

LE VOLEUR

FOR LOVE OF

A BEDOUIN

MAID

Le Voleur

For Love of a Bedouin Maid

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Содержание

INTRODUCTION	5
1ST EPOCH	9
CHAPTER I	9
CHAPTER II	11
CHAPTER III	20
CHAPTER IV	24
CHAPTER V	29
CHAPTER VI	33
CHAPTER VII	35
CHAPTER VIII	42
CHAPTER IX	47
CHAPTER X	52
CHAPTER XI	56
CHAPTER XII	61
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	62

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INTRODUCTION

"That will do; place the cigars upon the table and then you can go."

The speaker was Lord Throgmorten, a man of about thirty-six years of age, rather stout, with reddish hair and whiskers and cold, steel-gray eyes. He had just returned from a yachting cruise, upon which he had started upon his succession to the title about eighteen months before.

The scene was his lordship's chambers in the Albany, and the time the night of the 22nd of July, 1893.

Besides the speaker and the well-trained servant, who, in obedience to the order just given, occupied himself in fetching the silver cigar box from its accustomed place upon the sideboard, lighting the wax taper which stood by its side and placing them in front of his master, there were present two other persons. The man on his host's right near the fireplace, wearing spectacles and with the careworn look upon his features, was Mr. Percival Phelps, who had been his lordship's guest upon their recent cruise. He was a genial, dapper little man with inordinate vanity, and a slight stammer, when excited; with no income to speak of, save his stipend as a permanent clerk in the – Office, a position that, his host said, "suited him down to the ground."

The man facing him, and looking towards the window, though younger than either of the other two, was already coming into prominent notice and making a fair income as sub-editor of that popular paper "The Telescope."

When the servant had left the room, the young man proceeded to address his host in measured tones.

"Since I received your letter, I have been on tenter hooks to hear the story of this wonderful discovery. You wrote me only a bare line from Southampton on the 12th to say that you had had a pleasant trip, during which you had chanced on a most extraordinary find; and that you particularly wanted me to dine with you to-night and hear about it. Well, now the man's gone, you can fire off your intelligence. What is it: coins, fossils, bones, or buried treasure?" And the editor, refilling his glass with port, which he knew by experience was particularly good, settled himself in his chair in a less constrained attitude, and prepared to listen to his host's narration.

Lord Throgmorten's reply was to rise from the table and with Mr. Phelps' aid, to bring from the further end of the room a box—covered with a cloth—whose weight, judging from the efforts required to lift it, was considerable.

"There," said his lordship, reseating himself, "that is the discovery, and that," pointing to Mr. Phelps who, like his host, panting from his exertions, had resumed his seat, "is the discoverer."

"The s-s-story first. Tell the story," said that gentleman, stammering in his excitement, while Lord Throgmorten prepared to remove the cover. The latter acceded to the suggestion, and began as follows, addressing his remarks to the editor, while Phelps sat by, giving confirmatory nods by way of emphasis, when occasion seemed to call for it.

"You are aware that, last February twelvemonth, Phelps and myself started for Australia in my steam yacht the Osprey, for the purpose of visiting my property out there. With our voyage out my story has nothing to do; it was only when we had turned our nose homewards and on the 17th June that our adventure began. On that night we were sailing—not steaming, mind, because there was a fair wind and we wished to save our coal.

"This was the position of affairs at midnight when Phelps and I retired to our cabins. At five a.m. I was roused from my sleep by a commotion on deck and the cry of 'Land Ahead,' followed by

the order 'Hard a port.' I dashed on deck, on my way jostling against Phelps, who, like myself, had been awakened by the disturbance. On reaching it, we saw, rising out of the mist on our port beam, the rocky coast of an island; we made for the side and gazed over. To our horror, it seemed that we were almost grazing the rocks of a reef over which the sea was breaking. Slowly, ah! how slowly it seemed to us—all anxiously watching the line of surf which marked the treacherous rocks beneath—we passed them. A few minutes later we were hove to in deep water, the danger past; though, to this moment, it is a marvel to me how we escaped the rocks. I hailed Captain Soames, who was on the bridge, and asked him to lay down our position as well as his dead reckoning would permit, and, so soon as he had done so, to join me in the saloon with the chart.

"Then Phelps and I went below, where, presently, the skipper came to us. He unrolled the chart and placed his finger on a small cross, which we were able to distinguish by the light of the lamp. 'That, gentlemen,' he said, 'is our exact position marked upon a chart corrected to the most recent survey, and bought new, as your honors are doubtless aware, for the purposes of this trip. I beg your honors to notice that, by that chart, we ought to be in deep water hundreds of miles from any land. I trust, therefore, that you will exonerate me from blame for having so nearly run the ship aground.'

"Both Phelps and I assured him that we felt that our recent danger arose from no fault in navigation, but was an accident which no one could possibly have foreseen.

"Still the fact stared us in the face. The chart marked deep water, and yet we had, as nearly as possible, been wrecked upon an island that, according to the hydrographers, had no existence. When the truth dawned upon us, at first we both sat speechless, the skipper alone standing and looking from one to the other of us, as puzzled as ourselves. For fully half a minute we stared at one another, the unspoken question simmering in our brain, 'Whence comes this island?' the lamplight shining upon our faces, and the dawning sunlight playing through the open port hole and making ever shifting shadow patterns upon the cabin floor.

"Even now I can see myself with my eyes fixed upon the skipper's finger, which still rested upon the chart, and observing every stain and wrinkle upon it, though my brain was busy with the island.

"Phelps was the first to break the silence. 'Volcanic,' he exclaimed, and shut up.

"'Impossible,' I said, his voice rousing me from my reverie. 'There has been no eruption for ever so long of sufficient magnitude to cast up such an island.'

"Captain Soames's contribution to the discussion was the most practical of the three. 'Beg pardon, gentlemen, for interrupting your conversation, but would it not be better to go on shore and see for yourselves? Mr. Phelps here is a man of science, and they tell me he can say a powerful deal about what rock and stones are made of, by just looking at them.'

"I jumped to my feet exclaiming, 'The very thing. We will go on shore the moment they have got a boat ready. Stay,' I resumed, when the skipper, who had saluted, was about to leave, 'when you have made all ship-shape on deck, overhaul her below to see whether we have sustained any damage, so that, if necessary, we may make all speed to the nearest port to refit.'

"While the boat was being made ready, we had our breakfast; and, when we went on deck, the sun was shining brightly and a stiffish breeze was blowing, and the mist, which had before almost enshrouded the island, was gone, so that the latter could now be plainly seen. So far as one could judge from the deck, the island, seen through a telescope, was about a mile broad by three miles long, and, except for an excrescence in the center, entirely flat. Just abreast of the yacht, was a little inlet that seemed to offer a suitable landing place. We had taken our places in the boat and were about to shove off when the skipper called out to us to ask us to make our stay as short as possible, for that, should a heavy gale get up, he feared the anchor would not hold and we might be driven ashore. We, therefore, promised to make what haste we could, then shoved off, and began to pull towards the inlet. Before us was this barren rock, not a sign of life upon it, not even a bird; behind us the yacht rolling lazily upon an unending expanse of water. Short as was the distance between the ship and the shore, the journey was unutterably tedious owing to the terrific heat. But, in due course, we stepped ashore.

"Naturally the first thing we did was to make our way to the foot of the small hillock in about the center of the island. Here was a small group of rocks and on these we decided to rest ourselves; and very soon, overcome by our walk and the heat of the sun, I closed my eyes and went off to sleep. How long my sleep lasted, I cannot say, but I was roused by the sound of Phelps's voice.

"When I opened my eyes, I saw him hammering away at a small piece of rock as vigorously as if his whole life depended on it. I got up and walked towards him. 'What on earth are you hammering at now?' I asked.

"'Look,' he said, 'I started to break a piece of this rock off as a souvenir of our adventure, and this is what I found.'

"At first sight, it appeared to be a rock about two feet square and nine inches deep, buried partially in the soil; but, on examining it more closely, I found the cause of his excitement. The piece that he had broken off disclosed an iron corner.

"'There is something underneath,' said Phelps; 'the rock is only a deposit upon it.'

"An examination of the exposed portion proved the correctness of his remark.

"'I am going to get that out, whatever it is, if I work till dark,' he continued.

"At first I laughed at his enthusiasm, but it ended in my helping him. Armed with a fragment of rock as heavy as a blacksmith's sledge-hammer, I poised it above my head and, bidding Phelps stand away in case he should be struck by any fragments, I brought it down with all my might, upon the top of the rock. My improvised hammer split into bits with the force of the blow, but it cracked the rocky deposit sufficiently to enable us with a little trouble to remove it in pieces; and this is what was underneath."

Lord Throgmorten interrupted his narration to rise from his seat and withdraw the cover from the top of the box which stood upon the table in front of him. It was made of some dark wood, probably oak, heavily bound with iron at the corners and edges, the ironwork being of an ornamental character, but now almost covered with marine incrustation.

After examining the box from the outside, the editor asked his lordship to resume his narrative.

Lord Throgmorten went on. "Having got thus far in our exhumation of the box, the question was what next to do. Our first thought was to break the box to pieces and carry its contents to the boat, but here a doubt of what the box might hold prevented us. Phelps surmised that it was treasure.

"Our utmost efforts to move it proving useless we went back to the boat and told them to row to the yacht and get from the ship's carpenter tools for the purpose. In about half an hour they returned, bringing the carpenter with them. With his assistance, the box was raised from its rocky bed and conveyed to the yacht and placed in my cabin. On our return, the skipper told us that, so far as could be ascertained, we had sustained no damage; further, that his observation at noon had shown him that he had only an error of four miles to correct in the position he had marked upon the chart. This was satisfactory; so, there being nothing to detain us, we told him to get under weigh at once, and went down to luncheon. When we returned to the deck, the island appeared a mere speck, and, shortly after, the breeze being much in our favor, that too vanished below the horizon.

"Later in the afternoon, we opened the box, and in it we found these papers." Suiting his action to his words, Lord Throgmorten lifted the lid of the box and drew therefrom some manuscript, and handed it to the editor. That gentleman took the papers; then, putting his eyeglass to his right eye, looked inquiringly at his host and said, "Pray why do you hand these to me?"

"During our voyage home," replied Lord Throgmorten, "Phelps and myself amused ourselves with examining the papers. We found in them a story so interesting that we thought it ought to be placed before the world. This we ask you to do."

"Before I can give you a reply, I must of course, take the MS. home and examine it."

To this both the gentlemen agreed; and, shortly afterwards, they separated.

What followed is best told in the two accompanying letters, which passed between Lord Throgmorten and the editor, in the early part of the present year; by his lordship's kind permission, they are here transcribed.

I

To Lord Throgmorten,

*The Albany,
Piccadilly, W.*

Dear Algie,

I am now able to inform you that I have completed the task of compiling a story from the Manuscript which came into your possession in so extraordinary a manner. The events narrated in the MS. are highly interesting, as you remarked when you put the papers into my hands. In forwarding you the result of my labors, I leave you to apportion the merits and demerits between myself and the mysterious person who has vanished into the unknown whence the Manuscript also so marvelously came.

*Yours etc.
The Editor.*

II

*Y. Osprey,
off Cape Town.*

My dear Editor,

Many thanks for your letter and the accompanying parcel of MS. which came to hand by the mail quite safely last week. Both Phelps and myself render you our hearty thanks for the way in which you have performed your task, and trust that we shall be in England in time to witness the result. I shall, therefore, omit all news till we meet—except this. It will interest you to know that, on our voyage out here, we went out of our course, that we might revisit the unknown island from which we obtained the box with the MS. To our surprise, not a trace of it was to be discovered, though a reference to last year's log-book and a careful noting of our position told us that one day, at about 9:30 a.m., we passed within a quarter of a mile of where it had stood. Not a vestige of land could be seen, though a sharp look-out was kept throughout the search. When and how the island vanished is but a matter of conjecture; it is certain that it no longer exists, and, probably, has returned to the depths whence it came. Again renewing my thanks,

*Believe me,
Sincerely yours,
Throgmorten.*

1ST EPOCH

GENERAL BUONAPARTE

CHAPTER I

The march of civilization has been so rapid that most people know something of the City of Paris.

It is not, however, with the modern city that this story will deal; not with the gay, ever moving throng of boulevardiers that crowd its thoroughfares at night under the glare of electric light, the welcome product of this ever inventive and luxurious nineteenth century; but with Paris at the close of the eighteenth century; Paris before the era of Baron Hausmann, ill-lighted, ill-paved and, at this moment, noiseless and, for the most part, asleep. For it was the night of December 6th, 1797. The rain was falling fast, dripping almost in sheets from the roofs of the houses that overhung the narrow, tortuous streets, now deep in mud. At long intervals, where they had not been extinguished by the wind, a few oil lamps were suspended from chains, the fitful light they gave serving only to render visible the gloom.

An unpleasant night to be abroad; so thought two foot passengers who were standing under one of the afore mentioned lamps opposite to the Palais de Luxembourg, at that time the residence of the Directors of the French Republic.

"Pest on it, the night grows worse and worse," said the shorter of the two, drawing his long cloak more closely round him and pulling his slouch hat further over his eyes, to prevent the driving rain, that the wind hurled along, from dashing into his face.

"It does indeed, Vipont," replied the taller and older man; "only the importance of our errand would have made me stir forth to-night. Half past ten, as I live," looking at his watch. "Come, let us be moving; see, someone is approaching the Palace gate."

A lantern flickered at the moment in the court-yard of the Palace, its light gradually growing brighter.

"The Officer of the Guard, most likely, going his rounds," remarked Vipont, following his companion, who, without heeding the remark, was already splashing across the space that intervened between them and the light.

Just when they arrived at the Palace gate, the officer reached the street.

Then one of the sentries at the gate pushed the new-comers aside, saying, the while he presented his bayonet at their chests, "Pass on, good folk, you cannot enter here. Pass on, whoever you may be."

Seeing that they paid no heed to his injunction, the man was about to enforce it, when the officer came up and asked their business.

"To see Mons. Barras, the President of the Directory," was the reply.

The officer, a tall, good-looking young man with coal-black hair and eyes, laughed somewhat contemptuously. "It is impossible," he said. "You cannot be admitted at this hour. Come to the Levee to-morrow."

The tall man, who appeared to be the leader, Vipont not yet having uttered a word, spoke again, and his voice was loud and masterful. "I enter where I please, Sir. If you were not a stranger in Paris, you would know that I am the Minister of Police."

At this announcement, the young man fell back a step; for, in those days, to offend the Minister of Police was a dangerous proceeding, he being, next to the chief of the State, the most powerful personage.

"Pardon, Sir," he said, "I am, as you rightly remarked, a stranger in Paris, being an officer under General Buonaparte, at present commanding the army in Italy. My name is St. Just."

Matters being thus explained to the satisfaction of both parties, St. Just, first instructing a sergeant to take his place for the remainder of the round, conducted the Police Minister and his companion across the courtyard. As they approached the palace, sounds of hammering, proceeding from the ground floor apartments on their left, fell on their ears. Both the newcomers paused and looked inquiringly at their guide, for shadows kept flitting to and fro across the curtained windows.

Noticing their surprise, St. Just replied to their unspoken question: "The noise comes from the Chamber of Audience, which carpenters are fitting up for the public reception of General Buonaparte on his return to Paris, which, they say, may be expected daily."

No reply was given by St. Just's companions, nor, indeed, was there opportunity, for, by this time, they had passed through the central doorway and into the entrance hall. Here all was bustle, but subdued, out of respect for the occupants of the palace—the directors. Threading his way through the throng of soldiers and workmen, and closely followed by his companions, the officer mounted a staircase; then, traversing a corridor, he opened a door, that gave admittance to the antechamber of the President's apartments. St. Just crossed the room, and, parting the arras, knocked at a door, on the further side of which voices could be heard in conversation.

Taking advantage of St. Just's absence, the Minister of police cast his eye round the apartment. It was long and narrow, apparently having been partitioned off from the room beyond. It was sparsely furnished in the style of the late Louis Seize, the most noticeable object being a large table in the center, on which were spread the remains of supper laid for one, as was evident by the solitary chair, which the late occupant had pushed back on leaving the table. At the further end, the table service had been removed to make room for a large map of the seat of war (Italy), Buonaparte's route being faintly traced upon it in pencil. By the hearth, in which burned a small fire of logs, whose tongues of flame threw dancing rays upon the floor, stood a small round table, on which were an oil lamp and a book. Vipont picked up the latter and, reading the title, *Cæsar's Commentaries*, chuckled softly. "This is indeed the age of education, when officers read Latin in their leisure moments," he said sneeringly.

The Minister, who had drawn aside the curtains of one of the windows, received this observation in silence, occupying himself in gazing into the courtyard below.

At this moment St. Just returned and announced, "Mons. le President will receive the Minister of Police."

Vipont and his companion passed into the inner room, and St. Just closed the door behind them. Then, taking up the book which had called forth the Police agent's contemptuous comment, he soon became absorbed in it.

CHAPTER II

When they entered the apartments of the Directors of the Republic, the first thing that met the eyes of the Police Agents was a table laid, like that in the adjoining room, for supper. Those who had partaken of it were three in number. He who sat at the top of the table, facing the door, was Barras, the President of the Directory; the others were Co-Directors. He on the right with his back to the window curtains was Reubel, the man facing him La Reveillère. Now these three men had met together to discuss measures for propping up the power of the Directory, which, from various causes, one being the growing popularity of General Buonaparte, was on the wane. They feared what actually did happen later, though as yet few people had a suspicion of it; that General Buonaparte, in the plenitude of his power and popularity, might seek to oust them.

On the entry of the untimely visitors, Barras half rose from his chair, and, turning, addressed the Police Minister. "Sotin, you have brought news of importance?" Then he paused and glanced curiously at Vipont, who, abashed at the magnificence of his surroundings and the princely air and toilet of the speaker, shifted, uneasily, on his feet.

"Gentlemen," replied Sotin, "the President is right; nothing but the importance of my news would have brought me here at such an hour; I have it on the authority of my agent from Rastadt, on whom I can implicitly rely, and whom I here present to you," here he pointed to Vipont, "that it is the intention of General Buonaparte to quit Rastadt on November 15th and to arrive in Paris to-morrow night."

"Impossible," burst from the three directors in a breath, and rising to their feet, they crowded round Vipont and showered incessant questions on him, all speaking at one time.

So engrossed were they in questioning the agent, who, disconcerted at the novelty of his position, could only stammer his replies; that they failed to notice that the door was ajar, and that, without, hidden by the arras, was an unseen listener. St. Just, for he it was, had been attracted by the voices of the speakers. In their excitement and forgetful of the thinness of the wall that separated them from the antechamber, they had exclaimed, "Buonaparte in Paris to-morrow? Impossible!"

Anxious to hear more, St. Just had moved cautiously to the door, which, being imperfectly latched, had yielded at his touch. He had sprung back frightened, but, finding himself undiscovered, had crept forward again and now stood there listening.

"You say," continued Barras, who was the first to recover some measure of composure, "that Buonaparte is to leave Rastadt on the 15th November? How did you learn this?" addressing Vipont.

"By questioning indirectly the servants of the General," was Vipont's reply.

"If it is true," resumed Barras, turning to Sotin, "by what gate do you expect the general to arrive?"

"By the Porte St. Antoine," was the confident reply.

There was a dead silence for a moment; then Barras spoke again, and this time his voice was hoarse, as with emotion.

"It must be prevented; General Buonaparte must not enter Paris."

Again there was a moment's silence, followed by a sort of click. In his agitation at hearing these words, the unseen listener (St. Just) had touched the handle of his sword. Instantly he moved back noiselessly and stood within the window curtains out of sight. Those in the inner chamber started at the sound and, half drawing their swords, turned their eyes towards the door, with guilty fear.

Sotin was the first to speak. "See, the door is unlatched; perhaps the officer...." Then, seizing the door, he flung it open and peered forth. The lamp dimly burning left the outer room in gloom, but he crossed the floor and, going to the doorway opening on the corridor, looked up and down the passage. Nothing met his gaze, and all was silent, save for the distant murmuring of voices in the hall below. He drew back into the antechamber; then proceeded to one of the windows, the curtains

of which he pulled aside. The light of the moon, for the night had cleared, streamed into the room, but no one was to be seen.

