff buried," was the elegant title, and beneath it was the following:

Two swords, one gold hilt, and revolver—Tar el Dum—two yards from cookhouse.

Posh uniform, two pairs boots, Red Cross bag—side of big olive, Homs.

Five Turk watches and diamond ring—ten yards E of Golden Gate.

Roy sprang to his feet and clapped the major on the back. “He’s planted it,” he cried. “Ten yards east of the Golden Gate. That’s Jerusalem, isn’t it? Then all we’ve got to do is to go down there and dig it out.”

“East of the Golden Gate,” murmured Major Todd in puzzled fashion. “Now what on earth possessed him to choose such a spot?” He rose and looked absently at Rasharbi. Then suddenly his expression changed. “Boys,” he said swiftly, “we’ve been forgetting ourselves. There’s a window open in that long building up there in Rasharbi, and if I can trust my eyes, there’s some one standing at that window watching us through field-glasses. That’s the Rasharbi hotel, and ten to one the person watching us is Jacobs or Steele. If so, he must have noticed us looking pleased about something, and he’ll put two and two together. It seems to me the best thing we can do is to go and get breakfast, and then get down to the coast as quickly as possible. If our luck is in we may be able to get a boat right away and so shake those two bloodhounds off our tracks.”

Roy scowled up at the window. “If they cling to us too long they may get something more than a diamond for their pains, eh, Yorke?”

Yorke knitted his brows. “I must say I’m getting a bit fed up with them,” he agreed. “If I get a chance I shall certainly request them to turn their glasses in other directions than ours.”

The major nodded. “But let’s get this diamond safely in the bank first,” he said, and they coiled up the rope and hurried back to the hotel.

Breakfast was awaiting them, and Major Todd gave directions for the horses to be brought round in a quarter of an hour’s time.

“I suppose the boat *would* be better than going overland,” said Yorke, as they ate.

“Decidedly,” replied the major. “If we used the railway, we’d have to go to Beyrout, and then dawdle round Damascus. And from there we’d either have to cut back to Haifa and get on the coast line, or else get out of the train at Amman and pad it through the Jordan valley. I doubt whether the Hedjaz

line would be fit to travel on, anyway. Colonel Lawrence cut it pretty well to pieces during the war. No, our best way will be to get down to Jaffa by boat, and then get the train or hire a car to take us to Jerusalem.” He drained his second cup of coffee. “Hi, Rezzay!” he shouted. “Hurry up with that bill.”

CHAPTER IV

THE TEST OF THE CLUE

Six days later a Ford car left the outskirts of Jaffa and sped through the famous orange groves of the coastal plain. Yorke, sitting in front with the driver, looked back and smiled contentedly at his friends. "At last," he said. They had been unfortunate at Tripoli, and had had to wait four days for a boat; and to add to their uneasiness, the major had caught a fleeting glimpse of Ike Jacobs one day in the marketplace.

"I'm glad to be out of Jaffa," Roy remarked. "It looks picturesque from the sea, I'll admit, but that's about all one can say for it."

"It's had a chequered history," said the major. "It was at one time the port of Judea, and was fortified by Simon in the Maccabee wars. Strabo and Josephus both mention it as a piratical nest."

"It's that now," Roy grunted, for he had been overcharged for some picture post-cards.

The driver now put on a spurt, and very soon they had left behind them the region of oranges, pomegranates, olives, and figs, and were passing over the low foothills of the Judean range. As the car climbed the long winding road to the heights, the major pointed out landmarks of the recent campaign to the boys.

"On the day the army entered the hills, this road was a sight," he told them. "British, Australians, and Indians all mixed up, shells dropping all over the place, and aeroplanes banging overhead. See there, those stumps of olive trees. They were cut down by the troops that day for firewood to boil their billies on the march. We had to stop them at that, or very soon there wouldn't have been an olive left in the whole of Palestine."

Every terraced hill crowned with ruined cloister or castle seemed to hold some war memory for the major, and he kept the boys keenly interested until the long line of crenellated walls of Jerusalem appeared ahead, when he sank back and relapsed into silence, leaving them to form their own impressions of the most famous city in the world.

The car negotiated two sharp bends, and then ran along a good road beneath the massive west wall. They passed the Jaffa Gate, and then, running more slowly by reason of the camels, donkeys, and pedestrians,

came at last to their hotel, which was situated near the north-west corner of the ancient city. Giving their luggage into the care of a porter, they entered the lounge and interviewed the reception-clerk, a grey-haired Syrian, who shook his head at their request for three separate rooms.

“I have one large, airy one, gentlemen,” he said, rubbing his hands deprecatively. “It is furnished with three beds. Perhaps——”

“Show us this room,” said the major, and they followed the clerk upstairs.

As he had said, the room was a spacious one, and clean enough to satisfy the requirements of all but the most exacting travellers. So they had their luggage brought up, and set themselves to remove the stains of the journey. After which, summoned by the gong, they joined the cosmopolitan crowd in the dining-room.

“Appointments fairly good,” said the major, unfolding his napkin. “Company fairly mediocre.”

“It’s two up on Rezzay’s, anyway,” said Roy. “That was quite the prize hotel of the whole Near East, I should say.”

“Do you know the city well, major?” Yorke asked, as they settled down to their soup.

“Fairly well. I was camped at Bethlehem for some time, and that is only four miles away. But having a squadron of wild Australians to look after, I was not able to devote as much time as I should have liked to studying the holy places. However, I think I can find my way to the Golden Gate; and if you like, we will take a turn round that way this afternoon to spy out the land.”

They set out immediately after lunch, and walking down David Street, passed close to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, and then plunged into the network of narrow twelfth-century lanes to the west of the Dome of the Rock. There the major lost his bearings slightly, and suddenly they found themselves in an alley adjoining the mighty walls of the Haram, in the midst of a company of Jews and Jewesses of all ages, who, their arms stretched out against the massive stones, were crying and lamenting in most piteous fashion. The boys stopped in astonishment, and looked at their guide for explanation of this strange scene.

“We have evidently stumbled upon the Wailing Place of the Jews,” said the major. “I have heard of it, but I’ve never seen it before. They come here once a week, I believe, to bewail the lost glory of Israel and to pray for its

revival. Those great stones they are clutching are fragments of the outer wall of the Temple.”

They stood for a few minutes in silence, watching the mourners, their thoughts back in olden days, the days before Israel was led captive to Babylon, and the great Temple of Jerusalem was the wonder of the world. Then, still in silence, the major led the way up a flight of steps and into a wide, sombre-looking enclosure. Here were situated the Mosque of Aksa and the beautiful Dome of the Rock, commonly known as the Mosque of Omar, the latter a poem in turquoise which absorbed the boys’ attention at once.

“And that is really magnificent,” Yorke exclaimed.

“You are in agreement with all the architects and poets who ever lived since the mosque was built,” said the major, smiling. “When we have done what we set out to do, we must spend a week or so exploring the city. Every stick and stone is of historical interest. Jerusalem is a palimpsest, or, rather, a carapace. The records of countless ages and races lie hidden beneath its dust. Scratch here, and you find Rome; dig there, and you unearth Babylon or Egypt or Assyria. Well, shall we go and survey the scene of our operations?”

They walked past the withered cypresses, little *mirhabs*, and slender arches which littered the enclosure, and, mounting the walls close to the Golden Gate, which they found blocked with Saracen stone-work, peeped out through one of the ancient Turkish loopholes. Beneath lay the dried-up bed of the Kidron, the giant tombs of Absalom and Jehoshaphat, and the grey, sad-looking Mount of Olives with the Bethany road winding at its foot. For a moment the Biblical associations of the famous scene caused them to forget the business in hand, and they were only brought back to the present by the whining of an importunate beggar, who had followed them on to the ramparts, and was stretching out a filthy, ragged hand for *backsheesh*. Receiving a small silver coin from each, he called down the blessings of Allah upon their heads, and, squatting down on the bare stones, rocked himself to and fro, muttering in Arabic the while.

Returning to his contemplation of the landscape, the major frowned a little. “I simply cannot understand Jarvice choosing such a spot,” he told the boys. “Why on earth should he put himself to the trouble of walking all the way round the walls of Jerusalem to the Golden Gate to bury a diamond ring? He hated walking too. But he couldn’t have got his horse round here very well.”

“All the same, it was down plain enough on that scrap of paper,” said Yorke.

“Yes, it said Golden Gate plainly enough,” murmured the major thoughtfully. “Well, we’ll come round here and dig directly it’s dark, boys. Meanwhile I think we might stroll down to the Jewish bazaar and buy some trowels. I don’t suppose Jarvice buried his stuff very deep. He certainly wasn’t the sort to carry a spade such a distance. The probability is he used his bayonet to scrape a hole, so trowels will serve our turn very well, and they have the advantage that they are easily hidden.”

The night was a moonless one, with the stars shining brilliantly when they set out after dinner. At the major’s suggestion they had donned soft dark collars for the expedition. “The less white we have showing on a stunt like this the better,” he had said, “for we have no official permit to dig in the valley of the Kidron.”

In a few minutes the great Saracen portal, the Damascus Gate, flanked with its two old-world towers, showed in front, rearing up majestically against the deep blue of the sky; but the three hardly glanced at it: they were engrossed now with the thrill of the treasure hunt. Leaving the road at the corner of the city, they crept along in Indian file beneath the lofty eastern wall. They seemed now to be in a world of their own, and realized what it felt like to be without the city wall at night. Occasionally they heard the pit-pat of donkeys’ hoofs on the Bethany road, and now and again a jackal would howl dismally among the tombs in the Jewish cemetery; but from inside the walls there came no sound. It was like a city of the dead.

“Here we are,” whispered the major, coming to a halt, and looking up at the famous gate, through which, in the time of the Crusades, the Palm Sunday processions were in the habit of passing. “Get out your trowels.” He stepped out ten yards from the wall, and began to dig.

The boys joined him with a zest, and in ten minutes they had turned up a good-sized patch of earth, every trowelful of which had been felt carefully with their bare hands. Suppressing the feeling of doubt which the absence of any tangible result from their labour had caused to spring into the background of their minds, they continued the work for another quarter of an hour, and then Yorke voiced his suspicion.

“Jarvice must have buried his stuff very deep, eh, major?”

Before the Australian could reply, Roy gave an exclamation. His trowel had struck something small and hard, which might have been a Turkish

watch.

“What is it?” the others asked, and, suspending their own digging, came close to him to look.

“I don’t know yet.” Roy bent down and pulled something from the hole. The next second there came the sharp crack of a revolver shot as a thin jet of flame leapt out from a loophole above. All three leapt back a pace as a bullet whined its way past their heads and lost itself in the silence of the Kidron valley.

“Get back to the wall, quick,” hissed the major, and the boys leapt to obey him. Crouching in its shadow, they saw him drop on one knee, and extend his arm towards the loophole. Then there came three quick flashes from his automatic revolver, followed by a cry of pain from high above them. The next moment the major was by their side. “Along the wall, quick,” he whispered tensely, and they ran like antelopes, only pausing to regain their breath when they reached the road skirting the north wall.

“It seems as though we are destined to add our mite to the long and chequered history of Jerusalem,” said the major, brushing his garments as well as he was able, preparatory to walking back to the hotel. “What was that you found, Roy?”

“Only a stone. It was just about the size of a watch, and for a moment I thought I had struck Jarvice’s trove.”

“It looks as though some one else was of the same opinion,” commented Major Todd dryly. “It’s my belief, boys, we were watched from the moment we left the hotel to-night. I don’t like the look of things, I must confess. Well, let’s get back and have a good wash. Then we’ll have some hot coffee and a good confab in our room.”

CHAPTER V

THE PEEP-HOLE

Sitting on his bed, the major sipped his coffee and pulled thoughtfully at a long, strong cigar.

