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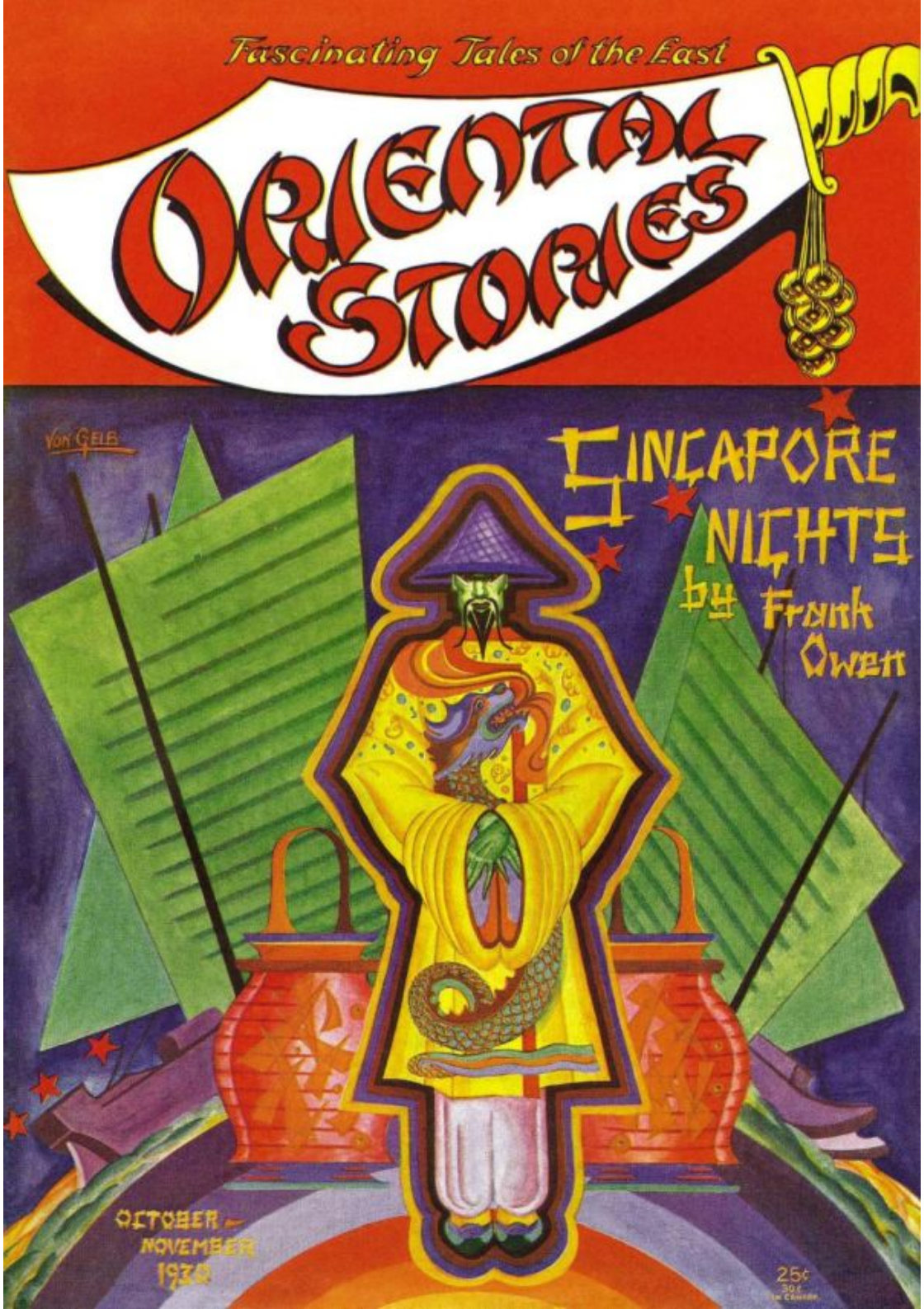
ORIENTAL STORIES

VON GELB

SINGAPORE
NIGHTS
by Frank
Quinn

OCTOBER -
NOVEMBER
1939

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The Man Who Limped

By

OTIS ADELBERT KLINE

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The strange and disagreeable adventure of Hamed the Attar, and how he overcame his perverse hatred of women.

You wonder why I limp, *effendi*? You are too considerate to ask, of course, but I, whom Allah, in his infinite goodness and mercy, has already permitted two years beyond man's allotted three score and ten, have learned to read the thoughts of people by their expressions. Serving as a dragoman sharpens the wits.

