

**ГЕНРИК
СЕНКЕВИЧ**

IN DESERT AND
WILDERNESS

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Содержание

PART FIRST	4
I	4
II	14
III	29
IV	37
V	45
VI	59
VII	67
VIII	83
IX	102
X	110
XI	114
XII	121
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	129

Henryk Sienkiewicz

In Desert and Wilderness

PART FIRST

I

"Do you know, Nell," said Stas Tarkowski to his friend, a little English girl, "that yesterday the police came and arrested the wife of Smain, the overseer, and her three children, – that Fatma who several times called at the office to see your father and mine."

And little Nell, resembling a beautiful picture, raised her greenish eyes to Stas and asked with mingled surprise and fright:

"Did they take her to prison?"

"No, but they will not let her go to the Sudân and an official has arrived who will see that she does not move a step out of Port Said."

"Why?"

Stas, who was fourteen years old and who loved his eight-year-old companion very much, but looked upon her as a mere child, said with a conceited air:

"When you reach my age, you will know everything which happens, not only along the Canal from Port Said to Suez, but in

all Egypt. Have you ever heard of the Mahdi?"

"I heard that he is ugly and naughty."

The boy smiled compassionately.

"I do not know whether he is ugly. The Sudânese claim that he is handsome. But the word 'naughty' about a man who has murdered so many people, could be used only by a little girl, eight years old, in dresses – oh – reaching the knees."

"Papa told me so and papa knows best."

"He told you so because otherwise you would not understand. He would not express himself to me in that way. The Mahdi is worse than a whole shoal of crocodiles. Do you understand? That is a nice expression for me. 'Naughty!' They talk that way to babes."

But, observing the little girl's clouded face, he became silent and afterwards said:

"Nell, you know I did not want to cause you any unpleasantness. The time will come when you will be fourteen. I certainly promise you that."

"Aha!" she replied with a worried look, "but if before that time the Mahdi should dash into Port Said and eat me."

"The Mahdi is not a cannibal, so he does not eat people. He only kills them. He will not dash into Port Said, but even if he did and wanted to murder you, he would first have to do with me."

This declaration with the sniff with which Stas inhaled the air through his nose, did not bode any good for the Mahdi and considerably quieted Nell as to her own person.

"I know," she answered, "you would not let him harm me. But why do they not allow Fatma to leave Port Said?"

"Because Fatma is a cousin of the Mahdi. Her husband, Smain, made an offer to the Egyptian Government at Cairo to go to the Sudân, where the Mahdi is staying, and secure the liberty of all Europeans who have fallen into his hands."

"Then Smain is a good man?"

"Wait! Your papa and my papa, who knew Smain thoroughly, did not have any confidence in him and warned Nubar Pasha not to trust him. But the Government agreed to send Smain and Smain remained over half a year with the Mahdi. The prisoners not only did not return, but news has come from Khartûm that the Mahdists are treating them more and more cruelly, and that Smain, having taken money from the Government, has become a traitor. He joined the Mahdi's army and has been appointed an emir. The people say that in that terrible battle in which General Hicks fell, Smain commanded the Mahdi's artillery and that he probably taught the Mahdists how to handle the cannon, which before that time they, as savage people, could not do. But now Smain is anxious to get his wife and children out of Egypt. So when Fatma, who evidently knew in advance what Smain was going to do, wanted secretly to leave Port Said, the Government arrested her with the children."

"But what good are Fatma and her children to the Government?"

"The Government will say to the Mahdi, – 'Give us the

prisoners and we will surrender Fatma' – "

For the time the conversation was interrupted because the attention of Stas was attracted by birds flying from the direction of Echtum om Farag towards Lake Menzaleh. They flew quite low and in the clear atmosphere could be plainly seen some pelicans with curved napes, slowly moving immense wings. Stas at once began to imitate their flight. So with head upraised, he ran a score of paces along the dyke, waving his outstretched arms.

"Look!" suddenly exclaimed Nell. "Flamingoes are also flying."

Stas stood still in a moment, as actually behind the pelicans, but somewhat higher, could be seen, suspended in the sky, two great red and purple flowers, as it were.

"Flamingoes! flamingoes! Before night they return to their haunts on the little islands," the boy said. "Oh, if I only had a rifle!"

"Why should you want to shoot at them?"

"Girls don't understand such things. But let us go farther; we may see more of them."

Saying this he took the girl's hand and together they strolled towards the first wharf beyond Port Said. Dinah, a negress and at one time nurse of little Nell, closely followed them. They walked on the embankment which separated the waters of Lake Menzaleh from the Canal, through which at that time a big English steamer, in charge of a pilot, floated. The night was approaching. The sun still stood quite high but was rolling in the

direction of the lake. The salty waters of the latter began to glitter with gold and throb with the reflection of peacock feathers. On the Arabian bank as far as the eye could reach, stretched a tawny, sandy desert – dull, portentous, lifeless. Between the glassy, as if half-dead, heaven and the immense, wrinkled sands there was not a trace of a living being. While on the Canal life seethed, boats bustled about, the whistles of steamers resounded, and above Menzaleh flocks of mews and wild ducks scintillated in the sunlight, yonder, on the Arabian bank, it appeared as if it were the region of death. Only in proportion as the sun, descending, became ruddier and ruddier did the sands begin to assume that lily hue which the heath in Polish forests has in autumn.

The children, walking towards the wharf, saw a few more flamingoes, which pleased their eyes. After this Dinah announced that Nell must return home. In Egypt, after days which even in winter are often scorching, very cold nights follow, and as Nell's health demanded great care, her father, Mr. Rawlinson, would not allow her to be near the water after sunset. They, therefore, returned to the city, on the outskirts of which, near the Canal, stood Mr. Rawlinson's villa, and by the time the sun plunged into the sea they were in the house. Soon, the engineer Tarkowski, Stas' father, who was invited to dinner arrived, and the whole company, together with a French lady, Nell's teacher, Madame Olivier, sat at the table.

Mr. Rawlinson, one of the directors of the Suez Canal Company, and Ladislaus Tarkowski, senior engineer of the

same company, lived for many years upon terms of the closest intimacy. Both were widowers, but Pani Tarkowski, by birth a French lady, died at the time Stas came into the world, while Nell's mother died of consumption in Helwan when the girl was three years old. Both widowers lived in neighboring houses in Port Said, and owing to their duties met daily. A common misfortune drew them still closer to each other and strengthened the ties of friendship previously formed. Mr. Rawlinson loved Stas as his own son, while Pan Tarkowski would have jumped into fire and water for little Nell. After finishing their daily work the most agreeable recreation for them was to talk about the children, their education and future. During such conversations it frequently happened that Mr. Rawlinson would praise the ability, energy, and bravery of Stas and Pan Tarkowski would grow enthusiastic over the sweetness and angelic countenance of Nell. And the one and the other spoke the truth. Stas was a trifle conceited and a trifle boastful, but diligent in his lessons, and the teachers in the English school in Port Said, which he attended, credited him with uncommon abilities. As to courage and resourcefulness, he inherited them from his father, for Pan Tarkowski possessed these qualities in an eminent degree and in a large measure owed to them his present position.

In the year 1863 he fought for eleven months without cessation. Afterwards, wounded, taken into captivity, and condemned to Siberia, he escaped from the interior of Russia and made his way to foreign lands. Before he entered into the

insurrection he was a qualified engineer; nevertheless he devoted a year to the study of hydraulics. Later he secured a position at the Canal and in the course of a few years, when his expert knowledge, energy, and industry became known, he assumed the important position of senior engineer.

Stas was born, bred, and reached his fourteenth year in Port Said on the Canal; in consequence of which the engineers called him the child of the desert. At a later period, when he was attending school, he sometimes, during the vacation season and holidays, accompanied his father or Mr. Rawlinson on trips, which their duty required them to make from Port Said to Suez to inspect the work on the embankment or the dredging of the channel of the Canal. He knew everybody – the engineers and custom-house officials as well as the laborers, Arabs and negroes. He bustled about and insinuated himself everywhere, appearing where least expected; he made long excursions on the embankment, rowed in a boat over Menzaleh, venturing at times far and wide. He crossed over to the Arabian bank and mounting the first horse he met, or in the absence of a horse, a camel, or even a donkey, he would imitate Farys* [* Farys, the hero of Adam Mickiewicz's Oriental poem of the same name. —*Translator's note.*] on the desert; in a word, as Pan Tarkowski expressed it, "he was always popping up somewhere," and every moment free from his studies he passed on the water.

His father did not oppose this, as he knew that rowing, horseback riding, and continual life in the fresh air strengthened

his health and developed resourcefulness within him. In fact, Stas was taller and stronger than most boys of his age. It was enough to glance at his eyes to surmise that in case of any adventure he would sin more from too much audacity than from timidity. In his fourteenth year, he was one of the best swimmers in Port Said, which meant not a little, for the Arabs and negroes swim like fishes. Shooting from carbines of a small caliber, and only with cartridges, for wild ducks and Egyptian geese, he acquired an unerring eye and steady hand. His dream was to hunt the big animals sometime in Central Africa. He therefore eagerly listened to the narratives of the Sudânese working on the Canal, who in their native land had encountered big, thick-skinned, and rapacious beasts.

This also had its advantage, for at the same time he learned their languages. It was not enough to excavate the Suez Canal; it was necessary also to maintain it, as otherwise the sands of the deserts, lying on both banks, would fill it up in the course of a year. The grand work of De Lesseps demands continual labor and vigilance. So, too, at the present day, powerful machines, under the supervision of skilled engineers, and thousands of laborers are at work, dredging the channel. At the excavation of the Canal, twenty-five thousand men labored. To-day, owing to the completion of the work and improved new machinery, considerably less are required. Nevertheless, the number is great. Among them the natives of the locality predominate. There is not, however, a lack of Nubians, Sudânese, Somalis, and

various negroes coming from the White and Blue Niles, that is, from the region which previous to the Mahdi's insurrection was occupied by the Egyptian Government. Stas lived with all on intimate terms and having, as is usual with Poles, an extraordinary aptitude for languages he became, he himself not knowing how and when, acquainted with many of their dialects. Born in Egypt, he spoke Arabian like an Arab. From the natives of Zanzibar, many of whom worked as firemen on the steam dredges, he learned Kiswahili, a language widely prevalent all over Central Africa. He could even converse with the negroes of the Dinka and Shilluk tribes, residing on the Nile below Fashoda. Besides this, he spoke fluently English, French, and also Polish, for his father, an ardent patriot, was greatly concerned that his son should know the language of his forefathers. Stas in reality regarded this language as the most beautiful in the world and taught it, not without some success, to little Nell. One thing only he could not accomplish, that she should pronounce his name Stas, and not "Stes." Sometimes, on account of this, a misunderstanding arose between them, which continued until small tears began to glisten in the eyes of the girl. Then "Stes" would beg her pardon and became angry at himself.

He had, however, an annoying habit of speaking slightly of her eight years and citing by way of contrast his own grave age and experience. He contended that a boy who is finishing his fourteenth year, if he is not fully matured, at least is not a mere child, but on the contrary, is capable of performing all kinds of

heroic deeds, especially if he has Polish and French blood. He craved most ardently that sometime an opportunity would occur for such deeds, particularly in defense of Nell. Both invented various dangers and Stas was compelled to answer her questions as to what he would do if, for instance, a crocodile, ten yards long, or a scorpion as big as a dog, should crawl through the window of her home. To both it never occurred for a moment that impending reality would surpass all their fantastic suppositions.

II

In the meantime, in the house, good news awaited them during the dinner. Messrs. Rawlinson and Tarkowski, as skilled engineers, had been invited a few weeks before, to examine and appraise the work carried on in connection with the whole net-work of canals in the Province of El-Fayûm, in the vicinity of the city of Medinet near Lake Karûn, as well as along the Yûsuf and Nile rivers. They were to stay there for about a month and secured furloughs from their company. As the Christmas holidays were approaching, both gentlemen, not desiring to be separated from the children, decided that Stas and Nell should also go to Medinet. Hearing this news the children almost leaped out of their skins from joy. They had already visited the cities lying along the Canal, particularly Ismailia and Suez, and while outside the Canal, Alexandria and Cairo, near which they viewed the great pyramids and the Sphinx. But these were short trips, while the expedition to Medinet el-Fayûm required a whole day's travel by railway, southward along the Nile and then westward from El-Wasta towards the Libyan Desert. Stas knew Medinet from the narratives of younger engineers and tourists who went there to hunt for various kinds of water-fowls as well as desert wolves and hyenas. He knew that it was a separate, great oasis lying off the west bank of the Nile but not dependent upon its inundations and having its water system formed by Lake Karûn

through Bahr Yûsuf and a whole chain of small canals. Those who had seen this oasis said that although that region belonged to Egypt, nevertheless, being separated from it by a desert, it formed a distinct whole. Only the Yûsuf River connects, one might say with a thin blue thread, that locality with the valley of the Nile. The great abundance of water, fertility of soil, and luxuriant vegetation made an earthly paradise of it, while the extensive ruins of the city of Crocodilopolis drew thither hundreds of curious tourists. Stas, however, was attracted mainly by the shores of Lake Karûn, with its swarms of birds and its wolf-hunts on the desert hills of Gebel el-Sedment.

But his vacation began a few days later, and as the inspection of the work on the canals was an urgent matter and the gentlemen could not lose any time, it was arranged that they should leave without delay, while the children, with Madame Olivier, were to depart a week later. Nell and Stas had a desire to leave at once, but Stas did not dare to make the request. Instead they began to ask questions about various matters relative to the journey, and with new outbursts of joy received the news that they would not live in uncomfortable hotels kept by Greeks, but in tents furnished by the Cook Tourists' Agency. This is the customary arrangement of tourists who leave Cairo for a lengthy stay at Medinet. Cook furnishes tents, servants, cooks, supplies of provisions, horses, donkeys, camels, and guides; so the tourist does not have to bother about anything. This, indeed, is quite an expensive mode of traveling; but Messrs. Tarkowski

and Rawlinson did not have to take that into account as all expenses were borne by the Egyptian Government, which invited them, as experts, to inspect and appraise the work on the canals. Nell, who, above everything in the world, loved riding on a camel, obtained a promise from her father that she should have a separate "hump-backed saddle horse" on which, together with Madame Olivier, or Dinah, and sometimes with Stas, she could participate in the excursions to the nearer localities of the desert and to Karun. Pan Tarkowski promised Stas that he would allow him some nights to go after wolves, and if he brought a good report from school he would get a genuine English short rifle and the necessary equipment for a hunter. As Stas was confident that he would succeed, he at once began to regard himself as the owner of a short rifle and promised himself to perform various astonishing and immortal feats with it.

On such projects and conversation the dinner passed for the overjoyed children. But somewhat less eagerness for the contemplated journey was displayed by Madame Olivier who was loath to leave the comfortable villa in Port Said and who was frightened at the thought of living for several weeks in a tent, and particularly at the plan of excursions on camel-back. It happened that she had already tried this mode of riding several times and these attempts ended unfortunately. Once the camel rose too soon, before she was well seated in the saddle, and as a result she rolled off his back onto the ground. Another time, the dromedary, not belonging to the light-footed variety,

jolted her so that two days elapsed before she recovered; in a word, although Nell, after two or three pleasure-rides which Mr. Rawlinson permitted her to take, declared that there was nothing more delightful in the world, in the same measure only painful recollections remained for Madame Olivier. She said that this was good enough for Arabs or for a chit like Nell, who could not be jolted any more than a fly which should alight upon a camel's hump, but not for persons dignified, and not too light, and having at the same time a certain proneness to unbearable sea-sickness.

But as to Medinet el-Fayûm she had other fears. Now in Port Said as well as in Alexandria, Cairo, and in the whole of Egypt nothing was the subject of more discussion than the Mahdi's insurrection and the cruelties of the dervishes. Madame Olivier, not knowing exactly where Medinet was situated, became alarmed as to whether it was not too near the Mahdists, and finally began to question Mr. Rawlinson about it.

But he only smiled and said:

"The Mahdi at this moment is besieging Khartûm in which General Gordon is defending himself. Does Madame know how far it is from Medinet to Khartûm?"

"I have no idea."

"About as far as from here to Sicily," explained Pan Tarkowski.

"Just about," corroborated Stas. "Khartûm lies where the White and Blue Niles meet and form one river. We are separated from it by the immense expanse of Egypt and the whole of

Nubia."

Afterwards he wanted to add that even if Medinet should be closer to the regions overrun by the insurgents, he, of course, would be there with his short rifle; but recalling that for similar bragging he sometimes received a sharp reproof from his father, he became silent.

The older members of the party, however, began to talk of the Mahdi and the insurrection, for this was the most important matter affecting Egypt. The news from Khartûm was bad. The wild hordes already had been besieging the city for a month and a half and the Egyptian and English governments were acting slowly. The relief expedition had barely started and it was generally feared that notwithstanding the fame, bravery, and ability of Gordon this important city would fall into the hands of the barbarians. This was the opinion of Pan Tarkowski, who suspected that England in her soul desired that the Mahdi should wrest it from Egypt in order to retake it later from him and make this vast region an English possession. He did not, however, share this suspicion with Mr. Rawlinson as he did not want to offend his patriotic feelings.

