

BURNING SANDS

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A SCENE FROM THE PHOTOPLAY—BURNING SANDS

Burning Sands

By
Arthur Weigall

Author of
Madeline of the Desert, Etc.

Illustrated With Scenes From The Photoplay

A Paramount Picture
Directed by George Melford

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CHAPTER I—A STUDY IN BEHAVIOUR

The music ceased. For a full minute the many dancers stood as the dance had left them, stranded, so to speak, upon the polished floor of the ballroom, clapping their white-gloved hands in what seemed to be an appeal to the tired musicians to release them from their awkward situation. The *chef d'orchestre* rose from his chair and shook his head, pointing to the beads of moisture upon his sallow forehead. Two or three couples, more merciful than their companions, turned and walked away; and therewith the whole company ceased their vain clapping, and, as though awakened from an hypnotic seizure, hastened to jam themselves into the heated, chattering mass which moved out of the brilliantly lighted room and dispersed into the shadows of the halls and passages beyond.

Lady Muriel Blair, to all appearances the only cool young person in the throng, led her perspiring partner towards a group of elderly women who sat fanning themselves near an open window, beyond which the palms could be seen redundant in the light of the moon. An enormous-bosomed matron, wearing a diamond tiara upon her dyed brown hair, and a rope of pearls about her naked pink shoulders, turned to her as she approached, and smiled upon her in a patronizing manner. She was the wife of Sir Henry Smith-Evered, Commander-in-chief of the British Forces in Egypt; and her smile was highly valued in Cairo society.

"You seem to be enjoying yourself, my dear," she said, taking hold of the girl's hand. "But you mustn't get overtired in this heat. Wait another month, until the weather is cool, and then you can dance all night."

"Oh, but I don't feel it at all," Lady Muriel replied, looking with mild disdain at her partner's somewhat limp collar. "Father warned me that October in Cairo would be an ordeal, but so far I've simply loved it."

Her voice had that very slight suggestion of husky tiredness in it which has a certain fascination. With her it was habitual.

"You've only been in Egypt twenty-four hours," Lady Smith-Evered re-

minded her. "You must be careful."

"Careful!" the girl muttered, with laughing scorn. "I hate the word."

Her good-looking little partner, Rupert Helsingham, ran his finger around the inside of his collar, and adjusted his eyeglass. "Let's go and sit on the veranda," he suggested.

Lady Muriel turned an eye of mocking enquiry upon the General's lady, who was her official chaperone (though the office had little, if any, meaning); for, in a strange country and in a diplomatic atmosphere, it was as well, she thought, to ascertain the proprieties. Lady Smith-Evered, aware of dear little Rupert's strict regard on all occasions for his own reputation, nodded acquiescence; and therewith the young couple sauntered out of the room.

"A charming girl!" remarked the stout chaperone, turning her heavily powdered face to her companions.

"She is beautiful," said Madam Pappadouloupolos, an expansive, black-eyed, black-haired, black-moustached, black-robed figure, wife of the Greek Consul-General.

"She has the sort of monkey-beauty of all the Blairs," declared Mrs. Froscombe, the gaunt but romantic wife of the British Adviser to the Ministry of Irrigation. She spoke authoritatively. She had recently purchased a richly illustrated volume dealing with the history of that eminent family.

"It is a great responsibility for Lord Blair," said Lady Smith-Evered. "Now that poor Lady Blair has been dead for over a year, he felt that he ought not to leave his only daughter, his only child, with her relations in England any longer; and, of course, it is very right that she should take her place as mistress here at the Residency, though I could really have acted as hostess for him perfectly well."

"Indeed yes," Madam Pappadouloupolos assented, warmly.

"You have a genius for *that* sort of thing," murmured Mrs. Froscombe, staring out of the window at the moonlit garden.

"Thank you, Gladys dear," said Lady Smith-Evered, smiling coldly at her friend's averted face.

Muriel Blair's type of beauty was in a way monkey-like, if so ludicrous a term can be employed in a laudatory sense to describe a face of great charm. She was of about the average height; her head was gracefully set upon her excellent neck and shoulders; and there was a sort of airy dignity in her carriage and step. Her enemies called her sullen at times, and named her Moody Muriel; her friends, on the contrary, described her as a personification of the spirit of Youth; while her feminine intimates said that, except for her dislike of the cold, she might have earned her living as a sculptor's model.

She possessed a much to be envied mane of rather coarse brown hair which she wore coiled high upon her head; and her skin was that of a brunette, though

there was some nice colour in her cheeks. Her eyes were good, and she had the habit of staring at her friends, sometimes, in a manner which seemed to indicate a fortuitous mimicry of childlike and incredulous questioning.

It was perhaps the tilt of her small nose and an occasional setting of her jaw which caused her undoubted beauty to be called monkey-like; or possibly it was the occasional defiance of her brown eyes, or the puckering of her eyebrows, or sometimes the sudden and whimsical grimace which she made when she was displeased.

As she seated herself now in the moonlight and leant back in the basket chair, Rupert Helsingham looked at her with admiration; and in the depths of his worldly little twenty-five-year-old mind he anticipated with pleasurable audacious hopes a season tintured with romance. He held the position of Oriental Secretary at the Residency, and was considered to be a rising young man, something of an Arabic scholar, and an expert on points of native etiquette. She was his chief's daughter, and heiress to the Blair estates. Every day they would meet; and probably, since she was rather adorable, he would fall in love with her, and perhaps she with him. It was a charming prospect.

His father had recently been created Baron Helsingham of Singleton. The old gentleman was the first of an ancient race of village squires who had ever performed any public service or received any royal recognition; and now he, the son and heir, might very possibly make the first notable matrimonial alliance of his line.

"I wonder what's happened to my father," said Muriel, breaking the silence engendered by Rupert's reflections. "I haven't seen him since the how-d'you-doing business."

His whereabouts was only of casual interest to her, for she regarded him with no particular love, nor, indeed, did she know him at all intimately. His duties had taken him abroad a great deal during her childhood, while her education had kept her in England; and for the last three or four years he had passed almost entirely out of her scheme of things.

"He's working in his study," her companion replied, pointing to the wing of the house which went to form the angle wherein they were sitting. "He always dictates his telegrams at this time: he says he feels more benevolent after dinner. He'll come into the ballroom presently, and say the correct thing to the correct people. He's a paragon of tact, and, I can tell you, tact is needed here in Cairo! There's such a mixture of nationalities to deal with. What languages do you speak?"

"Only French," she replied.

"Good!" he laughed. "Speak French to everybody: especially to those who are not French. It makes them think that you think them cosmopolitan. Every-

body wants to be thought cosmopolitan in a little place like this: it indicates that they have had the money to travel.”

“I shall look to you for guidance,” said Muriel, opening her mouth to yawn, and shutting it again as though remembering her manners.

“I’ll give you a golden rule to start with,” he answered. “Be very gracious to all foreigners, because every little politeness helps the international situation, but behave how you like to English people, because their social aspirations require them to speak of you as *dear* Lady Muriel, however fiercely they burn with resentment.”

Muriel smiled. She had a really fascinating smile, and her teeth were worthy of the great care she gave to them. “And how must I treat an Egyptian—I mean an Egyptian gentleman?” she enquired.

“There isn’t such a thing,” he laughed, having very insular ideas as to the meaning of the word.

“Well, a Prince or a Pasha or whatever they’re called?”

“O, that’s simple enough. If his colour is anything lighter than black coffee, ask him if he’s a Frenchman. He will protest vehemently, and cry ‘*Mais non!—je suis Egyptien.*’ But he’ll love you for ever all the same.”

Muriel gazed before her into the mystery of the garden. For a brief moment she had the feeling that their conversation was at variance with their surroundings, that the sweet night and the moon and the stately trees were bidding them be silent. But the thought was gone almost before it was recorded.

From where she sat she looked across one side of the short circular entrance-drive, and behind the acacias and slender palms, which grew close up to the veranda, she could see the high white wall of the garden, whereon the purple bougainvillea clustered. Through the ornate bars of the great front gates she watched the regular passage to and fro of the kilted sentry, the moonlight gleaming upon the bayonet fixed to his rifle. Beyond, there was an open lamp-lit square, in the middle of which a jet of sparkling water shot up from a marble fountain.

Roses grew in profusion at the edges of the drive, and the gentle night-wind brought their fragrance to her nostrils; while to her ears came the rustling of the trees, the ringing tramp of the sentry’s heavy boots, and the subdued chatter of the resting dancers to whom this part of the veranda was forbidden. In the clear Egyptian atmosphere so strong was the moonlight that every detail of the scene was almost as apparent as it would have been at high noon; and, between the houses on the opposite side of the square, her vision travelled out over the ranges of white buildings which gradually rose towards the towering Citadel and the hills of the desert beyond. Here and there a minaret pierced the sky, so slender that its stability seemed a marvel of balance; and countless domes and cupolas

gleamed like great pearls in the silvery light.

She was about to ask a further languid question of her partner in regard to the ways of Cairene society when her attention was attracted by the appearance of a man wearing a slouch hat, who came suddenly into view beyond the bars of the gates and was at once accosted by the Scotch sentry. He looked something of a ruffian, and the sentry seemed to be acting correctly in barring the way with his rifle held in both hands across his bare knees.

A rapid argument followed, the exact words of which she could not quite catch; but it was evident that the Scotchman was not going to admit any suspicious character or possible anarchist on to the premises until he had consulted with the native policeman who was to be seen hurrying across the square. On the other hand the intruder appeared to be in a hurry, and his voice had clearly to be controlled as he explained to the zealous guardian of the gate that he had business at the Residency. But the sentry was obdurately silent, and the voice of the speaker, in consequence, increased in volume.

"Now don't be silly," Muriel heard him say, "or I'll take your gun away from you."

At this she laughed outright, and, turning to her companion, suggested that he should go and find out what was the trouble; but he shook his head.

"No," he said. "We can't be seen here behind these flower-pots: let's watch what happens."

The newcomer made a sudden forward movement; the sentry assumed an attitude as though about to bayonet him, or to pretend to do so; there was a rapid scuffle; and a moment later the rifle was twisted out of its owner's brawny hands.

The soldier uttered an oath, stepped back a pace, and like a lion, leapt upon his assailant. There was a confused movement; the rifle dropped with a clatter upon the pavement; and the Scotchman seized about the middle in a grip such as he was unlikely ever to have experienced before, turned an amazingly unexpected somersault, landing, like a clown at the circus, in a sitting position in which he appeared to be staring open-mouthed at the beauties of a thousand dazzling stars.

Thereupon the ruffian quietly picked up the rifle, opened the gate, shut it behind him, and walked up the drive; while the Egyptian policeman ran to the soldier's assistance, blowing the while upon his whistle with all the wind God had given him.

The dazed sentry scrambled to his feet, and, with a curious crouching gait, suggestive of the ring, followed the intruder into the drive.

"Gi' me ma rifle," he said, hoarsely. It was evident that he was trying to collect his wits; and his attitude was that of a wrestler looking for an opening.

The ruffian stood still, and in voluble Arabic ordered the policeman to stop

his noise, at which the bewildered native, as though impressed by the peremptory words, obediently took the whistle out of his mouth and stood irresolute.

"Gi' me ma rifle," repeated the Scot, in injured tones, warily circling around his cool opponent.

Rupert Helsingham suddenly got up from his chair. "Why," he exclaimed, "it's Daniel Lane! Excuse me a moment."

He hurried down the steps of the veranda; and, with breathless interest, Muriel watched the two men shake hands, the one a small dapper ballroom figure, the other a large, muscular brigand, a mighty man from the wilds. He wore a battered, broad-brimmed felt hat, an old jacket of thin tweed, and grey flannel trousers which sagged at the knees and were rolled up above a pair of heavy brown boots, covered with dust.

With an air of complete unconcern he gave the rifle back to the abashed sentry; and, putting his hand on Helsingham's shoulder, strolled towards the veranda.

"I've ridden in at top speed," he said, and Muriel noticed that his voice was deep and quiet, and that there was a trace of an American accent. "A hundred and fifty miles in under three days. Pretty good going, considering how bad the tracks are up there." He jerked his thumb in the direction of the western desert.

"The Great Man will be very pleased," the other replied. "The Great Man" was the designation generally used by the diplomatic staff in speaking of Lord Blair.

As they ascended the steps Daniel Lane cast a pair of searching blue eyes upon the resplendent figure of the girl in the chair. In the sheen of the moon her dress, of flimsy material, seemed to array her as it were in a mist; and the diamonds about her throat and in her hair—for she was wearing family jewels—gleamed like magic points of light.

"Got a party on?" he asked, with somewhat disconcerting directness.

"A dance," Rupert Helsingham replied, stiffly, "in honour of Lady Muriel's arrival. But let me introduce you."

He turned to the girl, and effected the introduction. "Mr. Lane," he said, "is one of your father's most trusted friends. I don't know what we should do sometimes without his counsel and advice. He knows the native mind inside out."

Now that the man had removed his hat, Lady Muriel felt sure that she had seen him before, but where, she could not recall. The face was unforgettable. The broad forehead from which the rough mud-coloured hair was thrown back; the heavy brows which screened the steady blue eyes; the bronzed skin; the white, regular teeth—these features she had looked at across a drawing-room somewhere. His bulk and figure, too, were not of the kind to be forgotten easily: the powerful neck, the great shoulders, the mighty chest, the strong hands, were all

familiar to her.

"I think we've met before," she ventured.

"Yes, I fancy we have," he replied. "Use'n't you to wear your hair in two fat pigtails?"

"Four years ago," she laughed.

"Then I guess it was four years ago that we met," he said; and without further remark he turned to Rupert Helsingham, asking whether and when he might see Lord Blair. "I was going to ring at the side door there," he explained, pointing to the door behind them which led directly into the corridor before the Great Man's study. "That's my usual way in: I've no use for the main entrance and the footman."

"And not much real use for sentries, either," Muriel laughed.

"The lad only did his duty," he answered good-humouredly, pointing to his rough clothes; "but somehow things like fixed bayonets always make me impatient. I must try to get over it."

"If Lady Muriel will excuse me, I'll go and find out if his Lordship can see you at once," said Helsingham, in his most official tone of voice. A sentry after all is a sentry, not an acrobat; and if people will wear the garments of a tramp, they must take the consequences.

Daniel Lane thrust his hands into his pockets, and stared out into the garden; while Muriel, left alone with him, was aware of a feeling of awkwardness and a consequent sense of annoyance. His broad back was turned to her—if not wholly, certainly sufficiently to suggest a lack of deference, a lack, almost, of consciousness of her presence.

A minute or two passed. She hoped that her polite little partner would quickly return to take her back to the ballroom, in which the music had again begun. She felt stupid and curiously tongue-tied. She wanted to make some remark, if only as a reminder to him of his manners.

The remark which at length she made, however, was foolish, and unworthy of her: she knew this before the words had passed her lips. "You seem to find the garden very interesting," she said.

He turned round slowly, a whimsical smile upon his face. "Very," he answered; and then, after an embarrassing pause, "I haven't seen any roses for six months: I'm revelling in them."

"Do you live in the desert?" she asked.

"Yes, most of my time. It's a fine free life."

"Oh, one can be free anywhere," she replied. She felt an indefinable desire to be contrary.

"Nonsense!" he answered, abruptly. "You don't call yourself free, do you, in those diamonds and those absurd shoes?"

He turned again to the garden and breathed in the scent of the roses, with head thrown back. To Lady Muriel's joy Rupert Helsingham returned at this moment, followed by a footman.

"Lord Blair will see you at once," he said.

The girl gave a sigh of relief which she hoped Mr. Lane would observe; but in this she was disappointed, for, with a nod to her partner and a good-natured bow to herself, he strode away.

"A very odd fellow," remarked Helsingham, when they were alone once more. "His manners are atrocious; but what can one expect from a man who spends his life in the desert?"

"What makes him live there?" she asked.

He shrugged his shoulders. "Being a crank, I suppose. He's studying Bedouin manners and customs, or something. He's a great Arabic scholar."

"He made me feel rather uncomfortable," she said, as she rose from her chair and laid her fingers on her partner's arm.

"Yes, he's boorish," he replied, smoothing his sleek, dark hair with his disengaged hand.

"It isn't that, quite," she corrected him, her eyebrows puckering. "But he made me feel that I was of no importance whatsoever, and, being a woman, I resented it. He brushed me aside, like the sentry."

"He was probably shy," her companion suggested, for conciliation was his *métier*. "And of course he must have been tired after that long ride."

"No," she said, as they entered the ballroom, "I don't think he was in the least bit shy; and, as for being tired, could anything make a man of that kind tired? He looks like a Hercules, or a Samson, or something unconquerable of that sort."

Rupert Helsingham glanced quickly at her. There was a tone in her voice which suggested that their visitor's personality had at once imposed itself on her mind. Women, he understood, were often attracted by masculine strength and brutality. He had known cases where an assumption of prehistoric manners had been eminently successful in the seduction of the weaker sex, painfully more successful, indeed, than had been his own well-bred dalliance with romance.

A school-friend had told him once that no girl could resist the man who took her by the throat, or pulled back her head by the hair, or, better still, who picked her up in his arms and bit her in the neck. He wondered whether Lady Muriel was heavy, and, with a sort of timorous audacity, he asked himself whether she would be likely to enjoy being bitten. He would have to be careful of Daniel Lane: he did not want any rivals.

She led him across to the three elderly ladies. He was her partner also for the present dance; but Muriel, throwing herself into a chair beside Lady Smith-

Evered, told him that she would prefer not to take the floor. He glanced at the forbidding aspect of the three, and admired what he presumed to be her self-sacrifice in the interests of diplomacy.

"Rupert, my dear," said the General's wife, "do be an angel and bring us some ices."

"What a willing little fellow he is," murmured Mrs. Froscombe, as he hurried away on his errand, and there was a tone of derision in her voice.

"He's always very helpful," Lady Smith-Evered retorted, somewhat sharply, for he was her pet.

"I think he's a dear," said Muriel. "Nice manners are a tremendous asset. I hate churlishness."

"I think you seldom meet with churlishness in Englishmen," remarked Madam Pappadouloupolos. Her husband had told her to flatter the English whenever she could.

Muriel laughed. "I don't know so much about that," she replied. "On the veranda just now I met an Englishman who, to say the least, was not exactly courteous."

"Oh, who was that?" asked her chaperone, with interest.

"A certain Daniel Lane," she replied.

Lady Smith-Evered gave a gesture of impatience. "Oh, *that* man!" she exclaimed. "He's in Cairo again, is he? He's an absolute outsider."

"What is he?—What's he do?" Muriel asked, desiring further particulars.

"Ah! That's the mystery," said Lady Smith-Evered, with a look of profound knowing. "Incidentally, my dear, he is said to keep a harîm of Bedouin women somewhere out in the desert. I shouldn't be surprised if every night he beat them all soundly and sent them where the rhyme says."

She laughed nastily, and Muriel made a grimace.

CHAPTER II—THE FREEDOM OF THE DESERT

Lord Blair rose from his chair as the door opened, and removed from his thin, furtive nose a pair of large horn-rimmed spectacles which he always wore when

quite alone in his study.

“Come in, come in, my dear Mr. Lane,” he exclaimed, taking a few blithe steps forward and shaking his visitor warmly by the hand. “I’m very well, thank you, very well indeed, and so are you, I see. That’s right, that’s good,—splendid! Dear me, what physique! What a picture of health! How did you get here so quickly?—do take a seat, do be seated. Yes, yes, to be sure! Have a cigar? Now, where did I put my cigars?”

He pushed a leather arm-chair around, so that it faced his own desk chair, and began at once to hunt for his cigar-box, lifting and replacing stacks of papers and books, glancing rapidly, like some sort of rodent, around the room, and then again searching under his papers.

“Thanks,” said Daniel Lane, “I’ll smoke my pipe, if it won’t make you sick.”

“Tut, tut!” Lord Blair laughed, extending his delicate hands in a comprehensive gesture. “I sometimes smoke a pipe myself: I enjoy it. A good, honest, English smoke! Dear me, where *are* my cigars?”

Lord Blair was a little man of somewhat remarkable appearance—remarkable, that is to say, when considered in relation to his historic name and excellent diplomatic record. In a company of elderly club waiters he would, on superficial observation, have passed unnoticed. He bore very little resemblance to his daughter; and, in fact, he was often disposed to believe his late wife’s declaration, made whenever she desired to taunt him, that Muriel was no child of his. Lady Blair had had many lovers; and it is notorious that twenty odd years ago in Mayfair there was an exceptionally violent epidemic of adultery.

He himself had thin auburn hair, now nearly grey, neatly parted in the middle; nervous, quick-moving brown eyes; closely cut ‘mutton-chop’ whiskers; an otherwise clean-shaven, sharp-featured face; and a wide mouth, furnished with two somewhat apparent rows of false teeth. His smile was kindly and gracious, and his expression, in spite of a certain vigilance, mild.

The evening dress which he was now wearing was noteworthy in four particulars: his collar was so big for him that one might suppose that, in moments of danger, his head totally disappeared into it; his bow-tie was exceptionally wide and large; his links and studs were, as such things go, enormous; and the legs of his trousers were cut so tightly as to be bordering on the comic. In other respects there was nothing striking in his appearance, except, perhaps, a general cleanliness, almost a fastidiousness, especially to be noticed in the polished surface of his chin and jaw, and in his carefully manicured finger-nails.

Daniel Lane pulled out his pipe and began to fill it from a worn old pouch. “Please don’t bother about cigars,” he said, as Lord Blair extended his hand towards the bell. “Tell me why you sent for me. Your letter was brought over from El Homra by a nigger corporal of your precious frontier-patrol, who nearly lamed

his camel in trying to do the thirty miles in under four hours. My Bedouin friends thought at the very least that the King of England was dying and wished to give me his blessing.”

“Dear, dear!—it was not so urgent as all that,” his Lordship replied. “I told them to mark the letter ”Express,“ but I trust, I do trust, the message itself was not peremptory.”

“Not at all,” the other replied. “I was mighty glad of an excuse to come into Cairo; I wanted to do some shopping; and there was another reason also. A young cousin of mine—in the Guards—has come to Cairo, with his regiment, and I ought to see him about some family business. I should probably have let it slide if you hadn’t sent for me. Tell me, what’s your trouble?”

“Ah, that’s the point!—you always come to the point quickly. It’s capital, capital!” Lord Blair leaned forward and tapped his friend’s knee with a sort of affection. “I don’t know where I should be without your advice, Mr. Lane—Daniel: may I call you Daniel?”

“Sure,” said Daniel, laconically.

“When I came here two years ago, my predecessor said to me ‘When in doubt, send for Daniel Lane.’ Do you remember how worried, indeed how shaken—yes, I may say shaken—I was by the Michael Pasha affair? How you laughed! Dear me, you were positively rude to me; and how right you were! Personally I should have had him deported: it never occurred to me to convert him into a friend.”

His visitor smiled. “Bind a brave enemy with the chains of absolution,” he said.

“Yes, yes, very true,” replied Lord Blair, still hunting about for the cigars. “Very true, very daring: a policy for brave men.” He started into rigidity, as though at a sudden thought: one might have supposed that he had recollected where he had put the cigars. “Daniel!” he exclaimed, “you bring with you an air of the mediæval! That’s it! One always forgets that Egypt is mediæval.”

Daniel blew a cloud of oriental tobacco-smoke through his nostrils, at which his host frenziedly renewed his search for the less pungent cigars. “About this business you want to ask my advice upon ...?” he asked.

“Ah yes, you must be tired,” his Lordship murmured. “You want to go to bed after your long ride. Let me put you up here. I’ll ring and have a room prepared.”

“No thanks,” said Daniel, firmly. “I’ve left my kit at the Orient Hotel. But fire away, and I’ll give you my opinion either at once or in the morning.”

Lord Blair laid his thin fingers upon a document, and handed it to his friend. “Read that,” he said, and therewith leaned back in his chair, his dark eyes glancing anxiously about the room.

The document was written in Arabic, and beneath the flowing script a sec-

retary had pencilled an English translation. "The translation is appended," remarked his Lordship, as Daniel bent forward to study the paper in the light of the electric reading-lamp.

"I prefer the original," he replied, with a smile, "I don't trust translations: they lose the spirit."

For some considerable time there was silence. Suddenly Lord Blair rose from his chair, and hurried across to a cupboard, from which he returned bearing in triumph the missing cigars. He proffered them to his visitor, who, without raising his eyes, took one, smelt it, and put it in his breast pocket.

At length, through a cloud of smoke, Daniel looked up. "The man's a fool," he said, and laid the paper back upon the table.

"You think I ought to refuse?" asked Lord Blair.

"No, procrastinate. That's the basis of diplomacy, isn't it?"

The document in question was a request made by the Egyptian Minister of War that the nomadic Bedouin tribes of the desert should be brought under the Conscription Act, from which, until now, they had been exempt.

"I ventured to ask you to come in," said his Lordship, "because I am sure, indeed I know, you have the interests of these rascals at heart. I thought you would wish to be consulted; and at the same time I felt that you would be able to tell me just what the consequences would be of any action of this kind."

Daniel nodded. "Yes, I can tell you the consequences," he answered. "If you conscribe them, they will evade the law by all possible means, and you will turn honest men into law-breakers."

"But, as you see, he suggests that it will bring the benefits of discipline into their lives," Lord Blair argued. "And if some of them escape across the frontiers into Arabia or Tripoli, it will be, surely it will be, no great loss to Egypt."

Daniel spread out his hands. "What is military discipline?" he asked. "Good Lord!—d'you think the Bedouin will be better men for having learnt to form fours and present arms? Will barrack life in dirty cities bring them some mystic benefit which they have missed in the open spaces of the clean desert? Don't you realize that it is just their freedom from the taint of what we call civilization that gives them their particular good qualities? Why is it that the man of the desert is faithful and honourable and truthful? Because time and money and power and ambition and success and cunning are nothing to him. Because he is not herded with other men."

He leant forward earnestly. "Lord Blair," he said, and his voice was grave, "hasn't the thought ever come to you that we civilized people, with our rules and regulations, our etiquette and our conventions, have built up a structure which screens us from the face of the sun?"

"Ah, yes, indeed, my dear Daniel," he replied. "Back to the land: the simple

life: Fresh Air Fund—a capital sentiment. But, you know, I am very anxious, most anxious, not to offend this particular minister—most anxious.”

His visitor relapsed into silence, and the volume of smoke which issued from his mouth was some indication that he had much to say which he preferred to leave unsaid.

At length he took the pipe from between his teeth. “You had better fix your frontiers first,” he declared. “There’ll be a fine old row if Egyptian patrols blunder into foreign territory. There’s your chance for procrastination. Send out a commission to settle the desert frontiers definitely. That’ll keep you all wrangling comfortably for five years.”

“Ah!—that is an idea, a very good idea,” replied Lord Blair, bringing the tips of the fingers of one hand against those of the other sharply and repeatedly.

“Write to the minister,” Daniel went on, “and tell him you don’t altogether agree with him, but that you will consent to the preliminary step of fixing the frontiers. Before that’s accomplished you may both be dead.”

“I trust not, I trust not,” murmured Lord Blair.

“Or retired,” said his friend; and his Lordship nodded his thanks for the correction.

It was not long before Daniel rose to take his departure. “Oh, by the way,” he said, with a broad smile, “I have one little favor to ask you....”

“Certainly, certainly,” responded Lord Blair warmly. “Anything I can do, I’m sure—anything. You have put me under a great obligation by coming so promptly to my aid in this matter.”

“Well, will you be so good as to walk as far as your front gate with me? There’s something I want to show you.”

Lord Blair, somewhat mystified, accompanied him on to the veranda; and here they chanced upon Lady Muriel again taking the air with Rupert Helsingham who was once more her partner. The couple were strolling towards them as they came out of the house.

Daniel made for the steps. “What I want you to see is over here,” he said, pointing to the gateway.

“One moment,” Lord Blair interjected, taking hold of his arm. “I want to introduce you to my daughter.”

He called Muriel to him, who replied somewhat coldly that she had already met Mr. Lane.

“Really?” exclaimed his Lordship. “Splendid, capital!”

“Yes,” said Daniel, taking his pipe out of his mouth, “when she was quite a kid; but I’m blest if I know where it was.”

He was standing again almost with his back to Muriel, his pipe between his teeth, and once more a sense of annoyance entered her mind. She would have

liked to pinch him, but for all she knew he might turn round and fling her into the middle of the drive. She racked her brains for something to say, something which would show him that she was not to be ignored in this fashion.

"Ah," she exclaimed suddenly, "now I remember. It was in the Highlands that we met. You came over to tea with us: I was staying with my cousin the Duchess of Strathness."

Daniel scratched his head. "I'm so bad at names," he said. "What's she like?"

Lord Blair uttered a sudden guffaw, but Muriel did not treat the matter so lightly. A man with gentlemanly instincts, she thought to herself, would at any rate *pretend* he remembered.

"Oh, why bother to think it out?" she answered, her foot ominously tapping the floor. "It's of no consequence."

"None," Daniel replied, looking at her with his steady laughing eyes. "You're still you, and I'm still I... But I did like your pigtails."

Muriel turned to her partner, who stood anxiously fiddling with his eye-glass. "Come along," she said; "let's go back. The music's begun again."

She nodded with decided coolness to Daniel, and turned away. He gazed after her in silence for a moment; then he put his hand on her father's arm, and gently propelled him towards the gates.

As they walked down the drive in the moonlight, the sentry peered at them through the iron bars, and, recognizing Lord Blair, suddenly presented arms, becoming thereat a very passable imitation of a waxwork figure.

Lord Blair put his arm in Daniel's. "What is it you wanted to show me?" he asked, as they passed through the gate and stood upon the pavement outside.

"A good soldier," said Daniel, indicating the sentry, whose face assumed an expression of mingled anxiety and astonishment. "I wanted to call your attention to this lad. Do you think you could put in a word for him to his colonel? I was very much struck this evening with the way in which he dealt with a ruffianly tramp who apparently wanted to get into the grounds. He showed great self-restraint combined with determination and devotion to duty." There was not the trace of a smile upon his face.

Lord Blair turned to the rigid Scotchman, whose mouth had fallen open. "What's your name, my man?" he asked.

"John Macdonald, me Lord," he answered unsteadily.

"Now, will you make a note of it?" said Daniel. "And if you get a chance, recommend him for his soldierly conduct. Or, better still, send him a little present as a mark of your regard."

"Certainly, certainly," replied Lord Blair, still somewhat puzzled.

"Thanks, that's all," said Daniel. "Good-night."

“Will you come to luncheon tomorrow?” Lord Blair asked, as they shook hands. “I will then show you the draft of my reply to the Minister of War.”

“Thank you,” Daniel answered, knocking the ashes from his pipe. “I’ll be delighted, if it isn’t a party. I haven’t got any respectable clothes with me.”

“Tut, tut!” murmured his Lordship. “Come in anything you like.” And with that he patted his friend on the arm, and hastened with little tripping steps back to the house.

Daniel put his hands in his pockets and faced the sentry, who was once more standing at ease. “John Macdonald,” he said, “is the account square?”

The Scotchman looked at him with a twinkle in his eye. “Ye mus’ na’ speak tae th’ sentry on duty,” he answered.

Daniel uttered a chuckle, and walked off across the square.

CHAPTER III—THE WORLD AND THE FLESH

When a man, in the heyday of his manhood, voluntarily lives the life of a monk or hermit, his friends suppose him to be either religious, defective, or possessed of a secret mistress. Now, nobody supposed Daniel Lane to be religious, for he seldom put his foot inside a church: and people seem to be agreed that religion is, as it were, black kid gloves, handed out with the hymnbooks and, like them, “not to be taken away.” Nor did anybody think him abnormal, for a figure more sane, more healthy, or more robust in its unqualified manhood, could not easily be conjured before the imagination.

Hence the rumour had arisen in Cairo that the daughters of the Bedouin were not strangers to him; but actually, like most rumours, this was entirely incorrect. He did, in very truth, live the life of a celibate in his desert home; and if this manner of existence chanced to be in accord with his ideas of bachelorhood, it was certainly in conformity with the nature of his surroundings. Some men are not attracted by a diet of onions, or by a skin-polish of castor oil.

When he had been commissioned by a well-known scientific institute to make a thorough study of the manners, customs, and folk-lore of the Bedouin tribes of the Egyptian desert, he had entered upon his task in the manner of one

dedicated to the pursuit of knowledge; and he found in the life he was called upon to lead the opportunity for the practice of those precepts of the philosophers which, in spite of his impulsive nature, had ever appealed to him in principle during the course of his wide reading.

Almost unwittingly he had cultivated the infinite joys of a mind free from care, free from the desires of the flesh; and, with no apparent, or, at any rate, no great effort, he had established in himself a condition of undisturbed equanimity, by virtue of which he could smile benevolently at the frantic efforts of his fellow men and women to make life amusing. To him his existence in the desert was a continuous pleasure, for the great secret of human life had been revealed to him—that a mind at peace in itself is happiness.

But here in Cairo circumstances were different; and as he walked from the Residency through the moonlit streets to the Orient Hotel his thoughts were by no means tranquil. He did not feel any very noticeable fatigue after his long ride; for a series of recent expeditions through the desert had hardened him to such a point that the hundred and fifty miles which he had covered in the last three days had in no way strained his always astonishing physical resources. His senses were alert and active, and, indeed, were near to a riotous invasion of the placid palace of his mind, where his soul was wont to sit enthroned above the clamour of his mighty body.

He took the road which led him past the Semiramis Hotel, and through its brilliantly illuminated windows he could see the richly dressed throng of visitors, and could hear the strains of the orchestra which was playing selections from a popular musical comedy. He turned his head away, and gazed across the Nile which lay on his other hand; but here too the lights of the gay city glittered and were reflected in the water, while from a dahabiyah moored against the opposite bank there came the sound of tambourines and the rhythmic beating of the feet of native dancers.

In the main streets of the city the light of the lamps seemed strangely bright to his unaccustomed eyes; and the great square in front of the Orient Hotel presented an animated scene. Crowds of people were here streaming out of the Opera House, and carriages and automobiles were moving in all directions. The trees of the Esbekieh gardens were illuminated by the neighbouring arc lamps, and rich clusters of exotic flowers hung down towards the dazzling globes. The cafés on the other side of the square were crowded, and hundreds of small tables, standing in the open, were occupied by the native and continental inhabitants of the city. The murmur of many voices and the continuous rattle of dice upon the marble table-tops could be heard above the many sounds of the traffic; and somewhere a Neapolitan orchestra was playing a lilting tune.

The terrace and façade of the hotel were illuminated by numerous rows of

small electric globes, and as Daniel ascended the steps to the brilliantly lighted main entrance he was met by a throng of men and women in evening dress pouring out on to the terrace. Evidently the weekly ball was in progress, and the couples were emerging into the cool night air to rest for a few brief moments from their exertions.

For some time he wandered about the hotel, furtively watching the dancers; but in his rough clothes he did not feel quite at his ease, and he was conscious that many pairs of eyes looked at him from time to time with wonder, while those of the hall-porter and the waiters, so he thought, expressed frank disapproval, if not disgust. He had no wish, however, to retire to his room; for the music of the orchestra would undoubtedly prevent sleep for yet some time to come. Moreover, he felt excited and disturbed by the brilliant scenes around him; and the seclusion of his desert home seemed very far away.

At length he found a seat upon a sofa at the end of a passage near the American Bar, where, except during the intervals between the dances, he was more or less alone; and here he settled himself down to enjoy the cigar which he had pocketed at the Residency. He wanted to be quiet; his mind was disturbed by his sudden incursion into the world, and he was aware of a number of emotions which he had not experienced for many months.

Suddenly the swinging doors of the Bar were burst open and a red-headed young man, muffled in an overcoat, sprang through and darted down the passage. He was clutching at a lady's gold bag; and for a moment Daniel supposed him to be a thief. An instant later, however, he was followed by a girl, wearing an evening cloak and a large black hat, who called after him in broken English, telling him to behave himself. At this the man paused, tossed the bag to her, and, with a wave of his hand, disappeared round the corner.

The bag fell at Daniel's feet. He therefore stooped down, and, picking it up, returned it to her.

"A silly boy—that one," she smiled. "He like always the rag."

"I nearly shot him for a thief," said Daniel, placing his hand significantly upon his hip-pocket, where he still carried the revolver which had accompanied him on his journey.

The girl fixed her large dark eyes upon him in amazement. "Mais non!" she exclaimed. "He has the red hair: he like joking and running about."

She sat herself down beside him, and made a pretence to touch his hip-pocket.

"Why you carry a pistol?" she asked.

Daniel looked at her with mild amusement. Her profession was evident, but it did not shock him.

"Because I'm a wild man," he answered, with a smile.

"You not live in Cairo?" she queried.

"No fear!" he replied.

There was silence for some moments, while Daniel, smoking his cigar, endeavoured to ignore her existence. Once or twice she looked expectantly at him: it was evident that she could not quite classify him. Then she rose to her feet, and, with a little friendly nod to him, walked towards the swinging doors.

Daniel suddenly felt lonely, felt that he would like to have somebody to talk to, felt that he could keep any situation within bounds, felt that he did not much mind whether he could do so or not. He took the cigar out of his mouth, forming an instant resolution: "Hi!" he called out.

She turned round. "Why you call me 'Hi'?" she asked. "I'm Lizette."

"I beg your pardon," he answered, gravely. "Will you have supper with me, Lizette?"

"Have you got enough money?" she asked.

"Plenty," he laughed. "Shall we have supper here?"

She shook her head, "Oh, no," she replied frankly. "The Manager not like me, because I'm not good girl. Everybody know Lizette—very bad, very wicked girl. Everybody are shocked for Lizette."

"I'm not shocked," said Daniel. "I like your face. You look truthful."

He got up, and followed her into the bar, and, crossing it, made for the street-entrance.

"You give me supper at Berto's?" she said, putting her hand lightly upon his arm, and looking up at him, as they stood upon the pavement outside.

"Anywhere you like," he answered; and thus it came about that a few minutes later he found himself seated before her at a small table in a quiet restaurant. She was decidedly attractive. Her grey eyes were tender and sympathetic; the expression of her mouth was kindly; and her dark hair, which was drawn down over her ears, was soft and alluring. She was wearing a low-necked black-velvet dress, and her slender throat and shoulders by contrast seemed to be very white.

Her broken English, however, was her chiefest charm; and Daniel listened with pleasure as she talked away, candidly answering his somewhat direct questions in regard to her early life and adventures. She hailed originally, she told him, from Marseilles; but when her widowed mother had died she had found herself at the age of seventeen, alone and penniless. She had got into bad company, and at length had been advised by a well-meaning young British guardsman, on his way to Egypt, to ply her trade in Cairo. Here she had become a great favourite with his particular battalion, and in fact, was so monopolized by them that when she was seen in the company of a civilian her action was said to be "by kind permission of the Colonel and officers" of the regiment in question.

"Good Lord, what a life!" said Daniel.

“But what else can a girl do,” she asked, “after the little first mistake, eh? I get plenty good food; I not work eight hours, ten hours, every day to get thirty francs the week; I not live in the little top one room and cry: no, I have the beautiful *appartements au premier étage*, and I laugh always—plenty friends, plenty dresses, plenty sun.”

At a table at the other side of the room, Daniel had noticed, while she was talking, a heavy-jowled, red-faced young officer who was seated alone, and whose sullen eyes appeared to be fixed upon him. The girl’s back was turned to this man; but presently she observed that her companion was not paying attention to her remarks, and, wondering what had attracted his attention, she looked behind her. Immediately she uttered a little angry exclamation, and made an impatient shrug with her shoulders.

“That is a beast,” she said.

“He’s drunk, I think,” Daniel remarked. “Is he a friend of yours?”

She made a gesture of denial. “He hate me because I not let him come home with me ever.”

“Why not?” he asked.

“Because he very cruel pig-man. He beat his dog. I see him beat his dog.”

They rose presently to leave the restaurant, and as they did so the objectionable officer floundered unsteadily to his feet, and placed himself across the doorway. As in the case of most men of gigantic physical strength, Daniel’s nature was gentle, and wanting in all bellicose tendencies; and, moreover, he had already once that evening used his muscles in a manner which did not conform to his principles. He therefore made an attempt to take no notice of the obstruction; but finding the way entirely barred, he was obliged to request the man to stand aside. The officer, however, stood his ground stolidly.

Daniel raised his voice very slightly. “Will you kindly get out of the way,” he said.

For answer the man shot out his hand, and made an ineffectual grab at the girl’s arm. She darted aside, and by a quick manœuvre slipped out through the glass doorway, standing thereafter in the entrance passage, watching the two men with an expression of anger in her alert eyes.

It was now Daniel’s turn to bar the way, whereat his opponent thrust his red face forward and uttered a string of oaths, his fists clenched.

“I don’t stand any nonsense from a damned civilian,” he roared. “Let me pass, or I’ll put my fist through your face.”

Suddenly Daniel’s self-control for the second time deserted him. He blushed with shame for his countryman; he burnt with indignation at the arrogance of this product of a militaristic age; he felt like an exasperated school-master dealing with a bully. With a quick movement he gripped the man’s raised

arm, and seizing with his other hand the collar of his tunic, shook him so that his head was bumped violently against the wall behind him.

"I don't believe in violence," he said, shaking him till the teeth rattled in his head, "or I'd really hurt you. I don't believe in it."

In his tremendous grip the wretched man was, in spite of his bulk, as entirely powerless as the sentry at the Residency had been. His eyes grew round and frightened: he had never before come up against strength such as Daniel possessed.

"Let me go," he gasped.

"Shut your mouth, or you'll bite your tongue," said Daniel, a grim smile upon his face, as he administered another shattering shake. Then with a contemptuous movement he flung him backwards, so that he fell to the floor at the feet of an amazed waiter who had hurried across the room.

Daniel turned upon his heel, and, taking the girl's arm, conducted her out of the building. She appeared to be too enthralled by the discomfiture of her enemy to utter a word.

An empty taxi-cab was passing, and this he hailed.

"Where d'you want to go to?" he asked.

She gave him her address. "You are coming home with me?" she asked. "Please do." Her expression was eloquent.

"I'll drive you as far as your door," he replied.

"But...?" There was a question in her eyes.

He sat himself down beside her, and she put her arm in his, looking up into his face with admiration.

"I never see a one so strong," she whispered, with a kind of awe. "I think you very great man, very to be loved."

Daniel laughed ironically, "Oh, yes, of course you're filled with admiration because you've seen me handle a poor drunken fellow-creature roughly. My girl, that is not the thing for which you should admire a man. I'm ashamed of myself."

"Ashamed?" she exclaimed, incredulously.

"Yes," he answered, shortly. "D'you think I'm proud that I can master any man in a fair fight? What I want to be able to do is to master *myself!*"

There was silence between them, but he was aware that she did not take her eyes from him. At length he turned and looked at her and, seeing the admiration in her face, laughed aloud.

"Why you laugh?" she asked.

"I'm laughing at you women," he answered. "How you love a little show of muscle! Good God, we might be living in the year one!"

"I not understand," she said.

"No, I don't suppose you do," he answered. "But here we are: is this where

you live?"

They had stopped before some large buildings in the vicinity of the main station. She nodded her head.

"Please don't go away," she said.

"No," he answered. "I've had enough of the world, the flesh, and the devil for one day. I guess we'll meet again some time or other. Good night, my girl; and thank you for your company."

She held her hand in his. "Thank you," she said, "for fighting that pig-man, Barthampton."

"Barthampton? Lord Barthampton?" he repeated. "Was that the man?"

She nodded. "Why?" she asked, as he uttered a low whistle.

"Gee!" he laughed. "He's my own cousin."

CHAPTER IV—A JACKAL IN A VILLAGE

Tired after the dance, Lady Muriel stayed upstairs next day until the luncheon hour. The long windows of her room led out on to a balcony which, being on the west side of the house, remained in the shade for most of the morning; and here in a comfortable basket chair, she lay back idly glancing at the week-old magazines and illustrated papers which the mail had just brought from England. While the sun was not yet high in the heavens the shadow cast by the house was broad enough to mitigate to the eyes the glare of the Egyptian day; and every now and then she laid down her literature to gaze at the brilliant scene before her.

The grounds of the Residency, with the rare flowering trees and imported varieties of palm, the masses of variegated flowers and the fresh-sown lawns of vivid grass, looked like well-kept Botanical Gardens, and appealed more to her cultivated tastes than to the original emotions of her nature. It was all very elegant and civilized and pleasing, and seemed correspondent to the charming new garment—all silk and lace and ribbons—which she was wearing, and to the fashionable literature which she was reading. She, the balcony, the garden, and the deep blue sky might have been a picture on the cover of a society journal.

But when she raised her eyes, and looked over the Nile, which flowed past the white terrace at the bottom of the lawn, and allowed her gaze to rest upon the long line of the distant desert on the opposite bank, the aspect of things, outward and inward, was altered; and momentarily she felt the play of disused or wholly novel sensations lightly touching upon her heart.

So far she was delighted with her experience of Egypt. She enjoyed the heat; she was charmed by the somewhat luxurious life at the Residency; and the deference paid to her as the Great Man's daughter amused and pleased her. At the dance the previous night she had met half a dozen very possible young officers; and the secretaries whom she saw every day were pleasant enough, little Rupert Helsingham being quite amusing. That afternoon she was going to ride with him, which would be jolly...

There was, however, one small and almost insignificant source of unease in her mind, one little blot upon the enjoyment of the last two or three days. A ruffianly fellow had treated her in a manner bordering on rudeness, and in his presence she had felt stupid. He had shown at first complete indifference to her, and later he had spoken with a sort of easy familiarity which suggested a long experience in dealing with her sex, but no ability to discriminate between the bondwoman and the free. And she had behaved as a bondwoman.

The recollection caused her now to tap her foot angrily upon the tiled floor, and to draw the delicate line of her eyebrows into a puckered frown. The thought which lay at the root of her discomfort was this: she had pretended that their previous meeting had been at the house of the Duchess of Strathness simply because she had been lashed into a desire to assert her own standing in response to his lack of respect. The Duchess was her most exalted relative: she was a Royal Princess who had married the Duke, and the Duke was cousin to her mother. She knew quite well that she had not met Mr. Lane there: she had uttered the words before her nicer instincts had had time to prevail.

She had said it in self-defence—to make an impression; and his reply, whether he had meant it as a snub or not, had stung her. "I'm so bad at names: what's she like?" Her Royal Highness Princess Augusta Maria, Duchess of Strathness! Of course it was a snub; and she had deserved it. He couldn't have made a more shattering reply: he couldn't have said more plainly to her "Now, no airs with me, please!—to me you are just you."

The recollection of the incident was unpleasant; it made her feel small. She had behaved no better than the servants and shopkeepers who delight to speak in familiar terms of duchesses and dukes. However!... she did not suppose that she would see the man again: he belonged to the desert, not to Cairo; and with this consolation, she dismissed the matter from her mind.

When at last she descended the stairs at the sound of the gong, she came

upon General Smith-Evered, who had called to see Lord Blair upon some matter of business, and was just stumping across the hall on his way out. He was a very martial little man. He greeted her with jocularly tempered by deference; he kissed her hand in what he believed to be a very charming old-world manner; he told her what a radiant vision she made as she walked down the great staircase in her pretty summer dress; he described himself as a bluff old soldier fairly bowled over by her youthful grace; and he slapped his leggings with his cane and gloves and kissed his fingers to England, home and beauty.

Muriel knew the type well—in real life, on the stage, and in the comic papers; nevertheless, she felt pleased with the rotund compliments, and there was a pleasurable sense of well-being in her mind as she entered the drawing-room. Here the sun-blinds shaded the long French windows, and the light in the room was so subdued that she did not observe at once that she was not alone. She had paused to rearrange a vase of flowers which stood upon a small table, when a movement behind her caused her to turn; and she found herself face to face with Daniel Lane, who had just risen from the sofa.

“Good morning!” he said, gravely looking at her with his deep-set blue eyes.

Her heart sank: she felt like a schoolgirl in the presence of a master who had lately punished her. “Oh, good morning,” she answered, but she did not offer him her hand.

She turned again to the flowers. “Are you waiting to see my father?” she asked, as she aimlessly withdrew a rose from the bunch and inserted it again at another angle.

“I’ve come to lunch,” he said. “I’m early, I suppose. My watch is busted.”

Deeper sank her heart. “No, you’re not early,” she replied, “the gong’s gone.”

“Good!” he exclaimed; “then you haven’t got a party. I was shy about my clothes.”

He was wearing the same clothes in which she had seen him the night before, except that he appeared to have a clean collar and shirt, his hair was carefully combed back, and he had evidently visited a barber.

“Do sit down,” she said.

“Thanks,” he answered, and remained where he was, his hands deep in the pockets of his jacket, and his eyes fixed upon her.

There was an awkward pause, awkward, that is to say, to Muriel, who could not for the life of her think what to talk about.

“Will you smoke a cigarette?” she asked, handing him the box as a preliminary to an escape from the room.

He took it from her unthinkingly, and, without opening it, put it down upon

a table.

"I've remembered where it was we met," he remarked suddenly, as she moved towards the door.

"Really?" There was a note of assumed indifference in her voice; and, as she turned and came back to him, she made a desperate attempt to emulate the cucumber. She felt that there was a challenge in his words, in face of which she could not honourably run away.

"Yes," he said. "It was at Eastbourne, at your school. I came down to see your head mistress, who was a friend of mine; and they let you come into the drawing-room to tea."

A wave of recollection passed over her mind. "Of course," she exclaimed, "that was it."

They had let her, they had *allowed* her, to come into the drawing-room to have the honour of making his acquaintance! She paused: the scene of their meeting developed in her mind. A girl had rushed into the schoolroom where she was reading, and had told her that she and one or two others were to go into the drawing-room to make themselves polite to this man, who was described as a great scholar and explorer. She had gone in shyly, and had shaken hands with him, and he had stared at her and, later, had turned his back on her; and, after he had gone, the headmistress had commended her manners as having been quiet, ladylike, and respectful. Respectful!

He was smiling at her when she looked up at him once more. "You were wrong about it being at your cousin's," he said.

Muriel felt as though she had been smacked. "Oh, I only suggested that," she replied, witheringly, "to help you out. I didn't really suppose that you knew her."

"I know very few people," he answered, unmoved. "I can't afford the time. Life is such a 'brief candle' that a man has to choose one of its two pleasures—sociability or study: he can't enjoy both."

She looked at him curiously. He must have a tough hide, she thought, to be unruffled by a remark so biting as that she had made. For a moment she stared straight at him, her hand resting on her hip. Then she caught sight of herself in the great mirror against the wall, and her hand slipped hastily from its resting-place: her attitude had been that of a common Spanish dancing-girl. Her eyes fell before his.

"I'll go and find the others," she said, and turned from him.

As she did so Lord Blair hurried into the room. He was wearing a hot-weather suit of some sort of drab-coloured silk, straight from the laundry, where, one might have supposed, the trousers had been accidentally shrunk. His stiff and spacious collar, and his expansive tie, folded in the four-in-hand manner and

fastened with a large gold pin, detracted from the sense of coolness suggested by his suit; but a rose in his buttonhole gave a comfortable touch of nature to an otherwise artificial figure.

"Ah, good morning, Muriel dear," he exclaimed, giving her cheek a friendly but quite unaffectionate kiss. "You've had a lazy morning, eh? Feel the heat, no doubt. Yes? No? Ah, that's good, that's capital! Good morning Mr. Lane, or Daniel, I should say, since you permit it. I hope Muriel has been amusing you."

"She has," said Daniel, and Muriel blushed.

Rupert Helsingham entered the room; and, when he had made his salutations, Muriel turned to him with relief, strolling with him across to the windows through which the warm scented air of the garden drifted, bringing with it the drone of the flies and the incessant rustle of the palms.

"Please see that I don't sit next to that horrible man at lunch," she whispered.

"There's no choice," he answered. "The four of us are alone today."

"Shall we go in?" said Lord Blair, nodding vigorously to Muriel; and the three men followed her into the dining-room.

The meal proved to be less of an ordeal than she had expected. Their visitor talked at first almost exclusively to his host, who showed him, and discussed, the draft of his reply to the Minister of War; and Muriel made herself quite entrancing to Rupert Helsingham. Under ordinary circumstances she was, in spite of occasional lapses into bored silence, a quick and witty talker; one who speedily established a sympathetic connection with the person with whom she was conversing; and her laughter was frequent and infectious. It was only this Daniel Lane who had such a disturbing effect upon her equanimity; but here, at the opposite side of a large table, she seemed to be out of range of his influence, and she rejoiced in her unimpaired power to captivate the little Diplomatic secretary.

"I am going to call you Rupert at once," she said to him; and, breaking in on the opposite conversation, "Father," she demanded, "d'you mind if I call this man by his Christian name? Everybody seems to."

Lord Blair laughed, holding out his hands in a gesture which indicated that he took no responsibility, and turned to Daniel. "Do you think I ought to let her?" he asked.

To Muriel his remark could hardly have been more unfortunate, and a momentary frown gathered upon her face.

"I think it's a good idea," replied Daniel, looking quietly at her. "Then if you quarrel you can revert to 'Mr. Helsingham' with telling effect."

Muriel made a slight movement, not far removed from a toss of her head, and, without giving any reply, continued her conversation to Rupert.

The meal was nearly finished when she became aware that her friend was

not paying full attention to her remarks, but was listening to Daniel Lane, whose tongue a glass of wine had loosened, and who was speaking in a low vibrating voice, describing some phases of his life in the desert. At this she, too, began to listen, at first with some irritation, but soon with genuine interest. She had supposed him to be more or less monosyllabic, and she was astonished at his command of languages.

As she fixed her eyes upon him he glanced at her for a moment, and there was a pause in his words. For the first time he was conscious of a look of friendship in her face; and his heart responded to the expression. The pause was hardly noticeable, but to him it was as though something of importance had happened; and when he turned again to continue to address himself to his host, there was a warm impulse behind his words. Muriel thereafter made no further remark to Rupert; but leaning her elbow upon the table, and fingering some grapes, gave her undivided attention to the speaker.

"It's always a matter of surprise to me," he was saying, "that people don't come out more often into the desert. You all sit here in this garden of Egypt, this little strip of fertile land on the banks of the Nile, and you look up at the great wall of the hills to east and west; but you don't ever seem to think of climbing over and running away into the wonderful country beyond."

Was it, he asked, that they were afraid of the roads that led nowhere-in-particular, and the tracks that wandered like meandering dreams? Why, those were the best kind of roads, because they merely took your feet wherever your heart suggested—to shady places where you could sprawl on the cool sand; or up to rocks where the sun beat on you and the invigorating wind blew on your face; or down to wells of good water where you could drink your fill and take your rest in the shade of the tamarisks; or along echoing valleys where there was always an interesting turning just ahead; or into the flat plains where the mirage receded before you.

"You soon grow desert-wise," he said: "you can't get lost; and at last the tracks will always bring you to some Abraham's tent, and he'll lift up his eyes and see you, and come running to you to bid you welcome. And there's bread for you, and honey, and curds, and camel's milk, and maybe venison; and tobacco; and quiet, courteous talk far into the night, under the stars; and perhaps a boy's full-throated song.... I can't think how you can live your crabbed life here in Cairo, when there's all that vast liberty so near at hand."

Muriel sipped her coffee, and listened, with a kind of excitement. His voice had some quality in it which seemed to arouse a response deep in the unfrequented places of her mind. It was as though she saw with her own eyes the scenes which he was describing. With him she ascended the bridlepath over the wall of the hills, and ran laughing down into the valleys beyond, the wind in her

face and the sun at her back; with him she went sliding down the golden drifts of sand, or sprang from rock to rock along the course of forgotten torrents; and with him she sat at the camp fire and listened to the far-off cry of the little jackals.

He told of warm moonlight nights spent in the open, when the drowsy eye looks up at the Milky Way, and the mind drifts into sleep, rocked, as it were, in a cradle slung between the planets. He spoke of the first sweet vision of the opalescent dawn, when sleep ends in quiet wakefulness, without a middle period of stupor; and of the rising sun over the low horizon, when every pebble casts a liquid blue shadow and the shallowest footprints in the sand look like little pools of water.

He told of blazing days; of long journeys across hills and plains; of the drumming of the pads of the camels upon the hard tracks; of deep, shadowed gorges, and precipices touched only at the summit by the glare of the sun; of the endless waves of the sand drifts, their sharp ridges seen against the sky, like gold against blue enamel; of flaming sunsets, and mysterious dusks, when, by creeping over the top of a hillock, one might look down at ghostly gazelle drinking from a pool, and might listen to the sucking in of the water.

And more especially he spoke of the freedom of the desert. "Ah, there's liberty for you!" he exclaimed, and his eyes seemed to be alight with his enthusiasm. "That's the life for a man! There are no clocks out there, no miserable appointments to keep, no laying of foolish foundation stones, or inspecting of sweating troops, no diplomatic speeches, no wordy documents signifying nothing. Out there the men that you meet speak the truth openly, and do all that they have to do without cunning, and without fuss or frills. If you are wandering and hungry they give you shelter and feed you; if they like you they treat you as a brother; and when they wish to kill you they tell you so, and give you four-and-twenty hours in which to quit. They are free men, and to them all men have the status of the free; all partake, so to speak, of the liberty of the desert."

