

A bugle sounded from the Spahi barracks, a quarrelling of hoofs came from behind and, passing at a trot, went a patrol of Arab police. Silence closed down again except for the sound of the hot wind from the desert blowing across the streets, the palms and the orange trees of the town.

Now as he approached he could see a glimpse of the barrack gates. There was no one near them, but the sergeant of the watch would be inside. A dog crossed the road, and now, close to the wall of the Spahi barracks, he saw three figures—two Spahis and a girl.

The soldiers were talking to the girl, they seemed talking in a light-hearted way, for he heard one of them laugh, then they left her and went on, evidently for the town.

The girl was Karan.

He could see now the scarf bound round her head, the white haversack she always carried and a glint of the little drum.

He stopped, for his heart had stood still in him. Karan! Karan!—at last!

CHAPTER XXXVII

KARAN!

HE stood and watched.

She was walking on, but not for far. Not more than fifty paces she went and then returned, walking slowly, evidently with an eye on the gates of the Legion's barracks.

He came towards her diagonally across the road. She had just turned again, close to him now, he

put his hand on her shoulder. She sprang round, flinging off his touch.

Next moment she was in his arms. Her lips, clinging to his, did not even try to speak. Then, with his arm about her, they were moving away along the shadow of the side of the Spahi barracks.

The thing was quite simple; there was neither coincidence in it nor, seemingly, the hand of Fate; she had heard he was in the Legion at Sidi-Bel-Abbès and she had come. She had arrived yesterday and had asked for the barracks of the Foreign Legion. She had asked for him at the gate, but they told her to go away.

There were several légionnaires at the gate with the sergeant on duty, and one of them who had a kind face told her that if she waited about in the evening time and, if the man she wanted were in the *Première Etranger* and not at Saida, she would be sure to see him coming out after seven.

She had waited, without avail. Then she had gone and slept over there. She waved her hand in the direction of the waste land towards the plateau and the village nègre.

Then in the morning she had gone through the town, and at a little café in the ghetto she had got food and asked more questions about the Legion. She was not nervous and she had felt no doubt about success—and, look, to-night she had found him.

She was still quite unconscious that he was a deserter, that he was not in uniform did not matter to her mind. He was here.

Then he told her, but not all. Told her that he had escaped from the regiment, and that if he were recaptured he would be taken away from her for years. He did not mention his journey back

to Ragusa, and how Herdjiman had given him news of her having left for Sidi. There was too much to tell, and it would have pained her to know that had she only remained in Ragusa they would now have been safe and happy on Beljazi.

As they talked, walking together with his arm around her shoulder, they had forgotten the immediate world around them.

They had reached the plateau. This place in the morning so filled with the thunder and dust of troops exercising at the double, whistles, shrill commands or the clash of arms, was now dead silent under the stars and filled with their ghostly light.

Suddenly a match sprang alight behind Jean and, turning, he found himself face to face with Werde. Werde and Corporal Joffe. They had followed across the soft ground of the plateau without attracting attention.

Werde, recognising Jean in the Place Sadi Carnot, had evidently fallen upon Joffe and brought him into the hunt. Stalking their quarry to the barrack gate and then on to the plateau, they had arrived at the kill.

The match, held between the finger and thumb of the légionnaire, burned for the fraction of a second, and lit the blow that caught Werde on the point of his chin, felling him like an ox.

Karan, swift as a hawk, dipped down to him and wrenched his bayonet from its sheath. The blood of the wild in her had responded at once to the call—she turned on Joffe.

He ran—ran, shouting at the top of his voice, across the plateau in the direction of the barracks. She dropped the bayonet, and Jean seizing her by the arm hurried her to the shadow of the Mosque.

Here, looking back, they saw Werde struggling to his feet. He stood in the starlight looking about him. Then he made off in the direction of the barracks.

The hunt was up now indeed. In half an hour patrols would be out, the streets impossible, the gates impossible and the railway station impossible.