Towards the close of the dinner Stas began to ask why the Egyptian Government had annexed all the country lying south of Nubia, particularly Kordofân, Darfur, and the Sudân as far as Lake Albert Nyanza and deprived the natives there of their liberty. Mr. Rawlinson explained that whatever was done by the Egyptian Government was done at the request of England which

extended a protectorate over Egypt and in reality ruled her as Egypt herself desired.

"The Egyptian Government did not deprive anybody of his liberty," he said, "but restored it to hundreds of thousands and perhaps to millions of people. In Kordofân, in Darfur and in the Sudân there were not during the past years any independent States. Only here and there some petty ruler laid claim to some lands and took possession of them by force in spite of the will of the residents. They were mainly inhabited by independent Arab-negro tribes, that is, by people having the blood of both races. These tribes lived in a state of incessant warfare. They attacked each other and seized horses, camels, cattle, and, above all, slaves; besides, they perpetrated numerous atrocities. But the worst were the ivory and slave hunters. They formed a separate class, to which belonged nearly all the chiefs of the tribes and the richer traders. They made armed expeditions into the interior of Africa, appropriating everywhere ivory tusks, and carried away thousands of people: men, women, and children. In addition they destroyed villages and settlements, devastated fields, shed streams of blood, and slaughtered without pity all who resisted. In the southern portion of the Sudân, Darfur, and Kordofân, as well as the region beyond the Upper Nile as far as the lake they depopulated some localities entirely. But the Arabian bands made their incursions farther and farther so that Central Africa became a land of tears and blood. Now England which, as you know, pursues slave-dealers all over the world, consented that the

Egyptian Government should annex Kordofân, Darfur, and the Sudân. This was the only method to compel these pillagers to abandon their abominable trade and the only way to hold them in restraint. The unfortunate negroes breathed more freely; the depredations ceased and the people began to live under tolerable laws. But such a state of affairs did not please the traders, so when Mohammed Ahmed, known to-day as 'the Mahdi,' appeared among them and proclaimed a holy war on the pretext that the true faith of Mahomet was perishing, all rushed like one man to arms; and so that terrible war has been kindled in which thus far the Egyptians have met with such poor success. The Mahdi has defeated the forces of the Government in every battle. He has occupied Kordofân, Darfur, and the Sudân; his hordes at present are laying a siege to Khartûm and are advancing to the north as far as the frontiers of Nubia."

"Can they advance as far as Egypt?" asked Stas.

"No," answered Mr. Rawlinson. "The Mahdi announces, indeed, that he will conquer the whole world, but he is a wild man who has no conception of anything. He never will take Egypt, as England would not permit it."

"If, however, the Egyptian troops are completely routed?"

"Then would appear the English armies which no one has ever overcome."

"And why did England permit the Mahdi to occupy so much territory?"

"How do you know that she has permitted it?" replied Mr.

Rawlinson.

"England is never in a hurry because she is eternal."

Further conversation was interrupted by a negro servant, who announced that Fatma Smain had arrived and begged for an audience.

Women in the East are occupied exclusively with household affairs and seldom leave the harems. Only the poorer ones go to the market or work in the fields, as the wives of the fellahs, the Egyptian peasants, do; but these at such times veil their faces. Though in the Sudân, from which region Fatma came, this custom was not observed, and though she had come to Mr. Rawlinson's office previously, nevertheless, her arrival, particularly at such a late hour and at a private house, evoked surprise.

"We shall learn something new about Smain," said Pan Tarkowski.

"Yes," answered Mr. Rawlinson, giving at the same time a signal to the servant to usher Fatma in.

Accordingly, after a while there entered a tall, young Sudânese woman with countenance entirely unveiled, complexion very dark, and eyes beautiful but wild, and a trifle ominous. Entering, she at once prostrated herself, and when Mr. Rawlinson ordered her to rise, she raised herself but remained on her knees.

"Sidi," she said, "May Allah bless thee, thy posterity, thy home, and thy flocks!"

"What do you want?" asked the engineer.

"Mercy, help, and succor in misfortune, oh, sir! I am imprisoned in Port Said and destruction hangs over me and my children."

"You say that you are imprisoned, and yet you could come here, and in the night-time at that."

"I have been escorted by the police who day and night watch my house, and I know that they have an order to cut off our heads soon!"

"Speak like a rational woman," answered Mr. Rawlinson, shrugging his shoulders. "You are not in the Sudân, but in Egypt where no one is executed without a trial. So you may be certain that not a hair will fall from your head or the heads of your children."

But she began to implore him to intercede for her yet once more with the Government, to procure permission for her to go to Smain.

"Englishmen as great as you are, sir," she said, "can do everything. The Government in Cairo thinks that Smain is a traitor, but that is false. There visited me yesterday Arabian merchants, who arrived from Suâkin, and before that they bought gums and ivory in the Sudân, and they informed me that Smain is lying sick at El-Fasher and is calling for me and the children to bless them – "

"All this is your fabrication, Fatma," interrupted Mr. Rawlinson.

But she began to swear by Allah that she spoke the truth, and

afterwards said that if Smain got well, he undoubtedly would ransom all the Christian captives; and if he should die, she, as a relative of the leader of the dervishes, could obtain access to him easily and would secure whatever she wished. Let them only allow her to leave, for her heart will leap out of her bosom from longing for her husband. In what had she, ill-fated woman, offended the Government or the Khedive? Was it her fault or could she be held accountable because she was the relative of the dervish, Mohammed Ahmed?

Fatma did not dare in the presence of the "English people" to call her relative "the Mahdi," as that meant the Redeemer of the world. She knew that the Egyptian Government regarded him as a rebel and an imposter. But continually striking her forehead and invoking heaven to witness her innocence and unhappy plight, she began to weep and at the same time wail mournfully as women in the East do after losing husbands or sons. Afterwards she again flung herself with face on the ground, or rather on the carpet with which the inlaid floor was covered, and waited in silence.

Nell, who towards the close of the dinner felt a little sleepy, became thoroughly aroused and, having an upright little heart, seized her father's hand, and kissing it again and again, began to beg for Fatma.

"Let papa help her! Do please, papa!"

Fatma, evidently understanding English, exclaimed amidst her sobs, not removing her face from the carpet:

"May Allah bless thee, bird of paradise, with the joys of Omayya, oh, star without a blemish!"

However implacable Stas in his soul was towards the Mahdists, he was moved by Fatma's entreaties and grief. Besides, Nell interceded for her and he in the end always wanted that which Nell wished. So after a while he spoke out, as if to himself but so that all could hear him:

"If I were the Government, I would allow Fatma to go."

"But as you are not the Government," Pan Tarkowski said to him, "you would do better not to interfere in that which does not concern you."

Mr. Rawlinson also had a compassionate soul and was sensible of Fatma's situation, but certain statements which she made struck him as being downright falsehoods. Having almost daily relations with the custom-house at Ismailia, he well knew that no new cargoes of gums or ivory were being transported lately through the Canal. The trade in those wares had ceased almost entirely. Arabian traders, moreover, could not return from the city of El-Fasher which lay in the Sudân, as the Mahdists, as a rule, barred all traders from their territories, and those whom they captured were despoiled and kept in captivity. And it was almost a certainty that the statement about Smain's sickness was a falsehood.

But as Nell's little eyes were still looking at her papa appealingly, he, not desiring to sadden the little girl, after a while said to Fatma:

"Fatma, I already have written at your request to the Government, but without result. And now listen. To-morrow, with this mehendis (engineer) whom you see here, I leave for Medinet el-Fayûm; on the way we shall stop one day in Cairo, for the Khedive desires to confer with us about the canals leading from Bahr Yûsuf and give us a commission as to the same. During the conference I shall take care to present your case and try to secure for you his favor. But I can do nothing more, nor shall I promise more."

Fatma rose and, extending both hands in sign of gratitude, exclaimed:

"And so I am safe."

"No, Fatma," answered Mr. Rawlinson, "do not speak of safety for I already told you that death threatens neither you nor your children. But that the Khedive will consent to your departure I do not guarantee, for Smain is not sick but is a traitor, who, having taken money from the Government, does not at all think of ransoming the captives from Mohammed Ahmed."

"Smain is innocent, sir, and lies in El-Fasher," reiterated Fatma, "but if even he broke his faith with the Government, I swear before you, my benefactor, that if I am allowed to depart I will entreat Mohammed Ahmed until I secure the deliverance of your captives."

"Very well. I promise you once more that I will intercede for you with the Khedive."

Fatma began to prostrate herself.

"Thank you, Sidi! You are not only powerful, but just. And now I entreat that you permit me to serve you as a slave."

"In Egypt no one can be a slave," answered Mr. Rawlinson with a smile. "I have enough servants and cannot avail myself of your services; for, as I told you, we all are leaving for Medinet and perhaps will remain there until Ramazan."

"I know, sir, for the overseer, Chadigi, told me about that. I, when I heard of it, came not only to implore you for help, but also to tell you that two men of my Dongola tribe, Idris and Gebhr, are camel drivers in Medinet and will prostrate themselves before you when you arrive, submitting to your commands themselves and their camels."

"Good, good," answered the director, "but that is the affair of the Cook Agency, not mine."

Fatma, having kissed the hands of the two engineers and the children, departed blessing Nell particularly. Both gentlemen remained silent for a while, after which Mr. Rawlinson said:

"Poor woman! But she lies as only in the East they know how to lie, and even in her declaration of gratitude there is a sound of some false note."

"Undoubtedly," answered Pan Tarkowski; "but to tell the truth, whether Smain betrayed or did not, the Government has no right to detain her in Egypt, as she cannot be held responsible for her husband."

"The Government does not now allow any Sudânese to leave for Suâkin or Nubia without a special permit; so the prohibition

does not affect Fatma alone. Many of them are found in Egypt for they come here for gain. Among them are some who belong to the Dongolese tribe; that is the one from which the Mahdi comes. There are, for instance, besides Fatma, Chadigi and those two camel drivers in Medinet. The Mahdists call the Egyptians Turks and are carrying on a war with them, but among the local Arabs can be found a considerable number of adherents of the Mahdi, who would willingly join him. We must number among them all the fanatics, all the partisans of Arabi Pasha, and many among the poorer classes. They hold it ill of the Government that it yielded entirely to English influence and claim that the religion suffers by it. God knows how many already have escaped across the desert, avoiding the customary sea route to Suâkin. So the Government, having learned that Fatma also wanted to run away, ordered her to be put under surveillance. For her and her children only, as relatives of the Mahdi himself, can an exchange of the captives be effected."

"Do the lower classes in Egypt really favor the Mahdi?"

"The Mahdi has followers even in the army, which perhaps for that reason fights so poorly."

"But how can the Sudânese fly across the desert? Why, that is a thousand miles."

"Nevertheless, by that route slaves were brought into Egypt."

"I should judge that Fatma's children could not endure such a journey."

"That is why she wants to shorten it and ride by way of the

sea to Suâkin."

"In any case, she is a poor woman."

With this the conversation concluded.

Twelve hours later "the poor woman," having carefully closeted herself in her house with the son of the overseer Chadigi, whispered to him with knitted brows and a grim glance of her beautiful eyes:

"Chamis, son of Chadigi, here is the money. Go even to-day to Medinet and give to Idris this writing, which the devout dervish Bellali, at my request, wrote to him. The children of the mehendes are good, but if I do not obtain a permit, then there is no other alternative. I know you will not betray me. Remember that you and your father too come from the Dongolese tribe in which was born the great Mahdi."

III

Both engineers left the following night for Cairo where they were to visit the British minister plenipotentiary and hold an audience with the viceroy. Stas calculated that this would require two days, and his calculation appeared accurate, for on the third day at night he received from his father, who was already at Medinet, the following message: "The tents are ready. You are to leave the moment your vacation begins. Inform Fatma through Chadigi that we could not accomplish anything for her." A similar message was also received by Madame Olivier who at once, with the assistance of the negress Dinah, began to make preparations for the journey.

The sight of these preparations gladdened the hearts of the children. But suddenly an accident occurred which deranged their plans and seemed likely to prevent their journey. On the day on which Stas' winter vacation began and on the eve of their departure a scorpion stung Madame Olivier during her afternoon nap in the garden. These venomous creatures in Egypt are not usually very dangerous, but in this case the sting might become exceptionally baleful. The scorpion had crawled onto the head-rest of the linen chair and stung Madame Olivier in the neck at a moment when she leaned her head against the rest. As she had suffered lately from erysipelas in the face, fear was entertained that the sickness might recur. A physician was summoned at

once, but he arrived two hours later as he had engagements elsewhere. The neck and even the face were already swollen, after which fever appeared, with the usual symptoms of poisoning. The physician announced that under the circumstances there could not be any talk of a journey and ordered the patient to bed. In view of this it seemed highly probable that the children would be compelled to pass the Christmas holidays at home. In justice to Nell it must be stated that in the first moments particularly she thought more of the sufferings of her teacher than of the lost pleasures in Medinet. She only wept in corners at the thought of not seeing her father for a few weeks. Stas did not accept the accident with the same resignation. He first forwarded a dispatch and afterwards mailed a letter with an inquiry as to what they were to do. The reply came in two days. Mr. Rawlinson first communicated with the physician; having learned from him that immediate danger was removed and that only a fear of the recurrence of erysipelas prevented Madame Olivier's departure from Port Said, he, above all, took precaution that she should have proper care and nursing, and afterwards sent the children permission to travel with Dinah. But as Dinah, notwithstanding her extreme attachment for Nell, was not able to take care of herself on the railways and in the hotels, the duties of guide and paymaster during this trip devolved upon Stas. It can easily be understood how proud he was of this role and with what chivalrous spirit he assured little Nell that not a hair would fall from her head, as if in reality the road to Cairo and to Medinet

presented any difficulties or dangers.

All preparations having been completed, the children started that very day for Ismailia by way of the Canal. From Ismailia they were to travel by rail to Cairo, where they were to pass the night. On the following day they were to ride to Medinet. Leaving Ismailia they saw Lake Timsâh which Stas already knew, as Pan Tarkowski, being an ardent sportsman, in moments free from his duties had taken Stas along with him to hunt for aquatic birds. Afterwards the road ran along Wâdi Tûmilât close to the fresh-water canal leading from the Nile to Ismailia and Suez. This canal had been dug before the Suez Canal, so that the workingmen working on De Lesseps' grand achievement would not be deprived entirely of water fit for drinking purposes. But its excavation had yet another fortunate result, for this region, which before was a sterile desert, bloomed anew when through it coursed a strong and life-bringing stream of fresh water. The children could observe on the left side from the windows of the coach a wide belt of verdure composed of meadows on which were pastured horses, camels, and sheep, and of tilled fields, diversified with maize, millet, alfalfa, and other varieties of plants used for fodder. On the bank of the canal could be seen all kinds of wells in the shape of large wheels with buckets attached, or in the usual form of well-sweeps, drawing water, which fellahs laboriously carried to the garden-beds or conveyed in barrels, on wagons drawn by buffaloes. Over the sprouting grain pigeons soared, and at times a whole covey of quails sprang

up. On the canal banks, storks and cranes gravely stalked. In the distance, above the mud hovels of the fellahs towered, like plumes of feathers, the crowns of date palms.

On the other hand, on the north side of the railway there stretched a stark desert, but unlike the one which lay on the other side of the Suez Canal. That one looked as level as would the bottom of the sea, from which the water had disappeared and only wrinkled sand remained, while here the sand was more yellowish, heaped up as if in great knolls, covered on the sides with tufts of gray vegetation. Between those knolls, which here and there changed into high hills, lay wide valleys in which from time to time caravans could be seen moving.

From the windows of the car the children could catch sight of heavily loaded camels, walking in a long string, one after another, over the sandy expanse. In front of each camel was an Arab in a black mantle, with a white turban on his head. Little Nell was reminded of the pictures in the Bible, which she had seen at home, representing the Israelites entering Egypt during the times of Joseph. They were exactly the same. Unfortunately she could not see the caravans very well as at the windows on that side of the car sat two English officers, who obstructed her view.

But she had scarcely told this to Stas, when he turned to the officers with a very grave mien and, touching his hat with his finger, said:

"Gentlemen, could you kindly make room for this little Miss who wishes to look at the camels?"

Both officers accepted the suggestion with the same gravity, and one of them not only surrendered his place to the curious Miss but lifted her and placed her in a seat near the window.

And Stas began his lecture:

"This is the ancient land of Goshen, which Pharaoh gave to Joseph for his brother Israelites. At one time in far antiquity a canal of fresh water ran here so that this new one is but a reconstruction of the old. But later it fell into ruin and the country became a desert. Now the soil again is fertile."

"How does the gentleman know this?" asked one of the officers.

"At my age, we know such things," answered Stas; "and besides, not long ago Professor Sterling gave us a lecture on Wâdi Tûmilât."

Though Stas spoke English quite fluently, his slightly different accent attracted the attention of the other officer, who asked:

"Is the little gentleman an Englishman?"

"Miss Nell, whose father entrusted her to my care on this journey, is little. I am not an Englishman but a Pole and the son of an engineer at the Canal."

The officer, hearing the answer of the pert boy, smiled and said:

"I esteem the Poles. I belong to a regiment of cavalry, which during the times of Napoleon several times fought with the Polish Uhlans, and that tradition until the present day forms its glory and honor."* [* Those regiments of English cavalry which during

the times of Napoleon met the Polish cavalry actually pride themselves with that fact at the present time, and every officer speaking of his regiment never fails to say, "We fought with the Poles." See Chevrillon, "Aux Indes."]