"Bah! it was my fancy," he muttered; then, shaking his head as though still doubtful of what had caused the noise, he returned to the inner room. "The wind, I suppose," he said, at the same time closing the door.

Once more St. Just breathed freely. "If he had moved this curtain," was his thought, "France might have lost her General."

Again he moved forward and placed his ear against the partition. The act was futile. Cautioned by their recent fright, the directors lowered their voices, so that only scraps of the conversation reached St. Just:—

"A band of men Kill post boys witnesses dangerous Above all Buonaparte Highwaymen ... common thing who's to know? ... Sad great loss ... Public funeral Minister of police Hand bills No success Make certain...."

At this point their further words became inaudible. Then the sound of a carriage entering the courtyard caught his ears, and he moved rapidly, but noiselessly, to the window, and looked out. Below him was a post chaise drawn by four horses. He stood for a moment wondering. Who on earth could have arrived at this unseasonable hour: Carnot, the Director? Augereau, his general?

The next instant he had left the window and passed through the doorway and downstairs. At the foot of the staircase the soldiers in the hall had been drawn up in line. Two or three servants, with torches in their hands, were standing on the steps, while a soldier was opening the carriage door. The postillions were covered with mud, the horses also, and reeking and steaming with sweat; and the whole appearance of the carriage showed it to have traveled far and fast. A slight, short man, with pale face and long, auburn hair, and with eyes, that, without appearing to do so, took in the whole scene at a glance, alighted from the carriage. His dress was plain and simple; white breeches thrust into top boots, and a long, dark blue coat with a high collar. Round his waist was a tricolored sash and, suspended from a belt beneath it, was a sword. He wore a cocked hat which, after he had returned the salute of the soldiers, he removed.

The moment the light from the torches fell upon his features, all was bustle and excitement.

"Vive le General!" was the cry, "Vive le Petit Corporal!"

At these signs of recognition, a smile of pleasure flitted across the usually cold, impassive features; the next moment it died away, and, in a harsh, stern voice, he addressed St. Just who, with the others, had saluted him; "Officer of the Guard, conduct me to the President of the Directors."

At these words everybody present drew himself up into the stiffest of military attitudes; the soldiers presented arms, and, preceded by servants with torches, and escorted by St. Just, the newcomer entered the Palace.

Meanwhile, his arrival had been noted in the room above. Reubel from his seat by the window had, like St. Just, heard the approaching carriage. Nervously he peered from the window, which was sufficiently near the entrance of the palace for him to see the features of the person who had alighted. As one spell-bound, he gazed speechlessly upon the scene below. His companions, wondering at his silence, approached and joined him at the window. Even Sotin, at the sight of the figure, which he recognized at once, seemed perturbed; but only for an instant. Even while Buonaparte, escorted by St. Just, was disappearing through the doorway, he had made up his mind how to act. He turned to the others, and said rapidly:

"Mons. Vipont and myself will hide behind the curtain. Mons. Reubel had better remain seated where he is. When the visitor is preparing to depart, if President Barras will detain him in the hall, Mons. Vipont and I will dismiss the General's carriage, thus obliging him to walk home—which he will never reach. He will die on his way, as surely as if he were outside, instead of inside Paris."

"How?" asked Vipont.

"Cochon!" replied Sotin, "are there not footpads in the streets, and do they not commit murders nightly? Besides, shall we not be two to one? Hush, he is here."

Forthwith the two police agents glided behind the curtain. Hardly had they done so, when the door of the room beyond was opened, and footsteps were heard crossing the antechamber.

Dangerous as the movement was, Sotin's head was thrust out from the curtain long enough for him to whisper, "Messieurs, appear to be supping."

Even while he spoke, the door was opened, and St. Just entered and announced—

"General Buonaparte."

To all appearance, the General had broken in upon a friendly supper party. Barras, at the head of the table, was on his feet, a glass in his hand, as though about to toast the company. Reubel had pushed his chair far back, as if to give his legs more room, for he had crossed one knee over the other; La Reveillère, was peeling an orange and apparently awaiting Barras' toast, for a decanter, from which he had but that instant filled his glass, stood at his right hand.

"Gentlemen," exclaimed Barras, at the moment the General was announced, "I give you the conqueror of Italy!"

Then, when Buonaparte advanced into the room, Barras sprang forward to welcome him, his movement loosening his hold on the glass, which fell from his hand and smashed to pieces on the floor.

Reubel, either accidentally, or, perhaps, purposely, let fall the napkin from across his knees and stooped for it, so that he was prevented from rising simultaneously with his fellow directors to greet the General. As for La Reveillère, for one instant the thought crossed his mind to kill both the General and St. Just then and there—they were five to two—but it was as quickly put away; for, looking up, he encountered St. Just's gaze, sternly fixed upon him. Additionally, without, through the half open door, he saw the gleam of bayonets and instantly surmised the truth. Without his knowing or suspecting it, Buonaparte was guarded by two files of soldiers, who waited without in the antechamber, stern and motionless. Men who had fought under Buonaparte in Italy, and were in consequence devoted to him. They were, in fact, some of those whom Buonaparte had despatched under Augereau to guard the Directors in the recent revolt of the eighteenth Fructidor. Men, therefore (of whom St. Just was one), whom he knew that he could trust.

For his part, Buonaparte advanced not a step, but stood just inside the door of the apartment. Barras, on the contrary, rushed forward and effusively embraced him, shaking him by the hand and saying, "Welcome, General! welcome to France! You bring us glad tidings of glory upon glory!"

At this point St. Just left the room.

Buonaparte replied but coldly to Barras' fulsome greeting; then, merely nodding to the other two directors, he took a chair, seating himself with his back to the door, his face half turned away.

Barras and La Reveillère pressed him to sup. "Eat, General, eat; you must be hungry; you have journeyed far. Eat first, and let us have your news afterwards."

Buonaparte, thus invited, drew the nearest dish to him, and, as was his habit, began to eat rapidly, and, regardless of conventionality, passing from a conserve of prunes to meat, then back to a different kind of sweet, eating much in the aggregate and yet little of each dish, and hardly allowing one mouthful to be swallowed before taking the next. In fact, to put it shortly, he ate like a dog. Then, pouring himself out a tumblerful of wine, he swallowed it at a draught. Finally, he pushed the things from him and began to speak.

"Messieurs, the army has been again successful; the treaty of Campo Formio has been signed; liberty has been given to the people of nineteen different departments; French troops garrison Mentz, and the interests of France are secured by the congress of Rastadt." He paused for a moment; then resumed, in an heroic sort of manner, "Why should I declaim the glories of France? Why tell of the deeds her soldiers have achieved for her? Will they not proclaim themselves? Do not nineteen States speak for them? There," he concluded, throwing down a thick mass of papers roughly tied with scarlet tape, "There are the records."

There was a momentary silence; then the president, Barras, spoke. "I pray you, General, keep these papers in your possession till a few days shall have passed; for it is our intention to give you a fairer welcome than your present one, and to receive in a public and a more befitting manner, the man whom France desires to honor."

This he said for a double reason. *Imprimis*, should General Buonaparte's body be found in the gray light of the coming dawn, it could easily be arranged that to rifle his pockets should be the supposed object of the murder, and that the directors should in reality possess the papers about which a great outcry for their loss should be made. In the second place, should the plan fail, Buonaparte would be unlikely to suspect the members of the Directory of complicity in the attack on him, when they had but just expressed their satisfaction with him and had proposed to reward him for his services.

Buonaparte's reply to Barras' flattering remarks was merely to bow. Then he proceeded to discuss with them the attitude of England and the projected invasion of that country, and other matters affecting the welfare of France; matters, however, in no way concerning the actors in the present narrative.

Their business concluded, Buonaparte rose to his feet and, bowing coldly to the three directors, made his way towards the door. But, before he had reached it, Barras officiously sprang forward, saying, "Permit me, General, to accompany you to your carriage."

To this Buonaparte replied laconically, and almost rudely, "If you wish," and, opening the door, passed into the antechamber.

Motionless as statues, for two long hours the soldiers had stood, and now when the General—for it was to him more than to Barras that the honor was paid—passed between their lines, they presented arms. The scene was an impressive one, for every fifth soldier was holding aloft a torch, and, as the General moved down the room, the torch-bearers followed. Barras, who was almost as crafty as Satan himself, made St. Just, who was close to the top of the staircase, precede them, and engaged Buonaparte in conversation about his wife—whom Barras had met in former days—with the view of distracting his attention from those behind them, for he knew that his brother directors would follow with Sotin and Vipont, whom, of course, Buonaparte had not seen. They walked arm in arm, each with a director, Sotin with Reubel and Vipont with La Reveillère, their cloaks well wrapped around them. Meantime they discussed in subdued tones, so as not to reach Buonaparte's ears, incidents of the Italian campaign just told them by the General; their object being to make those present believe that they had accompanied Buonaparte. Thus, hoping to be mistaken for aides-de-camp, Sotin and Vipont crossed the ante-chamber and descended the staircase behind the others. At the foot of it, Barras persuaded the General to see for himself the alterations that were being made to prepare the Chamber of Audience for his reception. This gave Sotin and Vipont the opportunity of mingling with the crowd and subsequently gaining the doorway, whence they made their way to the General's carriage.

Meanwhile, St. Just had, by Barras' orders, accompanied General Buonaparte himself to the Hall of Audience. Here all was bustle and apparent confusion; carpenters armed with tools were rushing from one place to another. In one corner might be seen a group supporting a trophy of flags, whose battered appearance showed that they had recently arrived from the seat of war; they were now being placed at the back of a dais for the Directors, that other groups of men were erecting and decorating at the far end of the room. In other corners temporary seats were being fitted up for the accommodation of the Members of the Council of Five Hundred and for delegates from various public bodies, ambassadors, etc.

Barras dragged Buonaparte hither and thither by the arm, talking incessantly; St. Just, who, in his capacity of officer of the guard, stood in the doorway, followed the two figures with his eyes and meditated on the course he ought to pursue about the conversation he had overheard between Barras and his fellow-conspirators. Obviously, he ought to see the General privately before he left

the Palace, and warn him that his life was in danger. He knew, by having been at the entrance of the palace on the general's arrival, that Buonaparte was alone, and he suspected that, if a chance were given, the police agents would carry out the instructions of Barras. Unfortunately, he could not get near Buonaparte, who was never for a moment left alone.

Then St. Just reflected that he could warn Buonaparte's postillions; but here again he was frustrated, as will appear forthwith.

The General, having finished the inspection, returned in company with Barms to the doorway, and thence, preceded by St. Just, he made his way to the entrance hall of the palace. Lounging by the fireplace were La Reveillère and Reubel, to all appearance engaged in an animated conversation; but St. Just quickly noted that Vipont and Sotin had disappeared.

Suddenly, without deigning to notice any one, Buonaparte strode to the entrance door and called for his carriage. But there was no sound of wheels in answer to his shouts; plainly the carriage was not there.

To explain its absence, it will be necessary to follow the movements of Sotin and Vipont. The moment Barras and Buonaparte turned aside to the Audience chamber, they, wrapped in their cloaks, passed rapidly and quietly through the doorway of the palace and made their way towards Buonaparte's post-chaise, which had been drawn into an angle of the building, with the postillions curled up inside and sleeping soundly, tired out by the distance they had traversed.

Sotin cautiously advanced and peeped into the vehicle; then, satisfied as to the personality of its occupants, threw open the door, at the same time loudly and authoritatively calling to Vipont, "Show a light, sergeant."

Vipont, taking his cue, advanced with one of the carriage lamps and, throwing the light into the carriage in such a manner that it shone upon the sleepers' faces, while those of himself and his companion were left in shadow, shook the nearest by his arm. The young postillion started up and rubbed his eyes sleepily.

"Awake," said Vipont, "Mons. le Capitaine de la Garde de Mons. le President du directoire would speak with you."

"Dépêchez-vous, Sergent; Mons. le General waits," added Sotin behind him.

Soon the boy became thoroughly awake, and, in turn roused his companion.

In a gruff voice Sotin then told them they might go whither they would, for that Mons. Buonaparte was detained; but they were to return to the palace at noon the next day for their hire and attendant expenses.

The postillions grumbled slightly at having been kept waiting two hours for nothing; but their discontent was considerably mollified by the "pourboire" Sotin gave them.

They went to the heads of their horses and turned them and the carriage round; then mounted, and were preparing to start, when Sotin told them to wait. Advancing to the door, he flung it open and, followed by Vipont, who had rapidly comprehended the manoeuvre, got in, telling the postillions to drive to the gate and, if challenged, to say, "General Buonaparte's carriage." Once outside, they were to turn to the right and drive out of sight of the palace; then to stop.

Acting on their orders, and assuming that they emanated from the General, who did not wish it to be known that he was still at the Luxembourg, they passed through the gates without challenge, the carriage being recognized as Buonaparte's. Arrived at a corner of the street about four hundred yards away, they drew up, when Sotin and Vipont alighted. Then the carriage drove on, the two police agents remaining where they were, till it had vanished out of sight. Then, crossing the road, they retraced their steps to the lamp near which they were introduced to the reader; continuing their way, they arrived at a doorway of a house at right angles to the palace gates. There they ensconced themselves and watched and waited.

Meanwhile General Buonaparte was standing on the steps of the palace, surrounded by the Directors, all fulsomely apologizing and tendering suggestions. Barras at once offered to have his own carriage made ready, but the General declined it.

"Say no more, gentlemen," he said, "there is a stand for public vehicles close by, and the short walk will do me good. I am stiff from sitting so long."

At this point, St. Just, fearing for Buonaparte's safety, said in a loud whisper to Barras, "Will it be wise for General Buonaparte to walk the streets of Paris unattended? There are many abroad at this hour who would do evil." And he fixed his eyes searchingly on the Director's face.

Barras bore the scrutiny well, but, if looks could kill, St. Just would have died that instant.

Unfortunately for St. Just, Buonaparte, overhearing what was said, took the sentence to imply that St. Just thought he, Buonaparte, was afraid of walking alone at such an hour. So he turned to Barras with the words, "Mons. le Directeur would do well to teach his soldiers silence in the presence of their superiors."

Completely reassured, Barras addressed St. Just with the order, "get to your duties; we have no further use for you."

With that, the party moved to the gate, through which they passed, leaving St. Just standing in the courtyard. For a moment or so he remained undecided; then turned on his heel and went back rapidly towards the door of the palace. Passing through the hall and taking care that those who were still loitering there, should note his presence, he turned down a passage to the left. Opening a door on the right of this, he entered a guard room, and, by the faint light which shone into it, he selected a pair of pistols and a long cloak, which he flung round him; then retraced his steps to the hall and thence to the doorway, through which he passed. Wheeling round to the right of the building, he unlocked a door in the wall, and was about to step forth into the street, when he heard voices and footsteps near him. Immediately he recognized the voice of Reubel, though the moaning of the wind prevented him from catching all that was said. "Gone.... the other two.... on the opposite side.... will catch him at the turn of the road in the...."

St. Just waited for no more, but wrenched the door open, and dashed down the road at the top of his speed. Luckily for him, but unluckily for the two men lying in wait, the rain had ceased and the wind had cleared the clouds, so that the moon now shone brightly overhead, illuminating the street; for all that, once or twice he stumbled and nearly fell, so badly were the roads repaired.

On and on he ran, but still saw no signs of those he sought. At last he came to a large square, and here he paused for breath, and to consider his next step. It was evident he had missed the two police agents whom he believed to be following General Buonaparte. Then doubts began to assail him. Was he following the right road? that most likely to be taken by the General to gain his own house, which was situated, as St. Just knew, in the Rue Chantreine (afterwards Rue de la Victoire). For a moment he stood thinking and panting; then, anxious to lose no time, he was about to retrace his steps, when he heard a faint sound, like the cry of some one in distress, proceeding from a narrow court on his left. Impulsively, half hoping, half fearing it might proceed from those he sought, he dashed into the court, fear for Buonaparte, and excitement making his breath come short and fast.

This was what had happened. Vipont or Sotin, one of the two, creeping behind Buonaparte, had flung his cloak over the General's head and dragged him by his superior strength away from the street and partly up the court. His companion was, at the time, a few yards behind, and the General's frantic struggles to release himself from the strange bondage had necessitated the exercise of all his assailant's force to retain him in his grasp and force him out of the main street. No attempt had yet been made to kill him. But, at the moment when St. Just ran up, the man was shortening his sword to plunge it into Buonaparte's back; St. Just raised his arm; the crack of a pistol shot rang out upon the night; and the would-be assassin staggered forward and dropped upon the footpath, with a bullet in him. But so nearly had he achieved his purpose, that his sword, when he fell, made a long gash in Buonaparte's cloak.

The other, who had been coming up to help, seeing his comrade fall, and, with that, the failure of their plot, did not hesitate a moment, but made a rush for the narrow court, knocking down St. Just, who attempted to bar his passage; and, plunging into the darkness, disappeared.

When St. Just came to himself, which he did quickly, though the breath had been knocked out of him, he found Buonaparte bending over him and binding with a scarf a slight wound in his head.

"It is nothing, sir," he said, staggering to his feet, and feeling somewhat giddy. Buonaparte had asked him whether he was seriously hurt. "One gets harder knocks on the battlefield and marches; on—"

"You are a soldier, I see," interrupted the General, "and surely we have met before. Is it not so?"

"We have, General," was the prompt reply, and St. Just straightened himself and saluted. "I was with you through most of the Italian campaign. In General Augereau's division. I accompanied the corps home, when you ordered him to Paris. Lieutenant St. Just, at your service, General."

"You have seen service then, young man," was Buonaparte's sharp answer. Then, looking searchingly in the other's face. "Did I not see you at the Luxembourg; but now?"

"You did, sir, as officer for the day of the Guard of the Directors."

"And how comes it that you were so opportunely present when I was in such peril?"

"From certain words I accidentally overheard, I feared there were designs against your life, and I followed you. It was I who escorted you to the Directors on your arrival. When I heard you say that you would walk alone, I tried to warn you; you may recollect it, Sir, and that I was dismissed to my duties by the President of the Directors."

"I remember. I remember also that the President's words were prompted by my own. Lieutenant St. Just, I owe you an apology; more, my life. You shall not find me ungenerous or ungrateful."

"To have saved the life of the most illustrious soldier of France, General, is its own reward."

Buonaparte loved flattery, though he affected to despise it. "Your reward shall not stop at that," he laughed, "Walk with me now; we can talk of this attack upon me, on our way. One moment, though," and he kicked Vipont's unconscious body carelessly with his foot. "What are we to do with this carrion?"

"I will care for him; Voilà!" And so saying, St. Just dragged Vipont to the nearest doorway and, covering him with his cloak, left him. The body of a wounded—even of a murdered man—was at that time a common sight in the early morning in the streets of Paris.

St. Just leaning on Buonaparte's arm, they quitted the narrow passage and made their way back to the main thoroughfare. Here they were lucky enough to find a passing coach. This Buonaparte hailed. Then he told St. Just to get in and accompany him to his house in the Rue Chantierine.

During the drive, St. Just placed the General in the possession of affairs (so far as he knew them) at the Directoire. Buonaparte listened intently to every word that fell from St. Just's lips, and, though the faintness of the light prevented St. Just from seeing much more than the outline of his companion's figure, he knew from the tone of the other's replies that every word he uttered was being carefully weighed. He had hardly finished his relation, before the carriage drew up at Buonaparte's house. A few moments later, St. Just found himself following his host into a room in which sat Buonaparte's wife. Josephine sprang to her feet with a cry of joy. "My husband!" she exclaimed, throwing her arms around his neck. "I was beginning to think you were never coming. Bourrienne was here quite early in the evening and told me you would come to me immediately." Both Buonaparte and his wife were so taken up with one another that, for some moments, St. Just remained unnoticed. But presently Buonaparte remembered him and introduced him to his wife, to whom he made St. Just tell his story of the night's adventures.

When the young officer had finished, there was a momentary silence, during which Josephine and St. Just were thinking as was natural, one of the other, "how handsome he (she) is."

