

TAUCHNITZ EDITION

COLLECTION OF BRITISH AND AMERICAN AUTHORS

VOL. 4276

THE GOLDEN SILENCE

BY

C. N. & A. M. WILLIAMSON

IN TWO VOLUMES

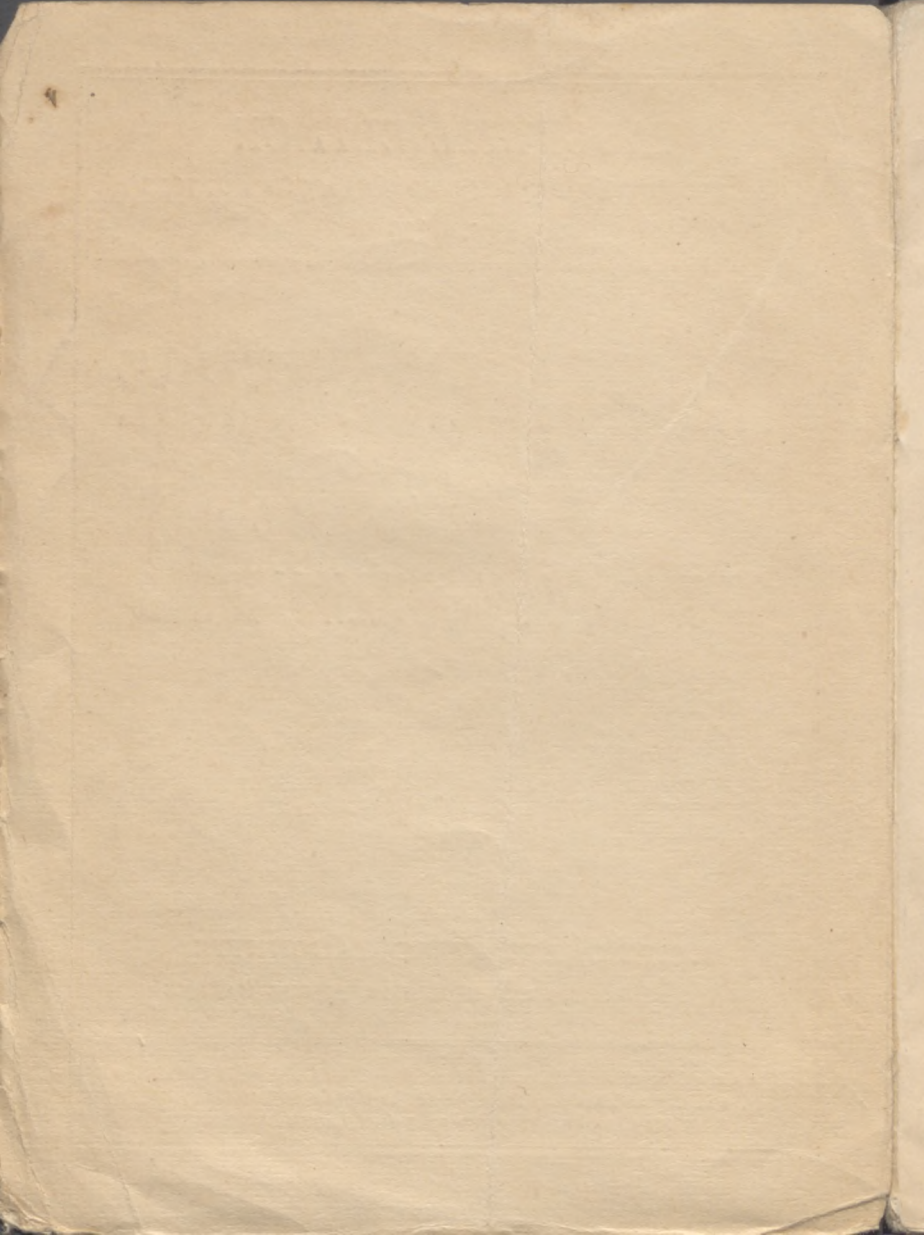
VOL. 1

LEIPZIG: BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

PARIS: LIBRAIRIE HENRI GAULON, 39, RUE MADAME

The Copyright of this Collection is purchased for Continental Circulation only, and the volumes may therefore not be introduced into Great Britain or her Colonies. (See also pp. 3-6 of Large Catalogue.)

EACH VOLUME SOLD SEPARATELY



H. Hamann

1920. Reval.

COLLECTION
OF
BRITISH AUTHORS

TAUCHNITZ EDITION.

VOL. 4276.

THE GOLDEN SILENCE.

BY

C. N. AND A. M. WILLIAMSON.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

TAUCHNITZ EDITION.

By the same Authors,

THE LIGHTNING CONDUCTOR . . .	1 vol.
LADY BETTY ACROSS THE WATER . .	1 vol.
THE MOTOR MAID	1 vol.
LORD LOVELAND DISCOVERS AMERICA.	1 vol.
THE GUESTS OF HERCULES	2 vols.
THE HEATHER MOON	2 vols.
SET IN SILVER	2 vols.
THE LOVE PIRATE	2 vols.
IT HAPPENED IN EGYPT	2 vols.

THE
GOLDEN SILENCE

BY

C. N. AND A. M. WILLIAMSON

AUTHORS OF "THE LIGHTNING CONDUCTOR," "THE MOTOR MAID,"
"LORD LOVELAND DISCOVERS AMERICA," ETC.

COPYRIGHT EDITION

IN TWO VOLUMES

VOL. I

LEIPZIG
BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

1911.

THE
GOLDEN SILENCE



U K-1945/483

1226665

THE GOLDEN SILENCE

TO
EFFENDI
HIS BOOK.

TO
ERRAND
THE

THE GOLDEN SILENCE.

I.

STEPHEN KNIGHT was very angry, though he meant to be kind and patient with Margot. Perhaps, after all, she had not given the interview to the newspaper reporter. It might be what she herself would call a "fake." But as for her coming to stop at a big, fashionable hotel like the Carlton, in the circumstances she could hardly have done anything in worse taste.

He hated to think that she was capable of taking so false a step. He hated to think that it was exactly like her to take it. He hated to be obliged to call on her in the hotel; and he hated himself for hating it.

Knigh was of the world that is inclined to regard servants as automata; but he was absurdly self-conscious as he saw his card on a silver tray, in the hand of an expressionless, liveried youth who probably had the famous interview in his pocket. If not there, it was only because the paper would not fit in. The footman had certainly read the interview, and followed the "Northmorland Case" with passionate interest, for months, from the time it began with melodrama, and turned violently to tragedy,

up to the present moment when (as the journalists neatly crammed the news into a nutshell) "it bade fair to end with marriage-bells."

Many servants and small tradespeople in London had taken shares, Stephen had heard, as a speculative investment, in the scheme originated to provide capital for the "other side," which was to return a hundred per cent. in case of success. Probably the expressionless youth was inwardly reviling the Northmorland family because he had lost his money and would be obliged to carry silver trays all the rest of his life, instead of starting a greengrocery business. Stephen hoped that his own face was as expressionless, as he waited to receive the unwelcome message that Miss Lorenzi was at home.

It came very quickly, and in a worse form than Stephen had expected. Miss Lorenzi was in the Palm Court, and would Mr. Knight please come to her there?

Of course he had to obey; but it was harder than ever to remain expressionless.

There were a good many people in the Palm Court, and they all looked at Stephen Knight as he threaded his intricate way among chairs and little tables and palms, toward a corner where a young woman in black crape sat on a pink sofa. Her hat was very large, and a palm with enormous fan-leaves drooped above it like a sympathetic weeping willow on a mourning brooch. But under the hat was a splendidly beautiful dark face.

"Looks as if he were on his way to be shot," a man who knew all about the great case said to a woman who had lunched with him.

"Looks more as if he were on his way to shoot," she laughed, as one does laugh at other people's troubles, which are apt to be ridiculous. "He's simply glaring."

"Poor beggar!" Her companion found pleasure in pitying Lord Northmorland's brother, whom he had never succeeded in getting to know. "Which is he, fool or hero?"

"Both. A fool to have proposed to the girl. A hero to stick to her, now he has proposed. He must be awfully sick about the interview. I do think it's excuse enough to throw her over."

"I don't know. It's the sort of business a man can't very well chuck, once he's let himself in for it. Everyone blames him now for having anything to do with Miss Lorenzi. They'd blame him a lot more for throwing her over."

"Women wouldn't."

"No. Because he happens to be young and good-looking. But all his popularity won't make the women who like him receive his wife. She isn't a woman's woman."

"I should think not, indeed! We're too clever to be taken in by that sort, all eyes and melodrama. They say Lord Northmorland warned his brother against her, and prophesied she'd get hold of him, if he didn't let her alone. The Duchess of Amidon told Lady Peggy Lynch—whom I know a little—that immediately after Lorenzi committed suicide, this Margot girl wrote to Stephen Knight and implored him to help her. I can quite believe she would. Fancy the daughter of the unsuccessful claimant to his brother's title writing begging letters to a young man like Stephen Knight! It appeals to one's sense of humour."

"What a pity Knight didn't see it in that light—what?"

"Yet he has a sense of humour, I believe. It's supposed to be one of his charms. But the sense of humour

often fails where one's own affairs are concerned. You know he's celebrated for his quaint ideas about life. They say he has socialistic views, or something rather like them. His brother and he are as different from one another as light is from darkness. Stephen gives away a lot of money, and Lady Peggy says that nobody ever asks him for anything in vain. He can't stand seeing people unhappy, if he can do anything to help. Probably, after he'd been kind to the Lorenzi girl, against his brother's advice, and gone to see her a few times, she grovelled at his feet and told him she was all alone in the world, and would die if he didn't love her. He's just young enough and romantic enough to be caught in that way!"

"He's no boy. He must be nearly thirty."

"All nice, normal men are boys until after thirty. Lady Peggy's new name for this poor child is the Martyr Knight."

"St. Stephen the Second is the last thing I heard. Stephen the First was a martyr too, wasn't he? Stoned to death or something."

"I believe so," hastily returned the lady, who was not learned in martyrology. "He will be stoned, too, if he tries to force Miss Lorenzi on his family, or even on his friends. He'll find that he'll have to take her abroad."

"That might be a good working plan. Foreigners wouldn't shudder at her accent. And she's certainly one of the most gorgeously beautiful creatures I ever saw."

"Yes, that's just the right*expression. Gorgeous. And—a *creature*."

They both laughed, and fell to talking again of the interview.

Stephen Knight's ears were burning. He could not hear any of the things people were saying; but he had a

lively imagination, and, always sensitive, he had grown morbidly so since the beginning of the Northmorland-Lorenzi case, when all the failings and eccentricities of the family had been reviewed before the public eye, like a succession of cinematograph pictures. It did not occur to Stephen that he was an object of pity, but he felt that through his own folly and that of another, he had become a kind of scarecrow, a figure of fun: and because until now the world had laughed with instead of at him, he would rather have faced a shower of bullets than a ripple of ridicule.

"How do you do?" he enquired stiffly, and shook Miss Lorenzi's hand as she gave it without rising from the pink sofa. She gazed up at him with immense, yellowish brown eyes, then fluttered her long black lashes in a way she had, which was thrilling—the first time you saw it. But Stephen had seen it often.

"I *am* glad you've come, my White Knight!" she said in her contralto voice, which would have been charming but for a crude accent. "I was so afraid you were cross."

"I'm not cross, only extremely ang—vexed if you really did talk to that journalist fellow," Stephen answered, trying not to speak sharply, and keeping his tone low. "Only, for Heaven's sake, Margot, don't call me—what you did call me—anywhere, but especially here, where we might as well be on the stage of a theatre."

"Nobody can hear us," she defended herself. "You ought to like that dear little name I made up because you came to my rescue, and saved me from following my father—came into my life as if you'd been a modern St. George. Calling you my 'White Knight' shows you how I feel—how I appreciate you and everything. If you just *would* realise that, you couldn't scold me."

"I'm not scolding you," he said desperately. "But couldn't you have stopped in your sitting-room—I suppose you have one—and let me see you there? It's loathsome making a show of ourselves——"

"I *haven't* a private sitting-room. It would have been too extravagant," returned Miss Lorenzi. "Please sit down—by me."

Stephen sat down, biting his lip. He must not begin to lecture her, or even to ask why she had exchanged her quiet lodgings for the Carlton Hotel, because if he once began, he knew that he would be carried on to unsafe depths. Besides, he was foolish enough to hate hurting a woman's feelings, even when she most deserved to have them hurt.

"Very well. It can't be helped now. Let us talk," said Stephen. "The first thing is, what to do with this newspaper chap, if you didn't give him the interview——"

"Oh, I did give it—in a way," she admitted, looking rather frightened, and very beautiful. "You mustn't do anything to him. But—of course it was only because I thought it would be better to tell him the truth. Surely it was?"

"Surely it wasn't. You oughtn't to have received him."

"Then do you mind so dreadfully having people know you've asked me to marry you, and that I've said 'yes'?"

Margot Lorenzi's expression of pathetic reproach was as effective as her eyelash play, when seen for the first time, as Stephen knew to his sorrow. But he had seen the one as often as the other.

"You must know I didn't mean anything of the sort. Oh, Margot, if you don't understand, I'm afraid you're hopeless."

"If you speak like that to me, I shall simply end everything as my father did," murmured the young woman, in a stifled, breaking voice. But her eyes were blazing.

It almost burst from Stephen to order her not to threaten him again, to tell her that he was sick of melodrama, sick to the soul; but he kept silence. She was a passionate woman, and perhaps in a moment of madness she might carry out her threat. He had done a great deal to save her life—or, as he thought, to save it. After going so far he must not fail now in forbearance. And worse than having to live with beautiful, dramatic Margot, would it be to live without her if she killed herself because of him.

"Forgive me. I didn't mean to hurt you," he said when he could control his voice.

She smiled. "No, of course you didn't. It was stupid of me to fly out. I ought to know that you're always good. But I *don't* see what harm the interview could do you, or me, or anyone. It lets all the world know how gloriously you've made up to me for the loss of the case, and the loss of my father; and how you came into my life just in time to save me from killing myself, because I was utterly alone, defeated, without money or hope."

She spoke with the curiously thrilling emphasis she knew how to give her words sometimes, and Stephen could not help thinking she did credit to her training. She had been preparing for the stage in Canada, the country of the Lorenzis' adoption, before her father brought her to England, whither he came with a flourish of trumpets to contest Lord Northmorland's rights to the title.

"The world knew too much about our affairs already," Stephen said aloud. "And when you wished our engage-

ment to be announced in *The Morning Post*, I had it put in at once. Wasn't that enough?"

"Everyone in the world doesn't read *The Morning Post*. But I should think everyone in the world *has* read that interview, or will soon," retorted Margot. "It appeared only yesterday morning, and was copied in all the evening papers; in this morning's ones too; and they say it's been cabled word for word to the big Canadian and American dailies."

Stephen had his gloves in his hand, and he tore a slit across the palm of one, without knowing it. But Margot saw. He was thinking of the heading in big black print at the top of the interview: "Romantic Climax to the Northmorland-Lorenzi Case. Only Brother of Lord Northmorland to Marry the Daughter of Dead Canadian Claimant. Wedding Bells Relieve Note of Tragedy."

"We've nothing to be ashamed of—everything to be proud of," Miss Lorenzi went on. "You, of your own noble behaviour to me, which, as I said to the reporter, must be making my poor father happy in another world. Me, because I have won You, *far* more than because some day I shall have gained all that father failed to win for me and himself. His heart was broken, and he took his own life. My heart would have been broken too, and but for you I——"

"Don't, please," Stephen broke in. "We won't talk any more about the interview. I'd like to forget it. I should have called here yesterday, as I wired in answer to your telegram saying you were at the Carlton, but being at my brother's place in Cumberland, I couldn't get back till——"

"Oh, I understand," Margot cut in. Then she laughed a sly little laugh. "I think I understand too why you

went to Cumberland. Now tell me. Confession's good for the soul. Didn't your brother wire for you the minute he saw that announcement in *The Morning Post*, day before yesterday?"

"He did wire. Or rather the Duchess did, asking me to go at once to Cumberland, on important business. I found your telegram, forwarded from my flat, when I got to Northmorland Hall. If I'd known you were moving, I wouldn't have gone till to-day."

"You mean, dear, you wouldn't have let me move? Now, do you think there's any harm in a girl of my age being alone in a hotel? If you do, it's dreadfully old-fashioned of you. I'm twenty-four."

During the progress of the case, it had been mentioned in court that the claimant's daughter was twenty-nine (exactly Stephen Knight's age); but Margot ignored this unfortunate slip, and hoped that Stephen and others had forgotten.

"No actual harm. But in the circumstances, why be conspicuous? Weren't you comfortable with Mrs. Middleton? She seemed a miraculously nice old body for a lodging-house keeper, and fussed over you no end——"

"It was for your sake that I wanted to be in a good hotel, now our engagement has been announced," explained Miss Lorenzi. "I didn't think it suitable for the Honourable Stephen Knight's future wife to go on living in stuffy lodgings. And as you've insisted on my accepting an income of eighty pounds a month till we're married, I'm able to afford a little luxury, dearest. I can tell you it's a pleasure, after all I've suffered!—and I felt I owed you something in return for your generosity. I wanted your *fiancée* to do you credit in the eyes of the world."

Stephen bit his lip. "I see," he said slowly.

Yet what he saw most clearly was a very different picture. Margot as she had seemed the day he met her first, in the despised South Kensington lodgings, whither he had been implored to come in haste, if he wished to save a wretched, starving girl from following her father out of a cruel world. Of course, he had seen her in court, and had reluctantly encountered her photograph several times before he had given up looking at illustrated papers for fear of what he might find in them. But Margot's tragic beauty, as presented by photographers, or as seen from a distance, loyally seated at the claimant's side, was as nothing to the dark splendour of her despair when the claimant was in his new-made grave. It was the day after the burial that she had sent for Stephen; and her letter had arrived, as it happened, when he was thinking of the girl, wondering whether she had friends who would stand by her, or whether a member of his family might, without being guilty of bad taste, dare offer help.

Her tear-blotted letter had settled that doubt, and it had been so despairing, so suggestive of frenzy in its wording, that Stephen had impulsively rushed off to South Kensington at once, without stopping to think whether it would not be better to send a representative combining the gentleness of the dove with the wisdom of the serpent, and armed for emergencies with a blank cheque.

Margot's hair, so charmingly dressed now, folding in soft dark waves on either side her face, almost hiding the pink-tipped ears, had been tumbled, that gloomy afternoon six weeks ago, with curls escaping here and there; and in the course of their talk a great coil had fallen down over her shoulders. It was the sort of thing that happens to the heroine of a melodrama, if she has plenty

of hair; but Stephen did not think of that then. He thought of nothing except his sympathy for a beautiful girl brought, through no fault of her own, to the verge of starvation and despair, and of how he could best set about helping her.

She had not even money enough to buy mourning. Lorenzi had left debts which she could not pay. She had no friends. She did not know what was to become of her. She had not slept for many nights. She had made up her mind to die as her father had died, because it seemed the only thing to do, when suddenly the thought of Stephen had flashed into her mind, as if sent there by her guardian angel. She had heard that he was good and charitable to everybody, and once she had seen him looking at her kindly, in court, as if he were sorry for her, and could read something of what was in her heart. She had imagined it perhaps. But would he forgive her for writing to him? Would he help her, and save her life?

Anyone who knew Stephen could have prophesied what his answer would be. He had hated it when she snatched his hand to kiss at the end of their interview; but he would scarcely have been a human young man if he had not felt a sudden tingle of the blood at the touch of such lips as Margot Lorenzi's. Never had she seemed so beautiful to him since that first day; but he had called again and again, against his brother's urgent advice (when he had confessed the first visit); and the story that the Duchess of Amidon was telling her friends, though founded entirely on her own imagination of the scene which had brought about Stephen's undoing, was not very far from the truth.

Now, he saw a picture of Margot as he had seen her



in the lodgings she hated; and he wished to heaven that he might think of her as he had thought of her then.

"I've got something important to say to you," the girl went on, when she realised that Stephen intended to dismiss the subject of the hotel, as he had dismissed the subject of the interview. "That's the reason I wired. But I won't speak a word till you've told me what your brother and the Duchess of Amidon think about you and me."

"There's nothing to tell," Stephen answered almost sullenly. And indeed there was no news of his Cumberland visit which it would be pleasant or wise to retail.

Margot Lorenzi's complexion was not one of her greatest beauties. It was slightly sallow, so she made artistic use of a white cosmetic, which gave her skin the clearness of a camellia petal. But she had been putting on rather more than usual since her father's death, because it was suitable as well as becoming to be pale when one was in deep mourning. Consequently Margot could not turn perceptibly whiter, but she felt the blood go ebbing away from her face back upon her heart.

"Stephen! Don't they mean to receive me, when we're married?" she stammered.

"I don't think they've much use for either of us," Stephen hedged, to save her feelings. "Northmorland and I have never been great pals, you know. He's twenty years older than I am; and since he married the Duchess of Amidon——"

"And her money! Oh, it's no use beating about the bush. I hate them both. Lord Northmorland has a fiendish, vindictive nature."

"Come, you mustn't say that, Margot. He has nothing of the sort. He's a curious mixture. A man of the world, and a bit of a Puritan——"

"So are you a Puritan, at heart," she broke in.

Stephen laughed. "No one ever accused me of Puritanism before."

"Maybe you've never shown anyone else that side of you, as you show it to me. You're always being shocked at what I do and say."

For that, it was hardly necessary to be a Puritan. But Stephen shrugged his shoulders instead of answering.

"Your brother is a cold-hearted tyrant, and his wife is a snob. If she weren't, she wouldn't hang on to her duchesshood after marrying again. It would be good enough for *me* to call myself Lady Northmorland, and I hope I shall some day."

Stephen's sensitive nostrils quivered. He understood in that moment how a man might actually wish to strike a nagging virago of a woman, no matter how beautiful. And he wondered with a sickening heaviness of heart how he was to go on with the wretched business of his engagement. But he pushed the question out of his mind, fiercely. He was in for this thing now. He *must* go on.

"Let all that alone, won't you?" he said, in a well-controlled tone.

"I can't," Margot exclaimed. "I hate your brother. He killed my father."

"Because he defended the honour of our grandfather, and upheld his own rights, when Mr. Lorenzi came to England to dispute them?"

"Who knows if they *were* his rights, or my father's? My father believed they were his, or he wouldn't have crossed the ocean and spent all his money in the hope of stepping into your brother's shoes."

There were those—and Lord Northmorland and the Duchess of Amidon were among them—who did not admit

that Lorenzi had believed in his "rights." And as for the money he had spent in trying to establish a legal claim to the Northmorland title and estates, it had not been his own, but lent him by people he had hypnotised with his plausible eloquence.

"That question was decided in court——"

"It would be harder for a foreigner to get an English nobleman's title away than for a camel to go through the eye of the tiniest needle in the world. But never mind. All that's buried in his grave, and you're giving me everything father wanted me to have. I wish I could keep my horrid temper better in hand, and I'd never make you look so cross. But I inherited my emotional nature from Margherita Lorenzi, I suppose. What can you expect of a girl who had an Italian prima donna for a grandmother? And I oughtn't to quarrel with the fair Margherita for leaving me her temper, since she left me her face too, and I'm fairly well satisfied with that. Everybody says I'm the image of my grandmother. And *you* ought to know, after seeing her picture in dozens of illustrated papers, as well as in that pamphlet poor father published."

"If you want me to tell you that you are one of the handsomest women who ever lived, I'll do so at once," said Stephen.

Margot smiled. "You really mean it?"

"There couldn't be two opinions on that subject."

"Then, if you think I'm so beautiful, don't let your brother and his snobbish Duchess spoil my life."

"They can't spoil it."

"Yes, they can. They can keep me from being a success in their set, your set—the *only* set."

"Perhaps they can do that. But England isn't the

only country, anyhow. I've been thinking that when—by-and-by—we might take a long trip round the world——”

“*Hang* the world! England's my world. I've always looked forward to England, ever since I was a little thing, before mamma died, and I used to hear father repeating the romantic family story—how, if he could only find his mother's letters that she'd tried to tell him about when she was dying, perhaps he might make a legal claim to a title and a fortune. He used to turn to me and say: ‘Maybe you'll be a great lady when you grow up, Margot, and I shall be an English viscount.’ Then, when he did find the letters, behind the secret partition in grandmother's big old-fashioned sandal-wood fan-box, of which you've heard so much——”

“Too much, please, Margot.”

“I *beg* your pardon! But anyway, you see why I want to live in England. My life and soul are bound up in my success here. And I could have a success. You know I could. I *am* beautiful. I haven't seen any woman whose face I'd change for mine. I won't be cheated out of my happiness——”

“Very well, we'll live in England, then. That's settled,” said Stephen, hastily. “And you shall have all the success, all the happiness, that I can possibly give you. But we shall have to get on without any help from my brother and sister-in-law, and perhaps without a good many other people you might like to have for friends. It may seem hard, but you must make up your mind to it, Margot. Luckily, there'll be enough money to do pleasant things with; and people don't matter so immensely, once you've got used to——”

“They do, they do! The right people. I *shall* know them,”

"You must have patience. Everybody is rather tired of our names just now. Things may change some day. I'm ready to begin the experiment whenever you are."

"You are a dear," said Margot. And Stephen did not even shiver. "That brings me to what I had to tell you. It's this: after all, we can't be married quite as soon as we expected."

"Can't we?" he echoed the words blankly. Was this to be a reprieve? But he was not sure that he wanted a reprieve. He thought, the sooner the plunge was made, the better, maybe. Looking forward to it had become almost unbearable.

"No, I *must* run over to Canada first, Stephen. I've just begun to see that. You might say, I could go there with you after we were married, but it wouldn't be the same thing at all. I ought to stay with some of my old friends while I'm still Margot Lorenzi. A lot of people were awfully good to father, and I must show my gratitude. The sooner I sail the better, now the news of our engagement has got ahead of me. I needn't stop away very long. Seven or eight weeks—or nine at most, going and coming."

"Would you like to be married in Canada?" Stephen asked; perhaps partly to please her, but probably more to disguise the fact that he had no impatient objections to raise against her plan. "If you wished, I could go whenever——"

"Oh no, no!" she exclaimed quickly. "I wouldn't have you come there for anything in the world. That is, I mean——" she corrected herself with an anxious, almost frightened side glance at him—"I must fight it out alone. No, I don't mean that either. What a stupid way of putting it! But it would bore you dreadfully to

take such a journey, and it would be nicer anyhow to be married in England—perhaps at St. George's. That used to be my dream, when I was a romantic little girl, and loved to stuff my head full of English novels. I should adore a wedding at St. George's. And oh, Stephen, you won't change your mind while I'm gone? It would kill me if you jilted me after all. I shouldn't live a single day, if you weren't true."

"Don't talk nonsense, my dear girl. Of course I'm not going to change my mind," said Stephen. "When do you want to sail?"

"The end of this week. You're sure you won't let your brother and that cruel Duchess talk you over? I——"

"There's not the slightest chance of their talking to me at all," Stephen answered sharply. "We've definitely quarrelled."

II.

WHEN he had dutifully seen Miss Lorenzi off at the ship, leaving her with as many flowers, novels, and sweets as even she could wish, Stephen expected to feel a sense of relief. But somehow, in a subtle way, he was more feverishly wretched than when Margot was near, and while planning to hurry on the marriage. He had been buoyed up with a rather youthful sense of defiance of the world, a hot desire to "get everything over." The flatness of the reaction which he felt on finding himself free, at least of Margot's society, was a surprise; and yet Stephen vaguely understood its real meaning. To be free, yet not free, was an aggravation. And besides, he did not

know what to do or where to go, now that old friends and old haunts had lost much of their attraction.

Since the announcement of his engagement to Miss Lorenzi, and especially since the famous interview, copied in all the papers, he disliked meeting people he knew well, lest they should offer good advice, or let him see that they were dying to do so.

If it had been weak to say, "Be my wife, if you think I can make you happy," one day when Margot Lorenzi had tearfully confessed her love for him, it would be doubly weak—worse than weak, Stephen thought—to throw her over now. It would look to the world as if he were a coward, and it would look to himself the same—which would be more painful in the end. So he could listen to no advice, and he wished to hear none. Fortunately he was not in love with any other woman. But then, if he had loved somebody else, he would not have made the foolish mistake of saying those unlucky, irrevocable words to Margot.

Stephen would have liked to get away from England for awhile, but he hardly knew where to look for a haven. Since making a dash through France and Italy just after leaving Oxford, he had been too busy amusing himself in his own country to find time for any other, with the exception of an occasional run over to Paris. Now, if he stopped in England it would be difficult to evade officious friends, and soon everybody would be gossiping about his quarrel with Northmorland. The Duchess was not reticent.

Stephen had not yet made up his mind what to do, or whether to do anything at all in his brief interval of freedom, when a letter came, to the flat near Albert Gate, where he had shut himself up after the sailing of Margot.

The letter was postmarked Algiers, and it was a long time since he had seen the writing on the envelope—but not so long that he had forgotten it.

“Nevill Caird!” he said to himself as he broke the neat seal which was characteristic of the writer. And he wondered, as he slowly, almost reluctantly, unfolded the letter, whether Nevill Caird had been reminded of him by reading the interview with Margot. Once, he and Caird had been very good friends, almost inseparable during one year at Oxford. Stephen had been twenty then, and Nevill Caird about twenty-three. That would make him thirty-two now—and Stephen could hardly imagine what “Wings” would have developed into at thirty-two. They had not met since Stephen’s last year at Oxford, for Caird had gone to live abroad, and if he came back to England sometimes, he had never made any sign of wishing to pick up the old friendship where it had dropped. But here was this letter.

Stephen knew that Caird had inherited a good deal of money, and a house in Paris, from an uncle or some other near relative; and a common friend had told him that there was also an Arab palace, very ancient and very beautiful, in or near Algiers. Several years had passed since Nevill Caird’s name had been mentioned in his hearing, and lately it had not even echoed in his mind; but now, the handwriting and the neat seal on this envelope brought vividly before him the image of his friend: small, slight, boyish in face and figure, with a bright, yet dreamy smile, and blue-grey eyes which had the look of seeing beautiful things that nobody else could see.

“DEAR LEGS,” began the letter (“Legs” being the name which Stephen’s skill as a runner, as well as the

length of his limbs, had given him in undergraduate days). "Dear Legs, I've often thought about you in the last nine years, and hope you've occasionally thought of me, though somehow or other we haven't written. I don't know whether you've travelled much, or whether England has absorbed all your interests. Anyhow, can't you come out here and make me a visit—the longer it is, the more I shall be pleased. This country is interesting if you don't know it, and fascinating if you do. My place is rather nice, and I should like you to see it. Still better, I should like to see you. Do come if you can, and come soon. I should enjoy showing you my garden at its best. It's one of the things I care for most, but there are other things. Do let me introduce you to them all. You can be as quiet as you wish, if you wish. I'm a quiet sort myself, as you may remember, and North Africa suits me better than London or Paris. I haven't changed for the worse I hope, and I'm sure you haven't, in any way.

"You can hardly realise how much pleasure it will give me if you'll say 'yes' to my proposal.

"Yours as ever,

"NEVILL CAIRD, alias 'Wings.'"

Not a word of "the case," though, of course, he must know all about it—even in Algiers. Stephen's gratitude went out to his old friend, and his heart felt warmer because of the letter and the invitation. Many people, even with the best intentions, would have contrived to say the wrong thing in these awkward circumstances. There would have been some veiled allusion to the engagement; either silly, well-meant congratulations and good wishes, or else a stupid hint of advice to get out of a bad business while there was time. But Caird wrote as he might

have written if there had been no case, and no entanglement; and acting on his first impulse, Stephen telegraphed an acceptance, saying that he would start for Algiers in two or three days. Afterwards, when he had given himself time to think, he did not regret his decision. Indeed, he was glad of it, and glad that he had made it so soon.

A few weeks ago, a sudden break in his plans would have caused him a great deal of trouble. There would have been dozens of luncheons and dinners to escape from, and twice as many letters to write. But nowadays he had few invitations and scarcely any letters to write, except those of business, and an occasional line to Margot. People were willing to be neglected by him, willing to let him alone, for now that he had quarrelled with Northmorland and the Duchess, and had promised to marry an impossible woman, he must be gently but firmly taught to expect little of Society in future.

Stephen broke the news to his man that he was going away, alone, and though the accomplished Molton had regrets, they were not as poignant as they would have been some weeks earlier. Most valets, if not all, are human, and have a weakness for a master whose social popularity is as unbounded as his generosity.

Molton's services did not cease until after he had packed Stephen's luggage, and seen him off at Victoria. He flattered himself, as he left the station with three months' wages in his pocket, that he would be missed; but Stephen was surprised at the sense of relief which came as Molton turned a respectable back, and the boat-train began to slide out of the station. It was good to be alone, to have loosed his moorings, and to be drifting away where no eyes, once kind, would turn from him, or turn on him with pity. Out there in Algiers, a town of

which he had the vaguest conception, there would be people who read the papers, of course, and people who loved to gossip; but Stephen felt a pleasant confidence that Nevill Caird would know how to protect him from such people. He would not have to meet many strangers. Nevill would arrange all that, and give him plenty to think about during his weeks of freedom.

Algiers seemed a remote place to Stephen, who had loved life at home too passionately to care for foreign travel. Besides, there was always a great deal to do in England at every season of the year, and it had been difficult to find a time convenient for getting away. Town engagements began early in the spring, and lasted till after Cowes, when he was keen for Scotland. Being a gregarious as well as an idle young man, he was pleased with his own popularity, and the number of his invitations for country-house visits. He could never accept more than half, but even so, he hardly saw London until January; and then, if he went abroad at all, there was only time for a few days in Paris, and a fortnight on the Riviera, perhaps, before he found that he must get back. Just after leaving Oxford, before his father's death, he had been to Rome, to Berlin, and Vienna, and returned better satisfied than ever with his own capital; but of course it was different now that the capital was dissatisfied with him.

He had chosen the night train and it was not crowded. All the way to Dover he had the compartment to himself, and there was no rush for the boat. It was a night of stars and balmy airs; but after the start the wind freshened, and Stephen walked briskly up and down the deck, shivering slightly at first, till his blood warmed. By-and-by it grew so cold that the deck emptied, save for half a dozen

men with pipes that glowed between turned-up coat collars, and one girl in a blue serge dress, with no other cloak than the jacket that matched her frock. Stephen hardly noticed her at first, but as men buttoned their coats or went below, and she remained, his attention was attracted to the slim figure leaning on the rail. Her face was turned away, looking over the sea where the whirling stars dipped into dark waves that sprang to engulf them. Her elbows rested on the railing, and her chin lay in the cup of her two hands; but her hair, under a blue sailor-hat held down with a veil, hung low in a great looped-up plait, tied with a wide black ribbon, so that Stephen, without wasting much thought upon her, guessed that she must be very young. It was red hair, gleaming where the light touched it, and the wind thrashed curly tendrils out from the thick clump of the braid, tracing bright threads in intricate, lacy lines over her shoulders, like the network of sunlight that plays on the surface of water.

Stephen thought of that simile after he had passed the girl once or twice, and thinking of it made him think of the girl herself. He was sure she must be cold in her serge jacket, and wondered why she didn't go below to the ladies' cabin. Also he wondered, even more vaguely, why her people didn't take better care of the child: there must be someone belonging to her on board.

At last she turned, not to look at him, but to pace back and forth as others were pacing. She was in front of Stephen, and he saw only her back, which seemed more girlish than ever as she walked with a light, springing step, that might have kept time to some dainty dance-music which only she could hear. Her short dress, of hardly more than ankle length, flowed past her slender shape as the black, white-frothing waves flowed past the

slim prow of the boat; and there was something individual, something distinguished in her gait and the bearing of her head on the young throat. Stephen noticed this rather interesting peculiarity, remarking it more definitely because of the almost mean simplicity of the blue serge dress. It was of provincial cut, and looked as if the wearer might have bought it ready made in some country town. Her hat, too, was of the sort that is turned out by the thousand and sold at a few shillings for young persons between the ages of twelve and twenty.

By-and-by, when she had walked as far forward as possible, the deck rising under her feet or plunging down, while thin spray-wreaths sailed by on the wind, the girl wheeled and had the breeze at her back. It was then Stephen caught his first glimpse of her face, in a full white blaze of electric light: and he had the picture to himself, for by this time nearly everyone else had gone.

He had not expected anything wonderful, but it seemed to him in a flash of surprise that this was an amazing beauty. He had never seen such hair, or such a complexion. The large eyes gave him no more than a passing glance, but they were so vivid, so full of blue light as they met his, that he had a startled impression of being graciously accosted. It seemed as if the girl had some message to give him, for which he must stop and ask.

As soon as they had passed each other, however, that curious, exciting impression was gone, like the vanishing glint on a gull's wing as it dips from sun into shadow. Of course she had not spoken; of course she had no word to give him. He had seemed to hear her speak, because she was a very vital sort of creature, no doubt, and therefore physically, though unconsciously, magnetic,

At their next crossing under the light she did not look at him at all, and he realised that she was not so extraordinarily beautiful as he had at first thought. The glory of her was more an effect of colouring than anything else. The creamy complexion of a very young girl, whipped to rose and white by the sea wind; brilliant turquoise blue eyes under a glitter of wavy red hair; these were the only marvels, for the small, straight nose was exactly like most pretty girls' noses, and the mouth, though expressive and sweet, with a short upper lip, was not remarkable, unless for its firmness.

The next time they passed, Stephen granted the girl a certain charm of expression which heightened the effect of beauty. She looked singularly innocent and interested in life, which to Stephen's mood seemed pathetic. He was convinced that he had seen through life, and consequently ceased forever to be interested in it. But he admired beauty wherever he saw it, whether in the grace of a breaking wave, or the sheen on a girl's bright hair, and it amused him faintly to speculate about the young creature with the brilliant eyes and blowing red locks. He decided that she was a schoolgirl of sixteen, being taken over to Paris, probably to finish her education there. Her mother or guardian was no doubt prostrate with seasickness, careless for the moment whether the child paraded the deck insufficiently clad, or whether she fell unchaperoned into the sea. Judging by her clothes, her family was poor, and she was perhaps intended for a governess: that was why they were sending her to France. She was to be given "every advantage," in order to command "desirable situations" by-and-by. Stephen felt dimly sorry for the little thing, who looked so radiantly happy now. She was much too pretty to be a governess, or to be

obliged to earn her own living in any way. Women were brutes to each other sometimes. He had been finding this out lately. Few would care to bring a flowerlike creature of that type into their houses. The girl had trouble before her. He was sure she was going to be a governess.

After she had walked for half an hour she looked round for a sheltered corner and sat down. But the place she had chosen was only comparatively sheltered, and presently Stephen fancied that he saw her shivering with cold. He could not bear this, knowing that he had a rug which Molton had forced upon him to use on board ship between Marseilles and Algiers. It was in a rolled-up thing which Molton called a "hold-all," along with some sticks and an umbrella, Stephen believed; and the rolled-up thing was on deck, with other hand-luggage.

"Will you let me lend you a rug?" he asked, in the tone of a benevolent uncle addressing a child. "I have one close by, and it's rather cold when you don't walk."

"Thank you very much," said the girl. "I should like it, if it won't be too much trouble to you."

She spoke simply, and had a pretty voice, but it was an American voice. Stephen was surprised, because to find that she was an American upset his theories. He had never heard of American girls coming over to Paris with the object of training to be governesses.

He went away and found the rug, returning with it in two or three minutes. The girl thanked him again, getting up and wrapping the dark soft thing round her shoulders and body, as if it had been a big shawl. Then she sat down once more, with a comfortable little sigh. "That does feel good!" she exclaimed. "I *was* cold."

"I think you would have been wiser to stop in the

ladies' cabin," said Stephen, still with the somewhat patronising air of the older person.

"I like lots of air," explained the girl. "And it doesn't do me any harm to be cold."

"How about getting a chill?" enquired Stephen.

"Oh, I never have such things. They don't exist. At least they don't unless one encourages them," she replied.

He smiled, rather interested, and pleased to linger, since she evidently understood that he was using no arts to scrape an acquaintance. "That sounds like Christian Science," he ventured.

"I don't know that it's any kind of science," said she. "Nobody ever talked to me about it. Only if you're not afraid of things, they can't hurt you, can they?"

"Perhaps not. I suppose you mean you needn't let yourself feel them. There's something in the idea: be callous as an alligator and nothing can hit you."

"I don't mean that at all. I'd hate to be callous," she objected. "We couldn't enjoy things if we were callous."

Stephen, on the point of saying something bitter, stopped in time, knowing that his words would have been not only stupid but obvious, which was worse. "It is good to be young," he remarked instead.

"Yes, but I'm glad to be grown up at last," said the girl; and Stephen would not let himself laugh.

"I know how you feel," he answered. "I used to feel like that too."

"Don't you now?"

"Not always. I've had plenty of time to get tired of being grown up."

"Maybe you've been a soldier, and have seen sad

things," she suggested. "I was thinking when I first saw you, that you looked like a soldier."

"I wish I had been. Unfortunately I was too disgustingly young, when our only war of my day was on. I mean, the sort of war one could volunteer for."

"In South Africa?"

"Yes. You were a baby in that remote time."

"Oh no, I wasn't. I'm eighteen now, going on nineteen. I was in Paris then, with my stepmother and my sister. We used to hear talk about the war, though we knew hardly any English people."

"So Paris won't be a new experience to you?" said Stephen, disappointed that he had been mistaken in all his surmises.

"I went back to America before I was nine, and I've been there ever since, till a few weeks ago. Oh see, there are the lights of France! I can't help being excited."

"Yes, we'll be in very soon—in about ten minutes."

"I am glad! I'd better go below and make my hair tidy. Thank you ever so much for helping me to be comfortable."

She jumped up, unrolled herself, and began to fold the rug neatly. Stephen would have taken it from her and bundled it together anyhow, but she would not let him do that. "I like folded things," she said. "It's nice to see them come straight, and I enjoy it more because the wind doesn't want me to do it. To succeed in spite of something, is a kind of little triumph—and seems like a *sign*. Good-bye, and thank you once more."

"Good-bye," said Stephen, and added to himself that he would not soon again see so pretty a child; as fresh, as frank, or as innocent. He had known several delightful American girls, but never one like this. She was a

new type to him, and more interesting, perhaps, because she was simple, and even provincial. He was in a state of mind to glorify women who were entirely unsophisticated.

He did not see the girl getting into the train at Calais, though he looked for her, feeling some curiosity as to the stepmother and the sister whom he had imagined prostrate in the ladies' cabin. By the time he had arrived at Paris he felt sleepy and dull after an aggravating doze or two on the way, and had almost forgotten the red-haired child with the vivid blue eyes, until, to his astonishment, he saw her alone parleying with a *douanier*, over two great boxes, for one of which there seemed to be no key.

"Those selfish people of hers have left her to do all the work," he said to himself indignantly, and as she appeared to be having some difficulty with the official, he went to ask if he could help.

"Thank you, it's all right now," she said. "The key of my biggest box is mislaid, but luckily I've got the man to believe me when I say there's nothing in it except clothes, just the same as in the other. Still it would be very, very kind if you wouldn't mind seeing me to a cab. That is, if it's no bother."

Stephen assured her that he would be delighted.

"Have your people engaged the cab already," he wanted to know, "or are they waiting in this room for you?"

"I haven't any people," she answered. "I'm all by myself."

This was another surprise, and it was as much as Stephen could do not to blame her family audibly for allowing the child to travel alone, at night too. The thing seemed monstrous.

He took her into the courtyard, where the cabs stood,

and engaged two, one for the girl, and one for her large luggage.

"You have rooms already taken at an hotel, I hope?" he asked.

"I'm going to a boarding-house—a *pension*, I mean," explained the girl. "But it's all right. They know I'm coming. I do thank you for everything."

Seated in the cab, she held out her hand in a glove which had been cleaned, and showed mended fingers. Stephen shook the small hand gravely, and for the second time they bade each other good-bye.

In the cold grey light of a rainy dawn, which would have suited few women as a background, especially after a night journey, the girl's face looked pearly, and Stephen saw that her lashes, darker at the roots, were bright golden at the turned-up ends.

It seemed to him that this pretty child, alone in the greyness and rain of the big foreign city, was like a spring flower thrown carelessly into a river to float with the stream. He felt an impulse of protection, and it went against his instincts to let her drive about Paris unprotected, while night had hardly yielded to morning. But he could not offer to go with her. He was interested, as any man of flesh and blood must be interested, in the fate of an innocent and charming girl left to take care of herself, and entirely unfitted for the task; yet she seemed happy and self-confident, and he had no right, even if he wished, to disturb her mind. He was going away without another word after the good-bye, but on second thoughts felt that he might ask if she had friends in Paris.

"Not exactly friends, but people who will look after me, and be kind, I'm sure," she answered. "Thank you

for taking an interest. Will you tell the man to go to 278A Rue Washington, and the other cab to follow?"

Stephen obeyed, and as she drove away the girl looked back, smiling at him her sweet and childlike smile.

III.

STEPHEN had meant to stop only one day in Paris, and travel at night to Marseilles, where he would have twelve or fifteen hours to wait before the sailing of the ship on which he had engaged a cabin. But glancing over a French paper while he breakfasted at the Westminster, he saw that a slight accident had happened to the boat during a storm on her return voyage from Algiers, and that she would be delayed three days for repairs. This news made Stephen decide to remain in Paris for those days, rather than go on and wait at Marseilles, or take another ship. He did not want to see anyone he knew, but he thought it would be pleasant to spend some hours picture-gazing at the Louvre, and doing a few other things which one ought to do in Paris, and seldom does.

That night he went to bed early and slept better than he had slept for weeks. The next day he almost enjoyed, and when evening came, felt desultory, even light-hearted.

Dining at his hotel, he overheard the people at the next table say they were going to the Folies Bergères to see Victoria Ray dance, and suddenly Stephen made up his mind that he would go there too: for if life had been running its usual course with him, he would certainly have gone to see Victoria Ray in London. She had danced lately at the Palace Theatre for a month or six weeks, and absorbed as he had been in his own affairs,

he had heard enough talk about this new dancer to know that she had made what is called a "sensation."

The people at the next table were telling each other that Victoria Ray's Paris engagement was only for three nights, something special, with huge pay, and that there was a "regular scramble" for seats, as the girl had been such a success in New York and London. The speakers, who were English and provincial, had already taken places, but there did not appear to be much hope that Stephen could get anything at the last minute. The little spice of difficulty gave a fillip of interest, however; and he remembered how the charming child on the boat had said that she "liked doing difficult things." He wondered what she was doing now; and as he thought of her, white and ethereal in the night and in the dawn-light, she seemed to him like the foam-flowers that had blossomed for an instant on the crests of dark waves, through which their vessel forged. "For a moment white, then gone forever." The words glittered in his mind, and fascinated him, calling up the image of the girl, pale against the night and rainy sea. "For a moment white, then gone forever," he repeated, and asked himself whence came the line. From Burns, he fancied; and thought it quaintly appropriate to the fair child whose clear whiteness had thrown a gleam into his life before she vanished.

All the seats for this second night of Victoria Ray's short engagement were sold at the Folies Bergères, he found, from the dearest to the cheapest: but there was standing room still when Stephen arrived, and he squeezed himself in among a group of light-hearted, long-haired students from the Latin Quarter. He had an hour to wait before Victoria Ray would dance, but there was some clever conjuring to be seen, a famous singer of *chansons*

to be heard, and other performances which made the time pass well enough. Then, at last, it was the new dancer's "turn."