"I am pleased to form your acquaintance," answered Stas.

The conversation easily proceeded farther, for the officers were evidently amused. It appeared that both were also riding from Port Said to Cairo to see the British minister plenipotentiary and to receive final instructions for a long journey which soon awaited them. The younger one was an army surgeon, while the one who spoke to Stas, Captain Glenn, had an order from his government to proceed from Cairo, via Suez, to Mombasa and assume the government of the entire region adjoining that port and extending as far as the unknown Samburu country.

Stas, who with deep interest read about travels in Africa, knew that Mombasa was situated a few degrees beyond the equator and that the adjoining country, though already conceded to be within the sphere of English interests, was yet in truth little known; it was utterly wild, full of elephants, giraffes, rhinoceroses, buffaloes, and all kinds of antelopes, which the military, missionary, and trading expeditions always encountered. He also envied Captain Glenn with his whole soul and promised to visit him in Mombasa and go hunting with him for lions and buffaloes.

"Good, but I shall invite you to make the visit with that little Miss," replied Captain Glenn, laughing and pointing at Nell who at that moment left the window and sat beside him.

"Miss Rawlinson has a father," answered Stas, "and I am only her guardian during this journey." At this the other officer turned quickly around and asked:

"Rawlinson? Is he not one of the directors of the Canal and has he not a brother in Bombay?"

"My uncle lives in Bombay," answered Nell, raising her little finger upwards.

"Then your uncle, darling, is married to my sister. My name is Clary. We are related, and I am really delighted that I met and became acquainted with you, my little dear."

And the surgeon was really delighted. He said that immediately after his arrival at Port Said he inquired for Mr. Rawlinson, but in the offices of the directory he was informed that he had left for the holidays. He expressed also his regret that the steamer which he with Captain Glenn was to take for Mombasa left Suez in a few days, in consequence of which he could not make a hurried visit to Medinet.

He therefore requested Nell to convey his compliments to her father, and promised to write to her from Mombasa. Both officers now engaged mainly in a conversation with Nell, so that Stas remained a little on the side. At all stations they had a plentiful supply of mandarin oranges, dates, and exquisite sherbet, and, besides by Stas and Nell, these dainties were shared by Dinah, who with all her good qualities was known for her uncommon gluttony.

In this manner the trip to Cairo passed quickly for the

children. At the leave-taking the officers kissed Nell's little hands and face, and squeezed Stas' right hand, and at the same time, Captain Glenn, whom the resolute boy pleased very much, said half-jokingly and half-seriously:

"Listen, my boy! Who knows where, when, and under what circumstances we may yet meet in life. Remember, however, that you can always rely upon my good will and assistance."

"And you may likewise rely upon me," Stas answered with a bow full of dignity.

IV

Pan Tarkowski, as well as Mr. Rawlinson, who loved Nell better than his life, was delighted at the arrival of the children. The young pair greeted their parents joyfully, and at once began to look about the tents, which internally were completely fitted up and were ready for the reception of the beloved guests. The tents appeared superb to them; they were double, one was lined with blue and the other with red flannel, overlaid at the bottom with saddle-cloths, and they were as spacious as large rooms. The agency which was concerned about the opinion of the high officials of the Canal Company had spared no effort for their comfort. At first Mr. Rawlinson feared that a lengthy stay under tents might prove injurious to Nell's health, and if he agreed to the arrangement, it was because they could always move to a hotel in case of bad weather. Now, however, having fully investigated everything on the place, he came to the conclusion that days and nights passed in the fresh air would be a hundredfold more beneficial for his only child than a stay in the musty rooms of the small local hotels. Beautiful weather favored this. Medinet, or rather El-Medineh, surrounded by the sandy hills of the Libyan Desert, has a much better climate than Cairo and is not in vain called "the land of roses." Owing to its sheltered position and the plentiful moisture in the air, nights there are not so cold as in other parts of Egypt, even those lying

further south. Winter is simply delightful, and from November the greatest development of the vegetation begins. Date palms, olive-trees, which on the whole are scarce in Egypt, fig, orange, mandarin trees, giant castor-oil plants, pomegranate and various other southern plants cover this delightful oasis as with a forest. The gardens are overflowing, as it were, with a gigantic wave of acacias, elders, and roses, so that at night every breeze carries their intoxicating scent. Here one breathes with full breast and "does not wish to die," as the residents of the place say.

A similar climate is possessed only by Helwan lying on the other side of the Nile and considerably farther north, but Helwan lacks such luxuriant vegetation.

But Helwan awoke sad recollections for Mr. Rawlinson, for there Nell's mother had died. For this reason he preferred Medinet, and gazing at present at the glowing countenance of the little girl, he promised to himself in his soul soon to purchase here land with a garden; to erect upon it a comfortable English house and spend in these blissful parts all vacations which he could secure, and after finishing his service on the Canal, perhaps even to reside here permanently.

But these were plans of the distant future and not yet wholly matured. In the meantime the children from the moment of their arrival moved about everywhere like flies, desiring even before dinner to see all the tents as well as the donkeys and camels hired at the place by the Cook Agency. It appeared that the animals were on a distant pasture and that they could not see

them until the morrow. However, near Mr. Rawlinson's tent they observed with pleasure Chamis, the son of Chadigi, their good acquaintance in Port Said. He was not in the employ of Cook, and Mr. Rawlinson was somewhat surprised to meet him in Medinet, but as he had previously employed him to carry his implements, he engaged him at present to run errands and perform all other small services.

The evening dinner was excellent, as the old Copt, who for many years was a cook in the employment of the Cook Agency, was anxious to display his culinary skill. The children told about the acquaintance they made with the two officers on the way, which was particularly interesting to Mr. Rawlinson, whose brother Richard was married to Dr. Clary's sister and had resided in India for many years. As it was a childless marriage, this uncle greatly loved his little niece, whom he knew only from photographs, and he had inquired about her in all his letters. Both fathers were also amused at the invitation which Stas had received from Captain Glenn to visit Mombasa. The boy took it seriously and positively promised himself that sometime he must pay a visit to his new friend beyond the equator. Pan Tarkowski then had to explain to him that English officials never remain long in the same locality on account of the deadly climate of Africa, and that before Stas grew up the captain already would hold his tenth position in rotation or would not be on earth at all.

After dinner the whole company went out in front of the tents, where the servants placed the cloth folding-chairs, and for the

older gentlemen brought a siphon of soda-water with brandy. It was already night but unusually warm; as there happened to be full moon it was as bright as in daytime. The white walls of the city buildings opposite the tents shone greenly; the stars glowed in the sky, and in the air was diffused the scent of roses, acacias, and heliotropes. The city already was asleep. In the silence of the night at times could be heard only the loud cries of cranes, herons, and flamingoes flying from beyond the Nile in the direction of Lake Karûn. Suddenly, however, there resounded the deep bass bark of a dog which astonished Stas and Nell, for it appeared to come from a tent which they had not visited and which was assigned for saddles, implements, and various traveling paraphernalia.

"That must be an awfully big dog. Let us go and see him," said Stas.

Pan Tarkowski began to laugh and Mr. Rawlinson shook off the ashes of his cigar and said, also laughing:

"Well, it did not do any good to lock him up."

After which he addressed the children:

"Remember, to-morrow is Christmas Eve, and that dog was intended by Pan Tarkowski to be a surprise for Nell, but as the surprise has started to bark, I am compelled to announce it to-day."

Hearing this, Nell climbed in a trice on Pan Tarkowski's knees and embraced his neck and afterwards jumped onto her father's lap.

"Papa, how happy I am! how happy I am!"

Of hugs and kisses there was no end. Finally Nell, finding herself on her own feet, began to gaze in Pan Tarkowski's eyes:

"Pan Tarkowski – "

"What is it, Nell?"

" – As I already know that he is there, can I see him to-night?"

"I knew," exclaimed Mr. Rawlinson, feigning indignation, "that this little fly would not be content with the news itself."

And Pan Tarkowski, turning to the son of Chadigi, said:

"Chamis, bring the dog."

The young Sudânese disappeared behind the kitchen tent and after a while reappeared, leading a big dog by the collar.

Nell retreated.

"Oh," she exclaimed, seizing her father's hand.

On the other hand, Stas grew enthusiastic.

"But that is a lion, not a dog," he said.

"He is called Saba (lion)," answered Pan Tarkowski. "He belongs to the breed of mastiffs; these are the biggest dogs in the world. This one is only two years old but really is exceedingly large. Don't be afraid, Nell, as he is as gentle as a lamb. Only be brave. Let him go, Chamis."

Chamis let go of the collar with which he had restrained the dog, and the latter, feeling that he was free, began to wag his tail, fawn before Pan Tarkowski with whom he was already well acquainted, and bark joyfully.

The children gazed in the moonlight with admiration on his

large round head with hanging lips, on his bulky paws, on his powerful frame, reminding one, in truth, of a lion with the tawny-yellowish color of his body.

"With such a dog one could safely go through Africa," exclaimed Stas.

"Ask him whether he could retrieve a rhinoceros," said Pan Tarkowski.

Saba could not, indeed, answer that question, but instead wagged his tail more and more joyfully and drew near to the group so ingratiatingly that Nell at once ceased to fear him and began to pat him on his head.

"Saba, nice, dear Saba."

Mr. Rawlinson leaned over him, raised his head towards the face of the little girl, and said:

"Saba, look at this little lady. She is your mistress. You must obey and guard her. Do you understand?"

"Wow!" was the basso response of Saba, as if he actually understood what was wanted.

And he understood even better than might have been expected, for taking advantage of the fact that his head was on a level with the little girl's face, as a mark of homage he licked her little nose and cheeks with his broad tongue.

This provoked a general outburst of laughter. Nell had to go to the tent to wash herself. Returning after a quarter of an hour she saw Saba with paws upon the shoulders of Stas, who bent under the weight; the dog was higher by a head.

The time for sleep was approaching, but the little one asked for yet half an hour of play in order to get better acquainted with her new friend. In fact, the acquaintance proceeded so easily that Pan Tarkowski soon placed her in lady fashion on Saba's back and, holding her from fear that she might fall, ordered Stas to lead the dog by the collar. She rode thus a score of paces, after which Stas tried to mount this peculiar "saddle-horse," but the dog sat on his hind legs so that Stas unexpectedly found himself on the sand near the tail.

The children were about to retire when in the distance on the market place, illumined by the moon, appeared two white figures walking towards the tents.

The hitherto gentle Saba began to growl hollowly and threateningly so that Chamis, at Mr. Rawlinson's order, again had to take hold of the collar, and in the meantime two men dressed in white burnouses stood before the tent.

"Who is there?" asked Pan Tarkowski.

"Camel drivers," answered one of the arrivals.

"Ah, Idris and Gebhr? What do you want?"

"We come to ask whether you will need us to-morrow."

"No. To-morrow and the day after are great holidays, during which it is not proper to make excursions. Come on the morning of the third day."

"Thank you, effendi."

"Have you good camels?" asked Mr. Rawlinson.

"Bismillah!" answered Idris; "real saddle-horses with fat

humps and as gentle as ha'-ga (lambs). Otherwise Cook would not have employed us." "Do they jolt much?"

"Gentlemen, you can place a handful of kidney-beans on their backs and not a grain will fall during the fullest speed."

"If one is to exaggerate, then exaggerate after the Arabian fashion," said Pan Tarkowski, laughing.

"Or after the Sudânese," added Mr. Rawlinson.

In the meantime Idris and Gebhr continued to stand like two white columns, gazing attentively at Stas and Nell. The moon illumined their very dark faces, and in its luster they looked as if cast of bronze. The whites of their eyes glittered greenishly from under the turbans.

"Good night to you," said Mr. Rawlinson.

"May Allah watch over you, effendi, in night and in day."

Saying this, they bowed and went away. They were accompanied by a hollow growl, similar to distant thunder, from Saba, whom the two Sudânese apparently did not please.

V

During the following days there were no excursions. Instead, on Christmas Eve, when the first star appeared in heaven, a little tree in Mr. Rawlinson's tent, intended for Nell, was illuminated with hundreds of candles. To serve as a Christmas tree there had been taken an arbor vitae, cut in one of the gardens in Medinet; nevertheless, among its branchlets Nell found a profusion of dainties and a splendid doll, which her father had brought from Cairo for her, and Stas, his much desired English short rifle. In addition he received from his father packages containing various hunters' supplies, and a saddle for horseback riding. Nell could not contain herself for joy, while Stas, although he thought that whoever owned a genuine short rifle ought to possess a corresponding dignity, could not restrain himself, and selecting the time when no one was about, walked around the tent on his hands. This knack, taught to him at the Port Said school, he possessed to a surprising degree and with it often amused Nell, who, besides, sincerely envied it in him.

Christmas Eve and the first day of the holidays were passed by the children partly in church services, partly in inspecting the gifts they had received, and in training Saba. The new friend appeared to possess intelligence beyond all expectations. On the very first day he learned to give his paw, retrieve handkerchiefs, which, however, he would not surrender without some resistance,

and he understood that cleaning Nell's face with his tongue was an act unworthy of a gentlemanly dog. Nell, holding her fingers at her little nose, gave him various instructions, while he, concurring with motions of his tail, gave her in this manner to understand that he heard with becoming attention and took her lessons to heart. During their strolls over the sandy city square the fame of Saba in Medinet grew with each hour and, even as all fame, began to have its disagreeable side, for it drew a whole swarm of Arabian children. In the beginning they kept at a distance; afterwards, however, emboldened by the gentleness of the "monster," they approached more and more closely, and in the end sat around the tent so that no one could move about with any freedom. Besides, as every Arabian child sucks sugarcane from morning to night, the children always attract after them legions of flies, which besides being loathsome are noxious, for they spread the Egyptian infection of inflammation of the eyes. For this reason the servants attempted to disperse the children, but Nell stood in their defense and, what is more, distributed among the youngest "helou," that is, sweetmeats, which gained for her their great love but also increased their number.

After three days the joint excursions began; partly on the narrow-gauge railways of which the English had built quite a number in Medinet el-Fayûm, partly on donkeys, and sometimes on camels. It appeared that in the praises bestowed on those animals by Idris there was indeed a great deal of exaggeration, for not merely kidney-beans but even people could not easily keep on

the saddles; but there was also some truth. The camels in reality belonged to the variety known as "hegin," that is, for carrying passengers, and were fed with good durra (the local or Syrian maize) so that the humps were fat and they appeared so willing to speed that it was necessary to check them. The Sudânese, Idris and Gebhr, gained, notwithstanding the wild glitter of their eyes, the confidence and hearts of the company, and this through their great willingness to serve and their extraordinary care over Nell. Gebhr always had a cruel and a trifle bestial expression of face, but Idris, quickly perceiving that that little personage was the eye in the head of the whole company, declared at every opportunity that he cared more for her than for his own soul. Mr. Rawlinson conjectured indeed, that, through Nell, Idris wanted to reach his pocket, but believing at the same time that there was not in the world a person who could not but love his only child, he was grateful to him and did not stint himself in giving "bakshish."

In the course of five days the party visited the near by ruins of the ancient city of Crocodilopolis, where at one time the Egyptians worshipped a deity called Sobk, which had a human form with the head of a crocodile. Afterwards an excursion was made to the Hanar pyramids and the remains of the Labyrinth. The longest trip was on camel-back to Lake Karûn. Its northern shore was a stark desert, on which there were ruins of former Egyptian cities, but no trace of life. On the other hand, on the southern shore stretched a fertile country, magnificent, with shores overgrown by heather and reeds and teeming with

pelicans, flamingoes, herons, wild geese, and ducks. Only here did Stas find an opportunity for displaying his marksmanship. The shooting from a common rifle as well as from the short rifle was so extraordinary that after every shot could be heard the astonished smacking of the lips of Idris and the Arabian rowers, and the falling of the birds into the water was accompanied by exclamations of "Bismillah" and "Mashallah."

The Arabians assured them that on the opposite desert-shore were many wolves and hyenas, and that by tossing amid the sand dunes the carcass of a sheep one might get within shooting range. In consequence of these assurances Pan Tarkowski and Stas passed two nights on the desert near the ruins of Dima. But the first sheep was stolen by Bedouins as soon as the hunters left it; while the second lured only a lame jackal, which Stas brought down. Further hunting had to be postponed as the time had arrived for both engineers to inspect the works conducted at Bahr Yûsuf near El-Lahûn, southeast from Medinet.

Mr. Rawlinson waited only for the arrival of Madame Olivier. Unfortunately, in place of her, came a letter from the physician informing them that the former erysipelas in the face had recurred after the bite, and that the patient for a long time would be unable to leave Port Said. The situation actually became distressing. It was impossible to take with them the children, old Dinah, the tents, and all the servants, if only for the reason that the engineers were to be one day here, another there, and might receive requests to go as far as the great canal of Ibrâhimiyeh.

In view of this, after a short consultation Mr. Rawlinson decided to leave Nell under the care of old Dinah and Stas, together with the Italian consular agent and the local "Mudir" (governor) with whom he had previously become acquainted. He promised also to Nell, who grieved to part from her father, that from all the nearer localities he would with Pan Tarkowski rush to Medinet, or if they found some noteworthy sight, would summon the children to them.

