

is all in the hands of Fate, but I am sure of one thing. I shall get away."

"I shall walk with you as far as Mansour's," said Lacoste.

"No," replied the other, "only as far as the opening of the lane. It might be dangerous for you to be seen with me when I go into that place—if anything happened."

Lacoste said nothing more. His heart was troubled, but he did not wish to depress his friend, and he hid the trouble.

"Good luck!" he said, when they reached the lane opening. He gripped Jean's hand, and they parted.

CHAPTER XXIX

MANSOUR

A FEW minutes later Jean entered Mansour's. The boy, serving coffee to an Arab, turned as Jean came in.

Yes, Mansour was in the back shop and there, next moment, Jean found him.

Mansour was seated on a rug smoking a cigarette and going over accounts in a narrow, black-covered book which he put away at the sight of the légionnaire. He pointed to another rug, and Jean sat down and took a cigarette.

"Mansour," said Jean, "you know all about me except one thing—the reason why I came into the Legion."

"It does not matter," said Mansour.

"It does," said Jean; "for I am leaving the

Legion to-night, and the reason that brought me in has something to do with that."

"You are going to run away?"

"Yes."

"But why? It seems to me that you were not discontent. And you know the risk, my friend."

"You remember that letter I wrote?"

"Ah, that letter. I remember, and the girl. I told you to forget that girl, she brought you bad luck, she is your unlucky person. Well, has she written?"

"No, another person has. I came into the Legion because I thought I had killed a man, and the letter told me this was not so. The man is alive and well. I was here in hiding. Now that I know the truth, and that I have nothing to hide from, and that I will be a free man if I can get away, I cannot remain; it has unsettled me. Besides, I have an enemy, Werde, you know what he did about the scarf. He played me another trick to-day through Sergeant Schneider—put me on to a filthy job. If I stay it will be the worse for me."

"You told me you hit Werde because of that letter you sent," said Mansour; "that is what made him your enemy. It is there again, the letter and the girl—always the girl."

"She cannot help it."

"Neither can the rock on which the ship runs. When a woman takes a part in a man's life it is always for good or evil. Well, what do you propose to do?"

"Escape."

"You mean try to escape?"

"No, for I will kill myself before they take me."

"Then you will escape," said Mansour, with a sardonic smile. "There is no doubt about that. Have you come to me for clothes?"

"Yes."

Mansour lit another cigarette, inhaled a lungful of smoke, and said :

"How much money have you ? "

"Over six hundred francs."

"Well, then," said Mansour, "I think you will escape. You see, the légionnaire making off is generally caught by his clothes ; he goes to some Jew in the Mascara quarter and buys a suit for sixty or a hundred francs, a pair of shoes for ten francs and a hat for five francs. He is at once remarkable, because the things do not fit him, nor do they fit each other. The military police are always looking out for just such a man.

"Now, to-day there was a draft of recruits in from Oran, and amongst them there was a man different from the others, an aristocrat. Men like that sometimes join. You know all recruits have to sell their clothes, and you know the crowd of Jews and infidels that gather round the side door of the barracks when a draft comes in. Of course I never mix with those, but when anything that is worth while turns up, as for instance this aristocrat to-day, I have a friend, a sergeant-major, who lets me know.

"I bought this man's clothes to-day. I think they will fit you, let us see."

He produced a bundle of clothes, drew a screen round a corner, and Jean changed.

It was a suit of light grey tweed cut evidently by a good English tailor and very slightly worn. It fitted well. There was also a shirt, collar and tie.

Sherlock Holmes would have deduced from these things a lot of imaginary "facts." He would have said, Here we have the evidence of a man in a good position, driven to take shelter in the Legion. Whatever his reason or fault, he has evidently gone

through no great hardships because the collar is immaculate, and the shirt new laundered. He joined, possibly, at Oran yesterday.