The curtain remained down for several minutes, as some scenic preparation was necessary before her first dance. Gay French music was playing, and people chattered through it, or laughed in high Parisian voices. A blue haze of smoke hung suspended like a thin veil, and the air was close, scented with tobacco and perfume. Stephen looked at his programme, beginning to feel bored. His elbows were pressed against his sides by the crowd. Miss Ray was down for two dances, the Dance of the Statue and the Dance of the Shadow. The atmosphere of the place depressed him. He doubted after all, that he would care for the dancing. But as he began to wish he had not come the curtain went up, to show the studio of a sculptor, empty save for the artist's marble masterpieces. Through a large skylight, and a high window at the back of the stage, a red glow of sunset streamed into the bare room. In the shadowy corners marble forms were grouped, but in the centre, directly under the full flood of rose-coloured light, the just finished statue of a girl stood on a raised platform. She was looking up, and held a cup in one lifted hand, as if to catch the red wine of sunset. Her draperies, confined by a Greek ceinture under the young bust, fell from shoulder to foot in long clear lines that seemed cut in gleaming stone. The illusion was perfect. Even in that ruddy blaze the delicate, draped form appeared to be of carved marble. It was almost impossible to believe it that of a living woman, and its grace of outline and pose was so perfect that Stephen, in his love of beauty, dreaded the first movement which must change, if not break, the tableau. He said to himself

that there was some faint resemblance between this chiselled loveliness and the vivid charm of the pretty child he had met on the boat. He could imagine that a statue for which she had stood as model might look like this, though the features seemed to his eye more regular than those of the girl.

As he gazed, the music, which had been rich and colourful, fell into softer notes; and the rose-sunset faded to an opal twilight, purple to blue, blue to the silver of moonlight, the music changing as the light changed, until at last it was low and slumberous as the drip-drip of a plashing fountain. Then, into the dream of the music broke a sound like the distant striking of a clock. It was midnight, and all the statues in the sculptor's bare, white studio began to wake at the magic stroke which granted them a few hours of life.

There was just a shimmer of movement in the dim corners. Marble limbs stirred, marble face turned slowly to gaze at marble face; yet, as if they could be only half awakened in the shadows where the life-giving draught of moonlight might not flow, there was but the faintest flicker of white forms and draperies. It was the just finished statue of the girl which felt the full thrill of moonshine and midnight. She woke rapturously, and drained the silver moon-wine in her cup (the music told the story of her first thought and living heart-beat): then down she stepped from the platform where the sculptor's tools still lay, and began to dance for the other statues who watched in the dusk, hushed back into stillness under the new spell of her enchantments.

Stephen had never seen anything like that dance. Many pretty *premières danseuses* he had admired and applauded, charming and clever young women of France, of

Russia, of Italy, and Spain: and they had roused him and all London to enthusiasm over dances eccentric, original, exquisite, or wild. But never had there been anything like this. Stephen had not known that a dance could move him as this did. He was roused, even thrilled by its poetry, and the perfect beauty of its poses, its poises. It must, he supposed, have been practised patiently, perhaps for years, yet it produced the effect of being entirely unstudied. At all events, there was nothing in the ordinary sense "professional" about it. One would say—not knowing the supreme art of supreme grace—that a joyous child, born to the heritage of natural grace, might dance thus by sheer inspiration, in ecstasy of life and worship of the newly felt beauty of earth. Stephen did know something of art, and the need of devotion to its study; yet he found it hard to realise that this awakened marble loveliness had gone through the same performance week after week, month after month, in America and England. He preferred rather to let himself fancy that he was dreaming the whole thing; and he would gladly have dreamed on indefinitely, forgetting the smoky atmosphere, forgetting the long-haired students and all the incongruous surroundings. The gracious dream gave him peace and pleasure such as he had not known since the beginning of the Northmorland case.

Through the house there was a hush, unusual at the Folies Bergères. People hardly knew what to make of the dances, so different from any ever seen in a theatre of Paris. Stephen was not alone in feeling the curious dream-spell woven by music and perfection of beauty. But the light changed. The moonlight slowly faded. Dancer and music faltered, in the falling of the dark hour before dawn. The charm was waning. Soft notes died, and

quavered in apprehension. The magic charm of the moon was breaking, had broken: a crash of cymbals and the studio was dark. Then light began to glimmer once more, but it was the chill light of dawn, and growing from purple to blue, from blue to rosy day, it showed the marble statues fast locked in marble sleep again. On the platform stood the girl with uplifted arm, holding her cup, now, to catch the wine of sunrise; and on the delicately chiselled face was a faint smile which seemed to hide a secret. When the first ray of yellow sunshine gilded the big skylight, a door up-stage opened and the sculptor came in, wearing his workman's blouse. He regarded his handiwork, as the curtain came down.

When the music of the dream had ceased and suddenly became ostentatiously puerile, the audience broke into a tumult of applause. Women clapped their hands furiously and many men shouted "brava, brava," hoping that the curtain might rise once more on the picture; but it did not rise, and Stephen was glad. The dream would have been vulgarised by repetition.

For fully five minutes the orchestra played some gay tune which everyone there had heard a hundred times; but abruptly it stopped, as if on a signal. For an instant there was a silence of waiting and suspense, which roused interest and piqued curiosity. Then there began a delicate symphony which could mean nothing but spring in a forest, and on that the curtain went up. The prophecy of the music was fulfilled, for the scene was a woodland in April, with young leaves a-flicker and blossoms in birth, the light song of the flutes and violins being the song of birds in love. All the trees were brocaded with dainty, gold-green lace, and daffodils sprouted from the moss at their feet.

The birds sang more gaily, and out from behind a silver-trunked beech-tree danced a figure in spring green. Her arms were full of flowers, which she scattered as she danced, curtsying, mocking, beckoning the shadow that followed her along the daisied grass. Her little feet were bare, and flitted through the green folding of her draperies like white night-moths fluttering among rose leaves. Her hair fell over her shoulders, and curled below her waist. It was red hair that glittered and waved, and she looked a radiant child of sixteen. Victoria Ray the dancer, and the girl on the Channel boat were one.

IV.

THE Shadow Dance was even more beautiful than the Dance of the Statue, but Stephen had lost pleasure in it. He was supersensitive in these days, and he felt as if the girl had deliberately made game of him, in order that he should make a fool of himself. Of course it was a pose of hers to travel without chaperon or maid, and dress like a schoolgirl from a provincial town, in cheap serge, a sailor hat, and a plait of hair looped up with ribbon. She was no doubt five or six years older than she looked or admitted, and probably her manager shrewdly prescribed the "line" she had taken up. Young women on the stage—actresses, dancers, or singers, it didn't matter which—must do something unusual, in order to be talked about, and get a good free advertisement. Nowadays, when professionals vied with each other in the expensiveness of their jewels, the size of their hats, or the smallness of their waists, and the eccentricity of their costumes, it was perhaps rather a new note to wear no jewels at all, and appear in ready-made frocks bought in bargain-sales; while,

as for the young woman's air of childlike innocence and inexperience, it might be a tribute to her cleverness as an actress, but it was not a tribute to his intelligence as a man, that he should have been taken in by it. Always, he told himself, he was being taken in by some woman. After the lesson he had had, he ought to have learned wisdom, but it seemed that he was as gullible as ever. And it was this romantic folly of his which vexed him now; not the fact that a simple child over whose fate he had sentimentalised, was a rich and popular stage-dancer. Miss Ray was probably a good enough young woman according to her lights, and it was not she who need be shamed by the success of the Channel boat comedy.

He had another day and night in Paris, where he did more sightseeing than he had ever accomplished before in a dozen visits, and then travelled on to Marseilles. The slight damage to the *Charles Quex* had been repaired, and at noon the ship was to sail. Stephen went on board early, as he could think of nothing else which he preferred to do, and he was repaid for his promptness. By the time he had seen his luggage deposited in the cabin he had secured for himself alone, engaged a deck-chair, and taken a look over the ship—which was new, and as handsome as much oak, fragrant cedarwood, gilding, and green brocade could make her—many other passengers were coming on board. Travelling first class were several slim French officers, and stout Frenchmen of the commercial class; a merry theatrical company going to act in Algiers and Tunis; an English clergyman of grave aspect; invalids with their nurses, and two or three dignified Arabs, evidently of good birth as well as fortune. Arab merchants were returning from the Riviera, and a party of German students were going second-class.

Stephen was interested in the lively scene of embarkation, and glad to be a part of it, though still more glad that there seemed to be nobody on board whom he had ever met. He admired the harbour, and the shipping, and felt pleasantly exhilarated. "I feel very young, or very old, I'm not sure which," he said to himself as a faint thrill ran through his nerves at the grinding groan of the anchor, slowly hauled out of the deep green water.

It was as if he heard the creaking of a gate which opened into an unknown garden, a garden where life would be new and changed. Nevill Caird had once said that there was no sharp, dividing line between phases of existence, except one's own moods, and Stephen had thought this true; but now it seemed as if the sea which silvered the distance was the dividing line for him, while all that lay beyond the horizon was mysterious as a desert mirage.

He was not conscious of any joy at starting, yet he was excited, as if something tremendous were about to happen to him. England, that he knew so well, seemed suddenly less real than Africa, which he knew not at all, and his senses were keenly alert for the first time in many days. He saw Marseilles from a new point of view, and wondered why he had never read anything fine written in praise of the ancient Phœnician city. Though he had not been in the East, he imagined that the old part of the town, seen from the sea, looked Eastern, as if the traffic between east and west, going on for thousands of years, had imported an Eastern taste in architecture.

The huge, mosque-like cathedral bubbled with domes, where fierce gleams of gold were hammered out by strokes of the noonday sun. A background of wild mountain ranges, whose tortured peaks shone opaline through long rents in mist veils, lent an air of romance to the scene,

and Notre Dame de la Garde loomed nobly on her bleached and arid height. "Have no fear: I keep watch and ward over land and sea," seemed to say the majestic figure of gold on the tall tower, and Stephen half wished he were of the Catholic faith, that he might take comfort from the assurance.

As the *Charles Quex* steamed farther and farther away, the church on the mountainous hill appeared to change in shape. Notre Dame de la Garde looked no longer like a building made by man, but like a great sacred swan crowned with gold, and nested on a mountain-top. There she sat, with shining head erect on a long neck, seated on her nest, protecting her young, and gazing far across the sea in search of danger. The sun touched her golden crown, and dusky cloud-shadows grouped far beneath her eyrie, like mourners kneeling below the height to pray. The rock-shapes and island rocks that cut the blue glitter of the sea, suggested splendid tales of Phœnician mariners and Saracenic pirates, tales lost forever in the dim mists of time; and so Stephen wandered on to thoughts of Dumas, wishing he had brought "Monte Cristo," dearly loved when he was twelve. Probably not a soul on board had the book; people were so stupid and prosaic nowadays. He turned from the rail on which he had leaned to watch the fading land, and as he did so, his eyes fell upon a bright red copy of the book for which he had been wishing. There was the name in large gold lettering on a scarlet cover, very conspicuous on the dark blue serge lap of a girl. It was the girl of the Channel boat, and she wore the same dress, the same sailor hat tied on with a blue veil, which she had worn that night crossing from England to France.

While Stephen had been absorbed in admiration of

Marseilles harbour, she had come up on deck, and settled herself in a canvas-chair. This time she had a rug of her own, a thin navy blue rug which, like her frock, might have been chosen for its cheapness. Although she held a volume of "Monte Cristo," she was not reading, and as Stephen turned towards her, their eyes met.

Hers lit up with a pleased smile, and the pink that sprang to her cheeks was the colour of surprise, not of self-consciousness.

"I *thought* your back looked like you, but I didn't suppose it would turn out to be you," she said.

Stephen's slight, unreasonable irritation could not stand against the azure of such eyes, and the youth in her friendly smile. Since the girl seemed glad to see him, why shouldn't he be glad to see her? At least she was not a link with England.

"I thought your statue looked like you," he retorted, standing near her chair, "but I didn't suppose it would turn out to be you until your shadow followed."

"Oh, you saw me dance! Did you like it?" She asked the question eagerly, like a child who hangs upon grown-up judgment of its work.

"I thought both dances extremely beautiful and artistic," replied Stephen, a little stiffly.

She looked at him questioningly, as if puzzled. "No, I don't think you did like them, really," she said. "I oughtn't to have asked in that blunt way, because of course you would hate to hurt my feelings by saying no!"

Her manner was so unlike that of a spoiled stage darling, that Stephen had to remind himself sharply of her "innocent pose," and his own soft-hearted lack of discrimination where pretty women were concerned. By doing this he kept himself armed against the clever little

actress laughing at him behind the blue eyes of a child. "You must know that there can't be two opinions of your dancing," said he coolly. "You have had years and years of flattery, of course; enough to make you sick of it, if a woman ever——" He stopped, smiling.

"Why, I've been dancing professionally for only a few months!" she exclaimed. "Didn't you know?"

"I'm ashamed to say I was ignorant," Stephen confessed. "But before the dancing, there must have been something else equally clever. Floating—or flying—or——"

She laughed. "Why don't you suggest fainting in coils? I'm certain you would, if you'd ever read 'Alice.'"

"As a matter of fact, I was brought up on 'Alice,'" said Stephen. "Do children of the present day still go down the rabbit hole?"

"I'm not sure about children of the *present* day. Children of my day went down," she replied with dignity. "I loved Alice dearly. I don't know much about other children, though, for I never had a chance to make friends as a child. But then I had my sister when I was a little girl, so nothing else mattered."

"If you don't think me rude to say so," ventured Stephen, "you would seem to me a little girl now, if I hadn't found out that you're an accomplished star of the theatres, admired all over Europe."

"Now you're making fun of me," said the dancer. "Paris was only my third engagement; and it's going to be my last, anyway for ever so long, I hope."

This time Stephen was really surprised, and all his early interest in the young creature woke again; the personal sort of interest which he had partly lost on finding that she was of the theatrical world.

"Oh, I see!" he ejaculated, before stopping to reflect that he had no right to put into words the idea which jumped into his mind.

"You see?" she echoed. "But how can you see, unless you know something about me already?"

"I beg your pardon," he apologised. "It was only a thought. I——"

"A thought about my dancing?"

"Not exactly that. About your not dancing again."

"Then please tell me the thought."

"You may be angry. I rather think you'd have a right to be angry—not at the thought, but the telling of it."

"I promise."

"Why," explained Stephen, "when a young and successful actress makes up her mind to leave the stage, what is the usual reason?"

"I'm not an actress, so I can't imagine what you mean—unless you suppose I've made a great fortune in a few months?"

"That too, perhaps—but I don't think a fortune would induce you to leave the stage yet awhile. You'd want to go on, not for the money perhaps, but for the fun."

"I haven't been dancing for fun."

"Haven't you?"

"No. I began with a purpose. I'm leaving the stage for a purpose. And you say you can guess what that is. If you know, you must have been told."

"Since you insist, it occurred to me that you might be going to marry. I thought maybe you were travelling to Africa to——"

She laughed. "Oh, you *are* wrong! I don't believe there ever was a girl who thinks less about marrying.

I've never had time to think of such things. I've always—ever since I was nine years old—looked to the one goal, and aimed for it, studied for it, lived for it—at last, danced towards it.”

“You excite my curiosity immensely,” said Stephen. And it was true. The girl had begun to take him out of himself.

“There is lunch,” she announced, as a bugle sounded.

Stephen longed to say, “Don't go yet. Stop and tell me all about the ‘goal’ you're working for.” But he dared not. She was very frank, and evidently willing, for some reason, to talk of her aims, even to a comparative stranger; yet he knew that it would be impertinent to suggest her sitting out on deck to chat with him, while the other passengers lunched.

He asked if she were hungry, and she said she was. So was he, now that he came to think of it; nevertheless he let her go in alone, and waited deliberately for several minutes before following. He would have liked to sit by Miss Ray at the table, but wished her to see that he did not mean to presume upon any small right of acquaintanceship. As she was on the stage, and extremely attractive, no doubt men often tried to take such advantage, and he didn't intend to be one of them; therefore he supposed that he had lost the chance of placing himself near her in the dining-room. To his surprise, however, as he was about to slip into a far-away chair, she beckoned from her table. “I kept this seat for you,” she said. “I hoped you wouldn't mind.”

“Mind!” He was on the point of repaying her kindness with a conventional little compliment, but thought better of it, and expressed his meaning in a smile.

The oak-panelled saloon was provided with a number

of small tables, and at the one where Victoria Ray sat, were places for four. Three were already occupied when Stephen came; one by Victoria, the others by a German bride and groom.

At the next table were two French officers of the *Chasseurs d'Afrique*, the English clergyman Stephen had noticed on deck, and a remarkably handsome Arab, elaborately dressed. He sat facing Victoria Ray and Stephen Knight, and Stephen found it difficult not to stare at the superb, pale brown person whose very high white turban, bound with light grey cord, gave him a dignity beyond his years, and whose pale grey burnous, over a gold-embroidered vest of dark rose-colour, added picturesqueness which appeared theatrical in eyes unaccustomed to the East.

Stephen had never seen an Arab of the aristocratic class until to-day; and before, only a few such specimens as parade the *Galerie Charles Trois* at Monte Carlo, selling prayer-rugs and draperies from Algeria. This man's high birth and breeding were clear at the first glance. He was certainly a personage aware of his own attractions, though not offensively self-conscious, and was unmistakably interested in the beauty of the girl at the next table. He was too well-bred to make a show of his admiration, but talked in almost perfect, slightly guttural French, with the English clergyman, speaking occasionally also to the officers in answer to some question. He glanced seldom at Miss Ray, but when he did look across, in a guarded way, at her, there was a light of ardent pleasure in his eyes, such as no eyes save those of East or South ever betray. The look was respectful, despite its underlying passion. Nevertheless, because the handsome face was some shades darker than his own, it offended Stephen,

who felt a sharp bite of dislike for the Arab. He was glad the man was not at the same table with Miss Ray, and knew that it would have vexed him intensely to see the girl drawn into conversation. He wondered that the French officers should talk with the Arab as with an equal, yet knew in his heart that such prejudice was narrow-minded, especially at the moment when he was travelling to the Arab's own country. He tried, though not very strenuously, to override his conviction of superiority to the Eastern man, but triumphed only far enough to admit that the fellow was handsome in a way. His skin was hardly darker than old ivory: the aquiline nose delicate as a woman's, with sensitive nostrils; and the black velvet eyes under arched brows, that met in a thin, pencilled line, were long, and either dreamy or calmly calculating. A prominent chin and a full mouth, so determined as to suggest cruelty, certainly selfishness, preserved the face from effeminacy at the sacrifice of artistic perfection. Stephen noticed with mingled curiosity and disapproval that the Arab appeared to be vain of his hands, on which he wore two or three rings that might have been bought in Paris, or even given him by European women—for they looked like a woman's rings. The brown fingers were slender, tapering to the ends, and their reddened nails glittered. They played, as the man talked, with a piece of bread, and often he glanced down at them, with the long eyes which had a blue shadow underneath, like a faint smear of kohl.

Stephen wondered what Victoria Ray thought of her *vis-à-vis*; but in the presence of the staring bride and groom he could ask no questions, and the expression of her face, as once she quietly regarded the Arab, told nothing. It was even puzzling, as an expression for a young

girl's face to wear in looking at a handsome man so supremely conscious of sex and of his own attraction. She was evidently thinking about him with considerable interest, and it annoyed Stephen that she should look at him at all. An Arab might misunderstand, not realising that he was a legitimate object of curiosity for eyes unused to Eastern men.

After luncheon Victoria went to her cabin. This was disappointing. Stephen, hoping that she might come on deck again soon, and resume their talk where it had broken off in the morning, paced up and down until he felt drowsy, not having slept in the train the night before. To his surprise and disgust, it was after five when he waked from a long nap, in his state-room; and going on deck he found Miss Ray in her chair once more, this time apparently deep in "Monte Cristo."

V.

HE walked past, and she looked up with a smile, but did not ask him to draw his chair near hers, though there was a vacant space. It was an absurd and far-fetched idea, but he could not help asking himself if it were possible that she had picked up any acquaintance on board, who had told her he was a marked man, a foolish fellow who had spoiled his life for a low-born, unscrupulous woman's sake. It was a morbid fancy, he knew, but he was morbid now, and supposed that he should be for some time to come, if not for the rest of his life. He imagined a difference in the girl's manner. Maybe she had read that hateful interview in some paper, when she was in London, and now remembered having seen his

photograph with Margot Lorenzi's. He hated the thought, not because he deliberately wished to keep his engagement secret, but because the newspaper interview had made him seem a fool, and somehow he did not want to be despised by this dancing girl whom he should never see again after to-morrow. Just why her opinion of his character need matter to him, it was difficult to say, but there was something extraordinary about the girl. She did not seem in the least like other dancers he had met. He had not that feeling of comfortable comradeship with her that a man may feel with most unchaperoned, travelling actresses, no matter how respectable. There was a sense of aloofness, as if she had been a young princess, in spite of her simple and friendly ways.

Since it appeared that she had no intention of picking up the dropped threads of their conversation, Stephen thought of the smoking-room; but his wish to know whether she really had changed towards him became so pressing that he was impelled to speak again. It was an impulse unlike himself, at any rate the old self with which he was familiar, as with a friend or an intimate enemy.

"I hoped you would tell me the rest," he blurted out.

"The rest?"

"That you were beginning to tell."

The girl blushed. "I was afraid afterwards, you might have been bored, or anyway surprised. You probably thought it 'very American' of me to talk about my own affairs to a stranger, and it *isn't*, you know. I shouldn't like you to think Americans are less well brought up than other girls, just because *I* may do things that seem queer. I have to do them. And I am quite different from others. You mustn't suppose I'm not."

Stephen was curiously relieved. Suddenly he felt

young and happy, as he used to feel before knowing Margot Lorenzi. "I never met a brilliantly successful person who was as modest as you," he said, laughing with pleasure. "I was never less bored in my life. Will you talk to me again—and let me talk to you?"

"I should like to ask your advice," she replied.

That gave permission for Stephen to draw his chair near to hers. "Have you had tea?" he enquired, by way of a beginning.

"I'm too American to drink tea in the afternoon," she explained. "It's only fashionable Americans who take it, and I'm not that kind, as you can see. I come from the country—or almost the country."

"Weren't you drawn into any of our little ways in London?" He was working up to a certain point.

"I was too busy."

"I'm sure you weren't too busy for one thing: reading the papers for your notices."

Victoria shook her head, smiling. "There you're mistaken. The first morning after I danced at the Palace Theatre, I asked to see the papers they had in my boarding-house, because I hoped so much that English people would like me, and I wanted to be a success. But afterwards I didn't bother. I don't understand British politics, you see—how could I?—and I hardly know any English people, so I wasn't very interested in their papers."

Again Stephen was relieved. But he felt driven by one of his strange new impulses to tell her his name, and watch her face while he told it.

"'Curiouser and curiouser,' as our friend Alice would say," he laughed. "No newspaper paragraphs, and a boarding-house instead of a fashionable hotel. What was your manager thinking about?"

"I had no manager of my very own," said Victoria. "I 'exploited' myself. It costs less to do that. When people in America liked my dancing I got an offer from London, and I accepted it and made all the arrangements about going over. It was quite easy, you see, because there were only costumes to carry. My scenery is so simple, they either had it in the theatres or got something painted; and the statues in the studio scene, and the sculptor, needed very few rehearsals. In Paris they had only one. It was all I had time for, after I arrived. The lighting wasn't difficult either, and though people told me at first there would be trouble unless I had my own man, there never was any, really. In my letters to the managers I gave the dates when I could come to their theatres, how long I could stay, and all they must do to get things ready. The Paris engagement was made only a little while beforehand. I wanted to pass through there, so I was glad to accept the offer and earn extra money which I thought I might need by-and-by."

"What a mercenary star!" Stephen spoke teasingly; but in truth he could not make the girl out.

She took the accusation with a smile. "Yes, I am mercenary, I suppose," she confessed with unashamed frankness, "but not entirely for myself. I shouldn't like to be that! I told you how I've been looking forward always to one end. And now, just when that end may be near, how foolish I should be to spend a cent on unnecessary things! Why, I'd have felt *wicked* living in an expensive hotel, and keeping a maid, when I could be comfortable in a Bloomsbury boarding-house on ten dollars a week. And the dresser in the theatre, who did everything very nicely, was delighted with a present of twenty dollars when my London engagement was over."

"No doubt she was," said Stephen. "But——"

"I suppose you're thinking that I must have made lots of money, and that I'm a sort of little miseress: and so I have—and so I am. I earned seven hundred and fifty dollars a week—isn't that a hundred and fifty pounds?—for the six weeks, and I spent as little as possible; for I didn't get as large a salary as that in America. I engaged to dance for three hundred dollars a week there, which seemed perfectly wonderful to me at first; so I had to keep my contract, though other managers would have given me more. I wanted dreadfully to take their offers, because I was in such a hurry to have enough money to begin my real work. But I knew I shouldn't be blessed in my undertaking if I acted dishonourably. Try as I might, I've only been able to save up ten thousand dollars, counting the salary in Paris and all. Would you say that was enough to *bribe* a person, if necessary? Two thousand of your pounds."

"It depends upon how rich the person is."

"I don't know how rich he is. Could an Arab be *very* rich?"

"I daresay there are still some rich ones. But maybe riches aren't the same with them as with us. That fellow at lunch to-day looks as if he'd plenty of money to spend on embroideries."

"Yes. And he looks important too—as if he might have travelled, and known a great many people of all sorts. I wish it were proper for me to talk to him."

"Good Heavens, why?" asked Stephen, startled. "It would be most improper."

"Yes, I'm afraid so, and I won't, of course, unless I get to know him in some way," went on Victoria. "Not that there's any chance of such a thing."

"I should hope not," exclaimed Stephen, who was privately of opinion that there was only too good a chance if the girl showed the Arab even the faintest sign of willingness to know and be known. "I've no right to ask it, of course, except that I'm much older than you and have seen more of the world—but do promise not to look at that nigger. I don't like his face."

"He isn't a nigger," objected Victoria. "But if he were, it wouldn't matter—nor whether one liked his face or not. He might be able to help me."

"To help you—in Algiers?"

"Yes, in the same way that *you* might be able to help me—or more, because he's an Arab, and must know Arabs."

Stephen forgot to press his request for her promise. "How can I help you?" he wanted to know.

"I'm not sure. Only, you're going to Algiers. I always ask everybody to help, if there's the slightest chance they can."

Stephen felt disappointed and chilled. But she went on. "I should hate you to think I *gush* to strangers, and tell them all my affairs, just because I'm silly enough to love talking. I must talk to strangers. I *must* get help where I can. And you were kind the other night. Everybody is kind. Do you know many people in Algeria, or Tunisia?"

"Only one man. His name is Nevill Caird, and he lives in Algiers. My name is Stephen Knight. I've been wanting to tell you—I seemed to have an unfair advantage, knowing yours ever since Paris."

He watched her face almost furtively, but no change came over it, no cloud in the blueness of her candid eyes. The name meant nothing to her.

"I'm sorry. It's hardly worth while my bothering you then."

Stephen wished to be bothered. "But Nevill Caird has lived in Algiers for eight winters or so," he said. "He knows everybody, French and English—Arab too, very likely, if there are Arabs worth knowing."

A bright colour sprang to the girl's cheeks and turned her extreme prettiness into brilliant beauty. It seemed to Stephen that the name of Ray suited her: she was dazzling as sunshine. "Oh, then, I will tell you—if you'll listen," she said.

"If I had as many ears as a spear of wheat, they'd all want to listen." His voice sounded young and eager. "Please begin at the beginning, as the children say."

"Shall I really? But it's a long story. It begins when I was eight."

"All the better. It will be ten years long."

"I can skip lots of things. When I was eight, and my sister Saidee not quite eighteen, we were in Paris with my stepmother. My father had been dead just a year, but she was out of mourning. She wasn't old—only about thirty, and handsome. She was jealous of Saidee, though, because Saidee was so much younger and fresher, and because Saidee was beautiful—Oh, you can't imagine how beautiful!"

"Yes, I can," said Stephen.

"You mean me to take that for a compliment. I know I'm quite pretty, but I'm nothing to Saidee. She was a great beauty, though with the same colouring I have, except that her eyes were brown, and her hair a little more auburn. People turned to look after her in the street, and that made our stepmother angry. *She* wanted to be the one looked at. I knew, even then!

She wouldn't have travelled with us, only father had left her his money, on condition that she gave Saidee and me the best of educations, and allowed us a thousand dollars a year each, from the time our schooling was finished until we married. She had a good deal of influence over him, for he was ill a long time, and she was his nurse—that was the way they got acquainted. And she persuaded him to leave practically everything to her; but she couldn't prevent his making some conditions. There was one which she hated. She was obliged to live in the same town with us; so when she wanted to go and enjoy herself in Paris after father died, she had to take us too. And she didn't care to shut Saidee up, because if Saidee couldn't be seen, she couldn't be married; and of course Mrs. Ray wanted her to be married. Then she would have no bother, and no money to pay. I often heard Saidee say these things, because she told me everything. She loved me a great deal, and I adored her. My middle name is Cecilia, and she was generally called Say; so she used to tell me that our secret names for each other must be 'Say and Seal.' It made me feel very grown-up to have her confide so much in me: and never being with children at all, gave me grown-up thoughts."

"Poor child!" said Stephen.

"Oh, I was very happy. It was only after—but that isn't the way to tell the story. Our stepmother—whom we always called 'Mrs. Ray,' never 'mother'—liked officers, and we got acquainted with a good many French ones. They used to come to the flat where we lived. Some of them were introduced by our French governess, whose brother was in the army, but they brought others, and Saidee and Mrs. Ray went to parties together, though Mrs. Ray hated being chaperon. If poor Saidee were

admired at a dinner, or a dance, Mrs. Ray would be horrid all next day, and say everything disagreeable she could think of. Then Saidee would cry when we were alone, and tell me she was so miserable, she would have to marry in self-defence. That made me cry too—but she promised to take me with her if she went away.

“When we had been in Paris about two months, Saidee came to bed one night after a ball, and waked me up. We slept in the same room. She was excited and looked like an angel. I knew something had happened. She told me she'd met a wonderful man, and everyone was fascinated with him. She had heard of him before, but this was the first time they'd seen each other. He was in the French army, she said, a captain, and older than most of the men she knew best, but very handsome, and rich as well as clever. It was only at the last, after she'd praised the man a great deal, that she mentioned his having Arab blood. Even then she hurried on to say his mother was a Spanish woman, and he had been partly educated in France, and spoke perfect French, and English too. They had danced together, and Saidee had never met so interesting a man. She thought he was like the hero of some romance; and she told me I would see him, because he'd begged Mrs. Ray to be allowed to call. He had asked Saidee lots of questions, and she'd told him even about me—so he sent me his love. She seemed to think I ought to be pleased, but I wasn't. I'd read the 'Arabian Nights,' with pictures, and I knew Arabs were dark people. I didn't look down on them particularly, but I couldn't bear to have Say interested in an Arab. It didn't seem right for her, somehow.”

The girl stopped, and apparently forgot to go on. She had been speaking with short pauses, as if she hardly

realised that she was talking aloud. Her eyebrows drew together, and she sighed. Stephen knew that some memory pressed heavily upon her, but soon she began again.

"He came next day. He was handsome, as Saidee had said—as handsome as the Arab on board this ship, but in a different way. He looked noble and haughty—yet as if he might be very selfish and hard. Perhaps he was about thirty-three or four, and that seemed old to me then—old even to Saidee. But she was fascinated. He came often, and she saw him at other houses. Everywhere she was going, he would find out, and go too. That pleased her—for he was an important man somehow, and of good birth. Besides, he was desperately in love—even a child could see that. He never took his eyes off Saidee's face when she was with him. It was as if he could eat her up; and if she flirted a little with the real French officers, to amuse herself or tease him, it drove him half mad. She liked that—it was exciting, she used to say. And I forgot to tell you, he wore European dress, except for a fez—no turban, like this man's on the boat, or I'm sure she couldn't have cared for him in the way she did—he wouldn't have seemed *possible*, for a Christian girl. A man in a turban! You understand, don't you?"

"Yes, I understand," Stephen said. He understood, too, how violently such beauty as the girl described must have appealed to the dark man of the East. "The same colouring that I have," Victoria Ray had said. If he, an Englishman, accustomed to the fair loveliness of his countrywomen, were a little dazzled by the radiance of this girl, what compelling influence must not the more beautiful sister have exercised upon the Arab?

"He made love to Saidee in a fierce sort of way that carried her off her feet," went on Victoria. "She used to

tell me things he said, and Mrs. Ray did all she could to throw them together, because he was rich, and lived a long way off—so she wouldn't have to do anything for Say if they were married, or even see her again. He was only on leave in Paris. He was a Spahi, stationed in Algiers, and he owned a house there."

"Ah, in Algiers!" Stephen began to see light—rather a lurid light.

"Yes. His name was Cassim ben Halim el Cheikh el Arab. Before he had known Saidee two weeks, he proposed. She took a little while to think it over, and I begged her to say 'no'—but one day when Mrs. Ray had been crosser and more horrid than usual, she said 'yes.' Cassim ben Halim was Mohammedan, of course, but he and Saidee were married according to French law. They didn't go to church, because he couldn't do that without showing disrespect to his own religion, but he promised he'd not try to change hers. Altogether it seemed to Saidee that there was no reason why they shouldn't be as happy as a Catholic girl marrying a Protestant—or *vice versa*; and she hadn't any very strong convictions. She was a Christian, but she wasn't fond of going to church."

"And her promise that she'd take you away with her?" Stephen reminded the girl.

"She would have kept it, if Mrs. Ray had consented—though I'm sure Cassim didn't want me, and only agreed to do what Saidee asked because he was so deep in love, and feared to lose my sister if he refused her anything. But Mrs. Ray was afraid to let me go, on account of the condition in father's will that she should keep me near her while I was being educated. There was an old friend of father's who'd threatened to try and upset the will, for Saidee's sake and mine, so I suppose she thought he might

succeed if she disobeyed father's instructions. It ended in Saidee and her husband going to Algiers without me, and Saidee cried—but she couldn't help being happy, because she was in love, and very excited about the strange new life, which Cassim told her would be wonderful as some gorgeous dream of fairyland. He gave her quantities of jewellery, and said they were nothing to what she should have when she was in her own home with him. She should be covered from head to foot with diamonds and pearls, rubies and emeralds, if she liked; and of course she would like, for she loved jewels, poor darling."

"Why do you say 'poor'?" asked Stephen. "Are you going to tell me the marriage wasn't a success?"

"I don't know," answered the girl. "I don't know any more about her than if Cassim ben Halim had really carried my sister off to fairyland, and shut the door behind them. You see, I was only eight years old. I couldn't make my own life. After Saidee was married and taken to Algiers, my stepmother began to imagine herself in love with an American from Indiana, whom she met in Paris. He had an impressive sort of manner, and made her think him rich and important. He was in business, and had come over to rest, so he couldn't stay long abroad; and he urged Mrs. Ray to go back to America on the same ship with him. Of course she took me, and this Mr. Henry Potter told her about a boarding-school where they taught quite little girls, not far from the town where he lived. It had been a farmhouse once, and he said there were 'good teachers and good air.' I can hear him saying it now. It was easy to persuade her; and she engaged rooms at a hotel in the town near by, which was called Potterston, after Mr. Potter's grandfather. By-and-by they were married, but their marriage

made no difference to me. It wasn't a bad little old-fashioned school, and I was as happy as I could be anywhere, parted from Saidee. There was an attic where I used to be allowed to sit on Saturdays, and think thoughts, and write letters to my sister; and there was one corner, where the sunlight came in through a tiny window shaped like a crescent, without any glass, which I named Algiers. I played that I went there to visit Saidee in the old Arab palace she wrote me about. It was a splendid play—but I felt lonely when I stopped playing it. I used to dance there, too, very softly in stockinged feet, so nobody could hear—dances she and I made up together out of stories she used to tell me. The Shadow Dance and the Statue Dance which you saw, came out of those stories, and there are more you didn't see, which I do sometimes—a butterfly dance, the dance of the wheat, and two of the East, which were in stories she told me after we knew Cassim ben Halim. They are the dance of the smoke wreath, and the dance of the jewel-and-the-rose. I could dance quite well even in those days, because I loved doing it. It came as natural to dance as to breathe, and Saidee had always encouraged me, so when I was left alone it made me think of her, to dance the dances of her stories.

“What about your teachers? Did they never find you out?” asked Stephen.

“Yes. One of the young teachers did at last. Not in the attic, but when I was dancing for the big girls in their dormitory, at night—they'd wake me up to get me to dance. But she wasn't much older than the biggest of the big girls, so she laughed—I suppose I must have looked quaint dancing in my nightgown, with my long red hair. And though we were all scolded afterwards, I was

made to dance sometimes at the entertainments we gave when school broke up in the summer. I was the youngest scholar, you see, and stayed through the vacations, so I was a kind of pet for the teachers. They were of one family, aunts and nieces—Southern people, and of course good-natured. But all this isn't really in the story I want to tell you. The interesting part's about Saidee. For months I got letters from her, written from Algiers. At first they were like fairy tales, but by-and-by—quite soon—they stopped telling much about herself. It seemed as if Saidee were growing more and more reserved, or else as if she were tired of writing to me, and bored by it—almost as if she could hardly think of anything to say. Then the letters stopped altogether. I wrote and wrote, but no answer came—no answer ever came."

"You've never heard from your sister since then?" The thing appeared incredible to Stephen.

"Never. Now you can guess what I've been growing up for, living for, all these years. To find her."

"But surely," Stephen argued, "there must have been some way to——"

"Not any way that was in my power, till now. You see I was helpless. I had no money, and I was a child. I'm not very old yet, but I'm older than my years, because I had this thing to do. There I was, at a farmhouse school in the country, two miles out of Potterston—and you would think Potterston itself not much better than the backwoods, I'm sure. When I was fourteen, my stepmother died suddenly—leaving all the money which came from my father to her husband, except several thousand dollars to finish my education and give me a start in life; but Mr. Potter lost everything of his own and of mine too, in some wild speculation about which the

people in that part of Indiana went mad. The crash came a year ago, and the Misses Jennings, who kept the school, asked me to stay on as an under teacher—they were sorry for me, and so kind. But even if nothing had happened, I should have left then, for I felt old enough to set about my real work. Oh, I see you think I might have got at my sister before, somehow, but I couldn't, indeed. I tried everything. Not only did I write and write, but I begged the Misses Jennings to help, and the minister of the church where we went on Sundays. The Misses Jennings told the girls' parents and relations whenever they came to visit, and they all promised, if they ever went to Algiers, they would look for my sister's husband, Captain Cassim ben Halim, of the Spahis. But they weren't the sort of people who ever do go such journeys. And the minister wrote to the American Consul in Algiers for me, but the only answer was that Cassim ben Halim had disappeared. It seemed not even to be known that he had an American wife."

"Your stepmother ought to have gone herself," said Stephen.

"Oh—*ought!* I very seldom saw my stepmother after she married Mr. Potter. Though she lived so near, she never asked me to her house, and only came to call at the school once or twice a year, for form's sake. But I ran away one evening and begged her to go and find Saidee. She said it was nonsense; that if Saidee hadn't wanted to drop us, she would have kept on writing, or else she was dead. But don't you think I should have *known* if Saidee were dead?"

"By instinct, you mean—telepathy, or something of that sort?"

"I don't know what I mean, but *I should have known.*

I should have felt her death, like a string snapping in my heart. Instead, I heard her calling to me—I hear her always. She wants me. She needs me. I know it, and nothing could make me believe otherwise. So now you understand how, if anything were to be done, I had to do it myself. When I was quite little, I thought by the time I should be sixteen or seventeen, and allowed to leave school—or old enough to run away if necessary—I'd have a little money of my own. But when my stepmother died I felt sure I should never, never get anything from Mr. Potter."

"But that old friend you spoke of, who wanted to upset the will? Couldn't he have done anything?" Stephen asked.

"If he had lived, everything might have been different; but he was a very old man, and he died of pneumonia soon after Saidee married Cassim ben Halim. There was no one else to help. So from the time I was fourteen, I knew that somehow I must make money. Without money I could never hope to get to Algiers and find Saidee. Even though she had disappeared from there, it seemed to me that Algiers would be the place to begin my search. Don't you think so?"

"Yes, Algiers is the place to begin," Stephen echoed. "There ought to be a way of tracking her. *Someone* must know what became of a more or less important man such as your brother-in-law seems to have been. It's incredible that he should have been able to vanish without leaving any trace."

"He must have left a trace, and though nobody else, so far, has found it, I shall find it," said the girl. "I did what I could before. I asked everybody to help; and when I got to New York last year, I used to go to Cook's

office, to enquire for people travelling to Algiers. Then, if I met any, I would at once speak of my sister, and give them my address, to let me know if they should discover anything. They always seemed interested, and said they would really do their best, but they must have failed, or else they forgot. No news ever came back. It will be different with me now, though. I shall find Saidee, and if she isn't happy, I shall bring her away with me. If her husband is a bad man, and if the reason he left Algiers is because he lost his money, as I sometimes think, I may have to bribe him to let her go. But I have money enough for everything, I hope—unless he's very greedy, or there are difficulties I can't foresee. In that case, I shall dance again, and make more money, you know—that's all there is about it."

"One thing I do know, is that you are wonderful," said Stephen, his conscience pricking him because of certain unjust thoughts concerning this child which he had harboured since learning that she was a dancer. "You're the most wonderful girl I ever saw or heard of."

She laughed happily. "Oh no, I'm not wonderful at all. It's funny you should think so. Perhaps none of the girls you know have had a big work to do."

"I'm sure they never have," said Stephen, "and if they had, they wouldn't have done it."

"Yes, they would. Anybody would—that is, if they wanted to, *enough*. You can always do what you want to *enough*. I wanted to do this with all my heart and soul, so I knew I should find the way. I just followed my instinct, when people told me I was unreasonable, and of course it led me right. Reason is only to depend on in scientific sorts of things, isn't it? The other is higher, because instinct is your *You*."

"Isn't that what people say who preach New Thought, or whatever they call it?" asked Stephen. "A lot of women I know had rather a craze about that two or three years ago. They went to lectures given by an American man they raved over—said he was 'too fascinating.' And they used their 'science' to win at bridge. I don't know whether it worked or not."

"I never heard anyone talk of New Thought," said Victoria. "I've just had my own thoughts about everything. The attic at school was a lovely place to think thoughts in. Wonderful ones always came to me, if I called to them—thoughts all glittering—like angels. They seemed to bring me new ideas about things I'd been born knowing—beautiful things, which I feel somehow have been handed down to me—in my blood."

"Why, that's the way my friends used to talk about 'waking their race-consciousness.' But it only led to bridge, with them."

"Well, it's led me from Potterston here," said Victoria, "and it will lead me on to the end, wherever that may be, I'm sure. Perhaps it will lead me far, far off, into that mysterious golden silence, where in dreams I often see Saidee watching for me: the strangest dream-place, and I've no idea where it is! But I shall find out, if she is really there."

"What supreme confidence you have in your star!" Stephen exclaimed, admiringly, and half enviously.

"Of course. Haven't you, in yours?"

"I have no star."

She turned her eyes to his, quickly, as if grieved. And in his eyes she saw the shadow of hopelessness which was there to see, and could not be hidden from a clear gaze.

"I'm sorry," she said simply. "I don't know how I could have lived without mine. I walk in its light, as if in a path. But yours must be somewhere in the sky, and you can find it if you want to very much."

He could have found two in her eyes just then, but such stars were not for him. "Perhaps I don't deserve a star," he said.

"I'm sure you do. You are the kind that does," the girl comforted him. "Do have a star!"

"It would only make me unhappy, because I mightn't be able to walk in its light, as you do."

"It would make you very happy, as mine does me. I'm always happy, because the light helps me to do things. It helped me to dance; it helped me to succeed."

"Tell me about your dancing," said Stephen, vaguely anxious to change the subject, and escape from thoughts of Margot, the only star of his future. "I should like to hear how you began, if you don't mind."

"That's kind of you," replied Victoria, gratefully.

He laughed. "Kind!"

"Why, it's nothing of a story. Luckily, I'd always danced. So when I was fourteen, and began to think I should never have any money of my own after all, I saw that dancing would be my best way of earning it, as that was the one thing I could do very well. Afterwards I worked in real earnest—always up in the attic, where I used to study the Arabic language too; study it very hard. And no one knew what I was doing or what was in my head, till last year when I told the oldest Miss Jennings that I couldn't be a teacher—that I must leave school and go to New York."

"What did she say?"

"She said I was crazy. So did they all. They got

the minister to come and argue with me, and he was dreadfully opposed to my wishes at first. But after we'd talked awhile, he came round to my way."

"How did you persuade him to that point of view?" Stephen catechised her, wondering always.

"I hardly know. I just told him how I felt about everything. Oh, and I danced."

"By Jove! What effect had that on him?"

"He clapped his hands and said it was a good dance, quite different from what he expected. He didn't think it would do anyone harm to see. And he gave me a sort of lecture about how I ought to behave if I became a dancer. It was easy to follow his advice, because none of the bad things he feared might happen to me ever did."

"Your star protected you?"

"Of course. There was a little trouble about money at first, because I hadn't any, but I had a few things—a watch that had been my mother's, and her engagement-ring (they were Saidee's, but she left them both for me when she went away), and a queer kind of brooch Cassim ben Halim gave me one day, out of a lovely mother-o'-pearl box he brought full of jewels for Saidee, when they were engaged. See, I have the brooch on now—for I wouldn't *sell* the things. I went to a shop in Potterston and asked the man to lend me fifty dollars on them all, so he did. It was very good of him."

"You seem to consider everybody you meet kind and good," Stephen said.

"Yes, they almost always have been so to me. If you believe people are going to be good, it *makes* them good, unless they're very bad indeed."

"Perhaps." Stephen would not for a great deal have tried to undermine her confidence in her fellow beings,

and such was the power of the girl's personality, that for the moment he was half inclined to feel she might be right. Who could tell? Maybe he had not "believed" enough—in Margot. He looked with interest at the brooch of which Miss Ray spoke, a curiously wrought, flattened ring of dull gold, with a pin in the middle which pierced and fastened her chiffon veil on her breast. Round the edge, irregularly shaped pearls alternated with roughly cut emeralds, and there was a barbaric beauty in both workmanship and colour.

"What happened when you got to your journey's end?" he went on, fearing to go astray on that subject of the world's goodness, which was a sore point with him lately. "Did you know anybody in New York?"

"Nobody. But I asked the driver of a cab if he could take me to a respectable theatrical boarding-house, and he said he could, so I told him to drive me there. I engaged a wee back room at the top of the house, and paid a week in advance. The boarders weren't very successful people, poor things, for it was a cheap boarding-house—it had to be, for me. But they all knew which were the best theatres and managers, and they were interested when they heard I'd come to try and get a chance to be a dancer. They were afraid it wasn't much use, but the same evening they changed their minds, and gave me lots of good advice."

"You danced for them?"