He stopped rather abruptly: it was as though suddenly he had become conscious that he had engaged the attention of the company, and was abashed.

"You make me quite restless," said Lord Blair, as they rose from the table. "Some day you will find me, even conservative me, setting out into that happy playground beyond the horizon. Aha! I grow lyrical, too!"

"I've stayed too long," said Daniel. "I must say good-bye at once. I have a lot of shopping to do, and I told my men to meet me with the camels at five o'clock at Mena House."

"What!—are you going back at once?" exclaimed Rupert Helsingham, adjusting his eyeglass.

"Yes, I've had enough of Cairo," he laughed. "I feel like a fish out of water here, or rather, I feel like a jackal that has ventured into a village and must make

tracks over the wall and away. I've stolen a square meal and I'm off again."

He stood at the door smiling at them. He seemed now to radiate imperturbable and rather disconcerting happiness: it was as though he regarded life as a quiet, good-natured comedy, and the friends before him as participators in the fun. His talking about the desert had, as it were, softened his uncouthness, and had made him of a sudden surprisingly intelligible.

"I'm immensely obliged to you for coming," said Lord Blair, warmly clasping his hand. "In fact I can't tell you how highly I value your advice and friendship."

Muriel held out her hand. She saw this man in a new light, and her hostility was temporarily checked. His words had aroused in her a number of perplexing sensations: it was like tasting a new fruit, in part sweet, in part bitter.

"I've enjoyed listening to you," she said, frankly.

"I've enjoyed talking to you," he replied, his voice sinking, but his eyes fixed powerfully upon her.

There was something dominating in his manner which again caused her to be perverse. "I thought you were talking to my father," she answered casually.

"No," he said, "I was speaking to *you*."

CHAPTER V—FAMILY AFFAIRS

Daniel Lane left the Residency with curiously mixed feelings; and as he made his way through the sun-scorched streets, he found some difficulty in bringing his thoughts to bear upon the afternoon's business. He felt that he had talked too much: it was almost as though he had faithlessly given away secrets that were sacred. Lord Blair and young Helsingham were hardly possessed of ears in which to repeat the confidences of the desert; and as for Lady Muriel, he was not in a position to say whether she had received his words with real understanding or not.

He had enjoyed his luncheon, and he was obliged to confess to himself that dainty dishes and a handsome table were by no means to be despised. On the other hand, he had been conscious of an artificiality, a sort of pose in much that was said or done at the Residency. His long absences from his countrymen had

made him rather critical, and seemed now to reveal what might otherwise have passed undetected.

On the previous evening Muriel Blair had appeared to him—in her diamonds and frills and high-heeled shoes—to constitute as artificial a picture as could well be imagined; and he was disconcerted by the fact that nevertheless she had looked delightful. And today he had overheard fragments of her conversation with Rupert Helsingham, and had been alternately charmed and distressed by the manner in which they exhibited to one another their familiarity with all that was thought to represent modern culture and refinement of taste. It had seemed to be such empty wit; and yet the effect was often, as though by accident, quite close to the truth.

“Epstein is plain-spoken by implication”; ... “dear Augustus John! He’s a striking instance of the power of matter over mind”; ... “I always enjoy the Russian dancers: they are so stupid”; ... “the trouble with English Art is that it is so Scotch”; ... and so forth.

It was the wit of a certain section of London society, and it troubled him because it was restless and superficial; and he did not want to find an attractive girl, such as Muriel Blair, to be a kind of dragon-fly of a summer’s day. He would like to take her right out of her environment; and yet—oh, he could not be bothered with her!

With an effort he collected his thoughts, and, standing still at the street corner, studied his notebook and his watch. The first thing to be done was to go to find his cousin, to whom he had already sent a note saying that he would call upon him in the early afternoon, a time of day when at this season of the year most reasonable people remained within doors. He had long dreaded the visit to this unknown relative; and now after the tussle of the previous night, he felt keenly the awkwardness of the situation. However, the painful family duty could not be shirked, and the sooner it was over the better.

He turned off to his left, and walked quickly over to the barracks, which were not far distant; and at the gates he enquired his way to the officers’ quarters.

“Who d’you want to see, mate?” said a young corporal who sat in the shadow of the archway, picking his teeth.

Daniel told him.

“Oh, ’im!” chuckled the soldier. “Are you the man from Kodak’s? I ’eard him a-cursin’ and a-swearin’ this morning when ’e smashed ’is camera. Just ’ere, it was. ’E’ll give you ’Ell!—’e says the strap broke. It’s always somebody else’s fault with ’is Lordship.”

Daniel smiled. “A bit impatient like, is he?” he asked. He saw no point in explaining his identity.

“Impatient!” laughed the corporal. “Twice already ’e’s sent for the whole

shop. You'll catch it, mate, I warn yer!"

Daniel followed the direction indicated to him, and crossing the flaming compound, soon reached the entrance of his cousin's rooms. Here a soldier-servant took in his name, and, quickly returning, ushered him through the inner doorway.

Lord Barthampton had risen from his chair, and was standing in what appeared to be interested expectation of the meeting with his unknown relation. His tunic was unfastened, and his collarless shirt was open at the neck, revealing a pink, hairy chest. His heavy red face was damp with perspiration, and it was evident that he was feeling the effects of a large luncheon. He had a big lighted cigar in his hand, and on a table beside him there were glasses, a decanter, and a syphon. The *Sporting Times* and *Referee* lay on the floor at his feet.

As Daniel appeared in the doorway his manner suddenly changed, and his bloodshot blue eyes opened wide under frowning eyebrows. He slowly replaced the cigar in his mouth and thrust his hands into his pockets.

"What d'you want?" he muttered.

"Well, Cousin Charles ..." said Daniel. He held out his hand, but Lord Barthampton made no responding movement.

"So *you* are Daniel, are you!" he ejaculated. "I might have guessed it. I'd heard that you were a sort of prize-fighting vagabond. What d'you want to see me for?"

"First of all," the visitor replied, "to say I'm sorry about last night. I didn't know till afterwards who you were."

His cousin grunted like a pig. "You took an unfair advantage of me," he said. "You could see I was a bit tight. In England we don't think it's sporting to knock a man down when he's full of whiskey; but you Americans don't seem to know..."

Daniel smiled. "I'm English too, you know."

"Yes, in a way I suppose you are," he grumbled, dropping into an arm-chair. "We're both Lanes; but your mother was a Yankee, and you've spent half your life over there. You had no right to hit me."

"I didn't hit you," said Daniel, with a broad smile. "I only shook you; and I'll do it again if you don't offer me a chair."

Charles Barthampton stared at him, and, taking the cigar out of his mouth, blew a cloud of smoke from between his lips. "There's a chair behind you," he replied, rudely. "You can sit in it if it doesn't make you stay too long."

Daniel fetched the chair, and, placing it immediately in front of his cousin, sat himself down. "This is a bad start, cousin," he said. "I've told you I'm sorry; but you know quite well it was your own fault."

"I tell you I was tight," he answered petulantly. "And besides, what right

had you to be with Lizette? She belongs to the regiment.”

“She was good enough to have supper with me,” Daniel answered, and there was an unmistakable menace in his voice. “Please leave her out of the question.”

Lord Barthampton laughed. “I suppose you feel a bit struck on her this morning.”

Daniel suddenly rose to his feet; and his cousin, startled by the look in his face, sprang from his chair, and placed his hand on the bell on the wall behind him.

“Sit down, *Cousin* Daniel,” he sneered, “or I’ll ring the bell and have you thrown out by the guard.”

Daniel shrugged his shoulders, and resumed his seat. “There’s nothing to be timid about,” he replied, “if you’re careful what you say. I tell you again I apologize for my part in last night’s affair: I’m always ashamed of myself when I’m rough with anybody. I’ve come here to talk about family business, so you’d better sit down too.”

He pulled out his pipe, and began to fill it, while Charles Barthampton, with an awkward air of unconcern, sat heavily down once more.

“Family business, is it?” he growled. “I suppose you’re going to claim some money or something. Well, your name was mentioned in my father’s will, if you want to know, but he didn’t leave you anything.”

“He sent me a copy of the will last year, just before he died,” Daniel answered, unmoved.

His cousin glanced quickly at him. “Did he really?” he remarked. “That was odd, as he left you nothing; but he was a bit strange always. I don’t see what it had got to do with you, though. Your father, his brother, died years ago, didn’t he? And your mother hardly knew him.”

Daniel lit his pipe. “You forget,” he said, “that your father and I had a couple of months shooting together on the Peace River, three or four years ago, while you were in India. We became good friends, and I saw him in England afterwards.”

Lord Barthampton nodded, and was silent. He puffed viciously at his cigar; then, as though deciding that there might be some call for diplomacy, he pointed to the table. “Have a drink?” he said.

“No, thanks,” his visitor answered.

“Well, what the Hell *do* you want?” He was becoming exasperated.

Daniel looked gravely at him. “I want you to turn over a new leaf,” he said. “Now that you’ve inherited the property, and now that you’re head of the family, you’ve got a lot of responsibilities.”

“That’s my own business, not yours,” muttered his cousin, again grunting loudly.

“No, it’s my affair, too,” Daniel answered. “You’re not married; you have no son. As things stand at present I’m the next of kin. I’m your heir.”

The other uttered a short laugh. “Oh, I see,” he scoffed. “You’re banking on my drinking myself to death, or something, before I can become a proud father, eh? You wanted to have a look at me: and I suppose you’re disappointed to find I’m in the pink. You’d rather fancy yourself as Daniel Lane, Earl of Barthampton.” He made a gesture of contempt. “A pretty sight you’d make in the House of Lords! I wonder they even let you into the barracks!”

Daniel laughed with genuine amusement. “They thought I’d come to mend your camera.”

Lord Barthampton suddenly leapt to his feet. “God!” he exclaimed. “Where the Hell is that man?” He rang the bell furiously. “Why the blasted Hell don’t they come when I send for them?”

“Are you in a hurry to have it mended?” asked Daniel mildly.

“Of course I am!” snapped his cousin.

“Then why didn’t you take it round to the shop, yourself, instead of going into tantrums like a baby?”

His Lordship stood stock still, and stared at Daniel, like an infuriated bull. “I wish to God I knew why you were sitting here in my room!” he roared. “Why don’t you go?”

There was a knock at the door.

“Come in!” he snorted.

The knock was repeated.

“Come in, confound you!” he shouted, and thereat a soldier entered. “Are you deaf? Send somebody over to the camera place at once, and tell them that if they don’t attend to my orders I’ll break every damned thing in the shop. D’you hear?”

“In other words,” said Daniel, turning to the soldier, “say Lord Barthampton presents his compliments, and would be very grateful if they would hustle a bit.”

His cousin turned on him as the soldier, prompted by natural tact, speedily left the room. “Will you kindly mind your own business!” he snapped.

“How Lord Barthampton behaves *is* my business,” Daniel answered sternly. “Now, sit down there,” he added peremptorily, “and listen to me.”

The infuriated man stood where he was, breathing hard and biting at his cigar.

“Sit down, I said!” Daniel repeated; and now there was a ring of command in his voice at which the other started. He evidently had not forgotten last night.

“Oh, very well,” he replied, and flung himself into his chair.

Daniel leant forward and drew a long, type-written letter from his pocket. “This,” he said, “is a copy of your father’s last letter to me.”

"If he promised you any money," the other interjected, "you won't get it."

Daniel took no notice. "I won't trouble you with the first pages of the letter," he remarked. "They just tell an old man's disappointment in his son, and his fears that you will not only ruin yourself, but also sully the name and squander the estate. 'Now, Daniel,' he writes, 'I am going to put the matter entirely into your hands, and to rely on your honour to carry out my wishes. In spite of my son's shortcomings I love him for his mother's sake, and it is my earnest desire that he should be a worthy representative of our line. If, however, you find that he is hopelessly going to the bad, I herewith place the documentary evidence in your hands by means of which you can turn him out in favour of yourself.'"

"What's he mean?" exclaimed his cousin, half rising from his chair. "It's forgery—it's a trick or something!" His voice was unsteady.

Daniel, pipe in mouth, continued quietly to read: "I regret to say that, as these papers will show, my son was born out of wedlock. You are aware, no doubt, that I met my wife in South Africa, when I had a farm there, some years before I even expected to come into the title; but, except you and I, no living person knows that Charles was born six months before our marriage. I now leave the secret entirely in your discretion, knowing that you will only reveal it if you feel that I should wish you to do so."

"It's a lie!" shouted Lord Barthampton. "It's blackmail!"

"No," said Daniel. "There's no getting over it. The documents are all in order. You're only Lord Barthampton on sufferance."

His cousin sank back in his chair. His cigar had gone out, and he flung it on the ground. Then he leant forward and rested his head in his hands, scratching his red ear with one finger. In this attitude he appeared fat, unpleasant, and altogether devoid of dignity.

At length he looked up, sullenly, with a sort of cunning in his face. "How much do you want for those papers?" he asked.

Daniel sucked at his pipe for a few moments. "I want rather a stiff price," he declared at length.

"What?" said his cousin, in a dull voice.

Daniel fixed his eyes upon him. "Your reformation," he said.

"Oh, go to Hell!" was the reply, and Daniel rather liked him for it. He felt uncomfortable in a mentorial rôle.

"Look here," he said, "let's understand what your father meant."

Charles Barthampton got up and mixed himself a whiskey-and-soda. "If that letter's genuine," he muttered, "there's no understanding him."

"Oh, yes, it's simple enough," replied Daniel. "You are his son, whether you're legitimate or not; and he didn't want to have your name, or his, or especially your mother's, dragged through the mud by letting out his secret. So he

wished you to inherit. But at the same time, he had a very Spartan sense of duty; and, as he was good enough to trust me, he thought I would act as a bit of a brake on you, if you knew that I could have you fired out if you didn't behave yourself."

"A dirty trick!" the other grunted, pacing up and down the room, his fists clenched, and much of the colour gone from his face. He swung round on his heel, and stared at Daniel with fierce, bloodshot eyes. "Oh, it'll be easy enough for you to find a pretext for outing me. I can see already I'm done for. You've only got to say the word, but, by God! if you do turn me out"—he shook his fist in his cousin's face—"I'll send a bullet through you."

Daniel put his hand to his hip-pocket, from which the butt of his revolver protruded. "I'm not a bad shot myself," he replied.

"Oh, really!" Barthampton ejaculated, with an explosive splutter, and, darting to the table, he pulled open a drawer and dived his hand into it.

Instantly Daniel whipped out his revolver and covered him. "Stand back from that table!" he called out, and there was something very terrible in his voice.

His cousin's hand fell to his side, and he took a pace back. Still covering him, and not taking his eyes from him, Daniel leaned over the table and felt for the revolver which lay there. Having found it, he slipped it into the pocket of his jacket.

"Now don't behave like a damned fool," he said. "Understand me: I am not going to turn you out. I haven't the slightest wish to do so. I don't want the beastly estates, and I much prefer to be plain Daniel Lane. By law I'm Lord Barthampton, not you; but by something that's above law, I mean fair-play, you are your father's son and the heir he wanted. And nothing short of your utter damn-foolery will ever make me turn you out. D'you understand? But, mind you," and his voice resumed its gravity, "you've got to turn over a new leaf. You've got to give up your drink and your pig ways, and your gambling, and your tantrums, and your women. You've got to be a considerate landlord to your tenants, and a good citizen, and a credit to your country, and your regiment, and your family. And you've got to live within your income, and give generously to the poor. D'you hear me?—give generously to the poor. We shan't see much of each other, but from time to time I'll look you up, and I shall be surprised if I don't find a great improvement in you."

Lord Barthampton stood in front of him, staring at him as at a ghost. He was visibly trembling, and his face had lost its colour. Very nearly he had been a murderer. He appeared to be on the verge of collapse.

"D'you mean what you say?" he whispered. "How can I trust you?" His mouth was so dry that his tongue clicked as he spoke.

"Your father trusted me," Daniel replied, and held out his hand.

Very slowly his cousin responded, and a cold, trembling, clammy hand was

[image]

A SCENE FROM THE PHOTOPLAY—BURNING SANDS

placed in his own.

“Very well, then, good-bye, Cousin Charles. I’m off to the desert now. I don’t know when we’ll meet again.”

He took his cousin’s revolver from his pocket and, putting it back in the place where he had found it, closed the drawer. “May I take one of your cigars?” he asked. His pipe had gone out.

“Y-yes, of course,” the wretched man replied, still standing like one in a dream.

Daniel took the cigar, lit it, and, turning round, walked out of the room.

In the blazing sunlight outside he paused and stared across the dazzling open space, which, towards the west, led down to the Nile. A scorching wind beat in his face, and blew the dust of his footsteps towards the building which he had left. “Phew!” he whispered. “Thus goes ten thousand pounds a year and a peerage!”

He gazed across the river to the shimmering line of the desert which could be seen in the distance between the palms, and held out his hands towards it.

CHAPTER VI—TOWARDS THE SUNSET

During the warm weather an afternoon siesta is habitual to the residents in Egypt, and Muriel at once lent her support to the custom with undisguised approval. This was but her third day in Cairo, yet, as soon as Daniel Lane had taken his departure, she went up to her room as though to the manner born, and slipped off her dress.

The bed looked cool and inviting, and a mass of white roses upon a table beside her pillow spread a gentle fragrance through the room; but this she thoughtlessly dissipated by lighting a Turkish cigarette. She did not particularly

want to smoke, but she felt that the little gold-tipped cigarette was in keeping with her state of dainty semi-undress, with her somewhat exotic surroundings, and with the French novel which she had selected as an inducement to sleep.

Anybody peeping at her through the keyhole as she lay upon the rose-bud coverlet, bare arms and silk-stockinged legs asprawl, would have been hard put to it to decide whether here rested the girlish chastity of English tradition or the naughtiness of French fiction; for nowadays, when the one has had the hardihood at last to claim its share of the habiliments of the other, appearances are astonishingly deceptive. Actually, however, Muriel was but an innocent production of that form of upbringing which, while encouraging independence of action, accustoms the minds to the standards of the seraglio.

She had moved freely in the segment of London society which patronizes Covent Garden, hobnobs with the stage, and becomes ecstatic over the latest painter, sculptor, poet, or dancer. She had been shown all the little vices and failings of the world in their most attractive guise; and for her special edification the ancient virtues had been rendered even more seemingly ridiculous than the virtuous themselves had made them. Obediently she had laid her thoughtless tribute at the altar of the alluring goddess of today; and she had been shown the correct posture of obeisance that was to be made to the World, the Flesh, and the Devil.

She had been taught, if she had not actually mastered, all the short cuts to that appearance of culture which is so highly appraised; and, in matters of taste and form, she had been shown how to be bizarre without being crude, audacious without being vulgar. She knew just what to say about men of letters, and what books to leave lying about the room; and in regard to politics, the church, and sport, she had been shown how to lump the three together under the one heading of "Tradition."

It was now three years since this part of her education had begun; and yet she had passed through the school with a surprisingly unsullied mind. Like most pupils of her age, she was, of course, in complete outward subjection to Mistress Fashion; but a spirit of mutiny still plotted in the dark chambers of her heart.

She had not yet altogether stupefied herself into that chronic semblance of light-heartedness which passes for happiness; and there were moments when in inward revolt she sent her entire circle of friends to blazes. At such times she was vaguely aware that, in some subtle manner, she was in bondage; but so carefully had she been trained to wear her golden chains with grace that the fleeting consciousness of their presence induced little more than an extra yawn or two, and a more luxurious enjoyment of any opportunity to kick up her heels.

As she lay now upon the bed, she was not conscious of any lack of freedom in her life, and yet she was profoundly happy to be out here in Egypt, where the

day's routine was not so hide-bound as it was in England.

The drone of the flies and the plaintive cry of the circling kites, the incessant cawing of the crows in the garden, and the occasional song of the boatmen on the Nile, soon lulled her to sleep; and it was four o'clock before she arose to dress herself for her ride with Rupert Helsingham. When she descended the stairs half an hour later, she was wearing a new riding-habit of white linen and a wide-brimmed felt hat in which she was conscious of appearing at her best.

Rupert, too, who awaited her at the tea-table in the drawing-room, was aware of his own becoming costume; and the spurs upon his highly polished boots clicked more frequently than was necessary. He was certainly good-looking, if somewhat undersized.

"I've told them to meet us with the horses on the other side of the water," he said. "We'll go across in the launch, which will save a long round by the bridge."

After a hasty cup of tea, therefore, they walked through the garden to the landing-steps, and were soon speeding over the river in the glare of the afternoon sun, the cloudless heavens above them and the swift-flowing waters of the ancient Nile shining beneath.

They landed amidst the cool shade of the palms on the opposite bank, near a road along which many native carriages and English dogcarts were passing to and fro, this being the fashionable hour for taking the air; and many curious eyes were turned upon the immaculate couple as they mounted their horses, for the white launch with its little Union Jack at the stern, and the scarlet livery of the native attendants, revealed their identity, and Lady Muriel's charms had already become a topic of general conversation.

"Which way would you like to go?" asked Rupert. "By the native roads across the fields, or straight along the main road out to Mena House?"

Muriel looked quickly at him. "Mena House?" she said. "Isn't that on the edge of the desert, where Mr. Lane said he was starting from?"

Her companion nodded. "Yes," he answered. "We would probably run into him. Shall we go the other way?"

Muriel drew rein for a moment. She would like to take her first view over that garden wall of which Daniel Lane had spoken, and it might be interesting to watch him ride away towards the setting sun. She might even have an opportunity of firing a parting shot at him—something about his rumoured harim of Bedouin women to whom he seemed so anxious to return. She would like to hurt him.

"No, let's go to Mena House," she answered at length, and she gave as her reason her anxiety to see the Pyramids which stand on the edge of the desert, dominating the well-known Mena House Hotel.

Rupert looked at his watch. "It's nearly five," he remarked, without any

particular reason. He was not thinking of the hour of Daniel Lane's departure.

But Muriel was thinking of it, and, for answer, she urged her horse forward.

"I enjoy a good long gallop, don't you?" she said, as they turned into the avenue of acacias which runs in a fine straight line out to the desert, flanked by a riding-track of soft earth.

"It's a bit hot for anything strenuous, isn't it?" he suggested. He wanted to ride quietly and talk to her as they went.

For some distance they trotted in silence, but at length Muriel shortened her rein. "Come in!" she laughed, and therewith she gave her restless Arab a touch with her heel, and instantly was off and away in a cloud of dust, as though she and her horse had been discharged in one piece from some monstrous gun.

Rupert swore peevishly, and followed in her wake, presently overtaking her and galloping by her side. The tree-trunks on either hand seemed to whirl past them, and the foliage, which met overhead, formed a sort of tunnel pierced at one side by stabbing shafts of dazzling sunlight. The effect was blinding, and soon Rupert, an excellent horseman, began to feel as though he were the maddened villain of some flickering film of the Wild West, whose career had soon to end in a frightful tumble.

"Isn't it lovely?" shouted Muriel, ecstatically. Her blood seemed to be boiling in her veins; she glowed like a fiery immortal being, full of tremendous excitement and enthusiasm. This was life!—this was youth! She dragged her hat over her eyes, regardless of her own appearance, regardless of the hat's. She felt entirely crazy, and presumably her horse felt the same, for not for a moment did he slacken his thundering speed. The warm wind whistled in her ears; occasional roadside villas appeared to whirl past almost as soon as they were sighted; an automobile, full of gesticulating Egyptians, raced them and had difficulty in beating them; the electric tram from the Pyramids to Cairo appeared to leap past them with wildly clanging bell; she caught sudden glimpses of peasant carts and an occasional smart carriage, astonished brown faces and smiling white ones. Her hair began to come down.

At last her horse had had enough, and his gallop decreased to a trot, his trot to a walk. Her companion turned a laughing red face to her. He had caught the infection of her spirits, and, like her, was conscious of a burning sense of youth and strength. The perspiration was streaming down his cheeks.

"Phew!" he exclaimed, and recklessly mopped his forehead with a coloured silk handkerchief intended only for a breast-pocket ornament. "D'you often get taken like that?"

Muriel laughed excitedly, and, twisting the reins around her arm, pulled off her hat, thereby letting loose a tumbling mass of brown hair, which fell about her shoulders. Then, handing the hat to Rupert to hold, she raised her hands

and coiled up the hair on to her head again, fastening it with the few remaining hairpins.

Rupert uttered an ordinary, vulgar whistle. He, too, had been galloped into naturalness. "By Jove!" he cried. "You have got glorious hair!"

Muriel settled her hat upon her head once more, and picked up her reins.

"I'll let it down properly for you some day," she said. At that moment she would have stood on her head, had anybody dared her to do so. A law should be passed prohibiting women from galloping.

"I'll kiss you if you do," replied Rupert. The law should, perhaps, include young men as well.

He was startled at his audacity; but Muriel was not in a mental condition to do otherwise than laugh.

Thus they arrived, like two flushed children, at the end of the road, the hotel on their right, the mighty Pyramids rising up like hand-made mountains on their left, backed by the descending sun. In front of them stretched the desert—a ridge of white and yellow shelving rocks, and great shadowed slopes of sand mounting to the clear sky. Southwards, at the foot of the hills, stood a native village, the clustered white houses and dignified groups of palms reflected in the still waters of the inundation which, at this time of the year, cover the surrounding fields.

Outside the hotel several Bedouin dragomans sauntered about or sat smoking and chatting; and a few camels and donkeys, saddled in readiness for hire, stood tethered near by.

Muriel hardly glanced at the Pyramids: they had been visible to her through the trees during most of the ride, and they were just as she had pictured them. But the Bedouin in their flowing silks, the betasselled camels, and the background of the desert made a picture which delighted her eyes.

"What's the time?" she asked. "I wonder if he has gone."

It was some seconds before Rupert took her meaning: he had forgotten about Daniel Lane. He looked at his watch: it was half-past five.

"I'll ask some of these fellows if they've seen him," he said, perhaps a little put out. A shadow had fallen upon the gay opening scene of his romance.

He rode forward, and soon elicited the information that "the Englishman who came in from the desert" had but a few minutes ago gone up the hill to the rocky plateau above, where his camels were awaiting him.

"We've missed him," he said, returning to her. "He's just gone."

"Well, let's ride after him," she answered, and without further remark she trotted up the short, winding road which led on to the higher ground. Rupert followed her, musing upon the inscrutable ways of women.

The road lay in the shadow of the hillside, but as they reached the summit they came into the full glare of the setting sun which was now nearing the distant

horizon. On their left the Pyramids towered up into the blazing sky, but before them the rock-strewn plateau lay open and vast, and over it the wind blew warm and mysterious.

Muriel arched her hand above her eyes and looked about her.

"There he is!" she cried at length, directing her companion to a little group in a sandy hollow about a hundred yards distant, and therewith they both trotted forward.

Daniel Lane was about to mount his camel as they approached. Muriel waved her hand to him, whereat he pulled off his well-worn hat and laughed aloud.

"That's odd!" he said. "I had a sort of feeling you'd come."

Muriel stared at him, and her responding smile died upon her lips.

"We rode in this direction quite at random," said she, coldly. "I don't yet know one way from another."

"Well, you've found your way to the desert quickly enough," he replied. "You know there are some people who seem to be drawn towards it at once."

Muriel glanced about her. "I think it looks a horrid place," she said, which was entirely untruthful. "I don't feel at all drawn to it."

She turned to Rupert Helsingham. He was slowly riding round the four camels which crouched, grunting, on the sand, in charge of two lean and wild-looking men of the desert, whose appearance was strikingly different from that of the Bedouin of the Pyramids, grown prosperous in their profession as guides and dragomans to the sightseers. Three of the camels were saddled, the seat in each case being covered by a rough sheepskin, and having on either side a coarsely embroidered bag containing food, while a rifle and two water-bottles were slung across the back. The fourth camel, which was to be led by one of the riders, was lightly laden with stores and various purchases made in Cairo, and two small water-skins depended at its sides.

"I travel light, you see," said Daniel, as Rupert returned to them.

"Yes, you couldn't otherwise have come in at the pace you did," he answered. "Are you going back at the same rate?"

Daniel laughed. "Oh, no," he said. "I shall travel in easy stages, taking five or six days probably—as long as the food lasts, in fact. We can pick up water at the wells, and if we shoot anything we can take it still slower."

Muriel looked curiously at him. "Then why were you in such a hurry to be off?" she asked.

"One night in a Cairo hotel is enough for me," he answered. "I'm starting now so as to get ten or fifteen miles away by bedtime, where I can sleep peacefully on the clean sand, away from mosquitoes and bad smells and noise. And then we can just saunter. So long as we plan to reach a water-hole every two days,

there's nothing to hurry us."

He turned towards the sunset and breathed in the pure air with evident satisfaction. "It's splendid to think there's all that empty space in front of one!" he exclaimed. "In a few minutes now I shall be swallowed up in it! Gee! I'll think of you tonight, my girl, in your stuffy bedroom; and you can envy me lying under God's heaven, talking with my two good friends here about cities and slavery and civilization and things, till we yawn ourselves to sleep."

Muriel's interest in him began to revive. "It sounds wonderful," she said, doubtfully.

The sun had sunk behind the low line of the horizon when at length Daniel bid good-bye and mounted his camel. Rupert, who was impatient to be back, had already turned his horse's head and was slowly moving away as the four camels, snarling and complaining in their wonted manner, rose upon their long legs, lifting their riders high above the ground; but Muriel remained for a moment or two, curbing her restless horse, while Daniel looked down at her from his lofty seat.

"I've enjoyed meeting you," he said. "I'm afraid you think I'm very rude and rough. I don't mean to be, only—"

"Only what?" she asked, as he paused.

"Yes?" She was all attention now.

"Only when I meet a girl like you—"

"Oh, I don't know," he said, and there came a look of great earnestness into his eyes. "There's so much you've got to unlearn, my dear."

He struck his camel lightly with his stick, and trotted away. Then, turning in his saddle, he put his hand to his mouth and called out to her: "Why don't you break loose?"

Muriel made a gesture indicating that she did not understand, but his head was again averted, and he did not look round. She watched him, as, followed by the men, he slid silently away into the barren vastness of the desert. He seemed to be riding straight into the glory of the sunset.

Then she wheeled her horse around, and cantered after her companion. Far off in front of her now the city was spread out amongst its trees and luxuriant fields. From the high ground she looked down on distant roofs of palaces and mansions, domes and cupolas, minarets and towers, and the lights began to twinkle in the windows along the embankment of the Nile. It looked like an enticing magic City of Happiness; and she glanced over her shoulder with a sudden wave of terror at the darkening immensity of the desert behind.

CHAPTER VII—THE DESERT AND THE CITY

Daniel's mind was not at ease as he rode through the gathering darkness. His thoughts had been shaken out of their habitual tranquillity by his few hours in the city, and he had the feeling that he had turned his back upon a picture which he would have liked a little longer to contemplate, that he had shut a book in which he would have preferred to read yet another chapter. But when the moon rose and cast its early mystery upon the empty wilderness around him, a greater calm fell upon him, and he began to appreciate once more that sense of detachment from the restless doings of the world which is the particular gift of the desert.

For two hours or more he rode in silence, and ever as he passed deeper into the great void before him his musing mind contemplated with increasing serenity the events of the last night and day. Out here in this everlasting calm he could smile at the little agitations which had beset him in Cairo, and could observe their triviality. Here the strident call of flesh and blood was hushed, and the equable balance of mind and body was able to be resumed. No wonder, he thought to himself that the monks of old had hidden themselves in the wilderness: they had discovered a blessed equanimity, and a consequent happiness not to be found in the busy thoroughfares of the city.

At length he called a halt in a rugged valley, through which a stream had flowed in bygone ages. Its bed of fine shingle and sand made a soft and pliable resting-place; and here he ate his evening meal, lying back upon his sheepskin thereafter, smoking his pipe and talking to his friends, until sleep came to him.

On the following day they rode no more than five-and-twenty miles, taking a course somewhat more roundabout than that of their outward journey, and it was mid-afternoon when they reached the water-hole at which the night was to be spent. Riding round a bend in a precipitous valley, Daniel, who was some distance ahead of his retainers, suddenly found himself looking down upon the rocky hollow in which lay the little pool of water, so blue in its setting of mellow sun-bathed rocks that it seemed even deeper in tone than the sky it reflected.

Here grew the greenest reeds and rushes, and, mirrored in the water, there was a delicate tamarisk whose soft foliage swayed in the breeze as though setting the time to the nodding dance of the reeds.

Sitting beside the pool a little girl was tending a few goats whose bleating came merrily to his ears on the wind. She had not heard the soft pads of his approaching camel, and he was almost upon her before she looked up. With a cry of surprise she fled down the valley, and suddenly, from amidst the shadows of the boulders, a grey-bearded son of the desert stepped forth into the sunlight, an ancient broadsword in his hands, and a ragged cloak of many colours thrown over his shoulders.

Daniel dismounted from his camel, and exchanged greetings with the patriarch, while the little girl hid herself behind the man's thin brown legs, and the goats leaped upon the rocks to stare at the stranger from a safe distance.

"Never fear, little one," said the old man as he patted the child's head. "This is only an Englishman. There are many such: they harm not."

The old goatherd, and two of his grandsons, who presently made their appearance, proved to be related to families in the Oasis of El Hamrân where Daniel resided; and the talk during the evening meal was all of mutual acquaintances, of the movements of various groups of Bedouin, of camping-grounds and water-holes.

A woman and the little girl, her daughter, sat amidst the rocks in the background as they talked, and Daniel observed that the child was nursing a primitive doll made of three sticks and a piece of rag, and that at length she fell asleep with this poor proxy held close in her brown arms. Later in the evening, therefore, in the light of the moon, he fashioned a very much more convincing article out of sticks, string, and a handkerchief; and with his fountain-pen he outlined an audacious face, which, with a few combings from his sheepskin in the place of hair, gave an appearance of striking and awful reality to the figure.

The goatherds encouraged his efforts with excited laughter, and when, at last, the doll was finished, he walked over to the sleeping girl and placed it in her arms.

On the third day they made good going, passing across a range of low hills, and descending into a wide plain where they disturbed a herd of gazelle, which went galloping off at their approach and were lost in the haze of the distance.

So they journeyed in easy stages; and day by day Daniel more fully resumed that jovial, contented mind which is the basis of happiness. The benign influence of sun and breeze and open space was upon him once more, and his heart was filled as it were with laughter. Riding ever westward, he seemed to be following the course of the sun; and each evening, as it passed down behind the horizon ahead, it marked tomorrow's track, as though bidding him come deeper, ever

deeper, into the merry freedom of the desert. He whistled a tune to himself as he rode through echoing valleys; he sang at the top of his voice as, far ahead of his men, he passed over the hills, and viewed the great vistas before him; and as he drew near to the oasis which was his destination, and observed once again the presence of birds and the tracks of jackals, he urged his camel forward with many an endearing and persuasive word.

Now he met with goatherds and camelherds who were his friends, and merrily he called his greetings to them; now he knew the lie of the country, and noted the places where, from time to time, he had camped or rested in the shade at noon when he had been out hunting gazelle, or tracking the jackals to their lairs, by way of exercise. Now the west wind brought the faint scent of the cultivated land to his sensitive nostrils, and his camel lifted its head to snuff at the breeze.

At last, in a golden sunset, amidst the chattering of innumerable sparrows, he descended from the barren hills into the dense palm groves of the Oasis of El Hamrân, from whose shadows the white-robed figures of the Bedouin emerged to greet him.

An all-pervading peace enfolded him, and his short visit to civilized life seemed like a dream that was fading from his memory. The city beside the Nile had become a thing of unreality, and he had awakened, as it were, to the happy sunshine of life's placid day, and was eager to be once more at his work.

Yet, in far-away Cairo, there were five minds at least which retained a vivid recollection of his brief incursion into the city. There was Lord Barthampton, who, for forty-eight hours after Daniel's departure, had lain in a drunken stupor which, for form's sake, was termed a touch of the sun; and who, thereafter, had forsworn all intoxicating liquor, and had resumed his place at the mess in the sullen silence of one who has returned unwillingly to the fold.

There was Lizette, who had wept a little, and for a little while had bemoaned her lot, and who, later, had gone, as was her wont, to the Franciscan Church, and had said her beads and had prayed that one day she might meet again the mighty man who had sent the pig Barthampton so beautifully sprawling upon the floor.

There was Lord Blair, who had received an effusive reply from the gratified Minister of War, and, thereat, had schemed and plotted to bring the wise Daniel within closer reach of the Residency. There was Rupert Helsingham, who, ever since the ride to Mena House, had been filled with matrimonial dreams and fears of rivalry, and had racked his brains to decide upon a course of action which should give him opportunities of displaying those brutal tendencies of manhood which seemed to be so successful with the opposite sex.

And lastly, there was Muriel, who had aroused Rupert's jealousy by talking from time to time about Daniel, with a sort of defiance in her voice which could almost be mistaken for awe.

It was inevitable that she and Charles Barthampton should meet: it was only strange that they had not met before in London. On the same evening upon which Daniel had arrived at his home in El Hamrân, his cousin was a guest at dinner at the Residency, where he found himself seated next to Muriel. The latter had been taken into dinner by one of the Egyptian princes, an elegant personage who had lived most of his life in Vienna, Paris, and Monte Carlo, and whose contempt for the English was only equalled by his scorn of the Egyptians. He was an authority on modern French art; and when Muriel, in a frenzy of tact, had rushed the conversation again and again into that province, and had exhausted all that she knew by rote upon the subject, she was glad of an opportunity to turn in the opposite direction and address herself to Barthampton.

He, on his part, had taken in the daughter of the French Consul-General, who was much more interested in Rupert Helsingham upon her other hand; and, being thus left alone to play with his toast and sip his wine, he had turned to Muriel with relief.

"I can't talk to this French girl," he whispered. "She doesn't understand English, and my French isn't exactly ladylike."

"Well, do you know anything about French art?" she asked, hopefully. "I'm sitting next to a connoisseur, and I've run dry."

"French art?" he laughed. "Rather! I've got a collection of postcards—I've framed some of them; and I take *La Vie Parisienne* regularly."

Muriel sighed. "No, I'm afraid that won't help," she said.

"Well, try him on English art," he suggested. "Good stuff, you know—Landseer and Leighton and Alma-Tadema."

"No," said Muriel gravely, "he's very modern."

"Oh, modern, is he? Then what about Kirchner? Or Cecil Aldin?—but I don't suppose he knows a fox from a hound." He leaned forward and stared at the Prince. "Queer little devil, isn't he, what? Doesn't look much like a nigger."

"Why should he?" Muriel asked. "The Royal house is Albanian—pure Turkish."

"Oh, I lump them all together," he answered, with a gesture of his red hand. "Quaint country, Egypt, isn't it? What d'you think of it?"

"So far, I like it immensely," she replied. "But I shouldn't think it was an interesting place for a soldier. What do your men think of it?"

"I don't know: I've never asked 'em," he replied. "Not much, I shouldn't think. There are not enough housemaids to go round, and the beer's atrocious. I can't think why we're not kept in London; after all, we're the Guards. They ought to leave the dirty work to the ordinary regiments of the line. I don't see why we should be made to sweat out here. It's these Radicals: they never can mind their own business."

“Father and I are Radicals, you know,” she smiled. “And our forebears were Whigs before us.”

“Beg pardon,” he said, with a grunt. “I’d forgotten my history lessons. We Lanes were always Tories.”

Muriel glanced at him quickly. “Oh, I’d quite forgotten,” she said, with interest. “Of course, you’re a Lane. I wonder if you’re any relation to a certain Daniel Lane?”

Lord Barthampton’s face fell. “How d’you come to know Daniel Lane?” he asked, as he busied himself with his food.

“I met him the other day,” she answered. “He’s a friend of my father’s. Oh, yes, I remember now: he said he had a relation out here in the Guards.”

“Yes,” he replied, with his mouth full. “He’s a cousin; but I hardly know him. He’s spent much of his life in the States.”

“Tell me about him,” she said. She was all interest.

“I don’t know anything to tell you,” he answered, casually. “He’s a crank—lives with the niggers in the desert or something. Looks like a tramp.”

“He’s very clever, isn’t he? My father thinks the world of him.”

Lord Barthampton noisily threw down his knife and fork. “There’s not much love lost between him and me,” he said, and relapsed into silence; while Muriel, seeing that she had touched upon a sore subject, took the opportunity to resume her conversation with her partner.

Late that evening, after the guests had departed, Muriel, prompted by a sense of duty, found herself in the library, bidding a motherly good-night to her father, who was smoking a final cigar, and was standing before the empty fireplace, his hands under his coattails in unconscious retention of the habits of other days.

“By the way,” she said, “did you know that Lord Barthampton was Daniel Lane’s cousin?”

“You don’t say so!” he exclaimed. “Well, well! I had no idea.”

He opened a bookcase, and lifting out *Burke’s Peerage*, turned over its pages with evident interest. After a few moment’s study, he uttered a little ejaculation.

“Dear me, dear me!” he remarked. “Daniel is not only his cousin, but his heir presumptive.” He stroked his chin, and carried the bulky volume nearer to the light. “Hm! Well, well—to be sure!” he muttered.

He laid the book down, and clasping his hands behind his back, walked to and fro across the room, while Muriel turned to glance at the family record.

As she looked up once more, her father paused, his head on one side, his fingers stroking his jaw. “Now, if that lout were to die ...” he mused.

“D’you mean Mr. Lane?” asked Muriel innocently.

“No, no! Tut, tut!” exclaimed her father, pinching the lobe of her ear, and

then, as though afraid of giving offence, patting her cheek instead. "Daniel Lane is not a lout! I was referring to his cousin. If Daniel were to inherit—"

"If he were to inherit," Muriel put in, as he paused, "there'd be a panic in the House of Lords—peers hiding under benches, Lord Chancellor flung into gallery, Archbishop popped into waste-paper basket—"

Lord Blair raised his delicate hand in protest: his thoughts were more serious. "You know," he said, "that man is wasting himself in the desert. I wish I could persuade him to accept some official position in Cairo. I should like to push him into prominence—oblige him, force him, to take an active part in the government of this country."

An expression almost of sadness came into his face. "I sometimes feel," he went on, "that we diplomatists, products of the Foreign Office, are totally unfitted to rule a mediæval country such as this. Look at me, Muriel; am I the romantic figure to impress the native mind? Egypt does not want diplomacy; she wants physical strength combined with philosophy—she wants a man who is a mighty hunter before the Lord, a giant, a hero out of a legend."

"Oh, father dear," Muriel replied, "everybody says you are the ideal ruler." She felt sorry for him: he seemed such an insignificant little figure, so fussy, so well-meaning, and just now so modest.

"No," he continued, "I don't understand the native mind; I must confess, I don't understand it. And I sometimes think that I am not serving the best interests of England. I want my country to be respected, Muriel; I have such vast ambition for England. I want our manhood to be seen to the best advantage, so that the natives may say: 'Since we are to be ruled, let us be glad that we are ruled by *men*.'"

Muriel put her hands upon his shoulders. For the first time she really liked him. "I think you're splendid, father," she said.

"Now, if Daniel Lane took his position in society," he mused, "if, for instance, he were Lord Barthampton, there would be no difficulty. I could push him forward, and in a few years he would be old enough to succeed me here at the Residency. A little more care about his appearance, perhaps—"

"And a little less rudeness," said Muriel.

"No, he is not rude," Lord Blair corrected her. "He is only unceremonious."

There was a tap at the door, and Rupert entered. He was the only one of the Secretaries who lived on the premises.

"I'm just off to bed," he said. "Is there anything you want me to do, sir?"

Lord Blair looked at him, as though waking from a dream. "Let me see, yes, there was something I was going to ask you to do. What was it, now? Dear, dear! How bad my memory is! Ah, yes, I have it! A letter: I want you to acknowledge it formally, the first thing in the morning. It's on my study table. No, you could

not find it in all that litter. I must really have a grand tidying-up, I must indeed. One moment: I'll get it for you."

He hurried from the room, in short, nervous steps, and, as he disappeared, Rupert turned to Muriel. "By Jove!" he exclaimed. "You do look beautiful tonight. I could hardly take my eyes off you all the evening."

Muriel smiled happily. "I'm glad you think so. I thought I looked a sight; and Prince What's-his-name was evidently bored with me."

"On the contrary," he answered, "he told me he thought you were charming, and such a connoisseur."

"Of what," she asked brightly.

"Of the art of the Stone Age, he said. I don't know what he meant."

Muriel flushed. "The little beast!" she cried, angrily. "He was trying to be rude."

"Rude, was he?" said Rupert, viciously. He assumed a fighting attitude, and, when Muriel had frankly explained the insinuation of the remark, he set his teeth and made a determined attempt to appear grim.

"He'll get one in the jaw, if he doesn't look out," he muttered.

Lord Blair re-entered the room, carrying the letter (for some unknown reason) extended in his thumb and first finger as though it smelt. He paused on seeing Rupert's simulation of pugilism, and looked at him critically, as it were measuring the young man's capacities in that arena. Then he shook his head sadly, and handed him the letter.

When Rupert had left them, Lord Blair turned to his daughter. "Undersized," he murmured, "sadly undersized."

"Oh, not so very," said Muriel, divining his thoughts. "And, any way, he's a good-looking boy, and his manners are charming. I'm growing very fond of Rupert."

Lord Blair glanced at her quickly.

CHAPTER VIII—THE ACCOMPLICE

Undoubtedly the ancients were quite right in regarding youth as a kind of fever,

an intermittent sickness lasting from puberty to middle age. In Egypt this particular illness is rampant: everybody who is not old feels youthful, and the actually youthful have hours of violent delirium.

As the weather, in the last days of October, became cooler and more stimulating, Lady Muriel began to experience a series of startling sensations. She felt excited, and her mind turned itself to a heated study of the romantic possibilities of existence at the Residency. She had always been told that a young woman's life was divided into two distinct ages, the first being a period filled with romantic episodes and terminated by marriage, and the second being a period crowded with very serious love affairs and only curtailed by age or the divorce court.

So far she could safely say that she had only been in love three times. Once at Eastbourne, during her school-days, she had fallen into a divine frenzy over a curate, who had been a rigger blue at Oxford, and who, in a certain brief and desperate sofa-episode, had apparently mistaken her for the football with which he was touching down a try, but who, a moment later, had recovered his feet and had staggered out into the night calling upon God for mercy upon a married man. She had nursed her bruises and had sorrowed for him for many days, ardently desiring to poison his wife and all her babies, but his sudden appointment to a far-away living had closed the story.

A year later she fell in love with a Russian singer who, at the time, was being heavily lionized in London; but, as luck would have it, she met three of his mistresses in one day, and the fright sobered her.

The third episode had been much more prosaic. The man was merely a young Member of Parliament who made his overtures in the most approved style, and might have succeeded in capturing her, had it not been discovered on the day the engagement was to be announced that he had borrowed money on the strength of the coming alliance. In this case she had not grieved for long: indeed, when she happened to see him a week later she had already sufficiently recovered to observe that his eyes were set too close together, his teeth were like a rabbit's, his hands too hairy, his head not hairy enough, and his legs bandy.

That was a year ago, and since then she had been entirely heart-whole. Now, however, the starry Egyptian nights, the sun-bathed days, the multitude of officers, officials, and diplomats whose acquaintance she was making, and the general court paid to her, both as a charming woman and as the Great Man's daughter, were beginning to stimulate her senses.

One morning, at the beginning of November, as she sat up in her bed, playing with her toes, the thought came strongly to her that her season in Egypt ought to be graced by some exceptional romance. Here was the setting for the play; here was the heroine; but where was the hero? It was true that Rupert Helsingham, of whom she had grown quite fond, was becoming daily more bold; but he had ever

an eye on her father, on whom depended his budding career. In her exposed position whatever romance came to her would have to be conducted on very correct lines; and would probably be expected to end in marriage; but she did not want to be married. Indeed, the thought appalled her. She vastly preferred the idea of a great sorrow, a heartbreaking parting under the stars, a life-long devotion to a sad, sweet memory. But that a man should walk nightly into her bedroom in his striped pyjamas was a horrible thought.

Pensively she gazed at her toes, upon which a shaft of the morning sunlight was striking. They were pretty toes. A man's feet usually had corns on them. No, she had little wish for a bare-footed romance: the hero she pictured would make love in his boots, and tragedy should descend before the hour came to take them off.

Everything pointed to a clandestine affair—something in a garden, with the scent of roses in it; or in a boat floating down the Nile, very placid and mysterious; or far away in the desert....

In the desert! The thought brought back to her mind the parting words of Daniel Lane. "Why don't you break loose?" Several times she had wondered what he had meant: whether he were suggesting a breaking away from the routine of her life, or whether he were advising her to run amuck in a moral sense. The latter, it seemed to her, was the more probable, judging by his reputation; but this was not a form of entertainment that appealed to her. She did not mind playing with fire, but she had no wish at all to be burnt. Her education had trained her to think lightly of the chastity of others, but so far it had not injured her own natural continence.

Getting out of bed she stood for a few moments in the middle of the room, staring through the open window at the distant line of the desert. Yes, the desert would be a wonderful setting for a romance; and yet even there she would not seem to be quite alone, quite unobserved. In her mind the whole of those vast spaces belonged, somehow, to Daniel Lane. She would feel his disturbing influence there: his head would rise from behind a rock, and his quiet eyes would stare mockingly at her and her lover, whoever he might be. He might even stroll forward, pick up the wretched Romeo, with a yawn throw him over the cliffs, seat himself by her side instead, and light his pipe. And if she protested he might whistle up half a dozen cut-throat Bedouin and peg her to the ground for the jackals to sniff at till he was ready to put her in his harim.

She laughed nervously to herself as she went to her bath; and her thoughts turned again to the possibilities of the garden and the Nile, and once more the difficulties of her position were manifest. Female accomplices are required in romance: she had none. There was her maid, Ada, a large Scotswoman, who would play the part about as nimbly as a hobbled cow. Lady Smith-Evered was

not to be trusted with secrets, even if she were able to be flattered into acquiescence. There was no other woman in Cairo with whom she was at all well acquainted as yet, and none that gave promise of the paradoxical but necessary combination of self-effacement and presence of mind.

What she required was the friendship of a young married woman without stain and without scruple. Then there would be some hope that the season would not be entirely barren of romance, and, when she returned to England in the spring, she would not be in the painful necessity of having to invent confidences for the ears of her girl friends.

There is, however, an ancient and once very popular Egyptian god who seems to have survived to the present day, if one may judge by the strange events which take place in the land of the Pharaohs. By the Greeks he was called Pan-Who-is-Within-Hearing; and he must certainly have been sitting in the bath-room. For no sooner had Muriel dressed and come downstairs than the accomplice walked straight into the house.

Muriel had just entered the drawing-room by one door when a footman threw open the opposite door and announced "Mr. and Mrs. Benifett Bindane."

A moment later a plump, square-shouldered young woman hurried into the room and flung herself into Muriel's arms. "Muriel—you darling!" she cried, and "Kate—my dear!" cried Muriel, as they kissed one another affectionately.

Mrs. Bindane beckoned to the middle-aged man who had followed her into the room. "This person is my husband," she said. "I think you saw him when he was courting me."

He came forward and gave Muriel a limp hand. He was very tall, and appeared to be invertebrate; he had watery blue eyes, thin yellow hair, a long, white, clean-shaven face, and a wet mouth which was seldom, if ever, shut.

"Benifett, my dear," said his capable, handsome wife, "say something polite to the lady."

"How-de-do," he murmured, staring at her awkwardly.

"Yes, I think we did meet once, didn't we?" said Muriel.

Mrs. Bindane intervened. "Yes, don't you remember? At the pictures, when we were keeping company. We got wed at our chapel ten days ago—such a to-do as you never saw! And afterwards a real beano at the Fried Fish Shop: beer by the barrel, and port too! And Pa gave me away, in his evening dress, red handkerchief and all!"

Such was her peculiar and characteristic way of referring to the fact that she had introduced Muriel to her fiancé one night at Covent Garden, and that she had been married to him at St. Margaret's, Westminster, where she had been given away by her father, Lord Voycey, a reception being later held at her paternal home in Berkeley Square.

"I didn't know you were coming out here," said Muriel. "It's splendid."

"We only decided on Egypt at the last minute," explained Mr. Bindane. "Kate was so anxious to go up the Nile."

"It's a blinkin' fine river, I'm told," remarked his wife, at which he smiled reprovingly.

Her friend's language was notorious, though actually she seldom approached an oath except in mimicry. She was a woman of five-and-twenty, and for seven years she had delighted London with her pretended vulgarity. Her husband, on the other hand, was more or less unknown to the metropolis, though, as the inheritor from his father of an enormous fortune, his name had lately been heard in Mayfair, while in the City it was well known. People said he was a fool; and everybody supposed that the eccentric Kate had married him for his money. As a matter of fact, she had married him for love.

"Where are you staying?" Muriel asked.

"We've got a little paddle-wheeled steamer on the river," he replied. "We arrived last night."

"And of course we came round to see you at once," said Kate. "Benifett's rather a snob, you know: loves lords and ladies. So do I. How's your pa?"

"Oh, just the same as always," Muriel answered. "I don't seem to see much of him."

"People say he's rather a success at running this 'ere country," the other remarked. "Personally, I detest the man: I think he's neglected you shamefully all your life."

"Oh, father's all right," said Muriel. "I'm very fond of him."

"Rot!" muttered her friend.

For some time they exchanged their news, and Muriel gave some account of the quiet life she had spent since her arrival.

"Any decent men?" Mrs. Bindane asked. "What about little Rupert Helmingham?"

"Oh, d'you know him?"

"Lord! yes. He stayed with us once when he and I were kiddies. I saw him when he was on leave last summer: he's grown into a handsome little fellow."

She asked if he were on the premises, and whether she might see him. In reply, Muriel rang the bell, and sent a message to the office where Rupert usually spent his mornings in interviewing native dignitaries.

"Here's a friend of yours," she said to him as he came into the room, and there ensued a rapid exchange of merry greetings.

"This is what I've married," remarked Mrs. Bindane, taking her husband's hand in hers and delivering it into Rupert's friendly grasp.

"How-de-do," said Mr. Bindane, looking down from his great height at the

dapper little man before him.

“Glad to meet you, sir,” said Rupert, looking up at the limp figure, which gave the appearance of being about to fall to pieces at any moment.

“His father’s a lord, dear,” whispered Mrs. Bindane to her husband, in a hoarse aside.

“You’re just as impossible as ever, Kate,” laughed Rupert.

“It’s my common blood,” said she. “One of my ancestors married his cook: she was the woman who cooked that surfeit of lampreys King John died of.”

“Is Lord Blair in?” Mr. Bindane asked, very suddenly.

Mrs. Bindane turned sharply and stared at him. “Now *what* has Lord Blair to do with you, Benifett?” she asked in surprise. “I didn’t know you knew him.”

Her husband flapped a loose hand. “I’ve met his Lordship,” he said.

“*His Lordship*,” mimicked the impossible Kate, giving a nod of simulated awe. “Rupert, my lad, go and tell the boss he’s wanted in the shop.”

“I’d like to see him,” murmured Mr. Bindane, quite unmoved.

“Well, I never!” said his wife.

“I’ll go and see if he’s busy,” Rupert volunteered.

“Thanks,” droned Mr. Bindane, his mouth dropping more widely open than usual.

[image]

A SCENE FROM THE PHOTOPLAY—BURNING SANDS

“Well, you have got some nerve!” exclaimed his wife.

Rupert went out of the room, and sought the Great Man in his study.

“What is it, what is it?” Lord Blair muttered with some irritation, looking up from a mass of disordered papers.

“Oh, sorry, sir,” said Rupert. “I didn’t know you were busy. There’s somebody here who wants to see you.”

“I can’t see anybody—no, nobody,” Lord Blair expostulated. “What’s he want? Who is he?”

“A Mr. Bindane. He’s in the drawing-room with Lady Muriel.”

Lord Blair sat up briskly. “Benifett Bindane?” he asked, sharply.

Rupert nodded, and thereat the Great Man jumped to his feet.

“Where is he?” he exclaimed. “Show him in at once. Dear me, dear me! How fortunate! I had no idea he was in Egypt. No, I’ll come into the drawing-room.”

He hurried past Rupert, and hastened across the corridor.

“How d’you do, my dear sir, how d’you do,” he exclaimed, as he tripped into the room and wrung his visitor’s feeble hand.

“My wife,” said Mr. Bindane, bowing towards his startled spouse.

Lord Blair took her hand in both his own. “An old friend!” he cried. “Capital, capital! We were reading about your marriage the other day. Splendid!” And he beamed from one to the other. Then, turning again to Mr. Bindane, “You’ve come to see for yourself, eh?” he exclaimed. “Very wise, very wise indeed.”

“It’s a pleasure trip,” the other replied; “our honeymoon, you know.”

“Of course, yes,” muttered Lord Blair. “Business and pleasure!”

“Business?” muttered Mrs. Bindane. “It’s the first I’ve heard of it. What a dark horse you are, Benifett.” And she abused him roundly in that absurd mimicry of the dialect of the slums which was habitual with her.

Muriel looked vacant. Her thoughts were racing ahead. Here was the desired accomplice, married to a rich fool who was evidently on the best of terms with her father. They had a private steamer on the Nile. Could anything be better, more secluded, more romantic? All she had to do was to find her Romeo.

