

A
GARDEN
TO THE
EASTWARD

HAROLD
LAMB

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A NOVEL

A GARDEN TO THE EASTWARD

DOUBLEDAY

by the author of GENGHIS KHAN and ALEXANDER OF MACEDON

A Garden

to the Eastward

By Harold Lamb

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Novel

A GARDEN TO THE EASTWARD

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A Garden
to the Eastward
BY HAROLD LAMB

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And the Lord God planted a garden eastward in Eden; and there he put the man he had formed.

GENESIS 2, 8.

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A Garden

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CHAPTER I *Three Names*

Christmas Eve in 1946 fell on a Tuesday, and a rainy Tuesday at that. As the afternoon drew toward its end and closing time approached, the distant clicking of typewriters grew noticeably fainter within the offices of the Division of Eastern Affairs in the antiquated building that sheltered the Department of State.

In one of the largest offices, fitted with a usable fireplace and rugs that slipped on the floor, Armistead Marly worked late. The silence around him suggested that fellow members of the Division had departed homeward without disturbing him. For Marly was an important man with a sense of formality—not the sort of man who would appreciate a “Merry Christmas” shouted through the door. Slight, his body erect at the desk, he shuffled through sheaves of papers with seeming impatience, his mild blue eyes intent.

At times he laid aside a memorandum or a penciled note. All of these were unusual because they dealt with tribes and mountains in western Asia; but all of them seemed to touch some memory in him. You might say that he was collecting bits of all that was unusual in the sheaves of reports.

So he happened on the three names.

They were not in themselves at all unusual, and probably no one else had linked them together for any reason. Marly put the first two together for the reason that they had been reported missing from Baghdad for the last five months—both being reported by British C.I.C.I.

One, at least, was vaguely familiar. *Sir Clement Bigsby K.C.I.E., F.R.G.S., et cetera, corresponding member of the French Academy et cetera. Decorated in last World War: led pursuit of German agent Vassan from Afghanistan to China; resigned his commission*

as brigadier general to devote his life to study; author of monographs on the linguistic affinities of Kurdish. . . .

Yes, Marly remembered reading Clement Bigsby's *Desert Trails of Ancient Asia*.

Now it seemed that he was missing from his bungalow in the mountains beyond Baghdad.

The second name, Miss Michal Thorne, had no such notation. She had left Baghdad, the British believed, to look for a certain garden in the mountains.

The third was hidden in a routine report of the American Legation at Baghdad. *Captain Jacob S. Ide, on terminal leave from the Cairo detachment of G-2, USAFIME* [United States Armed Forces in the Middle East] *had not reappeared in Baghdad after his departure on a trip to the mountains in the interior in August. He had been seen to leave the railroad at Kirkuk after being warned by British authority not to proceed toward the mountains.*

This portion of the earth, within western Asia, Marly knew to be full of displaced persons—Poles, Slavs, Jews, even Russians—homeless or seeking their homes, driftwood stranded there by the war. They were forever disappearing in one direction or another. But these three names were those of a British orientalist, an American officer, and an unknown woman. They would hardly vanish from official sight like refugees seeking a sanctuary.

The door opened and his personal secretary, a mild woman with an understanding of his moods, appeared. Beside the door she deposited a small canvas pouch of the type carried abroad by government mail couriers and a much smaller receipt book.

This done she hesitated, and Armistead Marly nodded. "I'm waiting for him. You can go." In afterthought he said "Merry Christmas."

Methodically, he noted down the three names on a scratch pad. For them he had no responsibility, and there was nothing to connect them together except the odd circumstance that they had been lost to sight in the same mountain region for several months. Putting a paper clip on the three notations about them, he added this to his small pile of gleanings.

Although he heard nothing, he was aware when the door opened

again. A man of large frame stood in the office, stooping, blinking as if drowsy, with the mingled alertness and fatigue characteristic of night drivers. Picking up the pouch, the newcomer examined the lock, took out the key, and then thumbed through the leaves of the receipt book.

This done, he placed the key carefully on a ring he drew from the chain at his belt, and for the first time glanced inquiringly at the man behind the desk. "Anything else, Mr. Marly?" he asked. In voice and manner he seemed to be nothing but a middle-aged messenger. But Marly knew him to be one of a group of nameless men who served on the other side of the earth as the eyes of the United States. Once afield, this courier who journeyed by air between legations and embassies might disappear for a while, to turn up elsewhere without explanation. He did not have to explain his goings or his comings; only at times he broke his silence to hold talks with ambassadors and key men like Armistead Marly. This was a time when the United States needed eyes in obscure regions that were out of the spotlight of routine news gatherers, whether of the press or the government itself.

"A little," Marly observed, "for your bedtime reading."

The pouch, he knew, held nothing more important than some foreign trade statistics the Department of Commerce was forever publishing. But the memoranda Marly had been collecting might give the pseudo-messenger new and unusual bearings on the territory he would visit. Presumably, if he was taking off in bad weather on Christmas Eve, he was in a hurry. Marly felt a faint irritation because he himself would not know the man's destination.

The pouch was marked for Cairo; yet anyone bound for the interior of western Asia would be apt to go in by way of Cairo.

Instead of pocketing the notes, the messenger ran through them as another man might sort out a deck of cards, except that he asked some apparently irrelevant questions which Marly answered promptly. Once he stopped and pointed to a name. "Is he still missing?"

The name was that of Jacob Ide. Marly nodded. "Yes—up to a week ago." And he felt that he could ask a question of his own. "You know him?"

The messenger displayed no interest. "I have seen him in Cairo. He reads obscure books, and you might call him a dreamer."

"That hardly explains his absence."

Still occupied with the three names, the courier smiled. "I can tell you why he left Cairo. He went to look for bronze horses—horses with wings." The voice of the messenger had changed. "I wish I knew if he found them, and where."

Marly laughed. "Trojan horses?"

"No, real ones."

On the scratch pad Marly scribbled absently against the three names he had written down—a writer of books, a dreamer, a woman who wanted a flower garden. There was nothing enlightening in that, except a certain quality of the unusual that all three seemed to possess. Folding the memoranda, the messenger placed them in his breast pocket and held out his hand.

"Good luck!" said Marly sincerely.

He watched the other, shambling a little, go out the door with the pouch. In some way the departure of this unnamed man into the storm had lightened the pressure of heavy responsibility on the statesman during an international crisis.

Waiting a moment before leaving, Marly went to a window. In the darkness of a rain gust, the lines of people hurrying home from offices scattered under the street lights, dodged into doorways, or opened newspapers over their heads and ran for streetcars and taxis. In this flight the crowd lost semblance as the fugitives sought shelter. A wind that bent branches of trees tore at the flimsy newspapers and raincoats, driving a spray of water over the gleaming asphalt of the street.

Sensitive to impressions, Marly felt for an instant as if the solid pillared building in which he waited had stirred and was drifting itself, formless and viscous, before the anger of the elements.

It was only an impression, born of fatigue. Before turning off the light at his desk he tore, from force of habit, the scribbled page from his scratch pad and crumpled it into the wastebasket. He had more pressing problems on his mind than that of three names which had formed an elusive pattern.

CHAPTER II *The Bronze Horse*

As he remembered it—and he often thought back over all that took place during those hours—nothing unusual happened on Jacob Ide's last evening in Cairo, unless it might have been the soldier at Shepherd's steps.

It was a Friday, the second of August. At dusk the heat of the day still lay on the crowded streets. Overhead the sunset glare filled the sky without penetrating the dimness of the streets, as if far above the earth a searchlight had been turned on. There were few lights as yet in the buildings because on a Friday most of the shops were closed in the teeming, heterogeneous city that clung to the banks of a silent river.

In the shaft of light from the open door of a café a small girl danced solemnly, alone, holding to the edges of her dress, to the strident music of an Egyptian radio within. Jacob Ide observed her as he noticed everything in the shadows he passed. He moved on unhurriedly, partly because he disliked to hurry, partly because he was lame. By keeping to a slow step and using his cane, he appeared to walk as other men did.

The dancing urchin glimpsed only an American officer, surprisingly alone and carrying a book in his free hand. She felt his eyes upon her, and danced on. Those eyes seemed pleased, although the wide, sensitive lips did not smile. The bones showed too strongly in the lean head, as in a medieval statue, giving the impression of cold and quiet and meditation. Jacob Ide had his Dutch ancestry to thank for that, as for his silence and stubbornness and way of walking alone.

That evening he was saying good-by not to friends—of whom

he had very few—but to the places he had known during his stay of more than four years in the G-2 section at Cairo headquarters. The others of the section had left long since while he remained to assemble scattered files and perform the last caretaking duties. He had volunteered to stay on for that. He had known these streets of Cairo during the tense nights of blackouts, when fugitive Italians wandered like ghosts in the Qattara depression and Sherman tanks had rolled in from Heliopolis to meet the Afrika Korps. His job had been, for most of those four years, to rewrite at his desk in the Sharia Lazoghli the reports that came in from sources in the field and from the British, who gleaned information from every corner of the Middle East theater. Before the war Jacob Ide had been a rewrite man on foreign news, with the New York *Transcript*, and he had a way of remembering what passed under his eyes. He also read unusual books. He was thirty-nine years of age.

He had become accustomed to working at desks, where his outlook had been through a window. His wanderings at night had been an escape into a world of his own imagining.

Now that his terminal leave had begun and he could go where he wished, he found that he did not want to leave Cairo with its world of the night that was more real to him than the routine of the days. It was an odd feeling, as if he were waiting for something that had escaped his notice—as if the ghost of war still lingered in the dark alleys.

His wandering that night took him past familiar landmarks—a small mosque set back in its garden of flamboyant trees, an abandoned fountain of the Mamluk time where the dark figures of veiled women clustered, along the riverbank where the curved sails of dhows moved against the stars. From a café table under an awning a young Egyptian in a European suit called out to him excitedly: "Captain Ide! Did you hear? There was a riot in Alex today."

"Hullo, Allouba," Jacob greeted him.

Beside the youth who reported for one of the newspapers sat his father, an old man, incredibly frail, sipping coffee. The father wore a fez and liked to be called Pasha. They both looked grieved when they learned that the American was leaving.

"How can I stay?" Jacob argued, smiling. "The war was over some time ago."

"*Alors*," replied the father in his precise voice, "*ce n'est pas la fin de la guerre*." Then he explained for the Americans like the Captain Ide the war was over, that was true; but not for the peoples of the East.

Jacob bade him look out at the river. "Your river has peace," he observed.

The Pasha considered, and agreed. But the Nile, he retorted, was Egyptian, and important to no foreigners. On the other hand, the Suez Canal, built by foreigners, was not at peace. And the seaport of Alexandria, made long ago by conquerors who had come to Egypt, was not at peace. Nor was the desert of Libya, which foreigners had invaded.

"And when," demanded Allouba, "will the foreign armies leave us, as you are doing?"

"Soon, I hope," said Jacob.

They insisted that he drink a last cup of coffee with them, and they rose to shake hands with him. With him they had seen the colossus of war pass by their land; they believed that this American officer who limped was going home to security in the United States, while they waited, uncertain, for what would happen before they could resume their own lives.

From the river Jacob pursued his course down the Boulak past the lighted fruit stands and the sherbet sellers he knew so well. So it happened that he met the soldier. Perhaps the meeting with the soldier was unusual, yet it could not have been called inexplicable. For the native soldier was standing alone, on the lower steps of Shepherd's veranda, watching the groups of foreigners that passed steadily in and out of that ancient hotel. The wide brim of his hat was turned up on one side and bore a small white plume; the rest of his uniform was like British battle dress, and Jacob identified him at a glance as one of the native Levies. He might have been waiting there for some officer, or he might have been watching the gay crowd that packed the veranda in the hour before dinner. He was young and spare in body, and for the moment he seemed to be enjoying himself.

This veranda raised above the crowds in the street, was like a stage set in the late Victorian period where white-robed Sudanese, emerging from the ancient doorway, slipped through the rings of sitters at the tables to serve drinks. Upon this lighted stage, enjoying the first coolness of the night, sat the foreigners who really dominated Egypt.

At one table Jacob recognized a congressman from home who was visiting Cairo for three days on the investigation of the sale of military property at Payne Field. His voice boomed over the modulated chatter around him as if he meant to be heard . . . "all our installations must be . . . to take it up at top levels . . . the facts about this flea-bitten country . . ."

An incisive British voice cut through the booming. "Those Americans!"

A woman's low laugh answered. Jacob glanced up through the grilled railing at a gleam of chestnut hair and a fragile figure in white organdie flanked by British officers at the table above him. "*Vivre avec chacun, de chacun faire compte.*" She sang the words almost insolently, keeping time with her head.

"To live with each one, to take account of everyone," the officer cried. "That's Joachim du Bellay, on a bet—but centuries old, my dear."

The woman seemed nervous and somehow defiant. "But aren't we all centuries old?"

Jacob moved on, with a surge of unreasonable anger at the Britishers and their lady who could be amused at sight of a noisy American party. The congressman and his cronies—oil men, salesmen, trade experts, loud-voiced, complaining of heat and delay, careless of who might hear them, were job holders, concerned with prices and time and contracts. They made a tight ring together, carrying invisible brief cases, yet sharing no common impulse between them. These Americans lacked the cohesion that bound together the other groups of foreigners, British, French, or Russian. They lacked, Jacob thought, a *sense of mission*, now that the war had ended—if it had ended.

Still, they were newcomers here, exploring the sights of Cairo with the fresh curiosity of children confronted with the Thousand

and One Nights. The British had been at home here ever since their trading ships had first come in, and they had made themselves comfortable by training the people of the East to serve them.

At the same time Jacob admitted to himself honestly that these same Britishers spent their lives here, spoke the languages, and tried to deal, however ineffectively, with ignorance and famine.

He was passing the steps where the soldier and servants waited when a taxi drew up and two civilians and a girl climbed out, hailing him cheerfully.

"Jake Ide!"

"Old Jake still in harness!"

Two of them Jacob knew. Tom Drouthen had been in G-4 at Cairo, and Diana Erlinger, who matched her red hair well with a dark green dress, was one of the secretaries at the legation. After his discharge Drouthen had returned to Cairo as liaison man for an oil company at a comfortable salary. It made Jacob feel awkward to be still in uniform. In immaculate gabardine and white shirt, Drouthen had changed into another personality. Although he suggested that Jacob join them at cocktails, he did not urge it. Looking at the book Jacob carried, he muttered, "*Aristotle!*"

"Jake Ide knows all the archaeological answers," Diana put in brightly to the third, a visitor. By her manner Jacob knew the stranger must be important. He proved to be the representative of a shipping combination. He had a question to ask.

"Is it true or not true, Captain Ide, that the Great Pyramid—I sweated up it today—was oriented to the stars, and built to foretell human fate?"

"It was built for a coffin for the Pharaoh Khufu."

"There!" chimed Diana, her glance straying to the tables above her. "We'll miss you, Jake, and not just because you're so stimulating for a girl to look at."

Jacob grunted.

"You're starting home tomorrow, aren't you?"

"Not home."

"Wherever, then? You're not under the sacred seal of secrecy now, are you?"

"No."

Diana laughed. "Well then. Don't you really know?"

Jacob shook his head, wishing they would say good-by and have it over with.

"You ought to be something in the State Department now."

Another desk. Moodily, Jacob tried to think of an amusing answer and failed.

"Try communications," suggested Drouthen, glancing at his watch. "What about TWA? There's sugar being passed out that way if you——"

"So long," said Jacob. "Thanks for the invite."

"Be seeing you," said Drouthen, adding with an effort of memory, "Old Jake."

When Jacob moved away with his slow pace, only Diana looked after him curiously. She had liked Jacob Ide, and had been greatly puzzled by him.

"A case," explained Drouthen to the shipping man, "of too long among the wogs—the Arabs, Sudanese, Armenians, and so forth. He even believes in the Atlantic Charter."

Drouthen had read Jacob's reports once, in the way of duty, or at least had initialed them as read.

"A case of being Dutch and reading too many books," corrected Diana. "Maybe when he gets home he'll realize the war is over."

"He'll realize that he's late for the good jobs," added the shipping man.

"There's a table!" cried the girl. "Quick, Tom."

They hurried to take possession of an empty table. The soldier who had been waiting within arm's reach of them abandoned his post and moved after Jacob through the crowd. On the veranda voices rose higher, gathering around shrill shreds of laughter. The Sudanese hurried, lifting their trays over the heads of the Europeans.

The soldier passed between a pockmarked vendor with a frame of horsetail fly whisks and a Levantine with oiled hair who watched the stairs in the hope of picking up a few piasters by selling his observations to a more prosperous Cairo spy or even to some obscure agent of His Britannic Majesty's government. The air reeked of sweat and dust and gasoline. In the press of people the man of

the Levies kept the American's figure in sight. At the lighted window of a curio shop Jacob paused to glance over the array of dubious scarabs, clay tomb figures, cheap ornamental brasswork designed for the thriving tourist trade. Before Jacob could move on, the soldier stepped beside him, smiling.

"You do not like these," he said in clear English. "You are an American captain?"

Jacob nodded.

"Then come!" As if remembering that he should give some explanation, he added carelessly, "You will see something better."

His manner was not that of a puller-in or pimp; he seemed to think it quite a matter of course that a foreign officer should listen to him. The lines of his head were those of a white man; some intensity of feeling stirred him, reflected in his dark eyes.

"I don't buy curios," Jacob refused. Soldiers often turned up with looted objects, and in any case Jacob did not care for souvenirs, having no one to send them to. For himself he had bought a few illuminated manuscript pages of Korans.

Instead of protesting, the soldier nodded. "I think this will help you," he said.

Jacob went with the soldier, not because he expected to see anything unusual, but because the man—who did not seem to be Arab or Armenian—interested him.

When he asked his name, the soldier said carelessly "Paul," and when Jacob glanced at him, he added, "the son of Kaimars." Although he had become familiar with Eastern names, Jacob could make nothing of these. Paul, or Saul, was common enough; but Kaimars did not sound like Arabic, or Greek either. Before he could ask any more questions, the soldier swung into a courtyard upon which several buildings faced. Apparently he knew his way, because he went directly to a massive wooden door and pushed it open.

Lingering a moment to run his eye over the entrance, Jacob observed that the only sign was the word *Antiquités* carved in the door; that, and the rusted iron shutters over the window, repelled customers rather than invited them.

Inside, there was only one light bulb without a shade over the counter where a grizzled individual—Jacob guessed him to be

Armenian—sorted out the fragments of a broken vase. After a glance at the soldier named Paul and the tall American, he appeared to take no notice of them.

The shelves held a scattering of dusty brass and bronze objects, with some nice mosque lamps and portions of stone statues that seemed to be Greek. Jacob wandered past them, deciding that they were really old and not stuff manufactured for the tourists. Then he noticed a bronze horse among the broken statuettes.

No larger than his palm, the horse crouched as if about to fly off on its half-folded wings. It was unlike anything Jacob had seen in Cairo. When he took it over to the light, he discovered that it had been cleaned carefully, or much handled, so that the lovely patina of age showed on the smooth green surface of the bronze. He thought: only a Greek of long ago could put life into metal like this.

"Isn't it Greek?" he asked.

The man seemed to understand because he shook his head. But Paul answered for him, "It is older than anything Greek, Captain Ide."

Usually dealers claimed the limit of antiquity for their better pieces, and this was a good one—too good-looking. Studying it, Jacob realized that its delicate lines were almost fantastic. "Egyptian, then?" he inquired, not because he believed it—the Egyptians almost never modeled horses or used bronze—but to see what they would answer.

"It was made before the pyramids of the Nile," Paul answered, smiling.

Silently, Jacob calculated that that meant five thousand years ago, which was earlier than the fine art of Crete. "How much do you want for this?" he demanded of the Armenian.

"Twelve pounds Egyptian," said the dealer indifferently.

A high price for an imitation, even as an asking price. And Jacob felt that this man would not bargain. If the archaic Pegasus were real, as they claimed, it was worth many times as much. Putting the horse back on the counter, Jacob decided not to buy it. "Can you tell me where you got it?"

Most dealers would say the Valley of the Kings, or Persepolis,

to lure on a customer; and Jacob was prepared for Paul to hint that the thing had been stolen from a museum. Nothing of the kind happened, however.

"Baghdad," responded the Armenian, intent on his fragmented vase.

Jacob smiled without irritation. "That bronze was never made in Baghdad."

"He found it there," Paul explained carefully. "But it is true it was made elsewhere, Captain Ide."

"Yes, in the shop of a good forger."

"No, Captain Ide!" For the first time the soldier seemed concerned. "It came from a country which exists but is not known to you because it is not on your maps. This land of which I speak has always been there, beyond what you would call your horizon. How would you call a place like that?"

By this time Jacob was enjoying himself. "Utopia."

Apparently the soldier did not recognize the name. "Please—what is that, Utopia?"

"A never-never land, a nowhere."

"I do not understand."

Because the young soldier seemed earnest about understanding, Jacob explained that Utopia had been an imaginary island in the Western world described by Sir Thomas More. Other men had told about the myth in other ways. Bacon, the scientist, held it to be a marvel created by human invention. *Erewhon* filled it with human hopes that had never been realized. "It was a dream of human beings," he said, "the kind of a place they wanted, but never found. It could not be found, of course, because it did not exist."

Paul had listened intently. "But this place where the bronze was made does exist. Your maps do not have it—that is all." Briefly he hesitated. "Did you ever hear of Kurdistan, Captain Ide?"

Jacob almost smiled. Probably the man of the Levies did not realize that he had been in military intelligence, which had had to deal with legends as well as realities. Yes, Kurdistan—the land of the Kurds—did exist as a place, although the name hardly ever appeared on a map nowadays. It was not small, either, consisting of

some thousands of square miles of the most rugged mountains in western Asia, where lived the obscure Kurdish tribes. To that extent Paul had spoken the truth. "Yes," he acknowledged, "but I never heard that the Kurds made bronzes like this."

Now that he looked at it closely, the horse with its half-folded wings appeared unlike a European animal. Suddenly Jacob wanted it, to have with him. Paul kept silent, seemingly aware of his thoughts. When the Armenian, believing that the American would not buy, reached out for the bronze Pegasus, Jacob picked it up and counted out a ten-pound note and two ones—more, he told himself, than he could afford to pay.

At the door he asked the soldier suddenly, "Did you expect me to buy that bronze?"

In the gloom of the courtyard the man's dark eyes held his. "It was the best in the shop—or in Cairo." With a gesture of farewell he said quietly, "The best of luck, Captain Ide," and went away into the shadows.

Left to himself, Jacob thought: he'll be back tomorrow to collect his two pounds, or maybe three, as commission from that dealer. I wonder how many of the horses they have, and how many Americans have fallen for that odd story?

When he switched on the light suspended over the bed in his hot room, he took out the bronze horse. It looked more real than in the dusty shop. He had never felt so drawn to a curio, and he remembered that the two men had not claimed this to be a bargain, or any exotic talisman; they had said only that it was incredibly ancient. He wondered if that could possibly be true.

Still the horse did not actually decide him to go on to Baghdad. After that evening he wanted to get out of the offices and streets and away from the groups of arriving civilians by the first train. He had two months' leave, with travel orders as far as Jerusalem, which he had wanted to visit.

There was an archaeologist at Baghdad who could tell him what the bronze Pegasus might be. By then Jacob would have given much to find out.

He did not discard his uniform by conscious decision, yet he found that he wanted to be rid of the familiar gear. He packed it away for storage, filling the kit bag for his trip with an extra civilian serge suit and accessories and putting in only one military item—a map. He added his copy of Aristotle and the bronze Pegasus.

When he snapped off the light and pulled the mosquito net down around his bed, he wondered why the soldier named Paul had wished him luck.

At Jerusalem Jacob met the squadron leader. There was nothing out of the ordinary in their encounter, except that they resembled each other so much. It happened on the far side of the old city, in the valley of the Kedron.

Jacob had avoided the new city, where armed patrols walked on Jaffa Road and a police headquarters and a great hotel had been demolished by bombs.

Passing the police control at the head of the valley road, he walked down, with his cane helping out his stiffened left leg, into the shadow of the old city toward the ancient graves. It was the hour he liked, just before sunset, when the tawny gray walls by the Golden Gate were tinged with flame. Selecting a vantage point along the road, he sat down to watch, close to the olive trees of the Franciscan garden, when he noticed the officer coming after him purposefully.

When the other came closer Jacob had the odd sensation that he was watching himself in uniform. The gray eyes and the outthrust chin might have been his own, except that the officer in blue-gray walked with a free stride. Abreast Jacob he halted without apparent reason, not aware, it seemed, of the resemblance. "Restful here, isn't it?" he asked, making a rather obvious display of filling his pipe.

Jacob nodded, and waited for what was to come.

"You're American, aren't you?"

Close at hand, the Englishman looked younger than himself and less sun-browned. Jacob nodded. "Why, yes, at least they call it that."

"Ah. Thanks." The squadron leader spoke rapidly, as if embarrassed. "You're staying at the King David, aren't you? We met there, I think. I'm Aurel Leicester."

Jacob knew the tone and guessed at the questions that would follow to identify him without actually requiring him to show his identification. "No. We look like each other, but otherwise we haven't met."

"Otherwise? I see." The officer's glance strayed down to Jacob's shoes and stick and quested along the path. Casual, hatless Americans did not, as a rule, stray among the graves of the valley of the Kedron. "Now that you mention it, I see there is a resemblance. But you're not mil'try, are you?"

"Not at the moment. I was only wondering why, at a time like this, the Golden Gate should be blocked up."

"It's been closed for years."

"For the wars. Like so many of the older gates." Jacob nodded approvingly. "Actually, Squadron Leader, I've come here because it's cool and I like it. I'm staying at the Y.M.C.A., not at the King David, but I'll be leaving tomorrow for Damascus to catch the Nairn convoy car to Baghdad. I don't know where I'll put up there, but you can easily run me to earth again."

The officer half smiled, amused. "Thanks. As a matter of fact I will."

He swung away with the manner of a man who, having completed one job, had much else to do. He had satisfied himself that the solitary walker was an eccentric American and presumably harmless. All that remained to be done was to check on his departure from Jerusalem upon the Damascus road.

In the shadow of the Hebrew tombs Jacob waited for the sun to go down over the gate by which prophets had entered the city, which was now closed.

In Baghdad, as soon as he had taken possession of a room in the Regent Palace Hotel and had got rid of the dust of the overnight drive across the desert, Jacob pocketed the bronze horse and started out with a faint stir of excitement to find the archaeologist

who had explained the museum to him painstakingly on previous visits. He did not waste time trying to struggle with the telephone in Arabic. "Now we'll know," he assured his prize, "if you are a good-looking phony or something more important than I am."

Not, Jacob reflected, that he was important in any way. He had done a routine job during the war, and after this last trip he would be back at a rewrite desk, waiting for news of what was happening elsewhere. He had put off going back to that as long as he could.

The one thoroughfare of the city, crowded with motorcars and displaying Western goods in the windows under the arcade, was jammed with humanity, and as soon as possible he slipped out of it into the labyrinth of the great bazaar, passing at one step from the present to a century ago. In this covered way smelling of saffron and cloth and wet clay Jacob could always feel a pulse beating. Its kaleidoscopic colors, its music of donkey bells and arguing voices held a message for him. At a glance, as he passed, he picked out the green headcloth of a pilgrim, the red of a sherif, the silver coins of the necklaces of Arab tribal women—who sold their coins in bad times and added to them in prosperity—and he noticed who bought silk and how many veiled girls crowded around the expensive trinkets in the goldsmiths' cases. He picked out bearded Armenian priests laden with new blankets, swarthy Assyrian elders followed by children carrying melons and meat for the day's supper.

On this day, he mused, food was plentiful and money abundant. Yet in the back of his mind the thought persisted that these people of the bazaar, garbed in the fashion of a century ago, were dependent for their future well-being on the officials who had thronged Shephard's Hotel, and even on the touring congressmen who had never seen them—unless from the cars speeding to a plane.

From the bazaar's labyrinth he threaded his way through the dust to the portal of the museum and to the door of a narrow office where water dripped over dry grass hung in a window. Without knocking he entered, and a slender man at a shaded electric light looked up. His intent face lighted with pleasure. His lean head, crowned by curling hair, had the austerity of an El Greco portrait. "Captain Ide!"

"Hello, Daoud."

As usual the assistant curator was barricaded by piles of pottery shards and half-reconstructed vases. Trained in England, Daoud ibn Khalid had endless patience and an instinctive skill in piecing together such jigsaw-like fragments. Jacob liked to watch him and to argue with him because the Arab dealt with the most insignificant question as carefully as if it might lead to a new discovery.

When they had drunk the tea that Daoud hastened to fetch to celebrate their reunion, Jacob put his bronze Pegasus on the table under the light without a word, watching the young archaeologist. With something like a gasp the slender Arab took the horse in his deft fingers, feeling the weight of it. "Where did you find this?"

"In Cairo, at a dealer's. He said it came from Baghdad." Jacob waited. "Is it real?"

"It's so real that you could sell it in Baghdad for five hundred pounds." Daoud laughed. "In no other place could you sell it for that much."

"You have a mercenary soul." Daoud relished a joke. "I'm not selling it. Is it archaic Greek?"

Daoud was digging a particle of bronze from a hoof with the edge of a miniature chisel. "Certainly not Greek," he responded absently, his eyes never leaving the miniature horse.

"Why not Greek? You Asiatics never turned out a Pegasus as delicate as this."

"We did in this case." Daoud still moved the horse in his fingers to catch the light against its head. "The mane isn't cropped. No Greek work existed before the eighth century B.C. This horse was made more than seven thousand years ago."

That was what the soldier in Cairo had said. Jacob felt a sharp bewilderment. The man across the table wouldn't jest about the age of an archaeological find. "Don't you mean seven centuries?"

Daoud shook his head.

Jacob studied him, puzzled. "Daoud, I know you fellows have been turning time back by millenniums. You don't think of mere centuries any more. I think the millenniums have addled your brains."

"Addled?"

"Made you crazy like a loon. History doesn't go back seven thousand years. In that sweet long ago our ancestors were cultivating millet with flint hoes and taming their first dogs and sheep. They hadn't begun to write, except to carve pictures in caves. I know that much."

"Your ancestors may have been acting as your say." Daoud put aside the bronze horse at last. "Yes, your European cavemen. But we do not know what my ancestors were doing then."

Although he had an Arab name, Jacob suspected that Daoud had Kurdish blood in him from fathers or grandfathers in the mountains. "Suppose you don't know what your ancestors were up to. You can be damn sure they weren't working bronze three thousand years before bronze was discovered."

Daoud looked queer, as if thinking of more than he wanted to say. "When was bronze used *first*? No one can say, Jacob, because copper came into use, as you say, before recorded history. Suppose some people more intelligent than others also mined tin and happened to mix it with copper? Can you even guess at a time or place where that might have happened?"

"You do like riddles." Jacob sighed. "Yes, I suppose it could happen. It doesn't follow at all that your mythical Asiatic-cavemen-ancestors-with-bronze would make a winged horse as beautiful as a beastie by Phidias just for art's sake. The thing's not *useful*. You can't expect me to believe that."

From a drawer at his side the young curator drew two pieces of bronze and an object carefully wrapped in silk. One of the bronze specimens looked like a horse's bit with ornamental cheek pieces. The other might have been a small hammer or battle-ax. Carefully cleaned, although cruder than the horse, they showed the same workmanship.

"And so?" Jacob prodded.

The two museum bronzes, Daoud explained, came from a mound excavated during the war at Tell Ramsar not far from Baghdad. The interesting thing about them was that they had been found under the crude brickwork of a prehistoric temple, at the lowest level of the excavation wherein the other objects were all of polished

stone. So these bronzes seemed to have intruded into an earlier time.

"Really, I am not asking you to believe anything, Jacob. There are the three bronzes of Araman——" He broke off abruptly.

"Of what?"

"Of Araman. That is merely our name for them. We do not know how to describe them otherwise."

"You found bronzes in a stone age level in archaeological time?"

"I saw them dug out." Daoud smiled tentatively. "If we were Americans we would publish a story about how we had found a new cradle of civilization or something like that at Tell Ramsar."

"If you were American, you would tell the truth about the bronzes."

"I am telling the truth."

"All right. Then tell me that the Empire State Building can be dug up under Khufu's pyramid. Buried there. I'll believe you just as much."

The Arab laughed. This was a joke he could appreciate. He savored it, thinking how to increase it fittingly. "No, it's too big," he responded. "I've seen pictures of it."

Jacob wasn't satisfied. His friend's excitement at seeing the winged horse that was so much finer than the other pieces had been unmistakable. But now he had become obscure about the bronzes he called "of Araman."

"If you found them at a prehistoric level, some workman must have planted them."

"Planted?"

"Sneaked them down into your excavation under everything else."

Daoud shook his head decisively. "No, Jacob. One cannot *plant* objects without digging up the earth first. This ground had not been disturbed." He reflected, then added cautiously, "You see, the evidence of the mound shows that these bronzes were not made at Ramsar. The people of the Ramsar temple, or earlier, must have used stone implements. We assume that the bronzes were brought to the village of Ramsar by some merchant or traveler from the mountains. No other explanation seems to fit. Perhaps the inhabit-

ants of Ramsar valued the strange bronzes highly because they were buried under the temple. But that is conjecture, Jacob."

"Then conjecture some more. I'm interested. You're making my horse a very valuable find, Daoud. A landmark in time, no less. You're doing beautifully. So some hitherto-unknown workmen in a place you call Araman turned out a full-fledged, Greek-fine Pegasus."

"Not a Pegasus, Jacob. Your Greeks didn't invent Pegasus until four millenniums later."

"There you go with millenniums. My proto-Pegasus, then. You're holding out on me, Daoud. Come across. What and where was Araman?"

Daoud looked troubled. "If I told you anything more the director would put me in prison. Can I show the winged horse to the director tonight?"

"Certainly. I have no secrets. You can keep my horse tonight—on one consideration."

"What consideration?" Daoud scented a jest.

"Just give me one hint as to what and where Araman is."

Beaming, Daoud pondered. "I will give you three excellent hints. Listen carefully, Captain Ide. The place of Araman—it is on the track of the oldest lions. It's where East and West first met, and the Tower of Babel was built because of it. There. They are fine hints, because we don't know much more ourselves. Exercise your ingenuity on them until tomorrow morning."

When Jacob left, the Arab bent over the bronze horse as if in prayer.

Jacob did not return to the museum the next morning. The interest of the archaeologist in his purchase excited him, because he knew Daoud would not make a joke out of such a find. Besides, he wanted to solve Daoud's riddles, or to seem to solve them. To do so would be to impress Daoud, and he himself might learn a lot in the process. It would be like breaking a cipher—simple enough if you kept on the right track but otherwise impossible.

He selected the library of the museum for his workshop, and

before looking at any books he considered the mind of his friend. Daoud, he suspected, wanted him to solve the riddles.

In Daoud's thoughts lay the puzzle. In his honest, scientifically trained mind the archaeologist accepted the *fact* that some unknown people of a place called Araman had worked metals as skillfully as artists could do it today. That had been done, Daoud thought, seven or eight thousand years ago. That was before copper had been melted with tin to make bronze elsewhere, or horses had been tamed. It did not seem possible, of course, but Daoud accepted it because of some evidence that had come to his attention. This had been done in Araman, which might be a city, or a river valley, or a mountain chain. Probably it would not be found on any map.

The name suggested Aramaic, the language of Jesus of Nazareth. Or Ararat, the mountain of survival, after the great floods, in Biblical tradition. Daoud—Jacob's memory held tenaciously to such details—had connected the name Araman with mountains. Daoud himself, Jacob suspected, was descended from the Kurds of the mountains north of Baghdad.

Making a mental note that he might be searching for an unnamed mountain chain, Jacob switched his attention to the archaeological part of Daoud's mind. The archaeologists had been digging up fantastic secrets of primitive men in these last two generations, after they had deciphered cuneiform, the wedge writing of Ur and the cities of the Two Rivers, the Tigris and Euphrates. They had made certain, inevitably, that long before the pyramids were built an advanced civilization existed in Ur, and Kish and Lagash, cities on these rivers.

From the library where he sat Jacob could have thrown a stone into the gray water of the swift Tigris.

He did not need to turn to books to trace back in his mind the path of archaeological discovery—the road, as it were, of human progress. It ran from the east. Greece had borrowed secrets from the island of Crete; that island had drawn knowledge of arts from the Nile Valley; the Nile civilization had been in turn indebted to that of the Two Rivers, which had been fostered by an older cul-

ture farther east, perhaps in Susa within the border mountains of Persia—perhaps farther to the northeast, within the mountain fringe of the main continent, Eurasia itself. Yes, the path of human progress might lead from that unknown northeast, the heart of the continent.

The earliest cultures had moved onward along river watersheds, where animals could graze, where the fertile soil of the banks could be cultivated by primitive stone tools.

The archaeologists were certain that this path of human progress had crossed the Tigris about here, yet had started somewhere—either near at hand or remotely far—within the hinterland, where grass grew and water ran and minerals lay, perhaps in a mountainous region.

Jacob pictured such a region carefully in his mind. Of course the presence of the minerals first known to men—copper, gold, silver, tin—meant nothing in itself. Savages could live for generations beside an outcropping of copper ore and do no more than stare at the red coloring. It took intelligence and skill to extract the metal and use it—to fashion pottery molds. It had taken superb artistry to make his bronze horse.

And horses might exist beside a village of bow-and-arrow hunters and be used, if caught at all, for no more than milk and food. His Aramanians—the word persisted in sounding like Armenians—must have had courage and imagination to tame and ride the wild horses. But if so, if they had worked strong bronze superbly and had tamed horses centuries before the peoples around them, they would have had great advantages over men who labored with polished stone. Bronze swords, for instance, could give them supremacy over wielders of stone battle-axes; the horses could carry them faster than any men could run. They must, in some way, have kept the secret of their bronzes and their tame charges.

He now had an inkling of Daoud's first riddle, *the track of the oldest lions*. Daoud certainly had not meant living animals. The Arab had been thinking of the lions in the museum, hewn out of steatite, or alabaster, the work of long-dead artists—the *oldest* lions.

Jacob turned to the books, and was soon satisfied that the track of the oldest man-made lions ran from the Two Rivers west into Egypt and Asia Minor. The earliest beasts incised upon schist, in prehistoric Egypt, were strangely like those carved along the Tigris in that remote time. They were not so much like the elongated beasts of the Pharaohs' time in later Egypt. Either artists had come from the east to make them on the Nile, or the early Egyptians had seen the work of better artists in the east and had copied it.

The only other lions in truly archaic art had been found in the stone figures of China. These Chinese monster-lions were much later, and the only thing remarkable about them was that no such beasts seemed to exist in China. They had been copied from animals seen elsewhere, probably in central Asia.

This meant that possibly artists had lived and depicted lions in remote antiquity somewhere between the Tigris and Euphrates and the rivers of China long before the arts had developed in Egypt, Chaldea, or China, all on the outskirts of Eurasia.

Eurasia. The greatest land mass, the heart of it least known of all the remaining continents. How much, Jacob pondered, did he himself know of the depths of Eurasia, from the river of Baghdad to the Great Wall of China? Until very recently deserts and mountain barriers and isolated, hostile peoples had kept out all but a few explorers from the West. Legends had gathered around this heart of a continent. The legends had told of tribes wandering there in the dawn world after the retreat of the glacial ice, of an earthly paradise upon a height to the eastward, of a fabulous kingdom of the Christian, Prester John, encircled by deserts, and of roads that led to the Cathay of Marco Polo.

Then for a generation the frontiers of the Soviet Union had enclosed inner Eurasia.

Behind all the legends might lie one truth. Perhaps in this heart of a continent, and not in the farther east or west, man's first civilization had arisen.

Jacob soon had a cross-bearing on this supposition. Daoud's second riddle had been, *where East and West first met*. That had no meaning, unless . . . He rifled through the works on early Chinese art quickly. Bronzes, again. In the dawn before history, in the

time of the Shang, the people had splendid bronze vessels and mirrors—superior to those made later. No modern authority could explain these Shang bronzes. Apparently the first of them had been brought in to the lands of the Yellow River. Like those brought in to Ramsar, Jacob thought. They had been carried in from the west, from the interior of Asia, and after a while the men of the Yellow River had learned how to copy them, only crudely. Again, mysterious bronzes had originated somewhere northeast of the Tigris . . .

But the Tower of Babel did not fit in all this. *The Tower of Babel was built because of it.* That was in Biblical times, many millenniums later.

Turning to Genesis, he glanced down the lines: *And the whole earth was of one language, and of one speech.*

And it came to pass, as they journeyed from the east, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar; and they dwelt there. . . . And they had brick for stone, and slime had they for mortar.

And they said . . . let us build us a city, and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven. . . .

From this mighty tower of legend men began to speak in strange tongues and were scattered over the face of the earth. So much the Biblical writings had to say of the people that came from the east and crossed the Tigris to build the huge conical towers, the ziggurats which still revealed traces of their ruins along the great plain of the Tigris. That had not been so long ago in the archaeological time scale. But why had the towerlike structures been built, reaching up into the sky?

These primitive skyscrapers were within the cities, and probably the builders sought to reach cooler air, far above the housetop level. Still . . .

Jacob stopped abruptly when his eye caught a reference in one work. *The people built the Tower-of-Babel structures to remind them of the mountains of their own homeland.*

Three days after he had first shown him the bronze horse, Jacob returned to Daoud's office and waited for tea to be brought. "I

have the answer to your riddles," he said. "Araman is a valley rather high up in a mountain chain, not so very far to the north-east of here, where the ancestors of the Biblical folk lived before they came down to these waters of Babylon to build their towers. The West and the Far East first met there because people of this land and of China went there to get some superbly made art, like your bronzes and my horse."

Daoud looked at him in silence. "Who has been talking to you?"

"I've been talking to myself long enough. It's your turn now."

"Well, you are right, as far as we know. Except that we——" He hesitated. "We've taken photographs of your winged horse. The director is very pleased."

"That wasn't what you started to say, Daoud."

"We are really thankful to you, Jacob. I wish——" He opened the drawer beside him, removed the bronze Pegasus, and then the object wrapped in white silk. With a quick gesture he unrolled this. "I—I'd like your opinion about it, please."

Examining it, Jacob recognized another specimen of the Araman bronze, different only in that it was worn smooth and dark by continued handling until the metal fairly shone. It seemed to be a pen case ornamented in a grapevine design, with a prowling lion among the leaves. When the top was removed, a slender pen slid out. This was cut from a reed, its tip discolored by ink or paint.

"It's a very old bronze pen case, like the other things in style."

"The same bronze alloy. We've tested it."

Jacob looked up, amused. "I might believe that some chosen people worked bronze several millenniums before anyone else—or tamed wild horses. But even you wouldn't say that your ancestors of the mountains of Eurasia wrote with pens millenniums before the first pictographs were carved."

Daoud did not rise to the jest. "It was strange—you thought out what we had found out."

"Not when we were both thinking along the same lines. Wishful thinking, Daoud." Jacob surveyed his friend. "I suppose you have a specimen of the Aramanac—or whatever it is—writing up your sleeve."

This time the Arab scientist smiled. Taking up the bronze pen case, he shook it, and a narrow slip of paper fell out.

Upon it Jacob read words written in an angular hand in ink: *With the compliments of Araman.*

"And so ends the chapter," he chuckled. "Aramanians write English on modern paper."

"Look at it again."

The only thing odd about the inscription was the height of the letters, which seemed to have been done with an up-and-down motion. This was vaguely familiar, and Jacob remembered that Germans of the old school still formed their letters that way in script.

Daoud nodded. "The pen case was left in the museum ten days ago on one of our exhibits of bronzes. The attendants do not know who left it, because many people were here in groups that day—soldiers and tribesmen."

Evidently, the Arab added, the bearer had slipped it out of his pocket when the attendants were not looking. It had been found when the rooms were cleaned the next morning.

"Whoever it was had a sense of humor," Jacob pointed out. "The joke is on you, and my horse is really Pegasus, and——"

"The bronze is not modern. And I saw the other two pieces dug out of the earth at the prehistoric level."

"Then it's a good joke, Daoud."

"The name of Araman, or Aorman, is known to my people—to the Kurdish tribes beyond the Tigris."

"All right. Then your Kurdish tribes found some rather ancient bronzes buried in their mountains, sold several to dealers, and brought one to the museum and left it there. It has happened before."

"With an inscription in English?"

"Why not, for a joke?"

"I don't think it was a joke. There is an Englishman who lives in our Kurdish mountains—Mr. Bigsby. But he wouldn't make letters like a German. I think someone sent the pen case to the museum for us to see." Daoud looked up quickly. "I am going to

the Kurdish mountains—I will have a vacation which begins in a few days.” He was still watching Jacob. “Why do you always travel alone?”

Jacob was thinking: he would like to get out of Baghdad; he wanted to escape from this thronged city that was like the congestion of Cairo. Obviously Daoud Khalid hoped to find some more of the unexplained bronzes. Such a search for archaeological finds was a tremendous gamble; you might stumble over a goddess carved upon the gem of a signet ring and dig up a palace on the spot, as happened at Knossos; or you might accumulate a treasure of an unknown literature, only to find your discovery to be the penmanship of an adroit forger such as Rudolf Hoernle had found at Kashgar.

“No one has wanted to tag around with me,” he muttered, and made his decision. “No, Daoud, I won’t bother you by tagging along. But I’ll take off tomorrow for Kirkuk and the northeast. I’ll work up into the mountains from the Rowanduz road”—he knew the map of that mountain region by heart—“and see what I can find.”

“Such as what?”

“Such as more horses like mine. You can find me easily enough when you come up.”

Daoud handed over the bronze horse, reflecting, obviously pleased. “Oh, I could find you easily, but could you find me? Are you really coming, Jacob? I thought Americans never strayed from their hotels and offices and cinemas. They have never been in these mountains. Where would you go?”

“Northeast.”

“Toward China? To Siberia? You don’t even know what to look for.”

Jacob smiled. “You’ve given me three hints. A mountain perhaps called Araman. A man named Mr. Bigsby. And your”—he guessed at this—“grandfather’s family. If all three are near together—”

Apparently he had made a close guess, because Daoud fell silent, his face a mask.

“I’ll be going on my own,” the American put in. “Not on your responsibility.”

With a nod Daoud acknowledged that, still pondering. "That, yes. But are you quite sure, now, you really want to go?"

"Quite sure."

Before dawn on the second night Jacob had waked because the train was quiet. The ancient carriage in which he lay on a hard board bed no longer creaked. Pushing up the window blind, he felt a cool breath of air. Overhead he picked out the four bright stars of the Square of Pegasus, with Andromeda pointing ahead.

The line of the horizon had moved higher and had broken up into summits against the pattern of the stars. He blinked drowsily at this new blackness, and realized that mountain ridges had risen in the east. At their base, far ahead, he picked out two red eyes of light that flickered as he watched. They were not two eyes, he knew, but the perpetual flames of the Kirkuk oil fields.

Through those everlasting flames ages before, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego had passed unharmed, in the time of Nebuchadnezzar, before Babylon, with its mighty walls, fell to the onset of the horsemen from the mountains. He breathed deep of the clean air of the desert, his mind half-asleep. The ruins of Babylon, the Tower of Babel lay near him, in this land, where stone bullmen guarded the gate of dead Nineveh.

In that moment of quiet the distant gas flames shone like signal beacons. Men passed his carriage window, moving silently with long steps, their heads wrapped in cloth—hillmen on the way to their hills. A voice called at them, "*Khabar-dar* [Take care]!" And a single coated figure came to stand beneath the window, a sentry on whose bayonet the star gleam fell. A watcher, a policeman at his window.

On the Kirkuk platform the early morning sun struck with a furnace blast. The images of the night fled into dust and noise and confusion as the few other foreigners on the train climbed into waiting cars of the Iraq Petroleum Company and were whirled off to breakfast. When Jacob asked how he could hire a car, the station attendants, busied with luggage tags, only shrugged and

told him to inquire at the company office. Left alone, Jacob carried his own bag under the gray, dust-coated trees to the rest bungalow where he might get tea and eggs.

He was waiting at an empty table, wondering how to conjure up a wheeled vehicle, when Squadron Leader Leicester approached briskly with the air of a man who has many worries and little time. Again Jacob thought of himself in uniform.

"I'm sorry," exclaimed the officer, "but did you have permission from our embassy to travel to Kirkuk?"

Jacob considered and shook his head. "Why, no. No, Squadron Leader, I'm only passing through. Sit down and have some tea." He was wishing that his travel orders had included Baghdad.

"Sorry. I'm rather rushed. Captain Ide"—so they knew his name—"I wish you had rung up the embassy before coming. Are you on duty? Of course, in that case——"

"I'm not."

"Might I see your identification?"

Because he gave no more than a glance at Jacob's identity card of Cairo Headquarters he must have known what it had to tell him. "Yes, but if you are on leave, Captain Ide, you must have travel orders. This area has been closed to ordinary travel."

"I've no orders of any kind. I'm only fossicking for bronzes, Squadron Leader."

"For bronzes?"

"For a mate to my horse."

"Your—— Can you show me what you are talking about?" The squadron leader was a decent man trying to be courteous, but with the burden of officialdom on him. When Jacob produced his small Pegasus, the officer stared at it. "Most unusual. You came all the way up here to look in the bazaar for a mate to this?"

An orderly appeared, hot under the weight of a rolled-up kit and bedding sack. The squadron leader looked up, exasperated. "Take it back to the station, you idiot. Wait for me; don't follow me."

"Not in the bazaar," said Jacob; "up in the hills."

"Where, exactly? Please be more precise."

"I don't know where exactly. You see——"

"I'm afraid it's impossible at present." All at once the squadron leader became concise, issuing his instructions. Jacob should have understood why it was impossible. The mountain area was disaffected. The Kurds were on the prowl again with rifles. Troops stationed in the Kirkuk *liwa* were going through maneuvers along the foothills. The Mullah who held tribal leadership in the mountains had refused to come in to Baghdad to agree to a peace. Under the circumstances, no stranger could be permitted to enter the mountain region.

"Yes, Squadron Leader," said Jacob patiently, "but that's where I want to go. And if I go against your warning, you won't be responsible in any way. So that's all right."

"I can't agree." The officer was firm in his decision. "There's a train to Baghdad in a few hours. I'll have a lorry take you over to the IPC compound until then. That is, if you are certain you do not intend to visit the bazaar."

"I'm certain. You seem to be putting me under escort."

"Yes." Leicester looked at his watch. "Sorry. Higher authority, you know. Your unauthorized visit to the mountains cannot be allowed." For an instant he contemplated Jacob dubiously. "Baghdad's not such a bad place, really."

When he had departed, Jacob drank the strong breakfast tea without relish, weighing his chances of slipping away from higher authority in Kirkuk. At the moment the chances seemed to be nil. He was under observation if not actually under guard. All good motor vehicles would be in use by the oil company or the military. Thoughtfully he pocketed the bronze horse and went out to see if his bag was still where he had left it at the bungalow door. It was, but now a sentry eyed it from a discreet distance.

Then the black car whirled up. It stopped in a cloud of dust, as if belated. Glancing into Jacob's eyes, the driver jumped from the front seat to catch the American's hand and press it to his forehead.

"*Marhaba,*" the man muttered, and snatched up the bag, thrusting it into the back seat and holding the door open for Jacob. This unexpected individual, slender and active, wore a European suit but not as if he felt at home in it.

Jacob's glance took in the sentry fleetingly. Apparently the soldier was not disturbed by the sight of the civilian car calling for Ide, and Jacob had no least desire to disturb him. In three seconds he was in the back seat. Immediately the strange driver was at the wheel, turning into the drifting dust.

The advent of this old-fashioned car, unmistakably American, with nickel fittings carefully polished and a fine rug woven in a rose design on the seat, and fresh poppies in a vase, was as unexpected as the appearance of a taxi in the desert. Leaning back, Jacob reflected that poppies did not grow in the August heat of Baghdad or Kirkuk.

They shot past the station where the squadron leader's orderly waited obediently; they twisted with resounding horn through the alleys of Kirkuk, circled the ancient cemetery height, and roared out along the gray highway eastward. Jacob leaned forward to tell the driver to go toward the hills, and then realized they were going that way at eighty kilometers an hour. Not until they passed the soldiers an hour later did Jacob discover that his driver could not or would not speak to him.

Instead of slowing down when they neared the marching column, Jacob's jehu merely pushed on the horn. The soldiers—khaki-clad Iraklis escorting a train of mule-drawn mountain guns—divided hastily to make way for the car. They flashed past the vehicles, obsolescent Bren carriers and canvas-topped lorries, and bore down on the military car at the head of the column. Heads projected from it, and the uniformed driver waved his arm down for the black car to pull up.

"Stop!" Jacob exclaimed. There were officers, apparently British, in the lead car. "*Shway—shway! Here—ahsti.*"

Without slowing down, Jacob's driver swung out from the gravel road, past the officers' machine and back to the road again, leaving a screen of rolling dust behind him. Jacob half-expected to hear a shot, but none came.

The swarthy driver did not seem at all disturbed as he raced on. Jacob tried to get a word out of him in English, French, and broken Arabic, and had only a reassuring nod for an answer.

Jacob had no desire to pull up with an angry military convoy trailing him.

Presently his jehu did slow down, only to swing sharply off the road to the left. The car lurched in drifting dust, then sped on again into the open plain.

A dust whorl, driven by a vagrant wind, danced beside them. Peering out, Jacob saw no sign of a kilometer stone or house. Ahead of him stretched tawny foothills upon which sheep moved imperceptibly without a shepherd.

The black car was dwarfed by the vast plain, and for a second Jacob had the sensation of being driven forward, like the dust whorl, by a force he could not perceive.

Then he noticed that the car was following faint wheel marks that wandered among the hillocks but kept on purposefully, up toward a ridge of yellow sandstone. In this stone, gashed as if by a sword, the dark gut of a gorge showed.

Toward this the car sped. When it entered the shadow of the ravine, slowing down over a bed of rocks, Jacob decided to call a halt to get his bearings. This time he resorted to a universal sign language, touching the driver's shoulder and thrusting his arm forward, palm down. Immediately his jehu stopped.

The man then would take orders if he understood them. But why? And why had he picked up Jacob, of all the foreigners in Kirkuk, at the station resthouse? Probably, Jacob reflected, the simplest answer was the right one. The man had been sent to fetch someone, and Jacob had been the only person waiting there at the moment. It had been a coincidence of timing, no more than that. Yet he wanted very much to know where they were headed. Drawing his map from his bag, he got out to see what bearings were visible.

As he had expected, the military cars came into view on the plain below him, crawling along the gray ribbon of the road he had not taken. Satisfied that they were going on past the point where he had turned off, he tried to guess at the direction in which he was now headed. Overhead heat haze obscured the sun. Without

a sight of any familiar landmark—he could no longer make out the brilliant flares of the oil fields far below on the Tigris plain—he could only guess that the trail led north and east.

His small-contour map of the Middle East showed a pink line that was the highway below him but no trace of the trail on which he stood. A glance at the ravine revealed that the trail edged along the dry bed of a watercourse that had cut this cleft in the rock foundation of the slopes.

Laying the map on the ground, Jacob turned it to approximate roughly the bearing of the road below. A wind breath in the ravine pulled at the outspread paper, and Jacob took out his bronze Pegasus to weight down one flapping corner.

As he did so the driver who had been filling up the gas tank with tins taken from the back came over to watch him. Jacob beckoned him closer, and he squatted down, his thin face intent, his gray eyes questioning. Jehu, Jacob told himself, if you don't speak my languages you should know a map when you see one. And he put a finger on the road upon the map, waving an interrogatory hand at the hills. His chauffeur looked blank. A map, it seemed, meant no more to him than any colored picture.

Then he noticed the bronze horse. Picking it up, he examined it and said explosively, "*Araman!*"

Araman. It was the last word Jacob had expected this man to utter. Something in the winged horse had been familiar to him. This jehu of the black car had known intimately what the scientists of Baghdad were searching for with their tabulated knowledge. Smiling, the man pointed toward the ravine; Jacob folded up the map and nodded. "Wherever it is," he said, "we'll go." It seemed that their way led now not toward a designation on his map but toward something embodied in a piece of bronze.

Leaning out as the car started, he scanned the rock wall of the ravine. The smoothness of water erosion ran far up. In other ages melting snow to the northward must have fed the river that poured through this gut into the arm of the sea that had become the valley of the Tigris. Now the ravine formed a natural gateway to the northern hills.

The uneasiness he had felt in the plain had left him. The air

had grown cooler; for the first time in weeks he was not wet with perspiration. Idly he watched the trail ahead, noticing that it showed more hoofmarks of animals than tire tracks. Through the afternoon he dozed at times.

Toward sunset the car stopped and Jacob roused, to find himself beside a noisy running stream. Above him on a rock pinnacle two men with rifles were outlined against the glow in the sky. Jacob heard a high-pitched shout. As if waiting for this, his driver started on, edging his way through a flock of sheep.

They were climbing into the dusk of another ravine with stone huts crowding the slopes on either side of the road. The dwellings sank deep into the slopes, and cattle stood tethered on the roofs. When the driver sounded his horn, women appeared unveiled in the doorways, wrapped in loose homespun garments. The black car edged past staring children into the open gate of a courtyard wall. Circling through a growth of poplars with a final blast of the horn, it drew up at a door where a brown boy stood watch with a lantern. Here, apparently, was the end of the road. Jehu disappeared inside with his bag, and the boy led the American up creaking wooden stairs to a balcony.

Here Jacob found that he was being scrutinized by a mild and sad-looking individual wearing horn-rimmed glasses, over piled-up account books. He also became aware of a scent so strong that it blotted out other odors, a scent warmly sweet that he could not identify. The individual of the books seemed to be transfixed.

"Good evening," Jacob said, hoping that English was spoken here.

"Good evening, sah." The small brown man blinked, as if remembering his manners.

Jacob would have liked to ask where he was and why the car had brought him here; but it would have been foolish to ask, and he much preferred to be told. "It smells good." He smiled, sniffing.

The little man nodded without surprise. With a shy bow he held out a printed card bearing the legend *Parabat Ltd. Perfumes, essences, concentrated fruit flavors. Riyat and Calcutta.*

"My name is Ide," explained Jacob, who did not care to exhibit any card. "Mr. Parabat."

The proprietor bowed. "I regret my ailing English," he apologized. "But Miss Michal will entertain. You, of course, will stay, Mr. Ide?"

Jacob thought: this must be Riyat, and by the looks of the village this joint is the best to be had. "Yes," he admitted.

"It is a pleszhar." Again Mr. Parabat bowed, all the while clutching a fountain pen. "Miss Michal waits still."

Jacob took this as a signal for him to leave. The owl-like regard of Mr. Parabat followed him to the door. "Please, you are not British, sah?"

"No. American."

Down the stairway the overpowering sweetness hung in the air. The servant boy led him through a hall lined with demijohns in wicker cases out into a garden of twilight coolness and the fresher scent of flowers in bloom. Through these the path approached a lighted bungalow hung with lattices.

"Dak bungalow," said the boy. "*Meimun k̄haneh*—guesthouse." Gaining courage, he pointed to a door by the entrance steps where a servant in white linen rose at their approach. "*Hamam*," said the young linguist.

"Bath," nodded Jacob, who wanted one very much. With a sigh of relief he took off his coat. The veranda looked both cool and inviting, and he felt very grateful to Mr. Parabat.

"Hot water, Jemail," a woman's voice called.

She was curled up in a chair, over a book, and she untangled herself lazily. "You are late for tea—" She stopped abruptly. "What, in heaven's name, have you been doing to yourself, Aurel?"

Somewhere Jacob had seen that fragile body and the small head under disordered chestnut hair. On Shepherd's veranda she had laughed at the Americans, and he had remembered.

"Sorry," he grunted. "I'm Jacob Ide." And he added thoughtfully, "You were looking for the squadron leader, Aurel Leicester."

"I thought I was looking at him."

Yes, she had laughed just like that, quietly amused. It made Jacob feel both resentful and clumsy. He didn't feel like explaining about the car to this woman who did not seem to be thirty years old—who was too lovely to be anything but a hanger-on of

the top Britishers. But he found himself saying, "I'm sorry. I think the driver picked the wrong person."

"He did indeed, Mr. Ide. He brought you alone, without any quinine?" She chuckled suddenly. "He went all the way down for Aurel."

When the servants appeared with the hot-water kettle and trays, she exclaimed, "Guava cakes and gingered fruits. This place has everything. Do you like strong tea or weak tea, Mr. Ide?"

Jacob stared at the array of sweets without enthusiasm. "Don't you wait for Mr. Parabat?"

"Oh, he's so polite he never comes to the guesthouse. He'll be waiting to walk with me. Do you mind having tea with me, Mr. Ide? I'm Michal Thorne among other names, of which I have many. I think you want brandy, and we have some."

Michal Thorne. Miss Michal. Occupying the guesthouse in advance of him, where Squadron Leader Leicester would presumably show up in no amiable mood. She acted as if he had merely dropped in late at her home . . .

"You can call me anything you like," she confided, "except Miss Thorne. I'm trying to escape from Miss Thorne. It's very amusing, isn't it—except for the quinine—that Badr should pick you up by mistake. Were you going anywhere in particular, Mr. Ide, or mustn't I ask?"

"No. Nowhere in particular. I was only shopping around for bronze horses." He thought she chattered on mockingly like a Victorian hostess. But the bronze horses gave her pause.

"Then I won't ask. But you're American, aren't you? I can't help asking that."

"It has been asked before. The answer is, yes."

Michal Thorne considered him, as, coatless, he drank his brandy. He had hooked his cane over the arm of his chair. The silence between them was like time being marked off, when enemies face each other. After a moment Jacob noticed his bag by the door, pulled it over with his cane, and, opening it, extracted a box. "If you need quinine," he said, "here's some."

For an instant her eyes closed, as if, greatly stirred, she wished to hide her feeling from him. The quinine, which had almost

ceased to exist even in military supplies three years before, must have meant a great deal to her. Jacob had kept this handful of capsules from the time of his enlistment. Although the girl looked pale in the half-light of the veranda she did not appear to be sick.

"They're for someone else," she said quickly. Her eyes, masked of feeling, met his. The unspoken enmity that lay between them she accepted indifferently. "Can you spare a few, Mr. Ide?"

"I can spare them all. I don't use them."

"You might. Quinine's worth its weight in diamonds, isn't it?"

There had been no malaria in Cairo or the large cities which had formed Jacob's orbit. "At this altitude," he pointed out, "we're above the malaria belt."

"Perhaps. But I don't think anyone's safe near water. Listen."

Jacob had heard it before now—the steady rush of the stream below them and the thud of a waterfall on a millwheel. And again Michal read his mind. "It's all Mr. Parabat's doing, the irrigation for his herbaceous garden and the power for the wheel. He says mechanical power doesn't press juices properly—that only the fall of water can turn flowers into essence. But of course there's no electricity within a hundred miles. He's a dear, and a Zoroastrian with all kinds of inhibitions, and probably money enough to buy half of Baghdad including the Alawiah Club if he wanted to."

With a twinge Jacob thought: I took his car, and crashed his gate, and he did not ask for any explanations. I suppose being an American explains a little thing like blundering into another man's house.

"But he doesn't want to," Michal rambled on. "He loves having guests; at least he pretends to. He says he came to Riyat because obscure kinds of ferns and moss grow here, and Zarathushtra—Zoroaster—meditated in the hills above us. He likes to argue—I mean Mr. Parabat now—about Spengler's *Decline of the West*. I can't read it. When I skipped to the end about the survival of the most warlike men in a kind of modern *Götterdämmerung*, it gave me nightmares. But I'm perfectly willing to argue that our West is declining, while Mr. Parabat believes we are only going through birth pangs and the ordeal of the machine age. Perhaps because he

was educated at Oxford, he still believes in us when we no longer believe in ourselves."

She glanced across the garden. Framed against the afterglow of sunset, Mr. Parabat's stocky figure in white linen dinner clothes bent over two small animals, a white sheep and black goat, tied up at a safe distance from the flower beds. He seemed to be feeding them.

"I'm late at the rendezvous," said Michal Thorne. "Thank you for the quinine, Mr. Ide."

For a while Jacob watched the two figures moving along the garden walks, the young woman bending a little to keep her head near the small man who paced impassively the length of the garden that had been his shelter and his profit during a world war. The stars were out when Michal Thorne hurried back to the veranda, to disappear into the bedroom and emerge in ten minutes clad in white organdie, pulling a scarf around her. Snatching up her handbag and the precious quinine, she ran down the steps, pausing abruptly to call back, "Please don't wait anything for me."

No sooner had she gone than the servant Jemail appeared with a towel and a cake of homemade soap to announce that there was warm water in the shower bath below the veranda and to ask at what hour the sahib desired dinner.

"Nine o'clock," said the sahib.

Although places were set for two and a whole chicken appeared in due course on the table, Michal Thorne did not show up. When Jemail removed the tablecloth, he brought in a floor mattress and embroidered quilts, making up a bed on the sitting-room floor. His knowledge of English seemed to extend only to his performance as butler, because when Jacob questioned him about Riyat he took refuge in silence.

Jacob gathered that only one Englishman was posted nearer than Rowanduz on the main highway below, and that in Riyat the people were tribal, speaking only Kurdish, while the Indian servants understood also Hindi and Pashtu—all three unknown tongues so far as Jacob was concerned. The bungalow was nothing unusual, he knew, since the hospitality of the hills made much of any guest.

It was all run pleasantly enough, in the best Indian Service colonial tradition, yet it seemed odd that a manufacturer like Parabat should have set up a factory, even in wartime, in such a remote frontier region.

Probably, he reasoned, Jemail's one Englishman would prove to be Leicester, who was overdue in Riyat. And Jacob, just as obviously, had less chance of getting out of Riyat than of slipping out of Kirkuk.

Moreover, he did not want to have to leave the village just then. He had been glancing through the one book on the reading table, which proved to be a copy of Spengler, unabridged. For some time he studied the inscription scrawled on the flyleaf. *Mein Geleibter Freund, Ninghia Parabat.*

The angular writing was the same he had seen on the card at the museum. The writer, then, was a friend of Parabat's. And someone who did not care to sign his own name except for the initial W.

Curiously he turned to the last page, and found there, underscored: "the genuine sense of a great mission (*race quality*, that is, and training) . . . can become a center which holds together the being-stream of an entire people and enables it to outlast this time and make its landfall in the future. . . . It falls to us to live in the most trying times known to the history of a great Culture. The last race to keep its form, the last living tradition, the last leaders who have both at their back, will pass through and onward, victors."

So had Spengler, Jacob reflected, prophesied twenty years before a final conflict among civilized nations.

He wondered whether the original German owner, or Parabat, or Michal Thorne had underscored these words. Somehow he did not think Michal had done so.

Replacing the Spengler, he took up Aristotle, but found that he couldn't concentrate on the greatest of philosophers.

Going out onto the veranda, he sprawled on the steps, listening to the thudding creak of the water wheel and wondering what a woman dressed for evening could find to do in a hill village where the people all presumably slept until the dawn hour. Except for the

lamp behind him, he could see no trace of a light. She couldn't be with Parabat.

She came to the steps, a white wraith, with small heels tapping the earth, and sat down by him clutching her bag, her head bent. He could feel the faint warmth of her body, and he thought that he had never met with a woman whose mind seemed so dissociated from her body, and both so restless.

"What would you do," she asked the darkness, "with a person who wants to die?"

Obliquely, she had not spoken of a man or of a woman, only of an intangible person. Jacob rubbed the hard head of his cane. "Either go away quickly or stay with him all the time, I suppose," he ventured.

He could hardly catch her voice. "What's quinine? A bark the natives gathered in Java, or was it India, made by our scientists into capsules that can keep life going but can't preserve it. Then we couldn't get the bark because of the war."

"You have quinine."

"I know. I'm only trying to think, and that is a very difficult thing for me to do, so I mutter about it."

Jacob waited, thinking that she had tension in her, drawn fine, ready to break.

"You shouldn't have waited up. I don't mind the dark here. And Badr and Jemail hold the gate for me in duty bound because I am a distinguished guest in Riyat. Badr, who drove you up, always sits with his rifle over his knees in the deep shadow by the doorstep, but I think he really sleeps, and I know Jemail does on the rug inside. But no matter how I try, I can't catch Badr asleep—he opens the door before I can touch him."

Abruptly she was silent, as if listening. The water wheel moaned upon its measured beat. "I don't lock my door at night," her low voice went on, "because, as you may have noticed, there are no keys and no locks, either. Not even on the front door. Mr. Parabat says he has the only doors in Kurdistan and he is quite proud of them."

She waited for Jacob to speak; now she was attentive to him. When he said nothing, she went on: "Locks don't seem to be necessary here."

Jacob nodded. "I have nothing worth stealing."

Michal smiled, turning her head. "When I was here before, a Major Cunninghame thought otherwise. He piled chairs and valises against the front door before he would go to sleep. I'm very much opposed to that, because it's like shutting me in, without a way of escape. I resented the barricade."

"And so?"

"The barricade stayed. You can't argue with a senior major. At least I can't."

"I think you could, Miss Thorne." The resentment inside Jacob hardened his words. She wouldn't be here, on familiar terms with a man such as Parabat unless she was attached to British Intelligence; nor would she talk on so guilelessly unless she wanted to find out certain things about him. So he reasoned, not quite believing it.

Michal's head didn't move, but her eyes went blank, as if she had been struck. "Were you a colonel or some such personage in this war?" she asked quietly.

Barely Jacob kept from admitting that he had been no more than a captain. "I was never a soldier," he confessed.

She still looked at him as if not seeing him. And he thought, she can't be afraid.

Lightly she touched his cane. "I only asked because this is one of the worst places on the habitable earth for an officer to go about in mufti just now. I think Diogenes with his lantern or Mr. Pickwick with his notebook could wander through these hills and be wine and dine. But it's not safe for a foreign officer——"

"I understand."

"I hope you do. I told Mr. Parabat—he asked me about you—that you were a shell-shocked American with a complex about horses, and that you didn't know what you were doing when you took his car. I did it for one reason."

Again she waited, and Jacob said nothing.

"Among many other things such as Finnish and Scottish, I'm American too," she explained, and went to her room.

When Jacob had blown out the light, he left the bungalow door carefully open and stretched out on his mattress, listening to

Michal stirring in the bedroom and the beat of the water wheel, feeling the cold breath of the mountains coming into the door that was her way of escape.