Josephine was the first to break the silence. Turning to St. Just with a smile, she said: "Sir, I thank you for your bravery and adroitness in delivering my husband from his peril. In return, if you

have anything at heart that we can forward, I am sure I express both his sentiments and my own when I say that we will do so."

"Madame," St. Just replied, "I am content in that I have been the humble means of saving your husband's life; of preserving a husband for you, but also her greatest General for France. Permit me to say in answer to your kindness that all I ask is, to be near the General in his campaigns now and always, in order that, while my life lasts, I may devote it to him."

Buonaparte rose to his feet and, crossing to St. Just, held out his hand. "Sir," he said, "you have earned from me to-night, not only my gratitude, but also my esteem, which I do not lightly confer, or, when conferred, withdraw. You have spoken like a soldier, and your sentiments do you honor. Your request to accompany me in the next campaign is granted."

Then Madame Buonaparte advanced to him.

"Mons. St. Just," she said, in her gracious manner, "to offer money to a soldier were an insult; for bravery and a sense of duty are beyond all price. But you may, at least, accept this little gift, as a memento of this night, and also as my witness to my husband's promise; for," she continued laughingly, tapping Buonaparte on the shoulder, "men, when they rise to power, are apt to forget those not so fortunate."

With that, she handed to St. Just a golden chain formed of a hand holding a heart suspended to it by a chain.

Bowing deeply, St. Just kissed the hand that held it out to him, as though she were already an Empress, instead of but a General's wife.

The action, theatrical as it was, delighted her.

Then Buonaparte interposed. "Mons. St. Just," he said, "in return for what you have done for me, I promise to do you three services, even to the sparing of your life, should you do aught to forfeit it; the promise to begin from now, and to remain in force till the end of my life."

St. Just bowed and thanked the General. Then he rose to go. Buonaparte pressed him to remain for that night, at least, in his house, urging as one reason St. Just's wound. At this the young soldier laughed. He had made light of this wound, removed the bandage before arriving at the house—so soon in fact as the bleeding had ceased.

"No, I must return to—my duties," he replied; "though, if the Minister of Police recognizes me, it will be a case of an underground cell in the Temple and then—" he paused.

"What?" asked Buonaparte smiling.

"Death," replied St. Just. "It was partly the thought of that, that made me ask you to let me be with you on your next campaign."

"But," said Buonaparte, "that may not be for months."

"No, no, sir," rejoined St. Just, "scarcely that, since you are about to inspect the forces for the invasion of England, in accordance with the plans of the Directoire."

"I had not thought of that," said Buonaparte. "In any case be assured of my protection; I will watch over you."

"And yourself, General. See that you do that, for Barras will not be gratified at his failure."

"I will take care of myself; but my time of danger is not yet. To-day is the 6th, is it not?"

"The 7th, sir," replied St. Just, glancing at a clock whose hand pointed to the hour of three. "We did not leave the Luxembourg till after midnight."

"True," said Buonaparte, smiling; "and the Directoire are to receive me publicly on the 10th, is it not?"

"That is so," said St. Just.

"Bien, I myself will tell Barras of the adventure that befell me; and I will watch the effect of my intelligence upon him. Till then, adieu." St. Just shook hands, first with Josephine, then with the General and, bowing, left them.

A quarter to four sounded when he reached his bedroom in the Luxembourg, tired out and suffering considerably from his wound.

CHAPTER III

Towards the end of April in the following year, a trooper rode into the courtyard of the palace. St. Just was standing at the main entrance. The man advanced to meet him and saluted.

"Lieutenant St. Just?" he said inquiringly.

"I am he," replied St. Just.

"I am instructed to deliver this, Lieutenant."

At the same time, he handed a packet to St. Just. Then, once more saluting, the man wheeled his charger round and trotted off.

With trembling hands and his mind strongly agitated, St. Just opened the despatch. His most ardent hopes were fulfilled. The document contained his formal discharge from his present duties and his appointment as aide-de-camp on General Buonaparte's staff. He was instructed to wait on the General at head-quarters for orders at three o'clock that afternoon.

To say that St. Just was overjoyed, would scarcely do justice to his feelings; he was mad with delight, and could scarce contain himself. By way of relief to his emotions, he indulged in a loud hurrah and threw his cap up into the air, for all the world as though he were only a common soldier. Then, recollecting where he was, and the extraordinary figure he must be cutting before his men, he replaced his cap on his head, straightened himself and made his way, as steadily as his exuberance would allow, into the palace, to hand over his command to the sub-lieutenant, preparatory to taking his departure.

With a soldier's regard for punctuality, at the stroke of three he presented himself at General Buonaparte's quarters, and was almost immediately admitted to his presence. The General was standing with his back to St. Just in front of a temporary table supported on trestles, and bending over a large scale map of Egypt and the surrounding country. Other maps and documents were spread about. He had a pair of compasses in his hand, and with it he was taking off the distances between the various places he had marked out as his route. At St. Just's entrance he turned round.

"Ah! Lieutenant," he exclaimed. "You are glad then to go with me to Egypt?"

"So glad, General, and so grateful, that I scarce know how to express my thanks. I—"

"Do not try then," interrupted Buonaparte abruptly; "nor are any due. Your appointment on my staff has not been made from personal motives, but solely in the interests of France, who has need of those of her sons who are distinguished for bravery and promptitude of action. From the circumstances of our introduction, I believe you to possess both. Further, I have made inquiries of General Augereau concerning you, and his report is eminently favorable. Your appointment, therefore, is the consequence of your own merit. But, if you still think any thanks are due to me, let them be expressed by deeds; by obedience, fidelity, courage, coolness and promptness in emergency; in a word, by unswerving devotion to France—and to me."

He shot a piercing glance at St. Just, as though to emphasize his words; a glance so keen and stern that the young officer felt that he trembled under it. But he replied, "General, you shall have no cause to regret your confidence in me. To my country I have dedicated myself body and soul. She possesses my unshared allegiance. I have no father or mother, no brothers or sisters. France stands for all these to me. To make her respected—aye feared—among the nations; to add to her glory, so far as my humble efforts can avail, is my sole ambition. If she demand my life, it shall be willingly laid down."

"Your sentiments do you honor, sir," said Buonaparte. "See that you live up to them. Now go, and make your preparations for departure. Present yourself here at daybreak on the third day from this—the 3rd of May—when we shall march out of Paris. Your horses will be provided for you. Till then, farewell." The General waved his hand towards him in token of dismissal, and St. Just saluted and took his leave.

When the young officer left General Buonaparte, he strode onward with a rapid, springy step, treading on air, as the saying is. At last, he thought, he had his opportunity; his fortune was secured. He was resolute to earn distinction in the career he had adopted; and, with the sanguine exuberance of youth and strength, he already saw himself mounting with nimble steps the successive rungs of the military ladder—Captain, Major, Colonel, Brigadier, General of Division; until he had attained the summit and found himself in command of an army, smiting the enemies of France—perhaps even rivalling the great Captain under whom he was about to serve. Such was the mental vision that gradually unfolded itself to his excited gaze. At this moment he had the most unbounded enthusiasm for the successful general whose marvelous achievements were the theme of Europe; the most absolute devotion to him. Later events will show how far these sentiments were destined to be lasting; for the present they were paramount.

St. Just had few preparations to make; having no near relatives, and being heart whole, there were no painful leavetakings; only a farewell dinner to his friends and intimate brother officers, the payment of a few bills, the purchase of sundry necessary articles, and he was ready.

At daybreak, on the 3rd of May he reported himself at General Buonaparte's headquarters, and, a few hours later, Buonaparte began the march that the great General hoped and believed would result in the adding of the land of the Pharaohs to the possessions of France. The advance guard had already preceded the main body.

The movement of troops through their own country—except when that country is in the partial occupation of the enemy—is seldom fruitful of adventure, and, in the present instance, it was wholly uneventful. St. Just had the opportunity, to a limited degree, of improving his knowledge of Buonaparte, also of becoming acquainted with some of his entourage. To his annoyance, however, almost immediately on their quitting Paris, a feeling of weakness and lassitude began to overtake him, despite his most strenuous efforts to shake it off. Day by day it grew upon him, until, by the time the army had reached Toulon, which they made on the 8th of May, he felt so prostrated as to be almost unfit for duty.

But he fought hard against his weakness; for all that, it was only by the exercise of unflinching determination to conceal how ill he felt, that he was not left behind invalided. He managed to hold up until the 19th of May, when, with Buonaparte, he embarked on board the Admiral's ship, L'Orient. Then, he broke down altogether, and was carried below. The army surgeons pronounced him to be suffering from low fever, and feared the worst. The efforts he had made to hide the real state of his health had aggravated his condition, so that his vitality was at the lowest ebb.

For more than a fortnight he lay oscillating between life and death; then a change for the better set in, and, from that moment, he began rapidly to improve, so that, at the end of another fortnight, he was able to set foot on the quarter deck, and breathe the pure, fresh air of the Mediterranean. Oh! in the relief, after inhaling the stifling atmosphere below deck, to drink in deep draughts of the ozone laden breezes that swept over the broad expanse of water! His spirits revived, and, once more, he felt that he had it in him to emulate his chief.

Wafted by favorable breezes, the gallant fleet sped on its way, until, on the morning of the first of July, the Admiral's ship sighted, in the far distance, the domes and minarets of Alexandria.

So the fleet was headed for the land. After beating along the coast for several hours in the teeth of a rising gale, in search of a suitable landing place, Marabou was selected, and at one o'clock in the morning of the second of July the disembarkation was begun. The spot was three leagues to the west of Alexandria.

The landing was accomplished with great difficulty, caused, not only by the roughness of the sea, but also by the attacks of the Bedouin Arabs, great swarthy fellows, who appeared in swarms. They showed marvelous horsemanship, circling round the French and making repeated dashes upon the right flank, and picking off many stragglers.

At three in the morning the march upon Alexandria began. The divisions of Bon, Kleber, and Morand heading the advance.

At the moment when the order to march was given, Buonaparte, who was mounted on a white horse—one of the six given him in Italy—turned to Kleber, and, pointing upwards to the sky, where a few stars still lingered before the advent of the dawn, as though loth to have their brightness veiled, said, "See yonder stars scintillate in token of our coming success; foretelling glory out of the clouds of trouble."

"Yet," rejoined Kleber, "they must pale before the glory of the rising sun." And he pointed Eastward to where a faint light showed the approaching dawn.

When Buonaparte appeared, the whole army set up a tremendous shout; cheer after cheer went up and, amidst them, the march began that all hoped and believed would result in the conquest of Egypt, but which to thousands of the sons of France meant but their grave.

After some hours marching under a dropping fire of musketry from the Arabs hovering around, and under a blazing sun, they arrived within gunshot of Alexandria. There was only a show of opposition to the French advance, for what took place was more of a skirmish before the gates than a battle. A few shots were fired, and then the Arabs fled into the city, followed by the French, some scaling the walls, and others making their way through gaps where the walls had been broken down, and through the gates.

Soon after their entrance, Buonaparte, who was attended by St. Just and accompanied by an escort of guides, had a near escape of being killed. The party was going along a narrow street, that but just allowed two persons to ride abreast; it was bounded at the end by a tall house. Those within were watching the approach of Buonaparte and his escort, apparently with friendly interest, when, all of a sudden, the party being about a hundred yards from the house, a musket shot was fired from one of the windows, and a bullet carried away the plume of Buonaparte's hat.

Instantly St. Just, followed by a sergeant of the Guides, enraged at the murderous attempt, galloped to the house, threw himself from his horse, scaled a staircase and rushed forward.

Two shots were fired at him by a woman who tried to bar his progress, one passing over his left shoulder and lodging in the arm of the guide behind him. Smarting with the wound, before St. Just could interpose, he cut her down. The other shot went through the metal ornament of St. Just's sabretache, and, striking on a button of his tunic, made him think for a moment that he was wounded. The shock made him stagger, and gave others of the Guides, who had followed, the opportunity of rushing past. Their blood was up and they were intent on revenging themselves for the shots fired on their officer and their comrade, and were in no mood to grant quarter. So that, when St. Just came up to them, he had the greatest difficulty in saving the life of a young Arab, who had been knocked down with the butt of a musket and was on the point of being sabered.

At some risk, St. Just interposed his own person, at the same time striking up the sword raised to slay the young man, who was then taken prisoner and bound.

Meantime the other persons in the house, recognizing the futility of attempting a stand, took to their heels with speed, and succeeded in making their escape from the back of the building.

So soon as, after a thorough search, St. Just had satisfied himself that the house was empty, he returned to General Buonaparte with their prisoner.

Buonaparte questioned the young fellow through an interpreter. At first he maintained a sullen silence, but, after a time, when he was reminded that his life had been spared, and was assured that the French had come solely to deliver the people from the tyranny of their rulers, and would reward and protect those who chose to give them information, his reserve and fear began to melt away and he became communicative.

He maintained that it was not he who had fired the shot at General Buonaparte nor, indeed, any shot. It appeared that the house belonged to one Islam Bey, the leader of a corps of Mamelukes.

Gaining confidence, the lad went on to warn General Buonaparte against Islam Bey, saying that this Sheik had sworn by the beard of the Prophet to take his life before six months had passed.

In the end, the General not only gave the lad his liberty, but appointed him to be his body servant, and afterwards, took him to Paris. The young fellow became a great favorite with everybody. His name was Ali.

Buonaparte stayed six days in Alexandria, issuing conciliatory edicts to the people and holding many conferences with the chief Sheiks of the city, many of whom had submitted to him. This was on account of the good conduct of the French troops. A few men of the first detachment, doubtless, began to plunder; but, the moment it was discovered such severe punishment was meted out as effectually to check it for the remainder of the French occupation.

On the evening of the third day after the French entry, St. Just received orders to take a detachment of five Guides and a native who knew the track to be traversed, and to start at day-break and make all speed to Damanhour, with despatches for General Dessaix, who was proceeding thither with an advance guard of nearly five thousand men.

CHAPTER IV

At early dawn, therefore, on the morning of the fourth day after Buonaparte's arrival in Alexandria, St. Just and his escort saddled and set out. They were accompanied by some Arabs belonging to a friendly tribe, whose chief was in the city and had offered his services to General Buonaparte. The force was small and both men and horses were picked so that they might ride fast and overtake Dessaix, who was already well on his way to Damanhour. At the last moment they were joined by a young subaltern of infantry in charge of a foraging party sent out in requisition of stores. The stores were to be carried by mules and it was the young subaltern's duty to convoy them and their drivers. St. Just found the young officer, whose name, he ascertained, was Garraud, a pleasant companion; and his men, who were infantry, fraternized with St. Just's troopers, the whole party for the first few miles marching along gayly, whistling and singing and chattering, as French soldiers will; but their chief topic of conversation was the shot that had been fired at the General on his entry into Alexandria. Garraud and his men had not yet been in Alexandria; so he asked St. Just for a full account of the affair; and St. Just gave it him.

As the sun rose higher in the heavens, conversation began to flag, both between the two officers and the men; for, although the march had begun in excellent spirits, the heat of the sun, which would shortly be at its zenith, made talking a fatigue, and movement alone sufficiently exhausting.

The Arabs only, mounted on their trusty ships of the desert, as they are wont to call their camels, seemed to be unconscious of the heat, as well as indifferent to two other evils the French severely felt, namely flies and thirst; to say nothing of the sand, which made marching horribly arduous. "Not good, honest ordinary sand," as an old veteran of Italy exclaimed, "but sand that penetrated through one's shoes and clothes, and made walking painful and tedious."

There was silence now for the most part among them all. It had lasted longer than usual, when St. Just, at last, broke it by inquiring in French of their chief guide how far they were to proceed before they halted. The old man turned his grizzly head round and gazed backwards, as though mentally measuring the distance they had already traversed; then up to the sky, as if seeking inspiration from this source. Finally he said briefly, "A league to the water, then three to the village, where my Masters sleep."

And so they plodded on.

At last, after crawling along in the boiling sun for two hours, they reached one of the stopping places indicated by their guide. There was a small pool of brackish water and there were a number of rocks standing out of the sand nine feet or more, behind which they could shelter themselves from the sun. Here St. Just called a halt. The men dismounted and tethered their horses; then gave them food and water. Afterwards they attended to their own wants and ate and drank. Referring to the water, one of the veterans, with the recollection of the luxuries of sunny Italy before his mind, remarked that one must march through the desert under a burning sun for hours before one would drink from such a hole as that before them; a pool that, in ordinary circumstances, one would not even put one's feet into.

Their inner man refreshed, they rested for a short time, and the Arabs and a few of the French began to smoke. St. Just was among these, for he had picked up this, at that time, uncommon habit from some Gipsies he had come across in Italy.

After an hour's repose, early in the afternoon the little company resumed its march; it was but a repetition of the morning's tramp; more heat, more flies, more sand, with thirst that seemed intensified, rather than appeased, by drinking the tepid, brackish water from the soldiers' water bottles.

By way of contrast, when the sun set, cold cutting winds sprang up that pierced them through.

It was late and quite dark when the party came in sight of the so-called village—a collection of mud-huts—which was to form their resting place for the night.

The advance guard under Dessaix had recently passed through the place, for everywhere there were signs of the presence of the French; but of inhabitants there were none. Worse still, half the huts were dismantled. Many portions of them had been torn away for fire-wood; but one was found after a careful search, large enough to shelter the whole party, with some crowding.

One man was posted as a sentry outside, and relieved every two hours. His duties were not only to give notice of the approach of enemies, but also to keep an eye on the Arab guides, who remained outside and who St. Just felt were not to be trusted.

The night passed without adventure or alarm, and the rest of the men in the hut was unbroken, so that they rose in the early morn in excellent spirits and with bodies refreshed. While the sky was still clothed in its gray mantle, and the sun had scarce given signs of his approach, St. Just and his escort recommenced their march, leaving the young subaltern, Garraud, and his convoy party to make their further way alone.

On the afternoon of the same day, they overtook General Dessaix at Beda. It was fortunate they had started so early as they did; for, otherwise, they would have been overwhelmed in a terrific sandstorm, which spent itself behind them and which they escaped by only one hour.

On handing in his despatches to Dessaix, St. Just received from him a sorry report of his command. Short as had been their stay in the country, the men were always murmuring; the heat, the sand, the flies, the scarcity and badness of the water had made them so discontented that the General had the utmost difficulty in keeping them in hand. They were mutinous, unruly, continually complaining of their lost luxuries. Even the officers complained. After a few days' rest, St. Just set out to return to Buonaparte, who, with the main body of the army, was to have left Alexandria on the 6th. Being anxious to join them with all speed, St. Just decided to travel all night. After marching for some hours and when darkness was setting in, St. Just, to his alarm, was informed by an Arab scout he had sent ahead, but who now rode back, that a large body of desert horsemen was advancing in their direction somewhat to the right of them. This was most unwelcome news. To wheel round and make an effort to escape, St. Just felt would be useless. Their only chance seemed to be to halt and wait until the enemy were close upon them; then to make a dash for it and try to cut their way through, and thus, aided by the darkness, to get clear away.

With this view, St. Just drew up his men as close together as they could stand. This mode of formation surprised the Arab guides, it being the custom of their countrymen to fight in a crescent-shaped wedge, a mode of formation Buonaparte found a strong one, when cavalry is massed in successive crescents one behind another.

Breathless, silent and motionless, the little troop remained drawn up, their ears on the alert for the first sounds of the approaching horsemen. Soon the tread of horses' hoofs, muffled by the sand, was heard, and the jangling of bridles and accoutrements. Nearer and nearer came the sounds. St. Just had given his men orders to make for the left, so as, so far as possible, to skirt the enemy, rather than meet them face to face; they were not to seek encounters, and only cut down those who barred their way; the main thing they were to keep before them was that they were to gallop for all that they were worth.

On came the Arabs. They had not yet discovered the French. A few seconds passed; then there was a shout, and the desert horsemen put their horses to the gallop and bore down upon the Frenchmen. Instantly St. Just gave the order, and from its scabbard flashed every sword; spurs were dug into the horses' sides, and they went off at the charge, meeting the fringe only of their opponents.