You will hear the story? So be it. Here is the coffee-shop of Silat where we can rest in comfort, and the tale will serve to while away the time. This cushioned *diwan* is better than the sidewalk stools, and more quiet.

Ho, Silat! Pipes and coffee for two.

You know me, *effendi*, as Hamed bin Ayyub, the Dragoman, for thus it is that I have been known for many a year—subsisting on the *baksheesh* of worthy travelers like yourself, and showing them the sights of the Holy City.

None remain who remember me as Hamed the Attar, for full fifty years have passed since I was a druggist and perfumer with a prosperous shop of my own.

Looking on this gray beard, this wrinkled countenance, and this withered frame, you will scarce be able to picture Hamed the Attar, for in those days I was a handsome youth with a skin as smooth as peach-bloom, a beard as black as night, and a tall, straight body that was the envy of many of my less favored acquaintances.

Most of my customers, *effendi*, were women, and I was patronized not only by the wives and daughters of the middle class, but by many of the great ladies and kohl-eyed beauties of the harems, as well. Aihee! What a business I did in scents, cosmetics and unguents, in henna, depilatories and aphrodisiacs, so that each day added to my profits, and I was in a fair way to become a man of great wealth.

Each day, also, added to my knowledge of the ways of women, for being prosperous I attracted flirtations from those of little wealth who desired husbands, and being also good to look upon, I received signs, hints, and even plain proposals from those who had wealthy lords but desired handsome lovers.

Many were the kohl-rimmed eyes that signed to me with signs of love—many the slender, henna-tipped fingers that sought to thrill me with their gentle pressures, and many the *yashmaks* that were dropped as if by accident from faces of such ravishing beauty as would have broadened the breast of a sultan.

My father, on whom be peace, was a great and wise *Imam*, and a true and pious believer. "My son," he had told me a hundred times, "beware of women who sign with the eyes and hands—and avoid as thou wouldst the unclean those who, feigning accident or innocence, disclose their charms to thy gaze, for if thou wert to take one of them to wife, Eblis himself could not play thee more falsely, nor wreak more mischief and bring more sorrow upon thee."

His words, perhaps because of their repetition, and also of the great love and respect I bore my father, had made a firm and lasting impression on my mind. Nevertheless, having an eye to business, I feigned ignorance to those who signed or hinted, put off with excuses those who made plain proposals, and turned piously away when aught was revealed that should not be, though I must confess that I was at times sorely tempted, and would perhaps have yielded, had it not been for the timely warning of my father. Thus it came about, that I slowly grew to be a decided misogynist.

For two years this went on, adding to my wealth and to my distrust of and dislike for women. That is, *effendi*, I *thought* I disliked women.

Then I saw *the* woman.

Having grown sufficiently prosperous, I had taken a pretentious, richly furnished house in a quarter favored by well-to-do merchants, and had bought two black slaves to minister to my wants.

So it chanced that, on the evening of the day I took possession of my new dwelling, when my shop was closed and vesper prayers were over, I mounted to my housetop to smoke my *shishab* in the moonlight and enjoy the coolness of the evening.

Scarcely had I seated myself on the cushioned *diwan* which my slaves had brought up for me, ere I heard the soft tones of a woman's voice, so silvery sweet that they might have been those of a *hourî* from Paradise, singing a love song of the *Badawin*.

There was that about the voice which thrilled me unaccountably, and I was consumed with a desire to see the singer. Presently, unable to restrain myself longer, I stood up on the *diwan* and looked over the wall. With that look, *effendi*, went the heart of Hamed the Attar.

The voice, I have said, might have been that of a *hourî* from Paradise, but when I looked over the wall it seemed to me that I looked on one whose comeliness would turn a *hourî* furious with envy. All unmindful of my ardent gaze, she reclined on a low *diwan* placed among potted shrubs and flowers, singing to a bird suspended in a cage before her. And even as I looked, she finished her song, and the bird answered her with trilling notes of its own.

To this day, *effendi*, I see her in my dreams as I saw her that night, her beauty radiant as the sun at dawn, with hair of spun, red gold, with Paradise in her eyes, her bosom an enchantment, and a form waving like the tamarisk when the soft wind blows from the hills of Nejd.

At some distance from her on a mat, there sat an old slave-woman with folded hands. Presently, with croaking voice, she interrupted the sweet warbling of the bird.

"Salamah Khatun," she said, "you sing so beautifully that the voice of the thrush rasps harshly in comparison. It is perhaps for gladness that you sing."