“Our duty, I suppose, as British subjects, is to report to the authorities that we have been fired on from a loophole in the east wall,” he said slowly, “but there are objections to that. We should, for instance, have to explain what we were doing digging in the vicinity of the Golden Gate, and that would lead to a lot of tiresome explanations. So I don’t think we’ll trouble the police with the affair. But there are one or two points that are puzzling me, boys. Assuming that Jacobs and Steele were at the back of that assault on us to-night, how did they know that we were going to dig where we did? I’ll swear that no one followed us round the wall. It looked as though the person was expecting us. There was no one near us on the wall this afternoon when we were talking about it, was there?”

“Only that old beggar,” said Yorke.

“Ah yes, I had forgotten him. Now I wonder——”

“You think he might have been a spy?” Roy’s eyes opened wide.

“It’s quite possible, in the light of these after events. Well, we’ll leave that question for the moment. Now the next thing. We scoured that patch of ground pretty thoroughly before we were interrupted. It’s quite likely that we could miss a buried ring, but a bunch of watches is another matter. Also the probability is that Jarvice used a box or a wrapping of some sort, which would make the search easier. But I must confess that all the time I was digging my astonishment at Jarvice’s choice of such a spot was growing. I knew the man well, you see, and I think I could hazard a guess at what he would do in any given circumstances. Why, then, when so many more desirable portions of the earth’s surface were at his disposal, should he choose a spot which any schoolboy desirous of secreting illicit tobacco would have passed by without a glance?”

The boys shook their heads and gulped coffee in silence. The question was beyond them.

“I suppose,” said Yorke presently, “there isn’t another Golden Gate in these parts, is there, major?”

“No, not that I know of. That is—ha!” The major swung himself suddenly off his bed, almost upsetting his coffee-cup as he did so. “Boys,” he cried, “write me down a dunderhead. Yorke, you’ve hit it. There *is* another Golden Gate. Or, rather, it isn’t really a gate. It’s a rock, over there in Moab, across the Jordan, up in the Jisr Ed Damieh track. Why, it’s as clear as noonday to me now——”

“Quick!” interrupted Roy suddenly, leaping off his bed, and making for the door. But even as he spoke another door banged and footsteps sounded receding rapidly down the corridor.

Wondering what it was all about, Yorke and the major rushed after Roy, who was traversing the passages at a furious pace. The front door closed sharply as they burst into the lounge.

The reception-clerk, sitting in his little office, raised his brows and came out to them. “What is it, gentlemen?” he asked.

Without troubling to reply, Roy leapt to the door, wrestled with the catch, and flung it open. Then he dashed into the street, followed by his friends. The passers-by looked with interest at the three Europeans as they ran swiftly up the street, peering into all the shops and side-turnings. But whoever it was that Roy was chasing had evidently eluded him, and at last he gave it up in disgust.

“Let’s come back,” he growled, “and punch that reception-clerk’s head off his body.”

“Before we do that, Roy, perhaps you would enlighten us a little as to the reason,” suggested the major. “It would, I know, be a comparatively easy task for you and Yorke to endow the hotel with a headless clerk, but I should like to be quite sure that he has deserved his fate before seeing the sentence executed.”

“I’ll give him a chance,” Roy promised. “But come back, and I’ll show you something.”

In the lounge the Syrian met them with concern. Roy cut through his babbled inquiries with a curt: “Who was that who went out just now?”

“A Syrian gentleman stopping in the hotel.”

“Oh, a Syrian gentleman, was he? He was in a great hurry.” Roy looked searchingly at the clerk.

“He said something about posting a letter.”

“He was in a hurry to catch the post, eh? I see. That would account for him leaping a whole flight of stairs. When did he come here?”

“Yesterday. I trust, gentlemen, there has not been a theft?”

“No, not exactly.” Roy looked at the man sternly. “But the fellow was a distinct undesirable. My friends and I wish to see his room. Take us there. It was the one next to ours.”

The clerk shrugged his shoulders, but accompanied them upstairs. All seemed in order in the small, barely-furnished apartment into which he ushered them. “He had no luggage, but left a deposit instead. What is it you wish to see, gentlemen?”

“This.” Roy crossed to the right-hand wall, and lifted a square piece of wallpaper, disclosing a cavity of some three inches.

The clerk’s amazement and consternation was genuine. He wrung his hands and looked supplicatingly at the three. “Never has such a thing occurred in this hotel before, I assure you, gentlemen. I will see the police. I will inform the proprietor. This man shall be tracked down. I will——” He continued to babble his indignation.

“Now, major,” said Roy, “I’m through. I’m inclined to believe this guy didn’t know about the peep-hole, and I’ll leave his head on his shoulders. But you can handle the affair better than I can now, I reckon.”

“Thank you, Roy. Just as you like.” The major lit a fresh cigar, the previous one having disappeared in the excitement of the chase. Then he turned to the clerk. “I think that a visit to the police would not be exactly a good advertisement for your hotel?”

“It is that which I wish to avoid. The proprietor, you know——” The clerk’s face was expressive.

“Exactly. You would wish, then, to prove to us how deeply you resent being the dupe of an eavesdropping guest? You would like to do some little thing for us which would have the effect of our recommending this hotel to our tourist friends instead of curling our lips at the mention of it, eh?”

“Please tell me what I can do.”

“Well, we find that we have to leave Jerusalem to-morrow morning immediately after breakfast. We want three good horses for an indefinite period, and also we wish to purchase a couple of revolvers—large bore, if possible. Can you arrange that for us?”

The clerk thought deeply for a moment, then his face set in determination. "It shall be done, gentlemen," he cried. "It will mean pulling people from their beds. But it shall be managed. You would be willing to pay current rates for the hire of the horses?"

"Yes, and a trifle extra in view of the fact that some people may lose a little sleep over the deal."

"Then excuse me, gentlemen. I will see to the matter at once." The clerk bowed and hurried out.

"And now, Roy," said the major, when they were back in their own room, "perhaps you'll tell us how you spotted that peep-hole? I must say I'm curious."

"Oh, it was quite simple. I happened to be looking in that direction when you were speaking, and I saw the paper move ever so slightly. I suppose the eavesdropper saw my face change, for I heard a noise immediately after. I guessed at once what it was, for I'd seen much the same sort of thing on a film in Winnipeg once." Roy examined the wallpaper closely. "Yes, here's the pinhole, you see. He was a wily gentleman."

"We didn't mind him *seeing* us," said the major. "It's what he *heard* that may cause us trouble later on. That eavesdropper knows that there is another Golden Gate in the Jisr Ed Damieh pass in Moab."

"He'll have to get a move on if he's going to get there before us," said Yorke. "I suppose that's where we're setting off to to-morrow?"

"Yes, that's where we are going, Yorke." The major pondered for a few moments. "Even if they got there before us, I doubt whether they would find that rock," he added presently. "It was Jarvice who pointed out the resemblance to me while we were halted for a short spell on our way up the pass. I had to look at it from a particular angle to see the likeness. It's curious that a chance remark of his should have stuck in my memory, but I've little doubt that my surmise is correct, and that the ring and the watches lie buried in the Jisr Ed Damieh. We were fighting in the neighbourhood of that rock throughout the whole of one night, and at one period it looked as if our troop was in danger of being cut off and captured. Jarvice was well aware of the danger, and naturally he would not wish to have anything of value on him if he fell into Turkish hands. No, the thing is as clear as noonday now to me; he buried the ring and the watches, meaning to go back at the first opportunity to retrieve them. . . . But look here, boys, I've ordered horses and revolvers the first thing to-morrow morning. Perhaps I

was a bit hasty. I think I was. We were fired on to-night in the Kidron valley, and I think it extremely likely that we shall get fired on again in the mountains of Moab. I don't know that I've any right to drag you any further into the affair. I think perhaps it would be better if I went alone."

The boys laughed derisively.

"Why, the show is just getting interesting, major," Yorke said lightly.

"The joke has just begun," Roy added.

"All the same——" the major began seriously.

"Speaking for myself," interrupted Yorke, in the lazy drawl which it pleased him to assume at times when he had made up his mind to do something in spite of all opposition, "I'm going to ride Moab way tomorrow, and I expect sooner or later I shall turn up in the Jisr Ed Damieh pass." He smiled charmingly. "Shall we travel together, major, or would you rather ride a mile or so ahead or behind?"

"Very pleased if you'd come with us, major," Roy grinned.

The major gave in. "I see it's no good," he said, shaking his head. "I hardly dared hope it would be. . . . Come in," he called, as a knock sounded at the door.

The Syrian clerk entered, busy and smiling.

"The horses will be here at eight o'clock, gentlemen. I have arranged that little matter on the telephone. The revolvers are more uncertain, but I think that also can be managed."

"We shall also want a couple of dark blankets for each saddle," said the major.

"That will be quite easy."

"Good. Thank you. We will now go to sleep in your excellent hotel. It may interest you to know that we find the beds comfortable and the appointments everything that can be desired."

The clerk smiled intelligently, bowed, and retired.

"I thought we'd better have blankets," said the major. "It's quite likely we may have to spend a night or two in the open, and though the Jordan valley is one of the hottest places on the face of the earth, yet the mountains on either side can be quite chilly on winter evenings. One of the coldest nights I ever spent was three thousand feet up on Moab. I'll get our friend

the clerk to fill a nosebag with tinned provisions in the morning, and I daresay he'll be able to raise us a billy." And he lit another of his strong black cigars, and puffed thoughtfully as he undressed and got into bed.

CHAPTER VI

RIDERS IN THE VALLEY

Punctually at eight o'clock the next morning the horses, in charge of a shabby Armenian, were brought round to the hotel.

"They'll do," said the major, running his eye over them. "Wiry-looking beggars. Shouldn't be surprised if they belonged to the Turkish cavalry at one time. We captured hundreds of them, and I believe they were sold in Jerusalem." He began to strap the blankets, which he had folded in military fashion, to the saddles. This done, he hung a well-filled nosebag of provisions from his own canteen, and fixed a billy-can to one of the others. Then he drew the boys into a dark corner of the lounge and handed them each a serviceable-looking Colt. "Stow these away in a pocket where you can get at them quickly, boys. They're both fully loaded, and here's a box of spare ammunition. The clerk has come up to scratch all right, but he doesn't want the fact advertised. Looks bad, flashing revolvers in a respectable hotel. That's right. One other thing: I've left thirty pounds deposit here for the horses. So if they get me down yonder and you come through, you can collect it and do what you like with the money."

"I expect we shall all come back together, or else all stay down there together," said Yorke, thrusting his revolver into his hip-pocket.

"I'd bet on that," said Roy. He broke open the box of ammunition, and poured a few cartridges into the palm of his hand. "Catch hold of these, Yorke."

The major shrugged his shoulders, but he looked pleased.

They set out along the road skirting the north wall of the ancient city, and turned to the right at the Burj Laklak, or Stork's Tower, to get on to the Jericho road. The gilded domes of the Russian convent above Gethsemane glittered in the sunlight as they rounded the corner, and as they passed the world-famous garden with its gnarled old olives and picturesque cypresses showing above its stucco-covered walls, all three instinctively removed their hats.

"In this land, more than in any other, a man wants to be quite sure that his errand is a good one," said the major, when they had cleared Olivet, and were plodding along the road to Bethany. "Ours is all right, I should

imagine, for it is to help a lady in distress. Otherwise, boys, I freely confess, I should be much more uneasy in mind.”

The boys nodded understandingly, and Yorke said seriously: “You’ve spoken exactly what was in my mind, major. If it was for my own gain that I was coming down here, I should feel tempted to chuck my revolver away and take my chance. As it is, I feel more like one of the old Hospitallers or Templars who used to range these parts. If the infidel comes to interfere with the work of the Lord, I shall do my best to smite him.”

Three hours’ riding down the long series of zigzags leading into the wilderness of Judea brought them to the inn of the Good Samaritan, and there they stopped for a couple of hours.

“It’s getting pretty hot,” Roy remarked as they remounted.

