

Lord of the Jackals

By Sax Rohmer

In those days, of course (said the French agent, looking out across the sea of Yûssuf Effendis which billowed up against the balcony to where, in the moonlight, the minarets of Cairo pointed the way to God), I did not occupy the position which I occupy to-day. No, I was younger, and more ambitious; I thought to carve in the annals of Egypt a name for myself such as that of De Lesseps.

I had a scheme—and there were those who believed in it—for extending the borders of Egypt. Ah! my friends, Egypt after all is but a double belt of mud following the Nile, and terminated east and west by the desert. The desert! It was the dream of my life to exterminate that desert, that hungry gray desert; it was my plan—a foolish plan as I know now—to link the fertile Fáyûm to the Oases! How was this to be done? Ah!

Why should I dig up those buried skeletons? It was not done; it never could be done; therefore, let me not bore you with how I had proposed to do it. Suffice it that my ambitions took me far off the beaten tracks, far, even, from the caravan roads—far into the gray heart of the desert.

But I was ambitious, and only nineteen—or scarcely twenty. At nineteen, a man who comes from St. Rémy fears no obstacle which Fate can place in his way, and looks upon the world as a grape-fruit to be sweetened with endeavor and sucked empty.

It was in those days, then, that I learned as your Rudyard Kipling has also learned that “East is East”; it was in those days that I came face to face with that “mystery of Egypt” about which so much is written, has always been written, and always will be written, but concerning which so few people, so very few people, know anything whatever.

Yes, I, René de Flassans, saw with my own eyes a thing that I knew to be magic, a thing whereat may reason rebelled—a thing which my poor European intelligence could not grapple, could not begin to explain.

It was this which you asked me to tell you, was it not? I will do so with pleasure, because I know that I speak to men of honor, and because it is good for me, now that I cannot count the gray hairs in my beard, to confess how poor a thing I was when I could count every hair upon my chin—and how grand a thing I thought myself.

One evening, at the end of a dreadful day in the saddle—beneath a sky which seemed to reflect all the fires of hell, a day passed upon sands simply smoking in that merciless sun—I and my native companions came to an encampment of Arabs.

They were Bedouins¹—the tribe does not matter at the moment—and, as you may know, the Bedouin is the most hospitable creature whom God has yet created. The tent of the Sheikh is open to any traveller who cares to rest his weary limbs therein. Feely he may partake of all that the tribe has to offer, food and drink and entertainment; and to seek to press payment upon the host would be to insult a gentleman.

That is desert hospitality. A spear that stands thrust upright in the sand before the tent door signifies that whosoever would raise his hand against the guest has first to reckon with the Sheikh. Equally it would be an insult to erect one’s own tent in the neighborhood of a Bedouin encampment.

¹ This incorrect but familiar spelling is retained throughout.

Well, my friends, I know this well, for I was no stranger to the nomadic life, and accordingly, without fear of the fierce-eyed throng who came forth to meet us, I made my respects to the Sheikh Saïd Mohammed, and was reckoned by him as a friend and a brother. His tent was placed at my disposal, and provisions were made for the suitable entertainment of those who were with me.

You know how dusk falls in Egypt? At one moment the sky is a brilliant canvas, glorious with every color known to art, at the next the curtain—the wonderful veil of deepest violet—has fallen; the stars break through it like diamonds through the finest gauze; it is night, velvet, violet night. You see it here in this noisy modern Cairo. In the lonely desert it is ten thousand times grander, ten thousand times more impressive; it speaks to the soul with the voice of the silence. Ah, those desert nights!

So was the night of which I speak; and having partaken of the fare which the Sheikh caused to be set before me—and Bedouin fare is not for the squeamish stomach—I sipped that delicious coffee which, though an acquired taste, is the true nectar, and looked out beyond the four or five palm trees of this little oasis to where the gray carpet of the desert grew black as ebony and met the violet sweep of the sky.

Perhaps I was the first to see him; I cannot say; but certainly he was not perceived by the Bedouins, although one stood on guard at the entrance to the camp.

How can I describe him? At the time, as he approached in the moonlight with a shambling, stooping gait, I felt that I had never seen his like before. Now I know the reason of my wonder, and the reason of my doubt. I know what it was about him which inspired a kind of horror and a revulsion—a dread.