The message arrived the next afternoon. Michal had not appeared by midmorning, and Jacob went to explore the village because he couldn't find Mr. Parabat, and when he looked into the rooms of the factory around the garden he beheld a few young Indian and tribal women working over tables fitted with burners, alembics, and rows of vials.

The mountain village, as he had suspected, was small. The people, all wearing rough homespun, stared at him from doorways and housetops without coming near him. No modern building other than the factory existed in Riyat, except for a small stone cabin with a screened veranda, perched among some cedars, up the slope. No one appeared to be moving about the cabin. Jacob felt like an intruder. He made up his mind to borrow a horse and start out of the village, he did not know where.

After lunch he looked for Michal, to tell her he was leaving. She seemed to be the common denominator of all the human beings here, and it was easier to tell her than Mr. Parabat.

She was snipping jonquils, wearing gloves, in the bed nearest the black goat. She told him that of course he could have a horse. Only the day before she had gone riding.

In the hot sunlight her chestnut hair shadowed her thin face, and he noticed how her eyes slanted when she tilted her head. "Did you find any bronze horses this morning?" she asked, over the flowers.

"I haven't started digging yet," he acknowledged. "I'm particular where I dig, and this doesn't seem to be a likely spot."

Casually he explained that he had no other purpose than to look for archaeological remains in the way of bronzes, of which he had heard at Baghdad. "The factor of finding them is about one in fifty," he confessed. "Not much of a chance, but it brought me here—or your driver did."

Michal laughed. "I'm here because I want to be nowhere else.

This garden is a woman's paradise, if you did but know it, Mr. Ide. I think it's a pagan garden because it has only a sheep and goat for tutelary deities—they're mixed up in some obscure way with Mr. Parabat's religion, which he never discusses. All I have to do is to clap my hands and real servants come running, like jinn. I can crook my finger for all the perfume stuffs that Chanel and Lelong dream on. It suits my natural laziness, and I love it." She surveyed the handful of jonquils with satisfaction. "My day's work."

Badr the driver appeared, importantly, offering a folded paper. Michal opened it swiftly and cried out, "The devils!"

Her eyes swept down the paper again and her lips pressed together. "It's Aurel's chit. He's not coming. They've ordered him to—somewhere else. But he could have helped here; he's the only one who could have helped."

"How?"

Michal hesitated, crumpling the message. "And he says there's no quinine in Baghdad. Why"—she began to weigh her words—"it's only politics. He had been assigned to this area as liaison officer to the Kurds. They have confidence in him. It's—oh, it's devilish because someone seems to want an outbreak here, a small one. But that means lives."

"And preserves military authority."

Michal nodded absently. "It used to be an old story. You know—divide and rule, trouble the waters in order to fish in them, let the frontier be disturbed and keep the Ministry of Defense under your thumb. Elderly colonels with livers, and gin pahits, and dancing on the club verandas." She looked up curiously. "But how did you know?"

Jacob hesitated. At Cairo he had pored diligently through thousands of pages of British reports for four years, and had drawn his own conclusions. "At least," he said lamely, "our cousins don't make a secret of it."

Faintly Michal sighed. She hardly seemed to be paying attention. "Oh, the pukka colonel-sahibs don't. They're as honest as drawing-room whist, and I respect them for it. But if you think that the British Foreign Office has no secrets, you're much mistaken,

Mr. Ide. Aurel didn't tell me that. He didn't like the colonial caste any better than I, and he worked among the Kurds to prevent just the kind of spontaneous uprising that seems to be going on now. It's all much too deep for me but I do understand that much. And now they've pulled him out, to send him a thousand miles away to inventory war-weary lorries. It won't break his heart, of course; it will only smash what he hoped for."

Gently she prodded the shears into the earth. "I'm afraid it won't be good for my garden."

Jacob thought: if it had not been for a twist of chance, Squadron Leader Aurel Leicester would be here in the garden instead of me, and the recall order might still be wandering about Kirkuk, as orders had a way of wandering.

"I'm never going to leave my garden," said Michal.

Sunlight filtered through the tracery of pepper trees, bright on Michal's head, bent over the yellow flowers, burnished gold over yellow. Jacob, watching the play of the sunlight, knew that he did not want to leave Mr. Parabat's garden that afternoon. He wanted to sit there, smoking his pipe on the porch, useless. Aurel Leicester would have been off on horseback somewhere, getting things done. And Michal, understanding the need that drew him away, would be arranging her flowers against his return, when the officer would take her in his arms and neither of them would think of barricades or escape doors. Nursing his pipe, Jacob reflected that the quiet of this garden had been disturbed, not so much by the unrest of the hills around it as by the cold calculation of a nameless official in Cairo or London.

For a moment she was silent. "I'm sorry I was cross." She considered him briefly. "I'll feel much better about it if you'll stay for tea and take the cakes as they come—and say that after all you regret leaving the thyme and *olynthus Asiaticus* and Castor and Pollux." She waved her basket toward the tethered sheep and goat.

"I hope you never have to leave Castor and Pollux," said Jacob abruptly. "I don't belong here, but you do by right."

"Is that a compliment?" Michal considered. "I'm quite sure nothing sweet could ever be distilled out of me. Poor Mr. Parabat

endures me because he is really sweet and kind—he lets me stay in his garden because it is all so good for me.” Her eyes turned up to him with faint defiance. “Whenever you want a horse, I’ll order you a charger complete with saddlebags.”

As if dismissing him, Michal began to arrange her flowers.

It was Jacob who caught the beat of the horse hoofs first. The sun had left the garden, to soften on the higher slopes, and he noticed as he sat across from Michal and the tea things that Mr. Parabat had not materialized to feed Castor and Pollux. Nor was Jemail in evidence when he heard the confused tread in the road outside—as if cavalry were passing in ranks. He reached for his stick and got up.

“What is it?” Michal asked.

“They don’t drive cattle here, or hold parades. We might take a look at whatever it is.”

As they crossed the garden, servants emerged to follow them to the gate, where Mr. Parabat joined them.

Then, from the gateway, beside Mr. Parabat and Badr, they saw the Mullah’s army pass through Riyat.

The cascade of mounted men flowed down the ravine, pressing between the walls of the houses. Some young women rode with the tribesmen.

The horses moved as if at the end of a long march, not picking their way carefully. Purple and green and red gleamed in the headcloths of the men; sometimes silver ornaments glinted from headstall and saddle. The Kurds rode easily in the saddle, apparently paying no attention to the villagers watching from the roofs.

“Havabands and Herki, and Baradust riders,” said Mr. Parabat. He whispered to Michal, who drew her scarf across her nose, like a veil. She explained afterward to Jacob that most of these riders had never seen a foreign woman before, and would think it indecent of her not to be veiled on the street.

Badr watched the passing warriors critically, with hunger in his dark eyes.

With surprise, Jacob noticed their fine bodies. They balanced themselves rhythmically, their young faces vacant yet stirred by an intangible delight in movement and in being together. Their faces shone with sweat and with delight, because they were following a road that might lead to battle.

They wore homespun dyed in the hills; they sat on homemade saddles ornamented by women's hands. The only things about them that came from the West were the rifles they carried. Jacob's experienced eye picked out long Mausers, relics of the older war, squat Italian carbines, stolen Enfields, and even a few light machine guns obtained he knew not where. The possessors of such weapons wore bandoliers of heavy cartridges about their shoulders. He thought of last-century Zouaves with baggy trousers, of Boer commandos. He heard the village women chanting.

"What is that?" Michal whispered.

Spectacled Mr. Parabat listened doubtfully. "It is something they sing, Miss Michal, about their boys the Kurds. You know"—and the plump man brightened at the thought—"like boys carrying home their shields, or being carried defunct upon them."

Michal pulled suddenly at Jacob's arm, still keeping her scarf up. "Do something, can't you! Stop them."

"Those men?" Jacob was estimating that they numbered less than two thousand and had no means of facing artillery. "With what, Michal?"

Suddenly Badr pointed up the road. "*Mullah Ismail amad.*"

Catching at Mr. Parabat, Michal cried, "Mr. Bigsby! If he could talk to the Mullah! He can't, so you must make the Mullah go up to Mr. Bigsby."

To Jacob's surprise, the scent manufacturer hopped into the road. No one made way for him, and he dodged under horses' noses to the rein of a rider without a rifle.

Instead of an old man in robes and voluminous turban, as Jacob had fancied him, the Mullah Ismail, leader of this warband, proved to be a middle-aged tribesman in a worn jacket who had, however, Daoud's intensity shadowed in his eyes. Reining in, he listened carefully to Mr. Parabat. He spoke a few words, while the riders

around him edged closer to listen; then he passed on. Not once had he glanced toward the foreign woman.

By the same zigzag process Mr. Parabat worked his way back to the gate, panting and wiping dust from his spectacles.

"That is what you call a holy man," he remarked impassively. "He says he has no house for his head, he has no wealth. He asks nothing, except the air and the earth of these hills. If the British officers wish to talk, they can come to him."

"Damn!" said Michal.

Strings of cattle, pack mules, and a few laden camels followed in the wake of the armed riders, in the thickening dust. Walking wearily, or riding on the laden beasts, women appeared carrying babies, older children running by them. Jacob wondered if the first crusaders who had followed the hermit Peter had taken their families with them.

The storm must have come up after dark. The hands of his watch pointed at nearly three when Jacob woke, hearing the surging clatter of rain on the roof. Wind eddies from the open door tugged at his quilts, and after a drowsy moment he got up, and, closing the door, wrapped himself more securely.

He was half asleep, listening to the tattoo on the roof, when he sensed movement in the room. Something—a chair—scraped, although the air in the room was still.

Quietly Jacob found his lighter and snapped it on. The point of flame showed nothing changed in the room. In the chair by the bedroom door Michal sat with her head back against the wall.

"Do you mind if I stay here for a while?" she said quickly.

Getting up again, he went over to the chair. She wore some kind of a mandarin robe and she kept her eyes closed, her hands clasped tight together. The moving flame threw the shadow of her hair dark against the white of her throat.

"I shut the door," Jacob assured her, "on account of the wind. Want it open again?"

She shook her head.

"Are you cold, Michal?"

"No." After a moment she looked up, her eyes empty, at the light. "It's only the gunfire down the valley. I'll be all right when it stops."

Jacob listened carefully. "There are no guns going; it's the rain."

Again she shook her head. "It's not that. I can hear it, Jacob. I ought to know. Ever since that ravine, and the people caught——"

"What ravine?"

"To Argos, in the night. I've been jittery since the Kurds came by. Of course they weren't refugees."

Argos had been a port of Greece, one of the evacuation ports. Five years before. He saw that her lips were twisting under the clamp of her teeth. It didn't do her any good to talk, or listen to him. Quickly he snapped out the light, picked her up clumsily, and sat in the chair holding her, surprised that she weighed so little.

Her hands and cheek were cold. Through the softness of her breast he felt her heart pounding, and that meant fear. So he gripped her hands, listening to the sharp breathing she tried to control. "There's no firing going on, Michal. This is Mr. Parabat's bungalow you're in, with a whopper of a shower sounding off. Isn't it?"

She relaxed a little, her hair caught across her face. Lifting a hand, he pushed it back, feeling her head against his shoulder, feeling the pulse throbbing in her throat. Whatever old fear or obsession gripped her held her motionless. The warmth of her ran through his body, and his hand pressed her throat. She wanted that, he thought, and certainly had wanted to be carried to her bed by the other men. Then he felt her hand pull at his.

He could not carry her to the door. But he could go there himself. She was trying to free herself from his hand, and he moved so that she could rest in the chair while he reached for his stick. Unsteadily, feeling weakness in his limbs from the desire for her, he felt his way to the door and opened it to the cold breath of the wind.

Then he laughed, not steadily. "Now you can hear it, Michal. That water wheel is your artillery."

Under the flooding of the storm the primitive wheel was thudding heavily. After waiting a minute, he went to the table and lit

the lamp. She sat in the chair, her feet gathered under her now, not looking at him.

"You are doing a fine job, Jacob—comforting a damsel in distress."

"No."

"Yes, you are. You lie very well, Jacob, because I keep expecting you to be truthful. Only you always look away when you lie, and now I've caught on to you. I almost believed my cannon were your water wheel."

Her voice rose a little, as if she were trying to keep from laughing. Jacob cursed the distant thudding of the wheel.

Fishing in his coat pocket, he held a package of cigarettes out to her, and she lit one absently from the lamp. Then he felt the weight in his pocket, and put the bronze Pegasus abruptly in front of her, on the table.

"Shut up!" he exclaimed. "And look at that."

Michal laughed. "So there is a bronze horse. Jacob, I never believed until this minute there was a bronze horse."

Seizing upon her interest, he said emphatically, "It's not just a bronze horse. This is a proto-Pegasus, with a pedigree seven thousand years old." And he started to tell her how the statuette had been identified.

She stirred restlessly, dropping the cigarette and picking it up again. "I'm sorry, Jacob, but I'm not fond of archaeology. Digging things up seems like uncovering a cemetery and opening up graves long before Judgment Day. Even cities look like skeletons when you uncover them," drowsily her voice checked. "Babylon did. They have taken everything away from Babylon except the one stone lion to mark the spot where Babylon lay." She nodded earnestly. And Jacob wondered what the fear could be that gripped her so hard. "Jacob, I must take you to Mr. Bigsby tomorrow. He knows all the secrets buried in the earth around here. That's because he has lived here for three generations. Yes, Mr. Bigsby's your man."

Jacob winced, starting to speak.

"But tomorrow, not today. Today has been a bad day from beginning to end. Now we've finished with today, tell me another

story, not necessarily a true story, but of some high and far-off thing."

In desperation he searched his memory. "When I'm tired at night, I go sailing in a sloop on a river."

When he stopped, aware of the absurdity of his words, she nodded encouragement. "On what river? Go on."

It had been his grandfather's sloop, beating up the Hudson through the vagrant winds around Storm King. The hilltops had been dark against the moonrise, and, as a boy, he had watched for the appearance of the ship in the sky that might be a warning. He told her all that had happened during a voyage of the sloop.

"It's nice to be there," she muttered sleepily. "You steer very skillfully, Jacob. Only my cannon are not any portent, like your spectral ship. They are real."

Soon she was asleep, her head against his shoulder. When he was certain of that, he blew out the lamp and waited for daylight. When the rain came down hard, the water wheel churned noisily, groaning as if in human pain, and often then Michal whimpered in her sleep.

By midmorning the sky had cleared and the garden breathed moistly under a blazing sun. Badr and Jemail gossiped, squatting at a respectful distance from the veranda steps where Jacob waited. Girls who looked like truant children emerged to hang around the workshop doors. This concourse of the garden had the appearance of waiting for Michal Thorne to come forth and join it. Something was radically wrong, he told himself, with this perfume factory; granting that a shrewd mind like Mr. Parabat's could distill scents and concentrates here and market them via the black car and Kirkuk—and Jacob had to admit that labor must be cheap here, while the perfumes could bring fantastic prices—still that did not seem to be reason enough for a man of Parabat's taste to sequester himself so far from Bombay or Baghdad.

Michal came out. The servants stopped their interlude, the work-women edged out into the garden. Jacob noticed how she merely moved from one group to the other, letting the servants discuss

their problems, allowing the shy girls to gather around her with children holding to them. They had brought out their children for her to see and to exclaim over. She was dressed as if she were going to pay a morning call in the Avenue Kléber, even carrying gloves.

She is coming out of her feudal manor, Jacob told himself irritably, to mingle with the villagers; she is fastidious and tolerant of them only because they serve her, and they admire her for it.

Michal moved toward him, attentive to the patter of a girl child, slender herself and walking with the balance of a dancer or climber.

"I'm very nervous about this," she observed, coming to rest at the steps, "because I'm taking you unannounced to call on Clement Bigsby. Shall we go?"

So she had not forgotten her assurance of the night before. Surprisingly, she showed no trace of weariness, unless to screw up her eyes against the sun's glare. She moderated her step easily to his.

When they had left Badr behind at the gateway, Jacob asked abruptly what had happened during her escape from Argos.

"It wasn't mine. It was Miss Thorne's."

"I know. But what happened to her?"

For a moment Michal occupied herself in avoiding the mud in the street. "It was quite accidental, if you must know. I had moved over from Napoli long before—remember the time when Italy had not yet decided to march her legions upon Greece?—and stayed at the British Embassy in Athens. I liked the Temple of the Winds because it had no priests and of course no tourists were visiting it then. I felt the usual glow when Greece began to resist, and volunteered to nurse anything and everything, being not even a student nurse. I was then a very young person and thought myself important, and I suppose I was difficult."

"And so . . ."

"Not one shell or bomb burst came near me." Michal breathed deep, flinging up her head. "It was the train of the casualties that burned at Corinth. It was the burning up of those severely wounded, and we all clothed in white just looking on. They carried in burned bodies that moved and were alive." Michal nodded. "That was the start of my journey to Argos, where the Australians

took care of me and I couldn't manage to do anything except look on. Shall we skip the journey?"

Politely, she was answering his questions. Carrying the copy of Spengler, he maneuvered morosely through the mud, until she turned into the path that climbed to the stone cottage.

"I haven't announced you, Mr. Ide," she confided, "because Sir Clement has a horror of visitors now that he is dying, I think chiefly of malaria but also because he has no visible motive for living. He is very restrained. He has many initials like FRGS and medals from things like the Royal Academy. Once he was a brigadier at Gallipoli, and he lost his son in some other place. He lives and breathes innermost Asia—not the foyers we know—but he is a darling." She reflected fleetingly. "His household gods, which he could not have seen for years, were blasted in London five years ago. That's all the briefing."

At the screened veranda she greeted a bearded Indian servant who looked like a cavalry officer. Without surprise this servant ushered them in.

Clement Bigsby, in an immaculate dressing gown, was lying among piled-up books. He seemed not at all disturbed by Jacob's intrusion (and Jacob reflected moodily that this was because Michal brought him). His dark eyes barely passed over the American, and he said that he was much obliged for the quinine Mr. Ide had sent by Michal's hand. Would they have a vermouth or coffee?

And in the library-sickroom Michal bloomed, waited upon by the deft Indian. Jacob noticed among the volumes flanking Sir Clement a set of Stein's *Serindia* and many German works he could not read.

"Mr. Ide," the woman of Riyat explained in a breath, "is a very persistent man. He wants information, and you may as well be good-natured and give it to him, about bronze horses and all the archaeological hoards of Kurdistan." She grinned at Jacob. "Produce the image. I know you've got it."

Like Daoud, Clement Bigsby exclaimed at sight of the winged horse. "A beautiful thing." He turned the small horse to the light, his eyes intent. "I've never seen one like it. You could sell it for a very large sum of money, Mr. Ide."

"I'm not selling it."

"He's looking for more like it," Michal amended. "Ambitious man."

Sir Clement raised his brows. "You've come to Riyat for that?"

"Americans don't always buy things," Michal put in firmly, "to sell for a profit."

Although fascinated by the Pegasus, the sick man avoided speaking of it. When he heard Jacob's account of the discussion of the bronzes at the museum, he only said that if Daoud ibn Khalid had set their date at seven millenniums, it must be correct.

Sensitive to impressions, Jacob felt that his appearance had disturbed the elderly scholar. Sir Clement devoted his attention to Michal. Evidently he counted on her visits—so much so that Jacob wondered if she might have come to Riyat to be with him. The game of pretense they played, that Sir Clement was an important person—a VIP, Michal called it, a very important person—gave proof of an old friendship.

"He relishes my marked attentions," she confided in Jacob; "they flatter his self-love and remind him that he is one to whom many women pay tribute of adoration."

It was an old-fashioned game, Jacob thought, and Michal could play it well.

"They remind me, Michele, that you are one among many women."

"And so he ministers to my self-esteem."

Deftly, Sir Clement had barred Jacob from the friendly interchange without seeming to do so. When Michal complained that Aurel Leicester had been ordered away from Riyat, he was silent.

"You know that someone ought to be with the Kurds," she urged. "It ought to be someone they know—and you can't go out to them."

"I knew Shaikh Mahmoud of Sulaimani," he murmured, "but the Mullah Ismail is one of the younger zealots and distrusts our politicians."

"With excellent reason. But you have long ceased to be a politician; you are the author of a forthcoming important book."

Sir Clement only smiled.

"The book," Michal prompted, "about the Kurds—the people forgotten by the world, you called them."

With a sharp surprise, Jacob realized that Michal had brought Sir Clement to speak of what he wanted to hear.

"They are not forgotten by the world, my dear. They were never remembered."

"That's better." Michal nodded. "I was afraid you were going to be difficult."

Sir Clement regarded her with mild distrust.

"What do you know of them in America, Mr. Ide?"

"Almost nothing"—Jacob avoided disclosing what he might possess in the way of knowledge; Sir Clement had a trick of probing with sudden questions—"except that they are savage tribes, expert in brigandage."

Sir Clement sighed. He spoke clearly, with an effort, drawing in few words a picture that Jacob had perceived only obscurely.

"On the contrary, they happen to be one of the most unfortunate people on earth, although unlisted by UNRRA or the omniscient UNO. Kurdistan has become the world's largest concentration camp. This happened by an accident of geography, of course, and by the political need of certain great nations as well. The truth about the Kurds is incredible simply because no one has imagined it could happen so."

"Go on," purred Michal. "What happened?"

"It happened quite a long time ago. The Kurds still call these mountains the Land of the Dawn. They call themselves *the holders of the hills and keepers of the tongue*—of the original language, of course. The dialect of the Mukri Kurds today has close affinity to Sanskrit."

"Please don't be too technical."

"Quite. But we recognize very clearly that Kurdish is Aryan speech in one of the purest forms existing today, older, I believe, than the original Greek. You see what that means, of course?"

"The Kurdish tribes are our kinsmen in a way," Jacob agreed.

"In a very real way, Mr. Ide." Sir Clement's weak voice strengthened as he spoke of a belief that he seemed to feel emotionally. Michal, interested, was silent for once.

The Kurds, he went on, had been isolated in their homeland. Dwelling in these mountains, they had remained apart from the

cross-currents of migration and the fertilization of trade and war. They had been divided into tribes by the roadless mountain ridges; in their separate upland valleys these tribes had developed different dialects and habits. Here they had tended on the heights the altar fires which had been originally the flame of some petroleum deposit—these mountains yielded the petroleum that fed, nowadays, the great oil fields at Baku, Kirkuk, and Masjidi-Sulaiman.

In spite of their separation into tribal groups, the Kurds had preserved certain characteristics—of pride in race and courage, in their mutual preservation of the old Aryan tongue. They had not intermixed with the peoples beyond the mountains. And they had defended their mountain citadel against militant peoples of the lowlands, the Assyrians, Parthians, Greeks, and Romans. In more modern times they had resisted the advances of the Persians and Arabs, the formidable Mongols of Genghis Khan, and the warriors of the last great Asiatic empire, the Turks.

Now they had only folk memories of the eternal fire of earth and their earlier reverence for the distant fire of the sun. They had kept, however, their romantic notions. While they had deteriorated in what was called civilization, they had retained the pattern of their impulses.

"A case of enduring childhood. Mentally, these fellows have retrogressed to teen age. They still sing *chantfables* of derring-do and torture and love. The trouble is that they have formed the habit of acting out their childish ideas. There's a word for that sort of thing, Michele."

"Exhibitionists."

"Yes. The outer peoples used to live in fear of Kurdish raids, so the tribes around here play the part of raiders and romantic lovers."

"Of Lochinvars and Valentino *shaiḳhs*." Michal nodded gravely. "And women still like that sort of acting, even if scientists don't."

Jacob remembered how Mullah Ismail had marched his followers through Riyat, like medieval crusaders. Sir Clement weighed Michal's words delicately.

"Yes, my dear, you might say that these tribesmen are survivals

of the mentality of Arthur's Round Table. And their women do seem to be content with the situation as it is."

"'White hands cling to the bridle rein,'" murmured Michal, and the elderly scholar glanced at her pensively.

Jacob reflected that these mountains had formed the hinterland of three eighteenth-century empires, the Persian, Turkish, and Russian. Under the shahs and the tsars and the sultans, such as Abdul Hamid, the Kurds had not been molested, but they had been reached by no missionaries or archaeologists from the outer world. They had followed their own design for living.

Michal seemed to read his mind. "Then came modern industrialists to drill for oil, and—no more Kurdistan," she put in. "It would be so inconvenient to have a Kurdish nation formed in this beautiful hinterland over such fine strategic oil deposits. The Kurds haven't any use for oil except to burn it in their lamps, and we have."

"And I'm afraid there are minerals too," murmured Sir Clement.

"And so Mullah Ismail goes marching forth to defend his hills against the artillery of civilization which will kill a lot of his people and probably disturb my garden, and we three intelligentsia can do nothing about it."

Sir Clement made no answer.

Realizing that the orientalist had said all that he intended to, Jacob produced the copy of Spengler, showing him the inscription on the title page signed by the single letter W.

"Did you ever see this handwriting before, Sir Clement?" he asked.

A gleam came into the dark eyes. "Vasstan!"

The name told Jacob much, and he was not surprised when Sir Clement told the inquisitive Michal that she had been born too late to know Vasstan. When Jacob called his attention to the word Araman, and explained Daoud's argument about it and his own guesswork, Sir Clement merely turned the pages of the copy of Spengler.

"Your reasoning is quite excellent, Mr. Ide," he murmured. "However, your premise may be entirely wrong. Araman may not be the name of a place."

"What else could it be?"

"There is no way of telling. Westerners have a habit of thinking too much of *places* in Asia. It has been so always. The lure of the unknown, you know. Cathay, the mythical land of Prester John, and more recently Tibet. I can remember when Tibet was popular in *causeries*, filled with mysterious lamaseries and snow peaks and esoteric ideas. The theosophists made much of it, did they not?"

Abandoning the Spengler, he picked up the winged horse. He is refusing to answer, very politely, Jacob thought.

"I mean merely that such names, coined by Europeans, fascinated our fancy. They were names invented by us and did not derive from within Asia. You concentrated very well, Mr. Ide, on identifying a place, assuming the place to exist. It may not. Araman could be a thing, or a prophet long since dead, or even a prophecy. What is Mecca, except a black curtain hung around a black stone which is a meteorolite?"

His voice trailed off as he stared at the horse.

"You're tired," said Michal quickly.

"Islam is a word and an idea. The Asiatics answer to things of the mind more than we do. They may wait for the coming of an Imam, or Messiah. They can be led to battle by a green banner as the Senussi were. They can even be led by a young dreamer like Ismail who does not know his own mind except when he is told by——" Sir Clement broke off, tapping the bronze Pegasus. "This lovely thing could be a god, or the symbol of a civilization. Certainly the Kurds of today could not make one like it. They have lost the art of doing so. Your secret may lie in this bronze, not on a mountain top."

You have been very careful, Jacob told himself, to keep from me any real information about Araman; you were startled by the Vasstan signature and you are wondering how much I know about such things and I think you tried to confuse me.

At parting, Sir Clement did not invite him to call again.

Michal lingered in the room, and the sick man watched her, his eyes unguarded. Vigorously, she shifted pillows around.

"Your American is quite attractive," he murmured.

"By that you mean you do not quite like him."

"He has such a matter-of-fact mind."

"Try to make him change it——" Michal stopped in mid-breath thoughtfully. "Wouldn't he be useful around here? You could keep on not telling him things and being amused."

Sir Clement reflected. "I am not so certain of that. He's not like you in that respect, not in the least like you."

In her permutation Michal had moved to the stand of medicines, and now she extracted the quinine box, peering into it with dissatisfaction. The number of quinine capsules had not diminished. "When are you going to let Badr drive you down to the Royal Hospital in Baghdad?" she demanded.

"I have been in the Royal Hospital in Baghdad, my dear. Besides, the road is not safe."

"You are being stern and Victorian—a servant of the Queen's Majesty." She sighed, abandoning the pillows and medicines. "You worry me, and it's very uncomfortable." Impulsively she bent over him, kissing both cheeks. "No, I don't mean that. But I *am* worried."

Capturing one of her hands, he touched it with his lips. "White hands cling to the bridle rein," he whispered.

That night, at a dinner served impeccably by Jemail, Jacob faced Michal and wondered at her, feeling an unspoken challenge in her. Because of Michal, Jemail walked more softly and smiled oftener. Because of Michal, Sir Clement had let drop a name important to Jacob, that of Vasstan.

That name was known through the caravanserais of Asia. It had worried the British in the first war more than an army, because the lone German officer known as Vasstan had got loose around the frontiers of India, as Von Luckner had at sea, and had stirred up the tribes, keeping just ahead of the British pursuit. Like Von Papen, he had appeared again in Turkey in the last war, proving to be as elusive as a ghost, and finally disappearing from sight after V-E Day. Apparently Vasstan had left his trace in these mountains. Certainly he knew Mr. Parabat. And he might have sent the bronze

pen case as a memento to the British at Baghdad. A very active if elderly ghost . . .

"Was it satisfactory," Michal's voice interrupted, "the information you got from him?" And, as Jacob hesitated, "I mean Sir Clement, of course."

It was as if he had spoken aloud to her. Quietly she waited, her supple body still, an old jeweled clasp shining against the curve of her shoulder. Her bared throat seemed too slight to support the mass of her gleaming hair. Over the flowers she had cut that day her eyes, dark at night, questioned his not ironically but gravely as a child's.

And he wondered if she were even thirty years of age. Her pallor and the slimness of her arms and hands that could not have known the strain of physical labor made her unreal in the glow of the old-fashioned lamp in this garden of a Zoroastrian. Feeling old and awkward, he stretched his hard brown hands on the white tablecloth. "Some of it was quite satisfactory," he answered carefully, "thanks to you."

This knowing child sheltered by other men, playing idly with words and thoughts, was an antagonist. She wanted no more than to live each hour, in her kind of gayety, as if there might not be another.

"I used my utmost wiles on your behalf." Michal nodded cheerfully. "But he's like Petronius Arbiter—no, like the fellow stanch as a snow peak, and I can't do anything with him. He won't leave these mountains to take care of himself. I think he has something on his mind, to be done."

"Such as?"

Her eyes smiled at him swiftly. "I don't know, Mr. Ide. It must be something no one else can do, unless——" She hesitated, and surprised him by exclaiming, "Oh, I wish I could persuade you to stay! Truthfully, I can't tell you why, but I feel it." And she hurried on. "You could study in his library. I think you ought to know a lot more before starting out after the bronze horses, Jacob."

And, Jacob reflected, he could keep the astute Englishman company and probably do a few chores for him on the side. Michal knew that well enough.

"And I could sit on Mr. Parabat's veranda," he pointed out.

"Mr. Parabat likes to see you sitting on his veranda," she assented, pleased. "He said so."

Jemail intruded, escorting Sir Clement's man. The Indian saluted and held out a folded notepaper to Jacob, who took it, wondering why it was not for Michal.

He read:

CAPTAIN IDE. *Before you leave Riyat will you have the kindness to call upon me? I would not ask it if it were not urgent.*

The message was signed CLEMENT BIGSBY.

Somehow the Englishman had learned that he held a commission. Allowing for the orientalist's restraint, Jacob guessed that the older man wanted to see him very urgently.

"Yes," he told the servant. "Tomorrow morning."

After a second's hesitation he gave the note to Michal.

"I knew you were an officer," she said promptly, "and it worried me."

"Why?"

"Why did I know? It was something in the way you said you had never been a soldier."

"I meant it, Michal. I sat at a desk. I read reports. At times I commuted around on planes."

Again her eyes questioned him gravely. "I understand—at least I think so."

Suddenly she put down her tiny coffee cup. "You needn't sit on the veranda here, Jacob, just because I asked it, or for us."

He could only stare at her.

"You mustn't worry because I heard cannonading in the waterfall. It's not latent shock that bothers me. It's myself. You did a splendid job of bringing me back to the norms of existence." She held out her hand to him. "And I thank you for it."

When Jacob was admitted after breakfast the next morning to Sir Clement's library, he found a surprise awaiting him. Grinning cheerfully, Daoud Khalid sat in the chair Michal had occupied.

Daoud rose, laughing. "My grandfather lives down the street,

Captain Ide." And he added as Jacob stared, "Don't you remember your three landmarks—Mr. Bigsby, a mountain called Araman, and my family? Behold, you have come to the right place."

"I was brought here."

"Well, here you are, safe."

The aged orientalist looked as if he had not slept well. He looked like a tired Roman patrician. "You did not inform me that you held a commission in the American Military Intelligence, Captain Ide."

"I am traveling; on leave. For all I know my discharge may have come through."

This did not satisfy Sir Clement. "You are not under orders?"

Daoud watched his friend curiously. Unmistakably the Arab took his cue from the British scholar. He was a product of Oxford in more ways than one, and his loyalty lay with his teachers, in spite of his liking for Jacob.

"I am not under orders. I came to Baghdad by chance, and that driver, Badr, brought me up here by accident. You can ask him about that if you wish." He felt the old sense of hostility at being questioned like a spy merely because he had ventured into one of the British closed preserves in Asia. Daoud was accepted here—probably Michal would welcome the brilliant archaeologist gladly—because he belonged to the caste.

The ghost of a smile touched the Englishman's lips. "We questioned him last night. Badr swears he mistook you for Aurel Leicester. A pity, but past remedying now." For a moment he considered. "Please tell me how you happened to buy the bronze Pegasus."

"Proto-Pegasus," corrected Daoud.

When Jacob explained, the orientalist shook his head. "A solitary soldier at Shepherd's—a single fine bronze among a lot of gimcracks. And sold to you for only a fraction of its value. All that is unlikely, most unlikely."

"I know it is."

Sir Clement raised his tired eyes. "You will forgive me, Captain Ide. I do not question your word. It is inexplicable, unless someone selected you to buy this particular specimen—which caused you to come here."

"It was planted," Daoud grinned. "The Americans say planted."

"We have another instance of the same procedure," Sir Clement went on mildly. "You see, we must look for similarities and connect them together if we can. The bronze horse brought you to the Baghdad Museum; a bronze pen case was left there to be found. On its tag we discovered the word *Araman*."

"Written by the German, Vasstan," Daoud put in.

Jacob said nothing. Deft as Sir Clement's surmise had been, it was hard to see any connection between the two. Certainly this whimsical German, this Flying Dutchman of a man, could have no possible relation to an Armenian's shop in Cairo.

"Yes, Daoud," the Englishman admitted. "But let us leave that supposition for the moment."

"But——"

"We can be certain only of one thing. Captain Ide was brought here by some unknown agency—an X force, let us say."

Impatiently the young Kurd shook his head. "The age of miraculous powers and talismans is past."

"Still, Captain Ide is here, Daoud. And I am greatly interested in this intangible force, which, because it is not identified, we call X."

Daoud relapsed into a skeptical silence.

"Although I told you the truth yesterday, Captain Ide," Sir Clement went on casually, "it was only a portion of the truth. Before I say any more I wish to warn you."

"Yes?"

"I cannot leave this bed. So I am going to ask you to do something that I cannot do. It may cost you your life."

He paused, and Jacob said nothing.

"I would not send an animal where I shall ask you to go. And that is to attempt to find *Araman* at once."

The place where the fine bronzes were made, the place where Daoud hoped to find some trace of the earliest civilization, the place named openly by an elusive German agent. "You wanted to search for this—place—yourself?" he asked after a moment.

"Yes. I would start tomorrow if I could travel." Sir Clement looked up at him quickly. "Do not let that influence you unduly.

Quite frankly, Captain Ide, I think you would be well-advised to refuse."

"You feel it's important?"

"Ah, that. It is for me. It could be more important than anything a single man could attempt in Asia today. Or it might amount to nothing. There is no way of telling."

Pouring a little rum from a flask into the cup of warm tea beside him, the old orientalist sipped it slowly. When he glanced appraisingly at the window, Daoud rose and closed it.

"You have felt the approach of a storm, Captain Ide, without being able to tell where or how hard it will strike. My feeling is much like that. There is a dry wind rising over Asia, over all of Asia. That wind is strongest from the highlands of Turkey to the mountain barriers of India. And the storm center may be very close to us here. What is happening is vital to England." He raised a cautioning hand. "Now is your opportunity to tell me to keep my troubles to myself. Your service in the war is over, or almost so. Refuse to enter into this and you can go back to Kirkuk tomorrow with a clear conscience and a whole skin."

Jacob nodded. "I'd rather hear what you have to say."

Relaxing, like a man who has rid himself of indecision, Sir Clement explained, "I shall lay all my cards on the table, of course. To do less would be dishonest."

Suddenly he smiled. "Michele declares you to be a most persistent fellow. You have already shown that you have imagination. A pity you were in Military Intelligence. Since forsaking the army I have come to think that military minds dote on formulae and lose the inspiration of imagination."

Daoud settled himself in his chair to listen impassively to the Westerners. Sir Clement, he thought, still seemed to be weighing his silent friend.

"The Germans were dangerous from the time of Clausewitz," went on Sir Clement, "because their generals became philosophers. They used imagination. They began to make war on human minds; they sapped our powers of resistance, and made defeat appear somehow more welcome than victory; they went into the air and under the sea and into our homes to war upon us until Von

Seeckt died. Then the Nazi crowd stormed in and blundered because they tried to make use of these magnificent new weapons which they only partly understood. They made their philosophers back into generals."

It was the brigadier who had stood on the beaches of Gallipoli who spoke now. "We Anglo-Saxons made mistakes almost as bad. After that war we were defeated in Asia by a force we did not understand. We began to lose our grip on events in the East. It was not merely the nationalism of Ataturk, or the scheming of the Japanese. Some *pressure* was exerted, outward, against us. We had won on the Marne and the Somme and we were defeated here. The same thing is happening now, on a greater scale, and again we do not understand it."

Rousing himself from contemplation, he looked at Jacob. "Now for my cards. I will not ask either of you never to repeat what I am saying, because that would be foolish. But I do ask you not to reveal it unless you feel it necessary for, shall we say, the Anglo-American cause."

"That's fair," agreed Jacob. "You have my promise on that."

He thought: this man trusts the Kurd more than me; he is doing this unwillingly because he must, yet he is very honest.

"My first card: the Mullah Ismail has taken up arms to resist the Iraki Government's taxation and conscription, and there has been some fighting along the roads already."

"The roads are closed," put in Daoud. "I came through the Kurds' lines."

"The Mullah is a fanatic in his desire to fight for freedom. He would not listen to me even if I were to be carried down to his camp. Only one thing would hold those Kurds back. And that is a command from Araman." As Daoud started to speak, he lifted his hand. "Wait, please. I mean that even Ismail would obey without question a word from those in Araman. It is possible that Captain Ide and you can get through to that place and bring back such a word for a truce."

Jacob thought: he mentioned people first and then a place.

Like a surgeon diagnosing a fresh wound, the orientalist measured the danger in the border fighting between the Mullah's Kurds

and the troops. If it kept on, other tribes would join in, believing themselves menaced in the mountains. And all because some European official in Baghdad, Cairo, or elsewhere, had made the mistake of counting on this armed clash to further some political aim, like a pawn moved out in a chess game. The fighting along the river might spread to other frontiers, now that the unpredictable Soviet Union was moving out pawns in its turn, to extend southward into these lands where she had never ventured before.

"My second card is Vasstan. I know a little of his mind. You see, in the last war I was pulled out after the Dardanelles fiasco, to rest in India, and I joined the hunt after him and found the gold he abandoned beyond the Karakorum Pass. I fancy he remembers that. And I doubt if he has retired, as I have, from an active and damaging life."

"Have you any actual trace of him?" Jacob was curious because Vasstan had disappeared from view in the last months.

"Only a report that he was seen in the Khanikin bazaar, not far from here." The orientalist smiled. "But you forget the pen case he sent to the museum two weeks ago *with the compliments of Araman.*"

"I did not forget," Daoud put in.

"I rather think he meant that for me. I had been in hospital in Baghdad, you know. Knowing Vasstan, I would say he's hit on something that pleases him hugely, and he announced it in a way that was bound to attract attention. By the same token, he's cocksure we'll never find it, or him."

"The pen case had been in use," Jacob pondered.

"An important point. By whom? Not by Europeans, certainly, and not by modern-minded Asiatics like Daoud. Evidently by individuals who still use ancient implements but are able to write. That combination of new-old is not extraordinary in Asia. Taking another bearing, what *situ* would appeal most to our German friend? Quite certainly a place where he could escape our search. It must be unusual, in that respect. We can assume it must be among the mountains. In any case, he has christened it Araman."

A boyish gleam came into the tired eyes, and he felt in the chest beside him, drawing out a large envelope and a battered photo-

graph. "But he has given us a valuable lead, this picture of some very interesting mountain scenery. I don't think he knows we have it."

"A photograph of——"

"What might be Araman taken from the air."

Sir Clement explained that German Intelligence had operated very thoroughly throughout Iraq and Iran before the war. At least one celebrated Teutonic archaeologist had made a labor of love of taking air views of all the historical ruins within the remoter border zones, including some archaeological remains that had not been noticed until the air views brought them out.

"Our counterintelligence found a batch of Vasstan's papers in a coffee shop in Khanikin, and they took copies of all the photographs, leaving the originals undisturbed. Evidently my old friend had obtained them from *his* friend the flying archaeologist, who is now safely lecturing in a neutral country. This particular one seemed to be no known archaeological site—in fact, no ordinary site at all. What do you make of it, Captain Ide?"

He handed Jacob a small magnifying glass.

Jacob had been studying the print which showed serried mountain summits, bare and featureless, appearing like giant waves arrested in motion. At that distance no forests or riverbeds were discernible. The central mountain—apparently the object of the picture—rose like an artificial cone, cut off near the summit. That flat summit was ringed by a dark line that might have been a wall. Upon it a lake gleamed, and dark patches showed what might have been groves of trees. There was no sign of human life, yet the prominent central cone seemed to have been erected by artificial means.

Jacob put down the glass. "The central truncated cone was the object of the photograph. It looks artificial but is much too large to have been made by human beings. The lake is too large to be a rain-water basin; it must be fed by springs from below."

"Quite correct." Sir Clement nodded over his replenished teacup. "So far."

"The big question is whether the summit is inhabited. Those white specks spreading out from the lake could be natural out-

cropping of some white stone, probably limestone. They seem to be spaced too regularly for that, and they show up where buildings would be constructed—close to the lake and trees. If they are man-made, then the dark line rimming the summit would be a stone wall, a high rampart. It's a tossup whether men have lived on this mountaintop. My guess is they have."

Sir Clement nodded, obviously pleased. "That is very good indeed. Most fortunately our methodical enemies the Germans have confirmed your reasoning. They have an incurable habit of making notes, often leaving their papers in convenient portfolios for us to find and profit by. In this case Vasstan made an identifying note on the back of his photograph: that it was taken at an altitude of forty-one hundred meters, on the south or entrance side of the mount. Now he would not have used the word *entrance* unless there was something to go into. It might be anything—a ruined city, an inhabited lamasery, or merely a cavern." Sir Clement looked up curiously. "But does nothing about this simple cone appear to you to be menacing—even terrifying?"

Jacob shook his head. "Its steep slopes may be corded lava—they don't look climbable."

"Nothing more?"

The regular cone standing among bare mountains did look stark and formidable. It looked like the ziggurats of the Tigris Valley, like the Tower of Babel.

Sir Clement sighed. "Ah well, you have no means of knowing. And I could be quite wrong. I do not wish to put ideas into your mind——" He broke off. "If only we knew where it was."

"If you are really looking for this one," Jacob pointed out, "you ought to find it quickly by an air survey. Summits with oversize lakes can't be so rare."

"We tried. I gave nearly a hundred copies of this to the pilots of our Air Force and BOAC. Not one of them reported sighting the summit we call Araman. From that we deduce it must lie at a distance from the traveled air lanes. Now our friend the flying archaeologist might well have gone where our pilots do not go, even after the war's end, and that is northeast of here toward the Caucasus where so many frontiers, including the Soviet, meet. This

northeasterly area has a labyrinth of ranges volcanic for the most part and several mountain lakes including Urmiah which is, I believe, the loftiest body of water on earth. This area is the ancient Kurdistan."

"If Araman were so near, the Kurds could take you there, picture or no picture."

"Yes. And that is precisely what these Kurds will not do. A man like Badr should know where this mountain is. Yet devoted as he is to Miss Michele, he will not admit there is such a mountain. For generations the Kurds have defeated, rifle in hand, any attempt to penetrate north of here by force. They have been defending *something* more than their pasturelands and villages."

Daoud stirred restlessly, and for the first time Jacob realized that he was uneasy.

"Daoud thinks, of course, that it is the ancient dwelling place of his people—you recall how the Tibetans for long defended Lhasa and the Chinese of the north their Forbidden City, so called? The Dalai Lama of Tibet was often a child, and always a child mentally—compared to Westerners—yet how many Easterners paid reverence to his name?"

Fingering the long envelope, Sir Clement meditated. "It might be a shrine or a tomb, at Araman. Perhaps the Kurdish tribesmen of today, like Mullah Ismail, have forgotten who or what was buried there, yet by long-established custom they guard it. The black stone of the Ka'aba at Mecca is only a meteorite, and so a rarity. Still it influences the actions of a hundred million human beings. Captain Ide, there must be some such force residing in Araman."

"Force?" Jacob questioned.

"The same that moved you from Cairo to Riyat," laughed Daoud.

"Forgive me for speaking *ex cathedra*," murmured the orientalist. "You have been concerned with the potentiality of Araman for how many days, Captain Ide? Seven? I have been studying it for twenty and seven years without arriving at anything that is definite. There are indications of an immense power emanating from the point we call Araman—power of a nature unknown in

the West. Two things are certain. It existed millenniums ago; it is very little understood by the Kurds of today."

Daoud shook his head. "There is nothing alive today. We may find the remains of a civilization predating history."

"The culture that produced Captain Ide's winged horse? Perhaps. But I have indications that the influence of Araman is not dead; and it seems to recur periodically, especially after a cycle of wars, as at this moment."

He paused, his eyes on Jacob. "I have not strength to go into that now, nor is there time. I have made some notes—they were to form a chapter of my book—which I have put into this envelope. If you decide to go, you will take them with you and read them at the monastery *after* you have formed some idea of your own. As I said, I would not wish you to start out with any fixed idea."

Jacob thought of his own journey to Riyat, to which he had been drawn by coincidences that were intangible and still perceptible. "There's a monastery?" he asked. "Where?"

"I forgot that you do not know our monastery," apologized Sir Clement. "Daoud can take you to it. A word *in explicio*:

"You know, Captain Ide, how refugees from wars or migrations tend to seek sanctuary in the heights? The sweep of warfare, plague, or destruction through the lowlands has driven human flotsam up to these hills as well as into the Swiss Alps. Men have even fled hither to escape religious persecution. In medieval days Eastern Christians took refuge here and built monasteries, where they have been more or less cut off from contact with the outer world for centuries.

"One of them, known as Darbatash, is situated in a ravine above the headwaters of this river, eighty miles or so—I have ridden it easily in three days—from Riyat to the north. The priests are quite medieval, I assure you; they live by cultivating their gardens. I went some years ago to Darbatash because I had heard in Baghdad that they had some manuscripts in estrangelo of the history of Abulfeda.

"While visiting the chapel at Darbatash I noticed a metal plaque set in the stone by the altar. The metal was tarnished gold, which of course gave no indication of its age; but the brief inscription in

medieval script could be read clearly. It said: *Here begins the way of the wanderers; let those who are not of their fellowship turn aside.*"

"Would that mean anything?" murmured Jacob.

"I might have attached no importance to it if it were not for one other indication. The name of the Nestorian monastery Darbatash was ancient Iranian—or Aryan—signifying the Gate of the Fire. I thought of the early local custom of preserving a supposedly sacred fire on a mountain summit. It's pure supposition, but the monastery might be the gateway to the mountain region of the photograph."

Sir Clement rested on his cushions, his eyes closed. Jacob studied him a moment in silence. This elderly scholar had concentrated for twenty-seven years upon one idea, and he had built up that idea by joining together conjectures as thin as spiders' webs. He was sincere, no doubt of that. What did all that boil down to? No more than the fact that an unvisited mountain chain existed somewhere within this hinterland. Two observant Germans had noticed it, and it might contain, as Daoud believed, some archaeological ruins—and probably more bronzes.

"Squadron Leader Leicester," Jacob said flatly, "is the one who might influence Mullah Ismail. I am nobody up here. And there are half-a-dozen reasons why I wouldn't be any use to you."

The man on the couch gathered himself together defensively. "Name them, please."

"I've never been in Asia before this war. I don't know a Parsee from a Brahmin. I read some Persian, and speak a little bazaar Arabic. I couldn't even talk to the people up there."

"Daoud could do all that."

"Yes. But he'd be better off alone."

Sir Clement smiled. "He does not agree. He wants you."

Jacob looked at the Kurd, who nodded. Jacob wished in that moment that Michal Thorne might be there in the chair. Her quick voice would cut through this fabric of imagination, making a jest of it.

"I haven't the first thing in the way of equipment," he objected. "Not a compass or large-scale map, or arms."

"You shouldn't have a weapon. It would be uncommonly dangerous. These hills are filled with men who would kill even a European for a rifle."

"All right. But what about following a route?"

"I can give you no compass bearings to follow. Your best chance is to find someone to guide you at the different stages." Sir Clement paused. "Your only guide will be the word we have, Araman—and perhaps that photograph."

"What about transport? I have very little money."

"You will not need money in the hills."

"Mr. Parabat will give us horses," put in Daoud, adding, "I have picked out two already."

"Why Mr. Parabat?"

Sir Clement interposed. "I have reason to believe the Zoroastrian communicates with the monastery, if not with Araman. At all events he seems uncommonly ready to help you go—if you will make the attempt, of course, Captain Ide."

Jacob laughed. "It has to be done, and you've convinced me that I'm the only person here able to try it. I'll try, Sir Clement."

The Englishman nodded gravely. "Your appearance here and acceptance has been well-nigh providential."

Providential. So they still talked like that, Jacob thought, in the colonial world of Asia. He could not have refused to go.

"We can start in an hour," exclaimed the Kurdish scientist, making no attempt to hide his satisfaction. Springing up, he hurried out.

"You can trust Daoud, Captain Ide, as long as you are with him. Does that sound strange?" Thoughtfully the elderly orientalist fingered the envelope in his hands. "Remember that the splendid chap is only one generation removed from the tribesmen of Riyat. If he no longer believes in ghosts, he is still afraid of them. If he went alone, he would turn back at the first uncertainty. With you he will go through hell and high water, as you Americans say."

He handed over the long envelope, and Jacob noticed that it was carefully sealed with wax. "Please do not open it until you feel the need of doing so. I must warn you to be very careful of what lies ahead of you, and I cannot tell you what that may be, except that

Daoud may be able to guide you safely to Darbatash. After that —” He broke off. “You will be seeking for a secret that is not only kept but jealously guarded by warlike tribes. If you find that you face any great physical risk, turn back *at once*. Quite selfishly, I do not want to have your death on my conscience.”

“All right,” said Jacob.

The Englishman held out his hand. “I lost my son in the last war, Captain Ide. Send me word when you can.” He hesitated. “Please do not mention to Michele your purpose in going.”

“If you like.”

“She will assume that you are merely looking for antiquities of some kind. If so, she will not worry. Her neurosis——” He paused and chose his words carefully. “She was a brilliant student at the Sorbonne and Leyden before this war, and her experience in Greece has affected her deeply. Think of her as trying to escape from anything that has to do with war. If she knew where you were going, and why——”

“I see,” said Jacob.

When he approached the veranda of his quarters, Michal was sitting as he had seen her first, bending over a book, among the magazines and flowers of the veranda.

When she did not speak, he paused by her uncertainly. “You’ve taken to Spengler,” he muttered stupidly.

She did not look up. “In preparation for my evening *causerie*.”

Somehow he felt relieved that he was departing, with all preparations made for him without further effort on his part. “Apparently I won’t need to beg a horse. Mr. Parabat is doing the arranging, and Daoud Khalid is going with me.”

She looked up, but not at him. “When are you going?”

“I’ve got to pack now. They want—I want to thank you.” The old resentment at himself roughened his voice. For the first time he noticed that her eyes were clear blue, expressionless. The scent of dried flowers touched him.

“You have been kind to me, and I am sorry to see you go, Jacob.”

Almost the only things he needed to pack in the sitting room

were his Aristotle and his pipe. He made an awkward business of it until he heard her step behind him.

"I think I read Spengler as you do Aristotle, Jacob." She picked up the envelope he had left on the table. "Does this go in or are you leaving it to be opened when the body is found or on some other happy occasion?"

Jacob took the packet. "It's Bigsby's," he said, wondering why she did not ask what had happened that morning. He had wanted to tell her. Now she stood in invisible armor, her thoughts hidden, challenging him.

"Sealed orders from him to you?" Her words had a bright anger in them. His eyes sought the delicate line of her throat rising from the loose lace of her dress. "Shall I put on the spurs, too, Jacob?"

In sudden anger his arm reached out to her. His hands gripped her shoulders, and his lips pressed hard against hers, as if by gripping her close to him he could break down the unseen armor and melt the hard brightness. He felt the softness of her hair and body, and felt that her lips were still against his. Then, ashamed, he let her go, and heard her voice, unchanged, "Was that quite satisfactory?"

Mechanically he bent to pack the envelope in his kit, then transferred it to his coat pocket. Michal had gone out the open door and he thought that she would be sitting in her chair. He had to go out to say something to her. When he reached the door, he found that she was not on the veranda. Searching the garden, he sighted her on the path where the black goat grazed. And he noticed two saddled horses inside the gate. Jemail came up to take his bag, and he followed the servant.

On the garden path Michal kneeled with her back to the gate, listening curiously. Idly she prodded the earth with a trowel, tracing a pattern around the familiar line of jonquils. It was a familiar pattern, and the flowers had no meaning because they would be there exactly the same on the morrow. Yes, it was a very familiar pattern; Jacob had gone as Aurel had gone.

When she heard a step on the path she stopped digging. Mr. Parabat, smiling with pleasure, was coming up the path with his small measured steps.

CHAPTER III *The Monastery*

Across the shoulders of the mountains the two men climbed with a silence between them. They moved slowly because the shaggy horses were laden with blanket rolls and saddlebags. Moisture rose in a vapor from the animals under the glare of the late afternoon sun.

Jacob, following Daoud along the narrow track, felt the pressure of the sun on his back. The plodding of his horse, the thrust of heat from the sky, blended with the picture in his mind's eye of the neat garden path where Michal had gone out. Jacob was glad that he could sit effortless in the damp saddle that stung his thighs as the horse moved methodically upward into space, without needing thought or a word spoken.

By squinting against the glare of the slopes, he could perceive that they had changed. The dimness and refreshing moisture of the Riyat ravine had yielded to yellow heights of broken stone. The air had grown thinner, forcing him to breathe deep. Wisps of brown and white flitted away from the trail ahead of him—gazelles. A mountain sheep climbed leisurely, pausing to watch him. Jacob reflected that these animals could not have been hunted with rifles, or they would have been more wary of men.

They must be climbing toward the level watered by melted snow. He had no aneroid; the sun had taken the place of a compass; his few articles of clothing and kit hung in saddlebags woven from goat's hair; the blankets pushing against his hips were pressed out of raw sheep's wool; he lacked even a pair of sunglasses. Up the slopes he sighted clusters of black tents looking like rusty black cloaks hung out to dry.

"*Aimak*," said Daoud, pulling in to rest his horse. "Some winter pastures. The people in those tents will not bother us."

In these pastures, where grass grew late, watered by melting snow, the people brought their herds to find grass after the summer's heat had destroyed grazing in the lowlands.

"How do they know who we are?"

"Know? Oh, they can see."

How could the dwellers in the upper pastures distinguish the nature of two blue figures half a mile away? Daoud had changed in certain respects. He seemed less sure of the English he spoke; in the saddle, with a sheepskin coat loose on his back, he had become more alive physically, less the shy scientist of the cubbyhole in the museum.

"Daoud, you are changing over from Oxford graduate to mountain Kurd."

"Now you feel better, Jacob! No, how should I change? It is only that we are in the hills. We are on real earth." He smiled. "These *Jebal*—these highlands have always been habitable." For a moment he reflected. "Yes, my grandfather, who is a Kurd, says men have always been here. Even now, after I have come back from Oxford, he says that. My Arab grandfather has only a folk memory of wandering to escape from the heat of deserts. The desert makes one feel religious, he said, because it is full of torment."

"It makes one feel imaginative."

Daoud took the least thing seriously. "So do the mountains, Jacob. It is the same thing. Only in cities you do not feel imaginative. There are too many tramcars."

"What about the Empire State Building?"

After considering, Daoud shook his head. "No, it has elevators. I have heard. You step in and *swosh*, you step out at five hundred feet. Do you imagine anything when you do that?"

Toward sunset they dropped down to the bed of the small river along which the trail traced its way. Immediately the air grew chill. The river rushed boisterously between outcroppings of limestone, and they crossed it upon a stone bridge. The bridge was too narrow for anything but a laden horse or a small cart, and Jacob

noticed that the stones were black volcanic basalt fitted together without mortar. It had stood here over the river flood for many centuries. Not even a jeep could cross it, to proceed beyond this point.

"We will sleep here," said Daoud, nodding at a stone hut set into the hill by the trail.

A gnarled human being came out of the hut with a bead rosary in one hand. His other hand held the fist of a slender ten-year-old boy. Their dark wool garments appeared as tough and unchangeable as the stone facing of the hut.

"There is no place else to sleep," the archaeologist apologized, noticing how Jacob stared around him. "This is what you call a roadhouse in America, and the keeper can give us tea and perhaps lamb."

After freeing his horse of all but the saddle blanket, Daoud tore a sheet from the notebook he carried and wrote a few lines on it with Jacob's fountain pen. Folding the page, he gave it to the ten-year-old who was helping them. "*Marhaba*," the boy exclaimed, pressing the paper against his heart.

"*Ei*," Daoud nodded, after giving a few directions.

Immediately the youngster turned and began to run up the hill, jumping rocks like a goat. As far as Jacob could see him, he kept on running.

"He will be there before us with the message," Daoud said, glancing after the boy. "By noon tomorrow, at the latest."

"Where?"

Daoud explained. The river at this point marked the boundary of the summer grazing of the Herki tribe, who were not accustomed to foreigners because they kept secluded in the upper ranges. His note would explain that the two of them were friends of Mr. Parabat on their way to the monastery, requesting that they might pass as guests through the land of the Herki. If the Herki received them as guests, they would have no trouble reaching the monastery.

"And suppose we don't rate as guests?"

"They might keep us from passing. These people are restless now, Jacob, because Kurds are being killed by the military in the lower

Zab valleys." Daoud did not want to discuss that. "Watch this happening," he said quickly.

The keeper of the bridge was dragging a five-months-old lamb from the small flock penned by the hut. As he did so he drew a curved knife from his girdle. Man and beast headed toward the single oak that sheltered a raised stone slab above the hut. This block of stone was bare, Jacob noticed, but for two points that projected up on either side like rudimentary horns or wings.

When he reached the altarlike stone, the keeper tied up the struggling animal with a cord attached to the stone. From a metal bowl he carried he emptied some embers of fire upon the top of the stone between the projections. Then with a single slash of the curved knife he cut the lamb's throat.

Framed against the sunset gleam, the bearded man and the smoking stone made a picture that tugged at Jacob's memory of something seen long before. "Abraham's sacrifice," he murmured.

"What?" Daoud laughed. "No, it's our dinner starting to cook."

When the stars were out from horizon to horizon and Jacob had eaten his dinner, he sat on the bridge to smoke a last pipe, hearing the horses stamp by the hut and the rush of the water below him. Daoud had gone inside to sleep, but Jacob did not feel like sleeping. The gray contour of the earth came closer now under the star gleam. This earth had not changed its shape under the hands of men. Only stones had been made into a house and the bridge that seemed at that moment to span two intervals of time. . . . A folded paper had come into Michal's hand on the garden walk, and the mountain boy was running through the night with another folded paper—running north and east, under the gleam of Andromeda and Polaris. He could not see the face of a compass yet he could discern those two pointers in the sky. By what intangible guide was Michal led, and was she asleep at this moment within her room, with the door that was her way of escape standing open?

Jacob tried to think of something tangible, to draw the quiet of drowsiness into his mind. Sir Clement had said, watch for what

is unusual. . . . Abraham had meant to sacrifice what he most loved. . . . Had he held Michal in his arms for five seconds or five minutes? No, he should concentrate on the warning, because Michal would be gone when he returned to Mr. Parabat's garden. If she would not be there on the paths . . . With all his years of study Sir Clement had admitted honestly that he could only be certain that *something* extraordinary existed in Araman, if Araman itself existed. How could you track down a *something*? Sir Clement had a core of integrity, not artificial righteousness, but a natural rightness that was unyielding. Michal had a word for that.

Under the bright mockery of the ageless stars Jacob could not sleep.

Perhaps it was lack of sleep, or perhaps the thin air of the heights, but the next day Jacob felt a subtle exhilaration.

In this translucent air objects at a distance became vivid and unmistakable. The very stones showed their specks of mica. These mountains had assumed a relationship to him; they were opening their innermost recesses to his unaccustomed sight. It was a feeling undefined as yet. Never before had he been in the saddle so far from man-made roads. For the first time he felt glad to be climbing up from the last outpost of civilization at Riyat.

Early in the afternoon they zigzagged up a sharp granite ridge, and Jacob beheld one of the secrets of the mountains. The gray ridge had to be climbed like a wall. On the summit they looked down into a vista of green—a long valley sprinkled with grazing herds, dark tree growth, and black patches which Jacob knew now to be clusters of tents at a great distance. This green expanse was fortified by the outer escarpment of granite. Planes flying over it would observe nothing but dark specks sprinkled over the vivid green.

"The valley of the Herki," Daoud informed him, and added sharply, "Stop!"

From a fold in the earth beside them a throng of horsemen appeared, spurring the animals into a gallop. This cavalcade of thirty or forty riders gathered speed swiftly and bore down on Jacob and Daoud. Bright cloaks fluttered over the small horses.

Jacob suspected they had been watching from the granite height, and he swore silently at his own stupidity in not sighting them before now. All the riders—some were girls with flying hair—carried rifles. At a few paces they reined in suddenly and dismounted. The men nearest Jacob clicked back the bolts of their rifles and drew out cartridge clips ostentatiously.

"It is nothing bad," Daoud muttered. "Only the usual show for visitors."

Most of the Herki riders had gray hair, some were boys and girls in their early teens. All carried themselves erect, moving as if on parade. Their fine bodies gleamed in striped silk shirts and velvet Zouave vests embroidered and heavy with silver. One oldster sported a dark blue full-dress uniform of a Turkish colonel. The slender boy who stepped out before this Victorian figure had loose sleeves hanging to the grass; gold glinted on his saddle. As he came closer Jacob realized that he was not more than thirteen or fourteen.

This stripling carrying an old Mauser on his arm touched his fingers to his forehead and heart. "*Man Baba Beg*," he said.

"*Khwasti-bi, Baba Beg*," murmured Daoud.

Baba Beg, the leader of the mounted commando of youthful and overage Herki, turned to Jacob, his eyes sparkling. "I am spiking," he said slowly, "English-little to you."

He spoke clearly but with the flat intonation of one who has learned a language from books.

"It was kind of you to come to welcome us, Baba Beg," responded Jacob, adjusting himself to the mood of the moment. And he added curiously, "Where did you learn English?"

"Once," said Baba Beg, "in the American school at Baghdad." He swung on his heel to let his glance travel over the faces of the excited tribesmen. His spare shoulders straightened with pride that he should be answered by the strange American.

"He is the son of Mullah Ismail," Daoud whispered. "He will take us in as guests."

"How old are you, son of Mullah Ismail?" Jacob asked.

The boy hesitated then spoke rapidly to the archaeologist. Daoud laughed cheerfully. "He does not know how to say it in little-

English. Baba Beg has got his first wife with child but has not yet killed an enemy with his rifle."

Eagerly the Herki Kurds, who now felt at liberty to talk, asked for news of the battle toward which Mullah Ismail had gone. Carefully Daoud answered that there was fighting but not yet a battle.

Then girls in the cavalcade brought out a filled goatskin and bowls, pouring milk curds and whey from the skin into the bowls and offering them shyly to the visitors. Jacob observed that the girls wore no veils and seemed to manage their horses as well as the men. They all sat down in the grass where the sun warmed the slope and ate from the bowls. They are all children, Jacob thought, with rifles for playthings, and time is nothing to them. What value should these hill people set upon an hour, except that visitors from the outer world had arrived, important men with news?

When Baba Beg heard that they wanted to go on to the monastery the next day, he showed sharp disappointment. "He says," Daoud explained, "no American has come to the Herki before. I think he wanted to show you a document and have his singers—his minstrels—perform. That would take more than one night. But if you wish to go, he says Father Hyacinth can guide you to what he calls the place of the old men."

He asked a question of the boy and went on.

"Apparently a priest, Father Hyacinth, comes down every now and then with herbs and dried rose leaves to be sold to Mr. Parabat, and also to eat some good dinners in the tents of the Herki, because Baba Beg says the dinners are lean licking at the place of the old men."

Long before the cavalcade reached their destination, at the main tents of the Herki, darkness had closed down on the valley, and Jacob saw the flicker of torches moving about the red glow of cooking fires ahead of them. Except for the boy, who was the son of Mullah Ismail, the Kurds rode apart from the visitors, escorting them but not intruding on them. Presently a rifle flashed in the gloom and a bullet cracked overhead.

Baba Beg reined in, and another rider lifted a cry that carried far. A distant wail answered it, and the boy moved on again, satis-

fied. "My sentries do not sleep," he explained in his best English.

And Jacob thought of Badr the driver who was never asleep at Mr. Parabat's gate when Michal came back at night.

Before full starlight—Jacob had ceased to glance automatically at his wrist watch—he was seated on a large carpet between Daoud and Father Hyacinth, to drink tea and eat bread and cheese and dates. The priest ate heartily, saying little—a spare, bronzed head with a beard so thick it seemed like overlong fur. Except for his silence and the restless watchfulness of his dark eyes, he appeared like any other figure of the West. "*Il n'y a rien ici*," he assured Jacob. "*Ne t'agite pas, c'est le jeu des enfants*."

Daoud glanced at Jacob expectantly—French being one of the languages he did not speak. And Jacob could only answer haltingly that he was not worrying; in fact he was enjoying himself, because his French conversational power was less than Baba Beg's little-English. This did not seem to surprise Father Hyacinth, who remarked that he had studied in the Biblioteca Apostolica in Rome before the beginning of the wars, in 1913, and he wondered whether American bombs had damaged this library of the Vatican. When Jacob said he thought not, Father Hyacinth remarked that that was a precious thing to hear, and returned to his bread and cream cheese.

In the firelight beyond the carpet Jacob sensed rather than saw rows of people sitting in attentive silence, to taste to the utmost the appearance in their midst of two men from the outside. In spite of his urging he could not make Baba Beg sit down by him. The boy insisted on standing to serve them himself, and he brought in his minstrel with the air of a master of ceremonies. Somewhere a flute sounded, and the singer, a saturnine man, his head bound in a scarlet gypsy scarf, chanted what seemed to Jacob to be a folk song.

"What is all this?" Jacob said quietly to the archaeologist.

"Only a song, Jacob. It goes on about life for the Kurds being to suffer, so it is better to dream and to smell sweet roses and watch for the dawn and caress a woman's soft hair——"

"Caresse les cheveux doux comme la soie," corrected Father Hyacinth.

"Anyway, to do all that, Jacob, before your heart and body grow cold and dead and you have lived without dreaming."

Young Baba Beg smiled, pleased by the interest of his guests. At the song's end Jacob seized the chance to show the boy his contour map, thinking that Baba Beg might tell him the truth about where he was on the map. Daoud shook his head uneasily.

Although Baba Beg pored over it earnestly, he could not point out the valley of the Herki on the shaded mountain ranges. "It is a bad map," he exclaimed, nettled.

"And so it is," assented Daoud quickly, his eyes warning Jacob. "You see these mapmakers in London did not know the Kurdish names; these purple frontier lines do not help any."

"Why not?" Jacob pressed the point. "We must be somewhere near the junction of the frontiers of Iraq and Iran and Turkey and not far from the Soviet area."

Daoud's voice sharpened. "Look at the lines. They run every which way, straight across mountain ranges and rivers. The men who drew them were sitting in Versailles drawing lines on maps to please each other. Had one of them been here in this land? No."

Baba Beg laughed with little amusement. "The Herki go what way they wish," he said proudly. "The frontiers, where are they? The eagles, they do not see them. No, the frontiers are where the armies are. My father said it."

Evidently what Mullah Ismail had said to be so was law to his son. And Jacob reflected that his own map, accepted as ultimate fact in the office at Cairo, seemed to the people of these hills to be filled with mistakes.

Meanwhile Baba Beg had produced from his tent a document of his own. When he unrolled it at the fireside, Jacob saw a proclamation published upon gloss paper. It was in a fine Arabic script that he could not read. So he expressed his admiration of the beautiful colored border.

"At-lanticchar-ter," said the boy.

At sight of this document the audience edged closer to the rug,

the minstrel taking his stand nearest, as by right. There was utter silence, except for the shuffling movements of animals. Daoud glanced at it with misgivings. "It's an Arabic copy of your Atlantic Charter," he informed Jacob; "you know—the thing about the right of small peoples to self-government."

Baba Beg assented eagerly. "When?" he asked.

Daoud had been reading through the text in his careful manner. "It says printed by American War Information Office." He spoke as if to Baba Beg, but meaning Jacob to take heed of his words. "The Kurds think this document promises them independence. They ask when that will be?"

Daoud swept his arm across the night sky. There were millions of Kurds, he said, five or six million of Kurds who had dwelt since time began in the mountains in all directions from here. On the map they were divided up between the frontier lines of Iraq and Turkey, Iran and the Soviet Union—the lines laid down by treaties made in Paris after the last war. The numbers of these Kurds were not known in the outer world; they had been forgotten after the treaties; they had been divided by lines on the new maps, and often they had fought the armies of each new country, in the fastness of their mountains, for their right to use the Kurdish language and to rule themselves. They did not want their language to die; they did not want to lose their entity as a people. They wished their share of the Four Freedoms and of the right promised in the Atlantic Charter.

"They say the name of Kurd is not spoken outside their mountains," Daoud concluded, his eyes admonishing Jacob, "and as a people they have been condemned to die without a hearing. Yet they exist and their land of Kurdistan exists."