CHAPTER IX—ON THE NILE

Muriel was not slow to spy out the possibilities of her friend’s steamer. Her father, she soon discovered, was glad enough that she should make herself agreeable to the Bindanes; for, as he explained to her at some length, Mr. Bindane was at that time engaged in raising an enormous sum of money for agricultural investment in the western oases of Egypt, and it was of great importance that the luxurious river-steamer and the Residency should be on intimate terms.

For years Lord Blair and his predecessors had endeavoured in vain to interest the financial world in the mineral products and rich soil of the chain of oases which spreads across the desert between Egypt and Tripoli. But nobody, least of all the Government, would yet trust their money in an outlying territory so recently explored and opened up. Then Benifett Bindane had wandered into the Foreign Office, when Lord Blair was on leave in England, and had remarked laconically that he would raise the necessary millions.

At first he had hardly been taken seriously, for he looked such a fool. Later it was thought that because he looked such a fool it might be worth while to help

him to part with his money; and finally it was discovered that he was not such a fool as he looked. The money he proposed to find was to be mostly other people's, those other people being likely to be persuaded by the fact that the money would appear to be mostly his own. He had promised to send somebody out to Egypt to investigate, and now, quietly and without any apparent pretext other than that of his honeymoon, he had come himself.

Three or four days after the Bindanes' arrival a thirty hours' excursion up the river was planned, the party consisting of the bridal couple, Lady Muriel, Lady Smith-Evered, Rupert Helsingham, and Professor Hyley, the Egyptologist. The Pyramid of Meidûm, some fifty miles upstream from Cairo, was the objective; and it was proposed to start at noon, to moor for the night near the village of Meidûm, to ride over to the ruins on the following morning, and to make the return journey to Cairo during the afternoon and evening.

Muriel boarded the steamer when the time came with keen interest hidden under a casual exterior. For her it was to be a sort of trial run: she was going to study the romantic possibilities of the Nile. If the trip provided opportunities for Rupert Helsingham to make love to her, in which direction his recent actions had begun to point, she would try to arrange further excursions, perhaps with him, perhaps in other company.

The professor was a neat and natty little man, with prominent teeth and wistful eyes, a eunuch's voice and pretty manners; and an hour had not passed before it was apparent that the General's lady had taken him to her bosom. He examined an antique scarab ring upon her finger, and told her to what dynasty it was to be dated; he showed her a somewhat similar ring upon his own finger, and said it was not so good nor so old a specimen as hers; he remarked what a fine old English soldier the General was, and he sighed to think how few were left of that breed; he poked delicate and kindly fun at the younger hostesses of Cairo, and compared their social efforts with those of the elder generation, so admirably represented by the lady to whom he was speaking. Lady Smith-Evered thought him a dear little man, a designation the first two words of which were certainly applicable.

"They just love each other, don't they!" Rupert whispered to Muriel.

"Yes," she replied. "I think that disposes of my chaperone."

She made the remark with evident satisfaction, and Rupert glanced quickly at her. His heart was beating fast.

"You seem glad," he said.

Muriel shrugged her shoulders.

The afternoon was hot, and as the party lounged on deck the glare of the sunlight upon the mirror of the water was dazzling. Mr. Bindane put on a pair of blue spectacles, and presently gave vent to a series of hay-feverish sneezes.

“Good God!” exclaimed his wife. “Look at what I’ve married!” She seized his unresisting arm.

“Come, Benifett, let’s go and lie down in the cabin.”

“A good idea,” said Lady Smith-Evered, thankfully following her hostess below. “I shall go to my cabin too.”

“I think forty winks for me, also,” the Professor presently remarked, feeling himself to be *de trop*.

“Are you going to have a siesta?” asked Rupert, looking at Muriel with fervour in his eyes.

“Not unless I fall off to sleep in this comfy chair,” she answered. “In that case, you must promise to wake me if my mouth drops open. Pull up your chair close to mine, and tell me the story of your life.”

Rupert stood up, and, taking off his coat, rolled back his shirt-sleeves, revealing a pair of well-made blue-veined arms. The leather belt which held up his white flannel trousers was pulled in tightly, and Muriel did not fail to admire the slimness of his waist as he settled himself in the long deck-chair at her side.

They were screened from the sun by an Arabic awning of many colours, and their eyes looked out across the oily surface of the water to the luxuriant river bank which seemed to pass before them like an unfolding picture, now revealing the open fields, now a village basking in the sunlight, now groups of palms and cedars in the deep shadows of which the peasants rested with their flocks, and now a native villa with mysterious latticed shutters and silent walled gardens. Every hundred yards or so there was a *sakieh*, by which the water was raised from the river into the irrigation channels; and as each came into sight the creaking of the great wooden cogwheel, and the song of the half-naked boy who drove his patient ox round and round, drifted to their ears, drowsily and with plaintive monotony.

Neither Muriel nor Rupert talked much, but their sleepy proximity engendered a quiet sympathy between them more potent than any words. Her hands lay idly in her lap; and presently, with a lazy movement, he extended his arm and let it fall across hers, so that his hand rested upon her hand. She turned slightly and smiled at him, but she did not move. Their two heads, each upon its cushion, drooped closer together. Muriel’s eyes closed, and, with a sense of gentle happiness pervading her mind, she fell asleep.

When she woke up, a quarter of an hour later, she knew that Rupert had just kissed her: she still felt the touch of his lips. She did not resent it; it was not unexpected. But somehow she felt that she was no longer carrying out an experiment. The handsome young man beside her, after these few weeks of probation, had managed, somehow, to step into the sanctuary of her heart, and had seated himself audaciously upon the throne which had stood vacant these many

months.

She sat up in her chair and passed her hands across her eyes. Then she turned, and, with a smile upon her lips, looked steadily at her companion.

“You kissed me,” she said. She spoke in a tone almost of awe.

“Yes,” he answered, and his voice failed him. He turned his eyes to the bank of the river and clenched his teeth. He felt very uncomfortable.

“Why?” she asked. Her face was very close to his, and his hand was about her wrist.

“Because I love you, Muriel,” he whispered; and the hoarseness of his voice would have seemed comical to her had she been in a normal condition.

Suddenly he put his arm about her shoulder and pulled her down to him, so that her head lay upon his breast and her hair touched his face. She did not resist; the drowsy warmth of the afternoon, the Oriental beauty of their surroundings, and the still unevaporated magic of that great enchanter, Sleep, held her powerless.

Again and again he kissed her—kissed her mouth and her eyes, her forehead and her cheeks, her throat and her hair; and with each touch of his lips the fires of her womanhood leaped up within her, so that in these few moments the whole course of her life, so it seemed to her, was changed, and new directions, new vistas, were revealed in intense illumination.

At last, dazed and flushed, she released herself from his hold and stood before him, her fingers clasping and unclasping themselves, her eyes wild and yet tender in their wildness.

“Rupert!” she gasped. “O Rupert!”

Suddenly she turned and ran to the companionway, and the next moment had disappeared.

Rupert sprang from his chair, and banged his fist into the palm of his other hand. “Gad!” he cried aloud, and there was exultation in his voice. He walked the length of the deck, with his hands in his pockets; then he sat down, and immediately got up again. His knees seemed to be trembling under him. He wondered whether that was a symptom of love, and decided that it was not. No he was not in love; he was just excited. And no wonder! Muriel was one of the great heiresses of England, and one of the most charming girls on the market, so to speak; and he had practically got her! Well, perhaps he was in love: her kisses were wonderful; the feeling of closeness to her was exquisite! How delighted his father would be! “Lady Muriel Helsingham,” and, in time to come, “Lady Helsingham of Singleton!” And all that money!

He lit a cigarette, puffed frenziedly at it, and threw it into the river. Then he, too, went below.

Muriel’s cabin was opposite his own, and at the door he paused and lis-

tened. He thought he heard her sigh, and his heart beat faster. She was madly in love with him! Why hadn't he acted sooner? His school-friend had been perfectly right: a man has only got to take his courage in both hands and attack a woman forcibly, and she succumbs.

He went into his cabin and shut the door briskly. He sat down on the edge of the narrow bed, and stared critically at himself in the mirror opposite. He was quite good-looking. He wondered how Lord Blair would take it. After all, it was not a bad match for his daughter: he was the son and heir of a Peer of the Realm, and his father had a very nice little estate.

In the cabin opposite, Muriel, likewise, sat upon the edge of her bed. She had been crying, and there were still tears in her eyes. Surely, she thought, this must be love that had come to her, though sudden and unexpected had been its advent. She was profoundly stirred, and wonderingly she recalled every moment of the experience through which she had just passed. It had been so sweet; his eyes had looked into hers so tenderly; his lips had aroused something so mighty within her. Of course she would marry him if he asked her; but she was so selfish, so stupid, and he was so clever. Everybody loved him: perhaps he would quickly grow tired of her....

At tea-time she could not look at him. She talked at random to the others, and as they all sat afterwards on deck watching the sun go down, she still kept aloof from him. Later, in dressing for dinner, she exacted particular care from her maid; and she was thankful that she had brought her most becoming dress with her.

"My dear, you look a dream!" exclaimed Kate Bindane as she came into the dining-room. "A dam' sight too beautiful for my liking! I'll have to keep my old man out of your way, or you'll make him feel all of a twitter. As it is, I see him eyeing you all the time. He's a dark horse, is Benifett: you never know what he's up to."

And certainly during dinner his watery eyes were fixed upon her from time to time with disconcerting directness. A glass or two of champagne helped her to overcome a feeling of shyness in relation to Rupert, and soon she became conscious of a growing excitement. She wondered what would happen before the evening was over, and alternately she longed for the meal to come to an end, and was dismayed to find it advancing so quickly. She talked feverishly, and, indeed, Lady Smith-Evered once felt it her duty to make signs to the butler to refrain from filling the girl's glass. Muriel, however, observed the signal, and laughed aloud.

"Am I talking too fast or something?" she asked, holding up her empty glass to the hesitating butler.

"No, it's only that wine is not very good for one in this climate," whispered

Lady Smith-Evered, her expression hinting at strange things.

"It can't hurt her," said Mr. Bindane, yet he drank only water himself.

As they went up on deck for their coffee, Muriel felt her face burning and her heart thumping; and when Rupert stood at her side and surreptitiously touched her hand she experienced so wondrous a thrill of emotion that she forgot what she was saying at the moment to Professor Hyley, and their conversation—something about ancient Egyptian gods—completely broke down.

Owing to some engine-trouble earlier in the day the steamer had not nearly reached its destination; and now, for the sake of the passengers' comfort, it was travelling quietly and at a much reduced pace. The night was warm, windless, and intensely dark, for the waning moon had not yet risen; but the stars were brilliant, and the Milky Way stretched across the heavens like a band of ghostly silver.

As soon as the coffee cups were removed Mr. Bindane proposed the inevitable game of bridge, and therewith their host and hostess, Lady Smith-Evered, and the Professor descended to the saloon, Muriel and Rupert remaining on deck—by the tacit and tactful arrangement of Kate Bindane, who seemed to anticipate their inclinations.

"There's a nice little cosy corner at the stern," she whispered to Rupert, and gave him a friendly dig in the ribs. Fortunately Muriel was out of earshot.

To the stern, therefore, he led his companion when at length they were left alone, and here on a comfortable sofa they seated themselves. Nor did he allow many moments to pass before he attempted to resume the intimacy of the afternoon. Muriel, however, was self-conscious, and as he kissed her she gently thrust him away from her.

"Don't," she muttered. "Please don't, Rupert, dear."

There was a tone of anguish in her voice, for at the dawn of love a woman feels terror such as no man can understand. Instinctively, and without definite reasoning, she dreads the consequences of her actions; and whereas a man's new love is glorious with the exultation of careless conquest, a woman's is tender with the vision of uncomprehended pain to be. At the lightest touch of a new lover's lips she catches sight of her whole destiny; and where a man rejoices, a woman quakes.

Rupert was abashed, and, releasing her from his grasp, stared before him into the darkness, while Muriel waited for him to make her quake again: it was a wonderful sensation.

"Why shouldn't I kiss you, Muriel?" he asked. "You love me, you know you do." He turned to her, and his face came close to hers. "You do love me, don't you?"

For answer she ran her fingers through his hair and looked long at him. In

the dim light he could see that she was searching his face as though endeavouring to find in it the assurance her womanhood required. He hoped that her hands were not untidying him beyond quick repair: he very much disliked having his hair ruffled.

Again he put his arms about her, and now she did not resist. Her eyes closed, and as in a dream she gave herself up to the emotion of the moment. In some miraculous manner it seemed to her Rupert had developed, and his arms that now enfolded her were suddenly endowed with celestial strength. It was as though by loving her he had identified himself with a force far greater than his own; and even the broken words which he uttered seemed to have a more profound meaning. She forgot that she had read such words in many a short story, many a novel; they sounded beautiful to her; they came to her ears with all the enchantment of things never before spoken in the whole history of the world.

“O Rupert,” she murmured, “do I mean all that to you?”

“You mean heaven and hell to me, Muriel,” he said, dramatically.

For a considerable time—though time to her stood still—they sat together in the darkness, closely held in one another’s arms, his cheek and his lips pressed against her bare shoulder and neck; and as the moments passed the intoxication of love began to bewilder him as it had already overwhelmed her. Her skin was so warm, so soft, so alluring, and the surge of her breath was so entrancing!

Suddenly they became conscious of the sound of much shouting amongst the native crew, and at the same time the drone of the paddle-wheels ceased. Rupert raised his head, and his hands began instinctively to tidy his hair and to arrange his disordered tie.

“We must have arrived,” he said. “The others will be coming up on deck: we’d better move.”

He stood up, and Muriel sank back into the corner of the sofa, her arm across her eyes. For some moments she seemed to be unable to bring her mind down from the heights of her dream; and Rupert watched her with anxiety, hoping that she would speedily master herself.

“Come,” he said. “Let’s walk along the deck.”

Very slowly she rose to her feet, and, with a sigh, put her arm in his.

The steamer had evidently reached its destination, and the captain’s bell incessantly rang his orders to the engine-room, while the hurried tread of bare feet could be heard on the bridge above them as they came into the soft light amidships. On one side the bank of the river could be discerned in the darkness, still some thirty or forty feet distant; on the other the open water stretched, reflecting the innumerable stars. To this latter side Rupert led her, and, leaning his back against the railing above the now silent paddle-wheel, he held his hand out

to her as she stood before him.

“Muriel,” he whispered, when fervently he had kissed her fingers, “will you be my wife?”

She drew in her breath sharply, and her hands clasped themselves against her breast. She had been waiting for these words, but now when she heard them they frightened her. Somehow in the light of the electric lamps her dream in the darkness had faded, and there was a sense of cooler reality in her mind, a kind of reaction. Why should she say ‘Yes’ at once? Ought she not to try him yet a little while before she gave herself to him? She remembered that until today she had not known that she loved him: perhaps it was all an illusion, created by the Nile.

He saw the look in her face, and as he leaned back heavily against the railing his heart sank within him. Was she only playing with him? Did she only feel for him what he felt for her?

“Well?” he asked, and his hands were clenched upon the iron rail.

She did not answer. She stood staring at him with fixed eyes, and as she did so a sensation of annoyance passed across his mind.

“Ah!” he muttered. “You don’t love me. You’re only amusing yourself with me.”

“Rupert!” she exclaimed.

Seeing that his tactics were correct, he allowed his anger to develop. He made a dramatic gesture and flung himself back against the railing. At the same moment the paddle-wheel beneath him began suddenly to revolve, as the captain manœuvred the ship towards the shore. There was a slight lurch; Rupert uttered an exclamation; he seemed to sway away from her; and, heels over head, he fell into the churning water.

Muriel sprang forward. In the half-light she saw the soles of his shoes disappear as the black water swallowed him; then a dripping, writhing form was lifted on a blade of the paddle and tossed into the air. She saw his horrified eyes and his spread fingers. She heard him shriek...

“Help!” she screamed, and, screaming, she rushed across the deck. “Help! Help!”

CHAPTER X—“FOR TOMORROW WE DIE”

Amidst the wildest clamour the rowing-boat was launched, and two red-jerseyed native sailors took the oars, while a third, shouting and gesticulating, stood at the tiller holding up a hurricane-lamp. Just as they pushed off, Professor Hyley, carrying another lantern, tumbled into the stern; and, in the unreasoning excitement of the moment, called out "Mr. Helsingham, Mr. Helsingham! Hi, hi! Mr. Helsingham!" in a piping voice which sounded through the darkness like that of a lost soul.

The pandemonium upon the steamer was appalling. The jabbering native sailors ran aimlessly to and fro, flinging ropes and buoys into the river from the vessel's stern; while the Egyptian captain, completely losing his head, rang and bawled orders down to the engine-room, as a result of which the paddle-wheels churned up the water, now this way, now that. Lady Smith-Evered and Mr. Bindane leant over the rail, shouting instructions to Professor Hyley as the boat dropped into the distance.

Muriel and Kate Bindane stood together in agonized silence. There was nothing to be done; for there was not a second rowing-boat, nor were there any available lamps or buoys. Their eyes were fixed upon the two points of light drifting astern, and on the illuminated figures of the searchers. And now the misshapen moon, in its last quarter, crept out from behind the horizon, as though curious to know what all the pother was about, but too disdainful to throw any light upon the scene.

At length there were renewed shouts from the boat, and much splashing of the oars; and presently it was apparent that the men were lifting something out of the ink-black water. A few minutes of horrible suspense ensued as the searchers returned; and at last, in a dazed condition, Muriel watched them raise the limp, dripping form out of the boat and lay it on the deck.

Mr. Bindane's servant, Dixon, knew something about the method of resuscitation to be employed in such cases; and, with the aid of Muriel and Professor Hyley, the sodden clothes were removed from the upper part of the prostrate figure, and the bare white arms were worked to and fro. Brandy in a teaspoon was forced between the blue lips by Kate Bindane, who sent her helpless and apparently callous husband off with the weeping Lady Smith-Evered to fetch blankets and the one hot-water bottle which chanced to be available.

Their efforts, however, were all in vain. With the tears flowing from her eyes, Muriel rose from the puddle of water in which she had been kneeling, and stood clinging to Kate's arm.

"He's dead," she sobbed. "He's been dead all the time;" and a shudder almost of repulsion shook her.

She dried her tears and tried hard to pull herself together: she felt that this undefined feeling of disgust was unworthy of any woman, and was altogether

despicable in one who had been so lately clasped in Rupert's arms. She wanted to run away, and that primitive instinct which produces in the mind the nameless horror of a dead body was strong upon her. Yet, bracing herself, she resisted the sensation of nausea, and stood staring down at the prostrate figure before her, vividly illuminated in the glare of the electric light.

His mouth, from which the water oozed, was slightly open, and a pale, swollen tongue protruded somewhat from between his lips. His eyes were closed, and wet strands of dark hair were plastered over his forehead. His bare neck and shoulders looked thin and poor; and damp wisps of hair covered his chest. The soaked, black trousers clung to his legs; and his ill-shapen toes, from which the socks and shoes had been removed, were ghastly in their greenish whiteness as they rested upon the hot-water bottle.

Suddenly she swayed, and the lights seemed to grow dim. She heard Kate Bindane call out sharply for the brandy, and she was dimly conscious that she was being led away by her maid, Ada. Her perceptions, however, were not clear again until she aroused herself to find that she was lying upon her bed in her cabin, and that Mr. Bindane was standing at the door, staring down at her with his mouth open.

She sat up quickly. "Did I faint?" she said, as the horror of remembrance came upon her once more.

"No," he answered. "You were only a bit giddy. You must try to sleep: we're all going to try to. We shall be back in Cairo before sunrise."

"Where is he?" she asked, pressing her fingers to her pale face.

"On the sofa at the end of the deck," he said.

She sprang to her feet. "No, no!" she cried. "Not there—please not there!"

She buried her face in her hands; and Benifett Bindane, disliking hysteria, hurried away to the saloon, where he played Patience by himself until the small hours; while his wife, Kate, wedging herself into Muriel's narrow bed, comforted her friend until dozing sleep fell upon them.

The next two or three days were like a nightmare. An impenetrable gloom seemed to rest upon the Residency; and, although the body lay in the mortuary of a neighbouring hospital, it was as though the presence of death were actually in the house.

The funeral came almost as a relief; and when the imposing ceremony was at an end, she felt as though the weight were beginning to be lifted from her heart. For the first time since the tragedy she was able to speak of it with calmness.

"You know, father dear," she said, "Rupert and I came to mean a very great deal to one another in these few weeks that we've been together."

He glanced at her timidly, and patted her hand.

"Yes," he answered, "I have eyes, Muriel."

She turned and looked at him with a little smile of confidence. "We were going to be married," she said.

He started violently. "What!" he exclaimed. "Well, well, we must see about that."

"It's no good seeing about it, father," she corrected him, feeling an hysterical desire to laugh; "he's dead."

"The poor boy, the poor boy!" he murmured. "Such a capital fellow."

"It was just after he had proposed to me that he fell overboard," she told him.

"Dear me, dear me!" he sighed. "And you had accepted him? I suppose the shock.... How very, very sad!—He just fell backwards."

Awkwardly, but with great tenderness, he put his arm about her. "You must forget all about it," he whispered. "You must have a good time."

"It was so ghastly," she said. "You see, when he asked me to be his wife, I didn't say 'yes.'"

"Of course not, of course not," he murmured. "Very proper, I'm sure."

"But he thought I was only playing with him," she faltered. "He was so angry, so hurt. And then the paddle-wheel started with a jerk, and he overbalanced."

"Ah, my dear," he answered, "the course of true love never runs smoothly. An ancient saw, but a very true one! But you are young: you will soon get over it. You must throw yourself into your duties as hostess at the Residency; and, in the first place, I want you to help me in a little scheme I have in mind."

Muriel guessed what was coming, and her feelings were peculiarly diversified.

"I want to persuade Daniel Lane to accept some official position," he said. "Of course I can't offer him the mere Oriental Secretaryship which poor dear Rupert has left vacant; but I think its scope and importance could be greatly extended, amplified, and he might be tempted."

"I doubt it," Muriel replied. She did not know quite what to say.

"I shall write to him at once," Lord Blair went on, nodding archly at her. "I shall say how whole-heartedly you second my proposal."

Muriel stiffened. "O, no, *please*," she answered, quickly, and the colour mounted to her face. "Please leave me out of it; Mr. Lane and I have nothing in common. I hardly know him, and much of what I do know I dislike."

Her father's face fell. There is no telling how far his scheming mind had advanced into the future, nor what plans he was forming for the well-being of his only child. It may only be stated with certainty that he had a very great admiration for Daniel, and that he was not blind to the fact that the object of this admiration was heir-presumptive to a man who, by common report, was drinking

himself to death.

To Muriel, however, the prospect of having the masterful Mr. Lane actually on the premises was disturbing in the extreme, and, during the ensuing days, added not a little to her mental distress.

She greatly missed Rupert's entertaining company; and although, as the days passed, she realized that his death was not as shattering a blow to her as she had thought, the remembrance of their brief romance often brought the tears to her eyes. Yet even as she wiped them away she was conscious that her sorrows were aroused rather by the tragedy itself than by her own heart's desolation. It is true that her emotions had been deeply stirred by his passion; but gradually the fires, lighted for so brief a moment, died down, and she was obliged to admit that her heart was not broken.

But if the romantic effect of the sad affair was proved in these few days to be less severe than she had at first supposed, there was another aspect of the matter which had a very profound bearing upon her mental attitude. The sudden termination of Rupert's career had set her thinking about life in a way that she had never thought before. If death were always so near at hand, if so simple an accident so quickly put out the little lamp of existence, ought one not to concentrate all the forces of the human constitution upon the enjoyment of each passing hour?

She stood off from herself as an artist stands back from his picture, and she saw that she was but a shadow amongst shadows, a speck of vapour passing across time's fixed stare, having no substance of which one could say, "this at least will remain." Today she was here; tomorrow she would be dissolved and gone.

To Kate Bindane she confessed all that had occurred on that fatal night. "I don't want to be romantic," she told her. "I don't want to make more of the thing than there was really in it. But his death means more to me than it does to any of you others. I can't forget the sight of the soles of his shoes disappearing into that black water. It's as though I'd seen Death himself swallow him up. I had always thought of Death as a sort of unknown country where one goes to; but in this case I saw it come for him and swallow him. I saw it as an ink-black monster; it snapped him up, and spit out the limp shell of him, but kept the essence of him in its stomach. And it's waiting to snap up you and me. It's close at hand, always close at hand...."

She shuddered as she spoke; and her friend, putting her strong arm around her, found difficulty in soothing her.

"Well, perhaps," she replied, "it was an act of Providence to save you from a mistaken marriage."

"O, but he loved me," said Muriel, "and I should have come to love him

entirely. He was so sweet, so good-natured.”

“Perhaps there’s something better in store for you, old girl.”

Muriel shook her head. “No,” she answered, “there’s nothing much but Death for any of us. It all comes to that in the end: it all leads just to Death.”

“Well, then, let’s eat, drink, and be merry,” said her friend.

“Yes,” Muriel replied, with conviction. “That’s what I’m going to do. Omar Khayyam was right: I’ve been reading him again.”

“He was a wise old bird,” Kate Bindane commented. “Wasn’t he the fellow who said something about a bottle of claret and a hunk of bread-and-butter in the desert? I’ve always thought it a fine conception of bliss.”

Muriel clasped her hands together, and looked up with youthful fervour. “Yes,” she replied, “and he said ‘Ah, make the most of what we yet may spend, Before we too into the dust descend; and ‘Ah, fill the cup:—what boots it to repeat how time is slipping underneath our feet.’”

“Yes,” said Kate, “I always remember that line by thinking of boots and slippers and feet.”

Muriel was speaking with too much earnestness to give heed to her friend’s lack of poetic reverence. “Life’s so short,” she went on, “that I’m going to make the most of it. I’m going to have my fling, Kate. I’m going to be merry.”

“Right-o!” said Kate. “I’m with you, old bean.”

CHAPTER XI—THE OASIS IN THE DESERT

Upon a day towards the end of November, Daniel Lane was seated upon the clean sand of the outer courtyard of the little mosque which stood at the southern end of the Oasis of El Hamrân. It was the hour of noon, and the shadow cast by the small, squat minaret behind him extended no further than his white canvas shoes, as he leaned his back against the unbaked bricks, and stared before him across the glaring enclosure to the palm-groves outside the open gateway.

In spite of the heat of the sun, the blue shadow in which he rested still afforded a pleasant coolness; and clad in a somewhat frayed tennis shirt, open at the neck, and a pair of well-worn grey flannel trousers, held up by a stout

leather belt, his figure gave the appearance of such comfort and ease that his lazy reluctance to rise and go home to his midday meal was understandable.

Five Bedouin Arabs who had been laughing and talking with him, were now standing a few yards distant at the whitewashed door of the mosque, and were engaged in removing their red shoes before entering the sacred building; while, at the same time, they were conversing together in undertones, as though discussing some matter of importance.

Daniel sprawled to his feet, and, pulling his hat over his eyes, walked towards the whitewashed gateway which gleamed with dazzling brilliance against the deep blue of the sky and the green of the palms; but as he moved away his Bedouin friends hastened to him across the hot sand, and one of the number, the white-bearded Sheikh Ali, the headman of the Oasis, laid a hand upon his arm.

"My friend," he faltered, speaking in the liquid-sounding Arabic of the western desert, "there is something I would say to you." He seemed to hesitate.

"He is wise who listens to the wise," Daniel replied, taking hold of the Sheikh's hand, in the native manner of friends.

The old man smiled. "The Prophet has written: 'Seek wisdom even if it were only to be found in China,'" he said.

Daniel looked into the kindly and, indeed, saintly face with perplexity. He was wondering what was to come; and, raising his arms, he clasped his two hands at the back of his neck, an attitude he was wont to assume when he was puzzled.

The four others, who had been hovering shyly at a little distance, came forward; and the Sheikh, as though emboldened by their support, bared his heart without much further preamble. He pointed out, as Daniel well knew, that there was a feud of many years standing in the Oasis, between the family of the speaker and that of a former Sheikh who had been dispossessed of his office. The quarrel had become almost traditional; and though, up till now, no very serious incident had occurred, there was a growing danger that a brawl might take place in which somebody might be shot, and that thus the feud might become an endless vendetta with its reciprocal crimes of violence.

Stripped of its pious and flowery decorations, the proposition put forward by the Sheikh was of the simplest character. He proposed that the Englishman should act as judge and mediator between the two families, and should hold a court at which the whole trouble should be ventilated; and so insistent was he that Daniel was obliged to acquiesce.

"Praise be to God!" exclaimed the old man, when at length he had received the definite answer he desired; and with many pious ejaculations of gratitude he and his friends turned to enter the mosque, while Daniel passed out through the gateway into the rustling palm-grove beyond.

His way led him for four or five hundred yards through the shade of the

thickly growing trees—a dusty shade, pierced by innumerable little shafts of sunlight; but presently he came out once more under the dazzling sky, and, bearing off to the left, mounted a rugged path which ascended the sloping side of a sandy hill, till, reaching the summit, it passed over level ground towards his house which stood upon a spur of rock overlooking the Oasis.

Two years ago, when he had come to reside at El Hamrân to make, for the Institute which had commissioned him, a study of the manners and customs of the Bedouin, he had here found the abandoned ruins of an ancient Coptic monastery, dating from the days when Christianity was still the religion of the Egyptians; and he had established himself in their shelter, and later had rebuilt some of the rooms, so that now his place of abode had come to be a much-loved desert home, where month after month was passed in quiet study, and the days slipped by in placid contentment.

From the windows of his rooms he could look down over the whole extent of the dreamy little Oasis, with its sun-baked palm-groves, some three miles in length and half a mile in breadth, its houses and tents, its dozen wells, its few acres of tilled ground, and its miniature mosque. All these lay in a kind of basin, surrounded by the cliffs and low hills of the vast desert; and from his vantage-point he could look over the swaying green sea of the massed palm-tops to the barren plateau around about, and on a clear day he could just discern, far away to the east, the first of the ranges of the hills which rose between his isolated home and the far-off valley of the Nile.

At the ruined gateway of his dwelling he was met by his three yellow dogs who had been with him since they were puppies, and were fairly well-mannered considering their low pariah breed; and while he was playing with them, his servant, Hussein, came out to tell him that his luncheon was served. Therewith he crossed the courtyard of the old monastery, with its shattered row of cells to right and left, and its still lofty walls of unbaked bricks, and entered the large refectory which he had caused to be roofed over with palm-beams and dried cornstalks spread in a loose thatch, and which now served as a kind of entrance hall to his apartments. Upon its plastered walls some of the ancient frescoes were still visible; and here and there a Coptic inscription in dim red paint recorded the names of pious sentiments of long forgotten monks; while over the ruined doorway there was an indistinct figure of St. Michael, the patron saint of the place, whose pale eyes and smudged lips seemed to look down on him with faded and vacant mirth.

A rebuilt doorway in the right-hand wall led into his whitewashed living room, at the northeast end of which two large casements framed the splendid view over the Oasis and the desert.

In a corner of the room, on a small table, a simple but not uninviting meal

was spread upon a spotless tablecloth. Fresh poultry and eggs were always plentiful in the Oasis; and on the store-room shelves there was a large and varied supply of preserved foods, and even delicacies, which had been brought over some months ago in a train of camels from Cairo.

Daniel sat down to his meal with good appetite; and as he munched his food in silence his gaze travelled round the airy room and brought back to his heart a glow of pleasant contentment. After all, what could the outside world give him in exchange for the peace and comfort of his desert home? Here he had the intellectual companionship of his books and his work, the simple friendship of courteous, good-hearted men, who had come to regard him as a kind of teacher, and the devotion of three well-meaning, if somewhat degenerate, yellow dogs. Here the brilliant sun, and the splendid north wind, which blew continuously from the distant Mediterranean across the great intervening spaces of clean desert, brought vigour and health to his body and a kind of laughing enthusiasm to his brain. Here he could amuse himself by long rambling walks in the freedom of the empty desert, or, with his gun, could make exciting expeditions in search of gazelle. Here, on the flat roof at the top of one of the ancient towers of the monastery, he slept each night under the blazing stars, lying in his comfortable camp-bed, breathing the purest air in all the world, and gazing up into the vault of the heavens, till the calm sleep of a child descended upon him. And here from golden sunrise to golden sunset the days slipped by, each brought to perfection by that greatest of all human blessings, an untroubled mind.

He rose from the table, and, lighting his pipe, sank luxuriously into a deck-chair, a book of the poems of Hafiz in his hand, a cup of Turkish coffee by his side, his feet resting crossed upon a wooden stool, and the cry of the hawks and the drone of the bees making music in his ears.

The barking of the dogs outside, followed by a knock at the door, aroused him; and his servant entered the room. "Sir," he said, "a soldier of the Frontier Patrol has ridden in from El Homra, bringing a letter for your Excellency."

Daniel threw down his book, and, making a broad gesture with his hands, looked up at the smiling Hussein with a frowning pretence of anger.

"Curses upon his father!" he thundered. "Will his confounded masters never leave me in peace? Bring him in to me."

A few moments later a smart, khaki-clad negro was shown into the room, who saluted in military fashion, and produced a sealed envelope from the breast pocket of his tunic.

Daniel saw at a glance that the letter was from Lord Blair, as he had expected. He opened it with misgiving, and read it through without any apparent change of expression, though it was noticeable that the pipe in his mouth was allowed to go out. Then he slowly folded the sheets, and, thrusting them into his

pocket, rose from his chair.

"I cannot give you my answer until tomorrow morning," he said to the messenger. "Go now and look after your camel, while Hussein prepares food for you; and in the morning you may carry back my reply."

As soon as he was alone once more, he pulled the letter from his pocket, and spreading it out upon the window-sill, stood bending over it, with wrinkled brows and brooding eyes, his elbows resting upon the sill and his head in his hands.

MY DEAR DANIEL,

You will be surprised to hear from me again so soon, and you will, I dare say, think me something of a nuisance. I am sorry to say that a sad calamity has befallen us. Poor young Rupert Helsingham was accidentally drowned in the Nile not many days after you returned to the desert; and we have all been very much cut up, especially my daughter, Muriel, in whose presence the tragedy occurred. You will recollect that Helsingham held the position here of Oriental Secretary; and it now falls to me to fill the vacancy. I have therefore decided greatly to extend the functions of the post and to offer it to you; and I shall esteem myself fortunate if you decide to accept it. As I am very anxious to increase by every means the respect in which the holder of the position should be held by the native population, I would propose to recommend you to His Majesty's Government for early elevation to Knighthood, an honour which your scholarly attainments and your services to the Residency fully deserve. I trust, my dear Daniel, that you will give me the reply that I desire; and I am sure you will know what a personal pleasure it will be both to me and to my daughter to have you at the Residency.

Yours very sincerely,
BLAIR.

After reading through the letter two or three times, he stood for some minutes staring before him with unseeing eyes. His first impulse had been to reject the invitation on the instant, for he detested officialdom and all its ways; and the thought of connecting himself with the social life of the Residency was horrifying. But now, against his inclinations, he obliged himself to consider the proposition with an open mind.

To some extent it might be said that his work in the Oasis was finished: his notebooks contained an enormous mass of information. Yet he was loth to consider that his task was accomplished. El Hamrân and its inhabitants, and

especially the saintly and benevolent Sheikh Ali, had become very dear to him; and the detachment from the world made an appeal to his nature which was very strong. His occasional journeys to Cairo were always disturbing to the peace of his mind; and how then could he expect to be happy in close daily contact with all that produced unrest?

There was this girl Muriel Blair, who, against his reason, had made some sort of impression upon him which was hard to eradicate. He had tried his best, even to the point of rudeness, to ignore her; and yet he had found himself interested in her welfare, and, on his return journey to the Oasis, he had given more thought to her than he supposed she deserved. And now he had to confess that Lord Blair's reference to her in his letter had aroused the response it was intended to arouse.

During the whole afternoon he turned the matter over in his mind, and at sunset he went out for a rambling walk into the desert behind his house; nor did he return until his mind was made up.

As he entered his gateway in the gathering darkness, he was met by the Sheikh, who had come to discuss further the subject which he had opened that morning.

Daniel led him into his lamp-lit sitting-room, and bade him be seated; but when the old man began to discuss the merits of his case and those of his enemy, his host held up his hand.

"I would first ask your advice upon my own affairs," he said. "My heart is sad tonight, my father."

"Let me share your sorrow," the Sheikh replied, with simple sincerity.

"My father," said Daniel, "you have told me that long years ago you resided for some years in Cairo and other great cities."

The Sheikh nodded his head. "It is so," he replied.

"Were you happy there?"

"My son, I was young."

"I mean," said Daniel, "do you believe that happiness is to be found in cities?"

The old man raised his hand and moved it from side to side. "No," he answered, "not happiness—only pleasure. Why do you ask?"

"Because I received a letter today..."

"I saw the messenger," said the Sheikh.

"I have been offered a position of some importance in Cairo. My friends want me to leave El Hamrân, and to live in Egypt."

Sheikh Ali uttered an exclamation of distress. "What is your reply?" he asked.

"Advise me, my father," Daniel answered.

The Sheikh leant forward and silently examined his red leather shoes. For some moments no word was spoken. At length he looked up, and his hand stroked his white beard. "What use is it for me to advise you?" he said. "Your decision is already made. You will leave us; but it is not the glory of office which attracts you, nor yet the call of your duty which bids you depart."

"What then is it?" Daniel asked.

"My friend," he answered, after a pause, "no son of Adam, having strength and vitality such as yours, and enjoying the springtime of life, can remain a *dervish*, an ascetic. It is true that you care little for the world, that you do not desire fine clothes, nor wealth, nor possessions. Yet you are man, and man looks for his mate. You go to choose for yourself a wife."

Daniel smiled. "You are mistaken," he answered. "I shall not marry for some years to come."

The Sheikh shook his head. "No man knows the secrets of his own heart," he replied, "yet his friend may read them like a book written in a fair hand. I say again, you go to choose for yourself a wife."

The ready denial was checked upon Daniel's lips. For a moment he paused, and it seemed to him that a sidelight had been flashed upon the workings of his brain: then he dismissed the thought as being something very nearly fantastic.

"No," he said, "I am going because I believe it to be my duty. My country needs me."

The Sheikh made a gesture which seemed to indicate the uselessness of argument. "It is not good for a man to live alone," he answered, with a sigh. "Some day, perhaps, you will return to us, bringing with you your wife."

Daniel smiled again, but there was sadness in his face. "El Hamrân is my wife," he said. "When I go, my heart will remain here."

"When will your Excellency leave?" the Sheikh asked, becoming suddenly a man of action.

"In a few days" the other answered; "as soon as this matter of feud is set to rights." And therewith he turned the conversation into that channel.

In the night as he lay upon his bed upon the tower-top, gazing up into the immensity of the heavens, he repeated to himself, almost with derision, the words of the Sheikh: "You go to choose for yourself a wife." It was absurd, and yet somehow the thought made a way for itself amongst the crowded places of his mind. To choose for himself a wife...!

"Good Lord!" he muttered; "what a horrible idea!"

CHAPTER XII—THE HELPMATE

Daniel was drying himself after his bath early next morning when Hussein came to tell him that the soldier of the Frontier Patrol craved permission to ask whether the reply was ready, as he was anxious to start back as early as possible, so as not to delay the messenger who wished to leave for Cairo at noon.

He therefore fastened a towel around his waist, and, striding into the adjoining room, scribbled his answer on a half-sheet of paper.

“Excuse scrawl,” he wrote, “but am having my bath, and the messenger, whom I’ve kept all night, can’t wait any longer. All right, I’ll turn up within a week or so and take on the job you so flatteringly offer. No knighthood, please. D. L.”

He thrust the sheet into an envelope, and with a broad smile addressed it: “The Rt. Hon. The Earl Blair of Hartlestone, G.C.B., G.C.M.G., etc.; His Britannic Majesty’s High Commissioner and Minister Plenipotentiary.” He felt that, since he was now to be a respectable member of society, he ought to accustom himself at once to the world’s accepted ways, even though they seemed to him to belong to the realm of comic opera. High-sounding titles always made him laugh. He could not explain it: it was just a clear sense of actuality, a looking at things as they are and not as ceremony presents them.

Now that his mind was made up, and Lord Blair’s invitation accepted, he felt no longer troubled; and, his reply having been dispatched, he set about packing his belongings and rounding off his affairs with the greatest equanimity.

To his great regret, however, he failed to bring the matter of the feud to a successful conclusion. The chief members of the family opposed to Sheikh Ali would not be reconciled; and all that Daniel’s eloquence and persuasion could accomplish was an agreement to maintain the *status quo* during the Sheikh’s lifetime. But as the old man was already bending under the weight of years, and as his hopes were concentrated upon the succession of his son, Ibrahîm, this compromise was not very satisfactory.

Daniel’s departure was the cause of much regret in the Oasis, for he had come to be regarded by the inhabitants as a loyal and helpful friend, one who

was full of wisdom and benevolence, and who could doctor both their souls and their bodies. But in the case of Sheikh Ali the parting was the occasion of deep sorrow; and the old man endeavoured on these last days to pour into his ears all the good advice he could command.

“This is my parting gift,” said Daniel to him, when at length the hour of setting out had arrived. “I give you my promise that when you go to rest with your fathers, I will support with all my might the candidature of your son, Ibrahim, for the office of Sheikh.”

The old man spread his arms wide. “God be praised!” he cried. “Now *am* I at peace, my dear.”

A crowd of natives followed his caravan for some distance, the men firing their guns in the air and shouting words of encouragement and blessing to him; and when at last the desert hills had swallowed him, he felt that he had set behind him a phase of his life the happiness of which he could never hope to enjoy again.

The journey was accomplished at a moderate speed, and on the fifth morning, soon after sunrise, they sighted the Pyramids in the distance ahead of them, backed by the green belt of the Nile valley. The early sun now struck full in their eyes; and Daniel, turning down the brim of his hat, did not often look far in advance of his camel’s nose until he was within some two miles of the Pyramids.

As he jogged along at the head of his caravan, his three yellow dogs trotting after him, his thoughts began to be coloured by a gentle excitement; and, for the first time, the future seemed to him to hold a variety of interesting possibilities.

After all, he said to himself, a man should rise above his surroundings; and indeed his philosophy would be proved a mere pretence if his happiness were dependent upon circumstances. Why should he dread the restlessness of Cairene life? If there were to be unease it would arise from within, not from without; and the citadel of his soul, of his individuality, would hardly be a fortress worth holding if the clamour of the world outside should be able to arouse an answering and traitorous disturbance within. Even in Cairo he would remain master of himself: one can be free anywhere.

“One can be free anywhere” ... Why, those were the words used by Muriel Blair when he had first met her; and he had laughed at them. Well, certainly she had not appeared to be very free as she sat there in the moonlight, with the diamonds sparkling around her throat. She did not know what freedom was: she was a product of the social conventions. He wondered whether she had taken his advice and had endeavoured to break loose from them.

He was aroused from his reverie by the sound of horses’ hoofs, and, looking up, he saw a man and two women approaching him at a fast trot. Behind them were the Pyramids, and in the far distance the minarets and domes of the great city rose into the splendour of the sunlight from above the opalescent mist of

the morning, backed by the shadows of the eastern hills. The air now in the first days of December was cool and sharp; and there was a sparkle in the sunshine which only this time of day enjoys.

The picture was exquisite, and for a moment his eyes rested upon it entranced. Then he turned his attention to the three figures coming towards him, and, with sudden excitement, he recognized the foremost of the three as Lady Muriel.

She reined in her horse and waved her hand. "I guessed it was you," she cried.

Without waiting for his camel to kneel, Daniel slid from the high saddle and dropped to the ground.

"Why, what are you doing out here at this time of day?" he asked her, as, leading his camel behind him, he hastened to her side and grasped her hand. "I'm mighty glad to see you."

She turned to her companions, Mr. and Mrs. Benifett Bindane, and introduced them to Daniel. She had been spending the night at Mena House Hotel, she explained, where the Bindanes were staying, and the fresh morning air having aroused her before sunrise, she had had an early breakfast and had come out for a canter over the desert.

"I spotted you a long way off," she said. "I knew you by your hat, if it is a hat." Somehow she did not feel so shy of him as at their meeting at the Residency.

"I guess I'm going to shock you all in Cairo with that hat," he laughed. "It's an old friend, and old friends are best."

"Am I an old friend?" she asked.

"Pretty old," he answered. "I've known you for four years, you must remember."

She told him that her father was not expecting his arrival for some days, and that she feared no room had yet been prepared for him.

"But I'm not going to stay in the house," he answered quickly. "You didn't think I'd come and live in the town, did you?"

Muriel felt somewhat relieved. Even if the feelings of ease in his society which at the moment she was experiencing were to last, she had no particular wish to have him always about the house, nor present at every meal.

"Well, where are you going to live?" she asked.

He glanced around him. They were standing upon a level area of hard sand, in the shadow of a spur of rock which formed the head of a low ridge. The broken surface of the desert was spread out to their gaze to north, east and west; but the rocks shut off the view towards the south. The caravan had strayed considerably from the beaten track; and the sand hereabouts was smooth and unmarked, except by their own footprints and by those of the desert larks which

were now singing high overhead.

“Where am I going to live?” he repeated, suddenly coming to a decision, in his impulsive way. “Why right here where we stand. It shall be my home: just where I shook hands with you.”

Muriel glanced at him, wondering whether his words contained any deep significance; but, by his smiling face, she judged that they did not.

He looked about him with interest. “It couldn’t be bettered,” he exclaimed. “It’s a good mile-and-a-half back from the Pyramids, and well out of the way of people. I’ll ride in to Mena House on my camel every morning, and take the tram into Cairo from there.”

Mr. Bindane stared at him open-mouthed.

“Rather far away, isn’t it?” he commented. “A bit lonely at nights.”

Daniel laughed. “I suppose there’s something wrong with me,” he answered. “I’m always happiest alone.”

Kate Bindane picked up her reins. “I think that’s the bird, Benifett, my love,” she remarked, “in fact the screeching peacock.”

Her husband looked blankly at her.

“The bird,” Kate explained; “a theatrical term indicating peremptory dismissal.”

By this time the train of camels was within fifty yards of them; and Daniel called out to his men to halt. His servant Hussein came forward, and took charge of his camel.

“I’ll pitch my camp at once,” he said to Muriel. “Then I can go and announce myself to your father this afternoon.”

Acting on an impulse, a desire to establish friendly relations at the outset, Muriel dismounted from her horse. “Do let me stay and help you,” she suggested.

“Sure,” said Daniel. He called to one of his men to hold her horse.

Muriel turned and explained the situation to her friend Kate.

“The man’s practically going to live with us,” she whispered: “I’d better make friends.”

“Oh, rot!” said Kate. “He’s a picturesque lunatic, and you’re a bit mad yourself, and it’s a lovely day, and you’ve got nothing to do, and you know you look a dream in that riding kit.” She turned to her husband. “Come along, Benifett; her ladyship’s going to spend the day with the gent from the Wild West.”

Muriel laughed. “I’ll ride back to the hotel soon,” she said.

“No hurry, old sport,” replied Kate; and, after a few polite remarks to Daniel, she and her pliant husband trotted away.

Muriel at once began to survey the surroundings. She clambered up the sand drift to the top of the spur of rock, and there, in the fresh morning breeze, she stood with her hand shading her eyes, gazing over the undulating spaces of the

desert. She felt like a child beginning a holiday at the seaside and investigating the possibilities of the sands.

The brisk morning air, the brilliant sunshine, the blue sky in which a few little puffs of white cloud were floating, the golden desert with its patches of strongly contrasted shadow, the distant green of the Nile valley, the far-away minarets of the city, the singing of the larks, the excited barkings of the three dogs, and the shouts of the camel-men: these sights and sounds seemed to be full of vivid life.

The shadow of her recent sorrow was quite removed from her mind; and though her furious attempts at gaiety of late had been sadly unsuccessful, this morning she felt that the world still contained wonderful possibilities of adventure, and it must be admitted that her fidelity to the memory of Rupert Helsingham was already indeterminate.

She turned and watched Daniel as he helped in the work of unloading the camels. He had taken off his coat, and his shirt sleeves were rolled back from his mighty arms. He was wearing a shabby old pair of riding breeches and gaiters; and the butt of his heavy revolver protruded from his hip pocket. His wide-brimmed hat was pulled over his bronzed face, and his pipe was in his mouth. He appeared to be lifting enormous loads with incredible ease; and just now he had set all his Bedouin laughing by walking off unceremoniously with a huge bundle of tenting, in the ropes of which one of the natives had become entangled, thereby dragging the astonished man across the sand as a puppy might be dragged at the end of a string.

Presently he came towards her, beckoning to her; and she slid down the sandy slope to meet him.

"Look here," he said, "this'll be a long job. I wish you'd let me send your horse away: I'll be wanting the man who's holding him soon."

Muriel felt abashed, and something of her old hostility returned to her.

"I'd better go," she said. "I'm in your way."

"No," he answered quickly "I don't want you to go. I like you to be here—very much indeed."

His obvious sincerity appeased her. He fetched a notebook and pencil from the pocket of his coat, and handed them to her.

"I'll send your horse back to the hotel," he said. "Please write a note to your friends."

"What d'you want me to say?" she asked, taking the writing materials from him, her eyes curiously wide open, and having in them that characteristic expression of assumed and mischievous innocence.

"Say this," he replied, and, with mock obedience, she wrote at his dictation: "Mr. Lane insists on my working. Please 'phone to my father that he has arrived,

and that I will bring him to the Residency for tea. I'll look in at the hotel in the early afternoon."

"Anything else?" she asked with a laugh. "Won't you send a few directions to my maid to pack my things, and order a car to take us into Cairo?"

"Yes," he replied, without a smile. "You'd better add that."

As she was writing he turned to the man who was holding her horse, and gave him his instructions; then, having handed him the note, he sent him galloping off.

"Now what?" asked Muriel. Unaccountably, her heart was beating fast.

"Now take your coat off, and come and help," he said.

For a moment she hesitated, and a sensation very much like fear took hold of her; but, recollecting that he was nothing more than her father's new diplomatic Secretary, she gave herself up to the enticement of the free and sparkling desert.

"Come on then," she answered; "let's get at it." And pulling off her long white linen coat, she tossed it aside, with her gloves and crop, and rolled up the sleeves of her silk shirt.

Daniel looked gravely at her as she stood before him in her well-cut white breeches and brown top-boots; and for the first time Muriel could see admiration in his eyes. She was feeling reckless, and her boyish costume did not disconcert her: she was quite aware that her figure had nothing of that ungainliness about the hips and knees which so often makes the hunting-field a place of mirth.

He wisely offered no comment upon her appearance, much as he liked the graceful freedom and vigour which it suggested; and together they hastened over to the camels, Muriel pretending, as they went, to spit on her hands.

For a couple of hours they worked with the Bedouin: erecting the tents at the foot of the spur of rock; laying down the grass mats over the level floors of sand; unpacking the kitchen utensils, the enamel jugs and basins, the plates and dishes; setting up the camp bed and collapsible tables and chairs; arranging the books in the portable bookcase; and folding up the towels and blankets in the useful camel-boxes, or lockers, of which there was a good supply.

Muriel threw herself into the work with energy; and indeed she thought it one of the best games she had ever played. She hastened to and fro, laden with pots and pans; she crawled about on her hands and knees, banging away at doubtful pegs, or scooping up the sand around the skirting of the tents; she sorted out and arranged the tins and bottles of food and drink; and she helped to heap up stones and sand to make a sort of kennel for the dogs.

Her labours gave her little time for conversation, and indeed a great part of Daniel's remarks had the nature of somewhat peremptory orders and instructions. When she dropped a glass bottle of jam, and smashed it, he scolded her

not altogether in jest; and she was quite relieved to find that he did not make her lick it up, but, on the contrary, took care that she did not cut her fingers. And when she tripped over one of the tent-ropes and fell flat on her face he actually tempered his reproofs with kindly enquiries after her general health, and dusted her down with the greatest care. Every now and then, however, they had short opportunities of exchanging their news; and she then gave him a few of the less compromising details of the recent tragedy, at which he showed genuine and undisguised distress. But she had no inclination to cast a shadow on the morning's strenuous enjoyment; and she did not linger on that sad subject.

"This is just like a game of Indians or something," she said, as she sat herself upon a packing case to rest.

"Yes," he answered, looking down at her with amusement. "That's the funny thing: life is generally lived on such rigid lines that when one comes down to actuality it seems like pretence."

He opened a tin of biscuits and a bottle of aerated water, and fetched a couple of tin mugs from the kitchen-tent; and, thus refreshed, they continued their work until midday.

By this time the camp was spick and span; and the three tents which served as dining-room, bedroom, and study, looked alluringly comfortable. They were decorated inside in the usual Arab manner, with bold designs and inscriptions cut out in bright coloured cotton-cloth stitched to the canvas; and the camp-chairs of green sail-cloth, the grass matting, and the plain wooden lockers, gave an appearance of clean and cool comfort which rejoiced Daniel's heart. The kitchen, and the smaller tent which was to shelter his servant at night, both stood somewhat apart, tucked away behind a projecting arm of the rock.

"What are you going to do with your camels and men?" Muriel asked, as she stood in the sunlight, regarding her handiwork with satisfaction.

"One of the camels belongs to me," he replied, "and its duties will be to take me to and from Mena House every day, and to fetch water from the well. My servant Hussein is going to remain with me; and his brother—the lean fellow with the squint—will look after the camel. All the rest of the bunch will be off back to the desert tomorrow morning, the lucky devils."

Muriel looked at him questioningly. "Why 'lucky'?" she asked. "Are you sick of your fellow countrymen already?"

He corrected himself quickly. "No," he said; "I spoke without thought. As a matter of fact, I'm mighty glad to be here, thanks to you."

"O, have I made any difference?" she queried, with an air of innocence.

He put his hands into his pockets, and, sucking at his pipe, regarded her thoughtfully. "Yes," he said at length, "I think you've made all the difference." And then, as though afraid that his words might be thought to bear a romantic

interpretation, he added: "You've made the place look fine."

Hussein now served an excellent little luncheon consisting of particular delicacies from the store-cupboard, washed down with refreshing lime-juice and soda; and Muriel did full justice to the meal. When she had devoured everything within sight, like a hungry schoolgirl, she yawned loudly; and Daniel, without further question, arranged some blankets on the floor at the side of the tent, and covered them with the sheepskin from his saddle.

She stared at him anxiously. "What's that for?" she asked.

"For you to sleep on," he said. "I'm going out to see about the men, and you'd better take the opportunity for a siesta. You look half asleep already."

"I think I'd better not," she replied. "We ought to be going soon."

"Do what I tell you," he commanded, pointing to the sheepskin; and, being indeed sleepy, she obeyed without further argument.

"Comfy?" he asked, as she lay down.

"Gorgeous," she answered drowsily, and shut her eyes. When she opened them again a few moments later he had already left the tent; and, with a sigh of supreme happiness, she settled herself down to her repose.

Half an hour later Daniel looked into the tent and found her fast asleep. She was lying upon her back with her legs crossed, and one arm behind her head; and frankly he admitted to himself that she made a most delightful picture.

He went away again, and busied himself for half an hour in changing his clothes and having something of a wash. He routed out quite a respectable suit of grey flannels, and a white stock for his neck; and thus arrayed, he returned to the sleeper.

She lay now upon her side, her cheek resting on her two hands, her knees drawn up; and he confessed to himself that she looked adorable. He did not take his eyes from her for a full minute.

He went out for a walk, and surveyed with satisfaction the position which he had chosen for his camp; and it was half past three when he returned once more to Muriel.

This time she was lying on her back, with one knee raised, one arm across her breast, and the other flung out upon the floor. He sat himself down in the entrance of the tent, and lit his pipe. He did not look at her; for suddenly some door in his heart had opened, revealing a vista of thought which was new to him. The girl upon the sheepskin was no longer merely a charming picture: she was a woman sleeping in his tent after her labours in the camp. She was his companion, his mate, tired out with helping him. She was Eve, and he was Adam: and lo!—the desert was become the Garden of Paradise.

He got up from his chair with a start, and uttered an exclamation of dismay. His thoughts were riotous, mutinous, foolish: he had no business to think of her

like that. He knew nothing about her—nothing, except that she did not belong truly to his system of life. Her little show of vigorous, outdoor activity was a pretence on her part, a mere experiment, a new experience filling an idle day. She was not a child of the open desert: she was a daughter of that busy, dressed up, painted old harlot, the World. Presently she would go back to her stuffy rooms and trim gardens, her dinner-parties and balls, her diamonds and frocks and frills, her conventions and mockeries of life.

[image]

A SCENE FROM THE PHOTOPLAY—BURNING SANDS

When he turned to her again she had opened her eyes, and was looking at him in dazed wonderment. She sat up with a start, and the colour flushed into her face. Then she threw her head back and laughed happily.

“It’s nothing to laugh about,” he said, gloomily. “It’s nearly tea-time.”

She jumped to her feet, and began arranging her hair, which was falling down. “Why didn’t you wake me, man?” she asked.

“I was too busy,” he replied.