"Yes, in such a stuffy parlour, smelling of gas and dust and there were holes in the carpet it was difficult not to step into. A dear old man without any hair, who was on what he called the 'Variety Stage,' advised me to go and try to see Mr. Charles Norman, a fearfully important person—so important that even I had heard of

him, away out in Indiana. I did try, day after day, but he was too important to be got at. I wouldn't be discouraged, though. I knew Mr. Norman must come to the theatre sometimes, so I bought a photograph in order to recognise him; and one day when he passed me, going in, I screwed up my courage and spoke. I said I'd been waiting for days and days. At first he scowled, and I think meant to be cross, but when he'd given me one long, terrifying glare, he grumbled out: "Come along with me, then. I'll soon see what you can do." I went in, and danced on an almost dark stage, with Mr. Norman and another man looking at me, in the empty theatre where all the chairs and boxes were covered up with sheets. They seemed rather pleased with my dancing, and Mr. Norman said he would give me a chance. Then, if I 'caught on'—he meant if people liked me—I should have a salary. But I told him I must have the salary at once, as my money would only last a few more days. I'd spent nearly all I had, getting to New York. Very well, said he, I should have thirty dollars a week to begin with, and after that, we'd see what we'd see. Well, people did like my dances, and by-and-by Mr. Norman gave me what seemed then a splendid salary. So now you know everything that's happened; and please don't think I'd have worried you by talking so much about myself, if you hadn't asked questions. I'm afraid I oughtn't to have done it, anyway."

Her tone changed, and became almost apologetic. She stirred uneasily in her deck chair, and looked about half dazedly, as people look about a room that is new to them, on waking there for the first time. "Why, it's grown dark!" she exclaimed.

This fact surprised Stephen equally. "So it has," he

said. "By Jove, I was so interested in you—in what you were telling—I hadn't noticed. I'd forgotten where we were."

"I'd forgotten, too," said Victoria. "I always do forget outside things when I think about Saidee, and the golden dream-silence where I see her. All the people who were near us on deck have gone away. Did you see them go?"

"No," said Stephen, "I didn't."

"How odd!" exclaimed the girl.

"Do you think so? You had taken me to the golden silence with you."

"Where can everybody be?" She spoke anxiously. "Is it late? Maybe they've gone to get ready for dinner."

From a small bag she wore at her belt, American tourist-fashion, she pulled out an old-fashioned gold watch of the kind that winds up with a key—her mother's, perhaps, on which she had borrowed money to reach New York. "Something must be wrong with my watch," she said. "It can't be twenty minutes past eight."

The same thing was wrong with Stephen's expensive repeater, whose splendour he was ashamed to flaunt beside the modesty of the girl's poor little timepiece. There remained now no reasonable doubt that it was indeed twenty minutes past eight, since by the mouths of two witnesses a truth can be established.

"How dreadful!" exclaimed Victoria, mortified. "I've kept you here all this time, listening to me."

"Didn't I tell you I'd rather listen to you than anything else? Eating was certainly not excepted. I don't remember hearing the bugle."

"And I didn't hear it."

"I'd forgotten dinner. You had carried me so far away with you."

"And Saidee," added the girl. "Thank you for going with us."

"Thank you for taking me."

They both laughed, and as they laughed, people began streaming out on deck. Dinner was over. The handsome Arab passed, talking with the spare, loose-limbed English parson, whom he had fascinated. They were discussing affairs in Morocco, and as they passed Stephen and Victoria, the Arab did not appear to turn; yet Stephen knew that he was thinking of them and not of what he was saying to the clergyman.

"What shall we do?" asked Victoria.

Stephen reflected for an instant. "Will you invite me to dine at your table?" he asked.

"Maybe they'll tell us it's too late now to have anything to eat. I don't mind for myself, but for you——"

"We'll have a better dinner than the others have had," Stephen prophesied. "I guarantee it, if you invite me."

"Oh, do please come," she implored, like a child. "I couldn't face the waiters alone. And you know, I feel as if you were a friend, now—though you may laugh at that."

"It's the best compliment I ever had," said Stephen. "And—it gives me faith in myself—which I need."

"And your star, which you're to find," the girl reminded him, as he unrolled her from her rug.

"I wish you'd lend me a little of the light from yours, to find mine by," he said half gaily, yet with a certain wistfulness which she detected under the laugh.

"I will," she said quickly. "Not a little, but half."

VI.

STEPHEN'S prophecy came true. They had a better dinner than anyone else had, and enjoyed it as an adventure. Victoria thought their waiter a particularly good-natured man, because instead of sulking over his duties he beamed. Stephen might, if he had chosen, have thrown another light upon the waiter's smiles; but he didn't choose. And he was happy. He gave Victoria good advice, and promised help from Nevill Caird. "He's sure to meet me at the ship," he said, "and if you'll let me, I'll introduce him to you. He may be able to find out everything you want to know."

Stephen would have liked to go on talking after dinner, but the girl, ashamed of having taken up so much of his time, would not be tempted. She went to her cabin, and thought of him, as well as of her sister; and he thought of her while he walked on deck, under the stars.

"For a moment white, then gone forever."

Again the words came singing into his head. She was white—white as this lacelike foam that silvered the Mediterranean blue; but she had not gone forever, as he had thought when he likened her whiteness to the spindrift on the dark Channel waves. She had come into his life once more, unexpectedly; and she might brighten it again for a short time on land, in that unknown garden his thoughts pictured, behind the gate of the East. Yet she

would not be of his life. There was no place in it for a girl. Still, he thought of her, and went on thinking, involuntarily planning things which he and Nevill Caird would do to help the child, in her romantic errand. Of course she must not be allowed to travel about Algeria alone. Once settled in Algiers she must stay there quietly till the authorities found her sister.

He used that powerful-sounding word "authorities" vaguely in his mind, but he was sure that the thing would be simple enough. The police could be applied to, if Nevill and his friends should be unable to discover Ben Halim and his American wife. Almost unconsciously, Stephen saw himself earning Victoria Ray's gratitude. It was a pleasant fancy, and he followed it as one wanders down a flowery path found in a dark forest.

Victoria's thoughts of him were as many, though different.

She had never filled her mind with nonsense about men, as many girls do. As she would have said to herself, she had been too busy. When girls at school had talked of being in love, and of marrying, she had been interested, as if in a story-book, but it had not seemed to her that she would ever fall in love or be married. It seemed so less than ever, now that she was at last actually on her way to look for Saidee. She was intensely excited, and there was room only for the one absorbing thought in mind and heart; yet she was not as anxious as most others would have been in her place. Now that Heaven had helped her so far, she was sure she would be helped to the end. It would be too bad to be true that anything dreadful should have happened to Saidee—anything from which she, Victoria, could not save her; and so now, very soon perhaps, everything would come

right. It seemed to the girl that somehow Stephen was part of a great scheme, that he had been sent into her life for a purpose. Otherwise, why should he have been so kind since the first, and have appeared this second time, when she had almost forgotten him in the press of other thoughts? Why should he be going where she was going, and why should he have a friend who had known Algiers and Algeria since the time when Saidee's letters had ceased?

All these arguments were childlike; but Victoria Ray had not passed far beyond childhood; and though her ideas of religion were her own—unlearned and unconventional—such as they were they meant everything to her. Many things which she had heard in churches had seemed unreal to the girl; but she believed that the Great Power moving the Universe planned her affairs as well as the affairs of the stars, and with equal interest. She thought that her soul was a spark given out by that Power, and that what was God in her had only to call to the All of God to be answered. She had called, asking to find Saidee, and now she was going to find her, just how she did not yet know; but she hardly doubted that Stephen Knight was connected with the way. Otherwise, what was the good of him to her? And Victoria was far too humble in her opinion of herself, despite that buoyant confidence in her star, to imagine that she could be of any use to him. She could be useful to Saidee; that was all. She hoped for nothing more. And little as she knew of society, she understood that Stephen belonged to a different world from hers; the world where people were rich, and gay, and clever, and amused themselves; the high world, from a social point of view. She supposed, too, that Stephen looked upon her as a little girl, while

she in her turn regarded him gratefully and admiringly, as from a distance. And she believed that he must be a very good man.

It would never have occurred to Victoria Ray to call him, even in thought, her "White Knight," as Margot Lorenzi persisted in calling him, and had called him in the famous interview. But it struck her, the moment she heard his name, that it somehow fitted him like a suit of armour. She was fond of finding an appropriateness in names, and sometimes, if she were tired or a little discouraged, she repeated her own aloud, several times over: "Victoria, Victoria. I am Victoria," until she felt strong again to conquer every difficulty which might rise against her, in living up to her name. Now she was of opinion that Stephen's face would do very well in the picture of a young knight of olden days, going out to fight for the True Cross. Indeed, he looked as if he had already passed through the preparation of a long vigil, for his face was worn, and his eyes seldom smiled even when he laughed and seemed amused. His features gave her an idea that the Creator had taken a great deal of pains in chiselling them, not slighting a single line. She had seen handsomer men—indeed, the splendid Arab on the ship was handsomer—but she thought, if she were a general who wanted a man to lead a forlorn hope which meant almost certain death, she would choose one of Stephen's type. She had the impression that he would not hesitate to sacrifice himself for a cause, or even for a person, in an emergency, although he had the air of one used to good fortune, who loved to take his own way in the small things of life.

And so she finally went to sleep thinking of Stephen.

It is seldom that even the *Charles Quex*, one of the

fastest ships plying between Marseilles and Algiers, makes the trip in eighteen hours, as advertised. Generally she takes two half-days and a night, but this time people began to say that she would do it in twenty-two hours. Very early in the dawning she passed the Balearic Isles, mysterious purple in an opal sea, and it was not yet noon when the jagged line of the Atlas Mountains hovered in pale blue shadow along a paler horizon. Then, as the turbines whirred, the shadow materialised, taking a golden solidity and wildness of outline. At length the tower of a lighthouse started out clear white against blue, as a shaft of sunshine struck it. Next, the nearer mountains slowly turned to green, as a chameleon changes: the Admiralty Island came clearly into view; the ancient nest of those fierce pirates who for centuries scourged the Mediterranean; and last of all, the climbing town of Algiers, old Al-Djézair-el-Bahadja, took form like thick patterns of mother-o'-pearl set in bright green enamel, the patterns eventually separating themselves into individual buildings. The strange, bulbous domes of a Byzantine cathedral on a hill sprang up like a huge tropical plant of many flowers, unfolding fantastic buds of deep rose-colour, against a sky of violet flame.

"At last, Africa!" said Victoria, standing beside Stephen, and leaning on the rail. She spoke to herself, half whispering the words, hardly aware that she uttered them, but Stephen heard. The two had not been long together during the morning, for each had been shy of giving too much of himself or herself, although they had secretly wished for each other's society. As the voyage drew to a close, however, Stephen was no longer able to resist an attraction which he felt like a compelling magnetism. His excuse was that he wanted to know Miss

Ray's first impressions of the place she had constantly seen in her thoughts during ten years.

"Is it like what you expected?" he asked.

"Yes," she said, "it's like, because I have photographs. And I've read every book I could get hold of, old and new, in French as well as English. I always kept up my French, you know, for the same reason that I studied Arabic. I think I could tell the names of some of the buildings, without making mistakes. Yet it looks different, as the living face of a person is different from a portrait in black and white. And I never imagined such a sky. I didn't know skies could be of such a colour. It's as if pale fire were burning behind a thin veil of blue."

It was as she said. Stephen had seen vivid skies on the Riviera, but there the blue was more opaque, like the blue of the turquoise. Here it was ethereal and quivering, like the violet fire that hovers over burning ship-logs. He was glad the sky of Africa was unlike any other sky he had known. It intensified the thrill of enchantment he had begun to feel. It seemed to him that it might be possible for a man to forget things in a country where even the sky was of another blue.

Sometimes, when Stephen had read in books of travel (at which he seldom even glanced), or in novels, about "the mystery of the East," he had smiled in a superior way. Why should the East be more mysterious than the West, or North, or South, except that women were shut up in harems and wore veils if they stirred out of doors? Such customs could scarcely make a whole country mysterious. But now, though he had not yet landed, he knew that he would be compelled to acknowledge the indefinable mystery at which he had sneered. Already he fancied an elusive influence, like the touch of a ghost.

It was in the pulsing azure of the sky; in the wild forms of the Atlas and far Kabyle mountains stretching into vague, pale distances; in the ivory white of the low-domed roofs that gleamed against the vivid green hill of the Sahel, like pearls on a veiled woman's breast.

"Is it what you thought it would be?" Victoria enquired in her turn.

"I hadn't thought much about it," Stephen had to confess, fearing she would consider such indifference uninteresting. He did not add what remained of the truth, that he had thought of Algiers as a refuge from what had become disagreeable, rather than as a beautiful place which he wished to see for its own sake. "I'd made no picture in my mind. You know a lot more about it all than I do, though you've lived so far away, and I within a distance of forty-eight hours."

"That great copper-coloured church high on the hill is Notre Dame d'Afrique," said the girl. "She's like a dark sister of Notre Dame de la Garde, who watches over Marseilles, isn't she? I think I could love her, though she's ugly, really. And I've read in a book that if you walk up the hill to visit her and say a prayer, you may have a hundred days' indulgence."

Much good an "indulgence" would do him now, Stephen thought bitterly.

As the ship steamed closer inshore, the dreamlike beauty of the white town on the green hillside sharpened into a reality which might have seemed disappointingly modern and French, had it not been for the sprinkling of domes, the pointing fingers of minarets with glittering tiles of bronzy green, and the groups of old Arab houses crowded in among the crudities of a new, Western civilisation. Down by the wharf for which the boat aimed like

a homing bird, were huddled a few of these houses, ancient dwellings turned into commercial offices where shipping business was transacted. They looked forlorn, yet beautiful, like haggard slavewomen who remembered days of greatness in a far-off land.

The *Charles Quex* slackened speed as she neared the harbour, and every detail of the town leaped to the eyes, dazzling in the southern sunshine. The encircling arms of breakwaters were flung out to sea in a vast embrace; the smoke of vessels threaded with dark, wavy lines the pure crystal of the air; the quays were heaped with merchandise, some of it in bales, as if it might have been brought by caravans across the desert. There was a clanking of cranes at work, a creaking of chains, a flapping of canvas, and many sounds which blend in the harsh poetry of sea-harbours. Then voices of men rose shrilly above all heavier noises, as the ship slowly turned and crept beside a floating pontoon. The journey together was over for Stephen Knight and Victoria Ray.

VII.

A FIRST glance, at such close quarters, would have told the least instructed stranger that he was in the presence of two clashing civilisations, both tenacious, one powerful.

In front, all along the shore, towered with confident effrontery a massive line of buildings many storeys high, great cubes of brick and stone, having elaborate balconies that shadowed swarming offices with dark, gaping vaults below. Along the broad, stone-paved street clanged electric tramcars. There was a constant coming and going of

men. Cloaked and hooded white forms, or half-clad apparitions wrapped in what looked like dirty bagging, mingled with commonplace figures in Western dress. But huddled in elbow-high with this busy town of modern France (which might have been Marseilles or Bordeaux) was something alien, something remote in spirit; a ghostly band of white buildings, silent and pale in the midst of colour and noise. Low houses with flat roofs or miniature domes, small, secret doorways, tiny windows like eyes narrowed for spying, and overhanging upper storeys supported on close-set, projecting sticks of mellow brown which meant great age. Minarets sprang up in mute protest against the infidel, appealing to the sky. All that was left of old Algiers tried to boast, in forced dumbness, of past glories, of every charm the beautiful, fierce city of pirates must have possessed before the French came to push it slowly but with deadly sureness back from the sea. Now, silent and proud in the tragedy of failure, it stood masked behind pretentious French houses, blocklike in ugliness, or flauntingly ornate as many buildings in the Rue de Rivoli or Boulevard Haussmann.

In those low-browed dwellings which thickly enamelled the hill with a mosaic of pink and pearly whiteness, all the way up to the old fortress castle, the Kasbah, the true life of African Algiers hid and whispered. The modern French front along the fine street was but a gay veneer concealing realities, an incrustated civilisation imposed upon one incredibly ancient, unspeakably different and ever unchanging.

Stephen remembered now that he had heard people decry Algiers, pronouncing it spoiled and "completely Frenchified." But it occurred to him that in this very process of spoiling, an impression of tragic romance had

been created which less "spoiled" towns might lack. Here were clashing contrasts which, even at a glance, made the strangest picture he had ever seen; and already he began to feel more and more keenly, though not yet to understand, something of the magic of the East. For this place, though not the East according to geographers, held all the spirit of the East—was in essence truly the East.

Before the ship lay fairly in harbour, brown men had climbed on board from little boats, demanding to be given charge of the passengers' small luggage, which the stewards had brought on deck, and while one of these was arguing in bad French with Stephen, a tall, dark youth beautifully dressed in crimson and white, wearing a fez jauntily on one side, stepped up with a smile. "*Pardon, monsieur,*" he ventured. "*Je suis le domestique de Monsieur Caird.*" And then, in richly guttural accents, he offered the information that he was charged to look after monsieur's baggage; that it was best to avoid *tous ces Arabes-là*, and that Monsieur Caird impatiently awaited his friend on the wharf.

"But you—aren't you Arab?" asked Stephen, who knew no subtle differences between those who wore the turban or fez. He saw that the good-looking, merry-faced boy was no browner than many a Frenchman of the south, and that his eyes were hazel; still, he did not know what he might be, if not Arab.

"*Je suis Kabyle, monsieur; Kabyle des hauts plateaux,*" replied the youth with pride, and a look of contempt at the shouting porters, which was returned with interest. They darted glances of scorn at his gold-braided vest and jacket of crimson cloth, his light blue sash, and his enormously full white trousers, beneath which showed a strip of pale golden leg above the short white stockings,

spurning the immaculate smartness of his livery, preferring, or pretending to prefer, their own soiled shabbiness and freedom. The Kabyle saw these glances, but, completely satisfied with himself, evidently attributed them to envy.

Stephen turned towards Victoria, of whom he had lost sight for a moment. He wished to offer the Kabyle boy's services, but already she had accepted those of a very old Arab who looked thin and ostentatiously pathetic. It was too late now. He saw by her face that she would refuse help, rather than hurt the man's feelings. But she had told him the name of the hotel where she had telegraphed to engage a room, and Stephen meant at the instant of greeting his host, to ask if it were suitable for a young girl travelling alone.

He caught sight of Caird, looking up and waiting for him, before he was able to land. It was the face he remembered; boyish, with beautiful bright eyes, a wide forehead, and curly light hair. The expression was more mature, but the same quaintly angelic look was there, which had earned for Nevill the nickname of "Choir Boy" and "Wings."

"Hullo, Legs!" called out Caird, waving his Panama.

"Hullo, Wings!" shouted Stephen, and was suddenly tremendously glad to see the friend he had thought of seldom during the last eight or nine years. In another moment he was introducing Nevill to Miss Ray and hastily asking questions concerning her hotel, while a fantastic crowd surged round all three. Brown, skurrying men in torn bagging, the muscles of whose bare, hairless legs seemed carved in dark oak; shining black men whose faces were ebony under the ivory white of their turbans; pale, patient Kabyles of the plains bent under great sacks

of flour which drained through ill-sewn seams and floated on the air in white smoke, making everyone sneeze as the crowd swarmed past. Large grey mules roared, miniature donkeys brayed, and half-naked children laughed or howled, and darted under the heads of the horses, or fell against the bright bonnets of waiting motor-cars. There were smart victorias, shabby cabs, hotel omnibuses, and huge carts; and, mingling with the floating dust of the spilt flour was a heavy perfume of spices, of incense perhaps blown from some far-off mosque, and ambergris mixed with grains of musk in amulets which the Arabs wore round their necks, heated by their sweating flesh as they worked or stalked about shouting guttural orders. There was a salt tang of seaweed, too, like an undertone, a foundation for all the other smells; and the air was warm with a hint of summer, a softness that was not enervating.

As soon as the first greeting and the introduction to Miss Ray were confusedly over, Caird cleverly extricated the new-comers from the thick of the throng, sheltering them between his large yellow motor-car and a hotel-omnibus waiting for passengers and luggage.

"Now you're safe," he said, in the young-sounding voice which pleasantly matched his whole personality. He was several years older than Stephen, but looked younger, for Stephen was nearly if not quite six feet in height, and Nevill Caird was less in stature by at least four inches. He was very slightly built, too, and his hair was as yellow as a child's. His face was clean-shaven, like Stephen's, and though Stephen, living mostly in London, was brown as if tanned by the sun, Nevill, out of doors constantly and exposed to hot southern sunshine, had the complexion of a girl. Nevertheless, thought Vic-

toria—sensitive and quick in forming impressions—he somehow contrived to look a thorough man, passionate and ready to be violently in earnest, like one who would love or hate in a fiery way. “He would make a splendid martyr,” the girl said to herself, giving him straight look for straight look, as he began advising her against her chosen hotel. “But I think he would want his best friends to come and look on while he burned. Mr. Knight would chase everybody away.”

“Don’t go to any hotel,” Nevill said. “Be my aunt’s guest. It’s a great deal more her house than mine. There’s lots of room in it—ever so much more than we want. Just now there’s no one staying with us, but often we have a dozen or so. Sometimes my aunt invites people. Sometimes I do: sometimes both together. Now I invite you, in her name. She’s quite a nice old lady. You’ll like her. And we’ve got all kinds of animal—everything, nearly, that will live in this climate, from tortoises of Carthage, to white mice from Japan, and a baby panther from Grand Kabylia. But they keep themselves to themselves. I promise you the panther won’t try to sit on your lap. And you’ll be just in time to christen him. We’ve been looking for a name.”

“I should love to christen the panther, and you are more than kind to say your aunt would like me to visit her; but I can’t possibly, thank you very much,” answered Victoria in the old-fashioned, quaintly provincial way which somehow intensified the effect of her brilliant prettiness. “I have come to Algiers on—on business that’s very important to me. Mr. Knight will tell you all about it. I’ve asked him to tell, and he’s promised to beg for your help. When you know, you’ll see that it will be

better for me not to be visiting anybody. I—I would rather be in a hotel, in spite of your great kindness."

That settled the matter. Nevill Caird had too much tact to insist, though he was far from being convinced. He said that his aunt, Lady MacGregor, would write Miss Ray a note asking her to lunch next day, and then they would have the panther-christening. Also by that time he would know, from his friend, how his help might best be given. But in any case he hoped that Miss Ray would allow his car to drop her at the Hotel de la Kasbah, which had no omnibus and therefore did not send to meet the boat. Her luggage might go up with the rest, and be left at the hotel.

These offers Victoria accepted gratefully; and as Caird put her into the fine yellow car, the handsome Arab who had been on the boat looked at her with chastened curiosity as he passed. He must have seen that she was with the Englishman who had talked to her on board the *Charles Quex*, and that now there was another man, who seemed to be the owner of the large automobile. The Arab had a servant with him, who had travelled second class on the boat, a man much darker than himself, plainly dressed, with a smaller turban bound by cheaper cord; but he was very clean, and as dignified as his master. Stephen scarcely noticed the two figures. The fine-looking Arab had ceased to be of importance since he had left the ship, and would see no more of Victoria Ray.

The chauffeur who drove Nevill's car was an Algerian who looked as if he might have a dash of dark blood in his veins. Beside him sat the Kabyle servant, who, in his picturesque embroidered clothes, with his jaunty fez, appeared amusingly out of place in the smart automobile,

which struck the last note of modernity. The chauffeur had a reckless, daring face, with the smile of a mischievous boy; but he steered with caution and skill through the crowded streets where open trams rushed by, filled to overflowing with white-veiled Arab women of the lower classes, and French girls in large hats, who sat crushed together on the same seats. Arabs walked in the middle of the street, and disdained to quicken their steps for motor-cars and carriages. Tiny children with charming brown faces and eyes like wells of light, darted out from the pavement, almost in front of the motor, smiling and begging, absolutely fearless and engagingly impudent. It was all intensely interesting to Stephen, who was, however, conscious enough of his past to be glad that he was able to take so keen an interest. He had the sensation of a man who has been partially paralysed, and is delighted to find that he can feel a pinch.

The Hotel de la Kasbah, which Victoria frankly admitted she had chosen because of its low prices, was, as its name indicated, close to the mounting of the town, near the corner of a tortuous Arab street, narrow and shadowy despite its thick coat of whitewash. The house was kept by an extremely fat Algerian, married to a woman who called herself Spanish, but was more than half Moorish; and the proprietor himself being of mixed blood, all the servants, except an Algerian maid or two, were Kabyles or Arabs. They were cheap and easy to manage, since master and mistress had no prejudices. Stephen did not like the look of the place, which might suit commercial travellers or parties of economical tourists who liked to rub shoulders with native life; but for a pretty young girl travelling alone, it seemed to him that, though it was clean enough, nothing could be less appro-

priate. Victoria had made up her mind and engaged her room, however; and so as no definite objection could be urged, he followed Caird's example, and held his tongue. As they bade the girl good-bye in the tiled hall (a fearful combination of all that was worst in Arab and European taste) Nevill begged her to let them know if she were not comfortable. "You're coming to lunch tomorrow at half-past one," he went on, "but if there's anything meanwhile, call us up on the telephone. We can easily find you another hotel, or a pension, if you're determined not to visit my aunt."

"If I need you, I promise that I will call," Victoria said. And though she answered Caird, she looked at Stephen Knight.

Then they left her; and Stephen became rather thoughtful. But he tried not to let Nevill see his preoccupation.

VIII.

As they left the arcaded streets of commercial Algiers, and drove up the long hill towards Mustapha Supérieur, where most of the best and finest houses are, Stephen and Nevill Caird talked of what they saw, and of Victoria Ray; not at all of Stephen himself. Nevill had asked him what sort of trip he had had, and not another question of any sort. Stephen was glad of this, and understood very well that it was not because his friend was indifferent. Had he been so, he would not have invited Stephen to make this visit.

To speak of the past they had shared, long ago, would naturally have led farther, and though Stephen was not sure that he mightn't some day refer, of his own

accord, to the distasteful subject of the Case and Margot Lorenzi, he could not have borne to mention either now.

As they passed gateways leading to handsome houses, mostly in the Arab style, Nevill told him who lived in each one: French, English, and American families; people connected with the government, who remained in Algiers all the year round, or foreigners who came out every winter for love of their beautiful villa gardens and the climate.

"We've rather an amusing society here," he said. "And we'd defend Algiers and each other to any outsider, though our greatest pleasure is quarrelling among ourselves, or patching up one another's rows and beginning again on our own account. It's great fun and keeps us from stagnating. We also give quantities of luncheons and teas, and are sick of going to each other's entertainments; yet we're so furious if there's anything we're not invited to, we nearly get jaundice. I do myself—though I hate running about promiscuously; and I spend hours thinking up ingenious lies to squeeze out of accepting invitations I'd have been ill with rage not to get. And there are factions which loathe each other worse than any mere Montagus and Capulets. We have rival parties, and vie with one another in getting hold of any royalties or such like, that may be knocking about; but we who hate each other most, meet at the Governor's Palace and smile sweetly if French people are looking; if not, we snort like war-horses—only in a whisper, for we're invariably polite."

Stephen laughed, as he was meant to do. "What about the Arabs?" he asked, with Victoria's errand in his mind. "Is there such a thing as Arab society?"

"Very little—of the kind we'd call 'society'—in

Algiers. In Tunis there's more. Much of the old Arab aristocracy has died out here, or moved away; but there are a few left who are rich and well born. They have their palaces outside the town; but most of the best houses have been sold to Europeans, and their Arab owners have gone into the interior where the Roumis don't rub elbows with them quite as offensively as in a big French town like this. Naturally they prefer the country. And I know a few of the great Arab Chiefs—splendid-looking fellows who turn up gorgeously dressed for the Governor's ball every year, and condescend to dine with me once or twice while they're staying on to amuse themselves in Algiers."

"Condescend!" Stephen repeated.

"By Jove, yes. I'm sure they think it's a great condescension. And I'm not sure you won't think so too, when you see them—as of course you will. You must go to the Governor's ball with me, even if you can't be bothered going anywhere else. It's a magnificent spectacle. And I get on pretty well among the Arabs, as I've learned to speak their lingo a bit. Not that I've worried. But nearly nine years is a long time."

This was Stephen's chance to tell what he chose to tell of his brief acquaintance with Victoria Ray, and of the mission which had brought her to Algiers. Somehow, as he unfolded the story he had heard from the girl on board ship, the scent of orange blossoms, luscious-sweet in this region of gardens, connected itself in his mind with thoughts of the beautiful woman who had married Cassim ben Halim, and disappeared from the world she had known. He imagined her in an Arab garden where orange blossoms fell like snow, eating her heart out for the far country and friends she would never see again,

rebellng against a monstrous tyranny which imprisoned her in this place of perfumes and high white walls. Or perhaps the scented petals were falling now upon her grave.

"Cassim ben Halim—Captain Cassim ben Halim," Nevill repeated. "Seems familiar somehow, as if I'd heard the name; but most of these Arab names have a kind of family likeness in our ears. Either he's a person of no particular importance, or else he must have left Algiers before my Uncle James Caird died—the man who willed me his house, you know—brother of Aunt Caroline MacGregor who lives with me now. If I've ever heard anything about Ben Halim, whatever it is has slipped my mind. But I'll do my best to find out something."

"Miss Ray believes he was of importance," said Stephen. "She oughtn't to have much trouble getting on to his trail, should you think?"

Nevill looked doubtful. "Well, if he'd wanted her on his trail, she'd never have been off it. If he didn't, and doesn't, care to be got at, finding him mayn't be as simple as it would be in Europe, where you can always resort to detectives if worst comes to worst."

"Can't you here?" asked Stephen.

"Well, there's the French police, of course, and the military in the south. But they don't care to interfere with the private affairs of Arabs, if no crime's been committed—and they wouldn't do anything in such a case, I should think, in the way of looking up Ben Halim, though they'd tell anything they might happen to know already, I suppose—unless they thought best to keep silence with foreigners."

"There must be people in Algiers who'd remember

seeing such a beautiful creature as Ben Halim's wife, even if her husband whisked her away nine years ago," Stephen argued.

"I wonder?" murmured Caird, with an emphasis which struck his friend as odd.

"What do you mean?" asked Stephen.

"I mean, I wonder if anyone in Algiers ever saw her at all? Ben Halim was in the French Army; but he was a Mussulman. Paris and Algiers are a long cry, one from the other—if you're an Arab."

"Jove! You don't think——"

"You've spotted it. That's what I do think."

"That he shut her up?"

"That he forced her to live the life of a Mussulman woman. Why, what else could you expect, when you come to look at it?"

"But an American girl——"

"A woman who marries gives herself to her husband's nation as well as to her husband, doesn't she—especially if he's an Arab? Only, thank God, it happens to very few European girls, except of the class that doesn't so much matter. Think of it. This Ben Halim, a Spahi officer, falls dead in love with a girl when he's on leave in Paris. He feels he must have her. He can get her only by marriage. They're as subtle as the devil, even the best of them, these Arabs. He'd have to promise the girl anything she wanted, or lose her. Naturally he wouldn't give it away that he meant to veil her and clap her into a harem the minute he got her home. If he'd even hinted anything of that sort she wouldn't have stirred a step. But for a Mussulman to let his wife walk the streets unveiled, like a Roumia, or some woman of easy virtue, would be a horrible disgrace to them both. His

relations and friends would cut him, and hoot her at sight. The more he loved his wife, the less likely he'd be to keep a promise, made in a different world. It wouldn't be human nature—Arab human nature—to keep it. Besides, they have the jealousy of the tiger, these Eastern fellows. It's a madness."

"Then perhaps no one ever knew, out here, that the man had brought home a foreign wife?"

"Almost surely not. No European, that is. Arabs might know—through their women. There's nothing that passes which they can't find out. How they do it, who can tell? Their ways are as mysterious as everything else here, except the lives of us *hiverneurs*, who don't even try very hard to hide our own scandals when we have any. But no Arab could be persuaded or forced to betray another Arab to an European, unless for motives of revenge. For love or hate, they stand together. In virtues and vices they're absolutely different from Europeans. And if Ben Halim doesn't want anybody, not excepting his wife's sister, to get news of his wife, why, it may be difficult to get it, that's all I say. Going to Miss Ray's hotel, you could see something of that Arab street close by, on the fringe of the Kasbah—which is what they call, not the old fort alone, but the whole Arab town."

"Yes. I saw the queer white houses, huddled together, that looked like blank walls only broken by a door, with here and there a barred window."

"Well, what I mean is that it's almost impossible for any European to learn what goes on behind those blank walls and those little square holes, in respectable houses. But we'll hope for the best. And here we are at my place. I'm rather proud of it."

They had come to the arched gateway of a white-walled garden. The sun had set fire to the gold of some sunken Arab lettering over the central arch, so that each broken line darted forth its separate flame. "Djenan el Djouad; House of the Nobleman," Nevill translated. "It was built for the great confidant of a particularly wicked old Dey of Algiers, in sixteen hundred and something, and the place had been allowed to fall into ruin when my uncle bought it, about twenty or thirty years ago. There was a romance in his life, I believe. He came to Algiers for his health, as a young man, meaning to stay only a few months, but fell in love with a face which he happened to catch a glimpse of, under a veil that disarranged itself—on purpose or by accident—in a carriage belonging to a rich Arab. Because of that face he remained in Algiers, bought this house, spent years in restoring it, exactly in Arab style, and making a beautiful garden out of his fifteen or sixteen acres. Whether he ever got to know the owner of the face, history doesn't state: my uncle was as secretive as he was romantic. But odd things have been said. I expect they're still said, behind my back. And they're borne out, I'm bound to confess, by the beauty of the decorations in that part of the house intended for the ladies. Whether it was ever occupied in Uncle James's day, nobody can tell; but Aunt Caroline, his sister, who has the best rooms there now, vows she's seen the ghost of a lovely being, all spangled gauze and jewels, with silver khal-khal, or anklets, that tinkle as she moves. I assure my aunt it must be a dream, come to punish her for indulging in two goes of her favourite sweet at dinner; but in my heart I shouldn't wonder if it's true. The whole lot of us, in our family, are romantic and superstitious. We

can't help it and don't want to help it, though we suffer for our foolishness often enough, goodness knows."

The scent of orange blossoms and acacias was poignantly sweet, as the car passed an Arab lodge, and wound slowly up an avenue cut through a grove of blossoming trees. The utmost pains had been taken in the laying out of the garden, but an effect of carelessness had been preserved. The place seemed a fairy tangle of white and purple lilacs, gold-dripping laburnums, acacias with festoons of pearl, roses looping from orange-tree to mimosa, and a hundred gorgeous tropical flowers like painted birds and butterflies. In shadowed nooks under dark cypresses, glimmered arum lilies, sparkling with the diamond dew that sprayed from carved marble fountains, centuries old; and low seats of marble mosaiced with rare tiles stood under magnolia-trees or arbours of wistaria. Giant cypresses, tall and dark as a band of Genii, marched in double line on either side the avenue as it straightened and turned towards the house.

White in the distance where that black procession halted, glittered the old Arab palace, built in one long façade, and other façades smaller, less regular, looking like so many huge blocks of marble grouped together. Over one of these blocks fell a crimson torrent of bougainvillæa; another was veiled with white roses and purple clematis; a third was showered with the gold of some strange tropical creeper that Stephen did not know.

On the roof of brown and dark-green tiles, the sunlight poured, making each tile lustrous as the scale of a serpent, and all along the edge grew tiny flowers and grasses, springing out of interstices to wave filmy threads of pink and gold.

The principal façade was blank as a wall, save for a

few small, mysterious windows, barred with *grilles* of iron, green with age; but on the other façades were quaint recessed balconies, under projecting roofs supported with beams of cedar; and the door, presently opened by an Arab servant, was very old too, made of oak covered with an armour of greenish copper.

Even when it had closed behind Stephen and Nevill, they were not yet in the house, but in a large court with a ceiling of carved and painted cedar-wood supported by marble pillars of extreme lightness and grace. In front, this court was open, looking onto an inner garden with a fountain more delicate of design than those Stephen had seen outside. The three walls of the court were patterned all over with ancient tiles rare as some faded Spanish brocade in a cathedral, and along their length ran low seats where in old days sat slaves awaiting orders from their master.

Out from this court they walked through a kind of pillared cloister, and the façades of the house as they passed on, were beautiful in pure simplicity of line; so white, they seemed to turn the sun on them to moonlight; so jewelled with bands and plaques of lovely tiles, that they were like snowy shoulders of a woman hung with necklaces of precious stones.

By the time they had left this cloistered garden and threaded their way indoors, Stephen had lost his bearings completely. He was convinced that, once in, he should never find the clue which would guide him out again as he had come. There was another garden court, much larger than the first, and this, Nevill said, had been the garden of the palace-women in days of old. It had a fountain whose black marble basin was fringed with papyrus, and filled with pink, blue, and white water lilies,

from under whose flat dark pads glimmered the backs of darting goldfish. Three walls of this garden had low doorways with cunningly carved doors of cedar-wood, and small, iron-barred windows festooned with the biggest roses Stephen had ever seen; but the fourth side was formed by an immense loggia with a dais at the back, and an open-fronted room at either end. Walls and floor of this loggia were tiled, and barred windows on either side the dais looked far down over a world which seemed all sky, sea, and garden. One of the little open rooms was hung with Persian prayer-rugs which Stephen thought were like fading rainbows seen through a mist; and there were queer old tinselled pictures such as good Moslems love: Borak, the steed of the prophet, half winged woman, half horse; the Prophet's uncle engaged in mighty battle; the Prophet's favourite daughter, Fatma-Zora, daintily eating her sacred breakfast. The other room at the opposite end of the tiled loggia was fitted up, Moorish fashion, for the making of coffee; walls and ceiling carved, gilded, and painted in brilliant colours; the floor tiled with the charming "windmill" pattern; many shelves adorned with countless little coffee cups in silver standards; with copper and brass utensils of all imaginable kinds; and in a gilded recess was a curious apparatus for boiling water.

Nevill Caird displayed his treasures and the beauties of his domain with an ingenuous pride, delighted at every word of appreciation, stopping Stephen here and there to point out something of which he was fond, explaining the value of certain old tiles from the point of view of an expert, and gladly lingering to answer every question. Some day, he said, he was going to write a book about tiles, a book which should have wonderful illustrations.

"Do you really like it all?" he asked, as Stephen looked out from a barred window of the loggia, over the wide view.

"I never even imagined anything so fantastically beautiful," Stephen returned warmly. "You ought to be happy, even if you could never go outside your own house and gardens. There's nothing to touch this on the Riviera. It's a palace of the 'Arabian Nights.'"

"There was a palace in the 'Arabian Nights,' if you remember," said Nevill, "where everything was perfect except one thing. Its master was miserable because he couldn't get that thing."

"The Roc's egg, of Aladdin's palace," Stephen recalled. "Do you lack a Roc's egg for yours?"

"The equivalent," said Nevill. "The one thing which I want, and don't seem likely to get, though I haven't quite given up hope. It's a woman. And she doesn't want me—or my palace. I'll tell you about her some day—soon, perhaps. And maybe you'll see her. But never mind my troubles for the moment. I can put them out of my mind with comparative ease, in the pleasure of welcoming you. Now we'll go indoors. You haven't an idea what the house is like yet. By the way, I nearly forgot this chap."

He put his hand into the pocket of his grey flannel coat, and pulled out a green frog, wrapped in a lettuce leaf which was inadequate as a garment, but a perfect match as to colour.

"I bought him on the way down to meet you," Nevill explained. "Saw an Arab kid trying to sell him in the street, poor little beast. Thought it would be a friendly act to bring him here to join my happy family, which is large and varied. I don't remember anybody living in

this fountain who's likely to eat him, or be eaten by him."

Down went the frog on the wide rim of the marble fountain, and sat there, meditatively, with a dawning expression of contentment, so Stephen fancied, on his green face. He looked, Stephen thought, as if he were trying to forget a troubled past, and as if his new home with all its unexplored mysteries of reeds and lily pads were wondrously to his liking.

"I wish you'd name that person after me," said Stephen. "You're being very good to both of us,—taking us out of Hades into Paradise."

"Come along in," was Nevill Caird's only answer. But he walked into the house with his hand on Stephen's shoulder.

IX.

DJENAN EL DJOUAD was a labyrinth. Stephen Knight abandoned all attempt at keeping a mental clue before he had reached the drawing-room. Nevill led him there by way of many tile-paved corridors, lit by hanging Arab lamps suspended from roofs of arabesqued cedar-wood. They went up or down marble steps, into quaint little alcoved rooms furnished with nothing but divans and low tables or dower chests crusted with Syrian mother-o'-pearl, on into rooms where brocade-hung walls were covered with Arab musical instruments of all kinds, or long-necked Moorish guns patterned with silver, ivory and coral. Here and there as they passed, were garden glimpses, between embroidered curtains, looking through windows always barred with greenish wrought iron, so

old as to be rarely beautiful; and some small windows had no curtains, but were thickly frilled outside with the violent crimson of bougainvillæa, or fringed with tassels of wistaria, loop on loop of amethysts. High above these windows, which framed flowery pictures, were other windows, little and jewelled, mere plaques of filagree workmanship, fine as carved ivory or silver lace, and lined with coloured glass of delicate tints—gold, lilac, and pale rose.

“Here’s the drawing-room at last,” said Nevill, “and here’s my aunt.”

“If you can call it a drawing-room,” objected a gently complaining voice. “A filled-in court, where ghosts of murdered slaves come and moan while you have your tea. How do you do, Mr. Knight? I’m delighted you’ve taken pity on Nevill. He’s never so happy as when he’s showing a new friend the house—except when he’s obtained an old tile, or a new monster of some sort, for his collection.”

“In me, he kills two birds with one stone,” said Stephen, smiling, as he shook the hand of a tiny lady who looked rather like an elderly fairy disguised in a cap, that could have been born nowhere except north of the Tweed.

She had delicate little features which had been made to fit a pretty child, and had never grown up. Her hair, of a reddish yellow, had faded to a yellowish white, which by a faint fillip of the imagination could be made to seem golden in some lights. Her eyes were large and round, and of a china-blue colour; her eyebrows so arched as to give her an expression of perpetual surprise, her forehead full, her cheekbones high and pink, her small, pursed mouth of the kind which prefers to hide a sense of

humour, and then astonish people with it when they have ceased to believe in its existence. If her complexion had not been netted all over with a lacework of infinitesimal wrinkles, she would have looked like a little girl dressed up for an old lady. She had a ribbon of the MacGregor tartan on her cap, and an uncompromising cairngorm fastened her fichu of valuable point lace. A figure more out of place than hers in an ancient Arab palace of Algiers it would be impossible to conceive; yet it was a pleasant figure to see there, and Stephen knew that he was going to like Nevill's Aunt Caroline, Lady MacGregor.

"I wish you looked more of a monster than you do," said she, "because you might frighten the ghosts. We're eaten up with them, the way some folk in old houses are with rats. Nearly all of them slaves, too, so there's no variety, except that some are female. I've given you the room with the prettiest ghosts, but if you're not the seventh son of a seventh son, you may not see or even hear them."

"Does Nevill see or hear?" asked Stephen.

"As much as Aunt Caroline does, if the truth were known," answered her nephew. "Only she couldn't be happy unless she had a grievance. Here she wanted to choose an original and suitable one, so she hit upon ghosts—the ghosts of slaves murdered by a cruel master."

"Hit upon them, indeed!" she echoed indignantly, making her knitting needles click, a movement which displayed her pretty, miniature hands, half hidden in lace ruffles. "As if they hadn't gone through enough, in flesh and blood, poor creatures! Some of them may have been my countrymen, captured on the seas by those horrid pirates."

"Who was the cruel master?" Stephen wanted to know,

still smiling, because it was almost impossible not to smile at Lady MacGregor.

"Not my brother James, I'm glad to say," she quickly replied. "It was about three hundred years before his time. And though he had some quite irritating tricks as a young man, murdering slaves wasn't one of them. To be sure, they tell strange tales of him here, as I make no doubt Nevill has already mentioned, because he's immoral enough to be proud of what he calls the romance. I mean the story of the beautiful Arab lady, whom James is supposed to have stolen from her rightful husband—that is, if an Arab can be rightful—and hidden in this house for many a year, till at last she died, after the search for her had long, long gone by."

"You're as proud of the romance as I am, or you wouldn't be at such pains to repeat it to everybody, pretending to think I've already told it," said Nevill. "But I'm going to show Knight his quarters. Pretty or plain, there are no ghosts here that will hurt him. And then we'll have lunch, for which he's starving."

Stephen's quarters consisted of a bedroom (furnished in Tunisian style, with an imposing four-poster of green and gold ornamented with a gilded, sacred cow under a crown) and a sitting-room gay with colourful decorations imported from Morocco. These rooms opened upon a wide covered balcony screened by a carved wooden lattice and from the balcony Stephen could look over hills, near and far, dotted with white villas that lay like resting gulls on the green wave of verdure which cascaded down to join the blue waves of the sea. Up from that far blueness drifted on the wind a murmurous sound like Æolian harps, mingled with the tinkle of fairy mandolins in the fountain of the court below.

At luncheon, in a dining-room that opened onto a white-walled garden where only lilies of all kinds grew, to Stephen's amazement two Highlanders in kilts stood behind his hostess's chair. They were young, exactly alike, and of precisely the same height, six foot two at least. "No, you are not dreaming them, Mr. Knight," announced Lady MacGregor, evidently delighted with the admiring surprise in the look he bestowed upon these images. "And you're quite right. They *are* twins. I may as well break it to you now, as I had to do to Nevill when he invited me to come to Algiers and straighten out his housekeeping accounts: they play Ruth to my Naomi. Whither I go, they go also, even to the door of the bathroom, where they carry my towels, for I have no other maid than they."

Stephen could not help glancing at the two giants, expecting to see some involuntary quiver of eye or nostril answer electrically to this frank revelation of their office; but their countenances (impossible to think of as mere faces) remained expressionless as if carved in stone. Lady MacGregor took nothing from Mohammed and the other Kabyle servant who waited on Nevill and Stephen. Everything for her was handed to one of the Highlanders, who gravely passed on the dish to their mistress. If she refused a *plat* favoured by them, instead of carrying it away, the giants in kilts silently but firmly pressed it upon her acceptance, until in self-defence she seized some of the undesired food, and ate it under their watchful eyes.

During the meal a sudden thunderstorm boiled up out of the sea: the sky became a vast brazen bowl, and a strange, coppery twilight bleached the lilies in the white garden to a supernatural pallor. The room, with its embroidered Moorish hangings, darkened to a rich gloom;

but Mohammed touched a button on the wall, and all the quaint old Arab lamps that stood in corners, or hung suspended from the cedar roof, flashed out cunningly concealed electric lights. At the same moment, there began a great howling outside the door. Mohammed sprang to open it, and in poured a wave of animals. Stephen hastily counted five dogs; a collie, a white deerhound, a Dandy Dinmont, and a mother and child of unknown race, which he afterwards learned was Kabyle, a breed beloved of mountain men and desert tent-dwellers. In front of the dogs bounded a small African monkey, who leaped to the back of Nevill's chair, and behind them toddled with awkward grace a baby panther, a mere ball of yellow silk.

"They don't like the thunder, poor dears," Nevill apologized. "That's why they howled, for they're wonderfully polite people really. They always come at the end of lunch. Aunt Caroline won't invite them to dinner, because then she sometimes wears fluffy things about which she has a foolish vanity. The collie is Angus's. The deerhound is Hamish's. The dandy is hers. The two Kabyles are Mohammed's, and the flotsam and jetsam is mine. There's a great deal more of it out of doors, but this is all that gets into the dining-room except by accident. And I expect you think we are a very queer family."

Stephen did think so, for never till now had he been a member of a household where each of the servants was allowed to possess any animals he chose, and flood the house with them. But the queerer he thought the family, the better he found himself liking it. He felt a boy let out of school after weeks of disgrace and punishment, and, strangely enough, this old Arab palace in a city of

North Africa seemed more like home to him than his London flat had seemed of late.

When Lady MacGregor rose and said she must write the note she had promised Nevill to send Miss Ray, Stephen longed to kiss her. This form of worship not being permitted, he tried to open the dining-room door for her to go out, but Angus and Hamish glared upon him so superciliously that he retired in their favour.