"What gladness, *Ya Ummi*? I have no reason to be glad."

"Is it not, then, an occasion for great joy that your brave and handsome cousin, Sheik Ali ben Mohammed, comes to take you to wife ere the moon waxes full again?"

"To be his third wife, and thus subject to the rule of the first and the jealousies of the second? I do not so understand the significance of joy."

"I, too, was young once, my lady, and though a slave, I loved and sang for love. You can not fool me thus easily, my pretty."

"Nor do I seek to, *Ya Ummi*, but rather to confide in you. I sing for love, but not for love of Sheik Ali, who forces his cousinly claims on me."

“*Awah!* I suspected as much. Today I saw the blush that suffused your cheeks when the youthful attar gazed into your eyes for but a moment. The *yashmak* could not hide it from my old, dim eyes, yet that young and sanctimonious fool did not perceive it. Or if he be not a fool, then is he like graven stone, and in neither case would he be worth a paring of your nail.”

Now when I heard these words of the old woman, *effendi*, though they were not complimentary, my heart leaped with a great joy that knew no bounds, for it happened that I was the only youthful attar in the city, and that I now recognized these two as having come into my shop that very afternoon. I recalled that the young lady had purchased a bottle of my most expensive scent from me, and had blushed when I looked into her eyes for a moment, whereat I had tactfully paid no attention, as was my wont, though marveling at the unusual occurrence. For while signing with the eyes and hands are voluntary, and denote boldness, a blush is involuntary and denotes modesty. It was like finding a nugget of pure gold in a worthless heap of glittering dross.

The old hag continued to vilify me, calling me an “*Akh al-Jahalah*,” which means “Brother of Ignorance,” and many other unpleasant names which I will not trouble to repeat, but her tirade was suddenly cut short by the girl.

“Enough!” she exclaimed. “I will not permit you to slander him thus. Begone, now, and prepare me a warm bath against my retiring.”

The old woman rose, shaking her head sorrowfully.

“*Awah! Awah!*” she groaned. “If this should come to the ears of the great Sheik Ali ben Mohammed, what calamities will befall us all! Were you to marry this fool of a drug-mixer this very night, the next full moon would find you both dead of his wrath, or you a widow and mayhap a slave; whence I would either be a slave of nobody or a slave of a slave.”

“Have no fear, *Ya Ummi*, that I will marry him this night, nor any other,” said the girl. “He does not even know that I exist; much less does he care. Go now. Prepare my bath and cease your wailing, or people will think we have a death in the house.”

Now, *effendi*, having heard all this, and seeing the girl cooing softly to the little bird, which had grown tired and tucked its head under its wing, I was more than ever affected by the beauty and modesty of this maiden, and the secret love she bore me, and desired her above all my possessions and above all the wealth which it had been my hope to acquire. Yea, I desired her even above my hope of Paradise.

This being so clear in my mind as to admit of no doubt, and I being a man of action, I climbed to the top of the wall and noiselessly let myself down not ten paces from her. So silent was my tread in my *mezz* of soft morocco, that I stood beside her, yet she was not aware of my presence.

Folding my arms, and bowing my head, like a slave awaiting the will of his master, I coughed gently.

She looked up at me, uttered a stifled cry of fear, and sprang to her feet on the other side of the *diwan*. Then, seizing a wrap of flimsy, translucent material, she threw it over her head and drew a corner across her face so that only her glorious, terrified eyes were visible.

“Have no fear, O lady,” I said, “and make no outcry, for I will go at your command, but only humbly ask leave to say what I have come to say before I depart.”

“Oh, my misfortune! Oh, my sorrow! Oh, my disgrace!” she exclaimed, drawing still farther away from me. “And alas, it is Hamed the Attar who brings this shame upon me.”

“Nay, Hamed your Slave,” I replied. “Wilt vouchsafe me but a moment to say that which I have come to say?”

For answer, she flashed at me such a look of scorn that I truly felt the very slave I had named myself. Then she turned her shapely back on me and started toward the stairway.

“Wait,” I pleaded, whipping my *jambiyah* from its sheath and poising its keen, curved blade above my heart, “or you leave only the corpse of Hamed your Slave behind you.”

At this, she turned and surveyed me with a look of concern that flooded my heart with hope. Her words, however, were words of scorn.

“Alas,” she said, “that my faith in you has been so rudely destroyed. I had thought you different from other men, and better, yet you violate the sanctity of the *harim* without so much as a single ‘*destoo’r*’ to warn me to veil my face. You, whom I had thought so good and so pious, enter my house like a common thief, to my disgrace and your own unending shame. Now you heap injury upon injury by threatening to take your life here. Take it, if you will, for it is a worthless thing, but pray do so elsewhere.”