He spoke roughly, and she thought he was angry with her. “I slept like a log,” she said. “I’m so sorry.”

“It’s no good being sorry,” he exclaimed. “The mischief’s done.”

“What d’you mean?” she asked, perplexed.

He did not answer. “I’ll go and get the camels,” he said. “Ever ridden a camel?”

She shook her head.

“Well, that’ll wake you up all right,” he laughed, and therewith left the tent.

She thought him very ungracious, after all the work she had done for him. “I suppose he wanted me to clean his boots,” she muttered.

CHAPTER XIII—THE NEW LIFE

Perched on the make-shift saddle of a baggage-camel at an apparently break-

neck height above the ground, Muriel still had the feeling that she was playing an elaborate game as she jogged along beside Daniel's taller and more magnificent beast, with its gaily coloured tassels and trappings, and its rich white sheepskin upon which its rider was seated. Behind them rode a black-bearded son of the desert, with a white *bernous* over his head, silver-mounted pistols stuck into his sash, and a rifle slung over his shoulders. Daniel was holding her guiding-rope, and her two hands were therefore free, as she bounced up and down, to cling on to the sides of the saddle—a circumstance for which she was grateful, although it caused her to feel like a captive being led into slavery.

At the gate of the hotel her companion's camel knelt at a word from him, and he dismounted; but in her own case her less accustomed mount was not so easily induced to go down on its knees, and startled by its antics, she recklessly slid from the saddle and hung for a moment at its side, her legs kicking about in the air. A moment later she tumbled into Daniel's arms, and presently found herself deposited, like a piece of baggage, upon the doorstep, in front of Mrs. Bindane, who happened to be standing in the entrance bullying the hall porter.

"Hullo," said Kate, casually, "the washing's come home."

Muriel felt herself all over carefully, as though to make sure that her anatomy was still reasonably complete, and then, linking her arm in that of her friend, described to her the day's strenuous events; while Daniel, feeling that his presence was not required during these confidences, went over to his attendant to give him his instructions.

"My dear," said Muriel enthusiastically, "we've made a lovely camp out there. It's like a story out of the *Arabian Nights*."

Kate Bindane looked at her suspiciously. "Well, you be careful of those stories," she said. "They generally need a lot of expurgation before they're fit for family reading. Isn't this the man you told me kept a harim in the desert?"

"So they say," she answered. "Anyway he's evidently given it up."

"He'll soon collect another," her friend replied. "I expect that's the Grand Chief Eunuch he's talking to now."

"Did you get my note?" asked Muriel, anxious to change the subject.

"Yes," she smiled, "and your esteemed orders received the prompt attention of our Mr. Bindane, who 'phoned your papa, and ordered the car, and made himself quite useful."

After the tragic death of Rupert Helsingham, four weeks ago, Kate Bindane had taken a gloomy aversion to their steamer, and had persuaded her husband to get rid of it, and to come out to this hotel on the edge of the desert. Muriel had, on more than one occasion, spent the night here with them in their comfortable suite of rooms; and now as she said "good-bye," she made arrangements for future meetings and visits, while Daniel, in a spasm of hospitality, suggested that they

should make use of his camp as an occasional halting-place.

"During the day, while I'm at work in Cairo," he said, "you can make use of my tents. I'll tell my servant to look after you."

Kate Bindane laughed. "O, come now," she answered, "that's driving your birds right over my gun. It makes shooting too easy."

Daniel was perplexed. "What d'you mean?" he asked, as he seated himself beside Muriel in the car.

"Well," said Mrs. Bindane, "you've got the reputation of being a bit short with your fellow men; but to say you'll be glad to entertain us provided that you yourself are not there is the limit."

Muriel turned to Daniel. "She's only joking," she assured him; "that's her way."

Kate uttered an exclamation. "Oh, you little swine!" she said to Muriel. "You're on *his* side now!"

"No, I'm not," Muriel protested, hastily, and the colour came into her face.

Daniel looked from one to the other. "I don't know what you're talking about," he said. "I'm all at sea."

The car moved away, and Muriel sat back in her corner luxuriously. She was very tired, and her feet ached. She was happy to find that she no longer felt awkward in this man's presence, and that her feminine intuition had not deserted her, for she seemed to have learned the trick of managing him. It was only necessary to make herself useful to him, to roll her sleeves up and show a little muscle, and his antagonism evaporated. He was prehistoric—that was all; and yet she could not associate the idea of brutality with him. No, she had not quite classified him; but at any rate she realized that she had probably been wrong in regarding him as being contemptuous of her sex. He was only contemptuous of uselessness.

She glanced at him as he sat in silence by her side, and she noticed that his expression had become grave, and even sad.

"What's the matter?" she asked. "You look unhappy."

He aroused himself, and smiled; but his eyes were troubled.

"Yes, I feel a bit blue," he said. "I suppose it's the thought of my new job."

"I'm rather surprised," she commented, "that you have taken it on. Why did you?"

He shrugged his massive shoulders. "I thought it was my duty," he said. "You see I happen to speak Arabic as fluently as I speak English, and I've made a study of the native mind. I understand these fellows and they understand me; and Egypt just now is craving for understanding."

"You've got a lot to live up to," she told him. "My father thinks you are going to be the saving of the country. I'm always hearing your praises sung."

He looked gravely at her. "You call to my mind," he said, "the prayer of Abu-Bakr, the first Khalif. When he heard that people were praising him, he used to say something like this: 'O God, Thou knowest me better than I know myself, and I know myself better than other people know me. Make me, I pray Thee, better than they suppose, and forgive me what they know not.'"

Therewith he relapsed into silence once more; and Muriel, feeling that there was a sort of momentousness in this hour of his entrance into the political arena, held her peace. There was in her mind a sense of pride at the part she was playing in a great event. She felt that she was, as it were, a sharer in a diplomatic secret; it was almost as though she, too, were serving a great cause. Suddenly the things which made up her social life seemed to become insignificant, and her existence took on a larger aspect.

As they drove up to the door of the Residency, she turned to him as though he were an old friend. "I'm awfully glad my father is going to have you with him," she said. "I feel a sort of personal interest in it all."

Daniel's reply was interrupted by Lord Blair's appearance on the steps. He had heard the car drive up to the door, and had hastened out to greet the newcomer.

"Welcome, my dear Daniel," he exclaimed, holding out his arms as though he were going to embrace his friend. "This is splendid, capital!"

The two men shook hands, and as they did so, Lord Blair winced as though his fingers had been crunched in a man-trap. For some minutes thereafter he held his right hand loosely in his left, bending the joints carefully to and fro, under the pretence of fiddling with his rings. Even after they had entered the drawing-room and Muriel was dispensing the tea, he was still clenching and unclenching his fist, and bending and straightening his first finger as though surreptitiously beckoning to somebody.

Muriel told her father of her morning's work, and described with enthusiasm the camp in the desert.

"I'm very sorry," he answered, turning to Daniel, "very sorry indeed, that you are not going to live here in the house, but I bow to your wishes. You must consider yourself entirely free; and indeed I know we shall lose you if you are not your own master."

"Oh no," Daniel replied, "I'm quite prepared to follow a routine. I'll work here all the morning, talking to your native callers, and I'll do the correspondence at the camp in the evenings."

"That will be admirable," said Lord Blair; and presently, when tea was over, he led Daniel away to his study.

"And now," he said, when they were seated, "let us discuss the question of your salary...."

Daniel interrupted him. "Oh, don't bother about that. I'll take whatever the position carries—I don't suppose it's much, as it's a Foreign Office job. I've got a small income of my own, you know; and my tastes are simple. Get me as much as you reasonably can, of course; but don't worry about it."

Presently Lord Blair spoke of the question of Knighthood, and attempted to persuade him to reconsider his decision; but Daniel was obdurate, and very reluctantly his chief abandoned the project.

"Let me follow my own instincts," said Daniel. "From the native point of view your adviser on Oriental matters does not need that sort of thing."

"Don't you think he does?" asked Lord Blair, rather doubtfully.

"Certainly not. If you'll let me, I shall turn out all the fine English office furniture from my official room: the desk, and the red leather chairs, and the pictures. They're all right for a governor, but not for the—what shall I say?—the court philosopher, as I intend to be. I want plain bare walls, bare floors with just a rug or two, and a few chairs. No books, or papers, or maps, or calendars, or clocks."

"As you wish, my dear Daniel: I rely on you," said Lord Blair.

"You see," he continued, "what English pro-consuls in the East so often lack is the go-between, the man who tries to get at the native soul, so to speak. You, as governor, must represent the might and the justice of England; but I must be the voice saying 'Don't be afraid: we shall not outrage your religion or your philosophies or your traditions.' Now I can't be that if I'm sitting at an American desk, with an eyeglass in my eye, and a stenographer tapping away beside me, and a large office clock ticking on the wall. I should be so unconvincing. Do you see what I mean?"

"Quite, quite," Lord Blair answered. "I dare say you are right."

His face, however, belied anything of conviction that he attempted to put into the words. He did not want Daniel to orientalize himself to any marked extent: he wished him to take his place in the English and Continental society of the Residency. He had great ambitions for him, and the idea of training him ultimately to occupy his own exalted position was developing rapidly in his mind. He dreaded anything in the nature of eccentricity: he had the characteristic British dislike of the crank. Yet he could not imagine Daniel as ever becoming unbalanced, for a kind of equilibrium and stability were apparent in all his actions.

On the other hand, the idea of the new Oriental Secretary adopting the rôle of philosopher appealed to him; he saw the force of it; for his experiences in the East had made him realize that if a white man is to gain the confidence of a brown race he must be, in both senses of the words, capable of a brown study.

When Daniel returned to the drawing-room to say "good-bye" to Muriel and to thank her, it was already dark outside, and the room was brilliantly illu-

minated by a number of somewhat inadequately shaded electric globes. There were five or six people in the room; and he paused for a moment in the doorway, wondering whether he would give offence by beating an immediate retreat. He was paying very careful regard to his behaviour, however; and when Muriel called out to him, he was obliged to enter.

"I'm going now," he said to her, approaching the sofa where she was seated. "I just wanted to say 'thank you.'" He looked neither to right nor left.

Lady Muriel turned to a very smartly dressed woman who was seated beside her on the sofa, and introduced Daniel. His hands were, at the moment, clasped behind his back, and he bowed to her with great gravity. She held out her hand, but, seeing that he had considered the more formal bow sufficient to the occasion, withdrew it again. He thought that perhaps he had been stiff, and at once held out his tanned and muscular paw, but finding that it was too late, thrust it into his coat pocket, at the moment when, for the second time, she offered her fingers. He snatched his hand out of his pocket, but simultaneously she withdrew hers again.

Muriel laughed nervously, but Daniel faced the situation frankly.

"I'm sure I don't know whether I'm supposed to shake hands or not," he said. "What do people do in society?"

"Which ever you like," the lady murmured, with a titter of laughter.

"That's no good," he answered, "unless you do what the other fellow's going to do. Anyway," he added, bending forward and very deliberately taking hold of her irresolute hand, "how d'you do?"

He glanced about him, and observed that the others were watching him with mild amusement. Near him was Sir Frank Lestrangle, the First Secretary, whom he had met before—a fair-haired, clean-shaven man of some forty years of age, whose rigid formality seemed incapable of disturbance. Daniel shook him warmly by the hand, but for all the impression he made he might have been greeting a tailor's dummy.

Near the window he saw Lady Smith-Evered, talking to a pale young Guardsman, who appeared to be in immediate need of a tonic. He went over to her, and made his salutations with cordiality, for a year ago he had made her acquaintance at the Residency, and he had a vague recollection that she had taken offence at something or other he had said. He held out his hand, but once more his pocket became its sudden place of refuge as she bowed with all the stiffness that her undulating figure permitted, and, with no more than a glance in his direction, turned to continue her conversation with the Guardsman.

In another part of the room an elderly man with sleek, grey hair was talking to a heavy matron whose respectable cloth dress looked as though it had been made for her by a builder of club-room furniture. Daniel thought he recognized

the man, and took a few steps towards him, but, deciding that he was mistaken, turned on his heel and, narrowly avoiding a collision with a small table, returned to Muriel.

The curious thing was that though these situations were embarrassing, he did not appear awkward. Muriel observed this remarkable fact, and wondered at it. He was certainly out of place in a drawing-room, she thought, but he was not therefore out of countenance; and his *sang-froid* seemed to deserve a more friendly treatment than it was receiving. She therefore got up as he approached her, and in a very audible voice asked him if he would let her help him to arrange his official quarters on the morrow.

He thanked her, and then, lowering his voice, asked her if she could explain Lady Smith-Evered's very marked hostility.

"Why, don't you know?" Muriel whispered. "She told me all about it: she said you had run down the Army once when you were talking to her last year."

"Nonsense," said Daniel, "I'm sure I never did."

Muriel nodded. "Yes, you did. She said you spoke of the officers of her pet regiment as men who looked as though they'd been through the ranks."

"But I meant that as a compliment," he answered. "I meant they looked as though they weren't afraid of hard work. Had she any other complaints?"

"No, I think that was her only grievance."

Before she could stop him, he turned and walked straight across the room to Lady Smith-Evered, and came to a halt immediately in front of her.

"I was just asking Lady Muriel how I had offended you," he said, with disconcerting directness; "and she tells me it was because you thought I had disparaged some of our soldier friends."

The General's lady flushed. He saw the red glow creep up from her neck to her face, under the thick powder, and her eyes gleamed menacingly; but she only inclined her head.

"I want to apologize," he went on. "I'm most awfully sorry: my remarks were stupid, and I think I must have been trying to say something bright. Will you please forgive me?"

The flush deepened. "I'm glad you apologize," she said, and she glanced at the Guardsman beside her, as though to bid him take notice of what she supposed to be the discomfiture of the offender.

"I'm very glad that you accept my apology," he said, and with a bow he left her.

"What on earth did you say?" asked Muriel, when he had returned to her.

"I apologized," he answered, quietly.

"Ate humble pie?" she queried, with a touch of disdain.

"I had hurt her feelings: I'm always sorry to annoy anybody," he replied.

“Well,” she remarked, “I think you’ve rather annoyed *me* now, by climbing down like that.” She did not feel that humility suited him, and she was conscious of a sense of disappointment.

“My good girl,” he whispered, “you’ve got a lot to learn from the philosophers. You must let me put you through a course of reading.”

Her disappointment flamed into anger at his words, and she responded coldly to his adieux. When he had left the room she sat down once more upon the sofa, and in the few moments of silence which followed, she experienced a variety of sensations. She felt as though he were the schoolmaster again who had scolded her; she felt abashed and did not know why; she felt angry with him, and, after their happy hours together, her displeasure fell like a destructive hand upon the day’s edifice; she felt that they belonged to different worlds, and that it was hopeless to attempt to understand him; she felt that she was right and he was wrong, and yet there was a doubt at the back of her mind as to whether the opposite might not somehow be the case.

CHAPTER XIV—THE COURT PHILOSOPHER

In the West an interest in Philosophy is considered to be an indication of eccentricity; and the thought brings before the imagination some long-haired and ancient professor, detached from the active world, wandering around a college quadrangle, his hands folded, and his face upturned to the sky as though averted from the stains of spilt food upon his breast. In the East, however, the Philosopher is held in high honour; and his vocation calls to mind a thousand tranquil figures each of whom has been the power behind an Oriental throne.

Daniel Lane was a philosopher by inclination and by education, and his great common sense was the definite consequence of careful reasoning.

He believed that Right was an unconquerable force which needed no display of manners or sounding of trumpets to signal its movement; and so long as he did not offend against the laws formulated by his philosophy, he did not look for difficulties or defeat.

Nor was he a man who could be terrorized by any threats; and though Lord

Blair had warned him that assassination was a likely end to a political career in Cairo, he was not in the slightest degree troubled by the thought. Very reluctantly he consented to profit by the activities of the Secret Service; and he determined to dispense with their aid as soon as he had made himself acquainted with the ramifications of native intrigue.

He began his work at the Residency, therefore, without trepidation; and on the first morning of his official employment he inaugurated a procedure which before nightfall was the talk of many in the native quarter.

In a secluded corner of the garden, at the end of a short terrace at the edge of the Nile, there was a luxuriant group of palms, in the shade of which stood a marble bench of Arabic design, built in a half-circle upon a base of Damascus tiles. A mass of shrubs and prolific rose bushes shut it off from the main grounds; while from passing boats it was screened by a low parapet covered by a wild tangle of flowering creepers. This sheltered and peaceful alcove was promptly appropriated by Daniel, and in this setting he made his appearance in the political life of Cairo.

His first visitor was a wealthy, silk-robed land-owner from Upper Egypt, who desired to lay certain complaints before the British authorities, in regard to the hostile actions of a native inspector of Irrigation. The man had been shown into the waiting-room in the Residency, where he had been filled with anxiety by the ticking of the typewriters in the adjoining room, the constant ringing of telephone bells, and the hurried passage to and fro of clerks and liveried servants. He had wondered whether he knew sufficient English to make himself understood without the aid of an interpreter, and whether, if the interpreter's services were required, he would have to give him very handsome *backshish* to render his tongue persuasive.

Therefore, when he was led presently across the lawn to the sunny terrace beside the Nile, where he came upon a mild and quiet figure who stood smoking his pipe, and idly tossing pebbles into the placid waters, and who now greeted him in the benevolent language of the Koran, his agitation left him upon the moment, and with it went the need of cunning. He stated his case frankly, as he strolled to and fro with Daniel in the sunlight, and he blessed God and his Prophet that the interview which he had dreaded so long in anticipation should prove so undisturbing in actuality.

Daniel next found himself seated upon the marble bench with a caravan-master who had failed through the ordinary channels to obtain redress for the illegal seizure of certain goods at the Tripolitan frontier; and this personage's amazement at the Englishman's knowledge of the desert routes was profound.

Later, a deputation of sheikhs from Dongola was received in the shade of the rustling palms: grave, anxious men who had come to speak of the disaffec-

tion of certain neighbouring tribes, and to express their own loyalty, which was somewhat in doubt.

At the close of the interview, while he was warning them against revolt, Daniel happened to notice a bundle of stout wooden faggots lying near by in readiness for use as supports for some young trees which had recently been planted. He went across to them, and selecting one of them, carried it back to his seat upon the bench; and presently, turning to the sheikhs, he asked if any man amongst them could break such a faggot across his knees.

The youngest member of the deputation, a magnificent specimen of negroid humanity, took the faggot in his brown hands, and strained his muscles in the attempt to break it, but without success. His colleagues, older men, made no trial of their lesser strength, but were satisfied to declare the task to be impossible.

Daniel rose and took it from them, and a moment later flung it to the ground in two halves. "That faggot," he said, quietly resuming his seat, "may be likened to the land of Dongola, which is to be the strong support of the fruit-bearing tree of the Sudan. But if it fail in its useful duty, it may thus be broken asunder by hands more powerful than yours, and be cast into the flames."

To the native mind a demonstration of this kind was more potent than any words, and the deputation of sheikhs left the alcove, carrying with them a tale which would be told to their children's children.

As they retreated across the lawn towards the entrance, Daniel suddenly caught sight of Muriel, whose face peered out from amongst the rose bushes, as though she were looking to see if he were alone.

"Hullo!" he called out; "what are you doing here?"

"Spying on you," she answered, coming out into the open, her arms full of roses which she had been picking.

"That's very wrong of you," he said.

"Well, you've taken possession of my particular corner," she laughed, "and I always get my roses from here."

"I'm sorry," he replied as they seated themselves upon the marble bench. "I though you slacked about upstairs until midday."

She looked at him squarely. "You've got a wrong idea about me altogether," she declared. "It's true I don't spend my mornings in smashing up Government property.... By the way, why did you break that wooden stake across your knee?"

He laughed quietly. "It was a parable: it represented a certain province of the Soudan, and its possible fate at England's hands."

She thought it out. "I wonder what would have happened," she mused, "if you'd found that you couldn't break it. I suppose in that case you would have said it represented England."

"No," he answered, "I should have been in a bad fix, and it would have

served me right for showing off. But I don't often attempt what I don't think I can do. It's a bad thing to fumble about with anything that's beyond one, like a dog with an uncrackable bone."

"Somebody ought to have invented a proverb," she said, "like 'Don't worry what you can't bite.' But, you know, you're fumbling about with me very badly."

"Would you rather I bit clean through you right away?" he asked. "Supposing I said I thought I had smashed you open already...?"

"I'd pity your strange delusion," she answered, and they both laughed, though Muriel did not feel hilarious.

"Well, supposing I just said I thought I *could* do so, and was going to try?"

"I'd reply: 'Any thing, so long as you don't worry me.'"

Again they laughed, and this time Muriel did so with more sincerity, for she felt that she had answered him well.

He took a rose from the bunch in her hands, and smelt it thoughtfully. "Yes, I'm going to try," he said at length. "I'm going to understand you, and then make you understand yourself. I'm going to show you yourself."

"You're a busy man," she answered, at once estranged; "you'd better not take on any new job."

"It's worth while, I think," he replied.

There was something in his voice which changed the tone of their conversation, and arrested the development of her hostile feelings. The flippancy of their words died away, and a new seriousness, a salient eventfulness, took its place. Suddenly Muriel was filled with longing to be understood, to be laid bare mentally both to him and to herself. She felt solitary and her heart cried out for the enlightenment of friendship; yet she did not dare to make an intimate of this man, whose treatment of her sex did not seem to be conspicuously delicate. Nevertheless the inadequacy, the inutility of her method of life was very forcibly presented to her, and she seemed to be beating at the bars of her cage. There was something so flat and unprofitable in all that she had done, and the desire was urgent in her to realize herself and expand.

"O, I want to be taught," she exclaimed, "I want to be taught...." She checked herself, and was silent.

He looked at her in surprise, for she uttered the words with intensity, and it was clear that she meant them; but it was not clear that they were prompted by more than a passing emotion, for presently she began to talk about the lighter things of her life, and she spoke of the various events in prospect which would keep her from brooding. The greater part of each day for the next week or so was already filled; and Muriel spoke of these coming events as though they were dispensations granted to her by a benevolent Fortune for her heart's comfort.

"I've come to the conclusion," she said, "that the only way to be happy is to

be surrounded by amusing people, so that there is no opportunity for thinking about oneself.”

He shook his head. “No, you’re wrong. Your happiness must come from within, from the contentment and fullness of your own mind. The Buddha once said ‘Let us dwell free from yearning, among men who are anxious’; and there is an anonymous Oriental poem which says something about the lost paradise being hidden, really, in the human breast. My good girl,” he exclaimed, warming to his subject, “don’t you realize that what you can get from this restless world of ‘society’ you live in is only pleasure, not happiness, and even at that it doesn’t last. You are like a punctured wheel: so long as people are pumping you up, you seem to be all right, but when they leave you alone you go flat, because your inner tube isn’t sound. You ought to be alone in the desert for a bit: it would do you all the good in the world.”

Muriel looked at him questioningly. “Were you alone in the desert?” she asked. There had come into her mind a vision of that *harîm* of which she had heard tell.

“Well, I wasn’t exactly alone ...,” he replied; for he had many friends among the natives.

His answer gave fresh colour to her thoughts, and a sense of annoyance crept over her.

“It seems to me,” she remarked, “that I ought to remind you of the Biblical saying, ‘Physician, heal thyself.’”

She got up, and, with a little nod to him, strolled back to the rose-bushes. He watched her as she added fresh blooms to the bunch she was carrying; and he noticed how the sunlight caught her hair and made it beautiful. He would have liked to have gone after her and taken her in his arms.

Presently he returned to the house, and, finding that there were no more native visitors, went to talk over serious matters of policy with the regular Secretaries.

He remained to luncheon at the Residency, and at the table Lord Blair enquired eagerly as to whether he had found his first morning’s work interesting, and appeared to be relieved to hear that such was the case.

Muriel joined in the conversation. “I was eavesdropping behind the bushes,” she said, “and I can say with confidence that Mr. Lane enjoyed it all thoroughly, especially the part where he smashed up the gardener’s work of weeks.” Therewith she related the incident of the wooden stake, but in her narrative the faggot became an immense tree-trunk.

Lord Blair rubbed his hands. “That’s the sort of thing!” he exclaimed. “Dear me, dear me!—what strength you have, Daniel!”

“Yes,” said Muriel, “his mere presence would make the dullest party pi-

quant. One has only to recollect that if he were suddenly to get out of control, every person in the vicinity would run the risk of being banged into a boneless emulsion....”

She broke off with a laugh, and Daniel smiled affably. Somehow, in spite of his Herculean proportions, he was not a man one would associate with violence.

After luncheon, Daniel spent some time in talking to Lord Blair in regard to native affairs; and it was already half past three when he left the Great Man’s study, and walked across the hall to the main entrance. Here he encountered Lady Muriel, who was just going off upon her visit to the bazaars. She was about to step into a very new and luxurious automobile, which Mrs. de Courcy Cavilland, wife of the Colonel of the Dragoons, had recently purchased to the honour of the regiment and to the dismay of her husband. This lady, a small fluffy woman, with innocent blue eyes and sharp little teeth, was making gushing remarks to Muriel as Daniel appeared at the head of the steps; and three young Dragoon officers were standing behind her, like nice little dogs awaiting their turn to go through their tricks. Actually they were excellent fellows, but in the presence of their colonel’s wife, they bore little resemblance to the fire-eating cavalrymen of tradition; and Daniel, as he looked down upon them from the top of the steps, wondered which was the more disastrous influence in a regiment—that of the colonel’s wife upon the younger officers, or that of the younger officers upon the colonel’s wife.

He felt a sort of gloomy interest in the group before him; and, as his presence seemed to be unnoticed, he leaned against the jamb of the door, hat in hand, watching the scene through a recurrent haze of tobacco-smoke.

“I suggest,” Mrs. Cavilland was saying to Muriel whose back was turned to him, “that we drive up the Mousky, and go first to the scent bazaar. Willie Purdett, here, wants to buy some scent for his mother—Lady Mary, you know. And then I must go to the brass bazaar: I promised dear Lady Agatha Lawer I’d get her one of those tea-tray things. She so hates going to the bazaars herself: she says they’re so smelly. Personally, I simply love the East....”

Muriel took her seat in the car, and as she did so she caught sight of Daniel.

“Hullo!” she exclaimed, “I thought you’d gone.”

He took his pipe out of his mouth, and told her he was just going.

Muriel introduced him to Mrs. Cavilland, who stared at him with disdain, casting a withering glance upon the disreputable hat he was holding in one hand, and upon the pipe in the other. She then turned away as though the sight were unbearable.

“Mr. Lane is a cousin of your friend Charles Barthampton,” Muriel told her; and thereat her manner changed with surprising suddenness, for the British peerage was as meat and drink to her.

“Why, of course,” she answered, “I can see the likeness now;” and she glanced with surprise at the mischievous smile—almost a wink—which Muriel directed at him. “You’re new to Cairo?” she added. “You must come and see me: I’m always at home on Tuesdays.”

“Yes,” said Muriel, “that will be very nice for him: he loves tea-parties, don’t you, Daniel dear?”

Daniel looked at her curiously. His Christian name sounded strange from her lips, and he wondered why she had used it now for the first time. Her expression suggested that there was a private joke between them, and the intimacy pleased him.

“Yes, Muriel dear,” he replied, gravely, and Muriel gasped; “but you needn’t blurt out my secret.” He turned to Mrs. Cavilland as though to explain. “I’m rather addicted to tea-drinking and quiet gossip,” he said.

Mrs. Cavilland thought him somewhat forward, but she excused it in one who was so well-connected. “We tear each other to pieces on Tuesdays,” she laughed.

He did not reply. He was still wondering why his name, Daniel, should have sounded so pleasant to his ears, and why the expression of silent understanding on Muriel’s face should have stirred him so subtly. It was as though their friendship had taken a leap forward.

He stepped to the side of the car, and put his hand on Muriel’s arm. “Don’t get too tired,” he said, “or you won’t enjoy your dance tonight.”

“Are you coming?” Mrs. Cavilland asked him.

“No,” he answered, “I have a previous engagement with a lady in the desert.”

“Who?” asked Muriel, quickly. She was taken off her guard.

“A very dear friend,” he replied. “Her name is Sleep.”

CHAPTER XV—A BALL AT THE GENERAL’S

Lady Smith-Evered’s dance was a social event of much importance, and those members of the English community who were not invited had perforce to regard themselves as outside the ranks of the elect: a fact which led that night to much

moodiness on the part of ambitious young women who wandered about their creditable little flats and houses, hating their mediocre husbands. On the other hand, those to whom invitations had come somewhat unexpectedly, vied with one another in their efforts to indicate that their presence at the General's house was to be regarded as a matter of course; and herein, perhaps, lay the explanation of those curious demonstrations of nonchalance which were so frequently to be observed—the careless attitudes, the friendly words to the servants behind the supper buffet, the assumed knowledge of the plan of the house and garden, and the casual remarks to host and hostess.

Muriel, of course, was the outstanding figure of the ball: not so much because of her looks, for there were many well-favoured young women in the ball-room, nor because of her charming frock, for the beginning of the winter season in Cairo is notable for a general display of recent purchases; but rather because she was her father's daughter, and, as his heiress, one of the most frequent victims of the familiarities of the London Press.

She paid little attention, however, to the many pairs of eyes which scrutinized her; for she had come here to enjoy herself, and her dancing program was full.

As an opening to the ball, she danced with the General; but her efforts to avoid having her toes trodden upon caused her to indulge in such antics that she speedily manœuvred him to a convenient sofa, where he puffed and blew until the military band had ceased and again renewed its conscientious din.

There are few noises so dispiriting as a British military band's rendering of American ragtime; but, as has already been stated, Muriel was determined to enjoy herself, and, save for an occasional desire to sandbag the conductor, she was entirely untroubled by ill-humoured thoughts as her elegant partners swung her around the room, or led her out to rest in the illuminated garden, where a hundred gaily coloured Chinese lanterns dispelled the mystic sorrow of the moonlight.

After some two or three hours of dancing, however, she began to grow weary; and when something went wrong temporarily with the suspender which held up one of her stockings, she was glad enough to come to rest in the supper-room. Here she seated herself next to her hostess, who was just forming a big party at a little table, and who was jovially endeavouring to pretend that there was much fun to be derived from jamming oneself into the smallest possible space and eating with one hand.

Lady Smith-Evered, having swallowed during the evening quite a lot of champagne, was in a talkative and even confidential mood. On several occasions she nudged Muriel, and whispered loudly to her from behind her fan, calling her attention to the General, who, at a neighbouring table, was flirting resolutely

with Kate Bindane.

“He’s such a Lothario,” she whispered: “I’m quite thankful he’s growing old; though, mind you, he doesn’t often show signs of age yet.” She laughed hoarsely, and turned her eyes upwards with a nod to express admiration for his virility.

Muriel, as she looked at her, conceived a violent horror of old age; and inwardly she prayed that in her own case she would know when to abandon the thoughts which only Youth can make beautiful.

“Women used to be mad about him,” Lady Smith-Evered went on presently, still speaking in husky asides, “but I don’t think he was unfaithful to me, except, perhaps, when he was in India.” She munched her lobster-salad in silence for a few moments. “One can’t blame him for that, poor dear,” she mused at length. “Men will be men—especially in that climate...!”

Muriel turned away in shame, and at once caught the eye of Lord Barthampton, who was one of the party. He was staring at her from the opposite side of the table.

“Lady Muriel,” he said, raising his glass to her, “Your very good health. Cheerio!”

Muriel thanked him, and busied herself in prodding at the food upon her plate which was a full arm’s length away from her.

“Do let me feed you,” said the good-looking youth who was sitting beside her, and who had managed to ram himself closer to the table.

He picked up her plate, and, screwing himself round on his chair, presented a morsel on the end of the fork to her lips. The intimate operation delighted him, and as he repeated it, Muriel observed the excitement in his face. It is a most dangerous thing to feed a woman: it arouses the dormant instincts of the Pliocene Age.

Lady Smith-Evered patted her hand archly. “You mustn’t let him do that,” she whispered. “That’s the way doves begin. And look at Charles Barthampton: he’s madly jealous.”

“Jealous?—Why?” asked Muriel, glancing at Lord Barthampton, who was scowling at her across the table.

“My dear, haven’t you eyes? Can’t you see that he is making a dead set at you?”

“Oh, nonsense,” said Muriel, a little crossly. “I’ve only met him once or twice, and this evening I’ve had half a dance with him.”

Lady Smith-Evered smiled knowingly. “He’s a very eligible young man,” she purred.

“He drinks,” Muriel remarked, shortly.

“Oh, but he has turned over a new leaf,” her hostess replied. “Didn’t you notice he drank your health in soda-water just now? He’s a very good sort. What

a difference there is between him and that extraordinary cousin of his!"

"There is, indeed," Muriel answered, with feeling.

The youth beside her had abandoned his attempts to feed her, and was excitedly filling his own mouth with good things, women and food being associated ideas in his pristine young mind.

"Did you notice how he apologized to me?" Lady Smith-Evered remarked.

"Who?" asked Muriel. Her thoughts were wandering.

"Mr. Lane," she answered. "It was a great triumph."

"Who for? You, or Mr. Lane?" Muriel's heart beat as she asked the question, for it was meant to be a blow in defence of the man she was beginning to regard as her good friend.

Lady Smith-Evered was too befogged to divine her meaning. "It was a triumph for me," she declared. "People generally find it better to be in my good books." She made a menacing gesture to the company at large; and three or four young officers, not quite catching her words, but judging by her expression that she was demanding their approbation, nodded their heads wisely. "But of course he's not quite right in his head," she went on. "He has lived alone in the desert too much. Why, my dear, do you know what I saw him doing yesterday in the street?"

"What?" asked Muriel, at once alert.

"It was just outside the Residency," she said. "I was talking to him, when a donkey, left alone in a native vegetable cart, got its leg over the shaft and started kicking. Well!... He lifted the creature clean off the ground, got its leg back between the shafts, and then took hold of its ear and whispered into it: 'Oh, you absurd ridiculous ass!' It sounded quite uncanny."

Lord Barthampton got up ponderously from his seat and came round the table to Muriel. "The music's started again," he said. "It's our dance, isn't it? Are you ready?"

Muriel rose, somewhat relieved to take her departure from the supper-table. As she did so her hostess again nudged her heavily.

"Just look at the General!" she whispered.

Kate Bindane turned round, and, catching Muriel's eye, burst out laughing; while the General, finding his wife's gaze fixed upon him, put his hand playfully over his face.

"What's the joke?" Muriel asked.

"Sir Henry is telling risky stories," replied Kate.

"It's all right, my dear," said the General, waving his hand to his wife. "It's only the one about the little boy and the Sunday school teacher."

Lady Smith-Evered laughed huskily. "I'm glad it's no worse," she declared. "Henry, you must behave yourself."

"She's egging me on," he replied, slapping his thigh.

"Now then, now then!" exclaimed Kate, "none o' your sauce."

Muriel put her hand on Lord Barthampton's arm, and turned away. She was feeling an indefinable sense of disgust; and she was glad to merge once more into the revolving mass of dancers, and to allow the brazen music to beat the thoughts out of her brain. Her partner did not speak. He was turning over in his mind the possibilities of future happiness, and the effort absorbed his attention, so that his dancing, never of a high standard, became atrocious.

The only solution of his perplexing problem was for him to marry a rich wife: then, if Daniel were to reveal the secret of his birth, he would not suffer a knock-out blow. He would lose his title and the fortune which went with it, but he would have refeathered his nest, and all would be well. And the partner with whom he was now dancing was an heiress, and a jolly fine girl into the bargain.

He was making praiseworthy efforts to check the downward course of his career, and ever since his interview with his cousin, he had been on the water-waggon; but, even though his reform were complete, was Daniel to be trusted not to dispossess him? He doubted it: the temptation would be too great. What a dirty trick his father had played him! But he wasn't so easily floored: he would obtain another fortune by marriage, and then he could tell Cousin Daniel to go to hell.

"You're looking very glum," said Muriel, as they wandered out, presently, into the garden.

Lord Barthampton braced himself. "Yes, I *am* a bit down in the mouth, little woman," he murmured. "You know, even we soldier fellows get the hump sometimes—sort of lonely."

Muriel glanced at him apprehensively. She saw at once that the moonlight and the lanterns had had an instant effect upon him, and she presumed that he would now become sentimental. Self-pity is the token of a fool, and her feminine intuition told her that, since he was worse than a fool, he would probably picture himself as a stern, silent Englishman of heroic mould bravely battling against a deep and poetic loneliness.

She sighed sweetly, for there was always something of the rogue in her. "Yes, I understand," she whispered, and she pressed her fingers sympathetically upon his arm.

His line of attack seemed to be justified, and he developed it with ardour. "Sometimes a chap comes to the end of his tether," he went on, but paused again and squared his shoulders. "However, one's got to keep a stiff upper lip, eh? We're out here, far from home, just to do our duty, so we mustn't grouse. We have to keep the old flag flying."

"The dear old flag," said Muriel fervently, feeling rather a beast thus to play

up to him, but excusing herself on the grounds of curiosity as to what he would say next.

"Sometimes it's hard, though," he confessed, "and I'm afraid I've been reduced more than once to the whisky bottle and baccarat and bad company. Ah! I know that sounds weak," he exclaimed, as she uttered a little squeak of distress, "but you don't know the temptations of a lonely man, with nothing to do, cursed with wealth..."

"O, but I can guess," she replied, intoning her words as though she were speaking Shakespearian lines. "Sunday afternoons, leaning over the parapet, with nothing to do but spit in the river—why shouldn't you join in a game of chance, instead of going to church? I can quite understand it."

He looked at her in astonishment, wondering if she were pulling his leg; but in the moonlight he saw only a sympathetic girl, gazing into the distance with an expression of saintly purity.

"It's worse than that," he sighed. "A man has temptations that you couldn't understand, little woman. What he wants is the pure friendship of a girl."

"An English girl," she murmured, with fervour.

He bent forward and looked into her eyes. "Lady Muriel," he said, "will you be a friend to me? Will you be my little English rose?"

"Lord Barthampton ..." she began, wondering how she could terminate a jest of which she was already tiring.

He checked her. "Please call me 'Charles,'" he begged.

The music began again in the ballroom, and Muriel rose with alacrity. "Come," she said, dramatically. "Let us go back to the gay and frivolous world."

"Right-o!" he exclaimed, brightly, inadvertently changing his tone now that the desired impression seemed to have been made.

As they entered the house they encountered Lord Blair, who had looked in at the dance for the purpose of demonstrating the perfect agreement between the diplomatic and the military services, for it so happened that his own policy and that of the General disagreed on every occasion and on every essential point. He was standing in the hall, having just made a parade of the ballroom with his hostess, and the latter was now talking to him, calling him "George" for the benefit of the guests who happened to be within earshot.

As the girl and her partner approached, Lady Smith-Evered whispered that Lord Barthampton seemed very attracted to Muriel; and she repeated her assertion that he was a very eligible young man.

At this, however, a frown gathered upon Lord Blair's forehead, and he made a deprecating gesture with his thin hand. He had other plans for his daughter which, if not yet mature, were already in train; and, it must be confessed, he wished Barthampton an early and comfortable demise.

Muriel presently wandered off with her chaperone, Lady Smith-Evered; and Lord Blair thereupon suggested that her late partner should come with him into the smoking-room for a quiet cigar. The heavy-jowled young man was inwardly astonished at the mark of consideration, and the thought entered his slow-working mind that Lady Muriel's father was taking an anticipatory interest in him.

The smoking-room not being open to the ordinary guests, the two men found themselves alone in it; and Lord Blair at once took up his stand, as was his wont, upon the hearthrug, and made his customary pretence of warming a certain part of his anatomy before the empty grate. Lord Barthampton, meanwhile, seated himself upon the arm of a neighbouring chair, and lit the cigar which had been proffered to him.

"I'm afraid I shall never persuade your cousin Daniel to come to these sort of functions," the elder man remarked, after a few casual references had been made to the evening's entertainment.

"No, he's a queer fellow," the other responded, shortly.

"I have the greatest admiration for him," Lord Blair declared. "Tell me, is he not your heir presumptive?" His words indicated only a polite interest.

"Yes," said Barthampton, puffing heavily at his cigar, and shifting his legs. "But, of course, I shall marry soon—when I find the right girl..."

"Of course, of course," Lord Blair replied. "Very right, very proper. But ..." he paused, "there is no hurry, is there?"

"I'd like to have a son and heir," the other responded. "You see there's a good deal of property involved. Luckily, I need not marry for money: I've got plenty." He was anxious to announce his eligibility.

"Well," said Lord Blair, speaking out of the blacker depths of his scheming mind, "take my advice, my dear fellow, and don't marry yet awhile. 'Marry in haste and repent at leisure,' you know—a very true adage. You have a long life before you ... plenty of time, plenty, to make your choice with care."

"Yes, I'm pretty healthy," he answered; and Lord Blair looked at him critically, hoping that he was mistaken.

"Does the climate agree with you out here?" he asked, hopefully.

"Well, I can't say I exactly enjoyed the summer," Lord Barthampton laughed. "A heavy fellow like me feels the heat."

Lord Blair's spirits rose. "A little tightness, perhaps, at the back of the head, eh?" His thoughts were running on the possibilities of apoplexy.

"No," he answered, "but I'm always in such a devil of a sweat."

"Yes, yes, very natural, I'm sure," Lord Blair murmured. "And a little short of breath sometimes, I dare say?"

The younger man stared at him warily. He was wondering whether the

questions were those of a prospective father-in-law; and he decided that it was his policy to show as clean a bill of health as possible.

"Oh, I'm as sound as a bell," he laughed.

Lord Blair's face fell. If apoplexy were unlikely to carry him off, perhaps there was some hope of kidney-trouble: there were ominous pouches under the young man's eyes.

"Some people," he said, "find that they suffer out here from pains in the small of the back—stabbing pains, you know, with a sensation of burning...."

"Do they, now?" the other replied, quite interested. "No, I can't say I ever felt 'em."

Again Lord Blair's hopes were dashed to the ground. He knew, however, that Barthampton was a heavy drinker, and he introduced the subject with manifest interest, and with a disregard of principle which sorely troubled him.

"Doctors sometimes advise abstemiousness out here," he said, "but personally I think a little stimulant is a good thing."

Lord Barthampton warmed to him. "So do I," he replied heartily. "Still, for the present I'm absolutely on the water-waggon."

"Dear, dear!" muttered Lord Blair, fidgetting openly. "Dear me!—dear me! That's a little drastic, isn't it?—a little unnecessary?"

"I don't suppose I'll keep it up for long," was the reply.

"No, why should you?" Lord Blair commented, and the younger man thought him very broad-minded.

The conversation was interrupted by the entrance of the General, in search of a quiet corner for a smoke, and Lord Blair, much dispirited, presently made his way back to the ballroom, and thence home to bed. His daughter, however, remained till past three o'clock in the morning, and at last was one of the little group of enthusiasts which kept up the revels to the accompaniment of amateur efforts on the piano, after the weary band had dispersed.

She traversed the short distance back to the Residency under the protection of Lord Barthampton; who had managed by sheer obstinacy to obtain this office for himself; and as she said "good-night," to him upon the doorstep, he held her hand in his somewhat longer than was necessary.

"I shall always remember tonight," he said, "as the first time I have really got to know you."

"Will you?" she replied, feebly, not finding any appropriate comment.

"Yes," he answered. "Good-night, little woman. Think kindly of your lonely friend." He came closer to her. "If ever you hear anything against me from Cousin Daniel, take it with a pinch of salt."

"Oh, I always rely on my own judgment," she answered; and with that she passed into the house.

CHAPTER CHRISTMASTIDE

XVI—AT

During the ensuing two or three weeks Daniel was absorbed in the organization of his work, and it was not until the festivities of Christmas interrupted his routine, that he was able to look about him and take his bearings. He had found the work extremely interesting, and already he could see some indications that his point of view was being adopted in the general policy of the Residency, while in specific cases Lord Blair accepted his advice with very little hesitation.

In this atmosphere of confidence Daniel thrived and his labours prospered. He was amused by his new insight into the Egyptian mind; and he enjoyed his frequent rambles through those quarters of the city which are unknown to the European visitor. Already he had native friends in all parts of Cairo—from scavengers to Pashas; and in many of the bazaars he was now greeted as a guest by the hospitable merchants. He did not find any great difficulty in avoiding the more tedious of the social functions at the Residency: and the early mornings and the evenings were spent in tranquillity at his camp or in the surrounding desert.

Sometimes, returning from his duties soon after luncheon, he would fill his pockets with biscuits and his water-bottle with cold tea, and, mounting his camel, would ride for two hours or more into the desert, until as the last light of day faded from the sky he would reach some sheltered drift of sand or bed of shingle amongst the rocks; and here he would refresh himself and take his rest, mental and physical, in the vast solitude, until the blackness of the night enveloped him. Then, under the glistening heavens, he would ride slowly home again, guiding himself by the stars, and dreaming his way through the witchery of the darkness, until the distant lights of his camp, with the promise of supper and bed, brought him down from the dim regions of everlasting quiescence to the pleasant things of the body, so that he would press forward in a final rush through the night, the sharp air of the Egyptian winter beating in his face, the planets swinging above him, and the obscure jackal-track slipping like a trail of

vapour beneath the soft pads of his camel.

He slept by night upon the top of the spur of rock above his tents; and here on his camp bed, under the warm blankets, he would lie absorbed in the splendour of the stars until sleep carried him outside the range of astronomy. As the first shafts of the morning sun struck upon him from above the eastern horizon, he would cast the blankets from him, and, full of the joy of vigorous life, would clamber down to his camp, there to bathe and dress himself in the keen air of the morning, and to devour his breakfast in the brilliant sunshine at the door of his tent.

Here in his beloved desert any anxieties which the day might bring were wholly banished from his brain; and each morning he took up his duties with a mind purged and washed clean of the dust of yesterday, enlivened by healthy sleep and vigorous exercise, and, above all, renewed in its unity with the everlasting Wisdom. It was as though his mighty hands were clasped in the mightier hands of that Spirit which dwells in the world's open spaces; and, if he strayed during his work into tangled paths of disquietude, he stepped back, as it were, with the descending sun into the grasp of the unfailing Friend.

In one particular there was especial need of this refreshment and renewal; for his thoughts were often disturbed in regard to his friendship with Lady Muriel. He was sufficiently frank with himself to realize that as the days passed he was growing more interested in her, and at the same time he was well aware that any such interest was likely to lead to discordance and unrest; for her method of life so greatly differed from his own.

Muriel was having what she called "a good time"; and the argument "eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die," was ever ready upon her lips. There was a sort of defiance in her attitude to Daniel, and sometimes as she set out upon some new chase of amusement she seemed to be daring him to stop her.

On a certain evening in Christmas-week this challenge had been particularly evident. He had stayed on at the Residency until past seven o'clock, for there had been an attempted assassination of one of the native ministers, and Daniel had at once set himself to get to the bottom of the trouble; and when at last he was crossing the hall on his way out, he had come upon Muriel descending the staircase, dressed for a dinner-party and dance which was being given at Mena House that evening. Her luxurious automobile was standing at the door, and she had, of course, offered to give him a lift.

Sitting by her side under the electric light in the car, he had been more than ever conscious of the dissimilarity of their views of life. It was not that he disapproved of her enjoyments, but rather that he regretted the absence of all attempt on her part to get below the surface of things. She was satisfied by her pursuit of the pleasures of what is called Society; and the trouble was that she had

caused him to be dissatisfied with his own more profound search after happiness.

In his rough clothes he had seemed to be so far removed from this exquisite dainty girl beside him, around whose white throat the pearls glistened, and from whose gold-tasseled cloak of blue velvet there came the faint scent of the lotus; and the disturbing fact had been this—that he had been intoxicated by the fragrance of her, and the touch of her arm against his. He had wanted to command her to abandon her friends and to follow him into the desert; and suddenly he had been aware that the expression in her eyes was one of disdain for the hardihood that he loved.

As they had driven up to the gates of the hotel he had called her attention to his camel which awaited him at the roadside, in charge of a silent native, who now raised his hand to his dazzled eyes as the headlights of the car fell upon him.

“Now confess,” she had said, “that you would rather be coming with me into the comfort of the hotel than bumping off on that great beast into the cold bleak desert.”

“I confess I would rather be with you tonight than alone,” he answered, “but not in the hotel. I don’t like noise and clatter and stuffiness.”

She had looked at him with a smile as the door of the car was opened by a liveried servant. “I wonder,” she mused, “why you play at being a hermit. You are not a hermit at heart.” She made a gesture with her arms which was full of enticement. “Don’t you ever hear the world calling you?” she asked.

“Yes,” he answered, gravely, “I hear it calling now; and I am shutting my ears, because I know that it has nothing worth having to offer me.”

“If you happen to be here at midnight,” she said, “I dare say I shall be wanting a breath of air.”

The words had thrilled in his ears, and as she disappeared into the lighted hall of the hotel he had stood for a moment irresolute. If he were to ride down from the desert at midnight, she would stroll with him for a few moments amongst the palms, and who could say what advancement in their relationship would take place? But in so doing would he not be but offering her material for new amusement?

He had ridden, then, in silence to his camp; and at his usual hour he had gone to his bed beneath the stars; and though he was awake at midnight he had not stirred from beneath his blankets.

That was three days ago; and now Christmas was passed, with its church-service which he had attended together with the whole diplomatic staff, and its heavy luncheon thereafter, at which he had been one of twenty guests. Already, today, he had resumed the routine of his work; but the short interruption had given him time to look about him, and his bearings troubled him with their threat of dangers ahead.

Muriel, on her part, had felt herself snubbed that night when he failed to take advantage of the midnight hour. She had slipped out on to the veranda of the hotel and had waited for him, thereby missing a dance and inconveniencing at least one partner. She had suggested the meeting experimentally, to see what might be his attitude towards her; for she could not decide whether he were fond of her or merely interested in her as a case of needing reformation. And when he failed to turn up at the trysting-hour, her foot tapped angrily upon the tiles of the veranda; and at length she had gone indoors again with her head in the air but her heart in the depths.

She was undoubtedly attracted to him, but she was also very decidedly afraid of him. Sometimes it was as though he were suggesting to her that she should abandon the luxuries and the little frivolities which she so much enjoyed, and should trail after him into the desert, the Lord knows where, and cook his food for him, and dress in a sheepskin, and sleep on the hard sand with a rock for a pillow.

One of the most serious aspects of the matter was that her father was very obviously attempting to throw her and Daniel Lane together. At first she had supposed that Lord Blair desired her to come under his influence for its philosophical value; but during the last few days certain things that had been said led her to the amazing conclusion that her father regarded him in the light of a possible son-in-law.

She utterly failed to picture this man in the rôle of husband: she could imagine him as a companion or even as a lover, but as a husband never! Husbands were people in top-hats, black coats, and stripey trousers, with whom one went to St. Margaret's, Westminster, and then to somebody's villa on the Riviera, "kindly lent," etc.; they had a lot of old family servants who sniffed at you and said that such-and-such wasn't his lordship's custom; they wanted sons and heirs, and, if you failed to provide them, they cynically made you try again; they developed money troubles sooner or later, and cut down your expenses at the moment when you wanted to rebuild the ballroom; as the years passed they became coldly courteous or hotly ill-tempered; and finally you were either divorced or else laid by their crumbling side in the family vault, in the sure and certain hope—thank God—that there were no marriages in heaven.

But Daniel Lane was not of this autocratic class; nor could she picture him living in England. If he succeeded to the Barthampton earldom he would make an appalling mess of it; if he had to wear London clothes he would look a sight; and if he shared the conjugal bed, it would probably be on the roof or in the shrubbery, with gnats and things biting your nose or an icy wind blowing around your legs.

She noticed her father's strategic dispositions one morning just after Christmas, when Charles Barthampton called to take her to a military review.

She went into the study to tell him of her proposed absence; but Lord Blair put his foot down, saying to her that if she attended this particular function she ought to do so in the company of a civilian, so as to avoid inter-regimental jealousies: a palpable excuse which did not bear scrutiny. He suggested that Daniel Lane should go with her; and before Lord Barthampton could escape, his cousin was sent for, and Muriel went off into the garden in annoyance, leaving the three men together in the hall. Lord Blair thereupon tripped back to his study, bidding Daniel offer his cousin refreshment in the library.

Lord Barthampton, however, was scowling with anger, and would have taken his departure immediately. But Daniel took him by the arm in a grip which, though friendly, was one of iron, and, forcing him into a chair, handed him a cigar.

“Have a whisky-and-soda?” he then suggested.

“No,” his cousin grunted. “I’m a teetotaller, damn you.”

Daniel chuckled. “Good for you,” he laughed. “Have some barley water?”

At this Lord Barthampton scrambled to his feet, but Daniel gently pushed him back into the chair.

“I want to have a talk with you,” he said. “I want to tell you how glad I am to see that you are pulling yourself together. You look a different man already.”

His cousin glared at him warily from under his heavy brows. “Yes,” he replied, “I’m not going to give you any excuse for turning me out. When you do so, you’ll have to do it against my father’s wishes and intentions; and I hope he’ll come back from the grave and haunt you.”

He spoke with dramatic gloom, and Daniel could not help being sorry for him.

“Oh, don’t worry yourself,” he assured him. “As long as you behave yourself decently, you’re quite safe.”

“I doubt it,” the other muttered, despondently.

“I heard the other day,” said Daniel, “from one of your brother officers that you’d sworn off cards too.”

Charles Barthampton puffed viciously at his cigar. “I suppose you’ll rob me of all my fun before I’m through with you. Hadn’t you better ask me whether I’ve joined the Y.M.C.A., and regularly say my prayers?”

“No, I’ll leave that to you,” Daniel answered with a smile. “But there’s one thing I should like to ask you: have you taken any steps yet to give anything to the poor?”

His cousin shook his head.

“Well, hurry up and do so,” said Daniel.

Once more Lord Barthampton rose from his chair, and this time to his relief, he was not pushed back again. “I’m late for the show,” he grumbled, “and anyway it’s no fun staying here, being put through my paces. You’ve got all the cards,

and the game's in your hands. It makes me sick."

"Yes, I'm sorry," Daniel replied, and he spoke with sincerity. "But don't worry yourself. You're going on fine."

With that he let him go.

Upon the following day, Lord Blair again acted in a manner which showed the movement of his thoughts. Muriel was going out to lunch at Mena House, and Daniel suggested that she and the Bindanes should ride over to his camp to tea. Lord Blair appeared to be delighted at the proposal, and gave it such hearty support that Muriel was constrained to accept the invitation.

Thus it came about, that soon after four o'clock Daniel was helping his three visitors to dismount from the hired camels which had jolted them over the desert to his tents; and no sooner had the attendant camel-men taken charge of the animals, than he found himself smilingly following in his friends' wake as Muriel began enthusiastically to conduct them around the camp, as though she were its proprietress.

She pointed out the various lockers and revealed their contents with pride; she showed how this table folded up, or how that chair could be converted into a bed; she called attention to the portable book-shelf, and held up for inspection some of the volumes which she had arranged; she introduced the three yellow dogs, and explained the merits of the kennel she had built for them.

In her interest and pride in the work of her hands there was a complete absence of self-consciousness; and the situation engendered so warm a sense of intimacy that she found herself calling Daniel by his Christian name, as though this had long been her habit.

When tea had been drunk and the sun was setting, Kate Bindane took her husband by the arm and suggested a stroll. At this, however, Muriel's mind returned to the conventions, and she intimated her desire to accompany them. But Kate, profiting by Daniel's momentary absence with Benifett Bindane, argued the point with her.

"You stay with Mr. Lane, old girl," she said. "He wants to be with you, I'm sure; and any way I want to be alone with Benifett. Damn it, we're on our honeymoon!"

There was a touch of wistfulness in her friend's jocular words; and Muriel had seen enough of their married life to be understanding. Kate Bindane had a romantic heart under her uncompromising exterior; and her cold-blooded husband, to whom she was obviously devoted, must have played the lover about as ardently as a jellyfish. But out here in the solitude, the glory of the setting sun might infuse a little warmth into his veins, and might lift his thoughts above those schemes of commercial enterprise which seemed to constitute his sole interest in Egypt.

The two couples therefore separated for a while; and Muriel strolled with Daniel to a cluster of rocks, amidst which they presently seated themselves upon the slope of a sand-drift, facing towards the south and west. Before them, framed between the great boulders of sun-browned limestone, the desert stretched out to the purple hills in the distance; and above the hills the glory of the cloud-flecked western sky was spread like a vision of the Isles of the Blessed.

The evening was warm and windless, and no sound came to their ears except the occasional twitter of an early bat, and the far-off wail of a circling kestrel. It was as though some magical leap through time had been accomplished, whereby they two had alighted upon the earth in an age before the advent of man and beast, or after the last trump had left the planet again desolate. Yet there was no sense of death in these rock-strewn spaces, but rather a pulse of sleeping nature which held the reiterated promise of life. The sand upon which they lay was warm and golden, and the rocks about them were not cold nor dead to the touch.

Muriel lay upon the slope, her hands behind her head; and Daniel, sitting beside her, and looking down at her with his calm blue eyes, had the sunset as his aureola, so that he put her in mind of some figure by Bonozzo Gozzoli painted against gold. His massive head and shoulders seemed to tower above her like those of a rugged presence rising out of the rocks and sand of the wilderness; and she noticed for the first time that his face was reminiscent of Watts' "Samson," a picture which had always delighted her.