Of what use were further attempts at flight? Had Jean been alone it was barely possible for him to get away; he might have returned to the hotel and taken refuge there, and have devised some means of escape, but with Karan he was marked down at once.

“A man accompanied by a girl.” That description singled him out at once. But if the hare took time to think it would never escape the hounds.

Holding Karan tight by the arm, he took the path that leads round the Mosque. He had been this way before and he knew what he was doing.

Lights shone in front of them, an alley opened up, and here the lights showed as braziers filled with burning coals set in front of the wretched looking huts that formed the alley. It was the village nègre.

The village nègre belongs to Sidi, but it not of it.

Despite the fact that it is the home and harbouring place of prostitutes of all nations and colours—French, Spanish, German and Negro—and despite its name, it is pure Arab—Arab at its worst.

Quite close to it, bordering on it, almost belonging to it, are houses well-to-do-looking with Moorish courts and inhabited by Arab traders, men engaged in all sorts of businesses, some with shops in the town, others who conduct their mysterious affairs without any show or place of business. Jean had once met one of these men at Mansour's. A man with a burnt-up black beard whose name was Ben Oman

and who dealt, so Mansour said, "in all the drugs that begin with tobacco, in charms, jewellery and native truck." Ben Oman had said, seeing that Jean was no common soldier, but a man of parts, and seeing that a man of parts is sure to have relations or connections who may send him money—Ben Oman had said, "Well, légionnaire, you must beware of the village nègre, but if you are ever in that direction, I live near it, and any one will tell you the house of Ben Oman. You will be welcome to a cup of coffee, and I will show you things worth buying if you have money to spend—and if you have not money to spend, it is the same."

That is the Arab trader, from the flea market of Algiers to the esparto grass market of Sfax. There is always the chance of doing business, even with the most unlikely of customers; failing that, coffee and talk.

Jean and his companion came down the high street of the village nègre, a wretched lane bordered by the huts of prostitutes.

Terrible, naked and unashamed, this last home of crippled vice and bankrupt infamy lay beneath the potent light of the stars—the stars that were washing the Mosque of Omar a few hundred yards away.

A great naked negress, suddenly emerging from a hovel before which a brazier was burning, seized Jean by the arm; she was asking for the price of a drink.

He disengaged himself and passed on, holding Karan tight by the arm till at a turning they came upon an Arab orange seller. Jean stopped and asked his way.

At the name of Ben Oman the Arab turned and walked with them, leading them through more filthy lanes to a wall above which palm tops cut the stars.

He pointed to a gate and left them. In a little courtyard beyond the gate Ben Oman was seated enjoying the beauty of the night. He was seated on a mat talking to three white-robed friends, four ghosts they looked, seated in conclave. They were discussing earnestly some matter of importance.

The truth is that news had just reached the Arabs of Sidi of a great rising in the south. Trouble down south is often blowing up. Sometimes it is just a tribe running amok, sometimes a widespread uprising. In either case the Legion is the remedy.

The Legion, from its colonel to its last recruit, loves this business. It means getting away from Sidi, movement, fighting, the chance of promotion, the chance of the Croix de Guerre. When the call comes the whole regiment is clear of Sidi in an hour, marching on the great southern road, band, ammunition carts, vivandiere and all. The Legion is always mobilised for war. The news of the rising had evidently not yet reached the authorities, yet the Arabs had it, how? They always get first news of a thing of this sort, and it is discussed in the bazaars hours before the telegraph brings it to the French. How? No one knows. By telegraph perhaps. A wire asking the price of dates ruling in the Sidi market may contain a lot of information in its wording. However that may be, Ben Oman had received the news hours ago, and was now discussing it with his friends.

It meant nothing much to them. A day might come in the far future when the infidels will be swept into the sea, but that day was far off and beyond the reach of practical politics. All the same, the news was of deep racial interest.