"We shall take with us, Chamis," he said, "whom in a certain case we shall send for you. Let Dinah always keep Nell's company, but as Nell does with her whatever she pleases, do you, Stas, watch over both."

"You may be sure, sir," answered Stas, "that I shall watch over Nell, as over my own sister. She has Saba, and I a short rifle, so let any one try to harm her – "

"It is not about that that I am concerned," said Mr. Rawlinson. "Saba and the short rifle will certainly not be necessary for you. You will be so good as to protect her from fatigue and at the same time take care she does not catch cold. I have asked the consul in case she feels unwell to summon a doctor from Cairo immediately. We shall send Chamis here for news as frequently as possible. The Mudir will also visit you. I expect, besides, that our absence will never be very long."

Pan Tarkowski also was not sparing in his admonitions to Stas. He told him that Nell did not require his defense as there was not in Medinet nor in the whole province of El-Fayûm any

savage people or wild animals. To think of such things would be ridiculous and unworthy of a boy who had begun his fourteenth year. So he was to be solicitous and heedful only that they did not undertake anything on their own account, and more particularly excursions with Nell on camels, on which a ride was fatiguing.

But Nell, hearing this, made such a sad face that Pan Tarkowski had to placate her.

"Certainly," he said, stroking her hair, "you will ride camels, but with us or towards us, if we send Chamis for you."

"But when alone are we not allowed to make an excursion, even though such a tiny bit of a one?" asked the girl.

And she began to show on her finger about how little an excursion she was concerned. The parents in the end agreed that they could ride on donkeys, not on camels, and not to ruins, where they might easily fall into some hole, but over roads of adjacent fields and towards the gardens beyond the city. The dragoman, together with other Cook servants, was always to accompany the children.

After this both gentlemen departed, but they left for a place near by, Hanaret el-Matka, so that after ten hours they returned to pass the night in Medinet. This was repeated the succeeding few days until they had inspected all the nearest work. Afterwards, when their employment required their presence at more distant places, Chamis arrived in the night time, and early in the following morning took Stas and Nell to those little cities, in which their parents wanted to show them something of interest.

The children spent the greater part of the day with their parents and before sunset returned to the camp at Medinet. There were, however, days on which Chamis did not come, and then Nell, notwithstanding the society of Stas, and Saba in whom she continually discovered some new traits, looked with longing for a messenger. In this manner the time passed until Twelfth Night, on the day of which festival both engineers returned to Medinet.

Two days later they went away again, announcing that they left this time for a longer period and in all probability would reach as far as Benisueif, and from there to El-Fachn, where a canal of the same name begins, going far south alongside of the Nile.

Great, therefore, was the astonishment of the children, when on the third day at eleven o'clock in the morning Chamis appeared in Medinet. Stas met him first as he went to the pasturage to look at the camels. Chamis conversed with Idris, and only told Stas that he came for him and Nell and that he would come immediately to the camp to inform them where they, at the request of the older gentlemen, were to go. Stas ran at once with the good news to Nell, whom he found playing with Saba before the tent.

"Do you know – Chamis is here!" he cried from a distance.

And Nell began at once to hop, holding both feet together, as little girls do when skipping the rope.

"We shall go! We shall go!"

"Yes. We shall go, and far."

"Where?" she asked, brushing aside with her little hands a tuft

of hair which fell over her eyes.

"I don't know. Chamis said that in a moment he would come here and tell us."

"How do you know it is far?"

"Because I heard Idris say that he and Gebhr would start at once with the camels. That means that we shall go by rail and shall find the camels at the place where our parents will be, and from there we shall make some kind of an excursion."

The tuft of hair, owing to the continual hops, covered again not only Nell's eyes but her whole face, her feet bounding as if they were made of India rubber.

A quarter of an hour later, Chamis came and bowed to both.

"Khanage (young master)," he said, "we leave after three hours by the first train."

"Where are we going?"

"To Gharak el-Sultani, and from there with the older gentlemen on camel-back to Wâdi Rayân."

Stas' heart beat with joy, but at the same time Chamis' words surprised him. He knew that Wâdi Rayân was a great valley among sandy hills rising on the Libyan Desert on the south and southwest of Medinet, while on the other hand Pan Tarkowski and Mr. Rawlinson announced on their departure that they were going in a directly opposite direction, towards the Nile.

"What has happened?" asked Stas. "Then my father and Mr. Rawlinson are not in Benisueif but in El-Gharak?"

"It happened thus," replied Chamis.

"But they ordered us to write to them at El-Fachn."

"In a letter the senior effendi explains why they are in El-Gharak."

And for a while he searched on his person for the letter, after which he exclaimed:

"Oh, Nabi! (prophet) I left the letter in a pouch with the camels. I will run at once before Idris and Gebhr depart."

And he ran towards the camels. In the meantime the children, with Dinah, began to prepare for the journey. As it looked as if the excursion would be a long one, Dinah packed several dresses, some linen, and warmer clothing for Nell. Stas thought of himself, and especially did not forget about the short rifle and cartridges, hoping that among the sand dunes of Wâdi Rayân he might encounter wolves and hyenas.

Chamis did not return until an hour later; he was covered with perspiration and so fatigued that for a while he could not catch his breath.

"I did not find the camels," he said. "I chased after them, but in vain. But that does not matter as we shall find the letter and the effendis themselves in El-Gharak. Is Dinah to go with you?"

"Why not?"

"Perhaps it would be better if she remained. The older gentlemen said nothing about her."

"But they announced on leaving that Dinah was always to accompany the little lady. So she shall ride now."

Chamis bowed, placing his hand on his heart and said:

"Let us hasten, sir, for otherwise the katr (train) will set off."

The baggage was ready, so they were at the station on time. The distance between Medinet and Gharak is not more than nineteen miles, but the trains on the branch line which connects those localities move slowly and the stops were uncommonly frequent. If Stas had been alone he undoubtedly would have preferred to ride camel-back as he calculated that Idris and Gebhr, having started two hours before the train, would be earlier in El-Gharak. But for Nell such a ride would be too long; and the little guardian, who took very much to heart the warnings of both parents, did not want to expose the little girl to fatigue. After all the time passed for both so quickly that they scarcely noticed when they stopped in Gharak.

The little station, from which Englishmen usually make excursions to Wâdi Rayân, was almost entirely deserted. They found only a few veiled women, with baskets of mandarin oranges, two unknown Bedouin camel drivers, together with Idris and Gebhr, with seven camels, one of which was heavily packed. Of Pan Tarkowski and Mr. Rawlinson there was no trace.

But Idris in this manner explained their absence.

"The older gentlemen went into the desert to pitch the tents which they brought with them from Etsah, and ordered us to follow them."

"And how shall we find them among the sand-hills?" asked Stas.

"They sent guides who will lead us to them."

Saying this he pointed to the Bedouins. The older of them bowed, rubbed with his finger the one eye which he possessed, and said:

"Our camels are not so fat but are not less speedy than yours. After an hour we shall be there."

Stas was glad that he would pass the night on the desert, but Nell felt a certain disappointment, for she had been certain that she would meet her papa in Gharak.

In the meantime the station-master, a sleepy Egyptian with a red fez and dark spectacles, approached them, and, not having anything else to do, began to stare at the European children.

"These are the children of those Englishmen who rode this morning with rifles to the desert," said Idris, placing Nell on the saddle.

Stas, handing his short rifle to Chamis, sat beside her, for the saddle was wide and had the shape of a palanquin without a roof. Dinah sat behind Chamis, the others took separate camels, and the party started.

If the station-master had stared at them longer he might perhaps have wondered that those Englishmen, of whom Idris spoke, rode directly to the ruins on the south, while this party at once directed its movements towards Talei, in a different direction. But the station-master before that time had returned home as no other train arrived that day at Gharak.

The hour was five in the afternoon. The weather was splendid. The sun had already passed on that side of the Nile and declined

over the desert, sinking into the golden and purple twilight glowing on the western side of the sky. The atmosphere was so permeated with the roseate luster that the eyes blinked from its superfluity. The fields assumed a lily tint, while the distant sand-hills, strongly relieved against the background of the twilight, had a hue of pure amethyst. The world lost the traits of reality and appeared to be one play of supernal lights.

While they rode over a verdant and cultivated region, the guide, a Bedouin, conducted the caravan with a moderate pace. But with the moment that the hard sand creaked under the feet of the camels, everything changed.

"Yalla! Yalla!" suddenly yelled wild voices.

And simultaneously could be heard the swish of whips and the camels, having changed from an ambling pace into a full gallop, began to speed like the whirlwind, throwing up with their feet the sand and gravel of the desert.

"Yalla! Yalla!"

The ambling pace of a camel jolts more, while the gallop with which this animal seldom runs, swings more; so the children enjoyed this mad ride. But it is known that even in a swing, too much rapid movement causes dizziness. Accordingly, after a certain time, when the speed did not cease, Nell began to get dizzy and her eyes grew dim.

"Stas, why are we flying so?" she exclaimed, turning to her companion.

"I think that they allowed them to get into too much of a gallop

and now cannot check them," answered Stas.

But observing that the little girl's face was becoming pale, he shouted at the Bedouins, running ahead, to slacken their pace. His calls, however, had only this result: that again resounded the cries of "Yalla," and the animals increased their speed.

The boy thought at first that the Bedouins did not hear him, but when on his repeated orders there was no response and when Gebhr, who was riding behind him, did not cease lashing the camel on which he sat with Nell, he thought it was not the camels that were so spirited but that the men for some reason unknown to him were in a great hurry.

It occurred to him that they might have taken the wrong road and that, desiring to make up for lost time, they now were speeding from fear that the older gentlemen might scold them because of a late arrival. But after a while he understood that such could not be the case, as Mr. Rawlinson would have been more angered for unnecessarily fatiguing Nell. Then what did it mean? And why did they not obey his commands? In the heart of the boy anger and fear for Nell began to rise.

"Stop!" he shouted with his whole strength, addressing Gebhr.

"Ouskout! (be silent)!" the Sudânese yelled in reply; and they sped on.

In Egypt night falls about six o'clock, so the twilight soon became extinct and after a certain time the great moon, ruddy from the reflection of the twilight, rolled on and illuminated the desert with a gentle light.

In the silence could be heard only the heavy breathing of the camels, the rapid hoof-beats on the sand, and at times the swish of whips. Nell was so tired that Stas had to hold her on the saddle. Every little while she asked how soon they would reach their destination, and evidently was buoyed up only by the hope of an early meeting with her father. But in vain both children gazed around. One hour passed, then another; neither tents nor campfires could be seen.

Then the hair rose on Stas' head, for he realized that they were kidnapped.

VI

Messrs. Rawlinson and Tarkowski actually expected the children, not amidst the sand-hills of Wâdi Rayân, where they had no need or desire to ride, but in an entirely different direction, in the city of El-Fachn on a canal of the same name at which they were examining the work finished before the end of the year. The distance between El-Fachn and Medinet in a straight line is almost twenty-eight miles. As, however, there is no direct connection and it is necessary to ride to El-Wasta, which doubles the distance, Mr. Rawlinson, after looking over the railway guide, made the following calculations.

"Chamis left the night before last," he said to Pan Tarkowski, "and in El-Wasta he caught the train from Cairo; he was therefore in Medinet yesterday. It would take an hour to pack up. Leaving at noon they would have to wait for the night train running along the Nile, and as I do not permit Nell to ride at night, they would leave this morning and will be here immediately after sunset."

"Yes," said Pan Tarkowski, "Chamis must rest a little, and though Stas is indeed impulsive, nevertheless, where Nell is concerned you may always depend upon him. Moreover, I sent him a postal card not to ride during the night."

"A brave lad, and I trust him," answered Mr. Rawlinson.

"To tell the truth, so do I. Stas with his various faults has an upright character and never lies, for he is brave, and only

a coward lies. He also does not lack energy and if in time he acquires a calm judgment, I think he will be able to take care of himself in this world."

"Certainly. As to judgment, were you judicious at his age?"

"I must confess that I was not," replied Pan Tarkowski, laughing, "but I was not so self-confident as he."

"That will pass. Meanwhile, be happy that you have such a boy."

"And you that you have such a sweet and dear creature as Nell."

"May God bless her!" answered Mr. Rawlinson with emotion.

The two friends warmly shook hands, after which they sat down to examine the plans and the report of expenditures connected with the work. At this occupation the time passed until evening.

About six o'clock, when night fell, they were at the station, strolling along the walk, and resumed their conversation about the children.

"Superb weather, but cool," said Mr. Rawlinson. "I wonder if Nell took some warm clothing with her."

"Stas will think of that, and Dinah also."

"I regret, nevertheless, that instead of bringing them here, we did not go to Medinet."

"You will recollect that that is just what I advised."

"I know, and if it were not that we are to go from here farther south, I would have agreed. I calculated, however, that the trip

would take too much time and on the whole it would be best to have the children here. Finally, I will confess to you that Chamis suggested the idea to me. He announced that he prodigiously yearned for them and would be happy if I sent for both. I am not surprised that he should be so attached to them."

Further conversation was interrupted by signals announcing the approach of the train. After an interval the fiery eyes of the locomotive appeared in the darkness, and at the same time could be heard its puffs and whistle.

A row of lighted coaches drew alongside the platform, quivered, and stood still.

"I did not see them in any window," said Mr. Rawlinson.

"Perhaps they are seated further inside and surely will come out immediately."

The passengers began to alight, but they were mainly Arabs, as El-Fachn has nothing interesting to see except beautiful groves of palms and acacias. The children did not arrive.

"Chamis either did not make connections in El-Wasta," declared Pan Tarkowski, with a shade of ill-humor, "or after a night of travel overslept himself, and they will not arrive until tomorrow."

"That may be," answered Mr. Rawlinson, with uneasiness, "but it also may be possible that one of them is sick."

"In that case Stas would have telegraphed."

"Who knows but that we may find a despatch in the hotel?"

"Let us go."

But in the hotel no news awaited them. Mr. Rawlinson became more and more uneasy.

"What do you think could have happened?" said Pan Tarkowski. "If Chamis overslept himself, he would not admit it to the children and would come to them to-day and tell them that they are to leave to-morrow. To us he will excuse himself by claiming that he misunderstood our orders. In any event, I shall telegraph to Stas."

"And I to the Mudir of Fayûm."

After a while the despatches were sent. There was indeed no cause for uneasiness; nevertheless, in waiting for an answer the engineers passed a bad night, and early morning found them on their feet.

The answer from the Mudir came about ten o'clock and was as follows:

"Verified at station. Children left yesterday for Gharak el-Sultani."

It can easily be understood what amazement and anger possessed the parents at this unexpected intelligence. For some time they gazed at each other, as if they did not understand the words of the despatch; after which Pan Tarkowski, who was an impulsive person, struck the table with his hand and said:

"That was Stas' whim, but I will cure him of such whims."

"I did not expect that of him," answered Nell's father.

But after a moment he asked:

"But what of Chamis?"

"He either did not find them and does not know what to do or else rode after them."

"Yes, I think so."

An hour later they started for Medinet. In camp they ascertained that the camels were gone, and at the station it was confirmed that Chamis left with the children for El-Gharak. The affair became darker and darker and it could be cleared up only in El-Gharak.

In fact, only at that station did the dreadful truth begin to dawn.

The station-master, the same sleepy one with dark spectacles and red fez, told them that he saw a boy about fourteen years old and an eight-year-old girl with an old negress, who rode towards the desert. He did not remember whether there were eight or nine camels altogether, but observed that one was heavily packed as if for a long journey, and the two Bedouins also had big pack-saddles. He recollected also that when he stared at the caravan one of the camel drivers, a Sudânese, said to him that those were the children of the Englishmen who before that had gone to Wâdi Rayân.

"Did those Englishmen return?" asked Pan Tarkowski.

"Yes. They returned yesterday with two slain wolves," answered the station-master; "and I was astonished that they did not return with the children. But I did not ask the reason as that was not my affair."

Saying this he left to attend to his duties.

During this narrative Mr. Rawlinson's face became white as paper. Gazing at his friend with a wild look, he took off his hat, pressed his hand to his forehead, covered with perspiration, and staggered as if he were about to fall.

"Be a man, Rawlinson!" exclaimed Pan Tarkowski. "Our children are kidnapped. It is necessary to rescue them."

"Nell! Nell!" repeated the unhappy Englishman.

"Nell and Stas! It was not Stas' fault. Both were enticed by trickery and kidnapped. Who knows why? Perhaps for a ransom. Chamis undoubtedly is in the plot, and Idris and Gebhr also."

Here he recalled what Fatma had said about both Sudânese belonging to the Dongolese tribe, in which the Mahdi was born, and that Chadigi, the father of Chamis, came from the same tribe. At this recollection his heart for a moment became inert in his breast for he understood that the children were abducted not for a ransom but as an exchange for Smain's family.

"But what will the tribesmen of the ill-omened prophet do with them? They cannot hide them on the desert or anywhere on the banks of the Nile, for they all would die of hunger and thirst on the desert, and they certainly would be apprehended on the Nile. Perhaps they will try to join the Mahdi."

And this thought filled Pan Tarkowski with dismay, but the energetic ex-soldier soon recovered and began in his mind to review all that happened and at the same time seek means of rescue.

