

Thrilling Adventure, Love, Intrigue and the Great War

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It was quite impossible for any pursuit from Egypt to cross the Red Sea and reach Arabia so soon as this. The capture of the Sheykh Hassan on the river had been made by a small guard of British soldiers whom von Hengel had had some difficulty in eluding, but by good fortune camels had been few and those of his own caravan had been fast. But the fact remained that here was Alan Jessup, and where the American had been able to come others could follow. A wireless to a British war ship would bring her speedily to Yambu.

In his heart he cursed the leisurely Hassan Isar, who had insisted on remaining to pray in the mosque at Assiut, when he should have already been well upon his way to the sea. But how had Alan Jessup succeeded in getting on his trail so quickly unless by a wireless from the British base at Cairo? And how unless in the Turkana? And if in the Turkana, were British soldiers with him?

In the few moments before von Hengel spoke Alan could see that he was deeply puzzled and suspicious, but there was no sign of anxiety in his easy, somewhat bantering tone.

"My congratulations, Alan," he began with a laugh. "It's really too bad that your effort is to be wasted."

Alan made no reply and only smiled in his weary way.

"I suppose it must be fairly obvious," von Hengel went on, "that your temerity has gotten you into a desperate situation. I've done what I could for the moment, though I can't tell how long in daylight I'll be able to keep these people at bay. But, as you see, I have some influence with them and if you'll meet me only half way I think I can save your life."

As von Hengel paused, Alan drawled: "Thanks, Conrad. Awfully good of you."

Von Hengel examined his captor keenly, now quite certain of many months of misjudgment. Alan was grinning in a very genuine sort of way as though fully aware of his captor's power to save him and quite amenable to any suggestion which would lead to that eventually. But von Hengel had learned to become wary of that grin. And he couldn't forget that although Alan was his prisoner, he was himself as helpless in his own mission as Alan, if the captive didn't reveal the whereabouts of the Black Stone. So he adopted an easy tone, reminiscent of friendship.

"It seems a poor return for all your hospitality, Alan, to be compelled to be your jailer. It's very distasteful. But Kismet wills it so. The only thing is to try to let you out as easily as I can."

"Awfully good of you," mumbled Alan again, "awfully."

"But, of course, you've got to be reasonable. You have the Kaba Stone, but they," and he indicated the multitude, "they've got you. And they're bound to kill you if you don't give it up."

"I haven't got the stone," said Alan, cheerfully enough. "I couldn't have swallowed it, you see."

Von Hengel's brow drew together for a moment.

"I advise you," he said slowly, "that you're taking the wrong course."

"Am I?"

"I want to give you your chance—it's the only one you'll have, I can assure you. Tell me where the Kaba Stone is and I'll promise to let you go."

Alan laughed.

"Oh, I say. That's rather a large order, isn't it?"

"What do you mean?"

"Merely that the beggars will kill me anyway."

"No," said the German positively. "I give you my word on it."

Alan remained silent a moment, thinking deeply.

"What's the use, Conrad?" he asked.

Von Hengel started up.

"You mean that you won't agree?"

"Something like that," said the prisoner reflectively. "You couldn't save me from these Johnnies even if you wanted to. They're bound to kill me if I can't fetch the Kaba Stone, and they'd have religious scruples against letting me go if I did. So what's the difference? I'm a goner any way you look at it. But I'd rather be a goner with the Kaba Stone than without it. That's what I came for, you know," he finished languidly.

Von Hengel concealed his anger with difficulty, aware that Alan was just the sort of fatuous idiot to carry the thing through to the end. But he had to admit that his reasoning was excellent.

"Haven't I said that I would help you to get away? Tell me what I want to know and I'll loosen your bonds so that you can slip away when my back is turned."

"I'd rather not, thanks."

Von Hengel's face grew darker in the moonlight and he flicked his cigarette furiously away.

"That's final?" he asked.

"I should say so, unless"—Alan paused.

"Unless what?"

Alan tried to settle himself more comfortably in his bonds. "Unless you'll trade with me even."

"Trade with you? What?"

"The parchments—the Karras of the Mosque of Hasaneyn."

Alan noted the slight involuntary movement of the Prussian's fingers toward the front of his kamis and found out what he wanted to know. He had them there! Not Ali Agha, but von Hengel had them in his shirt.

The German laughed. "And what would you do with them?"

"Take them aboard the Turkana and give you the Kaba Stone."

The look on von Hengel's face grew keen, then cleared quickly.

"Ah, yes, the Turkana. Of course. And where is she now?"

"In the harbor at Damghah, not fifteen miles from here."

"The Turkana—of course—and what else?"

Alan's face wore a look of inquiry.

"What else?"

"A British destroyer, perhaps—or a man-of-war."

Alan laughed. "A British destroyer! Oh, I say!"

"It's quite possible."

"Then she has come in since I left the coast."

"That's your privilege."

The calmness of his prisoner now angered him.