"Yes," cried Baba Beg. A murmur went through the listeners, who had not understood the words but had caught their sense. Jacob saw the boy of the bridge keeper watching at the edge of the carpet as if it were his privilege, because he had carried the message to the Herki. Father Hyacinth was lighting a long bamboo pipe, drawing a smoldering stick from the fire.

"When," cried Baba Beg, tossing his head, "will the promise be kept?"

Jacob put aside his own pipe. "Baba Beg," he said—thankful that Daoud had gained time for him to think—"it may be a long time."

"Long?"

Unconsciously Jacob spoke as if to a child. "The Charter tells only what we would like to do. How it is to be done neither we nor the British know as yet."

"No!" The son of Mullah Ismail cried out something at Daoud, who puzzled over it before interpreting.

"Ah, yes. The treaty of Sèvres. He says indep—autonomy was granted to the Kurds by that treaty. Was it?"

Dubiously Jacob thought back to the abortive treaty that had conceded Istanbul and the Dardanelles and islands in the Mediterranean to the Russians, Iraq itself to the British, under mandate, a share in the oil of Iraq to the French, and part ownership in that oil to the United States. In nineteen-twenty. Yes, there had been something about an independent Armenia and an autonomous Kurdistan.

"But that treaty was never signed," he said.

Antagonistic now, the boy faced him. "Was the Atlanticcharter signed?" he demanded.

"I don't know, Baba Beg."

"My father says Europeans do not keep a promise until they sign. And perhaps they do not keep it if they sign."

The silence held around them.

"Why do they make a promise?" insisted the boy.

Jacob could think of no answer that would be honest.

"*Al Akṛad al jinni ḡashafa allahu 'inhamu 'l ghita,*" said Daoud quickly, and the boy relaxed, smiling a little.

"It is one of their proverbs," the archaeologist explained, "that the Kurds are jinn, hidden away until God draws the curtain from them."

But the good feeling of the feasting had changed to restlessness. Baba Beg no longer spoke English; he went to stand moodily by the fire's edge. Sharp argument rose in small explosions as the listeners discussed what they had heard. There was a snarl as the minstrel grappled bodily another man. For a moment the two

struggled on the carpet, then separated. Knives flashed instantly between them, and the singer of the folk song fell to the rug, hurt. Picking himself up, he walked away from the guests, still with his swagger, taking no apparent notice of the blood running from his arm.

Father Hyacinth emptied his pipe with a sigh.

"You are too honest, Jacob," said Daoud. "You should have made a patriotic speech like me, or smoked your pipe in silence like the father here. But on the whole it gained something. We will always have a refuge with the Herki because we have eaten their curds and whey." He looked at his friend, amused. "You see, they keep promises."

When the Herki riders turned back the next day at the stone cairn that marked the limit of the tribe's grazing land, they made a picture that touched Jacob's memory. Wrapped in bright tartans and black sheepskins, they waited to give honor to the parting, sending after the travelers the faint falsetto melody of flutes and pipes.

And, listening, Jacob became aware of something odd in these highlanders of the East. The boy who had carried the message, the son of Mullah Ismail, the proud minstrel, all had one thing in common—a hope, an eagerness to discover what they did not know. Their minds were alive and restless. This was not the case elsewhere with isolated mountain folk like the Alpine Swiss. He wondered if outsiders had ventured among them before. Casually—for he dared not question too directly—he asked Father Hyacinth if visitors came by the monastery of Darbatash.

The priest shrugged. He himself had come, and the English gentleman, and now this American monsieur.

"No more?" Jacob wondered.

"There are, of course, the wanderers."

He might have meant the people eternally drifting through the ridges. But the word had been inscribed on the plaque Sir Clement had seen in the church. Father Hyacinth betrayed no interest; he

appeared immovable as the rocks beside the track, avoiding obscurities. Yet he had taken time to answer.

Daoud felt no concern for the political kaleidoscope; his heart lay among the objects of metal and stone preserved under the earth. Last night in the camp he had discovered a bronze utensil shaped like a spoon, used by children as a toy. Those children ate with their fingers, yet somebody in this place had made a spoon millenniums before.

Rubbing the small shape of bronze clean with his scarf, he shook his head. "It has little value because we cannot tell where it came from."

The rampart of earth over which they plodded was marked by the dark lines of wine grapes and flocks of grazing sheep. The human beings here lived upon the animals and seed planted in earth; they made their summer houses of goat's hair, their clothing of sheep's wool; half their food came from the milk and meat of the herds, as did all their boots and the trappings of the horses. What did they sell for money?

"What would they do with paper money?" Daoud countered absently, and smiled. "Once Sir Clement gave a bank note to Ibrahim at the black bridge."

"Who?"

"Ibrahim—Abraham. Next morning Abraham started a fire with it. He could not exchange a bank note up here, but he needed paper for the fire."

They sold some barley and hides for coins, Daoud admitted. The women used many of the coins for bracelets and anklets. "Oh, they can make money, as you say, out of a weed."

"Such as what?"

Laughing, Daoud pocketed the bronze spoon. "What you and the father are making into fire at this minute. The Kurds grow fine tobacco on the lower slopes."

The price of the tobacco yield, he explained, was fixed by the outer governments, and the tribesmen had to take what was given them—only a fraction of the price obtained by merchants in the cities. Jacob reflected that few among the Kurds smoked tobacco.

They raised it for the outer world, and it would best suit the convenience of that outer world to disarm these primitive tribesmen and turn them into docile cultivators of a weed that would burn with a peculiar smoke.

There was nothing in this contact with the outside to explain the excitement that was like a fever in the Herki and Mullah Ismail's men.

Father Hyacinth only smiled over his pipe, and Jacob wondered how much the silent priest had understood of their talk. The priest remarked that at the monastery they preserved the ancient scripts of the mountains. He himself was *bibliothécaire* of Darbatash.

Jacob had another impression that could not easily be rationalized. He made no attempt to do so, because he was seeking impressions rather than trying to account for them. Each day, he felt, they had climbed to a new level. It was not like ascending the reaches of a single mountain. These daily levels permitted them to move along freely, as if they were ascending the stairs of a step-back building.

Now, in the late afternoon, they were rounding a shoulder beneath a sheer wall of granite that hid the heights above. On Jacob's left, down the slope, lay a cloud curtain, hiding the lowlands. He looked down on the slowly shifting surface of white clouds into which the sun would disappear presently.

By no effort of his own had he come to this elevation over the clouds. First Mr. Parabat's kindness had advanced him a stage, to the care of the bridge keeper, and then to the aid of the son of Mullah Ismail. On his shoulders he wore a long sheepskin coat, the leather side out, a gift from the Herki. There could not be much about him now to recall Captain Jacob Ide of the cafés of Cairo.

"The monastery," said Father Hyacinth, pointing as the sun dimmed out.

Jacob could see nothing along the granite wall rising from the angle of detritus at its foot. Certainly no outline of a building showed. After a while he picked out a series of black specks in the face of the rock, which he judged to be caves. Then below them he noticed that the slide of rock assumed regularity. Some structure had been built out of the loose stones, almost concealed from ob-

ervation. Still farther down the slope he picked out the shape of vineyards and cultivated fields. But a man who was not looking for the monastery might have passed it by, so utterly did it merge into the stone face of the mountain.

Father Hyacinth explained the caves. The earliest monks, he said, had hollowed out the caves in order to live in peace beyond the reach of animals and armed men. Only a little while ago, a few centuries ago, their successors had moved down into the modern *monastère* for convenience' sake.

"Myself," he added pleasantly, "I add books to the library by selling the dried flowers to Messieurs Parabat Frères."

The next day, sitting cross-legged in his cell nursing a pipe which refused to draw properly at that altitude, Jacob faced the fact that the road had come to an end at the monastery.

The river itself had left him. Somewhere back along the slope it had gone underground. While he could retrace his path to the river's ravine, he could not expect to follow its course through the bowels of the mountain on which the monastery stood.

Aboveground the way ahead was filled with slides and sharp rock screes between the cliff and the cloud strata. Without wings it did not seem possible to proceed in any direction except back the way they had come.

Jacob had every chance for meditation because he had been given one of the upper hermits' caves, reached by steps cut into the rock—steps worn smooth and round by long use. This cell, a dozen feet deep, did not permit him to stand up. It provided a bed of dried heather overlaid with a black felt robe and quilts; it afforded heat at night from a small fire that burned in a niche within the rear wall of stone. Before that niche two hollows had been made in the floor by the knees of those who had prayed there during the centuries, he was told. The niche faced east.

For other comfort, the cell contained a silver basin, a clay jug filled with the monastery's strong red wine, a pitcher of goat's milk, a dish of dried curds, pomegranates, and strips of unleavened bread. The carpet upon which he sat bore the design of a

rude horseman. By now Jacob knew the name of this horseman and his story.

Daoud occupied the adjacent cell; but Daoud was asleep, in no humor for discussion.

"Sir Clement did some daydreaming," the archaeologist had vouchsafed. "Baba Beg has the right idea. This eyrie is nothing but a hideaway for old men."

Daoud, the ascetic, did not use tobacco or taste wine. He had no sympathy for these black-garbed folk who dug industriously in the vineyard during the morning hours and often copied stained ancient illuminations by candlelight. *Ahl-ḳitab*, he called them, people of the book. They copied sayings and legends of antiquity that would be forgotten otherwise—so Daoud insisted—instead of performing surgical operations on the earth to divulge its secrets. They were iconophiles, ghosts feeding themselves on memories and scents of dead flowers—images themselves, saved from the early time when the apostles of Christianity had walked the earth.

Actually, the denizens of Darbatash appeared both ignorant and simple to Jacob—Arabs, Turks, Persians, Armenians who had entered the monastery to find peace of mind. Except for Father Hyacinth and the patriarch, Mar Shimun (Simon) none of them had been farther west than Syria. Mar Shimun had wisps of white hair projecting from his black skullcap; his lined old eyes had gleamed like a raven's when he greeted the strangers at table the night before.

No one except the silent librarian spoke any language that Jacob could command.

Mar Shimun laughed when he said that already the peoples of the world below were coming up to the monastery. First an Inglisi, then an Allmani, then an American. When Daoud interpreted, Jacob realized that the patriarch had spoken of an Englishman, a German, and himself, an American. The German, then, might be Vasstan, concerning whom Father Hyacinth had kept silence.

Was it not true, Mar Shimun demanded, that the nations of the world below had been tearing at one another, to destroy themselves, for a generation or more? Up in the monastery they had heard of that, and they were waiting for the consequences.

"The old chap expects the survivors to jolly well come running up here for shelter," Daoud put in. "He thinks you three are the forerunners of the exodus from your three countries."

Apparently the jolly Mar Shimun did think so. He asked what the nations of the world were doing to avert this last great calamity.

Jacob tried to explain that an organization of the victorious united nations was being effected, to control destructive weapons and to try in its court the quarrels of its members.

"But not of all the nations?" persisted Mar Shimun.

"No."

"Yet the war was of all the nations. Yes, the seventh war of the world."

"The seventh?" Jacob had been interested. "Why that?"

Mar Shimun believed that the first world conflict had been some twenty-four centuries before, when his people of the east fought with the Yunnanis (the Greeks—Marathon and Salamis, Jacob reflected). That had been before the apostles went forth to preserve peace and churches like this on the height of Darbatash were founded.

When the bronzed bearded men around him nodded sagely at his words, Mar Shimun drank deep from his wine goblet and explained.

"It is something about a revelation written by a saint named John," Daoud grumbled. "It's simple rot!"

"Never mind," Jacob encouraged him, having a suspicion who might have spoken the words first. "How does it go?"

For a few moments Daoud listened. "Mar Shimun thinks it is a prophecy of things which must be hereafter. Now it's four beasts, including a lion with wings and a flying eagle . . . Hullo, here's a rider on a white horse and another on a red horse. The red horse rider has power to blast the earth. Perhaps a fire myth . . . Now something's really happening: the stars of the sky are falling into the earth, and the sky is rolling up—that's in the Koran too—and the mountains and islands are moving. Here are details of the slaughter: the kings of the earth and the big fellows and millionaires, and generals, and free voters, and slaves will come to hide themselves in the rocks of the mountains and in some way

to pull the mountains over them. It sounds like an air-raid panic or fissional energy let loose in a big way."

"It sounds like the chapter of Revelation by Saint John. Haven't you read it, Daoud?"

"No, but Mar Shimun does claim it to be a revelation of what is beginning to happen."

"Ask him why the fugitives should come here."

With his fourth wine cup, the patriarch had the answer to that.

"He says because here they can obtain the protection of Mar Giorgios—Saint George. That will help them to survive, I suppose."

"What has Saint George to do with Darbatash?"

"That warrior saint was born near a lake on a mountain somewhere around. That's point one—no particular importance. Point two *is* important. This church was consecrated to Saint George. You can see that for yourself, the patriarch says. For fifteen hundred years, more or less, candles have burned here in veneration of Saint George, or Giorgios, the great saint of the East."

"Is he supposed to be buried here?" Jacob asked quickly.

Daoud shook his head. "This is his *church*. You know, like Saint Peter's in Rome. All these ancient hives have a monopoly of something holy. I'm sorry, Jacob, but it's just palaver. I wanted to find out if they *knew* anything."

When the archaeologist produced his photograph of the solitary peak, Mar Shimun clapped his hands and dropped his pipe and exclaimed.

"He says there is a lake on a mountaintop, and therefore this must be the birthplace of Saint George!"

Reverently the priests passed the photograph around the table again, looking with interest at the miracle of a picture of the birthplace of their patron, made as if from the sky. Father Hyacinth studied it curiously. Although Jacob watched them without seeming to do so, he could detect nothing but sincere wonder in their sunburned faces.

Jacob made a point of going to the small church with Father Hyacinth. It proved to be, like most early shrines, a crypt in the rock of the cliff, at the rear of the building. The priest parted heavy, soiled curtains, to disclose the altar lit by seven candles.

The rock walls, smoothed and polished, supported by two massive stone pillars, showed a lighter square—a space from which a metal plaque might have been pried. But there was no other sign of the plaque seen there by Sir Clement.

The altar revealed only worn embroideries and tarnished silver vessels. Moving past it slowly, Jacob searched the surface of the rock behind it with his eyes. No crack or opening showed. He had wondered if there might be some inner chamber or tunnel at the entrance of which the plaque had been set.

What caught his interest was the painted decoration of the altar wall. Obscured by smoke and worn by age, dim figures were visible, incised and painted upon the stone. Jacob made out a flock of sheep in the foreground and the forms of a young man and woman in light draperies. The man might have been an apostle or the shepherd of the flock. Jacob could not imagine what the woman might be.

“Saint George?” he asked.

“Mar Giorgios.” Father Hyacinth held back the entrance curtain impatiently.

But all the priest’s evident unwillingness to display the possessions of Darbatash could not keep Jacob from visiting the library the next day. He was curious to see if there would be a trace of this Eastern saint among the books, as there had been behind the altar. And he was not disappointed.

The library of the monastery proved to be a very large closet serving to keep paper dry, rather than a reading room. The only furnishing was a carpet, the only light a candle, and the only ventilation the open door. One of the younger priests was copying an Armenian text laboriously, using a small brush on a sheet of scraped lambskin. Jacob, taking his time, noticed that the manuscripts were all in Asiatic scripts, which he could not read. It grieved him that Daoud had not been willing to help him here.

After a search, Jacob drew out a massive *Acta Sanctorum* and a *Golden Legend* by Voragine. To these he applied himself, using the light of the Armenian’s candle. For long hours he read through the dry narratives of saints and martyrs, following out a train of thought so elusive it was little more than a whim. He stopped only

when the candle's flame flickered down in a pool of grease and the smoky air became unbreathable.

Now, cross-legged on his carpet, he gazed out the oval entrance of the cell at a silver-gray bustard floating above the sea of mist and communed with himself on the subject of Saint George. From the carpet the square blank face of that legendary warrior looked up at him, unperturbed. Stripping off the husk of a pomegranate, Jacob dug into the juicy seeds with his fingers.

Saint George. Saint George for England . . . the patron of that land as Patrick had been of Ireland. Saint George and the dragon . . . the favorite warrior-saint of elder Russia. The order of his cult was still given commanders of soldiers, although it might be called a medal now. But the original George was different—he had lived and fought a battle of his own. And he had actually lived not so far from here, more than fifteen centuries ago, in the reign of the Emperor Diocletian.

George had been the carefree son of one of the best families near here, an officer of the Roman legions, in love with a girl no older than himself. Then he had changed his mind—the *Acta Sanctorum* said he had seen a vision—and he had got out of uniform to wander around, apparently seeking peace. The two lovers had done that. Except for the girl, it had been very much like the act of that other Roman, Paul of Tarsus.

At the end of long wars on this mountain frontier Giorgios seemed to have been content after he left his family and the army. Then a proclamation of the Emperor Diocletian had been posted in the province, ordering the destruction of the churches of the Christian refugees in the east. One of these proclamations had been displayed in the village where Giorgios was staying. When he had read it, he pulled it down and tore it up, and so became guilty of the crime of *laesa majestas*. He was put to death and the woman died with him, and their bodies were burned together. Before that, said the *Acta*, Giorgios had spoken to the people, who had named him as a martyr.

Jacob wondered if he had really made any oration. Somehow

Giorgios seemed to have been a soldier who did things rather than talk about them. Even after his death, people fancied that he had power; they called him bearer of the standard. Nothing was said about a dragon.

A standard, a shrine, a prophecy, Sir Clement had said might be found in Araman. Was this church of Mar Giorgios above the clouds actually the place they had been seeking for? Did these monks of Mar Giorgios cast bronze in the shapes of ancient implements they found in the hills, as they made sandals and wine after old methods?

Jacob did not think so. Mullah Ismail would not be influenced by a command from Mar Shimun.

Feeling the need of talking to Daoud, Jacob took his cane and edged his way along the narrow stone shelf between the caves. He found the archaeologist stretched out on his sheepskin coat, staring at a spider on the wall.

"Miracles!" Daoud only half listened to his friend. "These churches and mosques, they all have a story about some miracle worker. If they have no story, they invent one." Restlessly he sat up, pouring some water from a jar down his throat in the manner of a tribesman. "One thing only you say makes sense. We have come to the end of this road."

"And the German, Vasstan, seems to have been here. That photograph may mean nothing at all. But we know he has been here." Jacob added, "I think Father Hyacinth recognized the photo, and he seems to have the run of this region."

"I think they all recognized the mountain, these monks of Mar Giorgios! But what did they tell us? That it was the birthplace of Mar Giorgios!"

"They didn't invent the legend."

For a while Daoud maintained a moody silence. "No," he said savagely. "Of course they didn't. Where did the legend come from? Oh, there was some man named Giorgios who did something. The legend itself is much earlier than these professional worshipers. Look at this shrine"—he waved his hand at the rear of the cell—"where the first dwellers prayed. What is on it but fire? Lighting a fire on a height is an act of reverence to the sun. Life comes

from the sun. This church is a cavern toward the east. Perhaps it was a shrine of the earliest Aryans, a wayside shrine, when a road went past here. The east is where the sun rises. What is the other, older name of this church—the Gateway to the Fire?”

Jacob nodded thoughtfully. If a road had gone by here in some forgotten time, when this place had been known as the gate, there must be a track leading on from it. And if so, the monks would be aware of it. Granting that there was a sanctuary beyond—whether called Araman, as the driver Badr had believed, or the birthplace of Saint George, these same monks might be reluctant to admit strangers to it.

This reasoning Daoud accepted instantly. “Quite. The thing to do, Jacob, is to find an observation point, as you soldiers call it.”

About that the Kurd had an idea. “From the top of this cliff we might see what lies to the eastward.”

Neither of them had observed any trace of a path up the three-hundred-foot wall of rock, scarred by clefts. Nor did the monks make the ascent. “While you were tracking down Saint George in the books, Jacob, I have been watching the goats. They climb it, and they all take the same way up. Tomorrow morning I shall try to follow them.”

Soon after sunrise, when the workers of the monastery went out to the fields, the restless Kurd was ready for the climb, which Jacob could not attempt. With a small sack of food slung over his shoulder he started up the slope of rubble, saying that he would be back before dark to report. Then he swung up to the face of the rock, climbing easily along a path invisible from below.

Apparently, however, this track was clearly defined, because Daoud never paused as he traversed the cliff, disappearing at times behind outcroppings, to emerge higher up. Nor did he linger at the summit. Waving to Jacob, he pointed behind him and vanished.

Many of the monks gathering fruit in the orchard near Jacob had watched the ascent. As Jacob threaded his way back to the gardens, the cassocked figure of Father Hyacinth intercepted him, carrying a woven basket of pomegranates. With a shy greeting he offered one to his guest, and after a minute broke his habitual silence. “The mountains know their friends, Monsieur Ide.”

To this Jacob assented silently. Something seemed to be troubling the sunburned priest and impelling him to guarded speech. "Those who dwell apart in the mountains are of the camaraderie, and the doors of the heights are open to them. Yes, the paths and the steps are known to them."

It was an odd phrase—those of the comradeship, or fellowship. It touched a word in Jacob's memory.

"There is more than one path?" he asked casually.

The priest glanced at him. "The mountain sheep who dwell here do not take the same way as the horse who intrudes," he murmured. Then he pointed to the wall of rock behind them. "That is not a good way to take."

He excused himself saying that he had herbs to gather.

For a while Jacob watched children collecting leaves in the mulberry grove beyond the gardens. By fellowship, Father Hyacinth might have meant no more than the dwellers in the monastery; but Sir Clement had seen a similar word inscribed on the plaque now missing from the church—from *the way of the wanderers, those who are not of the fellowship, should turn aside*.

As nearly as Jacob could make out, the silent priest had warned him, and especially Daoud, not to go on from the monastery. By the same token there must be some way through the cliff known to these dwellers of the heights. Jacob's curiosity was roused by Father Hyacinth's actions after leaving him.

With a small bag slung over his shoulder, the priest made his way out along the foot of the cliff, past the last fields and grazing sheep. If he was picking herbs, he did not linger about it. His tiny black figure moved purposefully northward through the rubble of rock and was lost to sight behind a turn in the cliff. Although Jacob kept that point under observation until darkness closed in, he did not see Father Hyacinth return.

Nor did Daoud put in an appearance that night.

When sunset flooded the cliff the next evening without a sign of the two missing men, Jacob abandoned his watch with a growing sense of unease. It oppressed him as he drank in silence the

wine the monks poured for him at supper. They were kind, these men of the mountain, but they knew no English, and Jacob could not share his misgivings with them. He told himself that Daoud, a skilled climber, must have followed some lead far to the east. At the same time, the Kurd might be lying with a broken leg twenty miles away.

Too restless to sleep, Jacob went out for a final look around, and stopped abruptly in the act of lighting his pipe. It was full starlight. Gusts of wind swept the monastery height, driving shredded mist past him. Through the mist the arc of a new moon gleamed above the sea of cloud. And over the rush of the wind he heard the chiming of a bell. Yet there was neither bell tower nor bell in the monastery of Mar Giorgios.

Then, as he listened, he heard a faint wailing cry, high-pitched as the hail of a mountain watchman. Although he waited until he had smoked out his pipe, the hail was not repeated. Nothing moved around him.

Restlessly Jacob turned back to the one light that glowed. It was in the deserted library—a candlewick smoking pungently in grease, left there apparently for him. It was as if he had been led back to the familiar books again. In that moment a sense of failure struck into him. He had accomplished nothing, except to read up on a curious legend. The secret of the mountains and Sir Clement's quest lay farther away than at Riyat.

He coughed in the smoke. The bad air made his head swim, but he did not want to leave the light and the familiar books. One he picked up at random, and tried to read. Remembering Sir Clement's written message, he thought of opening the envelope. Then he told himself that he could not do that until he had come to some conclusion of his own, and he had learned nothing.

"The total sum of nothing," he muttered, watching the candle flame sink into its grease, stifling his breathing. "I'll wait out to-night and start after Daoud tomorrow with the two horses. If I can't get over the cliff I'll try to go around, in the direction Father Hyacinth took."

The door flung open, and Michal ran in. He heard her voice,

"*Jacob!*" Within reach of him she stopped, as if a barrier had touched her.

Yes, there she was with her small handbag, and a fur coat over her slim shoulders, her eyes holding his. "The cannon were real this time, Jacob! It wasn't your waterfall. I couldn't stand it when the artillery came within range at Riyat."

Jacob laughed, feeling the breath of cold air, of ghostly cold air. Michal was promenading with Mr. Parabat in the garden she had refused to leave. She was not here where the dying candle glowed red.

"Jacob, it's really deteriorating. The fighting—and we are cut off unless Sir Clement can persuade the Mullah to let us through. He has written, but he is not hopeful. Badr brought me up, and we saw a light flash——" With a quick breath she stopped. "Jacob, why don't you answer me?"

She was watching him, her eyes wide, her sensitive mouth quivering. "You *have* had wine for dinner, Jacob." She smiled at him. "Grinning like a Cheshire cat in all this smoke."

That was very funny, Jacob thought. When she put her arm quickly through his and drew him toward the door, he led her out to the garden, where the new moon shone over the sea of mist. By the faint moon gleam Michal was still visible beside him. So he told her how the moon was a lantern, lighting up this cloudy sea.

"Yes, Jacob," she assented.

Through the dim garden he led her to the steps cut into the rock of the cliff where it rose sharply. There was no one in the garden, of course, but the two of them. This woman who had been hostile only to him in the guesthouse at Riyat, who belonged to Riyat and luxury, was holding to his arm, stumbling in her high-heeled slippers.

"Are you quite sure you know where you are going?" she asked, as if worried.

"To my cell, Michal."

Now that the fumes of smoke were out of his head, Jacob could see clearly. The sky had resumed its normal dimensions but he

still felt a sense of wonder that this woman would be climbing the steps to his cell, only asking if he knew where he was going.

In the narrow cave a wood fire glimmered within the niche, outlining the silver basin and the wine jar. Michal stepped in uncertainly, bumping her head against the sloping wall, murmuring, "What *is* all this?"

"The fire," said Jacob clearly, "burns on the altar of the sun god."

Michal looked at it and smiled. "Well, it's nice to have, anyway, Jacob."

Loosening her coat, she glanced curiously around the cell, at his saddlebags and blankets. When he poured out a cupful of wine and offered it to her, she drank it gratefully. "And that's good, too, Jacob."

He had expected her to be amused by the primitive cell, to ask where she could be put up that night, to call for Badr and her luggage. Instead, she warmed her hands at the fire, then went to the entrance. She sat in quiet on the embroidered quilt, gazing out of the cell entrance.

The flames of the fire died down and he could barely make out her face. "It's strange to be above the clouds," she said. Close to him she stayed, not stirring, and he knew that she was afraid. The night of the storm she had been afraid. When he touched her, and brushed the light hair back from her face, he could feel the pulse in her throat. He could not tell what she was thinking, because she did not speak. She only held tight to his hand, looking past him at the open sky.

Then, as if tired, she lay down, her head resting on her arm, her face turned to him but hidden even from the star gleam. When his hand pressed against the softness of her throat, he heard her quick breath and felt her stir. She pushed aside the fold of the heavy fur coat. His arm held her down, shaking with the force of the hunger in him, until he felt her mouth warm against his, opening under his touch, her head lying against his arm, the warmth in her like a fever in him that grew with every motion until it drained the weariness and weakness from him. Michal's body beneath him pressed to him, her arms holding him.

Jacob waked. He lay still. His body, relaxed and sensitive in every nerve, felt Michal's smooth flesh against his. He had heard her breathing for long. She was sleeping, the tangle of her hair under his cheek, her hand holding tight to his arm around her. In her quiet breathing there was no sign of fear.

Gray light outlined the cave's entrance when Michal woke, with a sense of being called. Aware, then, of the man beside her, she lay still, letting herself relax in the stillness around her, marveling at the feeling that she was not alone. Since she could see almost nothing, she listened.

Somewhere outside the cave and far above her wind was rising with the dawn. With it she heard another note, melodious and reverberating. That would be a bell, far off. And what bell would peal at sunrise except a church bell? That was nice, Michal thought.

Quietly—and she could be very quiet when she wished—she edged away from Jacob and dressed herself without disturbing him. Pouring herself a cup of wine, she drank it, not because she wanted it but because there was nothing else to drink. Then for a space she was busied with her comb and compact mirror, yet glancing more often at the sleeping man who was not now withdrawn from her in pride and hostility. Relaxed, he slept like a boy. He had shared nothing with her before and certainly he had shown no gentleness to her, yet they had been drawn together by something more than desire—something that was unknowable. Michal did not question it. She only wanted this day to be a day of happiness.

Often she had risen with that thought, and it had become a kind of game that she played, and lost. This particular day seemed to her important above all, perhaps because of the bell that pealed for her.

When she stepped out on the ledge, she could hear it, faint and still clear as a peal from elfland. Then the wind buffeted her, and she had to hold to the cliff when she descended the steps.

At the bottom Badr, who had appeared to be asleep with his rifle over his knees, rose to let her pass. He did not lift his eyes to her face, and Michal flushed vividly, realizing that this watchman

of the night must have known that she had been sleeping with the American.

"*Marhaba, khanim* [Honor to thee, lady]," murmured the Kurd.

His face lighted when Michal smiled. Silently he pointed behind him to her suitcases piled under a black felt robe.

Mist billowed past them like smoke driven by the wind and somewhere the sun began to burn through, warming her. Curiously she surveyed the domain opening up before her eyes, for she had noticed nothing when she had arrived the night before, worried that she might not find Jacob. Bearded men in gray smocks, driving clumsy buffalo, stared at her as they passed on the way to the fields where others were already at work winnowing grain by tossing it into the air and letting the wind gusts carry away the chaff. On a clay threshing floor stolid buffalo were dragging sleds over piled-up barley, to separate the grain. Already women were coming in, carrying wide woven baskets of grapes on their heads, their eyes moving irresistibly toward the slender foreign girl who wore white instead of black.

Children drew close to Michal, gaining courage when they were not driven away. Girl children no taller than Michal's waist carried babies slung on their backs. Their dark eyes watched every move she made.

Michal felt very inquisitive about this friendly place. When the mist shredded away she observed that it was not a village. Cassocked monks walked in the fruit garden near her, aware, she fancied, of her presence. Suddenly and irresistibly Michal laughed, realizing that she had intruded within a monastery. Hearing her merriment, the children crowded closer to grasp and kiss her hand in turn.

Her day, she anticipated, was beginning well. This monastery and farmyard and nursery might be antiquated compared to Mr. Parabat's garden, and it certainly lacked servants, but the people seemed glad to see her, and that meant much to Michal.

Then Jacob came toward her. The gardens and the people receded from his moving figure and she felt his lean strength, the steadiness of his eyes upon her. He carried himself as if he wore invisible chains.

At that instant wonder touched Jacob; the brightness of her hair, the flush under her eyes that would not look up at him, even the slight scent of her body in the sun dazed him, and only with an effort did he keep from stretching out his arm to her. But he stopped, breathless. "I wasn't drunk last night," he said stubbornly. "It was some stuff burning in that candlestand."

That was not what he had wanted to say; the words came out of his fear that he had hurt her. She gave no sign of what she felt, only saying, "It doesn't matter, does it?"

It mattered terribly to him; her voice, remembered through the night, touched to the core of him.

The happiness she felt was too deep for words. She looked up curiously at the gray cliff that had become her home. "Did you pick out that cave for yourself, Jacob, or do they quarantine guests up there? Or is it really a shrine?"

"It's really a cliff dwelling of the oldest inhabitants, who had to keep out of reach of animals and human enemies."

"Does it still work that way?"

Jacob smiled at her sudden interest. "I don't think there are any enemies around. Even the wild buffalo have been tamed to the plow."

Nowadays, he thought, a rifle grenade would make short work of such a cave refuge. But he did not tell Michal that. He wondered at her quick fancy that accepted the reality of monastic life centuries ago. Just as she had accepted Mr. Parabat's bungalow.

"Do you think they will let us stay?" she wondered.

"Do you want to stay?" he asked. "I thought you wouldn't leave Riyat." When Michal did not answer, he pressed her. "How did Sir Clement let you come up here?"

"He didn't. Don't you know by now that I am gunshy, Jacob? Besides, he entrusted me to Badr, whose honor is now involved in keeping me well and out of harm."

Almost indifferently she explained that the frontier skirmish between the troops and the tribes had rolled back from the foothills into the ravine of Riyat, so close that artillery fire could be heard. Sir Clement, much disturbed, and anxious for Jacob's return, had sent down a written request to Mullah Ismail to pass Michal

and the American through the Kurdish lines under a flag of truce. But he had had no answer and was on the point of arranging to be carried down himself . . .

Suddenly her eyes met Jacob's. "I'm lying, and I hate it. I came because I wanted to. When you left the garden, I didn't think you would ever come back, although they all said you would. I couldn't stand waiting, so I worked on Sir Clement to remove me from the battle zone and to carry the message to Garcia. There, I feel better now." A smile touched her lips. "It must be the monastery. I hate to lie up here."

Leaning on his cane, his body rigid, Jacob felt a surge of happiness. And Michal was silent, seeing the hunger in his face.

At the entrance to the crypt Michal's mood changed abruptly. She had been delighted with the gardens and the passive men who seemed to be shaped by the labor their hands performed. Moving as if in time with some music within her, she stopped before the heavy soiled curtain in the dim corridor. "Ought we to go in there? I'm afraid—no, not actually afraid, Jacob. But I feel another omen coming on." Curiously, she nodded. "There shouldn't be two in one day, particularly on this day."

"Two? What was——"

"The church bell," she explained triumphantly. "I thought it was ringing for me at daybreak, and probably it was merely ringing for matins or whatever the first occasion is."

By now Jacob knew how Michal chattered when she was nervous. "This monastery doesn't have a bell," he assured her.

"But I heard it, Jacob."

"You heard something."

"It was a bell."

Somehow it became important to her that the bell should be real, in spite of the fact that Jacob would not admit that it existed.

Once the curtain was drawn back, she stared, intrigued at the figures on the wall. To his surprise Jacob found the altar lighted by a dazzling shaft of sunlight that descended through a cleft in the rock.

"They're nice," she announced. "But who are they—the shepherd lad and lass?"

"Saint George, alias Mar Giorgios, and his lady, name unknown."

Under Michal's urging, he told her the story of the two as he had interpreted it.

"So they burned her," she murmured, "because of him. And there was never really a dragon to writhe under his lance point."

Jacob smiled. This woman had a child's gift of blending fairy tales with reality. "I think Saint George fought his battle inside himself, and people invented the dragon afterward to make it picturesque."

Moving restlessly about the shaft of light, she investigated the tarnished fittings of the altar. "I like my new home. It will be very simple to go to church Sundays, if we can keep track of the Sundays."

He would be gone by the next Sunday. The news from Riyat made it urgent not to delay longer. There was no alternative to pushing on after Daoud, who had been missing three days now. While there was no evidence of a road, he meant to try to follow whatever path Father Hyacinth had taken.

Quizzically Michal eyed Saint George and his lady. "Is it really necessary to keep on? Why can't you stay here and wait for what is going to happen? It will happen anyway."

"I told Sir Clement I'd try——"

Her lips pressed together hard, Michal stared up at him. "Of course. You must go riding off over mountain peaks because politicians in Moscow or London have made a mess. Didn't you say your patron, Saint George, fought his battle without benefit of a dragon?" Her words came softly, quickly. "I'm sorry to be cross today, Jacob. My mind goes every which way when I try to think of plans. I had a plan for today and it went pop, as usual. Now, if you knew how hungry I am, you would lead me in to dinner."

It was odd to watch Michal at the long table, where Mar Shimun paid her friendly and quiet attention, and the priests talked in undertones, in awe of their lovely guest. Somehow, Michal managed to exchange words with the patriarch in good French mixed with bad Arabic. She wanted to know about her bell. And Mar Shimun explained, as Jacob anticipated, that the monastery had no bell; she had heard the pealing of the bell of the mountain

which he, the patriarch, had never seen, but which sounded in honor of their patron, Mar Giorgios.

Where was this great cloche? None of them at the table, the patriarch insisted, had seen it. So it must be within the mountain itself.

When they sat on the quilt at the side of the ledge that evening to watch the sun drop over the sea of clouds, Jacob puzzled over the mysterious bell, which the monks had admitted hearing. It seemed to exist, and it must be a big one, audible when the wind blew from it toward the monastery. Such a sound would carry with the wind for twenty miles. And it came from the direction in which Daoud had disappeared.

"What do you think?" he asked Michal, who was intent on the sunset.

"I think Aucassin never asked Nicolette what she thought."

"What *do* you think, Michal?"

"Do you want to know?" Her face resting against her bare arm was tinged by the sunset, and she stared into it as if to see beyond the glow in the west. "I should have warned you. I was thinking, Jacob, of the lovely shopwindows in the Rue Saint Honoré, and not of Saint George. I was thinking of the glow in the rose window of Notre Dame, when you look over your shoulder at it, and of the nice jasmine bushes in the grounds of the embassy at Athens. It's all back there with my vanished youth, and I loved it." She nodded stubbornly. "I warn you that I depend on my luxuries. I have five evening frocks—of the vintage of thirty-nine—packed in the bags that Badr guards so zealously. This frivolous part of me is the one I enjoy most; I have no patriotism, and I believe in none of the old clichés. Besides, I detest climbing mountains in the general direction of nowhere." Her eyes, half closed, turned to Jacob. "The beginning of today was such a happy one. Now that's not a full confession but it will do for you to go on. Do we start at dawn tomorrow?"

Jacob did not answer. Now that she had said it, he realized that she meant to go on, and that it was in a way inevitable that she should do so.

"Do we start at dawn to find the bell of Saint George?" she repeated tranquilly.

"I can take you back to Riyat," Jacob answered.

"Having accomplished how much? And to what would we go back?" She seemed not at all concerned about that, and smiled without enthusiasm. "I can see Sir Clement's face, and hear his cold disapproval. At least I won't be bored with myself while we find this Daoud individual. But how?"

No, there was no use discussing what they might do. They had to keep on just because they could not retrace their steps, easy as that might be.

"Jacob," exclaimed Michal, "you need not think of evasive tactics. I'm not going to be left to myself again."

"Then call Badr."

Dubiously, she looked at him. "Are you taking away my last remaining servant?"

"Yes."

Clapping her hands, she called, until the driver's dark figure burst from the stable below them and ran to the cliff, scattering the watching children. On the step by Jacob he came to rest, his great body poised in readiness to rush away as soon as he was given a command.

Producing the bronze horse and the photograph of the mountain range, Jacob showed them to the attentive Kurd; then, invoking the talismanic name of Araman, he tried to make clear by signs that he and Michal wanted to be guided along the cliff toward Araman. Badr understood quickly enough, but his eyes dropped and he shook his head stubbornly. He looked pained but very determined.

"*Ei, Badr,*" Michal cried suddenly. "*Baraye man. Subz.*"

Like an indicator on a dial, the mountaineer's attention fastened on her. Visibly he struggled inwardly, then swiftly seized her hand in both his, bending his head, murmuring, "*Ei, khanim.*"

"There!"

Jacob had ceased to be surprised at anything Michal did. "What did you tell him?" he asked.

"To do it for me. Tomorrow at dawn. That was when you wanted to go, wasn't it?"

It exasperated him that this man was ruled by Michal's wish; the Kurd's allegiance lay with her and the need to keep her from harm. And he, Jacob, could not do that. He understood beyond any doubt that Michal dreaded going on.

"Ask for something, Michal," he demanded suddenly. "For anything."

"I asked very nicely for something in the garden at Riyat, but you pretended not to know."

Jacob shook his head. "It wasn't pretending."

"Very well." Like a pleased child she smiled. "Now, can I rest and go to sleep?"

Her quick upward glance caught the disappointment he could not hide, and her slim fingers twined into his. "I'm not really hardened to this mountaineering yet, Jacob, and in about one minute I shall be asleep."

"It's this altitude." He tried to make the words casual. "You don't know it but you're lying down about ten thousand feet in the air."

Drowsily Michal blinked at the crimson clouds. "Higher than Saint Moritz, where the servants take off your ski boots when you come in at this sunset hour. I liked having my ski boots taken off, Jacob. There are ghosts of Scottish chatelaines in me, I suppose, and Finnish I-don't-know-whats, all of them my great-ancestors. So I'm unreliable, and often you won't like me. Let's see. You must have the ghost of a Dutch *Meister* in you, who wants to sail his ship over all the seven seas."

"No, he was a printer who set up type himself." With one hand Jacob was filling his pipe, frowning. "I'm his rightful descendant. I write at desks, read in armchairs, and observe people from verandas."

"Do you call this one?"

"Yes. I've hardly been off the pavements or out of car seats. I'm about as efficient in a spot like this as a doormat. Your Aucassin fellow wouldn't even waste a spear on me."

Her eyes did not open at him; she might have been asleep. "*Aucassin, beau doux ami*," she whispered.

"That's a fairy tale. I'd go mad"—suddenly his voice broke and he caught himself savagely—"if anything should hurt you now."

Gently her fingers caressed his. "You are like this cliff, Jacob. You're here, and you don't change into something not yourself, and there's nothing I can do about it, to change anything. Promise me"—her head lifted and her flushed, tired face turned to him—"you'll always be here."

"Here?"

"With me."

Looking at his pipe, he put it away. "I promise."

Coming in from the fields, the cultivators of Mar Giorgios watched the foreign man and woman who sat on the cliff, one smoking a piece of wood, the other asleep, holding hands like children. At the stables, the people of the fields heard that the two were going on the next morning whither they had been summoned.

When Badr brought the four horses to the steps after the last stars had vanished in a gray mist, Mar Shimun appeared, smiling, with a boy behind him. When Michal and Jacob came down to the horses he muttered a blessing and then shook hands solemnly in European fashion. Apparently it did not surprise him that his guests were going on. The boy, however, held a long talk with Badr, who approached Jacob apologetically. A gift of money was needed for the monastery, he made clear. Not pay, but a gift, to compensate for feeding the horses.

Jacob handed a bank note to the boy, who took it awkwardly.

"I'd forgotten. It's the last of our civilization, Michal, that we are leaving here."

CHAPTER IV *The Intruders*

All that first day on the shoulder of the mountain—until Badr pointed out the light—Jacob was troubled by a sense of familiarity with his surroundings.

There was the gray wall of granite always on his right. Yet he could not escape a conviction that he had been here before under the same gray massif where dark rhubarb grew wild and bright pheasants flitted away over the ridges. It bothered him because he knew that he had never been on such a mountain, above the cloud level.

It was difficult for the three of them and the pack horse to make any progress. Badr, in the lead, picked his way around the rock outcroppings and across the gullies that had appeared impassable from the monastery. Their unshod ponies scrambled down clay banks and plowed up slopes of loose shale courageously. Watching the Kurd closely, Jacob decided that he was following no landmarks and was contenting himself with keeping as close as possible to the cliff.

Still, Jacob regretted that he could discern no trail of any kind. The occasional hoofmarks of animals meant nothing along these uplands where herds both tame and wild grazed. By the same token, the monastery people had not come this way often.

It would have been a rare chance to find a road up here. Even the Romans had never penetrated this far into Asia—the stone skeletons of their highways lay far to the westward, lost in the immensity of the deserts they had never conquered.

Soon the route became more difficult; they were forced to circle huge pinnacles that stood out from the granite wall. No blasting

by man-made explosives could ever clear a way through these natural towers of rock.

"Does all this," he asked Michal, "remind you of anything?"

"Uhhm," she agreed, shifting uncomfortably in the saddle. "These aiguilles are exactly like cathedral spires."

Contemplating the nearest gray pinnacle, Jacob shook his head. "More like flying buttresses. We have to go around them, anyway."

Michal lifted a speculative gaze. "Are we going sunwise or otherwise? The sun is certainly keeping us company."

It was true enough, as she had said, that the cliff gave them the illusion of rounding a natural edifice enormously larger than any Notre Dame.

"When do we reach the bell tower, Jacob?"

"We don't."

"We do, when we find my bell. It will be a huge one, and somebody must have been very clever to hang it up here."

Being with Michal had changed this day from all the days that had gone before. His thoughts were not complete or satisfactory unless he shared them with her. He liked to ride a little behind her, to see her head turn when she answered him. And he wondered if she really expected to find a huge bell somewhere. Cast in bronze—there had been makers of bronze in Araman. Only Christian churches had bells . . .

"Those eagles," exclaimed Michal, "keep flying into the cliff."

"*Darbatash*," called Badr, swinging his horse to face them.

The Gate of the Fire, for which the monastery's site had been named. It was there in reality. Jacob noticed a wide depression before him filled with a spate of stones extending fanwise from a chasm in the cliff.

This break in the natural wall of granite might have escaped their notice if Badr had not headed toward it. Jacob would have crossed the spate of stones without wondering how they came to be there. Now he saw them for what they were, the rubble in the bed of a small river that had flowed out from the chasm at some remote time.

Badr, at least, appeared to think this might be a passage leading into the mountains. Jacob had gambled on the chance that

Father Hyacinth had gone that way after seeing the photograph and observing Daoud go over the cliff. And on the probability that the silent Badr would not start out with Michal in his charge unless he knew some route to the mountain of the photograph.

"Is this where we go in?" Michal asked, interested.

"I think so. Badr calls it a gate of fire."

"The wind seems to be trying to keep us out, Jacob."

As they neared the mouth of the narrow gorge they were buffeted by wind gusts that tore through the opening. Until then the cliff had protected them in a measure from the air currents of the heights. Now they had to push into the shadow of the chasm against the tangible force of the air.

At times the rock surfaces almost met overhead, and they probed their way upward into tunnelliike obscurity, between eroded walls, polished smooth by wind and water. Underfoot the debris was dry, and Jacob guessed that it had been carried down by the wash of rainfall rather than by the flow of a stream. Up here, he reflected, the rivers had changed their ancient courses. The chasm itself, so far as he could determine, ran due east.

When the light failed, Badr dismounted where the floor shelved up sharply and boulders gave them protection from the wind. As a sign that they were to sleep here, he took the burden off the pack horse. Watching him, Jacob was reminded how few were their possessions. They had a bundle of cold food and a jar of water from the monastery and their own sleeping gear. If Badr, who valued Michal's comfort, had been willing to go into the heights with no more than this, it meant that the Kurd expected to find supplies not too far away.

After dark they were given proof that Badr was taking them toward an objective known to him. Taking Jacob's hand, he led them up a few yards and pointed ahead. At first they could make out nothing except the narrow pattern of stars overhead. One star below the others gleamed red. Its light dwindled and grew stronger, as if a flame in it shifted, and that meant it must be a fire lit on the surface of the earth, not in the reaches of the sky. "*Atash*," said the Kurd, without excitement.

He had known where to look for the light; he had expected it to

be there. When Jacob returned an hour later to this observation point, the red eye of light shone as before.

When he stretched out on his blanket and pulled it over his body, he felt Michal's hand searching for his. Her fingers closed around his wrist so that when his own heartbeat quieted he felt the pulse that beat between them. Studying the sky overhead to determine in what direction they were journeying, he thought that they themselves were moving not so much toward a destination as onward through time.

It helped Michal, he thought, to live in this way hour by hour and to play with the passing moments as if finding companionship in them. He heard her voice: "Jacob, you didn't hear the bell again at vesper time?"

There was no use, he thought, in pretending they might not hear it in the ravine. "No, of course not," he replied confidently. "Bells have one peculiarity: they are quiet unless somebody rings them."

Her low, satisfied laugh answered not so much his words as the assurance of his voice. The invisible bell had become important to her. So might a young girl have hugged close to herself a doll when she relaxed to sleep.

The next day the veil of the heights was drawn over them. They ascended through the murk of a cloud. This palpable curtain cooled them, caressing their flesh while they hauled themselves from ledge to ledge, leading up the horses.

Once started, Michal climbed easily, her light body moving without apparent effort. Jacob had to force his heavy frame ahead by the thrust of his good leg, and the effort told on him. At times Badr took the bags from the pack horse and carried them up a steep gradient. He seemed to be untiring.

Jacob never realized when they reached the summit of the gorge. On either side the slopes had receded into the gray curtain and the sky overhead had lightened. Leading his horse forward, he looked for the next ascent, too weary to think of anything except the ground underfoot. The walking became easier, and he noticed that he was on a path.

Then he came out of the haze, seeing the path traced in a field of grass. Overhead he was aware of the blue of the sky.

He was standing, arrested, at the edge of a valley. Around it rose serried peaks. From gray to purple they reared to white veins that must be snow upon peaks incredibly distant. Like a barrier, they ringed the valley, whose dark green was shot with the flame of beds of poppies in bloom. The mountains had opened out, to disclose this hidden recess.

Midway across the valley rose an isolated conical peak. Alone, it was regular in outline, up to the flattened summit. It differed from the others in its coloring, a tawny gray. Jacob did not need to look at the photograph he carried. This was the valley centering upon the single mount of the photograph, the one Sir Clement said might be Araman.

He felt no surprise, except at the unusual silence after the many sounds of the gorge. And he had not been prepared for the stark colors of these heights where the encircling peaks appeared lighter than the ground, or the deeper blue of the sky along the horizon. Quick steps came behind him.

"It's lovely," Michal observed. "But what is it?"

He laughed in sheer relief from tension, remembering that she had not heard the arguments for and against Araman. "What does it remind you of, Michal?"

"The valley of Interlaken," she said promptly, "with a hill where the lake should be."

"That hill, as you call it, may be what we're looking for."

Michal pondered and drew a long breath like a favored child ready to answer at school. "Is it Khufu's pyramid by the Mena house, with its top cut off? No? Well, it looks a little like the Acropolis at Athens, or—let me think—something seen in India. Some kind of a tower." And she smiled up at him triumphantly, indifferent to the tawny mount, but pleased with his new mood.

"You haven't really looked at it. It's much higher than your pyramid. Those black specks along the foot are people like us, most of them mounted."

Briefly she concentrated on the distant height. "It's curious—it

is familiar, Jacob, but I don't know why. What are we going to do with it?"

"We're going to find out." Jacob could not hide his eagerness.

Without waiting for Badr, they started across the plain, the tired horses breaking into a gallop over the grassy footing. Jacob was intent on the solitary cone. There was no danger of losing sight of it, and it proved to be far distant, as he had expected, and great in height. As they neared it in the early afternoon, he guessed it to be four or five hundred feet above the plain. So steeply did the sides angle up that he found it difficult to believe it was not a man-made mound—certainly its upward lift was sharper than that of the Great Pyramid or of Vesuvius.

While he meditated, Michal rode by him effortlessly, singing to herself.

They were approaching the west face, and Jacob veered toward the south. That had been marked as the entrance side on the German's photograph, and a group of riders, moving slowly around the base, had stopped on that side. They looked like Kurds and seemed to be shifting their loads there by a stream, under a solitary tree. Jacob noticed several watercourses threading the valley, and decided that this might be the source of his river that had gone underground. Probably, millenniums ago, another river had flowed down the gorge that had served them for an entrance-way.

The excitement in him grew with the race over the flowered grass, and he breathed deep of the mountain air, sharper than that of the Riyat ravine. The mount loomed higher above him, baffling as before. It looked unclimbable, and he could make out nothing of what might be on the summit, except a glimpse of treetops.

Intent on the height above him, Jacob hardly observed the Kurdish horsemen at work under a tree opening their black packs and laying out an assortment of sacks and piles of fruit and some rolled-up rugs. He assumed that they were making camp. And he regretted afterward that in his haste he had paid so little attention to them. Vaguely he noticed that no rifles were visible, and that they formed two groups, only one of which wore the small shawl turban of the higher mountain tribes.

What held his attention was a faint dark line running diagon-

ally up the stone face of the south side of the mound. Only when he came within stone's throw could he be certain that the line was made by steps hewn into the rock—forming no proper stairway but offering a way for one person to climb up at a time.

Michal, however, was more concerned with a towerlike projection at the foot of the stair.

"Jacob!" she cried. "There's my campanile and the bell itself!" "What?"

She pointed at the slender tower which did indeed have a sizable bell hanging under the cupola. Its bright green surface showed that it must be of bronze long exposed to the weather. In all the valley this bell tower alone offered evidence of human purpose, and Jacob reined his horse over to it hurriedly. The tribesmen watched him curiously but without surprise or uneasiness.

Over the narrow door of the bell tower letters had been carved in the stone. At first he thought them to be Hebrew and then recognized them as early Armenian script, of the type he had seen in manuscripts in the library of Mar Giorgios.

Suddenly he laughed. The explanation of the bell tower might be simple indeed. It had been built by Christian Armenians a good many centuries before, but in no remote historical age. And Mar Shimun had told the truth when he had said that the bell they heard was the bell of Mar Giorgios. No doubt they had heard it often enough.

Still there must be a reason why it had been erected here at the steps. Glancing over at the tree, Jacob observed a rude stone shrine of the kind he had seen at the bridge the first night out of Riyat. Here, at this outdoor altar, the migrating tribesmen were piling some of their stuff. The steps leading up the mount were flanked, then, by an early Christian campanile and a mountain shrine, two things by no means remarkable in themselves.

Getting off his horse, he called to Michal, and started for the steps. But Michal looked stubborn.

"Must we go up to look at the view just now?" she murmured. "This tree is very inviting, and we'll have to wait for Badr to arrive for lunch."

In his excitement he hardly heard her. Now that he was close

to it, the slope revealed itself as eroded rock. This, then, was no volcanic cone, or any immense pyramid built by the hands of men. It was not corded lava but calcined rock.

"Water shaped it!" he cried.

The strangely smooth surface, almost bare of earth, shone with streaks of alabaster and limelike calcium. For geologic ages water must have dripped down this slope, forming its deposits that flashed like inset gems in the sunlight. And if water had dripped for so long, there must be a lake on the summit, fed by subterranean springs, which were in turn the sources of the rivers flowing from this valley.

The only way up seemed to be by the steps; they must lead to the top.

"Michal, there's a lake up there," he exclaimed, "and trees, and God knows what else. Daoud and Father Hyacinth may be there!"

The fever of restlessness in him would not let him delay to please her.

"Why must you climb the steps, Jacob?" she demanded instantly.

Angered, he started forward. Slipping by him, Michal ran up the first steps and staggered, on the smooth stone, in her small riding boots. Sitting down doggedly, she drew off her leather riding boots and went on easily, but keeping close to the slope, feeling for holds with her free hand. Glancing down, Jacob saw that they were climbing sharply. Below them, Badr had dismounted at the tree, to watch.

"He has more sense than we have," Michal muttered.

"Don't look back," he warned her impatiently when she hesitated.

"Then keep close to me," she retorted. "And be very glad there isn't a wind!"

Afterward he remembered only how she kept near him, moving easily and surely over the treacherous footing, for many of the steps had been so worn that they were little more than wet hollows in the slope, circling the height as they led up. Water dripped steadily in deep channels. If the wind of the gorge had beat against them here, they could not have gone on. If there had been water

in the gorge that morning, they could not have reached the valley.

Some of the steps had been repaired; there was no telling how long ago they had been made.

"If I drop a shoe, it will be a long way to go to pick it up." Her voice came back to him, cheerful now. "We're almost at the top of the ladder, Jacob."

Then he was standing with her in a level space, a fresh breeze touching him, the strain and anxiety forgotten. They were in the empty gateway of a wall, and the wall was built of massive limestone blocks fitted together without mortar or dowels. A cyclopean wall a dozen feet thick.

On one side of the entrance projected a head, so worn away that Jacob could only conjecture that it had been a lion's, with a pair of wings. Michal regarded it somberly as she put on her boots, and Jacob was glad of the respite to get his breath.

Not till long afterward did he reflect that the climb had been dangerous, that a single break in the cracked rock underfoot would have projected them out into space. He had not thought of Michal falling; if she had slipped, he would have caught her. Nor did he wonder why those who had used this fragile stair had devised no handhold for it. Least of all did he reason then that those who had lived on the summit of this towerlike height would have been safe from attack, until artillery was invented.

Instead, at that moment he felt rested; he moved through the open gate with Michal as if coming home.

This sense of well-being affected him physically. The eyestrain of the outer approach was relieved by the dark growth of wild oaks and walnuts inside the gate; even the encircling wall was overgrown with ivy, and had, moreover, fallen into rubble in many places. To his surprise he noticed some dwarf firs and birches. A vagrant flock of sheep grazed in a clear space among wild oleanders and moved away only lazily at their approach. Pigeons circled among the treetops.

Sighting the gleam of water ahead, he went toward it instinctively, and found himself on the edge of a narrow lake. The water

seemed clear and deep; when he plunged his hand into it, it proved to be icy to the touch, and he decided it must come from springs deep in the rock below.

A faint rushing sound at the lower end indicated that the water flowed out over a fall.

"I think I hear a wheel turning," Michal whispered. "I should know."

Poised at the lake's edge, she looked around without surprise, as if this woodland were hers. There was, after all, nothing remarkable about it except that it should be there. The verdure was that of a northern climate, of the Adirondacks or England. But this hilltop would be much colder than the semi-desert valleys far below. Jacob observed bees passing toward a line of hives along the shore, not of wood but of clay.

Michal smiled up at him suddenly. "I'm sorry I was cross. It's so lovely up here. Shall we sit in the grass and just look, or explore the village, Jacob?"

The village, as she called it, caused Jacob a disappointment that he hid from her. At the upper end of the lake the outlines of dwellings could be traced clearly against the limestone summit that gleamed in the late-afternoon sun. They rose lazily on easy terraces, in pueblo fashion, looking like a small Swiss village without the inevitable church spire. The open space in the upper level was empty of life.

In fact he could discern no sign of movement among the habitations. Over the lake and village lay a quiet so deep that it seemed as if he and Michal might wander from end to end of the place without disturbing the activity of one bee or pigeon. It seemed as if human beings did not exist, physically, in this community of the heights.

A current of air stirred the trees. A low musical note echoed over the lake, growing in volume.

"What would that be?" Jacob wondered.

Michal listened attentively. The note wandered up and down a scale, changing evasively. "It's a wind instrument. It couldn't be an oboe?"

The treetops rustled again, and the invisible musician rang in

changes on his scale. "It's nice," Michal murmured, "but it would have to be a very big oboe, wouldn't it?"

By one accord they moved toward the dwellings, quickening their pace to the accompaniment of the soft obbligato. The first thing that caught Jacob's attention was a sundial.

It stood on a marble pedestal, bronze, like any other sundial except that it was square in shape, with a slender vertical shaft for gnomon. And it had no numerals, Roman or otherwise.

The line of the sun's shadow fell near the eleventh mark at the edge of the base. The hands on Jacob's watch pointed to a little after five. The fifth hour of the watch was then the eleventh of the dial. So the day of the sundial must have begun at sunrise.

Michal, indifferent to the sundial's peculiar numbering of hours, was contemplating an aged oak. A comfortable bench stretched around its gnarled bole.

"Our musician *ought* to be sitting just there," she hazarded; "but he isn't there."

No one appeared in the doorways of the stone houses clustered at the head of the lake. On the roofs trays of fruit—grapes and persimmons—stood drying in the sun. Jacob noticed that the dwellings had no windows; glancing into one, he saw that light came in through a central opening in the roof. Embers of a fire smoked beneath it in a bronze brazier.

"Silk!" cried Michal suddenly. "White and flossy."

Near the door she had discovered a hand loom on which a square of white silk hung taut. The bars of the loom had been shaped out of slender boles of trees, worn smooth with much use.

Nowhere was any human being visible. Michal thought that the oboe or flute player must be farther away, and they went on, up broad steps, to an open space like a plaza. Here other buildings with colonnaded porches stood back against the rock summit. Grass thrust through the cracks between the great stones of the central space, and fruit trees fringed the base of the height beyond.

"I think our concert is going on over there." Intrigued, Michal pointed out a house with a small square tower. This had narrow vents in the stone, and Jacob thought it might have been a pigeon tower, but found that he was mistaken. As they approached, the

low notes of the scale sounded over their heads so softly that he could not be sure he actually heard them.

Inside the entrance, they found themselves in a room with bright rugs underfoot and broad divans by the apertures in the wall.

The faint echoes of melody came from a grilled opening in the roof, which was actually the base of the slender tower. Looking up into it, Michal could see the gleam of daylight through the opening. There was no sign of a musician in the tower, and she laughed. "It must be a radio, Jacob."

He shook his head. In the hollow tower he made out a projecting box of dark wood against which strings stretched taut upon a metal framework. A breath of air down the tower raised the pitch of the half-heard melody.

After a moment he satisfied himself that the sound varied with the wind. "There's your musician, Michal." He grinned. "And your wood and wind instrument."

Doubtfully she peered up, suspecting she was being teased.

"It's some aeolian harp thing," he explained. "The wind sets the strings to vibrating, and you hear whatever the wind chooses to play for you."

"Truly?" She smiled up at him and considered the room carefully. The deep recess at one end had a frame of woven branches stretched across it instead of a bed frame, and the branches smelled pleasantly of pine resin. The only decoration of the "living room" were two wall paintings, so dim that they could barely be seen in the faint light. Going closer, she found one to be a young shepherd with a harp on his knee.

Jacob was watching her. "Long ago, when the night wind blew," he reflected aloud, "King David used to hear his harp sing where it hung over his bed."

Head on one side, Michal studied the other painting in which a second man seemed to be leading a white beast from a growth of trees. "It's an elephant," she decided finally. "Jacob, I've never had a white elephant look me in the eye before. It's nice here." Slowly she revolved, considering. "There isn't any kitchen, and that's a blessing. I think it's going to be our house."

"Ours?"

"The instinct that tells me so is practically never wrong. It's really planning, not instinct." Her spirits rising, she smiled up at him. "You don't know, Jacob, but a woman is never fully content until she ferrets out a house to be hers. That *is* instinct. Now that we're here I might as well confess that I hated wandering around on horseback. And," she added quickly, "I'm not going down that spiral fire escape tonight. It's too late, anyway."

Suddenly she paused, listening. Close to them sounded a slow tread of hoofs on stone. It stopped and then rushed away, as if some animal had seen or scented them and had taken fright. An animal, Jacob thought, smaller than a horse or grown deer—it sounded like a goat, yet from the door he could see nothing moving about the house.

Michal came close to him. The flurry of sound had not disturbed her but she had sensed his uncertainty. "What *is* all this place?" she murmured. "Whoever could have planned it?"

"What do you think?" he asked casually.

Gravely she pondered. "It's odd. At first it seemed like a lovely mountain resort, but of course it can't be that. It's clean, and it doesn't smell in the least of mutton grease or human filth, like most of Asia."

"On a mountaintop," he reminded her, "everything is washed by the rain and dried by the wind and burned clean by the sun. That's natural. Go on."

Obediently she nodded, her eyes intent. And he wondered if she had not answered as a sensitive girl the questioning of older people, perhaps her father, in this way. He thought of the aeolian harp, so sensitive that it played at the wind's touch.

"Uhhm—yes, Jacob. It's like the sleepy villages up in the Basque part of the Pyrenees, or the Bernese Oberland, where people still make things by hand. It's even nicer." Then she frowned. "But where *have* the people gone?"

"Down the mountain probably. They ought to be back before dark." For a moment he reflected. "Does it bother you that they paint elephants and harpists on the walls of your house?"

"The guesthouse? No. Some villagers still paint saints and things on their doors, or shrines. I admit the elephant intrigues

me, but they do have white ones in Ceylon, don't they?" She was answering now with half her mind, the other half considering the details of the room. "They make fine old-fashioned rugs."

"Very old-fashioned. Michal, do you realize you've seen nothing today that might not have existed here in the time of the Romans, or of Ulysses for that matter?"

Michal laughed, without belief. What she had seen and heard she had accepted naturally. In this place she had found quiet and certain small comforts unperceived by Jacob, and evidently she was satisfied. "Now you're speaking archaeologically, and I don't know anything about that. What do the other experts say?"

"Daoud thinks this might be a treasure-trove of bronzes, buried once and now dug up again."

"More bronze horses?"

"Yes. Sir Clement reasons that this stone mount may contain a tomb, relic, or sign much revered by the Kurdish tribes, who seem to guard it against intrusion. Or perhaps some modern saint might live here. But I don't remember that anyone objected to our coming," he added thoughtfully.

"And what do you think?" She was interested now.

"I don't know. I don't know a thing about it, Michal." Jacob hesitated. "Except that I have a queer feeling that this is a place to rest."

Fleetingly he thought of Sir Clement's sealed notes in his pocket. Sheer relief flooded the woman's sensitive face. "That's exactly what it is," she approved.

The clear tolling of a church bell sounded, striking on his fatigue with the effect of shock. The acoustics of this place were extraordinary, because the bell must be down at the foot of the steps.

"My vesper bell!" Michal smiled triumphantly. "Let's see who is ringing, for what."

It could be a summons, Jacob thought as they hurried down from the plaza, or it could be a warning, or merely a routine ringing at the vesper hour. When they reached the lion gate the first thing he noticed was the nomad tribe moving away over the plain along a road distinctly visible from that height.

Scattered up the ascent, other figures were climbing the steps

slowly. Jacob counted more than thirty as they came into view. Those nearest him, women and children mostly, were carrying baskets and rugs—the things that had been left by the visiting nomads. In the line of human forms toiling up the rock he recognized Badr, weighted down by Michal Thorne's luggage. She had sighted it also.

"Look, Jacob! They are carrying in our bags—and we're going to stay."

At that moment the bell ceased tolling. Whatever message it had sent out into the fantastic corridors of sound around the peaks was ended. With sunset the wind had dropped, and the melody of the harp was stilled. In this quiet of the air framed against the glow in the west Jacob saw for the first time a thin line of smoke rising from the highest point of the rocks behind him, as if from a sacrificial fire that burned without ceasing.

Jacob could not escape a conviction that the people of the mountain had been expecting them. The fire on the peak, the clay lamps in which an oil flame flickered, the bronze trays of food brought in by Badr—trays with bronze heads of mountain sheep ornamenting the corners—the curds and whey, the sour milk and lentils and unleavened bread they ate reclining on a divan, the brightly clad woman who carried in a bronze caldron of hot water—all these he accepted as part of the *mise en scène*. They had the unreality of things and persons seen through the window of a plane by a passenger already disassociated from them because he is leaving them. Michal accepted them as readily as she had made herself at home in Mr. Parabat's garden. These people of the mount made no effort to speak to him, as if they had known beforehand that they would not be understood; only the younger children stared at the foreigners curiously. When they spoke, it was in a quick syllabic tongue that even Michal did not recognize. It did not sound as harsh as the Kurdish of Riyat.

Michal had been occupied with the water in the sleeping compartment for some time; she had emerged silently in a fresh dress, and had knelt beside him, as if preoccupied with food but eating

little. He thought: the sundial is dark, and the night has no hours here, the wind harp does not sound and we are very close to the stars, and still she accepts it as if it were a resort prepared for her.

They walked out under a cloudless sky, surprised at the light that revealed objects far away.

"Do you feel that this belongs to us?" he asked abruptly. Michal murmured, "There's no Mr. Parabat now."

Turning up the steps toward the glow of the solitary fire—the same, Jacob thought, that he had sighted from the gorge—they passed giant figures carved in half-relief on the smooth face of rock beside them. A horseman stood there beneath a sun of stone, and before him knelt a man who appeared to be a Roman without armor. Michal drew close to Jacob, pointing out a living man near the fire.

He was putting fresh fuel on the blaze. It shone red between the upraised wings of the altar, shifting with the vagrant air. The man, Jacob noticed, was tall; white hair gleamed on his head when he bent forward, drawing back long sleeves from his arms. He did not look like a priest. When he had finished with the fire he leaned against the outer parapet, motionless.

Michal stirred restlessly; then putting her hand in Jacob's, she drew him toward the fire. She was trembling, as if with cold. Coming close to the small blaze, she studied it and glanced shyly at the watcher, who took no heed of them. His heavy frame and massive head held the patience of the rock itself.

"Is he our night watchman?" Jacob wondered.

"Our Watchman of the Night," she said quickly.

They had been left to themselves. Even Badr had not taken his place, as usual, at the door of their quarters. In the darkness there was nothing more to see, only the glow of the fire this man kept up and the pattern of the stars. The glow touched Michal's hair and the pallor of her throat, making her fragile against the enveloping darkness which already had become familiar to them. Jacob felt the ache of desire for her deep within him.

"I'm glad I put on a clean dress." Michal waited a moment and then said, "Shall we go home, Jacob?"

They found their way back to the light in their house. The one

lamp stood on the floor inside the threshold. Jacob would have liked to have carried her through the door. Awkwardly, he picked up the flickering lamp. When he looked at the bed, made up with quilts and blankets, he could find no place to put it. He snuffed out the flame with his fingers and turned suddenly, blindly toward Michal.

When he waked, with Michal sleeping beside him, it was a moment before his memory convinced him that the two of them were alone among a strange people, and that Michal herself might be at his side that day and the next. Their life had that quality of unreality, whether they sat by the lamp or wandered the length of the cyclopean wall, exploring the tangles of vines and oleanders. Michal wanted to see everything, without questioning it; he felt disturbed by the quiet of the mount for which he could not account.

As the days went by, he dreaded the encroachment of time that might take Michal away. In an odd way the sundial became a friendly indicator, marking the hours they shared together; his watch, ticking inexorably, reminded him that time was accelerated elsewhere by the landing of far-questing planes and the ringing of telephones in offices in Cairo. He tried not to think of that; instead he hoarded every moment of companionship, attentive even to the movement of her slim body when she walked slowly at his side. With a glance now he could read her face, and he felt exultant because she seemed to be content to be with him.

Michal had quieted, often sleeping in the drowsy air of the heights. Waking, her eyes searched for Jacob instinctively.

"For days," he teased her, "you haven't asked what this place is."

She said gravely, "If there be a paradise on earth, this is it."

You shouldn't, she argued, question paradise; it was there or it wasn't. And they could rest and not worry about it. One morning she investigated the dark water wheel that groaned as it revolved under the outlet of the lake. It turned a heavy millstone upon another stone to grind grain. "It's just a wheel," she announced after a long interval, "and it only moans because it is weary doing such excellent work making bread for us. It is not connected in the least with artillery."

Not that Michal had expected any reverberation of guns to break the stillness of their mount. She was playing a game with herself, as a child might, smugly satisfied that she could sit unperturbed by this agonizing primitive water wheel which no longer held within it the dread of the storm-lashed wheel at Riyat. On the other hand, she still hated the sight of a fire, for which she was not prepared. It brought back the memory of the burning of the hospital train in Greece.

"I was frightened that first night when we went up to our own altar fire," she confessed. "But you were there." And, turning away to scrutinize the antics of the water, she added, "That's not exactly true. You frightened me more—as if I were a seventeen-year-old. You still do at times."