Humiliated beyond words, I sheathed my *jambiyah*, bowed low, and slowly walked back to the wall over which I had just come. I realized that every heart-stabbing word she had uttered was truth, and that I had committed one of the most disgraceful crimes a believer may commit. I was about to draw myself up on the wall when, to my surprise, I heard her speak once more.

“Stay.”

Turning, I saw her coming toward me, and with head bowed and arms folded once more, I awaited her further words.

“I know not why my heart is softened toward you, transgressor and profaner though you are,” she said, coming up before me, “yet the deed is done, and may not be undone by your sudden departure. Nor can it be made worse by your lingering a moment longer. I therefore grant you leave to say that which you came to say, providing only that it is honorable.”

“O, lady,” I replied, “it is honorable in thought and purpose, yet I dare not say it now, with the full realization of the heinous crime I have so thoughtlessly committed, upon me. My only words, then, will be to humbly ask your forgiveness for what I have done.”

“Allah does not withhold His mercy from the truly penitent. Who, then, am I to refuse you pardon? Take my forgiveness, freely granted, but pray to Allah for His.”

“May He requite you,” I said fervently, and laid my hand on the wall to draw myself up.

“Must you go?” she asked.

I paused. There was that in her eyes which somehow reassured me and bade me stay. After all, I had come with a definite purpose in mind, and it was the height of folly to leave without accomplishing it, now that I had the opportunity.

“It lies in your province to say,” I replied.

She laughed softly.

“I fear you have an ally, a very powerful aid on which you have not counted,” she said. “Woman’s curiosity has got the better of me, and it seems that I simply must know what you came to tell me. Take your moment, therefore, and say your say.”

I stood awkwardly before her, not knowing how to begin—seeking suitable words with which to describe fittingly the depth and purity of my passion. Finding none, and marking her growing impatience, I blurted it out in a most unseemly and uncourtly fashion.

“I came to tell you that I love you, and to ask you to become my wife.”

She drew in her breath sharply, and swayed slightly toward me, but when I would have caught her in my arms she quickly eluded me.

“Your words are no less startling than your manner of entrance,” she said when she had recovered herself, “nor are they less unconventional. If what you say be true, why have you not sent *khatibeh* women to convey the message, as is the custom? Surely you are not too poor to employ at least one *khatibeh*.”

“Nor a dozen, nor a hundred,” I rejoined. “I would squander my all on *khatibeh* women, if I might thus hope to win you. No, the reason is to be found in my own foolhardy precipitancy. Tonight, when I heard you singing, I suddenly realized that I loved you. I wanted to be with you, if but for a moment, to tell you——”

“Enough,” she said coldly. “You heard me singing, so I presume you also heard what I said to my slave. If so——”

It was my turn to interrupt.

“I heard you talking to someone,” I lied, instinctively feeling that her outraged pride would be my undoing, “but as to what was said, I know nothing.”

“Allah forgive you if you speak not the truth,” she said. “But I will grant you the benefit of the doubt. As to that which you have asked of me, it is that which I have not the power to give, even if I were inclined to give it.”

“You mean that you have parents—a guardian?”

“Not that. My parents have been received into the mercy of Allah, and I have no guardian. Being of age, I am legally my own mistress, yet I have a cousin, a powerful and war-like sheik of the Beni Sakr tribe, who has given notice that he comes next month to claim his cousinly prerogative.”

Well I knew, *effendi*, the rights which tradition and custom give a first cousin in such matters, and of the affront which would be placed upon him if his priority claim were disregarded. And only too well was I aware of the revenge which a powerful and war-like sheik would take for a transgression of such rights. Yet so great was my desire for this girl that I would have risked my life a thousand times to possess her.

“Such little as I have to offer, in comparison to that which your cousin can give you,” I replied, “is yours for the choosing. Only name your will, and it shall be the will of Hamed your Slave.”

“I can not answer you now,” she said. “I must have time to think.”

“So be it,” I replied, swinging up on the wall.

“My slave-woman will convey my answer to you,” she said. “Meanwhile, send no *khatibeh*, for I would spare you all unnecessary expense, and say nothing to anyone about this, lest it reach the ears of my cousin.”

“To hear is to obey,” I said. Then I dropped onto my own *diwan* where I spent the rest of the night smoking, and thinking over my strange adventure and what it might lead to, until the *mueddin* called the summons for the dawn prayer. . . .