The major smiled. “You should have come here in the middle of summer, Roy, when it was a hundred and twenty-two in the shade. You would have had reason to complain of the heat then. For sheer physical discomfort the Jordan valley in the summer time is hard to beat. There are snakes, there are scorpions, there are malaria mosquitoes, and goodness knows how many other varieties of insect torturers. Lying twelve hundred feet below sea level and shut in by two ranges of mountains, the place is the nearest approach to an oven that I’ve ever been in.”

The road, the scene of the parable of the Good Samaritan, which had been sad and forbidding-looking all the morning, now grew even more desolate and gloomy, and despite themselves a certain depression fell on the travellers which they had some ado to shake off. In the late afternoon they came to the top of a great gorge, and, by common consent, drew rein, gazing at the landscape ahead.

“It is like a picture by Gustave Doré,” Yorke murmured.

At their feet lay the green plain of Jericho, with the thin line of river jungle marking the wilderness beyond like a green ribbon. The little town itself glowed like a spot of silver in the burning sunlight. Far away to the right the northern end of the Dead Sea showed blue and motionless through its pall of mist, and immediately to the front the mountain range of Moab rose like an immense wall bounding the confines of the earth.

The major kicked his feet free of the stirrups, and, his elbow resting on the roll of blankets, leant his chin in his hand, the while his keen eyes roamed the familiar scene.

“It hasn’t altered at all,” he said presently, “except for one thing.”

“What’s that, major?” Roy asked.

“Dust. When I was here last there was dust rising everywhere. The horses churned it up, and the troops and the lorries. You couldn’t see the sky for it at times. Well, boys, I don’t think we shall be able to cross the Jordan to-night. This continual slipping and sliding down hill takes it out of the horses badly, and we want them to be fresh for to-morrow. Now I have a suggestion to make. Jericho in olden days was a large and important town, but to-day it has sunk to the state of being rather an undesirable little village composed chiefly of mud huts, and rather than sleep in one of its tourist houses, I should prefer to inflict my presence on the monks in the monastery round the corner. What do you say?”

The boys agreed at once, and riding down into the valley, they turned their horses’ heads to the north, and descried their objective perched on a ledge of the Judean range—a long, white building surmounted by a big blue belfry, which afforded a pleasing note of colour in the prevailing desolate grey of the landscape.

“You’re right about the dust, major,” coughed Roy, as thick clouds, kicked up by their horses’ hoofs, began to envelop them.

“Filthy stuff, too,” Yorke added, between set lips. “Not like ordinary dust. Whew!”

“You can imagine now what it was like to be riding at the tail end of a mounted brigade. I’ve ridden for hours sometimes without being able to see my horse’s head.”

They rode for half an hour along the foot of the range and then turned off up a goat track, which they followed for several hundred feet; then, the path becoming too rocky and precipitous for safety, they dismounted and led the horses up to a shed built on a broad shelf of rock.

“We’ll leave them here,” said the major. “We can’t take them any higher on ground like this; and even if we could, I doubt whether there’s any stabling for them up at the monastery. It’s a Greek establishment, and the ass is their favoured mode of conveyance.”

The door of the shed was open, and entering they unsaddled the horses and tied them to rings in the wall. Then the major filled the bins from sacks of chaff and grain which he discovered in another compartment. “We can pay for all this when we leave by dropping something in their alms-box,” he said.

Taking a few necessaries with them, they continued the ascent, and another ten minutes' climbing brought them to the monastery. In the little courtyard they were met by a monk, who smiled amiably and signed to them to follow him. In his charge they passed through a narrow passage into the main building, traversed a corridor lined with cells, hurried through a picturesque little chapel, which seemed half-hewn out of the living rock, its walls adorned with numerous icons and rather gaudy Biblical scenes, and into a room abutting on to the great blue belfry. There their guide motioned them to be seated, and left them, to reappear in a few minutes with the prior, a calm-eyed Greek in black robe and sandals, who extended to them a dignified welcome in English. Having ascertained their wants, he spoke a few words to the monk, who took them to the guests' apartments, and showed each into a simply furnished room with a little veranda overhanging the precipice. Hardly had they finished their toilet before a bell sounded from some remote part of the monastery, and again the monk appeared to conduct them to the refectory.

For the brotherhood of the monastery it was the period of their grand fast, and all of them ate sparingly at this their second and last meal of the day, but an abundance of good plain food was set before the visitors, to which, being hungry after their long ride, they did full justice.

When they had finished, all three repaired to Yorke's room, which was slightly larger than the other two, and the major strolled to the window and looked out. "Hallo," he said suddenly, "there's a couple of men just ridden out of the gorge. Did you bring your field-glasses up from the shed, Yorke? You did. Good. Just lend them to me a minute, will you? H'm, what do you make of those fellows?" He handed the glasses back to Yorke.

"Bedouin, I should say, major." Yorke adjusted the glasses to get the sharpest vision. "The light's going rather, but I can see their robes distinctly. . . . Have a look, Roy."

"Yes, I can see their robes too," the young Canadian agreed.

"Oh, I can see their robes," said the major, taking the glasses again. "But I suppose you could hardly be expected to notice what I noticed at once, for you haven't lived years in these parts like I have. . . . The fact is, boys, those Bedouin are riding like no Bedouin I have ever seen. One can't ride at all, and the other sits his saddle like a cavalryman."

The boys looked again.

“I see now,” said Yorke, “that one is riding rather like a sack of potatoes. Yes, and the other has quite a good seat.”

They looked at one another, and Roy voiced their suspicion. “Ike and George,” he said. “Seems as though we are to have some fun in the valley to-morrow, major. But why their comic opera clothes?”

“Perhaps they didn’t want to draw attention to themselves in this quarter of the globe. The people in these parts are mostly Bedouin. Those are their fires that you can see out there.” The major pointed to the thin columns of smoke which rose here and there from the plain. “A tough crowd most of them,” he added.

While the light lasted, they stood by the window, watching the two horsemen ride into the mist and shadows beyond Jericho.

CHAPTER VII

TRAPPED

“Last lap for the treasure,” said the major gaily, as he flung open the door of the shed the next morning. They had bidden adieu to their hosts at the monastery, and had dropped a liberal donation in the alms-box. All three were feeling exhilarated at the prospect of being so near the end of their quest, and Yorke broke into the Eton Boating Song as he led his horse down the rocky track into the valley.

Mounting as soon as it became practicable, they struck off across the barren waste in the direction of the Jordan, and two hours' riding brought them to the sunken channel of Kor, where a dense undergrowth of cane, willows, and tamarisks marked the presence of the river. Dismounting, they led the horses down the steep banks of white marl, and crossed the yellow swirling water by a narrow bridge. Clambering up the opposite bank, they mounted again and set their faces once more towards Moab.

Except for occasional wisps of smoke curling up from distant Bedouin encampments, the scene was one of unbroken solitude. The dark wall of Moab rose up in front, mysterious and forbidding, the scene of innumerable ancient conflicts, with the peaks of Pisgah and Nebo dominating all, remote, aloof, as though guarding the secrets of the ages.

“Very glad am I that our errand is a good one,” said the major, glancing up at the barren heights, “for I have a very strong feeling that our friends Jacobs and Steele are already ensconced up there, and are awaiting our approach with impatience, and I shall be much surprised if we come out of it without a fight.”

“There's not much doubt about their seeing us,” Yorke said, with a slight disgust. “They could pick up this dust we're making fifty miles away. I shall be glad when we get into the hills. Anything is better than this filthy stuff.” And he sneezed violently.

It was a good three hours' ride from the river to the foot of the great white irregular cleft which the major pointed out to them as the Jisr Ed Damieh pass, and, arrived there, they halted at the foot for a quick lunch, boiling the billy with armfuls of the thorny scrub which grew in profusion around.

“And you mean to tell me a brigade of horsemen got up there!” said Roy, craning his neck as he stared up at the craggy heights.

“It was done by the Australian Light Horse during the late war,” nodded the major. “The Turks thought the feat impossible, and that helped us considerably, for we caught them unawares. But it was a very rough trip, nevertheless.”

“So I should imagine,” said the marvelling Roy. “Gee, they must have been a tough lot, your Australians.”

“The Turks were certainly impressed by the feat. We discovered that later from captured correspondence.”

The meal over, they stamped out the remains of the fire, and began the ascent, the major in the lead, Roy following, and Yorke bringing up the rear.

“Keep your guns handy, boys,” the major turned his head to warn them. “I don’t think we shall have any trouble until we reach the rock and start digging, but you never know.”

The boys nodded. Both were acutely conscious of the atmosphere of hidden danger in that wild and gloomy spot, and well they knew that the silence might be punctuated with the sharp crack of rifle or revolver at any moment. But they had been climbing for a good half-hour up the narrow, rocky path before Yorke said in a quiet, conversational voice: “I’ve just seen a head about three hundred yards to the right.”

“Don’t halt or stare, then,” counselled the major, and he urged his steed over a slippery boulder. “Only one, Yorke?”

“As far as I could see, major. I just had one glimpse, and then he dodged down. A Bedouin by the look of him.”

“H’m, he may be a Bedouin, and he may not. Anyway, he’s keeping well away from the track, and that’s some comfort.”

“You’re going to have that comfort torn away from you, major,” said Roy. “I’ve just seen three do the bob-down away there to the left, and I’ll stake my best broncho they aren’t more than a hundred yards away.”

“Whew! and I’ve just spotted two more away up on the right. They evidently *are* Bedouin, and they’re lining the track. Boys, it looks to me as if we’ve walked into a trap. I should have thought of this. Unless I’m very much mistaken, Jacobs and Steele have been enlisting help from the Bedouin. No, I hadn’t reckoned on that move. Fighting Jacobs and Steele is one thing, but fighting Jacobs and Steele at the head of a little army of these

Bedouin is another. The whole lot will be armed with rifles, of course, and all they've got to do is to lie behind rocks and pick us off at their leisure."

"Looks rather a tight hole, major," said Yorke, and began to hum the Boating Song.

"Tight is the word," assented the Australian. "If they start shooting, we'd better let the horses go, and take cover. Tell me if you see any more. We've spotted six so far."

They plodded on in silence, leading and urging their horses up the almost impossible track. "And two makes eight," said Yorke, when five minutes had passed.

"Nine," Roy grunted. "There's a face over there that hasn't had a wash for a year by the look of it. . . . If I only had my Winchester," he added, with something like a sigh.

"And two makes eleven," said the major presently. "I don't think we need trouble to count any more. There's enough of them here to eat us. But we hold one trump card, boys. If they plug at us now, they stand a good chance of killing the goose which is going to show them the position of the golden eggs. And the fact that they've held off so long convinces me that they are waiting for us to locate the place for them. So we won't hurry to do that. We're very close to the Golden Gate rock now. It's on a line with those sangars up there on the left, if I'm not very much mistaken. Also, if I remember aright, there's a small green hollow a little farther up. Now this is what I propose: when we get to the hollow, I'll give a big hop, as if I'd sprained my ankle badly, and you will gather round and examine it. Then we'll all do a bit of play-acting, and convey, if possible, to our friends out yonder that the sprain is a very bad one and will necessitate our camping on that spot until it is better. If the ruse succeeds and the crowd holds off, we'll stay there till dark, and then get down to the rock and have a go at finding the ring. We shall stand a much better chance in the dark if it comes to shooting. Of course, it's quite on the cards that they may not be taken in with our plan, and they may start shooting at once. But I can think of nothing better. If we go too far up the pass, they will smell a rat and will cut us off from escaping through Es Salt. The situation is fairly desperate, and I can think of nothing better than trying to bluff them with this stunt of a sprained ankle. Can you?"

"I can think of nothing half so good," said Yorke.

“Nor I, major. Give your deer’s leap whenever you like. We’ll gather round and massage it for you.”

“We are now passing the Golden Gate rock,” said the major quietly, a few minutes later. “Have a casual look at it.”

