

fragment of it, blown here from Vienna, was set between him and Karan.

"And road wanderers who do not fear djinns, etc."

Even here !

## CHAPTER IX

### NIGHT AMIDST THE TOMBS

"AND there you are, monsieur, and bon voyage, but beware of the djinns."

Jean laughed.

Half-way down the hill he glanced back and nodded to the keeper of the Han, who lifted a hand in acknowledgment and then turned to shuffle about amidst his pots and pans, and his dreams of Vienna and old times.

The day was getting late, the bushes and the rocks were casting long shadows. The air, miraculously clear, showed the far blue hills, the rim of a landscape mellowed and warmed by the rays of the westering sun.

There was no one on the road, not even a peasant driving a mule, and in the sky there was nothing but a moving, circling dot—an eagle questing for food.

Then a rise of the ground showed the tombs, and in the air, close to them, a spiral of smoke.

She had built a little fire from bits of dry brushwood and she was standing by it when Jean came up. Away across the plain a figure was roving, Cavani. Moving here and there slowly and aimlessly like a strayed horse, tapping his way with his stick.

"He is all right here," said Karan. "He likes to be free and by himself sometimes, and there is nothing to hurt him. It is only the road that is unsafe for him—and he knows I am watching him."

Jean sat down near the fire and began to open the parcel he had brought. The girl remained standing, her face to the sunset over the Dalmatian hills. The wind that had shifted a bit to the west was coming hot as though from the fires of the sunset, hot and lazy, bringing with it the perfume of thyme and the faint, bitter scent of the bushes. Then a trace of smoke from the fire gave a tang to the air and completed the charm, made the place a camp and brought up in the mind who knows what prehistoric memories from the time when man was a wanderer, and the cities not even a dream.

Why had she built the fire? There was nothing to cook and it was not needed for warmth. Jean pushed the things he had taken from the parcel aside, and the girl who had turned to watch him sat down near him, but without looking directly at him.

"Karan," said he, "why did you build the fire?"

"Oh, the fire!" said she as though the question had wakened her from a reverie. "I don't know. It is good to have a fire in a lonely place."

"You did not want to cook any food?"

"No," said Karan.

"Do you always build a fire if you are alone like this?"

"Yes."

"Just for you and the old man?"

"Yes—and Titi, when he was with us. But of course it is only in the south one can stay out like this."

"Why do you ever go north?"

"We go as he wishes," said Karan, her eyes on

the far figure of the old man who, patient as a beetle, was moving here and there guided by his stick.

"Just so," said Jean; "but if you wanted to go your own way——"

"Oh, he would not stop me, he is very good, but it is always best to go the way he wishes."

"How best?"

"Most fortunate for us."

"Well, he led you so that day at Serajevo that you met me."

"No," said Karan, "he wished to take the road to the right, but I saw the road with the trees on either side and I led him that way."

"Why?"

"Because I liked it."

"So did I. When I saw it I had to walk down it. We both felt the same. And I met you there."

"Yes," said Karan.

"A tree had fallen and I sat down on it to rest, and then I heard your drum. I made the picture of you and the picture brought me south, only for that we would not be sitting here. And it was your wish to come into the avenue. You say it is always more fortunate for you to go the way the old man wants—was it fortunate for you that day?"

Karan without reply moved towards him. Then, to his surprise, she took his hand and opening the fingers looked at the palm.

There was something so bold and intimate in the action that he was startled as well as surprised. It was as though a barrier had been thrown down between them.

He forgot that only a few hours ago he had taken both her hands in his and called her "Dear Karan." The interval of time taken up by his journey to the

Han and back had made a little division between them, but now in a moment it was gone.

She held his hand confidently and firmly and as if it belonged to her, and he saw she was reading the lines.

"My mother taught me," said she in answer to his question. "It is all written here."

"In the lines?"

She did not answer.

She had fallen into a reverie—the reverie of the clairvoyant for whom the lines of the palm are nothing but a resting place for the eye, whilst the mind wanders into the land of dreams.

Then she let his hand fall and gazed before her. Her lips were parted and in her dark, beautiful eyes there was a look half of fear, half of happiness.

"What have you seen?" asked Jean. "Karan!"

He took her hands and drew her to him, and then she was wildly clinging to him, her lips to his and her very soul seeming to mingle with his breath. But she did not tell what she had seen.

Her abandonment lasted but a few minutes. Then, pushing Jean away and rising to her knees, she sheltered her eyes against the last rays of the setting sun. She was looking for the old man.

That eternal preoccupation could not be lifted from her for long, true to the strange trust that Fate had laid upon her, Love himself could not make her forget or break her eternal vigil.

Jean recognised this. He had begun to recognise it in the care and attention she gave to her charge, in her tenderness towards him, in the way she had made his pillow for the midday rest—and now, as she pushed Love aside and gazed with shaded eyes across the plain.

And the recognition was another bond between

Jean and her. He was beginning to see through the veil of the flesh and the illusions of sex—Karan.

It was the night of the full moon. She rose above the Herzegovinian hills, seeming to float in the ether, a ghost ; brightening as she rose, setting the shadows marching towards the sea and showing the road beyond the tombs clear as by day, yet empty as a road in dreamland.

The extraordinary nature of Night revealed itself here for a moment as she took the plain, the tombs and the distant hills, the ghostly something that the cities are unaware of, that even the twinkling of a cottage lamp will dispel.

Cavani, covered with the rug, was asleep. Deaf and blind, and asleep like the men in the tombs—those great tombs on which now the dancing girls and quaint processions took new life from the moonlight, and some reflection from the days when forgotten ghosts were men.