After prayers and breakfast, I went to my shop, but found it difficult to keep my mind on my business. Being lovesick, I mooned about, with the result that my faculties were not as keen as they should have been, and I lost several opportunities for quite profitable sales. When midafternoon came, I made up a package of choice perfumes, cosmetics and unguents, and sent my apprentice with them to the Lady Salamah, telling him that all was paid, and forbidding him to accept anything for them.

When he returned he told me that an old slave-woman had met him at the door, and had taken the package without so much as an offer of *baksheesh*.

On the following day, I sent a porter with a choice collection of potted flowers and shrubs which I had purchased at no little cost.

On the third, I forwarded by messenger an assortment of delicious and costly sweetmeats.

The next day being *El-Goom'ah*, which is our Sabbath, I repaired to the mosque for worship at the noon call, nor did I reopen my shop thereafter, but spent the rest of the day in holy contemplation, and in selfishly praying Allah to soften the heart of the lady toward me.

The fifth day found me still without word from her whose love-slave I had become, and in the afternoon I purchased a valuable prayer rug on which were depicted the *mihrab*—the tree of life—and the hands of Mohammed, the Apostle of Allah, on whom be peace and prayer. This I sent to the lady by messenger.

On the sixth day I sent a bale of valuable hangings, tapestries and silks.

The seventh day arrived without word from my beloved, and I sat behind the curtains in the rear of my shop, leaving my apprentice to attend to all sales. By this time, hope had so far fled me that my bosom was constricted, so that I no longer had the power of peace. In the afternoon, I rose, and taking with me a considerable sum of money, visited a jeweler, where I purchased an *asawir* bracelet studded with diamonds of great price.

I had resolved to deliver this valuable present in person, but passing my shop on the way, I looked within and was overjoyed to see the familiar figure of the Lady Salamah's slave-woman, evidently awaiting my return.

After I entered, and we had exchanged greetings, I led her into the rear room, anxious to hear what she would have to say.

"My mistress," she said, "sends you the peace, and the wish that Allah may increase your prosperity because of your great thoughtfulness and generosity. She has directed me to inform you that she will accept your offer under certain conditions."

"And what may be the conditions?" I inquired.

"They have to do with her safety, comfort and dignity," she said.

"Then I accede without further question."

"But wait," continued the old slave. "You may find them difficult."

"Well, name them," I said.

"My lady will not be married except in a manner befitting her station in life."

"That can be arranged," I answered.

"But not here in Jerusalem. Remember the question of my lady's safety. A secret marriage she will not have, but a wedding suited to her position would instantly be known over the entire city, and her cousin the sheik would learn of it and come for his vengeance."

"Then how can it be consummated?"

"By marrying elsewhere. Her desire, in brief, is this: that you sell all your possessions here, and take her to Damascus, where the ceremony will be performed. Only thus can you hope to escape the wrath of her war-like cousin. You can then set up a new business in Damascus without fear of being molested."

"But how travel in secret to Damascus?"

"Can you not get camels, and a litter?"

"But if we join a caravan the news will travel back to the sheik, and he will follow us, even to Damascus; so it were as well to stay here and have it out with him."

“Are you then afraid to fare forth with my mistress and me, you and your two slaves? If she puts her trust in your strength and bravery to protect her from the *Harami*, are you yourself fearful of them? Are you less brave than a woman? Fie upon you! I will go back and tell my lady you are afraid.”

“Stay, and be not so ready to judge me before I have spoken. I am not afraid for myself—only for the danger which she might run. If it is her desire to go, her will is my will. Tell her I will be glad to do all she asks, and only await her final word. Pray convey to her this *asawir*, a slight symbol of my affection, tendered with the hope that she may consider it a token of our pledged troth.”

“I go, and will return the answer of my mistress in the morning. . . .”

In the morning, the old woman returned, according to her word, and told me that her mistress would be ready to go with me in a week, that in the meantime she would dispose of her property, except such as might be taken with us. She also told me that her lady did not wish to put me to unnecessary expense and would therefore be willing to ride in an ordinary *shugduf*, or one-camel litter, but she added that if I wished to show true affection I would provide a *takht-rawan* with two camels of easy gait to carry it, as she feared her mistress’ frail form would not stand the swaying and jerking of a *shugduf*. This I promised to do, and she departed.

I immediately set about disposing of my business, my house, and other property which I did not have the means or the desire to transport.