The boys followed on, and passed the rock with a careless air. There was nothing very remarkable in its appearance. Geological attrition had fashioned it to something roughly resembling a crenellated wall with one outcrop which an imaginative person could compare with a model of a gateway. Had it not been for the major’s warning, they would have passed it without a second glance.

“Not a very arresting resemblance, major,” said Yorke.

“No,” the major agreed. “It is more striking when seen from farther off. Coming up the track one misses the general effect of it rather. So much the better for us. . . . Now, stand by. Here’s the hollow. I’m going to sprain my ankle.” He gave a sharp cry of pain, hopped for a few feet, and then sat down, nursing his foot.

The boys hurried to him, inquiring in loud, concerned voices what was the matter. The horses, with their bridles left drooping, stood bunched together, glad of the respite. The scene presented to an onlooker was a normal and convincing one.

The major, taking off his boot and sock, submitted with writhing face to the vigorous massage given him by the boys, now and then jerking out a sentence in an undertone on the general situation:

“I believe we’ve got away with it, boys. . . . We should have heard from them by now if they thought we were play-acting. . . . Or perhaps it is that they’re not quite sure, and are just marking time, awaiting developments. . . . We’ll go through with it, anyway. It’s our only chance. . . . Stand aside a minute; I’m going to limp round.” And, rising to his feet, the major essayed one or two painful steps, and subsided again, shaking his head.

“Major,” said Yorke admiringly, “I can’t think why you put yourself to all this trouble to get a beggarly ten thousand pounds reward. Why, you are in the direct line of Garrick and Sir Henry Irving, and there is a huge fortune awaiting you on the stage.”

“The film people would tumble over each other to sign you on, major,” Roy assured him. “Shall we bandage you up now?”

“Yes, I think we might get on to that part now.” The major contrived to twist a smile into an agonized grimace, and stretched out his leg for the operation. Five minutes later, his foot blatantly swathed in white handkerchiefs, he leaned back against a rock and watched the boys making preparations for a camp. In reply to a question of Roy’s as to the advisability of removing the saddles from the horses, he nodded his head.

“We’ll have to do it, boys. The impression that we’re aiming to convey is that my foot is badly sprained and that we’re camping here for the night. Leaving the saddles on would be as good as a confession that we’re going to make a break away as soon as possible.”

So the saddles were taken off, the horses tethered to convenient rocks and given a feed, and then the boys made a fire with the dried vegetation they found around, and put on the billy. During these operations the major kept a sharp look-out for signs of the enemy.

“They’re all about us like a lot of ants, boys,” he said presently. “Heads popping up and down all over the place. But they don’t seem to be crawling in, that’s one comfort.”

“Is that a cave I can see over there, just below that sangar?” Yorke asked. “It looks as if it might be one.”

The major glanced in the direction designated. “Why, yes,” he said. “I’d forgotten that cave. We used it for a machine-gun post throughout the whole of a very hot day. Those bushes in front screened the entrance splendidly, and the Turks never spotted the position. I remember when we left, which we had to do in a hurry, we buried a lot of gear in there—bombs, grenades, Mauser rifles, ammunition, and all the rest of it.” The major sat up suddenly as a thought occurred to him. “Now I wonder if that stuff’s still there, boys. By Jove! it might be! This is a very out-of-the-way spot.”

The boys looked eagerly at him. They were putting a good face on things, but the peril of their situation could not be ignored, and the prospect of getting possession of adequate weapons made them tingle with hope and excitement.

“Shall I go along and see?” Yorke asked.

“Not yet, Yorke. If you start pottering about in the cave, our friends may think that the treasure is buried there, and perhaps they’d come up to give you a hand to find it. No, we’ll wait till it’s dark, if they’ll let us, and then we’ll explore. If we can get our hands on a few Mills bombs, some of these

ragged people around us will wish they had stopped in their tents down on the plain.”

“They will that,” Roy agreed grimly. He lay down and looked across the wide valley to where their hostelry of the night before showed, a tiny white patch, on the side of the Judean range. “The monks will be at service now in the chapel,” he added. “Seems funny, doesn’t it? and us perched up here, surrounded by all these ragged, cut-throat lads.”

“I used to think much the same during the campaign,” said the major. “There they were, those monks, pursuing their quiet peaceful occupations in their nest on the hillside, looking down on the scenes of war and unrest in this ancient valley, where two armies were fighting for well over a year. I often wonder what they thought of it all.”

At intervals during the afternoon the major went through the performance of essaying to walk, and between the acts they matured their plans for the evening. The major had explained to the boys the probable position of Jarvice’s cache, and it was arranged that they should move down to the spot as soon as it was dark, dig for the ring, and then explore the cave for the hidden arms. After which, if all went well, they would continue the ascent of the pass, ride across the level country at the summit, and come down the next cleft into the valley.

“That’s our plan, and it doesn’t sound too bad,” the major summed up. “But we must remember that Jacobs and Steele have also been making their arrangements. How far their plans fit in with ours remains to be seen. Personally, I shall be very surprised if we get out of it without some fireworks.”

CHAPTER VIII

THE FIGHT IN THE CAVE

The boys sighed with relief as the short twilight of the East faded into dusk, for the long period of inaction was telling a little on their nerves. As soon as there was no possibility of their movements being observed, the major cast off his mock bandages and put on his boot. "Now for it, boys," he whispered.

As noiselessly as possible they set about putting their plans into execution. The horses were saddled and the fire doused to the merest glim. Then, on tiptoe they crept down the track, and reaching the rock, stepped out ten cautious paces to the east, and began to dig.

Scarcely three minutes had passed when Roy held up a warning hand for his companions to cease plying their trowels. "I've got something," he whispered, and pulled an earthy little bag from the shallow hole he had dug. Laying down his trowel, he shook off the dirt and felt the contents with his fingers. "The watches are here, and yes, the ring. I can feel it."

"Shove them in your pocket." The major drew both boys close to him, and whispered the words in their ears. "I heard a rock go over there to the left, and there's another. Listen! I believe they've smelt a rat and are closing in on us. This way." Clutching their revolvers they moved off stealthily in the direction of the cave.

The darkness around now began to fill with sounds. Dislodged pebbles rolled down rocky slopes, a rifle clicked metallicly against a stone, and from not more than twenty yards above their path there came the noise of a stumble and a half-stifled exclamation in Arabic.

Without a pause the major led the way along the rocky ledge, climbed over the old sangar, that relic of a stalwart defence during the Great War, and insinuated himself through the bushes fringing the mouth of the cave.

"Just in time," he said, as a yell came from the direction of the pass. "They've found out that we've been digging. Now you two lie down here at the entrance and hold them with your revolvers while I see what's at the back."

Without a word, the boys flung themselves down, and began to make a low barricade from the loose rocks lying around. They were interrupted in

this work by a low cry of satisfaction from the major.

“They’re all here, boys.” He came back to them, and laid a handful of Mills bombs by the side of each. “You know how these things work? Just pull out the pin, and then throw it. But be careful not to hold it for more than three seconds once the pin is out. Now I’ll get back and put some of these rifles into working order. I’ve found a full oil-bottle, and that was a stroke of real luck.” He groped his way back, and presently they heard him cautiously working the bolts of the rifles. From outside came other sounds—the scraping of feet on rocks, muffled calls in Arabic, and at last a rifle-shot, which echoed and re-echoed among the hills around. The shot brought the major quickly to the boys’ side. He came loaded with three Mausers, and a little pile of ammunition.

“Which way did that bullet go?” he asked.

“Went singing away to the left,” Yorke replied. “I think it must have been an accident.”

“Quite likely. Catch hold of this rifle, Yorke. And here’s one for you, Roy. I’ll dump the ammunition between you. Most of it could do with a bit of cleaning. I’ve loaded the rifles. Here’s a bit of oily rag. I’m off back to get some more bombs.”

Yorke tore the rag in half, and passed a piece to Roy. Lying prone behind their low sangar, they set to work cleaning the clips and ammunition, an occupation in which they were interrupted by a hail from the slope below:

“Major Todd! Hi, Major Todd!”

The boys lifted their rifle-butts and snuggled into firing position. The major came swiftly to them. “There’s a spare rifle lying behind each of you,” he whispered. “Don’t fire until I give the word.”

“Major Todd!” came the hail again. “It’s all right. We know you’re in that cave. Now I want to talk. We’ve got you three properly set. You may have a couple of revolvers between you; you may have three; but they’re not going to count much in what’s coming to you if you don’t listen to reason. You’re there, and you can’t get out. You haven’t too much ammunition, you’re short of grub and water, and you’re in a very bad way. Now I’ve got two dozen well-paid toughs planted out here, all dead anxious to have a bang at you, and every man Jack of ’em’s got the latest thing in Service rifles. I don’t say you’re not a bit of a tough yourself, major, but you and your two husky young friends haven’t got an earthly chance of getting away. Now I’ve got a proposition. Come out here and hand over that ring, and

promise to keep your mouth shut till we get the reward, and we'll let you get away. Or, if you don't fancy risking that, I'll come up alone to the cave if you'll give me your word you won't shoot.

"You're lying doggo, eh?" the voice went on, as the major made no reply. "Oh, I know you're there. You reckon I'm bluffing. I'll show you I'm not." There came a shrill whistle, and the next moment there came a ragged volley, and a shower of bullets struck the sides and roof of the cave, filling the air with white dust. But none of the defenders received a hurt. The floor of the cave was slightly submerged, and this and the sangar had saved them.

"Hang on," the major whispered grimly. "Don't fire yet. We can stand a lot of that sort of thing, and I want them to come within bombing distance, so that we can make a breakaway before they recover."

The echoes died away, and then the voice hailed again from the darkness:

"I wasn't bluffing, you see. Now are you going to hand over that ring, or shall we creep up and riddle you?"

"Get ready," the Major warned the boys. "I'm going to speak to this crew now, and the odds are they'll charge us at once. . . . Bombs first, mind, and then rattle at them with the Mausers." And raising his head a little above the level of the sangar, the major addressed his unseen adversaries. His discourse was in Arabic, and throughout it was cool, studied insult. He expressed his surprise at finding the lowest class of Arab in possession of firearms, the same class which Colonel Lawrence had passed by when looking for warriors in Trans-Jordania, as he had no use for men who sheltered behind their womenfolk in time of war; but he confessed to his amazement at the depth of their degradation in voluntarily linking themselves with two outcast white men, who only owed their liberty to the lax system of prison surveillance existing in their own country. His speech was cut short at this point by a crackling volley, which brought down pieces of the roof. In two seconds there came another, and then a third, this last from appreciatively closer range.

"That's done it," said the major, wiping the dust from his face with a quick movement. "They're coming! Got your bombs ready? Good. Sling hard and fast when I give the word. Phew! they're knocking the old place about, aren't they?"

The fusillade was now almost continuous, the flashes describing a rough semicircle round the front of the cave, and at every few seconds the radius

narrowed. The attackers were evidently in earnest.

“They mean it this time,” the major whispered. A graduate in the school of war, he could tell the real from the mock attack. “They’re getting confident too. They think they’ve got us rattled. Steady now. . . . Get ready. . . . Right, let them have it!” The last sentence he shouted during a cessation in the firing. He had sensed the psychological moment, and as he yelled the order, a line of wild-looking figures rose up fifteen yards from the entrance and rushed forward with fearsome yells. Then above their heads the darkness split into sudden brilliant light as three Mills bombs burst with ear-splitting detonations, and the line wavered and crumpled, while shrieks and groans testified to the complete success of the surprise.

“Quick as you like!” cried the major, leaping to his feet and hurling bomb after bomb. “That’ll do. They’re running now, what’s left of them. Get the Mausers on to them now.” They flung themselves down and sent a hail of bullets after the fleeing tribesmen.

“That’ll do, boys. Sling your rifles, and put a bomb in each pocket. We’ll clear while the going’s good.”