Confession was good, wasn't it, she mused aloud. It freed you from the dread you hugged close to yourself, and if you talked about fears they lost something of their reality. Or did they? Michal was not at all smug now, and her eyes distended as they watched the rushing water. "I go all to pieces mentally—and I can't reason about why that is. It's not the effect of shock alone after all these five years, Jacob."

Twenty years before, a child alone and spoiled, she had been surrounded by family portraits of high commanding officers and statesmen and their ladies. She had learned too easily in school, and had fancied herself too easily in love. She had been married in a breathless moment, and had freed herself by divorce, to be sent abroad, wandering with a fond and scholarly grandfather who served the Foreign Office of His Britannic Majesty's government. When this Michal Thorne had thrown herself into study at the Sorbonne she had won a prize; she had been a favorite of the diplomatic corps until, at drowsy Athens, she had been caught in the maelstrom of the German invasion.

Her fingers played with the pearls of her necklace as if they had been the parts of a rosary, and her eyes went far away. "Miss Michal Thorne had been agreeable and protected and quite in love with herself—in a protected garden. When the reality of terror came, after Athens, everything became confused. She felt that she belonged to Arthur—who was a British flier. Afterward, in

Cairo, he hurt me, not only physically but in the things he did. He had a way of calling waiters and watching other handsome women when he thought I didn't notice. I was only a body to him, and a foolish, sentimental personality. I *had* been sentimental about him. I felt lost, and outside myself." Michal tried to smile. "Like a little barnyard fowl that bruised itself when it tried to fly up, after the wild geese that swept by following the wind. I was hurt and grieved, all by my own doing, until . . . Jacob, in Mr. Parabat's garden I *knew* we were going to love one another."

Gravely she nodded. "There, I've confessed." And, after a moment, "The only thing hurt in Cairo, was the disembodied part of me—what answers for my mind. And that is still afraid. It's the part outside of me that's afraid, and I sometimes think in the early hours of the morning there isn't a *me* any more."

"There certainly is."

"I am here and in Cairo too. And I'm not twins."

"There's only one of you, and that one's here."

"Do you think so?" Michal looked relieved.

"But you'll miss Cairo," he said, "after a while."

Michal grimaced reflectively. "Shall I? I worked too hard there after V-E Day, being ornamental to society. Having no more money of my own, I circulated gaily. I made bright conversation and danced with old friends and acquaintances, and bartered pretty French songs for my bed and board—although nothing was said about any barter. I just sang, like a minstrel of old time, Jacob. No, that's quite wrong. The minstrels did something fine for their people, and I only amused mine. But what else could I do? And now what can I do? I can't even warp the woof or weft or whatever it is of silk, like these village women. No, don't say anything, Jacob. I'm facing the fact that I'm a useless thing, outside my background. I can't even soothe your mind, tired in the evening by speculation about Araman."

"You can."

"But not with music. Jacob, I can make no music without a piano. I'm not even as practical as an aeolian harp."

No, he thought, you are not practical in using people and things around you to help yourself; you have been bruised and

hurt, and still out of your joyousness, content with small things, you have made this place a sanctuary, and it is precious because you feel it cannot last.

Aloud, he said, "You're much too fond of staring at water rushing over a wheel, or at a fire. That's bad for your imagination."

"And are you good for it?" She smiled up at him.

From that hour Michal took to watching the village women at their tasks, observing how they heated water in caldrons over the bronze braziers, or baked bread in the clay ovens. She took to visiting the house of the woman who had served them that first night—a handsome person with wide, meditative eyes nearly as tall as Michal and perhaps forty years of age. Imanya, as Michal called her, seemed to live alone.

Once Jacob came on them fingering the embroidery that the other had skillfully applied to what looked like a homespun smock.

"Imanya did it all herself," Michal confided to him, "and it's better than I could ever manage to do."

"What else do you know about her?" Jacob asked, surprised.

"She has a son about my age."

"In what language did she explain all that?"

"I don't know."

Michal looked confused. You didn't need much of a vocabulary, she vouchsafed, to discuss children and ages and such. Anyway, Imanya understood that much of Persian. *Maudar* was mother just as *mater* in Latin, and *daukhtar* seemed to be daughter.

"Any other link words?"

"Don't be technical, Jacob. When two women get together in a house, they can find something to talk about, especially if one is perfectly willing to do all the work and the other hates doing it. I won't tell you which is which."

This gave Jacob something to reflect upon. Words of a family's relationship, parents and children, words for primitive tools such as plows, and inescapable marvels of nature like the sun and stars tended to keep to their ancient origin. They remained the old

words—unless a people learned another language. If these folk of the mount understood such Indo-Iranian words—which had come down through the changes in Latin, English, and German—it might mean they were originally of Aryan stock. Sanskrit and ancient Persian were of the same language stock. And possibly the growing things on the mount, the pines, wild roses, ivy, and oaks, had been brought with them in some early migration from a northern climate. Physically, these people appeared to be Aryan stock, with light eyes, slender bodies, and long heads. The darkness of their skin could come from long exposure to the sun.

“What does Imanya call the stars?” he wondered.

“Ask the Watchman, Captain Ide. Imanya has too much to attend to to bother about the stars.”

The Watchman, as Michal had christened him, was the taciturn caretaker of the fire. By day, apparently, he slept. At evening he emerged to eat and drink heartily, and to maintain his vigil. In time, Jacob learned that he recognized the word *astra* as signifying stars.

He had names also for the constellations, because he pointed out the Dipper and Orion’s Square, but Jacob could make nothing of his words. The old man did, however, assent to the name of Araman, which he seemed to apply to the valley as a whole.

Although he was distinguished from the others by living apart in one of the colonnaded dwellings set into the cliffs and fronting the plaza—the residences that Michal, who shared one, called the upper level—and by his attire—for his undergarment with the long Kurdish sleeves was the color of blood—the Watchman appeared to be more than any patriarch of his flock.

For one thing, Jacob had the impression that the Watchman waited at his post by the fire not merely because ritual might require it, but because he was waiting through the hours for some happening of which he alone had knowledge. And Jacob wondered if some others might not be absent from Araman.

The place certainly had been designed for more than its forty-odd inhabitants. How long ago it had been constructed, out of the stones of the summit, he had no means of telling. Like the cliff dwellings of Petra, Araman might have been built in remote

antiquity and added to in Roman times. Yet he felt certain Romans had never been there.

His observation of the people themselves showed that the family groups kept close together, preparing their food at common ovens and hearths although sleeping apart. The women had features as delicate as those delineated on Greek vases, and their draped garment, bound at the waist, resembled the early Greek *chlamys*. With the children, they worked the light silk looms while the men did the heavier cloth weaving. These women were kept in no purdah. They went down with the men at times to cultivate the few fields and grapevines near the shrine. There a herd of black goats grazed, taking its share of the crops.

Another tribe of Kurds passing by left supplies and fruit at the shrine. This seemed to be customary in the valley, whether the tribesmen felt obliged to leave propitiatory gifts, or whether they took pains to supply the folk of Araman.

The children did their share of the work. The youngest had toys—animal shapes carved out of wood. And they did not intrude within the house of the foreigners, although they must have been curious about them.

After a while Jacob was sure that he and Michal were accepted simply as guests on the summit. They shared food equally with the others—chiefly the *sana* meat gruel made out of mutton broth and scraps and pounded wheat. No subservience was paid them by the village folk, nor was anything asked of them.

"Some foreigners *must* have been here before," he told Michal.

"Then they did not disturb the village," she retorted. "I still think it's like Switzerland, only more peaceful. Why is that, Jacob?"

He had had the same thought. This sense of peace in Araman must come from the simplicity of the needs of the people, who gathered food and clothed themselves by the labor of their hands, and rested when they were tired. They might have no greater anxieties because they knew no other. That was not enough, however. This folk had a natural intelligence; if they had merely kept themselves alive for centuries in this fashion, they would have inbred and decayed in mentality to the point of idiocy. They must

have some preoccupation or some purpose to activate them. The quiet and the small comforts of Araman had become great to them because apart from these there existed some danger or determination that shaped their lives.

He was sure of this because an air of expectancy hung around the village. Often the people would go in groups to look from the ruined wall down the length of the valley. Michal admitted that ordinary peasants would never take such an interest in familiar scenery. "But these are not peasants," she added.

Jacob became morally certain that they watched for something outside the walls—something so important to them that the coming of the foreign pair had been no more than an interlude.

Would it be some specific danger? he wondered. If so, what danger could threaten this almost impregnable summit?

That they could endure death he discovered one day by accident. It was when they were carrying up the loads that Jacob saw a woman fall. A breeze was blowing fitfully, and as the climbers rounded a shoulder they strained against the rock's side. The woman stumbled, lost her footing, and rolled slowly down the shoulder. For three seconds she vanished. Then a black speck appeared below, thrown out from the mount's side, hurtling down.

The next day Jacob observed heavy smoke rising from the tree by the shrine, indicating that the body was being burned. He was glad that Michal had seen nothing of this. As it was, she refused emphatically to venture down from the summit. Doubting if he could make the descent himself without a rope, he did not want Michal to try it.

The two of them were immured on the summit of Araman.

Before two weeks had passed Jacob became convinced that, simple as the inhabitants of Araman might appear to be, they had developed an active intelligence. What puzzled him sorely was the nature of that intelligence.

Here was a remnant of people almost cut off from the outside world. Yet they had courtesy, and kindness, and some rudiments of scientific understanding. The latter was indicated by the symbols

on the rock faces and by the bronze instruments standing on the height near the altar.

First he studied the symbols patiently. They had been cut in regular groups where the surface of the stone was smooth. Many were almost obliterated by weathering; a few had been freshly made. Apparently, then, these symbols had been carved over a period of thousands of years.

With a little effort he picked out nine symbols repeated constantly in the inscriptions. Since there were nine, he suspected them to be numerals. Certainly they appeared more primitive than the Arabic and might well be much earlier in origin. He recalled that the first numerals had been formed out of signs made by the fingers of human hands long before the letters of a language had been shaped. By copying the nine symbols and juggling them around, he arranged a series that satisfied him.

— = ≡ ≠ ∫ ∫ 7 ∫ ?

Under these he copied the numerals of the Western world, developed from the Phoenician-Arabic. These two series corresponded roughly enough.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

The other markings on the rock occurred regularly among the numerals. Being so regular, they should be indications of time—such as the seasons, or events such as the reigns of kings succeeding each other, or possibly a combination of the two.

"It looks like a calendar, with some events mixed in, perhaps," he explained to Michal. "It's been kept up to date, if so, because some symbols have been cut in the last months."

"Why should our people want to keep a calendar?" she demanded instantly. "Does it make a difference to them if this is Anno Domini 1946, or last year or next?"

"Apparently it does. But you can be sure it's not A.D. 1946 to them—it's something else."

"I hope so, Jacob."

Her earnestness made him smile. Although she said little about it, Michal probed into the secrets of her village. And she avoided

going near the bronze instruments, which seemed ominous to her.

When Jacob reflected that if the calendar were as ancient as its symbols it must have been started before 3000 B.C. he became thoughtful. By that reckoning, this would be the year 5000 or so. But of what?

It was Michal who discovered the invisible beast that had fled from them the first night. By the lake she happened on a young gazelle, grazing, that scampered away from her with just such a clatter as the unknown animal had made. Sensitive to sounds, she had been startled in her house by hearing the talk of villagers close beside her when she was alone and, investigating, she had found a hollow in the wall under the wind tower. Listening carefully at this opening, she had heard human beings moving about, benches scraping, and children crying—all the habitual sounds of the village street two hundred yards away.

The funnel in the wall seemed to curve and to narrow. By craning her head in, Michal could glimpse a crack of light far down the small tunnel which apparently ran through the rock itself to the area below.

"It's a whispering corridor," she told Jacob. "They had one in a Byzantine palace so the Empress could hear the patriarch praying, or the other way around. Perhaps someone who lived here once wanted to listen to the talk of the crowd. I hope it doesn't work both ways."

Michal was much more interested in making friends with the half-tame gazelle than in the whispering tunnel.

"We'll not need to worry about our public utilities here, Michal. The water power is trouble-proof; the lights will burn as long as the oil lasts; our house telephone leads to the street, and the entrance bell can be heard for thirty miles. I think our telegraph works about as far as that."

"I didn't know we had a telegraph." Michal looked alarmed.

"It's up in the observatory."

"Oh, that."

The platform they called the observatory stood exposed on the

height near the fire altar. It had upon it three instruments, all cast in massive bronze. Unaccountably, Michal distrusted them. Jacob had found much to interest him in the instruments, and had spent many hours cleaning them with oil because they had been coated with dust and corrosion.

"Come and see it work," he said.

Michal followed him, silent and unwilling. The first instrument was a six-foot celestial globe, beautifully mounted on its bronze stand. Upon its surface the patterns of the principal constellations had been traced and the planets had been marked. Each bore a symbol unknown to Jacob, but there was no mistaking the familiar patterns which had been called by many names. Jacob had turned it to show uppermost the night sky of early autumn, and he thought the great sphere had been made for this latitude. Evidently it had not been used for many months.

The second instrument, hanging from a movable bar, seemed to be a simple astrolabe with the position of the bright stars showing on the points of its spiderlike frame. By sighting the astrolabe's pointer at stars or mountain peaks, their height above the horizon could be estimated, and astronomical time, fairly well.

"If these people could do it, that is," he added hastily. "Someone could, once, because these instruments are made carefully, for use."

"Jacob, *why* do you want to find out what they can estimate? We've found a lovely mountaintop, and you call it a truncated cone and want to know how high it is to a foot."

"It's about eleven thousand feet."

Michal looked at him.

"There's one odd thing about these instruments," he went on eagerly. "They all work by the sky—by the sun or stars—or deal with the heights nearest the sky."

"Then there's no telegraph after all, and you were teasing me."

Jacob nodded at the remaining apparatus—a round two-foot metal plate mounted like a searchlight, pivoted on a ring, so—like the astrolabe—it could be swung in any direction. Even with a scanty polishing this bronze plate reflected the sun's rays.

Stepping in front of it, Michal surveyed herself in it without approval. "It's not a very good mirror, is it?" she hazarded.

"Watch."

Swinging the handle of the plate, Jacob directed a shaft of light outward and upward, reflected from the slightly concave surface.

Michal cried sharply, "Don't do that! Stop!"

Without heeding her, he swung the plate down. Over a distant ridge, deep in shadow, a point of light moved downward. "Telegram by sun power," he explained triumphantly, "from the Mount to Beyond—ten miles in a tenth of a second."

"Jacob! Please let it alone."

Reluctantly, he released the plate. What bothered him was that the age of these primitive scientific instruments could not be conjectured. The hard bronze had withstood the erosion of weather.

When he looked around, Michal was over at the altar, putting wood on the fire as she had seen the village women do. Her head, tinged gold by the sun, was lifted defiantly. The wind pressed her light muslin dress back against her body. Behind her, immobile and lifeless, the summits of the mountains stretched to the horizon.

When Jacob came to her side, he saw that her eyes were wet with tears not of the wind's making. "It's so lovely, and I love it so." She was speaking in a monotone, as if to herself, yet aware that Jacob heard her. "There's nothing strange here; only we are strange. If we could see . . . Jacob, look back at the lake through tears—no, just squint your eyes, and you will see how very different it is without any of the contrivances you dote upon."

Obedying, he turned and looked down through half-closed eyes. The effect was startling. The steps from the altar height, the grass-grown plaza now appeared to be a natural amphitheater. The sculptures hewn into the rock merged into the surface of the stone. Below, the small buildings stood like boulders in the green of a garden falling to the verdure of the lake. Wild geese flying away overhead seemed to be leaving a paradise of the earth.

Jacob thought: whoever designed this knew the beauty of natural things and he designed nothing that did not belong here.

"It is beautiful," he said, and found Michal gone. When he called her she did not answer, although she must have heard. What had hurt her he did not know; she had a way of going off alone when the mood was on her.

Uneasy after an hour, he went down to their house. Michal had been there, because the wind was sounding its musical scale in the tower. That morning he had stopped the air inlet to the harp and Michal must have removed it since. Looking into the bed recess, he found that some of her favorite dresses were gone from the bar where she had hung them.

Anxiously, he searched through her favorite places for the missing woman, thinking that she must be lonely or homesick in this mountain prison where there was nothing to do.

She was not with the gazelle which he found feeding among the water lilies, nor did he sight her dress in their sitting places along the wall; there was no sign of her on the steps outside.

Then he heard women shrieking with laughter not far away. Going toward the sound, he found himself on the path that led to the lakeside where flat boulders and a stretch of sand provided the villagers with their public laundry.

Here a dozen women and girls were rinsing out clothes, laying them to dry on the stones, convulsed with mirth. They watched Michal who, with skirt tucked up around her hips and bare white arms, was trying to gather assorted garments into a bundle, laughing helplessly. Water dripped from her hair and shoulders.

"Jacob," she cried, seeing him, "I can't carry it on my head the way they do. I—I haven't been educated that way, and it comes all to pieces."

Relief flooded through him. Michal, struggling with her wash, was wiping away tears of mirth, the moodiness of a few hours before completely forgotten. Carefully she balanced the bundle of wash on her disordered head and rose unsteadily to tread gingerly in her bare feet.

"I couldn't have you going around in soiled shirts," she explained, watching her burden, "when Imanyia keeps everything so clean." The ache was still in Jacob, and he felt weak at the sight of her. "This isn't very much like your beach at Cannes," he said ruefully.

"I don't want it to be," she answered decisively. "I couldn't live so well at Cannes. Henceforth this day of the week shall be my washday while you are solving the symbols of the stars."

And Jacob marveled in silence at a woman's mind.

"It does hang together, and it does make sense," Michal insisted hotly when he mentioned the riddles of Araman. "For a newspaperman and a military mind like yours it doesn't because it's unfamiliar."

"How do you account for your Michelangelo?"

This individual, a shy man scrupulously clad in silk, worked with his grandson, scraping the clay wall of a house with a bronze razor and rubbing it down with an oiled sheepskin. He prepared colors by pounding up blue crystals and red clay and ochre on a schist slab, moistening them and mixing them until he had the desired effect. Yet he painted nothing on the wall. After watching him, she had christened him Michelangelo.

"He's waiting for inspiration. Perhaps he thinks it's better to do one painting that just suits him than one to please every customer. Aren't our own wall paintings something extra special, Jacob?"

Michal grimaced at him carelessly. In these last weeks the sun had tinted her skin, and the shadows had gone from under her eyes. She slept, she said, like a cow in pasture. And she talked already of the snow that would come with winter—as if they could stay on in their new home. Jacob knew that she felt superstitious about opening Sir Clement's notes. "There's nothing we can do about them now, Jacob, is there? Is there?" she asked insistently.

Nor did she want to break into the one door in Araman. It was a stout wooden door across the plaza from their house, and it bore a heavy modern padlock. Jacob had never seen it open.

The house next this locked door showed traces of occupancy by a European—a pile of gray blankets covered with dust and a litter of candle stubs and empty bottles. What interested Jacob more was an accumulation of valuables strewn against the far end of the room. Here some fine Fergana and Tabriz carpets lay mixed with some choice specimens of ancient bronze like his own and a bolt of raw silk that Michal said was almost priceless nowadays. In an open bronze casket lay polished turquoises, carnelians, and even flawed rubies with bits of silver and a few curios.

All these might have come from the region around Araman or the bazaars in Kurdish villages like Riyat. Yet they had been selected for their intrinsic value—that is as merchandise that

would bring high prices in European markets. Except for the carpets, they had no use in Araman. A European, Jacob thought, must have gathered this trove together, probably with the idea of taking it out someday.

Oddly enough the owner of the trove and the blankets—if he still existed—had not attempted to lock up his valuables, although the door of the next dwelling was securely locked. Apparently he had no fear that any of it would be stolen.

Unexpectedly, Michal took a fancy to one object in the chest. This was a small silver medallion within which the head of a saint had been painted, unmistakably Russian work.

"It's Nikolka," she cried. "Saint Nicholas you would call him, Jacob. He protects you from evil spirits. I need him."

This small ikon she hung by their bed, by the lampstand, saying that no home was complete without its household gods, and she would borrow Nikolka at least until an owner appeared to claim him. Across from the ikon she arranged Jacob's winged horse in a niche, saying that he also must have tutelary powers since he had brought Jacob to her. Admiring the effect, she said, "Now our two guardians should be able to protect us properly."

"You're reverting to your ancestors," he assured her. "The Scots and Finns had a touch of it—of being fey."

"I'm not seeing any fetches. It's simply that I feel comfortable and protected with my household gods."

"Protected against what?"

Michal's eyes turned dark and her supple lips drooped. "I don't know, Jacob."

What was there to fear on their mountain? Sir Clement had conjectured that there might be an unidentified power concealed on it. The sequence of events that had brought Jacob hither had been in no way inexplicable; the mount itself, although unusual, had been shaped by natural forces. The people themselves merely seemed odd because they had cut themselves off voluntarily from the outer world. This remnant of a mountain tribe kept up some of its customs here. The everlasting fire was ritual, or—suppose it was not? Flame by night and smoke by day had been the most ancient signals of human beings. Suppose the Watchman and his

folk signaled from the mount?—But to whom? Cogitate as he would, Jacob could discern nothing but natural life upon Araman.

"We could open Sir Clement's notes," he ventured.

Defiantly, Michal shook her head. "Please—let's not."

The change came with the winds of the equinox.

One evening Jacob saw the Watchman adjusting the globe of the sky. Examining it, he found that the sphere was set to show the star Fomalhaut just at the horizon's rim. That would be the night sky of the autumn equinox, when Fomalhaut was in line with the side of Pegasus's Square and the North Star. After that night the days would be shorter than the nights.

Winds buffeted the summit. Cloud banks pressed against the encircling peaks. In the village, children appeared with kites. Since strands of copper and gut were attached to the kites, a faint harmony sounded when they rose on the wind.

Swarming like bees up and down the slope, laughing and sweating, the villagers labored to get in the last of the harvest before the storms should come. While men still winnowed the dry wheat below—tossing it into the wind—the women and children lugged up panniers of wheat, barley, and grapes. Badr, who had been occupied with the horses in the valley, joined in salvaging their winter's food from the earth.

Michal flitted about, intrigued. "Jacob, I think we are going to have a party," she volunteered after the last loads were in. "There's a deal of washing and cooking going on—the children are guzzling grapes, the kites are tuning up beautifully, the girls are getting out white Greeklike things. I know we're invited."

"And I suppose," Jacob teased, "you haven't a thing to wear."

Michal thought she would wear a plain white sport dress with a scarlet scarf. Jacob noticed that the older women all had a touch of scarlet on them. It was a Zoroastrian touch, this hue of blood upon the white of purity. Down by the lake he came upon a dozen wine jars, all bearing a familiar mark stamped upon their handles, a miniature horseman, the Saint George of the monastery. Near the wine jars he sighted the familiar black-robed figure of Father

Hyacinth. The priest gave no explanation of his appearance, except to say that he had brought wine for the festival. "*Vin du pays*," he smiled, indicating the jars. He was sorting out and packing bundles of dried roses, jasmine, and poppies. Evidently he took these in exchange for the wine of the monastery. And in turn they would be sent to M. Parabat, for money. Eventually small vials of perfume would appear in the shops of the Kasr de Nil in Cairo, or in Calcutta, to be bought by women who had a wealth of money to spend.

"It is the commerce," Father Hyacinth remarked, smiling. When Jacob questioned him eagerly to discover if he had seen or heard anything of Daoud, the priest admitted that he had found Daoud the month before within sight of the valley of Araman. Instead of going on with him, the young Kurd had turned back abruptly, asking if there was a trail leading to Riyat. Father Hyacinth did not know why Daoud had turned back, except that he had said he would return.

"You think," Jacob asked him, "that we will be allowed to stay?"

Father Hyacinth wasted no thought upon the matter. "Stay, certainly, if you wish." He blinked mildly at Michal. "Or, if you wish to go, the way is still open."

"You mean," Michal asked quickly in her fluent French, "that the road may be closed by snow?"

"By snow, yes, that is true. But the arrival of others may occur."

"What others, Father Hyacinth?"

That he did not know, except that, as Mar Shimun had pointed out, foreigners were beginning to discover the way to Araman and the monastery. Michal pondered the possibilities of being snowed in for a winter.

That evening they saw the death of the summer. The sun, at setting, dipped beneath the dark cloud strata and for a few moments shone upward upon the mount. Wraiths of vapor twisted around the peaks as if unseen hands were waving veils.

Every soul came from the village to the altar height. The Watchman came and took his stand with his people. He raised his arms

and their arms rose. Rigid they stood and silent, even the children, facing the fading sun. From their throats came a deep lament, with the women's voices rising over the men's.

This chant had the undertone of mourning, the peal of joy. It was no merry harvest song but the oldest of all hymns. It mourned for the death of summer and of light, for Tammuz and that young god whose death must come before the birth of seed and light in the spring.

When the villagers had left the height with the imperturbable Father Hyacinth, Michal and Jacob sat by the altar to be alone.

"I feel as if I had been to church," Michal said suddenly, surprised.

Jacob nodded. "Yes."

That sensation was important to her, although she made light of it. "Feel better?" he asked.

"Don't you?"

It was hard to put into words, Jacob found. There was the feeling of peace, and of having touched for a moment something intangible which did not change, but which changed you. It was the sensation of reaching out toward the unknowable.

"It's probably just us thinking the same thing," he added.

"No, I still think it's like a church."

"Perhaps we've merely learned to say what we really feel, and to be honest about it."

Michal's lips were touched by a smile. "There's no point in being anything else here, is there? Not now, with us."

"Outside, it would be hard to do it. It means a great deal." Jacob wondered why he said that. Without Michal, it would not have been important.

"You were always honest, Jacob. Yet you never trusted yourself, and you went away from people." Her head resting on her slim arms, she looked up through half-closed eyes, as if in his face she found the focus of her thoughts. "You don't change easily, and I'm glad of that. I'm glad"—she smiled—"to be so nicely adjusted to my environment."

"Here?"

"In you, darling. You don't know it, but you protect me because

anything harmful would have to come through you to touch me. No, you do know that, and you want it. But all my simple pleasures also come through you."

There was something unknowable in her, and something he could never touch. "I'm not much of a protection. I'm always afraid that the gardens and the parties of Cairo are going to reach out and spirit you away to a dance somewhere. That sounds idiotic, but I dream about it."

"Do you? Is that when you mutter so in your sleep? Not even in a dream would I go a-hunting with generals to kill a poor desert gazelle—or recline by a pool listening to Mrs. General discuss the best insecticide." Her eyes closed and her voice changed. "That Michal Thorne is only a ghost now, a poor ghostling hovering over the bright lights with a polite Cheshire-cat smile. This is the real me, here. Only I don't know myself very well as yet."

Her head turned away from him. "I'm afraid of the unknowable in you too. I think we were meant to be here, but you do not. You have something in you that never listens to me. It made you feel the war was not over in Cairo, when everybody else in uniform was celebrating; it made you follow a bronze horse to Riyat and help a dreaming old man by coming here. It may make you fight for the Kurds, who are helpless children just like us. And someday it may hurt me very much."

After her moment of brooding, Michal threw herself wholeheartedly into the rejoicing of the feast that followed the singing of the hymn. Like hungry children the people of the mount gorged themselves with the flesh of young sheep, sacrificed from the small pasture herd. They soaked themselves with the red wine of the monastery, sipping it from clay bowls that Michal had not seen brought out before. They had anointed themselves with a fragrant oil, and they carried about small bay branches with the leaves still on them.

Bowls of goat's milk were passed around with the wine by the younger girls, and trays of grapes and nuts. Even Michelangelo and his grave grandson tasted solemnly of each dish. Then they

all joined hands and danced along the edge of the lake which reflected their shadows. It was more hand-holding than dancing, since the human chain merely moved happily about the water's edge, lifting their clasped hands with the green branches. To Jacob it appeared that they were all carrying out some remembered ritual, clumsily, as stage hands might enact a scene after the actors had departed from the stage.

"It is the fete of the autumn," Father Hyacinth observed. "In the spring will arrive the other fete of the planting of the seed."

It was noisy enough, because some of the girls played with castanets, and one pushed Badr into the lake and ran away when he emerged laughing.

"Now the party is a success," Jacob decided.

"I'm more intoxicated than I seem," Michal informed him. "With so much unaccustomed meat and wine and all, I feel slightly maenadic too. I'm glad I'm not too old for that."

"It's very becoming."

"It's good for my inhibitions."

She was diligently trying to work the castanets. Missing the Watchman in the crowd, Jacob went up to the fire altar. His head hummed, and he felt like talking. Such a simple thing as a language ought not to prevent him talking with the caretaker of the mount. To his surprise he found that the older man had bound a piece of sheer floss silk around his mouth and throat, to prevent his breath from coming near the fire. Under matted brows his blue eyes peered at Jacob, gravely questioning. He pointed toward the west.

In the dark line of the western ridge a speck of flame showed.

It seemed to be a fire, and for a moment Jacob wondered if human beings on another summit were celebrating the harvest night. Whatever the source of the flame might be, it did not disturb the Watchman.

Presently the old man went over to the cliff. Taking up a bronze hammer and wedge, he began to cut without haste a new symbol on the line of those he had made already. It looked like a miniature tree and Jacob could make nothing of it.

Probably the Watchman was merely chalking up the night of the

equinox, which this was. He had to keep a tally of the days somehow. Or did he? "To hell with speculation," Jacob remarked while the Watchman took no heed. "If I could break your code of language, I might know something. And if so, what? I'm happy enough as it is, old-timer."

No locked door would he unlock, no cliff writing would he decipher, no signal fire would he conjure into meaning. As Michal wished, he would let well enough alone.

"I'll no question make of ayes or noes," he added cheerfully, "but I'll be one with yesterday's seven thousand years. That's the opinion of a very wise man, a drunken astronomer, Omar Khayyam."

In the Watchman's veined hands the wedge and the hammer tapped patiently at the rock. By Jacob's watch it was midnight. He made his way back to his house.

Under the lamp Michal was rummaging in a saddlebag.

"I've had a good, one-way talk with the Watchman," Jacob assured her. "And we decided not to question our fate."

"I'm glad of that, Jacob. I've had a chat just like yours with Badr. I think the cold bath sobered him. He mentioned Sir Clement Bigsby and something about coming or going. I don't know which. Since poor Sir Clement can't be coming to us, Badr probably thought it was time we went back to him. But that's just what we are not doing." When she felt his arm around her and heard his laugh, she turned her face up to him instinctively. "I found Sir Clement's sealed orders in your bag, my dear man, and straightway I wanted to burn them. Shall we?"

"Lord, no." For a second Jacob was bothered. Those pages written by the sick man must be valuable to him. They could hardly tell anything important about this place called Araman, which the orientalist had never seen. "Michal, we ought to read those pages. Then perhaps we can send Badr back—if you can get the idea over to him—with a message."

From the circle of his arm she surveyed her household gods. "All right. I feel very bold tonight. We're both intoxicated. And I'm glad I didn't burn the dispatches, because you would never have forgiven me."

Going to the lamp, Jacob opened the sealed envelope and took out some pages covered with the Englishman's minute writing. In some surprise he said, "It's a chapter called 'The Wanderers.'"

"I have written much for learned societies [he read aloud to Michal] and perhaps at last I may be permitted to make a conjecture. I have been working alone in meditation by the headwaters of the Greater Zab River, and I am impelled to write this because it now appears that we have been standing near the presence of a truth which we have not recognized. This must be my excuse for voicing a conjecture which may of course be no more than the wishful thinking of a tired mind."

"Poor Sir Clement," Michal murmured, "apologizing for speaking his mind."

"The greatest mystery [Jacob read on] about ancient man has been the place of his origin. In what place did *Homo sapiens*, the first brilliant reasoning and inventive racial group, embark on its long progress upward from animallike existence? Needless to say, archaeologists have found signs of such an origin widely scattered throughout southwestern Asia. It would be better to say southern Eurasia. Those signs have been uncovered in the black-earth steppes of southern Russia, at Harappa in the Five River delta of India, in the valley of the Tigris, and scantily in the incense-producing coast of Arabia.

"Narrowing this circle, however, ruins of a pre-Flood civilization have been found at Carchemish in the shadow of the Anatolian hills, at Ray near the edge of the Caspian inland sea, and down the Euphrates River at Ur, called of the Chaldees. These centers, existing in the fifth millennium before Christ, predate the rise of civilization in the valley of the Nile.

"Within this narrower circle the mountain chains of Kurdistan form the center. Concerning this center we have reasoned often enough that it may have enjoyed a civilization unknown to us—one that would have been transmitted outward through such junctions (along the caravan routes) as Carchemish, Ur, or Ray.

"Recent excavations along the Tigris and Euphrates have disclosed similarities in the earliest culture to that of the valley of the Indus. These similarities, as C. Leonard Wolley and others state, point to a

common source somewhere—no one knows exactly where—between the Tigris and the Indus.

“So much the archaeologists have told us. The physicists add their word, which confirms rather than rejects a *situ* such as Kurdistan as the origin of human progress. For the physicists say that as the great glaciers retreated northward a belt of cyclonic winds prevailed from the end of the Mediterranean to the Tibetan plateau. These cyclones followed the retreat of the ice, leaving an area of abundant rains behind them.

“Within this area, during those early millenniums, the floods abated, the inland seas dwindled to the great lakes that became more salt. The steppes and hills of this southern slope of the great Eurasian mountain spine became temperate, incredibly fertile, and prolific of animal life. To the north, beyond the mountain spine, the great winds prevailed, with cold. To the south, the plains were drying up and the lakes becoming salt beds.

“In this garden belt, left to primitive man by the receding floods, we have some traces of supremely happy life. The inhabitants of the garden area seemed to have had no destructive enemies. No elaborate weapons of polished flint have been found in the few grave sites we have uncovered. Animal bones unearthed in this region belong neither to a distinct wild nor tame species (as at Anau). Apparently the men made some use of animals such as sheep, dogs, and horses without either slaughtering them or domesticating them—which means actually binding them into a slavery of work.

“Human minds here had invented the wheel, to be turned by water. Human tongues had mastered the tremendous feat of speech to convey ideas. Fire had become the universal servant of the settlements. Seed assured them of next season’s food.

“These earliest intelligent humans we will call the Wanderers. They traveled about more than we realize, because their herds could be moved with them, and they could carry seed of bread wheat, to be planted at the next stage in their journey. Owing to the abundant rainfall, they were not confined to irrigation works. Since they moved about, the land never became sterile under them.

“Having articulate speech, good memories, and active minds, they felt as yet no need of writing. For numerals they must have had ten

signs or symbols—having ten fingers upon which to do their first counting.

“They had not entered yet upon the Metallic Age. They made fine vases of clay and painted them; they used some of the more beautiful stones, such as jasper and chalcedony, and alabaster, and perhaps melted some gold or copper for utensils. They plaited baskets out of reeds. They built their dwellings out of wood, using tree trunks to support the roofs and porches, because forests were abundant and these builders did not need to work the harder stone or more laborious bricks of clay.

“These Wanderers lived, it seems, what we would call a balanced life—balanced, that is, between active labor and thought. The gold they shaped into headbands and drinking cups had not been cast as yet into coins, the possession of which might lead to theft or strife. Oil seeping up from the ground—for this garden area overlies some of the greatest oil deposits—gave them fuel. When ignited within its rock formation it provided an eternal fire. There was as yet no danger of conflagrations such as destroyed those *cities of the plain*, Sodom and Gomorrah, in a later day. Probably no towns were built by these Wanderers because they still existed in small family or tribal groups each having its animal herd—as did the Hebrew patriarchs after them.

“This way of life had been adjusted to animals in a fashion not clear to us. Hides of the beasts provided the stuff that clothed the humans and the milk nourished them. Shepherds’ crooks, horse bits, and ox goads were the Wanderers’ chief implements. The half-tame ox or bull provided their most powerful work engine. Vestiges of their care for the cherished oxen survive in the wall paintings of Cnossus in Crete, of youths and girls leaping charging bulls in a form of play that bore no resemblance to the bullfights of modern Spanish cities. To the east, the protection of cows and bullocks, as of other animal life, has held good among the Brahmans of northern India since prehistoric times.

“This balanced life of the Wanderers had no ease in it. Most certainly they knew no Utopia. Only by conforming to a law of nature that permitted life to continue could they themselves live. They had no joy in hunting as a sport, but the strongest of them hunted carnivo-

rous beasts like the lion on foot, to protect the herds. Traces of that hunting survive in the earliest stone sculptures at Carchemish and Nineveh.

"This tenacity of the Wanderers, urging them toward self-fulfillment by raising themselves above savagery, depended upon two intangible weapons—their courage and inventiveness. They conceived and stored up their treasures of accomplishment within their minds. Knowledge, as such, became a priceless thing, to be taught by word of mouth and memorized. They had no benefit of written texts or of machines to make labor easy. Knowledge they discovered to be harmful as well as helpful. Carefully, they must have separated the protective skills from the destructive in their effort to preserve life. Continually, they weighed the balance of a man's helpful deeds against those that were harmful. Transgressions could only be atoned for by mightier works on the assistance side. No one was permitted to depart from the truth of the spoken word, because that in itself was their only hold upon exact knowledge. The great skill of a metalworker could not be learned by one to whom he gave a brazier or spoon; it had to be taught patiently, or the art of the first smith would die with him. The secret lay in the mind of the smith, setting him apart from his fellows. His skill partook of magic, good or bad. Masters of the arts of firing or melting metals, as of medicine, were placed in a later day among the gods by the superstitious Greeks who personified the metalworker in the dark-tempered Hephaestus. The forging of swords became in legends the work of magicians or dwarfs.

"So with the skill of medicine; for the man able to select herbs to heal could also concoct poisons. And there was a black art as well as white in skill with numbering; for one who could accomplish much by combining numbers in his brain could also destroy others by such calculations. Only the skill of a musician was altogether beneficial. I think they had only harps and pipes for instruments.

"With this sole force of the human spirit the Wanderers sustained themselves in their long struggle toward self-fulfillment. The mind of a single man might at times be tuned to such splendor that he led and enlightened his people; the anger of a malevolent spirit sacrificed the hope of a community. How many Newtons or Aristotles worked

among them without any apparatus except thought? The soul of one such man might send out repercussions that would be felt, like the wash of a tidal wave, at the edges of this primitive garden.

"Their laboratory was the natural earth. In their patient progress toward betterment they advanced far—how far we do not know. They sought to prolong life after death.

"At some time before the first light of history their world ended. Some catastrophe of the earth, or some internal cleavage, drove the Wanderers to migrate. Perhaps the drying up of their valleys drove them to follow the rainfall, or to seek new lands. They went in the main to the east and west, reaching India and the end of the Mediterranean. Even the outpost communities of Harappa, Carchemish, and Ur became ruined; the speech of the different migrant groups altered from the original speech. But some may have stayed behind and survived by retreating to the mountaintops.

"How long the world of the Wanderers had endured it is impossible to say. But it had ended when the Metallic Age began, some five millenniums ago, with the rise of scattered cultures in city centers, in Crete and the valley of the Nile, in Babylon and Ray—wherein the science of astronomy led to the worship of the stars, and images of strange gods were set up. Invention turned toward mechanics, ideas were preserved in writing upon clay tablets and papyrus—in different scripts—and the continuity of the modern world had begun.

"This picture, conjured up of a vanished world, cannot be sustained as yet by the findings of archaeology. Only the evidence of stone buildings or bronze implements could have survived seven millenniums, and the Wanderers left no such evidence behind. The Wanderers held fire to be sacred, but they built no fire temples, nor did they shape massive enduring things in bronze.

"They left no certain indication of their garden spot. It might have been in these fertile mountains south of the spine of Eurasia, now populated by the Kurds; it could have been in the grasslands of fertile black earth north of the spine, now called the steppes of Russia. As it happened both these regions remained almost unexplored by the archaeologists of the nineteenth and twentieth Christian centuries. They have not been combed for evidence until today.

"There is evidence of another kind of this early paradise. Most

peoples retain myths of an earlier age of the gods, or golden age, when life was simpler. But in lands not too distant from these Kurdish mountains, folk memories endure of an actual earthly paradise.

"As early as 2100 B.C. an unusual man named Gudea appeared in the city of Lagash on the lower Tigris at the head of his people from the eastern mountains. Statues of him that have survived show a turbaned head with kindly meditative face. He carried with him a plan of a temple traced on lapis-lazuli, and he said he meant to build it, to serve 'The men bright as the sky, merry as the earth, their heads being the heads of gods, who come with the black storm cloud. They have commanded that this house be built; I do not understand their words.'

"After Gudea's lifetime, the lofty mound-temple was built at Babylon—the one called by the Hebrews the Tower of Babel—and named 'The House like the Terrace between Earth and Heaven.'

"When the Hebrews followed Abraham away from the land of Ur they carried with them the memory of a time when there had been only one language and one people. '*And the Lord God planted a garden eastward in Eden.*'

"Only a little later—about 1000 B.C.—the barbaric Aryan Greeks migrating to the west held to a folk memory of a Parnassus where divine beings had dwelt in etherian air between the earth and the sky. This place they believed to be in the remote mountains under the rising sun.

"Other Aryan folk threading down from the mountains into India in that same age kept a clearer tradition of a homeland they had left behind them, to the northwest of India. Some of their folk had remained there—'those who were left behind.' In their writing, Avestic, this ancestral land had been Aryan-vej, the place of the hearth, or the homeland. Their word *Aryaman* signified a god or a comrade."

With the last page in his hand, Jacob fell silent. There were notes scribbled upon it in pencil that appeared at first to be incoherent. "Here's something that doesn't make sense," he muttered. "*The Wanderers of our first civilization remain a mystery to us because they left no evidence in the way of artifacts or buildings . . . we have to look elsewhere for a trace of them . . . into the tradition of the human spirit. That spirit has left us messages almost obliterated*"

ated by time . . . messages left by the descendants of the Wanderers who went out into the world. Of those who went out we know little except of the last two, Siddhattha and Zarathushtra."

And he read from the last page:

"In India, as late as the dawn of history, a high-born Aryan of the warrior caste set out on a mission. His name has come down to us, Siddhattha. Abandoning his weapons, his chariot, and his servants, leaving his young wife who had given birth to a son, Siddhattha went away from the triumphal birth-festival, stepping over the sleeping dancing girls, to go into the jungle, renouncing his old life. There, it is written, he preached with the voice of a bell resounding in the sky. He was called the Gautama, and the religion that grew in his footsteps became Buddhism. The Buddha became the figure of a myth, but Siddhattha had been a human being.

"It is said that he turned aside from his own existence when he drove in his chariot to his pleasure ground, and passed on the way the bodies of people plague-stricken, and the rotting bodies of the dead.

"A few generations after Siddhattha a man of these mountains of Kurdistan, living near Lake Urmiah, taught again the doctrine of the spirit governing the body. Like the Gautama, he wandered among the villages, meditating and explaining that human life availed nothing unless it served the life to come, in purity. His disciples built fire altars as a sign of purification, putting on themselves, as he did, the clothing of beggars. They were mendicants, begging for the salvation of mankind, against the destruction which they believed would come after three thousand years by a conflagration of the earth and unendurable heat that would melt all metals. Such was the doctrine of Zarathushtra, whom the Greeks called Zoroaster. He gave the name of his homeland as Aryan Vej.

"In their lifetimes, these two men, speaking much the same language, had carried out a mission. Zarathushtra's teaching helped to shape the wisdom of the Magi, those men of the East whose mission led them far afield, even to the birthplace of Jesus of Nazareth.

"By then the Metallic Age had begun, with the use of iron hardening into steel. With Greece and Rome greater inventions had come into being, and the modern world was recording its history."

Thoughtfully, Jacob stared at the lamp's flame, and Michal stirred. "Go on," she urged.

"That's the end of the chapter. There isn't any more."

"It sounds like daydreaming. But it's a nice, comforting dream, isn't it?" She eyed him, questioning.

Jacob folded up the pages before he answered. "Comforting? Sir Clement says you and I may be housed at this moment on the spot where our very remote ancestors started to make good use of their human consciousness."

"No, I mean the garden that was paradise." Michal smiled up at him suddenly. "Didn't I say that if there is a paradise on earth, this is it?"

Jacob laughed. "Yes, you did put it more concisely than Sir Clement."

"I feel it, I don't reason about it. The process is much quicker. What does your editorial mind think?"

"It doesn't think just now, except about you."

"I'm glad of that." In her own way Michal had been pondering. "It seems too good to be true that there was an earthly paradise we've forgotten. Sir Clement said something about standing in the presence of a truth we do not recognize."

"Here, or in the steppes of Russia." Jacob had been thinking back methodically over the written pages. "That adds up to nothing. Something that might have been. A spot on the earth that might have been X." He went on, as Michal started to protest. "I'm not tearing down your dream, Michal. It's true that the site itself means nothing much. The Golden Gate is still in the wall of Jerusalem. What can it tell us? The stones do not speak. No, the miracle is in human consciousness that, unarmed and suffering, achieved something more enduring than the stones."

It was strange that they should be so concerned with these thoughts. They held to the words written by a sick man, turning them over as if something of vast importance might lie in them. Perhaps it did, because in this place such words did have importance. Because of them tomorrow or the next year might be different.

"Sir Clement wrote down only known facts, or near-facts," he

said aloud. "But he added them up in a way of his own. He added folk-memory to archaeology. His conjecture seems to be that the consciousness of that earlier age has not passed from the earth—that something was set in motion then in the souls of men that has influenced happenings since. Like a train which passes a given point and is gone but continues on its way elsewhere in time. Can you imagine human suffering or joy so great that its effect never quite dies away?"

"That's a lovely dream," Michal exclaimed. "Go on, Jacob."

"I can't. And you can break that one down easily."

"I don't want to."

"I don't mean you, Michal"—she was forever seizing upon a thought to apply to herself alone—"I mean the juries of learned minds; they'd demolish such a conjecture as easily as a house of cards."

"Why?"

"We have no artifacts."

"Meaning?"

"No bones, no skulls to be measured, no stone implements, no exhibits A, B, and C of any earthly paradise."

"Oh." Michal grimaced, and then brightened, pointing past him. "Jacob! My white elephant!" And as he glanced at the ill-assorted pair, man and beast, on the wall: "In the legend Gautama had an elephant like that in the jungle, and there they are coming out of it."

It was odd that an artist in a place like this so far from India should paint the figures of the Jataka legend. "Perhaps Michelangelo's grandfather liked the legend. It can't have been done so very long ago."

"But why?" She peered around at the other wall. "And who would *he* be?"

"He's still a shepherd playing a harp."

"Is he?" Michal looked doubtful and a little sleepy. "I'm not so sure that my house is my own now."

She was asleep when Jacob blew out the light. The fumes of the wine had cleared from his head, but he could not manage to sleep. He listened to the wind that tore at the stones of the house.

At times a gust of rain sent its spray through the cracks without waking Michal. Even when she was removed from him, unconscious of him, he felt the warmth of her body and the touch of her hand on his throat. In this way she lay holding to him, as if to guard against being left alone.

Her slight body, so quick to respond to the touch of desire, kept its touch upon him in another way when she was not conscious, even then attentive to his silence.

In the outer darkness the storm buffeted at the summit of the mount. Jacob heard at times a single melodious clang of the bell at the steps, as it was stirred by the violent blows of the air. The bell he had heard at the monastery— The bell of Saint George, that human being who was depicted now as an armored knight, treading a dragon underfoot. Giorgios had abandoned his rank and duty as a soldier to gain faith in something, as Siddhattha had left his wealth and his sleeping wife, and the dancing girls in his hall. In their tremendous endeavor the two had been alike, moved by a common purpose.

However differently they might be pictured now, a common impulse had moved them once.

The next evening the intruders came. The wind had died down, there was no storm, but their coming had the force of a storm.

Jacob had gone up to the altar, moved by curiosity to learn if the single light showed again on the western face of the hills. In the dusk of the evening he saw nothing. Presently he heard footsteps behind him that were not the tread of the Watchman's leather slippers. They were nailed boots that strode with assurance.

The two men climbing the steps had the unmistakable stamp of Europeans, yet were utterly unlike—one, unshaven and massive, enveloped in a worn sheepskin pushteen, looked like a seedy god Pan; the other, slight and stooped, had something of a woman's gentleness and the scar of pain on his pale face. This one wore a stained uniform that might have been English, except for the word "Poland" stitched on the shoulder. He appeared to be about Jacob's age, the heavy man a generation older.

"*Warum sind Sie hier?*" demanded the pushteen wearer instantly, and, as Jacob did not answer, "Why are you here? Why?"

By all odds, Jacob thought, this must be Vasstan. Aloud he said, "I was looking for a light over there."

The heavy man was not pleased. "There? Perhaps our fire you have seen last night. I asked why you are in Araman?"

His deep voice slurred the English words as if he disliked them, but he knew the language well enough—and the name of Araman.

"I'm here by happenchance," Jacob informed him simply.

"I do not understand!"

"But you're Vasstan, aren't you?" Jacob asked, because he did not feel like giving explanations.

"Vasstan—Rudolf Vasstan, Colonel." Then, with a hint of satisfaction, "Vasstan they call me so in Asia."

This man who had bedeviled the British Empire twice in two generations had conjured up phantoms of resistance to the Raj along the mountain barriers of India, had played upon the superstitions of tribes until the name Vasstan breathed aloud would silence talk at camp fires from Istanbul to the Khyber Pass. Jacob judged him to be unique of his kind, a virtuoso of the past, and—being lonely—he might be vain.

So casually did the German ask his next question that Jacob almost answered before he thought. "You recognized me from a photograph, Mr. Ide?"

"I only guessed. There couldn't be another Vasstan around here."

For an instant the German's close-set eyes stared, irritated. "*Allemachtig!* Can you not answer in plain English?" Then he seemed to throw off his exasperation. "I thought our mutual friends, the inevitable English, had identified me to you."

On his part the silent Polish officer introduced himself painstakingly as Colonel Jan Matejko, of General Anders's command. Speaking fluent French—apologizing for understanding no English—he invited Jacob to drink a cognac when the cognac arrived. They occupied, it seemed, the house with the curio trove.

At the door Colonel Matejko stopped with an exclamation to point at the glimmer of the lake. Silhouetted against it some children were playing a flute. Michal, carrying her laundry up from

the lake, put it down by the children. Dripping as she was, she seized the edge of her skirt and performed a grave little dance step before the young flute player.

"Undine!" muttered Vasstan. "A water spirit!"

When Jan Matejko was introduced to Michal, he kissed her wet hand. His shoulders straightened, and his sickly, handsome face lighted. His eyes, sweeping over her, sought the lines of her body beneath its dress.

Before dark a half-dozen men who looked like soldiers out of uniform appeared from the direction of the gate burdened with valises, crates of canned goods, bottles, and rolls of blankets. These they deposited inside the German's house and departed without a word. At that brief sight of them Jacob could make nothing of it except that they were Asiatics who obeyed the two Europeans without comment. Apparently they had no fear of the descent after dark.

Without wasting a minute, Matejko seized a bottle of Cyprus brandy and uncorked it deftly, filling three cups to the brim. His own cup he emptied in gulps, coughing. Color came into his drawn face. "It is not such a beast of a place, this," he commented almost cheerfully.

The German opened one of the bags where Jacob could not help but see the contents—odds and ends of cheap mirrors, lighters, and rings of the kind made in Cairo for tourists. "My stock in trade," he explained, although Jacob had asked no questions. "*Aber*, these I trade for those"—pointing out the piled-up curios—"like an honest stock merchant. Yes, I am an honest trader now. Why not? A Kurdish woman makes a rug; but to her the mirror I sell is worth the rug. So we trade. It is in the first place necessary to live."

And, as if in high good humor with Jacob, he explained that neither Colonel Matejko nor himself had a country to return to. They were in the situation of refugees without a country. Their situation required that they keep out of sight. So they intended to hibernate for the winter in Araman, like bears covered up with snow.

At that he stepped out the door and clapped sharply for the villagers to hear. "Sana!" he bellowed.

The newcomers wrought a change in the quiet of the summit for Jacob and Michal. It was not that they did anything to disturb the calm of the days, for they kept to themselves, sleeping much after their hard journey in. Rather it was the cross-current of the outer world that they brought in with them. They carried with them old angers and fears, and Jacob felt that Vasstan at least watched him attentively without appearing to do so.

Under his boyish good nature this scrutiny of Vasstan probed at Jacob, testing his knowledge and background, and exploring for his purpose in staying upon the mountain summit.

"Michal likes it," Jacob assured him once, "and I'm collecting the bronze work to take back with us."

It was not a good answer, and Vasstan muttered something about children with kindergarten toys. Leading Jacob up to the altar height impatiently, he pointed out a peak to the eastward that had been bare rock the day before. Now it showed white. "Gerka," Vasstan named it, "three thousand eight hundred meters. I know Gerka, but you will not find it on your maps. You see the snow?"

Jacob nodded, waiting.

"In one month snow will close the roads of outgoing. Then you and your wife will be here for the winter. Now I tell you something else. Beyond Gerka is a valley and a town. That town is Sanjbulak, a Turkish name. You understand? In Sanjbulak, across the Iranian frontier, tribal begs and aghas sit down to make a new government for themselves. They call it a democracy and an independent Kurdish republic. Out of the debris of war they make themselves a republic in the coffee shops of Sanjbulak, counting the rifles that are given them by those great Western nations. With those rifles they are arming horsemen to make a small war with the Iranian troops who know nothing about democracy but do not desire to see Kurdish tribesmen armed. You understand?"

"A little," admitted Jacob, who understood much more than that.

Swinging about, Vasstan pointed dramatically to the southwest. "Again, there the Iraqi Kurds are in arms under the Mullah Ismail, who preaches religion and freedom. Already he has had to retreat from Riyat closer to those mountains." Vasstan shook his grizzled

head ominously. "You see, Mr. Ide, how little space is left in this Oberland to shelter us. You will be wise to ask your wife if she is willing to be snowed in for the winter."

It was news to Jacob that the Mullah had had to give up Riyat, and he wondered briefly whether Daoud or Sir Clement had been caught in the border fighting.

"I think we'll take that chance," he said aloud.

Indifferently, as if he had given a charitable warning and had no further interest in what the Americans might do, Vasstan shrugged his heavy shoulders and said no more. Jacob fancied that the German agent was satisfied. It could not have suited his book to have the two Americans return to Baghdad to reveal his hiding place.

Concerning the two Americans, Vasstan said to Colonel Matejko, "There is every reason why they should not be here. They are visionary-romantics; they are accustomed only to the luxury of American cities; and here they are of the mental age of secondary-school children, who look for gold by rainbows."

"They look for kindness perhaps," objected the Pole.

"That will not keep them alive."

Until the dinner party, Michal felt a sense of friendship for the German. Jacob had ceased to be surprised at her quick understanding of anyone who came near her. She said simply that that was because she liked them all. "Vasstan has been scarred but not hurt," she assured him. "He's an old elephant, cunning and morose, dragging himself away to the burial ground of the elephants, but not allowing any other animal to touch him."

On the good days the German sat in the sun poring over paper-bound books while Matejko explored the lake and ruined wall, always wearing his pistol at his hip. With the indifference of the sick, he wandered rather than walked, often waiting by the sundial, in the hope that Michal would pass. Or he sat in the plaza over a chess set that he had carved for himself out of two kinds of wood. The board he had fashioned out of an American poster which showed a huge bomber soaring over the letters P E A C E.

Although Matejko never asked Michal to play with him, he

brightened when she seated herself across the board. Then the Pole would sit erect, concentrating on the two miniature armies, politely pointing out Michal's mistakes. When she left, he rose, kissed her hand, and put away the chessmen reluctantly.

Curiously enough the villagers would stop to watch these chess games which they seemed to understand.

"Colonel Matejko has nothing left to care for," she told Jacob. "He lost his wife. When he was caught in the surrender of Polish troops in the valley of Bzura, he escaped, but he could never reach his home in Lwów. And when he was serving with the Eighth Army he had only one letter from her, by way of Stockholm and the Argentine. It had been written eight months before from a labor camp near Tashkent, so he knew his wife had been transported into Soviet territory. It said only a few things—that she found the *kasha* gruel of the camp good at all the meals, and she still had one silk slip which she washed in her bucket every week, although she had been offered a great deal of money for it. Jacob, you can see how he must have been reading between those lines and thinking that she had only the gruel for meals and that all her own clothing was gone except the slip. At the end she said she missed most having doctors around to go to." Michal paused, thinking. "It was after V-E Day when he heard that his wife had died of typhus in the camp, before he got the letter. When the British stopped paying Colonel Matejko's regiment, he tried to find work in Cairo. He would not consent to return to his home because he said it was not there. He drifted on to Baghdad, to see if he could enlist as a private in the Levies, where the pay was still four pounds a month. But that didn't work out. For a while he studied in the library of the museum, and tried to learn Arabic. There was still a Polish colony at Baghdad, mostly young women and children. He could not get work because he didn't speak English or Arabic, and he did not want to stay where the Polish women earned some money as prostitutes and taught their children in kindergarten in the daytime."

Matejko had encountered Vasstan in the bazaar at Khanikin on the frontier, where he was selling a fountain pen.

Owing to his record in the two wars, Vasstan could not find a

home in a land where Anglo-American authority made itself felt; because Matejko had served with Anders in wartime, he could not cross a frontier controlled by the Soviet Union.

"He likes to tell me about it, Jacob. His wife had no child; they used to drive to the Cathedral of Mary the Mother in Kraków, to pray for children at Easter, and that was their sorrow then. And he is glad now they had no children."

Instinctively she gripped Jacob's hand. "I know I'm just babbling, but I *feel* a thing like that so. I know there's a reason for the treaties and the new frontiers of Poland, for all the Curzon lines that divide up the country. But it's the loss of what made them happy that is so terrible, because it is irreparable. We can't restore a cathedral to a people, can we, or give Jan back his wife?"

Gravely, Michal pondered the Polish officer. His grievance had scarred his spirit deep. He held to the pain of it, because it was his link to the past. He seemed to feel satisfaction in the pain. To take his injury away from him would be to empty him, to make him a shell of a man. In showing him affection, Michal feared that she had nourished his grief, making him more conscious of his pain and of himself. Was this good for him?

And Jacob thought: she is forgetting her own injury, she is growing alive. Her happiness could not be pent up within herself—it had to be shared with the children of the mount and the two fugitive men.

Presently he observed that she wore two rings taken from her toilet box—one merely a curio with a bit of jade in it, the other a slender band of platinum set with square sapphires. At once she was aware that he had noticed the rings. "They were bought with my money," she said casually, "purely for decorative purposes." Then she glanced up at him, startled. "I didn't mean that. It's really a lie, because although I *did* buy the sapphire one, it was to wear in Cairo when— Four years ago."

Then her fingers twined into his. "Now that I'm confessing, I'm going to make a good job of it. It's the other me that lies by instinct, and that Michal is dead, isn't she—or only a ghost?"

"In the hotels of Cairo, haunting the corridors."

"And the bars. She was a thirsty ghost, or she is. I'm getting all mixed up. Where were we? Oh yes, now I've put on both rings just for a social whim. That's funny, I suppose. But Colonel Matejko kisses my hand by way of greeting, and sometimes he picks my left hand, so I am faintly embarrassed at wearing neither engagement nor marriage ring." Suddenly she flushed. "Your eyes make me feel very self-conscious, Jacob. It *is* funny to be putting on a wedding ring here."

"Someday and soon," said Jacob, "I'm going to make you marry me."

Even as he spoke, he thought how absurd it sounded and how little meaning the words had here. But Michal laughed, delighted.

"That would be wonderful! But how will you do it?"

"Easily. Father Hyacinth comes up to barter for his wine."

"Jacob!" Michal had fallen serious, her mind going off somewhere. "I have very definite ideas about my marriage to you. We are doing so nicely in every way but the ceremony that that has to be important too. There's an old cathedral in Baghdad where the birds fly in and out and the bishop wears the most marvelous vestments—he's eastern Catholic. My parents were Catholic, and I cherish memories of candles and bells." Her fingers gripped his. "I know I sound frivolous, and I am frivolous, Jacob. I'm sure there are times when you want to throw me off the wall. But those memories mean so much to me, and I want to tie them up firmly to you."

One day Matejko descended the mount and reappeared at sunset with villagers carrying three freshly killed gazelles. In good spirits, he had explained that he had tried hunting with Badr and had brought back trophies. Jacob thought that the gazelles must have been half tame to let the riders come within automatic pistol shot of them.

Vasstan came over to invite Michal and Jacob with ceremony to a hunter's dinner. They would like the gazelle steaks, and he promised them music with the liqueurs.

Obligingly Michal changed her dress and spent a little time over a mirror, doing mysterious things to her hair.

"You haven't had a party since Baghdad," Jacob reminded her.

"I'm not sure I'm going to like this one," she murmured with a comb between her teeth. "But we couldn't refuse, could we? We couldn't possibly have had another engagement."

They found the German's house gay, with the trade carpets spread on the floor and Matejko arranging water lilies on the square of silk that served for a tablecloth. He had prepared drinks out of brandy and vermouth, and Vasstan, who seemed to be at home with music, played the shepherd's song from *Tännhauser* on one of the village flutes—a simple reed pipe. He looked more like Pan than ever. Matejko proposed toasts to the ghosts of Poland. When the gazelle steaks were served, he poured some good red wine from Carmel, a faint flush coloring his pinched face. His eyes strayed constantly to Michal.

Vasstan kept silent while he gorged on the fresh meat, then snatched up his glass and rose, to drown out the other's talk with his insistent voice. Michal listened and laughed. "He's started on Winston Churchill," she whispered to Jacob, "and he's good. He says the British hold nothing so sacred as their scarlet coats and tallyho when they go through the ritual of killing a fox. He says he's been a fox, and Winston is the M.H., the master of the hunt, or hounds."

Vasstan made his oration to the greatest of the fox hunters with academic gravity. Winston had hunted his foxes all over the world. He had made the new nation of Iraq a hunting field for the scarlet coats. At the end of the last war he had promised the Arab prince, Feisal, the friend of Lawrence, a kingdom. So he gave to the good Feisal the kingdom of Syria, carved out of the conquered Turkish Empire. By giving a kingdom to Feisal, Winston could stop paying gold sovereigns to the Arab leaders who had done the fighting for the British Empire in the deserts. But the Tiger, Clemenceau, had wanted Syria for the new French colonial empire.

So the fine hunter Winston had tricked the good Feisal and the fiery Clemenceau at the same time by removing Feisal from the

promised land of Syria to the region that was no land at all, Iraq. Iraq was populated mostly by Kurds and by desert tribes who knew nothing of Feisal, who went to London and to the League of Nations to protest about the broken promise. So Feisal was tricked a third time, because Iraq was not independent, and because, since the Kurds fought with the Arab troops, the British had to keep their soldiery encamped there. For the British had taken a lion's share—the British lion's share—of the oil of Kirkuk and the Kurdish hills. Feisal had died of a broken heart, the Kurds were in rebellion, but the British had the oil. And Lawrence died, embittered by British perfidy.

Vasstan beamed like a pleased child at the success of his oration.

"I've heard the British tallyho," Jacob admitted. "But they do try to keep most of their promises, and they do publish the facts afterward—long afterward. Iraq will get its independence, and probably Winston Churchill will write down in his last memoirs all that you've just speechified."

He spoke without forethought, and Vasstan took instant offense.

"What I say, I have seen happen. Now again I come to tell of it—a *revenant*. Those others who were my adversaries, where are they? Lawrence of the Arab *nada* is dead; Gertrude Bell lives only on a plaque over the door of the Baghdad museum she founded. Yes, Mr. Ide, I have been there to look at it. No, I have only memories. I would go down to enjoy the comforts of the hotels in Baghdad but the British, who never understand and never forget, they would send me with a young CICI *leutnant* to Rhodesia where Zulus would bring me my meals."

He did not look at Jacob; he flung out his words like an actor always conscious of the stage. But underneath his wordplay Jacob sensed his satisfaction. He *was* vain.

"Tonight, at Riyat," he shouted, "Arab and Shammar tribal troops, British-trained and British-advised, are fighting their way toward these mountains. And if those British fox hunters keep their promises sometimes, the good American missionaries do not. Your idealistic Woodrow Wilson promised at Versailles that all these Middle East peoples—all of them cut from the Turkish Empire—might have unmolested opportunity for self-government.

Have they? No. But your American industrialists have unmolested percentage of the oil of Iraq, with the French and the Dutch."

The violence of his words left discomfort in the air, and Michal laughed, saying that Jacob was Dutch too. Vasstan seemed to remember that he was host at the dinner, because he said it was now time for the surprise entertainment, and disappeared behind the curtained partition.

Although confused sounds came from behind the curtain, it was some moments before Vasstan emerged. The notes of the flute heralded his coming, and he walked in with two of the younger children of the village following. One was a girl about seven, and she held to the boy as if frightened.

"The floor show." Vasstan waved his flute, and drew discordant dance strains from it. The native children clasped each other and moved their feet in clumsy time. Their lips had been rouged and their skin powdered. Their small bodies swayed and staggered as if they had difficulty standing up. The flute coaxed them to greater exertions as the musician watched them, amused.

Suddenly Michal rose and snatched away his flute. Going to the children, she separated them. Taking their hands, she led them to the door curtain and pushed them through.

When she came back to the table her color was high. She handed their host his flute. "If you give those young things any more brandy to drink, Herr Vasstan," she cried, "I'll—" She caught herself. "I'm sorry. I liked your shepherd's song, I don't like one bit of this floor show."

Vasstan lisped as he answered, "They take no harm. It was to amuse my guests."

Michal looked lovely in her anger, and Matejko apologized out of an instinct of courtesy, because he saw the girl offended by the grotesquerie of the dancing children.

With her eyes Michal questioned Jacob: should she leave them now? Imperceptibly he shook his head. He was sure that Vasstan's vanity had been hurt, and nothing was more certain than that the German would react by asserting himself.

Fleetingly it crossed Jacob's mind that two years before, when he had been tied to his desk in the Sharia Lazoghli and Vasstan

had been occupied with his own kind of sabotage in these hills, they had been enemies by the rules of warfare. It seemed a long time ago. Now if the four of them were to exist together on this hilltop, he must somehow earn the respect of the veteran German secret agent.

Putting aside the flute as if no longer interested in it, Vasstan said something mildly in German.

Michal interpreted readily. "Our host apologizes for offending me, whom he calls a gracious lady; he did not know that the dance of the children would not please you, because he thought that Americans now enjoyed a spice of nastiness—something like perversion or licking up to brutishness . . ."

Her voice trailed off uncertainly. Jacob realized that Vasstan had actually been indifferent to the obscenity of innocent children imitating a sexual dance—he had wanted his American guests to sit through it, even to applaud. Probably Vasstan had seen German illustrations of hysteria in the miasma of sensation-seeking in centers like New York and Chicago—the stripped Negro bodies, the awkward jitterbugging, the perverted minds and abused bodies, the lengthy recitals of the craving of adolescent girls.

Michal laughed. "He says he does not think the missionary mask that Americans wear when they face the world is kept on at home."

Jacob nodded. They were drinking brandy after the meal, and Matejko's mind had drifted away to his lost Lwów. Vasstan showed not the least effect of the drinking, but he had absorbed too much brandy to be satisfied with any slight victory of words.

"Herr Vasstan"—Jacob turned to him with decision—"why did you come to Araman?"

Indifferently the other shrugged, speaking to Michal.

"He says you know well enough, Jacob. It is his hiding place."

"This one hilltop, of all the others in a thousand square miles? I'm not that much of a fool!"

Jacob knew the answer—that on the Araman summit there were food and shelter, even obedient servitors. But he wanted to draw the German out, and he succeeded.

"Never did I think you a fool, Mr. Ide. Simply, you are ignorant." He hesitated. "Why Araman? In one way this *berg* is like no other.

It has been a sacred place. About it the Kurdish tribes have superstition. It is their Lhassa, their Benares. From it they think deliverance will come." A gleam of satisfaction came into his dulled eyes. "I could hide in a hole somewhere, no doubt. Not that do I choose." His heavy shoulders straightened. "I do not seek *asyl*. This is the stage upon which a last act of the great wars will be played. You understand that? And here stay I, to watch—I who have never surrendered. *Es geht bei gedämpfem Trommelklang*. I do not trouble your lovely wife to translate that for you. It means I am of the folk who march always to the beat of muffled drums. To life or death we march so."

Then, as if aware that he had spoken too freely, he added, smiling, "Also, there is the Christian British knight, Clement Bigsby, who nurses himself in a hospital with medicines and Indian servants to make invalid's tea. How many years has he tried to find Araman? He has failed, and I have won."

Jacob shook his head. Of this nice speechmaking some of it was true enough. But he wanted to draw out the German's mind and meet it fairly.

"I only asked why you came here, Vasstan. You've told a good story without answering my question. I want to know."

Vasstan kept silence, digesting the words which surprised him.

"During the war," Jacob added, "I held a captain's commission in the American Military Intelligence, headquarters Cairo. Naturally I learned quite a bit about you. That war's over, I hope. We came here, Michal and I, to find Araman, not to find you. Then you arrived on the scene, prepared to stay. I don't for a minute believe your never-surrender-last-stand-last-stage talk any more than I believe the few Germans I've known hanker for a *Götterdämmerung* death in a nice twilight of the gods. You're much too intelligent. I'm simply asking *why* you came back and what you plan to do. That is necessary, if we're going to get along at all."

Over her glass, at which she pretended to sip, Michal held her breath. Matejko, oblivious, hummed the shepherd's song.

Vasstan sat motionless, then he smiled.

"I also can be frank, Captain Ide. If you have hope to turn me over to the British or to inform of me, you will fail."

He spoke quietly, thinking out his words in English.

"I don't intend to give out any information about you," Jacob assured him impatiently. "You still haven't answered my question."

Vasstan put down his glass. "I have still a force to command. I speak of military force. My *Landsknecht*—my soldiery. You know nothing about them. You do not understand the German spirit, at least of my generation, Captain Ide. You have heard, perhaps, the music of Richard Strauss and his tone poem *Ein Heldenleben*. How would you say that in English? A hero's life? A warrior's life? The words are not right. It is our life of the sword which ends by the sword and not in a nursing home. So lived Von Luckner, and so Von Mackensen, who could lead cavalry. I am only Vasstan, but my name shall be with theirs."

He caught himself quickly. "That is not a lie. You are right in one respect, Captain Ide. I am here to act, not to watch. I shall not saw wood in a Dutch resort in my last year. I shall make the English feel my strength, and if you are here and alive, you will be witness. But do not interfere with me." He bowed slightly, leaning forward toward Michal. "Again I make my apologies to the gracious lady for speaking so much of myself that I bore her."