Jean was not a Sherlock Holmes, but these suggestions were vaguely evident to him, they did not counter in any way his dislike at changing into the garments of another, but they gave him assurance once the change was made. A man well dressed is a man in armour. He is protected against all sorts of unpleasant things, also in Sidi, as far as the Legion is concerned, he is wearing an invisible cloak, for the escaping légionnaire is never well dressed.

"Ah, that will do," said Mansour, when he came from behind the screen. "You are the perfect tourist of the best sort. There is only now your head and your feet."

Jean was wearing no socks. Socks are not worn in the Legion, and he had left his heavy military boots with his uniform behind the screen.

Mansour produced a pair of socks and a pair of brown shoes of the best make, they had belonged to the aristocrat.

Jean put them on.

"A hat," said Mansour, and produced a grey felt, evidently too, part of the aristocrat's make up, for inside was the maker's name—the name was "Lock."

One man's hat never exactly fits another man's head to his entire satisfaction, still, this hat was not absurdly large or small, it did, and the armour was complete.

"And now," said Mansour, "you must have something to carry in your hand; without some luggage, should you reach Oran, you would be impossible."

He ferreted out a suit-case—battered but serviceable—and began to fill it with oddments; a couple

of old flannel shirts, a brush and comb that had seen better days, some odds and ends of under-clothing, and a violently coloured suit of pyjamas.

A suit-case stuffed with newspapers would have been quite as useful, but there was the question of the Customs on arriving at Marseilles. Newspapers would at once have marked Jean down as an object of suspicion.

He had never thought of all this. Mansour had, and now that he had completed the outfit, he began on the bill.

The aristocrat's total effects had cost Mansour fifty-five francs, the suit-case five francs, the rubbish in it maybe the same.

"Four hundred francs for the lot," said Mansour, "that will give me a fair profit, but nothing much."

"Four hundred francs," said Jean, "that will leave me only about two hundred and sixty francs." He felt that he was being done, but he could not tell by how much. Anyhow, there was no use in resisting. Two hundred and sixty francs—by going third-class, by scraping and saving, and denying himself food—well, two hundred and sixty francs might go a long way—get him, at all events, beyond the clutches of France, and then, if need be, he would beg his way to Ragusa. At Ragusa he could communicate with London.

His half-yearly income would not be due till October, but he could reckon on the solicitors to make an advance, or so he fancied.

He said nothing more, but began counting out the money. After all, he was paying for more than the clothes. Just as a man in a restaurant pays for more than the food he eats. Mansour was not engaged in business for the fun of the thing; he ran a certain risk in dealing with a légionnaire, and he had given

thought to the matter as well as service—still, four hundred francs !

Mansour, having pocketed the coin, looked at Jean. The Arab had lived several years in Paris and some months in London, he had a fine eye for things, and he saw that his work was good.

He had turned a légionnaire into a gentleman of leisure, a well-to-do tourist—there was nothing wanting—stay.

He ran to a corner and searching among some rubbish, produced a gentleman's umbrella—a silk umbrella tightly rolled, very chic—picked up heaven knows how, useless here in Sidi, but just the thing.

“To complete you,” said Mansour.

“I can't afford anything more,” said Jean.

“Then you can have it for nothing,” replied Mansour. “It is no use to me—I throw it in with the rest for good measure.”

It was really the artist in him that made the present. There is nothing more respectable—in the inanimate world—more sedate, more disarming to suspicion than an umbrella.

Jean, putting it under his arm and taking up the suit-case, bade good-bye to the other, and left the shop and café.

Mansour, who had followed him to the door, called him back. “Shall I have your uniform done up in a bundle and thrown over the barrack wall ?” asked he. “It can be done ; I can get a boy to do the business for five francs !”

“No,” said Jean. “I have a pocket knife—if they take me they will not take me alive.”

The loss of the uniform would mean the penal battalion if he were retaken. He imagined that he had the will and decision to make an end of things in that event, and there was in his mind the feeling

that his luck would hold faster to him if it were locked to him by this burning of his boats.

He went on, and in a minute he was in the main street.