Unmolested, they hurried across to the spot where they had left the horses, and an exclamation of relief broke from the major as the outlines of the animals showed up ahead. “I thought our ragged friends might have removed them,” he confessed, “and I must say I don’t fancy a tramp through to Jericho. Well, we’re all right now.”

“Not quite,” said Yorke, with a laugh, as a rifle cracked from somewhere down the slope and a bullet whined above their heads. “One of them isn’t dead yet, that’s very evident.”

“He must be going entirely by sound,” said the major, untying the neck-ropes of his horse, and knotting it round the animal’s neck. “Woa, there!” as another bullet sang close to them, causing his mount to rear and snort.

They hurried up the track, stumbling badly in the darkness, the bullets of their invisible enemy following them at quick intervals, knocking chips off the boulders around, and causing intense uneasiness among the horses.

“Here, this won’t do,” the major said, as a bullet, missing his head by an inch, flattened itself against a rock, and sprayed him with hot lead. “We’re making too much noise, and that beggar evidently knows the lie of the pass. All he’s got to do is to fire up it, and sooner or later he’ll get one of us. Yorke, just run out from the track a bit, and see if you can locate him. I’ll hold your horse.”

Yorke obeyed with alacrity. Unslinging his rifle, he ran out along a ledge some fifteen yards from the track, lay down, rested the barrel of his Mauser on a convenient stone, and waited. Out of the darkness below spouted a jet of flame, and another bullet whined up the pass. Yorke pointed his rifle as near as he could in the direction from which the shot had come, and waited for the next. It came in a few seconds, and, altering his sighting a little, Yorke fired "ten rounds rapid." Then he waited. He waited a full three minutes, but no more shots came from below, and, reslinging his rifle, he hurried back to his friends.

"Good boy," said the major approvingly. "You must have got very near to him, for he shut up like a book. Don't suppose you hit him, but that doesn't matter. All we wanted was to stop him making a nuisance of himself."

Without suffering any further inconvenience from their late enemies, they climbed steadily for another hour, and then, the ground permitting riding, they mounted and cantered across a stretch of level country to the top of the next defile.

"Are we going to walk down?" Roy asked, as the major dismounted.

"It's a case of needs must, Roy. If we try riding we shall certainly break our own necks and the horses' too. We'll go as quickly as we can in case some of our ragged friends have recovered sufficiently to trouble us again. They could make themselves decidedly unpleasant if they thought of lining this pass."

The journey down was an incredibly rough one, and, in spite of their efforts to attain speed, it was a good three hours before they emerged into the valley. Tired and bruised as they were, all three would have liked to camp at the foot of the pass, but they were not yet out of the danger zone, and the major suggested riding to the river at once. "We shall be pretty safe, once we get there," he told the boys, "and we can pitch camp and get a few hours' sleep." He swung himself into the saddle and picked up his bearings. "If we make to the right of that big star," he said, pointing to the south-west, "we shall come out somewhere near the bridge. We'll go in Indian file, as I know the country, and then we can canter."

Two hours later the party arrived on the banks of the Kor immediately above the bridge. Crossing the river, they selected a spot in the jungle of willows and tamarisks, and while Yorke and the major tethered and fed the horses, Roy lit a fire and made tea with water which he carried up from the Jordan in a canvas bucket.

“This is a very good place for a camp,” observed the major, as they sat down to a light meal. “The fire can’t be seen at all from the plain, and a man would have to be pretty close to us in this sunken channel before he spotted it. These trees and undergrowth make an excellent screen.”

When they had finished eating, the major produced one of his long black cigars, and lit it with a glowing twig from the fire.

“Let’s have a look at that ring now, Roy,” he said. “Throw a few more sticks on, Yorke.”

Yorke kindled the fire to a small blaze, and Roy, spreading out a blanket, emptied the contents of the small bag on to it—five tarnished watches and a diamond ring. The latter was a heavy gold one, of old-fashioned workmanship, its claw-like setting holding a stone of good size and unimpaired brilliancy. The major picked it up and flashed its facets in the firelight. “I sometimes think it would have been better for the world if there were no gems in it,” he said musingly. “This is by no means a large diamond, as diamonds go, but yet it has been the cause of several men’s death this night. Sooner or later, every large or historic stone seems destined to trail in its wake a record of tragedy. Well, let us hope the career of this one will be marked by no more bloodstained episodes.” And, wrapping up the ring in a small wash-leather bag, the major stowed it carefully in an inner pocket, and glanced carelessly at the watches. “Anything good there, boys?”

“A couple of gold ones, which would be all right if they had a clean up,” Roy replied. “These others aren’t much, I fancy. Silver, and a bit battered. What shall we do with them?”

“I’m going to take the best of the silver ones as a memento of an expedition undertaken in very congenial and gallant company,” announced the major. “You can please yourselves what you do with the others.”

The boys flushed with pleasure. A compliment from such a man as the major meant much.

“Take your pick, then, Yorke,” invited Roy. “You’d like a memento too, I’ll bet.”

“I should, very much.” And Yorke took one of the battered silver watches, and hooked it on to his chain.

“But,” said the major, as Roy took the other silver one, “I meant you boys to have the gold ones.”

“We know that, major,” said Yorke. “But Roy feels exactly as I do, I can see that. You’ve got a silver one, so we’d like silver ones. Also, I hardly know how to explain what I mean, but here we are, camped on the banks of the Jordan, and the Jordan isn’t an ordinary river. I, for one, don’t want to ride away from a spot like this with anything gold in the way of spoils.”

“Nor I,” Roy agreed.

“I quite see,” said the major. “We’ll leave them here, then.”

“In the river,” said Yorke, and taking up the two watches, he walked down to the bridge, and dropped them into the middle of the stream.

“We have been tossing as to who shall keep first watch,” said the major, when he returned, “and the first spell fell to Roy. We are going to do two hours each till daylight. You are second shift, Yorke, so you will wake me. You may hear some wild pigs rooting about. There used to be quite a lot of them here in the old days, so don’t fire at the first sound. . . . Take the nosebags off, Roy, when the horses have finished eating. . . . Good-night.” And wrapping himself in his blankets, the major lay down, and was soon fast asleep. Yorke was not long in following his example, and Roy, sitting on an upturned saddle, his rifle loaded and ready to hand, kept watch in the sunken channel of Kor.

CHAPTER IX

A NOCTURNAL VISITOR

“Anything doing, Roy?” A touch on the arm had wakened Yorke, and, throwing aside his blanket, he sat up and looked inquiringly at his friend.

“Not a thing,” Roy replied. “But my two hours are up, and I know what a stickler you are for doing your cut, otherwise I wouldn’t have disturbed you.”

“Quite right, Roy. Your turn for forty winks.” Yorke took up his rifle and strolled across to the vacated saddle. An hour passed, during which he heard nothing more exciting than a couple of wild pigs grunting and crashing through the undergrowth, the mournful howl of a distant hyena, and the trilling of a bird, which sounded remarkably like a nightingale, from one of the trees by the river. And then came another sound, a sound which caused Yorke to sit bolt upright and grip his rifle. *Clump, clump, clump, clump*, came from the direction of the bridge. A horse’s hoofs without a doubt.

Yorke took two great bounds to his sleeping comrades, shook them roughly, and then crept swiftly and silently through the willows, dropping on his knee and levelling his rifle as a horseman in Bedouin robes left the bridge and urged his horse towards the path up the steep bank.

“Halt!”

The stranger obeyed at once. “Friend!” he called out.

“What sort of friend?” Yorke demanded. “Don’t move. I’ve got you covered.”

Roy and the major now came running up.

“You needn’t worry,” said the horseman. “I’m Steele, and I’ve had one of your bullets through my arm. I’m not fighting any more to-night, thank you.”

“Is he alone?” the major asked Yorke.

“I think so.”

“Good. Keep him covered.” The major walked towards their visitor.

“You say you’ve had a bullet through your arm, Steele. Very well, let me see it.”

Steele displayed the injured limb. A bullet had ploughed through the upper muscle, and the wound had been very inadequately bandaged. The major nodded as he examined it. "You must be feeling pretty sick with a smack like that," he remarked. "Where are you making for?"

"I was trying to get to Jericho, but——" The sentence trailed, and Steele swayed a little in his saddle.

The major supported him. "Give me a hand with him, lads," he said. "He's feeling very faint, and I don't think he'll give us any more serious trouble."

Between them they assisted the wounded man to dismount, and half carried him to the camp. There the major gave him a strong nip of brandy from his flask, while the boys hurriedly set about kindling the fire and boiling the water. Half an hour later, his wound bathed, anointed with iodine, and bandaged with clean handkerchiefs, Steele lay propped against one of the saddles, feeling considerably better.

"If you'd got that smack during the war, you'd be having a ride in an ambulance wagon," the major told him. "But in these private little wars there are none of those conveniences."

Steele smiled. He was by no means a bad-looking man. There was indeed a hint of something predatory in his keen black eyes, and his thin, lined face showed traces of a rough and lawless life; but his features, seen by the light of the leaping flames of the campfire, were good and even arresting. Had a kindlier fate placed his energy and individuality on the side of the law instead of against it, he would undoubtedly have risen to distinction in his chosen calling.

"Yes," he said, "as you say, Major Todd, the little wars are always the roughest. By the way, what are you going to do with me? Hand me over to the police in Jerusalem?"

The major pulled his cigar-case from his pocket, and lit a weed. "I won't offer you one of these, Steele. They're much too strong for you in your present condition. But I've a cigarette somewhere. Yes, here they are. Try one of those. . . . What am I going to do with you, you say? Why, nothing. You interfered with us, and you got a crack in the arm for your pains. You're free to go where you like and do what you like. If you meddle with us again, we shall do our best to give you another smack, that's all."

"I'm not likely to try it, major. I give up. You've beaten me, and you're three good sports. I'll get this flipper of mine well, and then I'll streak out

for America. I've always had a fancy to try my luck out there. I've more than a few quid in the bank, and I reckon I'll take up land, and turn honest. Looks as though it pays in the long run."

"There's not the slightest doubt about that, Steele. . . . And what about your friend Ike?"

"Ike, I reckon, is lying out there." Steele nodded in the direction of the hills. "I searched a bit before I came away, and I yelled for him, but not a sign could I see. Either he got blown to bits by one of your bombs, or else he got a horse and lit out on his own somewhere." He smiled grimly. "You certainly had it all ready for us up there. We reckoned we had you boxed up, and then you kicked at us suddenly like a regiment of fresh infantry—bombs, rifles, and whatnots. If I hadn't got away when I did, the Bedouin would have torn me to bits—what was left of them, that is." He took a sip from the pannikin of tea which Yorke handed to him. "Thanks, that's fine. . . . Yes, I reckon Ike and I have parted company for good. If he's alive, he won't turn honest, not Ike."

"He certainly gave me that impression when you called upon me in my Sydney hotel. What induced you two to go ring-hunting? But perhaps you're not feeling up to talking much with that damaged arm of yours?"

"Oh, that's all right. This tea is putting new life into me. If the story will interest you, you're welcome. So here goes:

"Ike and I were in Sydney when we first saw that advertisement about the ring, and we didn't pay any more attention to it than most other people. Ike hadn't been through the war, but I'd seen a good bit of it with the A.S.C. I came out here in time for the Jerusalem stunt, and I stuck it right through to the end after that. So I know this country pretty well. After the Armistice I went back to Sydney, joined up with Ike, and among other things we did was to take a ticket in a big sweepstake—Tattersall's, to be exact—and we were lucky enough to draw a horse, which brought us eighteen hundred quid.