"You think," he said, with growing warmth, "that I will not kill you because in your death all trace of the Kaba Stone will be lost. But I'm in no position to stand on ceremony just now. You've provoked me more than once, and I'm getting to the end of my patience."

"And your tether?" put in Alan sweetly.

Von Hengel swore a round German oath under his breath and rose.

"You shall see. I think I fully under-



"She clung to his shoulders, weeping silently, and he bent over and kissed her on the brow."

"She is coming?"

"I'm sure I don't know. I'm not in the confidence of the Admiralty."

Von Hengel glanced westward and then peered for a long moment toward the mass of rock at the head of the gorge.

"You're speaking the truth?" he asked keenly.

Alan smiled.

"Did you ever know me to do anything else?"

Von Hengel sank lower upon his haunches, his eyes searching Alan's face. Its expression had not changed and its eyes returned the German's eager look with calmness.

"Who took the Kaba Stone to the Turkana?"

"I didn't say any one had taken it there, did I?"

"You said—"

"Merely that I would give you the Kaba Stone if you gave me the Karras."

Von Hengel turned away again to search the dim vistas of the desert. And then he smiled quietly.

"You'll pardon me, Alan, if I say that I don't believe you."

stand your game. But you haven't enough men, my friend. The chance of a rescue is small." He broke off and gazed out over the desert in the direction of the sea. "If that's the plan, we'll prepare for it."

And with a final glance at Alan he looked about him, peering up at the rocky promontory which dominated the gorge above and the desert beyond. Then he went over to the camp fire of the Sheykh, where he aroused one of them and gave him some instructions, pointing to the prisoner and then toward the desert below. Alan saw the man come toward him while von Hengel, moving majestically away in the character of Omar Hilal, climbed among the shrubbery at the foot of the cliff.

Perhaps Alan had said too much. Von Hengel was going to climb up to have a look around to view Damghah harbor at a distance and perhaps to discover the approach of Alan's men, who by this time could not be far away. If they came on in a body their white abas and burnuses would be as distinct as if in the sunlight from the top of this high crag. And what had been intended as a surprise attack might very well become an ambushade with the tables turned.

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The thought that he had thrown his men into a danger—perhaps needlessly—was to Alan more torturing than the pain of his wrists as the things ate into his raw flesh. He struggled quietly as the Sheykh who was to guard him approached, but he could not budge them. The way that they were fastened was an excellent example of efficiency. And as the Sheykh approached him and sat a few paces away Alan desisted and lay quiet.

The Arab was a tall man, the tallest and most villainous looking of the crowd that a while ago had surrounded him; and he

fingered his dagger with an unctious which was very suggestive of unpleasantness to come. The man wanted his hooreyehs in Paradise and he wanted many of them. To be the jailer of such a prisoner as this was an honor not to be lightly considered. The Sheykh Omar was soft hearted. Death swift and sudden should be the fate of such a desecrator—such a dog of an unbeliever as this. "Seventy-two wives of the girls of Paradise" and thousands of weleeds—they should be his, if he killed.

He half-unsheathed his dagger, then very slowly returned it. Alas! Perhaps the Sheykh Omar knew best. He would await what was to happen. But even then it would be his own jambyyah which should deal the fatal blow. In the meanwhile, if the desecrator and blasphemer so much as moved a hair's breadth or struggled to release himself—that would be enough of an excuse.

All of these thoughts Alan read or thought he read in the man's eyes, and he took pains to remain perfectly still in order that he might be alive as long as possible. The Sheykh was mumbling at the while, watching the horizon and

making the most hideous faces for the mere satanic pleasure to be derived from the captive's discomfort.

Alan, having satisfied himself that so long as he remained quiet he was in no immediate danger from his guard, composed his features and seemed to close his eyes. But through his eyelashes he was still keenly observant. He saw that the setting moon was palling just at the edge of the rocks upon the opposite side of the Wadi, and that the east was lightening. Less than an hour to dawn. He still had a chance, a faint one, if the tall rascal near him didn't suddenly change his mind and dispatch him in a sudden fit of religious fervor.

He tried to plan what he would do at the sound of the first shots—struggle to a sitting posture, leaping free of the crag that bound him and hurling himself like a catapult at the Sheykh, hoping to throw him over the edge of the cliff near which he sat. The thing seemed impossible, and yet he meant to try it. He might as well be killed for a sheep as a lamb.

Slowly he watched the pale rim of the moon descend against the ragged edge of the rocks and then suddenly drop out of sight. Except for the camp fires, which glowed here and there, the Wadi was in darkness. And confident that the hour of the Subh would deliver the prisoner into their hands, the pilgrims had relaxed into attitudes of repose—all, indeed, but Alan's guard, who still sat intently regarding him, his brows thatched, his keen eyes blazing with watchfulness and resentment. Alan under lowered lids tried to peer upward toward the mass of rocks von Hengel had climbed, but could see no sign of him.