"Fatma," he reasoned, "had no cause to revenge herself either

upon us or our children. If they have been kidnapped it was evidently for the purpose of placing them in the hands of Smain. In no case does death threaten them. And this is a fortune in misfortune; still a terrible journey awaits them which might be disastrous for them."

And at once he shared these thoughts with his friend, after which he spoke thus:

"Idris and Gebhr, like savage and foolish men, imagine that followers of the Mahdi are not far, while Khartûm, which the Mahdi reached, is about one thousand two hundred and forty miles from here. This journey they must make along the Nile and not keep at a distance from it as otherwise the camels and people would perish from thirst. Ride at once to Cairo and demand of the Khedive that despatches be sent to all the military outposts and that a pursuit be organized right and left along the river. Offer a large reward to the sheiks near the banks for the capture of the fugitives. In the villages let all be detained who approach for water. In this manner Idris and Gebhr must fall into the hands of the authorities and we shall recover the children."

Mr. Rawlinson had already recovered his composure.

"I shall go," he said. "Those miscreants forgot that Wolseley's English army, hurrying to Gordon's relief, is already on the way and will cut them off from the Mahdi. They will not escape. They cannot escape. I shall send a despatch to our minister in a moment, and afterwards go myself. What do you intend to do?"

"I shall telegraph for a furlough, and not waiting for an answer,

shall follow then trail by way of the Nile to Nubia, to attend to the pursuit."

"Then we shall meet, as from Cairo I shall do the same."

"Good! And now to work!"

"With God's help!" answered Mr. Rawlinson.

VII

In the meantime the camels swept like a hurricane over the sands glistening in the moonlight. A deep night fell. The moon, at the beginning as big as a wheel and ruddy, became pale and rolled on high. The distant desert hills were enveloped with silvery vapors like muslin which, not veiling their view, transformed them as if into luminous phenomena. From time to time from beyond the rocks scattered here and there came the piteous whining of jackals.

Another hour passed. Stas held Nell in his arms and supported her, endeavoring in this way to allay the fatiguing jolts of the mad ride. The little girl began more and more frequently to ask him why they were speeding so and why they did not see the tents and their papas. Stas finally determined to tell her the truth, which sooner or later he would have to disclose.

"Nell," he said, "pull off a glove and drop it, unobserved, on the ground."

"Why, Stas?"

And he pressed her to himself and answered with a kind of tenderness unusual to him:

"Do what I tell you."

Nell held Stas with one hand and feared to let him go, but she overcame the difficulty in this manner: she began to pull the glove with her teeth, each finger separately, and, finally taking it

off entirely, she dropped it on the ground.

"After a time, throw the other," again spoke Stas. "I already have dropped mine, but yours will be easier to observe for they are bright."

And observing that the little girl gazed at him with an inquiring look, he continued:

"Don't get frightened, Nell. It may be that we will not meet your or my father at all – and that these foul people have kidnapped us. But don't fear – for if it is so, then pursuers will follow them. They will overtake them and surely rescue us. I told you to drop the gloves so that the pursuers may find clues. In the meanwhile we can do nothing, but later I shall contrive something – Surely, I shall contrive something; only do not fear, and trust me."

But Nell, learning that she should not see her papa and that they are flying somewhere, far in the desert, began to tremble from fright and cry, clinging at the same time close to Stas and asking him amid her sobs why they kidnapped them and where they were taking them. He comforted her as well as he could – almost in the same words with which his father comforted Mr. Rawlinson. He said that their parents themselves would follow in pursuit and would notify all the garrisons along the Nile. In the end he assured her that whatever might happen, he would never abandon her and would always defend her.

But her grief and longing for her father were stronger even than fear; so for a long time she did not cease to weep – and thus

they flew, both sad, on a bright night, over the pale sands of the desert.

Sorrow and fear not only oppressed Stas' heart, but also shame. He was not indeed to blame for what had happened, yet he recalled the former boastfulness for which his father so often had rebuked him. Formerly he was convinced that there was no situation to which he was not equal; he considered himself a kind of unvanquished swashbuckler, and was ready to challenge the whole world. Now he understood that he was a small boy, with whom everybody could do as he pleased, and that he was speeding in spite, of his will on a camel merely because that camel was driven from behind by a half-savage Sudânese. He felt terribly humiliated and did not see any way of resisting. He had to admit to himself that he plainly feared those men and the desert, and what he and Nell might meet.

He promised sincerely not only to her but to himself that he would watch over and defend her even at the cost of his own life.

Nell, weary with weeping and the mad ride, which had lasted already six hours, finally began to doze, and at times fell asleep. Stas, knowing that whoever fell from a galloping camel might be killed on the spot, tied her to himself with a rope which he found on the saddle. But after some time it seemed to him that the speed of the camels became less rapid, though now they flew over smooth and soft sands. In the distance could be seen only the shifting hills, while on the plain began the nocturnal illusions common to the desert. The moon shone in the heaven more and

more palely and in the meantime there appeared before them, creeping low, strange rosy clouds, entirely transparent, woven only from light. They formed mysteriously and moved ahead as if pushed by the light breeze. Stas saw how the burnouses of the Bedouins and the camels became roseate when they rode into that illuminated space, and afterwards the whole caravan was enveloped in a delicate, rosy luster. At times the clouds assumed an azure hue and thus it continued until the hills were reached.

Near the hills the speed of the camels slackened yet more. All about could be seen rocks protruding from sandy knolls or strewn in wild disorder amidst the sand dunes. The ground became stony. They crossed a few hollows, sown with stone and resembling the dried-up beds of rivers. At times their road was barred by ravines about which they had to make a detour. The animals began to step carefully, moving their legs with precision as if in a dance, among the dry and hard bushes formed by roses of Jericho with which the dunes and rocks were abundantly covered. Time and again some of the camels would stumble and it was apparent that it was due to them to give them rest.

Accordingly the Bedouins stopped in a sunken pass, and dismounting from the saddles, proceeded to untie the packs. Idris and Gebhr followed their example. They began to attend to the camels, to loosen the saddle-girths, remove the supplies of provisions, and seek flat stones on which to build a fire. There was no wood or dried dung, which Arabs use, but Chamis, son of Chadigi, plucked roses of Jericho and built of them a big

pile to which he set fire. For some time, while the Sudânese were engaged with the camels, Stas and Nell and her nurse, old Dinah, found themselves together, somewhat apart. But Dinah was more frightened than the children and could not say a word. She only wrapped Nell in a warm plaid and sitting close to her began with a moan to kiss her little hands. Stas at once asked Chamis the meaning of what had happened, but he, laughing, only displayed his white teeth, and went to gather more roses of Jericho. Idris, questioned afterwards, answered with these words: "You will see!" and threatened him with his finger. When the fire of roses, which smoldered more than blazed, finally glowed they all surrounded it in a circle, except Gebhr who remained with the camels, and they began to eat cakes of maize, and dried mutton and goats' meat. The children, famished by the long journey, also ate, though at the same time Nell's eyes were closed by sleepiness. But in the meantime, in the faint light of the fire, appeared dark-skinned Gebhr and with glittering eyes he held up two bright little gloves and asked:

"Whose are these?"

"Mine," answered Nell with a sleepy and tired voice.

"Yours, little viper?" the Sudânese hissed through set teeth.

"Then you mark the road so that your father can know where to pursue us."

Saying this, he struck her with a courbash, a terrible Arabian whip, which cuts even the hide of a camel. Nell, though she was wrapped in a thick plaid, shrieked from pain and fright, but

Gebhr was unable to strike her a second time, for at that moment Stas leaped like a wildcat, butted Gebhr's breast with his head, and afterwards clutched him by the throat.

It happened so unexpectedly that the Sudânese fell upon his back and Stas on top of him, and both began to roll on the ground. The boy was exceptionally strong for his age, nevertheless Gebhr soon overcame him. He first pulled his hands from his throat, after which he turned him over with face to the ground and, pressing heavily on his neck with his fist, he began to lash his back with the courbash.

The shrieks and tears of Nell, who seizing the hand of the savage at the same time begged him "to forgive" Stas, would not have availed if Idris had not unexpectedly come to the boy's assistance. He was older than Gebhr and from the beginning of the flight from Gharak el-Sultani all complied with his orders. Now he snatched the courbash from his brother's hand and, pushing him away, exclaimed:

"Away, you fool!"

"I'll flog that scorpion!" answered Gebhr, gnashing his teeth.

But at this, Idris seized his cloak at the breast and gazing into his eyes began to say in a threatening though quiet voice:

"The noble* [* All relatives of the Mahdi were termed "noble."] Fatma forbade us to do any harm to those children, for they interceded for her – "

"I'll flog him!" iterated Gebhr.

"And I tell you that you shall not raise the courbash at either

of them. If you do, for every blow, I shall give you ten."

And he began to shake him like a bough of a palm, after which he thus continued:

"Those children are the property of Smain and if either of them does not reach him alive, the Mahdi himself (May God prolong his days infinitely!) would command you to be hung. Do you understand, you fool?"

The name of the Mahdi created such a great impression upon all his believers that Gebhr drooped his head at once and began to repeat as if with fear:

"Allah akbar! Allah akbar!"* [* This cry means, "God is great"; but Arabs utter it in moments of fear, summoning aid.] Stas rose, panting and whipped, but felt that if his father could have seen and heard him at that moment he would have been proud of him, for he had not only leaped to save Nell, without thinking, but now, though the blows of the courbash burnt him like fire, he did not think of his own pain but instead began to console and ask the little girl whether the blow had injured her.

And afterwards he said:

"Whatever I got, I got, but he will never attack you. Oh, if I only had some weapon!"

The little woman entwined his neck with her arms and dampening his cheeks with tears began to assure him that it did not pain her very much and that she was crying not from pain but from sorrow for him. At this Stas put his lips to her ear and whispered:

"Nell, I swear that, not because he whipped me, but because he struck you, I shall not forgive him." With that the incident closed.

After a certain time Gebhr and Idris, becoming reconciled, spread out their cloaks upon the ground and lay upon them, and Chamis soon followed their example. The Bedouins poured out durra for the camels, after which, having mounted two unengaged camels, they rode in the direction of the Nile. Nell, supporting her head on old Dinah's knee, fell asleep. The fire was dying out and soon could be heard only the grinding of the durra in the camels' teeth. On high rolled small clouds which at times veiled the moon, but the night was clear. Beyond the rocks resounded the mournful whining of jackals.

After two hours the Bedouins returned with the camels bearing leather bags filled with water. Having fed the fire, they sat on the sand and commenced to eat. Their arrival awoke Stas, who previously had been dozing, as well as Chamis, son of Chadigi, and the two Sudânese. Then at the camp-fire began the following conversation:

"Can we start?" Idris asked.

"No, because we must rest; – we and our camels."

"Did any one see you?"

"Nobody. We reached the river between two villages. In the distance dogs barked."

"It will be necessary always to go for water at midnight and draw it at deserted places. Only let us get past the first

'challa' (cataract); beyond that the villages are farther apart and they are more friendly to the prophet. A pursuing party will undoubtedly follow us."

At this Chamis turned over, with his back up, and resting his face on his hands said:

"The Mehendes will first wait for the children in El-Fachn during the whole night and until the following train; later they will go to Fayûm and from there to Gharak. Only there will they understand what has happened and then they will have to return to Medinet to send words flying over the copper wire to cities on the Nile and to the camel-corps which will pursue us. All that will take at least three days. Therefore we do not need to tire our camels and can peacefully 'drink smoke' from pipe-stems."

Saying this, he pulled out a sprig of a rose of Jericho and lit his pipe with it, while Idris began, according to the Arabian habit, to smack his lips with satisfaction.

"You arranged it well, son of Chadigi," he said, "but it is necessary for us to take advantage of the time and to drive during those three days and nights as far as possible southward. I shall breathe freely only when we shall cross the desert between the Nile and Kharga (a great oasis west of the Nile). God grant that the camels hold out."

"They will hold out," declared one of the Bedouins.

"People also say," interposed Chamis, "that the army of the Mahdi – may God prolong his life – has already reached Assuan."

Here Stas, who did not lose a word of this conversation and

remembered also what Idris had said to Gebhr, rose and said:

"The army of the Mahdi is below Khartûm."

"La! La! (no! no!)" Chamis contradicted.

"Don't pay any attention to his words," Stas replied, "for he not only has a dark skin but also a dark brain. Although you bought fresh camels every three days and rushed as you have done this day, you would not reach Khartûm for a month. And perhaps you do not know that an English, not an Egyptian, army bars the road to you."

These words created a certain impression and Stas, observing this, continued:

"Before you find yourselves between the Nile and the great oasis all the roads on the desert will be picketed by a line of army sentinels. Words over the copper wire speed quicker than camels. How will you be able to slip through?"

"The desert is wide," answered one of the Bedouins.

"But you must keep close to the Nile."

"We can cross over, and when they seek us on this side we shall be on the other."

"Words speeding over the copper wire will reach cities and villages on both banks of the river."

"The Mahdi will send us an angel, who will place a finger on the eyes of the Englishmen and the Turks (Egyptians) and will screen us with his wings."

"Idris," said Stas, "I do not address Chamis whose head is like an empty gourd, nor Gebhr who is a vile jackal, but you. I already

know that you want to carry us to the Mahdi and deliver us to Smain. But if you are doing this for money, then know that the father of this little 'bint' (girl) is richer than all the Sudânese put together."

"And what of it?" interrupted Idris.

"What of it? Return voluntarily and the great Mehendi will not spare money for you, nor will my father either."

"But they will give us up to the Government, which will order us to be hung."

"No, Idris. You undoubtedly will hang, but only in case they capture you in the flight; and that surely will happen. But if you return, no punishment will be meted out to you, and besides you will be wealthy to the end of your life. You know that the white people of Europe always keep their word. Now I give you the word for both Mehendes that it will be as I say."

And Stas in reality was confident that his father and Mr. Rawlinson would prefer to fulfil the promise made by him than expose both of them, and especially Nell, to the terrible journey and yet more terrible life among the savage and maddened hordes of the Mahdi.

So with palpitating heart, he waited for the reply of Idris who was plunged in silence and only after a long interval said:

"You say that the father of the little 'bint' and yours will give us a great deal of money?"

"Yes."

"But can all their money open for us the gates of paradise

which only the blessing of the Mahdi can do?"

"Bismillah!" shouted both Bedouins together with Chamis and Gebhr.

Stas at once lost all hope, for he knew that howsoever much the people in the East are greedy and venal, nevertheless when a true Mohammedan views any matter from the standpoint of faith, there are not any treasures in the world with which he can be tempted.

Idris, encouraged by the shouts, continued, and evidently not for the purpose of replying to Stas, but with a view of gaining greater esteem and praise from his companions.

"We have the good fortune not only to belong to that tribe which gave the holy prophet, but the noble Fatma and her children are his relatives and the great Mahdi loves them. If we deliver you and the little 'bint' to him, he will exchange you for Fatma and her sons and will bless us. Know that even the water, in which every morning according to the precepts of the Koran he makes his ablutions, heals the sick and eliminates sins; and think what his blessing can accomplish!"

"Bismillah!" reiterated the Sudânese and Bedouins.

But Stas, clutching at the last plank for help, said:

"Then take me and let the Bedouins return with the little 'bint' For me they will surrender Fatma and her sons."

"It is yet more certain that they will surrender her for you two."

At this the boy addressed Chamis:

"Your father shall answer for your conduct."

"My father is already in the desert, on his way to the prophet," retorted Chamis.

"Then they will capture and hang him."

Here, however, Idris deemed it proper to give encouragement to his companions.

"Those vultures," he said, "which will pick the flesh from our bones may not yet be hatched. We know what threatens us, but we are not children, and we know the desert of old. These men (here he pointed at the Bedouins) were many times in Berber and are acquainted with roads over which only gazelles roam. There nobody will find us and nobody will seek us. We must indeed turn for water to the Bahr Yûsuf and later to the Nile, but will do that in the night. Besides, do you think that on the river there are no secret friends of the Mahdi? And I tell you that the farther south we go the more of them we will find. There, tribes and their sheiks are only waiting for the favorable moment to seize the sword in defense of the true faith. These alone will supply water, food, and camels, and lead astray the pursuit. In truth, we know that it is far to the Mahdi, but we know also that every day brings us nearer to the sheep's hide on which the holy prophet kneels to pray."

"Bismillah!" shouted his companions for the third tune.

It was apparent that Idris' importance grew among them considerably.

Stas understood that all was lost; so, desiring at least to protect Nell from the malice of the Sudânese, he said:

"After six hours the little lady reached here barely alive. How can you think that she can endure such a journey? If she should die, I also will die, and then with what will you come to the Mahdi?"

Now Idris could not find an answer. Stas, perceiving this, continued thus:

"And how will the Mahdi and Smain receive you when they learn that for your folly Fatma and her children must pay with their lives?"

But the Sudânese had recovered himself and replied:

"I saw how you grasped Gebhr's throat. By Allah! you are a lion's whelp and will not die and she – "

Here he gazed at the little head of the sleeping girl resting on the knees of old Dinah and finished in a kind of strangely gentle voice:

"For her we will weave on the camel's hump a nest, as for a bird, that she may not at all feel fatigue and that she may sleep on the road as peacefully as she is sleeping now."