The Arabs loathe the Legion and the loathing

dates back to the far-away wars with the Beni Amen. If the Legion was sure to crush the rising, anyhow, légionnaires would be killed—and that was some comfort.

Into this discussion suddenly broke Jean, appearing through the gate with Karan.

The four seated men looked at the newcomers. Then Ben Oman, who never forgot a face, recognised the légionnaire whom he had met at Mansour's.

The légionnaire was in mufti—evidently a deserter.

He called a servant who had just come out, and the servant placed mats for the newcomers.

Ben Oman was a last chance. Instinct had led Jean to him, and instinct now said, "Tell him all. You have money, ask for hiding or disguise." The bother lay with the other men, but they solved the difficulty by rising and going off. They had done their talk, and here was evidently some business for Ben Oman.

"It is against the law to assist légionnaires to escape," said Ben Oman; "but we will see, you are a friend of Mansour's, that makes it different. You cannot leave the city as you are with your friend, but in Arab dress it would be different—at night and beyond the walls, what then? Can you speak the tongue?"

"A little," said Jean, who had picked up some Arabic from Mansour and Lacoste who could talk in it fluently.

"It does not matter," said Ben Oman who seemed considering; "an Arab to leave Algeria does not require to speak the tongue, he can talk French as though he had just learned it and that is enough for the French officials. Besides, once out of the gates if you take the road south to Samia which is a small town on the road, and if you ask there for

Ben Osman, who is a friend of mine, he will let you stay with him till you find some plan, or make some other preparation. You say you have money. I would ask a thousand francs for the garments—I take a risk. It is forbidden to help a légionnaire. All the same, for the sake of Mansour I will do this——”

“ I can give you a thousand francs,” said Jean.

“ Then,” said the other, “ let it be done quickly. I have a daughter, one of whose dresses would fit your companion; as for you, I can also supply you out of my own stock. Come!” He rose and beckoned to Karan, who followed him into the house.

Jean sat waiting.

He could hear the sounds from the village nègre, dogs barking, the tangling of a guitar, the screaming of a woman suddenly cut short, and mixed with these the patter of the palm leaves above the wall as the night wind played with them.

He sat waiting for the dress in which to play his new part.

It was just as though he were chief protagonist in a play that had now reached its last act. Each act required a different make-up. First, that of a student, then of a légionnaire, now of an Arab. He was waiting to go on in the last act. Who had written the play?

If he had never gone down that avenue at Serajevo he would never have met Karan, nor shown her picture to Stein, nor have received the commission to paint the Baroness Hauptmarch.

Accident. It was all accident—and yet . . .

As he sat listening to the sounds of the night, a sound like a cannon shot shook the sky. It was the bursting of a maroon.

Instantly came the far-away storming of a bugle blowing the assembly “ Aux armes—Aux armes.”

Ben Oman came out, followed by a little figure in white; it was Karan, completely masked even to the yashmak. He had heard the maroon and he heard now the bugle. He laughed.

"The Legion is crowing," said Ben Oman. "There is trouble down south, it seems. Well, that will make it perhaps easier for you in leaving the town. Now, come with me and I will make you Arab."

He led the way into the house, and they presently returned.

Yes. He had made Jean Arab truly enough. Nothing is more astonishing than the complete change this dress makes in a man. In changing his race it changes his face, as the French proverb goes.

The only danger now was that he might be spoken to by one of the Arab police.

Ben Oman, who had been paid a thousand francs for the second-hand robes worth fifty, and who, moreover, was always delighted to play any trick on the hated Legion, had considered this matter.

The railway station on this account was dangerous, and so he repeated his advice to take the southern road to Samia, and find Ben Osman. "Tell him I sent you," said he, "and there will be no difficulty in passing the town gates, as you are."

He went with them, showing the way by a narrow lane that would lead to the Place Sadi Carnot, and so to the street running to the southern gate.