[image]

A SCENE FROM THE PHOTOPLAY—BURNING SANDS

Neither she nor he found any need of words, and for some time there was almost complete silence between them, so that one might have supposed the spell of the desert to have bewitched them. His hands idly played with the sand; and, as the grains ran between his fingers, she seemed to feel the memories of all her days slipping from her, until only this one little moment of the present remained.

"Well?" she asked at last, and there was the question of all the ages in her eyes.

"No man can escape his destiny," he replied; but the words did not seem to be detached: rather they were the conclusion of a mute analysis to which they had both contributed.

Again there fell a silence between them, a silence, however, so filled with unspoken words that in it their relationship grew immeasurably more close. The glory of the sunset began to fade, and the veil of the twilight descended gently

about them; but in their hearts it was dawn, and the sunrise was very near.

At length he arose and stretched his arms to their full extent. Muriel gazed up at him, wondering how he would choose to seal the compact which, so it seemed, had been made between them in this period of their silence. Suddenly she was conscious that her heart was beating fast, and its throbbing brought her back from her dream.

She sat up, and looked at him for a moment with fear in her eyes; for it was as though she had spoken words in the depths of her being which her tongue would have been too reticent to utter.

Daniel clasped his hands behind the back of his head, and stood watching her, a whimsical smile on his face. His expression was one of perplexity, almost of amusement at the incomprehensibility of Fate.

“Come,” he said, “we had better be going, Muriel, my dear.”

He took her hand in his and raised her to her feet.

“Yes, Daniel, we had better be going,” she replied.

She linked her arm in his; and thus they walked slowly back to the tents, he looking down at her, and she looking up at him, and around them the vast spaces of the desert already dim with the coming of night.

CHAPTER XVII—DESTINY

Upon the following morning, before eleven o'clock, Muriel installed herself in a hammock slung from the lower branches of a shady sycamore, some yards distant from the rose-bushes and shrubs which screened her favourite alcove, now appropriated by Daniel. She had brought with her from the house a handful of fashion-papers and illustrated journals, but these she did not read as, with one foot touching the ground, she swung herself gently to and fro. She looked up through the tracery of the foliage to the brilliant blue of the sky, and her mind was too occupied with her thoughts to give its attention to the latest manner in which the women of Paris, London, and New York were adorning their nakedness.

Little shafts of sunlight, like fiery rods, pierced through the cool blue shadow wherein she lay; and beyond the protection of the heavy foliage the lawn of newly-sown grass gleamed in the radiance of the morning. The faithful north-

west wind, which almost daily blows over the desert from the Mediterranean, was gently rustling the greenery overhead, and rattling the hard leaves of the palms; and she could hear the cry of the circling kites above her, though she could only see these scavengers of the air when they swooped and tumbled down, as though in play, to snatch at any edible fragments floating upon the surface of the Nile.

All around her she was aware of the joy of existence, flashing out like laughter and vibrating like song. The water sprinkled upon the lawn by the garden hose seemed to be making merry in the sunshine; a black and grey cow lurching across the grass seemed to be overcome with hilarity; the palm-leaves swaying in the breeze might have been shaking with mirth; and the babbling of the river as it swirled past the terrace was like an endless lyric of well-being.

Muriel was too happily content to indulge in any profound self-analysis; but vaguely she was conscious that her life had entered upon a new phase, and shamelessly she asked herself whether the guiding hand were love. She had realized for some time that Rupert Helsingham had made a spurious impression upon her heart, and during the recent weeks of amusement she had come to wonder how it was that he had aroused any emotion in her, except that caused by his tragic death.

Now, however, she was aglow with buoyant happiness, and she had a persistent feeling that all was well with her. Yesterday, on her return from Daniel's camp, she had spoken to Kate Bindane of this sense of well-being, and her friend's reply had set her laughing.

"My dear," Kate had said, "I'm sure I don't want to mess up your bright picture of things; but in my opinion, look at it as you will, the joy of life is always some sort of an itch and the scratching of it."

But today Muriel felt that the definition was false. Her happiness was intangible, and all that she could say with certainty was that it was the result of her little time of silence yesterday in the desert.

It had been so quiet and gentle, so entirely opposite to the prehistoric rough-and-tumble which might have been expected. Her thoughts went back to the incident of the curate at Eastbourne, who had banged her about on the sofa, and would have rolled her on the floor, had not the ten commandments suddenly affrighted him. She thought, too, of Rupert and his impassioned kisses: he had left red marks on her shoulder.

But Daniel had been so silent, so tender, and withal so genuine. He had seemed to be part of the vast sky and desert around him, enfolding her, and harming her not. Yet with a twist of his hand he could have killed her.

In the distance she heard the murmur of his voice as he talked to his native visitors in the alcove; and she had a curious feeling that his proximity was protective. She was no longer afraid, or even shy of him.

Presently, across the lawn, she saw him dismissing three silk-robed Egyptians; and, when they had taken their departure, he waved his hand to her before returning once more behind the screen of roses and trees. The signal was like the caress of an old friend, and by it her happiness was enhanced.

A few minutes later she watched another caller being piloted by a native servant across the lawn to the alcove. He was a young *effendi* wearing European clothes and the usual red *tarboush* or fez—an unhealthy little man, who paused once to cough and to spit unpleasantly.

Lazily she watched the servant return to the house, and she hoped that Daniel was finding his new visitor interesting.

She closed her eyes, and sleep was stealing upon her when suddenly she was startled into full consciousness by the sharp crack of a pistol-shot. She sprang out of the hammock and stood for a moment staring about her, her heart beating.

The sound had come from the direction of the alcove, but now all was silent once more. Evidently nobody in the house had heard the shot; and she might have thought it to have been an illusion of sleep, had it not been for the manifest excitement of the birds which had risen from the branches of the trees around.

Almost without definite thought she hastened across the lawn, and paused, listening, near the rose bushes. A whimpering sound of moaning came to her ears; and at this she ran forward impulsively, and, a moment later, came to a sudden halt upon the secluded terrace.

Before her, upon the flagstones, crouched the figure of the young Egyptian. He was holding his right wrist in his left hand, and was staring up, with open mouth, at Daniel who stood over him, fingering a revolver which now he slipped quietly into his pocket as he caught sight of her.

“Go away, Muriel!” he exclaimed in surprise. “What are you doing here?”

The Egyptian struggled to his feet, but Daniel caught him by the arm and half dragged him to the marble bench.

“What’s happened?” she cried. “I heard a shot.”

“Did anybody else hear it?” he asked, so sharply that his voice startled her.

“I don’t think so,” she answered.

“Good,” he said. “This young man’s revolver went off by mistake: that’s all. Please go away.”

“O Daniel!” she cried, realizing the truth. “He tried to kill you!”

“Hush!” he whispered, impatiently. “Here, help me to tie up his wrist: I’ve broken it, I think.”

The Egyptian rocked himself to and fro, making no resistance as Daniel took hold of his injured arm, talking to him the while in Arabic, as though bidding him have no fear. With the would-be assassin’s handkerchief he bound up

the injured wrist, while Muriel gave all the assistance of which her trembling fingers were capable; and then, with his own large handkerchief he improvised a sling, never ceasing meanwhile to soothe the man with soft words of sympathetic consideration, as though he had been a doctor called in to attend the victim of an accident.

When the bandaging had been accomplished, he turned to Muriel. "Now please go away, Muriel dear," he said, "and thanks very much for your help. Remember, not a word about this to anybody at all."

He smiled at her reassuringly, and obliged her to take her departure, again cautioning her to keep the incident secret. She walked across the lawn to the house, dazed and anxious; and thus she went up to her room, where, looking into the mirror, she was surprised to observe the paleness of her face.

Meanwhile Daniel sat upon the bench beside the Egyptian, smoking his pipe, and waiting for him to recover his composure. The incident had been so foolish, and the attempt upon his life so bungled, that he felt nothing but pity for the wretched man who, he presumed, had believed himself to be performing a patriotic act.

The Secret Service Agents had fully warned him of possible danger, and he had spotted this youth as a suspicious character as soon as he had entered the alcove. The man had been trembling visibly, and when his unsteady hand had fumbled in his pocket, Daniel had gripped his wrist on the instant that the revolver came into sight. The bullet had struck the balustrade and had gone singing into the river, while the weapon had fallen with a clatter upon the pavement.

Daniel had experienced no alarm, and now he felt no anger. He was determined, however, to get to the root of the plot; and it seemed to him far wiser to take action here and now, than to await a judicial enquiry.

As soon, therefore, as his assailant had ceased his moaning and his monotonous rocking to and fro, Daniel took him by his left arm, and led him across the lawn and round to the front gates of the Residency. Here he hailed one of the little open carriages from the stand at the other side of the square, and, helping the Egyptian into it, told the coachman to drive to the nearest hospital.

In the consulting room he explained to the doctor that the man was a friend of his who had injured his wrist by a fall; and soon the mischief was rectified and the arm put into splints.

Daniel then announced his intention of seeing him back to his house; but at this the man aroused himself from the silent stupor into which he had fallen, and vehemently protested.

"You cannot come with me," he declared. "By God, I shall give no address."

Daniel had been told by his agents an address at which a certain group of

malcontents were known to meet; and, chancing the man's connection with this fraternity, he now named the house to the driver. The *effendi* immediately sank back into the corner of the carriage with a look of terror upon his face which indicated clearly enough that the surmise had been correct.

"Do not fear," said Daniel to him, "I mean you no harm. If God is willing I shall meet some of your friends, and we shall be able to talk over this matter."

Once during the journey, when their carriage had come to a momentary standstill, in the crowded Mousky, Daniel observed a certain tension in his companion's attitude which indicated that he was contemplating flight; and he was prepared, therefore, when the man made a sudden leap forward.

"Ass!" he exclaimed, pulling him down on to the seat. The meaning of the expression in Arabic is much the same as it is in English.

For the rest of the way Daniel kept an eye upon the injured man; but the sharp twinge of pain consequent upon his attempted flight had led him once more to prefer a condition of fatalistic apathy, and he made no second effort to escape.

A turning off the Mousky brought them into a winding native street, where a few low-class Greeks were the only European pedestrians to be observed in the crowd of Orientals; and at last the driver steered his carriage into a quiet alley, and pulled up before the arched doorway of a whitewashed house, the upper storeys of which projected outwards until they abutted those of the buildings on the opposite side.

Daniel assisted the Egyptian to alight, and, as they passed through the archway into the stone-flagged hall beyond, where the light was dim, warned him against treachery.

"I still have your loaded revolver in my pocket," he reminded him. "I have come to speak to your friends, and if they are here you must lead me to them."

For a moment the man hesitated, but Daniel accelerated matters by clapping his hands loudly, which is the Egyptian method of summoning a servant; and thereupon a door was opened at the head of the crazy flight of wooden stairs, and an untidy figure of a man in a blue-cotton shirt appeared before them.

"Are the others here?" asked Daniel, seeing that his companion was recognized.

"Upstairs," the man answered, shortly, pointing to the gallery above him, and therewith returned whence he came, his slouching attitude displaying all the indifference of which the untrained Egyptian servant is so eminently capable.

"Lead the way," said Daniel to his companion, who, recognizing the *Kismet al Allah*, the destiny of God, obeyed without protest, mounting the stairs in silence.

As they neared the shut door which had been indicated to them, the Egyptian was overcome with a fit of coughing, the rasping sound of which echoed

through the house; and, as though the sound had been recognized, the door before them was immediately opened, and the pock-marked face and red *tarboush* of another young native *effendi* appeared.

"What's this?" he exclaimed in astonishment, pointing to his friend's injured arm. Then, seeing the Englishman, he checked himself warily.

Daniel took a step forward. "I have brought him back to you," he said, affably. "He is hurt."

A moment later they were inside the room, and Daniel was fingering the trigger of the revolver in his pocket, as he glanced from one to another of the five men confronting him. They had risen to their feet, and were standing in attitudes of manifest nervousness. They had evidently been disturbed at their midday meal, for it was now a little past noon: three or four dishes of food stood upon the floor, and the mouths of at least two of the men were full. The smell of garlic and stale tobacco smoke pervaded the room; and a shaft of sunlight striking through the window revealed a mass of flies hovering and buzzing around a plate of something which appeared to be cold minced meat.

"Peace be unto you!" said Daniel, using the Islamic salutation; and the men muttered the customary response, as though by force of habit.

Daniel stood with his back to the door which he had closed behind. "I ask your forgiveness for my intrusion," he said, still speaking in Arabic, "but I thought the matter urgent. This morning this gentleman came to the Residency, where I have the honour of being employed, and fired the revolver at me which I am now holding in my pocket. But it pleased God to spare my life, and I immediately came to ask you why you wished my death. You know the words of the Prophet: 'Man is a building erected by God, and he who destroys the building of God shall himself be destroyed.'"

The injured man had collapsed upon a stiff bench which stood against the wall, and was now rocking himself to and fro once more, the tears of pain and exasperation streaming down his face.

"He is in great pain," said Daniel, "for I am sorry to say I have broken his wrist. I took him to the hospital, and the bones are set; but he will require much care. I think you would do well to give him something to eat."

One of the Egyptians, less concerned with his own interests than the others, fetched a cup of water, and held it to the sufferer's lips; but his companions still stood like startled sheep, eyeing their muscular visitor with undisguised dismay. They were all young men—students, perhaps, or clerks in minor employ; and it was evident that they were entirely nonplussed, for they answered not a word.

"My object in coming here," Daniel continued, "is simply to learn from you the cause of your anger. You must be feeling something very deeply to resort to assassination; but why should you desire to murder *me*? I am the only person

who can help you.”

He assured them of his desire to understand their point of view, and gradually he was able to break down their anxious reserve, so that presently they spoke to him with a certain amount of freedom, and they heard, probably for the first time, the English attitude expounded in terms of idealism. They were fanatical young men whose patriotism was nothing more than dislike of the foreigner, which, indeed, is a large part of all patriotism; and though Daniel made little attempt to argue with them he was able very soon to establish more or less sympathetic relations with his would-be murderers, and perhaps to convince them that bloodshed is foolish.

The situation had a piquancy which amused him vastly; and when, presently, he unloaded the revolver and handed it back to the melancholy figure upon the divan, he could not refrain from laughter, in which, to his surprise, the others joined.

“Cheer up, O son of complaint!” he said. “You ought to be praising God that you are not about to be hanged.” Then, turning to the others, he told them how glad he was that they found cause for mirth in the situation. “Are we not all like the pieces upon a chessboard?” he asked. “But do we realize that God is playing both sides of the game? Remember the words of the Koran: ‘They plotted, and God plotted; and God is the best of plotters.’ Now let us laugh and give thanks that no blood has been spilt, for it is precious stuff; and finally let us agree to forget the incident. So far as I am concerned it is *khalâs khâlas*—absolutely closed; and on your part, if you have further cause for hostility, come to the Residency and ask for me, but do not bring your revolvers with you or I shall give you no coffee.”

He arrived back at the Residency somewhat late for luncheon, and his high spirits were such that Muriel stared at him in amazement. When the meal was finished she took him aside, as the others left the room, and asked where he had been.

“I took my murderer home,” he explained, “and made friends with his fellow-assassins, and we all had a good laugh together. It seemed to be the best way of settling the matter.”

“O Daniel,” she whispered, “you’re either a hero or else you’re crazy.”

“No,” he answered, “I’m just a philosopher—that is to say, one who sees the comic side of life.”

“There’s not much comedy about the attempted murder of one’s best friend,” she answered.

His face became serious and his eyes sought hers. “Am I your best friend?” he asked.

She turned from him and stared out of the window. They were alone in the

room, and he put his hand upon her shoulder, as she nodded her head in silence.

Suddenly he observed that her eyes were full of tears, and at this his heart seemed for a moment to stop beating.

“Muriel,” he whispered, but his voice failed him.

She looked round at him, and smiled; and that which was destined to happen happened all in a moment. His arms enfolded her, and, bending down, he kissed her with the passion of revelation—fervently, exultantly, joyously.

CHAPTER XVIII—MAN AND WOMAN

On the following morning Daniel received a message from Lord Blair asking him to come into the study, and he presumed that the question of his relationship to Muriel was to be discussed, for in his present state of upheaval he could hardly imagine that there was anything else in the world to talk about. He was deeply troubled in his mind, for he felt that this fever of love which had kept him awake half the night, and which hourly was growing more intense, was a menace to his happiness and to hers. A thousand times he had told himself that their two lives were incompatible, and yet their unity was now to him the vital object of his existence. Nothing else seemed to matter.

Lord Blair received him with a whimsical smile, and waved him to a chair as though formally introducing him to it. “Sit down, my dear Daniel,” he said. “I want to know if you can throw any light upon this extraordinary letter which was delivered here this morning, by hand.”

He held up a large pink envelope inscribed in green ink, and handed it across the table; and, while Daniel examined it, he sat watching him benevolently, the tips of his thin fingers pressed together.

The document was written in English, and the wandering handwriting was not unlike that of a child. The address upon the envelope was arresting in its simplicity. “His Excel. The Lord’s Deputy,” it read.

“Frank Lestrangle opened it,” said Lord Blair; “for he presumed that the ‘Lord’ referred to was myself and not the Almighty, and that the ‘Deputy’ indicated a secretary. But the letter itself was an enigma to him, and the enclosure

a mystery.”

He held up a carefully folded pocket-handkerchief which the envelope had contained, and Daniel glanced at it with sudden recognition.

The document was as follows:

Dear sir we are sorry one assassnated you yesterday because you came to us and we see you for the brave gentilman and the Egyptian respect the Chivalry herewith please find and oblige
Your Wishwellers.

“Well?” asked Lord Blair.

Daniel burst out laughing. “Oh, what children they are!” he exclaimed. “I think that if we all packed up and went home, and sent out half a dozen school-masters in our place, the Egyptian question would be solved.”

“Why?—what is the meaning of the letter?” asked his lordship.

“I’d much rather not tell you,” Daniel replied.

“But I must insist,” said Lord Blair. “I must indeed insist.”

Daniel felt awkward: the story was so silly. “It was nothing much,” he explained. “A wretched boy came here yesterday to kill me, and in taking his revolver away from him I unfortunately broke his wrist. So I made a sling with my handkerchief and took him to the doctor. He was in great pain, poor chap.” He paused and reread the letter.

“Go on with the story,” said Lord Blair. “This is very serious, very serious indeed.”

“Oh, no, it’s not,” replied Daniel. “I guessed where he came from and took him home, and had a talk to the whole gang of them. They were all very young and very ardent. But there’s nothing more to hear from them now. Poor lads!—I think they were mighty glad the bullet went wide.”

“D’you mean to say you bearded them in their den?”

“Yes; luckily I found them assembled at their dinner.”

Lord Blair sat back in his chair and toyed with a paper-knife, while Daniel gave him a few more details of the occurrence. There was a curious expression on his face as he listened, and his dark eyes seemed to be shining very brightly. When the brief tale was finished, he rose to his feet, and made a flitting expedition to the window; drummed on the pane; and then, coming round in front of his friend, put his hands upon his broad shoulders.

“My dear fellow ...” he said, and hesitated. Then: “Dear me, dear me, Daniel.” Suddenly he drew himself up, and, thrusting forward a stiff arm, grasped the other’s hand and wrung it shyly but fiercely.

Daniel looked at him in surprise, for he appeared to be battling with some

powerful emotion; and, feeling that the situation no longer required his presence, he rose to go.

Lord Blair stopped him. "Wait," he said; "there is another matter about which I want to speak to you."

Daniel guessed what was coming, and waited with impatience for Lord Blair to open the subject. It seemed to him that his relationship to Muriel was the only thing worth discussing. But the Great Man's thoughts were still occupied with the tale which Daniel had unfolded, and for some time he continued to ask questions and to make ejaculatory comments.

At length, however, an awkward silence and some signs of nervousness indicated that the all-important subject was about to be introduced; but Lord Blair, as was his wont, circled round the outskirts of the matter for some time, speaking of his advancing years and of a father's duty to his only child.

Daniel was impatient to get to grips. "I take it," he said, interrupting him, "that you want to ask me what my intentions are in regard to Lady Muriel."

Lord Blair smiled nervously. "Or shall we say," he suggested, "that I want to know what Muriel's intentions are in regard to you. I have noticed the growing intimacy between you, and you will perhaps have observed that I have not discouraged it. But today, it is my duty to tell you, I saw you ... er ... ahem ... I saw you kiss one another good morning."

Lord Blair, having thus delivered himself, sat back in his chair, his eyes fixed upon the younger man.

"Yes, that's so," the latter replied; "and I wish to Heaven you'd tell me what is to be done about it. I am afraid I have got to tell you that I love Muriel." He leant forward and knitted his brows. "I'm sunk," he groaned, running his hand through his hair. "It's no good fighting against it any longer."

Lord Blair drummed his fingers on the table. "Dear me, dear me!" he muttered. "And what does Muriel say about it?"

"I haven't asked her," Daniel replied. "I suppose she believes she cares for me, too; but that's just the trouble: I've been wondering all night whether she knows her own mind. You see we are so totally unsuited to one another."

"What makes you say that?" Lord Blair asked, obviously pained.

Daniel shrugged his shoulders. "Well, I'm a serious-minded sort of fellow, and Muriel seems to enjoy all this Society business which I detest."

"She is young," was the reply.

"And then I'm a comparatively penniless nobody, and I've heard her described as one of the most eligible young women in England."

"Tut, tut," Lord Blair ejaculated. "It is true that she will inherit whatever I am able to leave; but an alliance between the Lanes and the Blairs does not seem to me to be open to criticism. After all, our respective names have figured side

by side in many pages of English history.”

Daniel did not wish to pursue this aspect of the matter. He wanted Muriel, but he wished her to be sure of her love before he bound her to him by a formal engagement: this summed up his attitude in a single sentence. He therefore discussed the question along these lines; but it was apparent that he was labouring under great mental and emotional stress. He begged Lord Blair not to influence his daughter in one direction or the other, but to leave the solution of the problem in the hands of Providence.

“I just want her to feel,” he explained, “that I am an intimate chum of hers; and then if the thing carries us both off our feet, why we’ll come to you and say we want to get married. If not—well, I’m not going to bind her unless it’s clear she is as head over ears in love with me as I am now with her.”

“You may lose her,” said Lord Blair, shaking his head wisely.

“If that is going to be at any time likely,” Daniel answered, “I would rather it happened now than after we are married.”

When the interview was at an end Lord Blair sat for some time in deep thought. He was somewhat disappointed that Daniel was not more impetuous, and he saw no reason why Muriel should be treated with such careful consideration, lest she should make a mistake and suffer for it later. He regarded his daughter as decidedly flighty, and, since she was his heiress, he wanted to see her married as soon as possible to the man of his choice, a man of strong will who would keep her well in hand: but that, to his surprise, was just what the mighty Daniel seemed disinclined to do.

Lord Blair did not believe in a man pandering to the whims of the woman he loved: his own experience had been too devastating for that. He would have liked to have heard Daniel say to him: “Your daughter wants mastering: I will take her in hand, and turn her into a dutiful wife and a God-fearing mother of your Blair-Lane grandsons.” But instead of this he had said in effect: “Since I shall always want her, if she wants me she can have me when she wants;” and this seemed a poor policy, bordering on self-abnegation.

Muriel’s own attitude was interesting. During this and the day following she waited breathlessly for a proposal of marriage, and when none was forthcoming, she decided that she would give him one week and then lose her temper. But the week went by, and nothing happened, except that their intimacy grew and their eyes sought one another more frequently.

His work kept him very busy, but daily he found some moment in which he could be alone with her; and at these times he put his arms about her and looked into her face with such tenderness in his eyes that she could have cried. He seemed to be searching her heart, to be trying to assure himself of her love; and when he kissed her he appeared to restrain the passion which she knew was

consuming him.

Once he came so near to a definite offer of marriage that she held her breath. Yet what he said was but this: "Life is short, and there is no time for a mistake. Think, Muriel, think!—You and I will soon have to make a decision which cannot be altered. Think of all those things in my method of life which you don't like or don't understand. Because the choice is close at hand."

And in her bedroom, in the darkness of the night, she had thought; but her thoughts had travelled in circles, leading her nowhere. Perhaps, she said to herself, he wished to hint that there were ugly aspects of his life which she ought to take into consideration: perhaps he was referring to those Bedouin women who were said to have been his mistresses in the desert; or perhaps his frequent visits to the bazaars and to native houses were not entirely dictated by the needs of his work. She knew that women of the poorer classes often came to see him at the Residency; and the stories which had come to her ears of his goodness to widows and destitute paupers might have their origin in less worthy circumstances than was supposed. It looked as though his conscience were smiting him.

He had said to her: "The woman who loves me must give up much." Was he suggesting, she wondered, that she should defy the conventions and fly with him into the desert? Perhaps he had no thought of marriage: he only wanted her to ride beside him over the limitless wilderness, and to sleep with him under the stars. His words might be interpreted as meaning that since one day they would grow tired of one another and he would leave her to fish for herself, she ought to consider carefully whether the adventure were worth while. But, no: that could hardly be his meaning, though his refraining from a definite proposal of marriage was suspicious.

Another matter greatly puzzled her. He did not seem to be jealous of her familiarity with other men; and though during the last few days she had rather enjoyed the novel experience of asking his permission, more or less, when she was going out on what she termed a "joy-ride," she had observed that he assumed no authority over her. He appeared to be quite indifferent to her exits from, and interested only by her entries on to, the stage of life.

Daniel, as a matter of fact, was determined to eradicate all those fierce feelings of jealousy which shamefully he was aware she had aroused in him. The green-eyed monster was a prehistoric beast, unfitting the fair pastures of a philosopher's mind; and he would have none of it. He believed passionately in freedom; and he was resolved to regard love not as a prison but as a sphere of unbounded liberty—for man and woman alike.

He was wroth with himself when he wished to break the heads of the young men who hovered around her. He had not believed himself capable of such disturbances; and his control was exerted to so much purpose that Muriel mistook

it for indifference.

Fortunately he was usually back in the solitude of his camp by mid-afternoon, and he did not have to watch Muriel setting out for her almost nightly dinners, dances, or opera-parties; and when, next day, she used to relate her adventures, he would oblige himself to show amusement and interest, though only black unrest could have been found in his heart. He was impatient for the time when she should grow weary of her amusements, and thus show that her heart was full of sweeter interest, but he had no wish to force her to leave all, as it were, and come to him.

Muriel, on her part, was increasingly annoyed at his apparent indifference; and matters reached a crisis one afternoon at the end of the first week in January. An expedition to the ancient necropolis of Sakkâra had been arranged, the party consisting of Muriel, Daniel, Mr. and Mrs. Bindane, and John Dregge, one of the younger Secretaries at the Residency. The Tombs of Sakkâra stand at the edge of the desert, some ten miles south of Mena House; and the excursion was made on horseback, servants having been sent on ahead to prepare tea at the little rest-house in the necropolis.

During the outward journey Benifett Bindane rode close to Daniel, cross-questioning him in regard to the possibilities of agricultural development in the Oases. He had decided to make a journey at the end of February through the great chain of these oases; and Lord Blair, who, as has been said, was keenly interested in the project, had already begun to make arrangements for the expedition. Daniel was surprised to find that Mr. Bindane had fully grasped all the essentials of the scheme, and, in spite of his lethargic appearance, seemed to be making himself master of the facts.

The subject was very interesting to both men, and Kate Bindane, who rode with them, put in some shrewd observations; but meanwhile Lady Muriel was left to ride ahead with John Dregge, and their two horses could be seen moving close abreast, while Muriel's laughter frequently floated back to them with the suggestion that she was enjoying herself thoroughly.

This, however, was not the fact. She did not like her companion, who was a very proper young man with a sallow face, side whiskers in the Byronic style, a button of a mouth, and small, watchful eyes.

She was growing decidedly cross—"turning nasty" as they say; and though she laughed loudly so that Daniel should hear, she made two or three remarks to Mr. Dregge which were neither kind nor clever. The three o'clock sun was extremely hot, the glare was intense, and her horse—a borrowed one—had an objectionable habit of ambling when she wished him to trot and of walking when she attempted to correct the amble.

When at last their destination was reached, and all five of them were to-

gether again, she would not so much as look in Daniel's direction. Tea was served at a tressel-table on the veranda of the rest-house, an island of cool shadow in the golden sea of sand; but Muriel enjoyed neither the meal nor the view. Nor did she give any great attention to the beauties of the sculptured tombs and mausoleum which they subsequently visited; and she felt only impatience when Daniel spoke with enthusiasm of the grace of the ancient figures.

"We haven't advanced much in these thousands of years, have we?" he said to her.

"No," she answered, "and judging by the progress made in the last ten days, it'll be many thousands of years more before anything happens."

Daniel glanced quickly at her, with an inward chuckle, but she turned from him with her head in the air.

The return journey was begun some time after the sun had set, and complete darkness descended upon them while they were still two or three miles from the hotel. Daniel now rode beside Muriel; and the others having pushed ahead, they presently found themselves completely alone, moving through the indigo of the night like two phantom riders wandering over the uninhabited plains of the moon.

The air was cold, and sharp; and the stars gleamed overhead, so numberless, so vivid, that the tremendous sky was densely spangled and jewelled, in brilliance unknown to the western eye. It is only in clear, dry air such as this that one actually sees the heavens as a vault, an inverted bowl of deep royal blue, with the Milky Way arched across like a vaporous white rainbow, and the greater stars and planets standing out in bold patterns amidst the glittering atoms powdered over the whole amazing area.

The pathway was obscure, and Daniel had to guide himself by the great Pyramids which were silhouetted on the horizon against the stars; but riding became altogether dangerous while yet there was over a mile to go, and he proposed that they should dismount and lead their stumbling horses.

Muriel followed his lead without protest; and Daniel, taking hold of her arm with one hand, and leading the horses with the other, piloted her slowly over the rough ground. He was very tenderly solicitous, anxiously enquiring whether she were cold or tired; and she, stirred by the marvel of the night, very largely forgot her anger. This trudging through the intense darkness was having an extraordinary effect upon her mind: she began to feel that her safety, indeed her very existence, depended upon the giant of the desert who held her arm so firmly.

"I'm glad you're with me," she said to him. "I should be frightened with anybody else."

"Frightened?" he asked. "But don't you feel, as I do, that the desert at night

is protective? Down there in the inhabited lands there are robbers and murderers of body or mind; but up here I'm in my own kingdom: I go wherever I like, do whatever I like, and there's nobody to disturb me and nobody I disturb except a shy little jackal or two."

Presently Muriel paused. "Wait a minute," she said. "My boot has got some sand in it."

She sat down upon the ground and pulled it off; while Daniel, being in no hurry to return to the world, tethered the horses by rolling a small boulder on to the trailing ends of the reins. This done, he came to her, and, sitting beside her, helped her to put on the boot once more.

She was tired physically, and tired also of being angry. The astonishing solitude caused her heart, as it were, to go to him for companionship. Here in this tremendous silence, in this enveloping obscurity, she seemed to belong to him, to be his property.

He put his arms about her. "Why have you been so unfriendly to me to-day?" he asked, reproachfully.

She leaned her head back, and her hand went up around his neck. "Because I love you, Daniel," she whispered.

She drew him down to her. At that moment she had no morals: she had shaken the conventions from her like so many pieces of useless armour. Her education had ever taught her to put small value upon such methods of protection; and now, with a mental shrug, they fell wholly from her. She wished only to be his, body and soul: here couched in the lap of this great Mother Earth, and in the presence of the starry host of heaven.

For a moment Daniel held her tightly within his arms; and the tempest of his passion carried him forward to the brink of heedless disaster. But mentally, as well as physically, he was a mighty man; and now his philosophic training in control did not fail him.

Roughly he threw her arms from him, and, rising to his feet, gripped her wrist. "Get up," he commanded her. "For God's sake get up!"

He dragged her up to him, and his fingers must have left bruises upon her arm.

"O Daniel," she murmured, and in her abandonment there was almost laughter in her words, and almost tears. "I'm yours—yours to do what you like with. You can put me in your harim if you want to."

He turned from her, and fetched the horses. "Fool, fool!" said his body to his mind. "Again, misunderstanding the meaning of life, you have robbed me." "Be silent, rebel," said his mind to his body. "Give me time to see if her passion be love." "Is there any difference?" sneered his body; and his mind replied, "Had I not thought so, you should have had your way."

CHAPTER XIX—THE SEEDS OF SORROW

During the ensuing fortnight circumstances were not favourable to the development of their romance. Daniel was closely occupied with the settling of certain political difficulties which had cropped up; and Muriel, on her part, found herself much occupied with the social functions of the Residency which, in the month of January, are always very exacting.

But if there were few opportunities for the tender intimacy of love, there was now the compensation of a very sweet understanding between them. There was no need, so it seemed, for a formal betrothal: the engagement was mutually assumed, and, though no binding words had been spoken, Lord Blair did not have to ask again what were their intentions.

Muriel was, of course, a little disturbed at Daniel's refusal to allow a definite announcement to be made, or even an irrevocable word to be spoken between them; but actually his attitude was quite understandable. He was keenly aware that his method of life was somewhat peculiar, and he was modest enough to regard himself as a thoroughly undesirable husband.

Muriel had told him all about the Rupert Helsingham affair, and, with some degree of correctness, he had attributed it to the enchantment of the Nile. He had realized, too, that in his own case his most intimate moments with her had occurred under exceptionally romantic circumstances; and though he was too deeply in love thus to explain away her emotions, he could not blind himself to the possibility that their origin was less profound than their intensity suggested.

He was determined not to bind her yet awhile; for, he argued to himself, if the miracle had happened, if really she had found in him her eternal partner, time would prove the fact to them; but if she had been building her love on the deceptive foundations of romantic passion, nothing but ultimate misery would come of the immediate exchange of mutual vows.

Being a philosopher, he did not judge love's day by the tempest of its passion: indeed, he mistrusted such storms as a frequent cause of disastrous mis-

calculation. But Muriel, being woman pure and simple—if ever there could be a woman of her upbringing either pure or simple—did not analyse her feelings nor mistrust them. She knew only that Daniel hung like a thunderstorm over the meadows of her heart, and she waited in breathless, headaching silence for his lightnings and his torrents to descend upon her.

There was one aspect of the matter, however, which troubled him. Muriel, he recognized, belonged to a section of English society which was very lax in its morals; and he knew quite well that, in the darkness of the desert on the memorable night of their return from Sakkâra, she had been entirely carried away by her love. The fact did not disturb him in itself, for he was a believer in instinct, and his judgment was not influenced by the conventions. If she really loved him, and if they had mutually taken one another for a life-partnership, no marriage ceremony would make the compact in his eyes more binding, and her desire at once to identify her life irrevocably with that of the chosen one would be comprehended and condoned by him.

But there was the fear at the back of his mind lest she had entered upon the adventure lightly. He knew too much about the ways of Mayfair: perhaps, indeed, his abhorrence of all that that name stood for was exaggerated. Her upbringing, therefore, caused him anxiety: not, be it understood, because of her possible willingness to break the traditional law, but because she might be willing to break it lightly. He hated himself for doubting her; but she was a child of Society, a daughter of the Old Harlot, and no member of her particular branch of that family was above suspicion.

One day, yearning for an hour alone with her, he asked her to come out to his camp on the following evening. She was to dine with the Bindanes at Mena House, and he suggested that he should call for her after dinner, when the young moon would be low in the heavens, and that they should ride out to his tents and talk for a little while.

Muriel fell in with the scheme readily enough; but there was something in her manner and in the expression of her face which indicated that she took the step with deliberation, fully conscious of all that it might involve. And, in actual fact, she did not care what happened. She only wanted to belong to him, to feel that she was in his power and he in hers.

But on the next morning she awoke with a bad cold in her head, and she was obliged to take to her bed. One cannot be really romantic with one's nose running, and any of love's most wonderful situations may be ruined by a sneeze.

A few days later, when she was more or less recovered, Daniel told her how disappointed he had been that the arrangement had fallen through.

"I expect it was my guardian angel," she whispered, with a laugh. "I had made up my mind to come; and I suppose the angel read my thoughts, and said

'You'd better not,' and sprinkled a handful of germs over me."

Daniel was startled. "Why, you don't think that I...?" He paused. Men are seldom so plain-spoken as women, and seldom face facts so deliberately.

On the following afternoon he was obliged to go to the railway station to pay his farewell respects to a native dignitary on his departure for England upon a commercial mission; and, while walking back through the Levantine shopping quarter, he came upon Lizette who, as he now recollected, lived in this part of the city.

He had not seen her since that night, three and a half months ago, when he had taken her out to supper at Berto's; and he was distressed to observe the change that had taken place in her. She was looking thin and haggard, and her eyes were like the melancholy eyes of a sick dog.

She glanced at him as she approached and a quick smile of pleasure came into her face; but the etiquette which is always observed in the best circles on such occasions prevented her from showing recognition of a client in a public place. (Money-lenders and dentists follow much the same code.)

Daniel, however, knew nothing about such rules of polite conduct. If Lizette were good enough to talk to in a restaurant she ought to be good enough to salute in the street. He therefore pulled off his hat as she passed, and, pausing, bid her good day.

"I believe you've forgotten me," he declared.

"Forgotten?—no!" she exclaimed. "I not ever forget that pig Barthampton jeté par terre."

"I'm sorry that's what you remember me by," he answered, seriously.

"I remember many things," she said. "But now you are so great, so important: one say you are like the Wazîr of Egypt. I astonish me that you speak here in the street. Lizette belong to the night, and to the American Bar."

She spoke with bitterness, and Daniel was sorry for her. She looked ill; and the afternoon sun seemed to disintegrate the bloom of the powder upon her face.

"You're not looking very well," he commented. "Is there anything the matter?"

She shrugged her shoulders. "The matter is here," she answered, tapping her heart.

"In love?" he asked.

"No, not love," she replied, with sudden intensity. "Hate, hate!"

He shook his head. "That's bad. Whom do you hate?"

"Men," she said.

There was tragedy in her face; and Daniel, in his simple wisdom, guessed that what she needed was the friendship of a man who had no ulterior motive. He looked along the street, and, seeing that there was a large French café on the

opposite side, asked her whether she would care to go in there and have coffee with him.

[image]

A SCENE FROM THE PHOTOPLAY—BURNING SANDS

She hesitated for a moment; but when he had explained that he had no more than half an hour to spare, and that he could not employ the time better than by talking to her, she crossed the street with him and entered the café.

“Now tell me what your trouble is,” he said, when they were sipping their coffee at a table in the almost deserted saloon.

“O, it is nothing,” she replied. “I suppose I am ill. I have—how do you say?—the ’ump, eh? If I had the courage I should suicide myself; but the priest he tell me that the little devils in hell are men, and the angels in heaven are men: so you see I cannot escape from men.”

“Oh, men are not so bad,” he told her. “You, of course, see them under rather startling circumstances; and, if I may say so, you can’t always judge of what a man is by looking at a subaltern in the Guards.”

She laughed. “But they tell me they are the élite of England.”

“Yes, poor lads,” he answered; “but it’s not their fault that they think so: it’s due to other men being so bashful.”

Almost as he spoke a young officer walked past the café, under the awnings, with an expression on his face which suggested that he detected a very unpleasant smell in the world. He glanced into the saloon, and, seeing Lizette, looked quickly in the other direction.

“That is one of them,” she said. “He come to me every Sunday after Church.”

Daniel turned his eyes to her, and there was pity and horror in them. “Ah, my girl, no wonder you hate us,” he declared. “If I were you, I’d try not to speak to a man for, say, six months.”

“But how to live?” she asked. “I must get the money to live.”

She moved her head from side to side in despair; and Daniel, searching his brains for a solution of the problem, stared out into the sun-bathed street, his brows puckered, his fingers combing back his unruly hair.

“Gee!” he muttered. “You’re in a fix! Hav’n’t you got any relations in Marseilles?”

She nodded, but without animation. “There is my brother Georges-Antoine...”

“Does he know how you earn your living?” he asked.

"No," she replied. "He think I make the hat."

"How much money have you saved?" he enquired.

She shook her head. "None."

"Well, look here," he said. "I'll pay your fare back to France, if you'll go."

She stared at him incredulously. "Why you say that?" she asked.

"Because I hate to see a girl like you behaving like a filthy beast," he answered sternly. "Oh, why were you such a fool as to start this life?"

"It begin," she sighed, "it begin so sweet. I was very young; and the man he love me so much. He was the real amant-passioné—what you do not know in England. He used to kiss me until my head went round and round; and I was like a mad one when he came into the room. Never in my life again or before was I so drunken by a man...."

Daniel watched her as she told the story of her youthful love, and he saw her eyes grow drowsy and full of memories.

"You must have been very happy," he said at length.

"Yes, I was happy," she answered, "but I paid for the happiness with tears and weeping and bitterness."

"Why?—did he desert you?"

Her voice, which had grown so tender and so near to a whisper, became light and clear in tone once more. "No," she said, with an almost flippant gesture of the hand, "he died. He had the—how do you say?—the gall-stones."

Daniel finished his coffee, pensively. The tale, and especially its ending, had a sound of stark and terrible truth about it.

"Then what happened?" he asked.

"Oh, then I was a good girl for half a year, perhaps; but presently when another man made the love to me, I say to myself: 'If once, then why not twice?' He was a soldier, big, very strong like you." She looked at him closely. "Yes, he were very like you; and I thought in my heart, 'I love him because he is so brave, and I am like a little bird in his hands.'" She laughed. "Oh, I knew he was a man à bonne fortunes. He had many girls; but in love all women are like the Orientals, is it not?—and I was content to have my day, like the new one in the harîm of the Egyptian pasha here...."

Daniel suddenly clenched the fingers of his hand which rested upon the table. Muriel's words came into his mind: "You can put me in your harîm if you want to." They rang in his ears again, and his heart seemed to stand still in fear.

The murmur of Lizette's voice continued, and he listened in terror now as she told of her second love.

"Then one night," she was saying, "we walked together on the road by the sea, the Chemin de la Corniche, you know; and the beautiful stars were in the sky, and there were little lights across the water on the islands of Ratonneau and

Pomegne. And I was so tired, and I sat down on the rocks by the sea, and we were all alone....”

Daniel stopped her with a sudden movement of his hand. “I know, I know,” he said. “Don’t tell me!”

“O, I soon forgot my love,” she laughed, thinking that the intensity with which he spoke denoted his concern for her sorrows. “A few months, a few weeks, perhaps, and it was finish. Then some one else, and some one else, and some one else....”

He rose from the table, sick at heart. “I must be going,” he said. “If you will accept my offer, write to me at the Residency, and I’ll send you the money for you to go to your brother.”

She looked at his troubled face with a question in her eyes. “I think you not like me,” she sighed. “I think you have the disgust.”

He shook his head. “No,” he answered, “I think you were not much different from other women at first.”

“And afterwards?”

“I suppose one’s feelings soon get blunted,” he replied; “and you had need of money.”

She assumed an expression, an attitude, not far removed from dignity. “Thank you for being—how you say? *fair* to me,” she said.

He paid his bill, and walked out of the café into the blaze of the afternoon sun; but between him and its brilliance the shadow of doubt had descended. “I am not the first of Muriel’s lovers,” he groaned in his heart. “How do I know that I am the last?”

He walked through the city, seeing nothing, hearing nothing, by reason of the clamour in his mind; but as he came down to the river, he raised his eyes and stared out into the west, where the sun was descending towards the far-off hills of the wilderness.

He stood stock still, and his lips moved. “Oh, peace of mind!” he was whispering. “Will you never come down to me here in the valley? Must I go up into the desert to find you once more?”

CHAPTER XX—PRIVATE INTERESTS

When Benifett Bindane found himself writing "February 1st" upon his letters, he suddenly became the victim of a violent fit of energy. Time was passing, and not much progress had been made with his great scheme for the floating of the Egyptian Oases Development Company. By nature he was indolent, and he had thoroughly enjoyed his three months basking in the Egyptian sun. It was always a great pleasure to him to sit in the warmest corner of a veranda, to glance at the *Financial News*, and then to stare in front of him with an empty countenance and a mind full of wonderful commercial schemes.

He had the habit of thinking in millions; and his brain, in many ways so deficient, was capable of visualizing an extraordinarily prolonged repetition of the figure "o" at the end of any sum in pounds sterling.

He had quickly made himself master of all the available information in regard to the territory in question, but there were a great many points on which he desired enlightenment before he made his projected grand tour through the Oases at the end of this month. He wished to go there fully primed, so that he should not fail to take note of all those matters on which personal observation might prove to be of value; but now the calendar had awakened him to the fact of the days' rapid passage, and he was obliged to make a serious effort to put some stiffening into the loose fabric of his bones and brain.

In the secret council-chamber of his mind he had decided that Daniel Lane was the one man really essential to the project, and it was his main object now to enlist his services. He wondered what was the lowest high salary that would tempt him; and he thought out many very fantastic schemes for getting him away from the Residency. Lady Muriel was the real obstacle; for Kate had kept him informed as to the progress of her friend's love affair, and he realized that as matters now stood there would be the utmost difficulty in persuading Daniel to abandon his present post. Steps, however, in the desired direction ought to be taken; and at any rate there would be no harm in ascertaining the possibilities of the matter.

He therefore telephoned to Lord Blair asking for an immediate interview; and as the clock struck noon he was being ushered into the Great Man's presence.

Lord Blair received him in a very businesslike manner. A large map of the Oases was spread upon the writing-table, entirely covering the chronic litter of papers heaped thereon, and, indeed, covering the greater part of his lordship himself as he sat in his desk-chair; while upon a side-table there were numerous chorographic memoranda, and a variety of type-written reports made upon the subject the last few years.

Lord Blair opened the proceedings by describing to his visitor the arrangements which had already been made for the forthcoming tour.

"The camels and camping-equipment are bespoken," he said; "perhaps you

would like to see the list of articles to be supplied."

He lifted the map, and dived his head under it in search of the document, while Benifett Bindane stared vacantly at the folds of the large sheet which rose and fell, like pantomime waves, as Lord Blair moved about under it.

At length the long type-written inventory was found, and for some minutes Mr. Bindane stared at it with dull, watery eyes. He might have been thought to have gone off into a trance; and Lord Blair had begun to fidget when at last the list was handed back.

"Please add 'one tea-tray' and 'one toasting-fork,'" said Mr. Bindane. "That's all that is omitted, I think."

Lord Blair was profoundly impressed; but his rising enthusiasm was somewhat damped when presently his visitor broached the subject which was uppermost in his mind.

"There are certain points about which I wish to be informed," said Mr. Bindane, "before I go out to the Oases." He drew a piece of paper from his pocket-book. "Here they are. Do you think it would be possible for Mr. Lane to give me his help?"

"Mr. Lane?" queried Lord Blair. "Why?"

"Because I think Mr. Lane's advice is essential to the scheme," replied Mr. Bindane.

Lord Blair spread out his hands. "Oh, but I don't think he can be spared just now," he protested.

"I thought I understood you to tell me," said the other, "that the political situation was extremely quiet just at present. I was hoping you might let Mr. Lane turn his attention now to the Oases."

"My dear sir," Lord Blair replied, leaning back in his chair, "the quiet times that we are having, that we are enjoying, are very largely due to Daniel Lane. His influence with the natives is extraordinary, quite phenomenal."

"Yes, I know," Mr. Bindane replied, his face devoid of expression. "That is why I want him for the scheme."

Lord Blair leaned forward. "I don't quite follow. Do I understand you to mean that you want him to be associated definitely with the enterprise?"

Benifett Bindane's mouth fell open more loosely than usual, and for a second or two he stared vacantly before him. "Yes," he answered, at length. "I want him to be our General Manager."

Lord Blair started. "Tut, tut!" he ejaculated, "By the time the company is floated I expect Daniel Lane will have made himself altogether indispensable to his Majesty's Government here at the Residency."

There was an uncomfortable silence. "I was counting on his support," said Mr. Bindane, presently. "Without it I don't know whether I would be inclined to

find the necessary capital.”

Lord Blair instantly accepted the challenge. “Then the project will have to be shelved,” he replied, sharply: and when he spoke sharply there was no doubt about his being the “Great Man.”

Benifett Bindane, however, appeared to be entirely unmoved. “I don’t think Mr. Lane is as happy now as he was when he lived in the desert,” he mused.

Lord Blair rose to his feet. “Please regard his services as unavailable, quite unavailable, for this project,” he said deliberately, “except in an occasional advisory capacity.”

Mr. Bindane had also risen, and now the two stood facing one another. Outwardly the trim, eager little man and the tall, lifeless figure before him might have appeared to the eye to be friendly enough; but a reader of hearts would have detected in them two opposing forces arrayed for battle, the one having in mind the extension of the prestige of England, the other the increase of his private fortune.

Meanwhile, in the library, another of life’s little plays was being enacted.

Lord Barthampton had come to the Residency to invite Lady Muriel to a picnic on the following day, and she had just disappointed him by saying that she was already engaged. He had arrived with such a flourish, spanking up to the door in his high dogcart, his little “tiger” leaping to the cob’s head as he pulled up, and the morning sunshine sparkling on the harness and the varnished woodwork; and now, after waiting a very long time in the rather severe library, Lady Muriel had come in and had told him that every moment of her time was booked up apparently for weeks to come.

“I never seem to get the chance to say half a dozen words to you,” he grunted, feeling thoroughly put out. “You women are all so mad about having a good time that you can’t spare a moment for us lonely fellows.”

Muriel was quite concerned at his depression, and asked him whether he would have a glass of port or a whiskey-and-soda.

“No, I will not,” he said, with a gloomy laugh. “I’m on the water-waggon for your sake, and you don’t even say you’re glad.”

“O, but I am,” she answered. “I’m awfully glad. I think you’ve shown true British grit. You’re one of the old Bulldog Breed, and, when once you’ve set your jaw, nothing can get the better of you.”

Somehow she could not help pulling this man’s leg; and she spoke to him in this strain the more readily in that he evidently appreciated the language of what she called the Submerged Male.

“God knows it’s been a struggle,” he said: and, turning away from her, he stared out of the window.

“How did you get into all those bad habits?” she asked, looking at him with

interest.

“Oh, India, I suppose,” he replied, with a shrug. “When one’s east of Suez, and the memsahibs have all gone home....”

She stopped him with a gesture. There were limits to the game of leg-pulling; and if he were going to become Anglo-Indian in his phrases, the jest would be intolerable.

“I’m so sorry I can’t come to your picnic,” she said, checking the drift of the conversation. “I’d come if I possibly could, but I’ve got to attend a meeting.”

“A meeting?” he asked, in astonishment. “That sounds a funny thing for you to be doing.”

“I’m honorary President of a fund for helping poor European children in Egypt,” she explained. “It’s a very worthy object, I believe.”

He seized his opportunity. “Yes, we’ve all got to help the unfortunate, hav’n’t we?” he said. “I do all too little myself—just a yearly donation.”

Muriel was impressed, and questioned him.

“Yes,” he told her, “I always try to give between £500 and £1,000 a year to the poor.”

“I call that very fine of you,” she declared, warming to him immediately.

“Oh, it’s nothing,” he answered. “I’m blessed with abundance, you know; and I like to practise what I preach. I’m not like *some* fellows I could mention—full of high principles in public, and full of sins in secret.”

“Who are you thinking of, specially?” she asked, noticing the marked inflection in his words.

He hesitated. “Well, Cousin Daniel, for example.”

“Oh, Daniel’s all right,” she replied.

“I don’t know so much about that,” he laughed. “There are some things you couldn’t understand, little woman. But ... well, there are some pretty tough female devils in the Cairo underworld; and Master Daniel has been seen more than once in low cafés and places with a girl who’s known as the ‘worst woman in Egypt’—the famous Lizette: but I don’t suppose you’ve heard of her.”

The words were like a knife in Muriel’s heart. So people were right, then, about Daniel’s disreputable character.

“Oh, that’s all past,” she replied, hardly knowing what she said.

“No, it isn’t,” he answered. “Only the day before yesterday one of my brother-officers saw him with her. And I saw him myself dining with her not so long ago—in fact I tried to separate them. I admit it was only for the honour of our family that I interfered. He was drunk, I think, and wanted to fight me.”

Muriel stared at him with round, frightened eyes; but Lord Barthampton had shot his arrow, and now desired only to make his escape.

“I must be going,” he said, nervously. “I oughtn’t to have told you that: it

slipped out.”

He could see plainly enough that she was grievously wounded; and his conscience certainly smote him, though it smote with a gentle forgiving hand.

She turned away from him with tears in her eyes; and he, feeling decidedly awkward, bade her “good-bye,” and hastened out of the room.

In the hall he came upon Benifett Bindane, who was also making towards the front door. The two malefactors greeted one another; and Mr. Bindane being, as Kate had said, “very fond of lords,” attached himself to the younger man with evident pleasure.

“That’s a smart turn-out,” he remarked, as they came out of the house into the glare of the sunshine.

“Give you a lift?” asked Lord Barthampton. “Anywhere you like.”

“Thanks,” the other replied. “I’m going to the Turf Club.”

“Right-o!” said his friend. “In you get. Hold her head, damn you, you little black monkey!” he shouted to the diminutive groom. “Now then!—*imshee riglak!*”—which he believed to be Arabic.

They drove off at a rattling pace, presently scattering the native traffic in the open square outside the Kars-el-Nil barracks, and nearly unseating a venerable sheikh from his slow-moving donkey.

“Why don’t you get out of the way!” shouted Lord Barthampton, turning a red face to the mild brown wrinkles of the clinging rider. “Lord! these niggers make me impatient.”

“Yes,” said his companion, who always disliked a show of temper, “I notice that it’s only the English resident officials who have learned to be patient with them.”

Arrived at the Turf Club, Lord Barthampton accepted Mr. Bindane’s invitation to refresh himself with dry ginger-ale; for, during the drive, a good idea (with him something of a rarity) had come into his head. He had suddenly recollected that Kate Bindane was Lady Muriel’s bosom friend; and it had occurred to him that if he could obtain the sympathy of the husband, the wife might plead his cause. It would be better not to say very much: he would adopt the manner which, he felt sure, was natural to him, namely that of the stern, silent Englishman.

He therefore lowered his brows as he entered the club, and looked with frowning melancholy upon the groups of laughing and chattering young men about him.

“God, what a noise!” he muttered as he sank into a seat.

Mr. Bindane stared vacantly around, and waving a flapper-like hand to a passing waiter, ordered the ginger-ale as though he were totally indifferent as to whether he ever got it or not.

"I'm feeling a bit blue today," said Lord Barthampton, leaning back gloomily in his chair.

"What's the matter?" asked his friend.

"I'm in love," was the short reply.

Mr. Bindane was mildly interested. "Who with?" he asked.

"Lady Muriel," the other replied, between his clenched teeth. He was anxious to convey an impression of sorrow sternly controlled.

"A very charming young lady," said Mr. Bindane, "and my wife's best friend."

"Yes, that's why I'm telling you," replied Lord Barthampton, looking knowingly at him. "I've been wondering if you could get her to put in a word for me."

"I'll see," said Benifett Bindane.

"Thanks awfully," answered his companion.

That was all. There was no more said upon the subject; but Charles Barthampton felt that the brief and pointed conversation had been very British and straightforward. There had been no mincing of matters; what he had said had been short and soldierly, as man to man.

When he was once more alone, Mr. Bindane lay for awhile loosely in the deep red-leather chair. His open mouth, his vacant eyes, the perpetual pallor of his face, and his crumpled attitude of collapse, might have led an observer to suppose that he had passed quietly away. He was, however, merely absorbed in a series of interesting thoughts. He was thinking that a possible engagement between Lady Muriel and Lord Barthampton would probably have the effect of sending Daniel Lane back to the desert in despair. He was thinking what a great deal of tact would be needed in buying up the land of the Oases from the natives, as he intended ultimately to do. He was thinking how very tactful Daniel Lane was said to be; and how wasted, commercially, he seemed to be at the Residency.

CHAPTER XXI—THE CLASH

During the next three days Muriel flung herself into her social engagements with desperation. She wanted to prevent herself from thinking about Daniel,

for her attitude towards him baffled her and put her out of conceit with herself. She was violently jealous of this Lizette, whoever she might be; but, somehow her jealousy did not estrange her from her lover. All the more passionately she wanted Daniel to belong to her: she wanted to step into his life, to drive all else out, and to take possession of him. It is true that she meant to hurt him, to punish him; but, even while being angry with him, she knew that she would ultimately forgive him.

Had her training been other than that of the typical young woman of the world, she would probably have regarded her relationship to him as at an end; but she had been brought up to the idea that men have to be indulged in their little peccadillos and excused for their excesses, and now, somewhat to her own annoyance, she found herself exonerating him. She was hurt, she was offended, she was jealous, she was disgusted; but she was not completely estranged. She declared to herself with her lips that she could never feel the same to him again; but her heart, by its very sorrows, gave the lie to her passionate mutterings.

She did not have many opportunities of speaking to him during these three days, and she shunned the beginning of what she knew was going to be a serious quarrel. But on the fourth day circumstances threw them together: and then the trouble began.