"You haven't bored me, Herr Vasstan."

Jacob felt an involuntary respect for this man who with grime in his flesh, with broken fingernails and tortured eyes, could assert himself with such human dignity. Something vital had been touched in this unkempt body, heavy with meat and alcohol, hardened beyond enjoyment of ordinary sensations. Vasstan, he thought, existed only for his legend. No other recognition would be his than the spoken word where men gathered in the bars and verandas.

"Yes," he said, "I understand."

He had challenged Vasstan and had been answered in his own language and worsted. The German had told his purpose but not his plan; he admitted that he could bring an armed force into the field still, but what men were his Landsknecht? Did he actually have influence over the Kurdish leaders like Mullah Ismail? Did he hope to lead them when he emerged from Araman in the coming crisis, perhaps with some token—a banner or emblem

sacred to the Kurds? Nothing of the kind seemed to exist in Araman. What then?

He waited, aware that Vasstan was mustering his thoughts to thrust back at him.

"And you, Captain Ide, you would not bring your wife through the chasms merely to look for bronzes such as these." The German pointed at his own accumulation in the heap of valuables. "What else did you hope to find on this berg?"

"We knew it had never been explored. It sounds foolish, but we hoped to find some trace here of our first ancestors, the people who made the bronzes."

"To find the *people* of many thousand years before?"

"Yes."

"But even much later peoples, the Greeks and Macedonians who penetrated *Mittelasia*, have intermarried and their traces have disappeared in the native stock!"

"Araman is no ordinary mountain."

"No? There is not one high and lonely mountain in Asia that has not a legend. Demavend above Tehran is sacred to Zoroastrians. Araman also has its legend." Vasstan smiled. "Should not I know, who gave it first the name of Araman to Europeans? Have you seen anything that is unusual here, Captain Ide?"

Impassive as a surgeon questioning a patient about symptoms, the old adventurer pressed his visitor. Jacob thought of the aeolian harp and the wall paintings. Any ingenious person could have been responsible for those.

"The rock sculpture certainly isn't ordinary," he suggested.

"*Das Felsrelief—der besiegte Kaiser Valerian vor König Sapor?*" Vasstan shrugged. This monument, he said, would have been executed by the Persians at the time of their emperor, Sapor, who took the Roman Emperor Valerian captive about the year A.D. 200. There were others like it scattered through the hills of Iran.

It was a natural place for such a monument, and for inscriptions, graffiti, paintings. People scratched their names on cliffs or mountaintops everywhere. At different times passersby had left their mark on Araman.

Seeing Jacob silenced, he grew cordial at once. "No, my young

explorer, you have too much enthusiasm and too little experience—you have discovered no secret." Briefly he hesitated, and then hoisted himself up. "The secret I have found. It is more valuable than these toys"—he waved at his collection. "It will prove to you that the marvel of Araman is European, not Asiatic. Come, I will show you, and you will have no more doubt."

Once he had made up his mind Vasstan rose promptly, advising them to take the lamps with them, and led the way out to the plaza to the locked wooden door that had stirred Jacob's interest.

Vasstan inspected the heavy padlock and drew a key from his pocket. "Let the lovely lady have no fear," he said over his shoulder, studying their faces.

He carried no lamp himself, and he swung the heavy door back as if accustomed to its weight. "Follow," he ordered.

Going in after him, Jacob became aware of blind walls and then of rock surfaces. The room, unfurnished and windowless, formed the antechamber of a long cavern where the air was dry and stale.

As they hurried after the German, the flames sank in the lamps. Jacob drew a quick breath of astonishment. He had been prepared for anything but what he saw. Steel gleamed on either side of him; the muzzles of guns took shape from the shadows.

They were passing down a natural corridor populated with skeletons of metal, shapes of chain armor. Sword blades hung on the stone, shining with oil. Dust stirred around their feet. The dried silk of a banner swayed gently in the air current from the open door.

Gold gleamed from dark recesses. This was no museum or ordinary armory. At the end of the cavern Vasstan wheeled on them, amused. "Well, Captain Ide, what is it?"

As if expecting no answer, he pointed to a niche in the rock beside him. "Here is the beginning—the bronzes. But can you identify these?"

Jacob picked up one of a pair of bronze swords as long as his hand and forearm, swelling slightly in mid-blade then tapering to a sharp point. Rude goldwork was inlaid on the small hilts.

The green metal, badly corroded, had been cleaned. Feeling

the surprising weight of the blade, he shook his head. Vasstan seemed pleased.

"No, you have never seen one like. This is a long leaf sword of bronze. It is a cutting blade, superior to the light daggers of primitive times. Yes, this would be the first effective sword, made for killing men, along the Danube River, more than three millenniums ago."

"The Danube?" questioned Jacob, surprised.

"Yes. That is known to your archaeologists. Now, be pleased to let me explain. After, you may comment, Captain Ide."

There was a faint contempt in the way Vasstan pronounced the word "captain." He was in his element now as he handled and discussed the gleaming bronze and iron and steel. He must have spent many hours studying the strange weapons that he called his *Waffe*.

"It may be," he conceded, "that these leaf swords were carried into Asia. It may be so—at the siege of Troy, or elsewhere, by Greeks who had found them on the Danube. For here also you see a Greek helm that might perhaps have been Spartan. A king of Sparta served in Asia as Landsknecht—you would say as a mercenary."

He showed them a heavy iron helm of the type used by hoplites with the hair crest vanished from it. There were deep dents in it, and Jacob thought it looked much like the pot-shaped German head armor of World War I. He was still trying to believe that these things might be real, for Vasstan knew what he was talking about.

Beside the Spartan's helm lay a long pike point of polished iron.

"You see?" Vasstan peered at them amiably. "The helm and the spear—they are together. They are the arms of the phalanx"—he pronounced it *falanges*. "The trained spearmen of the phalanx prevailed over the undisciplined barbarians who used the leaf swords."

He pointed to a strange metal skeleton. It looked like an iron platform, heavily ornamented, perched on ribs and bars of corroded metal. "Only once have I seen the like," Vasstan commented. "It is a war chariot of the early Romans. The woodwork has dis-

appeared. By it there is the eagle standard of a Roman legion. I need not tell you how the mobile Roman legions became masters of the ancient phalanx. The phalanx was like a hedgehog. It could defend itself, but it could not move easily. The soldiers of the legions could move around and destroy a phalanx."

Glancing at the German, Jacob satisfied himself that Vasstan was perfectly serious. But as far as Jacob knew almost no weapons of Roman times had survived. Lightly he touched the surface of the next object, a slender helmet looking curiously like a jockey's cap, with a fine gold lion's head upon it. The thin iron, dark with age, had been cleaned and oiled.

"You recognize it?" Vasstan asked sharply.

Jacob shook his head. The faint outline of a Greek inscription showed under the protective coating of oil.

"Only an expert would identify that," Vasstan acknowledged. "It is Byzantine—also the helmet of a king. I cannot read the Greek," he added regretfully. "The Byzantines were clever—they made war with their minds; they abandoned the heavy arms of the old legions—they survived the downfall of Rome in their city of Constantinople." He smiled at Michal. "In their ivory tower, my gracious lady. They plotted and contrived to survive."

"Is that one of their crowns?" Michal pointed promptly at a slender band from which small screws projected at the sides.

"A crown, no. It is perhaps called a diadem. Yet you would not enjoy wearing it. You will see." Picking up the headband, Vasstan placed it over her brows. Gently he began to turn the screws, and Michal gave a sudden exclamation.

Two tiny points touched her forehead, pressing in deeper. Vasstan loosened the screws and removed the band, which he said was a simple instrument of torture. The points, breaking through the tissue into the brain, would cause extreme agony.

Matejko had picked up a great sword, so heavy that he had to use both hands to lift it. These weapons had interested him and brought him out of his brooding.

Pointing to a cross traced on the ball of the hilt, he said "*Croisé.*"

It might have been a crusader's sword, Vasstan admitted. But it had steel in it along the edges. This heavy sword, in the hand of a

rider, a knight, had established superiority over foot soldiery, no matter how well armored or shielded. With such swords a military order like the Teutonic Knights had become masters of the Baltic and its peoples.

"But not the Poles," Matejko protested suddenly.

Beyond the crusader's blade hung what seemed to be an iron or steel man without flesh or blood. From heavy casque and shirt of link mail to steel-link shoes it formed a complete suit of armor, without the man inside. Gold inlay shone from it.

"What do you see?" Vasstan asked expectantly.

The Pole murmured that it was magnificent work. Michal said, "It would just about fit you, Herr Vasstan."

The German seemed pleased. Pointing out insignia—tiny eagles and crosses—on the collar strip, he said reverently, "It is fantastic. In your Metropolitan Museum, Captain Ide, you have no armor equal to this. Here, if I am not in error, is the battle armor of our Kaiser Red Beard—Barbarossa, you would say, who died on crusade in the mountains of Anatolia. It should be preserved in the Kaiser Friedrich Museum in Berlin."

Jacob felt a quick thrill of excitement. Michal murmured, "If it had been in Berlin, it wouldn't be so well preserved now."

Vasstan did not speak again until they reached an Italian crossbow with ivory inlay upon its polished wooden shaft. "The weapon that destroyed knighthood," he said curtly. "The bolt from this weapon in the hands of a burgher could pierce the armor of a rider. And with the crossbow came this explosive tool."

Two heavy tubes of brass, dim with age, leered up at them from a squat wooden stand. Two gaping mouths of inanimate beasts waited impassively for their food of gunpowder to be thrust in. Vasstan described the thing as a twin bombard made in Frankfurt, its advantage being that it could discharge two cannon balls at once.

To Jacob, these insensate monsters had gained new meaning. He only half attended to the German's words while he sought for that meaning.

The German was saying that as the crossbow bolt had done away with the charging horseman, this embryo, this clumsy forerunner

of the siege gun of Krupp, had doomed the medieval castle and had made fortification unavailing in the ages to come.

Touching a heavy harquebus, he added, "Here is the little tool that subjected Asia to the Europeans. A kiss of fire to the vent hole, and, *pouf*, the body of a man is shattered by an iron pellet."

"Was Asia ever subjected?" Jacob asked.

With a shrug, as if the question were childish, Vasstan answered, "By Portuguese galleons, by Spanish armadas, by French and then British regiments—yes, and by your Dutch ancestors, Captain Ide. And of course by the tsars and their Cossacks. You don't deny the imperialism that conquered Asia, do you? After the flag, the trade."

There were battle standards ranged against the wall and crossed French bayonets, and beneath these a pile of rusted iron tubes crudely fastened to stocks. Jacob thought these were trade muskets, made of the cheapest piping and sold wholesale to natives who wanted to buy replicas of the firearms of the invincible European soldiery. Very often these trade muskets burst in the faces of their purchasers.

Jacob puzzled over them—because he had not expected to see them here—until Vasstan called him. "Now we find products of America, Captain Ide."

The first product of America proved to be a blued steel rifle with a curious revolving cylinder set in the rear end of the barrel. Such a rifle had not been made for generations. Vasstan said with heavy sarcasm that he believed it to be the product of a most inventive American, a Herr Samuel Colt, although he could not explain how Herr Colt's primitive repeating rifle had reached Asia. "But after, a man who owned one could fire five or six lead bullets by pulling at the trigger, and he became what you call an important person."

Jacob, who knew much about firearms, reflected that Samuel Colt had traveled to Europe at the start of the Crimean War and had sold his revolving-cylinder rifles to the Sultan of Turkey and then to the Tsar of Russia. The rifle in his hands bore the emblem of a star and crescent worked in gold.

"This one seems to be nothing inventive, yet it is also American," Vasstan was saying.

The piece he pointed out, a long rifle with a heavy octagonal barrel, had nothing distinctive about it. After a moment's examination Jacob identified it as a Hall rifle made almost a century before in the United States and little used since. Five of the Hall's rifles had been given by Commodore M. C. Perry to the Mikado of Japan, along with other specimen carbines, sabers, cartridges, compasses, telegraph instruments, and miniature railroad engines. It had been before the start of the Crimean War when Commodore Perry steamed into the port of Yedo in Japan with cannon loaded, to influence the intransigent Japanese to buy American goods and inventions. In this mission the commodore had succeeded.

Almost indifferently Vasstan indicated the last weapon that looked like an oversize rifle. "American also, of the last war."

This was an automatic rifle, a Browning .30-caliber weapon, capable of firing a hundred to a hundred and fifty bullets a minute.

"So," Vasstan swung around. "What do you decide to be my Waffe?"

He spoke of the collection as his. "You found it here, arranged like this?" Jacob asked curiously.

"Yes. Some I have arranged, as I cleaned them during the last winter. Yet the Waffe were then as they are now, in order of time." He glanced inquiringly at Michal.

Frowning, she considered. "After all, they aren't very useful now, are they? I mean, without cartridges and things to fire in them." A malicious smile touched her lips. "You might still wear Kaiser Barbarossa's armor and I *might* swing that crusader's sword, but we couldn't either of us do much damage, could we?"

"It is a collection—a priceless collection," Vasstan reminded her impatiently.

Matejko merely said that he had never known so many ancient weapons to be gathered together with modern-type firearms.

"Of all the machinery made by man," the German corrected, "the tools of war alone survive—always. Human beings die in war—

time or they try to forget, saying it will not happen again. Yet always the tools live on and are preserved and others are found to use them. So war itself dies not."

In the flickering glow of the lamps, the fragments of metal took on a semblance of life. They were extrahuman, monstrous in their significance. "I think it's incredible," Jacob said frankly. "I can't account for their being here."

"That I am able to do," Vasstan rejoined. "Simply, all these weapons were made by Europeans—that is, by Westerners. What man of Asia would desire to collect them together, especially weapons so varied? So a European must have gathered them together and stored them here in Araman, in a place of safety. He would be a savant, a learned man, and he would have lived here perhaps twenty-five years ago. Not since then. No, there is no weapon here since the American automatic rifle of the last war."

He looked at Jacob, who said nothing. Then an unpleasant thing happened. Vasstan reached out his hand, freed the small automatic pistol from Matejko's hip, and held it up. "This little one would bring the collection up to now," he said, laughing.

The Polish officer flushed, snatching at his weapon. The thing at his hip had been a reminder of his rank, and he resented the other's brusque action. For several seconds their hands strained over the weapon. Then Vasstan released it, watching the Pole calmly while he replaced the pistol with a shaking hand.

It was typical of Vasstan that he remained indifferent to the weapon that might have been used against him, while Matejko had lost control of himself when it was taken from his side. Michal let out a long breath of relief, and Vasstan smiled at her. "In one respect you are right," he said. "For use, that toy is more important than all this armory. Because it has cartridges, it could kill the three of us."

Jacob thought of the four of them. This Polish soldier whose spirit had been lacerated was least likely to use the pistol.

When they returned across the plaza after bidding their hosts good night—while Vasstan locked the door of his armory—Michal hummed softly and said, "So ends the jolly evening." After a moment she asked quietly, "What is it, Jacob?"

"Those weapons—I'd give something to know how they came here."

Michal laughed. "What really is the matter?"

When he had pulled the door curtain shut after them—they had hung up a rug to serve as a curtain after the arrival of their neighbors—Jacob put down the lamp he carried and searched the room with his eyes. Michal came over to him quickly. "Now I'm frightened, Jacob. Is that—that arsenal so important?"

"Yes, until we find out what it is, and *why* it is."

"That junk?"

"That junk shows a human mind at work, or human minds—or extrahuman mentality. I don't know what." He was still puzzling blindly.

"Jacob, I've never seen you so bothered. Didn't Vasstan explain it?" She thought for a moment. "Kaiser Red Beard, Barbarossa—didn't he ride into a river and drown himself by the weight of his armor? They did not bring back his body, and I think there's a German myth that he's alive still, asleep in the mountains of Asia until the time comes for him to wake." Pleased with herself, she went on, "Vasstan said some of the other armor belonged to kings. If you want to be fantastic, can you suppose that all of those Western kings disappeared in Asia and their armor turned up here? Is that Gothic enough to suit you?"

"That's splendidly Gothic, Michal, and you have a wonderful imagination, but it doesn't suit me at all." Relaxing, he smiled at her appreciatively. "Now you've had enough of arms and men."

"No, I haven't." She grinned wholeheartedly. "I have braced myself to hear the truth, and you must tell it to me."

"Vasstan hit on the logical explanation. But no eccentric European exile could assemble all this stuff of three thousand years. No, the natural explanation is the only one, and it's unbelievable."

"And it is?"

"All those weapons were brought into Asia by Europeans at one time or another, and they have been gathered and stored here for some purpose. No one is going to *use* them, but they are here. They've been collected by people in Araman for three milleniums."

"Isn't that rather fantastic?"

"Worse than that, they make some kind of crazy sense. The bronze leaf swords date from a world disturbance of peoples in the Homeric age; the Greek stuff from the Greek-Persian world conflict; the Romans were at war long enough in Asia; the crusades mark another upheaval, and so do the medieval European things. The rifles come from the Crimean struggle, when the Indian Mutiny and other disturbances were going on. The Brownings from the next to last world war, which we used to call the first."

"But what good do they do here?"

"They might be trophies, or specimens of what's going on outside." Suddenly Jacob laughed. "They might be artifacts, exhibits A, B, and C of our civilization, collected in Araman. I'd give something to know why."

"I'm more worried about the pistol Colonel Matejko carries." Michal sighed. "He's quite capable of shooting himself, although he says he won't." Of a sudden she brightened. "Jacob, why don't you keep the pistol? Then it wouldn't do any harm."

Shaking his head, Jacob smiled. No one could take that sidearm from the Polish officer. Still, when he thought about it afterward, he admitted to himself that Michal had been right. Curiously enough the inexplicable collection of weapons had no practical use so long as ammunition lacked for the firearms. The single small pistol possessed by Matejko, that instrument of blued steel weighing less than a pound, had become dangerous in their small group—if Vasstan got really drunk or Matejko despondent. Knowing that he ought to get it into his own hands, he put off doing so.

This vague sense of danger sharpened to a new anxiety when he sighted the tents. On a day when the cloud wrack cleared from the summit two tents became visible under the tree at the Kurdish shrine below—army tents, not the black skin shelters of the roving tribes. In that camp tiny figures of men moved about. Evidently they were there to stay, at least for the time being, and Jacob judged them to be Vasstan's followers.

Very soon he had a demonstration of that fact. Three of the

men from below materialized, climbing to the summit of the steps—ascending with the skill of mountaineers, in spite of the apparent clumsiness of their figures in coarse civilian clothing. Rifles were slung on their shoulders.

Jacob observed, too, how the villagers of Araman resented such an approach to the summit. A score of them, children and men and women, lined the ruined wall above the steps and picked up heavy, broken rocks, raising their missiles overhead and crying a warning.

At this the climbers stopped, not unduly alarmed, but reaching quietly for their rifle slings. Their broad brown faces impassive, they acted in unison, like men accustomed to meet emergencies together. The folk of Araman, holding their missiles poised, seemed just as determined. Apparently they had defended their wall in this fashion—as old as the walls of Jericho—before now.

Before a rock could be thrown down or a shot fired by the dogged intruders, Jacob stepped between the two parties, descending several steps from the gate. Waving back the climbers, he shouted, "Get out of here, you fools! Back where you came from!"

He had spoken in English. To his surprise the climbers released their rifles and faced about to descend without argument. After watching for a few minutes, the villagers departed.

Because the three men had understood English—or the warning of a foreigner speaking English—Jacob guessed what they were: Assyrian ex-soldiers.

These Assyrians, as they called themselves, were Christian mountaineers who had migrated out of their highlands to fight in the last war under command of the Allies. Courageous peasants, they had made excellent soldiers in the native Levies under British training and pay. A small remnant of the lost peoples of these heights, impoverished, they held together, stoically relying on the promise of British officers that they would be cared for.

Now some of them discharged from their service seemed to have attached themselves to Vasstan. Jacob wondered how many others might obey the German's orders, and if more of the human flotsam of the war, Red Army deserters or landless Armenians, might serve the adventurer. Vasstan had mentioned his Landsknecht.

The incident gave Jacob further food for thought. When the Assyrians had come up bearing the luggage of the foreigners, they had been admitted to Araman; when they appeared alone, carrying rifles, they had been warned off in no uncertain fashion. The people of Araman might or might not realize that rifles were deadly weapons; more certainly, they appeared willing to admit foreigners, while they barred out other strangers and armed men. Why they should act in this fashion Jacob could not conjecture, unless the people here believed that Europeans were in some manner kin to themselves, or were *expected* to enter.

At the same time the summit of Araman took on a new aspect. The great winds of the equinox had driven south the warm air of the lower valleys and had drawn in the cold of the immeasurable ranges to the north. When openings appeared in the cloud wrack, Jacob beheld the white line of snow creeping down the outer ridges to the valley floor.

Watching this invasion of the elements, he had an odd impression. The surface of the cloud banks flowing down the valley took on the semblance of a moving flood, driven by the anger of the elements. Upon this flood the crest of Araman floated like a solitary ship with a small and helpless crew. The altar height with its passive instruments and perpetual flame might have been the bridge of the ship, where at the height of the storm some skipper might take command.

That was pure fantasy, he told himself—the result of watching too long while the world of the sky moved around him. It meant only in reality that any day now ice and snow might close the approaches to Araman, as the German had prophesied.

But would that happen? There must be paths leading out of the valley other than the chasm up which he and Michal had climbed. For one thing, Father Hyacinth appeared to use another track to the monastery, and the silent priest had disappeared immediately after the arrival of the German and the Pole. Daoud must have approached Araman by another route. Vasstan had been too emphatic when he argued that snow would shut them in like wintering beasts.

The snow would be deep at this altitude, yet for that very reason

it would be passable on skis. Rude skis could be made, and with a guide like Badr an able-bodied person might get out. Michal, who had had experience with skis, might do so. But with his lame leg, Jacob would be helpless in deep snow.

The hard truth of it was that the first heavy snowfall would pen him in Araman for six months or so, while the others, including Michal, might leave at any time.

When he told her the result of his brooding, Michal laughed, saying that her only worry was to get in enough wood for the coming winter cold and silk cloth to close the apertures, and wool to make some heavy socks for Jacob, who had none.

As far as Michal was concerned, that seemed to settle the problem of the future. Her high spirits and the gaiety of Imanya mystified Jacob but did not appear at all strange to Michal, who tried to explain.

"You grew up without benefit of a sister, Jacob, and so you don't understand women very well. I'm just as glad, because I can impose on you to my heart's content. Imanya and I simply do not worry about firearms or what the United Nations are failing to do, or what this Kurdish war is doing. We have meat in the flock of sheep and milk in the goat herd, and we have our homes comfortably heated, and, most vital of all, we have our menfolk present or accounted for. We know very well what they are doing. We're much like cows in that we can't see or understand danger outside our own pens; we rely on our men as indicators of things to come. The minute you feel unquiet, I'll begin to worry and nag." Thoughtfully, Michal eyed him. "I think that's all you need know about the women group for the present, Jacob. Oh, there's another thing, and it's important. If once you should decide to move out of Araman and bid us forsake our homes, then you would find us up in arms. There's no prospect of that, is there? Is there?"

"No," Jacob assured her. "You are pretending beautifully, Michal, that you're not anxious."

"I'm not pretending at all. I'm telling you the simple facts of a woman's life to add to your store of philosophy." Then she laughed at herself. "But it's quite all right for you to be anxious about me, Jacob."

After that Jacob made a practice of wandering out to a point on the wall where he had a good view down the gradients of the steps when the weather was clear, when the people of Araman watched for any intruders. The first time he sighted three figures climbing very slowly around the shoulder far up the slope late one afternoon, he decided to call the German. The leader and the last of the climbers bore packs and all three looked vaguely familiar. Vasstan had a good pair of field glasses.

When the two of them reached the lion gate, the three newcomers were close enough to be recognized by the naked eye. Jacob could almost feel the sudden tension in the German.

First came Badr carrying a heavy pack; Daoud Khalid, burdened in similar fashion, was last. Between them, and roped to them, Clement Bigsby hauled himself up laboriously.

As the Englishman reached the last steps he seemed to gather himself together and came on steadily. When he sighted them, he waved and called faintly, "Hullo . . . Captain Ide. Is Michele here?"

Stepping out on the top, he fought to get his breath, holding to Badr's shoulder, his eyes on the German. "Not too easy a climb. Colonel Rudolf Vasstan?"

The German nodded. "General Sir Clement Bigsby, M.C., F.R.G.S.?"

Sir Clement smiled. "Congratulations on being first in. I was delayed, you know, by illness."

"You are better, so?"

"Quite. I have some hope of persuading you to return with me to Baghdad."

Glancing past the Englishman, Vasstan stood rigid, considering.

"Your Assyrian chaps sighted me down the valley, Colonel Vasstan. Thought they had advised you I was on the way up."

"I regret they failed to do so." A strange contortion moved the German's head, and his close-set eyes blinked. He seemed embarrassed, almost shy. "So! It is like the pass in the Altai. You remember the yamen in Lanchow-fu twenty-eight years ago? It is like that."

Eagerness touched his voice; he was savoring their quest of

other years. Now that his enemy was here, his own prestige had increased by the measure of the other's effort in seeking him.

"Of course," Sir Clement acknowledged, as Daoud loosened the rope around him. Already his eyes were traveling eagerly over the stonework of the ruined wall.

Jacob gripped Daoud's hand and took Bigsby's arm. The Englishman's thin face was dark with congested blood and his arm trembled with fatigue. "I'm going to put you between blankets," Jacob said. "This wall and the other stuff will be here tomorrow."

That night hail and then snow came out of the north, enveloping the mount.

On the morrow the wall was there but not as before. Ice coated its outer side; snow banked up against its rubble. The steps leading down to the valley were impassable until the ice sheathing melted.

Winter had set in.

CHAPTER V *Death and the Colony*

For weeks, while ice rimmed the lake and the sun sank lower behind clouds in the southern sky, Clement Bigsby kept to his bed. Or, rather, he was kept in bed by Michal, who had assumed the duties of a nurse immediately she had seen him.

Although he finished the journey to the valley on his feet, he was very weak, and Michal announced at once that he had a temperature. This fever hung on, never high but never ceasing, and in spite of his protests he had to content himself with a glimpse of Araman from the portico, until the weather cleared. "It's older in design than Petra," he assured Jacob with boyish enthusiasm. "Romans never built this wall; there's not a touch of the West about it. And you're quite justified in supposing that hundreds may have inhabited it once. The shrine, or fire altar, would appear older than the village. What a story it could tell, my boy!"

Michal made him occupy the big bed with the mattress she had contrived for herself, while she and Jacob slept on quilts beyond the fire brazier. Borrowing cooking utensils from Imanyia, she boiled goat's milk and brewed lentil soup and *sana* for her patient. "I'll do no more fluttering around you," she informed him. "I've always wanted to tell off a general, and now I'm going to keep you well in spite of your best efforts."

"I do wish you'd drop the Sir Clement and this business of rank, Michele. It doesn't signify anything now, you know."

"Very good, Clement darling." She smiled as if delighted. "It's your precious self that signifies, and in bed you stay until your tertiary fever is cured."

It wasn't tertiary fever, she knew. Nor was it malaria. Knowing little of such sickness, listening to his laborious, unguarded breath-

ing at night, Michal feared incipient pneumonia or cardiac weakness.

It troubled her, too, when he took her hand once and pulled her head down to look close into her eyes. Scanning the soft brown skin, the clean line of the unrouged lips, and the clear eyes, he whispered, "Good lad, Michele. You're fit as bedamned. Have you lost the dark fetches that came by you?"

"I left them along the way," she explained proudly. "I think at Riyat, with Michal Thorne."

"Then you should never go back to Riyat," he said gravely, kissing her hand. "In any case, the place has been pretty well shelled."

Much as she delighted in the old scholar's approval, Michal was worried by an undertone in his words that sounded as if he were in some way taking farewell of her. While her spirit had healed of its scars in the mountains, his strength had failed perceptibly.

When the other foreigners came in, Sir Clement roused himself to jest with them. Now in the long evenings a circle formed around the invalid's bed; Colonel Matejko brought his chessboard unobtrusively and soon discovered that the Englishman was his master at the game.

Vasstan appeared at first with brandy and cognac; then he came to talk endlessly about the saga he had shared with the British, when he had been hounded—by the English leash hounds, he said, the Gurkhas, Sikhs, and Pathans of northern India who had taken the English King's pay to hunt him over the roof of the world. "They were all volunteers," Clement murmured, "good fellows."

In this fashion each night the two arch-enemies retraced their course over the mighty mountains of central Asia, recalling the bygone day when war had retained a vestige of a game, the matchless game of life against life played by Briton and Teuton.

Jacob noticed that Daoud kept away from these gatherings. For some reason the young archaeologist had lost his assurance. Although he spent long hours copying the carvings in the cliff and listening to the talk of Michelangelo, he took to wandering along the wall, brooding like the Pole. The only explanation he gave to Jacob of his disappearance two months before was that he

had sighted the solitary mount of Araman in the valley, but had lost his way completely until he reached the river lower down and followed it to Riyat, where Sir Clement had insisted upon attempting the ascent with him, once convinced that Araman could be reached.

Sir Clement had more to say.

"I'm sorry, Jacob—sorry to tell you he's lying, at least in part. He told me he came down over the passes with only one night's sleep. Imagine that! You nor I could not have done it. Something frightened Daoud, or he funk'd making the final ascent alone and ran for it. I wish I knew what turned him back; but it's one of the things that in all likelihood he will never explain."

And he added thoughtfully:

"It must have been something rather intangible, because he feels no concern about us. Those chaps have tremendous physical endurance, yet they go all to pieces mentally without warning—or at least they revert to a different state of mind. In a moment, for no apparent reason, they feel a soul sickness that drives them out into deserts or blinding heat, to feel rocks under their feet and the emptiness of the sky above them. It's like a fever that drives them away from the city pavements into solitude. Sometimes whole tribes or peoples catch this fever of unrest and snatch up a banner to go to war, to kill and be killed. Or they follow a new leader upon a trek to a new land. That's the Islam in them. It's more than nomadic restlessness—it's really fear that they may be losing their faith, and they turn blindly into the desert to restore it."

Deep anxiety sharpened the orientalist's words.

"The people around here aren't Moslems," Jacob pointed out.

"Still, they are afflicted by the fever. It's spreading from east to west, from the folk of poor, struggling India to the Turkish highlanders. Even the Afghans in their hills are watching for signs of disaster."

Only when they were alone and the wall vent stopped up did the tired Englishman speak so frankly to the American of the increasing anxiety that had driven him to the ascent of Araman. Between the two a father-and-son relationship had come into being,

and Jacob suspected that the retired soldier was trying at every opportunity to give him all the information he possessed.

"These men of the East are moved by signs and portents that you and I do not sense or believe in. And they do not explain such matters to us. If we knew what the sign was, we would be better able to deal with it. Of course, after this last war, they have lost trust in foreigners—in most of us British and even in you Americans, because you have broken wartime promises to them. If they would only stay quiet for a year!"

His words were like a cry of agony.

"How can you keep hundreds of millions quiet in their homes, when something has stirred them up to fear calamity?"

"Something they don't understand?" Jacob asked quickly.

"Of course they don't understand it. It is coming from outside the routine of their lives."

"From the west?"

"Not from our west, certainly. The chaps around here, the Herki and Baradust Kurds, have gone wild for independence. *Somebody* has stirred them up to that and has armed them into the bargain."

Unquestionably, Sir Clement added, agents of the Soviet Union had been at work along these frontiers. They had kept out of official sight, and had worked quietly to undermine the weak oriental governments by fragmenting all authority. By setting up new states beyond the frontiers, the control of the Kremlin could be extended and the Russian frontiers advanced in that manner toward the southern seas. "Each independent state taken under Soviet protection is another step outward, and those Russians have long legs." Sir Clement paused, with a wan smile. "We British have meddled in our time with the governments east of Suez, as you know, Jacob. But now we're very tired; we have our backs to the sea in Asia, and we hope for no more than to teach the Asiatics to manage their own affairs." He lay back with a sigh to sip a little cognac. "It's late in the day for that, I admit. Curious that the name of Moscow, the old name *Moskva*, should mean troubled waters."

Thinking of Riyat and the Mullah Ismail, Jacob said nothing. By degrees Sir Clement informed him of the convolutions of the outer world during the five months that he and Michal had been

beyond reach of newspapers and cabled news bulletins and even gossip—of the fruitless conferences of the foreign ministers of the great powers in New York, London, and Paris; of the disputes over Iran and Turkey that had checkmated the efforts of the Security Council of the United Nations to make progress toward peaceful adjustment of the wartime dislocation. To Jacob this news from the outside seemed bodiless, less real than the storm gusts that swept the wall of Araman.

"The trouble over control of the port of Trieste and the elections in Greece, within the Mediterranean, were bad enough," he pointed out. "As bad as the torturing of the carcass of Manchukuo. But I feel that the key to the trouble is here."

"Hardly in this valley," Jacob objected.

"In this valley, and even perhaps within Araman itself."

Here, Sir Clement insisted, they were on the line of the invisible frontier that stretched from the water gate of the Dardanelles in the west to the mountain passes above India in the east. This was the vital frontier.

The peoples bordering it—Turks, Iraqis, Iranians, Afghans, the multitudes of northern India—had escaped involvement in the last war. Yet they were becoming involved now in a new species of conflict, something they did not understand.

Along this frontier lay the great oil fields, from Baku to Kirkuk, Masjid-i-Sulaiman, and the Saudi Arabian refinery of the Americans. From it stretched communications to the sea, the Persian Gulf, as well as the Mediterranean. And within it waited sites for strategic airfields from which bombers could be over the seaports or oil refineries in a few minutes' time. These mountains contained mineral deposits now worth more than gold itself to the great powers outside.

"It's a veritable storehouse of the stuff of a future war," Sir Clement sighed, "and control of this Nearer East means control of Asia—for the Far East is exhausted, at least during these few years, by the Japanese war."

The heart of this frontier lay within the mountains of Kurdistan; Kurdish tribes roamed within sight of the Black Sea and the distant massifs of Afghanistan.

"These mountains have always been at peace, Jacob. Now conflict is breaking out within them and spreading like a pestilence. If it spreads, foreign powers will intervene. The situation here is worse than in eastern Europe in thirty-nine or forty-one. It's about as bad as could be. British Intelligence is definite on that point, as I happen to know."

"How great do you think the danger is?" Jacob asked, confident that the Englishman would not exaggerate.

Bigsby glanced at the ikon of Saint Nikolka. After a moment he said, "Peace itself is at stake."

As if in a dream, Jacob cast his thought out from the mist of the summit toward that outer world wherein great sprawling cities and intertwined arteries of communication, the fabric of a wounded civilization, waited, lighted and pulsing with mechanical power, fine-spun in laboratories—waited for what might come out of these recesses of Asia.

"The snow will cut off most of the mountain region," Sir Clement went on quietly. "And this truce of winter will last a month or so. If I had the strength to get about for only two months, to talk to Mullah Ismail and the tribal leaders at Sanjbulak—I'd give the rest of my time on earth for that."

In his words rang the determination of a soldier who, once his objective had been made clear, would sacrifice everything to gain it.

They did not speak of their fears to Daoud, who was finishing copying the inscriptions along the rock face. Readily the archaeologist agreed with Jacob that the figures represented the numerals from one to nine, with a sign added for zero.

That they had been utilized to keep a calendar of stellar time, he judged from the fact that other symbols were astronomical. "They are at least as ancient as the Nana Ghat inscriptions of India. You saw how plain lines were used for one, two, and three. Yes, they reveal similarities to the Indian system and *other* similarities to the earliest Sumerian or Arabic. That is important. Do you know why?"

Jacob grinned. "Yes. Because this place lies on the earth be-

tween those Indian mountains and your valley of the Tigris, that used to be Sumerian or Arabic."

"And because there are elements of both the others here. That means this system may well have been the oldest of the three. Like this."

Rapidly the archaeologist traced some letters.

AB BC CD

"That is too simple, of course. But if we find a B in the first of two pairs and a C in the second pairs, we can be pretty certain the middle combination was the original of the others." Thoughtfully he nodded. "Our rock calendar seems to have been kept up for three millenniums."

His patient watching of the people had shown Daoud that the children still used the fingers of their right hand to make the signs for numbers in their games. From such finger signs the numerals on the cliff had been formed in a very remote time.

Working with the numbers and names for members of a family and for the oldest elements of life—water, fire, earth, and the sun—Daoud was beginning to identify some spoken words; instead of trying to talk connectedly with the people of Araman he listened patiently as they worked indoors during the storms, milking goats, adding strands to the cloth on the hand looms. Especially when the women chanted over their work, he listened for recognizable sounds and copied them down—as a musician might make notes of some unfamiliar orchestration.

"They are speaking a dead language without any doubt," he informed Sir Clement. "And very clearly too. It has affinities with ancient Greek and with Sanskrit. Their hymns are very close to the Hindu Gathas."

Daoud went at this task without trying to theorize but identifying words before comparing them with other languages. In Araman, seven was *hapta*, as in Greek, in Sanskrit *sapta*, and in modern Persian *haft*. The elders or fathers of Araman were *pit-tara*, as in the Gathas, in contrast to the Latin *pater* and Persian *pedar*. Neither Daoud nor Sir Clement doubted that they were dealing with an Indo-European or Aryan language from the first.

Becoming more cheerful as he worked, Daoud laughed, remarking that this was the only dead language that had survived in speaking instead of writing—in fact, it was still alive!

To him the whole summit was no more than an undreamed-of laboratory of the remote past, where ghosts, as it were, had come to life. Only at night and in spells of brooding did he come under the shadow of intangible dread. And of that he spoke to Jacob only once. "It's like opening a tomb, Jacob. Even a hardened archaeologist going into such a place for the first time feels awe because the things around him had not been disturbed for centuries before him. Perhaps such tombs were protected in some way against human intrusion."

He said no more than that. But Jacob reflected that Daoud had gone away from Araman at the first sight of it.

That thought touched a chord of memory. When Sir Clement had shown him for the first time the photograph of the conical mount of Araman in the valley, the Englishman had asked if Jacob did not sense something terrifying in it. When he reminded the other of that, Sir Clement shook his head quickly. "Ah, yes. In the German's photograph it looked like an enormous Tower of Silence."

Michal, thinking of India, had said the same thing.

"But it's not that, Jacob. It's not a man-made tower." For a moment he reflected curiously. "What inspires terror may not be at all dangerous. In our thoughts we may shrink back from something quite harmless, as Michal used to dread a freshly kindled fire in her bad time. I was quite frightened once at my first sight of your Empire State Building. Yet I suppose several million New Yorkers see it every day without alarm. Now I am certain there is nothing for us to fear in Araman *itself*."

"But you have a sense of danger here?" Jacob knew that was true of himself, on Michal's account.

"Yes, quite unmistakably."

Jacob reflected that the people of Araman had a habit of watching from the walls, even during the storms.

"If we only knew what Araman hides," murmured the Englishman.

For a second Jacob thought of Vasstan, then dismissed the German from his mind. It was odd how each foreigner saw the mount with different eyes: to Vasstan the summit was no more than a good observation post from which to view the tribal strife he anticipated; Daoud beheld in it only a unique laboratory of the life of thousands of years ago; Matejko had found in it a last refuge, rendered endurable by Michal's presence.

And Michal had made it her home.

The two men were alone one afternoon after Michal had gone to sit with Imanyia at the silk loom, when Sir Clement lay back and frankly admitted defeat.

Both Jacob and Daoud had told him in careful detail all that they had observed on the summit that he himself had not seen.

"I've ransacked my poor brains until they ache, Jacob, without finding an explanation of this place. There's nothing."

"There's something," Jacob smiled over his copy of Aristotle, "because you're trying to find it."

"What have we found? A dozen families that speak a language of the dawn world. A fire altar as old as that. Beautiful bronze work, cliff sculpture, astronomical instruments, and an aeolian harp newer than that but still hoary with age. Wall paintings"—he glanced up at the figures on the wall—"of purely, oriental legends, alongside what you describe as a fantastic collection of European weapons."

"And the people watch expectantly for something to materialize from beyond the valley," added Jacob.

"Even so—and *we* have arrived—it doesn't yield an answer. Your Aristotle couldn't give meaning to this mystery!"

For once the orientalist sounded petulant. Jacob, who had threshed over all that long ago in his mind, went on reading calmly, because it interested him. "*If our world is believed to be the only one,*" he read aloud, "*who can suppose that it should be destroyed never to reappear? Since what generated it exists unchanging—*"

He broke off, thinking. Sir Clement said, "Aristotle seems to

mean that our inhabited earth can't be destroyed unless the universe that created it should cease to exist."

"Yes. That's hopeful. And it has a point of hope for us."

"I'd like to hear it."

"Araman has endured for fantastic ages—as long as nine or ten Romes. Why? It has not been destroyed because *what created it still exists.*"

Sir Clement was silent, his tired eyes brightening. More and more he had come to rely on Jacob's tenacity and his sensitivity. The lame man had a mind like a surgeon's, intent and probing with a delicate touch.

"What, or who, *made* Araman?" Jacob muttered over his cold pipe. "One thing's clear enough. These people have been retreating. I don't know if their original homes in the lower valleys dried up, or if they were driven out by enemies. But certainly, in their retreat, they took refuge on this summit. They left the steps precarious and built a wall; they invented the sun telegraph to flash warnings or summons from their refuge. As time went on, their numbers thinned out. Araman was occupied as a last refuge; there's nowhere else to retreat."

"That's sound," the Englishman admitted.

"A lot of work was done once on this summit—and then neglected. Evidently the people wanted to protect something very much, their ark of the covenant, or—— What did you expect to find here?"

"Some tomb or prophet that could influence the tribes." His eyes swept the room with almost desperate longing, pausing on the paintings and the bronze winged horse. "From all that I've heard, and even from Daoud's instinct, I am convinced that some such *force* exists here. Yet we've not hit on a sign of it."

"No. But in your notes you wrote that we might be in the presence of some truth we did not recognize."

"I meant the truth of what had been in the past."

"Something of that may have endured."

"If you invoke a miracle."

Jacob stared at his pipe. "I wonder what a miracle *really* is. Isn't it quite a natural happening that no one anticipates?"

"You aren't inclining to the supernatural?" Sir Clement sighed. "Perhaps I did hope for a miracle, Jacob. I've hoped so long. As the shrine of Our Lady of Lourdes may belong only to the past, so the shrine of Araman may. Well, Jacob, do you intend waiting for a miracle?"

"No—looking for one. I can't describe exactly what I mean. I only feel there's a force hidden from us because it's invisible to us." Thoughtfully his eyes held the other's. "Once you called this place a storm center. I suppose a physical storm center is caused by nothing more than a rush of warm air upward. No one *sees* that happen, but it does happen. I don't know what the impulse of force could be here—except that we've not seen it yet. It's up to us to identify it."

"By imagination?"

"No. We know it is strange to us. We can begin to search by taking account of anything that appears unusual or inexplicable. Instead of looking for things, we can search for things that have *in themselves* the principle of force."

Glancing at the book Jacob held, Sir Clement asked, "So says Aristotle?"

Jacob laughed. "Yes. So he did."

"Right! To find what is missing, look for the invisible." He stretched out lank arms. "Jacob, I've been a mewling mummy, a fossicking dodo! If nothing's possible, turn to the impossible. It's simple as Holy Writ. We'll scan every pebble of Araman. I'm going with you at break of dawn. No, I'm going."

His eyes fell grave. "The only thing that matters is, if we don't find it, somebody else will."

Bundled up in scarf and overcoat, Bigsby insisted on starting around the summit the next day. To Michal, who challenged him instantly, he explained that they were making a new search. "We're seeking for the evidence of things not seen, my dear."

"To find what?" Michal looked very skeptical.

"We don't know. I'm not senile. It was Jacob Ide's idea to strip our minds bare as your aeolian harp, to be touched by the intangible.

It's hard for an old man like me; I've so much rubbish stored away from textbooks and journals of learned societies."

Michal grinned cheerfully. "Poor darling."

"Michele!" A new, sharp note came into his voice. "You can be flippant afterward, not now. Four months ago I would not have told you what I am telling you—that the lives of all four foreigners are in jeopardy here."

"Aren't there five of us?"

"You are safe, I think. The tribes would not injure a woman. We four men may be secure in Araman. But if one of us ventures outside now, the Kurds are not apt to let him through. They are aroused by so many casualties. Even Daoud's attitude has changed. We have become hostages of a sort, for what is done by foreigners outside. And," he added quickly, "we can't very well blame the Kurds for that."

Something of light went out of Michal's face. "I'm glad you told me." Her hand touched Jacob's.

Unwontedly silent, she followed them as they made their rounds, Jacob smoking some of the tobacco the Englishman had brought. For a while they stood at the water wheel, and Michal pointed at the summit of the wall. A line of large ugly carrion birds were perched there. She had not seen them before.

"There's something," Michal volunteered, and waited.

"Vultures," said Clement Bigsby. Then he said "Hullo!" And after a minute, "First trace, Michele. There *is* something missing we've not noticed." Turning, he surveyed the white meadows and bare groves. "The cemetery."

"Cemetery?" Michal tried to understand. "We've an observatory but no cemetery."

"Graves then. Almost any old settlement will have its graves close at hand. Cairo is practically surrounded by graves."

"Oh, they burn their dead."

And Jacob added gravely, "I saw one burned down at the steps."

As he stared at the vultures, Clement seemed relieved. Michal wondered whether the vultures came looking for food in the dead of winter. After all, even vultures must eat. In India somewhere she had seen them sitting like this in towers. In the Towers of

Silence. . . . Jacob was silent, his fine head lifted, his dark hair curled over his forehead, and it was time she cut it again with her scissors. In his silence he imagined things that might be nice for her, and she waited to hear. . . . This joy he had in little things, in pity and pride . . . he was never afraid except for her, and she wished that he could be afraid for himself and her, and cruel to others, as other men could be.

Now they were staring at the rock portraits of the kneeling emperor and the Asiatic king. The part of her mind that kept track of their words, waiting for something interesting, heard Clement exclaim, "There's a cross bearing!"

"What is a cross bearing?" Michal demanded.

"A bearing is a direction in which you are thinking or going, right or wrong. If you hit on another bearing that crosses it, you may be right at that point. Useful also in directing artillery fire. Now somebody carved this Roman emperor, Valerian, in the rock to perpetuate his surrender. Judging by Jacob, somebody else brought to the cavern the body armor of a Holy Roman emperor, Barbarossa, to preserve it. The two things match up. Are they trophies or mementos, or what?"

"I thought," Michal ventured, "you two were going to rid your minds of logic."

"So we were. And we're not managing very well. But there's *something* odd in those exhibits, as Jacob realized at once. There was even a chariot of early Rome. Marcus Antonius—Mark Antony—used a chariot, I suppose because Cleopatra did. He might have been king of western Asia, but he died by his own sword, although Cleopatra had much to do with that." He thought for a space. "In one way or another we've just mentioned three kings—Valerian, Barbarossa, Mark Antony—I don't know why. There may be another cross bearing in that."

Three kings, Michal thought. Three, who had died with their legions or whatever they had when they marched into Asia. Kings shall draw his chariot—but whose? Mark Antony had been of the west—Cleopatra of the east, and he had died because he loved her too much.

Michal's feet were wet, and she felt cold even in the wan sun-

light. She felt cold and useless and unhappy. Suddenly she pointed. "The bird bath is frozen."

The men who had been moving toward the altar fire stopped and looked at the great marble bowl set upon a pedestal. Breaking the thin ice with her bare hand, Michal murmured, "So the swallows can drink. Sometimes they come in swarms."

"No doubt they do," Clement said, "but this wasn't made for a bird bath, Michele."

"It certainly looks like one."

"It looks more like a baptismal font."

Surprised, Michal blinked.

"But it was made before the time of baptism—Christian, at least. Worshipers used to cleanse their hands with water before approaching the altar. People clung to the idea of cleansing themselves. Later on all mosques had a pool in the outer courtyard and our churches kept a basin of water by the entry door."

The men moved on, dismissing the font from their thoughts. Feeling neglected, Michal wandered up to the altar where Daoud was at work, measuring the depth of the hollow in the blackened cracked limestone eaten away year by year by the heat of the fire. Putting on some fresh wood, being careful not to disturb the Kurd, she smiled at him. People usually smiled back at her, but Daoud only glanced up somberly and waited. Michal thought she might get a cross bearing from him, although she was not very good at that.

"Have you found out their word for this yet, Daoud?"

"*Hestia*. It means hearth fire, or sacrifice."

Abruptly, to her surprise, Daoud wheeled and caught up a length of wood, hurling it at the line of vultures perched on the parapet near them. The ungainly scavengers flapped off. For the first time she noticed that he had an amber rosary, like Father Hyacinth's, twisted around his wrist.

"They used to perch on the Towers of Silence, in India," she observed, watching them fly away.

"Yes, on the *dakhmas*," said Daoud angrily. "Where the ignorant Zoroastrians of today expose their dead, stripping the bodies—opening the legs and folding the arms—for the scavenger birds to

tear. Don't you see how this place is like the top of a Tower of Silence?" He stared at her, and she thought he must be overtired.

"These people are like the attendants of the dead. Suppose it is a place of burial for those who intrude. You are a foreigner. You should go away quickly, with Sir Clement Bigsby. You should go now, Miss Michal!"

Startled by the change in the young Kurd, thinking that he was angry because he was frightened, she did not know what to answer, and hurried away to Jacob.

At the locked door of the armory Vasstan and the Pole had joined the searchers. Sir Clement looked like a ruffled bird as he argued with the German, who exclaimed, "I did not find the Waffe to have them taken away to the British Museum, like the marble frieze your Lord Elgin stole from the Parthenon. No, I will not show them again."

The marbles of the Parthenon. When she had been Miss Thorne, Michal had gone to sit in the moonlight on the steps of the Parthenon, trying to keep far away from the voices of guides explaining to tourists the miracle of grace lighted by the moon. She had felt it behind her, just back of where her eyes could see, the loveliness shaped from stone by forgotten hands. So keenly had she felt it that she had wanted to cry.

"The Acropolis is still there," Sir Clement was saying, "but you chaps left precious little of the Ishtar Gate in Babylon, or the temple in Pergamum."

Then Jacob's voice, restrained, "Herr Vasstan, don't you want to bring out the Byzantine helmet at least for Sir Clement to examine?"

With a grunt Vasstan looked at Michal, then unlocked the door and disappeared inside. The Englishman turned his back punctiliously on the open door. Colonel Matejko moved closer to her. "What is it that they have said, gracious friend?" His voice spoke for her alone.

When Michal told him, he said, "Ah, the Germans. They have stripped the cathedral of the Lady Mary at Kraków, where I went with my wife."

Self-consciously he spoke, his handsome head bent toward her,

his eyes seeking hers. Uneasily, Michal felt that he was not thinking so much then of his wife as of holding her, in his arms. She smiled up at him brightly, aware that Jacob was watching her.

It pleased Vasstan to hand over the gray-gold helmet to his enemy, and he drank in Sir Clement's alert interest as the other traced the Greek lettering with his finger.

"One word is distinct," remarked the Englishman. "*Basileus*: that is, priest-emperor. This would be the helmet of an emperor of Byzantium. However could it have reached here?" Abruptly his head lifted. "Julian! Julian the Apostate, who came to the East to search for an unknown god. He met his death down in the desert along the Tigris."

Vasstan laughed. "A legend!"

As they went back slowly to their house Sir Clement seemed tired.

"Was that a cross bearing?" Michal asked curiously.

"Fantastically, yes. Julian makes our fourth king from the West. Like us, Julian was searching here for something unknown to him—what he believed to be a religion."

"Does it help?"

He shook his head. "I'm altogether at a loss. I'm simply putting on an act as you would say, my dear. I'm trying to help Jacob."

She nodded understanding. "Yes, Jacob can see his way through anything." Quickly she glanced at the orientalist. "But he's a child compared to you."

"In a sense, yes. But that is why he has a better chance than I—the two of you together have a better chance." He squared his shoulders. "Steady's the word. We'll try again tomorrow."

The morrow came, and other days followed. Unless it was a day of snow or driving rain, the Englishman insisted on going out, fossicking, as he called it, in company with Jacob, whose patience proved inexhaustible. Michal, aware that they were making no progress, worried silently. Unless they could make some discovery, she knew the Englishman would continue to exhaust himself.

Because she could be no help at their labor, she took to unnecessary tasks. One bright afternoon, when white clouds rolled beneath the summit, she sighted Father Hyacinth's familiar figure down by the water wheel. Dropping the caldron she had come to fill at the lake, she ran over to the silent priest who was watching a woman grind wheat in the mill.

He smiled so quickly, she wondered if he had expected her at the wheel.

"Father!" she cried at him. "It is good that you have come."

She wanted to pour out all her misgivings and anxieties, even if he could understand very little of them. Jacob had been morose of late.

"It is time," he said amiably, "for the fete of Noël."

Christmas! She had forgotten that it existed. Yet the priest said it would be in three days.

"Tell me, is it a fete here?"

"Of a certainty, my daughter."

Michal could hardly believe that, but she snatched at a chance to glean one of the precious cross bearings from this habitué of Araman.

"These people of Araman, Father Hyacinth, are they Zoroastrians like Mr. Parabat?"

He hesitated, and, sparing of words, shook his head. Michal pretended to be absorbed in the grinding stones. "They are Kurds, aren't they—like the Herki?"

"Not like the Herki."

Suppressing a sigh, Michal cried out, "Who are they, then?"

It did not seem to surprise the priest that she should want so terribly to know this. For the first time he spoke approvingly. "They? Our brothers. Our ancestors and their ancestors were the same, long ago, before the time of Mar Giorgios."

Michal tried to keep her voice casual over the moaning of the stones and the threshing of the wheel. "But that would be a remarkable thing, wouldn't it, Father Hyacinth? How do you know it to be true?"

"It is said in the countryside." Then, seeing Michal's disappointment, he added cheerfully, "In effect, put the clothing of

Monsieur Bigsby on Gopal, and the clothing of Gopal on Monsieur Bigsby, and how will you tell which one is the European?" Pointing across the lake, he indicated the aged Michelangelo who was walking with his grandson looking at the beehives. It occurred to Michal that Father Hyacinth was himself an Armenian.

Again Michal had the sharp realization that there was nothing strange about these people of the mountains. They had been here since time immemorial; only the foreigners were strange and helpless. What should they do in Araman, she begged the swarthy priest, and how should they guide themselves?

Fingering the coarsely ground wheat, Father Hyacinth listened and made a movement with his hand. Stretching out his hand, he offered her an ivory rosary and a gay silk tassel, not very white. "Take this, and use it when you pray. For many years I have made use of it."

There were endless questions Michal wanted to ask Father Hyacinth, but she felt that he had closed the door to any further questions, if indeed he knew how to answer them. So she thanked him, and asked casually whose portrait Gopal intended to paint on the wall he was preparing.

"He does not know." The priest smiled. "That is why he waits."

Feeling quite happy of a sudden at the prospect of Christmas and wondering what she would do about it, and how to persuade Sir Clement to take a day of rest, Michal immediately forgot what the priest had said about Araman, and ran to find Jacob.

"Christmas in three days, Jacob," she hailed, her cheeks flushed. "And we forgot it and Father Hyacinth's here."

"Yes, it's in three days," he admitted calmly. "The Watchman's checking the sky globe already."

"The Watch— What has he to do with it?"

Smiling down at her, Jacob explained that it was also an occasion in Araman. He did not know what the people would do to celebrate.

"Don't tell me they hang up their stockings and make egg nog!"

"If Father Hyacinth had eggs, he might at that. But for the people here it's the winter solstice."

"Don't be technical, Jacob. What's a solstice?"

"It's only the day when the earth stops going away from the sun and comes nearer. The sun begins to gain strength, and people know that spring will come around again. It's not marked on our calendars at home. At least not any more."

"I always took the sun for granted. But why Christmas?"

"The solstice was always celebrated. Your church named it Christmas not so awfully long ago. The Santa Claus business is just thrown in by our Anglo-Saxon forebears."

"With the tree?"

"I don't know about the tree."

"We can have one." Already Michal was planning about it. "And we'll have a wonderful Christmas."

Jacob knew she really felt the happiness she spoke of; she shared it with Matejko and the others of Araman. Was there any person whom, in some way, Michal did not share her feelings with?

Curiously enough it was Vasstan who showed keen interest in her search for a Christmas tree. When he found her gathering acorns to use as ornaments—she could think of nothing else—he laughed and said that his salesman-costume jewelry would be brighter on the tree. For the Christmas feast, he said he would bring over brandy and chocolate from American C-ration tins. "For the Anglo-American scientists," he assured her, when she protested.

Michal had her own ideas about Christmas, which had somehow become important to her. Ever since Bigsby had arrived, the German had observed his activity without appearing to do so, and Michal knew that he drew deep satisfaction from the anxiety of the other men.

Coming back from the grove, Michal burdened with her acorns and pine cones, they found an Assyrian from the tents below waiting at the sundial. This man, squat and scarred, with close-cropped grizzled hair, Michal had seen in talk with Vasstan several times. Now he waited stolidly while the villagers kept their distance from him.

"Sergeant Daniel," Vasstan called to him, and stepped to one side in the snow as the sergeant ran up. In this way the two of

them could talk without Michal overhearing. She had excellent hearing, and she dawdled on the path, but she caught only the murmur of the two guttural voices, until Vasstan uttered something explosively. It sounded like *skis*. But Michal could not be sure of that.

She thought that Sergeant Daniel looked old and kind. Smaller than the German, standing rigid, his body appeared stronger. His heavy farmer's hands could grip a rifle or a plow, and no doubt he could use skis.

Suddenly she stopped edging along the path. Jacob had appeared from the pine grove behind her, going directly toward Vasstan and the sergeant. Without hurrying, he made his way methodically through the snow, and Vasstan stopped talking at once.

"Good morning," said Jacob. "I thought you were going to keep the Assyrians out of the village, Vasstan."

Sergeant Daniel glanced quickly from one to the other. The German was not pleased. "I am not informed of your thoughts, Captain Ide. Kindly notice that the sergeant carries no rifle."

"That's right. But you know the custom here, Colonel Vasstan. No strangers allowed. Why not stick to the rules?"

Distinctly the other was irritated. "Why not?" Carefully he selected words in English. "First, because I am not obliged to be bound by rules made by Sir Clement Bigsby. Secondly, I am not bound to recognize a warning from Sir Clement Bigsby given by you as his—his aide de camp. Do you understand, Captain Ide?"

From the street the villagers watched intently this argument between the foreigners. Michal waited, clutching her pine cones and holding her breath.

Jacob seemed to be laughing, and that was not wise. He seemed to be forcing a quarrel, and that wasn't like him. "I do indeed. Look at it this way. Those soldiers are half frozen in their tents down below. And since they've been posted there the Kurds have left off depositing supplies at the shrine. Why not let the Assyrians go back to the monastery? That happens to be their church, by the way."

Vasstan savored the words and put them aside. To the Assyrian

he said, "Return. Carry out the orders." To Jacob he said, "I recall what I have this minute said. No, you are not Sir Clement Bigsby's second-in-command—you are beginning to be a missionary."

And he walked off, after the sergeant had departed, as if impatient of such stupidity.

"You offended him," Michal told Jacob. Her day was not turning out happily.

"He's not offended," Jacob chuckled; "he's angry. I don't think he likes me to talk to the Assyrians."

"But you haven't been talking to them—not until now."

After glancing around, he said, "I met this Sergeant Daniel at the head of the stairs. Daniel's decent, and fairly desperate. And he told me something important—sort of in trade for anything I might do for him."

It was like these men to be so content after a fight, Michal thought dismally. "Jacob," she almost wailed, "what *has* happened to the place?" Usually he guessed what was in her mind, but now he was thinking about men and guns. "It's important. The light and joy have gone, and we're all going around like hunters and hunted, racking our brains for some explanation."

"Easy, Michal. I know."

"Yes, Captain Ide. It's a military situation, isn't it? You're explaining a military situation. Please tell me just what it is, because I'm ignorant about such things."

He looked at her, and stopped to lean on his cane. She had known he would do that.

"The nine-man army encamped below is a veteran force well equipped. They take orders from Vasstan because he feeds them. They would like to be in British service, but the British Government has demobilized most of the Levies and cast the Poles adrift. Yes, there are Poles without a country and some miscellaneous Russians who don't want their country either in this embryo foreign legion of Vasstan. They are pretty desperate because some of them have families and the families have no food except what they can supply. As Vasstan has one ambition, so they have one loyalty. They will stick by the man who sticks by them as commander. Having been through hell on earth, nothing matters much to them now. What matters much to us is that these nine troopers

guard our gateway. They'll pass in only what Vasstan wants passed in, and that's not so good for us."

Shifting her pine cones, Michal began to think about that.

"Five years ago," Jacob went on inexorably, "some of those Poles were making last stands in the Tatra Mountains. In case you've forgotten, they were making their stand against the *Wehrmacht* which is, or was, the German Army—Colonel Vasstan's army. And the Russians were probably doing the same around Orel or the suburbs of Moscow. Oh yes, and the Assyrians had just helped a thin British battalion to hold the Habbaniya airfield against a few Luftwaffe planes and other things. Sergeant Daniel was there." And Jacob added thoughtfully, "I suppose our invisible gods are laughing at us. All we can do is to laugh at ourselves."

By then Michal had forgotten her pine cones. "You're doing something about it, Jacob."

"No, honestly. I merely exchanged grins with Sergeant Daniel. He knows I can't do anything. He just hopes. If I had ten thousand dollars in gold, I might start feeding the Assyrians' families, and we'd have an army a couple of hundred strong. I don't suppose Vasstan really has more than that."

"Where did he get the rifles?"

"They're finding their way even into these hills, after the war. Out here the price of an ex-service rifle that can use the local supply of cartridges is about eighty English pounds. So the rifles turn up along frontiers like these, no one knows how. That's bad, but it will be worse when heavy machine guns follow them. Vasstan could do with a heavy machine gun. He is a very efficient planner, while we merely muddle along."

"But what other people would want to come to Araman now, Jacob? I mean anyone Vasstan would want to keep out?"

Again he hesitated, with a glance into the pines. "Daniel more than hinted at that. What he said was that another Assyrian outpost had sighted a dozen foreigners traveling on skis and horseback. That's all he would say. But it sounded as if they were either searching or exploring, and they must have got around the Kurds some way."

Searching. Michal almost gasped. Of course by now people in Baghdad must be worried about Sir Clement, if not about her.

Perhaps the American Legation had begun to wonder what had happened to Jacob.

"If they tried to search for us, from Baghdad," she asked, "wouldn't they send planes? I haven't seen a sign of one in the sky."

Carefully Jacob considered that. "I don't think so. Sir Clement doesn't expect it. Putting the weather aside, they have only massive transport planes and the British fighters at Habbaniya. Even if they tried, a plane would have to keep at more than seventeen thousand feet, above these peaks. At that distance they could barely spot the lake on this summit."

Michal went into inward communion with herself. Two months before she would have hated the sight of a plane from outside; now she found herself hoping for one, because the authorities in Baghdad would never send a search party into the snowbound mountains on foot. No, the only hope would be an inquisitive plane that might circle Araman and sight the Assyrians' tents, or the smoke from the Watchman's fire.

"Jacob!" A new misgiving assailed her. "Do you believe this Sergeant Daniel?"

"I think he's honest. And then he was putting out a feeler." Jacob's grin turned crooked. "He said the Assyrian Christians had one hope. In the United States. Such a great and all-powerful United States could easily rescue a few thousand men and their families that had fought for the Allies. The United States did things like that."

Although he still looked grim, his eyes had the warmth she was accustomed to. "The situation's bad, Michal, and we can't do anything about it. So that's all right. Now suppose you pile those cones here, and we'll try to find a Christmas tree."

Obediently Michal dropped her burden, and felt better at once. It was just like Jacob to read her mind about the tree. "I don't want too big a one," she said.

When they dragged in the fir and the pine cones, Sir Clement stood at the fire beaming and rubbing his hands. His muffler hung open, and he almost crowed.

"Eureka!"

And he waved his thin arms as if embracing all the room. "The first light, children. The first glimmer of light."

Waiting until they exclaimed, he said quietly that Daoud had broken into the dead language of Araman—he had exchanged the first intelligible words with the people here who used the ancient speech. "And, to borrow an Americanism—what words!"

A wild and intangible hope surged within Michal while she held her breath.

"It was Gopal. Gopal began to answer Daoud's questions. He calls this the Land of the Dawn, and he calls the people the Holders of the Hills and the keepers of the old tongue."

Perplexed, Michal stared. Jacob noticed how flushed the Englishman's face was. "Isn't that what the Kurds say?" he asked.

"The phrases are older than the Kurds, who may have assimilated them. This is the Land of the Dawn, the birthplace of civilization."

What Michal had hoped for, she did not know, now. Jacob thought that Sir Clement's fever was worse.

To celebrate, they set up the tree that evening, and Michal hung Saint Nikolka at its top.

It was bitter cold that night, and she had wrapped a wool dressing gown around her. Usually, after a while the blankets warmed her and she felt comfortable and sleepy, but the wind struck into her and she lay awake. In the pocket of the dressing gown she fingered the beads of Father Hyacinth's rosary for reassurance, telling herself that the next evening would be Christmas Eve.

The embers of the fire glowed when the wind swept under the door curtain. The acorn and pine-cone ornaments were not doing well on the tree; the gusts of air loosened them from the branches, and one by one they plumped down on the floor. They were dismal ornaments, dark and foresty, but she wouldn't have Vasstan's jewelry. . . . Sir Clement thought they were all sleeping upon the portion of the earth where people and time itself had begun—time itself. But there were so many kinds of time, of the earth

as it changed, of the unchanging stars, and human inward time that marked the changes within a body. "We grow older," she tried to frame it in words, "in such a few years, but the ancient earth only changes a trifle in a century."

Here she was, trying to hold fast to inward time, to her treasures of the house and her hopes, while outside, beyond the winds, the ceaseless inexorable time of the stars was mocking at her.

It was inescapable, following her, coming out of the emptiness beyond the clustering stars. It was like the water wheel, groaning and turning without thought or meaning. . . . When she heard the whistle of the wind again, she peered around the room. Jacob lay motionless under his blankets, and Sir Clement did not stir in the dark alcove. Only their bodies lay in the room with her. Their minds were gone, in the wind gusts, off somewhere away from her. And she was alone.

Something crashed down from the tree, and Michal caught her breath, seeing that it was Saint Nikolka. She began to push at her blankets.

"What is it?" Jacob asked.

Michal did not answer, trying to keep from crying. His hand caught hers, and he got up, to stir the embers of the fire and look for more wood.

"I'd like to sit up," Michal heard herself saying.

They were alive again. Badr hurried in with his arms full of wood and knelt by the hearth. From his alcove Sir Clement emerged, filling his pipe from his pouch. After a searching glance at her, he sat down on the divan.

"I'm sorry," Michal began miserably.

"What was the dream like this time?" Jacob urged her. "Have your fetches been knocking at the door?"

She managed to smile. "You all went away and left your bodies——"

Over his pipe, Clement eyed her curiously, and she went on hastily, "It wasn't a dream. Oh, I just grieved because I've lost my paradise. Not that, of course, but something I hoped for."

Now Clement's voice quieted her. "Michele, I think you've found your paradise."

When she shook her head mutely, he leaned forward toward the blaze. "It sounds fantastic, but I believe it to be true. It's here."

This time no one spoke. Badr, having got the fire going, squatted by the door, waiting.

"There are the legends, of course," Sir Clement's voice went on. "They were always about far places—the Ultimate Thules, the Blessed Isles, just beyond the horizon. Such remote islands were only mysterious because they were hard to reach, and the human imagination filled them with wonders."

"Cathay," said Michal, remembering.

"Quite. Cathay was really China. When Messer Marco Polo and his brothers visited it and brought back a realistic account, the home bodies refused to believe it, because it did not correspond with their imagined Cathay. An explorer has no honor in his own country unless he brings back a tale of wonders, so most of them do just that."

Over his pipe he considered them benignly. "The myth of the earthly paradise is something quite different. Our ancestors in the West hoped that it might exist somewhere above the earth, in the highest mountains under the sunrise. They could imagine just what it was like because it did not exist—bestowing upon it the fountain of life which gave immortality and the tree which gave knowledge. They peopled it with angelic shapes, breathing ethereal air."

"And the New Jerusalem was there," Michal assented. "I feel better now, and I thank you for the story. But this wind is not ethereal, and the snow and wet are all around us, outside this fire, and most of us are beginning to be afraid. I know how frightened I am."

Jacob started to say something, then poked at the fire instead. He is letting Sir Clement answer, she thought.

"Yes, Michele," said the Englishman after a moment. "You are cold, and the wind has frayed your nerves. This rather desolate Christmas tree mocks you because at the moment you can see no hope anywhere of something better. Isn't that your case?"

Mutely she nodded.

"Very well. Now I am going to tell you the story of other women

who were here seven thousand years ago. Afterward you can tell me if there is not something to hope for."

He spoke slowly, as if guarding his strength, his thin head resting on his hand. "It is really the story of a miracle. They were like you physically, these women. Their brain structure was similar. If they could explain little about themselves, it was merely because language itself was new to them. And thought itself was new—their waking hours were spent in physical labor with little rest. Such things as ease of life, or luxuries, or effortless transport they had never imagined. They collected the grains of wild emmer wheat which grows in this region, and nowhere else, not because they had any concept of the advantage of agriculture but because it simplified matters for them to scratch up the earth near their homes and scatter the seed grains there, instead of searching for it elsewhere.

"Beyond the light of their fires, beyond the small circle in which their men and children slept, lay terrifying dangers—utter deprivation, intense cold, peril from hostile animals and humans. They had only their hands and a few light implements to work with. They died off rapidly and in many ways, by falling from these heights, by being caught in the rush of floods, and by starvation. Nothing was permanent; nothing was secure except the homes the men built. Because they had to preserve the animals which in turn gave them food and clothing, they learned to move about, to reach fresh grass and water. So they learned how to build new homes into the slopes of the mountains and to make their utensils of clay and copper light enough to be carried easily.