Saying this he walked towards the camels and with the Bedouins began to make a seat for the little girl on the back of the best dromedary. At this they chattered a great deal and quarrelled among themselves but finally, with the aid of ropes, shaggy coverlets, and short bamboo poles they made something in the shape of a deep, immovable basket in which Nell could sit or lie down, but from which she could not fall. Above this seat, so broad that Dinah also could be accommodated in it, they

stretched a linen awning.

"You see," said Idris to Stas, "quail's eggs could not crack in those housings. The old woman will ride with the little lady to serve her day and night. – You will sit with me, but can ride near her and watch over her."

Stas was glad that he had secured even this much. Pondering over the situation, he came to the conclusion that in all probability they would be captured before they reached the first cataract, and this thought gave him hope. In the meantime he wanted above all things to sleep; so he promised himself that he would tie himself with some kind of rope to the saddle, and, as he would not have to hold Nell, he could take a nap for a few hours.

The night already became paler and the jackals ceased their whining amid the passes. The caravan was to start immediately, but the Sudânese, observing the dawn, went to a rock, a few paces away, and there, conformably with the precepts of the Koran, began their morning ablutions, using, however, sand instead of water, which they desired to save. Afterwards resounded voices, saying the "soubhg," or morning prayer. Amidst the deep silence plainly could be heard their words: "In the name of the compassionate and merciful God. Glory to the Lord, the sovereign of the world, compassionate and merciful on the day of judgment. Thee we worship and profess. Thee we implore for aid. Lead us over the road of those to whom thou dost not spare benefactions and grace and not over the paths of sinners who have incurred Thy wrath and who err. Amen."

And Stas, hearing these voices, raised his eyes upwards and in that distant region, amidst tawny, gloomy sands, began the prayer:

"We fly to Thy patronage, O Holy Mother of God."

VIII

The night faded. The men already had the saddles on the camels, when suddenly they observed a desert wolf, which, with tail curled beneath it, rushed across the pass, about a hundred paces from the caravan, and reaching the opposite table-land, dashed ahead showing signs of fright as if it fled before some enemy. On the Egyptian deserts there are no wild animals before which wolves could feel any fear and for that reason this sight greatly alarmed the Sudânese Arabs. What could this be? Was the pursuing party already approaching? One of the Bedouins quickly climbed on a rock, but he had barely glanced when he slipped down yet more quickly.

"By the prophet!" he exclaimed, confused and frightened, "a lion is rushing towards us and is already close by!"

And then from beyond the rocks came a bass "wow" after which Stas and Nell shouted together:

"Saba! Saba!"

As in the Arabian language this means a lion, the Bedouins became frightened yet more, but Chamis burst out laughing and said:

"I know that lion."

Saying this he whistled drawlingly and in a moment the gigantic mastiff dashed among the camels. Seeing the children he leaped towards them. From joy he overturned Nell who extended

her hands to him; he reared himself on Stas; afterwards whining and barking he ran round both a few times, again overturned Nell, again reared himself on Stas, and finally lying down at their feet began to pant.

His sides were sunken, from his lolling tongue fell clots of froth; nevertheless he wagged his tail and raised his eyes full of love at Nell as if he wanted to say: "Your father ordered me to watch over you, so here I am."

The children sat close to him, one on each side, and began to pat him. The two Bedouins, who never before saw a creature like this, gazed at him with astonishment, repeating: "On Allah! o kelb kebir!" ("By God! that is a big dog!") while he for some time lay quietly. Afterwards he raised his head, inhaled the air through his black nose resembling a big truffle, scented, and jumped towards the extinct camp-fire, near which lay the remnants of food.

In the same moment goat's and lamb's bones began to crack and crumble as straw in his powerful teeth. After eight people, counting old Dinah and Nell, there was enough for such "kelb kebir."

But the Sudânese were worried by his arrival and the two camel drivers, calling Chamis to one side, began to speak to him with uneasiness and even with indignation.

"Iblis* [* Iblis, one of the names of the devil in the Koran. —*Translator's note.*] brought that dog here," exclaimed Gebhr, "but in what manner did he find the children, since they came

to Gharak by rail?"

"Surely by the camel tracks," answered Chamis.

"It happened badly. Everybody who sees him with us will remember our caravan and will point out where we went. We positively must get rid of him."

"But how?" asked Chamis.

"We have a rifle, so take it and shoot him in the head."

In a case of urgency, Chamis might be able, for Stas had several times opened and closed his weapon before him, but he was sorry for the dog of whom he was fond, having taken care of him before the arrival of the children at Medinet. He knew perfectly that the Sudânese had no idea how to handle a weapon of the latest model and would be at a loss what to do with it.

"If you don't know how," he said, with a crafty smile, "that little 'nouzrani' (Christian) could kill the dog, but that rifle can fire several times in succession; so I do not advise you to put it in his hands."

"God forbid!" replied Idris; "he would shoot us like quails."

"We have knives," observed Gebhr.

"Try it, but remember that you have a throat which the dog will pull to pieces before you stab him."

"Then what is to be done?"

Chamis shrugged his shoulder.

"Why do you want to kill the dog? If you should afterwards bury him in the sand, the hyenas will dig him out; the pursuers will find his bones and will know that we did not cross the Nile

but made off in this direction. Let him follow us. As often as the Bedouins go for water and we hide in the passes, you may be sure that the dog will stay with the children. Allah! It is better that he came now, for otherwise he would lead the pursuing party on our tracks as far as Berber. You do not need to feed him, for if our leavings are not sufficient it will not be difficult for him to get a hyena or jackal. Leave him in peace, I tell you, and do not lose any time in idle talk."

"Perhaps you are right," said Idris.

"If I am right, then I will give him water, so that he shall not run to the Nile and show himself in the villages."

In this manner was decided the fate of Saba who, having somewhat rested himself and eaten his fill, in the twinkling of an eye lapped up a bowl of water and started with renewed strength after the caravan.

They now rode on high, level ground, on which the wind wrinkled the sand and from which could be seen on both sides the immense expanse of the desert. Heaven assumed the tint of a pearl shell. Light little clouds gathered in the east and changed like opals, after which they suddenly became dyed with gold. One ray darted, afterwards another, and the sun – as is usual in southern countries, in which there are scarcely any twilight and dawn – did not ascend, but burst from behind the clouds like a pillar of fire and flooded the horizon with a bright light. It enlivened heaven, it enlivened the earth, and the immeasurable sandy expanse was unveiled to the eyes of men.

"We must hasten," said Idris, "for here we can be seen from a distance."

Accordingly the rested and satiated camels sped on with the celerity of gazelles. Saba remained behind, but there was no fear that he would get lost and not appear at the first short halt for refreshments. The dromedary on which Idris rode with Stas ran close to the one on which Nell was mounted, so that the children could easily converse with each other. The seat which the Sudânese had made appeared splendid and the little girl really looked like a bird in a nest. She could not fall, even sleeping, and the ride fatigued her far less than during the night. The bright daylight gave courage to both children. In Stas' heart the hope entered that since Saba had overtaken them, the pursuers might do the same. This hope he at once shared with Nell, who smiled at him for the first time since their abduction.

"When will they overtake us?" she asked in French in order that Idris should not understand them.

"I do not know. It may be to-day; perhaps to-morrow; perhaps after two or three days."

"But we will not ride back on camels?"

"No. We will ride only as far as the Nile, and afterwards go by way of the Nile to El-Wasta."

"That is good! oh, good!"

Poor Nell, who had previously loved these rides, had evidently now had enough of them.

"By way of the Nile – to El-Wasta and to papa!" she began to

repeat in a sleepy voice.

As at the previous stop she did not enjoy a full sound sleep, she now fell into that deep sleep which after fatigue comes towards morning. In the meantime the Bedouins drove the camels without a rest and Stas observed that they were making their way towards the interior of the desert.

So, desiring to shake Idris' confidence that he would be able to elude the pursuit, and at the same time to show him that he himself relied upon it as a dead certainty, he said:

"You are driving away from the Nile and from Bahr Yûsuf, but that won't help you, for of course they will not seek you on the banks where villages lie side by side, but in the interior of the desert."

And Idris asked:

"How do you know that we are driving away from the Nile, since the banks cannot be seen from here?"

"Because the sun, which is in the eastern part of heaven, is warming our backs; that means we have turned to the west."

"You are a wise boy," said Idris with esteem.

After a while he added:

"But the pursuing party will not overtake us nor will you escape."

"No," answered Stas, "I shall not escape – unless with her."

And he pointed to the sleeping girl.

Until noon they sped almost without pausing for breath, but when the sun rose high in the sky and began to scorch, the camels,

which by nature perspire but little, were covered with sweat, and their pace slackened considerably. The caravan again was surrounded by rocks and dunes. The ravines, which during the rainy season are changed into channels of streams, or so-called "khors," came to view more and more frequently. The Bedouins finally halted in one of them which was entirely concealed amid the rocks. But they had barely dismounted from the camels when they raised a cry and dashed ahead, bending over every little while and throwing stones ahead of them. Stas, who had not yet alighted from the saddle, beheld a strange sight. From among the dry bushes overgrowing the bed of the "khor," a big snake emerged and, gliding sinuously with the rapidity of lightning among the fragments of rocks, escaped to some hiding-place known to itself. The Bedouins chased it furiously and Gebhr rushed to their aid with a knife. But owing to the unevenness of the ground it was difficult either to hit the snake with a stone or to pin it with a knife. Soon all three returned with terror visible on their faces.

And the cries, customary with Arabs, resounded:

"Allah!"

"Bismillah!"

"Mashallah!"

Afterwards both Sudânese began to look with a kind of strange and, at the same time, searching and inquiring gaze at Stas who could not understand what was the matter.

In the meantime Nell also dismounted from her camel, and

though she was less tired than during the night, Stas spread for her a saddle-cloth in the shade on a level spot and told her to lie down, in order, as he said, that she might straighten out her little feet. The Arabs prepared their noon meal, which consisted of biscuits and dates, together with a gulp of water. The camels were not watered for they had drank during the night. The faces of Idris, Gebhr and the Bedouins were still dejected, and the stop was made in silence. Finally Idris called Stas aside, and began to question him with a countenance at once mysterious and perturbed.

"Did you see the snake?"

"I did."

"Did you conjure it to appear before us?"

"No."

"Some ill-luck awaits us as those fools did not succeed in killing it."

"The gallows awaits you."

"Be silent! Is your father a sorcerer?"

"He is," answered Stas without any hesitation, for he understood in a moment that those savage and superstitious men regarded the appearance of a reptile as an evil omen and an announcement that the flight would not succeed.

"So then your father sent it to us," answered Idris, "but he ought to understand that we can avenge ourselves for his charms upon you."

"You will not do anything to me as the sons of Fatma would

have to suffer for any injury to me."

"And you already understand this? But remember that if it was not for me, your blood would have flowed under Gebhr's courbash – yours and that little 'bint's' also."

"I therefore shall intercede for you only; but Gebhr shall swing on the rope."

At this Idris gazed at him for a while as if with astonishment and said:

"Our lives are not yet in your hands and you already talk to us as our lord – " After a while he added:

"You are a strange 'uled' (boy), and such a one I have not yet seen.

Thus far I have been kind to you, but take heed and do not threaten."

"God punishes treachery," answered Stas.

It was apparent, however, that the assurance with which the boy spoke in connection with the evil omen in the form of a snake which succeeded in escaping, disquieted Idris in a high degree. Having already mounted the camel he repeated several times: "Yes, I was kind to you," as if in any event he wished to impress this upon Stas' memory, and afterwards he began to finger the beads of a rosary made of the shells of "dum" nuts, and pray.

About two o'clock, though it was in the winter season, the heat became unusual. In the sky there was not a cloudlet, but the horizon's border was disfigured.

Above the caravan hovered a few vultures whose widely

outstretched wings cast moving, black shadows on the tawny sands. In the heated air could be smelt an odor like the gas exhaled from burning charcoal. The camels, not ceasing to run, began to grunt strangely. One of the Bedouins approached Idris.

"Some evil is brewing?"

"What, do you think?" asked the Sudânese.

"Wicked spirits awoke the wind slumbering on the western desert, and he rose from the sands and is rushing upon us."

Idris raised himself on the saddle, gazed into the distance, and replied:

"That is so. He is coming from the west and south but is not as furious as a Khamsin."* [* A southwest wind which blows in the spring.]

"Three years ago near Abu-Hamed he buried a whole caravan and did not sweep the sand away until last winter. Ualla! He may have enough strength to stuff the nostrils of the camels and dry up the water in the bags."

"It is necessary that we speed so that he strike us only with a wing."

"We are flying in his eyes and are not able to avoid him."

"The quicker he comes, the quicker he will pass away."

Saying this, Idris struck his camel with a courbash and his example was followed by the others. For some time could be heard the dull blows of the thick whips, resembling the clapping of hands, and the cries of "Yalla." On the southwest the horizon, previously whitish, darkened. The heat continued and the sun

scorched the heads of the riders. The vultures soared very high evidently, for their shadows grew smaller and smaller, and they finally vanished entirely.

It became sultry.

The Arabs yelled at the camels until their throats became parched, after which they were silent and a funereal quiet ensued, interrupted only by the groaning of the animals.

Two very small foxes* [* An animal smaller than our foxes, called "fennec."] with big ears stole by the caravan, running in an opposite direction.

The same Bedouin, who had previously conversed with Idris, spoke out again in a strange and as if not his own voice:

"This will not be a usual wind. Evil charms are pursuing us. The snake is to blame for all – "

"I know," answered Idris.

"Look! the air quivers. That does not happen in winter."

In fact the heated air began to quiver, and in consequence of an illusion of the eyes it seemed to the riders that the sands quivered. The Bedouin took his sweaty cowl from his head and said:

"The heart of the desert beats with terror."

And at this the other Bedouin, riding in the lead as a guide of the camels, turned around and began to shout:

"He is already coming! – He is coming!"

And in truth the wind came up. In the distance appeared as it were dark clouds which in their eyes grew higher and higher and approached the caravan. The nearest waves of air all around

became agitated and sudden gusts of wind began to spin the sand. Here and there funnels were formed as if someone had drilled the surface of the desert with a cane. At places rose swift whirlpools resembling pillars, thin at the bottom and outspread on top like plumes of feathers. All this lasted but the twinkling of an eye. The cloud which the camel-guide first espied came flying towards them with an inconceivable velocity. It struck the people and beasts like the wing of a gigantic bird. In one moment the eyes and mouths of the riders were filled with sand. Clouds of dust hid the sky, hid the sun, and the earth became dusky. The men began to lose sight of one another and even the nearest camel appeared indistinctly as if in a fog. Not the rustle – for on the desert there are no trees – but the roar of the whirlwind drowned the calls of the guide and the bellowing of the animals. In the atmosphere could be smelt an odor such as coal smoke gives. The camels stood still and, turning away from the wind, they stretched their long necks downward so that their nostrils almost touched the sand.

The Sudânese, however, did not wish to allow a stop, as caravans which halt during a hurricane are often buried in sand. At such times it is best to speed with the whirlwind, but Idris and Gebhr could not do this, for in thus doing they would return to Fayûm from where they expected a pursuit. So when the first gale passed they again drove the camels.

A momentary stillness ensued but the ruddy dusk dissipated very slowly for the sun could not pierce through the clouds of

dust suspended in the air. The thicker and heavier particles of sand began to fall. Sand filled all the cracks and punctures in the saddles and clung to the folds of the clothes. The people with each breath inhaled dust which irritated their lungs and grated their teeth.

Besides, the whirlwind might break out again and hide the whole world. It occurred to Stas that if at the time of such darkness he was with Nell on the same camel, he might turn around and escape with the wind northward. Who knows whether they would be observed amidst the dusk and confusion of the elements, and, if they succeeded in reaching any village on Bahr Yûsuf near the Nile, Idris and Gebhr would not dare to pursue them for they would at once fall into the hands of the local "police."

Stas, weighing all this, jostled Idris' shoulder and said:

"Give me the gourd with water."

Idris did not refuse for howsoever much that morning they had turned into the interior of the desert and quite far from the river, they had enough of water, and the camels drank copiously during the time of their night stop. Besides this, as a man acquainted with the desert, he knew that after a hurricane, rain usually follows and the dried-up "khors" change temporarily into streams.

Stas in reality was thirsty, so he took a good drink, after which, not returning the gourd, he again jostled Idris' arm.

"Halt the caravan."

"Why?" asked the Sudânese.

"Because I want to sit on the camel with the little 'bint' and give her water."

"Dinah has a bigger gourd than mine."

"But she is greedy and surely has emptied it. A great deal of sand must have fallen into her saddle which you made like a basket. Dinah will be helpless."

"The wind will break out after a while and will refill it."

"That is the more reason why she will require help."

Idris lashed the camel with his whip and for a while they rode in silence.

"Why don't you answer?" Stas asked.

"Because I am considering whether it would be better to tie you to the saddle or tie your hands behind."

"You have become insane."

"No. I have guessed what you intended to do."

"The pursuers will overtake us anyway; so I would not have to do it."

"The desert is in the hands of God."