Elfin locks he had, gray and matted, falling about his angular face, shading his strange, yellow eyes. His was dressed in rags, in tatters; he was furtive, and he staggered as one who is very weak, slowly approaching out of the vastness.

Then it appeared as though every dog in the camp knew of his coming. Out from the shadows of the tents they poured, those yapping mongrels. Never have I seen such a thing. In the midst of the yellowish, snarling things, at the very entrance to the camps the wretched old man fell, uttering a low cry.

But now, snatching up a heavy club which lay close to my hand, I rushed out of the tent. Others were thronging out too, but, first of them all, I burst in among the dogs, striking, kicking, and shouting. I stooped and raised the head of the stranger.

Mutely he thanked me, with half-closed eyes. A choking sound issued from his throat, and he clutched with his hands and pointed to his mouth.

An earthenware jar, containing cool water, stood beside a tent but a few yards away. Hurling my club at the most furious of the dogs, which, with bared fangs, still threatened to attack the recumbent man, I ran and seized the *dorak*, regained his side, and poured water between his parched lips.

The throng about me was strangely silent, until, as the poor old man staggered again to his feet, supported by my arm, a chorus arose about me—one long, vowelled word, wholly unfamiliar, although my Arabic was good. But I noted that all kept a respectful distance from myself and the man whom I had succored.

Then, pressing his way through the throng came the Sheikh Saïd Mohammed. Saluting the ragged stranger with a sort of grim respect, he asked him if he desired entertainment for the night.

The other shook his head, mumbling, pointed to the water jar, and by dint of gnashing his yellow and pointed teeth, intimated that he required food.

Food was brought to him hurriedly. He tied it up in a dirty cloth, grasped the water jar, and, with never a glance at the Arabs, turned to me. With his hand he touched his brow, his lips, and his breast in salute; then, although tottering with weakness, he made off again with that queer, hoping gait.

The camp dogs began to howl, and a strange silence fell upon the Arabs about me. All stood watching the departing figure until it was lost in a dip of the desert, when the watchers began to return again to their tents.

Saïd Mohammed took my hand, and in a few direct and impressive words thanked me for having spared him and his tribe from a grave dishonor. Need I say that I was flattered? Had you met him, my friends, that fine Bedouin gentleman, polished as any noble of old France, fearless as a lion, yet gentle as a woman, you would know that I rejoiced in being able to serve him even so slightly.

Two of the dogs, unperceived by us, had followed the weird old man from the camp; for suddenly in the distance I heard their savage growls. Then, these growls were drowned in such a chorus of howling—the howling of jackals—as I had never before heard in all my desert wanderings. The howling suddenly subsided . . . but the dogs did not return.

I glanced around, meaning to address the Sheikh, but the Sheikh was gone.

Filled with wonder, then, respecting this singular incident, I entered the tent—it was at the farther end of the camp—which had been placed at my disposal, and lay down, rather to reflect than to sleep. With my mind confused in thoughts of yellow-eyed wanderers, of dogs, and of jackals, sleep came.

How long I slept I cannot say; but I was awakened as the cool fingers of dawn were touching the crests of the sand billows. A gray and dismal light filled the tent, and something was scratching at the flap.

I sat up immediately, quite wide awake, and taking my revolver, ran to the entrance and looked out.

A slinking shape melted into the shadows of the tent adjoining mine, and I concluded that a camp dog had aroused me. Then, in the early morning silence, I heard a faint call, and peering through the gloom to the east saw, in black silhouette, a solitary figure standing near the extremity of the camp.

In those days, my friends, I was a brave fellow—we are all brave at nineteen—and throwing a cloak over my shoulders I strode intrepidly towards this figure. I was within ten paces when a hand was raised to beckon me. If you can read this, this story was taken from H M where it was posted after many hours of hard work.

It was the mysterious stranger! Again he beckoned to me, and I approached yet nearer, asking him if it was he who had aroused me.

He nodded, and by means of a grotesque kind of pantomime ultimately made me understand that he had caused me to be aroused in order to communicate something to me. He turned, and indicated that we were to walk away from the camp. I accompanied him without hesitation.