"They developed small skills, as you are developing them. Wherever they moved, fear accompanied them like a shadow. They could not escape it. Out of that in some way they contrived a hope. Penalized by their own inferiority and by utter deprivation, they began to develop themselves. Out of animal-like misery they learned the meaning of joy. And somehow out of their sufferings they gained serenity of spirit. There was no garden in Eden then. They did not know nepenthe or lotus flowers except by making that most difficult thing in the world, peace for themselves; nor did they pick wisdom in the fruit of trees, except by growing the trees.

But they had found peace and they knew hope. No, Michele, the first paradise was a bleak upland height such as this."

Leaning her head on her knees, Michal thought that the old scholar had gained serenity of mind. "Wasn't it down in the lush plain of Mesopotamia, between the rivers—didn't four rivers flow out of Paradise?"

She was growing a little sleepy now from the heat of the fire.

"If four rivers ran out of it, it couldn't have been a tropical valley; it must have been in the mountains. The word paradise, itself, by the way, is not Western but Eastern—*firudis*—and it might mean the place of the gods. But we do not know its original meaning." He considered that. "Most assuredly it was not the hot valley of the Tigris-Euphrates. The experts will tell you that the people who abode in these mountains did not venture down until much later into the awesome, swamp-ridden lowlands, alive with snakes and insects. In the same way they penetrated slowly into the bare steppes and the sandy deserts, like Hagar. Perhaps they were exiled, as she was. But hope came from the mountains and ended in the deserts and in the great cities."

"The great cities," murmured Michal. "*'And the street of the city was pure gold, as it were transparent glass. And the kings of the earth do bring their glory and honor into it.'* That's Revelation, telling about the New Jerusalem, and it's *not* in the mountains."

Sir Clement smiled. "Oh, but it was when one of the seven angels displayed it from '*a great and high mountain!*' The tellers of that story, the first Hebrews who migrated with Abraham away from the city of Ur across the deserts, had known a form of civilization. They could imagine wonderful buildings with foundations of chalcedony or jasper or chrysolite. They had learned to lift their eyes up unto the hills. The evidence is clear, Michele mine."

Michal smiled at him. "You coax very nicely, darling, and now I shall go to sleep obediently. It's all true, isn't it, even if I am scared?"

"Intelligent girl," nodded Jacob. Michal's hand touched his cheek. She knew it was a game they played—Sir Clement's game of cheering her up. He had answered her question, or rather the questioning of her instinct. But he had not answered Jacob's un-

spoken questions: could anything at all survive of what had been here seven thousand years before? Was there any evidence of the unseen force which the two men, and now Michal as well, had sensed here?

Unmistakably the villagers were gathering fir branches the next day. When she went out to cut some hardy ivy from the ruined wall, Michal saw them carrying in the branches, and she watched them curiously. No one of the foreign colony had suggested that to the people of Araman. It seemed that they were in the habit of decorating their rooms with green branches, not with trees. Michal had thought that the bareness of her own room and tree might be relieved by strands of the ivy. She had also borrowed extra lamps from Daoud's house.

It was late in the afternoon and she had wet herself thoroughly in the deep snow among the piles of stones. She was trying to reach a nice, waxy-looking vine when Imanyia came up behind her and spoke. Not understanding, Michal shook her head. Then the woman of Araman took her by the hand, which startled Michal a little because Imanyia had never touched her before. The hand that gripped hers was hard and warm.

As they went through the street, Michal noticed that the children were tying branches over the doorways and setting lamps on the benches outside. At her own door Imanyia left her.

Inside Jacob was lighting a lamp with a sliver of burning wood, and Michal remembered how their matches had gone long before. Daoud stood by him. On the divan Clement Bigsby lay dead.

Darkness came quickly to the summit. Daoud went on lighting the extra lamps, one from the other. Jacob stood, poking at the fire. Sir Clement's heart had given out, he thought, after the long weakness of malaria.

He had been up in the plaza looking for Michal when he had heard Sir Clement call. It was more like an excited cry. He had

seen the Englishman *running* from the door, toward the steps. Then Michelangelo—Gopal—had followed him out of the door. The Englishman had paused at the steps and sat down as if he had hurt himself. Gopal and Daoud had helped him back to the divan, and he had died within five minutes, breathing with great difficulty and not speaking again.

"He didn't say anything?" Michal asked confusedly.

"When he called out, it was one word over and over. He saw me, and he was calling to me, or to Daoud."

"Then what was the word, Jacob?"

He hesitated, frowning over the fire. "The Magi."

"Jacob!"

"I can't have been mistaken, Michal."

She thought, he was frightened and running away. "Was he so frightened, Jacob?"

"No, he looked happy. Like yesterday afternoon, when he'd made that discovery."

He shouldn't have tried to run. Still, he was excited and tired. Now he would not speak to her again and she would miss that terribly. To keep from crying, Michal got up and began to drape the ivy among the lamps. Daoud came and helped her deftly.

Long after dark they were still wondering what was to be done. There was the death to be reported, and all the Englishman's papers to be given to the proper authorities, and the burial.

"We can't get word, or—go to Baghdad," Jacob pointed out. They had no spades or pickaxes to dig a grave. Nor had they any boards to make a coffin.

"There is a necropolis at the monastery," Daoud vouchsafed.

Michal thought of Father Hyacinth. Somehow she felt very strongly that Clement Bigsby would have wanted to stay in Araman.

At first when the Watchman entered, she took no notice of him. Then she felt a faint surprise because he had never come into her door before. And then she saw that he carried a length of scarlet silk.

The Watchman went over to the body of the Englishman. Daoud

drew in his breath suddenly. The Watchman did not tiptoe around; solidly he walked, like a farmer in from the fields attending to some necessary thing in the house.

The bed they brought in was made out of branches, covered with fir ends. Four men who came after the patriarch lifted the poles of the bed on which the body could not be seen because it had been swathed in the silk. The Watchman went out, taking no notice of them, and the four men followed.

"Daoud," said Jacob, "what——"

"They are going to the hestia. So they call the fire, Jacob."

Clement Bigsby had never said anything about death or burial. He had wanted to finish his book. Jacob was looking at her, puzzling. Not wanting to speak, she went out after the men of Araman.

She had forgotten about the transformation of the village below them. Each house had its fir branches and the lamps glowed steadily because there was no wind. So illuminated, the snow underfoot looked different. Taking Jacob's hand because she felt the need of it, Michal followed the bearers up the steps to the altar height.

This also had changed. Wood and bundles of dead branches had been heaped before the altar. As Michal expected—she had seen burnings on the pyre in India—the bearers placed the bed of branches upon the wood. Then the Watchman held a torch in the smoldering altar fire of sacrifice to kindle it.

Now she saw Colonel Matejko and Vasstan, who must have been occupied with their dinner until they sighted the procession and learned the reason for it. Somehow the Pole appeared different: he was standing at attention, and he had fastened some faded ribbons on the shoulder of his uniform. A pair of white gloves covered his hands. Vasstan, his feet planted firmly, stared at the blaze with his head outthrust.

As the fire caught within the piled-up wood, sparks settled in the scarlet silk. Behind Michal the villagers had assembled in silence.

Michal bit her lip as the fire surged up over the silk. Feeling faint, she wanted to ask Jacob if she could go; instead she gripped his hand hard and tried to think of something apart from the fire.

All Sir Clement's knowledge was gone with him except the few written pages. His brilliant, tender mind—his smile, when she had come into the room. And now the fire. The fire had been man's first invention—the beginning and the end, as earth to earth.

She had not noticed Father Hyacinth before.

The framework of embers glowed, and Jacob whispered "Good, Michal."

At this Jan Matejko came over, treading carefully, his white hands gesturing, saying in his precise French, "Accept, madame and monsieur, my condolences of the heart. He was a gallant gentleman."

Then he stepped back, as if on parade. Vasstan appeared in his place. And Vasstan seemed embarrassed.

"*Tod fuhr!*" he exclaimed unsteadily. "*Traf ihn*—he of all men." Sentimentally, with moist eyes, he stared at the embers of the funeral fire, looking like a worried Wotan. Something, unmistakably, he wanted to do. There was some gesture to be made. "He killed himself?" he asked.

"No!" Michal exclaimed, and then said honestly, "Unless he killed himself because he would not take care of himself."

After considering this, Vasstan made his gesture. "So my enemy is gone. Perhaps my time is also over. Captain Ide, I will your friend be. I mean it, so."

He does mean it, Michal thought. But will he feel that way tomorrow, or the next day?

"Yes, Colonel Vasstan," Jacob said absently. Beyond the glowing embers he had noticed a spark of light moving in the darkness of the plain. Freeing his hand from Michal's, he stepped to the parapet, closing his eyes. When he opened them he could make out the distant gleam clearly.

It brightened, swaying as if swung by a man's hand. It could be a torch, he reflected, a mile or so away. Apparently it was meant to be seen by those on the mount around the pyre. Probably the Watchman had observed it, as he observed everything.

"Can we go now, Jacob?" Michal's whisper reached him. She moved away from the embers quickly, holding herself taut. By that he sensed how much she felt the strain of the burning. In her care-

free moods she walked as if dancing with instinctive grace—as if it did not matter where her feet led her.

“There’s only the two of us now,” he said lamely.

After an instant’s silence her lips protested, “Not the two of us, only us.”

Feeling the tightness in her, he said quietly, “It will be a sorry Christmas for you, Michal.”

“For us.” She cried out the words as if to avert an evil omen.

Left to himself at the altar, the Watchman scanned the plain below until the spark of light died out. Then he drew a bronze wedge and hammer from the stand of the globe of the sky. For a moment he traced the pattern of the stars upon the globe with his finger. Taking his tools, he went over to the face of the rock and began to cut a new symbol.

In their house it was still. On her knees, Michal had been putting Sir Clement’s things in order swiftly—packing his clothing and medicines deftly into a bag. She worked without stopping, wondering a little at the feeling that possessed her, that she was not so much tidying away what had belonged to Sir Clement as preparing for something that was going to happen.

By the fire Jacob, aware of Michal’s restlessness, thought over the manner of Sir Clement’s death. It was simple enough to call it heart failure. Yet that afternoon in this room the English scholar had been well enough to talk to Gopal, if they had talked. Certainly Sir Clement had made some startling discovery. If he had stumbled upon a secret he was not meant to know, a thin bronze blade might have been thrust into him without causing outward bleeding. Or at least not enough to show through his loose tweed clothing. There had not been time to strip the body, to make a careful examination for a wound, before the burning. He did not want to tell Michal that.

She was still in the stupor of shock. She and the Englishman had been of the same caste, understanding each other’s whims, relying on the other’s understanding. Since Sir Clement had appeared in Araman, Michal had devoted herself to nursing him.

Necessarily, she and Jacob had been separated physically, and he had felt himself again to be an intruder, as at Riyat. The tie of sympathy between the girl and the older man had been stronger than between her and the sick Matejko.

Jacob was aware when she turned her head to him without speaking. She had drawn out the mass of Sir Clement's papers and knelt helplessly among them, fingering the piles, her face bright with pain. Answering her appeal, he said, "I'll do that, later."

Still fumbling with the piled-up notes, she nodded. "He never finished his book."

Jacob waited.

"What will happen to his writings, Jacob? Will they all be tied up in neat bundles to be given to Daoud or to the proper authorities somewhere in England to be put away in a storeroom like ashes in an urn?"

"No."

Surprised, she looked up at him quickly. In that second, in the fire's glow she appeared bodiless as a spirit of color and light, holding her breath, waiting for his assurance. Seeing her so, it was incredible to him that she could be the woman who had lain in his arms in the warmth of passion and of quiet sleep. The slight face, intent in its brooding, under the loosened tangle of bright hair, seemed apart in its beauty from anything that he had shared or could ever possess. "You are so lovely," he whispered, "it hurts."

Bending his head down to her, he saw the pulse throbbing in the softness of her throat. "Tell me," she asked, after a second. Then, in a breath, "I feel so strange. I feel as if I had to listen to something that is being told me, only I can't understand. Jacob!"

Rising swiftly, she went to touch the ivy beneath the lamps and to glance questioningly at the shadowed face of the shepherd on the wall, mute as always.

In matter-of-fact words he told her his conjecture about Sir Clement's death. At once she shook her head. "No, Jacob, that never happened. He was happy at what he had found. Gopal did not hurt him. Even Vasstan felt his kindness."

This was a different Michal, speaking with inward certainty, withdrawn from him in thought. With the sharp pain of realiza-

tion, Jacob fancied that the tranquil Englishman who had loved her still had his claim upon her.

"Michal, you ought to leave Araman. You can," he said abruptly.

"Why?" She was attentive now, startled.

"You can go down with Daoud and Father Hyacinth, and take these things. You should never have come."

"But why? I don't feel frightened of anything that is here."

Restlessly, over the fire, he tried to explain his foreboding. It was his fault that in craving Michal he had brought her here, defenseless except for him, subject to his demands.

"But I wanted to come, Jacob. Perhaps I never told you that, but it's true."

"There's a lot more I never told you. There's a sense of power here, pulling at me. These Kurdish tribes look up to me as a kind of American Messiah. I don't like that. Yet these dislocated groups, the Assyrians and the others, would follow a new leader at the moment, ditching Vasstan. I kept imagining it—how I could ride in the saddle and have my commands obeyed. These mountains are a natural stronghold that could be held if a man knew how to do it."

"And I was there, in your imagining?"

Blaming himself, Jacob edged his words with bitterness. "Yes, following me and obedient to me."

"I know, Jacob."

"I would make a splendid commander, gratified by homage and recognition." Sudden words revealed what he had buried, expressed inside him. "I hated Father Hyacinth for interfering between us, as I thought. And then Jan Matejko—because you felt so much for him."

"Yes, Jacob."

"Worse than that, for a second after Sir Clement died I felt glad that he was taken away from you. Only for a second, but I did think of it."

Michal's eyes never left his face. "I'm glad you told me that."

"Glad?"

"Because now you're just as human as I am." Something within her shone delighted. Then as swiftly her eyes closed, and after a

moment she said, "We must love each other very much to be so afraid for each other."

And as if frightened by the words, she hurried on, drawing back into shadow against the wall, "I was afraid, a little, because I couldn't share your dreams. I mean the Kurds and these people of Araman, and searching for something I didn't understand. I was jealous, and—Jacob—I was even glad when you forgot and left the bronze Pegasus packed away for a week. I didn't want you to think of anything this place might be except our home."

"It is our home, Michal."

"I'm still afraid, and I can't help it." He could hear the quick catch of her breathing. "Now we do share everything we've been keeping muffled up inside ourselves, don't we, Jacob?"

"Yes."

She nodded as if that were settled forever. "I shall never leave Araman!" she cried out, and looked at him like a child surprised at her own outburst. "What should we do, Jacob?"

Gazing around helplessly, she went back to the orientalist's papers.

"We aren't going to tie those up, Michal," he objected quickly. "And they aren't going to be stored away in the vaults."

"I'm glad of that. But——"

"But nothing. I'm going over every scrap that man has written."

Michal nodded, lifting her head with deep satisfaction.

"He never *asked* us to do it," Jacob went on, thinking it out. "Still, he'd want it."

Assured now, her eyes became warm and tender. "Perhaps he was trying to tell you."

"Us."

At that she laughed. "I'd be a splendid collaborator." Then she frowned doubtfully. "But isn't it impossible to track down another man's mind just by reading all his notes?"

"Nothing's impossible until you've tried it. Then there's always the chance of a happy accident."

"Your miracle?"

Once more she was poised like her old self, mischievously attentive, and she had forgotten the grim spectacle of the fire.

"If it pleases you to call it that. I prefer the unforeseen."

He pondered that. "Sir Clement hit on something here, with Gopal. Perhaps Gopal will say what it was. Perhaps——"

He could not think of anything else that might help. Listening as if he were announcing all that would happen in the days to come, Michal left the papers and began to tuck up the ivy where it had slipped down. She felt that even if Jacob could not tell for certain, there was a chance and hope.

"Nothing's really impossible, is it, in Araman, anyway? We'll begin tomorrow." Suddenly Michal laughed at herself. "Who could have believed that I'd ever be carrying a torch?"

That night Sergeant Daniel had taken his post at the foot of the stairway. By planting his heavy body on the first step, he could observe the space between the dark loom of the bell tower and the shrine and could see if anyone moved along the path. He had satisfied himself that no one could pass him without waking him if he dozed with his hand through the sling of his rifle. Vasstan had told the Assyrians to watch the steps by night as well as by day. And Daniel had taken the post himself, to let his men sleep.

Not expecting visitors at night, the big Assyrian was drowsing comfortably when he heard the faint tread of someone moving purposefully. Without stirring, the ex-sergeant opened his eyes. An intruder was approaching him. At once Daniel was convinced of two things—that the stranger wore a uniform, and that he knew the path he was following. Daniel's hand lifted the rifle across his knees. The muzzle of a weapon showed over the other's shoulder.

"Stop," grunted Sergeant Daniel. "Tell your name."

Instead of halting, the stranger took a step forward, peering down and laughing. A small white plume showed where the edge of his wide hat was turned up, and he wore the battle dress of the native Levies. "A happy Christmas, Sergeant," he said. "Are you waiting here to greet me, Daniel Toghrak?"

Warily the Assyrian rose; then he exclaimed and threw his arms around the other. "Paul! The son of Kaimars!"

The man named Paul was much younger and slighter than the

Assyrian veteran. He had come through the camp without waking anyone else. Because they had been in service together along the African coast from Mersa Matruh to the Mareth line, Daniel begged him to come to the tents and taste brandy and bread. Both were Christians and they spoke English together.

But Paul would not sit down with the sergeant. "I am at the door of my house, Daniel Toghrak."

"Here?"

"Here. And I have come so far that if I sit, I shall sleep."

"*Ai*. Will you climb the steps in the dark?"

"Have they changed their shape in five years?"

In spite of his weariness the youth went on quickly, a light pack and automatic weapon slung over his shoulders. He went with the swing of a long march in his legs.

Wistfully the sergeant peered after him. Daniel had no home where he could rest with his wife and daughters. Sitting upon his step, he reflected, and felt cheered because the boy who had spoken to him would soon be asleep by his own fire.

Instead of going to the village, the soldier turned aside at the summit. Crossing the plaza, he went up into the majesty of moonlight at the altar height. There he slowed his steps and unslung his pack and weapon. At the basin of water he stopped to wash his hands.

He did not go up the altar steps. The Watchman came down to him, to look carefully into his face. Revealed under the turned-up brim of the hat it was a good-humored face, only the wide lips and the eyes, deep-set between cheekbone and brow, showed a weariness that was more than fatigue. After a moment the Watchman nodded as if satisfied and asked a question.

Paul had come back. Were the others with him?

The soldier shook his head. The two others who went out were not coming back: they had been killed.

When the Watchman said nothing more, Paul raised the back of his hand to his forehead and turned away, to pick up his pack. With a curious glance at the closed door and with the padlock that shut in the arms collection, he descended to the village street.

The lamps had been extinguished, but he found his way easily into Imanyá's house. Putting down his things, he drew off his boots with infinite care. Then silently he went to the side of the sleeping woman who had drawn a scarf over her head. Crouching by her, he opened his jacket and warmed his hands at the embers of the fire.

Almost at once his head began to sink, and with a sigh of relief he crawled to an outspread sheepskin and lay down. After a deep breath or two he was asleep.

On Christmas day it snowed in the morning. The sun, on its first day of new strength, remained invisible. From the gray sky wind drove the hard snow in particles that swept the mount like spray.

Under the silvered firs the sheep huddled in close-packed circles. Instead of staying under their roofs, however, the villagers came into the street when the first fires were lighted. From each house they came to the door of Imanyá's house.

Voices flung out against the snow. Excitement stirred the village like a fever. Father Hyacinth, plodding by, stopped to listen and turned into Imanyá's door. The fire blazed under spits and caldrons, and the stout woman perspired as she hurried around it, handing out honey and curdled milk and bits of meat on long strips of bread. These she pressed upon all the visitors anxiously, and hastened to the bearded priest. "*Khwasti-bi!*" she exclaimed. She had grown taller this morning and her broad cheeks twitched with smiles.

Behind the fire in the place of honor sat the young soldier, no older than Michal. The villagers were plying him with questions, and he answering them, so quickly that Father Hyacinth could not follow the words. "Paul, son of Kaimars," he exclaimed, and added, "and Imanyá!"

She brushed her hair from her eyes hastily. "He is well. They wounded him, but he is well again."

"Did you stop at the monastery, my son?" he asked. Paul had been baptized at the monastery of Saint George before he had

gone out into the world to study as a boy at the University of Lausanne.

"No, Father Hyacinth, I came straight from the river." Paul laughed. "I hurried!"

A shadow passed over the priest's face. The boy he had known as an eager student had not gone first to the monastery; he had hurried to his own fireside. This gaunt soldier of no more than thirty years appeared older than the elders of Araman; he held mysteries in his mind, and he had learned to be silent. There was a tightness of strain in him that he hid from the simple people. Once he turned to the meditative priest.

"The monastery is safe."

"If God permits."

"It is safe. But in the foothills I heard talk of Araman—I saw military supply trains encamped."

"Not near, Paul."

"Near enough. I should know."

And quickly he thrust into his mouth the pieces of broiled mutton that Imanya had saved for him jealously. With an ember from the fire Father Hyacinth lighted the tobacco in his pipe, pondering. Before now the mount of Araman had been more secluded from the outer world than the monastery at its threshold. Now that was changing. Only one of the young men who had gone forth from Araman at the start of the war had returned. These people were happy because Paul had been restored to them. But what could one mind accomplish here, except to warn them of the change that was coming?

In overcoats and gloves, Rudolf Vasstan and Jan Matejko emerged restlessly from their curtained doorway and wandered up to the altar where snow had covered the blackened remains of the pyre. They did not know what they should do this Christmas morning. Finally they called at Michal's door, and she came out wearing her clean white dress with the scarlet scarf tucked into its throat.

Vasstan ejaculated "*Grüss Gott!*" and she smiled at the old German greeting. She did not bid them come in, she explained,

because Jacob was working—later they must come for some tea. Matejko bowed from the hips. The sight of her was enough, so joyous she seemed.

"God keep you," he murmured.

Matejko saw in Michal's face the small face of his wife alight with expectancy, lifted to his in the shadow of the silver firs along the walk above Lwów. For an instant in this doorway that young face had come before his eyes as clearly as if it had never changed.

"Here," said Vasstan abruptly. "A gift for Undine from an old man."

And he handed her the key of the lock to the armory. "For Captain Ide also, with my compliments." Having made the gesture—he did not know why—he turned away.

Characteristically, he stamped off at that. To thank him, Michal had to call after him. Matejko did not follow, as usual. Not until he returned to their room did the German miss his companion and resent being left alone. He wondered what Matejko and the stupid Americans had found to do on a day when there was obviously nothing to do except pass the time.

Matejko hugged to himself the memory of his wife that had become so vivid. At such a moment he did not want to go to sit with the German. When he heard the chatter of voices in the village street, the Polish colonel turned in at a door where candles blazed recklessly, and found himself in the abode of Gopal. The painter did not seem surprised. Quickly he offered the silent officer a dish of raisins and fruit—tokens of the new life that would come in the spring, when the sun, reborn, shone again. Politely Matejko accepted some, and Gopal turned back to his wall.

This wall had changed overnight. With bits of charcoal Gopal had roughed in the figure of a man. Matejko could make out that the man was young and in uniform, but otherwise he recognized nothing about the portrait. Gopal, however, worked with zest, calling to his grandson to bring him things, and stepping back abruptly from time to time to eye the wall he was transforming.

Idly, the Pole examined the colors Gopal had prepared on slabs

of slate. When the painter, seeing his interest, offered him a clean square of silk to experiment with, Matejko began to paint. The silk suggested a flag, and he painted in a red stripe and green, the colors of the new Kurdistan. What other flag could there be in Araman?

For the first time in months he was making something of his own, and enjoying it.

Drawing her fur coat about her and swinging a bronze caldron, Michal went down the village street to draw water to be heated. She hoped to meet Father Hyacinth, but she did not see him. At the point on the lake shore where the water jars and vessels were filled she stopped, surprised.

Ice coated the lake's edge, and when she tried to break through it with a stick she could not do so. A ripple of laughter escaped her—so near to water she was, and out of reach of it.

Then a man taller than herself stepped down and picked up a heavy stone in one arm. Motioning her back, he dropped the stone, shattering the ice.

"It's really very simple, isn't it?" Michal said to herself.

"Most things are."

Surprised a second time, because he had answered in English, she noticed that the soldier wore the insignia of the Levies. He seemed to be pleased—at least he smiled, while his deep eyes surveyed her, wondering. Many men had gazed at Michal admiringly, but this one seemed to question her. She did not laugh when she filled the caldron too full and spilled water over her foot as she tried to drag it up the slippery slope. The soldier took the heavy vessel from her, using his left arm, and she wondered if his other arm were injured. He said his name was Paul, and he spoke excellent English, although he was Imany's son.

On the way back to her house he asked only one question.

"Why is that door locked?" And he pointed across at the entrance of the armory.

"It isn't—that is, Colonel Vasstan kept it locked, but I have the key now."

"May I open it?"

Without thinking about it, she gave Paul the key, and then, wondering if she had done right, told Jacob what had happened.

He paid little attention because he had sorted out all the manuscript notes carefully and had weighted them down with the copy of Aristotle while he looked over the letters and the worn passport which bore the cryptic stamp "Officially Approved."

One phrase of Aristotle's kept coming back into his mind: *Nothing in the natural world exists without a purpose.*

There were only three letters. One, in careful schoolboy penmanship, began "DEAR PATER," and said with resolute cheerfulness that it was written within sight of Passchendaele Ridge (whatever that might be), and that Old Fabius had said that he had not done too badly at his first brush-up—he was very fit, and only the rain that flooded the trenches had been bothersome. Old Fabius had said they would be through the German lines and at peace by Christmas. It was signed CEDRIC.

The second letter was more recent, typed under the heading of The Central Asiatic Society. It regretted, in carefully discreet sentences, that the society could not see its way to holding a public reading of General Sir Clement Bigsby's most interesting paper on "An Unknown Primitive Culture," since the society had found it necessary to confine its field of research to the ethnological, and the premise of this paper bordered upon religion.

The third, quite brief, bore the imprint of an Edinburgh publisher and a date just before the war. It said that while the publisher would welcome anything from the hand of Sir Clement, such a subject as an ancient myth in Kurdistan would hardly appeal to the public.

Fleeting, he caught a meaning in the letters. In India, after his loss, Sir Clement had resigned his commission and turned to writing. His pursuit of Vasstan had been his last turn of duty, and from then on he had forsaken weapons. He had never spoken of that. *He had forsaken weapons . . .*

"You're sure that soldier wasn't an Assyrian?" he asked Michal.

Busied over a bowl of tea, she shook her head. Taking his cane, Jacob stepped out to the portico; then seeing that the door of the

armory stood open, he made his way across to it. Since his first visit, he had had no sight of the stored weapons, and he was curious to learn what the strange soldier might want of them. While Michal was preparing tea, he could look in.

Again, as he passed down the cavern, he had the impression that the European arms had been stored there for a purpose. Stopping abruptly, he picked up the heavy Hall rifle, one of those presented to the Mikado of Japan. For an instant he wondered if it could use the cartridges of the Assyrians' Enfields. Then when he threw open the heavy breech, he saw that the modern cartridges would never fit. The rifle was useless to him—too heavy to make even a practical club.

Before he could put it back he heard movement in the outer chamber. Silhouetted against the door a slender man in uniform, carrying a Tommy gun, advanced carelessly, apparently not aware of Jacob's presence. Stepping over to the heavy Browning, the relic of the last war, the newcomer placed his own modern weapon beside it. For a second he contemplated the pair of machine guns, then came on toward Jacob.

"Thank you for the key, Captain Ide," his pleasant voice reached Jacob, "and I am sorry to be so late in welcoming you to Araman."

The familiar voice startled Jacob, taking him back to the shop of the Armenian in Cairo where he had bought the bronze horse. "Paul!" he cried. "How in thunder——"

"Home for Christmas, you know." The man of the Levies glanced curiously at the clumsy Hall rifle, and Jacob put it down hastily. "Imanya is all the family I have." A smile touched his eyes. "I have seen Mrs. Ide. She is lovely, and it is splendid that the two of you came, but——"

"But you couldn't have expected—to find us." Jacob's mind was still wrestling with their meeting in Cairo at Shepherd's steps.

"Not expected." Paul chose his words carefully. "I only hoped. But I didn't know there were two of you. You were alone, so very much alone in Cairo."

It seemed to trouble him that Jacob was no longer alone.

"Would you mind telling me," Jacob demanded, "exactly what you hoped for, when you tackled me at Shepherd's?"

Paul's eyes met his honestly. "Very little, Captain Ide. Kagig—the dealer I took you to—had shown me that winged horse which could only have come from these mountains, saying that an old German had sold it with several other pieces in the bazaar at Baghdad. Kagig wanted me to tell him what it was. But I was afraid the German had reached Araman, and that other foreigners would follow. That might mean harm to my people. I was troubled, and then I heard your friends say how you were a scholar who knew our people of the East. You understand that we do not reason very well, we go by instinct. My instinct told me that an American like you would do no harm to Araman." He laughed, as if at himself. "I half expected you to go to Baghdad, Captain Ide, to investigate the horse. Then Ibrahim at the bridge told me you had passed through, and I hurried."

His carelessness did not deceive Jacob. Paul did not believe that he had been responsible at Cairo for the American's journey—destiny or fate had decided that. So Jacob tried another tack, casually. "I see you've come armed."

"I? No, Captain Ide, I was never issued arms by the British. I was only a stretcher-bearer, what you call a corpsman." Then, seeing Jacob glance at the machine guns, "Oh, I stole that toy to bring back."

"Without ammunition?"

Indifferently, Paul shook his head. Because he did not care to explain further, Jacob pressed him.

"Why?"

"For a specimen." Briefly, Paul hesitated. "We do that, Captain Ide. From each war we bring a weapon that is new. My father brought the Browning after the last war."

Jacob smiled, fearful of asking too many questions. "And so you have a museum of antiquities—European antiquities of war!"

Paul shook his head. "Hardly a museum. More, a laboratory, in which we can see the tools made by men in the West for war. Year by year, you know, they become more destructive and more difficult to combat. Perhaps too difficult . . ."

He broke off, going to the end of the corridor, where he picked

up one of the primitive bronze leaf swords. Apparently he was familiar with all the weapons. "The first invention, for man to kill man. Our cousins, migrating to the west, found these swords on the Danube River."

"Why the first invention?"

"Because it was never made for use on an animal—for hunting." Paul laughed, hefting the weighty blade. "If you doubt that, Captain Ide, try hunting with it."

"You had weapons before that."

"Of another kind, yes. In that high and far-off time we had shepherds' pipes and flutes—ox goads and bows, knives for skinning and slicing and so forth. But not this."

No longer laughing, Paul put away the leaf sword. Under his merriment lay a deep sadness. Like Daoud, when his mind was troubled, he stood there saying nothing. Cautiously, Jacob filled his pipe, wondering how much this ex-soldier knew of the secret of Araman.

"These are only carcasses." Paul motioned down the corridor. "But your weapons of today are often alive, and they destroy by their own volition."

For a second Jacob had the fancy that this array of arms was more than metal and wood.

"I saw that happen," Paul went on. "On the Derna road. I saw my two comrades carrying a stretcher on which lay a third man. Then the thing exploded under the ground—the thing of metal and chemicals killing all three. I, the fourth, was hurt in the arm."

"A mine."

"Yes. A mine placed by Germans killed two of the wanderers from Araman, and a sick man who was an Italian. Had any *man* intended that, Captain Ide?" When he asked the question, Paul's eyes wandered, as if expecting no answer. "The terrifying thing was that I felt no surprise. I knew that we had cut across a mine field, that was all."

When they parted at the door, Jacob risked a direct question. "Your father was what you call a wanderer? And he took you on his travels?"

"Yes—when I was not studying in Switzerland. He said I could learn more by seeing things than by reading about them. And he was always studying himself."

"He was a scientist?"

"No, Kaimars called himself a student of the outer world."

Nursing his pipe against the drifting snow, Jacob nodded. "I'd like to know more about him."

But Paul did not answer readily as before. "What my father studied is not easy to understand. It is much harder to explain."

He was moving away when Jacob insisted, "Come over to my place anyway, and have some tea—when you are rested."

With a wave of the hand, Paul went off toward the village. If he came to their house, Jacob knew that the soldier would have accepted himself and Michal as fast friends.

As he passed the German's door, he observed Matejko hoisting a flag on a pole made out of a dead branch. The flag, resplendent in new colors, was Kurdish. Jacob smiled, asking himself, "Why not?"

Daoud was sitting by Michal, consuming tea and barley cakes and honey.

"How did you vanish?" she cried in relief. "Daoud was getting ready to drag the lake for you, Jacob. Gopal's coming." Eagerly she explained. "It was Daoud's idea—because Gopal was here last with Sir Clement, and perhaps he can tell us what happened. That is, what excited Sir Clement. So please hurry and sit down and look as if you've been waiting an hour, without thinking of anything, except that it's Christmas."

So they were chatting quietly when the aged painter appeared through the curtain, shy in Michal's presence. Squatting down by them, he accepted a bowl of hot tea. For a while he would not speak. Not until Sir Clement was mentioned did he respond.

"He says something about Araman losing a friend now that Sir Clement is dead," Daoud ventured.

"Try to get him to repeat what Sir Clement said yesterday. Or what he did," Jacob urged.

After a moment Gopal looked past them at the wall paintings.

"*An naqsh*," he said, and pointed at the young shepherd who had mystified them.

Sight of the painting released a flood of words from the old man, and Daoud listened intently. "He is saying the painting is very old—from time to time it has been done over, without change. Gopal's grandfather did it the last time."

"But what is it?" Michal demanded impulsively.

"Sir Clement asked that, and Gopal told him."

"What?"

"One of the Magi."

Michal caught her breath. And Jacob asked incredulously, "That shepherd?"

"Yes. Gopal is quite certain about that. He says this is one who was a disciple of Zarathushtra."

"The Magians or Magi were the wisest men of their time," muttered Jacob. "The Greeks knew that, and coined the word *magic* from their name. But this fellow with the harp . . ."

"*'There came wise men from the East,'*" Michal quoted softly. "And they followed a star which stood over Bethlehem. That's what Matthew said, Jacob, and this is Christmas, isn't it? Even Herod questioned them, and they went home by another road to escape Herod—after Bethlehem. Oh, and the earliest Christian paintings in the catacombs at Rome show only shepherds like this. There's one in the crypt of Lucina. I'm feeling all mixed up . . ."

"The earliest!" Abruptly Jacob swung around to her. "That's the key to so much. God, how dumb we've been!"

Startled, Michal thought of Sir Clement running out into the snow, shouting, "*The Magi!*" Curiously Daoud contemplated the painting that might have been restored without alteration from the earliest times. He knew nothing about such matters. Left to himself, Gopal slipped away, to return to the portrait of the survivor of the war who had come back to Araman.

"Tell me quickly," Jacob cried at Michal. "How do you visualize the three Magi at Bethlehem?"

"Why, three bearded and majestic old men, wearing splendid robes, in the dimness of the stable. One usually has a turban, and they hold caskets or——"

"That's just what we've all seen in dozens of paintings and Christmas cards. But who painted those kingly old men? Scores of Western artists for centuries. Italian masters painted Venetian doges—Dutchmen copied Turkish turbans. They weren't painting the real Magi, they were copying down the fashions of their own times. They put on the theatrical costumes and the wigs, and stuck in the caskets. Gopal's wall painting is the earliest, and it may be the only real one."

Michal rubbed at her eyes and smiled. "So the Magi were shepherds, and *young*? And there weren't any fine caskets, because incense does grow in the deserts near Bethlehem. And gold grows in the riverbeds."

"You are seeing it with your own eyes, Michal—not with the eyes of centuries of interior decorators."

A thought struck into his mind with the force of a blow. "We've been blind, Michal. We never recognized truth before our eyes. We've been looking at the end of things, the tortured, twisted end products of the twentieth century. We've been setting the screen of the twentieth century before our eyes to look back at the naked beginnings." He stopped, groping for a thought. "Aren't those the first words of the Bible? I know that much—they are *in the beginning*."

"Millenniums ago," Daoud smiled. "When these people of Araman made bronze horses. Jacob, I'm glad you are convinced of that at last."

"Of more than that, Daoud. We'll have to go back beyond the bronze horses and the migrations to the beginnings of things, when the world was young. What did the Watchman say the people were then? People of the Dawn."

"Too early for me," said the archaeologist. "Why don't you rest yourself, Jacob? We are all tired."

"Sir Clement didn't rest."

With a shock of remembrance Michal saw again the passive body of the scholar licked by flames. Jacob had been sitting by their fire on the open hearth, and now he knelt to stir the embers absently. When Daoud left, she settled down by him, her shoulder touching

his arm. Although he put his arm around her, she knew that his thought was still far away from her.

"What is it, Jacob?" she asked softly.

"It's like your painting, Michal. The truth that is hidden here. It's looking us in the face, trying to speak to us."

"Yes. The painting spoke to us."

"I have a feeling that if we can't see the face of this truth now we never will."

"We will."

His attention was caught by that. "Woman, can you tell me how?"

Michal could not, but she did not feel like admitting it. Instead she pulled his arm closer about her, closing her eyes so he might not read them. "Because we are together, Jacob, and because nothing else matters."

"You matter." She knew he was smiling now. "Daoud," he remarked absently, "goes by what he's read and observed. We're trying to forget all we've read and observed until now."

"Including Military Intelligence?"

"Including that, Michal."

"And Aristotle?"

"Aristotle lived when the world was too old. We'll have to be much younger than that."

He said, "Men like Zarathushtra must have known the peace of these mountains. At least the Magi, who learned from him, believed in it." His voice quickened. "Michal, Zarathushtra *lived* as a man in our young world. Yet what did you know of him before now?"

Now Jacob's mind was going off alone again, separating from hers. It gave her a forlorn feeling.

"From books?" she asked obediently.

"Yes."

"Why, he was Zoroaster, the founder of a religion that has fire worshipers and Towers of Silence where dead bodies are left for scavenger birds today."

Rising, Jacob searched among Sir Clement's notes until he found the fragment he wanted. "'Zarathushtra, born on one of the rivers of Aryan-vej,'" he read. "'Influenced by the earliest Iranian or

Aryan folk religion (its nature unknown to us today, except for the Avesta hymns) . . . built neither temples nor altars . . . he talked as he wandered . . . of the danger of conflict and the need of mercy by which food could be shared, and human beings survive . . . believed perhaps in a soul that could survive the first life, if it did not perish then. His people were the Medes or *Madai* inhabiting these hills—one people, but thought by him to be akin to all others. His disciples were called the *Magi*.”

Putting aside the note, Jacob added thoughtfully, “He was an ordinary man like that young shepherd, seeking for the meaning of life. In that search he wandered out of Araman. Men learned from him and tried to remember what he had said; after generations, they made a myth of him, and made his sayings into prophecy and his faith into a cosmic religion. To know the real Zarathushtra we’d have to discard all the trappings and pomp laid over his memory by other men.”

“As we discarded the wigs and the beards and the bric-a-brac gifts of the false Magi, who never followed a star to Bethlehem.” She glanced up at the wall painting. “But I’d like to think my white elephant was real, in the jungle. I’m sure there *was* a friendly elephant once upon a time.”

Jacob had a sense of helplessness. In the beginning, they had a clear thought about the Magi; now he was floundering mentally in the riddles of oriental mysticism, wondering whether a white elephant had existed.

“Jacob,” cried Michal, “if only he would talk to us, like the other!”

She was feeling the strain as well as he, after the death of Sir Clement. This mystery that enveloped Araman was taking its toll of each of them, separately.

“I don’t want you to wonder any more, Michal,” he explained quietly.

“I’m glad of that.”

“Put on your blue dress, because we’re going to have company for supper.”

Relieved, she looked up curiously. “What kind of company—Vasstan?”

“No, a voice that can talk to us.”

Paul was not down the village street, or at Gopal's. Hearing voices along the height, Jacob went up to the altar. The wind had fallen with evening, and the snow had softened to drifting flakes. Purple light penetrated a clear patch of sky.

A half-dozen men in sheepskins had been helping the Watchman keep the altar fire going during the worst of the storm. Among them Jacob singled out the young soldier, and asked, "Will you come?"

When they were able to leave the fire Paul followed him silently into the room where Michal had lit all the lamps. She had on her blue frock and a white shawl, and she greeted the soldier as if she had been expecting him. When she gave him a bowl of tea, he raised it slightly toward his forehead, pleased. "It's bright here now," he said.

"Wasn't it always? What was it before we came?"

"A guesthouse, Miss Michal—without guests. Long ago some distinguished people slept here."

"Who were they? I'd like to know."

"You might know two of them." Paul smiled at her uncertainly. "Mani the painter, and Saladin the Kurd. The name is really *Salah ad Din*."

"The gentleman of the crusades?"

"Yes, but he defeated the crusaders."

Paul accepted food and drink without embarrassment, although he had to favor his right shoulder which pained him. Of an age with Michal, he talked readily to her. And Michal, in the mysterious manner of a woman in her home with a guest, was enjoying herself and making no secret of it. The room is bright, Jacob thought, because she is here.

"Was Messer Marco Polo one of the distinguished visitors to Araman?" she asked. "He went everywhere."

"Not here. He was a Westerner."

Paul seemed to know much about Sir Clement. His father had met the English scholar on the Indian frontier—a trouble spot at the end of the last war. (At the time, Jacob reflected, when the Englishman had left the army and embarked on his quest.) "Then no one from the West," he said slowly, "came here before now."

Paul shook his head. "Many tried to come." He laughed. "They could not find it."

Jacob risked a guess. "The Emperor Julian tried."

"With his army? Perhaps, but he died on the way." Paul seemed uncertain and wary of his words. "Perhaps he never knew what this place was."

"I know." Michal spoke up unexpectedly. "It's the paradise of our first ancestors."

"Why did you say that, Miss Michal?"

"Because it's true. You know it's true, Paul. Even the sick Colonel Matejko is well here, and even we are happy."

For a moment his restless eyes studied them, and what he saw seemed to break down a barrier within him. "Yes, it is true. But it was a long time ago when we left Araman."

Michal was silent, waiting, and Paul said, "The elders have often told how that happened. Would you like to hear, Captain Ide?"

Nursing the cold bowl of his pipe, Jacob nodded. Bit by bit the outspoken Paul was filling in blank spaces in his picture of Araman—purposefully, he thought, while holding back other truths. "Yes," he said, "if you will."

"We were safe in the mountains, where we had been taught much by the Wanderer, Zarathushtra. He had strengthened our spirit and had taught us to share the food for our bodies. In the mountains the people were happy then."

Paul spoke as if the ancient past had been yesterday, frowning over it as he considered.

"Down below in the plain of Shinar was the great city, Babylon. The kings and merchants of the earth below found delight in her, to buy her merchandise of purple and all manner of ivory, of oil and incense and slaves."

Jacob glanced up curiously, for the soldier's words were much like those of Revelation. As if aware of his thought, Paul's tone changed. "Actually, Captain Ide, Babylon had reached a culture advanced for that day. Her people used wheeled machinery and chariots of war; they mortgaged land, stored and traded in grains and goods. They used blast furnaces and built lofty skyscrapers out of bitumen blocks—Gudea had shown them how to build a ziggurat, like a mountain in the plain."

"Yes," assented Jacob, remembering.

"Babylon had oil and a full state treasury from taxation. Labor was cheap, because it was slave labor—the Hebrews being among the slaves. Having wealth, the city also had its moneylenders. By reason of all this its population had grown enormously. The science of numbers and the knowledge of the stars flourished at the hands of Chaldean mathematicians. So the standard of living for a few people was very high. In Babylon also was found the blood of prophets and saints."

Again that echo of Revelation.

"Nebuchadnezzar, the king, felt a great pride in his city of Babylon and his land of the plain. Yet he had a foreboding that the power did not belong to him. Daniel relates how Nebuchadnezzar went forth from those sons of men and dwelt among the wild asses, where his body was wet by the night's dew. The prince Belshazzar had no such fear. Until the hand appeared writing on the wall of his hall——" abruptly Paul looked up. "Do you also remember how fell Babylon, fortified by impregnable walls?"

"It was stormed by the Medes and the Persians, as Daniel had prophesied."

Paul nodded. "Yes, that's true. And this also is true. The Iranians of the mountains around Araman—the *Madai* and the *Parsva*, our kinsmen—had then the leader named Kurush whom you call Cyrus. They were tempted and he was tempted by the knowledge and the wealth in Babylon. They thought and he thought that this great city was our antagonist, to be overthrown. So it happened. Our horsemen rode down into the plain against Babylon. But they had no more than bows and javelins. How could they storm walls as mighty as those of Babylon, defended by machines? When at that time we did not know how to wage war?"

Jacob was silent.

"Of course we had our horses," Paul explained. "Your archaeologists have deciphered from the cylinder of Cyrus words about what happened: *No one knows the strength of his armed men, but the waters of the river marched with him. Without battle or conflict, he was permitted to enter Babylon—the city was spared a calamity.*

"It's not a riddle, really." With the zest of a schoolboy enjoying

a joke, Paul explained. "The river that flowed through Babylon, it had no wall over it of course. And my people diverted enough of the water of the river to ride in along its bed. They spread through the streets within the great city where no one expected them to appear, least of all Belshazzar, whose rule ended that day. On the cylinder you have Cyrus had his words written: *All the inhabitants I restored to their own dwelling places . . . I permitted all to dwell in peace.* He did, too, as you know. The different peoples could open their temples, the Hebrews returned from captivity to rebuild their own temple at Jerusalem. Babylon had fallen. The kings who lived deliciously within her mourned her, and so did the merchants who no longer had trade with her."

For a moment Paul was silent, thinking. "We also had cause to mourn, although we did not know it then. Most of our people stayed there in the outer world. They gained much knowledge of the science of numbers and of metals. By that science they had shaped *things* to do the work of men."

"Such things as a globe of the sky," Jacob put in quickly.

"You have seen them here—the globe of the sky and the astrolabe and the heliograph. We became very skilled in casting bronze."

"Making winged horses," said Michal.

"I suppose so. I know we made swords after that." He was still pondering. "You see we changed—even those who stayed behind at the altar of Araman. We were forsaking old ways and learning new arts—only a few hundreds of us stayed in the mountains—those who had gone out followed Cyrus, not Zarathushtra. Those departed Medes and Persians became like their kindred elsewhere in the outer world, in India and the West; they took and held wealth and land and slaves, which in turn they had to protect. So you see they had not really conquered the great city of Babylon—Babylon had conquered them." Stretching out his good arm, he smiled at Michal. "That's the story our elders tell; I don't know if you'll believe it, but I do."

After a moment he added, "If you doubt it, Captain Ide, look at what is left of Araman today. And there are Babylons that are great cities today in the outer world."

"I don't doubt it, Paul." Jacob was probing toward another truth.

"Tell me this. After your isolation was broken and your people scattered, then the name of Araman was known in the outer world."

"Yes."

"And search was made for it."

"From the West—yes. Soon after, by the Romans. Valerian, who is carved in the rock here, came to conquer the East. So did Mark Antony, driven by Cleopatra's ambition. They came with armies and were defeated by Persian horsemen. But Alexander of Macedon, whom you call Alexander the Great, sought for more than that. He searched for the sanctuaries of the East as far as India. The elders say he passed through these mountains on his way to Babylon where he died."

"Julian the Byzantine also?"

"He also sought for the sanctuary of a religion in the East. So my father, Kaimars, said."

For an instant Jacob had the impression of mighty armies mobilized in the West moving against the intangible strength of religions in the East.

Another name had been mentioned that puzzled him. "You say Saladin was a Kurd who went out from these mountains. He certainly waged war in the Holy Land."

"He was also a scholar who hated war. When he had made peace with your Richard of England, he gave all pilgrims the right to journey to Jerusalem. Then he went back to his books and building hospitals."

So Saladin the Kurd had had a mission to perform. Jacob wondered how many others had departed from Araman on such missions.

"And the others?" he asked quietly.

A mask fell over the soldier's tired face. "My father could have told you, Captain Ide. He died in India, in the rioting at Amritsar."

With a glance at the silent Michal, he sprang up. "Why do you try to know more of Araman? Why do you stay here?" He flung out his arm toward her. "I—I want you to live!"

When he had gone, Michal wanted to run to Jacob. She felt afraid because Paul had been afraid, and besides, she was shivering with the night cold.

But Jacob had turned back to Sir Clement's notes, searching for something eagerly. Watching him settle down to reading, she put out the wall lamps and lay down on the divan, her head on a pillow where she could see him without moving. The flame of the one lamp shadowed his high cheekbones and made a thin line of his lips. When she half closed her eyes, his head had the appearance of a skull, motionless. And she longed to touch him and hear his voice.

"Won't you stop, Jacob, and rest?" she asked.

He shook his head. "Not yet. Try to sleep, Michal."

It was better after that. She could imagine that they were lying there, watching the embers of the fire die, thinking of nothing else. She wanted to help Jacob in his quest, but she couldn't. Why did he have to go on alone? Silently, she argued, *the shepherds went to Bethlehem, and one spoke to us, and Paul spoke to us, and now I'm afraid again, and Sir Clement isn't here*. She blinked at the fire to keep awake, and her eyes closed. When Jacob laid the sheepskin robe over her, she did not stir.

With one of the last notes of the pile in his hand, Jacob sat musing. The words in his hand had been scrawled on a sheet of paper with the heading, *Regent Palace Hotel, Baghdad*.

Tired, he eased his stiffened limbs by going to the door.

The chill of early morning struck into him. In the darkness he could see only the pin point of red flame upon the altar. When he stared at that, the drifting snow played tricks with his vision. Not only the snow seemed to be moving. Images that he had seen before assumed shape and moved with the drifting snow.

On the cliff the horseman stirred over the kneeling Caesar. Kaiser, the German Kaiser, his mind repeated, was the new word made out of the old word Caesar. Tsar, the imperial Russian Tsar, was a twin new word, also born of Caesar.

Other gray shapes moved out of the locked door across the way. They moved easily into the drifting snow. Falling into line, they followed each other toward the point of light, where they vanished. The first was like an animal—no, it was a heavy, plodding man with a spear, an Assyrian with the face of Sergeant Daniel, except

that the face had a beard and the body was hidden by a long robe, like a real Assyrian, the first soldier of old time. A good soldier, carrying a spear.

Behind him followed a chariot. Sword blades were bound to the hubs of the chariot and they turned viciously as it moved. But no one rode in it. Behind it came a bronze standard with eagles.

Then the shapes multiplied and gave forth sounds. Men were marching through the snow, with the hard, quick step of the Roman legions. Armored horsemen with lances uplifted under lofty banners galloped behind the glittering form of an emperor, Barbarossa, leading his host. . . .

They were vanishing now into the snow curtain, to the roll of muffled drums—no longer Roman eagles or crusaders' standards, but the banners of Napoleon retreating through the snow, falling into the ground, stacked in the stands around the tomb under the purple light of the Invalides where Napoleon had been laid for tourists to watch.

Closing his eyes to shut out the purple light, Jacob roused himself by gripping the doorpost. It had been restful to let his mind wander, imagining these shapes. They were not there, except as his tired eyes had formed them. Only the altar fire was real.

I'm imagining things, he told himself, and that will not help any. Often in Cairo, when he had been tired of making out reports, he had drawn a mental picture of what lay beyond his windows, of myriads of human beings armed and in armored machines moving in long columns upon the roads of a doomed civilization—a picture that must lie in the back of anyone's mind if anyone cared to summon it up.

No, he had been looking too long at the altar fire through the drifting snow. Going back inside the curtain, he hesitated, wanting to lie down on the couch close to the warmth of the sleeping woman. That fire, he reminded himself, would certainly be there on the rock the next day.

A memory persisted, troubling him. Somewhere he had read what he was thinking now. Returning to the stand, he picked up Sir Clement's last note that he had not understood, and reread it carefully.

The man who wrote that, in India, must have hated warfare with a consuming passion. "‘FOR WHAT MAN KNOWETH THE THINGS OF A MAN, SAVE THE SPIRIT OF MAN WHICH IS IN HIM?’ *So said Paul of Tarsus and so might Julian have said.*"

Until gray light stole through the opening overhead, Jacob sat with that page in his fingers. He felt as if he were sitting outside a closed door. This feeling was more real than the illusory figures of the drifting snow, and yet, in some unaccountable fashion, bound up with them.

The spirit of man . . . Paul of Tarsus had seen *something* in the blinding heat of a desert; he had felt a presentiment of truth that had revealed to him the emptiness of his own life in that hour of Damascus. He had wandered, like Zarathushtra who had followed a river down from these mountains, and like Mani, the Magian who had journeyed eastward to India. Moved by a passion greater than hatred or human love, they had opposed their weak bodies to the march of armies.

Paul of Tarsus. What had he meant by the spirit of man? What had survived of the words he spoke? His letters endured in fragments of papyrus penned by scribes in Greek long afterward. Mani's words had been found only in scraps of lambskin ornamented with pictures scattered through the deserts of Turkestan, where many of them had been used to make panes for windows.

No, the miracle of their lifetime had not survived these men. Ritual had swathed their words with manifold meanings, preserving them only as mummies are preserved. Their memories had hardened into the pages of books. They had departed, and along their footsteps shrines and monuments had risen, with inscriptions carved in stone. The artifacts of their time had survived them.

Could any power restore what they had said in life and bring back their living thoughts? If that could be . . .

Michal waked, feeling that the storm had passed. The sky had brightened above the light well. Pushing off the sheepskin, she looked for Jacob and saw him reading by the fire quietly.

"I'm glad you're here." He smiled at her drowsiness. "We've gone

at daybreak to see what is left of Athens, and you can help me there."

Heavy with sleep, she made an effort to sit up. He spoke so sharply, as if she must hurry. Shadowed hollows lay beneath the bones of his face. She asked, "Aren't you hungry, Jacob?" When he shook his head, she remembered. "I'm very glad to be in Greece again. I always liked sitting on the west side of the Parthenon. How can I help you, sir?"

"By sitting on the west side of the Parthenon. What do you see?"

Shaking out her hair, she tried to rouse herself from the delicious drowsiness. "I don't quite know what I'm doing there. But I see the lovely smiling faces of the caryatids. I see the marble blocks of the Parthenon, all gilded by the sun and full of the tiniest cracks, and I can breathe deep." She did so. "Now, going to the edge I can look down on the small roof of my beloved Temple of the Winds, which I like much better than the empty theater of Dionysus."

"Any people moving around?"

"No, only statues, and they don't move."

"Or speak?"

"Not even to say 'Good morning, pet.' Jacob——" She was fully awake now, and worrying.

Going over to the couch, he took her hand. Her warm fingers twined into his. "Good morning, dearest. Now that you've come back from Athens to Araman, I want to thank you for making that long journey. You saw at once what I've been trying to visualize. I've been so blind."

"You've never really been to Athens?"

"No. You told me what is left of it, a necropolis as Daoud would say, a city of the dead. A deserted theater, a ruined temple, the gravestones of a people."

"But they were nice people. You felt it."

Quizzically his tired eyes searched her face, and she thought that he looked as if he were in pain but not unhappy.

"Nice? No, more than that. They were daring and restless; they roved the seas like argonauts and found new islands; they broke away from the dead hand of the past and argued on street corners.

They disowned priesthoods and thumbed their noses at fate and pulled the oars of their small boats over the waves of the Great Sea, to explore the world and learn, if they could, the meaning of what they found. In their minds was the glory that was Greece, and nothing else mattered very much. If we could see now what was in their minds, we would know them intimately; there's not very much we can learn from the gravestones they left behind."

"But they also left some magnificent writing in plays or poems which neither you nor I can read—in Greek, that is."

"Yes, they have left us the shadow of a living reality. Didn't their actors all wear masks? We know they could laugh because we have laughed at *Lysistrata*. But if we read *Oedipus* we think that they could not escape fear or the nemesis of fate. Perhaps they had too much courage to be so afraid. If only for a moment they could tell us what was really in their minds."

"Now you're wishing, Jacob. I used to wish like that, on the Parthenon, hoping that the lovely caryatids would dance for me—they seemed to be all ready to dance."

"While you were asleep, Michal, a few minutes ago," he said thoughtfully, "I went back to Cairo, to see what might be left of Egypt. I saw the pyramids and mastabas, which were tombs and graves. I saw the temple columns along the Nile, and the tiny images of slaves and animals that had been made to put in graves to help the souls of the dead. I saw the pages of the *Book of the Dead*, and—that's all. Just a mortuary. Not a trace of the Egyptians who lived and breathed and sang long ago, before a priesthood ruled them and they had to build all those everlasting monuments to death, including the figures of terrible gods with the scavenger heads of dogs or eagles." He broke off, gripping her fingers. "When I was in Cairo before, I admired the monuments and thought what a remarkable people the Egyptians must have been to build such things out of stone. This time I saw only the sad remnant of a cemetery from which the human beings had gone away, and I wanted to follow the people."

Michal thought, this is something new in him; his mind is on edge and passionately eager, and I must be careful in what I say to him.

"Jacob," she began, and checked herself, to add lightly, "So you journeyed to Athens and found the people gone from there too. That was where I came in. What else happened that I missed?"

His eyes looked past her. "I know you feel it, too, Michal—that this place is different from Cairo or Athens. This is no cemetery of the dead past."

"No, Jacob."

"There's a living power here, old as the ages, and still here."

Fleeting she thought of a gigantic minotaur in a dark labyrinth beneath them.

"It stirred the ancient Egyptians and it voyaged with the young Greeks, because it has sent men out on such missions."

With a quick breath she ventured, "And it still collects assorted weapons from outside?"

He nodded. "Because it has a hatred of war."

"Vasstan thinks it's some mad European."

"Vasstan is thinking about himself. No, it's not any one man but a power greater than an army. Either I'm mad, or miracles *have* happened, or——" He broke off abruptly. "But we can test it by Vasstan. He certainly doesn't believe in miracles."

When Jacob brought in the German, Michal had the morning tea ready. Hungry and unshaved, Vasstan greeted her with benevolence. "Undine of the mountains!"

With gusto he accepted a bowl of tea, announcing what he termed the morning edition of news for the Americans of the colony. "All the peaks stand clear; the storm has blown away. Sergeant Daniel reports that an independent Kurdistan has been declared at Sanjbulak. It will extend even into the territory of the Soviet Union. You see, I tell you military secrets. I have no secrets now from my friends." He fairly twinkled at her. "I am content to be in Kurdistan. It will perhaps my country become."

He seemed to want to impress his benevolence on them.

"Colonel Vasstan," said Jacob suddenly, "why did the Byzantine Emperor Julian lead an army as far as this—farther than other Roman armies? And just how did he die?"

The sharp question seemed to please rather than annoy the German, who answered decisively.

"East-Roman, Captain Ide. Julian was emperor of the East, the nephew of the great Constantine, who removed the capital to Constantinople late in the fourth century of the Christian era, a little after the Saint George you talk about. You wish the facts of that strange death, not the kindergarten tale?"

Michal thought, he's in an excellent mood, and he wants to please us—I wonder why—yet he still thinks of us as school children. "Please, not the kindergarten story," she begged.

"So I will tell you." Absently he sipped at his tea. "Before then the legions of Rome had been invincible. They had the hard discipline of iron, the iron of the old Roman citizenry. A splendid machine. Why did it break down?"

Michal waited and Jacob was silent, both aware that the German would answer his own question.

"Those iron-hard legions of Rome which had the rule of the world in their hands and roads as far into the east as the deserts of Araman—they failed to conquer the East and they were broken by barbarians because they became soft. A new religion of the East softened them and took the iron from them."

Christmas and the rebirth of the sun, Sunday and rest day, the green branches and the tree, they were the same once, Michal thought.

"Always," Vasstan pointed out, "a soldier, even the best—the iron-hard legionnaire—is superstitious. When he wakes he looks first to see if a raven or eagle has perched on the standard, and always he looks for signs and portents. If a sign is good, he marches the more willingly; if a sign is bad, he may turn and run. To protect his life, he carries amulets or fetishes. *Aber*, the new religions of the East, fed enormously the superstition in the legions, especially of the many Asiatics. No more did they have a true will to war. Instead, they repeated the prayers of a Paul of Tarsus, or the invocation learned at a secret shrine of Mani. So did the destruction of the legions begin, and the ruin of the greatest empire. The armies had been infected by the germ of powerful superstition, and

they became Christians and Manichees first, and family men, instead of soldiers."

Vasstan emptied his tea bowl. Michal smiled at him, glancing at the silent Jacob, wondering how much the German who thought he was explaining a scientific fact to children was actually helping Jacob.

"So perished the army of Crassus, and of Valerian who kneels in his monument before the horseman of Asia in the *Felsrelief* outside your door, Miss Michal. The great Constantine understood the weakness of the armies. So he tried to turn that weakness into strength; he made the Christian religion publicly his own, and legal for the soldiers. He even carried, himself, a small wooden cross when he wished to inspire the armies to battle—letting it be said that the wood was taken from the true cross which his mother, Saint Helena, had found in Jerusalem. Yes, he built churches, like his mother, and made superstition the law which he himself enforced.

"After Constantine, Julian who was called the Apostate. You have here an orphan, a physical weakling, consumed by a great hatred for Constantine's branch of the imperial family. In boyhood he was removed to a tower near here in Asia Minor. There he buried himself in Greek writings and the teachings of Easterners, in books and prayers. You may be sure he prayed for vengeance. It happened so. Some of the frontier legions revolted and freed him from his guard, demanding that he become their Caesar. They made him emperor."

Vasstan eyed the intent Michal. "Now observe what happens in him. Emperor he is, protector of the Church, dictator of the legions. The weakling stiffens; he does well his work. *Aber*, the hatred is in him. Now what course is he to follow? Constantine whom he had hated had made the army Christian. So Julian changes the standards of the army to pagan eagles and is called Apostate. When he is told of defeats in Asia, and of the fate of Valerian, he musters a mighty army, the last iron of the legions, and marches east into the rising sun. Once he stops by the tower where he had buried himself in books. Once he stops in Tarsus, the city of Paul. On he marches to the east, with pagan standards, breathing

his secret prayers, riding in a litter because he is sick and feels that he has not long to live. Through the heat of the Syrian desert he leads his legions, across the Tigris River. There he orders his fleet of boats to be burned, and marches on toward these mountains, where dust and heat and the nomads and disease are all enemies of his legions. By day and by night he loses men, but he goes on. There is no reason for it. Yet he will not turn back. Soon he is wounded and dies in the foothills. It is said that the last night he lay in his bed he lifted his arm and cried, "Thou hast conquered."

Vasstan looked at them. Pleased with the effect he had produced, the German explained, "You understand? Like a true imperator Julian died attacking his greatest antagonist, the unknown god in the East. After, a few survivors of the legions found their way back and chose a new emperor. But Rome itself had died with Julian."

"Yes," said Jacob, "I understand now."

Vasstan departed in high good humor, telling them that they must see the new flag of Kurdistan that the excellent Matejko had made.

"Rome itself had died," Jacob whispered.

"Jacob, did the test help? Did Vasstan——"

"Yes, Michal." With a long sigh, he braced his shoulders back against the wall. "I'm not mad, and what seemed to be a miracle is really fact." Absently his hands piled up the Englishman's notes. "An angel of the Lord did scatter the host of Sennacherib. And the Assyrian armies that tried to invade these mountains were scattered in the lifetime of Zarathushtra. Babylon created new armies, and they ceased to be, as Paul told us. How many others were disintegrated in the same way?"

The vision of the snow returned to his mind.

"A name of Araman links up so often with their defeat. Mani lived when Valerian's legions were humbled. Our Saint George with the end of Diocletian. And then Julian."

"And Saladin defeated the crusades."

"And Napoleon had to retreat from the deserts of Syria. There are French bayonets here in the armory." His eyes sought hers. "Don't you see? Relics of each victory were brought to Araman. And each time a supposedly victorious army was disintegrated, a

military regime ceased to be. Men who came from Araman have fought against warfare from the earliest times. Not against other peoples but against war itself, that second terrible horseman of the apocalypse."

Michal came over and sat by him, silent.

"They've gone out without any weapon except the human spirit, to make an end of the machinery of war. In one way or another, most of them seem to have died in doing so."

"Sir Clement——"

"I think he guessed at the truth. He warned me of the danger of approaching Araman."

"Paul did too."

"In his way, yes." Jacob pushed the notes away, pondering. "He said this is *all that's left of Araman*. Their power must be failing, Michal. Perhaps it's ending. Perhaps it ended long ago."

He was still lost in thought. "What could they do today against even one mechanized column?"

But Michal had heard what she wanted to hear. "Perhaps there would be another miracle."

"If you believe in them."

Pressing her head against his, she laughed. "Certainly I do, my lover. I could have told you that forty hours ago. Now I'll show you one."

Flinging his sheepskin jacket at him, she caught his hands. "Come out and see."

Jacob could not believe what he saw. After his long vigil by the lamp, the brilliance of the sky hurt his eyes. Sheer white stretched through limitless space to the transparent blue overhead.

"Squint your eyes or it will dazzle you," Michal urged.

When he peered out toward the horizon, the sentinel peaks took form, rising from the purple of their rock buttresses. Unfelt winds moving around these remote peaks drew plumes of snow particles upward, like smoke. For an instant Jacob had the impression that they were poised, the two of them, on the lookout point of a fortress so gigantic that it extended outward into space itself. He felt as if he and the woman beside him were sheltered and safe within this cusp of the firmament.

Michal was not so silent. "I feel slightly intoxicated," she said happily. "Months ago—ages ago—I thought that clocks were ticking away my life, and a tiny bit of me was vanishing each moment. I hated it. Now time isn't running away. It's all tucked up inside me, and even the years don't matter any more. I suppose that's nonsense, but I don't care."

A sense of relief stole over him. The aching in his mind had ceased. It was as if he had laid a burden down and had stood up to breathe freely, no longer troubled by unquiet.

He told himself that this was because he was looking out over valleys that bore no trace of the handiwork of man, and so in their entirety remained at peace.

"It's never been lovelier," breathed Michal.

She led him down the village street, past the house where Gopal sketched at the portrait of Paul. Father Hyacinth, clearing the snow from the face of the sundial, in talk with Sergeant Daniel, smiled at them. His brown face reflected not only his joy in the morning but his delight at seeing Michal.

Then she led the way around the lake, and contemplated the wheel that turned slowly under a diminished flow of water.

"It's much quieter," she announced firmly. "It's saying that there's nothing to trouble me today, nothing at all, and you ought to be asleep, darling, and not thinking."

"I'm not."

Drowsiness was creeping through his body, drawing the blood from his overtired brain. The exhilaration of the morning still held strong, and he saw her as through a mist wherein moisture sparkled in her hair, and her eyes, unreadable, held his. With his arm around her slight shoulders, it seemed incredible that she should be there in the bright morning and should belong to him.

At that moment Michal's body ached for the touch of his. She forgot the brightness of the snow and the quiet of having him relaxed at her side. From her inner consciousness a voice cried to her that all his thought had been a dream, bodiless, seeking after shadows, away from her. Yet if it were that, why should fear lay its cold hand on her, until her body quailed and her arms strained at her sides, to grip him close and tight to her? She wanted to cry

out to him in tender, simple words her fear and her longing, and with an effort she kept quiet, knowing his mind had drifted away in drowsiness. To herself she cried silently that there was nothing real to trouble her, nothing at all, and Jacob had to sleep.

Stumbling over the stones, she led him back through their door. Throwing himself down on the bed, he sank into sleep at once, even while she pulled off his coat and shoes, and covered him, then sitting by him, not caring to prepare food for herself alone.

Jacob woke in the darkness of night, aware of Michal's small hands drawing off his clothing awkwardly. Half roused, he fumbled to help her. Lying back, he felt the warmth of her body resting light against him and her arms twisting around his neck. He felt her eyes wet, and heard her breath strangling in sobs that convulsed her silently. In fierce craving he held her under him, the pulsing of her breast, the straining of her thighs against him, the strength of the slender body engulfing him like a wave that swept him out of himself and restored him to consciousness and longing, while her voice whispered again words half heard, telling him once that if they could have a child . . .

Even when they slept again her arms held him, and when the wind whirled past their heads, she cried a little quietly, as she had done that first night with Jacob by her when she heard the thudding of the water wheel.

The weather remained clear. By day the ice on the lake thawed, to form again at night. Quiet settled upon the summit of Araman, where the people were occupied with the tasks of winter—feeding the sheep and getting in firewood.

Late on a mild afternoon the machines appeared. They moved like methodical animals, keeping in line along the trail from the east.

Two small vehicles in the lead oscillated back and forth in a manner strangely familiar. After an hour they showed themselves to be unmistakably American jeeps breaking a way through the snow. A light truck and two heavy wagons drawn by double horse teams followed, with a cavalcade of riders bringing up the rear.

Before dark the new arrivals had reached the approach to Araman. A rough square was formed by the vehicles and horse lines, apart from the small Assyrian encampment and the black tents of the Kurds. Through the binoculars, twenty or thirty human beings could be observed actively making camp, but who they might be no one on the summit knew.

The newcomers made no effort to climb the steps that night or the next day. Sergeant Daniel appeared with the first news of them. They had come, he said, from beyond Lake Urmiah, and they were Russians from the Archaeological Museum of Tiflis.

CHAPTER VI *The People of the North*

Apparently the Russians had come for a long stay. Except to go out for firewood they kept close to their encampment. They seemed to be a mystery to the villagers of Araman, who had been amazed at their first sight of motor vehicles moving without animals to draw them.

Daniel and his Assyrians could only explain that the strangers had been working around the shores of Lake Urmiah when snow interfered with them, and at Sanjbulak they had found Kurdish guides to conduct them to the foot of Araman. Jacob wondered briefly why any archaeologists had tried to come over the passes in midwinter. After two days, he decided to go down to meet them, taking Daoud with him as a possible interpreter, since Vasstan and Matejko showed no inclination to greet the newcomers.

"Shouldn't they make the first call on us?" Michal asked doubtfully.

"We were here first. Actually, they have as much right here as any of us."

"I suppose so. But do they know we're here?"

She did not want to watch Jacob make the descent, and she waved to the two men when they passed through the Lion Gate, then returned to occupy herself with the slight tasks of cleaning house. Finding that these did not serve to cure her restlessness, she went down to Imanya's house hoping to find Paul or Father Hyacinth. Only Imanya was there, threading the shuttles through her silk loom. Michal sat down to watch the flying shuttles, without being soothed by them.