This was St. Just's first experience of a cavalry skirmish, his sole experience of warfare having been gained in an infantry regiment during the Italian campaign. But his horse was an old stager and used to the business; and he communicated his excitement to his rider, who felt himself borne madly onward with the others, without seeing which way he was going. There was a crash of opposing forces, a *mêlée* of Frenchmen and swarthy Arabs, all slashing, stabbing and hacking at each other, and parrying the blows dealt at them, as well as the dimness of the light permitted; and then St. Just

felt his horse pause in its career and begin to stagger; at once he knew it had been badly wounded. In a moment he saw what had happened. An Arab, facing him alongside, so close that St. Just could have touched him, had come at him full tilt with his lance pointed dead at him. But, either by miscalculation of aim, or by an involuntary swerving on the part of one of the horses, the weapon had missed St. Just and buried itself deep in the flank of his charger, the point even protruding through the buttock. Quick as thought, St. Just realized that, if once he were unhorsed in the darkness and in the midst of all this crowd, the life would speedily be trampled out of him. Possessed of great muscular strength, to which his perilous position gave added energy, he raised himself in his stirrups, flashed his sword high in the air, then brought it down with all his force upon the turbaned skull of his opponent. The blade was sharp and trusty and it was wielded by a powerful arm. It struck the Arab's head a little to the left of his crown, and, cutting its way in a slanting direction, came out below the right ear, slicing off more than half the skull. But the force of the blow was not yet spent. Continuing its course, St. Just's sabre entered his adversary's right shoulder and, in a twinkling, had lopped off the arm that held the spear whose point and a good portion of its shaft were still fixed in the French officer's horse. Then, feeling his charger sinking beneath him, St. Just drew his feet from the stirrups and threw himself on the Arab's horse, the collision sending the lifeless body of the rider to the ground. With the man's warm blood gushing over him, he realized something of the horrors of war. But this was no time for sentiment. Settling his feet in the stirrups of the strange horse, at the moment he saw his own poor steed sink to the ground, St. Just seized the reins of his new mount, wheeled him round with the powerful Arab bit, struck his spurs into his sides, and, finding no one immediately opposing him, dashed off at full gallop; whither he knew not, except that he was going west of his proper route.

St. Just traversed a few miles on the same course, and then, satisfied that he was not being pursued, he reined in his recently appropriated horse and dismounted, intending to remain where he was, until day should break. The docile creature seemed to know what was expected of it, and, with very little trouble, St. Just got it to lie down; then, passing his arm through the reins, he laid himself down beside the animal, which thus helped to keep him warm. The young officer tried his hardest to keep his eyes open; but, spite of his efforts, after a time, he dropped asleep. He was exhausted with the heat and his exertions.

How long he had slept he did not know, but when he awoke, feeling cold and stiff, the day was breaking, for in the East he noticed a faint gleam of light.

At first he was puzzled to account for his whereabouts. But, when thoroughly awakened and in full possession of his senses, the occurrences of the previous night came back to him, and he remembered he had almost miraculously broken away from a horde of Bedouins, after cutting down the rider of the horse he had seized.

But what had become of his escort—French and Arab? Carefully he made the circuit of the horizon with his eye, but not a sign of a human being, friend or foe, was to be seen. Nor, further within the field of his vision, turn which way he would, was a single object, animate or inanimate, visible: not a tree, not a shrub, not a rock, nothing but sand, that appeared to be without bound, north, south, east and west; St. Just and his horse, to all appearance, were the sole occupants of the desert. The stillness and solitude were awful in their oppressiveness and the young officer felt that only action on his own part would make them bearable.

He got his horse to his feet and mounted, setting out in the direction he believed to be that which would lead him to General Buonaparte's line of march. There was not a landmark by which to shape his way; only the first glimmer of light eastward.

He had proceeded in a northerly direction for about two hours, when he espied a solitary horseman in the distance, advancing towards him. Nearer and nearer came the figure, and soon St. Just was able to make out that he was not a native of the desert, next that he wore a French uniform and finally, with a cry of joy, that he was Garraud, the young subaltern from whom, with his convoy

party, he had parted at the so-called village where they had rested for the night two days before. At the same moment, Garraud recognized him, and both simultaneously urged their horses forward.

Mutual explanations were at once made.

It appeared that Garraud and his command had left the village a few hours after St. Just, following slowly in his wake. The first misfortune that had assailed them was to be almost buried in the sand-storm that St. Just had managed to escape. Hardly had they got over this, when they had been attacked by the very horde that St. Just and his escort had encountered. They had done their best in the face of tremendous odds, making a temporary rampart of the mules and their loads, firing over their backs and surrendering only when several of them had been killed and many wounded and all their ammunition had been exhausted, so that further resistance would have been useless. In the confusion, somehow, Garraud had managed to escape.

The spirits of both raised by companionship, they rode on side by side, hoping they were nearing Buonaparte. All day they marched, resting themselves and their horses occasionally, but with no food or water for either. It was just beginning to grow dark, when they descried in the distance the huts in which they had passed the night. When they reached the spot, darkness had closed over it. They could see no one, but the welcome challenge "Qui va là?" fell on their ears. The two men replied "Napoleon" and, at the same moment, a light was shown in their faces.

They found that a regiment of Chasseurs occupied the place and that General Buonaparte was with them. The main body was some few hours behind, and ought to be up before the morning.

Buonaparte's orders were that all couriers were to be conducted to him immediately on their arrival, so St. Just at once dismounted and, escorted by a sergeant's guard, made instantly for the General's tent. Two soldiers, with loaded carbines, stood before the entrance, and within could be seen the figure of Buonaparte writing on an old door, propped upon two blocks of stone to form a table.

At the challenge of the sentries, Buonaparte raised his head and saw the little group standing without. "What is it?" he said in a sharp, shrill voice.

"A courier, Sir," replied the sergeant, saluting.

Buonaparte saw and recognized St. Just, who was standing a little behind the soldier. "Ah, from the advance guard at—"

"Beda, Sir."

"Despatches?"

"Delivered, Sir; but these are the reply;" handing in those Dessaix had given him on his return journey.

Buonaparte opened them, glanced at them, then said, "Did you encounter or see any force on your way here? For, on taking possession of this place, we saw many stragglers about in the far distance, apparently part of a large body of Bedouins."

"I cut my way through a band of the enemy—how many I can't say—last night, losing all my escort. Afterwards I fell in with a French infantry officer, whose party had been previously attacked by the same force."

"How many miles away?"

"Between twenty and thirty, Sir."

"Good." Then, rising, Buonaparte walked up and down his tent for a few minutes, his brows together, thinking deeply and evidently forgetful of St. Just's presence. Finally he turned to his impromptu table and wrote a few lines. These he sealed and addressed to the General in command at Alexandria, then handed the paper to St. Just. "Deliver this; join me again as soon as possible."

"Alone, Sir?"

"Yes, unless you can find an escort from Alexandria. Stay! When did you leave General Dessaix?"

"On the 8th in the evening, Sir."

"This is the 10th. You halted last at 11 to-day. Have you a good horse?"

"Yes, sir."

"Set off at six in the morning; it is now ten."

"Yes, sir."

"Go then, in the name of France." St. Just bowed and left the tent.

CHAPTER V

At six o'clock next day St. Just set out, to plough his solitary way across the sandy desert. If it had been dreary on the first occasion, when he had the company of an escort, he found the sandy wastes, now that he was alone, almost unbearable. It was, therefore, with great delight that, after the first few hours of his journey, he encountered the main body of Buonaparte's army crawling like a gigantic snake across his path. But his satisfaction was but momentary, for the sights that met his eyes were heartrending. Horses in a lather of sweat from head to foot and scarce able to stand from fatigue and heat, were being cruelly urged with whip and spur to drag along the heavy guns and ammunition wagons, whose wheels were deeply embedded in the sand and could scarce be got to move. Ever and anon some of the exhausted animals would fall down dead. Then the guns would have to be abandoned, sometimes for hours, until a detachment of infantry had been brought up and transformed into beasts of burden by being yoked to them, when the sluggish march of the artillery would be recommenced.

Often St. Just passed men, who, overcome by fatigue, could no longer walk, and had been left in the wake of the army, to follow afterwards, if they could; if not, to die where they were, of thirst and exhaustion, under the sun's scorching rays.

Many of these poor creatures cried out to him piteously for help; but he was absolutely powerless to relieve them, and, moreover, was the bearer of despatches which he had been charged to deliver with all speed.

Here and there, half buried in the sand, could be seen the putrefying bodies of both men and animals (horses and mules and here and there a camel) that had died, some of want, some of fatigue, some of illness, and a few of Arab wounds. In some cases only a few whitening bones remained of what a few hours before had been creatures instinct with activity and life; the loathsome vultures having picked off all the flesh.

Towards night he halted and, wrapping his cloak around him, he laid himself on the ground, his head resting on his horse's shoulder, the reins tightly knotted to his wrist, and soon dropped asleep, awakening only with the dawn. The next day he met with a terrible disappointment. On gaining the pool where he had intended to give his horse a drink and to replenish his own water-bottle, he found it dry, the marching army having drained it of every drop. With his tongue almost rattling in his mouth, so parched was it, and his poor horse in the same condition, he was riding on dejectedly, when, happening to cast his eyes around, he noticed a cloud of dust upon his left. The French could scarcely be in that direction; the disturbance must be due to Bedouins. At all hazards he must avoid capture; should his despatches fall into the enemy's hands, the consequences would certainly be serious, and might be fatal. He urged his jaded, thirsty steed to pace its best, and the noble animal responded bravely to his call.

He managed to escape the desert horsemen, but this would have availed him little, had not assistance come, for both man and horse were thoroughly pumped out and could proceed no further. St. Just felt his charger sway beneath him, and, to avoid falling with him, threw himself from the saddle only a moment before the exhausted animal rolled over. Then, just when he had resigned himself with all the philosophy he could command to the consciousness that, in a few hours at most, the carrion desert birds would be stripping the flesh from his bones and from his horse's, he heard a muffled tread, and, shortly afterwards, a troop of French Hussars, who were bringing up the rear guard, came in sight.

Seeing the exhausted condition of both rider and horse, and learning from St. Just that he was the bearer of important despatches from Buonaparte to General Kleber at Alexandria, the officer in command of the troop rendered the young aide-de-camp all the assistance in his power and

detailed two of his troopers to accompany him on his journey, and to return with him to Buonaparte's headquarters.

After a few hours' rest and a supply of food and water, the young officer and his horse were sufficiently restored to proceed upon their way, and, on the fifth day after leaving General Buonaparte, he, accompanied by the two hussars, entered Alexandria and delivered his despatches to General Kleber.

Two days after, St. Just, with the two hussars for escort, left Alexandria for the second time, bearing reply despatches from Kleber to Buonaparte, and made his way as rapidly as he could to Damanhour, where he expected to find the Commander-in-Chief. This place he reached in two days, but only to find that Buonaparte had gone forward towards Cairo. So St. Just had to follow.

It was reported by patrols that Mourad Bey, who had been recently defeated at Chebreissa, had posted skirmishers on the route to Cairo, to harass, even if they could not check, the French advance.

St. Just, therefore, asked for and obtained from the officer in command at Damanhour, an escort of thirty-three men, in addition to the two he already had, the troopers detailed for the purpose being selected from the squadron that had succored him when in such distress on his way to Alexandria.

Thus accompanied, he pushed on as fast as the horses could be made to go; for this carrying of despatches long distances in such a country was becoming irksome to him, and he longed to be fighting battles again, as he had fought when a lieutenant in Italy under Augereau.

Early on the morning of the 21st, St. Just and his troopers came to a village, where, they had been told by the French commandant at the last post, they would find remounts. Here reports reached them that Buonaparte was heavily engaged at Embabe, the next village, hard by those wondrous pyramids which had been built in the past ages of Egypt's glory.

At this news, they hurried forward; and soon could hear the distant sounds of musketry and cannon borne from afar upon the still, clear air. Both men and horses were excited by the noise and, though it was necessary to husband the strength of their fresh mounts, for they might have to take part in the action then proceeding, the men were bent upon joining their comrades with all speed.

Their route lay a little to the left, the Nile being on their right; but, judging from the firing that the French were occupying a portion of the road to Gizeh, St. Just and his men rode to the right, so as to cut off an angle.

It was now noon and the sun's rays were beating down pitilessly upon their heads when they came upon the first signs of the conflict.

They had drawn up their panting horses upon a little knoll to recover their wind, before bearing their riders on to the battle field below; and St. Just, on dismounting, had plenty of leisure to observe the scene. Ordering his hussars and their horses to lie down, that they might be as little conspicuous as possible, St. Just crept forward and, gaining a point of vantage, watched the movements of the combatants. Thick clouds of smoke, through which at frequent intervals could be seen streaks of flame, followed by the report of guns, hovered over the Frenchmen on his left; while, on the right, gleaming in the sunlight, were the tents of the Mameluke camp. Beyond, rose the distant banks of the Nile, and further away the huts of Boulac, a suburb of the city of Cairo. Dotted about the plain were swarms of Arab horsemen, their bright mail sparkling. A body of them were massing into formation in a last attempt to break the French squares.

St. Just had seen enough. It was plain to him that, so soon as the sun should have declined, General Buonaparte, knowing that the horses of the Mamelukes must be tired from their repeated charges, would launch his cavalry against them in the hope of cutting in two the mass of horsemen. Accordingly, he resolved to try to gain the French lines; but, to do so, it would be necessary to cut their way through a body of the enemy who were drawn up between them and their goal. Creeping cautiously back to his men, he gave the order to mount. Then, having drawn them up four deep in a square, he put himself at their head, and led them round the further side of the knoll; then bade them charge the Mamelukes. When within forty yards of the opposing squadron, the hussars fired

their pistols, then, like a torrent, dashed upon their enemy. Now, though the charge was a courageous act, it was also a very foolish one, for their foes were quite a hundred strong, and considering that the hussars' pistols had been fired at the gallop, certainly not more than twenty out of the possible thirty-six shots could have killed a man apiece, and probably not half that number. For thirty-six men to attack nearly, if not quite, a hundred, was a reckless act; but St. Just's blood was up, and so they charged. He hardly knew what followed, except that there was a general *mêlée* and clashing of weapons; then, somehow, he found himself on the ground. His next impression was that he was being pulled to his feet, and that a French voice was saying in his ear, "Diable! Monsieur, that was a fine charge; but I thought none of you would have come out of it."

St. Just, whose head was still confused, stumbled up, and found himself in the midst of a squadron of the Guards, and that the person who had addressed him was the young lieutenant in whose company he had ridden on his first journey across the desert.

"Ah, Garraud, my friend, we are quits now; I pulled you through last time; your men have done the same for me on this occasion."

"It's superb!" The exclamation was drawn from both by the magnificently reckless way their enemies were charging. Men were falling in heaps around them. One man at their feet had just had his stomach ripped up with a curved sword, and lay shrieking in his agony, while his intestines gushed out upon the ground. A stallion, badly hurt, was biting and tearing the wounded men around him; while, across his body, five of the barbarians were fighting tooth and nail within arm's length of the square. Here again could be seen men hurling themselves and their horses upon the French bayonets, dying agonizing deaths only too gladly, if, for one instant, they could find themselves within the square.

Meanwhile St. Just had not been idle. A man was advancing from amidst the host of warriors, apparently bearing a charmed life. He was mounted upon a splendid gray stallion, whose beauty aroused the envy, as much as the superb horsemanship and courageous bearing of the rider excited the admiration of St. Just. The youthful warrior, having failed to break the square, retired for a few yards, then coming on with a yell, he leaped it and landed in the center. But he paid for his rashness with his life. Almost before the horse's feet had touched the ground, St. Just had fired. The next instant, he had mounted the Arab's horse, and shouting "Au revoir! I am off to Buonaparte," in imitation of the late owners tactics, he leaped out of the square.

A roar of despair and rage went up from the opposing Arabs, but almost instantly it was drowned by a ringing cheer from the French. St. Just landed upon a group of horsemen who were being charged, at the same instant, by Dessaix and his cavalry.

"El J: The fiend!" the Bedouins cried, at his sudden appearance in their midst, smiting right and left, his horse almost as excited as himself.

Utterly demoralized, their superstition, for the moment, getting the better of them, they could make no stand against the French, who rode them down like sheep. Though falling by hundreds, the French cavalry accomplished their mission and separated the two bodies of Mamelukes, thus relieving the hard pressed guns.

And so the fight went on; frenzied now, on the Mamelukes' part, for they were fighting in despair. Another hour and they were flying, leaving Buonaparte master of the way to Cairo.

Meanwhile St. Just had ridden past the rear of the French army and was making for the center, where he found Buonaparte sitting motionless on his horse, watching the battle. St. Just—both he and his horse begrimed with dust—presented himself before the General, a little pale with fatigue, and with a slight sword cut on his cheek, his head bare, and his saber-tache riddled with bullets. But his eyes were sparkling with success when he handed to Buonaparte his despatches. "From General Kleber, Sir, from Alexandria."

Buonaparte continued to fix his eyes upon the battle and made no attempt to open the papers, holding them in one hand, while, with the other, he placed a telescope to his eye. No one spoke, all intently watching the man who, it was beginning to dawn on them, was no ordinary general.

At last he spoke. Turning to an aide near him, he shut up his field glass with a snap. "Tell the right wing to charge." Then, addressing himself to the others, "Gentlemen, the battle is ended; we can march upon Cairo to-morrow. You, Sir," addressing St. Just, "I thank in the name of France and of the Army."

And, even while he spoke, the sun hid itself below the horizon, and the pall of coming night settled upon the field of blood and the disheartened enemy now in full retreat.

CHAPTER VI

Throughout the night of the 21st of July, the darkness was intermittently illumined by the flashes of musketry which from time to time resounded from the direction of the village of Gizeh, whither Mourad Bey had retreated with the remainder of his Mamelukes—about two thousand—leaving his infantry to their fate in the intrenched camp on the bank of the Nile. St. Just passed the night under the shadow of the sphinx, having, like many others, no proper place of rest—for the army was without tents—and too tired to think of anything but sleep.

Early on the following morning he received the order to mount and proceed at the head of a squadron of Guides, about fifty strong, to help the detachment which was pressing on towards Gizeh, and, if possible, afterwards to advance to Cairo. Accordingly, mounted on the gray stallion which had stood him in such stead on the previous day, he placed himself at the head of his squadron and set out at a smart trot for Gizeh. The infantry, who were attacking the place, and to whose aid he had been sent, had found great difficulty in advancing, for the road to Gizeh had been one of the hottest points in the battle of the previous day. At last, however, the outskirts of the village had been reached, and here it was that St. Just and his Guides came up with them. Mourad Bey made repeated dashes, hoping to lead to victory the dispirited remnants of his followers; but it was not to be; St. Just and his Guides hurled themselves through the sea of fire—the blazing houses—that separated them from the enemy's ranks. Despite the clouds of pungent smoke and the myriads of sparks that fell upon them, they forced their way, supported by the infantry who had taken fresh heart at their arrival, with such vigor that, after a short but sharp encounter, they put the Mamelukes to rout. That night General Buonaparte slept at Gizeh in the Bey's country house.

St. Just and his troopers, now reduced to thirty, followed in the Bey's track to the Nile bank, but were prevented from crossing the river by the destruction of the bridge of boats that had led to the Mameluke fleet. Thus checked in his advance, he rested his men in a hut hard by the river side, while he considered what course he should pursue.

Before he had come to a decision, he noticed a good deal of activity on board the vessels in the river, and that, from some of them, smoke was beginning to ascend. Instantly he understood what was going on. They were firing them, to prevent their falling into the hands of the French.

Now St. Just concluded that, if the Egyptians thought the vessels worth the burning, there must be valuable cargo on board, and that they were worth the saving. Forthwith he resolved to do his best with that intent.

Leaving half his men and all the horses, posted at the hut, he marched on foot with the remainder to the river. Several boats were moored along the bank, and one of these they seized, and in it they rowed down the river towards the burning dahabeahs, St. Just's intention being to cut some of them adrift, in the hope of afterwards capturing them.