"Well, we'd gone halves in the ticket, so we split the prize. We had a good time in Sydney for a bit, and then we put our heads together and reckoned we wouldn't blow the lot. We went over to Victoria and began to do the race-meetings. We did pretty well. Ike was no good on the back of a horse, but when it came to putting money on them, he was hard to beat. One day we heard there was to be a meeting at a place called Lalla, with one or two good horses running. So we cut off up there, and on the way we stayed a night in an empty shack near the railway. I was sitting having breakfast the next morning when Ike gave a whistle from the yard. He didn't whistle like

that for nothing, not Ike, so I left my bacon and went out to see what was doing. He'd been fossicking about round a rubbish heap, and had fished out one or two old letters. He handed me one. It was from Jarvice to his father, telling him about an old-fashioned diamond ring he'd picked up in the Jisr Ed Damieh pass, and making a reference to you."

"To me?" echoed the major.

"Yes, to you. He said that you had advised him not to wear it, so he had put it in a safe place for a bit. Ike and I looked at each other pretty hard when we read that letter, for that advertisement flashed into our minds at once. We made a few inquiries in the neighbourhood, and discovered that Jarvice hadn't come back from the war, and that his father had died recently. We gave up the races then, and went down to Melbourne, where we sent a wire to the solicitors in London, asking if the ring had been recovered. We got a reply saying No, and there and then we decided to have a good go at finding it ourselves. The first thing to do was to have a yarn with you. You know what happened at that interview. We twigged at once by your trunks that you were on the same lay as ourselves, and we thought the best thing we could do would be to hang close to you, and let you do the locating." Steele drained his pannikin, and held it out to be refilled. "It's this knock on the arm that's making me so thirsty, I expect. Thanks." He took a deep draught and continued:

"I'd done a bit of dressing up when I was out in this country before, and when we found you'd booked for Tripoli, it was no trouble to me to make natives of Ike and myself, and we went up steerage on the same boat with you, and watched you make friends with Colonel Villers and his boys. We went up into the hills after you, and I was watching you from my window in Rasharbi when you were reading that bit of paper you took out of the pocket-book. We guessed from your faces it was a good clue you had got hold of, and we clung tighter than ever. We saw you safely into the hotel at Jerusalem, and then I whipped up one or two toughs I'd known during the war. One of them we squared to take a room next to yours at the hotel. Another was the beggar you gave alms to up on the east wall. From what he told us we guessed there would be something doing that night directly it got dark, so Ike and I planted ourselves on the wall to watch. We had a rope with us, and we reckoned that if you looked as if you'd found anything, we'd plunk in a shot to scare you, and then shin down to gather up the spoils. It wasn't a bad plan, but it didn't work very well. Ike fired, sure enough, but one of you fired back, and Ike got a piece chipped out of his cheek. To add to it all, we had to run for our lives to get clear of a mob of

natives who came swarming up to see what the firing was about. We were both feeling pretty sore when we got back to our diggings, but we cheered up when our pal from the hotel came round and made his report. He was very hot and flushed, that lad, for it seemed you'd chased him out of the hotel. But we liked what he told us immensely. If the ring was in the Jisr Ed Damieh, we'd a very good chance of laying hands on it. So I went round and hired a couple of gees while Ike went to a Syrian doctor and paid him double to keep his mouth shut and patch up his cheek.

“We were up early the next morning, gave you an hour's start, and then jogged down into the valley. When you turned to the left at the bottom, I guessed you'd be making for the monastery. Ike and I pushed on over the river, and presently we struck what we wanted—a camp of Bedouin. I'd had some truck with those gentry during the war, and I knew how to approach them. We gave them a couple of quid each, and then turned out our pockets to show them we hadn't any more. We didn't trouble to take off our boots, where we'd each got a wad stowed away. Then we explained what we wanted, and promised them another two quid each after the show, if we were successful. They jumped at it, and made no bones about lending us a couple of rifles. At daybreak we were in the pass, and I could see that it wasn't much use looking for Golden Gate rocks on our own, for we could have spent a week without hitting on the right one. So we lined the pass, and waited for you. We spotted you as soon as you crossed the river, and when you got into the pass we closed round. That sprained ankle of yours puzzled us a lot, though.”

“I meant it to,” said the major dryly.

“So it was a bluff, eh? We thought it might be, but we weren't going to shoot until we knew where the ring was, for we had a pretty good idea that you'd all fight to the last kick. So we made a circle round you, and watched. When dusk came we closed in a bit more. Then we heard you digging, and we reckoned we'd got you. You know the rest. Half of our crowd went down to your first lot of bombs. I was out on the wing, and that saved me. I dropped behind a rock and waited. I heard you come out of the cave and go up the pass, and then, feeling pretty savage at the turn things had taken, I sent some bullets up after you. Then some one pitched in a couple of clips at me, and I stopped this one in the arm. I'd had enough then. I managed to crawl round a bit, looking and shouting for Ike, and then I found my horse and started for Jericho.”

His story ended, Steele leant back again, and half-closed his eyes.

“You’re looking a bit pasty,” said the major. “You’d better stretch out for a bit.”

Between them they assisted the wounded man to a comfortable position by the fire, and then drew apart for a consultation.

“He certainly isn’t fit to tackle a ride to Jerusalem yet.” The major looked critically at the prostrate man. “He’s feeling pretty cheap, if I know anything about wounds. But we can’t leave him here. So what I suggest is, that we take him along to the monastery, and get the monks to give him a bed for a few weeks. We needn’t say anything about his past career. I really believe he means to turn over a new leaf.”

“Seems a good idea,” Yorke agreed.

“If he likes to go out Alberta way, I’m sure the dad would give him a hand if I asked him,” said Roy.

“I still go on with my shift to-night, I suppose major?” Yorke asked.

“You certainly do, Yorke, and when your two hours are up, you call me.” The major looked at his watch. “Hullo, your luck is in, Yorke. It’s my shift now. Turn in and get a couple of hours’ sleep. We’ll get an early start for the monastery.”

CHAPTER X

AN EVENTFUL NIGHT

Despite their efforts to get an early start that morning, the wounded man proved such an impediment that it was nine o'clock before the party set out for the monastery. The major rode a little ahead, picking the path, and the boys rode one on each side of the sick man, ready to extend a helping hand if he should need it. It was an arduous journey for Steele, and although he rode uncomplainingly, he was several times overcome with faintness, and on each of these occasions the party dismounted and halted for a long rest. So that it was not until late afternoon that, having left their arms and horses at the stables, they toiled up the steep ascent to the monastery, and stated their case to the monks. These proved quite amenable to the major's suggestion that Steele should be left with them as a paying guest, and the prior gave orders that one of the rooms should be fitted with everything that the building possessed necessary for nursing, and appointed a brother with a knowledge of medicine to look after him.

"We should like to stay here the night ourselves," the major added, which request was readily assented to. But before proceeding to their old rooms, which were in the opposite wing of the building, they put their heads in at Steele's door, to wish him good-night and a speedy recovery.

The sick man waved a hand to them gratefully.

"I shan't forget what you've done for me, gentlemen. To these people I'm a friend of yours who happened to get shot in a squabble with the Bedouin. That's what I gathered you told them, major?"

"That's right, Steele. No need to go into details. It would do you no good and them no good."

"That's right, major; it wouldn't. All the same, I take it as real kind of you to have passed them the word to look after your 'friend.' I appreciate that even more than being patched up by you last night. Thank you, gentlemen. I won't let you down."

"I'm quite sure of that, Steele. Good-night."

The three smiled at him and withdrew, and, soon after, the brother entered laden with lint and oils to dress the wound. He stayed in the room some hours, arranging the appointments to his satisfaction, and it was nearly

midnight before he retired, with a last injunction to his patient to pull the cord above his pillow if he should need anything.

The pain of his wound was not poignant, but it was sufficient to keep Steele awake, and when, two hours later, the door opened quietly, he turned his head at once. Then his jaw dropped and his eyes opened wide in astonishment as a Jewish-looking man with a plastered cheek sidled into the room and approached the bed.

“Ike!” he cried.

“Not so loud,” cautioned the visitor.

“I thought you were dead, Ike.”

“Dead? *Me?*” Jacobs’ lips curled unpleasantly “No, they didn’t get me. My luck wasn’t dead out. They got a big Bedouin in front of me, and he toppled me down as he fell, and I hit my head against a stone. When I came to, there was nothing on that hillside but dead men. I managed to find one of the horses though, and I got down to the river, where I camped. The first thing I saw this morning was you in the middle of Todd’s party crawling over here. So I lay doggo till dusk, and then did the distressed traveller stunt. Full of sympathy they were, these monks. Told me that a party of Europeans had ridden in at dusk, and I would meet them in the morning. . . . Meet in the morning,” he repeated with a devilish leer. “Well, perhaps we will. Todd’s got the ring, I suppose?”

“I don’t know. They didn’t tell me. . . . But look here, Ike, don’t you go trying any funny games at this monastery. I reckon they’ve earned that ring. Let them keep it.”

“Oh, oh, Georgie Steele turning soft?” The visitor sneered.

“Not more than you, I reckon, Ike. But those three have treated me well. I ran into them last night by the river, when I was feeling pretty cheap. They could easily have left me there, or run me into Jericho and wired for the police. But not they. Instead of that they brought me along here, and handled me all through as gentle as women.”

Jacobs’ eyes burned with hatred and malice.

“Gentle as women, were they?” he said venomously. “Well, I didn’t notice it, either at Jerusalem or up there in the pass.” He touched his wounded cheek. “If you like to give up, you can. But I came out here to get that ring and the reward, and I’m going to get it.” Then suddenly he changed his tone. “Look here, George, don’t you turn soft and start licking the hand

that nursed you. These three high-faluters have treated us pretty rough all through. They've given me one on the face and you one in the arm. I reckon we're not going to part company over them, eh?"

"We part if you start interfering with them, Ike. That's flat. I've turned honest. The other game doesn't pay, and the society's low. Chuck it up, Ike, and come out to America."

Jacobs snarled at the suggestion.

"Keep your honesty. I don't want it. This is the finish, George Steele. Mind that. Don't wire me for a fiver when you're tired of your honest work." He smiled evilly, and disappeared as silently as he had come.

For some minutes after he had gone, Steele lay on his back, gazing at the ceiling, a look of indecision on his face. He was debating with himself whether or not he should warn the major and the boys that Jacobs was in the monastery. While he was deliberating, the solitary candle in the apartment guttered and went out, and the subsequent darkness seemed to accentuate the danger to his three new-found friends. "I'm not going to have those white men hurt in their sleep if I can help it," Steele muttered, and, dragging himself slowly and painfully out of bed, he went out into the corridor, down which he staggered in the direction of the belfry.

Some three hours previously, Yorke, having said good-night to Roy and the major, had retired to his own room, and was in the middle of undressing when there came a knock, and Roy entered once more, holding up a thermos flask.

"Thought you'd like some of this, Yorke. I felt thirsty just now, and I'd lapped up all the water in my room, so I went out on the scrounge. I met one of the monks, and he smiled all over his face, and told me to go back and he would bring me something. He was as good as his word. Handed me in this flask, he did. Coffee—piping hot and sweet. I thought it was too good to drink all on my own, so I hiked in."

"Good boy. Chuck that tooth-brush out of the glass, and give me a drop in that, will you? Thanks. . . . Jove! there's nothing wrong with this, Roy. . . . Yes, I will have another drop."

They finished the flask, and sat down on the bed.

"Funny old business it's been, this treasure hunt," Roy remarked. "Very curious, too, the way this chap Steele's come round to our side. I'd bank on

him now, Yorke.”

“So would I, Roy.”

“I wonder what *did* happen to his friend Ike?” Roy went on ruminatively. “I suppose he must have been killed.”

“I don’t think so.”

Roy turned, and looked quickly at his cousin. “Why don’t you think so?” he asked.

“That’s the peculiar thing about it, Roy. I don’t know why I do think he’s alive, but somehow I have the feeling very strongly. Hullo, what’s that?” he broke off, as the door-bell of the monastery clanged rather loudly.

“Ike,” said Roy with a smile, “asking for shelter.” Then he grew serious again. “It’s funny that you should feel like that about Ike, though, Yorke. However, alive or dead, I don’t suppose he’ll worry us again.”