It was now getting on for nine o'clock. Daya Street was full of people—the usual evening crowd, townfolk, Arabs, visitors, a few soldiers, but no légionnaire, by chance. Boys were calling the *Echo D'Oran*. It was all strange, most wonderfully strange. He was no longer a légionnaire, he was himself again, a bit better dressed than he had ever been before, free, a tourist carrying his suit-case just as though he had that moment arrived, and were looking for an hotel. And he had not the slightest idea of his next move, except the nebulous idea that had for nucleus the railway station.

A train to Oran.

He did not know at what hours the trains left, but he did know that the station was always watched by the military police ; any indecision there or hanging about might be fatal.

He went into a café, took his seat at a marble-topped table and placing the suit-case beside him, called for a Dubonnet, and asked the waiter for a railway time-table. Putting his hand into the side pocket of his coat for his handkerchief, he brought out the handkerchief and a thousand-franc note.

It was folded in four. He could scarcely believe the evidence of his eyes. How had it got into his pocket? He put it back with the handkerchief, then from his waistcoat pocket he took the money to pay for the Dubonnet.

The little yellow traffic time-table he left unlooked at, the thousand-franc note, this mysterious " sending " out of the blue, held him entirely. The thing was evident enough, it belonged to the man to whom

the suit had belonged ; that gentleman, whoever he was, had evidently joined the Legion under some sudden stress or strain. Drink, drugs, gambling, women. Those are the names of the four recruiting sergeants who work for the Legion amongst the better classes of the world.

Under the suasion of one of these, or maybe even of the whole lot working together, the " aristocrat " had probably joined up. And in what state of mind upset might be gauged by this note, forgotten and undiscovered by Mansour.

However, that might be, the note was there—an amazing piece of luck, but not to the loser.

He belonged to the draft of recruits that had come in that morning from Oran, according to Mansour. (Jean had been on the parade ground all morning, and had seen nothing of this new lot of men.) Well, what did it matter, even if the face of the loser were known to him he could not tell his name ; the thing was a gift of Providence, Fortune, Luck. He finished his Dubonnet, lit a cigarette and looked at the time-table. He could not make head or tail of it, or whether the last train arrived from Oran or departed for Oran at 10.30.

He seemed to make out that there was a train in from Oran at 9.5, and leaving it at that he threw his cigarette end away, picked up his bag and started.

He intended walking to the station, but a man carrying a suit-case cannot walk far in Sidi without the inevitable Arab child and its offers of help. Three were whimpering and pattering beside Jean as he reached the end of Daya Street, where the Hotel Nesselrode is situated.

The station bus was standing in front of the hotel and discharging passengers, evidently just arrived by train. At the sight and in a flash Jean changed

his plan. He walked boldly into the hotel through the swing glass doors, across the tessellated hall and towards the office.

Here a lady of forty or so, wonderfully coiffeured, sat like a figure of wax, and to Jean's request for a room, handed him a pen and a register wherein to write his name. Then a key with a brass tab tied to it, and on the tab a number—33.

A little black page boy then took charge of him, whirled him up in a lift to the second *étage* and, opening a door, showed him into a bedroom.

It might have been the bedroom of a second-rate hotel that now scarcely exists. The walls were papered with a paper that had evidently been hanging many years, the furniture was Victorian, the smell stuffy, yet to Jean at the end of the first lap of his flight the place was Paradise. He had not known in the least of the stress and strain that had been put on his nervous system till now. He had been acting automatically, compelled to think only from minute to minute. Like a man going down a rapid in a canoe, he had to obey the dictation of outside things; the railway station at that hour was a rock to be avoided; the Hotel Nesselrode, easily entered, was a quiet piece of water.

For the moment he was quite secure. Entering as he did, as if he were one of the passengers just arrived from the station, he had attracted no attention to himself. He could sit down and rest, and think without distraction.

He sat down on the edge of the bed. Luck! Luck was with him, and the feeling was like wine.