But he had reckoned without his host, for the vessels had been too successfully set alight. There was a strong wind blowing, and the flames and smoke were such that he could not get near enough to cast the vessels from their moorings. Again and again he and his brave men renewed the attempt, but only to be as often driven back by the scorching heat. But, worse even than the flames, the enemy, who had marked them while they were some distance from the vessels, poured in a deadly fire of musketry. One by one his men kept dropping, and St. Just soon saw that it was no longer a question of capturing the enemy's ships, but of saving their own lives.

Meanwhile the ships burned furiously, producing such a light that the French troops at Gizeh could see dimly amid the crimson gleams the distant minarets and gilded cupolas of Cairo.

St. Just gave orders to row back to their starting point, close to which he had posted the remainder of his troop.

But soon he found that their retreat in that direction was cut off; for, while he and his men had been busy trying to cut adrift the burning, as well as the yet unlighted, dahabeahs, swarms of Arabs had put off in boats and had collected in their rear.

To turn the boat's head round and row towards Cairo seemed the only thing to be done, and even the risk of this was terrible, their safety depending upon General Buonaparte's having captured the city. His fifteen men were now reduced to eight, seven having fallen beneath the Mamelukes' fusillade. St. Just sat in the stern of the boat steering, pondering meanwhile on the peril of their situation and their chances of escape. He knew that some of the French troops were already moving on Cairo; and, from scraps of conversation picked up round the camp fires on the previous night, he entertained little doubt that Buonaparte would enter the city, either by storming it, or otherwise, at dawn on the following day.

Now if he, St. Just, could get into Cairo, with his men, unseen, and quietly take possession of some house, they would probably be able to maintain themselves secure in it till General Buonaparte's arrival. And this was what he set himself to do. But how to do it was the difficulty. The light from the conflagration on the river was so great that, were they to attempt to land in their French uniforms, they would be instantly discovered by the lawless and turbulent hordes scattered up and down the river banks, plundering and fighting and murdering in all directions, and would be quickly set upon, overcome and killed.

Their position was desperate, and desperate remedies were required; and the plan St. Just evolved was desperate, and depended also on chance for its accomplishment. Having explained it to his men, he ordered them to lie up under the shadow of some vessels moored in mid-stream and as yet untouched by the fire, just keeping the boat from drifting, and to wait for the chance of capturing a passing boat with Arabs on board, his intention being to massacre the crew for the sake of their clothes, which his own men would then put on; then they were to watch their opportunity to get ashore in the confusion that everywhere prevailed.

There is an old proverb to the effect that all things come to those who wait, if they but wait long enough; and so it was in this case. The men were sitting listlessly, tired of their inactivity, when a sudden cry brought them back to attention. Bearing down upon them was a large boat manned by about a dozen Arabs. A shaft of light cast from some burning wreckage floating by upon the encrimsoned waters in their direction, had betrayed to the approaching boat that in one of their own craft were some of the hated invaders. It was their fierce cry that awakened St. Just and his crew to a conviction of their danger. Ping! Ping! went the bullets from the Arab matchlocks, and at the same moment St. Just shouted, "Only two men row; the rest lie in the boat and fire at the Arab rowers. Take careful aim and don't throw away a shot. Your lives depend upon it."

The men obeyed at once. Crack, crack. Two of the Frenchmen had fired, and two of the Arabs threw up their arms and fell in a huddled heap at the bottom of their dhow. Almost immediately a wild volley was fired by the Arabs, and one of the Frenchmen, whose head had been exposed to the light, toppled over the side of the boat into the Nile, a bullet in his brain; giving his comrades a brief view of his face, ere he sank beneath the waters in the ruddy light.

St. Just's measures were prompt and decisive, and his voice rang out like a clarion on the night. "A volley, all of you; then pick up your oars and row for them as hard as you can go."

The order was as promptly obeyed. The seven shots flew straight and, before the Arabs could recover from the confusion they had occasioned, the French picked up their oars, crashed into them and boarded them. A few moments later, there drifted down the Nile an empty boat; while, pulling for the distant domes, which marked the city of Cairo, were eight men dressed as Arabs and speaking French.

CHAPTER VII

The flames from the burning vessels on the river wrapped the city of Cairo in a lurid glow, and above it hovered a cloud of smoke, but which the breeze that heralds the approach of dawn, was gradually, though almost imperceptibly dispersing. The air was rent with cries and groans and yells. The thoroughfares were thronged with the panic-stricken citizens. Some, laden with goods, were fleeing with their families into the desert towards Philiae; others, their clothes torn and blood-stained, their muskets still in their hands, their dress proclaiming them to be soldiers who, routed in that day's fight, had fled for refuge to the city, were occupying themselves with pillaging the houses of the merchants.

In marked contrast to the general glare and din, one little narrow side street near the citadel remained wrapped in gloom and silence. Running parallel to the river, as it did, the houses on its river side shut out the light of the conflagration and only a faint reflection was visible overhead.

Hugging the walls of the houses on one side of this court—for it scarce merited the name of street, so narrow was it—St. Just and his followers, enveloped in "haic" and "burnous," crept stealthily and silently along. No one was about, nor was a light to be seen in any of the houses.

So far their venture had been successful; aided by the semi-darkness and the confusion that was prevailing in the busier parts of the city, where the crowd had drawn together, St. Just had managed to run his boat ashore on an unfrequented spot and to land unnoticed. Then separating, the better to escape observation, but still keeping close enough together for mutual help, should they be attacked, they had made their way towards the citadel and had joined a mob that was pouring into its gates. At that point, however, St. Just had turned aside to investigate the little street which seemed deserted.

He and his men had almost reached the top, when, suddenly, a piercing shriek rang out upon the stillness of the night. It came from a house St. Just was passing. He halted instantly; then, in the shrill and fearsome tones of a woman, came some words in Arabic. Now, during the few weeks the young officer had been in Egypt he had, in his journeyings with despatches, contrived to pick up a few words of Arabic; and the knowledge thus acquired now stood him in good stead. Thus he could translate the woman's cry, "Let me go; Yusuf, let me go!"

What Frenchman could listen unmoved to such a call for help? Certainly not St. Just. In a whisper, he told the man next to him to close up and pass the same order on from each man to the one behind him. Then he cast his eyes up and down the house; it was a tall stone building and white-washed, and was windowless, save that high up from the ground were a few square holes protected by bars of iron. A strong iron-studded door, set deep in a stone archway, formed the entrance to this house.

Earnestly as St. Just desired to go to the rescue of the shrieking woman, the door was too strong to be forced, except after continued and strenuous efforts, and there was no other possible entrance from the front. He was debating whether to try to make his way round to the back of the house, in the hope of there finding a means of getting in, when, all at once, the heavy door swung open, and a swarthy Arab came out, bearing on his shoulders a woman, who was either dead or senseless, for she made no movement. With the opening of the door, the light from within fell upon St. Just and those behind him, disclosing to the man's astonished eyes that they were not Arabs, but Frenchmen. St. Just made a forward movement; the Arab hesitated for a moment, then dropped his burden and turned and fled into the house again.

St. Just's action was speedy. Fate seemed to be playing into his hands. Here was a house that might serve them for a refuge and that, to all appearance, could be defended for some hours, at any rate, by the small body of men he had at his disposal. At once he decided to take possession of it. Turning to the two nearest men, he said, "Pick up the woman, and take her inside." Then to the others, "Follow me, then close the door and make it fast."

His orders were promptly carried out. Then the party—two of them bearing the still unconscious woman—traversed the length of a narrow passage lighted by a small brass lamp that hung from the ceiling. At the end of this they found themselves in an open court, in the center of which a marble fountain was playing, the water falling into the basin with the sound of gentle rain, and moistening the air with its tumid spray.

At the further side of the courtyard was a colonnade, and above it were the latticed windows of the women's apartments, now open. But no dusky beauties peeped from them, nor was there any sign or sound of life; the whole place was silent as the grave.

Leaving one man as a sentry in the corridor, and despatching four to make a thorough search of the premises, St. Just told the two who were carrying the woman, to lay her down on a marble seat under the colonnade. This done, he set himself to restore her, if so be that she still lived. There were signs that she had struggled with her abductor, for, half way across the courtyard, they found a richly embroidered shawl and a jeweled dagger. A short examination showed St. Just that the woman breathed, and he could find no marks of injury about her. He sprinkled water on her face and fanned her and rubbed her hands; but, despite all his efforts to revive her, she remained insensible.

St. Just was still thus occupied, when the four men he had sent on a tour of inspection through the house, returned, each carrying a lighted lantern, to report that they had found not a soul about the place, though, from the appearance of the rooms, it was plain that the inmates had but recently vacated them.

While receiving his men's report, St. Just had temporarily stayed his efforts to revive the fainting woman, and had faced the troopers. Now he looked to her again. The men had turned their lanterns on her; her headgear had fallen to the ground, disclosing to the young officer's astonished gaze a face of such rare beauty as he had not even dreamed of. She was quite young and, for an Eastern woman, singularly fair; she had hair of a golden brown and dark blue eyes, and a mouth about which now lurked as sweet a smile as ever brightened woman's face.

For the light shining in her eyes had completed her awakening, and, at the moment when St. Just became conscious of her surpassing loveliness, she was gazing in bewilderment upon the group around her. In a few seconds, she recognized them as the invaders of her country, and, at the same time, remembered what had led to her unconsciousness.

Then, to the astonishment of her hearers, she thus addressed them, speaking in excellent French and a clear, musical voice.

"Messieurs, the fortune of war has thrown into your hands a woman who has some claim to call herself a French woman. My mother was captured by a slaver when traveling from France at the time of the death of Louis Quinze, whose soul may God preserve. All my life have I spoken your tongue, and, because of the French blood in me, I have cursed the slavery in which, in this country, we women are held.

"I thank you for your timely help. You have saved me from a fate worse than death.

"And now I will order the slaves to bring you some refreshment."

And, rising with difficulty, though not without grace and dignity, despite her stiffness and the novelty of her position, she made as though to walk to the colonnade.

"Mademoiselle!"

She stopped and faced the speaker, fixing her eyes intently upon his face. St. Just bowed low before her. She might have been an Empress; but his respect was a tribute only to her beauty.

"Mademoiselle," he repeated, "I regret to inform you that I have just learned that, save yourself and us, there is no one in the house."

"Is that indeed so?" she answered, bowing on her part. "Then I pray you order your men to forage for themselves. If you care to accompany me, I will show you where the stores are."

He turned to the men and said, "Hunt about, lads, and eat what you can; for, if that black rascal returns with any more of his friends, we shall have to stand a siege and fight for our skins, and" (after a pause) "the lady's."

With this the men dispersed, some in search of food and others to perform allotted duties.

An hour later, St. Just, who had busied himself in the interval in putting the house into a fair condition of defence, ascended, with beating heart, a staircase, at the top of which was a doorway screened by heavy blue curtains, that formed a glaring contrast to the bright red stair carpets. Bold soldier as he was, it was with a timid air that he pushed aside the curtains and found himself where, till now, no man, save the master of the house, had been permitted to set foot; in the women's apartments. It was a long, narrow room, but so gracefully and skillfully decorated that its narrowness was not at first apparent. The air was heavy with some Eastern perfume, that caused the feeling of oppression, for the lattices overlooking the courtyard that had been closed over night had not yet been opened, despite the fact that the sun was beginning to show its power.

St. Just looked round the room for signs of the girl he had rescued not two hours before; his eyes did not roam far before they lighted on her; she was reclining upon a pile of cushions, on a divan, one arm under her head, the other, bare to the shoulder and exquisitely molded, lying on her side, but bent slightly forward, so that her fingers just touched the floor. She was sleeping, her whole pose betokening the abandon of fatigue. Noiselessly St. Just moved to her side, and gazed enraptured on the vision of loveliness beneath him. Through the gauzy drapery, he could see her swelling bosom rise and fall in gentle undulations; he noted the faint flush, induced by sleep, upon her cheek, the ruddy lips slightly parted in a smile and showing just a hint of the gleaming teeth within, the delicately chiselled nose, the broad smooth brow, the exquisite oval of her face; and, at the sight of all her charms, he felt his manhood stir within him.

Then, as sleepers generally do when one is near to them, she became conscious that she was not alone, and the dark blue orbs unclosed. She started, and a look of fear came over her at finding herself in the presence of a man; but, the next instant, she recognized him and, remembering what had passed, she smiled.

St. Just, too, smiled, and at the same time registered a mental vow to save her from the usual fate of young and handsome women in a captured city.

Then she sat up and laughingly addressed him in French, as heretofore. "Fancy your finding me asleep like this. I feel quite ashamed. And with my face uncovered. And do you know, Sir, that no man but my father ever sets foot in the apartments. They are sacred to the women."

"I fear, Madame," replied St. Just, "that, in a state of warfare, nothing is sacred to a Frenchman. But I came here to help you; and this must be my excuse. Soon my countrymen will be in possession of the city, and you will need protection. But I will see to it that no harm shall come to you."

"I am sure of that," she answered, beaming on him with admiration. He was the handsomest man she had ever seen. "But come and breakfast with me," she went on, and she motioned to him to seat himself beside her on the divan.

St. Just needed no second invitation, but quickly did as he was bidden. Then he noticed that, on a small table close at hand, there was laid out a dainty refreshment in the shape of coffee and Arab cakes and fruit.

"Are you a conjurer?" he asked in surprise, when she had filled a cup and passed it to him. He did not understand how the repast had been prepared, all the servants having fled.

She laughed a merry laugh. "I made the coffee myself a short time ago," she said, "and then I must have dropped asleep. The fruit and biscuits were already in the room."

"But you had no stove," St. Just objected.

"There is a brazier in the corner. See? And the saucepan was put ready for this morning by the slave last night, who was not able to forget the habits of a lifetime even when overcome by terror.

Though, till my father returned from Gizeh late last night and told us how the battle had gone, we had no cause for fear."

"But how comes it that I find you here alone?"

"My father returned only for more slaves, and left immediately, when he had collected them. He promised to come back for me, or send Yusuf. Yusuf came indeed—he was the man you saw carrying me—but I would that he had stayed away, for he frightened and insulted me. He said that all law and order were at an end; that the French would soon be here, and that he loved me and was determined that I should be his; by force, if needs be. With that he advanced and would have embraced me. I screamed and fled from him; but he soon caught me and was carrying me away, when I fainted. I know no more; you know what followed."

"I do indeed," said St. Just gravely. "God be thanked that I came up when I did. I shudder to think what otherwise might have been your fate."

"It would have been death," she said; "for I never could have survived the ignominy of having been embraced by Yusuf. I should have slain myself at the first opportunity. Thus you have saved my life, my brave deliverer."

She turned her lovely eyes on him—eyes which beamed forth not only gratitude, but the dawn of love.

"You overwhelm me, when you talk like that," replied St. Just. "Any of my countrymen would have acted as I did. But tell me. You said but now, that your mother was a French woman; may I know her name?"

"Certainly; it was de Moncourt."

"What, of Moncourt in Brittany?"

"Yes."

"Indeed! then I have little doubt I have the honor to greet a cousin. I am a St. Just, also of Brittany."

"Truly? How delightful!"

"By what name did your mother call you?"

"Alas! it is an Arab one; I am called Halima."

Hardly had the words escaped her lips, when the sound of two shots following rapidly upon each other reached their ears. Both started to their feet.

"Yusuf!" she cried in terror.

And he, "Oh for arms and ammunition. We have but our pistols and a few rounds."

"Do you want guns?" asked Halima. "It so, there are matchlocks in the house; and gunpowder, too. Come with me and I will show you where they are."

St. Just shouted to one of his men; and Halima led them up a passage, halting at the end of it, before what seemed merely a wall panel. But she touched a knob that formed a portion of the Arabesque that decorated it; and, at the same time, pushed the panel. It opened on hinges, like an ordinary door, disclosing a room in which were arms of all sorts, the whole more or less old fashioned, and useless against disciplined troops, but that might be efficacious against a Cairo mob. At any rate, the matchlocks would make a noise, and firing blank cartridges often answers with a crowd. So St. Just and his trooper picked up a dozen of the firearms and as much ammunition as they could carry, the young girl helping them; then they rejoined the other men, who were gathered in the courtyard at the foot of the staircase that led to the women's apartments.

Quickly the matchlocks were distributed and loaded. But, before St. Just had decided how to post his men, a loud hammering at the entrance and the trampling of many feet and the sound of voices were heard. One louder than the rest shouted out in Arabic, "Open, open, ye dogs of Christians."

Then Halima trembled and panted in faltering tones, "It is Yusuf. Oh! save me from him. Kill me rather than let me fall into his hands."

And St. Just answered. "Trust me, Yusuf shall not have you, while I live. Keep close behind me." Then he called out to his men, "All follow me up the staircase!" and he led the way with Halima. Then he posted four men at the top of the staircase, two in front who were to lie down, and two behind, to stand up or kneel as occasion served. The staircase was not broad enough to allow more than two persons to ascend abreast; there was a fair prospect, therefore, that the four men could defend it.

These men placed, St. Just, with Halima and his three remaining troopers, betook themselves to a room with windows or embrasures that commanded the courtyard approach to the foot of the staircase. At these embrasures they took their stand, and awaited, stern and indomitable, the imminent attack.

Meanwhile the din without increased; the shouts and yells and menaces against the hated foreigners grew louder; the blows thundered upon the iron-studded door faster and harder. No door could long withstand such violence, and every moment St. Just felt that it must give way. At last, with a loud crash, it fell, and the crowd of Arabs came pouring into the courtyard.

"Aim low and fire," came the order from St. Just. He fired himself, and the three troopers did the same. Two men in the crowd dropped, and, with a howl of rage, the rest dashed across the yard and made for the staircase. When the first of them came in sight, the four men at the top fired, and several of the attacking party fell.

"Load and fire as fast as you can," said St. Just to the men in the room; "and show as little as possible of your bodies."

Before the beginning of the fight the French troopers had thrown aside their Arab draperies, finding they impeded their movements; so that, if ever their assailants had had any doubt about their nationality, it was now removed.

Both the men on the stairs and those in the room were now using their guns with fatal effect upon the densely packed crowd below, and many a bullet found its billet. But the besieged were not having it wholly their own way, for, though the attacking party recoiled time after time before the deadly fire at close quarters, they continually again pressed forward. They, also, were not without firearms, which they were using to some purpose, for every now and then a bullet crashed into the room and buried itself either in the wall, or in some article of furniture. Presently one of St. Just's men gave a cry and dropped, badly wounded. But there was no time to attend to him. All that happened was that Halima stepped forward and took his weapon and his place, loading and firing like the others.

Meanwhile the men at the head of the staircase were faring badly. Already two of them had been rendered hors de combat; and St. Just, rushing out of the room to learn how matters were progressing, arrived just in time to see a third man fall with a thud at his feet, stone dead.

There was a loud yell, then a rush up the staircase, and, the next moment, St. Just and the trooper at his side found themselves hacking and hewing and stabbing at the sea of swarthy faces in front of them. But they made no impression on the crowd, spite of those who kept falling beneath their blows. On and on the rabble came, pressed forwards by them who were behind. Then St. Just shouted out for those who were in the room to come to his help; but his words were lost in the din of the yelling Arabs. Fighting and retiring inch by inch, he, and the brave fellow at his side gradually regained the room in which were Halima and the others. The place was filled with smoke and sulphurous fumes, and almost stifling, and the many bullets that had entered it had made havoc of the furniture and woodwork.

The moment St. Just regained the room, his eyes sought Halima. She was standing at the window firing at the surging mass below. Calling to the two men with her to take his place and hold back the crowd so long as they were able, he ran swiftly to the girl. Each looked in the other's face, and both knew that their efforts to drive back the crowd were vain. Unless there was some way of escape, their doom was sealed. From the look of stern resolve she wore, and the way she clutched the dagger in her hand, St. Just knew that she would keep her word, and that, in securing her, the victors would capture but a corpse.

Meanwhile the three men at the door were fighting hard; but what could three men do, opposed by forty? With aching arms and parched mouths, and panting breasts, they slashed and stabbed, and parried, retiring step by step, the savage Arabs ever pressing forward, and by sheer weight forcing the three men back upon St. Just, who now once more joined in the fray.