The luncheon hour, even when cloaked in the mysterious gloom of a thunderstorm, is no time for confidences; besides, it is not conducive to sustained conversation to find a cold nose in your palm, a baby claw up your sleeve, or a monkey hand, like a bit of leather, thrust down your collar or into your ear. But after dinner that night, when Lady MacGregor had trailed her maligned "fluffiness" away to the drawing-room, and Nevill and Stephen had strolled with their cigarettes out into the unearthly whiteness of the lily garden, Stephen felt that something was coming. He had known that Nevill had a story to tell, by-and-by, and though he knew also that he would be asked no questions in return, now or ever, it occurred to him that Nevill's offer of confidences was perhaps meant to open a door, if he chose to enter by it. He was not sure whether he would so choose or not, but the fact that he was not sure meant a change in him. A few days ago, even this morning, before meeting Nevill, he would have been certain that he had nothing intimate to tell Caird or anyone else.

They strolled along the paths among the lilies. Moon and sky and flowers and white-gravelled paths were all silver. Stephen thought of Victoria Ray, and wished she could see this garden. He thought, too, that if she would

only dance here among the lilies in the moonlight, it would be a vision of exquisite loveliness.

"For a moment white, then gone forever," he caught himself repeating again.

It was odd how, whenever he saw anything very white and of dazzling purity, he thought of this dancing girl. He wondered what sort of woman it was whose image came to Nevill's mind, in the garden of lilies that smelt so heavenly sweet under the moon. He supposed there must always be some woman whose image was suggested to every man by all that was fairest in nature. Margot Lorenzi was the woman whose image he must keep in his mind, if he wanted to know any faint imitation of happiness in future. She would like this moonlit garden, and in one way it would suit her as a background. Yet she did not seem quite in the picture, despite her beauty. The perfume she loved would not blend with the perfume of the lilies.

"Aunt Caroline's rather a dear, isn't she?" remarked Nevill, apropos of nothing.

"She's a jewel," said Stephen.

"Yet she isn't the immediate jewel of my soul. I'm hard hit, Stephen, and the girl won't have me. She's poorer than any church or other mouse I ever met, yet she turns up her little French nose at me and my palace, and all the cheese I should like to see her nibble—my cheese."

"Her French nose?" echoed Stephen.

"Yes. Her nose and the rest of her's French, especially her dimples. You never saw such dimples. Miss Ray's prettier than my girl, I suppose. But *I* think mine's beyond anything. Only she isn't and won't be mine—that's the worst of it."

"Where is she?" Stephen asked. "In Algiers?"

"No such luck. But her sister is. I'll take you to see the sister to-morrow morning. She may be able to tell us something to help Miss Ray. She keeps a curiosity-shop, and is a connoisseur of Eastern antiquities, as well as a great character in Algiers, quite a sort of queen in her way—a quaint way. All the visiting Royalties of every nation drop in and spend hours in her place. She has a good many Arab acquaintances, too. Even rich chiefs come to sell, or buy things from her, and respect her immensely. But my girl—I like to call her that—is away off in the west, close to the border of Morocco, at Tlemcen. I wish you were interested in mosques, and I'd take you there. People who care for such things sometimes travel from London or Paris just to see the mosque of Sidi Bou-Medine and a certain Mirab. But I suppose you haven't any fad of that kind, eh?"

"I feel it coming on," said Stephen.

"Good chap! Do encourage the feeling. I'll lend you books, lots of books, on the subject. She's 'malema,' or mistress of an *école indigène* for embroideries and carpets, at Tlemcen. Heaven knows how few francs a month she earns by the job which takes all her time and life, yet she thinks herself lucky to get it. And she won't marry me."

"Surely she must love you, at least a little, if you care so much for her," Stephen tried to console his friend.

"Oh, she does, a lot," replied Nevill with infinite satisfaction. "But, you see—well, you see, her family wasn't up to much from a social point of view—such rot! The mother came out from Paris to be a nursery governess, when she was quite young, but she was too pretty for that position. She had various but virtuous adventures, and married a noncom. in the Chasseurs d'Afrique, who chucked

the army for her. The two kept a little hotel. Then the husband died, while the girls were children. The mother gave up the hotel and took in sewing. Everybody was interested in the family, they were so clever and exceptional, and people helped in the girls' education. When their mother became an invalid, the two contrived to keep her and themselves, though Jeanne was only eighteen then, and Josette, my girl, fifteen. She's been dead now for some years—the mother. Josette is nearly twenty-four. Do you see why she won't marry me? I'm hanged if I do."

"I can see what her feeling is," Stephen said. "She must be a ripping girl."

"I should say she is!—though as obstinate as the devil. Sometimes I could shake her and box her ears. I haven't seen her for months now. She wouldn't like me to go to Tlemcen—unless I had a friend with me, and a good excuse. I didn't know it could hurt so much to be in love, though I was in once before, and it hurt too, rather. But that was nothing. For the woman had no soul or mind, only her beauty, and an unscrupulous sort of ambition which made her want to marry me when my uncle left me his money. She'd refused to do anything more serious than flirt and reduce me to misery, until she thought I could give her what she wanted. I'd imagined myself horribly in love, until her sudden willingness to take me showed me once for all what she was. Even so, I couldn't cure the habit of love at first; but I had just sense enough to keep out of England, where she was, for fear I should lose my head and marry her. My cure was rather slow, but it was sure; and now I know that what I thought was love then wasn't love at all. The real thing's as different as—as—a modern Algerian tile is from an old

Moorish one. I can't say anything stronger! That's why I cut England, to begin with, and after awhile my interests were more identified with France. Sometimes I go to Paris in the summer—or to a little place in Dauphiny. But I haven't been back to England for eight years. Algeria holds all my heart. In Tlemcen is my girl. Here are my garden and my beasts. Now you have my history since Oxford days."

"You know something of *my* history through the papers," Stephen blurted out with a desperate defiance of his own reserve.

"Not much of your real history, I think. Papers lie, and people misunderstand. Don't talk of yourself unless you really want to. But I say, look here, Stephen. That woman I thought I cared for—may I tell you what she was like? Somehow I want you to know. Don't think me a cad. I don't mean to be. But—may I tell?"

"Of course. Why not?"

"She was dark and awfully handsome, and though she wasn't an actress, she would have made a splendid one. She thought only of herself. I—there was a picture in a London paper lately which reminded me of her—the picture of a young lady you know—or think you know. They—those two—are of the same type. I don't believe either could make a man happy."

Stephen laughed—a short, embarrassed laugh. "Oh, happy!" he echoed. "After twenty-five we learn not to expect happiness. But—thank you for—everything, and especially for inviting me here." He knew now why it had occurred to Nevill to ask him to Algiers. Nevill had seen Margot's picture. In silence they walked towards the open door of the dining-room. Somewhere not far away the Kabyle dogs were barking shrilly. In the distance

rose and fell muffled notes of strange passion and fierceness, an Arab tom-tom beating like the heart of the conquered East, away in the old town.

Stephen's short-lived gaiety was struck out of his soul. "For a moment white, then gone forever."

He pushed the haunting words out of his mind. He did not want them to have any meaning. They had no meaning.

It seemed to him that the perfume of the lilies was too heavy on the air.

X.

A WHITE peacock, screaming in the garden under Stephen's balcony, waked him early, and dreamily his thoughts strayed towards the events planned for the day.

They were to make a morning call on Mademoiselle Soubise in her curiosity-shop, and ask about Ben Halim, the husband of Saidee Ray. Victoria was coming to luncheon, for she had accepted Lady MacGregor's invitation. Her note had been brought in last night, while he and Nevill walked in the garden. Afterwards Lady MacGregor had shown it to them both. The girl wrote an interesting hand, full of individuality, and expressive of decision. Perhaps on her arrival they might have something to tell her.

This hope shot Stephen out of bed, though it was only seven, and breakfast was not until nine. He had a cold bath in the private bathroom, which was one of Nevill's modern improvements in the old house, and by-and-by went for a walk, thinking to have the gardens to himself. But Nevill was there, cutting flowers and whistling tune-

fully. It was to him that the jewelled white peacock had screamed a greeting.

"I like cutting the flowers myself," said he. "I don't think they care to have others touch them, any more than a cow likes to be milked by a stranger. Of course they feel the difference! Why, they know when I praise them, and preen themselves. They curl up when they're scolded, or not noticed, just as I do when people aren't nice to me. Every day I send off a box of my best roses to Tlemcen. *She* allows me to do that."

Lady MacGregor did not appear at breakfast, which was served on a marble loggia; and by half-past nine Stephen and Nevill were out in the wide, tree-shaded streets, where masses of bougainvillæa and clematis boiled over high garden-walls of old plaster, once white, now streaked with gold and rose, and green moss and lichen. After the thunderstorm of the day before, the white dust was laid, and the air was pure with a curious sparkling quality.

They passed the museum in its garden, and turned a corner.

"There's Mademoiselle Soubise's shop," said Nevill.

It was a low white building, and had evidently been a private house at one time. The only change made had been in the shape and size of the windows on the ground-floor; and these were protected by green *persiennes*, fanned out like awnings, although the house was shaded by magnolia-trees. There was no name over the open door, but the word "*Antiquités*" was painted in large black letters on the house-wall.

Under the green blinds was a glitter of jewels displayed among brocades and a tangle of old lace, or on embossed silver trays; and walking in at the door, out of

the shadowy dusk, a blaze of colour leaped to the eyes. Not a soul was there, unless someone hid and spied behind a carved and gilded Tunisian bed or a marqueterie screen from Bagdad. Yet there was a collection to tempt a thief, and apparently no precaution taken against invaders.

Delicate rugs, soft as clouds and tinted like opals, were heaped in piles on the tiled floor; rugs from Ispahan, rugs from Mecca; old rugs from the sacred city of Kairouan, such as are made no more there or anywhere. The walls were hung with Tunisian silks and embroidered stuffs from the homes of Jewish families, where they had served as screens for talismanic words too sacred to be seen by common eyes; and there was drapery of ancient banners, Tyrian-dyed, whose gold or silver fringes had been stained with blood, in battle. From the ceiling were suspended antique lamps, and chandeliers of rare rock crystal, whose prisms gave out rose and violet sparks as they caught the light.

On shelves and inlaid tables were beggars' bowls of strange dark woods, carried across deserts by wandering mendicants of centuries ago, the chains, which had hung from throats long since crumbled into dust, adorned with lucky rings and fetishes to preserve the wearer from evil spirits. There were other bowls, of crystal pure as full-blown bubbles, bowls which would ring at a tap like clear bells of silver. Some of these were guiltless of ornament, some were graven with gold flowers, but all seemed full of lights reflected from tilted, pearl-framed mirrors, and from the swinging prisms of chandeliers.

Chafing-dishes of bronze at which vanished hands had been warmed, stood beside chased brazen ewers made to pour rose-water over henna-stained fingers, after Arab

dinners, eaten without knives or forks. In the depths of half-open drawers glimmered precious stones, strangely cut pink diamonds, big square turquoises and emeralds, strings of creamy pearls, and hands of Fatma, a different jewel dangling from each finger-tip.

The floor was encumbered, not only with rugs, but with heaps of priceless tiles, Persian and Moorish, of the best periods and patterns, taken from the walls of Arab palaces now destroyed; huge brass salvers; silver anklets, and chain armour, sabres captured from Crusaders, and old illuminated Korans. It was difficult to move without knocking something down, and one stepped delicately in narrow aisles, to avoid islands of piled, precious objects. Everywhere the eye was drawn to glittering points, or patches of splendid colour; so that at a glance the large, dusky room was like a temple decorated with mosaics. There was nothing that did not suggest the East, city or desert, or mountain village of the Kabyles; and the air was loaded with Eastern perfumes, ambergris and musk that blended with each other, and the scent of the black incense sticks brought by caravan from Tombouctou.

"Why doesn't someone come in and steal?" asked Stephen, in surprise at seeing the place deserted.

"Because there's hardly a thief in Algiers mean enough to steal from Jeanne Soubise, who gives half she has to the poor. And because, if there were one so mean, Haroun el Raschid would soon let her know what was going on," said Nevill. "His latest disguise is that of a parrot, but he may change it for something else at any moment."

Then Stephen saw, suspended among the crystal chandeliers and antique lamps, a brass cage, shaped like a domed palace. In this cage, in a coral ring, sat a grey

parrot who regarded the two young men with jewel-eyes that seemed to know all good and evil.

"He yells if any stranger comes into the shop when his mistress is out," Nevill explained. "I am an humble friend of His Majesty's, so he says nothing. I gave him to Mademoiselle Jeanne."

Perhaps their voices had been heard. At all events, there was a light tapping of heels on unseen stairs, and from behind a red-curtained doorway appeared a tall young woman, dressed in black.

She was robust as well as tall, and Stephen thought she looked rather like a handsome Spanish boy; yet she was feminine enough in her outlines. It was the frank and daring expression of her face and great black eyes which gave the look of boyishness. She had thick, straight eyebrows, a large mouth that was beautiful when she smiled, to show perfect teeth between the red lips that had a faint, shadowy line of down above them.

"Ah, Monsieur Nevill Caird!" she exclaimed, in English, with a full voice, and a French accent that was pretty, though not Parisian. She smiled at Stephen, too, without waiting to be introduced. "Monsieur Caird is always kind in bringing his friends to me, and I am always glad to see them."

"I've brought Mr. Knight, not to buy, but to ask a favour," said Nevill.

"To buy, too," Stephen hastened to cut in. "I see things I can't live without. I must own them."

"Well, don't set your heart on anything Mademoiselle Soubise won't sell. She bought everything with the idea of selling it, she admits, but now she's got them here, there are some things she can't make up her mind to part with at any price."

“Oh, only a few tiles—and some Jewish embroideries—and bits of jewellery—and a rug or two or a piece of pottery—and maybe *one* copy of the Koran, and a beggar’s bowl,” Jeanne Soubise excused herself, hastily adding more and more to her list of exceptions, as her eyes roved wistfully among her treasures. “Oh, and an amphora just dug up near Timgad, with Roman oil still inside. It’s a beauty. Will you come down to the cellar to look at it?”

Nevill thanked her, and reserved the pleasure for another time. Then he enquired what was the latest news from Mademoiselle Josette at Tlemcen; and when he heard that there was nothing new, he told the lady of the curiosity-shop what was the object of the early visit.

“But of course I have heard of Ben Halim, and I have seen him, too,” she said; “only it was long ago—maybe ten years. Yes, I could not have been seventeen. It is already long that he went away from Algiers, no one knows where. Now he is said to be dead. Have you not heard of him, Monsieur Nevill? You must have. He lived at Djenan el Hadj; close to the Jardin d’Essai. You know the place well. The new rich Americans, Madame Jewett and her daughter, have it now. There was a scandal about Ben Halim, and then he went away—a scandal that was mysterious, because everyone talked about it, yet no one knew what had happened—never surely at least.”

“I told you Mademoiselle would be able to give you information!” exclaimed Nevill. “I felt sure the name was familiar, somehow, though I couldn’t think how. One hears so many Arab names, and generally there’s a ‘Ben’ or a ‘Bou’ something or other, if from the South.”

“Flan-ben-Flan,” laughed Jeanne Soubise. “That means,” she explained, turning to Stephen, “So and So,

son of So and So. It is strange, a young lady came enquiring about Ben Halim only yesterday afternoon; such a pretty young lady. I was surprised, but she said they had told her in her hotel I knew everything that had ever happened in Algiers. A nice compliment to my age. I am not so old as that! But," she added, with a frank smile, "all the hotels and guides expect commissions when they send people to me. I suppose they thought this pretty girl fair game, and that once in my place she would buy. So she did. She bought a string of amber beads. She liked the gold light in them, and said it seemed as if she might see a vision of something or someone she wanted to find, if she gazed through the beads. Many a good Mussulman has said his prayers with them, if that could bring her luck."

The two young men looked at one another.

"Did she tell you her name?" Stephen asked.

"But yes; she was Mees Ray, and named for the dead Queen Victoria of England, I suppose, though American. And she told me other things. Her sister, she said, married a Captain Ben Halim of the Spahis, and came with him to Algiers, nearly ten years ago. Now she is looking for the sister."

"We've met Miss Ray," said Nevill. "It's on her business we've come. We didn't know she'd already been to you, but we might have guessed someone would send her. She didn't lose much time."

"She wouldn't," said Stephen. "She isn't that kind."

"I knew nothing of the sister," went on Mademoiselle Soubise. "I could hardly believe at first that Ben Halim had an American wife. Then I remembered how these Mohammedan men can hide their women, so no one ever knows. Probably no one ever did know, otherwise gossip

would have leaked out. The man may have been jealous of her. You see, I have Arab acquaintances. I go to visit ladies in the harems sometimes, and I hear stories when anything exciting is talked of. You can't think how word flies from one harem to another—like a carrier-pigeon! This could never have been a matter of gossip—though it is true I was young at the time.”

“You think, then, he would have shut her up?” asked Nevill. “That's what I feared.”

“But of course he would have shut her up—with another wife, perhaps.”

“Good Heavens!” exclaimed Stephen. “The poor child has never thought of that possibility. She says he promised her sister he would never look at any other woman.”

“Ah, the promise of an Arab in love! Perhaps she did not know the Arabs—that sister. It is only the men of princely families who take but one wife. And he would not tell her if he had already looked at another woman. He would be sure, no matter how much in love a Christian girl might be, she would not marry a man who already had a wife.”

“We might find out that,” suggested Stephen.

“It would be difficult,” said the Frenchwoman. “I can try, among Arabs I know, but though they like to chat with Europeans, they will not answer questions. They resent that we should ask them, though they are polite. As for you, if you ask men, French or Arab, you will learn nothing. The French would not know. The Arabs, if they did, would not tell. They must not talk of each other's wives, even among themselves, much less to outsiders. You can ask an Arab about anything else in the world, but not his wife. That is the last insult.”

"What a country!" Stephen ejaculated.

"I don't know that it has many more faults than others," said Nevill, defending it, "only they're different."

"But about the scandal that drove Ben Halim away?" Stephen ventured on.

"Strange things were whispered at the time, I remember, because Ben Halim was a handsome man and well-known. One looked twice at him in his uniform when he went by on a splendid horse. I believe he had been to Paris before the scandal. What he did afterwards no one can say. But I could not tell Mees Ray what I had heard of that scandal any more than I would tell a young girl that almost all Europeans who become harem women are converted to the religion of Islam, and that very likely the sister wasn't Ben Halim's first wife."

"Can you tell us of the scandal, or—would you rather not talk of the subject?" Stephen hesitated.

"Oh, I can tell you, for it would not hurt your feelings. People said Ben Halim flirted too much with his Colonel's beautiful French wife, who died soon afterwards, and her husband killed himself. Ben Halim had not been considered a good officer before. He was too fond of pleasure, and a mad gambler; so at last it was made known to him he had better leave the army of his own accord if he did not wish to go against his will; at least, that was the story."

"Of course!" exclaimed Nevill. "It comes back to me now, though it all happened before I lived in Algiers. Ben Halim sold his house and everything in it to a Frenchman who went bankrupt soon after. It's passed through several hands since. I go occasionally to call on Mrs. Jewett and her daughter."

"It is said they wish you would call oftener, Monsieur Caird."

Nevill turned red. Stephen thought he could understand, and hid a smile. No doubt Nevill was a great "catch" in Algerian society. And he was in love with a teacher of Arab children far away in Tlemcen, a girl "poor as a church mouse," who wouldn't listen to him! It was a quaint world; as quaint in Africa as elsewhere.

"What did you tell Miss Ray?" Nevill hurried to ask.

"That Ben Halim had left Algiers nine years ago, and had never been heard of since. When I saw she did not love his memory, I told her people believed him to be dead; and this rumour might be true, as no news of him has ever come back. But she turned pale, and I was sorry I had been so frank. Yet what would you? Oh, and I thought of one more thing, when she had gone, which I might have mentioned. But perhaps there is nothing in it. All the rest of the day I was busy with many customers, so I was tired at night, otherwise I would have sent a note to her hotel. And this morning since six I have been hurrying to get off boxes and things ordered by some Americans for a ship which sails at noon. But you will tell the young lady when you see her, and that will be better than my writing, because sending a note would make it seem too important. She might build hopes, and it would be a pity if they did explode."

Both men laughed a little at this ending of the Frenchwoman's sentence, but Stephen was more impatient than Nevill to know what was to come next. He grugged the pause, and made her go on.

"It is only that I remember my sister telling me, when she was at home last year for a holiday, about a

Kabyle servant girl who waits on her in Tlemcen. The girl is of a great intelligence, and my sister takes an interest in her. Josette teaches her many things, and they talk. Mouni—that is the Kabyle's name—tells of her home life to my sister. One thing she did was to serve a beautiful foreign lady in the house of a rich Arab. She was only a child then, not more than thirteen, for such girls grow up early; but she has always thought about that lady, who was good to her, and very sad. Mouni told Josette she had never seen anyone so beautiful, and that her mistress had hair of a natural colour, redder than hair dyed with henna and powdered with gold dust. It was this describing of the hair which brought the story back to my head when Miss Ray had gone, because she has hair like that, and perhaps her sister had it too."

"By Jove, we'll run over to Tlemcen in the car, and see that Kabyle girl," Nevill eagerly proposed, carefully looking at his friend, and not at Jeanne Soubise. But she raised her eyebrows, then drew them together, and her frank manner changed. With that shadow of a frown, and smileless eyes and lips, there was something rather formidable about the handsome young woman.

"Mees Ray may like to manage all her own beesiness," she remarked. And it occurred to Stephen that it would be a propitious moment to choose such curios as he wished to buy. In a few moments Mademoiselle Soubise was her pleasant self again, indicating the best points of the things he admired, and giving him their history.

"There's apparently a conspiracy of silence to keep us from finding out anything about Miss Ray's sister as Ben Halim's wife," he said to Nevill when they had left the curiosity-shop. "Also, what has become of Ben Halim,"

"You'll learn that there's always a conspiracy of silence in Africa, where Arabs are concerned," Nevill answered. There was a far-off, fatal look in his eyes as he spoke, those blue eyes which seemed at all times to see something that others could not see. And again the sense of an intangible, illusive, yet very real mystery of the East, which he had felt for a moment before landing, oppressed Stephen, as if he had inhaled too much smoke from the black incense of Tombouctou.

XI.

STEPHEN and Nevill Caird were in the cypress avenue when Victoria Ray drove up in a ramshackle cab, guided by an Arab driver who squinted hideously. She wore a white frock which might have cost a sovereign, and had probably been made at home. Her wide brimmed hat was of cheap straw, wound with a scarf of thin white muslin; but her eyes looked out like blue stars from under its dove-coloured shadow, and a lily was tucked into her belt. To both young men she seemed very beautiful, and radiant as the spring morning.

"You aren't superstitious, engaging a man with a squint," said Nevill.

"Of course not," she laughed. "As if harm could come to me because the poor man's so homely! I engaged him because he was the worst looking, and nobody else seemed to want him."

They escorted her indoors to Lady MacGregor, and Stephen wondered if she would be afraid of the elderly fairy with the face of a child and the manner of an autocrat. But she was not in the least shy; and indeed

Stephen could hardly picture the girl as being self-conscious in any circumstances. Lady MacGregor took her in with one look; white hat, red hair, blue eyes, lily at belt, simple frock and all, and—somewhat to Stephen's surprise, because she was to him a new type of old lady—decided to be charmed with Miss Ray.

Victoria's naïve admiration of the house and gardens delighted her host and hostess. She could not be too much astonished at its wonders to please them, and, both being thoroughbred, they liked her the better for saying frankly that she was unused to beautiful houses. "You can't think what this is like after school in Potterston and cheap boarding-houses in New York and London," she said, laughing when the others laughed.

Stephen was longing to see her in the lily-garden, which, to his mind, might have been made for her; and after luncheon he asked Lady MacGregor if he and Nevill might show it to Miss Ray.

The garden lay to the east, and as it was shadowed by the house in the afternoon, it would not be too hot.

"Perhaps you won't mind taking her yourself," said the elderly fairy. "Just for a few wee minutes I want Nevill. He is to tell me about accepting or refusing some invitations. I'll send him to you soon."

Stephen was ashamed of the gladness with which he could not help hearing this proposal. He had nothing to say to the girl which he might not say before Nevill, or even before Lady MacGregor, yet he had been feeling cheated because he could not be alone with Victoria, as on the boat.

"Gather Miss Ray as many lilies as she can carry away," were Nevill's parting instructions. And it was exactly what Stephen had wished for. He wanted to give

her something beautiful and appropriate, something he could give with his own hands. And he longed to see her holding masses of white lilies to her breast, as she walked all white in the white lily-garden. Now, too, he could tell her what Mademoiselle Soubise had said about the Kabyle girl, Mouni. He was sure Nevill wouldn't grudge his having that pleasure all to himself. Anyway he could not resist the temptation to snatch it.

He began, as soon as they were alone together in the garden, by asking her what she had done, whether she had made progress; and it seemed that she retired from his questions with a vague suggestion of reserve she had not shown on the ship. It was not that she answered unwillingly, but he could not define the difference in her manner, although he felt that a difference existed.

It was as if somebody might have been scolding her for a lack of reserve; yet when he enquired if she had met anyone she knew, or made acquaintances, she said no to the first question, and named only Mademoiselle Soubise in reply to the second.

That was Stephen's opportunity, and he began to tell of his call at the curiosity-shop. He expected Victoria to cry out with excitement when he came to Mouni's description of the beautiful lady with "henna-coloured, gold-powdered hair"; but though she flushed and her breath came and went quickly as he talked, somehow the girl did not appear to be enraptured with a new hope, as he had expected.

"My friend Caird proposes that he and I should motor to Tlemcen, which it seems is near the Moroccan border, and interview Mouni," he said. "We may be able to make sure, when we question her, that it was your sister she served; and perhaps we can pick up some clue through

what she lets drop, as to where Ben Halim took his wife when he left Algiers—though, of course, there are lots of other ways to find out, if this should prove a false clue.”

“You are both more than good,” Victoria answered, “but I mustn’t let you go so far for me. Perhaps, as you say, I shall be able to find out in other ways, from someone here in Algiers. It does sound as if it might be my sister the maid spoke of to Mademoiselle Soubise. How I should love to hear Mouni talk!—but you must wait, and see what happens, before you think of going on a journey for my sake.”

“If only there were some woman to take you, you might go with us,” said Stephen, more eagerly than he was aware, and thinking wild thoughts about Lady MacGregor as a chaperon, or perhaps Mademoiselle Soubise—if only she could be persuaded to leave her beloved shop, and wouldn’t draw those black brows of hers together as though tabooing a forbidden idea.

“Let’s wait—and see,” Victoria repeated. And this patience, in the face of such hope, struck Stephen as being strange in her, unlike his conception of the brave, impulsive nature, ready for any adventure if only there were a faint flicker of light at the end. Then, as if she did not wish to talk longer of a possible visit to Tlemcen, Victoria said: “I’ve something to show you: a picture of my sister.”

The white dress was made without a collar, and was wrapped across her breast like a fichu which left the slender white stem of her throat uncovered. Now she drew out from under the muslin folds a thin gold chain, from which dangled a flat, open-faced locket. When she had unfastened a clasp, she handed the trinket to Stephen. “Saidee had the photograph made specially for me, just

before she was married," the girl explained, "and I painted it myself. I couldn't trust anyone else, because no one knew her colouring. Of course, she was a hundred times more beautiful than this, but it gives you some idea of her, as she looked when I saw her last."

The face in the photograph was small, not much larger than Stephen's thumb-nail, but every feature was distinct, not unlike Victoria's, though more pronounced; and the nose, seen almost in profile, was perfect in its delicate straightness. The lips were fuller than Victoria's, and red as coral. The eyes were brown, with a suggestion of coquetry absent in the younger girl's, and the hair, parted in the middle and worn in a loose, wavy coil, appeared to be of a darker red, less golden, more auburn.

"That's exactly Saidee's colouring," repeated Victoria. "Her lips were the reddest I ever saw, and I used to say diamonds had got caught behind her eyes. Do you wonder I worshipped her—that I just *couldn't* let her go out of my life forever?"

"No, I don't wonder. She's very lovely," Stephen agreed. The coquetry in the eyes was pathetic to him, knowing the beautiful Saidee's history.

"She was eighteen then. She's twenty-eight now. Saidee twenty-eight! I can hardly realise it. But I'm sure she hasn't changed, unless to grow prettier. I used always to think she would." Victoria took back the portrait, and gazed at it. Stephen was sorry for the child. He thought it more than likely that Saidee had changed for the worse, physically and spiritually, even mentally, if Mademoiselle Soubise were right in her surmises. He was glad she had not said to Victoria what she had said to him, about Saidee having to live the life of other harem women.

"I bought a string of amber beads at that curiosity-shop yesterday," the girl went on, "because there's a light in them like what used to be in Saidee's eyes. Every night, when I've said my prayers and am ready to go to sleep, I see her in that golden silence I told you about, looking towards the west—that is, towards me, too, you know; with the sun setting and streaming right into her eyes, making that jewelled kind of light gleam in them, which comes and goes in those amber beads. When I find her, I shall hold up the beads to her eyes in the sunlight and compare them."

"What is the golden silence like?" asked Stephen. "Do you see more clearly, now that at last you've come to Africa?"

"I couldn't see more clearly than I did before," the girl answered slowly, looking away from him, through the green lace of the trees that veiled the distance. "Yet it's just as mysterious as ever. I can't guess yet what it can be, unless it's in the desert. I just see Saidee, standing on a large, flat expanse which looks white. And she's dressed in white. All round her is a quivering golden haze, wave after wave of it, endless as the sea when you're on a ship. And there's silence—not one sound, except the beating which must be my own heart, or the blood that sings in my ears when I listen for a long time—the kind of singing you hear in a shell. That's all. And the level sun shining in her eyes, and on her hair."

"It is a picture," said Stephen.

"Wherever Say was, there would always be a picture," Victoria said with the unselfish, unashamed pride she had in her sister.

"How I hope Saidee knows I'm near her," she went on, half to herself. "She'd know that I'd come to her as

soon as I could—and she may have heard things about me that would tell her I was trying to make money enough for the journey and everything. If I hadn't hoped she *might* see the magazines and papers, I could never have let my photograph be published. I should have hated that, if it hadn't been for the thought of the portraits coming to her eyes, with my name under them; 'Victoria Ray, who is dancing in such and such a place.' *She* would know why I was doing it; dancing nearer and nearer to her."

"You darling!" Stephen would have liked to say. But only as he might have spoken caressingly to a lovely child whose sweet soul had won him. She seemed younger than ever to-day, in the big, drooping hat, with the light behind her weaving a gold halo round her hair and the slim white figure, as she talked of Saidee in the golden silence. When she looked up at him, he thought that she was like a girl-saint, painted on a background of gold. He felt very tender over her, very much older than she, and it did not occur to him that he might fall in love with this young creature who had no thought for anything in life except the finding of her sister.

A tiny streak of lily-pollen had made a little yellow stain on the white satin of her cheek, and under her blue eyes were a few faint freckles, golden as the lily-pollen. He had seen them come yesterday, on the ship, in a bright glare of sunlight, and they were not quite gone yet. He had a foolish wish to touch them with his finger, to see if they would rub off, and to brush away the lily-pollen, though it made her skin look pure as pearl.

"You are an inspiration!" was all he said.

"I? But how do you mean?" she asked.

He hardly knew that he had spoken aloud; yet chal-

lenged, he tried to explain. "Inspiration to new life and faith in things," he answered almost at random. But hearing the words pronounced by his own voice, made him realise that they were true. This child, of whose existence he had not known a week ago, could give him—perhaps was already giving him—new faith and new interests. He felt thankful for her, somehow, though she did not belong to him, and never would—unless a gleam of sunshine can belong to one on whom it shines. And he would always associate her with the golden sunshine and the magic charm of Algeria.

"I told you I'd given you half my star," she said, laughing and blushing a little.

"Which star is it?" he wanted to know. "When I don't see you any more, I can look up and hitch my thought-waggon to Mars or Venus."

"Oh, it's even grander than any planet you can see, with your real eyes. But you can look at the evening star if you like. It's so thrilling in the sunset sky, I sometimes call it my star."

"All right," said Stephen, with his elder-brother air. "And when I look I'll think of you."

"You can think of me as being with Saidee at last."

"You have the strongest presentiment that you'll find her without difficulty."

"When *I* say 'presentiment,' I mean creating a thing I want, making a picture of it happening, so it *has* to happen by-and-by, as God made pictures of this world, and all the worlds, and they came true."

"By Jove, I wish I could go to school to you!" Stephen said this laughing; but he meant every word. She had just given him two new ideas. He wondered if he could

do anything with them. Yet no; his life was cut out on a certain plan. It must now follow that plan.

"If you should have any trouble—not that you *will* but just 'if,' you know," he went on, "and if I could help you, I want you to remember this, wherever you are and whatever the trouble may be; there's nothing I wouldn't do for you—nothing. There's no distance I wouldn't travel."

"Why, you're the kindest man I ever met!" Victoria exclaimed, gratefully. "And I think you must be one of the best."

"Good heavens, what a character to live up to!" laughed Stephen. Nevertheless he suddenly lost his sense of exaltation, and felt sad and tired, thinking of life with Margot, and how difficult it would be not to degenerate in her society.

"Yes. It's a good character. And I'll promise to let you know, if I'm in any trouble and need help. If I can't write, I'll *call*, as I said yesterday."

"Good. I shall hear you over the wireless telephone." They both laughed; and Nevill Caird, coming out of the house was pleased that Stephen should be happy.

It had occurred to him while helping his aunt with the invitations, that something of interest to Miss Ray might be learned at the Governor's house. He knew the Governor more or less, in a social way. Now he asked Victoria if she would like him to make enquiries about Ben Halim's past as a Spahi?

"I've already been to the Governor," replied Victoria. "I got a letter to him from the American Consul, and had a little audience with him—is that what I ought to call it?—this morning. He was kind, but could tell me nothing I didn't know—any way, he would tell nothing

more. He wasn't in Algiers when Saidee came. It was in the day of his predecessor."

Nevill admired her promptness and energy, and said so. He shared Stephen's chivalrous wish to do something for the girl, so alone, so courageous, working against difficulties she had not begun to understand. He was sorry that he had had no hand in helping Victoria to see the most important Frenchman in Algiers, a man of generous sympathy for Arabs; but as he had been forestalled, he hastened to think of something else which he might do. He knew the house Ben Halim had owned in Algiers, the place which must have been her sister's home. The people who lived there now were acquaintances of his. Would she like to see Djenan el Hadj?

The suggestion pleased her so much that Stephen found himself envying Nevill her gratitude. And it was arranged that Mrs. Jewett should be asked to appoint an hour for a visit next day.

XII.

WHILE Victoria was still in the lily-garden with her host and his friend, the cab which she had ordered to return came back to fetch her. It was early, and Lady MacGregor had expected her to stop for tea, as most people did stop, who visited Djenan el Djouad for the first time, because everyone wished to see the house; and to see the house took hours. But the dancing-girl, appearing slightly embarrassed as she expressed her regrets, said that she must go; she had to keep an engagement. She did not explain what the engagement was, and as she betrayed constraint in speaking of it, both Stephen

and Nevill guessed that she did not wish to explain. They took it for granted that it was something to do with her sister's affairs, something which she considered of importance; otherwise, as she had no friends in Algiers, and Lady MacGregor was putting herself out to be kind, the girl would have been pleased to spend an afternoon with those to whom she could talk freely. No questions could be asked, though, as Lady MacGregor remarked when Victoria had gone (after christening the baby panther), it did seem ridiculous that a child should be allowed to make its own plans and carry them out alone in a place like Algiers, without having any advice from its elders.

"I've been, and expect to go on being, what you might call a perpetual chaperon," said she resignedly; "and chaperoning is so ingrained in my nature that I hate to see a baby running about unprotected, doing what it chooses, as if it were a married woman, not to say a widow. But I suppose it can't be stopped."

"She's been on the stage," said Nevill reassuringly, Miss Ray having already broken this hard fact to the Scotch lady at luncheon.

"I tell you it's a baby! Even John Knox would see that," sharply replied Aunt Caroline.

There was nothing better to do with the rest of the afternoon, Nevill thought, than to take a spin in the motor, which they did, the chauffeur at the wheel, as Nevill confessed himself of too lazy a turn of mind to care for driving his own car. While Stephen waited outside, he called at Djenan el Hadj (an old Arab house at a little distance from the town, buried deep in a beautiful garden), but the ladies were out. Nevill wrote a note on his card, explaining that his aunt would like to bring a friend, whose relatives had once lived in the house; and

this done, they had a swift run about the beautiful country in the neighbourhood of Algiers.

It was dinner-time when they returned, and meanwhile an answer had come from Mrs. Jewett. She would be delighted to see any friend of Lady MacGregor's, and hoped Miss Ray might be brought to tea the following afternoon.

"Shall we send a note to her hotel, or shall we stroll down after dinner?" asked Nevill.

"Suppose we stroll down," Stephen decided, trying to appear indifferent, though he was ridiculously pleased at the idea of having a few unexpected words with Victoria.

"Good. We might take a look at the Kasbah afterward," said Nevill. "Night's the time when it's most mysterious, and we shall be close to the old town when we leave Miss Ray's hotel."

Dinner seemed long to Stephen. He could have spared several courses. Nevertheless, though they sat down at eight, it was only nine when they started out. Up on the hill of Mustapha Supérieur, all was peaceful under the moonlight; but below, in the streets of French shops and cafés, the light-hearted people of the South were ready to begin enjoying themselves after a day of work. Streams of electric light poured from restaurant windows, and good smells of French cooking filtered out, as doors opened and shut. The native cafés were crowded with dark men smoking chibouques, eating kous-kous, playing dominoes, or sipping absinthe and golden liqueurs which, fortunately not having been invented in the Prophet's time, had not been forbidden by him. Curio shops and bazaars for native jewellery and brasswork were still open, lit up with pink and yellow lamps. The brilliant uniforms of young Spahis and Zouaves made spots of

vivid colour among the dark clothes of Europeans, tourists, or employés in commercial houses out for amusement. Sailors of different nations swung along arm in arm, laughing and ogling the handsome Jewesses and painted ladies from the Levant or Marseilles. American girls just arrived on big ships took care of their chaperons and gazed with interest at the passing show, especially at the magnificent Arabs who appeared to float rather than walk, looking neither to right nor left, their white burnouses blowing behind them. The girls stared eagerly, too, at the few veiled and swathed figures of native women who mingled with the crowd, padding timidly with bare feet thrust into slippers. The foreigners mistook them no doubt for Arab ladies, not knowing that ladies never walk; and were but little interested in the old, unveiled women with chocolate-coloured faces, who begged, or tried to sell picture-postcards. The arcaded streets were full of light and laughter, noise of voices, clatter of horses' hoofs, carriage-wheels, and tramcars, bells of bicycles and horns of motors. The scene was as gay as any Paris boulevard, and far more picturesque because of the older, Eastern civilisation in the midst of, though never part of, an imported European life—the flitting white and brown figures, like thronging ghosts outnumbering the guests at a banquet.

Stephen and Nevill Caird went up the Rue Bab-el-Oued, leading to the old town, and so came to the Hotel de la Kasbah, where Victoria Ray was staying. It looked more attractive at night, with its blaze of electricity that threw out the Oriental colouring of some crude decorations in the entrance-hall, yet the place appeared less than ever suited to Victoria.

An Arab porter stood at the door, smoking a cigarette.

His fingers were stained with henna, and he wore an embroidered jacket which showed grease-spots and untidy creases. It was with the calmest indifference he eyed the Englishmen, as Nevill enquired in French for Miss Ray.

The question whether she were "at home" was conventionally put, for it seemed practically certain that she must be in the hotel. Where could she, who had no other friends than they, and no chaperon, go at night? It was with blank surprise, therefore, that he and Stephen heard the man's answer. Mademoiselle was out.

"I don't believe it," Stephen muttered in English, to Nevill.

The porter understood, and looked sulky. "I tell ze troot," he persisted. "Ze gentlemens no believe, zay ask some ozzer."

They took him at his word, and walked past the Arab into the hotel. A few Frenchmen and Spaniards of inferior type were in the hall, and at the back, near a stairway made of the cheapest marble, was a window labelled "Bureau." Behind this window, in a cagelike room, sat the proprietor at a desk, adding up figures in a large book. He was very fat, and his chins went all the way round his neck in grooves, as if his thick throat might pull out like an accordion. There was something curiously exotic about him, as there is in persons of mixed races; an olive pallor of skin, an oiliness of black hair, and a jetty brightness of eye under heavy lids.

This time it was Stephen who asked for Miss Ray; but he was given the same answer. She had gone out.

"You are sure?"

"Mais, oui, monsieur."

"Has she been gone long?" Stephen persisted, feeling

perplexed and irritated, as if something underhand were going on.

"Of that I cannot tell," returned the hotel proprietor, still in guttural French. "She left word she would not be at the dinner."

"Did she say when she would be back?"

"No, monsieur. She did not say."

"Perhaps the American Consul's family took pity on her, and invited her to dine with them," suggested Nevill.

"Yes," Stephen said, relieved. "That's the most likely thing, and would explain her engagement this afternoon."

"We might explore the Kasbah for an hour, and call again, to enquire."

"Let us," returned Stephen. "I should like to know that she's got in all right."

Five minutes later they had left the noisy Twentieth Century behind them, and plunged into the shadowy silence of a thousand years ago.

The change could not have been more sudden and complete if, from a gaily lighted modern street, full of hum and bustle, they had fallen down an oubliette into a dark, deserted fairyland. Just outside was the imported life of Paris, but this old town was Turkish, Arab, Moorish, Jewish and Spanish; and in Algeria old things do not change.

After all, the alley was not deserted, though it was soundless as a tomb save for a dull drumming somewhere behind thick walls. They were in a narrow tunnel, rather than a street, between houses that bent towards each other, their upper storeys supported by beams. There was no electric light, scarcely any light at all save a strip of moonshine, fine as a line of silver inlaid in ebony, along

the cobbled way which ascended in steps, and a faint glimmer of a lamp here and there in the distance, a lamp small and greenish as the pale spark of a glow-worm. As they went up, treading carefully, forms white as spirits came down the street in heelless babouches that made no more noise than the wings of a bat. These forms loomed vague in the shadow, then took shape as Arab men, whose eyes gleamed under turbans or out from hoods.

Moving aside to let a cloaked figure go by, Stephen brushed against the blank wall of a house, which was cold, sweating dampness like an underground vault. No sun, except a streak at midday, could ever penetrate this tunnel-street.

So they went on from one alley into another, as if lost in a catacomb, or the troubling mazes of a nightmare. Always the walls were blank, save for a deep-set, nail-studded door, or a small window like a square dark hole. Yet in reality, Nevill Caird was not lost. He knew his way very well in the Kasbah, which he never tired of exploring, though he had spent eight winters in Algiers. By-and-by he guided his friend into a street not so narrow as the others they had climbed, though it was rather like the bed of a mountain torrent, underfoot. Because the moon could pour down a silver flood it was not dark, but the lamps were so dull that the moonlight seemed to put them out.

Here the beating was as loud as a frightened heart. The walls resounded with it, and sent out an echo. More than one nailed door stood open, revealing a long straight passage, with painted walls faintly lighted from above, and a curtain like a shadow, hiding the end. In these passages hung the smoky perfume of incense; and from over tile-topped walls came the fragrance of roses and

lemon blossoms, half choked with the melancholy scent of things old, musty and decayed. Beautiful pillars, brought perhaps from ruined Carthage, were set deeply in the whitewashed walls, looking sad and lumpy now that centuries of chalk-coats had thickened their graceful contours. But to compensate for loss of shape, they were dazzling white, marvellous as columns of carved pearl in the moonlight, they and their surrounding walls seeming to send out an eerie, bleached light of their own which struck at the eye. The uneven path ran floods of moonlight; and from tiny windows in the leaning snow-palaces—windows like little golden frames—looked out the faces of women, as if painted on backgrounds of dull yellow, emerald-green, or rose-coloured light.

They were unveiled women, jewelled like idols, white and pink as wax-dolls, their brows drawn in black lines with herkous, their eyes glittering between bluish lines of kohl, their lips poppy-red with the tint of mesouak, their heads bound in sequined nets of silvered gauze, and crowned with tiaras of gold coins. The windows were so small that the women were hidden below their shoulders, but their huge hoop-earrings flashed, and their many necklaces sent out sparks as they nodded, smiling, at the passers; and one who seemed young and beautiful as a wicked fairy, against a purple light, threw a spray of orange blossoms at Stephen's feet.

Then, out of that street of muffled music, open doors, and sequined idols, the two men passed to another where, in small open-air cafés, bright with flaring torches or electric light squatting men smoked, listening to story-tellers; and where, farther on, Moorish baths belched out steam mingled with smells of perfume and heated humanity. So, back again to black tunnels, where the blind walls

heard secrets they would never tell. The houses had no eyes, and the street doors drew back into shadow.

"Do you wonder now," Nevill asked, "that it's difficult to find out what goes on in an Arab's household?"

"No," said Stephen. "I feel half stifled. It's wonderful, but somehow terrible. Let's get out of this 'Arabian Nights' dream, into light and air, or something will happen to us, some such things as befell the Seven Calendars. We must have been here an hour. It's time to enquire for Miss Ray again. She's sure to have come in by now."

Back they walked into the Twentieth Century. Some of the lights in the hotel had been put out. There was nobody in the hall but the porter, who had smoked his last cigarette, and as no one had given him another, he was trying to sleep in a chair by the door.

Mademoiselle might have come in. He did not know. Yes, he could ask, if there were anyone to ask, but the woman who looked after the bedrooms had an evening out. There was only one *femme de chambre*, but what would you? The high season was over. As for the key of Mademoiselle, very few of the clients ever left their keys in the bureau when they promenaded themselves. It was too much trouble. But certainly, he could knock at the door of Mademoiselle, if the gentlemen insisted, though it was now on the way to eleven o'clock, and it would be a pity to wake the young lady if she were sleeping.

"Knock softly. If she's awake, she'll hear you," Stephen directed. "If she's asleep, she won't."

The porter went lazily upstairs, appearing again in a few minutes to announce that he had obeyed instructions and the lady had not answered. "But," he added, "one would say that an all little light came through the key-hole."

"Brute, to look!" mumbled Stephen. There was, however, nothing more to be done. It was late, and they must take it for granted that Miss Ray had come home and gone to bed.

XIII.

THAT night Stephen dreamed troubled dreams about Victoria. All sorts of strange things were happening behind a locked door, he never quite knew what, though he seemed forever trying to find out. In the morning, before he was dressed, Mahommed brought a letter to his door; only one, on a small tray. It was the first letter he had received since leaving London—he, who had been used to sighing over the pile that heaped up with every new post, and must presently be answered.

He recognised the handwriting at a glance, though he had seen it only once, in a note written to Lady MacGregor. The letter was from Victoria, and was addressed to "Mr. Stephen Knight," in American fashion—a fashion unattractive to English eyes. But because it was Victoria's way, it seemed to Stephen simple and unaffected, like herself. Besides, she was not aware that he had any kind of handle to his name.

"Now I shall know where she was last night," he said to himself, and was about to tear open the envelope, when suddenly the thought that she had touched the paper made him tender in his usage of it. He found a paper-knife and with careful precision cut the envelope along the top. The slight delay whetted his eagerness to read what Victoria had to tell. She had probably heard of the visit which she had missed, and had written this letter

before going to bed. It was a sweet thought of the girl's to be so prompt in explaining her absence, guessing that he must have suffered some anxiety.