They had both accepted an invitation to luncheon with Colonel and Mrs. Cavilland; and, Muriel's presence being the social feature of the occasion, she did not feel that she ought to disappoint her hostess. Nor could she avoid driving to the house in Daniel's company; and it was only the shortness of the distance that prevented some sort of an outburst.

As it was, she was distant and preoccupied, and Daniel looked at her every now and then, wondering what could be the matter.

Lady Smith-Evered was one of the guests; and the question as to whether the Colonel should take her or Lady Muriel as his partner must have been the subject of much discussion. It had evidently been decided, however, that the daughter of Lord Blair took precedence of the wife of Sir Henry Smith-Evered; and Colonel Cavilland therefore led the former into the dining-room, and to Daniel fell the duty of giving his arm to the latter.

Lady Smith-Evered plainly showed her indignation at this outrage by a mere colonel of Dragoons upon the martial dignity of the Commander-in-Chief; and for much of the meal she hardly spoke a word. Daniel was thus left to look about him; and he observed how gaily Muriel laughed and joked with her partner, and with Captain Purdett upon her other hand.

Snatches of her conversation came to his ears; and he was conscious, as ever, that the things she said in public had no relation to those meant for his private hearing. When she was alone with him she spoke with frankness and

sincerity; but to other people she seemed to be striving after an effect, and just now, somehow, he would have liked to have shaken her, even though she made him laugh.

The colonel was talking about the recent discovery at Alexandria of a Greek papyrus, extracts from which had appeared in translation in the Egyptian Gazette.

"It's a treatise on love," Colonel Cavilland was saying. "The Greeks were specialists on that subject."

"Oh, I thought they were general practitioners," Muriel replied, and was rewarded with a burst of laughter.

He spoke of the passages quoted as being very charming, direct, and simple; and Muriel remarked that she had always thought of the Greeks as wicked old men who sat on cold marble and made hot epigrams.

"But in this case," he laughed, "the author seems to have been a poor shepherd."

"Then no wonder his views were peculiar," said she. "Poverty makes us acquainted with strange bedfellows,' they say."

The colonel glanced at her apprehensively, but Muriel's face seemed to show perfect innocence. "Oh, well, for that matter," she added, musingly, "I suppose wealth does, too."

Her host's breath appeared to be taken away by her audacity. He was not used to the style of chatter current in what are called "smart" circles. He caught Daniel's eye, and, seeing that he had been listening, winked at him; but Daniel turned quickly away, and made another abortive attempt to engage Lady Smith-Evered in conversation.

Mrs. Cavilland observed his difficulties, and helped him to enter the gaieties at her end of the table; but here, again, he felt himself to be out of harmony with the laughter, and he began to think himself a very surly fellow.

Mrs. Cavilland was amusing her neighbours by making fun of the wives of the minor officials in Cairo; and she was clever enough to rend them so gently that her feline claws were hardly to be observed, her victims seeming, as it were, to fall to pieces of their own accord.

"What a cat I am!" she laughed. "Mr. Lane, I can see your disapproving eye on me."

Lady Smith-Evered leant forward. "Mr. Lane disapproves of everything English," she said. "He prefers natives."

"Oh, it's not as bad as that," Daniel replied, with a smile. "I've got the greatest admiration for my countrymen in the rough..."

He checked himself. He felt that he was being a boor. He wanted to add: "but I detest the ways of this politely infamous thing called Society."

It was Muriel, strangely enough, who came to his rescue. "Oh, don't take any notice of him," she said, speaking across the table. "That's only his fun."

If she spoke with bitterness she concealed the fact; and Mrs. Cavilland, knowing that he had lived much of his life in America, presumed that his form of drollery must be of that kind to which English people are notoriously obtuse. She did not wish to be thought slow in the uptake, and she therefore laughed merrily, declaring that he was "a perfect scream," which so tickled Daniel that he, too, smiled.

There was to be a garden party at the Residency that afternoon, which, owing to the anticipated presence of a number of native dignitaries, he would be obliged to attend. As soon as luncheon was finished, therefore, he whispered to Muriel, suggesting that they should leave early, and thus have a little time together before the afternoon's function.

"I *must* have an hour alone with you, Muriel," he said. "I'm feeling all on edge."

Muriel shook her head. "Can't be done," she answered casually. "I've promised Willie Purdett I'd go for a spin with him in his new car."

"Well, tell him you've changed your mind," he said, deliberately. "I want you."

"I'm afraid you're too late, my dear," replied Muriel, and turned away from him.

Later, at the garden party he watched her as she moved about the lawn; and he seemed to be unusually sensitive to the number of young men who hovered around her. His philosophy had wholly deserted him, and his mind was disturbed and miserable.

Once he joined a group in which she was the principal figure; and again he was distressed by the tone of her remarks. It was almost as though she were trying to offend his ear.

Somebody had said "The good die young," but Daniel had not heard the earlier part of the conversation; and Muriel replied, "Yes, dullness is the most deadly thing on earth, and the most contagious."

He did not wait to hear more: he turned his back on her and walked away, his heart heavy within him. He was utterly out of tune with her.

That evening she was to dine with the Bindanes at Mena House and to spend the night with them, so as to be ready for an early start next morning upon an all-day excursion into the desert. It was to be a large and elegant picnic; and Daniel had been glad to be able to make his work an excuse for not joining the party.

Soon after dark, therefore, he found himself driving out to the Pyramids with Muriel and her maid; and on reaching the hotel he asked her to come into

the garden for the half-hour before the first gong would ring.

"Oh, it's so dark out there," she replied. "I want to have a talk to you, too. Couldn't we find a corner in the lounge?"

"No," he said, "it's stuffy inside."

He took her arm, and led her towards the dense group of trees which surrounded the tennis court. She did not resist. This state of veiled hostility was intolerable, and she welcomed the thought of a pitched battle with him.

The night was moonless; and the hot south wind which had been blowing during the day had dropped, leaving the upper air so filled with a hazy dust that the stars were dim. The darkness, when they had passed out of the range of the hotel lights, was intense; and it was with difficulty that they found their way to a bench upon the lawn, under the blackness of the overhanging foliage.

Here they seated themselves in silence; and, though they were close to one another, each could feel, rather than see, the presence of the other. The distant clanging of the tram-car bells, and an occasional grumble of an automobile, reminded them that civilization was not far removed; but here in the obscurity all was hushed, and there was a sense of detachment from the busy ways of mankind which was accentuated by the ominous hooting of an owl and by the gentle rustle of the trees, as the leaves were stirred by the dying wind.

"Well?" said Muriel.

"Well?" he replied. "Let's have it out."

"Oh, then you know there's something wrong."

"I know you have been trying to hurt me for the past two or three days," he answered.

He put his hand upon hers as it rested on her knee, and drew her towards him; but she resisted the movement, and he noticed that her fingers, which pushed his own away, were cold.

"Tell me," he said. "What has been the matter? You have made me very unhappy."

"There's nothing to tell," she answered. "Only ..."

"Only what?"

"I don't think you know what love is," she murmured, and her voice was so low that her words were almost lost in the darkness.

"But that is just what I was going to say to you," he replied.

She uttered a little laugh. "It seems that we shall always interpret things differently," she said.

She turned to him, and in the obscurity his face seemed strange to her. She could not construct the features, nor supply the well-known lines now lost in the shadow. She saw only the great forehead, faintly white, and the upper part of his cheeks; but his eyes were hidden in two deep cavities of blackness, and all

expression was extinguished.

"There will always be these misunderstandings," he told her, "so long as you are tied to this sort of social life."

"I prefer it to the underworld," she answered, and her heart beat, for she was launching her attack.

"What d'you mean by the 'underworld'?" he asked.

"The world that Lizette belongs to," she replied.

She had said it!—she had hurled her lightning, and now she waited for the roll of the thunder. But there was no cracking of the heavens: only silence; and, as she waited, she could feel the beating of her pulse in her throat.

At last he spoke, and his voice was quiet and clear.

"Please tell me exactly what Cousin Charles has said about Lizette."

She turned quickly on him. "Why should you think it was Charles Barthampton who told me?"

"Because I was with Lizette the day I first met him," he answered.

"Then you don't deny it?"

"Deny it?" he repeated, with scorn in his voice. "Why on earth should I deny it?"

She shrugged her shoulders. "A man generally denies that sort of thing to the girl he wants to marry," she said.

"That only shows how little you understand me," he replied, and there was despair in his words.

"O, I understand you well enough," she answered, bitterly. "You are just like all men. But what I can't understand is how you could be going about with that woman at the same time that you were making love to me."

Again he was silent. It seemed that he had to turn her words over in his mind before their significance was clear.

"You mean," he said at length, "that if I had told you Lizette was an old flame of mine now set aside, you would have condoned it?"

"Women have to forgive a great deal in the men they love," she answered.

"You mean," he went on, ruthlessly, "that you think me capable of coming to you with that woman's kisses on my lips?"

It was she, now, who was silent for a while. "I've got to think you capable of it," she said at last. "You were with her only a few days ago."

"Yes," he answered. "I was with her, as you say, a few days ago. Well?"

She moved restlessly in her seat. "That's not the way to ask my forgiveness," she said.

Suddenly his shadowy bulk seemed to loom up above her. He gripped her wrist with his left hand, and drew her towards him; while the fingers of his right hand laid themselves upon her throat. His face came close to hers.

“How dare you!” he whispered. “How dare you think of me like that? D’you mean to say that if all this were true, if I were living with that woman, you would be prepared to forgive me?”

She did not speak. “Answer me!” he cried, and his arms crushed her to him.

“I don’t know,” she gasped. “I only know I love you, Daniel.”

He loosed his hold upon her. “Oh, you’re tainted,” he exclaimed. “Intrigues, jealousies, deceptions, quarrels, reconciliations—they’re all part of your scheme of life. I suppose you revel in them, just as you revel in the latest divorce case at your gossiping tea-parties, and the latest dresses from Paris, and the latest dancing craze, and the latest thing in erotic pictures or sensuous music...”

Muriel put her hands over her ears. “I won’t listen!” she cried. “You don’t know what you’re saying.”

He stood in front of her, his hands driven into the pockets of his coat. His massive head and shoulders shut out the misty stars, and as she looked up at him he appeared to her as a black and vaporous elemental risen from the ancient soil of Egypt.

It was evident that he was trying to control his anger; and when he spoke again his voice was quiet and restrained.

“I’m afraid I must seem to you very rude,” he said, “but when one is speaking out of the pit of despair the words one utters are black words. These last few days I’ve been seeing you with critical eyes: watching you, listening to you. And the result is ...”

“What?” she asked, as he paused.

“I realize more and more how I dislike all this fooling with the surface of things—surface emotions, surface wit, surface honesty. I can’t get down to the real You: the veneer is so thick. All that I have seen and heard belongs to the superficial. I’m beginning to think there’s nothing real or solid under it all. The things you say are clever empty things; the things you do...”

She rose to her feet and faced him—a shadow confronting a shadow.

“We seem to be getting further away all the time from the original point of contention,” she said, her voice rising. “I suppose that is what is called ‘confusing the issue.’ It is rather clever. But please try to remember that I am accusing you of deceit and disgusting duplicity. I am accusing you of being with a woman whom even your obnoxious cousin couldn’t stand seeing you with, so that he had to try to separate you.”

“Oh, he said that, did he?” Daniel’s tone was apathetic.

“Do you deny it?” she asked, quickly.

“No,” he answered. “If you believe the story, it has served its purpose.”

“How can I not believe it?” she cried. “You don’t deny it.”

"Why should I deny it?" he demanded. "It is not a compromise with you I am looking for: I am looking for your trust."

"Trust!" she scoffed. "You come to me and whisper to me of your wonderful desert, and the wonderful times we shall have there together; you tell me that I am your mate, your sweetheart; your chosen one: and all the time you are carrying on a liaison with a wretched woman in a back street."

"Yes," he answered, "and, believing that, you decide to have it out with me and then make it up. Oh, you sicken me! If I were to tell you the whole thing were nonsense, you wouldn't believe me. You might even be disappointed. The tale would have been found to have no point: it wouldn't be up to the standard of the stuff you read in your French novels."

Muriel sat down upon the bench once more, and her hands fell listlessly to her sides. "I don't think there's any use in talking," she murmured.

"No, none," he answered. "I shall never get to the real you until you cut loose from all this. We belong at present to different worlds. I'm all at sea when I try to look at things from your point of view."

"Very well, then," she said. "Please take me back to the hotel. I shall be late for dinner."

There was a complete silence between them as they made their way through the trees and along the gravel path towards the strongly-illuminated veranda. Through open doors the lounge could be seen, and here groups of visitors were gathering in readiness for dinner. The chatter of voices and little gusts of laughter came to their ears as they approached; and an elegant young man at the piano was lazily fingering the notes of Georges Hüe's haunting *J'ai pleuré en rêve*.

Daniel paused at the steps of the veranda, but Muriel walked on, and, without turning her head, passed into the house. He stood for a moment, after she had gone, staring into the brightly lit room with dazed uncomprehending eyes: then he turned towards the desert, and presently was engulfed in the night.

CHAPTER XXII—THE CALL OF THE DESERT

As soon as Daniel arrived at the Residency next morning he sent a message to Lord Blair, asking that he might see him. He had hardly slept at all during the night, and his haggard face showed the ravages of his emotion.

Lying on his bed upon the rocks above his camp, he had striven to examine the entire situation with an impartial mind; and he would not admit that his philosophy had failed him. His reason strove to assert itself, and to quell the tumult of his tortured heart; and again and again he reminded himself that there was no such thing as sorrow of the soul. It was only his body that was miserable; and could he but manage to identify himself with the spiritual aspect of his entity, the pain of the material world would be forgotten in the serenity of his spirit. This was a first principle of his philosophy; and yet it seemed now to be utterly beyond his attainment.

"I could not believe in a merciful God," he thought to himself, "unless I believed that He had placed within the reach of every man the means to overcome sorrow. Therefore the means must be at hand, if only I can take hold of them."

And again: "My reason, my soul, is unconquerable. It stands above my miserable body. If only I can look at this disaster with the calm eyes of the spirit, I shall get the victory over the wretched torment of my heart."

In itself the actual quarrel with Muriel had presented no insuperable obstacle to their relationship. Had the trouble been an isolated incident, it would not have been difficult for them to have kissed and made friends; but Daniel realized that the differences between them had been growing for some time, and for many days now it had seemed clear to him that Muriel was too chained in the prison of her class ever to understand the freedom of the desert. He despaired of her; yet he loved her so deeply that their estrangement was, beyond all words, terrible to him.

While he waited in his room for Lord Blair's reply, he paced to and fro; and in his weary brain the battle which had raged all night came ever nearer to a definite issue.

"I must get away from it all," he kept saying to himself. "I must go back to the desert, for only there shall I find peace."

At length a servant came to him, saying that Lord Blair would receive him; and thereat he betook himself to the Great Man's study, his impulsive mind made up on the instant and eager to meet his destiny.

"Why, what is the matter, Daniel?" Lord Blair asked, as he entered the room. "You looked troubled."

"I am more than troubled," said Daniel. "I'm in despair. It's about Muriel: I'm afraid we've had a definite quarrel."

Lord Blair wiggled in his chair, apparently with annoyance, though possibly with nothing more than an itch.

“Ah—a lovers’ tiff ...,” he commented; but Daniel stopped him with a gesture.

“No, it’s a total estrangement,” he said, fiercely. “It’s been growing gradually, and now there’s nothing to be done. I’ve come to give you my resignation. I’m going back to El Hamrân.”

Lord Blair suddenly sat back in his chair, his eyes fixed on his friend, the tips of his fingers touching the edge of the table as though some movement had been arrested. “My dear Daniel,” he said at last, and he spoke sharply, “control yourself! This is an absurd situation.”

“Oh yes, I know,” Daniel replied, “you think I’m just a fool in love, who’s going off in a huff. No, that’s not it. I want to go because I’ve lost my happiness since I’ve been in Cairo: I’m utterly out of tune with the people I meet. Why, yesterday at the Cavillands’ I could feel myself being a boor and a bore. I couldn’t laugh.... Yes, that’s it; since I’ve been amongst all these witty people I’ve forgotten how to laugh. Good God!—I hav’n’t smiled for weeks. Out there in the desert, when my mind was at peace, I was always full of laughter; I was always chuckling to myself, just from sheer light-heartedness or whatever you like to call it. But here my heart’s in my boots, and I’m blue all day long. I can’t even whistle.”

“I think—indeed, I am sure—you are taking things too seriously,” said Lord Blair.

“You’re right,” Daniel answered, quickly, interrupting him. “The gay life makes me painfully serious; this fashionable stuff fills me with gloom. It’s all this blasted chase after amusement, this immense preoccupation with the surface of things, that gives me the hump. You see, to my way of thinking, light-heartedness only comes from a tranquil sort of mind. It’s something deep inside oneself; one doesn’t get it from outside—though, on the other hand, outside things do certainly obscure one’s inner vision. Real happiness—not just pleasure—seems to be absolutely essential to life and to all human relations. It’s the key to diplomacy. You’ve got to see the fun of things, you’ve got to bubble inside with happiness before you can really govern or be governed. You’ve got to be the exact opposite of sinister, and nearly the opposite of solemn, before you can get any punch into your dealings with your fellow men, don’t you think? And how, in God’s name, can one be happy unless there is the right mental atmosphere of truth, and sincerity, and trust, and benevolence, and broad understanding?”

He spoke with intensity, and the movement of his hands added expression to his words.

“But do you realize,” said Lord Blair, “what an immense, what an unqualified success your work here has been? And now you would throw it all up just because a chit of a girl has annoyed you.”

“No, you don’t understand,” Daniel replied. “I might have been able to ignore all this miserable Society business; but when Muriel and I grew fond of

one another I was drawn into it. And then, gradually, I began to see that that was her world. At first I hoped she would be the buffer between me and that world, and a non-conductor, so to speak, but I find that she transmits the shocks to me direct."

He told Lord Blair something of the more tangible trouble between them, but he would not reveal all the bitter yearning of his heart. He might have said "I love her, I want her to be wholly mine, I want her to come over to my way of thinking so that I can show her where real happiness is to be found." He might have said "I am distracted by her, and I want to go away to forget her dear eyes, and the touch of her lips, and the intoxication of her personality." But on these matters he was silent.

As he talked his mind was filled with a passionate desire for the peace of the desert. He was like a monk, longing for the refuge of his quiet monastery walls; and he seemed to hear in his heart the gentle voice of the wilderness calling to him to come back into the sweet smiling solitude, away from the sorrows of the superficial world.

"I must go back to El Hamrân," he said. "I beg you not to stop me."

Lord Blair looked at him with pity. He was in the presence of an emotion which he could not altogether understand, but the reality of which was very apparent. "There must be no question," he said, "of your resignation. Go away for a time, if you wish, but you mustn't play the deserter."

An idea had suddenly come into his head, and he turned to Daniel with relief in his anxious eyes. "Now listen to me," he said. "Go back to El Hamrân: I can send you there on business."

He hunted about amongst his papers, and presently produced the memorandum which Benifett Bindane had handed to him. "Here are some matters upon which Mr. Bindane desires information before he starts his tour of the Oases in three or four weeks' time. You can send your answers in to him on his arrival at El Homra; and after that you can wait at El Hamrân in case he comes there. After that I won't hurry you to return: I can give you leave of absence. And then, when your mind is more settled you can come back here. The winter season will be over, and what you call 'Society' will have left the country for the summer."

Daniel fell in with the suggestion gladly. "You are very patient with me," he said. "I don't deserve it: I feel I'm being very cranky."

"I don't want to lose you," the elder man replied, and his sincerity was apparent. But he was much startled when Daniel asked if he might leave at once.

"Today?" he exclaimed, in surprise.

"Yes, now," said Daniel, emphatically. "There are practically no outstanding matters. I can put Lestrange wise about everything in ten minutes."

Lord Blair looked at him, curiously. "Muriel won't be back from Mena

House until this evening," he said. "Don't you want to see her before you go?"

"No," he replied, quickly and decisively, rising to go, "I have nothing to say to her."

Lord Blair sighed as they walked to the door. "Daniel," he said, "all this is a great blow to me."

Thus it came about that an hour after Daniel had arrived at the Residency he was on his way back to the desert, his teeth set, and his brain occupied, by force of will, with his plans. He did not dare to look into the future: he was going, as a sick man goes to an operation, to find by a path of pain the health of mind that he had lost. Perhaps he would return to the Residency; perhaps he would not; but for the present it was of paramount importance that he should master his complaint, and regain the power to see clearly, the power to work happily, the power to laugh.

By mid-afternoon his camp was struck, and he was ready to depart. A camel-owner in the village of Kafr-el-Harâm, near the Pyramids, had supplied the necessary camels and men at a moment's notice, hastened by the enthusiasm of Hussein and his brother, both overjoyed at the good fortune which was to take them so suddenly back to their home. Some of the tents and the unnecessary articles of furniture had been stored in the village at the house of a native friend; and the remainder were packed upon the camels.

As the afternoon shadows were lengthening the start was made. The camels, grumbling and complaining, lurched to their feet; the three dogs, barking with excitement, ran in circles around the company; and Daniel, swinging into his saddle, took his place at the head of the caravan. In single file, and at a slow trot, they moved away westwards, their long shadows stretching out behind them; and soon they had disappeared into the waste of sand and rocks, golden in the light of the descending sun.

An hour later the picnic party, coming back from a point to the south, rode towards the Pyramids. Muriel had been very silent all day; but Kate, who was in her confidence, had helped her to conceal her depression, and now was riding by her side, a little removed from the others. The desert had had a soothing influence upon the raw wound which the quarrel of the previous day had inflicted; and Muriel was already somewhat happier in her mind.

"Don't you worry, old girl," said Kate. "Men have got to be managed, and you'll soon put things ship-shape in the morning."

"But the morning is so far off," Muriel replied, pathetically.

She did not altogether understand what the trouble was about. Daniel had attacked her so suddenly, just when she had been wholly engaged in attacking him. So far as she could make out, he had been angry with her because she had made a fuss about his relationship with Lizette. "I suppose," she thought to

herself, "he thinks a woman oughtn't to question a man's movements, or know anything about what he is doing when he is not with her. It doesn't seem fair somehow..."

She did not in the least realize that Daniel's hostility had been aroused by her belief that there was anything between him and Lizette, and by her readiness, in spite of that belief, to overlook his supposed deception as soon as she had vented her feelings by a brief show of temper. She felt that he had been harsh, and rather brazen about the whole thing; and yet, so greatly did she yearn for his love, she was prepared to forgive even his brutality.

She turned to her companion. "I don't think I can wait till the morning," she said. "I'm going to ride over to his camp now, and say I'm sorry. It's only a mile out of the way, and I'll be home almost as soon as you."

Kate was sympathetic. "Go on, then," she replied. "I'll hint to the others that you've got a stomach-ache or something, and have ridden on. And let me see more colour in that old mug of yours when you get back."

She leant forward in her saddle, and struck her companion's horse with her cane, so that he went off at a gallop across the sand.

Bearing off to the left, Muriel soon described the head of rock which overlooked the camp; but approaching it thus from the south she knew that the tents would not come into view until she had rounded this ridge.

She had no idea what she was going to say. She thought only that she would go into his tent, where she would probably find him writing at his table; and she would put her arms about him, and tell him that she could not live under his displeasure.

At last she reached the rocks; and, as she rode round them, she drew up her reins and prepared to dismount. Then, with horrible suddenness, the truth was, as it were flung at her. Where she had thought to see the tents, there was only a patch of broken-up sand, a few bits of paper and straw, and innumerable footprints.

She uttered a little cry of dismay, and, with wide, frightened eyes, gazed about her. The footprints of the camels passed in a thin line out to the west, and she could see them winding away into the silent desert.

CHAPTER XXIII—THE NATURE OF WOMEN

Kate Bindane had just gone up to her room and was standing there alone, examining herself disapprovingly in the long mirror, when Muriel staggered in, her face white, her knees giving way.

"Kate!" she cried. "He's gone!"

She threw herself down on the floor in front of a low arm-chair, and spreading her arms across its seat, buried her face in them.

Her friend stood perfectly still for a few moments, staring down at her in amazement. She had never before seen Muriel give way to uncontrolled grief in this manner; and she was frightened by the terrible rasping of her muffled sobs, and by the convulsive heaving of her shoulders. She did not know what to do, and her hands hesitated uncertainly between the whiskey-bottle standing on a shelf and the smelling-salts upon the dressing-table near to it.

At last, discarding the stimulants, she knelt down by her friend's side, and put her strong arm around her. The tears had come into her own eyes, and as she patted Muriel's shoulder, she fumbled for her handkerchief with her disengaged hand.

"Hush, hush, my darling!" she whispered. "Tell me what has happened."

"He's gone," Muriel sobbed. "The camp's gone. I saw the track of his camels leading away into the desert."

She could say no more, and for a considerable time continued her passionate weeping.

At length she raised her head. "There are only some bits of paper and things left," she moaned; and therewith she returned to her bitter tears.

Kate rose to her feet. "I am going to 'phone your father," she said, "and ask him what has happened."

She gave Muriel an encouraging pat, and hastened into the adjoining sitting-room, where a telephone was affixed to the wall. A few minutes later she was speaking to Lord Blair, asking him the reason of Daniel's departure.

"We've just seen the deserted site of his camp," she said, "and poor Muriel is in floods of tears."

"Dear, dear!" came the reply. "Poor girl! Tell her Daniel has only gone away for a short time. I have had to send him to the Oases on business, that's all."

"Rather sudden, wasn't it?" queried Kate.

Lord Blair coughed. "Daniel is always very prompt to act, when action has to be taken," he said.

"Didn't he leave any note or message for Muriel?"

"No, none," was the reply. "He went away in a great hurry. Am I to expect Muriel back to dinner?"

"With her eyes bunged up?" exclaimed Kate, impatiently. "Of course not."

I'll send her back to you in the morning. Hav'n't you anything to say to comfort her?"

There was a pause. "Yes," he replied at length, "tell her I've just seen Ada going upstairs with two bandboxes. She says they are new night-dresses from Maison Duprez."

Kate uttered a contemptuous grunt. "That's the last thing to tell her!" she exclaimed. "Good-night."

She slammed down the receiver, and, going back to her bedroom, repeated to Muriel her father's explanation of Daniel's departure. This brought some comfort into the girl's forlorn heart; and a second outburst of tears, which occurred an hour or so later, was due more to a kind of self-pity, perhaps, than to despair.

"It's so unkind of him," she cried, "to go off without even saying good-bye, or leaving a note."

"But from what I gather," Kate replied, "he doesn't think you really care much about him."

"Ah, I do, I do," Muriel wailed, wringing her hands.

"Well, you know," Kate commented, somewhat brutally, "seeing how you've been carrying on this last month, I shouldn't have said myself that you were really stuck on him."

"You don't understand," Muriel moaned. "I wanted to be properly engaged to him, but he wouldn't hear of it—I told you at the time. I don't believe he ever wanted to marry me at all," she exclaimed, passionately. "I believe he only wanted me to run away with him."

Suddenly she looked up, with a curious light in her face. "I wonder...." She paused. She recalled the words he had said when he first knew her: "Why don't you break loose?" And then last night he had said: "I shall never get to the real you until you cut loose from all this." Could it be that the manner of his going away was meant to be a sort of silent gesture, a beckoning to her to follow?

She was so absorbed in her thoughts that her tears dried upon her face; and presently Kate was able to induce her to make somewhat more than a pretence of tasting the little dinner which had been sent up to them.

Later in the evening, when Benifett Bindane had come upstairs, and when Muriel had gone to her own room, Kate told her husband that she would sleep that night with her friend.

"As you wish, my dear," he answered pleasantly. "You must help her to get over this business. She'll soon live it down, I expect."

Kate looked annoyed. "You needn't be so damned cheerful about it," she said. "I sometimes think you haven't got a heart at all."

He sat down loosely, and stared at her for some moments, as though about to make a profound remark.

“Spit it out,” said Kate encouragingly.

“I was just thinking,” he droned, “that I shall probably get Lane as our General Manager after all.”

She turned upon him. “Oh, you cold-blooded brute! It’s always business first with you. I suppose you’re hoping he’ll never want to come back to Cairo.”

“Well,” he mused, “he evidently feels that life in the Oases suits him better.”

“Ugh!” his wife ejaculated. “I suppose you think he’ll be content to be a sort of pasha out there, with his harīm of Bedouin women; raking in a fat salary from your precious Company, and fleecing the natives to fill your pockets. It’s a pretty picture!”

[image]

A SCENE FROM THE PHOTOPLAY—BURNING SANDS

“Well, it isn’t a prettier picture,” he answered, “to think of a fine man like that messing about Cairo, wasting his time at dinner parties and dances on a wretched Foreign Office pittance.”

Kate did not continue the discussion, and it was not long before she went to her friend’s room, where, entering quietly, she found Muriel standing in her nightdress at the western window, her bare arms resting on the high sill, and her gaze fixed upon the obscurity of the desert which lay black and desolate under the stars. The window was open, and the drifting night-wind stirred the mass of her dark hair which fell about her shoulders.

She turned quickly as she heard the footstep, and Kate was dismayed at the pallor of her face.

“I can’t make him out,” Muriel said. “I can’t make him out. Right out there somewhere, in that blackness, he is smoking his pipe and stroking his dogs and yawning himself to sleep. And yet he must know that I’m here, calling to him and crying to him.”

She stretched out her arms, her fists clenched. “O God!” she muttered, “Let me understand him, let me see what’s in his mind.”

Kate drew the curtain across the window, as though she would shut out the dark menace of the desert, and drew her friend towards the bed.

“It’ll all come out in the wash, old girl,” she choked. “You’re not the only woman who finds her man incomprehensible sometimes.”

She looked at Muriel and Muriel at her; and suddenly, like two children, they put their heads each upon the other’s shoulder, and sobbed as though their hearts would break.

When Muriel returned next morning to the Residency, she went up to her own sitting-room at once; and presently she sent a message down to her father, who was at work in his study, asking him to come to her as soon as he had a few minutes to spare: nor was it long before he came tripping into the room.

It was evident that he felt the situation to be somewhat awkward; for his remarks began on a piping note of jocularly, and so rapidly descended the scale to one of profound melancholy that Muriel was reminded of a gramophone running down.

"Father," she said presently, "I want you to tell me exactly what Daniel said about me before he left. I suppose he told you that we had had a quarrel."

Lord Blair seemed puzzled, and he raised his hands in a gesture indicating his lack of grasp of the essential points in Daniel's recent tirade.

"Yes, he told me about the little tiff; but I really don't know whether I apprehend his meaning exactly. He was very much upset, very overwrought. It seems, if I have understood him aright, that he finds fault with you because you are rather—what shall I say?—rather given to the superficialities of our civilization. He would prefer you *in puris naturalibus*"—he corrected himself—"that is to say metaphorically speaking. He said that 'the fashionable world,' as he called it, filled him with gloom, gave him the ... ah ... hump, I think he said; and he was disappointed to find that you associated yourself so fully with the frivolities of society, and were so foreign to the liberties, the sincerities, of more primitive conditions. I don't know whether I am making myself clear."

"Perfectly," said Muriel. "I suppose he would have preferred to see me turning head over heels in the desert *in puris ... what-you-said-ibus*."

"I take it," Lord Blair explained, "that he was referring to your mental, not your physical attitude."

"Oh, quite so," replied Muriel; and she burst out laughing, but her laughter was very close to tears.

Lord Blair patted her cheek. "Ah, Muriel," he said, his manner again becoming serious, "you mustn't lose Daniel. I would rather that he were your husband than any man living."

"But I don't think he wants to be my husband, or anybody's husband," she replied.

"He is deeply in love with you," her father told her.

"That's another matter," said she; and Lord Blair glanced at her in perplexity.

He was not altogether sorry that events had taken their present course; for it seemed to him that this temporary disunion would have a salutary effect on his daughter's character. He could see clearly the faults of which Daniel complained; and he could not help thinking that this forceful show of disgust on her lover's

part would be instrumental in arousing her to the more serious things of life. It would be a lesson to her which would serve to fit her to be the wife of a man of genuine sincerity.

Moreover, in the case of Daniel, his sudden return to El Hamrân, with his heart left behind him here at the Residency, would probably dispel, once and for all, that haunting dream of his desert paradise which otherwise would always cause him to be restless in Cairo. This time, if he were made of flesh and blood, he would find the desert intolerable, and in a few weeks he would probably be lured back to civilization by the call of his manhood.

That Daniel should marry Muriel, and take up his permanent position at the Residency, was his most ardent hope; and as the present events had occurred he had fitted them each into place in his growing plan of action.

In brief, his scheme was as follows. At the end of the month he himself would have to go up to the Sudan on his annual tour of inspection; and about the same time the Bindanes would be going to the Oases. He had expected to take his daughter with him to the Sudan, but, instead, he would send her with the Bindanes, and thus she would be in a position to effect a reconciliation with Daniel on his own ground, so to speak. Hardy Muriel on camel-back in the desert would be more likely to win him than dainty Muriel in the ballroom; and Lord Blair, priding himself on his strategy, had almost come to believe that his sending Daniel off to El Hamrân had been a definite move in his game, made with the object of bringing about this romantic meeting in the desert.

He rubbed his hands together now as he prepared to tell Muriel of his plan, so far as she ought to know it.

"Now, my dear," he said to her, "you must not fret. I have a little scheme in my mind, of which I think you will approve. I am going to try to arrange for you to go out to the Oases with our friends; and thus you will be able to see Daniel for a day or two, and, if so you wish, you will be able to make it up with him."

He stood back from her, and beamed upon her, his hands raised as though he were beating time to a visionary orchestra. But as he saw the expression in her eyes his face fell, and his hands sank to his side. He looked at her in dismay, and the thought came into his mind that she was undoubtedly a Blair; for, like all the Blairs in a temper, she resembled a beautiful monkey. Her eyebrows were knitted, her eyes were round and wide open, her lips were pursed, and her jaw was set. He had never realized before how very attractive she was.

"Do you suppose," she said, slowly and distinctly, "that I shall again put myself in a position to be snubbed? Do you think I would lower myself to go out to him in the desert and ask his forgiveness? No! If he wants me he can come back and ask *my* forgiveness."

He watched her anxiously as she turned haughtily away. Then he shrugged

his shoulders. "You both seem determined to lose one another," he remarked; and presently, like a man who has no time to waste, he stepped back to the door and opened it.

"I never want to see him again," said Muriel over her shoulder.

Lord Blair did not answer, but, shutting the door with a snap, left her to her bitter reflections.

Five minutes later a message was brought up from Lady Smith-Evered, who had called to consult her in regard to a proposed picnic; and Muriel therefore went downstairs to the drawing-room. There she found her imposing visitor seated upon the sofa behind a great bunch of pink peonies which stood in a vase upon a low table. She had evidently been walking in the hot sun, and her face, in spite of its powder, was itself extraordinarily suggestive of a pink peony in full bloom, so that, appearing as it seemed to do from amongst these showy flowers, it was like a burlesque of caricature of the works of nature.

"Good morning, my dear: forgive my getting up," she said to Muriel. "Your sofa is lower than I expected."

Muriel sat down beside her. "I think Daniel Lane must have broken the springs," she answered. "He always used to fling himself into that corner when he had a fit of laziness."

Lady Smith-Evered glanced at her. "Why d'you say he 'used to'? Doesn't he do it now?"

"He's gone," said Muriel. "Didn't you know?"

"Gone?"

Muriel told her how Lord Blair had sent him off on a mission to the Oases. Her voice betrayed no trace of feeling as she explained away his sudden departure.

"Well, my dear," said Lady Smith-Evered, "I know you and he quite like each other, but I must say I can't understand it. I'm relieved to hear he has gone. I don't trust him in regard to women."

Muriel uttered a short laugh. "One might say the same of any man," she replied.

Lady Smith-Evered looked at her curiously. "I wonder what's the real reason of his being sent off so suddenly," she remarked, a crafty expression coming into her face. "His going on a mission is probably only eyewash."

Muriel shrank before her prying eyes, and a feeling of anger was awakened in her; but she only shrugged her shoulders.

"I wonder if your father has been wise enough just to dismiss him in this way," Lady Smith-Evered mused. "I'll find out: yes, I'll get to the bottom of it."

The expression of inquisitive, self-complacent cunning in the woman's face, and her actual blindness to the real facts of the matter, combined to arouse

in Muriel an uncontrollable hostility.

"Oh, you needn't bother to find out," she said. "You wouldn't understand the real reason."

"Ah, then there *is* a secret: I thought as much," she replied, with a knowing smile. "There's always a secret about the movements of such men as Mr. Lane."

"Yes," answered Muriel, suddenly seeing red, as the saying is; "absolute frankness and absolute honesty must always seem fishy to those who can't conceive what such things mean. If you want to know, Daniel Lane has gone away because he was fed up with the rotten life we lead here in Cairo. The sham of it all sickened him. He has gone away to escape from the pretences and the hatefulness and the pettiness of people like you and me. He's gone to get some fresh air: he was being suffocated here."

Lady Smith-Evered stared at her in blank astonishment, and the pinkness of her face turned to a deeper red. "Oh, that's what he has told you, is it?" she scoffed. "He must think you very gullible."

Muriel rose from the sofa, and faced her visitor with blazing eyes. "I said you wouldn't be able to understand," she exclaimed. "There's no mystery about it: he was just frankly disgusted, and off he went. But he'll come back one day, when the hot weather begins and we've all gone home. Then he and Father will be able to get on with their work, with England's work, without being distracted by fussy little interruptions from women like you and me..."

Lady Smith-Evered managed to raise herself with some dignity from the sofa. "I wanted to speak to you about plans," she said, stiffly; "but that can wait now till another day. I don't know what is the matter with you, but I know we shall quarrel if I remain. I don't care to be spoken to as you are speaking to me."

Her large bosom was heaving threateningly, and Muriel was abashed.

"I'm sorry," she answered, the light of battle dying in her eyes.

Lady Smith-Evered took her departure without many more words, and thereon Muriel went directly up to her room again, her heart aching within her. Here at the open window she stood staring out across the lawn to the translucent Nile. A native boat, with huge bellying sails, was making its way slowly up stream; and she could hear the wailing song of the blue-gowned youth at the rudder. Away in the distance the Pyramids marked the edge of the placid desert, now bathed in sunlight; and above, the cloudless sky stretched in tranquil splendour.

She was ashamed of herself, ashamed of her inconsistency. Her mind was confused, but in its confusion she was conscious of one clear thought, namely that Daniel would have rebuked her for her show of temper. "Look away over there at the quiet desert," he would have said. "Do you see how it is smiling at you for your angry thought and for that flush in your face? You won't get at the root of things by raising your little voice in protest."

“O Daniel, Daniel,” she whispered, her eyes filling with tears, “you oughtn’t to have left me here alone. You oughtn’t, you oughtn’t.”

And some time later, still staring out of the window, she said: “Did you go away because you wanted me to follow you? Must I humiliate myself and come to you? O Daniel, my darling, how I hate you!”

CHAPTER XXIV—THE GREAT ADVENTURE

As the days passed, and the Bindanes’ departure for the Oases drew near, Muriel’s rather feeble resolution not to accompany them steadily weakened. Lord Blair had done his best to alter her decision, and the Great Man could be a clever strategist: his daughter, indeed, would have had little chance of opposing his wishes successfully in this matter even had she battled against him with a whole heart, but in the vacillating condition to which love had brought her she had no chance at all.

“Don’t be a dam’ fool,” Kate Bindane said to her one morning at the Residency. “What’s the good of moping about outside the ropes like a heavyweight with a stomach-ache? You know you’re fed up with everybody here: Gor’ blimy!—why don’t you swallow your maidenly pride, and put on the gloves, and have three rounds with Fate? It’s better to be counted out than never to have boxed at all. Tennyson.”

Thus it came about that at the end of February, when Lord Blair took the train southwards upon his journey to the Sudan, Lady Muriel set out westwards as a member of the Bindanes’ elaborate caravan. The start was made one morning from Mena House, and so great was the general confusion and hullabaloo that Muriel’s thoughts did not begin to clarify themselves until a ride of two hours had brought them to the rocky valley wherein they halted to eat their luncheon.

Here, seating herself upon the rocks at the foot of the cliff, she shaded her eyes with her hand, and surveyed the animated scene with amused interest. There was Kate, in a white coat and skirt, and a sun-helmet, stumping over the sand to cure the “pins-and-needles” from which she was suffering; her husband, in a grey flannel suit and a green-veiled helmet, was still seated upon his

camel as though he had forgotten to dismount; his man, Dixon, rather fat and red, and wearing his new gaiters apparently back to front, was hastening to his master's assistance; and the two imposing native dragomans, in silks all aflutter in the wind, were shouting unnecessary orders to the Egyptian cook and *sofragi* to hasten the luncheon.

A few yards down the valley a khaki-clad Egyptian police-officer, wearing his red *tarboush*, or fez, at a rakish angle, was giving instructions to his four negro troopers; a fat native gentleman from the Ministry of Agriculture was mopping his forehead as he stood beside his grumbling camel, and the Egyptian secretary to the party, a dapper youth with mud-coloured complexion and coal-black eyes, had just thrown himself down in the shade and had removed the *tarboush* from his close-cropped head, in conscious defiance of local etiquette.

The baggage camels, carrying the camp equipment, the stores, and the tanks of water, were lurching at a walking pace along the valley, led by blue-robed camel-men, under the orders of the caravan-master, a grey-bearded Arab who rode sleepily at the head of the line. These were not to halt at the midday hour, but, pushing ahead, they would be overtaken later in the day by the swifter riding-camels; and Muriel watched them now as they slowly jogged along the little-used track between the yellow cliffs, the brilliant sun striking down upon them from a deep blue sky in which compact little bundles of snow-white cloud went scudding past.

There was a boisterous breeze blowing, and the tingling glow of the sun and wind upon her cheeks, as she sat perched high upon the rocks, seemed to match the exhilaration of her heart. The morning's ride had shaken her brain free from the heavy gloom of the last three weeks; and already the shining open spaces of the desert had produced their effect upon her, so that she felt as though her mind had had a cold bath.

It was good to be up and doing; it was good to be setting out upon this adventure, the ambiguousness of which seemed every moment to be growing less disconcerting; it was good to be in this great playground where the rules of her life's schoolroom were mainly in abeyance. Up here in these splendid spaces it would not matter if she pulled her skirt off, or let her hair down, or turned a cartwheel, or stood on her head. Already she was whistling loudly, and throwing fragments of stone into the valley before her, in the manner of a child upon the seashore; and all her love-sick sorrows of yesterday seemed to have vanished in the exaltation of youth and youth's well-being.

She watched the servants, in the distance at the other side of the valley, spreading the picnic luncheon on a white tablecloth laid upon a shaded patch of sand; and when at length the meal appeared to be ready, she took a flying leap down from the rock where she had been sitting, and landed sprawling upon the

sand-drift below. The sensation pleased her, and, clambering up the rocks once more, she repeated the jump, this time arriving with a considerable thud upon her back, and sliding down the drift with her legs in the air.

She hopped across the valley, rubbing herself, and was presently joined by the Bindanes.

"I feel about twelve years old," she told them; and indeed at the moment she did not look much more than that age. "The desert is having an extraordinary effect on me."

"But we're only ten or twelve miles into it so far," said the practical Kate. "You wait another week..."

"If I go on at this rate," Muriel laughed, "I'll be in arms by the time we reach the Oases."

"I wonder whose," muttered Kate, with a smile; but her friend's face at once became serious. It was a jarring note, and it nearly ruined the joviality of the picnic.

The afternoon ride carried them another fifteen miles; and towards sunset they came to a halt in the midst of a wide flat plain of sand, across which a winding ribbon of stunted tamarisks and sparse vegetation marked the bed of a primeval river now reduced to a mere subterranean infiltration. In the far distance on all sides the low hills hemmed them in, like a rugged wall encircling a sacred and enchanted area.

The tents were pitched amongst the low-growing bushes in the dry, shingly bed of the stream; and the hobbled camels were turned loose to crop such twigs and grasses as they found edible. Muriel, meanwhile, wandered away into the open desert; and presently, like warm sand, and resting her chin on her hands, watched the sun go down behind the purple hills.

For some time the excitements of the day, and the physical exhilaration produced by her long ride in the sun and wind, held her from thought. But at length the dreamlike silence of the wilderness, the amazing sense of isolation from the outside world, began to release her mind from the captivity of the flesh, so that becoming one with the immensity of nature, her spirit drifted out into the sunset with the freedom of light or air.

The little deeds of all her yesterdays appeared suddenly insignificant to her, and she began to feel that life, and the happiness of life, was something far greater than she had supposed. She wondered why she had been troubled with regard to Daniel: he was just an expression of nature, as she was: and here, in the solitude he so dearly loved, she seemed to understand for the first time his scorn of the intricacies of modern civilization. Here all was so simple, so devoid of complexities, that she laughed aloud. It was only her wits, the mere fringe of her mind, which had veiled her spirit from his spirit; but now she had shaken

herself loose from these ornamentations of life, and stood as it were, revealed like a lost fragment dropped at last into place in the great design.

She rose to her feet at length, with a sense of light-heartedness such as she had never before known; and, returning to the camp in the gathering dusk, she looked with amused pity at Benifett Bindane who sat in a deck-chair reading the *Financial News* by the light of a glass-protected candle.

"Just look at him!" said Kate, who, herself, had been admiring the sunset. "Isn't it pitiful?"

Mr. Bindane laid the paper down, and stared at his wife with uncomprehending eyes.

"The market is showing a good deal of weakness in Home Rails," he said to his wife; "but your South Africans are all buoyant enough, so you needn't worry."

"Worry!" exclaimed Kate, contemptuously, and turned from him to the fading light in the west.

"I'm glad I bought those Nitrates," he went on, addressing the back of her neck; "they're improving, so far as one can tell from the closing quotations given here."

He held the newspaper out, but she struck at it viciously with her hand.

"Oh, for God's sake shut up!" she cried. "It's money, money, money all the time with you."

"I was speaking," he said, very slowly, and as though he had been hurt, "of stock I had bought for you, my dear."

Kate turned to him, and her friend observed that her face softened, as though at the thought that in his own way he was showing his affection for her. But the picture was, nevertheless, pathetic; and the recollection passed through Muriel's mind, in sudden illumination, that Daniel was entirely free from financial interests. So long as he earned a reasonable living he never seemed to trouble himself about money.

Next morning they were in the saddle by eight o'clock, while yet the sun was low in the heavens and the air cold and sharp. Crossing the wide plain in which they had camped, they passed into the echoing valleys amongst the hills; and for the next three days they made their way through rugged and broken country, now mounting some eminence whence they surveyed a wide prospect in which range behind range of rugged peaks was revealed to them, now losing themselves in the intricate valleys, where they rode in the blue shadow of the cliffs, and where the sound of their voices and their laughter was flung back at them from the walls of rock.

Each night they camped beside some water-hole or well, known by name to their guides, but which to them seemed to be a deserted and unvisited place, frequented only by the unseen gazelle whose footprints were marked upon the

sand. It was cold here in the high ground, and they were glad of all the blankets which they had brought; but in the mornings the sun soon warmed them, and by noon they were glad to take their rest in the shade.

It was in the afternoon of the fifth day of their journey that, descending from the higher level, they came into sight of the little Oasis of El Homra, set like an emerald in the golden bowl of the desert. Muriel was riding beside Kate Bindane when, emerging from the maze of the hills, they first looked down into this wide basin in the centre of which the Oasis was situated; and both she and her friend uttered a cry of delight.

In the case of Muriel the ejaculation was a response to the grandeur of the scene; but in that of her friend the exclamation was one of devout thankfulness that the outward journey was nearing its end. Being heavily built and somewhat stout Kate had suffered very much more severely from the long-protracted jolting than she had been willing to admit; and there were many very sore places upon her body which caused the thought of much further exercise of this kind to be intolerable.

"You won't catch me coming out here again," she declared, "until the Company has built its light railway. Five days of blinkin' torture!—that's what it's been. And to think that five hours by train would have done it...!"

Muriel looked at her in dismay. "I'd much rather not think we were so near Cairo as that," she answered. "The whole pleasure of the thing is that we're so cut off from civilization."

Kate groaned. "Well, I'm glad to say I've brought a bit of civilization with me in the shape of a pot of ointment and a roll of lint."

Her further remarks, however, were checked by her efforts to pull in her camel; for the west wind had brought to its nostrils the scent of vegetation, and its pace had suddenly increased.

Muriel turned in her saddle as her own beast hurried forward, and waved her hand excitedly to Mr. Bindane, who was holding on to his pommels with both hands, his head wobbling, and his body swaying.

As they neared their destination the police officer overtook her, and directed her towards the south end of the Oasis, where, a little removed from the palm-groves, some whitewashed buildings were clustered together. He explained that these formed the headquarters of the Frontier Patrol, near which their camp would be pitched; and soon he had galloped ahead, followed by one of his troopers, to herald their arrival.

The sun was setting when at last the party dismounted within the walled compound of the outpost; and it was dark before the baggage caravan came creaking and grunting into the circle of light cast by the lanterns of the police. Kate and her husband had at once gone into the bare-walled room which had

been placed at their disposal; but Muriel, who was experiencing an extraordinary sense of activity, went out with the dragoman to supervise the erection of the tents in the open desert some little distance from the buildings.

For some time she lent a hand to the work, but at length she sat herself down upon a derelict packing-case, and watched the figures moving to and fro, now lit up by the flickering light of the lanterns, now passing again into the darkness.

The evening was warm, for the month of March had begun; and there was not that sharp tingle in the air which had been experienced up in the high ground they had lately traversed. On her one hand there were the dark palm-groves, their branches silhouetted against the brilliant stars: she could hear the rustling of the leaves, and there came to her ears, also, the sound of a flute, the notes rising and falling in plaintive inconsequence like babbling water in a forest at night. On her other hand the open desert lay obscure and mysterious, the darkness made more intense by contrast with the flicker of the lanterns and the light issuing from the open doorways of the adjacent buildings.

It was so strange to feel that she was separated from El Hamrân, and from the man she loved, by no more than thirty miles—an easy day's ride to the south-west; and her heart was restless as she realized that Mr. Bindane proposed to make an extended tour of the northern Oases before getting into touch with Daniel. It seemed to her that she could not tolerate another day of absence from him; and a wild thought entered her mind that she would give her friends the slip next morning and ride alone to El Hamrân. It was, indeed, the thought of such an escapade which sent her presently hurrying back to the light of the outpost, as though in flight from the mad suggestions of the starlit spaces about her.

The evening meal was served in the room where Mr. and Mrs. Bindane had settled themselves; and it was still early when they went to their tents. Muriel was already yawning loudly, as she helped Kate to doctor herself; and no sooner was she alone than she crawled into bed, and, in spite of the barking of the dogs, the lowing of the cattle, and the braying of a donkey; fell instantly asleep.

On the following morning Benifett Bindane displayed unwonted briskness, and, after an early breakfast, set out with the native officials to make a tour of inspection of the Oasis. His plan was to continue his journey next day to the large Oasis of El Arâbah, to the northwest, where he would spend the night. Then, returning to El Homra, where they were at present, he would ride northwards on a tour which would occupy twelve or thirteen days; and that being accomplished, he would, if necessary, visit El Hamrân where Daniel was staying, though he had now received the latter's very full reply to the questions on which he had desired information.

When he got back to the camp, however, after his first day's work, he found

that his wife and Lady Muriel had made certain plans of their own, consequent upon Kate's abrasions. They had decided to remain where they were while Mr. Bindane paid his short visit to El Arâbah; and it was hoped that on his return his wife would be sufficiently recovered to go north with him on his longer trip.

He received the news with apparent indifference, merely remarking that he would take with him on this short trip only one servant and one tent, leaving the remainder of the camp where it was, under the care of the two dragomans. The Bedouin of the Oases were a peaceful, law-abiding people; and the two ladies would be as safe here, he well knew, as they would be in an English village at home.

That night, after Muriel had gone to her bed, Kate Bindane took her husband into her confidence.

"I don't know what's going on in Muriel's head," she told him, "but it seems to me that she's about the most love-sick creature I've ever struck. She won't even look in any other direction except the southwest, because that's where her Daniel is."

A slight expression of interest came into her husband's blank face. He was sitting in his striped pyjamas on the side of his bed, scratching himself dreamily; but now he paused and his arms fell loosely upon his pointed knees. "I thought," he said, "she had got over all that. She has been jolly enough all the way here."

"Yes," answered Kate, "but now that she's within a day's ride of her young man, she seems to have come over all funny-like. I can't make her out." She waited a moment. "Wouldn't it be possible for us to go to El Hamrân before we make the northern trip?" she asked, poking the wick of the candle, absently, with the stump of a match.

Her husband shook his head. "No," he replied. "The plans are all fixed. And, you see, I don't suppose Mr. Lane will give me more than a couple of days of his time just now; and I'd rather have it at the end of my tour, when I know what I'm talking about, than now when I hav'n't yet seen the lie of the land. I want to be able to come to him with a definite offer."

He relapsed into silence for some time, resuming his leisurely scratching; but at length he surprised his wife by asking a further question as to Muriel's state of mind.

"Why, Benifett," she said, smiling upon him, "you seem quite interested. You know, I believe you're rather a sport, after all."

He looked at her with his mouth open. "Oh, it's a recognized maxim of the commercial world," he answered: "Make yourself a party to the love affairs of your business friends."

"But Muriel isn't a business friend," said Kate.

"No," he replied, "but her father is." And with that enigmatical remark, he

blew out the candle.

At sunrise next day he was up and about; and an hour later he had assembled his party for the start upon their journey. Kate and Muriel watched them as they filed out of the compound in front of the police buildings, in the brilliant light of the morning.

"Tomorrow evening, probably," called Mr. Bindane, waving his hand to them; and, "No hurry," replied Kate, casually: "we'll be quite all right."

With that he moved away, riding with the fat Egyptian from the Ministry of Agriculture. Behind him followed the police-officer and the native secretary, and after them went their servants and baggage camels.

As the cavalcade passed out of sight behind the palm-trees, Kate turned to her friend. "Now for a quiet time with the ointment pot," she laughed; but her words were checked as she observed the surprising expression on Muriel's face. "Why, what's the matter?" she exclaimed.

Muriel caught hold of her arm. "Kate," she said, "I'm going to shock you. I'm going to Daniel."

Mrs. Bindane stood perfectly still, her hands upon her hips in the manner of a fishwife. "What the Hell d'you mean?" she asked.

Muriel confronted her, the monkey expression suddenly developing upon her face—her jaw set, her eyes wide open. "I'm going to leave you, Kate," she said. "I made up my mind in the night. I can't bear it another moment: I'm going to start at once."

"Don't be a damned fool," her friend ejaculated, angrily.

Muriel shrugged her shoulders. "I shall take my dragoman with me," she went on. "He knows all the roads hereabouts. I shall be quite safe. I'm going to Daniel for a fortnight: I've thought it all out, and I know now that's what he's been wanting me to do. You'll find me at El Hamrân when you come there—if you do come, and, if not, I'll join you here."

"But, my good idiot," cried her friend, "there'll be the most awful scandal! What d'you think Benifett will say?"

"I'll leave that for you to find out," she answered. "I don't see Master Benifett changing his plans for anybody. You can say I was ill, and therefore went off to Daniel so that I shouldn't spoil your trip or delay you. Father need never know, and I'm sure Benifett won't give me away. Not that a scandal isn't just what he wants. Doesn't he want to oblige Daniel to remain here in the Oases?—Oh, but I know what I'm doing. Daniel never wanted to marry me: he wanted me to run away with him."

"Yes, but where are you going to run to?"

"To seed," Muriel replied, with a little laugh. "I can't help it. He's won: I can't stay away from him. I'm going to have this fortnight with him, if I hang for

it!”

“Oh, you’re mad!” exclaimed Kate, and, clutching hold of Muriel’s arm, she led her into her tent.

Here they argued the matter to and fro; but it was apparent from the first that the thing was irrevocably sealed, and that all the details of the plan had been thought out so as to prevent the adventure becoming public.

“Very possibly there’ll be no scandal at all,” said Muriel; “the natives can be bribed not to tell. I shall come back with you to Cairo when you return there, and who is going to give me away?”

“But what is a fortnight?” asked Kate, in despair. “Good God!—what is a fortnight, when it means even the *possible* ruin of your whole life?”

“I can’t look so far ahead,” Muriel replied. “I only know I want him now. And I’m going to him, Kate; I’m going to the man I love, the man who loves me!”

She ran out of the tent, calling to her dragoman, Mustafa, who appeared at once from the domestic quarters. He received the news without perturbation.

“Yes, my leddy,” he said. “I varry pleased. My wife’s brother him live at El Hamrân. Thirty mile’—it is nudding: five, six hours riding; and the road him varry good, varry straight.”

She told him to get two camels ready at once, to fill the water-bottles, collect a few eatables, and—to hold his tongue. “I have to take some important papers over to Mr. Lane,” she said, and he smiled at the lie.

Her large dressing-case was already packed; but, returning to her tent, she opened it to put into it her little revolver, which, for the fun of the thing, she had purchased in Cairo. This done, she went back to Kate, who received her in cold silence.