A moment more, and the soldier on his right fell to the ground with a spear point through his heart. Instantly St. Just brought down his sword upon the spearman's head, and the Arab joined the Frenchman he had slain.

Enraged at seeing their comrade fall, and thirsting for revenge, St. Just's two last men hurled themselves upon the mob, and, for a moment, made it waver.

Then, feeling that their final moment had arrived, St. Just placed himself before the girl, prepared for the last deadly rush that would end the life of both. But, for all that he knew that resistance would avail them nothing, that their case was hopeless, so strongly implanted in the human heart is the love of life, that he did not stand passively awaiting death, but savagely fought on, desperation urging him to superhuman efforts in one last supreme struggle for life.

Then, just when he had received a spear thrust through the left arm and all seemed lost, suddenly, with the swiftness of a flash of lightning, despair gave way to hope. A measured tramp was heard along the narrow street; then the inspiring sound of a French bugle call. Help was at hand, if he could but hold out a few moments longer! The knowledge lent him strength and inspired him to fresh efforts. Once more he threw himself upon his foes. But his ardor this time was scarcely needed, for the Arabs also had heard the sounds, and knew what they portended. Their enemy would soon be upon them. They wavered, then fell back before his whirling sword; the next moment they had turned and were rushing pell mell out of the room and down the staircase, tumbling over each other in their hurry.

But, warned by the approaching march of men, instead of making for the main entrance, on reaching the foot of the staircase, they wheeled right and left and made their escape by doors and windows at the back.

During this stampede, the Arab girl had not been idle. She, too, had heard the marching and the bugle, and knew that, if she could but gain the French, her life and honor were secure. She saw that the courtyard was deserted—for all the Arabs, who were not in the room, were crowded on or about the staircase—also that the main entrance to the house was clear.

In a moment her resolve was taken, and, while St. Just was still brandishing his sword to keep his foes at bay, she made her way carefully through the window, and lowered herself on to a protruding gargoyle, about four feet below and somewhat to the side of it. Steadying herself for a moment, she stooped, or, rather, squatted down, until she touched the gargoyle. From this point to the top of the colonnade was scarcely ten feet. Clinging firmly to the gargoyle, she let her body down, until it swung at full length from her hold. Then she dropped. The fall shook her somewhat, but, almost immediately, she recovered herself and ran along the colonnade, until she gained a water pipe. To slide down this and reach the ground in safety was but a second's work. Then, like a young antelope, she sped across the courtyard, and over the large studded door, which had been torn from its hinges and lay athwart her path: and out into the narrow street.

Onward she rushed with the cry, "A moi! à moi! mes enfants! Au secours; pour la France!" Nor did she pause until she found herself panting and breathless in the arms of a French officer. But, withdrawing herself immediately, she hurriedly explained St. Just's great peril.

At this, scarcely waiting for orders, the soldiers rushed past her through the house and across the courtyard. There they found St. Just covered with blood and black with powder, but, save for the spear thrust through his arm, and sundry bruises, not much the worse for what he had undergone. But he was panting for breath, and resting on his sword, and could not speak. With a cheer, the soldiers ran to him, and, two of them supporting him, one on each side, they got him down the staircase,

then carried him across the quadrangle, and set him down before the officer in command of the detachment, which General Buonaparte had that moment joined.

To account for the arrival of his fellow soldiers, so opportunely for St. Just, it needs but to be stated that Buonaparte had made his attack at dawn upon the city, as he had intended. The sheiks had made but a poor defence of the Citadel and had quickly agreed to its surrender. The troops were on their way to take possession of it, when the Arab girl ran out and told what was occurring in the house.

So soon as he had breath enough, St. Just gave his account of all that had occurred from the time of his pursuit of Mourad Bey. Buonaparte's dark eyes flashed unpleasantly, at times, but he spoke no word until the young officer had concluded his report; then he turned to a man at his side, over whose head the knife of the assassin was already hovering, and in a few weeks would fatally descend; and said something in an undertone. General Kleber, for it was he, replied inaudibly to those about them, and shook his head.

Then Buonaparte addressed St. Just and, pinching his ear, he said, "Be careful, be careful. France is watching you, and has need of you."

The words seemed cold and formal—almost stern; but coming from this little man with the piercing eyes, to the young officer, they sounded like unmerited praise.

Continuing, Buonaparte turned to a captain and said,

"Guard the house and look well to the lady also." The next instant he rode away, followed by all, but a captain's guard, to receive the homage due to a conqueror.

Then St. Just fell fainting to the ground and was carried into the house in which he had so bravely fought, and where he was to lie upon a bed of sickness and be tended by a beautiful woman who was already more than half in love with him.

CHAPTER VIII

For three weeks St. Just lay in bed in the house of Halima's father, for the greater part of the time unconscious; for—what with his wound and bruises, the excitement he had undergone and the great heat—on the day after the attack on the house, he fell into a raging fever. Once General Buonaparte came to see him, but the young officer did not know him.

During all this time Halima helped to nurse him, and, so true is it that we acquire affection for the objects of our care, each day she felt herself more drawn towards him.

At last his mind came back to him, and he began to gain strength fast; so much so, that he realized, with great dejection, that, in a few days, he would have to return to his duties, and bid farewell to the Arab girl who had wound herself about his heart. Now, in the game of love there is often much finesse and subterfuge. He would have given anything, to know Halima's sentiments towards himself, but it so happened, that in proportion as St. Just gained consciousness and strength, so did she withdraw herself from his society, until at last she would spend but a few minutes of each day in his company, and then only in the presence of another person. Had he known how assiduously she had attended him during his term of insensibility, his mind would have been at rest, for the knowledge would have given him the information he desired, and he would have declared the love that was consuming him. As it was, fearing to offend her by his precipitancy, he said nothing, when he left her, except to thank her for the shelter and attention she had given him.

Halima blushed and hung her head, and, though longing for him to take her in his arms, with her Eastern bringing up, was too shy to give him an inkling of her feelings; and so they parted, each outwardly calm, but with a devouring flame within.

His duties, when he returned to them, he found irksome, for thought of her, though they were really light—nothing beyond an hour's drill daily with his regiment.

In this way two months passed, but more stirring times were coming; this was the calm that heralded the storm. The conquered citizens of Cairo, though, to all appearance, acquiescing with cheerfulness and content in the new order of things, were in reality planning a revolt, and the knowledge of it was brought to St. Just's ears in this way.

At five o'clock in the morning of the 21st of October, his servant aroused him to say that a messenger from the "Lady Halima" wished to see him. St. Just dressed with all speed, and Halima's messenger was introduced. He was the bearer of a letter from her to say that she was assured on authority, on which she could implicitly rely, that the citizens had for some time been quietly arming themselves, and that they were at that very moment silently massing themselves throughout the city, and would, at a certain signal, rise simultaneously in the different quarters, and massacre the French.

This news was as startling as it was alarming, and St. Just instantly had the reveille sounded and ordered his squadron to horse; then hurried towards the citadel. But, meantime, the insurrection had begun, and General Buonaparte, at the first alarm, had also galloped thither, attended by three Guides. But he was ahead of the young officer, so that when, a few minutes later, the latter came on the scene, he found Buonaparte surrounded by a mob of Arabs, his escort killed, his horse shot under him, and himself in imminent peril of his life.

Just in the nick of time St. Just and his troop dashed forward, and by the impetuosity of their onslaught, broke through the crowd, forced them back, and soon cleared a space around their General. But the Arabs were only checked, not broken, and, seeing the small number of their assailants, they prepared to renew the attack; and, had their courage but equalled their numerical advantage, they must have annihilated the Frenchmen.

From the French point of view, discretion was the better part of valor, and St. Just saw the means of putting that better part into execution; for it so happened that, once more, he was close to the Lady Halima's abode. To suggest to Buonaparte that they should take refuge there, to mount the

General on one of his trooper's horses, and to gallop at full speed through the gateway of the house was the work but of a few seconds. Before the astonished Arabs had divined their object, the whole squadron had passed through, and the entrance to the courtyard had been barred.

St. Just's heart beat high at the thought that, for the second time, it seemed likely he would have to defend the house of his lady love; but, on this occasion, with the added responsibility for the safety of his Commander's person.

To set against this, however, were the circumstances that they were in sufficient numbers (fifty) to hold the place, with the protection of the walls afforded, for a considerable time, and were well-armed; not, as on the previous occasion, with obsolete and rusty weapons.

But, fortunately, the valor and endurance of the party were not put to the test; for the arrangements for defence had scarcely been completed, when the march of infantry was heard approaching at the double. A French regiment was passing the end of the narrow street on its way to the citadel, news having been received that most of the rioters were assembled there.

At the sound of their footsteps, some of St. Just's troopers leaned out of the windows and shouted for help. At once the men were halted, then wheeled round and up the street. The effect was magical! with shouts and cries of terror, the crowd of Arabs assembled before the Lady Halima's house, without making the slightest show of fight, took to their heels and ran helter-skelter up the street and out at the end, some of the French soldiers chasing them to that point. Then the door of the house was opened, and one of the troopers informed the commanding officer the meaning of their presence there, and that General Buonaparte was with them. At this unlooked for news, the officer said he would see the General and take his orders.

Now, though when the attack was made on him, Buonaparte was on his way to the citadel, at the sight of the Lady Halima he—always an admirer of the other sex—was so captivated by her beauty, that he gladly accepted her invitation to remain for breakfast. So, when the Colonel of the infantry regiment was introduced to him, instead of taking advantage of his escort to continue his journey to the citadel, he contented himself with giving the officer certain orders, among which was that he was to keep open communications between the house in which they were, and the citadel; and to let him know if his presence should be urgently required. Failing any such message, he, Buonaparte, would be at the citadel in two hours time.

Then he dismissed the Colonel and he and St. Just sat down to breakfast with the Lady Halima in the women's apartment. It brought to St. Just the remembrance of that first repast he had taken with her in that very room, nearly three months before, and in somewhat similar circumstances. Now, as then, there were sounds of firing in the distance, and the tramp of feet and the rattle of arms awoke the echoes of the court-yard below. But in the room itself how different was the state of things. She had been his sole companion on that memorable morning, and he had been the object of her assiduous courtesy; now, in the presence of this all-conquering young General, he was a sort of "quantité négligeable." As before, the sun-light fell with full effect upon her lovely face, now filled with animation, her eyes sparkling with delight, the while she gayly chatted with the "man of destiny" who was seated upon the divan facing her. Buonaparte, for once, had cast off the iron mask of coldness and impenetrability he usually wore, and was basking in the sunshine of her smiles. For the time the cares of his position had been thrust aside, and, as he himself expressed it, he was amusing himself while Cairo was in revolt, like Nero fiddling while Rome was burning.

His chatter was not, however, altogether frivolous; occasionally he would be serious. For instance, speaking of the city and his plans he said, "I must confess that to-day's disturbance has surprised me. And I had thought the future would be so easy. Alas! which one of us knows the future?"

The girl, who had been listening intently, here interrupted with a laugh. "You would know your future? That is told easily enough. Remember I have been brought up in the East and have been taught to forecast events by people who have forgotten more than you of the West have ever heard of. I could convince you."

So saying, she clapped her hands and, before Buonaparte could object, if indeed he had wished to do so, had said something to her slave in Arabic, that resulted in the removal of the breakfast table and the production of a large earthenware bowl filled apparently with water, for she invited both men to taste it. One thing they noticed, and it was this; that, though the bowl was shallow and the sunlight shone around on the table on which it stood, it did not seem to shine upon the water, which looked black as ink.

Presently from a flask, she took from a corner cabinet the girl let fall a drop of liquid into the bowl; then, bending over, she gazed into it in silence, and both her companions did the same. Now, whether the act of fixing their eyes intently on the bowl, in a measure hypnotized them, so that their brains became enslaved by her suggestions, it is not for the present chronicler to say; but, in a few seconds, pictures seemed to form themselves on the surface of the inky looking liquid in the bowl. At first the images presented appeared blurred and misty; but, gradually, they took definite shapes. In the first picture Buonaparte was seated on a throne and on his head was a golden crown, and Josephine his wife was by his side, she also crowned. Gradually the figures faded and disappeared. Next St. Just saw himself on a prison floor chained to the wall and with the visage of a madman. In the next tableau there were many figures dressed in generals' uniforms, and Buonaparte in their midst. It was night and they were seated round a camp fire; from the expression on the faces of all, very serious matters were engaging their attention; and scattered around were dead and wounded men and horses and broken weapons and accoutrements. This scene also passed away. In that which followed Buonaparte and St. Just were driving in a sleigh, and in front of them was a woman beckoning to them. Her face was unknown to both; upon her head was the crown that Buonaparte's wife had worn in the first picture; and, wherever she pointed was desolation, the desolation that comes to a country over which an invading army has passed; and across the picture was written "France." The next tableau was a battle field. On a mound, surrounded by generals, but slightly in advance of them, and mounted on a white horse, was Buonaparte, but looking older and stouter. A short distance from him, soldiers were massed about a large farmhouse, which they were attacking, and which was being defended by other soldiers within. The scene changed; troops were flying in all directions—the French—the figure of Buonaparte among them. Yet one more scene; a lonely rock-bound islet in a boundless sea. The moon and stars overhead showed that it was night. On a narrow bed in a plainly furnished room lay Buonaparte; and at the door there stood a soldier in a uniform that was not that of France. 'Twas plain his duty was to guard a captive! This vision, like those which had preceded it, vanished, and the liquid mirror in the bowl revealed no further pictures.

St. Just raised his head from the bowl and encountered the troubled gaze of Buonaparte; while, seated hard by on a divan, was the girl. There was silence for a space. It was Halima who broke it.

"Have you seen enough, Sir?" she said, turning to the General. "Or would you see more?"

Buonaparte's answer was to overturn the table; the bowl fell and was smashed into a thousand pieces on the floor. Then a sudden light leapt into those awful eyes, and he broke forth into a torrent of reproach. "Why did you bring me here?" he asked angrily, turning to St. Just. "Am I to be insulted, fooled by such mummeries as these? As for you, girl, did I but know your father, I would send you to him dead." And he hissed out the last words, his face white with passion.

And St. Just, who loved the girl and was rightly counted brave, and would have struck to the earth any other man who had so spoken, was so dominated by the glance of this little man, whom physically he could easily have crushed the life out of; that he sat unmoved and tongue-tied.

Not so the girl; with face aflame and flashing eyes, she sprang to her feet and faced the conqueror; then thus she spoke, "My father the Sheik Ibrahim of the tribe of Auim (faithful) has with him many warriors who would avenge my death by killing you."

Buonaparte made no reply to her, but addressed himself to the young officer. "Captain," he said, "Assemble your troop and attend me to the Citadel. We have dallied here too long." Then, turning to the Lady Halima, "I thank you, madame, for your hospitality and the timely shelter of your

house. Adieu. I doubt not we shall meet again." He bowed to her and strode quickly from the room. She made no answer, but merely inclined her head. But to St. Just, who followed Buonaparte, she nodded smilingly, and, just when he was passing through the doorway, the words were wafted to him, "You will come to see me soon, my Captain."

On their way to the Citadel and the moment they were out of hearing, Buonaparte made reference to the Arab girl's remark. "You heard what she said about her father," he said, "and the men under his command. He will be useful to me; he must be gained somehow. I shall send you to him." Then he relapsed into silence, and no further word was uttered till they reached the Citadel.

Here they found all quiet; the incipient insurrection had been quelled before it had attained dangerous dimensions.

The news of the attempt on Buonaparte's life had reached the French, and, when he made his appearance, loud huzzahs were raised, and many of his officers pressed forward to congratulate him on his escape. Among these were Kleber, and Buonaparte's secretary, Bourrienne. Him the General hailed.

"Ah! Bourrienne!" he cried; "the very man I want. Get writing materials, and pen me what I shall dictate."

The letter presently dictated was addressed to the Sheik Ibrahim, Halima's father, urging him to join forces with the French and, while pointing out the hopelessness of opposition, and the certainty of the eventual victory of the invaders, promising him great rewards for his assistance.

The letter was dictated in the hearing of St. Just, for Buonaparte wished him to know its contents. When it was finished, he turned to the young man and handed it to him with the words, "You will take a squadron of men and go to this Ibrahim with this letter, and use your best endeavors to induce him to adopt my views. I have heard of this man; he is a powerful chief. I think you will either fall in with him, or gain news of him in the neighborhood of the third cataract, near Abu Klea. But his daughter can inform you."

"How soon do I start, General?" asked St. Just, in a tone that was none of the liveliest. He had had his fill of desert rides, and looked forward to the coming expedition with anything but pleasure.

"To-morrow at day-break," was the General's reply. "Meanwhile your time is at your own disposal." Then, turning to Kleber, who was standing by, "General, give Captain St. Just a squadron of Arabs you can trust, and an interpreter for service in the desert, in case this sheik should not know French."

"I will see to it, Sir," was Kleber's answer. "The men shall be in readiness at day-break."

Then, with a nod, Buonaparte dismissed St. Just.

Much as he disliked the prospect of the mission that had been confided to him, there was a temporary solace in the excuse it gave him for once more calling on Halima; and not more than two hours after he and General Buonaparte had left her, she was astonished to receive the announcement of his return.

She advanced smilingly to meet him, but with a look of inquiry on her face. "I am delighted to see you again so soon, Captain St. Just, but I am not so vain as to attribute your call to my attractions, or even to your courtesy. Besides, I see trouble in your face. Are you the bearer of bad news?"

Then St. Just told her of his coming journey, and how loath he was to leave Cairo, where she was, and to face the hardships of the desert, of which he had already had so painful an experience.

When she learned his destination, she told him she would write a letter to her father, if he would bear it to him; and, there and then, she sat down and wrote it, inscribing it with her father's name and present resting-place, so far as she believed. Handing it to the young Frenchman, she said, "I have told my father all that you have done for me, and I have prayed him to protect you and put you on your way. Also I have told him of Yusuf's treachery towards a daughter of the house of "Auim." She drew herself up proudly when she mentioned her tribe's name. "He will punish Yusuf either with banishment for ever from the tribe, or with death."

St. Just took the letter from her, but his hand trembled with excitement, and he could scarce find words in which to thank her, for stress of the passion that was surging like a torrent in his breast. He tried to stem it, but it would not be confined, and at last broke forth.

"Oh, Halima!" he cried. "It is not the perils of the desert that alarm me; what cuts me to the heart is that I must leave you; for I love you, I love you; I feel that I cannot live without you. Until I saw you, my heart yearned only for military glory—to rise in my profession; but now—now I would forfeit every prospect, all else that I hold dear, if I might win your love. Tell me, lady, is there no cord in your heart that vibrates in unison with my own? Surely such love as mine cannot be all in vain. Oh, if you could only know its strength, you would pity me with such pity that, close behind it, would follow its half-sister, Love. Speak, Halima, and end my torture."

He stood back to feed his eyes upon her beauty, his breast panting and heaving in his excitement.

And she? Gradually her creamy complexion took on a warmer hue, until her face and neck were colored like the rose; the long, dark lashes veiled her limpid eyes; she raised her hand; then, to the young officer's wonder and consternation, with a little cry of joy, she ran to him and threw herself on her knees before him. "My love! my lord! my master!" she murmured rapturously. Then she seized his hand and covered it with kisses.

But to have a woman kiss his hand was more than he could bear. A feeling of shame came over him; it seemed so utter a reversal of what was fitting. The blood rushed to his face.

"Not there," he cried. "But here, close to my heart, my Halima." He raised her from the ground and folded her in his arms, she hiding her face upon his shoulder.

The hours that followed for the lovers seemed to travel with the speed of light, for they were given up wholly to loving dalliance and endearing phrases, that never seemed to weary the performers; and it was not till night was well advanced, that St. Just tore himself from the arms of the Arab girl, whom he had pledged himself to make his own, on his return, and who on her part had sworn fidelity to him.