Although the camp was never left unguarded, no one had challenged us; and, a hundred yards beyond the outermost tent, this strange old man stopped and turned to me.

First, he pointed back to the camp, then to myself, then out along the caravan road towards the Nile.

“Do you mean,” I asked him—for I perceived that he was dumb or vowed to silence—“that I am to leave the camp?”

He nodded rapidly, his strange yellow eyes gleaming.

“Immediately?” I demanded.

Again he nodded.

“Why?”

Pantomimically he made me understand that death threatened me if I remained—that I must leave the Bedouins before sunrise.

I cannot convey to you any idea of the mad earnestness of the man. But, alas! youth regards the counsels of age with nothing but contempt; moreover, I thought this man mad, and I was unable to choke down a sort of loathing which he inspired in me.

I shook my head then, but not unkindly; and, waving my hand, prepared to leave him. At that, with a sorrow in his strange eyes which did not fail to impress me, he saluted me with gravity, turned, and passed out of sight.

Although I did not know it at the time, I had chosen of two paths the one that led through fire.

I slept little after this interview—if it was a real interview and not a dream—and feeling tired and unrefreshed, I saw the sun rise purple and angry over the distant hills.

You know what *khamshîn* is like, my friends? But you cannot know what *simoom* is like—*simoom* in the heart of the desert! It came that morning—a wall of sand so high as to shut out the sunlight, so dense as to turn the day into night, so suffocating that I thought I should never live through it!

It was apparent to me that the Bedouins were prepared for the storm. The horses, the camels and the asses were tethered in an enclosure specially strengthened to exclude the choking dust, and with their cloaks about their heads the men prepared for the oncoming of this terror of the desert.

My God! it was a demon which sought to blind me, to suffocate me, and which clutched at my throat with strangling fingers of sand! This, I told myself, was the danger which I might have avoided by quitting the camp before sunrise.

Indeed, it was apparent to me that if I had taken the advice so strangely offered, I might now have been safe in the village of the Great Oasis for which I was bound. But I have since seen that the *simoom* was a minor danger, and not the real one to which this weird being had referred.

The storm passed, and every man in the encampment praised the merciful God who had spared us all. It was in the disturbance attendant upon putting the camp in order once more that I saw her. If you can read this, this story was taken from H M where it was posted after many hours of hard work.

Shine came out from the tent of Saïd Mohammed, to shake the sand from a carpet; the newly come sunlight twinkled upon the bracelets which clasped her smooth brown arms as she shook the gaily colored mat at the tent door. The sunlight shone upon her braided hair, upon her slight robe, upon her silver anklets, and upon her tiny feet. Transfixed I stood watching—indeed, my friends, almost holding my breath. Then the sunlight shone upon her eyes, two pools of mysterious darkness into which I found myself suddenly looking.

The face of this lovely Arab maiden flushed, and drawing the corner of her robe across those bewitching eyes, she turned and ran back into the tent.

One glance—just one glance, my friends! But never had Ulysses' bow propelled an arrow more sure, more deadly. I was nineteen, remember, and of Provence. What do you foresee! You who have been through the world, you who once were nineteen.

I feigned a sickness, a sickness brought about by the sandstorm, and taking base advantage of that desert hospitality which is unbounded, which knows no suspicion, and takes no count of cost, I remained in the tent which had been vacated for me.

In this voluntary confinement I learned little of the doings of the camp. All day I lay dreaming of two dark eyes, and at night when the jackals howled I thought of the wanderer who had counseled me to leave. One day, I lay so; a second; a third again; and the women of Saïd Mohammed's household tended me, closely veiled of course. But in vain I waited for that attendant whose absence was rendering my feigned fever a real one—whose eyes burned like torches in my dreams and for the coming of whose little bare feet across the sand to my tent door I listened hour by hour, day by day, in vain—always in vain.

But at nineteen there is no such thing as despair, and hope has strength to defy death itself. It was in the violet dusk of the fourth day, as I lay there with a sort of shame of my deception struggling for birth in my heart, that she came.