"DEAR MR. KNIGHT," he read, the blood slowly mounting to his face as his eyes travelled from line to line, "I don't know what you will think of me when I have told you about the thing I am going to do. But whatever you may think, don't think me ungrateful. Indeed, indeed I am not that. I hate to go away without seeing you again, yet I must; and I can't even tell you why, or where I am going—that is the worst. But if you could know why, I'm almost sure you would feel that I am doing the right thing, and the only thing possible. Before all and above all with me, must be my sister's good. Everything else has to be sacrificed to that, even things that I value very, very much.

"Don't imagine though, from what I say, that I'm making a great sacrifice, so far as any danger to myself is concerned. The sacrifice is, to risk being thought unkind, ungrateful, by you, and of losing your friendship. This is the *only* danger I am running, really; so don't fear for me, and please forgive me if you can. Just at the moment I must seem (as well as ungracious) a little mysterious, not because I want to be mysterious, but because it is forced on me by circumstances. I hate it, and soon I hope I shall be able to be as frank and open with you as I was at first, when I saw how good you were about taking an interest in my sister Saidee. I think, as far as I can see ahead, I may write to you in a fortnight. Then, I shall have news to tell, the *best of news*, I hope; and I won't need to keep anything back. By that time I may tell you all that has happened, since bidding you

and Mr. Caird good-bye, at the door of his beautiful house, and all that will have happened by the time I can begin the letter. How I wish it were now!

"There's just one more word I want to say, that I really can say without doing harm to anybody or to any plan. It's this. I did feel so guilty when you talked about your motoring with Mr. Caird to Tlemcen. It was splendid of you both to be willing to go, and you must have thought me cold and half-hearted about it. But I couldn't tell you what was in my mind, even then. I didn't know what was before me; but there was already a thing which I had to keep from you. It was only a small thing. But now it has grown to be a very big one.

"Good-bye, my dear friend Mr. Knight. I like to call you my friend, and I shall always remember how good you were to me, if, for any reason, we should never see each other again. It is very likely we may not meet, for I don't know how long you are going to stay in Africa, or how long I shall stay, so it may be that you will go back to England soon. I don't suppose I shall go there. When I can leave this country it will be to sail for America with my sister—*never without her*. But I shall write, as I said, in a fortnight, if all is well—indeed, I shall write whatever happens. I shall be able to give you an address, too, I hope very much, because I should like to hear from you. And I shall pray that you may always be happy.

"I meant this to be quite a short letter, but after all it is a long one! Good-bye again, and give my best remembrances to Lady MacGregor and Mr. Caird, if they are not disgusted with me for the way I am behaving. Gratefully your friend,

VICTORIA RAY."

There was no room for any anger against the girl in Stephen's heart. He was furious, but not with her. And he did not know with whom to be angry. There was someone—there must be someone—who had persuaded her to take this step in the dark, and this secret person deserved all his anger and more. To persuade a young girl to turn from the only friends she had who could protect her, was a crime. Stephen could imagine no good purpose to be served by mystery, and he could imagine many bad ones. The very thought of the best among them made him physically sick. There was a throat somewhere in the world which his fingers were tingling to choke; and he did not know where, or whose it was. It made his head ache with a rush of beating blood not to know. And realising suddenly, with a shock like a blow in the face, the violence of his desire to punish some person unknown, he saw how intimate a place the girl had in his heart. The longing to protect her, to save her from harm or treachery, was so intense as to give pain. He felt as if a lasso had been thrown round his body, pressing his lungs, roping his arms to his sides, holding him helpless; and for a moment the sensation was so powerful that he was conscious of a severe effort, as if to break away from the spell of a hypnotist.

It was only for a moment that he stood still, though a thousand thoughts ran through his head, as in a dream—as in the dreams of last night, which had seemed so interminable.

The thing to do was to find out at once what had become of Victoria, whom she had seen, who had enticed her to leave the hotel. It would not take long to find

order to play nurse. A doctor corroborated this story, and nothing was to be gained in that direction.

Then it was that Nevill almost timidly renewed his suggestion of a visit to Tlemcen. They could find out by telegraphing Josette, he admitted, whether or no Victoria Ray had arrived, but if she were not already in Tlemcen, she might come later, to see Mouni. And even if not, they might find out how to reach Saidee, by catechising the Kabyle girl. Once they knew the way to Victoria's sister, it was next best to knowing the way to find Victoria herself. This last argument was not to be despised. It impressed Stephen, and he consented at once to "try their luck" at Tlemcen.

Early in the morning of the second day after the coming of Victoria's letter, the two men started in Nevill's yellow car, the merry-eyed chauffeur charmed at the prospect of a journey worth doing. He was tired, he remarked to Stephen, "*de tous ces petits voyages d'une demi-heure, comme les tristes promenades des enfants, sans une seule aventure.*"

They had bidden good-bye to Lady MacGregor, and most of the family animals, overnight, and it was hardly eight o'clock when they left Djenan el Djouad, for the day's journey would be long. A magical light, like the light in a dream, gilded the hills of the Sahel; and beyond lay the vast plain of the Metidja, a golden bowl, heaped to its swelling rims of mountains with the fairest fruits of Algeria.

The car rushed through a world of blossoms, fragrant open country full of flowers, and past towns that did their small utmost to bring France into the land which France had conquered. Boufarik, with its tall monument to a brave French soldier who fought against tremendous odds:

Blidah, a walled and fortified mixture of garrison and orange-grove, with a market-place like a scene in the "Arabian Nights"; Orleansville, modern and ostentatiously French, built upon ruins of vast antiquity, and hotter than all other towns in the dry cup of the Chelif Valley: Relizane, Perrégaux, and finally Oran (famed still for its old Spanish forts), which they reached by moonlight.

Always there were fields embroidered round the edges with wild flowers of blue and gold, and rose. Always there were white, dusty roads, along which other motors sometimes raced, but oftener there were farm-carts, waggons pulled by strings of mules, and horses with horned harness like the harness in Provence or on the Spanish border. There were huge, two-storeyed diligences, too, drawn by six or eight black mules, crammed under their canvas roofs with white- or brown-robed Arabs, and going very fast.

From Oran they might have gone on the same night, reaching the end of their journey after a few hours' spin, but Nevill explained that haste would be vain. They could not see Mademoiselle Soubise until past nine, so better sleep at Oran, start at dawn, and see something of the road,—a road more picturesque than any they had travelled.

It was not for Stephen to offer objections, though he was in a mood which made him long to push on without stopping, even though there were no motive for haste. He was ashamed of the mood, however, and hardly understood what it meant, since he had come to Algeria in search of peace. When first he landed, and until the day of Victoria's letter, he had been enormously interested in the panorama of the East which passed before his eyes. He had eagerly noticed each detail of colour and strange-

ness, but now, though the London lethargy was gone, in its place had been born a disturbing restlessness which would not let him look impersonally at life as at a picture.

Questioning himself as he lay awake in the Oran hotel, with windows open to the moonlight, Stephen was forced to admit that the picture was blurred because Victoria had gone out of it. Her figure had been in the foreground when first he had seen the moving panorama, and all the rest had been only a magical frame for her. The charm of her radiant youth, and the romance of the errand which had brought her knocking, when he knocked, at the door of the East, had turned the glamour into glory. Now she had vanished; and as her letter said, it might be that she would never come back. The centre of interest was transferred to the unknown place where she had gone, and Stephen began to see that his impatience to be moving was born of the wish not only to know that she was safe, but to see her again.

He was angry with himself at this discovery, and almost he was angry with Victoria. If he had not her affairs to worry over, Africa would be giving him the rest cure he had expected. He would be calmly enjoying this run through beautiful country, instead of chafing to rush on to the end. Since, in all probability, he could do the girl no good, and certainly she could do him none, he half wished that one or the other had crossed from Marseilles to Algiers on a different ship. What he needed was peace, not any new and feverish personal interest in life. Yes, decidedly he wished that he had never known Victoria Ray.

But the wish did not live long. Suddenly her face, her eyes, came before him in the night. He heard her

say that she would give him "half her star," and his heart grew sick with longing.

"I hope to Heaven I'm not going to love that girl," he said aloud to the darkness. If no other woman came into his life, he might be able to get through it well enough with Margot. He could hunt and shoot, and do other things that consoled men for lack of something better. But if—he knew he must not let there be an "if." He must go on thinking of Victoria Ray as a child, a charming little friend whom he wished to help. Any other thought of her would mean ruin.

Before dawn they were called, and started as the sun showed over the horizon.

So they ran into the western country, near to the Morocco border. Dull at first, save for its flooding flowers, soon the way wound among dark mountains, from whose helmeted heads trailed the long plumes of white cascades, and whose feet—like the stone feet of Egyptian kings in ruined temples—were bathed by lakes that glimmered in the depths of gorges.

It was a land of legends and dreams round about Tlemcen, the "Key of the West," city of beautiful mosques. The mountains were honeycombed with onyx mines; and rising out of wide plains were crumbling brown fortresses, haunted by the ghosts of long-dead Arabs who had buried hoards of money in secret hiding-places, and died before they could unearth their treasure. Tombs of kings and princes, and koubbahs of renowned marabouts, Arab saints, gleamed white, or yellow as old gold, under the faded silver of ancient olive-trees, in fields that ran red with blood of poppies. Minarets jewelled like peacocks' tails soared above the tops of blossoming chestnuts. On low trees or bushes, guarding the graves of saints, flut-

tered many-coloured rags, left there by faithful men and women who had prayed at the shrine for health or fortune; and for every foot of ground there was some wild tale of war or love, an echo from days so long ago that history had mingled inextricably with lore of fairies.

Nevill was excited and talkative as they drove into the old town, once the light of western Algeria. They passed in by the gateway of Oran, and through streets that tried to be French, but contrived somehow to be Arab. Nevill told stories of the days when Tlemcen had queened it over the west, and coined her own money; of the marabouts after whom the most famous mosques were named: Sidi-el-Haloui, the confectioner-saint from Seville, who preached to the children and made them sweetmeats; of the lawyer-saint, Sidi Aboul Hassan from Arabia, and others. But he did not speak of Josette Soubise, until suddenly he touched Stephen's arm as they passed the high wall of a garden.

"There, that's where *she* teaches," he said; and it was not necessary to add a name.

Stephen glanced at him quickly. Nevill looked very young. His eyes no longer seemed to gaze at far-away things which no one else could see. All his interests were centred near at hand.

"Don't you mean to stop?" Stephen asked, surprised that the car went on.

"No; school's begun. We'll have to wait till the noon interval, and even then we sha'n't be allowed indoors, for a good many of the girls are over twelve, the age for veiling—*hadjabah*, they call it—when they're shut up, and no man, except near relations, can see their faces. Several of the girls are already engaged. I believe there's one, not fourteen, who's been divorced twice, though she's

still interested in dolls. Weird, isn't it? Josette will talk with us in the garden. But we'll have time now to take rooms at the hotel and wash off the dust. To eat something too, if you're hungry."

But Stephen was no hungrier than Nevill, whose excitement, perhaps, was contagious.

The hotel was in a wide *place*, so thickly planted with acacias and chestnut-trees as to resemble a shabby park. An Arab servant showed them to adjoining rooms, plain but clean, and a half-breed girl brought tins of hot water and vases of syringas. As for roses, she said in hybrid French, no one troubled about them—there were too many in Tlemcen. Ah! but it was a land of plenty! The gentlemen would be happy, and wish to stay a long time. There was meat and good wine for almost nothing, and beggars need not ask twice for bread—fine, white bread, baked as the Moors baked, across the border.

As they bathed and dressed more carefully than they had dressed for the early-morning start, strange sounds came up from the square below, which was full of people, laughing, quarrelling, playing games, striking bargains, singing songs. Arab bootblacks clamoured for custom at the hotel-door, pushing one another aside, fiercely. Little boys in embroidered green or crimson jackets sat on the hard, yellow earth, playing an intricate game like "jack stones," and disputed so violently that men and even women stopped to remonstrate, and separate them; now a grave, prosperous Jew dressed in red (Jewish mourning in the province of Oran); then an old Kabyle woman of the plains, in a short skirt of fiery orange scarcely hiding the thin sticks of legs that were stained with henna half-way up the calves, like painted stockings. Moors from across the frontier—fierce men with eagle faces and striped

cloaks—grouped together, whispering and gesticulating, stared at with suspicion by the milder Arabs, who attributed all the crimes of Tlemcen to the wild men from over the border. Black giants from the Negro quarter kept together, somewhat humble, yet laughing and happy. Slender, coffee-coloured youths drove miniature cows from Morocco, or tiny black donkeys, heavily laden and raw with sores, colliding with well-dressed Turks, who had the air of merchants, and looked as if they could not forget that Tlemcen had long been theirs before the French dominion. Bored but handsome officers rode through the square on Arab horses graceful as deer, and did not even glance at passing women, closely veiled in long white haïcks.

It was lively and amusing in the sunlight; but just as the two friends were ready to go out, the sky was swept with violet clouds. A storm threatened fiercely, but they started out despite its warning, turning deaf ears to the importunities of a Koulougli guide who wished to show them the mosques, "ver' cheap." He followed them, but they hurried on, pushing so sturdily through a flock of pink-headed sheep, which poured in a wave over the pavement, that they might have out-run the rain had they not been brought to a sudden standstill by a funeral procession.

It was the strangest sight Stephen had seen yet, and he hardly noticed that, in a burst of sunlight, rain had begun to pelt down through the canopy of trees.

The band of figures in brown burnouses marched quickly, with a sharp rustling of many slippered feet moving in unison, and golden spears of rain seemed to pierce the white turbans of the men who carried the bier. As they marched, fifty voices rose and fell wildly in a stirring chant, exciting and terrible as the beat-beat of a tom-tom,

sometimes a shout of barbaric triumph, sometimes a mourning wail. Then, abruptly, a halt was made in the glittering rain, and the bearers were changed, because of the luck it brings Arab men to carry the corpse of a friend.

Just in front of the two Englishmen the body rested for an instant, stretched out long and piteously flat, showing its thin shape through the mat of woven straw which wrapped it, only the head and feet being wound with linen. So, by-and-by, it would be laid, without a coffin, in its shallow grave in the Arab cemetery, out on the road to Sidi Bou-Medine.

There were but a few seconds of delay. Then the new bearers lifted the bier by its long poles, and the procession moved swiftly, feverishly, on again, the wild chant trailing behind as it passed, like a torn war-banner. The thrill of the wailing crept through Stephen's veins, and roused an old, childish superstition which an Irish nurse had implanted in him when he was a little boy. According to Peggy Brian it was "a cruel bad omen" to meet a funeral, especially after coming into a new town. "Wait for a corpse," said she, "an' ye'll wait while yer luck goes by."

"They're singing a song in praise of the dead man's good deeds, and of triumph for the joys he'll know in Paradise," explained Nevill. "It's only the women who weep and scratch their faces when those they love have died. The men rejoice, or try to. Soon, they are saying, this one who has gone will be in gardens fair as the gardens of Allah Himself, where sit beautiful houris, in robes woven of diamonds, sapphires, and rubies, each gem of which has an eye of its own that glitters through a vapour of smouldering ambergris, while fountains send up pearly spray in the shade of fragrant cedars."

"No wonder the Mohammedan poor don't fear death, if they expect to exchange their hovels for such quarters," said Stephen. "I wish I understood Arabic."

"It's a difficult language to keep in your mind, and I don't know it well," Nevill answered. "But Jeanne and Josette Soubise speak it like natives; and the other day when Miss Ray lunched with us, I thought her knowledge of Arabic wonderful for a person who'd picked it up from books."

Stephen did not answer. He wished that Nevill had not brought the thought of Victoria into his mind at the moment when he was recalling his old nurse's silly superstition. Victoria laughed at superstitions, but he was not sure that he could laugh, in this barbaric land where it seemed that anything might happen.

XVI.

NEVILL had not sent word to Josette Soubise that he was coming to see her. He wished to make the experiment of a surprise, although he insisted that Stephen should be with him. At the door in the high white wall of the school-garden, he asked an unveiled crone of a portress to say merely that two gentlemen had called.

"She'll suspect, I'm afraid," he muttered to Stephen as they waited, "even if her sister hasn't written that I thought of turning up. But she won't have time to invent a valid excuse, if she disapproves of the visit."

In three or four minutes the old woman hobbled back, shuffling slippered feet along the tiled path between the gate and the low whitewashed house. Made-moiselle requested that ces Messieurs would give them-

selves the pain of walking into the garden. She would descend almost at once.

They obeyed, Nevill stricken dumb by the thought of his coming happiness. Stephen would have liked to ask a question or two about the school, but he refrained, sure that if Nevill were forced into speech he would give random answers.

This was being in love—the real thing! And Stephen dimly envied his friend, even though Caird seemed to have small hope of winning the girl. It was far better to love a woman you could never marry, than to be obliged to marry one you could never love.

He imagined himself waiting to welcome Margot, beautiful Margot, returning from Canada to him. He would have to go to Liverpool, of course. She would be handsomer than ever, probably, and he could picture their meeting, seven or eight weeks from now. Would his face wear such an expression as Nevill's wore at this moment? He knew well that it would not.

"She is coming!" said Nevill, under his breath.

The door of the schoolhouse was opening, and Nevill moved forward as a tall and charming young woman appeared, like a picture in a dark frame.

She was slender, with a tiny waist, though her bust was full, and her figure had the intensely feminine curves which artists have caused to be associated with women of the Latin races; her eyes were like those of her elder sister, but larger and more brilliant. So big and splendid they were that they made the smooth oval of her olive face seem small. Quantities of heavy black hair rippled away from a forehead which would have been square if the hair had not grown down in a point like a Marie Stuart cap. Her chin was pointed, with a deep cleft in

the middle, and the dimples Nevill had praised flashed suddenly into being, as if a ray of sunshine had touched her pale cheeks.

"Mon bon ami!" she exclaimed, holding out both hands in token of comradeship, and putting emphasis on her last word.

"She's determined the poor chap sha'n't forget they're only friends," thought Stephen, wishing that Caird had not insisted upon his presence at this first meeting. And in a moment he was being introduced to Mademoiselle Josette Soubise.

"Did I surprise you?" asked Nevill, looking at her as if he could never tear his eyes away, though he spoke in an ordinary tone.

"Ah, I know you want me to say 'yes'," she laughed. "I'd like to tell a white fib, to please you. But no, I am not quite surprised, for my sister wrote that you might come, and why. What a pity you had this long journey for nothing. My Kabyle maid, Mouni, has just gone to her home, far away in a little village near Michélet, in la Grande Kabylia. She is to be married to her cousin, the chief's son, whom she has always loved—but there were obstacles till now."

"Obstacles can always be overcome," broke in Nevill.

Josette would not understand any hidden meaning. "It is a great pity about Mouni," she went on. "Only four days ago she left. I gave her the price of the journey, for a wedding present. She is a good girl, and I shall miss her. But of course you can write to ask her questions. She reads a little French."

"Perhaps we shall go ourselves," Nevill answered, glancing at Stephen's disappointed face. "For I know Miss Ray can't be here, or you would have said so."

"No, she is not here," echoed Josette, looking astonished. "Jeanne wrote about the American young lady searching for her sister, but she did not say she might visit Tlemcen."

"We hoped she would, that's all," explained Nevill. "She's left her hotel in Algiers in a mysterious way, not telling where she meant to go, although she assured us she'd be safe, and we needn't worry. However, naturally we do worry."

"But of course. I see how it is." The dimples were gone, and the brightness of Josette's eyes was overcast. She looked at Nevill wistfully, and a flash of sympathetic understanding enlightened Stephen. No doubt she was generously solicitous for the fate of Victoria Ray, but there was something different from solicitude in her darkening eyes.

"Good! she's jealous. She thinks Nevill's heart's been caught in the rebound," he told himself. But Nevill remained modestly unconscious.

"Miss Ray may arrive yet," he suggested. "We'd better stop to-day, anyhow, on the chance; don't you think so, Stephen? and then, if there's no news of her when we get back to Algiers, go on to interview the bride in Grand Kabylia?"

Stephen had not the heart to dispute the wisdom of this decision, though he was sure that, since Victoria was not in Tlemcen now, she would never come.

"So you think we've made a long journey for nothing, Mademoiselle Josette?" said Nevill.

"But yes. So it turns out."

"Seeing an old friend doesn't count, then?"

"Oh, well, that can seem but little—in comparison to what you hoped. Still, you can show Monsieur Knight

the sights. He may not guess how beautiful they are. Have you told him there are things here as wonderful as in the Alhambra itself, things made by the Moors who were in Granada?"

"I've told him about all I care most for in Tlemcen," returned Nevill, with that boyish demureness he affected sometimes. "But I'm not a competent cicerone. If you want Knight to do justice to the wonders of this place, you'll have to be our guide. We've got room for several large-sized chaperons in the car. Do come. Don't say you won't! I feel as if I couldn't stand it."

His tone was so desperate that Josette laughed some of her brightness back again. "Then I suppose I mustn't refuse. And I should like going—after school hours. Madame de Vaux, who is the bride of a French officer, will join us, I think, for she and I are friends, and besides, she has had no chance to see things yet. She has been busy settling in her quarters—and I have helped her a little."

"When can you start?" asked Nevill, enraptured at the prospect of a few happy hours snatched from fate.

"Not till five."

His face fell. "But that's cruel!"

"It would be cruel to my children to desert them sooner. Don't forget I am malema—malema before all. And there will be time for seeing nearly everything. We can go to Sidi Bou-Medine, afterwards to the ruins of Mansourah by sunset. Meanwhile, show your friend the things near by, without me; the old town, with its different quarters for the Jews, the Arabs, and the Negroes. He will like the leather-workers and the bakers, and the weavers of haïcks. And you will not need me for the Grande Mosquée, or for the Mosquée of Aboul Hassan,

where Monsieur Knight will see the most beautiful mihrab in all the world. When he has looked at that, he cannot be sorry he has come to Tlemcen; and if he has regrets, Sidi Bou-Medine will take them away."

"Has Sidi Bou-Medine the power to cure all sorrows?" Stephen asked, smiling.

"Indeed, yes. Why, Sidi Bou-Medine himself is one of the greatest marabouts. You have but to take a pinch of earth from his tomb, and make a wish upon it. Only one wish, but it is sure to be granted, whatever it may be, if you keep the packet of earth afterwards, and wear it near your heart."

"What a shame you never told me that before. The time I've wasted!" exclaimed Nevill. "But I'll make up for it now. Thank Heaven I'm superstitious."

They had forgotten Stephen, and laughing into each other's eyes, were perfectly happy for the moment. Stephen was glad, yet he felt vaguely resentful that they could forget the girl for whose sake the journey to Tlemcen had ostensibly been undertaken. They were ready to squander hours in a pretence of sightseeing, hours which might have been spent in getting back to Algiers and so hastening on the expedition to Grand Kabylia. How selfish people in love could be! And charming as Josette Soubise was, it seemed strange to Stephen that she should stand for perfection to a man who had seen Victoria Ray.

Nevill was imploring Josette to lunch with them, chaperoned by Madame de Vaux, and Josette was firmly refusing. Then he begged that they might leave money as a gift for the malema's scholars, and this offer she accepted, only regretting that the young men could not be permitted to give the *cadeau* with their own hands. "My girls are so pretty," she said, "and it is a picture to see

them at their embroidery frames, or the carpet making, their fingers flying, their eyes always on the coloured designs, which are the same as their ancestresses used a century ago, before the industry declined. I love them all, the dear creatures, and they love me, though I am a Roumia and an unbeliever. I ought to be happy in their affection, helping them to success. And now I must run back to my flock, or the lambs will be getting into mischief. Au revoir—five o'clock. You will find me waiting with Madame de Vaux."

At luncheon, in the bare, cool dining-room of the hotel, Nevill was like a man in a dream. He sat half smiling, not knowing what he ate, hardly conscious of the talk and laughter of the French officers at another table. Just at the last, however, he roused himself. "I can't help being happy. I see her so seldom. And I keep turning over in my mind what new arguments in favour of myself I can bring forward when I propose this afternoon—for of course I shall propose, if you and the bride will kindly give me the chance. I know she won't have me—but I always do propose, on the principle that much dropping may wear away a stone."

"Suppose you break the habit just for once," ventured Stephen.

Nevill looked anxious. "Why, do you think the case is hopeless?"

"On the contrary. But—well, I can't help feeling it would do you more good to show an absorbing interest in Miss Ray's affairs, this time."

"So I have an absorbing interest," Nevill protested, remorsefully. "I don't want you to suppose I mean to neglect them. I assure you——"

Stephen laughed, though a little constrainedly. "Don't

apologise, my dear fellow. Miss Ray's no more to me than to you, except that I happened to make her acquaintance a few days sooner."

"I know," Nevill agreed, mildly. Then, after a pause, which he earnestly occupied in crumbling bread. "Only I'm head over ears in love with another woman, while you're free to think of her, or any other girl, every minute of the day."

Stephen's face reddened. "I am not free," he said in a low voice.

"I beg your pardon. I hoped you were. I still think—you ought to be." Nevill spoke quickly, and without giving Stephen time to reply, he hurried on; "Miss Ray may arrive here yet. Or she may have found out about Mouni in some other way, and have gone to see her in Grand Kabylia—who knows?"

"If she were merely going there to enquire about her sister, why should she have to make a mystery of her movements?"

"Well, it's on the cards that whatever she wanted to do, she didn't care to be bothered with our troublesome advice and offers of help. Our interest was, perhaps, too pressing."

"Mademoiselle Soubise is of that opinion, anyhow—in regard to you," remarked Stephen.

"What—that angel *jealous*? It's too good to be true! But I'll relieve her mind of any such idea."

"If you'll take one more tip from me, I'd leave her mind alone for the present."

"Why, you flinty-hearted reprobate?"

"Well, I'm no authority. But all's fair in love and war. And sometimes an outsider sees features of the game which the players don't see."

"That's true, anyhow," Nevill agreed. "Let's *both* remember that—eh?" and he got up from the table abruptly, as if to keep Stephen from answering, or asking what he meant.

They had several empty hours, between the time of finishing luncheon, and five o'clock, when they were to meet Mademoiselle Soubise and her chaperon, so they took Josette's advice and went sightseeing.

Preoccupied as he was, Stephen could not be indifferent to the excursion, for Tlemcen is the shrine of gems in Arab architecture, only equalled at Granada itself. Though he was so ignorant still of eastern lore, that he hardly knew the meaning of the word mihrab, the arched recess looking towards Mecca, in the Mosque of the lawyer-saint Aboul Hassan, held him captive for many moments with its beauty. Its ornamentation was like the spread tail of Nevill's white peacock, or the spokes of a silver wheel incrusting with an intricate pattern in jewels. Not a mosque in town, or outside the gates, did they leave unvisited, lest, as Nevill said, Josette Soubise should ask embarrassing questions; and the last hour of probation they gave to the old town. There, as they stopped to look in at the workshops of the weavers, and the bakers, or stared at the hands of Fatma-Zora painted in henna on the doors of Jews and True Believers, crowds of ragged boys and girls followed them, laughing and begging as gaily as if begging were a game. Only this band of children, and heavily jewelled girls of Morocco or Spain, with unveiled, ivory faces and eyes like suns, looked at the Englishmen, as Stephen and Nevill passed the isolated blue and green houses, in front of which the women sat in a bath of sunshine. Arabs and Jews walked

by proudly, and did not seem to see that there were strangers in their midst.

When at last it was time to go back to the hotel, and motor to the École Indigène, Josette was ready, plainly dressed in black. She introduced her friends to the bride, Madame de Vaux, a merry young woman, blonde by nature and art, who laughed always, like the children in the Arab town. She admired Knight far more than Caird, because she liked tall, dark men, her own husband being red and stout. Therefore, she would have been delighted to play the tactful chaperon, if Josette had not continually broken in upon her duet with Stephen, ordering them both to look at this or that.

The country through which they drove after passing out of the gate in the modern French wall, might have been the south of England in midsummer, had it not been peopled by the dignified Arab figures which never lost their strangeness and novelty for Stephen. Here, in the west country, they glittered in finery like gorgeous birds: sky-blue jacket, scarlet fez and sash glowing behind a lacework of green branches netted with flowers, where a man hoed his fields or planted his garden.

Hung with a tapestry of roses, immense brown walls lay crumbling—ruined gateways, and shattered traces of the triple fortifications which defended Tlemcen when the Almohades were in power. By a clear rill of water gushing along the roadside, a group of delicate broken arches marked the tomb of the "flying saint," Sidi Abou Ishad el Taïyer, an early Wright or Blériot who could swim through the air; and though in his grave a chest of gold was said to be buried, no one—not even the lawless men from over the border—had ever dared dig for the treasure. Close by, under the running water, a Moor had

found a huge lump of silver which must have lain for no one could tell how many years, looking like a grey stone under a sheet of glass; nevertheless, the neighbouring tomb had still remained inviolate, for Sidi Abou Ishad el Taïyer was a much respected saint, even more loved than the marabout who sent rain for the gift of a sacrificed fowl, or he who cured sore eyes in answer to prayer. Only Sidi Bou-Medine himself was more important; and presently (because the distance was short, though the car had travelled slowly) they came to the footpath in the hills which must be ascended on foot, to reach the shrine of the powerful saint, friend of great Sidi Abd el Kader.

Already they could see the minaret of the mosque, high above the mean village which clustered round it, rising as a flame rises against a windless sky, while beneath this shining Giralda lay half-ruined houses rejuvenated with whitewash or coats of vivid blue. They passed up a narrow street redeemed from sordidness by a domed koubbah or two; and from the roofed balconies of cafés maures, Arabs looked down on them with large, dreamy eyes like clouded stars. All the glory and pride of the village was concentrated in the tomb and beautiful mosque of the saint whose name falls sweet on the ear as the music of a summer storm, the tinkle and boom of rain and thunder coming together: Sidi Bou-Medine.

Toddling girls with henna-dyed hair, and miniature brown men, like blowing flower-petals in scarlet, yellow, and blue, who had swarmed up the street after the Roumis, stopped at the portals of the mosque and the sacred tomb. But there was a humming in the air like the song of bees, which floated rhythmically out from the zaouïa, the school in the mosque where many boys squatted cross-legged before the aged Taleb who taught the Koran;

bowing, swaying towards him, droning out the words of the Prophet, some half asleep, nodding against the onyx pillars.

In the shadow of the mosque it was cool, though the crown of the minaret, gemmed with priceless tiles from Fez, blazed in the sun's rays as if it were on fire. Into this coolness the four strangers passed, involuntarily hushing their voices in the portico of decorated walls and hanging honeycombs of stucco whence, through great doors of ancient, greenish bronze (doors said to have arrived miraculously from across the sea), they found their way into a courtyard open to the sky, where a fountain waved silver plumes over a marble basin. Two or three dignified Arab men bathed their feet in preparation for the afternoon prayer, and tired travellers from a distance slept upon mats of woven straw, spread on tiles like a pavement of precious stones, or dozed in the little cells made for the students who came in the grand old days. The sons of Islam were reverent, yet happy and at home on the threshold of Allah's house, and Stephen began to understand, as Nevill and Josette already understood, something of the vast influence of the Mohammedan religion. Only Madame de Vaux remained flippant. In the car, she had laughed at the women muffled in their haïcks, saying that as the men of Tlemcen were so tyrannical about hiding female faces, it was strange they did not veil the hens and cows. In the shadowy mosque, with its five naves, she giggled at the yellow babouches out of which her little high-heeled shoes slipped, and threatened to recite a French verse under the delicate arch of the pale blue mihrab.

But Stephen was impressed with the serene beauty of the Moslem temple, where, between labyrinths of glimmer-

ing pillars like young ash-trees in moonlight, across vistas of rainbow-coloured rugs like flower-beds, the worshippers looked out at God's blue sky instead of peering through thick, stained-glass windows; where the music was the murmur of running water, instead of sounding organ-pipes; and where the winds of heaven bore away the odours of incense before they staled. He wondered whether a place of prayer like this—white-walled, severely simple despite the veil-like adornment of arabesques—did not more tend to religious contemplation than a cathedral of Italy or Spain, with its bloodstained Christs, its Virgins, and its saints. Did this Arab art perhaps more truly express the fervour of faith which needs no extraneous elaborations, because it has no doubts? But presently calling up a vision of the high, dim aisles, the strong yet soaring columns, all the mysterious purity of gothic cathedrals, he convinced himself that, after all, the old monkish architects had the real secret of mystic aspirations in the human heart.

When Josette and Nevill led the way out of the mosque, Stephen was in the right mood for the tomb of that ineffable saint of Islam, Shaoib ibn Husain el Andalouisi, Sidi Bou-Medine. He was almost ready to believe in the extraordinary virtue of the earth which had the honour of covering the marabout's remains. It annoyed him that Madame de Vaux should laugh at the lowness of the doorway under which they had to stoop, and that she should make fun of the suspended ostrich eggs, the tinselled pictures and mirrors, the glass lustres and ancient lanterns, the spilt candle-wax of many colours, or the old, old flags which covered the walls and the high structure of carved wood which was the saint's last resting-place.

A grave Arab who approved their air of respect, gave

a pinch of earth each to Stephen and Nevill, wrapped in paper, repeating Josette's assurance that their wishes would be granted. It would be necessary, he added, to reflect long before selecting the one desire of the soul which was to be put above all others. But Nevill had no hesitation. He wished instantly, and tucked the tiny parcel away in the pocket nearest his heart.

"And you, Monsieur?" asked Madame de Vaux, smiling at Stephen. "It does not appear easy to choose. Ah, now you have decided! Will you tell me what you wished?"

"I think I mustn't do that. Saints favour those who can keep secrets," said Stephen, teasingly. Yet he made his wish in earnest, after turning over several in his mind. To ask for his own future happiness, in spite of obstacles which would prove the marabout's power, was the most intelligent thing to do; but somehow the desire clamouring loudest at the moment was for Victoria, and the rest might go ungranted.

"I wish that I may find her safe and happy," he said over the pinch of earth before putting it into what Josette named his "poche du cœur."

"As for me," remarked Madame de Vaux, "I will not derange any of their Moslem saints, thank you. I have more influential ones of my own, who might be annoyed. And it is stuffy in this tomb. I am sure it is full of microbes. Let us go and see the ruined palace of the Black Sultan who, Josette says, founded everything here that was worth founding. That there should be a Black Sultan sounds like a fairy tale. And I like fairy tales next to bon-bons and new hats."

So they made their pilgrimage to the third treasure of the hill-village; and then away to where the crumbling

walls of Mansourah, and that great tower, which is one of the noblest Moorish relics in all Algeria, rise out of a flowering plain.

Cherry blossoms fell in scented snow over their heads as the car ran back to Tlemcen, and out once more, through the Moorish Porte de Fez, past the reservoir built by a king for an Arab beauty to sail her boats upon. Sunset was near, and the sky blazed red as if Mansourah burned with ten thousand torches.

The way led through vast blue lakes which were fields of periwinkles, and along the road trotted pink-robed children, whose heads were wrapped in kerchiefs of royal purple. They led sheep with golden-gleaming fleece, and at the tombs of marabouts they paused to pray, among groups of kneeling figures in long white cloaks and turbans. All the atmosphere swam with changing colours, such as come and go in the heart of a fire-opal.

Very beautiful must have been the city of Mansourah, named after murdered Sultan el Mansour, the Victorious, who built its vast fortifications, its mosques and vanished palaces, its caravanserais and baths, in the seven years when he was besieging Tlemcen. And still are its ruins beautiful, after more than five centuries of pillage and destruction. Josette Soubise loved the place, and often came to it when her day's work was done, therefore she was happy showing it to Nevill and—incidentally—to the others.

The great brown wall pricked with holes like an enormous wasp's nest, the ruined watch-towers, and the soaring, honey-coloured minaret with its intricate carvings, its marble pillars, its tiles and inset enamels iridescent as a Brazilian beetle's wing, all gleamed with a splendour that was an enchantment, in the fire of sunset. The scent

of aromatic herbs, such as Arabs love and use to cure their fevers, was bitter-sweet in the fall of the dew, and birds cried to each other from hidden nests among the ruins.

"Mussulmans think that the spirits of their dead fly back to visit their own graves, or places they have loved, in the form of birds," said Josette, looking up at the minaret, large marguerites with orange centres embroidering her black dress, as she stood knee-deep in their waving gold. "I half believe that these birds among the lovely carvings of the tower are the priests who used to read the Koran in the mosque, and could not bear to leave it. The birds in the walls are the soldiers who defended the city."

As she spoke there was a flight of wings, black against the rose and mauve of the sunset. "There!" she exclaimed. "Arabs would call that an omen! To see birds flying at sundown has a special meaning for them. If a man wanted something, he would know that he could get it only by going in the direction the birds take."

"Which way are they flying?" asked Stephen.

All four followed the flight of wings with their eyes.

"They are going south-east," said Nevill.

XVII.

If Victoria Ray had accepted Nevill Caird's invitation to be Lady MacGregor's guest and his, at Djenan el Djouad, many things might have been different. But she had wished to be independent, and had chosen to go to the Hotel de la Kasbah.

When she went down to dinner in the *salle à manger*,

shortly after seven o'clock on the evening of her arrival, only two other tables were occupied, for it was late in the season, and tourists were leaving Algiers.

No one who had been on board the *Charles Quex* was there, and Victoria saw that she was the only woman in the room. At one table sat a happy party of Germans, apparently dressed from head to foot by Dr. Jaeger, and at another were two middle-aged men who had the appearance of commercial travellers. By-and-by an elderly Jew came in, and dinner had reached the stage of peppery mutton ragout, when the door opened again. Victoria's place was almost opposite, and involuntarily, she glanced up. The handsome Arab who had crossed from Marseilles on the boat saluted her with grave courtesy as he met her look, and passed on, casting down his eyes. He was shown to a table at some distance, the manner of the Arab waiter who conducted him being so impressive, that Victoria was sure the newcomer must be a person of importance.

He was beautifully dressed, as before, and the Germans stared at him frankly, but he did not seem to be aware of their existence. Special dishes arrived for him, and evidently he had been expected.

There was but one waiter to serve the meal, and not only did he somewhat neglect the other diners for the sake of the latest arrival, but the landlord appeared, and stood talking with the Arab while he ate, with an air of respect and consideration.

The Germans, who had nearly finished their dinner when Victoria came in, now left the table, using their toothpicks and staring with the open-eyed interest of children at the picturesque figure near the door. The commercial travellers and the Jew followed. Victoria also

was ready to go, when the landlord came to her table, bowing.

"Mademoiselle," he said, in French, "I am charged with a message from an Arab gentleman of distinction, who honours my house by his presence. Sidi Maïeddine ben el Hadj Messaoud is the son of an Agha, and therefore he is a lord, and Mademoiselle need have no uneasiness that he would condescend to an indiscretion. He instructs me to present his respectful compliments to Mademoiselle, whom he saw on the ship which brought him home, after carrying through a mission in France. Seeing that Mademoiselle travelled alone, and intends perhaps to continue doing so, according to the custom of her courageous and intelligent countrywomen, Sidi Maïeddine wishes to say that, as a person who has influence in his own land, he would be pleased to serve Mademoiselle, if she would honour him by accepting his offer in the spirit in which it is made: that is, as the chivalrous service of a gentleman to a lady. He will not dream of addressing Mademoiselle, unless she graciously permits."

As the landlord talked on, Victoria glanced across the room at the Arab, and though his eyes were bent upon his plate, he seemed to feel the girl's look, as if by a kind of telepathy, instantly meeting it with what seemed to her questioning eyes a sincere and disarming gaze.

"Tell Sidi Maïeddine ben el Hadj Messaoud that I thank him," she answered, rewarded for her industry in keeping up French, which she spoke fluently, with the Parisian accent she had caught as a child in Paris. "It is possible that he can help me, and I should be glad to talk with him."

"In that case Si Maïeddine would suggest that Ma-

demoiselle grant him a short interview in the private sitting-room of my wife, Madame Constant, who will be honoured," the fat man replied promptly. "It would not be wise for Mademoiselle to be seen by strangers talking with the distinguished gentleman, whose acquaintance she is to make. This, largely for her own sake; but also for his, or rather, for the sake of certain diplomatic interests which he is appointed to carry out. Officially, he is supposed to have left Algiers to-day. And it is by his permission that I mention the matter to Mademoiselle."

"I will do whatever you think best," said Victoria, who was too glad of the opportunity to worry about conventionalities. She was so young, and inexperienced in the ways of society, that a small transgression against social laws appeared of little importance to a girl situated as she was.

"Would the time immediately after dinner suit Mademoiselle, for Si Maïeddine to pay his respects?"

Victoria answered that she would be pleased to talk with Si Maïeddine as soon as convenient to him, and Monsieur Constant hurried away to prepare his wife. While he was absent the Arab did not again look at Victoria, and she understood that this reserve arose from delicacy. Her heart began to beat, and she felt that the way to her sister might be opening at last. The fact that she did feel this, made her tell herself that it must be true. Instinct was not given for nothing!

She thought, too, of Stephen Knight. He would be glad to-morrow, when meeting her at luncheon in his friend's house, to hear good news. Already she had been to see Jeanne Soubise, in the curiosity-shop, and had bought a string of amber prayer-beads. She had got an introduction to the Governor from the American Consul,

whom she had visited before unpacking, lest the consular office should be closed for the day; and she had obtained an appointment at the palace for the next morning; but all that was not much to tell Mr. Knight. It seemed to her that even in a few hours she ought to have accomplished more. Now, however, the key of the door which opened into the golden silence might be waiting for her hand.

In three or four minutes the landlord came back, and begged to show her his wife's *petit salon*. This time as she passed the Arab she bowed, and gave him a grateful smile. He rose, and stood with his head slightly bent until she had gone out, remaining in the dining-room until the landlord returned to say that he was expected by Mademoiselle.

"Remember," Si Maïeddine said in Arabic to the fat man, "everybody is to be discreet, now and later. I shall see that all are rewarded for obedience."

"Thou art considerate, even of the humblest," replied the half-breed, using the word "thou," as all Arabs use it. "Thy presence is an honour for my house, and all in it is thine."

Si Maïeddine—who had never been in the Hotel de la Kasbah before, and would not have considered it worthy of his patronage if he had not had an object in coming—allowed himself to be shown the door of Madame Constant's salon. On the threshold, the landlord retired, and the young man was hardly surprised to find, on entering, that Madame was not in the room.

Victoria was there alone; but free from self-consciousness as she always was, she received Si Maïeddine without embarrassment. She saw no reason to distrust him, just because he was an Arab.

Now, how glad she was that she had learned Arabic! She began to speak diffidently at first, stammering and halting a little, because, though she could read the language well after nine years of constant study, only once had she spoken with an Arab;—a man in New York from whom she had had a few lessons. Having learned what she could of the accent from phrase-books, her way had been to talk to herself aloud. But the flash of surprised delight which lit up the dark face told her that Si Maëddine understood.

“Wonderful!” he exclaimed. “My best hope was that French might come easily to thy lips, as I have little English.”

“I have a sister married to one of thy countrymen,” Victoria explained at once. “I do not know where she is living, and it is in finding out, that I need help. Even on the ship I wished to ask thee if thou hadst knowledge of her husband, but to speak then seemed impossible. It is a fortunate chance that thou shouldst have come to this hotel, for I think thou wilt do what thou canst for me.” Then she went on and told him that her sister was the wife of Captain Cassim ben Halim, who had once lived in Algiers.

Si Maëddine who had dropped his eyes as she spoke of the fortunate chance which had brought him to the hotel, listened thoughtfully and with keen attention to her story, asking no questions, yet showing his interest so plainly that Victoria was encouraged to go on.

“Didst thou ever hear the name of Cassim ben Halim?” she asked.

“Yes, I have heard it,” the Arab replied. “I have friends who knew him. And I myself have seen Cassim ben Halim.”

"Thou hast seen him!" Victoria cried, clasping her hands tightly together. She longed to press them over her heart, which was like a bird beating its wings against the bars of a cage.

"Long ago. I am much younger than he."

"Yes, I see that," Victoria answered. "But thou knewest him! That is something. And my sister. Didst thou ever hear of her?"

"We of the Mussulman faith do not speak of the wives of our friends, even when our friends are absent. Yet—I have a relative in Algiers who might know something, a lady who is no longer young. I will go to her to-night, and all that is in her heart she will tell me. She has lived long in Algiers; and always when I come, I pay her my respects. But, there is a favour I would beg in return for any help I can give, and will give gladly. I am supposed to be already on my way south, to finish a diplomatic mission, and, for reasons connected with the French government, I have had to make it appear that I started to-day with my servant. There is also a reason, connected with Si Cassim, which makes it important that nothing I may do should be known to thy European friends. It is for his sake especially that I ask thy silence; and whatsoever might bring harm to him—if he be still upon the earth—would also harm thy sister. Wilt thou give me thy word, O White Rose of another land, that thou wilt keep thine own counsel?"

"I give thee my word—and with it my trust," said the girl.

"Then I swear that I will not fail thee. And though until I have seen my cousin I cannot speak positively, yet I think what I can do will be more than any other could,

Wilt thou hold thyself free of engagements with thy European friends, until I bring news?"

"I have promised to lunch to-morrow with people who have been kind, but rather than risk a delay in hearing from thee, I will send word that I am prevented from going."

"Thou hast the right spirit, and I thank thee for thy good faith. But it may be well not to send that message. Thy friends might think it strange, and suspect thee of hiding something. It is better to give no cause for questionings. Go then, to their house, but say nothing of having met me, or of any new hope in thine heart. Yet let the hope remain, and be to thee like the young moon that riseth over the desert, to show the weary traveller a rill of sweet water in an oasis of date palms. And now I will bid thee farewell, with a night of dreams in which thy dearest desires shall be fulfilled before thine eyes. I go to my cousin, on thy business."

"Good night, Sidi. Henceforth my hope is in thee." Victoria held out her hand, and Si Maëddine clasped it, bowing with the courtesy of his race. He was nearer to her than he had been before, and she noticed a perfume which hung about his clothing, a perfume that seemed to her like the East, heavy and rich, suggestive of mystery and secret things. It brought to her mind what she had read about harems, and beautiful, languid women, yet it suited Si Maëddine's personality, and somehow did not make him seem effeminate.

"See," he said, in the poetic language which became him as his embroidered clothes and the haunting perfume became him; "see, how thine hand lies in mine like a pearl that has dropped into the hollow of an autumn leaf. But praise be to Allah, autumn and I are yet far apart,

I am in my summer, as thou, lady, art in thine early spring. And I vow that thou shalt never regret confiding thy hand to my hand, thy trust to my loyalty."

As he spoke, he released her fingers gently, and turning, went out of the room without another word or glance.

When he had gone, Victoria stood still, looking at the door which Si Maïeddine had shut noiselessly.

If she had not lived during all the years since Saidee's last letter, in the hope of some such moment as this, she would have felt that she had come into a world of romance, as she listened to the man of the East, speaking the language of the East. But she had read too many Arabic tales and poems to find his speech strange. At school, her studies of her sister's adopted tongue had been confined to dry lesson-books, but when she had been free to choose her own literature, in New York and London, she had read more widely. People whom she had told of her sister's marriage, and her own mission, had sent her several rare volumes,—among others a valuable old copy of the Koran, and she had devoured them all, delighting in the facility which grew with practice. Now, it seemed quite simple to be talking with Sidi Maïeddine ben el Hadj Messaoud as she had talked. It was no more romantic or strange than all of life was romantic and strange. Rather did she feel that at last she was face to face with reality.

"He *does* know something about Cassim," she said, half aloud, and searching her instinct, she still thought that she could trust him to keep faith with her. He was not playing. She believed that there was sincerity in his eyes.