If she could *do* something as simple as making the silk she wore,

Michal thought, she would be better off. But she was no whole woman like Imany, she was only a fragment, depending upon others. . . . Jacob had never before gone away where she could not call him. The two of them should never care so much for each other that it hurt to be separated. Yes, they should care for each other just like that!

And I have so much, she assured herself purposefully. I've had months of precious hours, and even the minutes mean so much more now; Jacob has accomplished what he came to Araman to do, and he no longer has a shadow of a duty to perform, unless to go back and report what we have discovered. Sometime we're bound to do that.

For a moment she felt the faint absurdity of such a report as she, Michal, would make it. *For seven thousand years the people of Araman have made war upon war.* It was absurd. As absurd as picturing Imany going on the air, sponsored by some gremlin aid to housewives, telling how happy she was to have her son Paul back from Africa. And the aged Watchman really did look like Peter in some old-fashioned miracle play, where natives took the part. It was ludicrous, too, to think of the somber Paul standing in the way of those American jeeps driven by the Russians.

The shuttles flashed like darts through the taut white strands.

No, it wasn't absurd, to think of them in Araman itself. Michal had only to step through the door to see the guardian mountain peaks that hemmed in the valley like benevolent giants. The air she breathed had given life in this valley, untroubled for geological ages until now.

What was it Jacob had said was here? a living power?

"And it is," she assured herself. "I'm the only absurd thing in all this valley, sitting in a Paris-made dress, brooding because I'm cold, and a little frightened as usual."

Resolutely, she got up to go back to her house, and turned off into the wood instead. She excused this detour by thinking she would pick some more ivy. Of all things, she had not intended to go near the wall. When she discovered Father Hyacinth sitting on a stone of the crumbled wall, however, she hurried over to him.

He was looking down at the new encampment which, from that

height, appeared to be no more than miniature huts populated by insects. The priest greeted her and made way for her to sit in the sun.

"You should not wear slippers in the snow," he pointed out. "That will give you the pneumonia."

Michal explained that she could not wear the Kurdish boots that had no heels. Then she pointed. "Those people there—why do you think they came?"

The brown face of the priest wrinkled when he made one of his rare remarks. "Why not? They have come. Mar Shimun has said that the peoples of the earth will arrive, to take refuge in the mountains."

Apparently the thought of refuge was a fixed idea at the monastery. "Why?" demanded Michal.

After consulting the horizon with his eyes, Father Hyacinth made answer. "Because here it is the City of God."

"The City?"

He nodded.

Michal knew from past experience that he would not explain how that could be. Her memory told her that the actual *City of God* had been the *De Civitate Dei*, written by Saint Augustine, and she knew very little about it. When she said as much the priest fell into contemplation.

"That city in the book," he vouchsafed at last; "where is it now, Michal?"

Michal shook her head. Perhaps the monasteries survived.

"Ah, well." He gave up contemplation, to smile mischievously. "Michal, when Augustine was young he heard voices which bade him take and read the message of Paul of Tarsus. And so the City of God of which he spoke must also have arisen here in the East."

His quaint reasoning cheered up Michal. "Of course it's here," she agreed.

They were discussing with enjoyment the presence of the mythical city with mountains for walls and the valley for a plaza when Michal heard a faint thudding. Peering down into the camp, she puzzled over it before she realized the truth.

The irregular sharp impacts in the air were made by guns firing

to the eastward. The day was clear, with a strong wind blowing from that direction.

"It's artillery, miles and miles away," she cried.

Father Hyacinth glanced into the tranquil valley and shook his head. Having no knowledge of gunfire, he thought it must be axes at work.

The sounds merged together after a moment and ceased.

"Where is Paul?" she demanded, feeling cold of a sudden.

Pointing out the trail to the east with his pipe, the priest said, "He went that way."

Although she listened intently, Michal could hear nothing more, and she wondered if anyone else on Araman had caught the sound of firing. She could not have been mistaken. More than five years before and a thousand miles away she had heard that same thudding on the wind when she had been chatting by the orange trees in the garden of the embassy at Athens.

He looked at her. "You are not well."

"I'm all right." Drawing her coat about her, Michal waited, listening.

Jacob had not encountered any Russians before now. He thought they looked like Midwestern Americans in rough-cut clothing, and with a heavy sprinkling of gold teeth. Ordinary people, but shy, without any manners. That did not bother him so much as it did Daoud.

Barbed wire had been strung carelessly around their site, and a handful of men in parts of uniforms were setting up huts without haste. The sentry at the gate looked like a Turk although he wore a military overcoat. The battered one-and-a-half-ton truck—made in Detroit—contained a radio, set up, and Jacob recognized it as one taken from an Airacobra pursuit plane. Its range, he calculated, would reach Tabriz in Azerbaijan, or Nakhichevan across the Soviet frontier. It had a good big aerial.

It took a moment for him to realize the significance of this. Araman, or at least the encampment below the mount, was now

in touch with the outer world by way of Tiflis in the Caucasus and Moscow. What effect that might have would need to be seen.

When the members of the expedition understood that he was an American, they kept crowding around, and he could not examine any more of their equipment. They made no move to prevent him; they merely stood around and stared. Several military rifles were in evidence.

He had his first surprise when Daoud introduced him to the head of the expedition. A stocky woman with wide, impassive eyes and hair the hue of bleached fire confronted him. Dr. Anna, they called her, and she might have been no older than Michal—although with her clipped hair and heavy military overcoat she looked a world apart from Michal. She spoke English as if she were reading it out of a textbook.

"Is it that no representatives of the Soviet Union have been here before, Mr. Ide?" she asked. And again, "Is it that the ancient city of Kurdistan has ruins up there?"

When Jacob answered yes to both questions, Dr. Anna caught the hand of the only soldier in the group—a good-natured athlete with a full set of gold teeth and three ribbons on his shoulder, with the insignia of a major. Omelko, as he was named, was a Ukrainian from Kiev, now on leave.

A shadow of a man with a clipped beard, who tried to hold himself straight when spoken to, followed them about, and gave his name as Professor Vorontzev, mineralogist. He spoke excellent French—so excellent that he must have spent some time with Frenchmen. Daoud was impressed by him.

A fourth, Svetlov, coughed constantly and held his head to one side. The others of the mission seemed to be mechanics and teamsters.

When Dr. Anna had finished asking her rhetorical questions, Jacob invited her to visit the summit, explaining that the ascent was not dangerous if taken slowly on a dry day.

"You permit?" she asked curiously.

"I invite you, Dr. Anna."

When they left, the members of the mission walked to the

entrance in the barbed wire and shook hands carefully, as if on parade.

Jacob felt that the Russians had been both puzzled and uncertain. It was odd that a woman should be chief of a mission of some size, and a young woman at that.

"I don't think," Daoud added, "she has been out of the Soviet frontier before. They *are* beyond their frontier here, you know. She has handled nothing older than Scythian gold or Varangian grave objects."

"She's a redhead, and that kind gets around."

Daoud shook his head.

Sitting by the bell tower, his hands empty of a rifle for once, Sergeant Daniel rose at their coming. For a few paces he walked with them to the stair, then he spoke.

"David Khalid, *they* have no passports."

He did not say the Russians, and he kept his deep voice low. Daoud did not look surprised. Jacob reflected that if the mission had crossed into Iraq territory without passports, three things were certain: they had not requested permission of the Baghdad Government to visit Araman, and so, probably, the British Intelligence knew nothing of their arrival here; also, since they carried no papers of identification, it would be difficult to prove afterward who they had been or why they had come. For that matter he himself had no valid civilian passport. No one at Araman had a passport, except Daoud and Michal.

"David Khalid," went on Daniel, "will you hurry and go to Baghdad? I will show you a way. You should report them."

Hesitating, Daoud shook his head and muttered something in Kurdish. Evidently he did not intend to go. Patiently the veteran sergeant turned to the American.

"Captain Ide, tell me. Will the United States Government send ships to take us Assyrians to America?"

Timidly he put his scarred hand on Jacob's arm. "We are only thirty thousand, Captain Ide. We are Christians. Two wars we have fought for the Allies. Some land is all we need. Still," he added hopefully, "we would like to be in the mountains in America."

While Jacob was trying to think of an answer that would be the

truth and not too painful to the old man, Daoud spoke up irritably.

"Daniel Toghrak, the Americans do not know that you Assyrians are alive. What does it matter to them if you are alive or dead?"

Without change of expression, the peasant who had become a soldier stood aside. Carefully he eyed the broken stones at his feet. Then patiently he followed after the two, planting his feet methodically on each step but making no effort to catch up with them. Instinct stronger than reason told him that in a few days these two might be gone—the archaeologist to his office in Baghdad, secure under British protection, the American to Washington where every family had untold wealth. The family of Sergeant Daniel had no land to cultivate. So he followed, thinking how help might be had in the face of dangers he no longer understood.

Under the battered lion's head Michal waited, while the light faded and the cold struck into her. Sitting there, where she could see only the top steps, she restrained herself from jumping up at every sound to look down the ascent.

When she heard the steady scrape of nailed shoes and sighted Jacob's wide shoulders, swaying as he climbed, she felt faint inside and sat very still, so as not to seem to be so frantically worried about him. And the first thing he noticed was her dress!

"Why, you've changed already, Michal. This is no weather for the blue dress."

She smiled and spoke first to Daoud carefully. "What were the Russians like, Daoud?"

"Stupid." He laughed, cheerful again after the long climb.

"Friendly," corrected Jacob.

"Really friendly, Jacob?" Her slipped feet moved gaily into the snow.

"A bit shy. But they're real people, Michal. They'll be coming visiting someday."

Michal felt like singing. The strangers, then, would make no new complication in Araman.

Behind them Sergeant Daniel plodded across the plaza toward Vasstan's house.

Not until they had finished supper and Michal had curled up on the divan did she tell Jacob about hearing the distant artillery fire.

"No one else heard it, Michal."

"I don't care. I did."

He glanced at her still profile. "If you did, it must have been far off, across the Iranian frontier."

Lifting her head, she said quickly, "Let's not think about it."

"All right. Let's think about you, returning triumphantly to civilization and swatting flies on Shephard's veranda while generals and ambassadors admire you."

"No, Jacob." Her slight shoulders moved restlessly. "Please take me away somewhere on the sloop you told me about." Anxiously she looked up at him. "The one you sailed on the river when you were tired."

"Waiting for the phantom ship to come over the mountains?"

"Yes."

When she lay motionless, touching him, he thought of the waterfall in Mr. Parabat's garden, and his arm tightened around her.

After his talk with Daniel that night, Vasstan bestirred himself and went down alone to the new encampment. He came back in an ironical mood and was pleased to poke fun at Jacob.

"What did you observe, Captain Ide? A redhead and a radio. That down there is a traveling show—what you call a circus. A circus with sideshows. I have the ability to count up to more than one. Two, a dispensary giving anti-typhus injections to tribesmen. Three, a member of the new Soviet-Kurdish Cultural Institute, to educate tribesmen. For free, as you missionary Americans say. Four, good interpreters, who speak Sulaimani Kurdish, Turkish, and Armenian. Five, a plan for distributing the land of the tribal *aghass* and *begs* who are feudal landholders among the deserving tribal peasantry."

Producing a crumpled pamphlet, he waved it before Jacob's eyes. "What is it?"

"Something in Arabic script."

"*Aber*, in the Kurdish language. A declaration of the leaders of

the new Democratic party of Kurdistan, asserting the ancient Kurdish right to the land, minerals, and *oil*. Your Russian circus men brought the printing press."

"Any harm in it?"

"How can there be harm in a circus? Now, your redheaded *chef de mission*. I count and arrive at a total of one emotional woman, who bites the ear of the younger, egocentric Cossack officer. I count on the other hand seventeen rifles—Mausers, German-made, or Brno, most of them having numbers of German divisions captured at Stalingrad. What does the American Military Intelligence think of that? That means the rifles were given out of military stores to the honest circus people here."

"Anything else?"

The German reflected. "Ah, the costumes. You have noticed that Russian uniforms are worn only by these mountain people; the Russians themselves are all honest civilians."

"Like us, Vasstan." Jacob considered the German. "I still think the Soviet mission is a scratch outfit—just what it seems to be."

"You are still in kindergarten. Few they may be, but behind them is the prestige of the Red Army."

"That's true enough. Granting all that, what do you think they are here for?"

Vasstan took several seconds to think about that. "If you are wise, Captain Ide, you will not try to find out."

Jacob thought: his information is accurate, but he has pointed it up to throw a scare into me. That means he doesn't want me to be too friendly with the Soviet personnel. That, in turn, may mean he's angling to be on good terms with them himself. Also, by this kindly warning he's keeping a drag on my good will.

"Just exactly what do you want me to do for you?" he asked.

"I?" The bloodshot eyes opened too wide and then closed in appreciation. "Excellent! You are no longer in kindergarten, Captain Ide."

Jacob waited.

"I lay my cards on the table." Vasstan spread out his plump hands. "These Russians will know my name and can get my dossier. Who does not know Vasstan? As a German agent, I will

be suspect; as a thorn in the rump of the British lion, I can be useful. You understand?"

"You want me to testify that you are no other than the lifelong, undefeated Vasstan, arch foe of Winston Churchill and all the English reactionaries?"

"Exactly. Alone, without followers——"

"But unconquered."

"Do you agree?"

Jacob thought about it. "I agree. Now what does your Russian circus really think of us?"

"Of you two Americans?" The German's quick mind came to full attention. "They have envy of you. I predict you will have no trouble with them."

That's clever, Jacob reasoned. Now that everything's so fine, I need not worry. I wonder what happened to the Assyrians?

"I hope not," he said sincerely.

After that Vasstan spent most of the daylight hours down in the encampment, leaving Matejko to his own devices. For some reason the Polish officer avoided Michal's house. Only occasionally she saw him wandering around the ramparts.

"Don't you feel well, Jan?" she asked once, falling into step with him.

Although he assured her he felt quite well, he did not brighten as usual when she spoke to him.

"My only sickness," he explained at last, "is shared by many Poles—at least those who served with General Anders."

Out of this somber mood she could not stir him. And it affected her strongly. Perhaps it touched her, too, because her presence had no visible effect on him now. When she pressed him to come in to supper, he refused.

"My sickness is contaminating. Colonel Vasstan is aware of that."

"That's nonsense!" she cried.

It *was* nonsense that he could harm her by being with her in Araman. Matejko only muttered an excuse and kissed her hand. Jacob noticed that he had taken to wearing the revolver sheath hooked on to his belt again.

"It's not good for him to be entirely alone," Michal worried.

The next day the Soviet mission appeared in a group at the summit, led by Vasstan. They seemed to be indefatigable in examining everything on the summit. Particularly, they lingered over the rock carving and the symbols—the Cossack taking measurements while Dr. Anna copied zealously into her worn notebook. While they did this, Vorontzev warmed himself at the altar fire.

At sight of them Matejko strolled off into the woods.

After giving them a clear field for most of the day, Jacob and Michal went out to greet them, finding Dr. Anna flushed with concentration over the bronze globe of the sky. Unbelievably, she stared at Michal's delicate silk scarf and slippers. Standing sturdily, grasping her book, as a peasant stands, she remained silent, fingering the coarse black shawl over her own head.

"Zdorovo," smiled Omelko, with appreciation.

"He says," Dr. Anna interpreted mechanically, "it is wonderful here."

Vasstan explained that Dr. Anna had done the work of three men already in that day; that in Tiflis she had been named *udarnik*—"A human spark plug!" he enunciated.

Unmistakably Dr. Anna flushed with pleasure, brushing back the hair from her eyes. Curiously she glanced at Michal. "It is my first opportunity to do interesting work here. But you have already copied and photographed all inscriptions for your American university?"

When Michal invited them into her house, they excused themselves because it was late and they had to make the descent to their quarters. Again took place the parade of handshaking. Vasstan, who had escorted them to the gate, came back with an odd look in his eye.

"Already, Jacob," he announced, "your mystery of Araman is solved. Dr. Anna says it is Armenian."

"This place?"

"Ethnologically, she said it was Armenian, like the bell tower which she has been studying below."

Jacob laughed. "Better not let Daoud hear her say that. He'd blow his top."

With deep enjoyment, Vasstan nodded. "But why not Armenian?"

Armenians live around here. Almost we can see their Mount Ararat."

"Because this happens to be Kurdistan, which is the land of the Kurds. The Armenoids came in later, and they didn't stay."

Closing one eye, the German surveyed the makeshift flag still hanging on its pole. "I predict that if the University of Tiflis—and hence Moscow—believes this to be the *situ* of ancient Armenia, our spark plug will find that to be incontrovertible fact. Ancient Armenia it will be."

"I don't believe it," Michal retorted. "And I like Dr. Anna. She seems so eager—it's like a woman's love for a child."

Then and there Michal declared that she would have the Russian woman to tea where they could let their hair down and Daoud could argue to his heart's content.

"A love feast." Vasstan shrugged. "And will you invite Colonel Jan Matejko?"

"If he would only come."

The weather changed when the wind changed. The storms ceased and the midwinter thaw set in, shrouding the summit in mist. Through this mist the sun came in long shafts that changed color through the vapor strata. At times the summit became a haze of gold, hung between shifting cloud masses.

Only Dr. Anna and Omelko appeared out of this curtain of mist occasionally, she to work painstakingly while he sat by, to smoke cigarettes and take photographs with a good German camera as she directed him. For no visible reason, violent arguments flared up between them, and afterward they would sit hand in hand eating the bread they had brought up with them. From somewhere Anna had produced a striped silk scarf which she wore loosely around her throat like Michal.

"They *are* very human," Michal assured Jacob, "but she works as if every minute was too precious to be lost. It tires me just to watch her."

"That's because it takes her a quarter of an hour to get done what would take you only a minute."

"And what can I do, Jacob?"

She felt tired because she had taken cold during the thaw. Feeling the dry heat of a temperature, she kept indoors, lingering in bed as long as she could without attracting Jacob's attention.

Only Matejko seemed to be aware that she was sick. Once, to her surprise, he brought the big Cossack to the door, to offer her a cigarette. It was strange to see two officers with sidearms standing there inside the curtain, smoking.

"He is Ukrainian," Matejko explained, "Five years ago he was dodging German shells along the Dnieper, as I was in the Tatras. We get along."

He seemed to want her to understand that. •

"There! You see, Jan," she exclaimed.

"*Zdorovo!*" ejaculated the major, listening to the wind tower.

"That was six years ago," said Matejko carefully. "Now, it is different. His city of Kiev will be built again; my Tatra Mountains—they are not there." He hesitated, then said quickly in his fluent French, "Remember now that always you must be a simple American, the wife of Captain Ide."

Michal smiled, feeling odd because the swarthy Cossack did not understand a word of what they were saying. "Should I be that?"

"Always, madame. You will not know who is the member of the secret police in this mission—whether the man Svetlov or a camion driver. Never mention that your friends were British, or diplomats, or that you had a Finnish grandfather."

"Then I'll have only a Scottish grandmother."

When the two men walked away together, she noticed how Matejko shambled, while the Cossack, untouched by moodiness, moved lazily. And she wondered if she and Matejko were not alike in seeing ghosts where no spectral shapes really were. No, she thought, it's more than that. It's like becoming a marionette pulled by an invisible string. Not even a marionette, because they dance and play tricks together very happily even if they're made to do it. The human beings on Araman couldn't sing and dance together because suspicion had crept in among them. Not suspicion of one another, but suspicion of what might happen because of events outside Araman.

As always, she told Jacob what disturbed her mind, sitting at his knee when he came in.

"Matejko can't forget the past, Michal," he explained after thinking about it. "God knows he has reason not to forget it. But you've put it behind you, and you should."

She felt better, until she remembered Matejko's wife who had died apart from him in some unknown place. A marionette made to labor. "Then I'm not seeing any fetches, or hearing my ancestral voices prophesying war?" she asked doubtfully.

"I'm not too sure about the ancestral voices. You do get ideas." In his methodical fashion, Jacob was comparing all the different persons caught by the winter at Araman. "As long as Vasstan doesn't try any sleight of hand, there shouldn't be a quarrel in our midst now."

"Vasstan! I'm quarreling now, even if you don't know it. You wouldn't know it, Jacob, you are so gentle." She sighed, her head light on his knee. "I don't think you could hate even your deadliest enemy. I suppose if you could, you'd be cruel and demanding like most other men."

"Don't I demand enough?"

"Not nearly." Then she cried, "But I don't want you to be different. I'm different enough for both of us."

When the east wind blew and the clouds cleared from the summit, Jacob discovered that the clusters of tents below had increased. The new camps showed black around the shrine.

"You did not know?" Vasstan eyed him curiously when he asked about them. "Have you forgotten that a Kurdish *huryat*, an independent Kurdistan, has been proclaimed—in print on posters? A conference of leaders has also been called."

"By whom?"

"Ask your wise men of the East—ask of those of Araman! Do they know?" Irritably, Vasstan muttered to himself in German. Then he seemed to find amusement in his own exasperation. "Jacob Ide! For the last time I tell you what happens. Undine will smile—she is clever."

He glanced around to make certain they were alone in the plaza. "The tallyho huntsmen, the British, ordered the conference, to

name leaders of the Kurds"—he closed his eyes to relish this the more—"of the tribal Kurds. Now, what else happens, as we know? The Soviet circus appears, proclaiming a free and happy Kurdistan under different leaders, members of the new Democratic party. This is all quite *en règle*; no one speaks of war. Not even of coercion! It is even altruistic. Yes, the British huntsmen idealistically wish to support the elderly aghas and begs of the tribes, while the Soviet circus men are eager to aid the proletariat to education and land. Only they show themselves to be in too much of a hurry."

A gleam of something like triumph came from the inflamed eyes. "All this I see, and more that I do not tell you. What am I? A ghost. I watch your great Allies who marched into Berlin at the end of the last war, to make the world safe for democracy!"

Vasstan himself appeared to be in a hurry. Loading his blankets and some supplies upon Badr's back, he hastened ahead of the Kurd out the Lion Gate, to take up his quarters in the encampment.

Without the German's binoculars it was hard to distinguish the growing crowds below. Jacob observed that more huts had gone up in the Russian square, including one large building. When he tried to go down again with Daoud, he slipped badly on the icy steps and had to turn back, leaving the archaeologist to make the descent alone.

Daoud had been moody and anxious, although he said little. It was an old custom of the Kurdish tribes to hold their assemblies in the valley of Araman in summer, he had explained.

"I'm glad it's all in the valley," put in Michal, "and not here in Araman."

With only Father Hyacinth and Jan, the quiet of their height would not be broken, and after a while the encampment would go away, as camps always did when there was no war.

Daoud came back less cheerful than at the end of his first visit below. Tribal leaders were coming in, he explained, from the Baradust and Begzadeh, and there was much sheep killing and feasting near the shrine. The young son of Mullah Ismail had appeared, to speak for the Herki until his father could make the journey through the snow. The Ghazi himself, head of the Azer-

baijan Kurds, was expected from Sanjbulak. "Only a few, Jacob, and all of them from the older tribes of the heights."

When Jacob asked if the new Russian building was going to be used for a place of assembly, Daoud almost choked.

"A cinema, Jacob! They have a small projector, and a man to explain to the tribesmen, who go because they have never seen such pictures. They see the Red Army in action—tanks and guns. The commentator tells them how other people are being liberated by Russian tanks and guns."

"Does the audience enjoy it?"

"The audience, except for me, had never seen a moving picture. To see is to believe, Jacob."

Quite clearly the motion pictures had disgusted the archaeologist. Yet Jacob wondered if he would have been so put out by scenes of Britain at war.

From that hour Daoud almost disappeared. His daily routine changed, and he slept through the hours of sunlight, to sit with the Watchman and Gopal after dark. In Paul's absence, the old painter had ceased to work on his wall, where the portrait remained sketched in in charcoal. On the other hand, Daoud had resumed making notes, working with concentration as if against time. But what he was doing he did not see fit to explain to Jacob.

For those few days the two Americans were left to themselves almost as utterly as when they had first come to the summit. Michal felt this acutely, because she knew that Jacob was disturbed again, although he said little about it.

"The sense of peace we had is gone," she declared.

With her inherent honesty, she had to admit it was not the fault of the Russians. They had not interfered. Matejko's hopelessness, Daoud's abstraction in a new task of his own, Vasstan's departure—all had been due in some measure to their own natures. Something intangible had pulled them apart, like marionettes when the play begins.

"But we're not marionettes," she cried to herself. "We're alive, and most of us are young."

If only they could break through the barriers of language; Omelko had been friendly to Matejko because they had fought the same

enemy once; Daoud could teach the youthful Dr. Anna so many things; and she conjectured that the distraught Vorontzev would like to talk to her in his excellent French—if he dared speak so, apart to her. There was no reason to be afraid in Araman. What they all feared—if they did fear—lay outside the mountains.

“Hasn’t the village always been a sanctuary?” she asked Jacob. “Otherwise why would strangers have been admitted for so many ages?”

Sanctuary. Michal had a way of conjuring words up that cut through ordinary thought. When Jacob went out at the end of that day to a break in the wall, to examine the condition of the steps below, the word lingered in his mind. As usual, the steps shone faintly under hard ice. That side of the mount lay in shadow now, and as soon as the sun left it, ice froze hard.

Father Hyacinth appeared with his pipe, to sit on a flat rock and contemplate the valley before darkness closed in. The shadow had obscured the camps below, yet it was too early for fires to be lighted, so the white valley gleamed beneath them, its only visible scar the dark line of the road to the east.

After a polite “Good evening,” Jacob had said nothing to the priest, not being able to make himself understood well in French.

They didn’t understand each other very well even in thinking. Jacob found that he missed the forthright Paul, who met every question honestly, like a soldier. He had not seen Paul since he had probed so deep into the secret of Araman.

And he wondered, as he had done a hundred times, what means might exist within this bare summit to affect the course of warfare in any way. Obviously the young soldier knew of some latent force, of which his father had been aware. Methodically, Jacob’s mind had probed for the nature of that power, without success so far, except to eliminate the obvious.

Once Paul had admitted that modern invention had made this power difficult to use. It could hardly, even as a fantastic possibility, be a neutralizing force—some hitherto-unknown development of electronics which would neutralize electricity. Apparently, it must operate on human beings, as the mild religions of the East had sapped the will to war of the Romans. A new religion? There had

been no trace of that. The doctrine of non-resistance, once developed by Gandhi? That had turned out to be no more than political action affecting some of the inhabitants of one country.

In Asia, people could be moved by an immensely strong personality, by a new idea—even by a token, although by no ordinary token. Sir Clement had understood that. But there was no visible sign of such a fantastic talisman.

Father Hyacinth had been saying something, pointing with his pipe.

"The city?" Jacob asked absently. "What city?"

"The City of God."

Of that Jacob could make nothing. Probably the priest meant the effect of the sunset light. It was unusual. The circumvallate rock peaks, purple and gray in the distance, did assume the shape of towered structures. When he half closed his eyes against the glare, Jacob could fancy that these houses hung between the white surface of the snow and the deepening blue of the sky. Evidently the priest found significance in these mountains. Jacob remembered the monastery and the nearer bell tower.

It was very quiet here.

Moving aside one of the crudely shaped stones, he sat down by the Armenian, who knew every aspect of these valleys.

"Was the monastery built," he asked, "because of this——"

He waved his hand outward, vaguely, searching for words.

"It was built beyond the threshold of this," responded the priest. "Yes, at the gateway, you understand, where people come in. They come to learn to live together and endure."

An odd tradition, Jacob thought. The monastery of Mar Giorgios had not been placed within the higher valley but at the entrance. Yet the bell tower was here. For the first time he wondered who had actually sounded the bell, unless the wind itself . . .

Sanctuary. An invisible city, extending over these mountain summits, a barrier against the outer world, a habitation for refugees.

With the stone held absently on his knee, he pondered that. Even Vasstan had used the word *Asyl*. Matejko as well as Michal

had found refuge here. These mountains stretched out a vast way, at least as far as Ararat and Mount Demavend, on the borderland of eastern Turkey and Iran. If they could be made into a sanctuary—

What had become of man-made sanctuaries—final inviolate refuges—in the outer world? Vatican City, in which Jacob had studied manuscripts for some years, had been extraterritorial, removed from outer political interference. A small area, cramped within rambling, medieval buildings. Was it still as it had been? Certain temples in Hindu India had protected anyone crossing their thresholds. Within some politically backward tribes the right of asylum could still be claimed. Where else?

At the monastery Mar Shimun had predicted that peoples of the nations would flee for refuge to these mountains.

For an instant Jacob had a vision of fugitives from the outer world escaping the terrors of war, or famine, or devastating pestilence, within the shelter of these heights. Here they might survive, as in legend other folk had survived earlier floods on Ararat. They might live, to resume their slow progress again, in the outer world.

He shook his head. That was an old myth. He had merely thought of Ararat, and, subconsciously, of Araman, to the summit of which these people had retreated as they had been driven from the lowlands. No, there was something more.

Then he sat quiet, hugging the stone. Myths or no myths, these mountains had been a *sanctuary* once for human beings. They could be that again if the great powers of the nations would agree to set them apart, as a refuge. To cut these unsurveyed mountain ranges from the political map and hold them inviolate.

It had been done for animals, why not for men?

Setting down the stone, he went away without saying anything more to the priest. Father Hyacinth only glanced curiously after the strange lame man and at the stone beside him.

When Jacob poured out his imagining to Michal, she listened silently.

"We have our house, Jacob," she said at last; "and now——"

"It's been accomplished in a way in the Swiss mountain cantons.

There you have mixed people living their own lives, kept inviolate by the surrounding great powers."

"And there you have hotels and skiing and tunnels and nice little railroads guarded by a little Swiss army, all very modern and restful." Then, glancing up at him, she smiled swiftly. "But it's a nice dream to have, Jacob."

The next afternoon five Russians appeared at the summit. Anna and Omelko were accompanied by Vorontzev, who looked bored and tired after his climb, and by two of the camp guards who sat themselves down in the Lion Gate and lighted cigarettes. Jacob eyed them with some curiosity before he went on with the others.

Instead of coming to call, Dr. Anna explained, they had instructions to carry out. They had been informed that arms were hidden in Araman. If this were true, could they see the weapons? They had noticed nothing of the kind, themselves.

"It's a collection of old weapons, not at all hidden," Jacob explained, and led them into the armory cavern. Only Omelko made any close scrutiny of the weapons, and he seemed to be more puzzled than startled. For a moment he fingered the Thompson sub-machine gun, putting it back when he discovered there was no ammunition for it.

"Nothing Russian is here," the woman archaeologist summed up, relieved. Evidently it had not occurred to her that this collection could date before modern times. "And you have nothing—no ammunition—in your own house, Mr. Ide?"

"Why not come and see?"

Briefly, Jacob wondered who had instructed them to make this new search of the summit. But it was natural enough, along that frontier, to keep a close check on weapons that might be lying around—especially in such a strategic strong point as this summit. For an instant he smiled, thinking of the village of Araman defending itself with modern firearms.

Michal and Daoud were taking tea by his fireside, and Anna came in, uncertain of her welcome, fingering the blue scarf around her throat at sight of Michal. She said, "Good evening," and hur-

ried in to examine the bronze water basin. Then her expression changed and she almost ran to pick up the winged Pegasus. With professional interest she turned it in her fingers.

Stealing a glance at Daoud, Michal said inwardly, "Oh, Lord," and said aloud with her friendliest smile, "It's one of the best pieces of Araman, isn't it, Dr. Anna?"

Impatiently the Russian shook her head. "This statuette is not handiwork of Araman. Its provenance is within our steppes."

"You mean it comes from Russia?" Thinking of the silent Daoud, Michal hastened on. "Will you have a cigarette, Dr. Anna?"

Taking one without lighting it, Anna continued her inspection of the bronze horse. "We have found similar objects in Bashkiria."

"With wings?" demanded Daoud abruptly.

"Not yet have we found objects with wings, Professor. From excavations in the Minusinsk basin we have obtained horses with rudimentary wings."

Michal thought: she doesn't mean to be dogmatic, she is only repeating what she has been told, but it will infuriate Daoud. To her relief, Jacob intervened.

"The Siberian art? The one you call the art of the steppes?" he asked amiably.

"Yes, Mr. Ide. It is actually the animal style of central Eurasia, which is the most ancient of all. It influenced the Chinese on one hand and the Babylonian on the other."

She repeated that easily, more confident now. Jacob had a way of quieting people.

"You mean," he pressed her, "that the first culture—the articulate intelligence of the human species—originated in the plains of middle Eurasia and spread outward."

"Yes, Mr. Ide, that is correct." Something like warmth came into Dr. Anna's flat voice. "From our steppes."

"At what time?" Daoud put in.

"The earliest time, possibly after— No, that is not correct. *Before* five thousand years, Professor."

Again Jacob intervened. "Tell us how, Dr. Anna." And he smiled encouragement to her.

"It is evident of itself." Anna had lost her shyness. "It could not

have been in our *taiga*, that is our forestland, or in the brown, dry steppes. No, it was upon the good earth of the black steppes where wild cattle and grain multiplied. There the most ancient people who were our ancestors had water in abundance and metals near the surface in the Urals. The requirements of a culture growth are two, no more. First, fertility of land; second, ease of communications. By the first people grow strong and dynamic; by the second they meet, in war or trade, and fertilize. Out of conflict the strong grow stronger, the weak are eliminated. All these conditions were present in middle Eurasia, so that not only a few but thousands upon thousands of human beings strengthened themselves upon our steppes, over millions and millions of hectares of land. Nowhere else were conditions so favorable."

Nursing his pipe, Jacob squinted at the fire. "Then you believe that human beings progressed upward by their ability to propagate their kind and make war?"

"Of course, yes, Mr. Ide. That was made clear by the Englishman, Professor Charles Darwin, who proved that only the most fit can survive."

"A good deal depends," murmured Jacob, "on what you mean by the most fit."

"The strongest, who win in the struggle for life."

"Is there such a thing, except in war, Dr. Anna? I'd call it the struggle *in* life."

He touched the book near his knee. "Tens of thousands of Greek hoplites did not survive their generation. But the mind of one Aristotle endured and multiplied itself in these books. Numbers and strength and ease of living can't be everything."

To this she did not answer. Either she did not understand him, or she had closed some door in her mind abruptly.

"What do you think has survived in Araman, Dr. Anna?" asked Michal curiously.

Doubt vanished from the open face of the Russian woman. "Unmistakably it is no more than a single primitive tribal culture. The patriarch, who is also priest, obeys an inherited superstition, because he keeps burning the altar fire. We have found similar groups among our Kara Kirghiz and Dungans, except that they

are nomadic. This remnant of a tribe is sedentary, perhaps for a thousand years."

"Anna!" With a single motion Daoud came to his feet, his voice strained with temper. "You have made a mistake!"

Fleetingly Michal sensed that his anger was not directed at the woman, and, curiously, Anna's swift flash of fear was not caused so much by Daoud's temper as by what he said.

"What you say of the open grasslands is true in every way of animals. It is not true of human beings." Facing her, the Kurdish scientist lifted his arms. "If it were true, your people of the steppes today would be a species of superior animals, cunning in ways to protect themselves and get meat. You would have no souls."

Startled, she stared at him.

"You are an archaeologist, Anna," he stormed, "but you have made the mistake ignorant people make. You assume that human evolution has gone forward in a straight line from the lower animal forms to the highest humans. That the aboriginal Esquimaux or Tasmanians are vestiges of what we were a few millenniums ago. Is not that what you think?"

"You are correct. But that is the law of nature."

"There is no law of nature. Human progress has followed no line of development. It has been won a little at a time and lost, and found again by incalculable effort and courage. In no one spot could it have originated and spread outward."

Michal thought, these two young Asiatics, taught in different ways, are trying to reach the same truth through a language not their own—English. The force of their two minds could be felt almost physically within the room as words poured from the impassioned Daoud, while the woman listened, not believing at first but eager to understand.

The human species, Daoud insisted, did not gain wisdom as a whole. The gain was achieved by small groups, separated by accident or catastrophe from the others, and forced to adapt themselves to strange conditions. Somewhere a land bridge might have sunk into the sea, leaving such a group isolated upon an island.

Within this human nucleus special characteristics developed through centuries and even millenniums of time. The group became what Darwin called an accidental variation. Cut off from their fellows, they survived by increasing not their physical force but their mental powers. Conflict with other human beings could not aid in this immeasurably slow building up of the force of the spirit.

Within these human islands progress was made, to be shared later with the main bodies. Some of the isolated people perished. Others added their mite to the spirit of man, not to his physical well-being. For some twenty-five thousand years this process of specialization had gone on, until now, to create modern man.

He was quieter now, and Jacob noticed how eagerly Anna listened, trying to memorize words, like a student having a perplexing problem explained.

"Here in Araman," Daoud explained, "we have found the culture of our ancestors—yours too. It is older than Egypt, and has survived untouched by the outer world."

"How long?" demanded the red-haired woman fiercely.

"At least seven thousand years."

"Seven——" She almost screamed. "But that would be a culture-age greatest of all. And to discover it first!" She flushed with excitement. "*Ekh ma!* It is more ancient many times than the lake settlement Kosloff found in the Altai!"

The effect on her was extraordinary; she trembled and seemed about to cry. Then Major Omelko stamped in from the door where he had been watching the argument with growing concern.

With head lowered, he faced Daoud. Instantly Anna grasped his arms and tried to push him back. As if calming an excited horse, she made shushing sounds, "*Patisze—pat isze!*"

Convinced in this fashion that she was neither hurt nor alarmed, the Cossack thrust her away impatiently. In high good humor Anna explained to Michal, "This boy says I squeal like a sow." Then she whirled on Daoud, intent again. "Can you the language decipher, Professor?"

The Kurd reflected, his dark eyes impassive. "Has not Professor Vorontzev made anything of it?"

"Vorontzev has made first category findings, but in mineralogy. Around Urmiah he found deposits of barites, molybdenum and uranium——"

When she stopped abruptly, Daoud showed no surprise.

"Daoud!" Jacob exclaimed, disturbed.

His friend had tricked the naïve woman from Tiflis. Anna, carried away by her enthusiasm and fumbling for English words, had not realized what she was admitting about Vorontzev. What if the elderly mineralogist who pottered around collecting ordinary specimens of rock had actually unearthed deposits of molybdenum and uranium?

Before the Kurd could answer, Omelko's deep voice repeated what seemed to be a jest. In the middle of the room, he had been listening to the faint caroling of the wind tower. Anna looked abashed. "The major had forgotten. We also had instructions to ask, please, Mr. Ide, if there is here in your *choutar*—in your dwelling place—a radio and a concealed telephone."

Catching Michal's eye, Jacob burst into laughter. "Indeed we have, Dr. Anna, but very old models." And he explained how the ancient wind harp made melody and the primitive sound passage carried voices. Eagerly the Cossack and the woman of the Caucasus examined the contrivances, chattering like squirrels. "Antiquities of the dawn period," Dr. Anna proclaimed in relief.

Like children, they were delighted at discovering a jest where they had feared to find something ominous. All Omelko's gold teeth showed. Michal caught at this camaraderie, turning impulsively to Daoud.

"Now answer Dr. Anna fairly, Daoud. She asked if you could understand the original speech of Araman." And she added swiftly, "Please!"

"I am only beginning to understand——"

"Please, Daoud."

Abruptly the Kurd opened his mind to them. "I will prove that a little can be understood, Miss Michal. Dr. Anna, I will take you to hear it spoken by the man you call the patriarch of the tribe."

"I to hear him?"

"Yes." Carefully Daoud weighed his words. "The Americans

call him the Watchman; he is actually the Elder of Araman, and he holds in his mind the memories of his people—what you would term vestigial memory of a folk.”

Dr. Anna nodded, pleased. She understood that.

“Remember that he knows nothing of such European terms. He is the only man alive who can speak to us in the words of the dawn era. To him the fire by night and the sun by day are symbols of light, guiding”—he sought for a word—“what the Greeks call the soul, and Jacob the spirit of man, in its conflict. Night and darkness are the symbols of defeat and death.”

Anna’s lips moved steadily as she memorized the words.

“For *hvareno* I have no translation. It means both glory and achievement—perhaps the final sovereignty of man over himself and his world.”

Jacob wondered how much Paul might have taught Daoud in the days after Christmas.

Anna nodded understanding. To her glory meant the recognition of her work.

As they went out, it was dark. Vorontzev pulled his sheepskin close about his thin body; Omelko lighted a cigarette, glancing over his shoulder. Michal, looking back, saw a figure in the darkness of the portico that she recognized as Matejko’s. Instinctively she drew breath to call to him to come with them, then realized that he would not join the Russians. Dr. Anna ran to fetch her notebook.

A wild surmise stirred Jacob. Could there be somehow in the Watchman’s keeping an unknown talisman, an ark of the covenant, a formula that would bestow power—as Sir Clement had hoped from the first?

Michal pulled back her sleeve, peering at the hands of her watch which showed it to be nearly midnight. She said inwardly, I am dreaming this.

Sharp in the moon’s light, the figures took color from the pale sky and the fire. In one instant they seemed white, in another crimson. Behind them in the crystal sky a myriad points of light

gleamed. Underfoot the brightness of the snow. She had stood here watching the flames rise over Sir Clement, and she had stood here that first night, frightened, with Jacob's hand in hers. As in a dream, thinking that she had been here listening like this before, she heard Dr. Anna's pencil scratching over paper, and the quick voice of Daoud interposing, and the deep voice of the Watchman rising and falling. That voice never ceased. Once she had heard a man standing alone in the empty theater of the Acropolis in moonlight, speaking in this fashion with the ancient tongue of the Greeks, not chanting but sending forth a human voice in cadenced sound into the stillness of the night. But that had been the verses of Homer.

Barely, she caught Daoud's translating words—like the whisper of a friend sitting by her during a concert stealing through the music.

Omelko had thrown away his cigarette, Vorontzev was trying not to cough, and somewhere Jan Matejko lurked like a shadow apart from the moonlight. If only I could understand, she whispered to herself.

" . . . the time of fear when the wall was built . . . those who survived in the highest valley built the wall for a refuge . . . the fear of what lay below . . . the time of the use of metals outside had begun. . . . In Babylon the worship of the stars and of numbers."

It's like inscriptions, she thought, where only a few words are clear.

The Watchman was not looking at them; he was close to the fire, looking out beyond it.

" . . . the time of strife, because of the fear . . . our young men on their horses rode down to the walls of Babylon. . . . Out of the strife, darkness for a great cycle of time . . ."

The walls of Babylon. Why, that had been the Medes and the Persians from the mountains, and Daniel prophesying, reading the writing on the wall, and foretelling the end of the Babylonian empire. As Paul had said.

*" . . . those who had gone forth from the hearthland of Aryan
vej into Hind, into Parsa—"*

"India and Persia, Michal," Jacob exclaimed.

"—*to the region of the setting sun . . . multiplied and changed.*"

"The emigrants."

"*. . . they built walled cities and learned new arts.*"

Only at times could Daoud interpret the meaning of the Watchman.

"*. . . who were left behind . . . fewer and fewer . . . losing their memory . . .*"

"The survivors here, on the last summit——"

"*. . . eating the flesh of penned cattle, taking gifts from the barbarian tribes . . . making images in metal . . .*"

"Pegasus?" whispered Michal.

"Pegasus," Jacob nodded. "Ssh!"

For long moments Daoud was silent. Anna's pencil scribbled its course across paper. Her head bent, she was chewing her lip in her concentration. And Michal thought, we are all trying to understand.

At this point the Watchman's voice had changed cadence, as an orchestra changes from the rhythm of strings to the call of woodwinds, and the linguist could not follow him. Michal wondered why no one stopped him to ask a question, then realized that he would not stop.

This patriarch with majesty in his voice was not *telling them* anything. He was intoning a poem, an epic of his people—his *Avesta* or *Iliad*. And as they had been sung and set in words, so this unknown epic had been set in its form, to be repeated from generation to generation and memorized by minds that had never depended on the written word. Each night, while he eyed the constellations, this Watchman had been performing his task of repeating the old words. Gopal had said the *keeper of the tongue*. Probably he had used the very stars to aid his memory, attaching to each bright cluster some portion of his lore, and the stars in their courses had paced his silent recital. In all odds no one except the Watchman knew the whole of this epic. In his single mind the treasure was guarded.

The Watchman's voice resounded like a bell on a single word.

"*The Glory,*" cried Daoud, "*went beyond the great sea . . . the*

Glory that could not be held by the hands of man . . . went for a small cycle with the children of the sun . . .

And quickly he exclaimed, "Helios the sun, the children the Hellenes—Jacob, that might be the Greeks . . . the Glory departed from Araman and appeared beyond the sea among the Greeks for a few generations." He listened. "Then followed a gathering of darkness."

Jacob thought, we are only catching fragments; if we had dic-tographs—if we could assemble the Sanskrit scholars of the world—if Daoud and Anna and Paul could write it all down for a year—

He touched Daoud, who nodded. "We knew this part, Jacob," he said. "It's the peril beneath the earth, told by Zarathushtra."

Into the Watchman's voice had come the clash of iron.

" . . . on the surface of the earth where air merges with light, giving life . . . in the region below the earth, perpetual darkness endures . . . man forsook the light to delve into the bowels of the earth, to seek power from below . . . from the bowels of the earth he drew its liquids and fetid air . . ."

Jacob thought of the reservoirs of oil and gas formed from rock by incalculable heat.

" . . . upon the surface in the beginning we had found metals soft and pale-bright, and they were shaped for beauty . . . each in a great cycle, for the age of gold, the age of silver and of red metal, soft as they . . ."

Vorontzev was dozing comfortably, close to the fire, not understanding.

" . . . then by flame the metals were hardened, in the age of bronze and the age of iron . . . by flame, tools were shaped that aided, and instruments that destroyed . . . harder and enduring the metals, outlasting the men who made them . . . until the new metals forged by earth-heat, indestructible themselves except by earth-destruction, shall walk upon the face of the earth as monsters . . . immortal until the end of earth time . . . until the powers men sought in the bowels of the earth and in darkness will become the powers upon the surface of the earth and in light . . . the powers shaped by the hands of men can outlast the men . . . the dark-

ness from below may cover the surface of the earth . . . unless men survive the metals they have wrought, life will be taken from them . . . until there comes upon the earth a new cycle of time and a new race of men seeking the light—"

Jacob heard steps behind him on the hard snow, and saw Omelko open his overcoat. At the Cossack's belt hung a heavy service revolver.

The Watchman's voice ceased abruptly.

Exasperated, Jacob peered behind him. Out of the shadow appeared the insignificant figure of Svetlov wrapped in an overcoat. At this Omelko relaxed and Anna folded up her notebook hurriedly. Vorontzov woke up at the silence.

Apparently Svetlov seemed surprised to find them all at the fire at this late hour. "Why do you meet late like this?" he observed in his halting English.

Abruptly he stepped to the altar, stretching out his bare hands to warm them. At this simple gesture the aspect of the group changed. Vorontzev coughed heavily in his chest, and Omelko went over to whisper to Anna. The moon, low in the sky, lighted only the form of the Watchman who had gone to the parapet. He looked like an old man in tribal dress, who had chanted a poem significant only to his failing memory.

Anna said very loud that she thanked them for notes on the folklore. Without a word Daoud went off.

Taking Jacob's arm, Michal walked back with him down the plaza.

"I wonder," she whispered, "if the prophets spoke like that."

If Jacob had been asleep, he might not have heard the shots an hour later; if he had been fully awake, he would have known what they were instantly. As it was, lying in a half coma before daylight, he was roused by a drumbeat of shots. Cursing the acoustics of the room which brought far-off sounds near, he listened, and then realized that he had heard a burst—five or more sharp cracks—from an automatic weapon. Then there had been an echo of two deeper explosions.

The only automatic on the summit belonged to Matejko. As quickly as he could he put on his shoes and sheepskin coat. Michal, who waked so easily, had slept through the faint explosions.

Outside the sky was almost dark. After a moment he could make out objects against the gray of the snow underfoot; but nothing moved.

Cautiously he called Matejko's name, and had no answer. Making his way across the plaza, he called again. The village street was silent. As he was going on toward the Lion Gate, he heard a faint movement. Brush stirred, and two shadows moved across a patch of snow.

Jacob did not call again. Matejko would have been alone. Unarmed himself, it was useless to wander around in this obscurity. Returning to the house, he stirred up the fire and waited for daylight.

When it was full light and people appeared in the street below, he explored the plaza. Matejko was not in the house he had occupied alone since Vasstan's departure, nor was he to be found elsewhere. The Polish colonel had been on the summit alone in the early hours of the morning; now he had disappeared. When Jacob searched for him along the wall, he noticed the two Russians still waiting at the gate with their rifles.

For the first time Jacob felt a sense of helplessness. There was no one he could talk to except Daoud, and Daoud did not care to talk beyond saying that the Polish colonel might have shot himself. But if so, Matejko could hardly have fired a full clip of cartridges. Besides, no trace of him remained.

Not until Father Hyacinth appeared late in the afternoon did Jacob learn anything more. Jan Matejko was dead. Obviously tired, the priest explained that he had repeated the prayers for the dead over Matejko's grave near the bell tower below. The Russian workmen had made a suitable grave.

The body, Father Hyacinth understood, had been crushed by a fall from the height. More than that he did not know. No, he had not asked if there had been bullet wounds in the body. "But assuredly the unfortunate soldier fell."

Unless the grave were dug up, nothing more than that could be

known for certain. What Jacob had heard in the night was no clear indication of what had happened. The first burst must have come from Matejko's pistol, and two shots that might have been from rifles had mingled with it. . . . Carefully Jacob examined the surface of the snow inside the ruined wall on both sides of the gate.

In reward, he found a half-dozen empty cartridge shells, of a caliber that might have fitted the Pole's pistol. They were scattered, half buried in the snow where a crisscross of tracks made a confused pattern—as if several men had stamped around deliberately to obscure the traces on the ground. There were no bloodstains visible. On the far side of the wall the descent was almost sheer. Jacob visualized the moody Pole wandering sleepless in the darkness and encountering of a sudden the two armed guards—firing at them in desperation or anger. Had he emptied his pistol and jumped from the wall? Had the two wounded him, and then thrown him down? There were no witnesses to testify as to that.

At the plaza he found Father Hyacinth waiting for him. Without explanation, the priest informed him, "After this morning no one may descend without a permit such as this."

And he showed Jacob a slip of cardboard on which a few words had been inscribed in Russian.

Michal had insisted on sorting out the belongings of the dead officer, although she had no notion where they might be sent. Except for his identification papers, with British countersign, and a creased photograph of his home in Lwów, she found nothing.

"Not even a watch or cigarette case, Jacob," she said miserably. "There's a ribbon that must belong to some decoration, but the medal isn't here. He must have sold all those things."

Fingering the crude chess set, she caught her breath. Carefully selecting a scarf that had been washed until it was ragged, she began to tie up the papers. It seemed important to her that they be kept. To burn them would be to destroy the last trace of Jan Matejko.

"Why do you keep them?"

Neither Michal nor Jacob had heard Paul come in the door. Nor

had their attention been drawn to the figure in tribal dress—in the loose trousers, waist girdle, and heavy jacket of a Kurd.

"Paul!" she cried. "You're not in uniform."

He explained that he had kept on the uniform only because it had been easier to travel in it as far as Araman. "Nobody outside asks questions of a soldier nowadays," he nodded. "I do not mean that I was a soldier, except for the uniform. No, I was a corpsman. And I have done what you are doing"—he squatted by Michal, as if in resuming his own clothing he had reverted to tribal manners—"so many times!"

Again she had the feeling that his eyes were questioning her without approval. "In Africa there were papers in so many languages—even Slovak and Arabic. We did them all up, of course. I wonder who read them and where they were sent—if anywhere." His glance traveled around the almost bare room and he said, "It is too late to do anything for him now."

If they had been able to confiscate Matejko's pistol, Jacob reflected, the Pole might still be alive. If Michal had not stirred his pride, so that he had begun to care for his own life again, he might be trailing after Vasstan down below at that moment. No, they had not been able to help him. It occurred to Jacob that Paul did not seem surprised by the death of the Pole.

"It is not too late to help another man to live," Paul said suddenly.

"Who?"

"Daniel Toghrak."

"The Assyrian? But how?"

"You are Americans."

Jacob eyed him curiously. "These two Americans, as you know very well, can't even climb down from Araman without a permit." When Paul was silent, he asked, "Have you a permit to enter?"

The man of Araman roused from his meditation, and his laugh echoed through the house. "I? To enter Araman?"

"Then how did you come up, Paul?"

"The way the black goats came. There *was* a herd once, and I tended them, a child. They did not like the steps, so they climbed a different path. I have not forgotten."

Before Jacob could question him he went from the room. Michal knotted the scarf, and asked, "Can we help the Assyrians, Jacob?"

"No, Michal."

After that evening one of her spells of silence settled on Michal. "I don't know why," she confessed. "Yes, I do. I feel so useless, and angry too. I wonder if marionettes ever feel that way."

When he tried to find the others, Jacob began to share her mood. Daoud and Father Hyacinth had disappeared; Imany and Gopal were deep in talk together. The quiet of the village was like the stillness before the sweep of a storm wind. He could not find Paul, until one of the young boys called at the door and signed for Jacob to come with him. It was nearly dark by then, and when his guide conducted Jacob to the altar, Paul and the Watchman were visible in the glow of the fire.

"I sent for you," the stretcher-bearer said, "because I am going down."

Unlike other orientals Jacob had known, he spoke swiftly to the point. "The *divan*—the council has begun. The Ghazi arrived from Sanjbulak, and tomorrow the Mullah Ismail will pitch his tents—his horsemen are descending now from the western pass."

Jacob wondered if Paul had been signaling with the sun telegraph, or if messengers came and went unseen. And the youth seemed to read his mind. "We have good eyes, Mr. Ide." For the first time he hesitated. "Those below are the patriarchal tribes of the heights. They used to hold this mount in reverence, coming here for counsel. Ay, they called it the Throne of Judgment. And in other years they had advice and aid from Araman."

"And now?"

"They may want it still."

Once Sir Clement had declared that Ismail would respect tidings from Araman. And now the tribes themselves had assembled at the shrine below.

"From whom?" Jacob asked.

Braced on his good arm against the stone, Paul looked into the fire, and the glow of it revealed the lines of weariness in his gaunt face. Now he spoke very slowly. "There are only three of us—left—on Araman."

Only three. Jacob said, "The Elder. And——"

"Myself and you."

"No one else?"

Unmistakably surprised, Paul glanced up. "Who else should there be, Mr. Ide? No, there is the patriarch who has never left his valley and this damaged student who speaks now, and you, a stranger, knowing nothing of the mountains."

At first Jacob could not believe that. There must be some other personality, or some authority that could be summoned. Then he reflected that the authority of Araman had been exerted only in the past, and that the outlying tribes, aware of this tradition of power, could not know what actually remained on the summit at this day. They might imagine much.

"What do you want me to do, Paul?" he asked, and wondered why he had not explained simply that he could do nothing.

Instead of answering at once, the man of Araman waited, as if the silence between them might speak of its own accord.

"If you——" Paul changed his words, saying, "If I send word that there is need, can you try to arrange for the Elder to be passed down? He has agreed to leave the fire."

"I can try, of course."

Without so much as a nod the man of Araman slipped over the parapet and dropped down to a narrow ledge below. Along this ledge he moved swiftly, as if it were full daylight. Gradually his body disappeared in the obscurity under the iridescence of the stars. This was evidently the path of the goats.

As he was making his way down to the plaza Jacob thought that Paul had really wanted himself to come down, but had been unwilling to ask it.

When he pushed through the door curtain, he found Daoud moving restlessly by the fire and Michal excited. "Jacob," she cried, "they are leaving us!"

"Tomorrow the priest is going to the monastery for advice," the Kurd explained, not meeting his friend's eyes. "I can work my way down from there. I must go, Jacob. Some report should be made to Baghdad of this—council."

Without pause, his words hurried on. They had planned out the

details: Father Hyacinth would carry down a bundle of food without being questioned; he, Daoud, could descend with the priest who had a pass. With two pairs of rude skis stored in the bell tower below they could make pretense of taking casual exercise until they were clear of observation.

"What about the Watchman, Daoud—and his legend? You were translating the saga——"

"I can do nothing more here, Jacob." The Kurd glanced anxiously at the curtained doorway. Not that he was afraid in a physical sense—he could not face uncertainty and strain. And Jacob remembered that once before he had fled from Araman.

"I understand, Daoud."

"And you—it is not safe to stay!"

Jacob tried to ease the tension with a jest. "It may be as safe as sliding down the mountains on one ski. Besides, we're American citizens."

For an instant the archaeologist stared. "Do you think your Parliament—your Congress, isn't it, will protect you here? I have seen your American congressmen. They do not know Iraq from Iran."

"I'm not relying on congressmen, Daoud."

"Have you a diplomatic passport, then?"

"I've no passport—only an out-of-date military identification."

"Destroy that!" In his anxiety Daoud stammered over the English words. "Is it—have you any *reason* for staying now, Jacob?"

The single thought of escape had seized on the Kurdish scientist; he no longer heeded Michal, yet to leave his friend behind would have injured his pride, and he argued fiercely against it.

"It's not a reason exactly. It's more of an idea and pretty hazy at that."

"A what?"

Daoud was not angered at Jacob. This burning anger in him came from his dread of the unknown forces gathering around Araman and his own awareness that he was deserting in this crisis the man who had shared his food and thoughts, his *rafik*, his friend. Deliberately he avoided looking at Michal, a woman.

"A dream, Daoud." She laughed.

It was a dream, Jacob knew, taking clearer form with each hour. To safeguard these mountains and Araman, the heart of the mountain region. To lift this area off the map of territorial disputes, to separate it from the oil fields, the airfields, the strategic communications of the earth demanded by the separate nations, to keep it intact, to internationalize it so that it might cease to be a breeding ground of conflict and might become a sanctuary; to pen its strategic minerals underground where they had lain for a myriad ages—yes, that was the stuff dreams were made on, and if he should speak of it to Daoud, the scientist would believe he had gone mad. Yet if he could not convince Daoud, his friend, of the possibility of making such a project an actuality, whom else could he convince?

"A scientific dream, something for the archaeologists," he explained. Carefully he asked if the archaeologists when they opened a tomb of ancient kings long buried—if they did not try first to protect what was inside. Experts at work on the tomb barred off the enclosure from intrusion and devoted months to extracting each object and studying it. Now that Araman was being opened up by no single expedition but by a kind of international grouping—with even Americans present—wasn't the first need to preserve it for international study while the Watchman still lived?

"You know we've done that on a smaller scale, Daoud. That is, we have foundations like the Rockefeller to advance the knowledge of science for humanity as a whole, and not tied to American political interests. There's the Nobel fund, too, for the advancement of peace. Think of the amount of work to be done here. It would take all next summer to put up housing for the experts to be called in, the Sanskrit scholars and ethnologists. There can't be so many of them, at that. Jackson of Columbia's dead; I don't know about Sir Aurel Stein. There must be Russians like Rostovtzeff, and Germans somewhere or other like Feist and Meyer——"

"Dead or lost to sight in the war years, or exiles, Jacob. Are you calling up ghosts?" For an instant something like hunger sharpened the Kurd's intent face. "Do you believe there is so much as a chance of preserving this as a theater for study?"

"There's always a chance. And it could be more than that."

"How much of a chance?"

The words were like a cry of appeal. A fantastic hope had touched the spirit of this Kurd, divided between his native fears and the indoctrination of Western teaching. He appealed instantly to his friend to tell him the reality of that hope. It was not merely that Jacob Ide knew more about the unpredictable happenings outside the mountains than Daoud could know. It was not that Daoud wanted to be reassured—of the two he was the greater realist. Instead, he was asking for the final word that the oriental can never utter, the yes or no that will decide a matter. Because in the mind of an oriental fate is forever unknowable and may not be decided by his own will. To Daoud, Jacob's dream must be either one of two things—an un hoped-for reality, or a casual American's hope of the unattainable.

Aware of that, Jacob hesitated. "Actually, not too good a chance, Daoud. But if an American expedition could explore the Gobi Desert for dinosaur eggs——"

"How good a chance?"

"About one in twenty."

At once the Kurd nodded. He recognized the truth. His instinct had warned him that Jacob's dream was hopeless. Then he was silent, troubled, unable to say good-by. Michal watched them, sitting apart, knowing that the men must speak their own farewell. After a minute Jacob picked up Sir Clement's papers, tied in a neat bundle. "You'd better take these to the Baghdad Museum, Daoud. We've finished with them."

Abruptly the Kurd threw his arm across Jacob's shoulder and hugged him. "Oh, there are so few men like you, Jacob."

Then, flushed and self-conscious, he drew away. "I'll endeavor to have R.A.F. planes sent here from Habbaniya airdrome."

He had grown up in the tutelage of the British; in the past they had resolved all his problems for him, and to them he was hastening now.

"By all means send R.A.F. planes, Daoud. How much of a chance that they'll really come?"

"If they could, the British aviators would restore order here. They have done so before."

"How much of a chance?"

A glance told the Kurd that his friend was making a joke of this.

"Better than your chance. Let us say one in five."

"Then we'll watch for them."

They both laughed, and Daoud was able to leave without harm to his pride. Only at the door did he remember to say that he hoped to see Miss Michal also in Baghdad.

"I hope so, too, Daoud."

After a little Father Hyacinth called, carrying a basket of walnuts as a present. And Michal rummaged among her belongings, to bring out the old rosary and return it to him. With some surprise he took it.

"You are well, my daughter?" he asked gently.

"Quite well now."

Hardly noticing Jacob, he took his farewell of her, saying that there would be a chamber awaiting her in the monastery if she decided to return there.

"But it's only a cave." She laughed.

There had been times, the priest replied gravely, when great dangers had threatened and human beings found shelter in caves. And in monasteries also the spark of human knowledge had been kept alight. "That hope remains always," he said simply.

When he had gone, Michal looked around her curiously. The polished metal of the Russian ikon and the bronze horse shone in the candlelight. "We still have Nikolka and Pegasus," she said.

It pleased the two guards sitting on the fallen stones under the lion's head that the next day was clear and warm. Except for allowing a black-garbed *batko* and a thin man clad like a Kurd to pass down, they had had nothing to do. They sat close together without speaking, chewing dried sunflower seeds and moving when the chill of shadow fell on them. They had not been able to read the writing on the bit of cardboard that the priest had exhibited to them, and they hoped that they had obeyed the order properly in letting him and his companion by. To obey an order was the one unalterable necessity of their lives since the mobilization for the war. But their

thoughts traveled comfortably down to the encampment where a meal of *kasha* and good hunks of gray bread awaited them.

When Svetlov, in his black otter-skin cap and heavy civilian overcoat, appeared up the steps, coughing, they had a moment of suspense. However, he gave no order and spoke of no order. They settled back where the sun was warmest.

Along the wall, at the break Michal had christened the lookout point, she and Jacob searched the valley below for any sign of Father Hyacinth and Daoud. No two skiers could be discerned in the hivelike activity of the growing camps. The black dots that were living men swarmed like bees. Down there they must be moving purposefully, to argument or conflict; from the height they appeared to stir constantly, aimlessly, as if it were against their nature to be still. Like bees.

It had been a strange fancy, that of the brown priest, of the City of God in the valley below.

"More bees," said Michal, pointing.

Hundreds of specks in clusters were moving in a dark line from the west. Apparently they crawled over the snow; actually, Jacob knew by the pace of their approach they must be horsemen trotting fast. He had seen that array before.

"The army of Mullah Ismail," he identified it.

After watching it for a moment, Michal asked if they couldn't take their walk around everything. She meant all their familiar spots—from the thicket where the ivy grew to the waterfall and the altar height. She was cold, and she walked quickly in the graceful stride that was so like a dance. Passing the sundial, she stopped to clean its face carefully. By the bronze globe of the sky she paused thoughtfully.

"It seems friendly now," she observed. "Is that because we know what it is, Jacob?"

She lingered over the instruments as if holding to the minutes of time; as if it were a gain to her to keep each minute shared between them. Jacob felt a faint impatience at this dawdling that kept him from observation of the camp as the Herki riders came in. If only he had the German's binoculars!

She thought, I am breaking into pieces, all separating and coming

away; I don't know what to hold to, while he is growing stronger with purpose. *Why can't we speak of it?*

"Jacob," she asked suddenly, "just how real is the possibility of making this country international and safe? Oh, I'm not saying it the right way—you know what I mean. Wouldn't it need full agreement between the four great powers, in the Security Council, to make a kind of world Geneva out of Araman?"

It seemed that he had an answer to that.

"If all this country were settled and developed, Michal, there'd be no possibility. But look at these mountains. Almost unexplored by Westerners. The people are tribal—they would be content to carry on their village life. No existing nation would actually lose any productive territory, because these *are* bare mountain chains, and anyway Iraq and Iran and Turkey have never established a workable authority in Kurdistan. But the main thing would be to get the western powers, the big fellows, to agree to leave the oil and minerals here unexploited. The whole thing would be an experiment, but at least a practical experiment."

Carefully she listened, her slim fingers gripping the rim of the globe of the sky. Her eyes, narrowed, seemed faintly mocking. "Put in simple words, you are asking for a Utopia to be marked out, to see if it would work."

"We can't go back to Geneva."

"Or to Cairo." Her head turned away from him quickly. She felt weak and ill, and she told herself she must not be sick. Aloud she said with a ripple of amusement, "It could be so nice, darling. With Sanskrit scholars skiing for their health like so many snow rabbits. And indoors, all the worried diplomats playing an endless chess tournament instead of arguing around polished conference tables. Then all their interpreters and wise specialists in foreign trade and strategic materials could look on as pure kibitzers."

Words had become brittle, and Michal could not stop. "The generals of the staffs could play poker, and the espionage agents could be sent to glean medicinal herbs up the steepest mountains instead of stealing each other's secrets, or shooting each other in dark alleys as the fashion used to be. The nice young R.A.F. fliers could practice chasing vultures, or—— Don't listen to me, Jacob. I don't know why I'm saying stupid things."

"Michal——"

"There's Mr. Svetlov," she said.

The solitary Russian was climbing up from the plaza. Slowly he moved, as if in pain or cautious of his step. When he coughed, his breath whistled between his chapped lips. At Michal's smart jacket he blinked inflamed eyes that lifted involuntarily to her face. "Lady," he said in English, "tell me."

"What?"

Svetlov uttered each word without expression. "This sentence." From an overcoat pocket filled with scraps of paper he drew a soiled copy of a book, and she saw the title, Shakespeare's *Comedy of the Tempest*. His gloved finger pointed to words on the end of a page:

. . . sometime am I

All wound with adders who with cloven tongues

Do hiss me into madness.

"Adders are what?"

"Why, they are snakes."

Although he scanned the printed words and he nodded, the Russian stood before Michal, eying the light chain of imitation pearls around her slim throat. She thought he was closed in upon himself like one who had been long in prison, or ill. He had not followed them to ask the meaning of a word of Shakespeare's. Why should he care for Shakespeare? In her own distress, Michal thought that Svetlov, too, might be suffering in mind.

Svetlov's dark arm swept out at the altar height. "*These be fine things.*" And he added cautiously, "Pretty?"

"It's lovely." Michal smiled, wondering how many sayings of Caliban he could conjure up.

"Michal——" Jacob was losing patience.

"Fine, like this—park." Svetlov produced a photograph from his inner pocket and displayed it—a view of a giant statue of Lenin with an arm thrust skyward. Evidently he was thinking of the summit of Araman as an immense monument—to what? She tried to smile persuasively.

"Mr. Svetlov, can you take my husband down with you to the camps?"

"Take?"

Before Jacob could say anything, Michal explained. "He needs a permit, a pass, doesn't he? If he goes with you, it will be the same as a pass."

Perceptibly gratified, the Russian assented, and Michal turned to Jacob. "You must go quickly—before there's ice on the way." Avoiding his eyes, she said hurriedly, "I know you have to go, Jacob, to the meeting."

"Then we'll both try it."

Michal shook her head mischievously. "My appearance unveiled at a council would appall your tribesmen. Daoud made that only too clear."

She gave him no chance to argue. Walking down to the plaza with Svetlov between them, she chattered about Caliban, as if Jacob were leaving for only a few hours. At the sundial she stopped, rubbing at the bronze face with one of her gloves. "Come back as soon as you can, my lover," she said softly.

"Tomorrow."

"If you can."

The Russian glanced curiously at the delicate woman who seemed too frail to be wandering in the winter snow. She walked away quickly, gracefully, toward the village, turning to wave her glove at them. After a moment the lame American stirred and began to walk along the path to the gate.

There two men with rifles who had relieved the guards of the noon hour barely glanced at them, being occupied with starting a fire out of broken branches against the rocks. Svetlov touched Jacob's arm. "You want?" he questioned, pointing down.

"Yes."

Cautiously the Russian began to descend the wet rock. Discovering that the American could not keep up with him, he went on alone. It gave him a feeling of achievement to do so. Those fragile, luxury-lapped Americans were not suited to this hard frontier.

In Tiflis he had been informed that this was the outer frontier zone now, and himself one of the pathfinder *yeikās*, or cells, push-

ing outward to free the giant tortured Soviet Union from its Barricades. About those Barricades Svetlov had read much. They had been erected around the land-locked mass of mid-Eurasia, the heart of the mightiest continent, by monarchists and fascists, and the warlike powers that sought to pen the blind, bound Soviet giant behind barriers. Now the Barricades must be broken down, so that the united people of the Soviet could gain access to the outer lands, the ports, and the seas that had been the monopoly of the outer jailer powers until now. Near at hand, within Turkey and Iran, other pathfinders were breaking through the Barricades, winning bloodless battles planned by the directing authority of the Kremlin to push the frontiers down into the sea. . . . Svetlov had been imprisoned in his youth; he could feel the urgency of smashing the Barricades. To him the Soviet, wounded by its efforts to defend itself during two wars, was a tormented, poisoned, and inarticulate Caliban.

When he reached the valley floor and turned into the barbed-wire enclosure that housed the Russians, he went directly to the one-and-a-half-ton truck. Within it sounded the faint humming of a radio in circuit. The operator sat holding to one earphone while lighting a cigarette with the other hand. He wore no uniform or insignia and he glanced only casually at Svetlov.

"Anything today?" asked the latter.

The operator shook his head.

"Anything at all?" Svetlov hesitated as he asked this. The man in the ragged coat, scratching at a lighter with a broken thumbnail, was in touch with those unseen beings who issued *orders*. In his hand lay the key of operations.

"Only storms and the devil's own amount of static," observed the operator sleepily. "This machine was never made for mountains," he added in disapproval.