She came through the tent door bearing a bowl of soup, and the rays of the setting sun outlined her fairy shape through the gossamer robe as she entered.

At that my poor weak little conscience troubled me no more. How my heart leaped, leaped so that it threatened to choke me, who had come safe through a great sandstorm.

There is fire in the Southern blood at nineteen, my friends, which leaps into flame beneath the glances of bright eyes.

With her face modestly veiled, the Bedouin maid knelt beside me, placing the wooden bowl upon the ground. My eager gaze pierced the *yashmak*, but her black lashes were laid upon her cheek, her glorious eyes averted. My heart—or was it my vanity?—told me that she regarded me at least with interest, that she was not at ease in my company; and as, having spoken no word, having ventured no glance, she rose again to depart, I was emboldened to touch her hand.

Like a startled gazelle she gave me one rapid glance, and was gone!

She was gone—and my very soul gone with her! For hours I lay, not so much as thinking of the food beside me—dreaming of her eyes. What were my plans? Faith! Does one have plans at nineteen where two bright eyes are concerned?

Alas, my friends, I dare not tell you of my hopes, yet upon those hopes I lived. Oh, it is glorious to be nineteen and of Provence; it is glorious whom all the world is young, when the fruit is ripe upon the trees and the plucking seems no sin. Yet, as we look back, we perceive that at nineteen we were scoundrels.

The Bedouin girl is a woman when a European woman is but a child, and Sakîna, whose eyes could search a man's soul, was but twelve years of age—twelve! Can you picture that child of twelve squeezing a lover's heart between her tiny hands, entwining his imagination in the coils of her hair?

You, my friend, may perhaps be able to conceive this thing, for you know the East, and the women of the East. At ten or eleven years of age many of them are adorable; at twenty-one most of them are *passé*; at twenty-six all of them—with rare exceptions—are shrieking bags.

But to you, my other friends, who are strangers to our Oriental ways, who know not that the peach only attains to perfect ripeness for one short hour, it may be strange, it may be horrifying, that I loved, with all the ardor which was mine, this little Arab maiden, who, had she been born in France, would not yet have escaped from the nursery. But I digress.

The Arabs were encamped, of course, in the neighborhood of a spring. It lay in a slight depression amid the tiny palm-grove. Here, at sunset, came the women with their pitchers on their heads, graceful of carriage, veiled, mysterious.

Many peaches have ripened and have rotted since those days of which I speak, but now—even now—I am still enslaved by the mystery of Egypt's veiled women. Untidy, bedraggled, dirty, she may be, but the real Egyptian woman when she bears her pitcher upon her head and glides, stately, sinuously, through the dusk to the well, is a figure to enchain the imagination.

Very soon, then, the barrier of reserve which, like the screen of the *harêm*, stands between Eastern Women and love, was broken. My trivial scruples I had cast to the winds, and feigning weakness, I would sally forth to take the air in the cool of the evening; this two days later.

My steps, be assured, led me to the spring; and you who are men of the world will know that Sakîna, braving the reproaches of the Sheikh's household, neglectful of her duties, was last of all the women who came to the well for water.

I taught her to say my name—René! How sweet it sounded from her lips, as she strove in vain to roll the 'n' in our Provençal fashion. Some *ginnee* most certainly presided over thus enchanted fountain, for despite the nearness of the camp our rendezvous was never discovered, our meetings were never detected.

With her pitcher upon the ground beside her, she would sit with those wistful, wonderful eyes upraised to mine, and sway before the ardor of my impassioned words as a young and tender reed sways in the Nile breeze. Her budding soul was a love lute upon which I played in ecstasy; and when she raised her red lips to mine. . . . Ah! those nights in the boundless desert! God is good to youth, and harsh to old age!

Next to Saïd Mohammed, her father, Sakina's brother was the finest horseman of the tribe, and his white mare their fleetest steed. I had cast covetous eyes upon this glorious creature, my friends, and secretly had made such overtures as were calculated to win her confidence.

Within two weeks, then, my plans were complete—up to a point. Since they were doomed to failure, like my great scheme, I shall not trouble you with their details, but an hour before dawn on a certain night I cut the camel-hair tethering of the white mare, and, undetected, led the beautiful creature over the silent sands to a cup-like depression, a thousand yards distant from the camp.