The grayness in the east now brought into silhouette the long flank of Jebel Radhwah, Amneh's mountains of Paradise. Poor little thing! She had seen him captured and had possibly slunk away in terror at the calamitous results of his venture. He only hoped that she would get back—some way. And Danud. What on earth had happened to Danud? They hadn't caught him, Alan was sure of that. Perhaps—

Alan closed his eyes for a moment, and then for some reason instantly opened them. Behind the sitting Sheykh a shadow was rising from the gully—a dim, unrelieved, absolutely noiseless, which presently resolved itself into a head, shoulders and a pair of arms, groping upward. With an

effort Alan closed his eyes again, trying not to look, but beneath his lashes saw that the Sheykh still leaned forward, staring and mumbling, oblivious of the grim shapes that encompassed him; saw the groping arms and hands suddenly close around the Sheykh's throat and mouth, garrotting him silently and dragging him backward by sheer strength to the edge of the abyss, over which the two figures slid and vanished.

The occurrence was almost uncanny. Alan listened for the sound of falling bodies, but only heard a kind of choking cough and after that—silence. Less than a hundred feet away the sheykhs by the embers of their fire still lay in slumber.

Alan struggled desperately to release himself. Who had done this thing? Not Amneh. Daoud? He had worked his thong clear of the rock when he felt his hands suddenly become free, then his ankles, and rolling over silently, heard a whisper at his elbow just at the edge of the chasm. He could distinguish nothing of the dim figure before him sliding down upon the ledge below, but he followed as quickly as his stiffened limbs would allow, reaching a group near the prostrate figure of the Sheykh, who lay very still.

"There's no time to spare, Mr. Jessup, sir," whispered a familiar voice. "It's a terrible chance you took. If it hadn't been for Miss Amneh here, sir—"

Amneh! Alongside of him, clinging desperately to his arm, the fingers of her other hand still clutching the knife that had released him, she huddled against the rock, her face pallid as the dawn it reflected.

"I had to, Monsieur Alan," she gasped, "they would have killed you."

"I found her, sir," whispered Dawson, "down the Wadi, cryin' her eyes out—and she brought me up here. Be careful, sir. The ledge just below is slippery. So, now, Miss, while I lift you down—"

Still bewildered, but realizing that every moment counted, Alan descended quickly, helping Amneh down, carrying her part of the way in his arms while she clung to him in terror, murmuring strange foreign words at his ear, while Dawson followed noiselessly, an automatic in his hand, guarding against pursuit. Now that victory, at least a temporary one, had perched so suddenly, so surprisingly upon his banners, Alan planned what he should do next.

A moment ago he would have given all he possessed for the very chance of escape that had been offered him, but when he reached the bottom of the ravine and no sound yet came from the cliff which they had descended he gazed up the line of the gully toward the rocks at its end, which seemed a part of the bulk of the cliff which guarded the upper gorge. The spot where they stood was deep in shadow, carpeted with soft sand in which small trees and clumps of vegetation were striving for existence.

"The men are coming, Dawson?" Alan whispered.

"Soon, sir, I should say. I was ahead with Captain Hoagland. He's waiting for them in the village."

"There may be time to head them off."

"Head 'em off, sir?"

"Captain von Hengel has just climbed those rocks to watch. If he sees them—"

"Oh, I understand, sir."

Alan looked down the shadows of the ravine.

"Where does this gully lead, Dawson?" he asked.

"Into the desert, sir, about half a mile above the caravan road."

"Then you can get Miss Amneh out safely?"

"I should say so, sir, unless they slip around."

"Then go—at once. Lose no time and warn Hoagland. They'll be about our ears like hornets in a minute."

"And you, Monsieur Alan?" whispered Amneh, terrified.

Alan smiled down at her gayly.

"I'll come soon. Go with Dawson. You're the bravest girl in the world."

"You will venture again?"

"There's something I've got to do, Amneh. I'll come through safely—don't worry."

"They will kill you this time."

"Not while my legs hold out. I've learned prudence. I shall run."

"O, God!" She clung to his shoulders, weeping silently, and he bent over and kissed her on the brow and handed her gently to Dawson, who stood watching his employer.

"If I might be so bold, Mr. Jessup, sir, I think you'd better be coming along with us. Miss Constance is there."

"Constance! Alan paused a moment in indecision and then firmly:

"I can't, Dawson, not just yet."

"If you'll pardon me, sir, there's such a thing as trusting luck too far."

Alan caught his man by the hand joyously.

"Good old Dawson! Don't worry. I'll be back all right. Go! please—that's a good chap."

But Dawson still hesitated.

"It's him you're after? If I might—if Miss Amneh could slip down alone—"

But Alan wouldn't hear of it, and with a final word which was almost in tones of command to them both Alan watched them slowly move away down the ravine among the underbrush. And then, listening intently for the slightest sound on the rocks above him, he moved quickly up the ravine toward the mass of rocks which loomed above him.