The next morning, when Victoria called at the Governor's palace, and heard that Captain Cassim ben Halim

was supposed to have died in Constantinople, years ago, she was not cast down. "I know Si Maïeddine doesn't think he's dead," she told herself.

There was a note for her at the hotel, and though the writer had addressed the envelope to "Mademoiselle Ray," in an educated French handwriting, the letter inside was written in beautiful Arab lettering, an intentionally flattering tribute to her accomplishment.

Si Maïeddine informed her that his hope had been justified, and that in conversation with his cousin his own surmises had been confirmed. A certain plan was suggested, which he wished to propose to Mademoiselle Ray, but as it would need some discussion, there was not time to bring it forward before the hour when she must go out to keep her engagement. On her return, however, he begged that she would see him, in the salon of Madame Constant, where she would find him waiting. Meanwhile, he ventured to remind her that for the present, secrecy was even more necessary than he had at first supposed; he would be able to explain why, fully and satisfactorily, when they met in the afternoon.

With this appointment to look forward to, it was natural that Victoria should excuse herself to Lady MacGregor earlier than most people cared to leave Djenan el Djouad. The girl was more excited than she had ever been in her life, and it was only by the greatest self-control that she kept—or believed that she kept—her manner as usual, while with Stephen in the white garden of lilies. She was happy, because she saw her feet already upon the path which would lead through the golden silence to her sister; but there was a drawback to her happiness—a fly in the amber, as in one of the prayer-beads she had bought of Jeanne Soubise: her secret had

to be kept from the man of whom she thought as a very staunch friend. She felt guilty in talking with Stephen Knight, and accepting his sympathy as if she were hiding nothing from him; but she must be true to her promise, and Si Maïeddine had the right to exact it, though of course Mr. Knight might have been excepted, if only Si Maïeddine knew how loyal he was. But Si Maïeddine did not know, and she could not explain. It was consoling to think of the time when Stephen might be told everything; and she wished almost unconsciously that it was his help which she had to rely upon now.

XVIII.

TRUE to his word, Si Maïeddine was waiting in Madame Constant's hideous sitting-room, when Victoria returned to the hotel from Djenan el Djouad.

To-day he had changed his grey bournous for a white one, and all his clothing was white, embroidered with silver.

"It is written," he began in Arabic, as he rose to welcome the girl, "that the messenger who brings good tidings shall come in white. Now thou art prepared for happiness. Thou also hast chosen white; but even in black, thy presence would bring a blessing, O Rose of the West."

The colour of the rose stained Victoria's cheeks, and Si Maïeddine's eyes were warm as he looked at her. When she had given him her hand, he kissed his own, after touching it. "Be not alarmed, or think that I take a liberty, for it is but a custom of my people, in showing

respect to man or woman," he explained. "Thou hast not forgotten thy promise of silence?"

"No, I spoke not a word of thee, nor of the hope thou gavest me last night," Victoria answered.

"It is well," he said. "Then I will keep nothing back from thee."

They sat down, Victoria on a repulsive sofa of scarlet plush, the Arab on a chair equally offensive in design and colour.

"Into the life of thy brother-in-law, there came a great trouble," he said. "It befell after the days when he was known by thee and thy sister in Paris. Do not ask what it was, for it would grieve me to refuse a request of thine. Shouldst thou ever hear this thing, it will not be from my lips. But this I will say—though I have friends among the French, and am loyal to their salt which I have eaten, and I think their country great—France was cruel to Ben Halim. Were not Allah above all, his life might have been broken, but it was written that, after a time of humiliation, a chance to win honour and glory such as he had never known, should be put in his way. In order to take this blessing and use it for his own profit and that of others, it was necessary that Ben Halim—son of a warrior of the old fighting days, when nomads of high birth were as kings in the Sahara, himself lately a captain of the Spahis, admired by women, envied of men—it was necessary that he should die to the world."

"Then he is not really dead!" cried Victoria.

The face of Si Maïeddine changed, and wore that look which already the girl had remarked in Arab men she had passed among French crowds: a look as if a door had shut behind the bright, open eyes; as if the soul were suddenly closed.

"Thy brother-in-law was living when last I heard of him," Maïeddine answered, slowly.

"And my sister?"

"My cousin told me last night that Lella Saïda was in good health some months ago when news came of her from a friend."

"They call her Saïda!" murmured the girl, half sadly; for that Saidee should tolerate such a change of name, seemed to signify some subtle alteration in her spirit. But she knew that "Lella" meant "Madame" in Arab society.

"It is my cousin who spoke of the lady by that name. As for me, it is impossible that I should know anything of her. Thou wishest above all things to see thy sister?"

"Above all things. For more than nine years it has been the one great wish of my life to go to her."

"It is a long journey. Thou wouldst have to go far—very far."

"What would it matter, if it were to the end of the world?"

"As well try to reach the place where she is, as though it were beyond where the world ends, unless thou wert guided by one who knew the way."

Victoria looked the Arab full in the face. "I have always been sure that God would lead me there, one day, soon or late," she said.

"Thy God is my God, and Mohammed is his Prophet, as thy Christ was also among his Prophets. It is as thou sayest; Allah wills that thou shouldst make this journey, for He has sent me into thy life at the moment of thy need. I can take thee to thy sister's house, if thou wilt trust thyself to me. Not alone—I would not ask that.

My cousin will take care of thee. She has her own reason for going on this great journey, a reason which in its way is as strong as thine, for it concerns her life or death. She is a noble lady of my race, who should be a Princess of Touggourt, for her grandfather was Sultan before the French conquered those warlike men of the desert, far south where Touggourt lies. Lella M'Barka Bent Djellab hears the voice of the Angel Azraïl in her ears, yet her spirit is strong, and she believes it is written in the Book that she shall reach the end of her journey. This is the plan she and I have made; that thou leave the hotel to-day, towards evening, and drive (in a carriage which she will send)—to her house, where thou wilt spend the night. Early in the morning of to-morrow she can be ready to go, taking thee with her. I shall guard thee, and we shall have an escort which she and I will provide. Dost thou consent? Because if the idea pleases thee, there are many arrangements which must be made quickly. And I myself will take all trouble from thy shoulders in the matter of leaving the hotel. I am known and well thought of in Algiers and even the landlord here, as thou hast seen, has me in consideration, because my name is not strange to him. Thou needst not fear misconstruction of thine actions, by anyone who is here."

Si Maïeddine added these arguments, seeing perhaps that Victoria hesitated before answering his question.

"Thou art generous, and I have no fear," she said at last, with a faint emphasis which he could read as he chose. "But, since thou hast my word to be silent, surely thou wilt tell me where lies the end of the journey we must take?"

"Even so, I cannot tell thee," Si Maïeddine replied with decision which Victoria felt to be unalterable. "It

is not for lack of trust in thee, O Rose, but for a reason which is not mine to explain. All I can do is to pledge my honour, and the honour of a princess, to conduct thee loyally to the house of thy sister's husband. If thou goest, it must be in the dress of an Arab lady, veiled from eyes which might spy upon thee; and so thou wilt be safe under the protection of my cousin."

"My thanks to thee and to her—I will go," Victoria said, after a moment's pause.

She was sure that Stephen Knight and his friend would prevent her from leaving Algiers with strangers, above all, in the company of Arabs, if they could know what was in her mind. But they were unjustly prejudiced, she thought. Her brother-in-law was of Arab blood, therefore she could not afford to have such prejudices, even if she were so inclined; and she must not hesitate before such a chance as Si Maïeddine offered.

The great difficulty she had experienced in learning anything about Ben Halim made it easy for her to believe that she could reach her sister's husband only through people of his own race, who knew his secrets. She was ready to agree with Si Maïeddine that his God and her God had sent him at the right moment, and she would not let that moment pass her by.

Others might say that she was wildly imprudent, that she was deliberately walking into danger; but she was not afraid. Always she trusted to her star, and now it had brought her to Algiers, she would not weaken in that trust. Commonsense, in which one side of the girl's nature was not lacking, told her that this Arab might be deceiving her, that he might know no more of Ben Halim than she herself had told him yesterday; but she felt that he had spoken the truth, and feelings were more to her than

commonsense. She would go to the house which Si Maïeddine said was the house of his cousin, and if there she found reason to doubt him, she had faith that even then no evil would be allowed to touch her.

At seven o'clock, Si Maïeddine said, Lella M'Barka would send a carriage. It would then be twilight, and as most people were in their homes by that hour, nobody would be likely to see her leave the hotel. The shutters of the carriage would be closed, according to the custom of Arab ladies, and on entering the vehicle Victoria would find a negress, a servant of Lella M'Barka Bent Djellab. This woman would dress her in a gandourah and a haïck, while they were on their way to the house of Victoria's hostess, and on stepping out she would have the appearance of a lady of Algiers. Thus all trace of her would be lost, as one Arab carriage was exactly like another.

Meanwhile, there would be time to pack, and write a letter which Victoria was determined to write. To satisfy Si Maïeddine that she would not be indiscreet in any admission or allusion, she suggested translating for him every word she wrote into French or Arabic; but he refused this offer with dignity. She trusted him. He trusted her also. But he himself would post the letter at an hour too late for it to be delivered while she was still in Algiers.

It was arranged that she should carry only hand-bags, as it would be too conspicuous to load and unload boxes. Her large luggage could be stored at the hotel until she returned or sent, and as Lella M'Barka intended to offer her an outfit suitable to a young Arab girl of noble birth, she need take from the hotel only her toilet things.

So it was that Victoria wrote to Stephen Knight, and

was ready for the second stage of what seemed the one great adventure to which her whole life had been leading up.

XIX.

VICTORIA did not wait in her room to be told that the carriage had come to take her away. It was better, Si Maïeddine had said, that only a few people should know the exact manner of her going. A few minutes before seven, therefore, she went down to the entrance-hall of the hotel, which was not yet lighted. Her appearance was a signal for the Arab porter, who was waiting, to run softly upstairs and return with her hand-luggage.

For some moments Victoria stood near the door, interesting herself in a map of Algeria which hung on the wall. A clock began to strike as her eyes wandered over the desert, and was on the last stroke of seven, when a carriage drove up. It was drawn by two handsome brown mules with leather and copper harness which matched the colour of their shining coats, and was driven by a heavy, smooth-faced Negro in a white turban and an embroidered caftan of dark blue. The carriage windows were shuttered, and as the black coachman pulled up his mules, he looked neither to the right nor to the left. It was the hotel porter who opened the door, and as Victoria stepped in without delay, he thrust two hand-bags after her, snapping the door sharply.

It was almost dark inside the carriage, but she could see a white figure, which in the dimness had neither face

nor definite shape; and there was a perfume as of aromatic amulets grown warm on a human body.

"Pardon, lady, I am Hsina, the servant of Lella M'Barka Bent Djellab, sent to wait upon thee," spoke a soft and guttural voice, in Arabic. "Blessings be upon thee!"

"And upon thee blessings," Victoria responded in the Arab fashion which she had learned while many miles of land and sea lay between her and the country of Islam. "I was told to expect thee."

"Eïhoua!" cried the woman, "The little pink rose has the gift of tongues!" As she grew accustomed to the twilight, Victoria made out a black face, and white teeth framed in a large smile. A pair of dark eyes glittered with delight as the Roumia answered in Arabic, although Arabic was not the language of the negress's own people. She chattered as she helped Victoria into a plain white gandourah. The white hat and hat-pins amused her, and when she had arranged the voluminous haïck in spite of the joltings of the carriage, she examined these European curiosities with interest. Whenever she moved, the warm perfume of amulets grew stronger, overpowering the faint mustiness of the cushions and upholstery.

"Never have I held such things in my hands!" Hsina gurgled. "Yet often have I wished that I might touch them, when driving with my mistress and peeping at the passers-by, and the strange finery of foreign women in the French bazaars."

Victoria listened politely, answering if necessary; yet her interest was concentrated in peering through the slits in the wooden shutter of the nearest window. She did not know Algiers well enough to recognise landmarks; but after driving for what seemed like fifteen or twenty minutes through streets where lights began to turn the

twilight blue, she caught a glint of the sea. Almost immediately the trotting mules stopped, and the negress Hsina, hiding Victoria's hat in the folds of her haïck, turned the handle of the door.

Victoria looked out into azure dusk, and after the closeness of the shuttered carriage, thankfully drew in a breath of salt-laden air. One quick glance showed her a street near the sea, on a level not much above the gleaming water. There were high walls, evidently very old, hiding Arab mansions once important, and there were other ancient dwellings, which had been partly transformed for business or military uses by the French. The girl's hasty impression was of a melancholy neighbourhood which had been rich and stately long ago in old pirate days, perhaps.

There was only time for a glance to right and left before a nailed door opened in the flatness of a white-washed wall which was the front of an Arab house. No light shone out, but the opening of the door proved that someone had been listening for the sound of carriage wheels.

"Descend, lady. I will follow with thy baggage," said Hsina.

The girl obeyed, but she was suddenly conscious of a qualm as she had to turn from the blue twilight, to pass behind that half-open door into darkness, and the mystery of unknown things.

Before she had time to put her foot to the ground the door was thrown wide open, and two stout Negroes dressed exactly alike in flowing white burnouses stepped out of the house to stand on either side the carriage door. Raising their arms as high as their heads they made two white walls of their long cloaks between which Victoria

could pass, as if enclosed in a narrow aisle. Hsina came close upon her heels; and as they reached the threshold of the house the white-robed black servants dropped their arms, followed the two women, and shut the nailed door. Then, despite the dimness of the place, they bowed their heads turning aside as if humbly to make it evident that their unworthy eyes did not venture to rest upon the veiled form of their mistress's guest. As for Hsina, she, too, was veiled, though her age and ugliness would have permitted her face to be revealed without offence to Mussulman ideas of propriety. It was mere vanity on her part to preserve the mystery as dear to the heart of the Moslem woman as to the jealous prejudice of the man.

A faint glittering of the walls told Victoria that the corridor she had entered was lined with tiles; and she could dimly see seats let in like low shelves along its length, on either side. It was but a short passage, with a turn into a second still shorter. At the end of this hung a dark curtain, which Hsina lifted for Victoria to pass on, round another turn into a wider hall, lit by an Arab lamp with glass panes framed in delicately carved copper. The chain which suspended it from cedar beams swayed slightly, causing the light to move from colour to colour of the old tiles, and to strike out gleams from the marble floor and ivory-like pillars set into the walls. The end of this corridor also was masked by a curtain of wool, dyed and woven by the hands of nomad tribes, tent-dwellers in the desert; and when Hsina had lifted it, Victoria saw a small square court with a fountain in the centre.

It was not on a grand scale, like those in the palace owned by Nevill Caird; but the fountain was graceful and charming, ornamented with the carved, bursting pomegranates beloved by the Moors of Granada, and the marble

columns which supported a projecting balcony were wreathed with red roses and honeysuckle.

On each of the four sides of the quadrangle, paved with black and white marble, there were little windows, and large glass doors draped on the inside with curtains thin enough to show faint pink and golden lights.

"O my mistress, Lella M'Barka, I have brought thy guest!" cried Hsina, in a loud, sing-song voice, as if she were chanting; whereupon one of the glass doors opened, letting out a rosy radiance, and a Bedouin woman-servant dressed in a striped foutah appeared on the threshold. She was old, with crinkled grey hair under a scarlet handkerchief, and a blue cross was tattooed between her eyes.

"In the name of Lella M'Barka be thou welcome," she said. "My mistress has been suffering all day, and fears to rise, lest her strength fail for to-morrow's journey, or she would come forth to meet thee, O Flower of the West! As it is, she begs that thou wilt come to her. But first suffer me to remove thy haïck, that the eyes of Lella M'Barka may be refreshed by thy beauty."

She would have unfastened the long drapery, but Hsina put down Victoria's luggage, and pushing away the two brown hands, tattooed with blue mittens, she herself unfastened the veil. "No, this is *my* lady, and my work, Fafann," she objected.

"But it is my duty to take her in," replied the Bedouin woman, jealously. "It is the wish of Lella M'Barka. Go thou and make ready the room of the guest."

Hsina flounced away across the court, and Fafann held open both the door and the curtains. Victoria obeyed her gesture and went into the room beyond. It was long and narrow, with a ceiling of carved wood painted in

colours which had once been violent, but were now faded. The walls were partly covered with hangings like the curtains that shaded the glass door; but, on one side, between gold-embroidered crimson draperies, were windows, and in the white stucco above, showed lace-like openings, patterned to represent peacocks, the tails jewelled with glass of different colours. On the opposite side opened doors of dark wood inlaid with mother-o'-pearl; and these stood ajar, revealing rows of shelves littered with little gilded bottles, or piled with beautiful brocades that were shot with gold in the pink light of an Arab lamp.

There was little furniture; only a few low, round tables, or maidas, completely overlaid with the snow of mother-o'-pearl; two or three tabourets of the same material, and, at one end of the room a low divan, where something white and orange-yellow and purple lay half buried in cushions.

Though the light was dim, Victoria could see as she went nearer a thin face the colour of pale amber, and a pair of immense dark eyes that glittered in deep hollows. A thin woman of more than middle age, with black hair, silver-streaked, moved slightly and held out an emaciated hand heavy with rings. Her head was tied round with a silk handkerchief or takrita of pansy purple; she wore seroual, full trousers of soft white silk, and under a gold-threaded orange-coloured jacket or rila, a blouse of lilac gauze, covered with sequins and open at the neck. On the bony arm which she held out to Victoria hung many bracelets, golden serpents of Djebbel Amour, and pearls braided with gold wire and coral beads. Her great eyes, ringed with kohl, had a tortured look, and there were hollows under the high cheek-bones. If she had ever been handsome, all beauty of flesh had now been drained away

by suffering; yet stricken as she was there remained an almost indefinable distinction, an air of supreme pride befitting a princess of the Sahara.

Her scorching fingers pressed Victoria's hand, as she gazed up at the girl's face with hungry curiosity and interest such as the Spirit of Death might feel in looking at the Spirit of Life.

"Thou art fresh and fair, O daughter, as a lily bud opening in the spray of a fountain, and radiant as sunrise shining on a desert lake," she said in a weary voice, slightly hoarse, yet with some flutelike notes. "My cousin spoke but truth of thee. Thou art worthy of a reward at the end of that long journey we shall take together, thou, and he, and I. I have never seen thy sister whom thou seekest, but I have friends, who knew her in other days. For her sake and thine own, kiss me on my cheeks, for with women of my race, it is the seal of friendship."

Victoria bent and touched the faded face under each of the great burning eyes. The perfume of *ambre*, loved in the East, came up to her nostrils, and the invalid's breath was a flame.

"Art thou strong enough for a journey, Lella M'Barka?" the girl asked.

"Not in my own strength, but in that which Allah will give me, I shall be strong," the sick woman answered with controlled passion. "Ever since I knew that I could not hope to reach Mecca, and kiss the sacred black stone, or pray in the Mosque of the holy Lella Fatima, I have wished to visit a certain great marabout in the south. The pity of Allah for a daughter who is weak will permit the blessing of this marabout, who has inherited the inestimable gift of Baraka, to be the same to me, body and soul, as the pilgrimage to Mecca which is beyond the

power of my flesh. Another must say for me the Fatakah there. I believe that I shall be healed, and have vowed to give a great feast if I return to Algiers, in celebration of the miracle. Had it not been for my cousin's wish that I should go with thee, I should not have felt that the hour had come when I might face the ordeal of such a journey to the far south. But the prayer of Si Maïeddine, who, after his father, is the last man left of his line, has kindled in my veins a fire which I thought had burnt out forever. Have no fear, daughter. I shall be ready to start at dawn to-morrow."

"Does the marabout who has the gift of Baraka live near the place where I must go to find my sister?" Victoria enquired, rather timidly; for she did not know how far she might venture to question Si Maïeddine's cousin.

Lella M'Barka looked at her suddenly and strangely. Then her face settled into a sphinx-like expression, as if she had been turned to stone. "I shall be thy companion to the end of thy journey," she answered in a dull, tired tone. "Wilt thou visit thy room now, or wilt thou remain with me until Fafann and Hsina bring thy evening meal? I hope that thou wilt sup here by my side: yet if it pains thee to take food near one in ill health, who does not eat, speak, and thou shalt be served in another place."

Victoria hastened to protest that she would prefer to eat in the company of her hostess, which seemed to please Lella M'Barka. She began to ask the girl questions about herself, complimenting her upon her knowledge of Arabic; and Victoria answered, though only half her brain seemed to be listening. She was glad that she had trusted Si Maïeddine, and she felt safe in the house of his cousin; but now that she was removed from European influences, she could not see why the mystery concerning Ben Halim

and the journey which would lead to his house, should be kept up. She had read enough books about Arab customs and superstitions to know that there are few saints believed to possess the gift of Baraka, the power given by Allah for the curing of all fleshly ills. Only the very greatest of the marabouts are supposed to have this power, receiving it direct from Allah, or inheriting it from a pious saint—father or more distant relative—who handed down the maraboutship. Therefore, if she had time and inclination, she could probably learn from any devout Mussulman the abiding places of all such famous saints as remained upon the earth. In that way, by setting her wits to work, she might guess the secret if Si Maïed-dine still tried to make a mystery of their destination. But, somehow, she felt that it would not be fair to seek information which he did not want her to have. She must go on trusting him, and by-and-by he would tell her all she wanted to know.

Lella M'Barka had invited her guest to sit on cushions beside the divan where she lay, and the interest in her feverish eyes, which seldom left Victoria's face, was so intense as to embarrass the girl.

"Thou hast wondrous hair," she said, "and when it is unbound it must be a fountain of living gold. Is it some kind of henna grown in thy country, which dyes it that beautiful colour?"

Victoria told her that Nature alone was the dyer.

"Thou art not yet affianced; that is well," murmured the invalid. "Our young girls have their hair tinted with henna when they are betrothed, that they may be more fair in the eyes of their husbands. But thou couldst scarcely be lovelier than thou art; for thy skin is of pearl, though there is no paint upon it, and thy lips are pink

as rose-petals. Yet a little messouak to make them scarlet, like coral, and kohl to give thine eyes lustre would add to thy brilliancy. Also the hand of woman reddened with henna is as a brazier of rosy flame to kindle the heart of a lover. When thou seest thy sister, thou wilt surely find that she has made herself mistress of these arts, and many more."

"Canst thou tell me nothing of her, Lella M'Barka?"

"Nothing, save that I have a friend who has said she was fair. And it is not many moons since I heard that she was blessed with health."

"Is she happy?" Victoria was tempted to persist.

"She should be happy. She is a fortunate woman. Would I could tell thee more, but I live the life of a mole in these days, and have little knowledge. Thou wilt see her with thine own eyes before long, I have no doubt. And now comes food which my women have prepared for thee. In my house, all are people of the desert, and we keep the desert customs, since my husband has been gathered to his fathers—my husband, to whose house in Algiers I came as a bride from the Sahara. Such a meal as thou wilt eat to-night, mayst thou eat often with a blessing, in the country of the sun."

Fafann, who had softly left the room when the guest had been introduced, now came back, with great tinkling of khal-khal, and mnaguach, the huge earrings which hung so low as to strike the silver beads twisted round her throat. She was smiling, and pleasantly excited at the presence of a visitor whose arrival broke the tiresome monotony of an invalid's household. When she had set one of the pearly maidas in front of Victoria's seat of cushions, she held back the curtains for Hsina to enter, carrying a copper tray. This the negress placed on the

maida, and uncovered a china bowl balanced in a silver stand, like a giant coffee-cup of Moorish fashion. It contained hot soup, called cheurba, in which Hsina had put so much fell-fell, the red pepper loved by Arabs, that Victoria's lips were burned. But it was good, and she would not wince though the tears stung her eyes as she drank, for Lella M'Barka and the two servants were watching her eagerly.

Afterwards came a kouskous of chicken and farina, which she ate with a large spoon whose bowl was of tortoiseshell, the handle of ivory tipped with coral. Then, when the girl hoped there might be nothing more, appeared tadjine, a ragout of mutton with artichokes and peas, followed by a rich preserve of melon, and many elaborate cakes iced with pink and purple sugar, and powdered with little gold sequins that had to be picked off as the cake was eaten. At last, there was thick, sweet coffee, in a cup like a little egg-shell supported in filigree gold (for no Mussulman may touch lip to metal), and at the end Fafann poured rosewater over Victoria's fingers, wiping them on a napkin of fine damask.

"Now thou hast eaten and drunk, thou must allow thyself to be dressed by my women in the garments of an Arab maiden of high birth, which I have ready for thee," said Lella M'Barka, brightening with the eagerness of a little child at the prospect of dressing a beautiful new doll. "Fafann shall bring everything here, and thou shalt be told how to robe thyself afterwards. I wish to see that all is right, for to-morrow morning thou must arise while it is still dark, that we may start with the first dawn."

Fafann and Hsina had forgotten their jealousies in the delight of the new play. They moved about, laughing

and chattering, and were not chidden for the noise they made. From shelves behind the inlaid doors in the wall, they took down exquisite boxes of mother-o'-pearl and red tortoiseshell. Also there were small bundles wrapped in gold brocade, and tied round with bright green cord. These were all laid on a dim-coloured Kairouan rug, at the side of the divan, and the two women squatted on the floor to open them, while their mistress leaned on her thin elbow among cushions, and skins of golden jackal from the Sahara.

From one box came wide trousers of white silk, like Lella M'Barka's; from another, vests of satin and velvet of pale shades embroidered with gold or silver. A fat parcel contained delicately tinted stockings and high-heeled slippers of different sizes. A second bundle contained blouses of thin silk and gauze, and in a pearl box were pretty little chechias of sequined velvet, caps so small as to fit the head closely; and besides these, there were sashes and gandourahs, and haïcks white and fleecy, woven from the softest wool.

When everything was well displayed, the Bedouin and the negress sprang up, lithe as leopards, and to Victoria's surprise began to undress her.

"Please let me do it myself!" she protested, but they did not listen or understand, chattering her into silence, as if they had been lively though elderly monkeys. Giggling over the hooks and buttons which were comical to them, they turned and twisted her between their hands, fumbling at neck and waist with black fingers, and brown fingers tattooed blue, until she, too, began to laugh. She laughed herself into helplessness, and encouraged by her wild merriment, and Lella M'Barka's smiles and exclamations punctuated with fits of coughing, they set to work

at pulling out hairpins, and the tortoiseshell combs that kept the Roumia's red gold waves in place. At last down tumbled the thick curly locks which Stephen Knight had thought so beautiful when they flowed round her shoulders in the Dance of the Shadow.

The invalid made her kneel, just as she was in her petticoat, in order to pass long, ringed fingers through the soft masses, and lift them up for the pleasure of letting them fall. When the golden veil, as Lella M'Barka called it, had been praised and admired over and over again, the order was given to braid it in two long plaits, leaving the ends to curl as they would. Then, the game of dressing the doll could begin, but first the embroidered petticoat of batiste with blue ribbons at the top of its flounce, and the simple pretty little stays had to be examined with keen interest. Nothing like these things had ever been seen by mistress or servants, except in occasional peeps through shuttered carriage windows when passing French shops: for Lella M'Barka Bent Djellab, daughter of Princes of Touggourt, was what young Arabs call "vieux turban." She was old-fashioned in her ideas, would have no European furniture or decorations, and until to-night had never consented to know a Roumia, much less receive one into her house. She had felt that she was making a great concession in granting her cousin's request, but she had forgotten her sense of condescension in entertaining an unveiled girl, a Christian, now that she saw what the girl was like. She was too old and lonely to be jealous of Victoria's beauty; and as Si Maïeddine, her favourite cousin, deigned to admire this young foreigner, Lella M'Barka took an unselfish pride in each of the American girl's charms.

When she was dressed to all outward appearances

precisely like the daughter of a high-born Arab family, Fafann brought a mirror framed in mother-o'-pearl, and Victoria could not help admiring herself a little. She wished half unconsciously that Stephen Knight could see her, with hair looped in two great shining braids on either side her face, under the sequined chechia of sapphire velvet; and then she was ashamed of her own vanity.

Having been dressed, she was obliged to prove, before the three women would be satisfied, that she understood how each garment ought to be arranged; and later she had to try on a new gandourah, with a white burnouse such as women wear, and the haïck she had worn in coming to the house. Hsina would help her in the morning, she was told, but it would be better that she should know how to do things properly for herself, since only Fafann would be with them on the journey, and she might sometimes be busy with Lella M'Barka when Victoria was dressing.

The excitement of adorning the beautiful doll had tired the invalid. The dark lines under her eyes were very blue, and the flesh of her face seemed to hang loose, making her look piteously haggard. She offered but feeble objections when her guest proposed to say good night, and after a few more compliments and blessings, Victoria was able to slip away, escorted by the negress.

The room where she was to sleep was on another side of the court from that of Lella M'Barka, but Hsina took great pains to assure her that there was nothing to fear. No one could come into this court; and she—Hsina—slept near by with Fafann. To clap the hands once would be to bring one of them instantly. And Hsina would wake her before dawn.

Victoria's long, narrow sleeping room had the bed

across one end, in Arab fashion. It was placed in an alcove and built into the wall, with pillars in front, of gilded wood, and yellow brocaded curtains of a curious, Oriental design. At the opposite end of the room stood a large cupboard, like a buffet, beautifully inlaid with mother-o'-pearl, and along the length of the room ran shelves neatly piled with bright-coloured bed-clothing, or ferrachiyas. Above these shelves texts from the Koran were exquisitely illuminated in red, blue and gold, like a frieze; and there were tinselled pictures of relatives of the Prophet, and of Mohammed's Angel-horse, Borak. The floor was covered with soft, dark-coloured rugs; and on a square of white linen was a huge copper basin full of water, with folded towels laid beside it.

The bed was not uncomfortable, but Victoria could not sleep. She did not even wish to sleep. It was too wonderful to think that to-morrow she would be on her way to Saidee.

XX.

BEFORE morning light, Si Maïeddine was in his cousin's house. Hsina had not yet called Victoria, but Lella M'Barka was up and dressed, ready to receive Maïeddine in the room where she had entertained the Roumia girl last night. Being a near relation, Si Maïeddine was allowed to see Lella M'Barka unveiled; and even in the pink and gold light of the hanging lamps, she was ghastly under her paint. The young man was struck with her martyred look, and pitied her; but stronger than his pity was the fear that she might fail him—if not to-day, before the journey's end. She would have to undergo a strain terrible for an invalid, and he could spare her much of this if he chose; but he would not choose, though he was fond of his cousin, and grateful in a way. To spare her would mean the risk of failure for him.

Each called down salutations and peace upon the head of the other, and Lella M'Barka asked Maïeddine if he would drink coffee. He thanked her, but had already taken coffee. And she? All her strength would be needed. She must not neglect to sustain herself now that everything depended upon her health.

"My health!" she echoed, with a sigh, and a gesture of something like despair. "O my cousin, if thou knewest how I suffer, how I dread what lies before me, thou wouldst in mercy change thy plans even now. Thou wouldst go

the short way to the end of our journey. Think of the difference to me! A week or eight days of travel at most, instead of three weeks, or more if I falter by the way, and thou art forced to wait."

Ma'eddine's face hardened under her imploring eyes, but he answered with gentleness, "Thou knowest, my kind friend and cousin, that I would give my blood to save thee suffering, but it is more than my blood that thou askest now. It is my heart, for my heart is in this journey and what I hope from it, as I told thee yesterday. We discussed it all, thou and I, between us. Thou hast loved, and I made thee understand something of what I feel for this girl, whose beauty, as thou hast seen, is that of the houris in Paradise. Never have I found her like; and it may be I care more because of the obstacles which stand high as a wall between me and her. Because of the man who is her sister's husband, I must not fail in respect, or even seem to fail. I cannot take her and ride away, as I might with a maiden humbly placed, trusting to make her happy after she was mine. My winning must be done first, as is the way of the Roumis, and she will be hard to win. Already she feels that one of my race has stolen and hidden her sister; for this, in her heart, she fears and half distrusts all Arabs. A week would give me no time to capture her love, and when the journey is over it will be too late. Then, at best, I can see little of her, even if she be allowed to keep something of her European freedom. It is from this journey together—the long, long journey—that I hope everything. No pains shall be spared. No luxury shall she lack even on the hardest stretches of the way. She shall know that she owes all to my thought and care. In three weeks I can pull down that high wall between us. She will have learned to de-

pend on me, to need me, to long for me when I am out of her sight, as the gazelle longs for a fountain of sweet water."

"Poet and dreamer thou hast become, Maïeddine," said Lella M'Barka with a tired smile.

"I have become a lover. That means both and more. My heart is set on success with this girl: and yesterday thou didst promise to help. In return, I offered thee a present that is like the gift of new life to a woman, the amulet my father's dead brother rubbed on the sacred Black Stone at Mecca, touched by the foot of the Prophet. I assured thee that at the end of your journey I would persuade the marabout to make the amulet as potent for good to thee as the Black Stone itself, against which thou canst never cool the fever in thy forehead. Then, when he has used his power, and thou hast pressed the amulet on thy brows, thou mayst read the destiny of men and women written between their eyes, as a sand-diviner reads fate in the sands. Thou wilt become in thine own right a marabôuta, and be sure of Heaven when thou diest. This blessing the marabout will give, not for thy sake, but for mine, because I will do for him certain things which he has long desired, and so far I have never consented to undertake. Thou wilt gain greatly through keeping thy word to me. Believing in thy courage and good faith, I have made all arrangements for the journey. Not once last night did I close my eyes in sleep. There was not a moment to rest, for I had many telegrams to send, and letters to write, asking my friends along the different stages of the way, after we have left the train, to lend me relays of mules or horses. I have had to collect supplies, to think of and plan out details for which

most men would have needed a week's preparation, yet I have completed all in twelve hours. I believe nothing has been forgotten, nothing neglected. And can it be that my prop will fail me at the last moment?"

"No, I will not fail thee, unless soul and body part," Lella M'Barka answered. "I but hoped that thou mightest feel differently, that in pity—but I see I was wrong to ask. I will pray that the amulet, and the hope of the divine benediction of the baraka may support me to the end."

"I, too, will pray, dear cousin. Be brave, and remember, the journey is to be taken in easy stages. All the comforts I am preparing are for thee, as well as for this white rose whose beauty has stolen the heart out of my breast."

"It is true. Thou art kind, or I would not love thee even as I should have loved a son, had one been given me," said the haggard woman, meekly. "Does *she* know that there will be three weeks or more of travelling?"

"No. I told her vaguely that she could hardly hope to see her sister in less than a fortnight. I feared that, at first hearing, the thought of such distances, separating her from what she has known of life, might cause her to hesitate. But she will be willing to sacrifice herself and travel less rapidly than she hoped, when she sees that thou art weak and ailing. She has a heart with room in it for the welfare of others."

"Most women have. It is expected of us." Lella M'Barka sighed again, faintly. "But she is all that thou describedst to me, of beauty and sweetness. When she has been converted to the True Faith, as thy wife, nothing will be lacking to make her perfect."

Hsina appeared at the door. "Thy guest, O Lella M'Barka, is having her coffee, and is eating bread with it," she announced. "In a few minutes she will be ready. Shall I fetch her down while the gracious lord honours the house with his presence, or——"

"My guest is a Roumia, and it is not forbidden that she show her face to men," answered Hsina's mistress. "She will travel veiled, because, for reasons that do not concern thee, it is wiser. But she is free to appear before the Lord Maïeddine. Bring her; and remember this, when I am gone. If to a living soul outside this house thou speakest of the Roumia maiden, or even of my journey, worse things will happen to thee than tearing thy tongue out by the roots."

"So thou saidst last night to me, and to all the others," the negress answered, like a sulky child. "As we are faithful, it is not necessary to say it again." Without waiting to be scolded for her impudence, as she knew she deserved, she went out, to return five minutes later with Victoria.

Maïeddine's eyes lighted when he saw the girl in Arab dress. It seemed to him that she was far more beautiful, because, like all Arabs, he detested the severe cut of a European woman's gowns. He loved bright colours and voluptuous outlines.

It was only beginning to be daylight when they left the house and went out to the carriage in which Victoria had been driven the night before. She and Lella M'Barka were both veiled, though there was no eye to see them. Hsina and Fafann took out several bundles, wrapped in dark red woollen haïcks, and the Negro servants carried two curious trunks of wood painted bright green, with

coloured flowers and scrolls of gold upon them, and shining, flat covers of brass. In these was contained the luggage from the house; Maïeddine's had already gone to the railway-station. He wore a plain, dark blue burnous, with the hood up, and his chin and mouth were covered by the lower folds of the small veil which fell from his turban, as if he were riding in the desert against a wind storm. It would have been impossible even for a friend to recognise him, and the two women in their white veils were like all native women of wealth and breeding in Algiers. Hsina was crying, and Fafann, who expected to go with her mistress, was insufferably important. Victoria felt that she was living in a fairy story, and the wearing of the veil excited and amused her. She was happy, and looked forward to the journey itself as well as to the journey's end.

There were few people in the railway-station, and Victoria saw no European travellers. Maïeddine had taken the tickets already, but he did not tell her the name of the place to which they were going by rail. She would have liked to ask, but as neither Si Maïeddine nor Lella M'Barka encouraged questions, she reminded herself that she could easily read the names of the stations as they passed.

Soon the train came in, and Maïeddine put them into a first-class compartment, which was labelled "reserved," though all other Arabs were going second or third. Fafann arranged cushions and haïcks for Lella M'Barka; and at six o'clock a feeble, sulky-sounding trumpet blew, signalling the train to move out of the station.

Victoria was not sleepy, though she had lain awake thinking excitedly all night; but Lella M'Barka bade her

rest, as the day would be tiring. No one talked and presently Fafann began to snore. The girl's eyes met Si Maïeddine's, and they smiled at each other. This made him seem to her more like an ordinary human being than he had seemed before.

After awhile, she dropped into a doze, and was surprised when she waked up, to find that it was nearly nine o'clock. Fafann had roused her by moving about, collecting bundles. Soon they would be "there." And as the train slowed down, Victoria saw that "there" was Bouira.

This place was the destination of a number of Arab travellers, but the instant they were out of the train, these passengers appeared to melt away unobtrusively. Only one carriage was waiting, and that was for Si Maïeddine and his party.

It was a very different carriage from Lella M'Barka's, in Algiers; a vehicle for the country, Victoria thought it not unlike old-fashioned chaises in which farmers' families sometimes drove to Potterston, to church. It had side and back curtains of canvas, which were fastened down, and an Arab driver stood by the heads of two strong black mules.

"This carriage belongs to a friend of mine, a Caïd," Maïeddine explained to Victoria. "He has lent it to me, with his driver and mules, to use as long as I wish. But we shall have to change the mules often, before we begin at last to travel in a different way."

"How quickly thou hast arranged everything," exclaimed the girl.

This was a welcome sign of appreciation, and Maïeddine was pleased. "I sent the Caïd a telegram," he said.

"And there were many more telegrams to other places, far ahead. That is one good thing which the French have brought to our country. The telegraph goes to the most remote places in the Sahara. By-and-by, thou wilt see the poles striding away over desert dunes."

"By-and-by! Dost thou mean to-day?" asked Victoria.

"No, it will be many days before thou seest the great dunes. But thou wilt see them in the end, and I think thou wilt love them as I do. Meanwhile, there will be other things of interest. I shall not let thee tire of the way, though it be long."

He helped them into the carriage, the invalid first, then Victoria, and got in after them; Fafann, muffled in her veil, sitting on the seat beside the driver.

"By this time Mr. Knight has my letter, and has read it," the girl said to herself. "Oh, I do hope he won't be disgusted, and think me ungrateful. How glad I shall be when the day comes for me to explain."

As it happened, the letter was in Maïeddine's thoughts at the same moment. It occurred to him, too, that it would have been read by now. He knew to whom it had been written, for he had got a friend of his to bring him a list of passengers on board the *Charles Quex* on her last trip from Marseilles to Algiers. Also, he had learned at whose house Stephen Knight was staying.

Maïeddine would gladly have forgotten to post the letter, and could have done so without hurting his conscience. But he had thought it might be better for Knight to know that Miss Ray was starting on a journey, and that there was no hope of hearing from her for a fortnight. Victoria had been ready to show him the letter,

therefore she had not written any forbidden details; and Knight would probably feel that she must be left to manage her own affairs in her own way. No doubt he would be curious, and ask questions at the Hotel de la Kasbah, but Maïeddine believed that he had made it impossible for Europeans to find out anything there, or elsewhere. He knew that men of Western countries could be interested in a girl without being actually in love with her; and though it was almost impossible to imagine a man, even a European, so cold as not to fall in love with Victoria at first sight, he hoped that Knight was blind enough not to appreciate her, or that his affections were otherwise engaged. After all, the two had been strangers when they came on the boat, or had met only once before, therefore the Englishman had no right to take steps unauthorised by the girl. Altogether, Maïeddine thought he had reason to be satisfied with the present, and to hope in the future.

XXI.

STEPHEN and Nevill Caird returned from Tlemcen to Algiers, hoping for news of Victoria, but there was none; and after two days they left for Grand Kabylia.

The prophetic birds at Mansourah had flown in a south-easterly direction, but when Stephen and Nevill started in search of Josette's maid Mouni, they turned full east, their faces looking towards the dark heights of Kabylia. It was not Victoria they hoped to find there, however, or Saidee her sister, but only a hint as to their next move. Nevertheless, Nevill was superstitious about the birds, and said to Stephen when the car had run them out of Algiers, past Maison Carré, into open country: "Isn't it queer how the birds follow us? I never saw so many before. They're always with us. It's just as if they'd passed on word, the way chupatties are passed on in India, eh? Or maybe Josette has told her protégées to look after us."

And Stephen smiled, for Nevill's superstitions were engaging, rather than repulsive; and his quaintnesses were endearing him more and more to the man who had just taken up the dropped thread of friendship after eight or nine years. What an odd fellow Nevill was! Stephen thought, indulgently. No wonder he was worshipped by his servants, and even his chauffeur. No wonder Lady

MacGregor adored her nephew, though treating him as if he were a little boy!

One of Nevill's idiosyncrasies, after arranging everything to fit a certain plan, was to rush off at the last minute and do something entirely different. Last night—the night before starting for Grand Kabylia—he had begged Stephen to be ready by eight, at which time the car was ordered. At nine—having sat up till three o'clock writing letters, and then having visited a lately imported gazelle in its quarters—Nevill was still in his bath. At length he arrived on the scene, beaming, with a sulky chameleon in his pocket, and flew about giving last directions, until he suddenly discovered that there was a violent hurry, whereupon he began to be boyishly peevish with the chauffeur for not getting off an hour ago. No sooner had the car started, however, than he fell into a serious mood, telling Stephen of many things which he had thought out in the night—things which might be helpful in finding Victoria. He had been lying awake, it seemed, brooding on this subject, and it had occurred to him that, if Mouni should prove a disappointment, they might later discover something really useful by going to the annual ball at the Governor's palace. This festivity had been put off, on account of illness in the chief official's family; but it would take place in a fortnight or so now. All the great Aghas and Caïds of the south would be there, and as Nevill knew many of them, he might be able to get definite information concerning Ben Halim. As for Saïdee—to hear of Ben Halim was to hear of her. And then it was, in the midst of describing the ball, and the important men who would attend, that Nevill suddenly broke off to be superstitious about birds.

It was true that the birds were everywhere! little

greenish birds fitting among the trees; larger grey-brown birds flying low; fairy-like blue and yellow birds that circled round the car as it ran east towards the far, looming mountains of the Djurdjura; larks that spouted music like a fountain of jewels as they soared into the quivering blue; and great, stately storks, sitting in their nests on tall trees or tops of poles, silhouetted against the sky as they gazed indifferently down at the automobile.

“Josette would tell us it’s splendid luck to see storks on their nests,” said Nevill. “Arabs think they bring good fortune to places. That’s why people cut off the tops of the trees and make nests for them, so they can bless the neighbourhood and do good to the crops. Storks have no such menial work here as bringing babies. Arab babies have to come as best they can—sent into the world anyhow; for storks are men who didn’t do their religious duties in the most approved style, so they have to revisit the world next time in the form of beneficent birds.”

But Nevill did not want to answer questions about storks and their habits. He had tired of them in a moment, and was passionately interested in mules. “There ought to be an epic written about the mules of North Africa!” he exclaimed. “I tell you, it’s a great subject. Look at those poor brave chaps struggling to pull carts piled up with casks of beastly Algerian wine, through that sea of mud, which probably goes all the way through to China. Aren’t they splendid? Wait till you’ve been in this country as long as I have, and you’ll respect mules as I do, from army mules down to the lowest dregs of the mule kingdom. I don’t ask you to love them—and neither do they. But how they work here in Africa—and

never a groan! They go on till they drop. And I don't believe half of them ever get anything to eat. Some day I'm going to start a Rest Farm for tired mules. I shall pay well for them. A man I know did write a pæan of praise for mules. I believe I'll have it translated into Arabic, and handed about as a leaflet. These natives are good to their horses, because they believe they have souls, but they treat their mules like the dirt under their feet." And Nevill began quoting here and there a verse or a line he remembered of the "mule music," chanting in time to the throbbing of the motor.

"Key A minor, measure common,
 One and two and three and four and—
 Every hoof-beat half a second
 Every hoof-beat linked with heart-beat,
 Every heart-beat nearer bursting.
 Andantino sostenuto:
 In the downpour or the dryness,
 Hottest summer, coldest winter;
 Sick and sore and old and feeble,
 Hourly, hourly; daily, daily,
 From the sunrise to the setting;
 From the setting to the sunrise
 Scarce a break in all the circle
 For the rough and scanty eating,
 For the scant and muddy drinking,
 For the fitful, fearful resting,
 For the master-haunted sleeping.
 Dreams in dark of God's far heaven
 Tempo primo; tempo sempre."

And so, through pools of wild flowers and the blood of poppies, their road led to wild mountain scenery, then into the embrace of the Djurdjura mountains themselves—evil, snow-splashed, sterile-seeming mountains, until the car had passed the fortified town of Tizi Ouzou, an over-

grown village, whose name Stephen thought like a drunken term of endearment. It was market-day there, and the long street was so full of Kabyles dressed apparently in low-necked woollen bags, of soldiers in uniform, of bold-eyed, scantily-clad children, and of dyed sheep and goats, that the car had to pass at a walk. Nevill bought a good deal of Kabyle jewellery, necklaces and long earrings, or boxes enamelled in crude greens and reds, blues and yellows. Not that he had not already more than he knew what to do with; but he could not resist the handsome unveiled girls, the wretched old women, or pretty, half-naked children who offered the work of the neighbouring hill villages, or family heirlooms. Sometimes he saw eyes which made him think of Josette's; but then, all beautiful things that he saw reminded him of her. She was an obsession. But, for a wonder, he had taken Stephen's advice in Tlemcen and had not proposed again. He was still marvelling at his own strength of mind, and asking himself if, after all, he had been wise.

After Tizi Ouzou the mountains were no longer sterile-seeming. The road coiled up and up snakily, between rows of leering cactus; and far below the densely wooded heights lay lovely plains through which a great river wandered. There was a homely smell of mint, and the country did not look to Stephen like the Africa he had imagined. All the hill-slopes were green with the bright green of fig-trees and almonds, even at heights so great that the car wallowed among clouds. This steep road was the road to Fort National—the "thorn in the eye of Kabylia," which pierces so deeply that Kabylia may writhe, but revolt no more. Already it was almost as if the car had brought them into another world. The men who occasionally emerged from the woolly white blankets

of the clouds, were men of a very different type from the mild Kabyles of the plains they had met trooping along towards Algiers in search of work.