They became silent again. The thicker sand fell entirely; there remained in the air a subtile red dust, something of the nature of pollen, through which the sun shone like a copper plate. But already they could see ahead. Before the caravan stretched level ground at the borders of which the keen eyes of the Arabs again espied a cloud. It was higher than the previous one and, besides this, there shot from it what seemed like pillars, or gigantic

chimneys expanding at the top. At this sight the hearts of the Arabs and Bedouins quailed for they recognized the great sandy whirlpools. Idris raised his hands and drawing his palms towards his ears began to prostrate himself to the approaching whirlwind. His faith in one God evidently did not prevent his worship and fear of others for Stas distinctly heard him say:

"Lord! We are thy children; therefore do not devour us."

But the "lord" just dashed at them and assailed the camels with a force so terrible that they almost fell to the ground. The animals now formed a compact pack with heads turned to the center towards each other. Whole masses of sand were stirred. The caravan was enveloped by a dusk deeper than before and in that dusk there flew beside the riders dark and indistinct objects, as though gigantic birds or camels were dispersed with the hurricane. Fear seized the Arabs, to whom it seemed that these were the spirits of animals and men who had perished under the sands. Amid the roar and howling could be heard strange voices similar to sobs, to laughter, to cries for help. But these were delusions. The caravan was threatened by real danger, a hundredfold greater. The Sudânese well knew that if any one of the great whirlpools, forming incessantly in the bosom of the hurricane, should catch them in its whirls, it would hurl the riders to the ground and disperse the camels, and if it should break and fall upon them then in the twinkling of an eye an immense sandy mound would cover them in which they would remain until the next hurricane, blowing away the sand, should reveal their

skeletons.

Stas' head swam, his lungs seemed choked, and the sand blinded him. But at times it seemed to him that he heard Nell crying and calling; so he thought only of her. Taking advantage of the fact that the camels stood in a close pack and that Idris might not observe him, he determined to creep over quietly to the girl's camel, not for the purpose of escaping, but to give her assistance and encouragement. But he had barely extended his limbs from under him and stretched out his hands to grasp the edge of Nell's saddle, when the giant hand of Idris grabbed him. The Sudânese snatched him like a feather, laid him before him and began to tie him with a palm rope, and after binding his hands, placed him across the saddle. Stas pressed his teeth and resisted as well as he could, but in vain. Having a parched throat and a mouth filled with sand he could not convince Idris that he desired only to go to the girl's assistance and did not want to escape.

After a while, however, feeling that he was suffocating, he began to shout in a stifled voice:

"Save the little 'bint'! Save the little 'bint'!"

But the Arabs preferred to think of their own lives. The blasts became so terrible that they could not sit on the camels nor could the camels stand in their places. The two Bedouins with Chamis and Gebhr leaped to the ground, in order to hold the animals by cords attached to the mouthpieces under their lower jaws. Idris, shoving Stas to the rear of the saddle, did the same. The animals spread out their legs as widely as possible in order to

resist the furious whirlwind, but they lacked strength, and the caravan, scourged by gravel which cut like hundreds of whips and the sand which pricked like pins, began now slowly, then hurriedly, to turn about and retreat under the pressure. At times the whirlwind tore holes under their feet, then again the sand and gravel bounding from the sides of the camels would form, in the twinkling of an eye, mounds reaching to their knees and higher. In this manner hour passed after hour. The danger became more and more terrible. Idris finally understood that the only salvation was to remount the camels and fly with the whirlwind. But this would be returning in the direction of Fayûm, where Egyptian Courts and the gallows were waiting for them.

"Ha! it cannot be helped," thought Idris. "The hurricane will also stop the pursuit and when it ceases, we will again proceed southward."

And he began to shout that they should resume their seats on the camels.

But at this moment something happened which entirely changed the situation.

Suddenly, the dusky, almost black, clouds of sand were illumined with a livid light. The darkness then became still deeper, but at the same time there arose, slumbering on high and awakened by the whirlwind, thunder; it began to roll between the Arabian and Libyan deserts, – powerful, threatening, one might say, angry. It seemed as if from the heavens, mountains and rocks were tumbling down. The deafening peal intensified, grew, shook

the world, began to roam all over the whole horizon; in places it burst with a force as terrible as if the shattered vault of heaven had fallen upon earth and afterwards it again rolled with a hollow, continual rumble; again it burst forth, again broke, it blinded with lightning, and struck with thunderbolts, descended, rose, and pealed continuously.* [* The author heard in the vicinity of Aden thunder which lasted without intermission for half an hour. See "Letters from Africa."]

The wind subsided as if overawed, and when after a long time somewhere in the immeasurable distance the chain-bolt of heaven rattled, a deadly stillness followed the thunder.

But after a while in that silence the voice of the guide resounded.

"God is above the whirlwind and the storm. We are saved."

They started. But they were enveloped by a night so impenetrable that though the camels ran close together, the men could not see each other and had to shout aloud every little while in order not to lose one another. From time to time glaring lightning, livid or red, illuminated the sandy expanse, but afterwards fell a darkness so thick as to be almost palpable. Notwithstanding the hope, which the voice of the guide poured into the hearts of the Sudânese, uneasiness did not yet leave them, because they moved blindly, not knowing in truth in which direction they were going; – whether they were moving around in a circle or were returning northward. The animals stumbled against each other every little while and could not run swiftly,

and besides they panted strangely, and so loudly that it seemed to the riders that the whole desert panted from fear. Finally fell the first drops of rain, which almost always follows a hurricane, and at the same time the voice of the guide broke out amidst the darkness:

"Khor!"

They were above a ravine. The camels paused at the brink; after which they began to step carefully towards the bottom.

IX

The khor was wide, covered on the bottom with stones among which grew dwarfish, thorny shrubs. A high rock full of crevices and fissures formed its southern wall. The Arabs discerned all this by the light of quiet but more and more frequent lightning flashes. Soon they also discovered in the rocky wall a kind of shallow cave or, rather, a broad niche, in which people could easily be harbored and, in case of a great downpour, could find shelter. The camels also could be comfortably lodged upon a slight elevation close by the niche. The Bedouins and two Sudânese removed from them their burdens and saddles, so that they might rest well, and Chamis, son of Chadigi, occupied himself in the meantime with pulling thorny shrubs for a fire. Big single drops fell continually but the downpour began only when the party lay down to sleep. At first it was like strings of water, afterwards ropes, and in the end it seemed as if whole rivers were flowing from invisible clouds. Such rains, which occur only once in several years, swell, even in winter time, the water of the canals and the Nile, and in Aden fill immense cisterns, without which the city could not exist at all. Stas never in his life had seen anything like it. At the bottom of the khor the stream began to rumble; the entrance to the niche was veiled as if by a curtain of water; around could be heard only splashing and spluttering.

The camels stood on an elevation and the downpour at most

would give them a bath; nevertheless the Arabs peered out every little while to see if any danger threatened the animals. To the others it was agreeable to sit in the cave, safe from danger, by the bright fire of brushwood, which was not yet soaked. On their faces joy was depicted. Idris, who immediately after their arrival had untied Stas' hands so that he could eat, now turned to him and smiling contemptuously said:

"The Mahdi is greater than all white sorcerers. He subdued the hurricane and sent rain."

Stas did not reply for he was occupied with Nell, who was barely alive. First he shook the sand from her hair, afterwards directed old Dinah to unpack the things which she, in the belief that the children were going to their parents, brought with her from Fayûm. He took a towel, wet it, and wiped the little girl's eyes and face with it. Dinah could not do this as seeing but poorly with one eye only, she lost her sight almost entirely during the hurricane and washing her heated eyelids did not bring her any relief. Nell submitted passively to all of Stas' efforts; she only gazed at him like an exhausted bird, and only when he removed her shoes to spill out the sand and afterwards when he smoothed out the saddle-cloths did she throw her arms around his neck.

His heart overflowed with great pity. He felt that he was a guardian, an older brother, and at that time Nell's only protector, and he felt at the same time that he loved this little sister immensely, far more than ever before. He loved her indeed in Port Said, but he regarded her as a "baby"; so, for instance, it

never even occurred to him to kiss her hand in bidding her good night. If any one had suggested such an idea to him he would have thought that a bachelor, who had finished his thirteenth year, could not without derogation to his dignity and age do anything like that. But, at present, a common distress awoke in him dormant tenderness; so he kissed not one but both hands of the little girl.

Lying down, he continued to think of her and determined to perform some extraordinary deed to snatch her from captivity. He was prepared for everything, even for wounds and death; only with this little reservation secreted in his heart, that the wounds should not be too painful, and that the death should not be an inevitable and real death, as in such case he could not witness the happiness of Nell when liberated. Afterwards he began to ponder upon the most heroic manner of saving her, but his thoughts became confused. For a while it seemed to him that whole clouds of sand were burying him; afterwards that all the camels were piling on his head, – and he fell asleep.

The Arabs, exhausted by the battle with the hurricane, after attending to the camels, also fell into a sound sleep. The fire became extinct and a dusk prevailed in the niche. Soon the snores of the men resounded, and from outside came the splash of the downpour and the roar of the waters clashing over the stones on the bottom of the khor. In this manner the night passed.

But before dawn Stas was awakened from a heavy sleep by a feeling of cold. It appeared that water which accumulated in

the fissures on the top of the rock slowly passed through some cleft in the vault of the cave and began finally to trickle onto his head. The boy sat up on the saddle-cloth and for some time struggled with sleep; he did not realize where he was and what had happened to him.

After a while, however, consciousness returned to him.

"Aha!" he thought, "yesterday there was a hurricane and we are kidnapped, and this is a cave in which we sought shelter from the rain."

And he began to gaze around. At first he observed with astonishment that the rain had passed away and that it was not at all dark in the cave, as it was illuminated by the moon which was about to set. In its pale beams could be seen the whole interior of that wide but shallow niche. Stas saw distinctly the Arabs lying beside each other, and under the other wall of the cave the white dress of Nell who was sleeping close to Dinah.

And again great tenderness possessed his heart.

"Sleep, Nell – sleep," he said to himself; "but I do not sleep, and must save her."

After this, glancing at the Arabs, he added in his soul:

"Ah! I do want to have all these rogues – " Suddenly he trembled.

His gaze fell upon the leather case containing the short rifle presented to him as a Christmas gift, and the cartridge boxes lying between him and Chamis, so near that it would suffice for him to stretch out his hand.

And his heart began to beat like a hammer. If he could secure the rifle and boxes he would certainly be the master of the situation. It would be enough in that case to slip noiselessly out of the niche, hide about fifty paces away, among the rocks, and from there watch the exit of the Sudânese and Bedouins. He thought that if they awakened and observed his absence they would rush out of the cave together but at that time he could with two bullets shoot down the first two and, before the others could reach him, the rifle could be reloaded. Chamis would remain but he could take care of him.

Here he pictured to himself four corpses lying in a pool of blood, and fright and horror seized his breast. To kill four men! Indeed they were knaves, but even so it was a horrifying affair. He recollected that at one time he saw a laborer – a fellah – killed by the crank of a steam dredge, and what a horrible impression his mortal remains, quivering in a red puddle, made upon him! He shuddered at the recollection. And now four would be necessary! four! The sin and the horror! No, no, he was incapable of that.

He began to struggle with his thoughts. For himself, he would not do that – No! But Nell was concerned; her protection, her salvation, and her life were involved, for she could not endure all this, and certainly would die either on the road or among the wild and brutalized hordes of dervishes. What meant the blood of such wretches beside the life of Nell, and could any one in such a situation hesitate?

"For Nell! For Nell!"

But suddenly a thought flew like a whirlwind through Stas' mind and caused the hair to rise on his head. What would happen if any one of the outlaws placed a knife at Nell's breast, and announced that he would murder her if he – Stas – did not surrender and return the rifle to them.

"Then," answered the boy to himself, "I should surrender at once."

And with a realization of his helplessness he again flung himself impotently upon the saddle-cloth.

The moon now peered obliquely through the opening of the cave and it became less dark. The Arabs snored continually. Some time passed and a new idea began to dawn in Stas' head.

If, slipping out with the weapon and hiding among the rocks, he should kill not the men but shoot the camels? It would be too bad and a sad ending for the innocent animals; – that is true, but what was to be done? Why, people kill animals not only to save life but for broth and roast meat. Now it was a certainty that if he succeeded in killing four, and better still five camels, further travel would be impossible. No one in the caravan would dare to go to the villages near the banks to purchase new camels. And in such a case Stas, in the name of his father, would promise the men immunity from punishment and even a pecuniary reward and – nothing else would remain to do but to return.

Yes, but if they should not give him time to make such a promise and should kill him in the first transports of rage?

They must give him time and hear him for he would hold the

rifle in his hand; he would be able to hold them at bay until he stated everything. When he had done, they would understand that their only salvation would be to surrender. Then he would be in command of the caravan and lead it directly to Bahr Yûsuf and the Nile. To be sure, at present they are quite a distance from it, perhaps one or two days' journey, as the Arabs through caution had turned considerably into the interior of the desert. But that did not matter; there would remain, of course, a few camels and on one of them Nell would ride.

Stas began to gaze attentively at the Arabs. They slept soundly, as people exceedingly tired do, but as the night was waning, they might soon awaken. It was necessary to act at once. The taking of the cartridge boxes did not present any difficulties as they lay close by. A more difficult matter was to get the rifle, which Chamis had placed at his further side. Stas hoped that he would succeed in purloining it, but he decided to draw it out of the case and put the stock and the barrels together when he should be about fifty paces from the cave, as he feared that the clank of the iron against iron would wake the sleepers.

The moment arrived. The boy bent like an arch over Chamis and, seizing the case by the handle, began to transfer it to his side. His heart and pulse beat heavily, his eyes grew dim, his breathing became rapid, but he shut his teeth and tried to control his emotions. Nevertheless when the straps of the case creaked lightly, drops of cold perspiration stood on his forehead. That second seemed to him an age. But Chamis did not even stir. The

case described an arch over him and rested silently beside the box with cartridges.

Stas breathed freely. One-half of the work was done. Now it was necessary to slip out of the cave noiselessly and run about fifty paces; afterwards to hide in a fissure, open the case, put the rifle together, load it, and fill his pockets with cartridges. The caravan then would be actually at his mercy.

Stas' black silhouette was outlined on the brighter background of the cave's entrance. A second more and he would be on the outside, and would hide in the rocky fissure. And then, even though one of the outlaws should wake, before he realized what had happened and before he aroused the others it would be too late. The boy, from fear of knocking down some stone, of which a large number lay at the threshold of the niche, shoved out one foot and began to seek firm ground with his step.

And already his head leaned out of the opening and he was about to slip out wholly when suddenly something happened which turned the blood in his veins to ice.

Amid the profound stillness pealed like a thunderbolt the joyous bark of Saba; it filled the whole ravine and awoke the echoes reposing in it. The Arabs as one man were startled from their sleep, and the first object which struck their eyes was the sight of Stas with the case in one hand and the cartridge box in the other.

Ah, Saba! what have you done?

X

With cries of horror, all in a moment rushed at Stas; in the twinkling of an eye they wrested the rifle and cartridges from him and threw him on the ground, tied his hands and feet, striking and kicking him all the time, until finally Idris, from fear of the boy's life, drove them off. Afterwards they began to converse in disjointed words, as people do over whom had impended a terrible danger and whom only an accident had saved.

"That is Satan incarnate," exclaimed Idris, with face pallid with fright and emotion.

"He would have shot us like wild geese for food," added Gebhr.

"Ah, if it was not for that dog."

"God sent him."

"And you wanted to kill him?" said Chamis.

"From this time no one shall touch him."

"He shall always have bones and water."

"Allah! Allah!" repeated Idris, not being able to compose himself.

"Death was upon us. Ugh!"

And they began to stare at Stas lying there, with hatred but with a certain wonder that one small boy might have been the cause of their calamity and destruction.

"By the prophet!" spoke out one of the Bedouins, "it is

necessary to prevent this son of Iblis from twisting our necks. We are taking a viper to the Mahdi. What do you intend to do with him?"

"We must cut off his right hand!" exclaimed Gebhr.

The Bedouins did not answer, but Idris would not consent to this proposition. It occurred to him that if the pursuers should capture them, a more terrible punishment would be meted to them for the mutilation of the boy. Finally, who could guarantee that Stas would not die after such an operation? In such a case for the exchange of Fatma and her children only Nell would remain. So when Gebhr pulled out his knife with the intention of executing his threat, Idris seized him by the wrist and held it.

"No!" he said. "It would be a disgrace for five of the Mahdi's warriors to fear one Christian whelp so much as to cut off his fist; we will bind him for the night, and for that which he wanted to do, he shall receive ten lashes of the courbash."

Gebhr was ready to execute the sentence at once but Idris again pushed him away and ordered the flogging to be done by one of the Bedouins, to whom he whispered not to hit very hard. As Chamis, perhaps out of regard for his former service with the engineers or perhaps from some other reason, did not want to mix in the matter, the other Bedouin turned Stas over with his back up and the punishment was about to take place, when at that moment an unexpected obstacle came.

At the opening of the niche Nell appeared with Saba.

Occupied with her pet, who, dashing into the cave, threw

himself at once at her little feet, she had heard the shouts of the Arabs, but, as in Egypt Arabs as well as Bedouins yell on every occasion as if they are about to annihilate each other, she did not pay any attention to them. Not until she called Stas and received no reply from him, did she go out to see whether he was not already seated on the camels. With terror she saw in the first luster of the morning Stas lying on the ground and above him a Bedouin with a courbash in his hand. At the sight of this she screamed with all her strength and stamped with her little feet, and when the Bedouin, not paying any attention to this, aimed the first blow, she flung herself forward and covered the boy with her body.