The Bedouin whine was upon guard that night had with him a gourd of *'erksoos*. This was customary, and I had chosen an occasion when the duty of filling the sentinel's gourd had fallen upon Sakîna; to his *'erksoos* I had added four drops of dark brown fluid from my medicine chest.

It was an hour before dawn, then, when I stood beside the white mare, watching and listening; it was an hour before dawn when she for whom my great scheme was forgotten, for whom I was about to risk the anger, the just anger, of men amongst the most fierce in the known world, came running fleetly over the hillocks down into the little valley, and threw herself into my arms. . . .

When dawn burst in gloomy splendor over the desert, we were still five hours' ride from the spot where I had proposed temporarily to conceal myself, with perhaps an hour's start of the Arabs. I knew the desert ways well enough, but the ghostly and desolate place in which I now found myself nevertheless filled me with foreboding.

A seam of black volcanic rock split the sands for a great distance, forming a kind of natural wall of forbidding aspect. In places this wall was pierced by tunnel-like openings; I think they may have been prehistoric tombs. There was no scrap of verdure visible, north, south, east or west; only desolation, sand, grayness, and this place, ghostly and wan with that ancient sorrow, that odor of remote mortality which is called "the dust of Egypt."

Seated before me in the saddle, Sakîna looked up into my face with a never-changing confidence, having her little brown fingers interlocked about my neck. But her strength was failing. A short rest was imperative.

Thus far I had detected no evidence of pursuit and, descending from the saddle, I placed my weary companion upon a rock over which I had laid a rug, and poured out for her a draught of cool water.

Bread and dates were our breakfast fare; but bread and dates and water are nectar and ambrosia when they are sweetened with kisses. Oh! the glorious madness of youth! Sometimes, my friends, I am almost tempted to believe that the man who has never been wicked has never been happy!

Picture us, then, if you can, set and that desolation, which for us was a rose-garden, eating of that unpalatable food—which for us was the food of the gods!

So we remained awhile, deliriously happy, though death might terminate our joys ere we again saw the sun, when something . . . *something* spoke to me

Understand me, I did not say that *someone* spoke, I did not say that anything *audible* spoke. But I know that, unlocking those velvet arms which clung to me, I stood up slowly—and, still slowly, turned and looked back at the frowning black rocks.

Merciful God! My heart beats wildly now when I recall that moment.

Motionless as a statue, but in a crouching attitude, as if about to leap down, he who had warned me so truly stood upon the highest point of the rocks watching us!

How long did I remain thus?

I cannot pretend to say; but when I turned to Sakîna—she lay trembling on the ground, with her face hidden in her bands.

Then, down over the piled-up rocks, this mysterious and ominous being came leaping. Old man though he was, he descended with the agility of a mountain goat—and sometimes, in the difficult places, *he went on all fours*.

Crossing the intervening strip of sand, he stood before me. You have seen the reproach in the eyes of a faithful dog whose master has struck him unjustly? Such a reproach shone out from the yellow eyes of this desert wanderer. I cannot account for it; I can say no more. . . .

It was impossible for me to speak; I trembled violently; such a fear and such a madness of sorrow possessed me that I would have welcomed any death—to have freed me from that intolerable reproach.

He suddenly pointed towards the horizon where against the curtain of the dawn black figures appeared.

I fell upon my knees beside Sakîna. I was a poor, pitiable thing; the madness of my passion had left me, and already I was within the great Shadow; I could not even weep; I knew that I had brought Sakîna out into that desolate place—to die.

And now the man whose ways were unlike human ways began to babble insanely, gesticulating and plucking at me. I cannot hope to make you feel one little part of the emotion with which those instants were laden. Sakîna clung to me trembling in a way I can never forget—never, never forget. And the look in her eyes! even now I cannot bear to think of it, I cannot bear—

Those almost colorless lizards which dart about in the desert places with incredible swiftness were now coming forth from their nests; and all the while the black figures, unheard as yet, were approaching along the path of the sun.

My mad folly grew more apparent to me every moment. I realized that this which so rapidly was overtaking me had been inevitable from the first. The strange wild man stood watching me with that intolerable glare, so that my trembling companion shrank from him in horror.