“Oh, Kate,” she cried, “don’t be beastly to me. I’m only going to do the sort of thing that’s been done by most of the girls we know. It’s human nature, Kate. When you love a man and feel you absolutely can’t live without him, you’ve got to surrender to him and do what he wants; and I know now that this is what he’s been asking me to do all along.” She put her arms about her neck, and kissed her.

Kate looked at her sorrowfully, and her face softened. “Muriel, you blinkin’ idiot,” she said, “I don’t know what’ll come of this, but whatever happens, old bean, I’m with you.”

CHAPTER XXV—BREAKING

LOOSE

The road, or rather camel-track, from El Homra to El Hamrân passes across a wide plain of comparatively flat sand, which looks like the bed of a vast lake from which the waters have been drained off. It is a huge hollow separated by high ground from the smaller basin in which the former oasis is situated. Ranges of hills form the boundaries of this area, those to the east being high and many-peaked, the others low and undulating; and from one side of the plain to the other must be something like twenty miles. There are three wells between the two oases, the second being practically in the centre of the plain, and marking the half-way point of the journey.

Muriel and her dragoman reached this well at about one o'clock, when the sun was almost directly overhead and the glare intense. It was a deep pool not more than a dozen feet from side to side; but in the clear water the blue of the sky was so vividly reflected that Muriel, as she stood staring down into it, had the impression that the earth was flat and that she was looking through a hole into further spaces of empty air beneath.

A few yards distant there were some tamarisks, providing a little patch of shade, almost as blue as the sky and water; and a stone's throw away there was a hillock of sand upon which grew a few low and dusty bushes. With these exceptions there was no vegetation to be seen, and the sand stretched out in all directions, barren and dazzling, until the surface was lost in vaporous mirage, so that the far-off hills looked like islands floating above the haze.

She called her dragoman to her. "Mustafa," she said, "I'm going to bathe. You must go and sit behind that hillock over there, and you mustn't move till I tell you you may."

Servants in the East are ever accustomed to be told to take themselves off in this fashion, when their native mistresses desire to amuse themselves; and he now received his orders from the daughter of the foreign ruler of Egypt without surprise. He quickly filled the water-bottles from the pool, and, telling her that he would prepare the luncheon on the other side of the hillock, walked off across the sand.

As soon as she was alone, Muriel divested herself of her clothes in the shelter of the tamarisks, and plunged into the cool water. Never in her life had she felt so boisterously, recklessly happy; never before had she realized how cramped her existence had been. Here in these empty spaces of the world she was like a child with all the delights of the open garden to herself; and presently she would

slip into the next garden and greet there her playmate.

As she splashed in the water she learned for the first time the wonderful sensation of bathing without the weight of a costume about her limbs; and her thoughts flashed back with disdain to those elegant days at fashionable seaside resorts where she had almost feared to let the waves wet her dainty bathing-dress, and where she had been aware of opera glasses levelled upon her as she walked sedately into the sea.

From side to side of the little pool she swam, tossing the water into the air in showers of sparkling drops; and, presently, when, clambering back on to the sand, she stood with arms stretched out to the sunlight, she felt that at last she knew the meaning of life.

The hot sun dried her body, without much need of the aid of her handkerchief; and when she was dressed she hastened with a wonderful appetite to her luncheon. Mustafa, being a well-trained dragoman, did not trouble her with his presence; and she was thus able to make very frank inroads into the tongue and sweet-pickles, the biscuits and the jam, which he had provided. And after the meal she lay back in the shade, against the slope of the sand, and slept for half an hour in profound content.

She awoke with the conviction that at last all was well with her. It seemed to her that what Daniel had all along desired was that she should renounce "the World," as he called it, and come to him; and now, in these last few days, she had realized that this was no renunciation at all. He had been perfectly right: a life in the open was the only life for Youth; and here, not in the cities, real happiness was to be found.

All he had asked of her was to break loose from her conventional existence, and to come to him; and now she knew how incomprehensible her reluctance must have seemed to him. He had been holding out to her the free joys of her youth: he had been saying to her, "Come and be my playmate and my dear companion," and when she had refused, he had gone off by himself, bidding her follow him if at last she should shake herself free of her imaginary bonds. How stupid to him, how vulgar, must have been her wish for a correct betrothal!—no wonder he had given up in dismay.

Such thoughts occupied her brain during the afternoon as she trotted exultantly, and with wild and reckless freedom from all restraint, towards El Hamrân; but very different were the thoughts in the mind of Daniel Lane, as, all unaware of her proximity, he sat peacefully in his room, putting the finishing touches to his interrupted study of the customs of the Bedouin of the Oases.

In a manner it might be said that he was content. He had fought a terrible battle with himself during these five-and-twenty days since he had left Cairo, and his mighty spirit had won the victory over his mutinous body. Like a monk aban-

doning the pleasures of the world, he had crushed within him the one passionate episode of his continent life.

Throughout his strenuous manhood he had put away from him the call of the flesh: he had mastered his body, and had subordinated all other interests to those of his work. In a sense he had lived the life of an ascetic, save that he had not actually mortified his body. He had governed and controlled his physical instincts, but he had found no need to break them with rods. In perfect health, in perfect physical fitness, he had passed his days, filled with that deep, laughing happiness which comes from a quiet mind. His gigantic muscles were ever ruled by his mighty reason; and serene, smiling tranquillity had been his reward.

It was only since Muriel had come into his life that he had known any disturbance; for she was practically the first woman with whom he had ever been on intimate terms. And when she had failed him he had beaten out the very thought of her from his riotous heart, and had fled to the placid sanctuary of the desert, there to recover his equanimity.

To him she had seemed to be tainted by her contact with that section of society whose artificiality he so heartily disliked. These people paid outward court to the conventions of life, but in secret they treated in the lightest manner the very bases upon which these conventions were founded. Being satisfied with the surface of things, they lived their lives in turmoil and called it pleasure; nor had they any idea of that deeper happiness which comes from contact with fundamental truth and simplicity.

And Muriel had been as blind as the blindest of them. She only played with life—skimmed over the surface, snatching at such pleasures as lay to hand.

If she had turned her back on her dances and her parties, and had come to him and had said, "Take me into the desert for ever," he would have believed in her love, and nothing could have held them apart; but, whether correctly or incorrectly he knew not, he had had the impression that she had wished to fill but an idle hour with the sweets of love, just as, so it seemed to him, all fair women of Mayfair were wont to do.

Therefore he had come back to the clear and open spaces of the desert; and here, in the ruined monastery which for so long had been his home, he had sought and found once more his peace of mind. In a few weeks' time he would return to Cairo; but in future he would arrange to receive his Egyptian visitors away from the Residency, at some house in the native quarter where he could work without distraction.

As he sat writing in his shirt-sleeves at his table near the window and the sun was descending towards the horizon, his attention was attracted by the barking of his dogs, and he wondered whether some native from the village had come to see him. He was concerned just now in regard to the growing quarrel between

the two main families of the Oasis, and visits were frequently paid to him by persons connected with the great feud.

The barking, however, presently ceased abruptly, and therewith he went on with his work. The room was large, and the loud chattering of the sparrows in the palms outside the window prevented him from hearing the opening of the door behind him. He was not aware that his servant, Hussein, had entered, agog with excitement; nor did he see Muriel, who, followed him, as she waved him out of the room, and shut the door behind her.

It was only when she was close to him that he heard the footstep and looked around.

He sprang to his feet. "Muriel!" he exclaimed, as he stared at her in astonishment.

She did not speak. She ran to him, and, throwing her hands around his neck, was lifted from the ground in his arms. For a few moments she did nothing but kiss him—she rained kisses on his mouth and his bewildered face in a very frenzy of love, so that he gasped. Then her hands, slipping from behind his neck, passed over his forehead and his cheeks, and through his hair, patting him and stroking him; while her hat fell off, unnoticed, and her feet dangled above the ground, vainly seeking for foothold in the vicinity of his shins.

At last, having been lowered to the ground, she stood before him, her hands held in his, her face flushed, her hair falling down.

"Oh, my darling," she cried, "I couldn't live without you any longer. I've broken loose: I've run away and come to you."

And, as his arms went about her once more, nigh crushing the breath out of her, she shut her eyes and received his answering kisses in passionate glorious silence.

CHAPTER XXVI—THE STOLEN HOUR

She had come to him! Impelled by her love she had come to him! That was the jubilant thought in Daniel's rejoicing heart. At last she had turned her back upon the amusements and pleasures of the old life, finding them altogether un-

satisfying now, and she had come to him! She loved him, and she had given up all to come to him! No longer was romance to be sandwiched in between race-meetings and dances, between "At Homes" and opera-parties: she had renounced the whole thing, and had come to him!

"How did you manage it?" he said, looking at her with admiration in his eyes.

"Oh, it was quite simple," she laughed. "There was nothing extraordinary in my joining the Bindanes on their trip; and then ..."

She told him how she had waited until Mr. Bindane was out of the way, and had then made a bolt for it.

"But what is the next step?" he asked. "What about the future?"

"Oh, man," she cried, "don't talk about the future—that can wait till you have time to think."

The words may have had no particular significance, but to Daniel they seemed to be the most wonderful he had ever heard. They meant to him that she trusted him, that she placed her future in his hands, that she gave herself unreservedly to him. She left it to him to think out what he was going to do with her....

He looked at her with deep gratitude in his face; for she had, as it were, crowned him as lord of their destinies and enthroned him upon the very pinnacle of eventuality.

He could not take his eyes from her as she stood at the window, the reflected light of the sunset in her face, her well-proportioned figure seeming to be more vigorous, more athletic, than he had known it before. Her smile, always brilliant, was now intoxicating to him; and her eyes were filled with such tenderness that he could find no adequate response to their appeal. It was as though his kisses and his words of love were all insufficient to this great hour; and, with inward, joyous laughter, he found himself baffled in his search for means of expression.

He lifted her up in his arms, and kissed her throat and her shoulders and her knees. He lowered her to her feet again, and, with his arm about her, walked half-way across the room and back. He buried his face in her hair; held her hand to his mouth and kissed her fingers one by one; he sat her in a deck-chair, and, kneeling before her, laid his head for a moment upon her lap.

She was his, she belonged to him!—the thought went coursing through his brain in headlong career, breaking down his reserve, overthrowing the walls of the citadel of his being.

At last, forcing himself down from the heights to the practicalities, he went to the door and shouted for tea; but Hussein, who, like most loyal Egyptian servants, regarded himself, with due deference, as *ibn el bêt*, "son of the house," or "one of the family" as we should say, had thrown himself whole-heartedly into

his master's excitement, and had already prepared the tea and had opened the choicest tin of biscuits in the store-cupboard.

Muriel was hungry after her long ride; but she had so much to say, and the interruptions induced by their love were so frequent, that the meal occupied a great deal of time. She told him of the journey from Egypt, and of the wonders of the desert which had been revealed to her; she spoke of the bath that day in the pool at the roadside; she described her sensations of increasing happiness and well-being as day by day the old routine of her life had slipped further from her; and she talked with enthusiasm of the beauties of El Hamrân as she had approached it just now from the high ground.

"I spotted this old ruin of yours from miles away," she said, "and we skirted along the high ground on this side of the Oasis until we came without a single wrong turning to your door."

She went to the window, and, standing there with her arm linked in his, gazed in silence over the shimmering sea of the tree-tops. Upon the near side the shadow of the cliffs was spread, and the foliage seemed here to be tinged with cobalt and purple; but on the far side the mellow light of the vanishing sun still bathed the green of the leaves with a tincture of gold and copper.

The chirping of thousands of sparrows, as they gathered themselves in the branches to roost, filled the air with clamorous sound; and at the foot of the cliff, just below the window, a string of camels went by, the foremost being ridden by a small boy, dressed in a single garment of blue cotton, who was exultantly carolling a native song in a full-throated voice which, with its chucks and gurgles, seemed to be an imitation of the nightingale.

"What is he singing about?" Muriel asked. "He's nearly bursting with it."

"It is a part of the story of Leila and her lover Majnûn," Daniel explained, after listening for a few moments; "the part where the Sultan sees Leila, and tells Majnûn that he doesn't think she is anything to write home about; and Majnûn says: 'O King, if you could only see her from the window of Majnûn's eyes, the miracle of her beauty would be made known to you.'"

The boy's voice passed into the distance; and Muriel stood gazing in front of her in silence, while the golden light faded from the palms as the sun went down.

At length she turned to Daniel, asking him to show her over his house; and, arm in arm, therefore, they went out of the airy, whitewashed living-room, coming presently to the old monks' refectory, with its roofing of dried cornstalks, and so to the servants' quarters and the kitchen, and thence to the ruined tower at the top of which Daniel was wont to sleep. They ascended this tower together, and from its summit Muriel could see the whole extent of the building; and, in a rapid passage of thought, she realized with inward satisfaction that the story of

his harīm was a fabrication.

The view from here was magnificent. In the west, above the rugged line of the dark hills, the sunset was revealed to her in sudden, overpowering splendour. To the east the Oasis lay in cool shadow; and here and there a thin wisp of smoke rose into the air. Beyond lay the silent desert, and the far-off ranges of pink and mauve hills; and above them the sky was turquoise, fading into grey-blue. The wind had dropped, and now the chattering of the sparrows was ceasing, so that there seemed to be an increasing hush upon all things.

The foliage of the palms screened from sight any movement of human life in the Oasis; and Muriel had the feeling that she and Daniel stood quite alone in this vast setting, like two little sparks of vibrant energy dropped down from the hand of Fate in an empty, motionless world.

She looked up at him as he stood before her, his rough grey shirt thrown open at the neck, his sleeves rolled back from his bronzed arms, and his white trousers held up by an old sash of faded red and yellow silk knotted about his waist. He looked down at her, dressed in her silk sweater, and the same white serge skirt with the little stripe of grey in it which she had been wearing that afternoon at Sakkāra. And as their eyes met they both laughed, like two playmates of childhood who had quarrelled, and whose quarrel was now forgotten.

Presently he led her down the stairs again and across the outer kitchen yard. Here her dragoman, Mustafa, was waiting to take his orders; and he now asked permission to ride over to the house of his brother-in-law, which was situated at the far end of the Oasis, and there to spend the night; and this Muriel at once gave him.

“Where are the camels?” she asked; and in reply he pointed to a shed built against the outer wall of the monastery near the entrance. Here, also, were the three yellow dogs, who, knowing her well, came now to her with the fawning attitudes and uncertainly wagging tails of the real pariah breed.

Hussein was lighting the lamps in the living-room when they returned; and he paused to ask whether the evening meal should be served at the usual hour. Daniel referred him to Muriel. “Any time you like,” she answered, smiling happily at Daniel, as though even the arranging of such trivial details were a matter of delight. “I want a bath first, if I can have one.”

At this Daniel suddenly laughed. “Gee!” he exclaimed, “I’d forgotten to fix up a bedroom for you.” He scratched his head. “Now where on earth am I to put you?”

There was a small whitewashed chamber—originally a monk’s cell—opening off the refectory. This, Daniel used as his dressing-room, and in it stood his large tin foot-bath. He now told his servant, therefore, to set up the spare camp-bed in that room, to prepare the bath, and to remove his own belongings

to the chamber at the base of the tower below the stairs.

"You won't be nervous alone there, will you?" he asked her, and she shook her head. "If you feel lonely or frightened, you've only got to slip round to my tower and shout to me, or come up the stairs and wake me up."

To Muriel there seemed to be a wonderful intimacy in his words, and she pictured herself creeping up the dark staircase in the night, and standing by her lover's bedside under the stars, whispering to him that she could not sleep.

Hussein was not long in carrying out his instructions, and soon he came back to announce that the bath was ready. Therewith, Daniel took Muriel to this room, which looked exceedingly clean and comfortable in the lamplight. Towels and jugs of hot and cold water stood upon the grass-matted floor beside the bathtub; the camp-bed had been made up in one corner; and Muriel's dressing-case stood upon a chair near a table above which a looking-glass was hung. In place of a door a grass mat was suspended across the entrance; and the unglazed window, looking westwards on to the open desert, was fitted with rough wooden shutters now standing open to the warm night.

Daniel was loathe to leave her even for this little while, and he stood with his arm about her while she unfastened her dressing-case. He helped her to lay out her brushes and toilet utensils; and there was a peculiar and very tender sense of intimate companionship as she handed him her slippers to place beside the bed and her nightdress to lay upon the pillow. He made no attempt to go when she began to take the hairpins from her hair; and, when it fell about her shoulders, he took her in his arms once more, calling her by so many loving names that her brain seemed to be singing with them, and she could feel her riotous heart beating as it were in her throat.

At last he left her, and went to his own improvised dressing-room, to put on more presentable clothes; but when he was ready, and she had not yet made her reappearance, he went back to her doorway and spoke to her through the screen of the grass-matting.

She told him he might enter, and he found her sitting before the mirror fastening up her hair. She was dressed now in a kind of kimono; and he seized her bare white arms, which were raised above her head, kissing them fervently.

When at length her toilet was finished, he led her back to the living-room, where soon the evening meal was served at a small table upon which two candles burned at either side of a bowl of wild flowers hastily picked in the fields, where, at this time of the year, they grow in great abundance; and never in all their lives had either of them felt so completely happy. Through the open window the stars glistened in the wonderful sky, like amazing jewels sprinkled upon velvet; and the dimly lit room, with its series of shadowy domes, seemed to be a magical banquet-hall, its walls of alabaster and its flooring of marble. It was somewhat

bare of furniture, for many things had been left behind at the Pyramids; but its very bareness enhanced its Oriental effect and added to its enchantment.

Hussein had prepared a very excellent meal, not sparing the store-cupboard; and he had opened a particularly large fiasco of Italian red-wine to grace the occasion. He had donned a clean white garment, held in at the waist by a crimson sash; and as he noiselessly entered or left the room he seemed to Muriel to have taken to himself the nature of a geni out of a tale of the *Arabian Nights*.

When at last the meal was finished, and cleared away, and she and Daniel were seated in the deck chairs at the open window to drink their coffee, Muriel felt that the whole world of actuality had slid from her, leaving her enthroned with her lover in a palace of glorious dream; and when, out of the darkness of the palm-groves below, there came to their ears the distant and wandering sound of a flute, played by some unseen goatherd passing homewards with his flock, the magic of the desert was almost overpowering in the measure of its enchantment. She was bewildered and intoxicated by it; and in Daniel's eyes she found, too, a light of love such as she had never seen there before.

The hours passed unnoticed, for time had ceased to be; and it was already late when at last Daniel arose, and stood looking down at her with a smile upon his face. "Well," he said, with a sigh, "I didn't think anything would induce me to return to Cairo so soon; but now.... When shall we start?"

Muriel looked at him in surprise. "O Daniel," she whispered, "there's no hurry, is there? The Bindanes won't be going back for a fortnight."

Her low voice set his heart beating for a moment, but he did not take the real significance of her words.

"Well," he said. "I suppose it will be all right for you to be here for a day or two; and then we can ride straight to Cairo and be married by special licence or whatever they call it." He lifted her fingers to his lips. "Oh, darling, in less than a week you'll be my wife!"

Muriel stared at him, wide-eyed. It was as though she had suddenly awakened from a dream. "Oh, but the family will be horrified," she said. "Everybody will expect a proper wedding in London: after we get home—in May or June. You'll have to make that concession to the world, my darling."

Daniel laughed. "Yes, but what about our compromising situation, here?" he asked. "Don't you see, my sweet, what I mean? Your bolting from the Bindanes is to me a sort of sacred and wonderful thing that you have done, because you've put your fate irrevocably in my hands. To my way of thinking we are already married, because you have openly abandoned everything and come to me; but I'm not going to give anybody the chance to question our acts. We belong to each other, and the quicker the position is regularized, so to speak, the better."

“But who is to find out?” she said. “If I stay with you till the Bindanes come, nobody will hear of it in Cairo.”

He looked quickly at her, his brows drawn together. “What d’you mean?” he asked, as though he could not follow the workings of her mind.

She laughed. “I mean, I’ve arranged it all,” she answered. “Kate is to say I was ill, and that I came to you so as not to be a nuisance to them. She can prevent her husband ever giving me away, and I should think you could manage the others, or at any rate keep them from talking until we’re married.”

He did not answer, but his eyes were fixed upon her. She got up from their chair, and put her hands about his neck. “This is to be our wonderful fortnight, darling,” she whispered. “It is to be our secret.”

He lifted her arms from his shoulders, holding her wrists. “I don’t understand,” he said, and his voice was hard.

She looked at him with wonder. She could not comprehend what was troubling him. “Darling, what’s the matter?” she asked, in dismay. “What I mean is that I’ve done what you always wanted me to do: I’ve broken loose; only I’ve chosen my opportunity, and arranged it so that people won’t talk.”

Still he did not take his eyes from her; but he removed his hand from her wrist. “You mean,” he said very slowly, “that you will return with the Bindanes, and finish up the Cairo season?”

“Well,” she answered, “I’ve got all sorts of more or less official engagements, you know.”

“This is to be just a stolen fortnight?” he asked, and she was frightened by the stern tones of his voice.

She nodded, and again her arms sought his shoulders. But he stepped back quickly from her, and his hand passed across his forehead.

“You are going to cover up your tracks with a pack of lies,” he said, his breath sounding like that of one in pain. “And then you are going back to your dances and your parties, pretending nothing has happened.”

“Oh, you don’t understand,” she cried. “I’ve given myself to you, body and soul.”

“Yes,” he scoffed, his voice rising. “You’ve given yourself to me for a fortnight. A sneaking fortnight that you think nobody will ever hear about. A fortnight sandwiched in between the middle and the end of the Cairo season, to fill up the blank time while your father is away.”

“But I never want to go back,” she answered, her voice trembling.

“If that is true,” he said, “why have you arranged everything for your return? You’ve given yourself to me, you say! Yes, for a stolen fortnight, as you call it yourself: it is to be just an underhand little intrigue. Good God!—and I believed you had given up everything for your love’s sake; and now I find you’ve

given up nothing. You've taken all the necessary steps to prevent your action being decisive, to make your return to society perfectly easy. And I thought you had burnt your boats!"

She faced him angrily. "Oh, you're incomprehensible," she exclaimed. "You let me see in every possible way that you want me to give myself to you and to follow you into the desert; you let me understand that this is what you expect of a woman; you knew that I had heard about your affairs with the Bedouin women here; you didn't seem to mind my having heard about Lizette: and then, when I accept your point of view and come to you, you tell me I've done wrong."

"What on earth are you saying?" he cried. "What do you mean about Bedouin women? I have never had any relations whatsoever with native women in my life—never. And as for Lizette, I didn't tell at the time, because I wanted you to trust me of your own accord; but I will tell you now. I've only spoken to her twice in my life. Once we had supper together, and once we had coffee together in a restaurant. That is the beginning and the end of my relationship with her. Do you mean to say that thinking me a sort of libertine, you have come out to live with me here as my mistress for a fortnight? Is that what you mean?"

She did not reply. She sat down on a cane chair near the table, and twisted her handkerchief to and fro with her fingers. The expression on her pale face revealed the black despair of her heart.

"Answer me!" he said, sharply.

"I have no answer," she replied. "I thought you wanted me, I thought you loved me."

He turned from her, sick at heart. It seemed now to him that his worst fears were realized: he could almost have called her "Harlot." In no wise had she abandoned the world and run to him, defying the conventions because she desired to be his mate. She had merely planned a secret love-affair: she had just slipped out of the ballroom, so to speak, to enjoy an amorous interlude, and she would be back amongst the dancers once more before anybody had missed her. This sort of clandestine, cunningly arranged affair was an insult to the whole idea of union: it was an intrigue out of a French novel.

He looked at her once more as she sat at the table, and, in his revulsion of feeling, he thought her kimono gaudy. The expression on her face was angry, almost sullen.

"I think you must be mad," she said. "In Cairo you wouldn't be publicly engaged to me, and you made me understand quite clearly that it wasn't our actual marriage you were thinking about: you wanted me to run away with you. You always jibbed at the thought of marriage, and were silent about it; but you talked freely enough about our life together. You made it quite clear that you regarded morals with contempt; and now, you suddenly have scruples, and pretend that

you are shocked at my having taken steps to prevent a scandal which would hurt my father's reputation."

"If you were afraid of a scandal," he answered, quickly, "why did you come at all? When you arrived this afternoon I thought you had left that question to me, and were ready to get married at once, which was the only way to avoid hurting your father—unless I had sent you back this very night to Kate Bindane. No, you weren't afraid of a scandal: you arranged it all too cleverly for there to be much risk."

"I was prepared to marry you," she said, "if you really wanted marriage."

"And if I didn't," he replied, "you were prepared to live with me for a fortnight. Oh, you make me ashamed!"

"I wanted to save you from these other women," she protested.

"I tell you there never were any other women," he answered. "I'm not a man out of one of your horrible novels."

"I don't know what you are driving at," she exclaimed. "Anyway I won't be played fast and loose with like this. I shall go back to my friends tomorrow, and I hope I shall never see you again."

Suddenly her voice broke, and throwing her arms out across the table, she laid her head upon them, and cried bitterly.

Daniel did not move. His heart was hardened against her, and he told himself that her tears were but one of the wiles of her sex.

"No," he said at length, coming suddenly to a decision, "you shall not go back tomorrow. You have come here for a fortnight, and have made arrangements for your visit to be secret. You say there is no fear of a scandal such as would hurt your father. Very well then, you shall stay here a fortnight whether you want to or not. I propose that we get to know each other: we've had enough misunderstandings. You have misunderstood everything I have ever said to you: it has all been warped and twisted by your miserable society attitude of mind."

"I shall never understand you," she answered, raising her head, and drying her eyes with the back of her hand. "This is quite final. You've insulted me and humiliated me. I might have known that that was what you'd do."

"Very well," he said, "I think you had better go to your room now. Remember, you are going to stay here for the full fortnight."

"I shall do no such thing," she declared, facing him defiantly.

He gripped hold of her wrist. "Do you want me to have to lock you up?" he asked; and she quailed before the authority of his voice.

He went across to the door and opened it. Outside, upon the floor, a hurricane lamp was burning; and this he picked up.

"Here's a lamp," he said, "and here are matches. Now go to bed."

She took them from him in silence, and slowly walked out of the room.

He watched her as she passed across the refectory, the light from her lantern casting her swaying shadow in huge size upon the ruinous walls. Then he shut the door, and sitting down at the table, buried his face in his hands.

CHAPTER XXVII—THE FLIGHT

For a long time Daniel lay awake upon his bed at the top of the tower, while his thoughts passed through a number of recurrent phases. More than once he felt that he had made a mountain out of a molehill; but this attitude of mind was dismissed by the recollection that, whether Muriel truly loved him or not, she had come to him "on the sly," and, by planning this surreptitious interlude (for she had meant it to be no more than that) she had invested their relationship with that very atmosphere of intrigue which he so strongly resented.

He saw in her action the influence of that small section of London society which he abhorred, wherein the women appeared to him to be secret courtesans who would neither abide by the traditional law nor openly flout it; and he was determined either to eradicate that influence or to lose Muriel. He was not entirely clear in his mind as to what he was going to do with her in the Oasis for this fortnight; but of this he was sure, that she needed a lesson, and that he was going to take her in hand, remorselessly, whatever might be the consequences.

The moon, in the last quarter, rose above the far-off hills while yet he was wearily thinking, and realizing thus that daybreak was not more than two hours distant, he obliged himself by force of will, to compose his mind for sleep. In this he was successful and presently he fell into a deep slumber from which it would have been difficult to wake him.

Meanwhile, Muriel had also watched the dim light of the rising moon as it slowly spread over the desert. She had slept for two or three hours—a miserable sleep of exhaustion; but when she was awakened by the hooting of an owl outside the window, she lit her lamp and made no further attempt at repose.

Her one idea was to get away from Daniel and to go back to Kate Bindane, who would still be alone at El Homra until the end of the coming day. She did not want to wait until daybreak, for if Daniel were awake he would perhaps try to stop her; and now the slight illumination given by the moon encouraged her

to make her immediate escape. She could hardly miss the road: all she had to do was to mount her camel and ride straight ahead.

Hastily she put on her clothes, and soon she had crept out into the refectory, carrying her heavy dressing-case in her hand. She had slipped her revolver into one of the pockets of her skirt, and in the other she had placed a packet of chocolate unused on the previous day, while her water-bottle was slung across her shoulder.

Her heart was beating, and she was frightened at the prospect of the long journey alone, but there was no practicable way of getting into touch with her dragoman, and she was obliged, therefore, to steel herself for the adventure.

By a stroke of good luck she found the three dogs wandering about the refectory, and they were thus not startled into barking: they followed her with wagging tails as she made her way to the camel-shed outside. There were no doors to open, nor bolts or bars to unfasten; and she could hear the servants snoring at the other end of the building.

Creeping into the shed, lantern in hand, she found her camel and Daniel's kneeling side by side upon the sand, dreamily chewing the cud, and, having learned the tricks of the stable during her journey from Cairo, she quickly slipped a rope around the bent knee-joint of the foreleg of her own beast, thus preventing it from rising.

The saddle was heavy, and was furnished with a number of confusing straps; but, after a somewhat prolonged struggle, she managed at length to adjust it, and to tie her dressing-case on to the back pommel. Then, removing the tether, she held the nose-rope in one hand, and prodded the unwilling beast with her toe until it floundered to its legs, snarling and complaining as is the habit of the breed.

Leading it out into the open she buckled the girth in a fashion, but for some minutes she failed to make the creature kneel so as to allow her to climb into the saddle. She tugged at the nose-rope, and tapped its legs with her crop, but presently she was obliged to desist, owing to her fear that its whining grumbles would be heard.

She was in despair and was very near to tears, when suddenly she recollected that the native makes a certain noise in the roof of his mouth, like the rolling of a German *ch*, when he wishes his camel to kneel; and no sooner had she imitated this sound than the creature went down on its knees with the utmost docility. She clambered into the saddle with a sigh of relief, and a moment later was trotting silently northwards while the dogs stared at her in mild surprise as they stood in the light of the lantern which she had left burning at the doorway of the shed.

The soft pads made little sound as she passed under the outer walls of the

monastery, and, looking up at the tower, she saw no signs of movement, for Daniel was fast asleep. Nor was there any indication of human life in the Oasis below her as she trotted along the cliff-tops, but the sporadic barking of the village dogs much alarmed her.

The day was now breaking in the east, while the moon also gave a certain amount of light; and she therefore found the track with ease, and in less than half an hour had left the Oasis behind and was heading out into the open desert across the high ground.

The excitement of her escape had prevented her from thinking of her actual sorrow, and now she was too nervous, too overawed by her surroundings, to be conscious of more than a general horror. A six hours' ride across an absolutely uninhabited and lifeless stretch of country, with nothing but a packet of chocolate for sustenance, was likely to be a physical ordeal; and already she knew that the nervous strain was going to be very great.

As has been said, there were three wells upon the route, and the nearest of these, some six miles from the Oasis, she reached within the hour. The sun being now well above the horizon, she did not halt; for she realized that Daniel, on his tower top, would already have been awakened by its rays, and would perhaps be even now in pursuit.

This, in fact, was the case. When he had descended from the tower he had quickly discovered her flight, and had sent Hussein scuttling into the stable, while he himself put on a shirt and a pair of trousers and slipped his bare feet into the old canvas shoes which lay to hand.

Snatching his water-bottle and a tin of biscuits from the living-room, and pocketing his pipe and pouch, he ran through the refectory like a charging bull, sprang on to his camel, and was off and away before his servant had recovered from his first astonishment.

"*Walla kilma!*" he shouted to the staring Hussein, which means "Not a word!" And the loyal native thereupon went back to the kitchen, muttering to himself "His Excellency has gone hunting," as though to convince himself of the veracity of the statement, which, after all, was not very far removed from the truth.

As Daniel raced along in the sparkling sunshine he could detect here and there the marks of Muriel's camel upon the tracks before him, and he knew that, at the pace at which he was travelling, he would have the chance of overtaking her before she had accomplished half the journey back to El Homra; for he had not been long asleep, and her departure could not have taken place earlier without attracting his attention. He therefore settled down to a protracted and pounding chase, and in the brisk morning air his steed did not fail to show its mettle.

He was travelling at twice Muriel's pace, and he caught sight of her, and

she of him, as he descended from the high ground into the wide plain which lay between the two oases. She was over a mile ahead of him, a mere speck, like a little fly crawling across a vast brazen dish, and a considerable time passed before he had come close enough to observe her movements.

He saw her now urging her camel forward, beating it with her crop. Her hat had been discarded, and her hair had fallen down and was being tossed out behind her by the north wind like a fluttering banner.

She turned to glance at him, and he saw her flushed face, as again she belaboured her tired beast. He was about to call out to her when suddenly her camel stumbled. The loosely buckled girth gave way, and the saddle slipped over to one side. For a moment she clutched on to it, while her camel went round in a circle as though about to overbalance and fall on top of her. Then she slid to the ground, fell on her hands and knees, picked herself up, and set off running like a maniac, while the startled camel went staggering off to one side.

Daniel did not slacken his pace, and in a few moments he was close upon her heels.

“Stop!” he called, coming to a halt. “It’s no good running like that!”

For answer she suddenly swung round and faced him, panting and distracted. Her hand dived into her pocket, and issued again holding her revolver. He saw the sunlight flash upon it as she pointed it at him.

His camel was well trained, and he did not wait to tether it. Vaulting from the saddle he walked rapidly towards her, regardless of the menace of the weapon which covered him.

“Don’t dare to come any nearer,” she gasped, “or I’ll shoot you, you brute!”

He stretched out his arms. “Very well, shoot!” he said. “Good God! D’you think I value my life now?”

He saw her fingers press the trigger. There was a flash, a sharp report, and the bullet went singing past his ear, not close enough, perhaps, to suggest that she had taken aim at him, but not so distant that he could ignore it. He ran at her, therefore, and grasped her wrist, so that the revolver fell to the ground. Instantly she flung herself upon her knees and grabbed at it with her left hand, but he dragged her back by her arm, pulling her to her feet.

“You beast!” she exclaimed. “Leave me alone!” and she struck at him with her free hand. Her eyes were flashing, and her hair was tossed about her shoulders.

He put his arm about her, holding her as in a vice, and, stooping, he picked up and pocketed her revolver.

“Now sit down there,” he said, lowering her on to the sand, “and get your breath.”

She saw that there was no use in resisting, and she sat, therefore, glaring

up at him as he stood before her.

He turned his head and glanced at the camels, and as he did so she stretched out her foot and kicked his shins.

“Ough!” he exclaimed. “Don’t do that—it hurts!”

“Oh, I wish we were near Cairo,” she cried. “I’d turn the servants on to you and have you whipped. Go and fetch my camel!”

“Yes,” he answered, “I’m just going to. And don’t you start running away again, or I’ll not be so gentle with you when I catch you.”

He hastened across the desert, and, without any difficulty, caught Muriel’s wandering and tired animal, and readjusted the saddle. Soon he had tethered it beside his own; and coming back to her, he sat himself down a yard or two away from her, and lit his pipe.

“Say when you’re ready to start back,” he said, stretching himself out and resting his head upon his elbow.

“I’m not coming back with you,” she replied. “I’m going back to El Homra.”

“No, you’re not,” he told her. “You’re going to stay with me for this fortnight you’ve so carefully planned.”

She scrambled to her feet, her fists clenched. “If you try to force me to come with you,” she burst out, “I shall ... I shall *bite* you.”

He also stood up. “Now look here,” he said. “Understand me: you’re going back with me, whether you like it or not. And if you struggle I shall tie you up. Now, come along quietly.”

He caught hold of her wrist, and led her towards the camels.

“Take your hand off my arm!” she gasped. “You’ve got me in your power now, but you just wait till my father hears of this. He’ll have you hounded out of Egypt.”

He did not reply, but releasing her, left her to climb into the saddle.

“Go and get my crop,” she said. “I dropped it somewhere here.”

“Very well,” he replied, “but, remember, if you ride off while my back is turned, I’ll come after you and tie your hands behind your back.”

Muriel wriggled furiously in her seat, but she knew that it was useless to attempt to escape. Presently Daniel found her crop and brought it back to her. Then he mounted his camel, and the two of them rode off southwards side by side.

“We shall come across your hat soon,” he said. “Be on the lookout for it. You’ll get sunstroke without it, in spite of all that mass of hair.”

She uttered something like a growl as she jogged along beside him over the blazing sand.

CHAPTER XXVIII—THE SURPRISING FORTNIGHT

It was mid-morning when they reached the house, and Daniel advised Muriel to go at once to her room, whither Hussein presently brought refreshments and cans of water for the bath.

“Send Mustafa to me,” she said to him, but, understanding no English, and grasping only the name of the dragoman, he pointed towards the Oasis, indicating by signs that the man had not yet returned.

At this she went to the door of her room and called out sharply “Mr. Lane!”

Daniel, who at the moment had just ducked his head in a pail of water, came into the refectory drying his hair with a towel.

“What’s the matter?” he asked. “Anything I can do for you?”

“Where’s my dragoman?” she asked, suspiciously.

“I don’t know,” he replied. “I haven’t touched him.”

Hussein volunteered the information that Mustafa had not yet returned, and Daniel translated the statement into English.

“Well, when he comes,” she said, “please send him to me at once.”

“No,” he replied, very decisively, “I’m going to send him straight off to El Homra before he hears of our little trouble this morning. I can trust Hussein to say nothing in the village, but Mustafa I don’t know very well.”

She turned angrily to him. “You do like bullying women, don’t you!” she sneered.

He looked at her with steady, serene eyes, “You won’t need a dragoman for a fortnight,” he remarked. “He may as well make himself useful to the Bindanes.”

With that he went back to his ablutions, and when, half an hour later, Mustafa made his appearance, Daniel immediately sent him off on his long journey, telling him to convey his compliments to Mr. and Mrs. Bindane and to say that her Ladyship was in the best of health, and would come back to them on the thirteenth day from now.

This done, he called Hussein to him and spoke to him somewhat after this

manner: "Her Excellency," he said, "desires to go back to her friends, but I believe I shall be carrying out the wishes of her father by obliging her to remain here. You will therefore take her camel and mine into the village, so that she cannot get at them; and you will notify me at once if she leaves the house. Otherwise you are to treat her with the deference due to her high rank; and I think it will be best to make no mention of what I have told you to your friends."

Hussein bowed, and at once went off to find a suitable stable for the camels.

When luncheon was announced a couple of hours later Muriel came into the living-room, carrying herself with dignity.

"Am I obliged to eat my meals with you?" she asked.

"It will be more convenient," he replied.

"I shall probably be sick," she muttered.

"You'll get used to it," he answered; and therewith they sat down at the table.

The meal was eaten in a distressing silence, broken only by Daniel's polite proffering of salt, pepper, and the like, and by his pressing but vain invitations to her to eat a little more of this or that dish. When at length they rose from the table, he advised her to go to her room to rest. "You must be very tired," he said, "after getting up so early, and all that excitement."

"I'll lie down," she replied, "but I don't suppose I shall sleep. The very fact of being anywhere near you disgusts me too much to allow me to go to sleep."

"You must try to master that feeling," he said, with perfect seriousness. "It hurts nobody but yourself. I can quite understand your being angry; but I think Al Ghazzali, the Muslim philosopher, put the matter in a nutshell when he said: 'God loves those who swallow down their anger, and not those who have no anger at all.' It only makes you yourself miserable to be in a temper; but try to say to yourself that you won't let me be of such importance in your life as to have the power to upset you. You ought to say: 'Nothing that this fellow does can shake my equanimity: he has absolutely no power over my inner self.' If you can really say that to yourself you'll sleep all right. There'll be some tea going at half-past four."

She stared at him freezingly and went out of the room, while Daniel quietly settled down to his writing, refusing to allow himself any further thoughts in regard to her.

At tea-time he told her that he wanted her to come down into the Oasis with him. "It will take your thoughts off yourself," he said.

"Thank you," she replied. "I prefer to stay here in my prison. I wish you'd realize that your society is obnoxious to me. I hate the sight of you."

"I quite understand that," he said, "but, all the same, I want you to come, please."

"If I refuse," she retorted, "I suppose you'll drag me down by the hair?"

"No," he replied, "not by your hair: only by your hand."

She was too tired to put up any resistance, and soon they left the house together, descending by the rough path down the cliffs to the lower level, where the shadow lay deep.

Presently they entered the forest of palms, wherein, here and there stood a mud-brick hut or cluster of huts, upon the flat roofs of which the goats and chickens ran about, and sometimes a dog looked down at them and barked.

The shadow of the cliffs extended for some distance, like a blue veil, but further ahead the sun still struck down upon the Oasis, and the mellow light, seen between the tree-trunks and foliage, was made so rich by contrast with the cool tones of the shadowed foreground that Muriel was constrained to remark on its beauty. Pigeons fluttered to and fro amongst the trees, those close at hand being white as snow, but those in the sunlit distance appearing to flash before the eyes like gilded birds of a fairy tale.

Soon they passed out of the shadow, and now the sunlight was sprinkled upon them from between the rustling palm-branches overhead, and the dust of their footsteps was like a haze of powdered gold. Before them, in a clearing, a number of rough buildings, some of them whitewashed, encircled an open space of sun-baked ground wherein a number of natives sauntered to and fro. Here there were a few stalls, sheltered by tenting or tattered fragments of brown camel-cloth: grain being on sale at one of them; at another, basket-work; at another, pottery.

The loiterers and salesmen greeted Daniel with polite salaams, and to some of them he spoke a few words; but they were too well-mannered, or perhaps too indifferent, to show any particular interest in Muriel, and even when she paused to pat the shaven head of a little naked urchin, and to give him a piastre, there were few curious eyes upon her. The villagers seemed to be dawdling through a peaceful dream, unruffled by the ardours and eagerness to which the Westerner is accustomed; and Muriel had the feeling that she had come into a lull in the breeze of life, as when a sailing boat is becalmed and the sails flap idly. Even the tempest in her heart was quietened, and the warmth of the evening caused her to feel a languor that was temporarily almost serene.

Daniel led her across the open ground to a lane between the ramshackle buildings on the far side. Here, at a crazy-looking door, he paused.

"I want you just to shake hands with an old man," he said. "He acted as guide years ago to one of your father's predecessors."

"There's no need to say who I am, is there?" she asked, a little anxiously.

He smiled. "Your dragoman will have spread the news already."

"I told him not to," she answered.

Daniel made a gesture of impatience. "We must try to correct that," he said. "Secrecy is very unpleasant, though it is sometimes necessary. You'll find it always best to be frank when you can."

In response to his knocking the door was opened by a small, smirking boy, and they entered a little yard, wherein a clean cow, several emaciated hens, and a couple of goats wandered about in front of a two-roomed house, the rear wall of which appeared to be about to collapse. Here a dim-eyed old man sat upon a native bedstead of split palm-branches, engaged in hunting for fleas in his cloak, and, as his gnarled old fingers plucked at the folds, his grey-bearded mouth was pursed and pushed forward in the manner of a monkey.

He rose, creaking, to his feet as he caught sight of his visitors, and, tottering forward, grasped Daniel's extended hand, who then introduced him to Muriel.

Daniel spoke to him in Arabic, and presently, turning to his companion, asked her to say something to the old man.

"What shall I say?" Muriel enquired.

"He is very old," Daniel replied. "Wish that God's face may shine upon him. Say you hope the evening of his life may be full of peace and blessedness."

"Yes, tell him that," she answered.

"Anything else?" he asked.

"Oh, make up something for me," she replied.

"No," he answered, severely. "Please take your thoughts from yourself, and concentrate them on this old fellow. Think what is the best thing you can wish him. Think hard."

Muriel glanced at him in surprise, while her host turned his fading eyes to Daniel, asking what she was saying.

"She is trying to think what is the most blessed wish she can make for you," he replied, speaking in Arabic; and the old man beamed upon her.

Muriel made an effort, and, taking his horny hand in hers, told him that she hoped he would keep his health and that his affairs would prosper. With an eye on his cloak, she wanted to add that she hoped he would have good hunting, but she restrained herself.

Daniel translated the words into the native tongue, and, after a brief conversation, they took their departure.

As they walked down the lane Muriel asked him, freezingly, why he had so particularly wished her to make herself polite to the old man.

"I had no reason," he answered, "except that I wanted you to think of him and not of yourself."

"Why?" she asked with increasing ill-humor. "Am I usually selfish?"

"You have been trained to think first of yourself," he answered, with disconcerting candour, "though by nature you are not really selfish at all. During

this fortnight I want you to think mostly of other people.”

She had no time to reply before Daniel stopped at another and larger door, which he pushed open without a preliminary knock. Here, in a shed, two camels and a donkey stood feeding from a trough.

“This,” he told her, “is my hospital for sick animals. Both these camels have saddle-sores, as you see, and the old moke foaled the other day, but the youngster died. She is very depressed about it.”

Muriel was interested, and patted the donkey affectionately, while Daniel, stepping on to an inverted box, examined the camels’ sores.

“Just hand me that bottle over there,” he said. “It’s my patent mixture of carbolic and lamp-oil. It keeps the flies off, and heals up the sores mighty quick.”

Muriel haughtily gave him the bottle, and watched him as he poured a few drops on to the wounds. Her attention was presently attracted by a board nailed to the wall, upon which an inscription was written in large, flowing Arabic characters.

“What does that say?” she asked, forgetting for the moment that she was not really desirous of holding any communication with him.

“It is a quotation from the Koran,” he told her. “I wrote it and stuck it up for a lesson to these people. It reads ‘The *Prophet* has written: There is no *beast* on earth, nor bird that flieth, but the same is a people like unto you, and unto God shall they return.’”

“I like that,” she said.

He fetched a broom from the corner of the shed and held it out to her. “Would you mind just sweeping the ground a bit while I clean up the troughs?” he asked. “The native attendant is off duty today.”

He busied himself with his work, and Muriel, making a grimace, did as she was bid. It was less awkward than standing still, and the cause was good though the job unpleasant.

They walked home in silence through the gathering dusk. Daniel offered her his hand to help her up the steep path which ascended the cliff to his house, but she frigidly refused it; and when, presently, she stumbled and nearly fell, she scrambled to her feet once more in surprisingly quick time, as though to avoid his proffered aid.

Later she sat down to the evening meal without uttering a word, and the silence was extremely oppressive.

“Look here,” Daniel broke out at last, “I don’t know what you feel about it, but for my own part I rather object to this silence.”

“I have nothing to say to you,” she replied.

“That doesn’t matter,” he said. “I will do the talking. I shall choose a subject and talk about it: you can listen if you want to.”

Therewith he gave her an account of the Bedouin tribes of this part of the desert, how they had come to settle there, how he had recovered a part of their history from the old tales and ballads which he had recorded; and he told her something of their curious laws and customs.

Muriel's face did not betray any interest whatsoever, but Daniel persevered courageously until the meal was finished.

"You can stay in this room and read a book if you like," he said to her, as they rose from the table.

Muriel looked at him coldly. "Thank you," she replied, with an emphasis which she hoped was withering, "I prefer to go to my room. Good-night!" And with that she took her departure.

The day had seemed intolerably long to her, and her smouldering anger had flamed up within her at frequent intervals. She realized that Daniel was playing the schoolmaster to her, and she was determined not to knuckle under to him. If he had decided to keep her a prisoner here for the full fortnight, she would do her best to make him thoroughly uncomfortable. His cool, impersonal attitude annoyed her; she was amazed that a man who but yesterday was branding her with his burning kisses could be today so entirely detached from emotion, and she flushed at the insult of it.

Her only consolation lay in the thought that he was injuring himself by his behaviour. She would now never be even so much as a sister to him—not even so much as a friend. When she had escaped from this horrible place she would go to England, and soon, no doubt, she would marry a nice, ordinary man, with sleek hair and a tooth-brush moustache and long, thin legs; and as she came out of the church after the marriage ceremony she would catch sight of Daniel in the crowd and would smile contemptuously at him....

She was very tired, and many minutes had not passed before she abandoned the pretence of reading the anthology of English verse which Daniel had placed in her room on the previous evening, nor was it long before she fell into a deep and dreamless sleep which held her as it were entombed until Hussein caused her resurrection by bringing in the bath-water in the morning.

The cool breeze and the sparkling air brought a certain feeling of well-being into her heart; but the meeting with Daniel at the breakfast table was a wretched business, and was made all the more distasteful by his evident good health and the morning freshness of his mind.

"I hope you are feeling fit," he said to her. "We have a busy morning before us."

That he was not speaking in jest was proved by the event. Soon after breakfast he took her down to the house of Sheikh Ali, and introduced her to the old man and his son Ibrahim. Thereafter the four of them walked over to the open

ground outside the mosque, where a large number of men and camels were gathered, while on the outskirts of the area many women and children stood in the shade of the palms. Daniel explained to her that a large number of the chief men of the El Hamrân were setting out upon the long journey to the far-off Oasis of El Khargeh, where there was to be a great gathering of the tribes. Sheikh Ali himself was too old and too feeble to go with the caravan, and his eldest son, Ibrahîm, was remaining with him; but his younger sons and most of his male relatives and adherents were going.

She watched the animated scene with interest, and the hubbub came to her ears with the wonder of novelty—the women uttering their strange, whinnying cries in token of their grief at parting with their husbands; the white-bearded old Sheikh embracing his sons, like a Biblical picture come to life; the diversely robed figures steering their camels in circles and firing their rifles in the air; the barking of innumerable dogs skulking amongst the palms; and over all the brilliant sunshine and the deep blue of the sky.

She and Daniel shook hands with a very large number of men, and, as she walked homewards after the caravan had departed, she had a confused memory of smiling bearded faces, dark eyes, and many-coloured robes fluttering in the wind.

After sundown he took her down to the village, armed with pots of ointment, to help him to doctor the eyes of two little grandchildren of the Sheikh, who were suffering from ophthalmia, and whose sight his daily ministrations were saving. And in the evening he continued his writing, leaving her to read a book until, with many yawns, she betook herself to her room.

This day was typical of all the others in that surprising fortnight. Quietly and impersonally he led her through her duties, obliging her to make herself useful in a score of different ways. Now he set her to the task of classifying his photographs and notes; now he sent her down to the animals' hospital to doctor the camels' sores; now he asked her to massage the sprained ankle of a small girl who had been brought to the house for treatment; now he made her grace with her presence a village wedding festival; and now he dispatched her with milk and eggs to the hovel of a blind old woman who lived on her neighbours' charity.

In the afternoons he would take her for painfully long tramps over the desert, for the good of her health as he told her; and when the silence became oppressive he would talk to her, whether she listened or no, about the nature of the birds they saw or whose footprints were marked upon the sand, about the geological formation of the country, about the jackals and their habits, and so forth. During their meals together he attempted, cold-bloodedly, to enlighten her on many subjects, and sometimes he would talk philosophy to her, endeavouring to give her a new standpoint on certain age-old themes, but "You do like

preaching, don't you?" was the kind of response he received.

Sitting opposite to him at the table, it seemed to him that she carried herself with great dignity; and he had to admit that, under the circumstances, she was a great deal more self-possessed and high-mettled than he had expected her to be. She stood up to him, so to speak, and there were times at which he had the feeling, though he did not show it, that he was behaving like a boor.

On one occasion in particular he was conscious of having been put to rights by her. He had been talking about the sincerity of Islâm, and had said how wise the Prophet was to refuse to organize a priesthood, preferring to leave the faith in the hands of the laity.

"It is so different from the empty ceremonials of our own religion," he said. "It seems to me that the Church's idea of the imitation of Christ is generally a burlesque in bad taste."

"In every walk of life," she replied, "there are men who make an outward hash of their inner ideals. You, for example, have great ideas as to what women should be; but in actual fact you make a terrible mess of your dealings with them."

"I wonder," he mused. It was as though he had been chastised.

She did not continue the argument. That was, to Daniel, the baffling thing about her: she was growing so quiet now that she was in his power. She performed the tasks he set her almost in silence, and he could never tell whether she were learning her lesson or whether she were treating him with contempt as a man who lacked sympathetic understanding.

In her silence he seemed to find the quiet suggestion that she knew already all he wished to teach her; and there were moments when he felt that he had estranged himself needlessly from her. At such times he was obliged to remind himself that she had deliberately treated his love as a romantic adventure, and such treatment had had to be dealt with drastically. It was better that it should die outright than live to bring misery to them both; and with this thought he steeled his heart.

Thus the days passed by—days of brilliant sunshine and warm, mysterious nights, of active toil and healthy sleep; days meant for love and companionship, but turned down, one after the other, in cold antagonism and frigid reticence. Sometimes in the evening, after she had gone to her room, he would sit with his head buried in his hands, calling himself a fool and loathing his rôle of school-master; and more than once there was a black hour of despair when, had she come to him, she would have been astonished to see his huge arms spread out across the table and his head sunk upon his mighty breast.

CHAPTER XXIX—IN THE PRESENCE OF DEATH

By the middle of March Muriel's enforced residence at El Hamrân was drawing to a close. Already she had been with Daniel for eleven or twelve days, and he had kept her so busy that the time had passed rapidly. These days had been like a fantastic dream to her, and she could hardly believe in the reality of her actions. The whole situation was absurd; and yet, notwithstanding her artificial outward stiffness and her actual inward rebellion, she was conscious that her experience had not been unprofitable.

In spite of Daniel's hectoring and churlish manners—for so she thought them—she felt that she had seen something of life as it is lived under primitive conditions which otherwise she would never have known. She had even experienced, latterly, a pleasant sense of calm while she had been carrying out her duties: it was almost as though being under orders were a satisfactory condition—now and then. And as to her physical health, she was obliged to admit that she had never before felt so thoroughly fit.

Her attitude to her monitor was one of unbending hostility, but now no longer of furious anger. She was not afraid of him, but very decidedly she did not feel the contempt for him which she endeavoured to show. She regarded him as a man of difficult and contrary character, but she now realized that she had greatly misjudged his outlook upon life. She had thought that in regard to women he was a prurient savage: she now knew that he was a high-principled and rather fastidious celibate.

Undoubtedly he had taught her the lesson of her life, but she was certainly not going to grasp his hand and thank him kindly on that account. He had built up a barrier between them which would remain a fixture for all time, and, though her heart often ached, she was far too estranged from him to think of any future intimacy whatsoever between them.

Only in one respect, in these days of their life together, did she feel drawn towards him. He had an indefinably benevolent and humorous attitude towards

life, of which she was daily more conscious. It was something which could not be described, but on more than one occasion it nearly served to break down the wall of ice within in which she had enclosed herself. Sometimes it would be merely that he stopped in his walk to make an absurd remark to a passing cow or to a wandering goat; sometimes it would be the way in which he played with his dogs; or sometimes it was his manner to the native children which would cause her to unbend towards him. It was as though he had a private joke with every living creature. It was too quiet to be termed joviality: it was in no wise rollicking. It was a subtle droll and whimsical good-nature; it seemed almost as if, conscious of his own great strength, he were saying "Bless your little heart!" to all things weaker than he.

One morning, just as they were finishing a silent breakfast, Hussein entered the room, and delivered himself of a few rapid words in the Arabic tongue, which so much upset Daniel that he rose to his feet and paced up and down the floor in great perturbation.

"Anything wrong?" asked Muriel, temporarily unfreezing.

"Yes; very bad news," he replied. "Old Sheikh Ali is very ill. It sounds like pneumonia. I must go down to him at once."

He snatched up his hat, and, without taking any further notice of Muriel, hurried out of the room. Sheikh Ali was a man whom he loved and respected, and the possible death of his friend was so great a sorrow to him that his mind was filled full of darkness, like a room in which the blinds have suddenly been pulled down. And the condition in which he found the old man confirmed his worst fears; and presently, in deep anxiety, he hastened back to the house to procure the necessaries for his proper nursing.

"Will you come with me," he said to Muriel, "and help me to look after him?"

She hesitated. "I am not much good as a nurse," she demurred, "but I'll do what I can."

"Thank you," he replied, and the words were uttered with genuine gratitude.

Daniel knew something of the rudiments of medical science, and he was aware that there was very little to be done in a case of pneumonia except to keep the patient warm and to maintain his strength. When he returned, therefore, to the Sheikh's house with Muriel, he was carrying with him a small oil stove with which to warm the sick-room at night, and a pillow in its clean white cover was thrust under his arm, while Muriel held a basket containing a number of articles from the store-cupboard and medicine-chest.

The house, a whitewashed building of two storeys, stood amongst the palms, not more than three or four hundred yards distant from the monastery.

As they approached it they heard the sound of wailing in the women's quarters, and at this Daniel uttered an exclamation of disgust.

"Oh, these women!" he muttered. "We mustn't let them do that. Wait a minute."

He went to the side door and knocked upon it. An old negress, a servant of the house, opened the door, her eyes red with weeping, and her withered breast bare.

"The Sheikh is dying, the Sheikh is dying!" she wailed, as Daniel questioned her.

He put his hand on her shoulder. "Go and tell them," he said, "that if I hear another sound of weeping I shall send somebody to beat you all with a stick. Do you not know the saying of the Prophet: 'Trust in God, but tether the camel'? If God has decreed that your camel shall run away it will certainly run away, but nevertheless you must do your part in preventing it. If the Sheikh is going to die he will die; but until he is dead you must do all you can to tether him to life. Let me hear no more sounds of mourning until the breath has left his body. In my country we say 'While there is life there is hope.' Go now and hope—hope in silence."

He pushed her back into the house and returned to Muriel.