First of all, Mansour. No other dealer in Sidi would have helped him like that. Mansour had thought for him as well as clothed him. Then the miraculous thousand-franc note left in the pocket of

the aristocrat's suit, then the sudden lead into this hotel.

Yes, luck was with him, and the knowledge gave him new life.

He took the two hundred and fifty-nine francs—he had paid a franc for the Dubonnet—from his waistcoat pocket, and put them on the bed coverlet, then he took the thousand-franc note and laid it beside them. One thousand, two hundred and fifty-nine francs.

That meant Ragusa, certain.

That meant Karan.

This was Karan's moment. Art and the passion for creation and the desire for fame, with regard to all these things the Legion, now that he had no fear of the Law and could think clearly, had said to him "all these things are not for you," and so saying had increased his desire for them to the exclusion of all other thoughts.

Now that he was free from the Legion, now that these things were all but assured, Karan came back to him.

In a week, in ten days, in a fortnight, he would hold her in his arms again. He put the money back into his pocket. There was an old cheval glass in the corner of the room facing the electric light. He looked at himself.

¶Frosch, the outfitters of Maskara Street, has a huge sheet of looking glass at the side of his entrance. Jean had seen himself several times in this as a légionnaire, he now saw himself in mufti, and the sight gave him complete assurance.

He was well dressed, no one would ever dream of associating him with the Legion, even if he were to meet any of the men of his company he would be safe—all except Lacoste, perhaps, or Werde.

This assurance gave him extra confidence in himself. Leaving his hat, umbrella and suit-case in the room, he came downstairs.

The Nesselrode has a large clientèle among the military of Sidi, and in the hall when Jean came down there were several Spahi officers, a turco and an officer of the Legion.

It seems an extraordinary fact that whilst the légionnaire is looked down on by the French army, the officers of the Legion are looked up to.

The reason perhaps is that the légionnaire is nearly always a foreigner, German, English, Russian, Swiss, what not, and the officer a Frenchman. However that may be, the distance separating Lazarus from Dives is not greater than the distance that separates the soldier of the Legion from his officer. The latter live in a world apart, leaving everything to the non-coms., so that if Jean had met even one of his company officers he would not have been recognised in this new get-up.

There was a little placard in the hall pointing to a barber's shop at the side of the stairs, and Jean found it brilliant with lights and coloured bottles, and empty for the moment of custom. He had a wash and shave, and shampoo; then, having arranged his tie and looked at himself again in the glass, he made for the dining-room.

The Nesselrode is very Spanish in some of its ways. You can get dinner there up till ten if you like, and having found a table he dined, strolling after dinner into the smoking-room.

The problem of cashing the thousand-franc note had risen before him. Should he go to the Credit Lyonnaise to-morrow before starting or should he ask the hotel to change it when paying his bill. He determined on this latter course. This being the

year before the Great War there was no trouble about passports.

Then came the question of the train, more than that, the question of what he should do on reaching Oran. When did the boats run for Marseilles?

He could have made inquiry at the office into these matters, but he did nothing. He felt that he was being carried along by luck. To-morrow he would take the earliest and most convenient train, at Oran the first boat available. To think out and plot his course might be to run counter to the something that was leading him.

Meanwhile, the smoking-room was filling up with the usual crowd that came in towards eleven o'clock; hotel guests who have been out about the town, business men, and a few officers calling in for a drink before returning to barracks.

Amongst them, talking to a captain of Spahis, was a captain of the Legion, Jean knew him by sight quite well and by reputation. His name was Legendre, a tall, dark, good-looking man, but a terror as far as discipline was concerned.

He was seated with the Spahi at a table near by, and several times his eyes passed over Jean, but without any sign of recognition. Then having finished their drinks he and the Spahi rose up, and went off.

Jean felt that his disguise had passed the supreme test. He was as safe from the eyes of the Legion as though he wore an invisible cloak.

He had now something more added to his assets as a deserter—self-confidence.