But evidently he was seeking to convey some idea to me. He gesticulated constantly, pointing to the approaching Arabs and then over his shoulder to the frowning rock behind. Since it was too late for flight—for I knew that the white mare with a double burden could never outpace our pursuers—it occurred to me at the moment when the muffled beat of hoofs first became audible, that this hermit of the rocks was endeavoring to induce me to seek some hiding-place with which no doubt he was acquainted.

How I cursed the delay which had enabled the Arabs to come up with us! I know, now, of course, that even had I not delayed, our ultimate capture was certain. But at the moment, in my despair, I thought otherwise.

And now I cursed the stupidity which had prevented me from following this weird guide; I even thought wrathfully of the poor frightened child, whose weakness had necessitated the delay and whose fears had contributed considerably to this later misunderstanding.

The pursuing party, numbering four, and led by Saïd Mohammed, was no more than five hundred yards away when I came to my senses. The hermit now was tugging at my arm with frightful insistence; his eyes were glaring insanely, and he chattered in an almost pitiable manner.

“Quick!” I cried, throwing my arm about Sakîna, “up to the rocks. This man can hide us!”

“No, no!” she whispered, “I dare not—”

But I lifted her, and signing to the singular being to lead the way, staggered forward despairingly.

The distance was greater than it appeared, the climb incredibly difficult. My guide held out his hand to me to assist me to mount the slippery rocks; but I had much ado to proceed and also to support Sakîna.

Her terror of the man and of the place to which he was leading us momentarily increased. Indeed, it seemed that she was becoming mad within fear. When the man paused before an opening in the rocks not more than fifteen or sixteen inches in height, and wildly waving his arms in the air, his elfin locks flying about his shoulder, his eyes glassy, intimated that we were to crawl in—Sakîna writhed free of my grasp and bounded back some three or four paces down the slope.

“Not in there!” she cried, holding out her little hands to me pitifully. “I dare not! He would devour us!”

At the foot of the slope, Saïd Mohammed, who had dismounted from his horse, and who, far ahead of the others, was advancing towards us, at that moment raised his gun and fired. . . .

Can I go on?

It is more years ago than I care to count, but it is fresher in my mind than the things of yesterday. A lonely old age is before me, my friends—for I have been a solitary man since that shot was fired. For me it changed the face of the world, for me it ended youth, revealing me to myself for what I was.

Something more nearly resembling human speech than any sound he had yet uttered burst from the lips of the wild man as the report of Saïd Mohammed’s shot whispered in echoes through the mysterious labyrinths beneath us.

Fate had stood at the Sheikh’s elbow as he pulled the trigger.

With a little soft cry—I hear it now, gentle, but having in it a world of agony—Sakîna sank at my feet . . . and her blood began to trickle over the black rocks on which she lay.

* * *

The man who professes to describe to you his emotions at such a frightful moment is an impostor. The world grew black before my eyes; every emotion of which my being was capable became paralysed.

I heard nothing, I saw nothing but the little huddled figure, that red stream upon the black rock, and the agonized love in the blazing eyes of Sakîna. Groaning, I threw myself down beside her, and as she sighed out her life upon my breast, I knew—God help me—that what had been but a youthful amour, was now a life's tragedy; that for me the light of the world had gone out, that I should never again know the warmth of the sun and the gladness of the morning.

The cave man, with a dog-like fidelity, sought now to drag me from my dead love, to drag me into that gloomy lair which she had shrunk from entering. His incoherent mutterings broke in upon my semi-coma; but I shook him off, I shrieked curses at him.

Now the Bedouins were mounting the slope, not less than a hundred yards below me. In the growing light I could see the face of Saïd Mohammed.

The man beside me exerted all his strength to drag me back into the gallery or cave—I know not what it was; but with my arms locked about Sakîna I lay watching the pursuers coming closer and closer.

Them, those persistent efforts suddenly ceased, and dully I told myself that this weird being, having done his best to save me, had fled in order to save himself.

I was wrong.