[image]

A SCENE FROM THE PHOTOPLAY—BURNING SANDS

They found the Sheikh lying upon a couch in the whitewashed upper room, into which the sun struck through the open casements. He was propped up upon the hard square pillows taken from an ordinary native divan, and his laboured breathing sounded ominously in their ears. His son Ibrahîm, a grave, black-bearded man of middle age, stood by his side, drumming the fist of one hand into the palm of the other in his great distress.

"See," said Daniel, speaking to the patient in Arabic, "I have brought her Excellency to nurse you. Let me put this soft pillow under your head; and, look, here is a stove to keep off the chill of night. In two or three days, my father, we shall bring you back to health."

The old man shook his head. "No, my dear," he whispered, "I am going to my God. God has said, 'I am a hidden treasure. I have made man that he might find Me!' I go now to find Him."

Daniel knelt down by his side, and, taking the thin hand in his, remained silent for some moments, his eyes shut, his brows knitted. Muriel watched him

in surprise. It was evident that he was praying; and she had never before seen anybody pray, though in church she had known people go through the correct postures and outward formalities of prayer.

Presently he rose to his feet, and at once became businesslike and practical. He took the patient's temperature; dexterously pinned the native shawl about him; arranged the pillows under his head; opened a bottle of meat-extract and administered a little of its contents; and, sending for milk and eggs, made Muriel go out on the rickety landing to beat up the eggs into the milk.

When she returned with the beverage she found that he and Ibrahim had fastened grass matting across the windows to check the glare of the sun, and now were standing in the subdued light talking in quiet cheerful tones to the sick man.

Presently Daniel turned to her. "I think the best thing you can do," he said, "is to sit beside him and fan away the flies when you see them bothering him."

He handed her a fly-whisk, and placed a small stool beside the couch; and here she sat herself, while her patient closed his eyes and drowsed in some degree of comfort.

They went back to the house for luncheon, and during the meal Daniel told her of the troubles which might ensue in the Oasis if the Sheikh were to die. He spoke of the feud between the sick man's family and that of their rivals; and he explained how Sheikh Ali desired to be succeeded in his office as headman by his son Ibrahim, and that there was a danger of the other party taking advantage of the absence of so many of the Sheikh's adherents, who had gone to El Khargeh.

"If Sheikh Ali dies," he pointed out, "the other faction may carry out a *coup*, and establish their candidate in power while all these men are away. That would be a disaster; for the man they wish to set up is a crook, if ever there was one. He would be just the sort of fellow to play into Benifett Bindane's hands and sell himself to the Company."

"But," said Muriel in surprise, "aren't you in favour of this Company?"

"No," he answered. "I have come to the conclusion that it is not in the best interests of the natives. They are happier as they are, for their products are sufficient to their needs, and are pretty evenly distributed. I don't trust these Stock Exchange fellows: they'll exploit the Oasis to fill their own pockets. That's what I'm going to tell your father when I get back to Cairo."

"Poor Mr. Bindane!" Muriel smiled. "He has set his heart on this business."

In the afternoon they returned to the sick-room, where she made herself very useful, and showed a remarkable aptitude for nursing; and the sun was setting before they came back to the house once more. Muriel was very tired by now, and as soon as the evening meal was over Daniel advised her to go to bed.

"What about yourself?" she asked.

"Oh, I'll go back to him for a bit," he answered, but he would not accept her

proffered help.

She therefore went early to her room and soon fell asleep, nor did she awake again until Hussein aroused her at sunrise with his clattering preparations for her bath.

She found herself alone at breakfast, and it was explained to her by signs that Daniel was with Sheikh Ali. Presently, therefore, she went down to the sick man's house, a little ashamed of herself for not having risen earlier.

As she entered the upper room she caught sight of Daniel's face, and its expression of weary sorrow checked her. He was seated beside the couch, his hand on the patient's pulse, his eyes fixed upon the old man, who lay panting for breath, the beads of perspiration upon his wrinkled forehead.

"Is there anything I can do?" she whispered.

He raised his head and gazed at her: she had never seen him look so haggard before. "No," he answered, "he is beyond human aid. It's only a question of minutes now."

"I ought to have come to help you sooner," she said. "How long have you been here?"

"All night," he replied. "I couldn't leave my *friend*, could I?" There was something in the inflection of his voice which very much touched her.

The Sheikh turned his head slightly, and Daniel bent forward to catch the laboured words.

"Ibrahîm," he whispered.

Muriel understood, and, at a nod from Daniel, went out of the room to find the dying man's son, whom she had seen at the doorway of the house, on her arrival, kneeling upon the praying-carpet, his hands extended towards the East. He had just risen to his feet as she came now to him, and she made signs to him to go upstairs.

When she entered the sick room once more she saw the younger man kneeling beside his father's couch. Daniel was holding the feeble old hand, so that it rested upon Ibrahîm's turbaned head. She heard and seemed almost to understand the whispered words of the old man's blessing, and presently, to her surprise, she observed the tears start from Daniel's eyes, and their quick brushing away, with the back of his hand. She had not thought him capable of tears.

Then suddenly she saw the dying man raise himself; she saw Daniel and Ibrahîm leaning forward to support him. She heard the rattling of his breath, and she recognized the words that he uttered as those of the Moslem formula which Daniel had more than once repeated to her: "I testify that there is no God but God...." They came rolling now from his lips with passionate energy: it was as though the sum of his whole life were being expressed in these guttural, rhyming sounds. But the declaration remained unfinished. The voice ceased upon the

name of Allah, the mouth dropped open, and the patriarchal head fell back.

Muriel had only once before stood at a deathbed; and later, as she walked back to the monastery, she compared the scene of her mother's death with that from which she had just come.

In the one case there had been the big four-poster bed, with its hangings of embroidered velvet; the sombre room, lit by a shaded bedside lamp and by the flickering of the fire in the wide Tudor grate; the tapestried walls with their designs of dim huntsmen pursuing phantom deer through the time-worn twilight of forgotten forests; the faded Jacobean painting upon the ceiling, representing the fat back-view of a reclining Venus and the fat front-view of naked Cupid. There had been the pompous family doctor and the frigid specialist in their black frock coats, and in the bed, between the embroidered sheets, her mother had lain inert, her dyed hair, tidy to the end, framing her carefully powdered face.

"Come here, my dear," she had whispered to Muriel. "Tell me, do you believe in a God?"

"Yes, I think I do," she had replied.

"Well, I don't," was her mother's reply; and those were almost her last words.

And, in contrast, there was this patriarchal scene in the bare, whitewashed room, the sun beating upon the grass matting, the palms rustling outside, and the flies droning: the old, saintly face of the dying man, his withered hand laid upon the head of his beloved son, and the fervent affirmation of his faith in God upon his lips.

Muriel was in a very subdued and reflective mood when she returned, and as she stood at the window of the living-room, listening to the wailing of the mourners in the distance, she wondered how best she could show her sympathy with Daniel in his loss, without in other respects unbending to him. He relieved her of the difficulty, however, when he came in; for he showed no outward signs of his grief, and seemed in no wise to be asking for her condolence. He spoke of the beauty of the Sheikh's life, and of the serenity of his death; and when Muriel made some remark in regard to the sadness of the event he quietly corrected her.

"Death," he said, "is not a calamity when a man has reached old age. It is like the ripeness of corn, as Marcus Aurelius says, when the soul drops out of the husk almost of its own accord. It is a natural action, just as birth is. It is only we who are left behind who are unhappy—because we have lost a friend; and as for that, why, I am not going to let my loss make me wretched."

"That sounds extremely selfish," she remarked, coldly.

"No," he answered, "sorrow is selfish, not happiness. There's never any use in pulling a long face."

CHAPTER XXX—THE REVOLT

The funeral took place next morning, as is the native custom, and it was during the great gathering of the Sheikh's friends that the adherents of the opposing faction made their feared *coup*. The event, and its serious consequences for Muriel and Daniel, was upon them so quickly that there was no time for preparation or retreat.

Muriel had not gone to the funeral, and she was sitting quietly writing in the living-room when Daniel flung open the door.

"Quick!" he said. "Get ready to start at once. Leave your dressing-case: you just want your water-bottle and a tin or two of food from the cupboard. We've got to ride like the wind. I'm just going to get the camels."

She stared at him in amazement as he hastened away, and thought how extremely inconsiderate he was; but the realization that her extraordinary fortnight with him was now at an end led her to obey his instructions with alacrity. She was soon ready, but for some time she waited impatiently for his reappearance.

At last he came in, this time slowly and with careful serenity.

"I'm afraid the journey's off," he said.

Muriel was angry, and she tapped her foot sharply on the floor. "Oh, you're impossible!" she exclaimed. "I'm all ready to start, and now you say you're not going."

He looked at her gravely and steadily for a moment, and then very calmly he told her what had occurred. While Ibrahîm and those of his adherents who had not gone to El Khargeh were attending the funeral, the rival faction had seized every camel and donkey in the Oasis, for of the former more than half the number owned by the inhabitants had gone with the caravan. They had disarmed the village *ghaffirs*, or guards, they had proclaimed their own chief as Sheikh of the Oasis, and they had picketed every track leading out into the desert and to the lands beyond.

Daniel had found his and Muriel's camel gone from the stable, and he had encountered a group of "enemy" leaders who had informed him that he would not be permitted to communicate with the outside world for several days.

“Their idea,” he explained, lighting his pipe, “is to get their man firmly established in power before the police hear of it, and then it will be a *fait accompli*. It is to be a peaceful revolution, without bloodshed if possible; but I don’t suppose they will hesitate to shoot anybody who tries to get away. So, you see, we’re caught.”

Muriel received the news calmly. According to the time-table the Bindanes would return to El Homra tomorrow or the next day, and then, if she had not made her reappearance, they would probably send her dragoman and a trooper or two to fetch her. But Daniel pointed out that three days might elapse before these men arrived, and two weeks before the authorities in Egypt could give instructions. Moreover, their coming might lead to an awkward situation for himself and her.

“You see, they know that I will support Ibrahîm’s claim,” he said, puffing quietly at his pipe, “for I promised his father I would do so; and if an unfortunate accident could account for you and me, it would be all the better for them. Supposing, for example, you and I were found to have gone out hunting, and to have lost our way, and to have fallen over a cliff or something of that kind, there would be nobody much to uphold Ibrahîm against a rival already established in office.”

Daniel did not take his eyes from hers as he put this aspect of the matter before her. It was as though he were testing her nerve; or perhaps it was that he thought candour best in regard to a contingency the possibility of which would doubtless occur to her.

“It seems to me,” she said presently, “that human nature is much the same all the world over. You were rather intolerant of the intrigues of Cairo; but rivalries and disputes evidently go on in the desert too. I’m very disappointed.”

“So am I,” he replied, with disarming candour. “The only thing to be said for it is that it has been done pretty openly and boldly.”

“What do you intend to do?” she asked. She was remarkably calm.

“I’m going to slip away after dark,” he replied, with a smile, “and walk to El Homra.”

“It’s thirty miles,” she said. “And supposing you get shot or caught...?”

“You can come too, if you like,” he replied. He might have added that this actually was his intention.

She remained silent for some moments, her face a little flushed, her fingers drumming on the table. In spite of her self-control he could see that she realized the danger. “Yes,” she said at length, “I’ll come too.”

He smiled broadly. She caught sight of his strong white teeth, in which the stem of his pipe was gripped.

“I don’t see anything to smile about,” she remarked.

He did not answer. In his mind there was an astonishing sense of exultation. He had had no idea that she would show such quiet pluck: he had hardly dared to think, as he put the graver possibilities of their situation before her, that she would receive the news without a tremor. But now, suddenly, his heart was crying out within him: "This is my mate; this is the woman who will dare all with me"; and he laughed to think of their present absurd relationship. He did not realize how deep was their estrangement.

After the midday meal he sent her to her room to rest, and, pocketing his revolver, went down into the village. Here all was quiet, but he observed that small groups of the revolvers were moving to and fro, some of them carrying their antiquated firearms. Ibrahim, he was told, was more or less a prisoner in his own house, and he thought it politic to make no attempt to visit him.

"Time will show," he said to an adherent of the usurper, "whether your master is worthy to be Sheikh"; and that was as far as he would commit himself.

At tea-time he returned to the monastery, and now he gave full instructions to Hussein. The latter was to go to bed as usual that night, and was to take no part in the events of the darkness. He was to call his master an hour after sunrise, and if it chanced that he failed to find him, he was to take what steps he chose to report the disappearance and exonerate himself from blame.

It was not until after nightfall that any outward signs of their dangerous situation were to be observed. Daniel found then that three armed natives were loitering outside the ruined walls, and, in answer to his enquiries as to their business, they told him amiably that they were there to prevent him leaving the Oasis.

"But how can I leave it without a camel?" he asked. "In the morning you must tell your master that the two camels must be brought back to me. They must be here before midday." His voice was peremptory, and the natives salaamed respectfully.

It was at about an hour before midnight that, from the top of his tower, he took a final survey of his surroundings. There was a young moon in the heavens, and by its pale light he observed the figure of one of the guards reclining on the sand, his back against the wall, directly beneath the window of Muriel's room. The other two, as he had previously noticed, were seated in a more or less comatose state at the entrance of the monastery, at which point they no doubt presumed that reason required them to remain.

He descended stealthily from the tower, and, feeling his way through the dark refectory, found Muriel seated, ready, upon her bed. In silence she rose to her feet, and thereupon Daniel gathered up the bedclothes in his arms and crept with them to the window. She did not know what he was about to do, but presently she saw him crouching upon the sill, his figure silhouetted against the

sky.

Suddenly, with a flutter of the blankets, he disappeared, and from outside she heard a series of muffled sounds. Darting to the window, she saw him struggling with what appeared to be a furiously animated bundle of bedclothes from which two kicking brown legs protruded; and, a moment later, this bundle was lifted from the ground.

“Quick!” he whispered, looking up at her, and thereupon she crawled through the window and jumped on to the soft sand outside.

Daniel, clasping his burden, with the head pressed against his breast, told her to pick up the man’s rifle and to put it through the window on to her bed. When she had done so he at once set off at a run towards the open desert, and Muriel followed him, her heart wildly beating. A distance of not more than fifty yards separated them from some clusters of rock which would shelter them from sight, and soon they were scrambling over the rough ground in temporary immunity from detection.

Here Daniel paused to rearrange his struggling captive, who was in grave danger of suffocation, and, having warned him that a single sound would mean instant death, he lifted him across his shoulder, with the blankets more loosely thrown over his head, and again broke into a jog-trot.

When about a quarter of a mile had been covered they descended into a shallow ravine, with which Daniel was well acquainted; and here, being screened from the Oasis, he set down his burden, cautiously removing the bedclothes from the perspiring and anxious face. The man’s eyes were wide with fear as he found himself looking into the muzzle of a revolver; but his captor smilingly reassured him, promising him that no harm would come to him if he but walked ahead in complete silence.

“I am afraid,” he said in Arabic, “that you are about to have a somewhat lengthy walk.”

“Where are we going?” the man asked.

“To El Homra,” Daniel replied casually.

“*Ya salaam!*” exclaimed the man, in an awed whisper. In our language the expression may be rendered “Oh, lor’!”

The ravine led them to the northwest, and they must have covered nearly two miles before Daniel deemed it safe to bear off more to the north, over the higher ground. The going was easy, for the surface of the rocks was smooth, and the light of the moon sufficient to prevent stumbling; and an hour’s walking brought them to a point at which they could without risk move to the east, so as to pick up the track leading to El Homra. This they found at length without any difficulty, and they now judged themselves to be beyond the pickets, being already two or three miles distant from the near end of the Oasis.

The first danger was now past, and Daniel therefore began to discuss with Muriel their chances of success.

"We must have come six or seven miles," he said. "I suppose you are pretty tired?"

"No," she answered, "I can keep up for some time yet. You've taken me for some pretty long walks during the last fortnight: it was good training."

"Well, say when you're done," he said, "and I'll carry you."

"Thanks," she replied stiffly, "I'm not a child."

They walked on in silence, three ghostly figures stalking through the dim light of a dream.

"I suppose," said Daniel presently, "that they'll not miss us until well after sunrise, if then; so I think our chances are fairly rosy. It all depends on your feet, my girl."

With the extra mileage due to their detour, the distance to the half-way pool would be about eighteen miles or so; and it was obvious to Daniel that Muriel would not be able to stand more than twelve or fourteen. He therefore glanced anxiously at her every now and then as they pushed forward across the great open plain which lay between the two oases; and at length he noticed that she was limping.

It was nearly four o'clock in the morning, and they were still some four or five miles distant from the pool, when Daniel suddenly took hold of her arm.

"Now I'm going to carry you," he said.

She did not protest. For some time she had been hobbling forward in a kind of nightmare, her feet sore and burning, her knees feeble, and her brain fevered. The moon had now set, but the stars gave sufficient light for them to see the straight track beneath them. She hardly realized what he was doing as he lifted her from the ground, putting one of his great arms about her shoulders and the other under her knees. In a confused manner she was aware of a feeling of annoyance at her weakness; but presently, nevertheless, her head dropped upon his shoulder. She did not sleep, but she was certainly not awake.

When at last she recovered full consciousness she found to her infinite surprise that the day was breaking, and that Daniel was in the act of depositing her upon the sand at the edge of the half-way pool.

"Good heavens!" she exclaimed. "How far have you carried me, man?"

"About five miles," he said, rubbing his stiff arms. "Now for a bit of a rest."

She was wide awake again, and to her great relief she found that her feet were no longer burning. Their wretched captive, however, was entirely exhausted, and was stretched upon his stomach, drinking greedily from the pool.

Daniel himself did not show any marked signs of fatigue. A walk of eighteen miles was nothing to him, and the burden of Muriel's weight was not intol-

erable to a man of his colossal strength.

When half an hour later, they resumed their journey the sun was rising above the distant hills. They walked off alone, for Daniel had extracted an inviolable promise from their captive to rest where he was until noon before setting out on his return journey; and he had given the man a few biscuits and a slice or two of meat to keep him going. Both Muriel and Daniel had bathed their feet in the pool, and having eaten a square meal they fared forth once more with some degree of vigour.

As the sun increased in power, however, this sense of freshness vanished, and but five miles had been covered when Daniel was obliged once more to take his companion in his arms, in spite of her valiant protests. This time he set her upon his shoulder, clasping her about the legs, and every mile or two he varied the position.

From the pool to the hills which divided the plain from El Homra was, roughly, ten miles, and when at last they mounted, at about ten o'clock, on to the high ground, Daniel was already feeling the strain. For the next couple of miles Muriel limped along by his side; and now their practical immunity from capture permitted them to take an occasional rest in the shade of the rocks.

The last three miles of the journey were very exhausting to them both, for it was now noon, and the sun was intensely hot. Their water-bottles were nearly empty and their provisions were all gone; but the sight of the Oasis in the distance served to keep up their courage.

Muriel, much against her inclinations, had now to be carried almost continuously, but Daniel would not listen to her repeated requests that he would leave her while he went on to fetch help. He still feared a possible pursuit, for even so near to their goal they were travelling through uninhabited and utterly isolated country. He set his teeth, therefore, and carried her forward, now on this shoulder, now on that, now upon his back, and now, as originally, in his arms. He was aching from head to toe, and his feet felt like burning coals of fire, while the perspiration issued from every pore.

"Gee!" he said, as he set her down a mile from their destination, "this has been some walk!"

He took her in his arms again, and set out upon the last lap. The buildings of the police headquarters were now clearly visible against the palms, and near them stood the tents which told them that the Bindanes had returned from the north.

Muriel looked up at his haggard face. "I'm ashamed of myself for being so feeble," she said. "It is very humiliating for me to have to be carried by *you*, of all people."

For answer he suddenly bent her head down and kissed her.

Muriel uttered an exclamation. "Put me down!" she cried. "How dare you!"

Again he kissed her, holding her up in his arms as her legs kicked at his hip. She freed her hand and pressed it into his face.

"If you do that," he laughed, "I'll drop you."

"How dare you!" she repeated. "Oh, you brute!"

He threw his head back, and looked up at the sun from under the brim of his battered old hat. "It's been an extraordinary fortnight," he panted, as though he were addressing the heavens.

Muriel did not answer, but she was breathing hard as he looked down into her face once more, and her eyes were wide with anger.

"I've learned a lot about you," he said, "during these days; and I guess you're worth winning, after all."

"In that case," she replied furiously, "I guess you'll be sorry that you've lost me."

"Have I lost you, Muriel?" he asked.

"You have," she replied, shortly and decisively. "What else did you expect, after the way you have insulted and bullied me? You've lost me for ever."

The intensity with which she spoke silenced him; and thus they came stumbling into the camp.

CHAPTER XXXI—PAYING THE PRICE

"Kate!—where are you?" Muriel called, as she stood in the blazing sun in the midst of the silent camp.

Daniel had deposited her here, and was now hastening, in a last spurt of energy, towards the police headquarters, intent on gathering a force to return with him to El Hamrân.

"Good Lord!—it's Muriel," came a voice from one of the tents, and Kate Bindane ran out into the sunlight, shading her eyes with her hand.

She slapped Muriel lustily on the back, and led her to an empty tent, where she put her arms about her and kissed her. "My word!—you're looking tired!" she laughed. "Have you had a wonderful time?"

“Lovely,” said Muriel, sitting down upon the camp bed.

“Where are your camels?—where’s Daniel?” Kate asked, somewhat bewildered.

“Oh, we walked back,” Muriel answered, with a casual gesture. “I’m feeling quite tired.” She began to laugh hysterically.

“D’you mean to say he made you walk?” her friend asked, incredulously.

“There wasn’t much choice,” she replied. “Oh, for heaven’s sake, get me something to drink, something long—miles long, and cold. I’ll tell you all about it presently.”

Kate hurried away to find refreshments, and as she crossed the hot sand once more, carrying an assortment of bottles, she encountered Daniel coming back with the local police officer. He pulled off his hat and shook hands with her, rapidly.

“How d’you do,” he said. “Have you got a spare tent where I can have an hour’s sleep?”

Kate stared at him. “You seem very pleased to see me,” she laughed. “You’re bubbling over with news, aren’t you?”

“So sorry,” he replied. “Muriel will tell you: there’s been a bit of trouble at El Hamrân. I’m going back there with the police presently. Can I doss down in here?” He pointed to the tent behind him; and, hardly waiting for her reply, walked into it, telling the officer to arouse him in an hour’s time.

Kate shrugged her shoulders, and went back to Muriel, whom she found pulling off her boots and stockings.

“Muriel, what’s happened?” she asked. “Daniel says he’s going back to El Hamrân with the police in an hour’s time.”

Muriel looked up, her face flushed. “Oh, the man’s mad!” she declared. “He’s fagged out. He carried me half the way.”

Rapidly she told her friend of the trouble in the Oasis and of their escape, while Kate, uttering ejaculations of awe, plied her with refreshment and helped her to pull off some of her clothes. Muriel was far too exhausted to give a very intelligible account of their adventures; and while yet Kate was fussing around, dabbing her feet with eau de cologne, and rubbing her legs, she suddenly fell off to sleep.

Benifett Bindane listened, later, to his wife’s version of the story with marked interest.

“Well,” he said, at length, “that settles our plans for us. We’ll start back for Cairo tomorrow.” He looked at his wife curiously. “I wonder what Lord Blair will say to it all,” he mused.

“He must never know that Muriel wasn’t with us,” said Kate.

“That’s impossible,” he replied. “I shall have to tell him the truth.”

“Benifett!” exclaimed his wife, staring at him in horror. “You’re not going to give her away, are you?”

His mouth hung open for some moments. “I’ve been thinking it over,” he said, at length, “and it seems to me that Lord Blair will have to be told. If it leaked out, and we were found to have lied to him, there’d be no hope of doing business with him in the future.”

“Business!” Kate snorted. “Oh, man alive, is business the only thing in life?” She turned away in disgust.

“No,” he answered, “it’s not the only thing, but it happens to be my hobby, Kate, as you knew quite well when you married me. And I may as well say now, that I am very hurt at the way you sneer at what is meat and drink to me. I hope you’ll think that over.”

He looked very nearly pathetic as he spoke; and his wife was sufficiently touched by his dejection to turn an angry scene into one of affectionate conciliation.

“P’r’aps you’re right,” she said; and presently they went out together to see what was happening to Daniel.

They found him just emerging from the tent where he had slept. It was evident that he was still thoroughly tired; but a group of troopers and their camels outside the police buildings indicated that, nevertheless, an immediate start was to be made.

He was munching biscuits as he shook hands with Mr. Bindane. “I’m sorry I can’t stay,” he said. “I’ve got to set this business to rights at once. But I dare say we’ll meet in Cairo before you leave for England. Good-bye!” He held out his hand, but Kate checked him.

“I’ll go and see if Muriel is awake,” she said.

“No, never mind,” Daniel answered, with his mouth full. “I won’t disturb her. Please tell her I’m coming to Cairo within a month from now.”

He waved his hand to them, and hurried away; and presently they saw him mount his camel and ride away southwards, followed by half a dozen troopers, their rifles slung across their shoulders.

“Well, I’m blowed!” muttered Kate.

“It seems to me it’s business first with him, too,” remarked Mr. Bindane, looking vacantly before him.

“Oh, rot!” replied his wife. “From what Muriel says it appears that he had promised the old Sheikh that his son should hold office after him; and he’s going to keep his word.”

That night Muriel confessed the whole truth to her friend, only exacting the promise that she would not tell of her humiliation to Benifett. She related the events without emotion, her voice steady and the expression of her face calm. It

was as though she were telling the story of some other woman in whom she felt no personal interest. It was as though Daniel had now passed entirely out of her life.

"I'm going to marry the first man who proposes to me," she said, setting her jaw.

"Well, you'll have to look sharp about it," Kate replied. "He's coming to carry you off by the hair in a month's time, and don't you forget it."

Muriel put out her hand quickly, and touched her friend's arm. "No, you don't understand him," she said. "He's not a bit that sort of man...."

She checked herself, feeling that she had no desire to be inveigled into discussing his character.

Next morning, soon after breakfast, the start was made on the return journey to the Nile. Muriel, after a long sleep, was quite recovered from her fatigue; but she did not feel happy, and the wide vistas of the desert did not make the same appeal to her as on the outward journey. She felt herself to be very much older, very much more subdued; and there was, as it were, a veil between her eyes and the beauty of the wilderness.

Moreover, she was very self-conscious. It seemed to her that she had lost caste; and, now that all the alarms and excursions were over, she was not a little dismayed at the affront she had put upon the conventions. Benifett Bindane's attitude to her was non-committal, but in his evasion of the subject of her adventures he displayed an awkwardness which she found almost insulting.

And then the natives.... She felt as though many pairs of eyes were upon her, and more than once it seemed to her that she was not being treated with the same deference as formerly.

Once, when her camel had lagged behind the others, she found herself riding beside the Egyptian secretary of the expedition, a young man who evidently regarded his personal appearance with favour; and it seemed to her that he turned his dark eyes upon her with a boldness which she had not previously observed.

But the most galling experience was provided by her dragoman, Mustafa, who took the opportunity to speak to her on the day of their departure, when she was sitting alone, waiting for the picnic luncheon to be served.

"I hope my leddy was varry happy at El Hamrân," he said, grinning at her boldly.

"Thank you, yes," she answered, fiddling with her shoe.

"Mistair Lane he varry nice gentleman," he went on; and then, leaning forward, he lowered his voice. "Mustafa know the beesness: he say nudding; he keep varry quiet, my leddy. No talk 'bout El Hamrân...."

"What d'you mean?" she exclaimed angrily, but he only smiled at her, and salaamed.

It was disgusting, and she felt a cold shiver creep down her spine, as she hastened across to the others.

As she jogged along, day after day, towards Cairo her thoughts were given more and more to the subject of her coming return to her father. What was she going to say to him? It had all seemed so easy before: she had thought that there would be no difficulty in concocting a plausible story. But now the idea of inventing a pack of lies revolted her; and as they drew ever nearer to the Nile there grew steadily in her mind a determination to tell him the truth.

Daniel, it seemed to her, had deliberately left her to extricate herself; and at the thought her heart was filled with renewed anger against him. Yet had she not told him that her plans were all laid to prevent gossip, to prevent her father's name being injured? He probably supposed that there would be no scandal; and, after all, why should there be? A little talk in the native quarter, perhaps, that would be all. But these lies she would have to tell her father! They hung over her like a menacing storm.

Yet if she told the truth, what then? Daniel's reputation would suffer as much as hers: she wondered whether he had realized this fact, when he had obliged her to stay with him for the full fortnight.

Yes, she would tell the truth. It would be a ghastly ordeal, that hour when she would have to face her father; but it would be better than lies, and shufflings, and the crooked ways of which she had seen so much amongst the women she had known in her life.

Suddenly the realization came to her that her character was not such as theirs, that it took no delight in intrigue; and upon that disclosure there followed a new understanding of Daniel's attitude to her when she had told him of her arrangements for their secret fortnight.

"Good heavens!" she exclaimed, almost speaking aloud in the surprise of her sudden shame. "What a sneaking little liar I must have seemed to him!"

At last one day, in the blaze of noon, they descended from the desert and dismounted from their camels at the gates of Mena House Hotel. Now, towards the end of March, the days were growing hot, and Muriel appreciated to the full the cool halls and shaded rooms of the hotel, and at luncheon the ice which tinkled in her glass seemed to be a very gift of the gods.

Amongst her letters, addressed to the care of Mr. Bindane, she found one from her father, written from the White Nile; and her heart leaped with sudden relief when she read in it that he had decided to extend his tour through the Sudan, and would not be back in Cairo for another three weeks. He suggested to her that she should invite the Bindanes to stay at the Residency, so that Kate could be with her, thereby relieving Lady Smith-Evered of the responsibility of upholding the conventions by her otherwise unnecessary presence; or else that

she should remain at Mena House with them until his return.

She therefore put the two alternatives to her friends, and, though Kate was all for remaining where they were, her husband could not resist the aristocratic enticement of the Residency. Next day, therefore, they made their adieux to the desert and drove into Cairo. Muriel's relief at not having yet to face her father had raised her spirits; and for the first time for many days she appeared once more to be vivacious and conscious of the enjoyments of life.

All went well for a week or more. Muriel entertained her guests at the Residency with painstaking care; and every day had its list of engagements. Indeed she was glad of the task, for, now that her life had resumed its unadventurous course, she could not keep her mind from thinking over the events of the last few months, although her recollections brought her nothing but searchings of heart.

Towards Daniel she maintained an attitude of estrangement. Though her eyes had been opened to her own shortcomings, and she was no longer so sure of herself as to be able to censure him without qualification, yet she wanted to assert herself, and to show him that she was mistress of her own destiny; and, like a spectator of her own life, she almost hoped that she would find herself belonging to some other man by the time that Daniel returned, so that she would be able to say, "There now!—you've lost me, you see."

The bombshell fell unexpectedly. One morning Lady Smith-Evered came over to the Residency soon after breakfast, and asked Muriel if she might see her alone. She had been dining with them only the night before, and Muriel did not, therefore, anticipate any serious trouble.

They went into the library together, and no sooner was the door shut than the elder woman sat herself down in the desk chair, and cleared her throat as though she were about to make a speech.

"Now Muriel," she began, "I want you to tell me the truth, please. I have acted more or less as your chaperone throughout the winter, and I'm sure you can trust me to do what is right. I want you to give me a direct answer to a direct question: did you or did you not spend a fortnight alone with Mr. Lane in the Oases?"

For a moment Muriel's head was in a whirl, and she felt the colour mounting to her cheeks, as she hesitated to face the sudden crisis. Then, fortifying herself to meet the situation with candour, she looked at her questioner straight in the face.

"Tell me, first," she replied, "the story you have heard."

Lady Smith-Evered shrugged her shoulders. "I see no reason why I should not. My maid told me late last night that she had heard it from our native cook, who had heard it in the bazaars. The story was simply that you left the Bindanes and went to stay with that man. I thought the best thing I could do, and the

General agreed, was to come and ask you straight.”

“Thank you,” Muriel replied. “Yes, it’s perfectly true.”

Lady Smith-Evered threw up her fat hands. “My dear girl!—what on earth made you do such a foolhardy thing? You might have known the natives would talk. Of course I guessed you were in love with him, otherwise you would never have been so rude to me as you were that day when I asked you why he had left the Residency so suddenly. But I never dreamed that things had gone so far. Supposing you have a baby...?”

An expression of amazed indignation came into Muriel’s eyes, and for a few moments she was absolutely dumb. It was as though she had had a lump of mud flung straight at her face; and at first she experienced only burning resentment and blinding anger. Then, suddenly, she saw things as they were: the thought had never come to her until now in all its crudeness, its stark nakedness.

“How can you suggest such a thing?” she answered at last, lamely, her indignation strengthening her voice but not her wits.

“You must have been mad,” said Lady Smith-Evered. “And at your age, too! It was more than naughtiness: it was downright folly. And as for the man, he deserves to be thrashed.”

“But you don’t understand,” Muriel gasped. “There was no intimacy of any kind.”

Her visitor moved impatiently on her chair. “Oh, don’t tell me such fibs,” she exclaimed. “My dear Muriel, I am a woman of the world. I only want to help you.”

Her words only served to accentuate the girl’s alarm.

“But it’s true,” she cried. “I swear to you there was nothing of that kind between us.”

Lady Smith-Evered stared at her. “You can’t expect me or anybody else to believe that. Why, the man is a notorious bad character in regard to women.”

“No, he’s not,” she answered. “He may be a brute in other ways, but all this rot about his Bedouin harīm is just the silly talk of Cairo. I’m not going to beg you to believe me. I’m just telling you the truth; and if you don’t think it’s the truth you can go to ...”

She checked herself suddenly.

“But what are we to do?” said the elder woman, spreading out her hands. “I’m not a prude; but the whole thing is shocking in a country like this. How are we to prevent it ever coming to your father’s ears?”

“I’m going to tell him as soon as he comes back,” Muriel replied.

“Oh, you’re incorrigible,” exclaimed Lady Smith-Evered, angrily. “You hav’n’t got the sense even to know when to hold your tongue.” She rose to her feet and paced up and down the room. “What’s to be done? Will you please tell

me what's to be done?"

"Nothing much," Muriel answered. She was becoming calmer now. She saw herself in a new light, and her humiliation was extreme. Lady Smith-Evered belonged to that world which Daniel had tried to teach her to despise; and in this woman's eyes she appeared merely as a foolish, naughty girl, whose rash actions had to be covered up by some sort of lie. She would have infinitely preferred it if she had been instantly ostracized and cut.

"Of course," Lady Smith-Evered went on, "I shall tell my maid that the whole thing is nonsense; and it's just possible that the story will go no further. But you ought to be ashamed of yourself for taking such risks. And I have no words to express what I feel about Mr. Lane."

"Oh, please leave him out of it," Muriel exclaimed. "He never asked me to come, or knew I was coming."

Lady Smith-Evered sniffed. "He knows his own power over women," she said.

Muriel turned upon her fiercely. "I tell you he is in no way to blame."

Her visitor bowed. "I respect you for trying to defend him," she answered. "We women always defend the men we love."

"But I don't love him," she cried. "I hate the sight of him."

Lady Smith-Evered spread out her hands again, evidently baffled. "That makes it all the worse," she said. "Romance is whitewash for the sepulchres of passion: it makes these things presentable; but if you say the affair was not prompted by love, then I absolutely fail to understand you. It sounds unnatural, indecent."

She moved towards the door. "I'll do my best to hush it up," she concluded; "but the sooner you get married to some nice easy-going Englishman the better. These sort of things are more *comme il faut* after marriage, my dear."

And with that she left the room.

CHAPTER XXXII—THINKING THINGS OVER

Benifett Bindane was seated on the front verandah of the Residency one after-

noon, when Lord Barthampton drove up to the door in his high dogcart. He rose from his chair, and going to the steps, shook hands with the younger man somewhat less limply than was his wont.

“Is Lady Muriel in?” asked the visitor.

Mr. Bindane shook his head. “I’m afraid not; but I think she’ll be home to tea. Come in and have a drink.”

He led him into the library, and rang the bell. “What will you have?” he asked. “A whiskey and soda?”

“Thanks,” Lord Barthampton replied. “I’ve given up the temperance stunt. I think one needs something with a punch in it now that the weather’s getting hot.”

A servant entered the room, and Mr. Bindane, playing the host with relish, ordered the refreshments.

Charles Barthampton had seen Muriel more than once since her return from the desert, and now he had come with the determination to make her a proposal of marriage. He was nervous, therefore, and soon he was helping himself liberally from the decanter and with marked moderation from the syphon. While doing so he thought he observed the older man’s eye upon him, and felt that candour would not here come amiss.

“I’m fortifying myself,” he laughed, holding up his glass. “Fact is, I’m going to pop the question this afternoon.”

Mr. Bindane nodded slowly, with seeming abstraction, and his lordship decided that a little drama ought to be added to his words.

“Yes,” he said, bracing his shoulders bravely, “this suspense is too much for me; so I’m going to rattle the dice with Fate, and win all or lose all at a single throw. What d’you think of my chances?”

“Not much,” replied Mr. Bindane, gloomily. “Lady Muriel is a difficult sort of girl. Still, she may be suffering from a reaction: you may catch her on the rebound.”

The words slipped from him without intention; but as soon as they were spoken he realized that he would either have to explain them or cover them up as best he could.

“How d’you mean?” came the inevitable question, and Mr. Bindane’s brains were immediately set rapidly to work. He knew that Lord Barthampton was running after the girl’s fortune: such a chase seemed a very natural thing to his business mind; and he did not suppose that the suitor would be deterred by hearing that the lady’s hand had already been given temporarily to another.

“Well,” he replied, “you know, of course, that she was by way of being in love with your cousin a short time ago.”

His visitor scowled. “No, I didn’t know that,” he muttered. “Confound the

fellow!—he’s always getting in my way. I wish he’d stay in the desert, and not come back.”

“Yes, so do I,” Mr. Bindane remarked. “I want him to live out there, and manage this Company I’m trying to launch. Frankly, that is why I wish you success. At present it is Lady Muriel who attracts him to Cairo; and if by any chance she should marry him, my plans would be spoilt.”

“Oh, I see,” said the other, a look of cunning coming into his red face. “So we both want the same thing.”

“Yes,” replied Mr. Bindane. The conspiracy interested him, the more so because he felt that he was acting in the best interests of Daniel, for whom he had conceived an unbounded admiration. He thought that he was wasted at the Residency: there was no money in his present work, whereas, if he entered the proposed Company’s employment, he might rise to great wealth. Nor would he ever be happy in Cairo, certainly not if he were tied to Lady Muriel: she was not the right wife for him. She was too flighty, and this escapade of hers in the desert stamped her as a woman of loose morals, who would bring only sorrow to a man of Daniel Lane’s temperament.

Lord Barthampton leaned forward. “Did she see much of him in the Oases?” he asked.

Mr. Bindane hesitated. He did not like to give the secret away; yet he felt that if this burly and rather unscrupulous young man were in possession of the facts, he might terrorize Lady Muriel into marrying him. Then Cairo would cease to have any attraction for Daniel Lane. “She saw a great deal of him,” he replied at length.

“Why, was he with your party?”

Mr. Bindane’s lips moved flabbily, but he did not speak.

“I thought you told me the other day that he wasn’t with you,” Lord Barthampton added.

“Yes, that’s so,” the other answered. “He wasn’t.”

His visitor got up suddenly from his chair. “Do you mean that *she* was with *him*?” he asked, incredulously.

“That is a secret,” Mr. Bindane replied, a little scared, but at the same time calming himself with the assurance that he was acting for the best.

Lord Barthampton paced the floor, chewing his lips, his heavy brows knitted. “I see,” he said, at length. “And you think that it will help me if I hold this piece of information over her head.”

Mr. Bindane’s blank expression indicated that nothing of the kind had entered his head—in fact, that nothing of any kind had ever entered it. “You could have heard it from the natives,” he said. “They all know she was at El Hamrân while we went north. If I hadn’t let it slip out like this, no doubt you would have

heard it from somebody else in time.”

“No doubt,” the other answered, and he drained his glass once more.

Benifett Bindane also rose from his chair. He was alarmed, and the qualms of conscience were upon him. “Of course it was just an escapade,” he murmured. “I don’t suppose there was anything wrong in it.”

“Well, I won’t use the information, unless I’ve got to,” said Lord Barthampton.

As they issued from the library, they heard the sound of an automobile driving up to the door. “That’s probably her,” Mr. Bindane remarked. “You’d better go and wait in the drawing-room, and I’ll make myself scarce.”

He patted the young man on the shoulders and hurried up the stairs to his room, while Charles Barthampton, nervously tidying himself, went into the drawing-room, where a footman was arranging the tea-table.

He had not long to wait. In a few minutes Muriel entered, and, seeing him, held out her hand.

“Hullo!” she said. “You here again?”

“I don’t seem to be able to keep away from you for long,” he sighed. “Can I see you alone?”

Muriel glanced at him quickly. There was an expression of ludicrous agony upon his face, and she knew full well what he had come to say to her. “Let’s have tea, first,” she answered. “It will fortify us.”

He stared anxiously at her, but all further preliminary remarks were checked by the entrance of Kate Bindane; and soon two or three callers were ushered in.

It was a long time before he managed successfully to outstay the other visitors; but at length he found himself alone with Muriel. The removal of the tea-tray caused another interruption; and he refrained with difficulty from cursing aloud when the footman again entered to switch on the lights.

At last, however, the moment for his declaration arrived, and Muriel settled herself down upon the cushions of the sofa to hear him, as though she were preparing to listen to a recital upon the grand piano. “Now tell me,” she said, “what it is that you want to say to me.”

He was standing in front of her, the fingers of his hand scratching his ear. He cleared his throat. “Well, it’s like this,” he began. “Ever since I’ve known you I’ve felt that there was something lacking in my life...”

“I was wondering how you’d begin,” she said, interrupting him.

He flushed, and hastened on with his prepared speech. “Even soldiers, you know, long for the comforts of home. I suppose every Englishman likes to think of his own fireside...”

“Not in this weather, surely,” she put in, again interrupting him.

He hurried on. "... With the woman he loves, seated before him, after the day's toil is over."

"Are you proposing to me?" she asked, wishing mercifully to cut him short.

"Well, yes, I am," he answered, with a deep sigh. "Ah, don't be cruel to me. You know that I love you. I'm quite well off: I can give you a fairly comfortable time of it."

"Yes, but they say you have led a very wild life," she told him. "You said yourself that you drank."

"I've sown my wild oats, little woman," he sighed.

"But drink is such a dreadful thing," she murmured. "I wonder your conscience hasn't pricked you. Or are you one of those people who have no conscience, only a religion?"

Without waiting to reply he returned to the speech which he had memorized, and drew a picture of his English home: the snow on the ground at Noël, the bells of the little church ringing, the Yule log, and his tenants singing carols to them as they dined in the great hall. It reminded Muriel of a Christmas-card—something with sparkling stuff powdered over it, and "Hark, the herald angels sing" printed in the corner.

Lord Barthampton, however, was very much touched by his own eloquence; and, coming close to her, he held out his hands. "Will you?" he said, brokenly.

"I must have time to think," she answered. "This is so sudden." Then, with deep seriousness, she added: "Yes, I want to think it over."

"Well, I'm going off to the Fayoum tomorrow to shoot," he told her. "May I come for my answer in three days from now?"

"Very well," she replied.

He seized her hand in his, and pressed it fervently to his lips. Then, as though overcome with emotion, he whispered, "God bless you, little woman," and, turning, walked slowly out of the room.

CHAPTER RETURN

XXXIII—THE

Daniel's work at El Hamrân was soon accomplished. When he returned there with the police, he was not empowered to use the aid of the law further than to restore order, to release the camels which had been seized, and to liberate Ibrahîm from his illegal semi-captivity. The officer in command of the troopers, however, was aware that the messengers who had been dispatched at top speed to Cairo would bring back instructions to him to act in accordance with the Englishman's dispositions; and thus Ibrahîm had been recognized already as Sheikh by the time that the official confirmation of his appointment arrived, and when the men who had made the journey to El Khargeh returned home, the abortive revolt was a thing of the past.

Daniel, however, was unable to reconcile the two parties, and the feud thereafter continued its tedious course, though now in a more underground manner. He was disappointed in the failure of his attempts at conciliation, and was disgusted at the bickerings and the petty insults exchanged between the one faction and the other. The tranquillity of the desert had been rudely disturbed.

It was, thus, with a feeling of relief that he packed up his belongings once more, and turned his face towards Cairo. It was now the middle of April, and he crossed the desert in a blaze of burning sunshine, but his mind was so much occupied with his thoughts that he took little notice of his surroundings. The shimmer of heat rising from the sand, the haze of the distances, and the red dusk of the warm evenings, seemed but to carry his sad heart into the region of speculation; and, at nights, the stars and the crescent of the new moon lifted him into a sphere in which his brain worked with terrible clarity.

He saw his life spread out before his inward consciousness like a tale written in a fair hand upon an open scroll, wherein his mistakes and his shortcomings were inscribed in bolder letters, very apparent to the eye. It seemed to him that his attitude towards Muriel, towards humanity, had been illiberal, too one-sided. There had been need of so much greater tolerance: he had been too inclined to be impulsive, to jump to a conclusion.

In teaching Muriel the lesson that the love between a man and a woman should be a thing of frankness and permanence, not snatched at in secret, nor lightly conceived, he had learned as much as he had taught. He had found in her all manner of qualities to which he had paid insufficient regard—dignity, control, bravery in face of danger, and courage to act according to the dictates of her heart.

He saw now that while she had walked the pathways of that world which he had despised, he had taken refuge, like a coward, in the desert; yet she, in spite of the pitfalls and the sloughs which he had shunned, was not at heart contaminated. She had honestly believed that he had wished her to come to him in the desert, and she had obeyed him. A less impulsive man would have treated

her mistake gently, and with more understanding, as being something for which her lax education and not her brave heart was to blame.

In an agony of mind he asked himself whether he had really lost her. He would go to her; he would make her look right into his mind, so that she should see how greatly he had need of her. But would she have pity on him?

Would she have pity on him?... Suddenly an essential aspect of the relationship of man and woman flashed before him. Man, mighty man, was but a lonely, blundering wanderer, a weak thing, a dweller in the desert, seeking where to lay his head. With all his strength, with all his masterful handling of events, man was yet a vagabond in the world, until he had found his mate; and woman, in spite of the greater sway of her thoughtless instincts, held for him the keys, as it were, of his heart's home. From the summit of her weakness she could look down upon his strength, and could smile at his struggle to surmount the obstacles which he had placed in his own path. In the loneliness of his soul she could look down and pity him, and take him to her breast, and heal his wounds.

Over and over again he asked himself whether she would turn from him when he came to her now, or whether she would forgive and be forgiven. He was feeling mentally and physically tired, yet he found no respite from his dark thoughts as he jogged along; and when at last he came into sight of Cairo and the Pyramids he was nigh exhausted by his anxiety to know what was to be his fate.

He reached his old camping-ground at about three o'clock in the afternoon, and in a short time one of the tents had been erected, wherein he was able to have a wash and a change of clothes. He then left his retainers to pitch the other tents and to arrange the camp, and, mounting his camel once more, rode to Mena House, where he boarded the electric tram for Cairo.

Weary though he was, he was desperately impatient to find Muriel and to get this matter settled at once. Nothing else was of the slightest importance.

At the terminus of the tramway he jumped into a carriage, calling to the coachman to drive "like the wind" to the Residency; and, arrived there, he handed to the *bowab* at the gate a generous sum, telling him to keep the driver waiting for a good half-hour before paying him off, so that the sweating horses should have a rest after their exertions.

In the hall he asked a footman whether Lord Blair were in, and was surprised to hear that he had not yet returned from the Sudan. Lady Muriel, he was told, was in the garden with Lord Barthampton: the man thought that they were in the alcove beside the river. Mr. and Mrs. Bindane were out driving, and the Secretaries had all gone home.

Daniel hastened through the house, and out by the door at the back. His legs were aching, but he went down the stone steps of the terrace two at a time,

and hurried across the lawn, his heart full of foreboding. He could not understand why Muriel should be entertaining his cousin.

At the rose bushes which screened the alcove, however, he paused; for the thought came to him with renewed terror that he might be an unwelcome visitor.

But, even as he came to a halt, he heard his cousin's voice, and for a moment he could not help playing the eavesdropper.

"Yes," he was saying, "you'll have to marry me, or I shall tell all I know, and then there'll be a fine old scandal. Come on, now, give me a kiss."

Daniel did not wait to hear more, but ran round the bushes on to the terrace beyond. At a glance he took in the situation. Lord Barthampton, his back turned to him, was endeavouring to take Muriel in his arms; and from behind the screen of his burly form, the girl's figure was partly visible, struggling to escape.

Daniel leaped forward and grasped him by the scruff of the neck, flinging him aside so that he staggered across the terrace. He saw Muriel's wide frightened eyes; and hardly realizing what he was doing, he put his arm about her.

She, too, forgot her relationship to him: she only knew that he had intervened between her and a half-drunken bully; and she clung to him, clung desperately, her hands clutching at his coat.

"What's the meaning of this?" Daniel exclaimed, angrily staring at his cousin, who seemed to be about to spring upon him.

"What the Hell do you want here?" Lord Barthampton roared, his face scarlet.

Muriel pointed her finger at the furious man. "You'd better go," she said. "Go and tell everybody whatever you like—I don't care." She turned to her protector. "There's a lot of gossip about my having stayed at El Hamrân."

Daniel stared from one to the other. "Well, and what is your answer to it?" he asked her, and, waiting for her reply, he seemed to hold his breath.

"I hav'n't denied it," she said, looking at him full in the face.

He uttered an exclamation, a sort of suppressed shout of joy. "Good for you!" he cried; and, forgetting all else, he snatched off his battered hat and flung it up into the air. Catching it again, he turned to his cousin. "I take it," he said, "that you are trying to blackmail Lady Muriel. Is that it?"

"I have asked her to be my wife," he answered, his fists clenched, "and it's no damned business of yours."

"Well," said Daniel, "you've got your answer now, so you'd better go."

Lord Barthampton was trembling with passion; he was beside himself. "Yes, I'll go," he shouted, "and you'll very soon find, dear Cousin Daniel, that you and Lady Muriel will be cut by all Cairo, and Lord Blair will have to leave the country. I know enough to ruin the lot of you."

Daniel looked at him steadily. "Don't forget that I know something about

you, too," he replied; "and if you do what you say you're going to do, I shall not consider you worthy to hold your present position any longer. And you've been drinking again, too: you're half drunk now."

"Very well then, dispossess me, you swine!" his cousin blurted out, coming close to him and shaking his fist so menacingly that Muriel took fresh hold upon Daniel's coat. "Take the title and the money, and be damned to you! I'd rather be a penniless bastard than the smug pillar of society you're trying to make of me. Good God!—I've stood enough from you, you pious hypocrite."

Daniel laughed aloud. "Don't be a fool," he said. "I've told you that so long as you behave yourself you're quite safe. It surely isn't so difficult as all that to be a gentleman."

With a snort, Lord Barthampton lurched round, and, without another word, took his departure.

Muriel stepped back. "I don't know what I'm clinging on to you like that for," she said, with a smile. "What on earth does he mean about your taking his title and his money?"

"Oh, I'll explain later," he answered, rather listlessly. "It's only that by law I ought to have inherited when his father died, not he. It's a great joke, because, you see, he thinks I'll dispossess him if he misbehaves himself; but, of course, really he'd have to go altogether to the dogs before I'd do such a thing. I don't want the bother of being a peer, and I would be hopeless with a lot of money."

Muriel looked up at him with wonder in her face. Quietly and naturally she linked her arm in his, "I've been wanting so much to be beastly to you, Daniel," she said, and her voice was husky; "but it's no good, my dear. When a man like Charles Barthampton curses you and tells you to take his money, and you simply laugh and say you don't want it, what chance have I got of upsetting this disgusting unworldliness of yours? I should only hurt myself, not you."

"No, you're wrong there," he answered. "You will hurt me more than I can bear, *more than I can bear*, Muriel, if you keep up this quarrel any longer. I don't feel that I can stand it."

There was a weariness in his voice which startled her, and, looking at him, she saw an expression in his eyes which made an instant and overwhelming appeal to her.

"Somehow," he said, speaking hardly above a whisper, "I feel that all these misunderstandings are so superficial. D'you know, I believe that if you were to remain implacable I should simply collapse. I've never felt such a thing before in my whole life."

It was the first time she had ever heard him speak in this way, and all her woman's heart responded. "Oh, my dear," she answered, putting her arm about his neck, "it's no good pretending that we don't belong to one another, is it?"

He looked at her with joy in his face, and led her towards the marble seat under the palms. "We've got a great deal to tell each other," he said.

They had, indeed, so much to tell that the sun went down behind the Pyramids while yet they were talking, and the dusk gathered about them.

At length they arose and walked back to the house; but now they were laughing like two children, and as they crossed the lawn their arms were still linked together.

Kate Bindane, having returned from her drive, was standing at the drawing-room window as they approached the house.

"Great Scott!" she exclaimed, turning to her husband. "Come here, Benifett: just look at that!"

He arose from his chair, laying aside the *Financial News* which he had been reading; but he gave no more than a single glance through the open window. Then he returned to his newspaper, and looked at it with listless eyes and open mouth.

Two days later a telegram was received saying that Lord Blair would arrive from the south by special train on the following morning at ten A.M.

Soon after breakfast next day, therefore, Daniel presented himself at the Residency to take Muriel to the station. He was dressed in a suit of grey flannels; and as he crossed the hall, he was carrying his now famous old felt hat in one hand and his pipe in the other.

Here, to his dismay, he came upon Sir Frank LeStrange and John Dregge, both dressed as though they were about to attend a London wedding, and carrying their gloves and silk hats in their hands.

"Great Scott!" he exclaimed. "What on earth are you rigged out like that for?"

"We're going to the station," replied LeStrange, somewhat stiffly. "Aren't you coming too?"

"Sure," said Daniel.

"I'm afraid you'll be rather out of the picture," remarked the punctilious Mr. Dregge, and he uttered a short laugh. "Two of the Princes, and most of the Ministers and Advisers will be there, not to mention the General in full war-paint."

"Gee!" muttered Daniel. "In this hot weather, too! I guess I'll look the only sane person on the platform."

John Dregge glanced at his companion, and he at him, as Daniel, waving his hat to them, went towards the dining-room to find Muriel; but they were too startled even to exchange glances when, at the door of that room, the Great Man's daughter made her appearance, and stood on tiptoe, holding up her face to be kissed by Daniel.

The scene at the railway-station, half an hour later, was very disconcerting to a man so recently come from the wilds; but Daniel either managed somehow to conceal his embarrassment or felt none at all. Upon the platform the inevitable piece of red carpet was spread, and under the draped British and Egyptian flags several frock-coated celebrities were standing, the Europeans wearing silk hats, the Egyptians the more becoming red *tarboushes*. A guard of honour of British and native troops was drawn up near the iron palings; and at intervals down the whole length of the platform stood brown-skinned policemen, their hands looking curiously farcical in white cotton gloves.

Muriel's cool pink dress, her shady hat, and her parasol, gave by contrast a remarkable appearance of discomfort and heat to the assembled males; and Daniel appeared to be the only man present who could turn his head or swing his limbs with ease. Strange to say, his unceremonious clothes were inappropriate only in European eyes. The native mind regarded them as perfectly suitable to one who was already recognized as a kind of court philosopher: a Mohammedan holding a similar office would probably have been garbed in the coarse robe of a *derwish*. It was thus noteworthy that while the Westerners regarded him askance, the Orientals greeted him with particular respect, so that even John Dregge presently began to walk beside him and to converse with him—in marked contrast to his earlier attitude of distant disdain.

At length the white, dusty train panted into the station; and the black-faced engine-driver, by means of a desperate struggle with the breaks, managed to manœuvre the entrance of the saloon to a reasonable proximity to the red carpet.

“Now for the little surprise for Father,” said Muriel, and suddenly she linked her arm in Daniel's, allowing her hand to rest upon his own.

Lord Blair, hat in hand, stepped on to the platform, and, at a sharp word of command, the guard of honour presented arms.

He did not seem to see the crowd of waiting dignitaries: he stared at Muriel and Daniel, a wide smile revealing the two even rows of his false teeth.

“Dear me, dear me!” he exclaimed, kissing his daughter's cheek. “My dear Muriel! How are you, Daniel? This is capital, capital! You two, arm in arm...”

“Yes, Father,” Muriel laughed, “we're going to be married, ... please.”

“Aha!” chuckled Lord Blair. “I knew it, I knew it! A little bird told me. Well, well!—I'm delighted. A Lane and a Blair: capital, splendid!”

Frank Lestrange stepped forward anxiously glancing at the native Princes. “Their Highnesses, sir, ...” he whispered.

“Ah, yes, to be sure,” said Lord Blair, turning to them, and holding out his hand. “I beg you to excuse me for speaking first to my daughter and my future son-in-law.”

THE END

Transcriber's Note

Spelling and punctuation inaccuracies were silently corrected.
Archaic and variable spelling is preserved.
The author's punctuation style is preserved.
Hyphenation has been made consistent.

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