Within the week, I had completed all preparations, packed my belongings, and purchased a gorgeous *takht-rawan*, together with brass and scarlet trappings and two gentle, sure-footed dromedaries to carry it. My two black slaves I retained to lead the dromedaries, and purchased also a third slave and four pack-camels to be haltered together and led by him, carrying our tents, provisions, rugs, and other possessions. For my own use I bought a swift-pacing dromedary with a splendid saddle and equipment. Each of my slaves I armed with two pistols, a simitar, and a *jambiyah*, and in addition to this armament for myself, I carried a rifle, slung across my back. The greater part of my possessions I had converted into gold, which I divided into equal quantities and placed in strong bags depending from either side of my saddle.

Thus prepared and equipped, it was with no small feeling of pride and satisfaction that I drew up my cavalcade before the door of my lady’s house. She was ready to go—a virtue which I understand is quite lacking with your *Ferringeh* women—and I noticed with satisfaction that she had disposed of all but a few of her belongings, which consisted of the rug and bale of goods I had given her, a small bundle of clothing, her caged song-bird, and her slave.

I assisted her and the old woman into the *takht-rawan*, while the slaves loaded her belongings on the pack-camels, and I reflected that the crafty old hag, when advising a two-camel litter, had probably been quite as much concerned about her own comfort as that of her mistress.

It was early morning when we set out, and coming to the Via Dolorosa—along which walked Sayyidna Isa with the cross, nineteen centuries ago—we passed thence through the Bab es Subat, which the *Ferringeh* call St. Stephen’s Gate, and struck out on the Jericho Road, our first objective the Hajj Road which leads from Mecca to Damascus.

Having traveled all day with but a short stop for prayers, food and rest, we made camp in a wady, some fifteen miles beyond El Ghor, near Mt. Nebo. We pitched three tents—one for the lady and her slave, one for my slaves, and one for me.

My slaves built a fire, and would have prepared coffee, but my lady insisted on doing this herself, and her old slave, who was busy baking bread, declared that no coffee was quite so good as that prepared by the fair hands of her mistress.

As I watched my affianced at her tasks, and noticed her grace, her skill, and above all, her maidenly modesty—for she continually kept herself veiled to the eyes—I felt that she was indeed worth a thousandfold more than any cost I might be able to bear for her.

The coffee prepared, she tasted it, then, as a mark of special favor to me, stuck a small lump of ambergris in the bottom of my cup, that my beverage might be perfumed with it. I asked her to enjoy it with me, but she insisted that she had purchased this ambergris for me alone, and hoped that her lord-to-be, who being an attar was an excellent judge of such things, might find it good.

One of my slaves, meanwhile, brought me my *shishah*, and I smoked, and enjoyed many cups of coffee while the meal was being prepared. Presently, to my great surprize, I found myself growing drowsy. My head nodded, and I heard, as if in a dream, my lady commanding her slave-woman to serve coffee to my slaves, as there was more than enough for all of us. Then a strange sensation came over me—a feeling of exhilaration and of lightness, as if I were floating in the air like a bit of down. This was followed by strange and grotesque hallucinations, in which I would, at one time, imagine myself as tall as Mt. Nebo, and at another, as small as the ants that crawled at my feet. A word seemed to be forming itself in my mind. Presently I saw it flash in letters of fire from various points of the landscape. I saw it written on a silvery cloud in the sky above me. The word was “*bhang*.” More I do not remember, for consciousness left me. . . .

The sun had been near to setting when I lost consciousness. When I awoke it had just risen. Moreover, I was no longer in the friendly shadow of Mt. Nebo, but was surrounded by a glittering expanse of rolling sand dunes. My head ached frightfully, I had a feeling of intense nausea, and my muscles were sore and bruised as if they had been pounded. Attempting to move my arms, I found them bound to my sides. My feet, also, were tied together. I turned on my left side, and saw that my three black slaves were lying on the sand, all bound and helpless. Turning on my right side, I beheld two women and a man packing camp equipment and utensils on my kneeling camels. The man I had never seen before, but the women, their faces now indecently unveiled, were the two I had brought out with me. A mule, evidently belonging to the strange man, was tethered near my beasts.

She whom I had known as the Lady Salamah was the first to notice that I had awakened. She immediately called this to the attention of her male companion, and the two walked to where I lay. To my horror, I saw that she was attired in the costume of a common *ghazeeyeh*, a shameless dancing girl who displays herself before all men in vulgar postures and movements, and that her companion was a low and extremely villainous-looking hautboy player with a warty, bulbous nose and a black patch over one eye.