You may have asked me for a story of the magic of Egypt, and although, as you see, it has cost me tears—oh! I am not ashamed of those tears, my friends!—I have recounted this story to you. You say, where is the magic? and I might reply: the magic was in the changing of my false love to a true. But there was another magic as well, and it grew up around me now at this moment when I lay inert, waiting for death.

From behind me, from above me, arose a cry—a cry. You may have heard of the Bedouin song, the 'Mizmûne':

“Ya men melek ana dêri waat sa jebb,
Id el' ish hoos' a beb hatsa azât ta lebb.”

You may have heard how when it is sung in a certain fashion, flowers drop from their stalks? Also, you may have doubted this, never having heard a magical cry.

I do not doubt it, my friends! For I *have* heard a magical cry—this cry which arose from behind me! It started some chord in my dulled consciousness which had never spoken before. I turned my head—and there upon the highest point of the rocks stood the cave man. He suddenly stretched forth his hands.

Again he uttered that uncanny, that indescribable cry. It was not human. It was not animal. Yet it was nearer to the cry of an animal than to any sound made by the human species. His eyes gleamed with an awful light, his spare body had assumed a strange significance; he was transfigured.

A third time he uttered the cry, and out from one of those openings in the rock which I have mentioned, crept a jackal. You know how a jackal avoids the day, how furtive, how nocturnal a creature it is? but there in thing golden glory which proclaimed the coming of the sun, black silhouettes moved.

A great wonder possessed me, as the first jackal was followed by a second, by a third, by a fourth, by a fifth. Did I say a fifth? . . . By five hundred—by five thousand!

From every visible hole in the rocks, jackals poured forth in packs. Wonder left me, fear left me; I forgot my sorrow, I became a numbed intelligence amid a desert of jackals. Over a sea of moving furry backs, I saw that upstanding crag and the weird crouching figure upon it. Right and left, above and below, jackals moved . . . and all turned their heads towards the approaching Bedouins!

Again—again I heard that dreadful cry. The jackals, in a pack, thousands strong, began to advance upon the Bedouins!

Not east or west, north or south, could you hope to find a braver man than was the Sheikh Saïd Mohammed; but—he fled!

I saw the four horsemen riding like furies into the morning sun. The white mare, riderless, galloped within them—and the desert behind was yellow within jackals! For the last time I heard the cry.

The jackals began to return!

Forgive me, dear friends, if I seem an emotional fool. But when I recovered from the swoon which blotted out that unnatural spectacle, the wizard—for now I knew him for nothing less—had dug a deep trench—and had left me, alone.

Not a jackal was in sight; the sun blazed cruelly upon the desert. With my own hands I laid my love to rest in the sands. No cross, no crescent marks her resting-place; but I left my youth upon her grave, as a last offering.

You may say that, since I had sinned so grievously, since I had betrayed the noble confidence of Saïd Mohammed, my host, I escaped lightly.

Ah! you do not know!

And what of the strange being whose gratitude I had done so little to merit but yet which knew no bounds? It is of him that I will tell you.

Years later—how many it does not matter, but I was a man with no illusions—my restless wanderings (I being still a desert bird-of-passage) brought me one night to a certain well but rarely visited. It lay in a depression, like another well that I am fated often to see in my dreams, and, as one approached, the crowns of the palm trees which grew there appeared above the mounds of sand.

I was alone and tired out; the next possible camping-place—for I had no water—was many miles away. Yet it was written that I should press on to that other distant well, weary though I was.

First, then, as I came up, I perceived numbers of vultures in the air; and I began to fear that someone near to his end lay at the well. But when, from the top of a mound, I obtained a closer view, I saw a sight that, after one quick glance, caused me to spur up my tired horse and to fly—fly, with panic in my heart.

The brilliant moon bathed the hollow in light and cast dense shadows of the palm stems upon the slope beyond. By the spring, his fallen face ghastly in the moonlight, in a clear space twenty feet across, lay a dead man.

Even from where I sat I knew him; but, had I doubted, other evidence was there of his identity. As I mounted the slope, thousands of fiery eyes were turned upon me.

God! that arena all about was alive with jackals—jackals, my friends, eaters of carrion—which, silent, watchful, guarded the wizard dead, who, living, had been their lord!