

## CHAPTER XXXV

KARAN ! KARAN !

THE Herdjimans had said nothing to him of this. Possibly they knew nothing of it, for the affairs of the great do not trouble people of the Herdjiman type. But what had led him into the garden to see that ? Was it a warning—or what ? If Madame Herdjiman had known she might have had more food for vague and antagonistic remarks concerning the "Gitana."

"Every one who crosses her path," the good woman would most likely have begun.

Well, the Hauptmarch had certainly crossed Karan's path, although Karan had neither seen her nor dreamed of her ; even so, the good Madame Herdjiman would doubtless have kept on warning Jean not to touch again that which was so full of fatality. But she was not there to talk and advise, and Jean, taking the sea road to the port, would not have listened if she had been.

Baroness Hauptmarch, instead of warning him, had cast his mind back into the fire of those burning days at Beljazi. Again he trod the sands by that sapphire sea, against which the naked and beautiful body of his companion was outlined like a carving on a gem.

Karan ! Karan !

He paused for a minute at the port to look at the sea, now shadowed by evening and showing the lights of the shipping.

Karan at *Sidi-Bel-Abbès* !

He travelling to meet her and she travelling to find him, and crossing each other on the journey.

And all might have been well only for those fatal days of delay at Bordighera. The amazing luck that had given him confidence and money had left him nothing but the money.

He had more than enough to take him back to Sidi.

Was he going back ?

Ask the west wind if it is going to the east.

Leaving aside his passion for her, a future haunted by the vision of Karan lost in Sidi-Bel-Abbès, Karan vainly searching for him, would have been worse than any death, and, though the fact did not strengthen his intention in the least, his return was less dangerous than it seemed. The boats of departure from Marseilles and arrival at Oran are not watched for escaping légionnaires, nor are the trains of arrival at Sidi. He had come out of the shark's mouth against the points of the back-directed teeth ; entering, his road would be smooth, the points would not hurt him. Even in the belly of the beast, even in Sidi itself he might count on fair immunity if he were cautious.

At the shipping office he found that there was a boat out in the morning for Trieste and Venice. He took a berth in the second-class for Venice and, leaving his suit-cases at the office, came back towards the town.

He had supper with the Herdjimans, and during the meal he told them about his plans. In an extraordinary way, these plain, simple fishing folk had become, as it were, his relations ; that is to say, people who had a right to advise and object.

"And you will put your head into that place again," said madame. "Well, I can't think !"

"It is worse than a lobster pot," said Herdjiman ; "but there, the lobster goes into the pot because of the bait inside." Meaning to imply Karan, no doubt.

But they could do nothing, and knew it.

"It is quite simple," said Jean ; "I shall go there and find her, and bring her back. They will have given up looking for me by this. The French are a clever people, and they don't spend too much time or money hunting for a halfpenny a day légionnaire."

"Don't you believe it," said Herdjiman. "That is just why they hunt for him, a man got to work for a halfpenny a day is a valuable possession. Bad pay, tight clutch, is the rule with owners."

"And you might as well be saying that to the wind," said madame. "He is not listening to you. Get on with your suppers, the stew is getting cold."

That night, after they had given Jean the spare room to sleep in, Herdjiman and his wife sat for a while talking.

"After all," said Herdjiman, "she's his woman, and who's to blame him for going to find her."

"Who said any one was to blame him for going to find her?" replied madame. "If he didn't, seeing what that place is by his account, and seeing she's a young girl, he would be a dirty dog— No, the blame is in his picking her up at all, a wandering gipsy like that—tcha! Don't talk to me, it's the same with all you men when a woman like that comes along."

"A woman like what?"

"Like the Devil. It's not her fault, maybe, but there it is—she's the sort that's made to ruin men—only just out of the egg, so to say, and look what she's done. Him a gentleman too. If it hadn't been

him it would have been some one else, and when she's done with him it will be some one else. Those eyes of hers and that face of hers, are all that's wanting to turn men into pigs running after her."

"Well, I didn't see any harm in her."

"Oh, you aren't the sort of stick that a woman like that makes a fuss of," replied the other.