The fellow spurned me with his foot.

“Sit up, O son of a disease,” he ordered gruffly.

“Not at your command, O spawn of a pestilence,” I replied.

He kicked me again so that my ribs were near crushed in when I uttered this defiance, then swung on the girl. "Build a fire, slave, and heat the oil," he commanded. "We shall see to the case of this thief who robs the homes of true believers."

"Harkening and obedience, master," she replied, and set about building a fire.

"Now, stealer of slaves and profaner of the *harim*," he said addressing me once more. "You know the penalty the Koran and the law of the land impose for theft. Can you give me any good reason why I should not strike off your right hand, which is the legal penalty for the first offense?"

"What mockery is this?" I asked him. "First I am drugged with *bhāng* and robbed. Then I am accused of theft."

"First, O father of a calamity, you committed theft. Then you were drugged and bound, but you have not been robbed. I have taken nothing from you but my own property, as Allah is my witness. Yours is untouched, and near at hand."

"Will you be so kind as to inform me what I have stolen?" I asked.

"In the first place, O dog, you stole my slave-girl, Salamah."

"She was represented to me as a great lady, whose favors were her own," I retorted.

"That does not excuse you, even if true." So saying, he suddenly seized me by my beard and jerked me to a sitting posture. Then he unbound my right hand, and unsheathed his simitar.

"Will you hold out your hand, that I may strike it off?" he asked. "Or must I have it bound across one of your bales?"

The girl, who had placed a small cauldron of oil over the fire, the purpose of which I knew only too well, now walked over in front of me, swaying her hips in the wanton manner of the *ghazeeeyeh*.

"Is there no help for it, but that you cut off his hand, my lord?" she asked.

"There is no help," he replied. "Hold out your hand, O sink of corruption."

"It is pitiful for him to lose his hand," she said, "when he has worldly goods with which he may expiate his crime. They can be replaced, but a hand lost is lost forever."

"That is true," he replied. "Offender against the law, how much is your right hand worth to you?"

Before replying, I considered the situation in which I was placed. What he had said regarding the law was only too true, and it was quite apparent that Salamah was really the slave of this villainous musician. The fact that he and the two women had plotted against me to bring this very thing about, might or might not be capable of proof. In the meantime they had not only the Koran and the law of the land on their side, but the well-known "right of might" as well.

I bethought me of the two bags of gold which hung from my saddle, each of which represented nearly half of my fortune. After all, what is half of one's fortune compared to one's right hand?

"There is a bag of gold hanging on the right side of my saddle," I replied. "If it suffice you not, then strike off my hand."

Immediately he sent the slave-girl to fetch the bag, and when she brought it, he examined and hefted it.

"A fair price for a right hand," he said. Then he turned to my three slaves, who had by this time regained consciousness. "You have heard and seen this transaction, and bear witness that your master has purchased his right hand with this gold," he said.

All assented.

“It is well. The right hand is secure to your master. Now, the Koran says that for the second offense, the left foot shall be cut off. Your master has committed a second offense, in that he stole Marjanah, the slave of my slave. Unbind his left foot from the other, that I may strike it off.”

“Is there no remedy, master, but that you strike off his left foot?” asked the girl.

“There is none,” he answered. “It is the command of the Koran, which every true believer should obey.”

“But if he make restitution, can not his foot be saved to him?”

“Take the other bag of gold, which hangs on the left of my saddle, and have done with it,” I groaned.

Whereupon the slave-girl fetched the other bag of gold, and my slaves were duly exhorted to bear witness to the transaction.

“It grieves me to relate,” said the mendicant, screwing his ugly face into a look of extreme sternness, “that still another theft has been committed. The song-bird of my slave was stolen—carried out of my house, and into the highways and byways. The Koran expressly states that, for the third offense of this nature, the left hand of the thief must be cut off. Therefore, O my pretty slave, bind his right hand and unbind his left, that I may comply with the command of Allah, the great, the glorious, issued through Mohammed the Apostle, on whom be peace.”

“There lie my three slaves,” I said. “Take them and leave me my hand.”

“Their value is but slight,” said the ruffian, glancing contemptuously at them. “Now if you will include the camels, together with their trappings, all weapons and ammunition, and all things which they have carried to this place, your person excepted, then will I consider your offer.”

“What! All these for a song-bird?”

“Nay, for your left hand.”

“Take them—take all,” I moaned. “I may as well be utterly ruined.”

“You heard him?” asked the fellow triumphantly.

“We heard, and bear witness,” replied my slaves and his, in a chorus.