Yorke shrugged his shoulders. “It will be his own look-out if he does, Roy. He should know by now that Major Todd isn’t an easy man to fool about with.”

“I expect he’s realized that,” Roy assented. “Well, I’ll get back now to my little short bed. They can’t be used to guests of our inches here, Yorke. I’ll swear that pallet of mine isn’t a fraction more than five feet nine. Night-night!”

“Good-night, Roy. Thanks for the coffee.”

Yorke finished undressing, and, blowing out the light, got into bed. But contrary to his usual habit, he did not fall instantly asleep. The fact was that the monk’s coffee was unusually strong, and the effect on Yorke was to make him toss from side to side, the while all the events of the past few days, marshalling themselves before him in unhurried procession, awaited his examination and judgment. Physically tired, but mentally stimulated, Yorke found himself giving close attention to each, and at last, despairing of sleep, he got out of bed, struck a match and looked at his watch, and found it to be nearly two o’clock. Yawning disgustedly, he walked to the window, and stepped out on to the little balcony which connected the three guest-rooms, hoping that a breath of fresh air might compose him to slumber.

Standing out there on the balcony he immediately forgot his disgust. The night was very still, and the sky of a velvety blue. Moab was invisible in the blackness beyond Jordan, but its presence could be divined by the sudden ending of the great spread of stars to the east. Down in the valley a single

light gleamed in modern Jericho—a single gleam, where once the lights of the city must have shone like a huge swarm of golden bees. Yorke gazed down at it and tried to picture the town as it must have been in its heyday, when, rich in her trade of dates and balsam, a great and important city, set about with rich groves and gardens, the Greeks and Romans had spread her fame throughout the world. In those days the hum of her citizens and the roar of her commerce must have been plainly audible on this quiet hillside. But Joshua had come, and had cried after his assault: “Cursed be the man before the Lord, that riseth up and buildeth this city Jericho.” And the curse had endured.

For some minutes Yorke stood, leaning against the railing of the balcony, wrapped in reverie. He was aroused by a gentle knock at his own door, and entered the room swiftly. “Who’s that?” he called.

“Steele,” was the reply. “Let me in a moment. I want to speak to you.”

Yorke flung open the door, and Steele half stumbled in, and subsided on the bed.

“I’m weaker than I thought,” he said apologetically. “It’s all right, though, Mr. Villers: I can get back to my own room. I’ve come along to tell you that Ike Jacobs is here in the monastery, and that he’s up to no good.”

“Jacobs!” Yorke frowned. But Steele met his gaze squarely.

“Don’t think I asked him here, Mr. Villers. He just turned up on his own hook. You might have heard the bell go a few hours back.”

“Ah,” said Yorke. “So that *was* Ike.”

“Yes, that was Ike.” Steele rose from the bed. “Well, I’ve warned you, Mr. Villers, and I guess you know what steps to take.” He made for the door.

“I’ll come with you,” Yorke began, but Steele held up a hand.

“You stay right here, Mr. Villers. I can get back all right. Keep a sharp look-out. He may visit you. Good-night.”

“Good-night, Mr. Steele. Thanks very much for the warning. I will certainly keep a sharp look-out.”

Steele went off down the corridor, and, left to himself, Yorke lit his candle and ruminated over this new feature of the position. For five minutes he sat in deep thought, his hand resting on the butt of his revolver beneath the pillow. Then he came to a decision. He would not wake his friends. Instead, he would sit up all night himself, and keep guard. But first he would

see that both their doors were locked. Creeping out into the corridor, he tried the handles cautiously. Both were locked, and, feeling relieved, he returned to his own room, set his door slightly ajar, and sat down to listen. He was feeling very confident in his ability to keep an adequate watch, for he was in a position to hear the slightest sound in the corridor, and the most skilful locksmith in the world could not have hoped to gain an entry into either of his friends' rooms without detection. The candle, after some deliberation, he left burning. It might, he thought, act as a deterrent to Jacobs if he were inclined to nocturnal prowling; and if it came to a fight, Yorke preferred to have a little light on the scene.

An hour passed, and then he heard the creak of a footstep on the staircase which led to the upper apartments at the end of the corridor. Yorke stiffened as footsteps sounded coming along the corridor. Sitting on the end of his bed, his revolver hidden, but ready for instant work, he kept his eyes on the door, and his ears alert, ready for whatever might befall. But the footsteps passed and went slowly on. Creeping to the door, Yorke opened it a little wider, and saw the dark figure of a monk moving down the corridor. Presently a candle sprang into radiance in the little chapel at the end, and by its light Yorke saw the brother prostrated in reverence before an icon. Satisfied that all was well, he retired again into the room, and presently he heard the monk come shuffling back.

Not caring to be discovered out of bed at that hour of the morning, Yorke lay down and, half-closing his eyes, feigned sleep. The steps came to a halt outside his door, and Yorke had much ado to conceal a smile. This brother, it seemed, had not been able to eliminate curiosity from his list of mundane imperfections. He wished to see why one of the European visitors needed a light at two in the morning. The door opened, and from beneath his lowered lashes Yorke could see the monk's gown and girdle. Then, suddenly, as the monk drew near, some instinct of danger prompted him to open his eyes and leap up. But he was a fraction of a second too late. Even as he sprang something struck him violently on the side of the head, and as he sank back he had a momentary vision of an evil face glaring at him in triumph from beneath a monk's cowl. Then he lapsed into unconsciousness.

When he came to, he was still lying on the bed, but helpless, gagged with a handkerchief, and bound hand and foot. And then he heard Roy's voice calling from the balcony:

“Yorke! Yorke! Come on! Quick!”

Yorke tried to throw himself on the floor, but he hardly succeeded in moving a muscle. He had been securely bound with a monk's girdle, straps from his own saddlery, and torn sheeting. And the candle had been extinguished. Sick and dizzy, a prey to the liveliest anxiety, he lay there in the darkness, unable to budge. Once more he heard his cousin's voice calling: "I'm going down, Yorke." And then there was silence.

On Roy the strong coffee had not had such an invigorating effect, and a quarter of an hour after he had left Yorke's room he was fast asleep. A finer specimen of healthy young manhood than Roy it would have been hard to find, and, like most healthy young men, he liked to stretch his legs in bed on occasion. The occasion this night came at about half-past two, when, after several somnolent attempts to stretch his pallet's capacity, he was forced to give up the attempt. Opening his eyes, he gave a disgusted sigh as he realized the bed's shortcomings, and, turning on his back and crooking his knees, was about to resume his interrupted slumbers when a loud creak from the balcony arrested his attention. Like most Canadians who have lived a good deal in the open, Roy liked to know the origin of a noise. He held his breath and listened. It came again, that creak, and Roy got out of bed. The idea of any possible danger did not occur to him at the moment. He was a guest in a monastery, and that seemed to him one of the safest places in the world. He simply wanted to know why woodwork should take upon itself to creak on a still night when all reasonably seasoned woodwork should be as silent as the grave.

Stepping out on to the balcony, he waited. The creak came again, from the left opposite the major's room. He groped his way there, passing Yorke's window without a glance. And then he halted suddenly, his further progress barred by a taut rope which came down from the veranda of one of the rooms above and disappeared into the void by way of the railings on that part of the balcony opposite Major Todd's apartment. At the sight of that rope suspicion flared in Roy's mind, and he thrust his head into the major's room. "Major!" he called sharply. "Are you there?"

There was no response, and Roy entered the room, groped on the mantelpiece for matches, struck one, and looked round him. There was no sign of the major, but the bed had evidently been slept in, and his clothes were lying in disarray on the floor. Knowing the major's neat military habits, that seemed to Roy to be a very bad sign. For a moment he stood there, thinking quickly. The woodwork outside gave another loud creak. "He must have gone down there," Roy thought. "But what on earth for? I'd

better go and see, I guess. I'll give Yorke a hail, and get along with the job." Running to his cousin's window, he called his warning, and then, scaling the railings, he grasped the rope, and went down hand over hand into the abyss.

For a few minutes after hearing Roy's hail, Yorke tried desperately to free himself; but at last he had to admit his impotence, and gave it up in despair. Presently he heard a step on the veranda, and then a match flared, and the major, in pyjamas, stood at the foot of the bed, gazing at him in startled concern.

"Yorke, my dear boy! What does this mean?" And then he caught sight of the handkerchief in Yorke's mouth, and rushed forward to remove it. The next moment he had lit the candle and was hard at work cutting and untying the lad's bonds.

"Thanks," said Yorke faintly, when he was free; and, sitting up, he began to stretch his cramped limbs. "The ring's gone, I suppose?"

"Yes, that's gone, Yorke. And Roy's gone too. There's a rope hanging over my balcony. . . . But what happened to you?"

"It was a monk, or rather a fellow dressed as one. Jacobs, no doubt. I was sitting on guard, after Steele warned me that he was in the monastery, and he took me by surprise. Hit me out before I could do a thing." Yorke put a hand to his head. "He certainly gave me a stinger. . . . But I heard Roy call a few minutes ago. He said he was 'going down.' We'll have to follow him, major. I suppose he meant into the valley?"

"I expect so. Possibly down the rope. But look here, Yorke, you're very sick and bruised. Don't you think you'd better stay here, and let me investigate?"

For once Yorke paid no attention to the major's advice. "Sorry," he said, "but I've got to be in this, sore head or no sore head."

"Get some clothes on, then, and come into my room for a drop of brandy. I see it's no use arguing with you."

In less than two minutes Yorke presented himself in the major's apartment, and gulped down a mouthful of neat brandy from the flask which the Australian always carried in case of emergency.

"Good medicine, but a bad drink," said the major, replacing the stopper, and slipping the flask into his pocket. He was now dressed in coat and trousers and roughly-laced boots. "I've carried that brandy for a year, and, with the exception of Steele last night, you're the first to have a nip of it. . . .

Got your revolver? Good. Come on, then.” He went out on to the balcony and peered down into the blackness. “I wish Roy would give us a coo-ee or something,” he murmured.

As if in answer to his wish there came at this moment the sound of iron-shod hoofs ringing on stones far below, and then the sharp report of a rifle-shot.

“Down the rope!” Yorke cried.

“Quicker the other way, I think. Come on. I know the trick of the bolts.” They dashed through into the corridor and along to the great front door of the building.

“Keep the light going, Yorke.” The major thrust a box of matches into his hand, and wrestled with the complicated system of bolts and bars by the light of successive flares. At last the door swung open, and they hurried down the steep path to the stable. There a couple of more matches disclosed the fact that Roy’s horse and rifle were gone.

Crack. Another shot sounded from below.

“Quick,” cried the major. “Grab your horse and gun, Yorke. Don’t worry about a saddle.”

Hastily untying the animals, they slipped in the bits, and led them down the path, slinging their rifles as they did so.

They had been groping and stumbling for some ten minutes down the uneven way when two more shots galvanized them into even greater speed.

“We’ll risk it and mount now, Yorke,” the major called back. “The path’s rough enough, goodness knows, but I don’t like this firing.”

“Nor I,” Yorke agreed. “But, all the same, Roy knows all about night-riding, and I think he can hold his own with Jacobs at it. That’s one consolation.” And unslinging his rifle, he sprang on to his horse’s back, and followed the major at a jog-trot.

“Hi, major! Yorke! Is that you?” The hail came from below and to their left.

“Thank God,” said the major, his tone conveying the extent of his past uneasiness, and he shouted back: “Yes, we’re coming, Roy.”

“Keep on the track,” came Roy’s hail again. “The show’s over, and there’ll be no more shooting. Take your time.”

Moderating their pace considerably, they rode another five hundred yards along the track until they came in sight of Roy, sitting on a rock, holding two horses, and at his feet the prostrate body of a man in the dress of a monk.

“His neck’s broken,” Roy said, as they came to halt. “He tried firing from the saddle and cantering at the same time, and his horse reared and slipped, and pitched him over the rock. It’s Jacobs, I suppose?”