The Bedouin hesitated, as he did not have an order to strike the little girl, and in the meantime her voice resounded full of despair and horror:

"Saba! Saba!"

And Saba understood what was the matter and in one leap was in the niche. The hair bristled on his neck and back, his eyes flamed redly, in his breast and powerful throat there was a rumble as if of thunder.

And afterwards, the lips of his wrinkled jaws rose slowly upward and the teeth as well as the white fangs, an inch long, appeared as far as the bloody gums. The giant mastiff now began to turn his head to the right and to the left as if he wanted to display well his terrible equipment to the Sudânese and Bedouins and tell them:

"Look! here is something with which I shall defend the children!"

They, on the other hand, retreated hurriedly for they knew in the first place that Saba had saved their lives and again that it was a clear thing that whoever approached Nell at that moment would have the fangs of the infuriated mastiff sunk at once in his throat. So they stood irresolute, staring with an uncertain gaze and as if asking one another what in the present situation had better be done.

Their hesitation continued so long that Nell had sufficient time to summon old Dinah and order her to cut Stas' bonds. Then the boy, placing his hand on Saba's head, turned to his assailants:

"I did not want to kill you – only the camels," he said through his set teeth.

But this information so startled the Arabs that they undoubtedly would have again rushed at Stas were it not for Saba's flaming eyes and bristling hair. Gebhr even started to dash towards him, but one hollow growl riveted him to the spot.

A moment of silence followed, after which Idris' loud voice resounded:

"To the road! To the road!"

XI

A day passed, a night, and yet another day and they drove constantly southward, halting only for a brief time in the khors in order not to fatigue the camels too much, to water and feed them, and also to divide their provisions and water. From fear of the pursuit they turned yet farther to the west, for they did not have to concern themselves about water for some time. The downpour had lasted indeed not more than seven hours, but it was as tremendous as if a cloud-burst had occurred on the desert. Idris and Gebhr as well as the Bedouins knew that on the beds of the khors and in those places where the rocks formed natural cavities and wells they would, for a few days, find enough water to suffice not only for their and the camels' immediate wants but even for replenishing their supplies. After the great rain, as usual, splendid weather followed. The sky was cloudless, and the air so transparent that the view reached over an immeasurable distance. At night the heaven, studded with stars, twinkled and sparkled as if with thousands of diamonds. From the desert sands came a refreshing coolness.

The camel-humps already grew smaller but the animals, being well-fed, were, according to the Arabian expression, "harde," that is, they were unimpaired in strength and ran so willingly that the caravan advanced but little slower than on the first day after their departure from Gharak el-Sultani. Stas with astonishment

observed that in some of the khors, in rocky fissures protected from rain, were supplies of durra and dates. He inferred from this that, before their abduction, certain preparations were made and everything was pre-arranged between Fatma, Idris, and Gebhr on one side and the Bedouins on the other. It was also easy to surmise that both the Bedouins were Mahdist adherents and believers, who wanted to join their leader, and for that reason were easily drawn into the plot by the Sudânese. In the neighborhood of Fayûm and ground Gharak el-Sultani there were quite a number of Bedouins who with their children and camels led a migratory life on the desert and came to Medinet and the railway stations for gain.

Stas, however, had never seen these two before, and they also could not have been in Medinet, for it appeared they did not know Saba.

The idea of attempting to bribe them occurred to the boy, but recollecting their shouts, full of fervor, whenever the name of the Mahdi was mentioned by them, he deemed this an impossibility. Nevertheless, he did not submit passively to the events, for in that boyish soul there was imbedded a really astonishing energy, which was inflamed by the past failures.

"Everything which I have undertaken," he soliloquized, "ended in my getting a whipping. But even if they flog me with that courbash every day and even kill me, I will not stop thinking of rescuing Nell and myself from the hands of these villains. If the pursuers capture them, so much the better. I, however, will

act as if I did not expect them." And at the recollection of what he had met at the thought of those treacherous and cruel people who, after snatching away the rifle, had belabored him with fists and kicked him, his heart rebelled and rancor grew. He felt not only vanquished but humiliated by them in his pride as a white man. Above all, however, he felt Nell's wrong and this feeling, with the bitterness which intensified within him after the last failure, changed into an inexorable hatred of both Sudânese. He had often heard, indeed, from his father that hatred blinds, and that only such souls yield to it as are incapable of anything better; but for the time being he could not subdue it within him, and did not know how to conceal it.

He did not know to what extent Idris had observed it and had begun to get uneasy, understanding that, in case the pursuing party should capture them, he could not depend upon the boy's intercession. Idris was always ready for the most audacious deed, but as a man not deprived of reason, he thought that it was necessary to provide for everything and in case of misfortune to leave some gate of salvation open. For this reason, after the last occurrence he wanted in some manner to conciliate Stas and, with this object, at the first stop, he began the following conversation with him.

"After what you wanted to do," he said, "I had to punish you as otherwise they would have killed you, but I ordered the Bedouin not to strike you hard."

And when he received no reply, he, after a while, continued

thus:

"Listen! you yourself have said that the white people always keep their oath. So if you will swear by your God and by the head of that little 'bint' that you will do nothing against us, then I will not order you to be bound for the night."

Stas did not answer a single word to this and only from the glitter of his eyes did Idris perceive that he spoke in vain.

Nevertheless, notwithstanding the urging of Gebhr and the Bedouins, he did not order him to be bound for the night, and when Gebhr did not cease his importunities, he replied with anger:

"Instead of going to sleep, you will to-night stand on guard. I have decided that from this time one of us shall watch during the sleep of the others."

And in reality a change of guards was introduced permanently from that day. This rendered more difficult and completely frustrated all plans of Stas to whom every sentinel paid watchful attention.

But on the other hand the children were left in greater freedom so that they could approach each other and converse without hindrance. Immediately after the first stop Stas sat close to Nell for he was anxious to thank her for her aid.

But though he felt great gratitude to her he did not know how to express himself, either in a lofty style or tenderly; so he merely began to shake both of her little hands.

"Nell!" he said, "you are very good and I thank you; and

besides this I frankly say that you acted like a person of at least thirteen years."

On Stas' lips words like these were the highest praise; so the heart of the little woman was consumed with joy and pride. It seemed to her at that moment that nothing was impossible. "Wait till I grow up, then they will see!" she replied, throwing a belligerent glance in the direction of the Sudânese.

But as she did not understand the cause of the trouble and why all the Arabs rushed at Stas, the boy told her how he had determined to purloin the rifle, kill the camels, and force all to return to the river.

"If I had succeeded," he said, "we would now be free."

"But they awoke?" asked the little girl with palpitating heart.

"They did. That was caused by Saba, who came running toward me, barking loud enough to awaken the dead."

Then her indignation was directed against Saba.

"Nasty Saba! nasty! For this when he comes running up to me I won't speak a word to him and will tell him that he is horrid."

At this Stas, though he was not in a laughing mood, laughed and asked:

"How will you be able not to say a word to him and at the same time tell him he is horrid?"

Nell's eyebrows rose and her countenance reflected embarrassment, after which she said:

"He will know that from my looks."

"Perhaps. But he is not to blame, for he could not know what

was happening. Remember also that afterwards he came to our rescue."

This recollection placated Nell's anger a little. She did not, however, want to grant pardon to the culprit at once.

"That is very well," she said, "but a real gentleman ought not to bark on greeting."

Stas burst out laughing again.

"Neither does a real gentleman bark on leave-taking unless he is a dog, and Saba is one."

But after a while sorrow dimmed the boy's eyes; he sighed once, then again; after which he rose from the stone on which they sat and said:

"The worst is that I could not free you."

And Nell raised herself on her little toes and threw her arms around his neck. She wanted to cheer him; she wanted, with her little nose close to his face, to whisper her gratitude, but, as she could not find appropriate words, she only squeezed his neck yet more tightly and kissed his ear. In the meantime Saba, always late – not so much because he was unable to keep pace with the camels, but because he hunted for jackals on the way, or drove away vultures perched on the crests of rocks with his barking – came rushing up, making his customary noise. The children at the sight of him forgot about everything, and notwithstanding their hard situation began their usual caresses and play until they were interrupted by the Arabs. Chamis gave the dog food and water, after which all mounted the camels and started with the

greatest speed southward.

XII

It was their longest journey, for they rode with small interruption for eighteen hours. Only real saddle-camels, having a good supply of water in their stomachs, could endure such a drive. Idris did not spare them, for he really feared the pursuit. He understood that it must have started long ago, and he assumed that both engineers would be at its head and would not lose any time. Danger threatened from the direction of the river, for it was certain that immediately after the abduction telegraphic orders were despatched to all settlements on the banks directing the sheiks to start expeditions into the interior of the desert on both sides of the Nile, and to detain all parties riding southward. Chamis assured the others that the Government and engineers must have offered a large reward for their capture and that in consequence of this the desert was undoubtedly swarming with searching parties. The only course to pursue would be to turn as far as possible to the west; but on the west lay the great oasis of Kharga, to which despatches also could reach, and besides, if they rode too far west they would lack water after a few days, and death from thirst would await them.

And the question of food became a vital one. The Bedouins in the course of the two weeks preceding the abduction of the children had placed in hiding-places, supplies of durra, biscuits, and dates, but only for a distance of four days' journey from

Medinet. Idris, with fear, thought that when provisions should be lacking it would be imperatively necessary to send men to purchase supplies at the villages on the river banks, and then these men, in view of the aroused vigilance and reward offered for the capture of the fugitives, might easily fall into the hands of the local sheiks, – and betray the whole caravan. The situation was indeed difficult, almost desperate, and Idris each day perceived more plainly upon what an insane undertaking he had ventured.

"If we could only pass Assuan! If we could only pass Assuan!" he said to himself with alarm and despair in his soul. He did not indeed believe Chamis who claimed that the Mahdi's warriors had already reached Assuan, as Stas denied this.

Idris long since perceived that the white "uled" knew more than all of them. But he supposed that beyond the first cataract, where the people were wilder and less susceptible to the influences of Englishmen and the Egyptian Government, he would find more adherents of the prophet, who in a case of emergency would give them succor, and would furnish food and camels. But it was, as the Bedouins reckoned, about five days' journey to Assuan over a road which became more and more desolate, and every stop visibly diminished their supplies for man and beast.

Fortunately they could urge the camels and drive with the greatest speed, for the heat did not exhaust their strength. During daytime, at the noon hour, the sun, indeed, scorched strongly but

the air was continually invigorating and the nights so cool that Stas, with the consent of Idris, changed his seat to Nell's camel, desiring to watch over her and protect her from catching cold.

But his fears were vain, as Dinah, whose eyes, or rather, eye, improved considerably, watched with great solicitude over her little lady. The boy was even surprised that the little one's health thus far did not suffer any impairment and that she bore the journey, with everdecreasing stops, as well as himself. Grief, fear, and the tears which she shed from longing for her papa evidently did not harm her much. Perhaps her slightly emaciated and bright little countenance was tanned by the wind, but in the later days of the journey she felt far less fatigued than at the beginning. It is true that Idris gave her the easiest carrying camel and had made an excellent saddle so that she could sleep in it lying down; nevertheless the desert air, which she breathed day and night, mainly gave her strength to endure the hardships and irregular hours.

Stas not only watched over her but intentionally surrounded her with a worship which, notwithstanding his immense attachment to his little sister, he did not at all feel for her. He observed, however, that this affected the Arabs and that they involuntarily were fortified in the conviction that they were bearing something of unheard-of value, some exceptionally important female captive, with whom it was necessary to act with the greatest possible care. Idris had been accustomed to this while at Medinet; so now all treated her well. They did not spare

water and dates for her. The cruel Gebhr would not now have dared to raise his hand against her. Perhaps the extraordinarily fine stature of the little girl contributed to this, and also that there was in her something of the nature of a flower and of a bird, and this charm even the savage and undeveloped souls of the Arabs could not resist. Often also, when at a resting place she stood by the fire fed by the roses of Jericho or thorns, rosy from the flame and silvery in the moonlight, the Sudânese as well as the Bedouins could not tear their eyes from her, smacking their lips from admiration, according to their habit, and murmuring:

"Allah! Mashallah! Bismillah!"

The second day at noon after that long rest, Stas and Nell who rode this time on the same camel, had a moment of joyful emotion. Immediately after sunrise a light and transparent mist rose over the desert, but it soon fell. Afterwards when the sun ascended higher, the heat became greater than during the previous days. At moments when the camels halted there could not be felt the slightest breeze, so that the air as well as the sands seemed to slumber in the warmth, in the light, and in the stillness. The caravan had just ridden upon a great monotonous level ground, unbroken by khors, when suddenly a wonderful spectacle presented itself to the eyes of the children. Groups of slender palms and pepper trees, plantations of mandarins, white houses, a small mosque with projecting minaret, and, lower, walls surrounding gardens, all these appeared with such distinctness and at distance so close that one might assume that after the lapse

of half an hour the caravan would be amid the trees of the oasis.

"What is this?" exclaimed Stas. "Nell, Nell! Look!"

Nell rose, and for a time was silent with astonishment, but after a while began to cry with joy:

"Medinet! to papa! to papa!"

And Stas turned pale from emotion.

"Truly – Perhaps that is Kharga – But no! That is Medinet perhaps – I recognize the minaret and even see the windmills above the wells – "

In fact, in the distance the highly elevated American windmills resembling great white stars, actually glistened. On the verdant background of the trees they could be seen so perfectly that Stas' keen sight could distinguish the borders of the vanes painted red.

"That is Medinet! – "

Stas knew from books and narratives that there were on the desert phantasms known as "fata morgana" and that sometimes travelers happen to see oases, cities, tufts of trees and lakes, which are nothing more than an illusion, a play of light, and a reflection of real distant objects. But this time the phenomenon was so distinct, so well-nigh palpable that he could not doubt that he saw the real Medinet. There was the turret upon the Mudir's house, there the circular balcony near the summit of the minaret from which the muezzin called to prayers, there that familiar group of trees, and particularly those windmills. No, – that must be the reality. It occurred to the boy that the Sudânese, reflecting upon their situation, had come to the conclusion that

they could not escape and, without saying anything to him, had turned back to Fayûm. But their calmness suggested to him the first doubts. If that really was Fayûm, would they gaze upon it so indifferently? They, of course, saw the phenomenon and pointed it out to each other with their fingers, but on their faces could not be seen the least perplexity or emotion. Stas gazed yet once more and perhaps this indifference of the Arabs caused the picture to seem fainter to him. He also thought that, if in truth they were returning, the caravan would be grouped together, and the men, though only from fear, would ride in a body. But, in the meanwhile, the Bedouins, who, by Idris' order, for the past few days drove considerably in advance, could not be seen at all; while Chamis, riding as a rear guard, appeared at a distance not greater than the vulture lying on the ground.

"Fata Morgana," said Stas to himself.

In the meantime Idris approached him and shouted:

"Heigh! Speed your camel! You see Medinet!"

He evidently spoke jokingly and there was so much spite in his voice that the last hope that the real Medinet was before him vanished in the boy's heart.

And with sorrow in his heart he turned to Nell to dispel her delusion, when unexpectedly an incident occurred which drew the attention of all in another direction.

At first a Bedouin appeared, running towards them at full speed and brandishing from afar a long Arabian rifle which no one in the caravan possessed before that time. Reaching Idris, he

exchanged a few hurried words with him, after which the caravan turned precipitately into the interior of the desert. But, after a time, the other Bedouin appeared leading by a rope a fat she-camel, with a saddle on its hump and leather bags hanging on its sides. A short conversation commenced, of which Stas could not catch a word. The caravan in full speed made for the west. It halted only when they chanced upon a narrow khor full of rocks scattered in wild disorder, and of fissures and caverns. One of these was so spacious that the Sudânese hid the people and camels in it. Stas, although he conjectured more or less what had happened, lay beside Idris and pretended to sleep, hoping that the Arabs, who thus far had exchanged but a few words about the occurrence, would now begin to speak about it. In fact, his hope was not disappointed, for immediately after pouring out fodder for the camels, the Bedouins and the Sudânese with Chamis sat down for a consultation.

"Henceforth we can ride only in the night; in the daytime we will have to hide!" spoke out the one-eyed Bedouin. "There will be many khors now and in each one of them we will find a safe hiding-place."

"Are you sure that he was a sentinel?" asked Idris.

"Allah! We spoke with him. Luckily there was only one. He stood hidden by a rock, so that we could not see him, but we heard from a distance the cry of his camel. Then we slackened our speed and rode up so quietly that he saw us only when we were a few paces away. He became very frightened and wanted to

aim his rifle at us. If he had fired, though he might not have killed any of us, the other sentinels would have heard the shot; so, as hurriedly as possible, I yelled to him: 'Halt! we are pursuing men who kidnapped two white children, and soon the whole pursuit will be here!' The boy was young and foolish, so he believed us, only he ordered us to swear on the Koran that such was the case. We got off our camels and swore – "

"The Mahdi will absolve us – "

"And bless you," said Idris. "Speak! what did you do afterwards?"

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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