CHAPTER IX

The sun had all but vanished below the horizon; in its departure lighting up the almost cloudless heavens with masses and streaks and rays of every hue from blood red to golden yellow—Nature's glorious tints, to be seen in their fullest beauty only in the East. But the beauty of this particular sunset no one witnessed; for taking a trio of palm trees set in a little patch of vegetation, as the point of vision, an observer placed there would have looked in vain, North, South, East and West for the slightest sign of life. In every direction for leagues upon leagues, as far as the eye could travel was the boundless desert. Not a single object broke the dead level of the sand. The solitude was supreme, the silence awful. Presently, when the sun was on the point of sinking out of sight, a little breath of wind from the direction of the waning light sprang up, sending a shiver through the palm plumes aloft, and rustling the herbage at their base; the deadly stillness was at an end.

Then, if the imaginary watcher by the palm trees had looked North, he would have noticed a little cloud upon the level plain; next a blurred mass of something. Gradually he would have seen this something expand and develop, until, finally, it took form in the shape of a troop of horsemen. On they came, a company of from thirty to forty, shaping their course for the little oasis about the palm trees, the eagerly sought mark of a resting place for the tired traveler and his beast, where the former hopes he will obtain both food and water.

Ten minutes later, they had reached their goal. Both men and horses were covered with dust and sweat, and were dropping with fatigue; and it was plain that they had traveled far and fast. Then, at the word of command, each man dismounted and began to water his horse, before attending to his own requirements. The man who gave the order, the reader has met before. He was St. Just; he was on the mission to the sheik with which General Buonaparte had entrusted him, and he expected in a few days to accomplish it.

He vaulted from his saddle; then, having unstrapped his cloak, he patted the neck of the grey stallion lovingly, for the good horse had carried him many a weary mile right gallantly. Then he glanced, with a laugh, at his dusty uniform. It was frayed and torn and soiled; yet he wore it with a glow of pride; for was it not the visible sign of his fellowship with that brave army which had proved itself invincible, and was still adding to the glory and the possessions of his country?

Be sure that he first attended to his gallant charger's wants. Then he went round among his men to see that they had looked properly to theirs. This duty performed, he sat down to eat his lonely supper; for lonely he was, his only companions being his Arab escort, with whom, though they were friendly, he had naught in common.

When he had finished his scanty meal, he seated himself at the foot of one of the palms, set light to his pipe, and gave himself up to thought. It was now six weeks since he had started on this mission. He cursed the luck that had deprived him of the presence of his lady love and, at the same time, of gaining glory in the field of battle under Buonaparte. Was he never to have the same chance as had his brothers in arms of winning renown? He wondered what they were doing at that moment, and what was Halima; was she thinking of him?

Though it was irksome and fatiguing, he had not found desert life altogether uneventful; the various difficulties and dangers he had encountered on his journey had prevented that; for instance, on one occasion, owing to the lowness of the Nile, the boat, in which he and some of his men were crossing, had been stranded for hours upon a shoal, and they had been in imminent danger of being drowned. Another time, they had drifted on the rocks at one of the great cataracts, a boat had been dashed to pieces and ten of his followers drowned. Then they had marched for days, without getting to any place where they could purchase remounts; so that, at last, their horses had become so utterly exhausted that they had had to rest for several days to recruit, before proceeding. Besides this, repeated dashes had been made upon them by marauding Arabs they had fallen in with by the way.

Thus his original fifty men had been reduced by one mishap and another to thirty-five; and the sullen indifference of these, and his fears of treachery on their part, sorely tried his temper and filled him with anxiety. Further, he was beginning to feel much solicitude about the outcome of his mission; for he was now nearing his journey's end, and expected to make his destination in a day or two.

Altogether he was in no happy frame of mind on that November night, while he sat silent in that desolate waste, with his eyes fixed on the glowing embers of the fire, listening drowsily to the movements of the tethered animals and the monotonous tramp of the sentry on the sand hill just above him. Presently he shivered and drew his cloak more closely round him. Then, gradually, his head sank and soon, with the remainder of the camp, he slept.

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The hours wore on. Meanwhile the solitary watcher paced up and down upon his beat, scanning the Eastern sky intently for the first signs of coming day. In his eagerness, he halted for several minutes, and fixed his eyes upon the quarter in which the sun would rise. In his preoccupation, he failed to notice what the camels stretched below him did, that a body of horsemen about a hundred and fifty strong were approaching from the West. The sand muffled the sound of their horses' hoofs. But one old camel heard it; like the veritable desert warrior he was, he raised his head and snorted loudly. At this, the musing sentinel turned round. Too late he saw their danger; the horde was sweeping down, in a rapidly converging semicircle, upon the sleeping camp. It was his last sight on earth; a shot rang out upon the air, and he fell upon his face, struck dead. The next moment, with a resounding yell, the hostile Arabs dashed upon the sleepers.

The shot that slew the sentry roused St. Just; he sprang to his feet and rushed to his horse. Two or three others did the same and, mounting, galloped off into the darkness, a hailstorm of bullets in their wake. One of these grazed the gray stallion and made him restless, so that he would not stand for St. Just to mount him. While he was still striving to effect his purpose, the enemy came pouring into the camp on every side, ruthlessly slaying St. Just's half-awakened escort. One of the assailants, seeing by the moonlight St. Just's white face, uttered a cry of joy and threw over his head a noose, then drew him backwards suddenly and sent him to the ground, with a crash that momentarily stunned him. When he came to himself, which he quickly did, he found that he was being searched from head to foot; the noose was tightly bound about his chest, confining his arms behind his back, thus rendering him wholly incapable of resistance. Watch, money, knife, sword, pistol—and, worst of all, his despatches were being passed from hand to hand amidst cries and yells from the crowd around him. One thing only escaped their notice, and that was his darling's locket.

Presently a tall man with a coal black beard came up and spoke to him in French. "Are you not he that rode the gray horse at the battle of Embabe?"

"I am," replied St. Just, expecting that, there and then, an end would be put to his existence.

"I was sure of it," muttered his interlocutor; then turned to his followers and said something in Arabic that St. Just failed to catch, but it stirred them greatly, for instantly arose a hoarse murmur of anger and disappointment. The man who seemed to be their leader, quieted them by raising his hand, as would a huntsman to his hounds, saying, at the same time, "I will it." Then returned again to St. Just, who, having regained his composure, thus addressed him.

"Kill me, if you will; but I pray you forward my despatches to him to whom they are addressed. One of them is a letter from a daughter to her father. Have pity upon his gray hairs, if you have none for me."

"That is for the Chief to say," retorted the bearded man. "March!" he wound up.

In obedience to the order, St. Just set out. Oh, the torture that followed when, at the will of his savage captors, he was compelled by the stress of the rope, though he was on foot, to keep up with his mounted escort, and all the while his chest so confined by his bonds that he could not breath freely.

When he lagged, he was urged on and dragged forward with the rope. And, meanwhile, he had the mortification of seeing his own gray horse bestridden by the bearded warrior.

At last, after ten hours of this misery, they came in sight of the Nile, on whose bank, under the shadow of overhanging rocks, was pitched what was evidently the temporary encampment of the tribe.

The squadron halted and were immediately surrounded by a crowd of women and children and barking dogs, who indiscriminately greeted the returning warriors. Looking about him from the spot where he lay guarded by four men, who regarded him with no friendly eye, St. Just noted that most of the tents had been struck and that, before his arrival, active preparations had been made for a move; also that the main body were eagerly questioning his captors, who, in reply, vociferated loudly and pointed at him with lively gesticulations. Such was the babel of sounds around him, that he could make nothing of their conversation, and, indeed, was in no condition to try, worn out, as he was, in mind and body. He lay in the shadow of a camel, where he had thrown himself upon his arrival, and, at last, he fell asleep.

When he awoke, it was dusk, and, while he yet struggled between sleeping and waking, his guards came to him and dragged him to his feet; then drove him unceremoniously towards the pile of rocks. Here, in their shadow, squatting in dignified silence around a fire in front of a large tent, were from ten to twenty aged men—apparently the counsellors of the camp. St. Just was placed in the center, near the fire, whose strong light was shed upon his features, immediately facing the opening of the tent, where he could just make out the form of some one seated. At this juncture, a little breeze sprang up, fanning the fire into greater brightness; so that St. Just could now discern the features of those about him. Seated within three feet of him upon a square carpet, was one of the oldest men he had ever seen. His beard was white as snow, and so long that it swept the ground in front of him. It was impossible to guess his age, for, save for his eyes, which sparkled brightly, he looked like a living corpse.

So soon as St. Just was placed before him, the old man spoke: "Let him be unbound, but guarded."

Immediately some one behind him cut the rope, and St. Just knew that he was free. After gazing at him for a moment, the old man called, "Ben Idherim!"

Out of the throng there strode the man who had been leader of the band that had captured St. Just, and, forthwith, he told how he had swooped down upon the camp; accompanying his recital with expressive gestures. St. Just looked on unmoved while, one by one, to lend vraisemblance to the tale, the articles that had been found on him were handed round the circle of impassive listeners. Finally Idherim produced the despatches and was about to hand them also round, when St. Just broke silence.

"Sirs, as I said to him who has just spoken, kill me if you will, but send on my despatches."

The old chief, who, since the sentence recorded of him, had not spoken, and seemed to have sunk into a stupor, merely nodding his head occasionally when some point in his lieutenant's speech gained his approval, now looked up and fixed his eyes upon St. Just, who stood there pale, travel-stained and weary, but fearless and almost defiant. "Why so; what would you?" he inquired.

"Sir, one is my general's letter to a chief to whom I was journeying, when stopped, and the other is from the chief's daughter telling of her safety. Again I say, I ask not for my life. Do with me what you will. All I pray is that both letters may be sent on; the one, that my General may know me to be faithful; the other, that a father may have tidings of his daughter."

The old man's reply was short and sharp. "Give me the letters." They were handed to him, and then, to the surprise of the young Frenchman, he broke the seals and began to read them.

At this moment, a man came out of the darkness and sat down by the chief's side; plainly he was on intimate terms with him. At first, St. Just regarded him idly, out of mere curiosity; then, as though in a dream, the present scene was blotted out, and he saw himself again in Cairo, and in front of him was a house, and from that house came forth a man bearing a woman on his shoulder. Quick

as lightning did this scene flash across him, and as quickly did it pass, and he was once more in the present. Forgetting his position as a captive, and with the cry of "Yusuf!" on his lips, he sprang forward and made a rush at the new comer.

Instantly the latter started to his feet. In a moment he had recognized the speaker, and, drawing a pistol, he fired point blank at the French officer. The bullet whizzed past his head and flattened itself against the rock behind him.

At a word from the chief, four men sprang up and seized the would-be assassin and bore him out of sight. This done, the old man thus addressed his counsellors. "Yusuf, because he is my nephew, have I spared; but for that, he would have died; first, because he deserted my daughter the lady Halima, when the invaders came; secondly, because he has outraged justice by firing upon a prisoner undergoing trial. For this I have decreed that Yusuf be banished from our tribe for ever."

A murmur of approbation went round the circle. The chief continuing, addressed St. Just, "As to you, know that I am him you seek; and this is my answer to your General's letter. For myself and on behalf of my tribe, I refuse to accede to his request. No bribes or promises shall make me turn my arms against my country. Yet, because he has spared my daughter, will I stand aloof; I will take no part against him. You can tell him this, if you live to see him. But the chances are against you, for you, a messenger of peace, have fired upon my tribe."

The venerable gentleman forgot to state that his people began the firing; possibly, in the one-sided view he took, he overlooked it. "For this," he went on, "justice demands that there shall be shot for shot; accordingly, you will take your stand on the top of yonder rock, and ten of the youngest of the camp children of those able to bear arms, shall fire a shot each at you. If you survive, then shall you go free. As I have said, so let it be."

He ceased speaking, whereupon the circle broke up, and all took up a position in front of the tent.

Now, the distance from the rock to the tent was but forty yards, and the rock itself, on the top of which St. Just soon found himself, tied so that he could not move, was about twenty feet high by only two feet broad. And here he stood, looking down upon the scene upon which the silvery moonbeams fell, waiting for the death he felt was close upon him. Outwardly he was calm, for he had faced death too often to display fear of it; but a tumult raged within his breast. It was hard to die so young, and, for an instant, such anguish took possession of him that, but that his tongue clave to the roof of his mouth, he would have pleaded for mercy; but, the next moment, the word 'Courage' was whispered in his ear, and the voice that whispered it was Halima's. Doubtless this was the result of imagination acting on an overwrought mind, but it steadied him, and his failing heart revived.

The next instant, there was a flash, followed by the ping of a bullet, and the report of a gun echoing among the rocks. A voice below counted "One," in Arabic; then there was a pause. The bullet had missed. The second, aimed better, grazed his ear. The third passed through the fleshy part of his shoulder and buried itself in the stake behind him. The fourth and fifth shots hit the rock at his feet; and the sixth passed through the rope that bound him, almost severing it. The seventh, eighth and ninth flew wide. After that, there was a long pause.

Presently the Frenchman heard a howl of exultation, and a tall, graceful youth took his place in front of the living target, resting his weapon on the ground, with the air of a practiced marksman. From where he stood, St. Just could see the youngster's black eyes twinkling with joy, while he glanced along the barrel; for was he not the best shot of the tribe, and his aim deadly? A second's pause, then, carefully pressing the trigger, the marksman fired.

St. Just felt as though a hot iron had seared his side, and he knew that he was hit. Unconsciously, he bounded into the air with the shock; thereby bursting the already half severed rope. Then, falling over and over, he landed, not on the ground, but on a projecting corner where he was held suspended by his tunic.

When he recovered consciousness, he found himself lying in a tent, and by him was the Sheik, holding in his hand the locket of Halima, the case deeply dented with a bullet mark.

"But for this, you would have died," exclaimed the Sheik. "Further had I read the whole of my daughter's letter, Yusuf would have taken your place. Now, rest yourself, assured that you have the friendship of one who is strong to help alike in hate and love."

On the morrow St. Just lay unconscious in a raging fever.

CHAPTER X

But what of the Lady Halima, who had not seen her lover, or had any tidings of him for six weary weeks?

At the very moment when St. Just was undergoing his fearful ordeal on the rock, she was wandering restlessly, feverishly, about her own apartments, her thoughts wholly occupied with him. Indeed, ever since they had been parted, she had thought of little else. But, whereas, generally, her reflections, though she felt saddened by his absence, were tinged with pleasure at the thought of his handsome face and form, his bravery, his return to her with credit to himself for the successful performance of his mission; to-night they were full of gloom. She had a presentiment, she strove in vain to dissipate, that her beloved was in the direst peril. She was endowed with a more than ordinary share of that faculty which places us en rapport with those with whom we have a strong affinity; so that, even when separated by thousands of miles from those we love, we feel, rather than know, that misfortune is overtaking them.

And so it was that Halima; convinced of her lover's danger and her helplessness to avert it, she paced up and down the room wringing her hands, the tears trickling down her cheeks, and continually crying, "Oh! Henri, Henri, what is it that is happening to you, my love? My heart tells me that you are in dreadful peril; and I—I am powerless. Oh! why did you leave me?"

At the thought that she would never see him more, Halima became so overcome that she burst into a flood of weeping and sank upon a divan, burying her fair face in its cushions. And thus, somewhat later, she was found by Buonaparte, who, since his aide-de-camp's departure had been a not infrequent visitor. Unheard by her, he entered the room, wrapped in an ample cloak, and silently approached her side; then, with arms folded, stood looking down upon her.

Feeling intuitively that she was not alone, Halima raised her tear-stained face, and her eyes fell on the General. She gave a little start, then feebly tried to smile. Buonaparte dropped his cloak and seated himself upon the cushions by her side.

"What ails you, fairest one?" he asked. "Why this grief? I would come to see you oftener, but my leisure hours are few, so that I cannot visit you so often as I would. Come, pretty one, dry those tears, and tell me what it is that troubles you."

Now Halima, having known Buonaparte for hard on two months, had learned something of his disposition; and she feared to tell him that she loved St. Just. So, bringing her feelings under some control, she answered, "Alas, Sir, I wept, because the memory came back to me that I had annoyed you, when, wishing to amuse, I pretended to forecast your future. But indeed, General, I was not serious; and, surely, you did not so take me."

If she thought that by this speech she had cleverly put him off the scent of her real sentiments, she mistook her man. He tapped the floor impatiently with his foot and answered fretfully, "Tut, tut, that is all past and gone. It cannot be that which troubles you. Is it not rather the absence of the handsome Captain? By my soul, I am greatly in his debt for introducing me to so fair a flower." And he looked ardently at Halima.

Now, when a victorious General, and, moreover, a youthful one, lays himself out to captivate a woman, she feels flattered by his notice, and he rarely fails. The present instance was no exception to the rule, for a smile broke out on the fair lady's face, and she gave him a glance that told even more than words.

"But fret not for him," Buonaparte went on; "he is not worth your tears; forecast his future, as you profess you can, and you will see that it is so. Even I am seer enough to tell, without the aid of magic bowls, what he is doing. I know what my young officers are, and he is no exception. Doubtless he is at this moment flirting with some dusky beauty on the banks of the Nile, while his men are resting for the night."

Then he leaned back in his seat to see how she would take his reflections on her lover's want of constancy; at the same time he was furtively casting his eyes in his cold, calculating way, upon her charms; though, apparently examining his hands, of whose delicate whiteness he was inordinately vain.

But the way that she received his words astonished him. Indignant at his sneering accents, stung by the suggestion that any other woman could take her place in St. Just's affections, her jealousy aflame at the thought that perhaps there was some truth in it, and anxious to defend the absent one, she threw prudence to the winds, and gave her feelings play.

Springing from the divan, she turned and faced the General, her eyes flashing with the scorn and anger he had enkindled.

"If all men were as you suppose," she cried, "then should I pity women. But it is not so. To seek to make me jealous by hinting that the man I love—yes, I love him, and I glory in it—and shall love so long as I draw breath, has forgotten me and is dallying with another woman, is unworthy of the conqueror of Egypt. You have dared me to peer into the future, to learn my lover's doings and his fate. I fearlessly accept your challenge. Doubtless I shall find that many dangers will beset him, for, in these perilous times, it can scarce be otherwise; but, be that as it may, of this I am well assured, that, whatever the future has in store for him, in the end, he will be more fortunate than yourself, who, though you will rise to the highest point of human greatness, will not retain it—not even the freedom of the humblest subaltern in your army. Your insatiable ambition will prove your fall. Now you know my feelings towards Henri St. Just. I had meant to keep my secret. But what I feel for him can be of no consequence to you; and I am sure you will not let it prejudice him. But if I thought that you would harm him, I would this instant bid you begone, and would look upon your face no more. And, had I ever feared you on his account, this city weeks ago would have no longer held us, for you would have been no more, and I should have fled with my lover to the desert. But now to read his fate."

And she turned from him and began to make her preparations for diving into the unseen.

Now, although what she had said had sunk deep into his breast and rankled there, Buonaparte did not suffer his resentment and his wounded pride to show upon the surface. But he stored it up against her, adding it to the grievance of her previous forecast of his future. He meant to make this woman his, and his anger made him all the more determined; but the fruit was not yet ripe for plucking, albeit it was maturing fast. Clever actor as he was, there were few better able to disguise their feelings. He broke into a little laugh and then replied:—

"I crave your pardon, gentle lady;" he laughed to himself at the irony of the epithet; "in that unconsciously I have angered you. I little thought that my soldier's badinage would have let loose so impetuous a torrent of wrath from the lips of so beautiful a creature. Happy St. Just to have such a champion. But one thing I have to urge in my excuse; I knew not that he was so favored, for you had never let fall a word to that intent. Forgive me then, fair Halima; I will not so offend again." Then, after a short pause, during which he watched her movements, he resumed, "well, is the magic bowl in order? I would see how far the outcome of your incantations will give the lie to my jesting prophecy."

The preparations had given the girl the time and opportunity for regaining her self-control and recognizing the folly of making an enemy of Buonaparte. She laughed gayly; then placed the crystal bowl upon a table near the divan and, as on the former occasion, dropped some of the mysterious fluid into it.

"Now it is ready," she said.

Eagerly both craned their necks forward over the bowl and gazed intently into the clear black fluid.