“Unbind these slaves, girl, since they are now mine,” he ordered.

When she had unbound them, and they had stretched their cramped limbs, he said: “Ho slaves! Two of you attend the beasts, and the third come here. I have yet a duty to perform toward this stealer of slaves and violator of the *harim*.”

When my former black slave had come up to where I sat, in accordance with the command of his new master, the mendicant continued: “Much as it pains me to dwell on the many offenses of this habitual criminal, there is yet another crime which must be expiated. This villain, who is so crafty he could steal the kohl from off the eyelid, and so depraved he would undertake it, has pilfered, in addition to other property, the cage in which the bird of my slave is confined. He who would steal the home of a bird must be a scoundrel indeed. Now the Koran explicitly commands that when a fourth offense of this nature is committed, the right foot shall be cut off. Who am I to disregard the commands of Allah, the One and Most High God?”

“It is there you are in error,” I corrected him, “for the *Sooneh* law expressly ordains that this punishment shall not be inflicted if the value of the stolen property be less than a quarter of a *deenar*.”

“Unfortunately for your argument, and your foot,” he replied, “the cage cost me exactly twice that sum. Unbind his legs, therefore, slave, that I may comply with the law.”

“Is there no alternative, but that you strike off his foot?” asked the girl.

“There is absolutely none,” he replied. “Has he not just told us that he is penniless?”

“Yet he has one thing which everyone has, and which he can give,” said the girl.

“What is that?” asked her master.

“His blessing,” she replied.

“True enough, yet it does not suffice.”

“But it is something.”

“It is something. If he give me his blessing, I will only strike off part of his foot.”

And so, near choking with rage at the irony of this final humiliation, I called upon Almighty Allah to bless this malefactor, his slaves, his relatives, and his descendants.

Scarcely had I finished, ere he swung his simitar and cut off all the toes of my right foot. Then, while my former slave held me, he plunged the wounded stump into boiling oil, and stopped the bleeding. At this, I swooned dead away. . . .

When I came to my senses, I was alone. There was no sign of the beasts or the people who had surrounded me when I fainted. My hands had been unbound, and in one of them was a note. Gritting my teeth with the pain of my wounded foot, I opened and read the missive:

In the Name of Allah, the Merciful, the Compassionate!

To Hamed the Attar, greeting:

Food, cooking-utensils, water, coffee and tobacco are under the mat behind you. There is sufficient of everything to last you two weeks, but your foot should be well enough to permit of some travel within ten days. It had been spared you entirely, except that, as it is, it will effectively dissuade you from the folly of following me. Follow the path of the setting sun, and you will reach the Hajj Road, where assistance is bound to be forthcoming, and

The Peace.

HE WHOM YOU ROBBED.

I abode in that barren spot for ten days, whereupon my foot was nearly healed as the note had prophesied. Then I slowly and painfully made my way to the Hajj Road, and then, with the help of a kind-hearted traveler who had room for me on his *shugduf*, to Jerusalem.

Being penniless and crippled, I was forced to beg for a living until a certain learned *Ferringeh*, hearing my story, gave me light work to do in his home, and in return for my poor services gave me food and lodging, and taught me your language. My benefactor left, but his teachings enabled me to make a living thereafter as a dragoman.

And so you will conclude, *effendi*, that I became a confirmed misogynist, and never married. Not so. It chanced one day, when I was passing the *hammam*, a well-dressed young lady of pleasing carriage signed to me with her eyes. Not being employed at the moment, I followed her at a distance and learned where she lived. I loitered about the place thereafter when business was poor, and she sat in the window of the *harim* and flirted with me. Several times she made it appear that her veil had slipped out of place, and thereby revealed to me a countenance of rare beauty. I had saved some money, so I sent a *khatibeh* to sue for her hand,

and we were married. For forty years she was a true and faithful wife to me. Then Allah received her into His mercy.

They tell me, *effendi*, that you have in your country many women and girls who brazenly expose as much of their persons as the law will allow—who pluck their eyebrows, kohl their eyes, dye their cheeks, make scarlet their lips with red grease, and flirt with men. But I am also informed that you have a few females whose becoming modesty forbids these things, and who are, therefore, bright and shining examples of virtue in an otherwise vicious and depraved world.

If I were of your people, *effendi*, I should never cease extolling the excellence of these modest and reticent maidens who *seem* too good to be true—but I would select a wife from among the others.

Ho, Silat! Bring the sweet and take the full!

[The end of *The Man Who Limped* by Otis Albert Kline]