The major dismounted and bent over the body. “Yes,” he said, “it’s Jacobs. No doubt about that.”

“And has he got the ring?”

“Upon my word, Roy, I’d forgotten all about the ring. We were so alarmed for your safety. But I suppose he has it, and I suppose I must look for it. It isn’t a nice job, but I don’t want to have to prove my claim to other people later on.” He knelt down and searched the dead man’s clothing. “Yes, here it is, in its wash-leather bag. . . . Well, boys, I think we’ll save our explanations until we get back to our rooms. It is now our painful duty to acquaint the prior that the latest guest at his monastery was a thief in disguise, who has broken his neck in a fall from his horse. I’m glad you didn’t shoot him, Roy.”

“I didn’t try to, major. I just wanged the bullets above his head.”

“It will save us a good deal of explanation, anyway. That horse of his came down pretty badly too, Roy. Just look at his knees. Bring the poor brute along, and we’ll see to him up at the stable.”

CHAPTER XI

EXPLANATIONS

“And now, Roy,” said the major two hours later, “I must confess I am curious to know exactly what happened.”

After reporting the death of Jacobs to the prior, they had gone down again with a party of monks, and had assisted them to bring up the body in a litter to the mortuary. Then they had gone down again to the stable, where they bathed and bandaged the knees of the wounded horse. And now the three were seated in the major’s room, feeling very fatigued after the night’s adventures, but too keyed-up to think of sleep.

“There isn’t very much to tell,” Roy replied. “That bed of mine was so confoundedly short that it woke me up, and before I could get to sleep again I heard the woodwork creaking out on the balcony. So I went out to have a look at it. It was the rope that was doing it, and there was evidently some one on the end of it. I didn’t like the look of things. So I poked my head into your room, major, and found you weren’t there. I thought you must have gone down the rope, so I gave a shout to Yorke, and went down after you, as I thought. I was half-way down when I heard the stable door open, and some one came out leading a horse. I called to him: ‘Major, is that you?’ but there was no reply, and then it dawned on me that it was some one else. I shinned down the rest of the rope as quickly as I could, and ran round to the stable. Our horses were all there, but one of the rifles had gone. So I jumped on my nag, picked up one of the Mausers, and set off to investigate. Presently he had a crack at me, but the bullet went very wide, and I didn’t trouble to reply for a bit. Then I heard him quite clearly scrambling about among the rocks, and I fired high from the saddle, just to scare him. I kept within sound of him all the time after that, and I felt pretty confident. He was going along at a good rate, but I knew the track, and I’ve done a fair amount of night-riding out West. Whoever he was, I thought, he wasn’t much of a horseman. He cantered over bad parts and walked over good ones. I could pick up with him when I wanted to, but I thought the best thing to do was to hang on his skirts till dawn, and then see what sort of a fellow he was. It did cross my mind that it might be Jacobs, but, of course, I wasn’t sure. He got very restive—I could tell that by the way he swore at his horse—and at last he tried a crack at me from the saddle, and that finished him. He pitched off, and his horse came back along the track to me. Directly I saw his knees I

guessed what had happened, and I dismounted and walked along till I came to the body. I was surprised when I saw the monk's dress, but when I saw the face beneath the cowl I knew it was a disguise, and I guessed it was Jacobs lying there. You know the rest. . . . Now it's your turn, major. Where were you when I went into your room?"

"I was in the chapel, Roy."

"The chapel!"

"Yes. I suppose that sounds rather a peculiar place for a man to be in at that hour of the morning. But I am a man of unconventional habits, as perhaps you have noticed, and to-night, what with thinking out one or two problems connected with my sister's affairs, I was restless in bed. Now it has always been my experience that a church or chapel is an ideal place for attaining a broad view of things, and resolutions made in such buildings are, as a rule, free from pettinesses. So I went into the chapel, and found its atmosphere soothing and inspiring. I was rather surprised to find a candle burning there, but its light was just sufficient for my needs, and when I had come to a decision on my problems, I came back to my room to find my things in disarray and the ring gone."

"It's funny that you should have chosen that moment to go into the chapel," Yorke said thoughtfully. "If you hadn't gone in, you would have been in bed, and then you would have been at Jacobs' mercy."

The major nodded.

"The impulse was a religious one, and the yielding to it saved me from assault. Quite possibly it saved my life, for this man Jacobs was evidently in a dangerous mood. . . . The theft, of course, was quite a simple affair for him. He just went through my clothes and took the ring from my waistcoat pocket. Being in a monastery, I had deemed myself safe. . . . Now, Yorke, it's your turn. What exactly happened to you?"

"I'm almost ashamed to tell it, major. I thought I was being so 'cute and clever', and instead of that I let you both down." And Yorke told them his story. "Sorry I made such an awful mess of it," he ended up.

The major laid a hand on his shoulder.

"Yorke, my boy, you acted throughout like a gentleman, and you handled the affair like an old campaigner. But naturally you could not penetrate to the depths of depravity which could induce a man to perform actions of mock worship in a chapel. Jacobs knew that, and he played upon it. . . . But it hasn't done him much good, has it?" The major rose. "Now, you two, go

and lie down for an hour or two, even if you don't sleep. And if you're feeling fit enough after breakfast, Yorke, we'll try and get along to Jerusalem."

When the hour of departure drew near, Yorke professed himself quite fit for travel, and accordingly the horses were saddled and got ready. Before they left, the major left a written statement concerning the night's incidents with the prior. The latter expressed his regrets that such happenings should have occurred to the monastery's guests, and shuddered to think that a man of such evil deeds should go to his death without absolution. He explained that the room which had been given to Jacobs was immediately above the three principal guest-rooms, and adjacent to the store-room, from which he had purloined his monk's robes and the rope. Having taken their leave of the prior, the three called in at Steele's room to say farewell. The sick man welcomed them warmly.

"I've heard the news," he told them. "I'm sorry for Ike, but I'm glad you all came through without a bad hurt."

"We wish to thank you, Steele, for coming to warn us as you did," said the major. "I quite realize that it meant a lot to you to give your former pal away."

"Couldn't see anything else for it, Major Todd. I thought pretty hard for a bit, and then I got out of bed and trundled along. I've been thinking it over since, and I reckon I did the right thing."

"Yes, you did the right thing, Steele," the major assented gravely. "Well, good-bye. If you ever come to Australia again, look me up, and I'll do anything I can for you."

"Or if you should find yourself in Alberta at any time, call on the dad," said Roy. "Every one out there knows Cloudesley Villers, and if it's a job you want, he'll see that you get the best that's going."

"And here's my father's card, if you should ever want a friend in London." Yorke laid the pasteboard on the coverlet.

Steele took it up and examined it. "Cavalry Club," he murmured. "Well, that ought to be easy enough to find, I reckon. I'm sure I'm much obliged to you all, gentlemen, and if I find myself stuck in any of these places, I'll make a point of calling. Good-bye, and thank you."

They found it a long, hot, and tiring journey up the series of steep zigzags to Jerusalem, and it was six o'clock in the evening before they reached their hotel. Arrived there, they gave their horses into the charge of the major-domo, and indulged in the luxury of a hot bath and a change of clothing. The bell rang for dinner just as they had completed their toilet, and it was with a feeling of pleasant relaxation that they took their places in the dining-room and scanned the menu card. It seemed to them that they had been a long time away from the comforts of civilization.

"We haven't, though," said the major, when Roy remarked on this. "We've only been away three days." He twinkled. "We managed to cram in quite a lot during the time, all the same."

After dinner, not feeling inclined for any further exercise, they sat in the lounge, studying the French and English papers and chatting with other European tourists. Presently the major put his paper down.

"Boys," he said, "what are your plans now?"

"Wait about here till the dad comes out," Yorke replied. "That's it, isn't it, Roy?"

"Sure thing. I guess we shan't be bored in a town like this. I've just been looking at a guide-book, and really the history of Jerusalem is most amazing, quite apart from New Testament associations. . . . What are you going to do, major?"

"I've been thinking I'd better go to London and hand this ring to the solicitors. But I'd like to see a little more of you young men before I return to Australia. I was wondering if you'd mind me pottering about with you for a few weeks when I come back from London?"

The boys' faces showed what they thought of the project, and the Australian flushed a little with pleasure.

"It's rather gratifying to me to find that my company is desirable to you in peace as well as war," he said. "Very well, then, I'll come back as soon as I can, and then we'll do a bit of touring together."

He went the next day, catching the train for Port Said, where he hoped to be in time for the homeward-bound P. & O. steamer. He was gone nearly three weeks, and when he returned he found the boys still ensconced in the hotel at Jerusalem. Their first question was about the ring.

"That's all fixed up," replied the major. "No hitch at all in that business. Your father was most helpful there. He put me in touch with the right

people, and acted as guarantee. I received the cheque almost at once. Have you heard from Colonel Villers?"

"The last was a week ago," said Yorke. "He said then that he would be coming out again very soon, as he had put that little matter right at the War Office. Since then we've heard nothing."

"Then I've news for you in that direction. He will be here to-morrow. We came out together on the same boat, and he would have been here to-day, but there was some political dinner in Cairo last night which he was particularly requested to attend. . . . Now what have you been doing with yourselves in the interim?"

"Exploring Jerusalem mostly, with the aid of guide-books. Roy and I are both dead keen on it. Also we've done a few excursions in the country around. We went to Hebron yesterday, and among other things had a look at the blown glass works. Most interesting it was to see them turning out lamps and coloured glass rings. We had intended going out to the monastery of Mar Saba to-morrow, but, of course, we shall put that off as the dad's coming back."

Colonel Villers arrived by train the next day. The boys, accompanied by Major Todd, met him at the station, and all four drove to the hotel in a car. After lunch, when Major Todd had disappeared upstairs in search of one of his black cigars, the colonel drew the boys aside into a corner of the lounge.

"I just want to say, lads, how pleased I am with your conduct. I'm quite proud of you both. The major gave me a full account of the expedition, and confessed that without your help he would have stood no chance of success in his venture, and would probably have lost his life into the bargain. I may tell you that he pleaded with me to take a half of the reward on your behalf, and suggested that it could be put away for you in case of a rainy day, and that you need not know anything about it until the rainy day came. I refused his offer without, I think, hurting his feelings. However, lads, I think you've earned a reward of some sort, so what I wish to say is this: for the rest of our time out here, I place the itinerary of the tour entirely in your hands. You can go where you like and do what you like, and I'll pay the piper."

"And I call that a real sporting offer, Uncle Herbert," cried Roy warmly. "Yorke, we'll get up Smyrna way, and then on to Constantinople."

"And we simply must have a look at Albania, Roy."

"Rather. We'll sprint right across the Balkans."

“Ah, come along, Major Todd,” said the colonel smilingly, as the Australian appeared. “You have an interest in this discussion. The boys are fixing the map of our route. I’ve given them *carte blanche* as a reward for the way they backed you up in your treasure hunt.”

“I certainly couldn’t have wished for better company, colonel. But I wish they would take something more tangible than the mapping out of a tour. It seems to me that I get the lot and they get nothing.”

“You are not quite correct in your summing-up, if I may say so, major. They have got something out of it which is of infinitely more value than mere gold. Unless I am mistaken, they have gained a proved friend.”

“Well, they’ve certainly got that.” There was a ring in the major’s voice which showed that the words were not spoken idly. Then he smiled. “And where are you leading us this time, boys?”

“Smyrna, Constantinople, Albania, and across the Balkans, to start with,” replied Yorke promptly. “Are you game?”

“Why, of course. Just give me time to buy a couple more revolvers and a dagger or two.” The major twinkled. “For such a route seems likely to be the scene of another test of our friendship. Are we taking in Bulgaria?”

“May as well,” said Roy. “We want to do the place properly. Why?”

“Oh, in that case I shall add a blunderbuss to my equipment,” laughed the major.

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[The end of *The Treasure of the Pass* by Stephen Bartlett (as Gurney Slade)]