At first, nothing was to be seen; then, gradually, in the depths of the fluid could be discerned the outline of a rock, which, by degrees, became more and more distinct. Then it was seen that on the summit of it was a figure made fast to a stake. Next an Arab came in sight, and he leveled a matchlock at the captive man, who was standing with head bent low upon his breast. There was a

puff of smoke; the human target bounded up in the air, then fell headlong from the rock and into space, disclosing in his fall the features of St. Just!

At this, Halima removed her gaze and uttered a piercing shriek; the spell was broken, the picture vanished; nothing but the smoke-black surface of the liquid in the bowl remained.

Then, "Mon Dieu!" she cried, "it cannot be; it must be false;" and, with that, fell fainting at the feet of Buonaparte.

For the moment, he also was staggered by the vision; but his bewilderment did not last long. He broke into an unpleasant laugh, and turned his gaze on the unconscious girl. "True, or not, it is as marvelous as it is unaccountable. As for St. Just, I am persuaded he is dead. I am sorry, for he was a good officer, and he saved my life. I wish I had not sent him on this mission."

For a few seconds, he felt a touch of genuine regret, not unmixed with remorse, and the feeling showed itself in his usually impassive face.

Then, a glance at the unconscious girl turned his thoughts into a fresh channel. Bah! regrets were vain and childish; St. Just was gone; 'twas a pity; but the girl remained and no one now stood between her and him.

He turned his attention to her, and, by dint of fanning her and sprinkling her with water, in a short time he was rewarded by seeing her languidly unclose her eyes in returning consciousness. He now raised her from the ground, and placed her on the divan. At first her eyes wandered vaguely round the room, as though in search of something that she missed. As yet, memory had not returned; but the blessing of forgetfulness was not granted her for long; soon she knew all that had occurred, and with the knowledge, she burst into a flood of tears.

Buonaparte made no attempt to restrain her sobs; he knew her weeping would be the sooner over, if unchecked until it had spent its force. He sat beside her, watching her in silence. Gradually the heaving became slower and more regular in its movements; the sobs less frequent; the tears, instead of streaming down her cheeks, now came only in odd drops, and presently, with a long-drawn sigh, they ceased.

Then Buonaparte gazed tenderly into the liquid depths of the glistening eyes, and took one of her little hands in his. Forgotten was his own charming wife in distant Paris, in the fascination of the little Arab beauty, and, bending over her, he murmured in the thrilling tone he well knew how to use as often as occasion served, "Dear heart, let me console you. To regret is weak, is useless; it will not bring him back. You may think me hard and cruel; but be advised by me, when I tell you that the easiest way to solace one's self for a lover's loss is to install another in his place. Come then to me, and I will teach you so to love, that you will say that all your previous experiences were but a parody of the passion."

He spoke with such ardor that she could not but be moved. Still, she shook her head petulantly, but she did not withdraw her hand, and her glance showed no displeasure. And so, for a short time, they sat in silence, Buonaparte still holding her hand, and fearing to break the spell by speaking.

His patience was rewarded, for, presently, she spoke in a voice that trembled slightly, but still was clear and sweet, and her eyes were turned on him, in such wise that he felt himself bewitched and consumed try his desire.

"If I could have absolute faith in what my eyes have seen this night," she said, "I would consider your proposal, which, in your position, is most flattering; for I know that you will rise—aye faster than has risen any other man before. And those who join themselves with you will rise with you. See," she continued, getting up and walking to the open window. She flung open the lattice and, pointing to one of the many stars with which the sky was studded, "Right over your head you behold yon star. It is the star that rules your destiny. Each one of us in coming into this world has his particular star that brightens with his rise, with his fall, and dies with him. But the majority of persons are so commonplace and unimportant that their stars are so small as to be invisible. It is only the great ones

of the earth whose stars can be observed. My mother told me that it is the same in her country—France—that, when a star is seen falling from the sky, some soul is quitting its earthly tenement.

"Mark well your star and watch its varying brilliancy, and, when you see that lessening, be warned and pause in your career; if not, be well assured that, for all your many victories—and those you have already won are as nothing to those in store for you—the time will come when you will suffer a defeat so crushing that it will put the finishing stroke to your career."

She ceased, and, at first, Buonaparte made no reply, but stood gazing at the star she had pointed out, now twinkling dimly before the approaching dawn. Not that he paid any heed to her "prophetic vaporings," as, mentally, he termed them. He was thinking over her statement that, if assured of her lover's death, she might entertain his (Buonaparte's) proposal; and conning how he might convince her that St. Just was dead; for he had conceived a burning passion for this woman.

Then he turned from the window and thus addressed her. "Fair Halima, I thank you for your warning, and it shows you take an interest in me. I may, therefore, hope that in time your spark of interest may kindle into the flame of love. With you always at my side to scan the heavens for me and give me warning, failure would be impossible. Come to me, then, and share the greatness that is in store for me. Why remain faithful to what is but a tender memory; why deny your youth and beauty the pleasures that are their due. You have proved to your own satisfaction that St. Just is dead, and—"

"Sir," she interrupted him, "I am but a beginner in my art; and the Fates sometimes play us false. A woman is influenced more by instinct than by reason. Now, my instinct, or my heart—call it which you will—tells me that to-night my vision has been distorted, that my eyes have seen that which was not true. If I had absolute proof that St. Just is dead I—I might—" She ceased, not knowing how to complete her sentence; her thoughts had out-run her powers of speech. She cast down her eyes and the blood rushed to her face in her confusion.

And the man noticed it and was quick to take advantage of her implication. "You might learn to love me," he exclaimed; and there was a note of triumph in his tone.

Halima marked it and hastened to reply, "Nay, Sir, you do violence to my thoughts, and make my word out-run them. I said not aught of love."

Buonaparte eyed her keenly. "For the present," he said, "I will be satisfied with your unspoken thought. But you talked of proof of your lover's death. Alas! I fear it will be only too easy to obtain. I doubt not that, before a month is out, I shall bring you such evidence as it will be impossible to disbelieve."

"But how will you convince me? Nothing short of the evidence of eye-witnesses will do it."

"You forget that St. Just had an escort of fifty tried and faithful Arabs. If one or more of these should testify to his death, would you then believe?"

And she, strong in her belief that St. Just would die, ere he would suffer himself to be taken captive—in which case the vision must have been false—assented. She knew her lover would strain every nerve to execute his trust; to deliver not only his General's but also her own letter; both his honor and his love were at stake. So, in the hope that the month's delay would bring a favorable turn in Fortune's Wheel, she parted from her new admirer.

CHAPTER XI

Buonaparte was not the man to let the grass grow under his feet; whether the object of his pursuit was a hostile army or a woman. So, the next morning, he started enquiries for news of St. Just amongst the chiefs now under his sway. Failing to gain information in that quarter, he sent his Mameluke, Roustan, with a search party in a boat up the Nile, to learn whether any of the headmen of the villages on its bank had seen or heard anything of the young French Officer, or any of his party of fifty Arabs.

Day followed day with no result, until a month had slipped by since Buonaparte's parting with the Arab girl. The General was seated one afternoon under a tree in the garden of his house at Cairo musing on various matters and, among them, on Halima, when word was brought to him that Roustan was without, desiring to have speech with him.

Buonaparte ordered the messenger to admit him instantly. When the Mameluke entered, he bent his knee deferentially to his master, then stood in a position of attention, waiting to be addressed.

"Well, Roustan, what news?" asked Buonaparte sharply.

"Sir," replied the faithful slave, "I have performed the commission you entrusted to me, and have obtained certain information concerning Captain St. Just."

"In one word," interrupted Buonaparte, "is he alive or dead?"

"He is dead, General; of that I have obtained indisputable proof."

A scarcely audible sigh escaped the General; but this was the only sign of relief he gave. His face remained impassive as usual, nor did he make the slightest movement.

"Proceed with the particulars," he said.

Roustan went on to relate that he had traced St. Just and his party to a certain oasis in the desert, distant about five weeks' journey from Cairo, and that there the trail had broken off. Not to abandon the search, he had remained in the neighborhood for a few days, prosecuting inquiries among the tribe that dwelt about there. He had been on the point of giving up his quest as useless, and returning to Cairo the next day, when he was aroused from sleep by the return of some of the tribe, in company with four strangers. Three of these had formed part of St. Just's escort, and the fourth was a prisoner, a renegade of the tribe of Auim, of the name of Yusuf. Him the three others were desirous of bringing on to Cairo, where, of course, they would have to report themselves to their commander.

Roustan then went on as follows:

"I brought the four men on with me and they are now guarded in the citadel, where they will remain until your pleasure concerning them shall be known."

"You have done well, Roustan," was the General's comment, when the slave ceased speaking; "I shall not forget to reward your services. Bring me that little table."

There was a light writing table near at hand in the garden, and Roustan wheeled it up to his master. Buonaparte seized a sheet of writing paper, wrote a few lines on it rapidly, folded it up and addressed it to the Lady Halima. It was to the effect that he had much to tell her at eleven o'clock that night. He handed the letter to Roustan, charging him to deliver it at once, and, having done so, to proceed to the citadel with orders that the fourth man, Yusuf, was to be kept apart from the others, and that all were to be strictly watched and allowed to have no communication with any one outside.

"Inform the Governor," Buonaparte concluded, "that I shall visit them at nine o'clock this evening, when you are to be ready to accompany me."

Then, once more commending him for his sagacity, Buonaparte waved his hand to signify that the interview was at an end.

* * * * *

The deep tones of the bell that notified the hours was resounding through the citadel at nine o'clock that evening, echoing along the silent passages in the great courtyard, when Buonaparte, attended by his body servant, passed through the arched entrance way.

Standing within the gate, a few yards from the sentry, was a figure that, like Buonaparte, was closely muffled in a cloak. The figure approached the newcomers and saluted.

"No formalities, General, if you please," said Buonaparte. "I prefer my visit here to be unknown. Lead me to the prisoners."

"Will you follow me, Sir?" said the person thus addressed. Then, taking a lighted lantern from underneath his cloak, he led the way across the courtyard towards a low block of buildings, which he entered. Traversing a short, dark passage, they turned to the right, and were immediately challenged by a soldier, whose "Qui va là?" was answered by their guide who, after giving him the countersign, ordered him to stand aside from a heavy wooden door before which he stood on guard. Then the guide placed the lantern on the ground, while he unlocked the door that gave entrance to a small square chamber. In a corner of this room the Arabs were huddled up together asleep. Round their wrists ran the light steel chains, the ends of which were attached to staples in the wall. Buonaparte took the lantern from their guide and, walking up to the three sleeping figures, regarded them much as a keeper would the wild beasts in his charge. The flashing of the lantern, dim as was its light, awoke the sleepers, who yawned and stretched themselves. Then they rose to a sitting posture and glared with sullen indifference and in silence at their visitors.

Buonaparte gazed at them for a moment or two; then, turning to Roustan, said, "Go to guard house and call a dozen men. Bring them hither and bid them conduct these men to the house of the Lady Halima. I will interrogate them in her presence."

Roustan salaamed and left the chamber.

"Come, General," Buonaparte went on, "we will go and see the other prisoner."

Then he passed out, with his companion.

After walking a few paces, they came to a door, and this having been unlocked, they found themselves in a smaller cell than that in which the three Arabs were confined. Here, however, there was but one occupant. Yusuf, for he it was, was, unlike the other captives, unbound, and was pacing his cell with restless step.

At the entrance of Buonaparte and his companion, he scowled at them; then broke into a torrent of angry words, that both his hearers found difficult to follow.

When he ceased speaking, Buonaparte addressed him.

"You are of the tribe of Auim?" No reply. "Speak and I will free you, if you tell me what I want to know."

"I accept," came the sullen answer; "you do not look like a man who lies. Say on."

Buonaparte put several questions, which Yusuf answered; then he went on to relate what the reader already knows; how that he had seen St. Just shot at and fall headlong from the rock.

"Ha, ha!" he ended with a fiendish chuckle, "He is dead, sure enough. I knew he would die when they shot at him." Here he stopped.

"How?" asked Buonaparte, who, during the recital, had stood leaning with his back against the door and idly kicking one foot against the lintel.

"Because I have his amulet. That once lost, his fate was certain. See, here it is."

And the exulting ruffian held before Buonaparte's astonished eyes the identical trinket Josephine had given to St. Just in Paris on the night of their meeting at the Palais de Luxembourg.

Buonaparte snatched it from him suddenly.

With a howl of rage, Yusuf dashed forward to regain it—only to meet the point of a sword, which, gleaming at his breast, had been instantaneously drawn by the General's companion.

Buonaparte put the jewel in his pocket and, as if abstracted, and taking no further notice of the captive, walked from the cell. A moment later, his companion, having locked the door, rejoined him.

Presently they reached the outer gate way, and Buonaparte, mounting his horse, which a soldier held, galloped off into the darkness, leaving his companion standing under the archway, lost in thought.

* * * * *

The Lady Halima was pacing her room in a fever of impatience. She had received Buonaparte's letter, and the hour of his promised visit had arrived. In the courtyard below, surrounded by their guards, stood the three hapless captives. The moon's silver light fell upon them shivering in their scanty clothing of haic and burnous—a great contrast to the French soldiers in their uniforms, and three-cornered hats—the two groups fair samples of the East and of the West.

Presently there was a slight movement among the French soldiers, and their listless attitude was changed for one of expectation; at the same time a faint sound, like that of muffled blows, could be heard in the distance, though it scarce penetrated the thick, high walls. But, low as it was, it reached the Lady Halima's ears, and it made her heart beat high and brought the color to her face. The sound came nearer, and now could plainly be recognized as the sharp trot of a horse. No wonder she was in a fever of excitement, for she knew that Buonaparte was approaching, and all that his visit meant for her. What had the Fates in store for her? Was she to learn that her lover still lived, and, having performed his mission in the desert, would soon return to her; or that he was dead and that she must fulfill her promise and permit Buonaparte to take his place? True, she had not promised to install him as her lover, in so many words; but she had given him to understand that it would be so, and she considered that she was in honor bound to give herself to him, should he demand it; she knew she had meant this all the time, should she receive unimpeachable evidence that St. Just no longer lived. But she would not allow herself to think of the possibility of his death. Ill he might be; seriously ill of fever; even grievously wounded; but dead? No. Fate could not be so cruel.

But, should the worst have happened, she would have gone to Buonaparte's arms without the least repugnance or sense of shame. Despite the French strain in her, her upbringing had been an Eastern one; she was a Mahometan and familiar with the usages of the harem, and to the light esteem in which Eastern women were held; so that she saw nothing degrading, if she could not have the man she loved, in becoming the paramour of some one else. In the case of Buonaparte, another factor helped to influence her decision, and that was Ambition. As already shown, she was superstitious and believed in a mysterious connection between humanity and the stars; and, according to her reading of the heavens, Buonaparte was destined to rise to the highest flights of power; were she with him, she would rise with him.

To sum up, Love was easily first with her; she would sacrifice everything for that. If St. Just lived, nothing should stand between her and him. But, if he was dead, then she would bury Love, and install Ambition in its place. Union with Buonaparte, at any rate, would serve her immediate purpose—to flee from Egypt and take up her abode in France.

She moved to the latticed window and looked out; presently she saw Buonaparte ride into the courtyard, unattended, and dismount. Her agitation grew almost more than she could bear, Love and Ambition being in the balance; the most momentous question of her life was on the eve of settlement.

The room was almost in darkness, for only a small oil lamp, that hung above the divan, gave a feeble light; so that, before she saw Buonaparte, he was upon her. While she was still standing at the window, he entered softly, and unannounced. Stealing up to her, he wound his arm about her waist and kissed her.

She struggled with him, and he let her go. She started back, and then stood facing him with flashing eyes and heightened color, her bosom heaving with indignation.

"How dare you, Sir?" she cried. "So it is thus you think to gain a woman's favor? I have heard much of the deference paid by your countrymen to women; is this a sample of it? Oh, would that my lover were here to avenge for me this insult!"

Buonaparte answered with a laugh, "Your lover? Ah! he is here; but not the one you mean."

And he tapped his breast with his hand.

Halima made a step forward.

"My lover!" she cried eagerly. "What mean you? Do you bring me intelligence of his return? If that is the reason of your coming, I could find it in my heart to pardon you. Speak; Oh! keep me not in suspense, but speak."

She panted in her agitation, while she hung in mingled hope and fear upon his answer.

It came in harsh and strident tones. He was angered at the depth of her feeling for St. Just, and it made him pitiless and heedless of the pain his words would cause.

"Never in this world will you see St. Just again," he said. "He lies buried in the desert, slain by your father's orders."

At this dreadful news, so suddenly and cruelly imparted, his hearer swayed as though she would have fallen; but, with an effort, she so far controlled herself as to stagger to a divan, on which she dropped.

"It is not true, it cannot be true," she cried; "you are deceiving me for your own ends. Why should my father slay him? No, I believe you not."

Buonaparte took no notice of her words. He merely stepped to the open window and called out, "Roustan, bring up the prisoners."

The Arab girl sprang to her feet and advanced to him. "Prisoners?" she asked wonderingly. "Who are they? Why are they here?"

"You say you disbelieve me. They bring you proof of what I have just told you."

Even while he spoke the tramp of men could be heard outside, and, in another moment, Roustan entered with the three Arab soldiers and their guards.

Buonaparte cross-examined them in Halima's presence, and she herself put such questions to them as she chose. They told her of the capture of St. Just by members of her father's tribe and all that had followed, to his final fall from the rock. They were so evidently the witnesses of truth that Halima could not fail to be convinced that St. Just was dead.

She waved her hand to them as a signal that they were to go, and Buonaparte dismissed them.

Then the tears, that her excitement had kept back, poured forth. The girl staggered to the divan and, burying her head in its cushions, wept long and passionately.

As on a similar occasion, Buonaparte sought not to check her tears, but sat near, waiting patiently till her grief should spend itself. Meanwhile he fingered mechanically St. Just's charm, which he had taken from Yusuf, and meant to give to Halima.

At last the force of her weeping died away, and she raised her tear-stained face to his, a look of piteous entreaty on it.

At a loss for words of consolation, Buonaparte handed her the jewel.

"It was St. Just's," he said. "Now you have a right to it."

She reached out her hand and took it. At the same time, Buonaparte seated himself upon the divan and drew her to him. Then he kissed her, while he whispered tenderly in her ear, "I love you, Halima, I love you. My Queen, my heart's desire, tell me you love me too."

But she had St. Just's death too freshly in her mind. She shook her head sadly. "No, no," she murmured; "not to-night. Perhaps, to-morrow I will tell you."

Now Buonaparte, always imperious, could and would brook no resistance. For reply, he crushed her to himself. Violent was his embrace and masterful his manner. And, she, in her inmost heart

already yielding, made but a faint resistance. And, at that moment, the light above the divan flickered out and darkness fell upon the scene.

CHAPTER XII

To return to St. Just who, when last seen, was lying unconscious in the tent of the Arab Sheik; the fever that had robbed him of his senses soon spent its force, and, with a lowering of his temperature, he returned to consciousness. Accustomed to the hardships of a campaign in the field, and with some experience of wounds, and by no means impatient or given to complaining, he could not but chafe at his slow progress towards recovery. He seemed to gain no strength. No doubt this was due in great measure to his want of European comforts, medical attendance, and the diet suitable to an invalid.

When, at last, he was able to get about again, which, was not till December had ended and a new year had dawned, he found, somewhat to his surprise, that the sheik, if harsh, was just in all his dealings. One night he and the sheik were sitting over the camp fire under the shadow of the very rock which had been the scene of St. Just's narrow escape from death, when the sheik spoke concerning that adventure.

"If I had wished to kill you, I could easily have done so. You must not suppose that my men are, as a rule, the bad marksmen they proved themselves on that occasion. If you had been killed, I had avenged the affront your General had put upon me, and, indirectly, upon the tribe, by trying to bribe me to become his ally. If you survived the shots, you could carry my answer, and, possibly, save the life of one of my own tribe, whom your General might slay for being the bearer of unpalatable news. That you would be hit fatally I expected; and how Mahmoud, who, though but eighteen, is a good marksman, came to miss, I know not, though he only failed by chance.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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