These were brave, upstanding men, worthy of their fathers who revolted against French rule and could not be conquered until that thorn, Fort National, was planted deeply in heart and eye. Some were fair, and even red-haired, which would have surprised Stephen if he had not heard from Nevill that in old days the Christian slaves used to escape from Algiers and seek refuge in Kabylia, where they were treated as free men, and no questions were asked.

Without Fort National, it seemed to Stephen that this strange Berber people would never have been forced to yield; for looking down from mountain heights as the motor sped on, it was as if he looked into a vast and intricate maze of valleys, and on each curiously pointed peak clung a Kabyle village that seemed to be inlaid in the rock like separate bits of scarlet enamel. It was the low house-roofs which gave this effect, for unlike the Arabs, whom the ancient Berber lords of the soil regard with scorn, the Kabyles build their dwellings of stone, roofed with red tiles.

This was a wild, tormented world, broken into a hundred sharp mountain ridges which seemed to cut the sky, because between the high peaks and the tangled skein of far-away villages surged foaming seas of cloud, which appeared to separate high, bright peaks from shadowed vales, by incredible distances. As far as the eye could travel with utmost straining, away to the dark, imposing background of the Djurdjura range, billowed ridges and ravines, ravines and ridges, each pointing pinnacle or razor-shelf adorned with its coral-red hamlet, like a group

of poisonous fungi, or the barnacles on a ship's steep side. Such an extraordinary landscape Stephen had never imagined, or seen except on a Japanese fan; and it struck him that the scene actually did resemble quaint prints picturing half-real, half-imaginary scenes in old Japan.

"What a country for war! What a country for defence!" he said to himself, as Nevill's yellow car sped along the levels of narrow ridges that gave, on either hand, vertical views far down to fertile valleys, rushed into clouds of weeping rain, or out into regions of sunlight and rainbows.

It was three o'clock when they reached Michélet, but they had not stopped for luncheon, as both were in haste to find Mouni: and Mouni's village was just beyond Michélet. Since Fort National, they had been in the heart of Grand Kabylia; and Michélet was even more characteristic of this strange mountain country, so different from transplanted Arabia below.

Not an Arab lived here, in the long, straggling town, built on the crest of a high ridge. Not a minaret tower pointed skyward. The Kabyle place of worship had a roof of little more height or importance than those that clustered round it. The men were in striped brown gandourahs of camel's hair; the lovely unveiled women were wrapped in woollen foutahs dyed red or yellow, blue or purple, and from their little ears heavy rings dangled. The blue tattoo marks on their brown cheeks and foreheads, which in forgotten times had been Christian crosses, gave great value to their enormous, kohl-encircled eyes; and their teeth were very white as they smiled boldly, yet proudly, at Stephen and Nevill.

There was a flight of steps to mount from the car to

the hotel, and as the two men climbed the stairs they turned to look, across a profound chasm, to the immense mass of the Djurdjura opposite Michélet's thin ledge. From their point of view, it was like the Jungfrau, as Stephen had seen it from Mürren, on one of his few trips to Switzerland. Somehow, those little conventional potterings of his seemed pitiable now, they had been so easy to do, so exactly what other people did.

It was long past ordinary luncheon time, and hunger constrained the two men to eat before starting out to find the village where Mouni and her people lived. It was so small a hamlet, that Nevill, who knew Kabylia well, had never heard of it until Josette Soubise wrote the name for him on one of her own cards. The landlord of the hotel at Michélet gave rapid and fluent directions how to go, saying that the distance was two miles, but as the way was a steep mountain path, *les messieurs* must go on foot.

Immediately after lunching they started, armed with a present for the bride; a watch encrusted with tiny brilliants, which, following Josette's advice, they had chosen as the one thing of all others calculated to win the Kabyle girl's heart. "It will be like a fairy dream to her to have a watch of her own," Josette had said. "Her friends will be dying of envy, and she will enjoy that. Oh, she will search her soul and tell you everything she knows, if you but give her a watch!"

For a little way the friends walked along the wild and beautiful road, which from Michélet plunges down the mountains toward Bougie and the sea; but soon they came to the narrow, ill-defined footpath described by the landlord. It led straight up a steep shoulder of rock which at its highest part became a ledge; and when they had climbed to the top, at a distance they could see a

cluster of red roofs apparently falling down a precipice, at the far end.

Here and there were patches of snow, white as fallen lily-petals on the pansy-coloured earth. Looking down was like looking from a high wave upon a vast sea of other waves, each wave carrying on its apex a few bits of broken red mosaic, which were Kabyle roofs; and the pale sky was streaked with ragged violet clouds exactly like the sky and clouds painted on screens by Japanese artists.

They met not a soul as they walked, but while the village was still far away and unreal, the bark of guns, fired quickly one after the other, jarred their ears, and the mountain wind brought a crying of raïtas, African clarionettes, and the dull, yet fierce beat of tom-toms.

"Now I know why we've met no one," said Nevill. "The wedding feast's still on, and everybody who is anybody at Yacoua, is there. You know, if you're an Arab, or even a Kabyle, it takes you a week to be married properly, and you have high jinks every day: music and dancing and eating, and if you've money enough, above all you make the powder speak. Mouni's people are doing her well. What a good thing we've got the watch! Even with Josette's introduction we mightn't have been able to come near the bride, unless we had something to offer worth her having."

The mountain village of Yacoua had no suburbs, no outlying houses. The one-storey mud huts with their pointed red roofs, utterly unlike Arab dwellings, were huddled together, with only enough distance between for a man and a mule or a donkey to pass. The best stood in pairs, with a walled yard between; and as Stephen and Nevill searched anxiously for someone to point out the home of Mouni, from over a wall which seemed to be

running down the mountain-side, came a white puff of smoke and a strident bang, then more, one after the other. Again the wailing of the raïta began, and there was no longer any need to ask the way.

"That's where the party is—in that yard," said Nevill, beginning to be excited. "Now, what sort of reception will they give us? That's the next question."

"Can't we tell, the first thing, that we've come from Algiers with a present for the bride?" suggested Stephen.

"We can if they understand Arabic," Nevill answered. "But the Kabyle lingo's quite different—Berber, or something racy of the soil. I ought to have brought Mohammed to interpret."

So steeply did the yard between the low houses run downhill, that, standing at the top of a worn path like a seam in some old garment, the two Europeans could look over the mud wall. Squalid as were the mud huts and the cattle-yard connecting them, the picture framed in the square enclosure blazed with colour. It was barbaric, and beautiful in its savagery.

Squatting on the ground, with the last rank against the house wall, were several rows of women, all unveiled, their uncovered arms jewelled to the elbows, embracing their knees. The afternoon sunlight shone on their ceremonial finery, setting fire to the red, blue and green enamel of their necklaces, their huge hoop earrings and the jewelled silver chains pinned to their scarlet or yellow head-wrappings, struck out strange gleams from the flat, round brooches which fastened their gaily striped robes on their shoulders, and turned their great dark eyes into brown topazes. Twenty or thirty men, dressed in their best burnouses, draped over new gandourahs, their heads swathed in clean white muslin turbans, sat on the opposite

side of the court, watching the "powder play" furnished by two tall, handsome boys, who handled with delicate grace and skill old-fashioned, long-muzzled guns inlaid with coral and silver, heirlooms perhaps, and of some value even to antiquaries.

While the powder spoke, nobody had a thought for anything else. All eyes were upon the boys with the guns, only travelling upward in ecstasy to watch the puffs of smoke that belched out round and white as fat snow-balls. Then, when the music burst forth again, and a splendidly handsome young Kabyle woman ran forward to begin the wild dance of the body and of the hands—dear to the mountain men as to the nomads of the desert—everyone was at first absorbed in admiration of her movements. But suddenly a child (one of a dozen in a row in front of all the women) tired of the show, less amusing to him than the powder play, and looking up, saw the two Roumis on the hill behind the wall. He nudged his neighbour, and the neighbour, who happened to be a little girl, followed with her eyes the upward nod of his head. So the news went round that strangers had come uninvited to the wedding-feast, and men began to frown and women to whisper, while the dancer lost interest in her own tinklings and genuflections.

It was time for the intruders to make it known that business of some sort, not idle curiosity, had brought them on the scene, and Nevill stepped forward, holding out the visiting card given him by Josette, and the crimson velvet case containing the watch which Stephen had bought in Algiers.

XXII.

AN elderly man, with a reddish beard, got up from the row of men grouped behind the musicians, and muttered to one of the youths who had been making the powder speak. They argued for a moment, and then the boy, handing his gun to the elder man, walked with dignity to a closed gate, large enough to let in the goats and donkeys pertaining to the two houses. This gate he opened half-way, standing in the aperture and looking up sullenly as the Roumis came down the narrow, slippery track which led to it.

“Cebah el-kheir, ia Sidi—Good day, sir,” said Nevill, agreeably, in his best Arabic. “Ta’ rafi el-a’ riya?—Do you speak Arabic?”

The young man bowed, not yet conciliated. “Ach men sebba jit lhena, ia Sidi?—Why have you come here, sir?” he asked suspiciously, in very guttural Arabic.

Relieved to find that they would have no great difficulty in understanding each other, Nevill plunged into explanations, pointing to Josette’s card. They had come recommended by the malema at Tlemcen. They brought good wishes and a present to the bride of the village, the virtuous and beautiful Mouni, from whom they would gladly receive information concerning a European lady. Was this the house of her father? Would they be per-

mitted to speak with her, and give this little watch from Algiers?

Nevill made his climax by opening the velvet case, and the brown eyes of the Kabyle boy flashed with uncontrollable admiration, though his face remained immobile. He answered that this was indeed the house of Mouni's father, and he himself was the brother of Mouni. This was the last day of her wedding-feast, and in an hour she would go to the home of her husband. The consent of the latter, as well as of her father, must be asked before strangers could hope to speak with her. Nevertheless, the Roumis were welcome to enter the yard and watch the entertainment while Mouni's brother consulted with those most concerned in this business.

The boy stood aside, inviting them to pass through the gate, and the Englishmen availed themselves of his courtesy, waiting just inside until the red-bearded man came forward. He and his son consulted together, and then a dark young man in a white burnous was called to join the conclave. He was a handsome fellow, with a haughtily intelligent face, and an air of breeding superior to the others.

"This is my sister's husband. He too speaks Arabic, but my father not so much." The boy introduced his brother-in-law. "Messaud-ben-Arzen is the son of our Caïd," (he spoke proudly). "Will you tell him and my father what your business is with Mouni?"

Nevill broke into more explanations, and evidently they were satisfactory, for, while the dancing and the powder play were stopped, and the squatting ranks of guests stared silently, the two Roumis were conducted into the house.

It was larger than most of the houses in the village,

but apart from the stable of the animals through which the visitors passed, there was but one room, long and narrow, lighted by two small windows. The darkest corner was the bedroom, which had a platform of stone on which rugs were spread, and there was a lower mound of dried mud, roughly curtained off from the rest with two or three red and blue foutahs suspended on ropes made of twisted alfa, or dried grass. Toward the farther end, a hole in the floor was the family cooking-place, and behind it an elevation of beaten earth made a wide shelf for a long row of jars shaped like the Roman amphoræ of two thousand years ago. Pegs driven into one of the walls were hung with gandourahs and a foutah or two; and of furniture, worthy of that name in the eyes of Europeans, there was none.

At the bedroom end of the room, several women were gathered round a central object of interest, and though the light was dim after the vivid sunshine outside, the visitors guessed that the object of interest was the bride. Decorously they paused near the door, while a great deal of arguing went on, in which the shriller voices of women mingled with the guttural tones of the men. Nevill could catch no word, for they were talking their own Kabyle tongue which had come down from their forefathers the Berbers, lords of the land long years before the Arabs drove them into the high mountains. But at last the group opened, and a young woman stepped out with half-shy eagerness. She was loaded with jewels, and her foutah was barbarically splendid in colour, but she was almost as fair as her father; a slim creature with grey eyes, and brown curly hair that showed under her orange foulard.

Proud of her French, she began talking in that lan-

guage, welcoming the guests, telling them how glad she was to see friends of her dear Mademoiselle Soubise. But soon she must be gone to her husband's house, and already the dark young bridegroom, son of the Caïd, was growing impatient. There was no time to be lost, if they were to learn anything of Ben Halim's wife.

As a preface to what they wished to ask, Nevill made a presentation speech, placing the velvet watch-case in Mouni's hand, and she opened it with a kind of moan expressing intense rapture. Never had she seen anything so beautiful, and she would cheerfully have recalled every phase of her career from earliest babyhood, if by doing so she could have pleased the givers.

"But yes," she answered to Nevill's first questions, "the beautiful lady whom I served was the wife of Sidi Cassim ben Halim. At first it was in Algiers that I lived with her, but soon we left, and went to the country, far, oh, very far away, going towards the south. The house was like a large farmhouse, and to me as a child—for I was but a child—it seemed fine and grand. Yet my lady was not pleased. She found it rough, and different from any place to which she was used. Poor, beautiful lady! She was not happy there. She cried a great deal, and each day I thought she grew paler than the day before."

Mouni spoke in French, hesitating now and then for a word, or putting in two or three in Arabic, before she stopped to think, as she grew interested in her subject. Stephen understood almost all she said, and was too impatient to leave the catechising to Nevill.

"Whereabouts was this farmhouse?" he asked. "Can't you tell us how to find it?"

Mouni searched her memory. "I was not yet thirteen," she said. "It is nine years since I left that place; and I travelled in a shut-up carriage, with a cousin, older than I, who had been already in the house of the lady when I came. She told her mistress of me, and I was sent for, because I was quick and lively in my ways, and white of face, almost as white as the beautiful lady herself. My work was to wait on the mistress, and help my cousin, who was her maid. Yamina—that was my cousin's name—could have told you more about the place in the country than I, for she was even then a woman. But she died a few months after we both left the beautiful lady. We left because the master thought my cousin carried a letter for her mistress, which he did not wish sent; and he gave orders that we should no longer live under his roof."

"Surely you can remember where you went, and how you went, on leaving the farmhouse?" Stephen persisted.

"Oh yes, we went back to Algiers. But it was a long distance, and took us many days, because we had only a little money, and Yamina would not spend it in buying tickets for the diligence, all the way. We walked many miles, and only took a diligence when I cried, and was too tired to move a step farther. At night we drove sometimes, I remember, and often we rested under the tents of nomads who were kind to us.

"While I was with the lady, I never went outside the great courtyard. It is not strange that now, after all these years, I cannot tell you more clearly where the house was. But it was a great white house, on a hill, and round it was a high wall, with towers that overlooked the country beneath. And in those towers, which were on either side the big, wide gate, were little windows

through which men could spy, or even shoot if they chose."

"Did you never hear the name of any town that was near?" Stephen went on.

"I do not think there was a town near; yet there was a village not far off to the south. I saw it from the hill-top, both as I went in at the gate with my cousin, and when, months later, I was sent away with her. We did not pass through it, because our road was to and from the north; and I do not even know the name of the village. But there was a cemetery outside it, where some of the master's ancestors and relations were buried. I heard my lady speak of it one day, when she cried because she feared to die and be laid there without ever again seeing her own country and her own people. Oh, and once I heard Yamina talk with another servant about an oasis called Bou-Saada. It was not near, yet I think it could be reached by diligence in a long day."

"Good!" broke in Nevill. "There's our first real clue! Bou-Saada I know well. When people who come and visit me want a glimpse of the desert in a hurry, Bou-Saada is where I take them. One motors there from Algiers in seven or eight hours—through mountains at first, then on the fringe of the desert; but it's true, as Mouni says, going by diligence, and walking now and then, it would be a journey of days. Her description of the house on the hill, looking down over a village and cemetery, will be a big help. And Ben Halim's name is sure to be known in the country round, if he ever lived there."

"He may have been gone for years," said Stephen. "And if there's a conspiracy of silence in Algiers, why not elsewhere?"

"Well, at least we've got a clue, and will follow it up

for all we know. By Jove, this is giving me a new interest in life!" And Nevill rubbed his hands in a boyish way he had. "Tell us what the beautiful lady was like," he went on to Mouni.

"Her skin was like the snow on our mountain-tops when the sunrise paints the white with rose," answered Mouni. "Her hair was redder than the red of henna, and when it was unfastened it hung down below her waist. Her eyes were dark as a night without moon, and her teeth were little, little pearls. Yet for all her beauty she was not happy. She wasted the flower of her youth in sadness, and though the master was noble, and splendid as the sun to look upon, I think she had no love to give him, perhaps because he was grave and seldom smiled, or because she was a Roumia and could not suit herself to the ways of true believers."

"Did she keep to her own religion?" asked Stephen.

"That I cannot tell. I was too young to understand. She never talked of such things before me, but she kept to none of our customs, that I know. In the three months I served her, never did she leave the house not even to visit the cemetery on a Friday, as perhaps the master would have allowed her to do, if she had wished."

"Do you remember if she spoke of a sister?"

"She had a photograph of a little girl, whose picture looked like herself. Once she told me it was her sister, but the next day the photograph was gone from its place, and I never saw it again. Yamina thought the master was jealous, because our lady looked at it a great deal."

"Was there any other lady in that house," Nevill ventured, "or was yours the master's only wife?"

"There was no other lady at that time," Mouni replied promptly.

"So far, so good," said Nevill. "Well, Legs, I don't think there's any doubt we've got hold of the right end of the stick now. Mouni's beautiful lady and Miss Ray's sister Saidee are certainly one and the same. Ho for the white farmhouse on the hill!"

"Must we go back to Algiers, or can we get to Bou-Saada from here?" Stephen asked.

Nevill laughed. "You are in a hurry! Oh, we can get there from here all right. Would you like to start now?"

Stephen's face reddened. "Why not, if we've found out all we can from this girl?" He tried to speak indifferently.

Nevill laughed again. "Very well. There's nothing left then, except to say good-bye to the fair bride and her relations."

He had expected to get back to Algiers that night, slipping away from the high passes of Grand Kabylia before dusk, and reaching home late, by lamplight. But now the plan was changed. They were not to see Algiers again until Stephen had made acquaintance with the desert. By setting off at once, they might arrive at Bou-Saada some time in the dark hours; and Nevill upset his old arrangements with good grace. Why should he mind? he asked, when Stephen apologised shamefacedly for his impatience. Bou-Saada was as good a place as any, except Tlemcen, and this adventure would give him an excuse for a letter, even two letters, to Josette Soubise. She would want to hear about Mouni's wedding, and the stately Kabyle home which they had visited. Besides she would be curious to know whether they found the white farmhouse on the hill, and if so, what they learned there of the beautiful lady and her mysterious fate. Oh

yes, it would certainly mean two letters at least: one from Bou-Saada, one after the search for the farmhouse; and Nevill thought himself in luck, for he was not allowed to write often to Josette.

After Michélet the road, a mere shelf projecting along a precipice, slants upward on its way to the Col de Tirouda, sharp as a knife aimed at the heart of the mountains. From far below clouds boil up as if the valleys smoked after a destroying fire, and through flying mists flush the ruddy earth, turning the white film to pinkish gauze. Crimson and purple stones shine like uncut jewels, and cascades of yellow gorse, under red-flowering trees, pour down over low-growing white flowers, which embroider the rose-coloured rocks.

Then, suddenly, gone is the green Kabyle mountain-world, gone like a dream the tangle of ridges and chasms, the bright tapestry of fig-trees and silver-olives, dark karoubias (the wild locusts of John the Baptist) and climbing roses. Rough, coarse grass has eaten up the flowers, or winds sweeping down from the Col have killed them. Only a few stunted trees bend grotesquely to peer over the sheer sides of shadowed gorges as the road strains up and up, twisting like a scar left by a whip-lash, on the naked brown shoulders of a slave. So at last it flings a loop over the Col de Tirouda. Then, round a corner the wand of an invisible magician waves: darkness and winter cold become summer warmth and light.

This light was the level golden glory of late afternoon when Stephen saw it from Nevill's car; and so green were the wide stretching meadows and shining rivers far below, that he seemed to be looking at them through an emerald, as Nero used to gaze at his gardens in Rome. Down

the motor plunged towards the light, threading back and forth a network of zig-zags, until long before sunset they were in the warm lowlands, racing towards Bordj-bou Arreredj and Msila. Beyond Msila, they would follow the desert track which would bring them by-and-by to the oasis town of Bou-Saada.

If Stephen had been a tourist, guide-book in hand, he would have delighted in the stony road among the mountains between Bordj-bou Arreredj and Msila; but it was the future, not the past, which held his thoughts to-day, and he had no more than a passing glance for ruined mosques and palaces. It was only after nightfall, far beyond the town of Msila, far beyond the vast plain of the Hodna, that his first dim glimpse of the desert thrilled him out of self-absorption.

Even under the stars which crusted a moonless sky, the vast stretches of billowing sand glimmered faintly golden as a phosphorescent sea. And among the dimly gleaming waves of that endless waste the motor tossed, rocking on the rough track like a small boat in mid-ocean.

Nowhere was there any sound except the throbbing of their machinery, and a fairy fiddling of unseen crickets, which seemed to make the silence more intense, under the great sparkling dome that hung over the gold.

"Now I am in the place where she wished to be: the golden silence," Stephen said to himself. And he found himself listening, as if for the call Victoria had promised to give if she needed him.

XXIII.

ON the top of a pale golden hill, partly sand, partly rock, rises a white wall with square, squat towers which look north and south, east and west. The wall and the towers together are like an ivory crown set on the hill's brow, and from a distance the effect is very barbaric, very impressive, for all the country round about is wild and desolate. Along the southern horizon the desert goes billowing in waves of gold, and rose, and violet, that fade into the fainter violet of the sky; and nearer there are the strange little mountains which guard the oasis of Bou-Saada, like a wall reared to hide a treasure from some dreaded enemy; and even the sand is heaped in fantastic shapes, resembling a troop of tawny beasts crouched to drink from deep pools of purple shadow. Northward, the crumpled waste rolls away like prairie land or ocean, faint green over yellow brown, as if grass seed had been sprinkled sparsely on a stormy sea and by some miracle had sprouted. And in brown wastes, bright emerald patches gleam, vivid and fierce as serpents' eyes, ringed round with silver. Far away to the east floats the mirage of a lake, calm as a blue lagoon. Westward, where desert merges into sky, are high tablelands, and flat-topped mountains with carved sides, desert architecture, such as might have suggested Egyptian temples and colossal sphinxes.

Along the rough desert track beneath the hill, where bald stones break through sandy earth, camels come and go, passing from south to north, from north to south, marching slowly with rhythmic gait, as if to the sound of music which only they can hear, glancing from side to side with unutterable superciliousness, looking wistfully here and there at some miniature oasis thrown like a dark prayer-carpet on the yellow sand. Two or three in a band they go, led by desert men in blowing white, or again in a long train of twelve or twenty, their legs a moving lattice, their heart-shaped feet making a soft, swishing "pad-pad," on the hard road.

The little windows of the squat, domed towers on the hill are like eyes that spy upon this road,—small, dark and secret eyes, very weary of seeing nothing better than camels since old days when there were razzias, and wars, something worth shutting stout gates upon.

When, after three days of travelling, Victoria came southward along this road, and looked between the flapping carriage curtains at the white wall that crowned the dull gold hill, her heart beat fast, for the thought of the golden silence sprang to her mind. The gold did not burn with the fierce orange flames she had seen in her dreams—it was a bleached and faded gold, melancholy and almost sinister in colour; yet it would pass for gold; and a great silence brooded where prairie blended with desert. She asked no questions of Maïeddine, for that was a rule she had laid upon herself; but when the carriage turned out of the rough road it had followed so long, and the horses began to climb a stony track which wound up the yellow hill to the white towers, she could hardly breathe, for the throbbing in her breast. Always she had only had to shut her eyes to see Saidee, stand-

ing on a high white place, gazing westward through a haze of gold. What if this were the high white place? What if already Si Maïeddine was bringing her to Saïdee?

They had been only three days on the way so far, it was true, and she had been told that the journey would be very, very long. Still, Arabs were subtle, and Si Maïeddine might have wanted to test her courage. Looking back upon those long hours, now, towards evening of the third day, it seemed to Victoria that she had been travelling for a week in the swaying, curtained carriage, with the slow-trotting mules.

Just at first, there had been some fine scenery to hold her interest; far-off mountains of grim shapes, dark as iron, and spotted with snow as a leper is spotted with scales. Then had come low hills, following the mountains (nameless to her, because Maïeddine had not cared to name them), and blue lakes of iris flowing over wide plains. But by-and-by the plains flattened to dullness; a hot wind ceaselessly flapped the canvas curtains, and Lella M'Barka sighed and moaned with the fatigue of constant motion. There was nothing but plain, endless plain, and Victoria had been glad, for her own sake as well as the invalid's, when night followed the first day. They had stopped on the outskirts of a large town, partly French, partly Arab, passing through and on to the house of a caïd who was a friend of Si Maïeddine's. It was a primitively simple house, even humble, it seemed to the girl, who had as yet no conception of the bareness and lack of comfort—according to Western ideas—of Arab country-houses. Nevertheless, when, after another tedious day, they rested under the roof of a village adel, an official below a caïd, the first house seemed luxurious in contrast. During this last, third day, Victoria had been eager and excited, because

of the desert, through one gate of which they had entered. She felt that once in the desert she was so close to Saidee in spirit that they might almost hear the beating of each other's hearts, but she had not expected to be near her sister in body for many such days to come: and the wave of joy that surged over her soul as the horses turned up the golden hill towards the white towers, was suffocating in its force.

The nearer they came, the less impressive seemed the building. After all, it was not the great Arab stronghold it had looked from far away, but a fortified farmhouse a century old, at most. Climbing the hill, too, Victoria saw that the golden colour was partly due to a monstrous swarm of ochre-hued locusts, large as young canary birds, which had settled, thick as yellow snow, over the ground. They were resting after a long flight, and there were millions and millions of them, covering the earth in every direction as far as the eye could reach. Only a few were on the wing, but as the carriage stopped before the closed gates, fat yellow bodies came blundering against the canvas curtains, or fell plumply against the blinkers over the mules' eyes.

Si Maïeddine got down from the carriage, and shouted, with a peculiar call. There was no answering sound, but after a wait of two or three minutes the double gates of thick, greyish palm-wood were pulled open from inside, with a loud creak. For a moment the brown face of an old man, wrinkled as a monkey's, looked out between the gates, which he held ajar; then, with a guttural cry, he threw both as far back as he could, and rushing out, bent his white turban over Maïeddine's hand. He kissed the Sidi's shoulder, and a fold of his burnous, half kneeling, and chattering Arabic, only a word of which Victoria

could catch here and there. As he chattered, other men came running out, some of them Negroes, all very dark, and they vied with one another in humble kissing of the master's person, at any spot convenient to their lips.

Politely, though not too eagerly, he made the gracious return of seeming to kiss the back of his own hand, or his fingers, where they had been touched by the welcoming mouths, but in reality he kissed air. With a gesture, he stopped the salutations at last, and asked for the Caïd, to whom, he said, he had written, sending his letter by the diligence.

Then there were passionate jabberings of regret. The Caïd was away, had been away for days, fighting the locusts on his other farm, west of Aumale, where there was grain to save. But the letter had arrived, and had been sent after him, immediately, by a man on horseback. This evening he would certainly return to welcome his honoured guest. The word was "guest," not "guests," and Victoria understood that she and Lella M'Barka would not see the master of the house. So it had been at the other two houses: so in all probability it would be at every house along their way unless, as she still hoped, they had already come to the end of the journey.

The wide open gates showed a large, bare courtyard, the farmhouse, which was built round it, being itself the wall. On the outside, no windows were visible except those in the towers, and a few tiny square apertures for ventilation, but the yard was overlooked by a number of small glass eyes, all curtained.

As the carriage was driven in, large yellow dogs gathered round it, barking; but the men kicked them away, and busied themselves in chasing the animals off to a shed, their white-clad backs all religiously turned as

Si Maïeddine helped the ladies to descend. Behind a closed window a curtain was shaking; and M'Barka had not yet touched her feet to the ground when a negress ran out of a door that opened in the same distant corner of the house. She was unveiled, like Lella M'Barka's servants in Algiers, and, with Fafann, she almost carried the tired invalid towards the open door. Victoria followed, quivering with suspense. What waited for her behind that door? Would she see Saidee, after all these years of separation?

"I think I'm dying," moaned Lella M'Barka. "They will never take me away from this house alive. White Rose, where art thou? I need thy hand under my arm."

Victoria tried to think only of M'Barka, and to wait with patience for the supreme moment—if it were to come. Even if she had wished it, she could not have asked questions now.

XXIV.

It was midnight when Nevill's car ran into the beautiful oasis town, guarded by the most curious mountains of the Algerian desert, and they were at their strangest, cut out clear as the painted mountains of stage scenery, in the light of the great acetylene lamps. Stephen thought them like a vast, half-burned Moorish city of mosques and palaces, over which sand-storms had raged for centuries, leaving only traces here and there of a ruined tower, a domed roof, or an ornamental frieze.

Of the palms he could see nothing, except the long, dark shape of the oasis among the pale sand-billows; but early next morning he and Nevill were up and out on the roof of the little French hotel, while sunrise banners marched across the sky. Stephen had not known that desert dunes could be bright peach-pink, or that a river flowing over white stones could look like melted rubies, or that a few laughing Arab girls, ankle-deep in limpid water, could glitter in morning light like jewelled houris in celestial gardens. But now that he knew, he would never forget his first desert picture.

The two men stood on the roof among the bubbly domes for a long time, looking over the umber-coloured town and the flowing oasis which swept to Bou-Saada's brown feet like a tidal wave. It was not yet time to go and ask questions of the Caïd, whom Nevill knew.

Stephen was advised not to drink coffee in the hotel before starting on their quest. "We shall have to swallow at least three cups each of *café maure* at the Caïd's house, and perhaps a dash of tea flavoured with mint, on top of all, if we don't want to begin by hurting our host's feelings," Nevill said. So they fasted, and fed their minds by walking through Bou-Saada in its first morning glory. Already the old part of the town was alive, for Arabs love the day when it is young, even as they love a young girl for a bride.

The Englishmen strolled into the cool, dark mosque, where heavy Eastern scents of musk and benzoin had lain all night like fugitives in sanctuary, and where the roof was held up by cypress poles instead of marble pillars, as in the grand mosques of big cities. By the time they were ready to leave, dawn had become daylight, and coming out of the brown dusk, the town seemed flooded with golden wine, wonderful, bubbling, unbelievable gold, with scarlet and purple and green figures floating in it, brilliant as rainbow fish.

The Caïd lived near the old town, in an adobe house, with a garden which was a tangle of roses and pomegranate blossoms, under orange-trees and palms. And there were narrow paths of hard sand, the colour of old gold, which rounded up to the centre, and had little runnels of water on either side. The sunshine dripped between the long fingers of the palm leaves, to trail in a lacy pattern along the yellow paths, and the sound of the running water was sweet.

It was in this garden that the Caïd gave his guests the three cups of coffee each, followed by the mint-flavoured tea which Nevill had prophesied. And when they had admired a tame gazelle which nibbled cakes of

almond and honey from their hands, the Caïd insisted on presenting it to his good friend, Monsieur Caird.

Over the cups of *café maure*, they talked of Captain Cassim ben Halim, but their host could or would tell them nothing beyond the fact that Ben Halim had once lived for a little while not far from Bou-Saada. He had inherited from his father a country-house, about fifty kilometres distant, but he had never stayed there until after retiring from the army, and selling his place in Algiers. Then he had spent a few months in the country. The Caïd had met him long ago in Algiers, but had not seen him since. Ben Halim had been ill, and had led a retired life in the country, receiving no one. Afterward he had gone away, out of Algeria. It was said that he had died abroad a little later. Of that, the Caïd was not certain; but in any case the house on the hill was now in the possession of the Caïd of Ain Dehdra, Sidi Elaïd ben Sliman, a distant cousin of Ben Halim, said to be his only living relative.

Then their host went on to describe the house with the white wall, which looked down upon a cemetery and a village. His description was almost precisely what Mouni's had been, and there was no doubt that the place where she had lived with the beautiful lady was the place of which he spoke. But of the lady herself they could learn nothing. The Caïd had no information to give concerning Ben Halim's family.

He pressed them to stay, and see all the beauties of the oasis. He would introduce them to the marabout at El Hamel, and in the evening they should see a special dance of the Ouled Naïls. But they made excuses that they must get on, and bade the Caïd good-bye after an hour's talk. As for the *gazelle approvoisée*, Nevill named

her Josette, and hired an Arab to take her to Algiers by the diligence, with explicit instructions as to food and milk.

Swarms of locusts flew into their faces, and fell into the car, or were burned to death in the radiator, as they sped along the road towards the white house on the golden hill. They started from Bou-Saada at ten o'clock, and though the road was far from good, and they were not always sure of the way, the noon heat was scarcely at its height when Stephen said: "There it is! That must be the hill and the white wall with the towers."

"Yes, there's the cemetery too," answered Nevill. "We're seeing it on our left side, as we go. I hope that doesn't mean we're in for bad luck."

"Rot!" said Stephen, promptly. Yet for all his scorn of Nevill's grotesque superstitions, he was not in a confident mood. He did not expect much good from this visit to Ben Halim's old country-house. And the worst was, that here seemed their last chance of finding out what had become of Saidee Ray, if not of her sister.

The sound of the motor made a brown face flash over the top of the tall gate, like a Jack popping out of his box.

"Ia Sidi, el Caïd?" asked Nevill. "Is he at home?"

The face pretended not to understand; and having taken in every detail of the strangers' appearance and belongings, including the motor-car, it disappeared.

"What's going to happen now?" Stephen wanted to know.

Nevill looked puzzled. "The creature isn't too polite. Probably it's afraid of Roumis, and has never been spoken to by one before. But I hope it will promptly scuttle indoors and fetch its master, or someone with brains and manners."

Several minutes passed, and the yellow motor-car con-

tinued to advertise its presence outside the Caïd's gate by panting strenuously. The face did not show itself again; and there was no evidence of life behind the white wall, except the peculiarly ominous yelping of Kabyle dogs.

"Let's pound on the gate, and show them we mean to get in," said Stephen, angry-eyed.

But Nevill counselled waiting. "Never be in a hurry when you have to do with Arabs. It's patience that pays."

"Here come two chaps on horseback," Stephen said, looking down at the desert track that trailed near the distant cluster of mud houses, which were like square blocks of gold in the fierce sunshine. "They seem to be staring up at the car. I wonder if they're on their way here!"

"It may be the Caïd, riding home with a friend, or a servant," Nevill suggested. "If so, I'll bet my hat there are other eyes than ours watching for him, peering out through some spy-hole in one of the gate-towers."

His guess was right. It was the Caïd coming home, and Maïeddine was with him; for Lella M'Barka had been obliged to rest for three days at the farmhouse on the hill, and the Caïd's guest had accompanied him before sunrise this morning to see a favourite white mehari, or racing camel, belonging to Sidi Elaïd ben Sliman, which was very ill, in care of a wise man of the village. Now the mehari was dead, and as Maïeddine seemed impatient to get back, they were riding home, in spite of the noon heat.

Maïeddine had left the house reluctantly this morning. Not that he could often see Victoria, who was nursing M'Barka, and looking so wistful that he guessed she had half hoped to find her sister waiting behind the white wall on the golden hill.

Though he could expect little of the girl's society,

and there was little reason to fear that harm would come to her, or that she would steal away in his absence, still he had hated to ride out of the gate and leave her. If the Caïd had not made a point of his coming, he would gladly have stayed behind. Now, when he looked up and saw a yellow motor-car at the gate, he believed that his feeling had been a presentiment, a warning of evil, which he ought to have heeded.

He and the Caïd were a long way off when he caught sight of the car, and heard its pantings, carried by the clear desert air. He could not be certain of its identity, but he prided himself upon his keen sight and hearing, and where they failed, instinct stepped in. He was sure that it was the car which had waited for Stephen Knight when the *Charles Quex* came in, the car of Nevill Caird, about whom he had made enquiries before leaving Algiers. Maïeddine knew, of course, that Victoria had been to the Djenan el Djouad, and he was intensely suspicious as well as jealous of Knight, because of the letter Victoria had written. He knew also that the two Englishmen had been asking questions at the Hotel de la Kasbah; and he was not surprised to see the yellow car in front of the Caïd's gates. Now that he saw it, he felt dully that he had always known it would follow him.

If only he had been in the house, it would not have mattered. He would have been able to prevent Knight and Caird from seeing Victoria, or even from having the slightest suspicion that she was, or had been, there. It was the worst of luck that he should be outside the gates, for now he could not go back while the Englishmen were there. Knight would certainly recognise him, and guess everything that he did not know.

Maïeddine thought very quickly. He dared not ride on, lest the men in the car should have a field-glass. The only thing was to let Ben Sliman go alone, so that, if eyes up there on the hill were watching, it might seem that the Caïd was parting from some friend who lived in the village. He would have to trust Elaïd's discretion and tact, as he knew already he might trust his loyalty. Only—the situation was desperate. Tact, and an instinct for the right word, the frank look, were worth even more than loyalty at this moment. And one never quite knew how far to trust another man's judgment. Besides, the mischief might have been done before Ben Sliman could arrive on the scene; and at the thought of what might happen, Maïeddine's heart seemed to turn in his breast. He had never known a sensation so painful to body and mind, and it was hideous to feel helpless, to know that he could do only harm, and not good, by riding up the hill. Nevertheless, he said to himself, if he should see Victoria come out to speak with these men, he would go. He would perhaps kill them, and the chauffeur too. Anything rather than give up the girl now; for the sharp stab of the thought that he might lose her, that Stephen Knight might have her, made him ten times more in love than he had been before. He wished that Allah might strike the men in the yellow car dead; although, ardent Mussulman as he was, he had no hope that such a glorious miracle would happen.

"It is those men from Algiers of whom I told thee," he said to the Caïd. "I must stop below. They must not recognise me, or the dark one who was on the ship, will guess. Possibly he suspects already that I stand for something in this affair."

"Who can have sent them to my house? Ben Sliman

wondered. The two drew in their horses and put on the manner of men about to bid each other good-bye.

"I hope, I am almost sure, that they know nothing of *her*, or of me. Probably, when enquiring about Ben Halim, in order to hear of her sister, and so find out where she has gone, they learned only that Ben Halim once lived here. If thy servants are discreet, it may be that no harm will come from this visit."

"They will be discreet. Have no fear," the Caïd assured him. Yet it was on his tongue to say; "the lady herself, when she hears the sound of the car, may do some unwise thing." But he did not finish the sentence. Even though the young girl—whom he had not seen—was a Roumia, obsessed with horrible, modern ideas, which at present it would be dangerous to try and correct, he could not discuss her with Maïeddine. If she showed herself to the men, it could not be helped. What was to be, would be. Mektûb!

"Far be it from me to distrust my friend's servants," said Maïeddine; "but if in their zeal they go too far and give an impression of something to hide, it would be as bad as if they let drop a word too many."

"I will ride on and break any such impression if it has been made," Ben Sliman consoled him. "Trust me. I will be as gracious to these Roumis as if they were true believers."

"I do trust thee completely," answered the younger man. "While they are at thy gates, or within them, I must wait with patience. I cannot remain here in the open—yet I wish to be within sight, that I may see with my own eyes all that happens. What if I ride to one of the black tents, and ask for water to wash the mouth of my horse? If they have it not, it is no matter."

"Thine is a good thought," said Ben Sliman, and rode on, putting his slim white Arab horse to a trot.

To the left from the group of abode houses, and at about the same distance from the rough track on which they had been riding, was a cluster of nomad tents, like giant bats with torpid wings spread out ink-black on the gold of the desert. A little farther off was another small encampment of a different tribe; and their tents were brown, striped with black and yellow. They looked like huge butterflies resting. But Maïeddine thought of no such similes. He was a child of the Sahara, and used to the tents and the tent-dwellers. His own father, the Agha, lived half the year in a great tent, when he was with his douar, and Maïeddine had been born under the roof of camel's hair. His own people and these people were not kin, and their lives lay far apart; yet a man of one nomad tribe understands all nomads, though he be a chief's son, and they as poor as their own ill-fed camels. His pride was his nomad blood, for all men of the Sahara, be they princes or camel-drivers, look with scorn upon the sedentary people, those of the great plain of the Tell, and fat eaters of ripe dates in the cities.

The eight or ten black tents were gathered round one, a little higher, a little less ragged than the others—the tent of the Kebir, or headman; but it was humble enough. There would have been room and to spare for a dozen such under the *tente sultane* of the Agha, at his douar south of El Aghouat.

As Maïeddine rode up, a buzz of excitement rose in the hive. Someone ran to tell the Kebir that a great Sidi was arriving, and the headman came out from his tent, where he had been meditating or dozing after the chanting of the midday prayer—the prayer of noon.

He was a thin, elderly man, with an eagle eye to awe his women-folk, and an old burnous of sheep's wool, which was of a deep cream colour because it had not been washed for many years. Yet he smelt good, with a smell that was like the desert, and there was no foul odour in the miniature douar, as in European dwellings of the very poor. There is never a smell of uncleanness about Arabs, even those people who must perform most of the ablutions prescribed by their religion with sand instead of water. But the Saharian saying is that the desert purifies all things.

The Kebir was polite though not servile to Maïeddine, and while the horse borrowed from the Caïd was having its face economically sprinkled with water from a brown goat-skin, black coffee was being hospitably prepared for the guest by the women of the household, unveiled of course, as are all women of the nomad tribes, except those of highest birth.

Maïeddine did not want the coffee, but it would have been an insult to refuse, and he made laboured conversation with the Kebir, his eyes and thoughts fixed on the Caïd's gate and the yellow motor-car. He hardly saw the tents, beneath whose low-spread black wings eyes looked out at him, as the bright eyes of chickens look out from under the mother-hen's feathers. They were all much alike, though the Kebir's, as befitted his position, was the best, made of wide strips of black woollen material stitched together, spread tightly over stout poles, and pegged down into the hard sand. There was a partition dividing the tent in two, a partition made of one or two old haïcks, woven by hand, and if Maïeddine had been interested, he could have seen his host's bedding arranged for the day; a few coarse rugs and *frechias* piled

up carelessly, out of the way. There was a bale of camels' hair, ready for weaving, and on top of it a little boy was curled up asleep. From the tent-poles hung an animal's skin, drying, and a cradle of netted cords in which swung and slept a swaddled baby no bigger than a doll. It was a girl, therefore its eyes were blackened with kohl, and its eyebrows neatly sketched on with paint, as they had been since the unfortunate day of its birth, when the father grumbled because it was not a "child," but only a worthless female.

The mother of the four weeks' old doll, a fine young woman tinkling with Arab silver, left her carpet-weaving to grind the coffee, while her withered mother-in-law brightened with brushwood the smouldering fire of camel-dung. The women worked silently, humbly, though they would have been chattering if the great Sidi stranger had not been there; but two or three little children in orange and scarlet rags played giggling among the rubbish outside the tent—a broken bassour-frame, or palanquin, waiting to be mended; date boxes, baskets, and wooden plates; old kous-kous bowls, bundles of alfa grass, chicken feathers, and an infant goat with its mother.

The sound of children's shrill laughter, which passed unnoticed by the parents, who had it always in their ears, rasped Maëddine's nerves, and he would have liked to strike or kick the babies into silence. Most Arabs worship children, even girls, and are invariably kind to them, but to-day Maëddine hated anything that ran about disturbingly and made a noise.

Now the Caïd had reached the gate, and was talking to the men in the motor-car. Would he send them away? No, the gate was being opened by a servant. Ben Sliman must have invited the Roumis in. Possibly it was a wise

thing to do, yet how dangerous, how terribly dangerous, with Victoria perhaps peeping from one of the tiny windows at the women's corner of the house, which looked on the court! They could not see her there, but she could see them, and if she were tired of travelling and dancing attendance on a fidgety invalid—if she repented her promise to keep the secret of this journey?

Maïeddine's experience of women inclined him to think that they always did forget their promises to a man the moment his back was turned. Victoria was different from the women of his race, or those he had met in Paris, yet she was, after all, a woman; and there was no truer saying than that you might more easily prophesy the direction of the wind than say what a woman was likely to do. The coffee which the Kebir handed him made him feel sick, as if he had had a touch of the sun. What was happening up there on the hill, behind the gates which stood half open? What would she do—his Rose of the West?

XXV.

It was a relief to Stephen and Nevill to see one of the horsemen coming up the rough hill-track to the gate, and to think that they need no longer wait upon the fears or inhospitable whims of the Arab servants on the other side of the wall.

As soon as the rider came near enough for his features to be sketched in clearly, Nevill remembered having noticed him at one or two of the Governor's balls, where all Arab dignitaries, even such lesser lights as caïds and adels show themselves. But they had never met. The man was not one of the southern chiefs whom Nevill Caird had entertained at his own house.

Stephen thought that he had never seen a more personable man as the Caïd rode up to the car, saluting courteously though with no great warmth.

His face was more tanned than very dark by nature, but it seemed brown in contrast to his light hazel eyes. His features were commanding, if not handsome, and he sat his horse well. Altogether he was a notable figure in his immensely tall white turban, wound with pale grey-brown camel's-hair rope, his grey cloth burnous, embroidered with gold, flung back over an inner white burnous, his high black boots, with wrinkled brown tops, and his wonderful Kairouan hat of light straw, embroidered with a leather appliqué of coloured flowers and silver

leaves, steeple-crowned, and as big as a cart-wheel, hanging on his shoulders.

He and Nevill politely wished the blessings of Allah and Mohammed his Prophet upon each other, and Nevill then explained the errand which had brought him and his friend to the Caïd's house.

The Caïd's somewhat heavy though intelligent face did not easily show surprise. It changed not at all, though Stephen watched it closely.

"Thou art welcome to hear all I can tell of my dead relation, Ben Halim," he said. "But I know little that everybody does not know."

"It is certain, then, that Ben Halim is dead?" asked Nevill. "We had hoped that rumour lied."

"He died on his way home after a pilgrimage to Mecca," gravely replied the Caïd.

"Ah!" Nevill caught him up quickly. "We heard that it was in Constantinople."

Ben Sliman's expression was slightly strained. He glanced from Nevill's boyish face to Stephen's dark, keen one, and perhaps fancied suspicion in both. If he had intended to let the Englishman drive away in their motor-car without seeing the other side of his white wall, he now changed his mind. "If thou and thy friend care to honour this poor farm of mine by entering the gates, and drinking coffee with me," he said, "we will afterwards go down below the hill to the cemetery where my cousin's body lies buried. His tombstone will show that he was El Hadj, and that he had reached Mecca. When he was in Constantinople, he had just returned from there."

Possibly, having given the invitation by way of proving that there was nothing to conceal, Ben Sliman hoped it would not be accepted; but he was disappointed. Be-

fore the Caïd had reached the top of the hill, Nevill had told his chauffeur to stop the motor, therefore the restless panting had long ago ceased, and when Ben Sliman looked doubtfully at the car, as if wondering how it was to be got in without doing damage to his wall, Nevill said that the automobile might stay where it was. Their visit would not be long.

"But the longer the better," replied the Caïd. "When I have guests, it pains me to see them go."

He shouted a word or two in Arabic, and instantly the gates were opened. The sketchily clad brown men inside had only been waiting for a signal.

"I regret that I cannot ask my visitors into the house itself, as I have illness there," Ben Sliman announced; "but we have guest rooms here in the gate-towers. They are not what I could wish for such distinguished personages, but thou canst see, Sidi, thou and thy friend, that this is a simple farmhouse. We make no pretension to the luxury of towns, but we do what we can."

As he spoke, the brown men were scuttling about, one unfastening the door of a little tower, which stuck as if it had not been opened for a long time, another darting into the house, which appeared silent and tenantless, a third and fourth running to a more distant part, and vanishing also through a dark doorway.

The Caïd quickly ushered his guests into the tower-room, but not so quickly that the eyes of a girl, looking through a screened window, did not see and recognise both. The servant who had gone ahead unbarred a pair of wooden shutters high up in the whitewashed walls of the tower, which was stiflingly close, with a musty, animal odour. As the opening of the shutters gave light, enormous black-beetles which seemed to Stephen as large as pigeons'

eggs, crawled out from cracks between wall and floor, stumbling awkwardly about, and falling over each other. It was a disgusting sight, and did not increase the visitors' desire to accept the Caïd's hospitality for any length of time. It may be that he had thought of this. But even if he had, the servants were genuinely enthusiastic in their efforts to make the Roumis at home. The two who had run farthest returned soonest. They staggered under a load of large rugs wrapped in unbleached sheeting, and a great sack stuffed full of cushions which bulged out at the top. The sheeting they unfastened, and, taking no notice of the beetles, hurriedly spread on the rough floor several beautifully woven rugs of bright colours. Then, having laid four or five on top of one another, they clawed the cushions out of the sack, and placed them as if on a bed.

Hardly had they finished, when the first servant who had disappeared came back, carrying over his arm a folding table, and dishes in his hands. The only furniture already in the tower consisted of two long, low wooden benches without backs; and as the servant from the house set up the folding table, he who had opened the windows placed the benches, one on either side. At the same moment, through the open door, a man could be seen running with a live lamb flung over his shoulder.

"Good heavens, what is he going to do with that?" Stephen asked, stricken with a presentiment.

"I'm afraid," Nevill answered quickly in English, "that it's going to be killed for our entertainment." His pink colour faded, and in Arabic he begged the Caïd to give orders that, if the lamb were for them, its life be spared, as they were under a vow never to touch meat. This was the first excuse he could think of; and when, to his

joy, a message was sent after the slayer of innocence, he added that, very unfortunately, they had a pressing engagement which would tear them away from the Caïd's delightful house all too soon.

Perhaps the Caïd's face expressed no oppressive regret, yet he said kindly that he hoped to keep his guests at least until next morning. In the cool of the day they would see the cemetery; they would return, and eat the evening meal. It would then be time to sleep. And with a gesture he indicated the rugs and cushions, under which the beetles were now buried like mountain-dwellers beneath an avalanche.

Nevill, still pale, thanked his host earnestly, complimented the rugs, and assured the Caïd that, of course, they would be extraordinarily comfortable, but even such inducements did not make it possible for them to neglect their duty elsewhere.

"In any case we shall now eat and drink together," said Ben Sliman, pointing to the table, and towards a servant now arriving from the house with a coffee-tray. The dishes had been set down on the bare board, and one contained the usual little almond cakes, the other, a conserve of some sort bathed in honey, where already many flies were revelling. The servant who had spread the table, quietly pulled the flies out by their wings, or killed them on the edge of the dish.

Nevill, whiter than before, accepted cordially, and giving Stephen a glance of despair, which said: "Noblesse oblige," he thrust his fingers into the honey, where there were fewest flies, and took out a sweetmeat. Stephen did the same. All three ate, and drank sweet black *café maure*. Once the Caïd turned to glance at something outside the door, and his secretive, light grey eyes were

troubled. As they ate and drank, they talked, Nevill tactfully catechising, the Caïd answering with pleasant frankness. He did not enquire why they wished to have news of Ben Halim, who had once lived in the house for a short time, and had now long been dead. Perhaps he wished to give the Roumis a lesson in discretion; but as their friendliness increased over the dripping sweets, Nevill ventured to ask a crucial question. What had become of Ben Halim's American wife?

Then, for the first time, the Caïd frowned, very slightly, but it was plain to see he thought a liberty had been taken which, as host, he was unable to resent.

"I know nothing of my dead cousin's family," he said. "No doubt its members went with him, if not to Mecca, at least a part of the way, and if any such persons wished to return to Europe after his death, it is certain they would have been at liberty to do so. This house my cousin wished me to have, and I took possession of it in due time, finding it empty and in good order. If you search for anyone, I should advise searching in France or, perhaps, in America. Unluckily, there I cannot help. But when it is cool, we will go to the cemetery. Let us go after the prayer, the prayer of *Moghreb*."

But Nevill was reluctant. So was Stephen, when the proposal was explained. They wished to go while it was still hot, or not at all. It may be that even this eccentric proposal did not surprise or grieve the Caïd, though as a rule he was not fond of being out of doors in the glare of the sun.

He agreed to the suggestion that the motor-car should take all three down the hill, but said that he would prefer to walk back.

The "teuf-teuf" of the engine began once more out-

side the white gates; and for the second time Victoria flew to the window, pressing her face against the thick green moucharabia which excluded flies and prevented anyone outside from seeing what went on within.

"Calm thyself, O Rose," urged the feeble voice of Lella M'Barka. "Thou hast said these men are nothing to thee."

"One is my friend," the girl pleaded, with a glance at the high couch of rugs on which M'Barka lay.

"A young girl cannot have a man for a friend. He may be a lover or a husband, but never a friend. Thou knowest this in thy heart, O Rose, and thou hast sworn to me that never hast thou had a lover."

Victoria did not care to argue. "I am sure he has come here to try and find me. He is anxious. That is very good of him—all the more, because we are nothing to each other. How can I let him go away without a word? It is too hard-hearted. I do think, if Si Maïeddine were here, he would say so too. He would let me see Mr. Knight and just tell him that I'm perfectly safe and on the way to my sister. That once she lived in this house, and I hoped to find her here, but——"

"Maïeddine would not wish thee to tell the young man these things, or any other things, or show thyself to him at all," M'Barka persisted, lifting herself on the bed in growing excitement. "Dost thou not guess, he runs many dangers in guiding thee to the wife of a man who is as one dead? Dost thou wish to ruin him who risks his whole future to content thee?"

"No, of course I would do nothing which could bring harm to Si Maïeddine," Victoria said, the eagerness dying out of her voice. "I have kept my word with him. I have let nobody know—nobody at all. But we could

trust Mr. Knight and Mr. Caird. And to see them there, in the courtyard, and let them go—it is too much!”

“Why shouldst thou consider me, whom thou hast known but a few days, when thou wouldst be hurrying on towards thy sister Saïda? Yet it will surely be my death if thou makest any sign to those men. My heart would cease to beat. It beats but weakly now.”

With a sigh, Victoria turned away from the moucharabia, and crossing the room to M'Barka, sat down on a rug by the side of her couch. “I do consider thee,” she said. “If it were not for thee and Si Maïeddine, I might not be able to get to Saïdee at all; so I must not mind being delayed a few days. It is worse for thee than for me, because thou art suffering.”

“When a true believer lies ill for more than three days, his sins are all forgiven him,” M'Barka consoled herself. She put out a hot hand, and laid it on Victoria's head. “Thou art a good child. Thou hast given up thine own will to do what is right.”

“I'm not quite sure at this moment that I am doing what is right,” murmured Victoria. “But I can't make thee more ill than thou art; so I must let Mr. Knight go. And probably I shall never see him, never hear of him again. He will look for me, and then he will grow tired, and perhaps go home to England before I can write to let him know I am safe with Saïdee.” Her voice broke a little. She bent down her head, and there were tears in her eyes.

She heard the creaking of the gate as it shut. The motor-car had gone panting away. For a moment it seemed as if her heart would break. Just one glimpse had she caught of Stephen's face, and it had looked to her more than ever like the face of a knight who would

fight to the death for a good cause. She had not quite realised how noble a face it was, or how hard it would be to let it pass out of her life. He would always hate her if he guessed she had sat there, knowing he had come so far for her sake—she was sure it was for her sake—and had made no sign. But he would not guess. And it was true, as Lella M'Barka said, he was nothing to her. Saidee was everything. And she was going to Saidee. She must think only of Saidee, and the day of their meeting.

Stephen had never seen an Arab cemetery; and it seemed to him that this Mussulman burial-place, scattered over two low hills, in the midst of desert wastes, was beautiful and pathetic. The afternoon sunshine beat upon the koubbahs of marabouts, and the plastered graves or headstones of less important folk; but so pearly pale were they all that the golden quality of the light was blanched as if by some strange, white magic, and became like moonlight shining on a field of snow.

There were no names on any of the tombs, even the grandest. Here and there on a woman's grave was a hand of Fatma, or a pair of the Prophet's slippers; and on those of a few men were turbans carved in marble, to tell that the dead had made pilgrimage to Mecca. All faces were turned towards the sacred city, as Mussulmans turn when they kneel to pray, in mosque or in desert; and the white slabs, narrow or broad, long or short, ornamental or plain, flat or roofed with fantastic maraboutic domes, were placed very close together. At one end of the cemetery, only bits of pottery marked the graves; yet each bit was a little different from the other, meaning as much to those who had placed them there

as names and epitaphs in European burial grounds. On the snowy headstones and flat platforms, drops of rose-coloured wax from little candles, lay like tears of blood shed by the mourners, and there was a scattered spray of faded orange blossoms, brought by some loving hand from a far-away garden in an oasis.

"Here lies my cousin, Cassim ben Halim," said the Caïd, pointing to a grave comparatively new, surmounted at the head with a carved turban. Nearer to it than any other tomb was that of a woman, beautified with the Prophet's slippers.

"Is it possible that his wife lies beside him?" Stephen made Nevill ask.

"It is a lady of his house. I can say no more. When his body was brought here, hers was brought also, in a coffin, which is permitted to the women of Islam, with the request that it should be placed near my cousin's tomb. This was done; and it is all I can tell, because it is all I know."

The Arab looked the Englishman straight in the eyes as he answered; and Stephen felt that in this place, so simple, so peaceful, so near to nature's heart, it would be difficult for a man to lie to another, even though that man were a son of Islam, the other a "dog of a Christian." For the first time he began to believe that Cassim ben Halim had in truth died, and that Victoria Ray's sister was perhaps dead also. Her death alone could satisfactorily explain her long silence. And against the circumstantial evidence of this little grave, adorned with the slippers of the Prophet, there was only a girl's impression—Victoria's feeling that, if Saidee were dead, she "must have known."

The two friends stood for awhile by the white graves, where the sunshine lay like moonlight on snow; and then,

because there was nothing more for them to do in that place, they thanked the Caïd, and made ready to go their way. Again he politely refused their offer to drive him up to his own gate, and bade them good-bye when they had got into the car. He stood and watched it go bumping away over the rough, desert road, pieces of which had been gnawed off by a late flood, as a cake is bitten round the edge by a greedy child.

They had had enough of motor-cars for that day, up there on the hill! The Caïd was glad when the sound died. The machine was no more suited to his country, he thought, than were the men of Europe who tore about the world in it, trying to interfere in other people's business.

"El hamdou-lillah! God be praised!" he whispered, as the yellow automobile vanished from sight and Maïed-dine came out from the cluster of black tents in the yellow sand.

XXVI.

NEXT day, Lella M'Barka was well enough to begin the march again. They started, in the same curtained carriage, at that moment before dawn while it is still dark, and a thin white cloth seems spread over the dead face of night. Then day came trembling along the horizon, and the shadows of horses and carriage grew long and grotesquely deformed. It was the time, M'Barka said, when Chitan the devil, and the evil Djenoun that possess people's minds and drive them insane, were most powerful; and she would hardly listen when Victoria answered that she did not believe in Djenoun.

In a long day, they came to Bou-Saada, reaching the hidden oasis after nightfall, and staying in the house of the Caïd with whom Stephen and Nevill had talked of Ben Halim. Lella M'Barka was related to the Caïd's wife, and was so happy in meeting a cousin after years of separation, that the fever in her blood was cooled; and in the morning she was able to go on.

Then came two days of driving to Djelfa, at first in a country strange enough to be Djinn-haunted, a country of gloomy mountains, and deep water-courses like badly healed wounds; passing through dry river-beds, and over broken roads with here and there a bordj where men brought water to the mules, in skins held together with ropes of straw. At last, after a night, not too comfort-

able, spent in a dismal bordj, they came to a wilderness which any fairytale-teller would have called the end of the world. The road had dwindled to a track across gloomy desert, all the more desolate, somehow, because of the dry esparto grass growing thinly among stones. Nothing seemed to live or move in this world, except a lizard that whisked its grey-green length across the road, a long-legged bird which hopped gloomily out of the way, or a few ragged black and white sheep with nobody to drive them. In the heat of the day nothing stirred, not even the air, though the distance shimmered and trembled with heat; but towards night jackals padded lithely from one rock shelter to another. The carriage drove through a vast plain, rimmed with far-away mountains, red as porphyry, but fading to purple at the horizon. Victoria felt that she would never come to the end of this plain, that it must finish only with eternity; and she wished in an occasional burst of impatience that she were travelling in Nevill Caird's motor-car. She could reach her sister in a third of the time! She told herself that these thoughts were ungrateful to Maïeddine, who was doing so much for her sake, and she kept up her spirits whether they dragged on tediously, or stopped by the way to eat, or to let M'Barka rest. She tried to control her restlessness, but feared that Maïeddine saw it, for he took pains to explain, more than once, how necessary was the detour they were making. Along this route he had friends who were glad to entertain them at night, and give them mules or horses, and besides, it was an advantage that the way should be unfrequented by Europeans. He cheered her by describing the interest of the journey when, by-and-by, she would ride a mehari, sitting in a bassour, made of branches heated and bent into shape like a great cage,

lined and draped with soft haoulis of beautiful colours, and comfortably cushioned. It would not be long now before they should come to the douar of his father the Agha, beyond El Aghouat. She would have a wonderful experience there; and according to Maïeddine, all the rest of the journey would be an enchantment. Never for a moment would he let her tire. Oh, he would promise that she should be half sorry when the last day came! As for Lella M'Barka, the Rose of the West need not fear, for the bassour was easy as a cradle to a woman of the desert; and M'Barka, rightfully a princess of Touggourt, was desert-born and bred.

Queer little patches of growing grain, or miniature orchards enlivened the dull plain round the ugly Saharian town of Djelfa, headquarters of the Ouled Naïls. The place looked unprepossessingly new and French, and obtrusively military; dismal, too, in the dusty sand which a wailing wind blew through the streets; but scarcely a Frenchman was to be seen, except the soldiers. Many Arabs worked with surprising briskness at the loading or unloading of great carts, men of the Ouled Naïls, with eyes more mysterious than the eyes of veiled women; tall fellows wearing high shoes of soft, pale brown leather made for walking long distances in heavy sand; and Maïeddine said that there was great traffic and commerce between Djelfa and the M'Zab country, where she and he and M'Barka would arrive presently, after passing his father's douar.

Maïeddine was uneasy until they were out of Djelfa, for, though few Europeans travelled that way, and the road is hideous for motors, still it was not impossible that a certain yellow car had slipped in before them, to lie in wait. The Caïd's house, where they spent that night, was

outside the town, and behind its closed doors and little windows there was no fear of intruders. It was good to be sure of shelter and security under a friend's roof; and so far, in spite of the adventure at Ben Sliman's, everything was going well enough. Only—Maïeddine was a little disappointed in Victoria's manner towards himself. She was sweet and friendly, and grateful for all he did, but she did not seem interested in him as a man. He felt that she was eager to get on, that she was counting the days, not because of any pleasure they might bring in his society, but to make them pass more quickly. Still, with the deep-rooted patience of the Arab, he went on hoping. His father, Agha of the Ouled-Serrin, reigned in the desert like a petty king. Maïeddine thought that the douar and the Agha's state must impress her; and the journey on from there would be a splendid experience, different indeed from this interminable jogging along, cramped up in a carriage, with M'Barka sighing, or leaning a heavy head on the girl's shoulder. Out in the open, Victoria in her *bassour*, he on the horse which he would take from his father's *goum*, travelling would be pure joy. And Maïeddine had been saving up many surprises for that time, things he meant to do for the girl, which must turn her heart towards him.

Beyond Djelfa, on the low mountains that alone broke the monotony of the dismal plain, little watch-towers rose dark along the sky-line—watch-towers old as Roman days. Sometimes the travellers met a mounted man wearing a long, hooded cloak over his white burnous; a cavalier of the Bureau Arabe, or native policeman on his beat, under the authority of a civil organisation more powerful in the Sahara than the army. These men, riding alone, saluted Si Maïeddine almost with reverence, and Lella M'Barka

told Victoria, with pride, that her cousin was immensely respected by the French Government. He had done much for France in the far south, where his family influence was great, and he had adjusted difficulties between the desert men and their rulers. "He is more tolerant than I, to those through whom Allah has punished us for our sins," said the woman of the Sahara. "I was brought up in an older school; and though I may love one of the Roumis, as I have learned to love thee, oh White Rose, I cannot love whole Christian nations. Maïeddine is wiser than I, yet I would not change my opinions for his; unless, as I often think, he really——" she stopped suddenly, frowning at herself. "This dreariness is not *our* desert," she explained eagerly to the girl, as the horses dragged the carriage over the sandy earth, through whose hard brown surface the harsh, colourless blades of *drinn* pricked like a few sparse hairs on the head of a shrivelled old man. "In the Sahara, there are four kinds of desert, because Allah put four angels in charge, giving each his own portion. The Angel of the Chebka was cold of nature, with no kindness in his heart, and was jealous of the others; so the Chebka is desolate, sown with sharp rocks which were upheaved from under the earth before man came, and its dark ravines are still haunted by evil spirits. The Angel of the Hameda was careless, and forgot to pray for cool valleys and good water, so the Hameda hardened into a great plateau of rock. The Angel of the Gaci was loved by a *hourî*, who appeared to him and danced on the firm sand of his desert. Vanishing, she scattered many jewels, and fruits from the celestial gardens which turned into beautifully coloured stones as they fell, and there they have lain from that day to this. But best of all was the Angel of the

Erg, our desert—desert of the shifting dunes, never twice the same, yet always more beautiful to-day than yesterday; treacherous to strangers, but kind as the bosom of a mother to her children. The first three angels were men, but the fourth and best is the angel woman who sows the heaven with stars, for lamps to light her own desert, and all the world beside, even the world of infidels.”

M'Barka and Maïeddine both talked a great deal of El Aghouat, which M'Barka called the desert pearl, next in beauty to her own wild Touggourt, and Maïeddine laughingly likened the oasis-town to Paris. “It is the Paris of our Sahara,” he said, “and all the desert men, from Caïds to camel-drivers, look forward to its pleasures.”

He planned to let the girl see El Aghouat for the first time at sunset. That was to be one of his surprises. By nature he was dramatic; and the birth of the sun and the death of the sun are the great dramas of the desert. He wished to be the hero of such a drama for Victoria, with El Aghouat for his background; for there he was leading her in at the gate of his own country.

When they had passed the strange rock-shape known as the Chapeau de Gendarme, and the line of mountains which is like the great wall of China, Maïeddine defied the danger he had never quite ceased to fear during the five long days since the adventure on the other side of Bou-Saada. He ordered the carriage curtains to be rolled up as tightly as they would go, and Victoria saw a place so beautiful that it was like the secret garden of some Eastern king. It was as if they had driven abruptly over the edge of a vast bowl half filled with gold dust, and ringed round its rim with quivering rosy flames. Perhaps the king of the garden had a dragon whose business it

was to keep the fire always alight to prevent robbers from coming to steal the gold dust; and so ardently had it been blazing there for centuries, that all the sky up to the zenith had caught fire, burning with so dazzling an intensity of violet that Victoria thought she could warm her hands in its reflection on the sand. In the azure crucible diamonds were melting, boiling up in a radiant spray, but suddenly the violet splendour was cooled, and after a vague quivering of rainbow tints, the celestial rose-tree of the Sahara sunset climbed blossoming over the whole blue dome, east, west, north and south.

In the bottom of the golden bowl, there was a river bed to cross, on a bridge of planks, but among the burning stones trickled a mere runnel of water, bright as spilt mercury. And Maïeddine chose the moment when the minarets of El Aghouat rose from a sea of palms, to point out the strange, pale hills crowned by old koubbahs of marabouts and the military hospital. He told the story of the Arab revolt of fifty odd years ago; and while he praised the gallantry of the French, Victoria saw in his eyes, heard in the thrill of his voice, that his admiration was for his own people. This made her thoughtful, for though it was natural enough to sympathise with the Arabs who had stood the siege and been reconquered after desperate fighting, until now his point of view had seemed to be the modern, progressive, French point of view. Quickly the question flashed through her mind—“Is he letting himself go, showing me his real self, because I'm in the desert with him, and he thinks I'll never go back among Europeans?”

She shivered a little at the thought, but she put it away with the doubt of Maïeddine that came with it. Never had he given her the least cause to fear him, and

she would go on trusting in his good faith, as she had trusted from the first.

Still, there was that creeping chill, in contrast to the warm glory of the sunset, which seemed to shame it by giving a glimpse of the desert's heart, which was Maïeddine's heart. She hurried to say how beautiful was El Aghouat; and that night, in the house of the Caïd (an uncle of Maïeddine's on his mother's side), as the women grouped round her, hospitable and admiring, she reproached herself again for her suspicion. The wife of the Caïd was dignified and gentle. There were daughters growing up, and though they knew nothing, or seemed to know nothing, of Saidee, they were sure that, if Maïeddine knew, all was well. Because they were his cousins they had seen and been seen by him, and the young girls poured out all the untaught romance of their little dim souls in praise of Maïeddine. Once they were on the point of saying something which their mother seemed to think indiscreet, and checked them quickly. Then they stopped, laughing; and their laughter, like the laughter of little children, was so contagious that Victoria laughed too.

There was some dreadful European furniture of sprawling, "nouveau art" design in the guest-room which she and Lella M'Barka shared; and as Victoria lay awake on the hard bed, of which the girls were proud, she said to herself that she had not been half grateful enough to Si Maïeddine. For ten years she had tried to find Saidee, and until the other day she had been little nearer her heart's desire than when she was a child, hoping and longing in the school garret. Now Maïeddine had made the way easy—almost too easy, for the road to the golden silence had become so wonderful that she was tempted to forget her haste to reach the end.

XXVII.

"THERE is my father's douar," said Si Maïeddine; and Victoria's eyes followed his pointing finger.

Into a stony and desolate waste had billowed one golden wave of sand, and on the fringe of this wave, the girl saw a village of tents, black and brown, lying closely together, as a fleet of dark fishing-boats lie in the water. There were many little tents, very flat and low, crouched around one which even at a distance was conspicuous for its enormous size. It looked like a squatting giant among an army of pigmies; and the level light of late afternoon gave extraordinary value to its colours, which were brighter and newer than those of the lesser tents. As their swaying carriage brought the travellers nearer, Victoria could see deep red and brown stripes, separated by narrow bands of white. For background, there was a knot of trees; for they had come south of El Aghouat to the strange region of dayas, where the stony desolation is broken by little emerald hollows, running with water, like big round bowls stuck full of delicate greenery and blossoms.

Suddenly, as Victoria looked, figures began running about, and almost before she had time to speak, ten or a dozen men in white, mounted on horses, came speeding across the desert.

A stain of red showed in Maïeddine's cheeks, and his eyes lighted up. "They have been watching, expecting

us," he said. "Now my father is sending men to bid us welcome."

"Perhaps he is coming himself," said Victoria, for there was one figure riding in the centre which seemed to her more splendidly dignified than the others, though all were magnificent horsemen.

"No. It would not be right that the Agha himself should come to meet his son," Maïeddine explained. "Besides he would be wearing a scarlet burnous, embroidered with gold. He does me enough honour in sending out the pick of his goum, which is among the finest of the Sahara."

Victoria had picked up a great deal of desert lore by this time, and knew that the "pick of the goum" would mean the best horses in the Agha's stables, the crack riders among his trained men—fighting men, such as he would give to the Government, if Arab soldiers were needed.

The dozen cavaliers swept over the desert, making the sand fly up under the horses' hoofs in a yellow spray; and nearing the carriage they spread themselves in a semicircle, the man Victoria had mistaken for the Agha riding forward to speak to Maïeddine.

"It is my brother-in-law, Abderrhaman ben Douadi," exclaimed Maïeddine, waving his hand.

M'Barka pulled her veil closer, and because she did so, Victoria hid her face also, rather than shock the Arab woman's prejudices.

At a word from his master, the driver stopped his mules so quickly as to bring them on their haunches, and Maïeddine sprang out. He and his brother-in-law, a stately dark man with a short black beard under an eagle nose, exchanged courtesies which seemed elaborate to

Victoria's European ideas, and Si Abderrhaman did not glance at the half-lowered curtains behind which the women sat.

The men talked for a few minutes; then Maïeddine got into the carriage again; and surrounded by the riders, it was driven rapidly towards the tents, rocking wildly in the sand, because now it had left the desert road and was making straight for the zmla.

The Arab men on their Arab horses shouted as they rode, as if giving a signal; and from the tents, reddened now by the declining sun, came suddenly a strange crying in women's voices, shrill yet sweet; a sound that was half a chant, half an eerie yodelling, note after note of "you-you!—you-you!" Out from behind the zeribas, rough hedges of dead boughs and brambles which protected each low tent, burst a tidal wave of children, some gay as little bright butterflies in gorgeous dresses, others wrapped in brilliant rags. From under the tents women appeared, unveiled, and beautiful in the sunset light, with their heavy looped braids and their dangling, clanking silver jewellery. "You-you! you-you!" they cried, dark eyes gleaming, white teeth flashing. It was to be a festival for the douar, this fortunate evening of the son and heir's arrival, with a great lady of his house, and her friend, a Roumia girl. There was joy for everyone, for the Agha's relatives, and for each man, woman and child in the zmla, mighty ones, or humble members of the tribe, the Ouled-Serrin. There would be feasting, and after dark, to give pleasure to the Roumia, the men would make the powder speak. It was like a wedding; and best of all, an exciting rumour had gone round the douar, concerning the foreign girl and the Agha's son, Si Maïeddine.

The romance in Victoria's nature was stirred by her

reception; by the white-clad riders on their slender horses, and the wild "you-yous" of the women and little girls. Maïeddine saw her excitement and thrilled to it. This was his great hour. All that had gone before had been leading up to this day, and to the days to come, when they would be in the fiery heart of the desert together, lost to all her friends whom he hated with a jealous hatred. He helped M'Barka to descend from the carriage: then, as she was received at the tent door by the Agha himself, Maïeddine forgot his self-restraint, and swung the girl down, with tingling hands that clasped her waist, as if at last she belonged to him.

Half fearful of what he had done, lest she should take alarm at his sudden change of manner, he studied her face anxiously as he set her feet to the ground. But there was no cause for uneasiness. So far from resenting the liberty he had taken after so many days of almost ostentatious respect, Victoria was not even thinking of him, and her indifference would have been a blow, if he had not been too greatly relieved to be hurt by it. She was looking at his father, the Agha, who seemed to her the embodiment of some biblical patriarch. All through her long desert journey, she had felt as if she had wandered into a dream of the Old Testament. There was nothing there more modern than "Bible days," as she said to herself, simply, except the French quarters in the few Arab towns through which they had passed.

Not yet, however, had she seen any figure as venerable as the Agha's, and she thought at once of Abraham at his tent door. Just such a man as this Abraham must have been in his old age. She could even imagine him ready to sacrifice a son, if he believed it to be the will of Allah; and Maïeddine became of more importance in

her eyes because of his relationship to this kingly patriarch of the Sahara.

Having greeted his niece, Lella M'Barka, and passed her hospitably into the tent where women were dimly visible, the Agha turned to Maïeddine and Victoria.

"The blessing of Allah be upon thee, O my son," he said, "and upon thee, little daughter. My son's messenger brought word of thy coming, and thou art welcome as a silver shower of rain after a long drought in the desert. Be thou as a child of my house, while thou art in my tent."

As she gave him her hand, her veil fell away from her face, and he saw its beauty with the benevolent admiration of an old man whose blood has cooled. He was so tall that the erect, thin figure reminded Victoria of a lonely desert palm. The young girl was no stern critic, and was more inclined to see good than evil in everyone she met; therefore to her the long snowy beard, the large dreamy eyes under brows like Maïeddine's, and the slow, benevolent smile of the Agha meant nobility of character. Her heart was warm for the splendid old man, and he was not unaware of the impression he had made. As he bowed her into the tent where his wife and sister and daughter were crowding round M'Barka, he said in a low voice to Maïeddine: "It is well, my son. Being a man, and young, thou couldst not have withstood her. When the time is ripe, she will become a daughter of Islam, because for love of thee, she will wish to fulfil thine heart's desire."

"She does not yet know that she loves me," Maïeddine answered. "But when thou hast given me the white stallion El Biod, and I ride beside the girl in her bassour

through the long days and the long distances, I shall teach her, in the way the Roumi men teach their women to love."

"But if thou shouldst not teach her?"

"My life is in it, and I shall teach her," said Ma'eddine. "But if Chitan stands between, and I fail—which I will not do—why, even so, it will come to the same thing in the end, because——"

"Thou wouldst say——"

"It is well to know one's own meaning, and to speak of—date stones. Yet with one's father, one can open one's heart. He to whom I go has need of my services, and what he has for twelve months vainly asked me to do, I will promise to do, for the girl's sake, if I cannot win her without."

"Take care! Thou enterest a dangerous path," said the old man.

"Yet often I have thought of entering there, before I saw this girl's face."

"There might be a great reward in this life, and in the life beyond. Yet once the first step is taken, it is irrevocable. In any case, commit me to nothing with him to whom thou goest. He is eaten up with zeal. He is a devouring fire—and all is fuel for that fire."

"I will commit thee to nothing without thy full permission, O my father."

"And for thyself, think twice before thou killest the sheep. Remember our desert saying. 'Who kills a sheep, kills a bee. Who kills a bee, kills a palm, and who kills a palm, kills seventy prophets.'"

"I would give my sword to the prophets to aid them in killing those who are not prophets."

"Thou art faithful. Yet let the rain of reason fall on

thy head and on thine heart, before thou givest thy sword into the hand of him who waits thine answer."

"Thine advice is of the value of many dates, even of the *deglet nour*, the jewel date, which only the rich can eat."

The old man laid his hand, still strong and firm, on his son's shoulder, and together they went into the great tent, that part of it where the women were, for all were closely related to them, excepting the Roumia, who had been received as a daughter of the house.

When it was evening, the douar feasted, in honour of the guests who had come to the *tente sultane*. The Agha had given orders that two sheep should be killed. One was for his own household; his relatives, his servants, many of whom lived under the one vast roof of red, and white, and brown. His daughter, and her husband who assisted him in many ways, and was his scribe, or secretary, had a tent of their own close by, next in size to the Agha's; but they were bidden to supper in the great tent that night, for the family reunion. And because there was a European girl present, the women ate with the men, which was not usual.

The second sheep was for the humbler folk of the *zmala*, and they roasted it whole in an open space, over a fire of small, dry wood, and of dead palm-branches brought on donkey back twenty miles across the desert, from the nearest oasis town, also under dominion of the Agha. He had a house and garden there; but he liked best to be in his douar, with only his tent roof between him and the sky. Also it made him popular with the tribe of which he was the head, to spend most of his time with them in the desert. And for some reasons of which he

never spoke, the old man greatly valued this popularity, though he treasured also the respect of the French, who assured his position and revenues.

The desert men had made a ring round the fire, far from the green *daya*, so that the blowing sparks might not reach the trees. They sat in a circle, on the sand, with a row of women on one side, who held the smallest children by their short skirts; and larger children, wild and dark, as the red light of the flames played over their faces, fed the fire with pale palm-branches. There was no moon, but a fountain of sparks spouted towards the stars; and though it was night, the sky was blue with the fierce blue of steel. Some of the Agha's black Soudanese servants had made kous-kous of semolina with a little mutton and a great many red peppers. This they gave to the crowd, in huge wooden bowls; and the richer people boiled coffee which they drank themselves, and offered to those sitting nearest them.

When everybody had eaten, the powder play began round the fire, and at each explosion the women shrilled out their "you-you, you-you!" But this was all for the entertainment of outsiders. Inside the Agha's tent, the family took their pleasure more quietly.

Though a house of canvas, there were many divisions into rooms. The Agha's wife had hers, separated completely from her sister's, and there was space for guests, besides the Agha's own quarters, his reception-room, his dining-room (invaded to-night by all his family) the kitchen, and sleeping place for a number of servants.

There were many dishes besides the inevitable cheurba, or Arab soup, the kous-kous, the mechoui, lamb roasted over the fire. Victoria was almost sickened by the succession of sweet things, cakes and sugared preserves,

made by the hands of the Agha's wife, Alonda, who in the Roumia's eyes was as like Sarah as the Agha was like Abraham. Yet everything was delicious; and after the meal, when the coffee came, lagmi, the desert wine distilled from the heart of a palm-tree, was pressed upon Victoria. All drank a little, for, said Lella Alonda, though strong drink was forbidden by the Prophet, the palms were dear to him, and besides, in the throats of good men and women, wine was turned to milk, as Sidi Aissa of the Christians turned water to wine at the marriage feast.

When they had finished at last, a Soudanese woman poured rose-water over their hands, from a copper jug, and wiped them with a large damask napkin, embroidered by Aichouch, the pretty, somewhat coquettish married daughter of the house, Ma'eddine's only sister. The rose-water had been distilled by Lella Fatma, the widowed sister of Alonda, who shared the hospitality of the Agha's roof, in village or douar. Everyone questioned Victoria, and made much of her, even the Agha; but, though they asked her opinions of Africa, and talked of her journey across the sea, they did not speak of her past life or of her future. Not a word was said concerning her mission, or Ben Halim's wife, the sister for whom she searched.

While they were still at supper, the black servants who had waited upon them went quietly away, but slightly raised the heavy red drapery which formed the partition between that room and another. They looped up the thick curtain only a little way, but there was a light on the other side, and Victoria, curious as to what would happen next, spied the servants' black legs moving about, watched a rough wooden bench placed on the blue and

crimson rugs of Djebel Amour, and presently saw other black legs under a white burnous coil themselves upon the low seat.

Then began strange music, the first sound of which made Victoria's heart leap. It was the first time she had heard the music of Africa, except a distant beating of tobols coming from a black tent across desert spaces, while she had lain at night in the house of Maïeddine's friends; or the faint, pure note of a henna-dyed flute in the hand of some boy keeper of goats—a note pure as the monotonous purling of water, heard in the dark.

But this music was so close to her, that it was like the throbbing of her own heart. And it was no sweet, pure trickle of silver, but the cry of passion, passion as old and as burning as the desert sands outside the lighted tent. As she listened, struck into pulsing silence, she could see the colour of the music; a deep crimson, which flamed into scarlet as the tom-tom beat, or deepened to violent purple, wicked as belladonna-flowers. The wailing of the raïta mingled with the heavy throbbing of the tom-tom, and filled the girl's heart with a vague foreboding, a yearning for something she had not known, and did not understand. Yet it seemed that she must have both known and understood long ago, before memory recorded anything—perhaps in some forgotten incarnation. For the music and what it said, monotonously yet fiercely, was old as the beginnings of the world, old and changeless as the patterns of the stars embroidered on the astrological scroll of the sky. The hoarse derbouka, and the languorous ghesbah joined in with the savage tobol and the strident raïta; and under all was the tired heart-beat of the bendir, dull yet resonant, and curiously exciting to the nerves.

Victoria's head swam. She wondered if it were wholly the effect of the African music, or if the lagmi she had sipped was mounting to her brain. She grew painfully conscious of every physical sense, and it was hard to sit and listen. She longed to spring up and dance in time to the droning, and throbbing, and crying of the primitive instruments which the Negroes played behind the red curtain. She felt that she must dance, a new, strange dance the idea of which was growing in her mind, and becoming an obsession. She could see it as if she were looking at a picture; yet it was only her nerves and her blood that bade her dance. Her reason told her to sit still. Striving to control herself she shut her eyes, and would have shut her ears too, if she could. But the music was loud in them. It made her see desert rivers rising after floods, and water pounding against the walls of underground caverns. It made her hear the wild, fierce love-call of a desert bird to its mate.

She could bear it no longer. She sprang up, her eyes shining, her cheeks red. "May I dance for you to that music, Lella Alonda?" she said to the Agha's wife. "I think I could. I long to try."

Lella Alonda, who was old, and accustomed only to the dancing of the Almehs, which she thought shameful, was scandalised at the thought that the young girl would willingly dance before men. She was dumb, not knowing what answer to give, that need not offend a guest, but which might save the Roumia from indiscretion.

The Agha, however, was enchanted. He was a man of the world still, though he was aged now, and he had been to Paris, as well as many times to Algiers. He knew that European ladies danced with men of their acquaintance, and he was curious to see what this beautiful child

wished to do. He glanced at Maïeddine, and spoke to his wife: "Tell the little White Rose to dance; that it will give us pleasure."

"Dance then, in thine own way, O daughter," Lella Alonda was forced to say; for it did not even occur to her that she might disobey her husband.

Victoria smiled at them all; at M'Barka and Aichouch, and Aichouch's dignified husband, Si Abderrhaman: at Alonda and the Agha, and at Maïeddine, as, when a child, she would have smiled at her sister, when beginning a dance made up from one of Saidee's stories.

She had told Stephen of an Eastern dance she knew, but this was something different, more thrilling and wonderful, which the wild music put into her heart. At first, she hardly knew what was the meaning she felt impelled to express by gesture and pose. The spirit of the desert sang to her, a song of love, a song old as the love-story of Eve; and though the secret of that song was partly hidden from her as yet, she must try to find it out for herself, and picture it to others, by dancing.

Always before, when she danced, Victoria had called up the face of her sister, to keep before her eyes as an inspiration. But now, as she bent and swayed to catch the spirit's whispers, as wheat sways to the whisper of the wind, it was a man's face she saw. Stephen Knight seemed to stand in the tent, looking at her with a curiously wistful, longing look, over the heads of the Arab audience, who sat on their low divans and piled carpets.

She thrilled to the look, and the desert spirit made her screen her face from it, with a sequined gauze scarf which she wore. For a few measures she danced behind the glittering veil, then with a sudden impulse which the music gave, she tossed it back, holding out her arms, and

smiling up to Stephen's eyes, above the brown faces, with a sweet smile very mysterious to the watchers. Consciously she called to Stephen then, as she had promised she would call, if she should ever need him, for somehow she did need and want him;—not for his help in finding Saidee: she was satisfied with all that Maïeddine was doing—but for herself. The secret of the music which she had been trying to find out, was in his eyes, and learning it slowly, made her more beautiful, more womanly, than she had ever been before. As she danced on, the two long plaits of her red hair loosened and shook out into curls which played round her white figure like flames. Her hands fluttered on the air as they rose and fell like the little white wings of a dove; and she was dazzling as a brandished torch, in the ill-lit tent with its dark hangings.

M'Barka had given her a necklace of black beads which the negresses had made of benzoin and rose-leaves and spices, held in shape with pungent resin. Worn on the warm flesh, the beads gave out a heady perfume, which was like the breath of the desert. It made the girl giddy, and it grew stronger and sweeter as she danced, seeming to mingle with the crying of the raïta and the sobbing of the ghesbah, so that she confused fragrance with music, music with fragrance.

Maïeddine stared at her, like a man who dreams with his eyes open. If he had been alone, he could have watched her dance on for hours, and wished that she would never stop; but there were other men in the tent, and he had a maddening desire to snatch the girl in his arms, smothering her in his burnous, and rushing away with her into the desert.

Her dancing astonished him. He did not know what to make of it, for she had told him nothing about her-

self, except what concerned her errand in Africa. Though he had been in Paris when she was there, he had been deeply absorbed in business vital to his career, and had not heard of Victoria Ray the dancer, or seen her name on the hoardings.

Like his father, he knew that European women who danced were not as the African dancers, the Ouled Naïls and the girls of Djebel Amour. But an Arab may have learned to know many things with his mind which he cannot feel with his heart; and with his heart Maïeddine felt a wish to blind Abderrhaman, because his eyes had seen the intoxicating beauty of Victoria as she danced. He was ferociously angry, but not with the girl. Perhaps with himself, because he was powerless to hide her from others, and to order her life as he chose. Yet there was a kind of delicious pain in knowing himself at her mercy, as no Arab man could be at the mercy of an Arab woman.

The sight of Victoria dancing, had shot new colours into his existence. He understood her less, and valued her more than before, a thousand times more, achingly, torturingly more. Since their first meeting on the boat, he had admired the American girl immensely. Her whiteness, the golden-red of her hair, the blueness of her eyes had meant perfection for him. He had wanted her because she was the most beautiful creature he had seen, because she was a Christian and difficult to win; also because the contrast between her childishness and brave independence was piquant. Apart from that contrast, he had not thought much about her nature. He had looked upon her simply as a beautiful girl, who could not be bought, but must be won. Now she had become a be-

wildering houri. Nothing which life could give him would make up for the loss of her. There was nothing he would not do to have her, or at least to put her beyond the reach of others.

If necessary, he would even break his promise to the Agha.

While she danced inside the great tent, outside in the open space round the fire, the dwellers in the little tents sat with their knees in their arms watching the dancing of two young Negroes from the Soudan. The blacks had torn their turbans from their shaven heads, and thrown aside their burnouses. Naked to their waists, with short, loose trousers, and sashes which other men seized, to swing the wearers round and round, their sweating skin had the gloss of ebony. It was a whirlwind of a dance, and an old wizard with a tom-tom, and a dark giant with metal castanets made music for the dancers, taking eccentric steps themselves as they played. The Soudanese fell into an ecstasy of giddiness, running about on their hands and feet like huge black tarantulas, or turning themselves into human wheels, to roll through the bed of the dying fire and out on the other side, sending up showers of sparks. All the while, they uttered a barking chant, in time to the wicked music, which seemed to shriek for war and bloodshed; and now and then they would dash after some toddling boy, catch him by the scalp-lock on his shaved head (left for the grasp of Azraïl the death-angel) and force him to join the dance.

Mean-faced Kabyle dogs, guarding deserted tents, howled their hatred of the music, while far away, across desert spaces, jackals cried to one another. And the

scintillating network of stars was dimmed by a thin veil of sand which the wind lifted and let fall, as Victoria lifted and let fall the spangled scarf that made her beauty more mysterious, more desirable, in the eyes of Maïed-dine.

END OF VOL. I.

Biblioteka Główna UMK

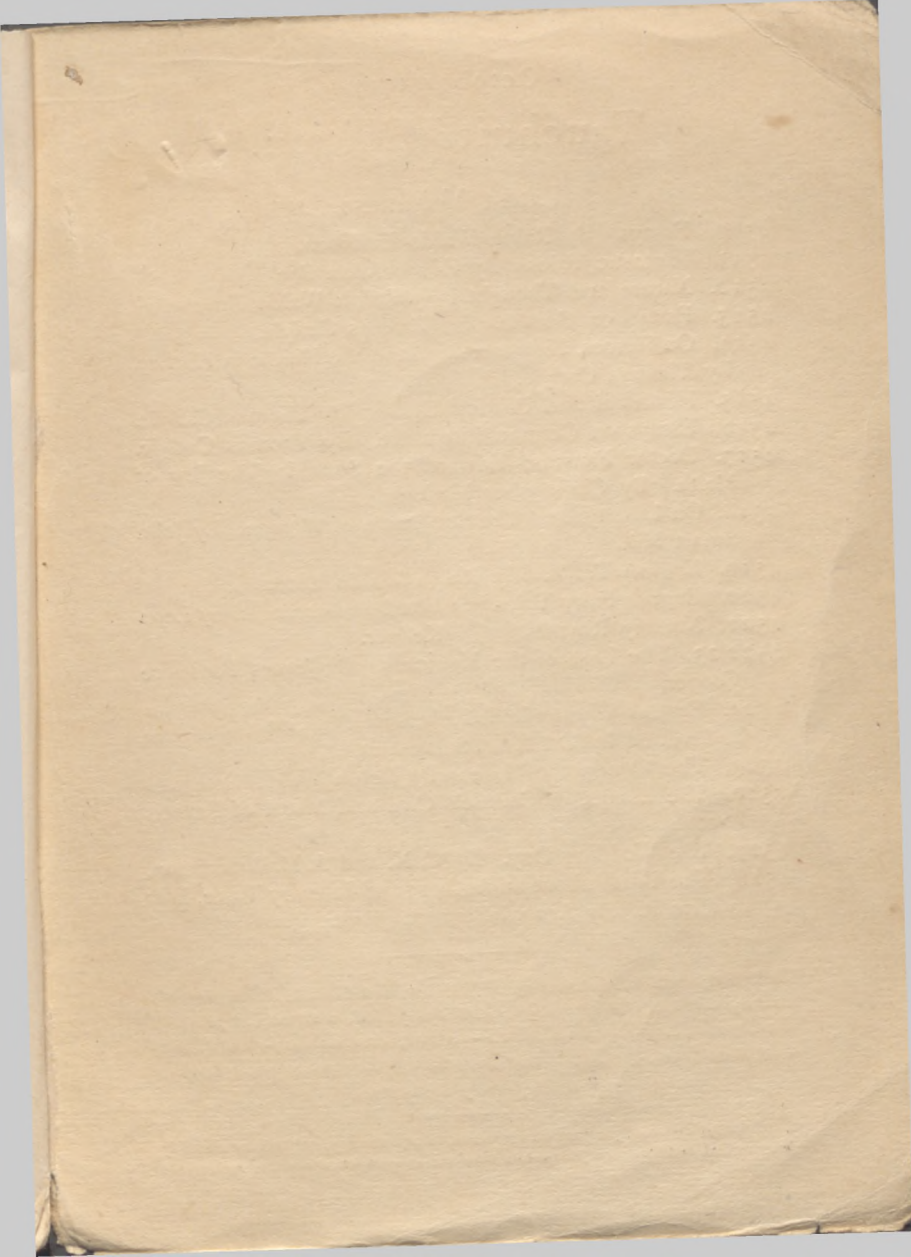


300048844358

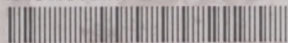
PRINTING OFFICE OF THE PUBLISHER.

~~W.02084~~





Biblioteka Główna UMK



300048844358

Biblioteka

Główna

UMK Toruń

1226665

Latest volumes

4510. Essays. By Ralph Waldo Emerson.
4511. Fantastic Tales. By Edgar Allan Poe.
4512. Nature and Thought. By Ralph Waldo Emerson.
4513. Essays on Goethe. By Thomas Carlyle.
4514. On Heroes, Hero-worship, and the Heroic in History.
By Thomas Carlyle.
4515. Historical and Political Essays. By Thomas Carlyle.
4516. Essays on German Literature. By Thomas Carlyle.
4517. Doctor Faustus; Edward the Second; The Jew of
Malta. By Christopher Marlowe.
4518. On Liberty, and The Subjection of Women. By John
Stuart Mill.
4519. English Traits. By Ralph Waldo Emerson.
4520. English Fairy Tales. } Selected and arranged by Leon
4521. Nursery Rhymes. } Kellner.
4522/23. The Last of the Mohicans. By James Fenimore
Cooper.
4524. Earl of Chesterfield, Letters to his Son. Selected
and edited by Dr. Kurt Schumann.
4525. The Conduct of Life. By Ralph Waldo Emerson.
4526. The Essays, or Counsels Civil and Moral of Francis
Bacon.
4527. The Wedding Day. By C. N. and A. M. Williamson.
4528. The Truth about an Author; and Literary Taste, how
to form it. By Arnold Bennett.

In consequence of the steady increase of the costs of all materials during the war the publishers are compelled to raise the price of the Tauchnitz Edition to M 4.— sewed, and in half-cloth (Halbleinenband) to M 6.50. This increase of price is only intended as a temporary measure.

Until further notice only a few volumes bound in soft binding, half-leather and half-cloth are still available; but purchasers must reckon with longer delay of such orders.