With her gloves off and her jacket open, Michal sat before Imanya's small silk loom, her fingers shooting the sharp pointed spindles through the white strands as the woman of Araman worked the crosspiece over her head. When the thread tangled

they both bent over it. Michal could not keep her thoughts on the flying spindles. *White hands cling to the bridle rein*, but Sir Clement and Jan Matejko were dead. You are a long time dead. . . . Imanya poured hot tea from the caldron and offered it to her with a dish of dried peaches soaked in wine.

After that Michal roused herself and took some embers from the hearth in a burner, going up to her own dark house. For the first time the plaza was dark at night. The flare of the altar fire whipped by a heavy wind sent shadows dancing across the hard snow.

After starting the fire in her room Michal lit all the lamps and curled up on the bed between her household gods, Pegasus and Nikolka, to wait.

Jacob had made his way through drifting smoke, past tethered horses and the loom of black tents, aware that the thousands of men gathered around him were divided into three sections—the Russian enclosure, the camp of the Azerbaijan Kurds from across the frontier, and the camp of Mullah Ismail. Torches danced through the murk, sheep pressed frantically ahead of boys who drove them, and wailing calls rose over the tumult of the clustering humans. In this maelstrom of life Jacob had found no one to speak with.

When he moved toward the Soviet barbed wire, to find Dr. Anna, a throng of tribesmen hurried by. Joining them, he was swept into the door of a large log building, filled with men sitting shoulder to shoulder in near darkness. Above them shone a white screen on which human beings moved fantastically as shadows. To these motionless spectators, the life on the screen displayed itself as a miracle.

To Jacob, it was a motion picture badly lighted. The only sound pulsed out of a phonograph in the strident beat of jazz. The man operating the phonograph shouted some explanation of the film at intervals, in Kurdish. Jacob caught the word *Amricai*—American—and then realized with a shock of surprise that the commentator referred to the picture, not to him.

The scene was within a skyscraper hotel in New York—he recog-

nized a glimpse of the skyline—in which an actress, occupying what seemed to be a luxury suite, was trying on dresses. Since no voices issued from the screen, the people moved and gestured in pantomime. They picked up telephone receivers, pushed silent buttons, gestured over radios, and laughed at jests that were secret to themselves.

"*Malikeh!*" muttered a tribesman pressed against Jacob's knees. A queen. To the primitive minds of the watchers, the actress appeared to be regal in her splendor and authority. Within her closet hung an array of court dresses, and behind them the camera disclosed a young man in white tie and tails hidden away. The story, then, was a comedy; but the audience did not know that.

The scene cut to the street outside where a fireman was opening a hydrant. From it burst a flood of water. Into this danced a dozen half-naked urchins. The watching tribesmen murmured, wondering. This glimpse of water issuing from a metal post seemed to them incredible as if a rock, tapped in the desert, had given forth a living stream.

The children vanished and the bedroom reappeared, with the actress developing a stormy temper. Another woman, almost as splendid, now engaged her in silent persiflage. A youth in uniform with a small round hat cocked over his eye led in a miniature fluffy dog. Over this lapdog the two queens stormed, and, as Jacob winced, they snatched at each other's hair, and tore at the resplendent garments covering the shapely bodies. The bellboy made motions as if seconding a favored fighter in the ring, and from between the filmy negligees in the closet the hidden man smiled in cynical amusement.

Turning impulsively, Jacob forced his way through the men wedged around the door and out into the cold night air. For a second he thought of the Soviet film that Daoud had seen—of men handling guns and tanks in battle. Between that and this there stretched the width of the world.

Then, as he moved listlessly away from the cinema hut, through the groups in sheepskins and wool waiting to see the new marvel displayed by the Russians, he was aware that another man followed in his steps.

Jacob kept on without pause until he was past the guards at the

wire entrance. Then he turned sharply back, and almost collided with his shadow. It was Badr.

The big Havaband Kurd bent his head, smiling, and touched Jacob's hand with both his own. Then he beckoned the American and hurried on to where torches gleamed.

After a few paces he stopped, looking pleased. From beneath the wavering torch came a thin voice. "Mr. Ide, sah, good evening. How is health Miss Michal?"

Beside the servant who held the torch Mr. Parabat of Parabat Limited shivered with the back of his greatcoat turned to the wind. "Congratulations, Mr. Ide, on most impressive New York buildings and exquisite American costumes!"

So the Zoroastrian merchant had been among the spectators!

"That picture? That's not the real America, Mr. Parabat."

"Not? Then what is America?"

Before Jacob could answer, the merchant touched him in warning. A group of Kurds strode into the light, the leader bareheaded, his coat open to the wind. A rifle on his arm, his dark eyes vigilant, he swung by with only a glance at them. Jacob had seen hunters walk like that, observant of every movement before them, patient and purposeful.

"The Ghazi," whispered Mr. Parabat. "The Atabeg of the Azerbaijani Kurds. A patriot, but not a fool."

These shifting groups of humanity seemed to Jacob to be so many fragments of a kaleidoscope, each separate from the others yet falling together when the glass was moved. When he started to question Mr. Parabat, the Zoroastrian cautioned him and bade him come to his quarters.

"I will elucidate for you, Mr. Ide, if you will correspondingly inform me of Miss Michal's health."

It occurred to Jacob that his companion was frightened. Yet the small tent they entered was lighted and warmed by a kerosene stove, and the servant, who proved to be Jemail, served them a supper of curry, patties, and sour milk. "This climate is like aurora boreal," his host informed him, "but my factory is closed by artillery, and I have anxiety to view present situation." And he added thoughtfully, "The situation is deteriorating rapidly."

In his quaint words, the little man outlined the crisis at Araman quite clearly. The army of Mullah Ismail, driven from Riyat and the foothill villages, had ascended to this valley at the frontier to take refuge with the Russians. They, in turn, had promised Ismail a gift of heavy machine guns and anti-tank guns suitable for the mountains, with a plentiful supply of ammunition. Mullah Ismail expected these weapons the next day, and with them he could hold the higher ridges against the British-sponsored columns from Iraq.

At the same time the Ghazi had led his personal following westward from the Sanjbulak region where there had been fighting. The Ghazi had the silent support of the Democratic party of Kurdistan, which, in turn, had been fathered in Tiflis, or in Baku, the Soviet oil center.

"The Ghazi was to be puppet of Kurdistan puppet state. But he has own ideas upon subject, and wishes to be creator of *fait accompli* state realistically. He has that fixed idea. And has likewise moved out of Russian frontier-extension zone. In pursuance of aims, he makes friendly *pourparlers* with British. In like measure Mullah Ismail has pride, and more religion. Both have fixed idea of independent Kurdistan, but know free Kurdistan idea being used by both great powers to further own aims. It is a pity."

It was a pity, because being a tribal Kurd and hot-headed for that reason, the Ghazi would never allow the Mullah Ismail to receive the overbalancing aid of the modern artillery even as a gift from the Russians, nor would the Mullah permit the Iranian leader to treat with British agents.

"So if those guns appear on scene like *deus ex machina*, there will be civil strife, and if bloody, the old tribal feud will not be healed. And if so, the Russian military may appear on scene to maintain order and banish illiteracy and landowners." Mr. Parabat sighed. "Trouble the waters to fish in them. Both the British and Russians have troubled waters here. Can they fish in same pool? I think not."

"Suppose the Ghazi and the Mullah happen to agree together?" Jacob asked.

"That will not be allowed to happen."

After a moment Jacob asked abruptly, "What if the United

States should guarantee—that is, support—an independent Kurdistan? A real one, I mean.”

The Zoroastrian smiled. “That would never happen.”

“But if it did?”

Hesitating, the little man looked at his guest. “Do you wish truthful answer or polite response?”

“In this case—the truth.”

“An American promise would be broken reed. Why broken? During war Americans sent all aid to Soviet Russia. Now the Soviet spokesmen say, you lend money to Britain and form bloc against the Soviet. What *is* your purpose? Your President Wilson made pledge of absolutely unmolested opportunity for these new small nations like Iraq to form autonomous government. Your martyred President Roosevelt signed Atlantic Charter during war promising self-government to small nations. I regret that those reeds were broken.”

Jacob nodded. He had expected that, and had no answer for it. This elderly Zoroastrian, a man of peace, had come up here to observe the crisis because hundreds of thousands of Zoroastrians in the regions near by might have their fate decided by it. And Mr. Parabat was very much afraid. “What do you hope for, then?” he asked bluntly.

Closing his overcoat carefully about him, Mr. Parabat went to the tent entrance and stepped outside. When Jacob followed, he said, “Wait a minute.”

After their eyes had become accustomed to the murk, he pointed up. Far overhead, on the summit of the mount, the faint glow of the altar fire was visible.

“That,” he said.

It seemed to cheer him to hear that Michal was still on the summit.

“Do you know a man named Paul Kaimars?” Jacob asked.

Mr. Parabat did not answer at once. Instead he glanced up at the tall American. “Why do you mention him?”

“Because I want to talk with the Mullah Ismail, and Paul is the best man I know to interpret.”

"It is possible," said Mr. Parabat, "that you will see him tomorrow."

When the lamp was put out, although the stove still burned, Jacob saw the Zoroastrian kneeling on his sleeping quilt to pray.

By early morning the wind had risen, and flurries of dry snow lashed the tents. The tethered horses edged themselves together, their backs to the wind blasts. Pulling his quilt close around his throat, Jacob listened and knew that there would be no climbing the face of Araman for many hours. He heard Mr. Parabat groan and mutter something.

"What?" he called.

"Tellurian wrath is loose." And the man from India huddled deeper into his quilts.

Then Jacob heard the pealing of the bell. Close at hand, its clangor came over the rush of the wind, and for a moment he thought it had worked loose from its fastenings in the tower and was swinging with the gusts. Yet its peal came hard and regular, as if beating out a message. Certainly somebody's hand was working it. Long ago he had caught that pealing in their house, but it had not seemed to be a message.

Other sounds intruded. Steel clanked, as men walked past the tent. The murmur of their voices drifted back. Mr. Parabat was stirring, pulling his clothing over his pajamas. The camp had roused, at the bell, before dawn.

In the Russian wire, Svetlov made his way over to the truck where the operator warmed his hands against a lantern, cursing. There was nothing coming through the storm area except static.

"Then we are muffled out?" Svetlov asked, to make certain. He did not relish the long silence of the air. And it would be dangerous to make even a slight mistake at a time like this.

"This is muffled out, my boy. But if Nakhicheven Division wants to get word through, they will do it, if a plane has to bring it."

"In this weather?"

The operator's thin lips drew down. This sickly Svetlov, this man of Smolensk with the weak lungs, was soft and vacillating. Of

nights he read himself to sleep with an English play about fairies and a monster. These White Russians had old superstitions sticking to them like cancer germs. They listened for voices in the wind. "Who sounded off that antique bell?" he demanded.

"I don't know. Perhaps the wind."

"It was no wind. Somebody played a tune on it!" Because the sick man hesitated, the operator was peremptory. "Is that French-speaking priest still around? No? You aren't sure? Well, take it down, Ilia."

"The bell?"

"The bell in the tower. Unship it—hide it away in a wagon, in the ambulance wagon. Then the devil himself can't send any messages by it."

Having an explicit order, Svetlov moved away briskly. The operator thought: he's an automaton, has to be set going. *Ceaseless vigilance is necessary to avoid mistakes.* Now Anna was another head of cabbage entirely. Even if she was a Bashkir girl of the green steppeland, she wanted to learn the hang of things. She would answer back until she understood.

When Svetlov called Major Omelko, the Cossack was meditating in his blankets over a cigarette, while Anna prepared the morning tea and kasha. She liked to do this for him.

"What's the matter with the bell?" Omelko objected immediately. "I heard it, but why shouldn't it ring at daybreak? It's an Armenian bell, and we have plenty of Armenians around here."

He had no desire to go out into the wind to superintend the lowering of a hefty bronze bell.

"It's an order."

"It's a blind pig of an order." The Cossack made no move to stir out of his blankets.

"You'd better get it down all the same," called Anna cheerfully, "or it may start ringing again."

At that Omelko grunted and stretched himself and spat. Svetlov wondered what this front-line soldier thought about when he sat without reading or speaking, simply sat and looked into the distance. It needed a whip of the tongue to make this Ukrainian exert himself, now that he was finished with the military front and occu-

pied a post of honor in charge of the transport and guards on this new front against the Barricades. Didn't he know that when the Barricades were broken down and the Soviet was freed, there would be peace?

Mr. Parabat led Jacob over the tangle of woolen tent ropes of the Herki camp to the small sleeping tent of Mullah Ismail. They had to go around it to reach the entrance on the sheltered side, where a heavy canopy projected. The Mullah, Mr. Parabat explained, never kept guards at his door. But a massive figure reclined comfortably on the entrance carpet, intoning a song. Jacob caught familiar words: "*Es geht mit gedämpftem Trommelklang.*"

At sight of them Vasstan sat up. "God in heaven, the missionary and the banker. Too late and too little."

A whiff of spirits came from him when he spoke, assuring them that Ismail was absent in conference with the heads of the tribes. He, Vasstan, was awaiting the outcome, and he invited the American Military Intelligence and the merchant made by British money to join his watch.

"Not British money," Mr. Parabat murmured uneasily.

"No? Enough of it you have here spent. Still, I predict a Soviet victory here."

"Why?" Jacob asked.

"Strange that this missionary who should give information always seeks it. Well, I answer you. Because the Kurds are sitting now in the cinema house, with Russian bayonets around them. My Assyrians also have joined forces with the Soviet power. Food and force are good arguments; to give food and threaten by force. An unanswerable argument, that, Captain Ide." The German was enjoying himself after silencing the Zoroastrian. "So I predict victory for the Soviet circus men here and in Iran where a strike has stopped the working of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company. Also in Iraq, where the Kirkuk production has been struck also. The stoppage of oil hurts the British pounds sterling, or should I say dollars, Captain Ide? Is there such a strike in Baku, or Ploesti, under the Russians? Never! I have some ability to add facts together, as you

know, Captain Ide, and I predict that before life is extinct in my carcase the British Empire will be reduced to a bankrupt borrower of American dollars. You agree, of course, Mr. Parabat?"

Uneasily the Zoroastrian shook his head. With full daylight the wind was falling. Herki riflemen, their shawl turbans wrapped around their heads, had gathered to sit at a respectful distance from the three foreigners who were so obviously holding an important conference of their own at the entrance to Mullah Ismail's tent.

Inspired by his audience, and elated by more than cognac, the German conjured up a word picture to frighten the Zoroastrian—of Soviet power reaching for and taking in the food-producing areas of the outer world in eastern Europe and here in the Middle East. Beyond that control, as in Greece and the remnant of Germany itself, the outer populations of the West were being crowded together, backed up against the seas, unable to grow food for themselves. "Elsewhere, beyond the new Soviet frontier, there is famine also in Bengal-India and the Chinese coast. As you should know, Mr. Parabat."

The Zoroastrian touched Jacob, nodding slightly. Through the crouching tribesmen Paul was making his way toward the tent. At sight of Vasstan he hesitated, then knelt down by the nearest spectators.

"At least peace itself has come to India," Mr. Parabat murmured.

"Peace! Peace, my Zoroastrian money-changer, is no more than a dream, an opium dream of the world. At intervals between wars, there is a truce, yes." Hearing no denial, the German raised his voice. "War is the natural state of human beings, and as they change, so it also changes its shape. Now the Soviet uses biology instead of battles. I count populations, and I find already under its *imperium* perhaps two hundred and thirty million human beings. Soon will be added the hundreds of millions here and in India and China. Asia will be propagating its spawn, to bring pressure against the surviving democracies in the West. How many human beings in Anglo-France? Eighty-five million, penned in narrow industrial life."

He seemed to strive to expand his own personality, to draw into

it all the currents of conflict that besieged Araman, as if he himself were the dynamic mover of events and not a shell of a man made voluble by alcohol.

Paul spoke beside him. "Colonel Vasstan, are you so sure the hundreds of millions in Asia will yield to military control?"

Challenged, the German's head jerked around. "With what will they resist?"

"Perhaps with their spirit; perhaps they will not resist, and not yield."

"A young spiritualist. A non-resister!"

Jacob remembered that Vasstan, who knew so much, was not acquainted with Paul, the son of Kaimars.

"As you say, Colonel Vasstan, it will be a conflict between the spirit of Asia and the arms of the West."

His quiet irritated Vasstan. "Behind the armies, my youthful prophet, ride the four horsemen of the Revelation. Will you resist *them*?"

"We have known them also. But as Saint John spoke of them in his Revelation, they were four dark horsemen, Colonel. The first was *conquest*, the second war, the third famine, and the fourth was death. Only your European artists have painted four mythical horsemen riding abreast. In Revelation, the dark riders follow each other and conquest comes first, to be followed by war, and after that famine and then death."

Listening closely, Jacob became aware that Paul was speaking to him as well as Vasstan and was watching movements outside the tent.

"And if they do follow each other, my student of the Bible?"

"Beware of conquest. For the others will come after."

The German did not laugh. His keen mind caught at the reasoning. "And where will you escape the relationship between conquerors and subjects—in some form? Rule must be by the victorious state from above. Military authority must support it. Peace, you have bespoken. So! When did the world enjoy peace, except under a supreme armed state? The *pax Romana* came after the iron Roman legions; the Mongol peace after the conquests of

Genghis Khan. And, if you will, British colonial peace, of the last century, came after the British ironclads."

"There was peace, Colonel, before such organized war began."
"Never so."

"Before Babylon and Nineveh, and the first throwing ax and bronze swords."

"Among primitives? *Ach*, the soldier was ignorant then."

"Soldiers never existed then. They were created by the modern state."

Vasstan seemed pleased. "Good, student. Yet you have yourself trapped. The state was in itself a product of warfare; the war leaders became the first kings and counselors. So says Keller—"

"Darwin denied it, for he believed that intelligent man sprang from a gentle species, already knowing the order of society."

"If so, Spencer says without war the world would still be inhabited by weak men sheltering themselves in caves."

"And Nicolai says that warfare increased directly with growth of populations and indirectly with standards of living."

"Who, I ask, was this Nicolai?"

Paul smiled. "A German who escaped to Switzerland."

"So! You would say that war grew out of society as it progressed and is not a natural heritage of the past?"

"Someone wiser than I said that, Colonel."

"Not a scientist."

"It was my father, Kaimars."

Now Jacob was certain that Paul, crouching apart from them, meant for him to hear what passed between them, and that Paul was talking against time, waiting for something unperceived by the foreigners.

Vasstan, angered, began to shout. "Conflict is inbred in us; the victor in that conflict lives, the loser dies. What does the American Military Intelligence think?"

Jacob was thinking: the sky has cleared and the way is open up to the summit. He said, "I think Paul has spoken the truth. Warfare is an invention of society, and it has become the greatest activity of that society. But it's a truth we won't face. I mean that we'd have to break down the old progression of society toward

war. We've tried limiting it without getting anywhere; we've tried balancing military powers and failed. The best we've evolved is a security council of certain nations, which is the old balance of power under a new name."

"Then it is with me you agree?"

"Only in that you can't stop the making of weapons, and if they're made, they will be used by somebody. What you can change is the mentality of men, even in a mass. Some groups exist today that have become incapable of taking up modern annihilation weapons to attack others. The Swiss and the Esquimaux aren't the only ones. I would say that the English and the Dutch and my own people have lifted themselves above any attempt to gain advantage by using modern weapons. There may be others. I don't know. But down the scale in intelligence, or whatever you choose to call it, there are still the great majority of peoples. Weapons exist—all kinds of 'em. And those others, who haven't had experience with utter destruction, or are afraid not to use the weapons, or have the calousness to try—they will still buy or make them and use them. Wars will not stop until the last strata of human beings down the scale of intelligence have tried modern arms and found them too destructive."

"Until the Siberians and Patagonians and Pathans have gained the enlightened culture of Anglo-Americans?"

"I wouldn't call it culture."

"The missionary spirit then." Vasstan focused all his attention on Jacob. "Do you know what that means, when the next war is waged against the United States? I tell you. I have seen Jodl's comments on the general memorandum of your own Joint Chiefs of Staff. *Aber*, you have the true missionary spirit, so you make no move until you are attacked. Also, you have no half-serviceable intelligence operating in foreign countries, so inevitably you will not be aware of the time or power of the attack upon you, which will be by fissional energy rocket propelled. The first volleys of descending rockets will disintegrate your city centers along the seaboard, around the great lakes, and down the Mississippi region. Remember, this is what your own staff anticipates. Then, indeed, you will lose your industrial centers, and famine and pestilence will

follow the deaths of scores of millions. Think you the remnant of you will have desire to continue to defend themselves?"

"I think so."

"Admirable spirit! But where will the remnant be? In the outer islands, like Hawaii, and in Alaska. Also scattered in the deserts and mountains. And of course sheltered in your great caverns, like the Mammoth. Also there will be some ships at sea. So will your people become like primitives again, sheltering in caves and heights, and seeking for food, cut off from knowledge of the outer world. As Spengler predicts, you will revert to the eternal peasant, digging in the bare soil."

The eyes in the shaggy head glowed vindictively. "You will be reduced to existing like these tribal Kurds. No, you will be less than they, since they have learned to gather food skillfully, and they have no pestilence in their valleys. What power will be left to the mighty missionary American nation then?"

To the prodding of his words Jacob made no answer. He thought: this man is helpless except for his mind, and his mind strains to hold its authority over us by words.

"What will be left you?" Vasstan snarled.

"When the earth has been shaken, and the cities of the nations fall, and the islands and mountains are not to be found as they were," said Paul gravely, "then the sovereignty of the earth will pass to the Lord. That is foretold in Revelation."

"Lies!" shouted Vasstan. "Ancient lies!"

Paul sprang up to look beyond the tent. The tribesmen were no longer listening to Vasstan. Enraged by this distraction, he raised his voice. "So, I am mistaken. It is this boy who is the missionary."

Across the shredding mist overhead a shaft of light passed and vanished.

Then an odd thing happened. Vasstan, finding himself ignored, opened his mouth to crush the listeners with words. His heavy body quivered. His voice came out in a scream, and he choked.

"Please," Paul whispered, touching Jacob's shoulder, "come with me."

He passed quickly through the tribesmen and Jacob followed, leaning heavily on his cane because his leg was stiff with long sitting. After them trotted Mr. Parabat.

Vasstan hesitated, then, sensing a new movement in the encampment, lurched up to peer around him. At once he noticed that throngs of tribesmen were moving toward the bell tower where a crowd had collected. Planting his feet firmly in the snow, he remained where he was, to watch for the explosion he anticipated among the high-strung Kurds.

The blue of the sky showed through the thinning mist; from the steaming summit of Araman came elusive flashes of light, as if the sun were reflected on something moving. Jacob guessed that the bronze reflector must be in motion, in clear sunlight above him. Someone was trying to signal through the curtain of the mist.

"They are coming down," Paul told him, waiting for Jacob to catch up.

On a shoulder of the rock, near the summit, figures moved, descending.

"Vishtapa—the one you call the Watchman. I sent a call to him this morning before he left the fire."

"By the bell?"

"How else? He will need help to descend, and it is dangerous. But what else could I do?"

For an instant Paul stopped to watch the throng pressing around the bell tower. Herki tribesmen were arguing heatedly with the Cossack Omelko at the small entrance of the tower. Up in the open bell chamber teamsters were at work attaching ropes. Jacob sensed that the Kurds were both curious and angry at this invasion of the tower. After a searching glance, Paul hurried on.

As he did so he explained. He was afraid of the temper of the Kurds in the gathering. What the appearance of the Elder would accomplish he could not foretell; but the Kurds would listen to a voice from Araman, and Mullah Ismail, at least, could be influenced. "His voice will be that of the *Kahangan*, the old ancestors. They will not hear me in council, Mr. Ide—I am too young."

Hastily Paul whispered his fears, watching each passerby to be certain he was not overheard. The Kurds were being manipulated to their destruction as a people; they had arms and would use them on the slightest sign of violence; those weapons they must put aside. They could trust neither the new Democratic party spon-

sored by Tiflis nor the vague assurance of independence that had come from Baghdad. Their only chance lay in joining together, in keeping peace, and, regardless of British or Russian pressure, putting their case before the Security Council of the United Nations. If they could get word through to the outer world. "If only a voice from Araman could be heard!"

"There's a chance of that."

"You don't know my people, Mr. Ide! To agree together and to keep quiet and wait, that is the last thing they will do."

At the wire entrance Sergeant Daniel and his Assyrian veterans stood guard. Jacob noticed that they had their rifles again. After a second's hesitation the old Assyrian allowed his two friends to pass in, but they stopped Mr. Parabat.

As they stepped through the door of the cinema hut, the talk ceased as if at a signal gong. Jacob had time only for a glance at the blank screen overhead, the fine carpet spread over the dirt, at the dozen chieftains of Kurdistan separated into groups. At the elbow of Mullah Ismail sat his son Baba Beg tense with excitement, beside the minstrel with the scarlet headcloth. No one seemed to heed an orderly in Russian uniform with a tray of tea glasses and cake. Jacob saw no sign of another Russian present—apparently the chieftains had been left to themselves in the hut.

Then Paul, answering a challenge from the Ghazi, was speaking, gesturing, making clear that the Elder of Araman would enter the camp in an hour or more. This had an instant effect, and even the Ghazi threw himself back against a cushion to meditate. But Ismail's eyes were on the American, and he asked a question of Paul. His thin face had the weariness of incessant care and little sleep.

In contrast, Baba Beg sat like a statue, anxious and proud, a rifle over his slender knees.

"We cannot stay here." Paul turned swiftly to Jacob. "But Mullah Ismail has greeted you in God's name. He has seen no American before, yet he has heard your people are friendly. Now he asks if you have any message for the Kurds."

Jacob questioned the youth with his eyes.

"You must speak, Mr. Ide. Every minute of quiet now is an advantage to us. Only, tell them the truth. There must be *some* hope you have for us." Paul's voice was thin with strain, and abruptly he cried a word to the listeners.

It flashed through Jacob's mind that Paul had planned this since the sounding of the bell. For a moment he studied the faces turned to him, trying to read them. In that poor light he sensed only their tension—the brittle edge of anxiety. He thought of Araman. But what could he say of that to men who had revered Araman for generations?

Even while his mind raced, he was aware of the servant edging out of the door beside him.

"Greet the Mullah Ismail and—and you know the others—for me," he told Paul. "Tell them I am not the spokesman of my government. I have no authority to be here. I am their friend, only that——"

As Paul interpreted, Jacob thought: their faces are blank as Indians', and I am speaking as if to Navahos or Apaches; yet their faces are like mine, and they are children. How can I tell them the truth? And with a sudden impulse he spoke as if to his own kindred. "You have been shut up in these hills of yours. You do not realize that the great war is over, because it has come here into your valleys in another form that is not the war you understand but the working out of schemes."

They were shut off from communication with the outer world, yet within a stone's throw a radio was sending reports of their actions to cities beyond the mountains.

"America knows nothing about you. You have sent no spokesman to us. It will be a long time before the outer world knows the truth of what is happening here, and until that time comes, there is nothing you can do but unite, and keep your arms without using them, and wait."

They had caught the appeal in his voice, and Ismail raised his head. Paul smiled for the first time. "The Mullah says that waiting is bitter for wounded men, but its fruits may be sweet for their children."

Before Jacob could go on, one of the enclosure guards pushed past him and called out something. As one man, the Kurds stirred, and the Ghazi strode out the door with his followers after him.

Ismail, passing Jacob, spoke briefly.

"He asks," Paul interpreted gravely, "why America, which has made planes and guns for all the nations, has sent nothing to the Kurds?"

In his anxiety the Mullah had not waited for a reply. Outside the door, they were staring beyond the camp at the dark line of the eastern trail. A half mile away, on rising ground, a convoy of six trucks had halted. These were the vehicles bringing to Mullah Ismail's army the weapons promised by Soviet agents, and they had arrived on time. Evidently the drivers were cautious about approaching a strange encampment without an invitation.

"If they would only stay out there," Paul muttered, his glance searching the steps to the summit, where four men were descending slowly.

Out of the corner of his eye Jacob saw Major Omelko run into the enclosure gate toward the horse lines.

Two shots cracked and echoed from the rock. Jacob was turning to try to place them, when the knots of men around him sprang into action.

"Stay here!" Paul shouted at him, and ran for the gate, toward the bell tower.

Near the tower door a crowd revolved upon itself, within its center the swirl of fighting. There had been struck the spark that had set off the explosion of fury in the encampment. The teamsters who had taken down the bell had been attacked by Herki riflemen and shots had been fired.

Once aroused, the tribesmen acted with silent speed; they rushed at the Russian guards, snatching away their rifles; at the bell they threw and tied the workmen; at the wire fence they leaped over or swept into the gate, disarming every man with a weapon. Only the veteran Assyrians, alert at the outbreak of fighting, kept together and held off the tribesmen with their bayonets. Daniel had started his detachment toward shelter, making for the empty cinema house.

When they were inside, the Assyrians closed and locked the door

and manned the windows, while the Herki riflemen hesitated outside.

The Mullah was mounting a horse, trying to get a clear sight of what was happening beyond the enclosure, while keeping his men from attacking the Assyrian detachment. So far, Jacob realized, very few men had been hurt. It had been a flare-up of tempers on both sides, and the powerful tribesmen had disarmed the more sluggish guards in less than five minutes. Helpless to do anything himself, he started back to find Paul.

Unnoticed because he carried no weapon, Svetlov had hurried over to the light truck, where the radio operator watched from the step.

"The fools," muttered the operator. "What do they want of twenty rifles? They could have had as many heavy machine guns by evening and a battery of anti-tank babies as well. Now they've done themselves out of a nice gift. Unless——" His quick eye caught a movement along the horse line, and he kicked Svetlov. "Ilia, warn that crazy Cossack. He ought to inform the convoy. Orders are, *no force* unless necessary. And *no massed firing*. Stir yourself!"

Agitated, Svetlov plowed through the snow with an ominous sense of responsibility. There was the devil to pay, and he had to repeat an order. The order was that Omelko must inform the convoy what to do. When he reached Omelko, the Cossack had saddled a horse and was mounting. Svetlov coughed, and cried hoarsely. "Major—have to warn you. The convoy! There's no force to be——"

"Save your breath, Ilia."

Avoiding the anxious messenger, Omelko swung his horse toward the gate. Unlike Svetlov, he was not agitated, but he was angry. Because the bell had been hauled down, his men had been mauled, and when one had fired a shot, their weapons had been snatched by the devils of tribesmen. Force! There was force enough in the convoy to give the Kurds the lesson they needed. Their Mullahs could argue about it afterward, but he, Omelko, meant to bring in that convoy prepared for retaliatory action. Out there the guards on the trucks were front-line troops who knew

how to handle a mob. And the Cossack turned his horse out of the gate at a gallop.

A fine rider, he avoided a knot of tribesmen and threaded through the tents toward the east. Instinctively as he rode he drew his revolver, watching behind him.

A dozen Kurds appeared, mounted, their ponies jumping rocks and making fast time over the snow. A bullet cracked over him. The Cossack swung his right arm back and began to reply to the firing.

From the rise near the shrine Jacob, searching for Paul, heard the faint crack of the weapons. The horsemen pursuing the one rider on the road seemed to move very slowly over the surface of the valley. Except for the distant explosions, it might have been a friendly race. More Kurds were streaming out, mounted, from the encampment to join it.

On the distant ridge, where the trucks waited, more rapid movement took place. Black specks descended, two or three together, and lay down in the snow. With mechanical precision, they formed a line on the crest of the rise. Two trucks also moved up beside the first at the head of the column.

Thereupon the knoll waited, without movement. The single rider ascended toward it, and the moment's silence struck chill into Jacob's body. It was too quiet on the knoll.

Then he heard the faint metallic chattering. The group of pursuers fell apart. The men and horses seemed to roll in the snow. Three of the Kurds turned and started back. Then they also sank down and remained still.

A sigh went through the tribesmen on the knoll by Jacob. "*Az Kurmanjam!*" one cried, jerking up his rifle. As if drawn by a common longing, of love and hatred, they hastened away, avoiding women who ran out from the tents to hold to them. In the clear spaces men were mounting into saddles eagerly, dreading to be slow in joining the rush that was moving like a flood through the encampment. This flood of riders turned toward the east.

Jacob sighted Ismail for a moment in the dark mass of horsemen.

The Mullah tried at first to check the rush of his tribesmen into the plain; when the mass went on, he went with it.

Without a rifle, Badr ran beside the Mullah's stirrup.

In their gay jackets and flying sheepskins the men of the Herki and the Havaband and the Baradust galloped toward the stretch of valley that lay, open and shelterless, between them and the knoll.

"They have seen their kinsmen killed," said Paul. He had climbed to the shrine by Jacob to watch, and when the massed riders moved out from the tents, he sat down, his arms on his knees as if not knowing what to do.

Out in the plain there must have been two thousand riders, Jacob thought. Those from the Azerbaijani camp had followed after the Mullah's small army. Except for a few women and servants the camps of the Kurds had emptied into the plain, where the horsemen were ranging themselves into two long lines. In this rush forward Mullah Ismail and the Ghazi had forgotten their rivalry.

The double line began to move at a slow trot toward the knoll.

On that ridge some forty men lay quietly around the heavy machine guns, adjusting ammunition belts while waiting for the word of command. They looked very much alike, the bones standing out in their faces, their fingers deft in ministering to the steel machines. Since most of them were Siberians from a regiment that had been decorated for remaining under fire across the river at Stalingrad, they wasted no motion in readying their steel machines. They were picked men, selected for this trip to instruct the ignorant tribesmen in the use of these machines.

Seated in the middle truck of the first three vehicles, the senior sergeant, also a Siberian, waited for Omelko to give an order. At the outset the sergeant, when he had observed the officer pursued by a few tribesmen, had instructed the crew of one gun to fire a burst over the heads of the Kurds to stop them. But the tribesmen had kept on, and had been killed by the next burst.

Now the sergeant waited for the major to give the order. Automatically the sergeant estimated, while he waited, that there were two full regiments of horsemen attempting to charge their position

on the ridge—more than two thousand men moving at a rapid pace against sixteen guns and forty men. But these Kurds rode knee to knee in regular lines, making an admirable target of themselves.

That target grew within the Cossack's vision. Across just such a stretch of snow he had watched other enemies in gray moving.

"One dose and they'll show their tails," he grunted; then something hard and urgent pressed into his brain. "Give it to them!" he shouted.

Into the sergeant's mind flashed the thought that he himself had tried a warning volley, without result; but when he turned to tell this to the major, from long habit he shouted the order to the waiting gunners instead.

In his excitement he forgot to give the range. The experienced gun crews, however, had estimated that for themselves.

Instead of breaking asunder at the first laceration of the steel that tore into their lines, the Kurds began to fire from their saddles. Well-aimed, the bullets from their powerful military Mausers and Enfields searched the crest of the ridge, bursting open the skulls of three of the gunners and shattering the windshields of the trucks. The Kurds rode on, impelled by no command but by an inward rejoicing in rushing forward together knee to knee and hearing the sound of their rifles over the blasting of the guns on the ridge. Not to go forward in this manner was as unthinkable as to become pariahs of the tribes—men without pride and excluded from the love of women.

The stripling son of Mullah Ismail, straining to wield a heavy rifle, shouted with all the power of his lungs. His joy paralyzed him, making him weep while his limbs moved spasmodically.

Ahead of them flame sparked across the snow and unseen steel tore into the bodies of the Kurds and their horses.

As Jacob and Paul watched silently, the aspect of the valley changed. A haze that was no natural mist covered the ridge a half mile away. The slope leading to it had turned dark with tiny figures motionless or crawling. The second line of horsemen had

almost climbed to the summit of the knoll. The first had vanished or merged into it.

The thin reverberation of the guns kept on.

Paul said quietly, "The weapons have come alive."

Jacob thought, absurdly, that it did not matter now if those remaining few hundred maddened horsemen reached and rode over the surviving gunners. The valley had changed, and the terror that lay upon the distant ridge like the haze of the explosions would not end when the guns ceased. He heard a complaining voice and realized that Mr. Parabat was asking, "Can nothing be done?"

Paul did not look up. Answering himself rather than the Zoroastrian, Jacob said, "Not now, but the Russians have a radio, and——"

The stupidity of his words silenced him. Then Paul sprang up, striking his hands together. Groups of riders were racing back from the crest of the ridge. They had not reached the guns. As they fled back toward the camp the thin diapason of the guns changed to a stammering *tac-toc* as the invisible gun crews searched out the changed and moving targets. Entire knots of horsemen collapsed into the snow. The others scattered as wounded horses plunged to the side. But the riders kept on in their slow flight toward the camps they had left.

"The firing is useless now," said Paul, as if arguing. "It must be stopped. Can't you talk to the Russians at the radio?"

Jacob nodded, and they began to hurry through the almost deserted camp. Their ears were strained for the bursts of firing that did not stop.

"The dispensary of the mision," Paul went on in the same flat voice, "has typhus serum and smallpox vaccine, and I think some of your American penicillin. Only that to treat a thousand stretcher cases out there."

Paul was not babbling under the influence of shock. The former corpsman was thinking of the reality of innumerable wounded bodies without means of caring for them. "Listen," he said suddenly.

The bursts of the machine guns dwindled and ceased. There was

silence for three or four minutes. This silence was broken by the sharper, authoritative crack of larger, high-velocity guns.

Immediately the air over the tents was shaken by a series of explosions. Fragments of wool flung up in swirls of vapor from the tents.

Out from the vapor Vasstan staggered like a man intoxicated.

At the same time fleeing horsemen swept into the camp. They came singly, many of them still holding their rifles. A rider passed Jacob gripping the mane of his straining horse, blood streaming from the torn flesh where his jaw had been.

Some of the fugitives turned into their tents, and helped out women, lifting them into the saddles. One woman appeared with her arms grasping quilts and cooking utensils. Some of them, coming out of the black tents, became frightened and hurried back seeking shelter again beneath the flimsy woolen cloth.

The surviving men seemed to be staggering after a long intoxication. Their eyes were fixed, their mouths open. The sweat-soaked horses labored over the snow, steaming. Jacob felt a faint surprise when he sighted one horse propped up on its forelegs, its head straining back as if it were trying to raise its shattered body after its head.

He thought: these shells are searching the two Kurdish camps; the Russian enclosure will be safe; but these people must get away from all the tents. When another horseman came up to him, Jacob waved urgently to one side. Without heeding him, the man dismounted at a tent. Even under the shelling, the instincts of the Kurds drove them to find and carry off their children and women and belongings.

Jacob saw no sign of any of the leaders who had listened to him less than an hour before in the cinema house.

Now he heard a high-pitched wailing from the voices of terrified women and the screaming of horses. It kept on between the shells.

Then he retraced his steps toward the shrine and the stairway leading up Araman, which he would have to climb to reach Michal. Mr. Parabat was running ahead of him in this direction. Paul's voice called, "Lie down."

He was close to the shrine when a blast of air pushed him forward, and his arm jerked. The burst of a shell so close deafened him, and he shook his head as he walked on. Mr. Parabat was lying down, as if trying to embrace the snow. Beneath the Zoroastrian blood spread in a dark pool.

Jacob went over to him. Then, seeing that Mr. Parabat was dead, he hurried on, finding it hard to keep his footing. His shoulder had begun to ache, and his arm felt cold.

After a moment he felt blood running from his fingers, and tried to examine his left arm beneath the heavy sleeve of the sheep-skin coat. When he slipped off the coat, he could move more easily. His arm, however, felt numb, and he lifted it to check the bleeding.

Then he was surprised to discover that instead of climbing the steps he was still stumbling on the slope leading to the tree of the Kurdish shrine. It was hard to move his legs, and he sat down for a moment to rest himself. The shelling had stopped and the camp again seemed deserted. Out in the valley a few human beings fled away from the camp. In small groups of families, laden with their belongings, they ran toward the shelter of the forest.

The only person near that he recognized was Vasstan, walking between two Russian guards toward the wire of the enclosure which had not been harmed by the firing.

Vasstan looked old and feeble, stumbling between the guards.

Perhaps of all those in the encampment Sergeant Daniel had observed most clearly what had passed. No shells had exploded near him. This man with a body like iron had the cunning of thirty years of campaigning in him. He had no responsibility except for the lives of the eight Assyrians with him, and he had been able to look out for them up to this point. Moreover, as the Assyrians were now taking the rations and pay of the Soviet mission, he anticipated no further danger from the disorder of battle after the shelling ceased.

But like an old lynx, overlooking the forest after a storm, he felt instinctively that evil would come of all this derangement.

For one thing, the Kurdish tribes, from the Herki to the Baradust, would never forget the slaughter of their leaders and young men. For another, somebody in the mixed Russian command had blundered, and Daniel knew that when that happened among these variegated Russians, punishment always followed. When he saw Colonel Vasstan, his former patron, led in under guard, he smelled punishment as a wolf smells the track of its enemy, man. He acted then, sending half his men questing through the shattered camps for information and moving over himself to the radio truck, to try to discover what commands were being issued.

There he found Dr. Anna sobbing and Professor Vorontzev gaping aimlessly at the soldiers. Svetlov looked sick, repeating constantly that he had made no mistake. All this Daniel took in silently, not daring to approach too close, while he listened to the voice of the operator within.

The operator was in touch with outer commands, and by his shouting Sergeant Daniel knew he was disturbed by what he was reporting. He said something about a plane and awaiting the arrival of somebody who seemed to be a colonel en route from Tiflis.

This was sufficient to decide the Assyrian, who retraced his steps to the gate and consulted with his men who were coming back from their tour of the camps. They reported that there was not an unwounded Kurd left near Araman; that they had found the Elder of Araman wounded and injured by a fall from the steps. He was dying.

"Christ have mercy on his soul," Daniel repeated mechanically, wondering what the survivors on Araman would do without their patriarch.

When he sighted the convoy of armed trucks approaching along the valley road, he told his men to get hold of what food they could, and to scatter in pairs toward the forest.

"There is nothing here but danger," he said. "If you need shelter, there is the church of Mar Giorgios."

He waited at his post until he had seen all his Assyrians disappear beyond the tents. When the trucks pulled up at the gate and began to unload their wounded, with the heavy machine guns,

Sergeant Daniel slung his rifle over his shoulder and wandered off, with blankets over his arm.

Many times in the past he had saved himself from situations like this, when invasion or starvation had harried the mountain frontiers of the Soviets after two wars. Pity in him had been exhausted, except for the suffering of his own people. He decided it would be best to appear to wander among the wounded ostensibly looking for someone until twilight closed in; after that he would steal a stray horse or even a wagon, and escape from the valley.

At the tree by the shrine Sergeant Daniel found the lame American sitting holding his arm. Prudently, the old Assyrian did not go up to Jacob. Wandering on, he searched until he found Paul, the son of Kaimars, who was tying up the body of a child in one of the tents.

Together they went back to Jacob. Without a word the man of Araman freed the American's torn arm from its clothing and bound it with a dressing, tying bands tightly around the severed artery. He wondered how much blood Jacob had lost. There would be, he knew, no possibility of a blood transfusion in the mountains nearer than Baghdad.

"Thanks," Jacob said. "I'm going up to join Michal now." He looked around restlessly. "There isn't a thing I can do here now."

"No," Paul agreed. "But you should lie down, Mr. Ide."

Jacob laughed. It was no time to lie down. When he tried to get up his legs felt strangely numb. Only by turning around and raising himself on his good arm could he get to his knees. He shook his head to clear it of dizziness and felt Paul's hands on his shoulders, pushing him down.

"You can never climb the rock now, Mr. Ide," Paul said.

Not until then did he realize that he could not walk.

For a moment the other two watched him. And Jacob, aware of his helplessness, studied their gaunt, tired faces. He could not ask anything more of them. Sitting there at the foot of the steps, he could be no more to them than a wounded man, a nuisance. Many hundreds of others were dead or torn apart in the valley.

The Assyrian spoke in Kurdish to the man of Araman. After

such a killing, he ventured, foreign witnesses would not be wanted by the military, and the military would take command. Except for the old German, the only surviving witnesses were the American man and woman, both Christians.

Paul agreed, but said that the survivors on Araman must be protected as well. There was Gopal the painter, and—he hesitated—his mother also.

To this Daniel agreed. He only added that on Araman the people were not foreigners who could return to the outer world.

Looking at Jacob, they argued in low voices. Then Sergeant Daniel laid his blankets over Jacob's knees and went off a little way to stand at the bottom step of the ascent, as if on duty there. Paul waited a moment, and then started to walk off, over the debris at the foot of the mount.

For a while he climbed swiftly among the rocks, seeking one of the lower ledges. Here two half-grown boys crouched in silence beside a figure lying on their spread cloaks. Vishtapa, the Elder of Araman, was dead. When Paul's fingers touched his cheek, the flesh was shrunken and cold; the blood had dried in his white hair and upon the scarlet tunic. Paul moved the old man's arms down to his sides and looked at him for a while. Then he said to the youths, "Stay here," and went on.

When at last the shadow of the mount spread over the camps in the valley, and even the movement of the tiny motor vehicles could no longer be seen, Michal closed her eyes and told herself resolutely that the valley had not actually changed. The dark specks lying like grains of pepper scattered over a bed of salt, out from the moving shadow, had not altered the silence of the peaks.

She told herself that, knowing it was not true; then she got to her feet, grateful for the pain that shot through her chilled limbs. The other watchers at the lookout point rose from their seats, their eyes turning to her inquiringly. Michal had to remind herself that they had understood nothing of the splintering sound of the guns, or the sight of the trucks crawling like beetles. And in all the afternoon no one had come up from the camps with word of

what had happened. Michal could guess at much. Approaching Imanya, she took the older woman's hand. "*Khwasht*—" she began, and stopped because the dark eyes of the mother of Paul were fastened on her with a questioning that Michal could not answer. So she held Imanya's hand while they walked back through the grove to the village.

There the people went into their houses, but they did not replenish the fires or set food on to cook. Gopal and his grandson climbed up the steps to the altar height to put some fresh fuel on the embers there. They were dazed by the sight of moving men turned into dots in the snow and tents exploded into vapor.

For the first time Michal felt herself to be alone and unheeded by the others. From the ringing of the bell and the departure of the Watchman with three young men, she had watched with Imanya, assuring herself that in the absence of the men the foreign lady must set an example to the villagers in the best colonial tradition of pukka sahibs, who dressed every evening and carried walking sticks jauntily into battle.

And all the while she had been afraid, grateful even for the presence of those silent people who understood nothing of the splintering sound of the guns that beat at her memory.

Hastily Michal began to take off her sport jacket and woolen dress. She could not keep on standing alone in a darkening cold room, peering every two minutes at her watch, and thinking that in an hour it would be dark outside and Jacob could not climb up to the summit then, as he would beyond any doubt if he could.

When she drew off the dress, she took a washrag and began to bathe her slim arms and chest and throat, even reproving herself because the surface of bones showed in her chest. Carefully she scrubbed her forehead and ears, then dried herself painstakingly, and selected the blue dress to put on for the evening. When she had laid it out on the bed she turned to comb her hair, dimly seen in the bronze wall mirror. With an uncertain impulse, she caught up the mirror of her compact and looked into it closely. Startled at the shadows under her eyes in the thin white face, she set to remedying her appearance with lipstick, pencil, and powder. For months she had not used any. She was not thinking of Jacob's

coming, she told herself, but she could not let him see her looking like something under the surgeon's knife.

She thought: you could not live sheltered by money and by the devotion of admiring friends; all that broke away, until you tried to find in yourself the meaning of life and its pain.

The instant she heard the roaring in the air, her fingers stopped fluttering around her hair, which looked as well as it ever did. Hearing the reverberation mount swiftly, she ran out through the curtain into the plaza.

Overhead the sunset glow tinted the cloud banks, and she knew the valley would be shining gold where shadows did not lie. After her rapid movement and the glimpse of a radiant sky she had a wild hope that the planes might be friendly and merciful, like the stray R.A.F. pursuit planes circling over Athens five years before.

Instead she saw a V formation of gray two-engined bombers turning to circle Araman.

Five she counted as the roaring beat into her ears. Coming close, they rounded the summit, then veered off to return in line. At the altar Gopal and the boy stared, transfixed.

"I suppose," Michal said to herself, "that these ordinary planes are miraculous to them as winged monsters."

As the planes passed close on the entrance side of the summit, white parachutes blossomed under them and floated down out of Michal's range of vision. The parachutes, she thought, would land on the valley floor very close to the encampment. Only by an effort of will did she restrain herself from running to the gate where the two sentries watched, to see exactly where they would land.

The planes went off to the northeast, gaining altitude as they left the valley.

In her room, with the lamps lighted, Michal put on dry evening slippers and her fur jacket, then set herself determinedly to count the cheerful things around her—Jacob's pipe on the settee, the faint caroling of the wind tower, and the benevolent bearded face of Saint Nikolka peering from his silver frame.

It was full dark when she heard the strange voices outside, and she pressed her arms tight against her chest, to wait until she

should recognize one. Jacob and the Watchman and Paul, she repeated to herself, they are alive and have come back. Perhaps Dr. Anna and Major Omelko. Jacob had hoped for a miracle, and there might indeed be wanderers like winged angels dropping from the air.

Outside lights were flashing, striking against the curtained doorway. Miracles did not happen, and winged angels existed only in the pictures of children's books. If only Jacob were here in the room!

The two men who came in slowly were soldiers. Over their uniforms they wore sheepskin jackets, belted in tight, and they carried Tommy guns at the ready while they inspected the room. Then one took his stand in the center, under the wind tower, while the other searched into the recesses and corners. Short, with round heads and thin lips, they looked like Tatars. One wore the old-style military cross of Saint George.

He was the searcher, who emptied out all the suitcases on the floor, taking from the piles of clothing only Jacob's map, which he examined and pocketed. Then the glint of silver in the ikon caught his eye, and he pulled it down, studying it without expression.

Neither of the two had paid attention to Michal after a first curious glance. The man under the wind tower had been attracted by the melody of the hidden harp overhead, and had been poking around with the muzzle of his short weapon. With a word to his comrade, he fired a blast of shots up into the tower—apparently believing like Omelko, that it had a radio installed.

In that confined room the explosions tore into Michal's ears, and she whimpered, feeling a stab of agony behind her eyes. The two Siberians waited until they were certain that the machine hidden in the tower vent gave out no more sound.

Through the door Svetlov appeared, and when he observed Michal, yelled at the soldiers in anger. He ordered them outside with no trace of his customary vacillation, and he snatched the ikon away as they went, putting it back on the bed. Coming close to her, he whispered in his distorted English, "I sorry," and added, his weak eyes blinking, "pretty lady."

Shyly he touched a fold of her dress, feeling the silk, as if by touching the garment he could bring himself closer to the miraculous loveliness of the woman. His eyes wavered away and came back to her face as he explained that he would take her where she must go.

"I will stay here," Michal said at once.

Svetlov shook his head and motioned her to follow him. When she did so she found the plaza in possession of the parachutists, who worked with flashlights, their weapons slung. From the door of the armory they were carrying out the collected arms, piling them carelessly in a heap. On the altar height they were stringing wire for an aerial. Their packs had been left at the doors of the different houses. Michal saw no face familiar to her. The rays of the torches, crisscrossing the open space, sometimes came to rest on her.

"*So brave a lass!*" The sick Russian smiled at her. And he explained that she would be put with the village people for the night. In turn, she must try to make clear to them that they could take with them only what belongings they could carry, and no weapons. Because the next day the summit of Araman must be vacated by its inhabitants.

"But why?" Michal was startled. "They can't leave their homes."

Svetlov said that during the revolt the summit must serve for a military post—for observation and to quarter a garrison.

"Then I'm going down now!" cried Michal.

That would not be possible, in the dark, without light, the Russian pointed out, and urged her toward the steps to the street. "It is for him, this place." He nodded at the plaza and pointed to a strange officer.

"Where is Major Omelko?" asked Michal desperately.

Shrugging his shoulders, the Russian did not answer. Before coming up to the summit he had seen the Cossack deprived of his revolver by this colonel, the new commandant, and confined to the hut of the members of the mission where Anna was still weeping. How often these soldiers, returning from the fronts, made mistakes and had to be replaced by others. Besides, Omelko had been friendly with the foreigners.

"Come now," he whispered. The new commandant was walking over to them. His uniform, a fresh one, fitted him well, and it bore a colonel's star but no ribbon. Michal noticed that.

This officer, now in command of Araman, looked at her searchingly and questioned Svetlov briefly, then waved the sick Russian away and motioned her down to the village. This done, he turned on his heel as if it were unthinkable that an order should not be obeyed. Without another word Svetlov sidled off into the darkness.

What had Jacob said after their days of questing? That there was life here in Araman, and still here after all the ages. That had changed.

"It's gone now," Michal said softly.

She herself could not even go back to her house. She must go down to the huddle of people standing uncertainly in front of their doors. At that moment they looked to her like any other peasants, herding together like animals. Michal had never seen Imanya with empty hands before.

What is gone, she thought, is the garden itself, and the water wheel grinding the corn, and the children making music with their kites, and our days of loving. They were little things with no force in them except hope, but now they are gone.

When a man in uniform, half visible in the flicker of lights, approached her, Michal turned obediently to go down to the waiting villagers. With a quick intake of breath she stopped, recognizing Paul.

Then she saw that he had put on his uniform of the Levies again, without the distinctive hat.

"Your husband is injured by a fragment of shell, Miss Michal; the worst of it is that he has lost so much blood." In a few swift words Paul explained that Jacob was being watched by Sergeant Daniel and was in no immediate danger.

Michal drew a long breath. "You must take me down to the valley, Paul, quickly. I know you can."

"You? It would be dangerous for you."

Nothing could be bad for her, if only she could escape and find Jacob. She did not think beyond that. So she smiled persuasively

at Paul, and her voice was gay. "It would be much more dangerous tomorrow for me, Paul. Please!"

Paul never wasted time in thought. Walking beside her, he had turned toward the altar when she whispered to him to wait, and slipped away into her doorway.

Within the room, she caught up the ikon of Saint Nikolka, and, after a second's hesitation, the small bronze Pegasus. The rosary she remembered she had given back to Father Hyacinth. Putting the two of them into her jacket pockets, she started to run out, then went back to blow out the lamps. At the last one she paused for a second, to look once around the familiar room. In the darkness she found her way out easily, and tried to make her voice steady when she explained to Paul.

"My household gods—I couldn't leave them, could I?"

Without answering, he led her past the cliff carving, up the steps to the altar, where he stopped, surprised.

"Paul!" she cried.

Two of the parachutists had taken wood from the pile at the parapet and had started a fire on the stone below the altar out of the wind. To do so, they had scraped out embers from the altar hearth between the wings. There they were warming themselves and talking comfortably. The appearance of the foreign woman and the youth in a strange uniform did not disturb them. They were not on duty here, at the summit of what seemed to them to be a sheer cliff.

For the moment Michal could see nothing of the commandant in the plaza below. Casually, Paul moved, and she followed, away from the firelight along the parapet.

"Paul, the altar fire is out, isn't it?"

Swinging himself up on the parapet, he lowered himself on the outer side and motioned for her to do as he did. "If it's not out, it will be soon, after quite a few thousand years, Miss Michal."

As she was slipping down by him, he stopped her and felt her slippers with the dainty heels. Drawing them off, he thrust them into her pockets. Then, carefully, he wound a heavy cord of twisted wool strands several times around her waist, knotting the other end around his own. "We are going into darkness where

there is no light," he said gravely. "It's just as well, Miss Michal, that for the moment you can't see where you are going."

At the fire, the soldiers were still loitering. Over on the observatory height, where Jacob's bronze instruments shone, the colonel and the working crew bent over their flashlights setting a large radio into place under canvas. Michal let herself slide off, with Paul's arm guiding her, until her feet touched a narrow ledge of rock.

"Paul," she strangled a hysterical laugh, "you are such a good shepherd, and I'm a nuisance of a lost lamb."

"Not a shepherd, Miss Michal. I herded goats."

But you are, she thought, and Gopal will not be able to finish your portrait on the wall.

Sensations new to Michal seized on her. When she stopped to catch her breath, she felt the vertigo of space; when she moved on, the darkness pushed against her like an impalpable force. Above her stretched the brightness of the Milky Way—the Path of the Wild Geese, Paul called it. Orion's square became four lanterns hung in space to light her way.

Never before had she felt the edges of stone tearing her bare feet, or the blood running between her fingers when she caught at outcroppings of rock. The cord around her waist rasped her sides when she slipped. It would be very easy to die if that cord itself slipped, and an hour before then she would not have minded; now she had hope, and if you had hope you did not need a light in darkness. Paul's voice, telling her where to put her feet and where to hold with her hands, assured her that he had hope.

With the lanterns of Orion lighting her way across space, she did not hear the echo of the splintering roar of the guns or the thrumming roar of the planes, nor did she think of that other flight down to Argos where she and a man now strange to her had watched the sky for planes. Jacob sailed his ship with her secure in it, watching for the other ship to cross the night sky.

When the last of her strength gave out, she sank down and felt round pebbles against her face. Paul's hands raised her, and he

lifted her high, her body against his good shoulder, and presently the leaves of a tree brushed against her hair. She was conscious of being lowered to the ground, and when she reached up to brush her hair back, Jacob's hand took hers.

She was sitting on a blanket, with Jacob's shoulder touching hers. To make certain of that, her fingers felt his cheek. And she said, "I'm a mess, all of me. I'm glad it's dark, Jacob." Then she began to cry.

While the three men talked, low-voiced, Michal said nothing. She drank from the canteen Daniel had brought her, letting the water run out over her lacerated fingers. All three of them agreed that she and Jacob must get away from Araman that night, yet he could not walk, nor could Michal, after her descent of the cliff. So it was not possible.

That did not worry Michal; she could luxuriate in her weariness now that she could hear Jacob's voice. Besides, it was a matter for the men to decide.

Saying that he would see if he might find something, Daniel went away, and Michal slept after Jacob pulled a blanket over her.

The creaking of wagon wheels woke her. A team of horses trudged up to the tree, and the wagon stopped almost within reach of them. Sergeant Daniel got down from it and said it would do for an ambulance because he had found a cot to put in it and some food. It had a good canvas top, he added proudly.

"Can you get a wagon through the passes?" Jacob asked.

"To go out, yes. If we can find others to help on the slopes."

"Can you take us as far as Riyat?"

The old Assyrian considered, running his hands over the harness buckles. "Who knows? Perhaps."

"Jacob," whispered Michal, "the monastery is nearer."

"This thing couldn't descend the gorge. And we have to get to Baghdad."

Michal hardly understood. She knew that she could not think very clearly. "Then perhaps Riyat would be lovely, Jacob," she agreed.

It seemed that they had to hurry. Sergeant Daniel complained that half the night was gone already. The two men helped Jacob in over the back of the wagon, and then turned to lift her in. Drowsily she felt in her pockets to make sure that her treasures were safe, and she pulled out her shoes, thinking that there would have been nothing left of them or of her if she had kept them on during the descent.

When the wagon lurched suddenly, starting, she had to hold to the edges of the cot. After a moment she realized that Paul, who had been standing back of the wagon, had not climbed in. As she called out, Jacob caught her arm in warning and obediently she hushed.

"He will not leave Araman," he whispered, "ever."

Words in this night were finalities. You started to walk down through space; you climbed into a wagon smelling of wet canvas and onions, to drive through solid mountains and arrive somewhere, perhaps.

To reassure herself, because her thoughts whirled around dizzily, Michal reached out to touch Jacob and make certain he was lying quietly as he should. In doing so her hand struck against cold metal, and when her fingers explored it, the thing seemed to be a rather massive bell.

Stifling a laugh, Michal bent over and whispered, "My bell is going with us."

On the driver's seat, Daniel Toghrak guided the team toward the south, along marks left by two pairs of skis that wound toward a break in the surrounding ridges. It was important for him as well as for the two Americans to be out of sight of the camps by day-break. Beyond that, the matter rested with God. Whether the man with the torn arm could reach Baghdad alive was a problematical matter; whether the young woman who cried when she was happy and laughed because the bell taken down by the Russians was riding with her—whether she would regain her sanity of mind Sergeant Daniel did not know.

About the bell he did not care. Since it was in the wagon it would need to stay there now, because it would be dangerous to leave it lying behind them on the wagon's track. That wheel track

in the snow worried him. Squinting ahead into the murk over the gray snow, the Assyrian mountaineer sampled the night and the vista ahead of him. When he saw the horses lift their heads and made out two figures standing close together in his way, he felt no alarm. They stood as if waiting, and when he reached them he stopped, finding them to be two of his own men. "You can come with me," he told them.

Lying at the edge of the cot, her hand on Jacob's bandaged arm, Michal looked out the back of the wagon, to see why they had stopped. Behind them stretched the white valley. Far down it she could make out the shape of Araman. There was no glimmer of a fire on the altar height.

"It's dark, Jacob," she said.

Then, when the wagon creaked on again, and trees closed in shutting out the valley, she had a forlorn feeling as if she were leaving behind something that never could be recovered.

A hand pressing his knee woke Jacob from a troubled sleep. The wagon was motionless, and with daylight flooding the opening he recognized Sergeant Daniel crouching by him pulling gently at his knee. On the cot beside him Michal, wrapped in blankets and the tangle of her hair, breathed steadily, not waking.

Sliding out with the Assyrian's aid, Jacob stood up dizzily, the back of his head aching and his body shaking with the early morning cold.

"You have passport," whispered Sergeant Daniel. "What kind?"

This could not be a frontier post. Overhead the sky was a gray veil, and wisps of clouds threaded through the pine trees that covered the knoll on which they had halted, a little above the shallow ravine they had followed through the night. Jacob's forearm felt stiff from the clotted blood that had hardened into Paul's bandages. Mechanically he fumbled awkwardly with his right hand, to draw out his wallet and extract the battered card that proclaimed him to be Captain Jacob S. Ide, of the Third Battalion, Headquarters Cairo, USAFIME. Carefully the Assyrian read the card and shook his head.

"Your American Army, will it look for you now?" he asked earnestly.

"No."

"Will the British Army look for you?"

At each question the faded blue eyes of the mountaineer searched his face. With an effort Jacob tried to think back over the months. Daoud had said something about British planes searching, but where was Daoud? No, Jacob Ide existed only for the British authorities as the stray American who had gone off in the car of their security officer, Squadron Leader Aurel Leicester, at Kirkuk station, ages before—in spite of their warning.

"No," he said.

With a sigh Daniel handed him a pair of field glasses. They were old-fashioned Zeiss glasses, somehow familiar—the pair that had belonged to Vasstan. "Look," Daniel bade him, pointing back down the shallow ravine. Following the line indicated by his stubby finger, Jacob sighted black figures moving up a clear space between the trees. Adjusting the glasses with his good hand, he brought the figures into close view.

In advance a horseman uniformed in gray ascended between the faint tracks of the wagon wheels. Two others followed, keeping to the side slopes. All carried rifles across their knees. The vehicle behind them disclosed itself as a jeep, in which a Soviet officer rode beside the driver and a soldier behind him held upraised an ominous-looking tube that would be a heavy machine gun. The fourth man, in a black overcoat, had a familiar appearance. Only Svetlov wore an overcoat like that. A bulky object resting between them might be a walkie-talkie, of the type shipped by the thousands to Russia.

Without a word Jacob lowered the glasses. The pursuing detachment might be a third of a mile away, approaching at a foot pace. The wagon tracks led up from the valley bed for a hundred yards or so to the wagon itself in which the exhausted woman slept. The two horses loosed from the traces were nosing barley spread on a blanket.

Above Jacob rose the shoulder of a hill, studded with pines. Across from him a similar slope ascended into the gray mist. The

snow in which he stood was a foot deep. It was, he thought, a very peaceful scene, and it afforded not the slightest hope of escape.

Sheer bad luck must have impelled this armed party to search for the missing wagon. Or had it been luck? The glasses in his hand reminded him of the German, and he thought that Vasstan had got in a word about him, whereupon he had been searched for and found missing, as well as the wagon.

Twenty-four hours before he could have walked down to the officer in the jeep and joked about the wagon over cigarettes. But this officer was not Omelko, and now he, Jacob, was a wounded fugitive after the battle that had changed everything in the valley. He knew beyond any doubt that he and Michal could not force their way up the hillside in the deep snow, nor could the three Assyrians carry even Michal far on the cot. Not without leaving tracks, and tracks would be followed. The situation was very clear.

"All right, Daniel," he assented. "I see how it is. You and the other two scam—get out of here, up the hill. You can; we can't. So long." He held out his hand with the glasses.

The stocky Assyrian made no move to go. "You will not defend this place, Mr. Ide?"

Behind him the other two listened carefully. One was a bandy-legged fellow with a shock of gray hair, the other a pinched-faced boy who looked as if he did not know what a square meal was.

"With them?" Jacob asked. "With only three rifles?"

"Yes."

"And with how much of a chance?"

Planting his feet, his scarred hand rubbing the butt of his rifle, Sergeant Daniel searched the screen of pines around them with his eyes. He even sniffed the wind and muttered something about snow. "It is a sporting chance," he announced at last.

"That's what you think?"

"Yes, Mr. Ide. We can hold this hill for a while, then—we may have help." Quickly he conferred with his companions, who nodded assent. Then he thrust into Jacob's hand a half sheet of ruled notepaper. On it were printed in pencil two groups of Christian-sounding names, eleven in all, male and female. Daniel's square forefinger pointed to the first group. "My family and rela-

tives." To the second—"Masha's family. All are living in Keif, which is two hours' ride by automobile from Mosul. If Masha or I are killed, will you provide a little for the families, Mr. Ide?"

Anxiously his blue eyes questioned Jacob, who thought stubbornly, except for the commandeered wagon he and Michal had every right to be where they were, and he *had* to try to get down to Baghdad to report the story of Araman. Sir Clement would have taken that sporting chance.

"All right, Daniel," he agreed, folding the notepaper and putting it in his wallet. "If I get to Baghdad, that is."

Not until the Assyrians had rushed to the wagon and hauled Michal's cot down to the hollow behind the hillock, and he had seen her pushing at the blankets, did he realize the insanity of it all. For Sergeant Daniel, as soon as he rose from the cot, lifted his rifle and fired a shot into the air. "I want the hills to hear," grunted the Assyrian, and Jacob bent over Michal, saying they were all crazy, and she must keep quiet where she was or spoil everything. Then he hurried back to the wagon and lay down between the Assyrians who had placed themselves a dozen yards apart, the other two to the sides and a little back of Daniel, who laid his rifle between two rocks.

Jacob, resting his chin on his good arm, watched two bugs crawling over the moss on the stone in front of him. If Daniel had not fired that shot, they might have been able to surprise— But they couldn't open fire on men who had not seen them. It would begin to snow and then everything would be crazy.

The jeep crawled up the trail with the gunner and Svetlov walking on the other side, and the gun in place, pointing toward the wagon. The officer, who wore a new uniform, walked behind all this and made no effort to hail the hillock. Instead, the gun opened fire, cutting through the wagon, which sank crazily on its side in a cloud of flying splinters. The bronze bell clanged mournfully.

About a hundred yards away the jeep stopped, the driver ducking behind it by the gunner. Jacob waited so long for something else to happen that he began to glance at his watch. Then Daniel fired once, and a rifle cracked back from the opposite slope of the ravine. One of the riders, dismounted, must have climbed over

there, a little above them. His shots began to crack very close over their heads.

It was as crazy as this, Jacob reflected; you did not see what was happening, you lay dug into the snow until it was over. You only listened. He heard the machine gun fire a burst at Daniel's lair, certain of that because bullets screamed, glancing off rocks. Then he heard the boy on his other side shooting, and guessed that the remaining two soldiers were working toward the hillock from that flank.

When he did not hear the boy's rifle, he rolled over and twisted his head to look. The boy was sitting up, carefully wiping blood from his eyes. Then he lay down, feeling his head, and Jacob squirmed toward him, to take up the rifle.

It was a Mauser, expertly cleaned, a nineteen thirty-nine model with a single word carved in German script upon the stock—*Sieg*.

Placing this weapon across a flat stone, Jacob searched the slope in front of him with his eyes. These were the hills of Kurdistan and the fine German rifle was inscribed with *Victory*. But he could see nothing moving on the white slope with its dark patches of laurel under the pines. He felt uneasy because he could see no trace of the two enemies who might be lining up their sights on him at that moment.

Then this vista of silence became wholly insane. Rifles cracked above Jacob and ahead of him, far off and near. They sounded across the ravine.

Out of the corner of his eyes Jacob sighted swift movement above him, as the shapes of men slid downhill from cover to cover. Below him the jeep's engine roared instead of the machine gun.

Directly in front of him two men in gray jumped out of a thicket and ran for the trail. One of them dropped and rolled over until the other locked an arm around him and hauled him on.

Sergeant Daniel crouched beside Jacob and gripped his hand that was on the rifle. "Be careful, Mr. Ide," he said.

Down the slope ran the men who had appeared from the mist above, in dark baggy garments, all firing as they raced down.

"Some Baradust Kurds, some Herki also," explained the Assyrian.

These must have been among the fugitives escaping through the ravine, and they would have heard Daniel's first warning shot. Lifting himself on his elbow, Jacob looked for the jeep and found that it had turned in the trail and was starting back, loaded with men who crouched low, hugging each other. Where it had been Svetlov, the civilian, was left. At once Svetlov began to run, not after the machine but into the brush on the far slope.

Without his rifle, Sergeant Daniel stood up, lifting both arms and sending the wailing call of a mountain shepherd into the ravine.

In an hour a curtain of snow enveloped the hillsides and wind roared through the pine forest. They could not see a stone's throw ahead or behind them. Where the ground was clear, flurries of icy particles drove up at them, seething around them. Jacob, walking laboriously beside Michal's cot, had no least idea where they could be going.

Ahead of him, Sergeant Daniel was carrying the injured boy over one shoulder, with two rifles slung across the other. Masha and a Kurd who might have been Badr's twin carried the end of the cot. Ahead of them, breaking the force of the wind, other tribesmen led the team from the demolished wagon and the three ponies they had captured along the trail.

Bending down, they forced their way through the storm, along the hillside where no road existed. Jacob did not know by what signs or instinct they guided themselves, but they stopped and tethered the horses in a heavy stand of timber where smoke came from a single low shelter of black wool stretched over tree branches.

Under the cloth women and children were packed around the fire. Without surprise they watched the arrival of the strangers and made way for the cot of the sick woman. In the pot over the embers broth simmered, smelling of meat.

Between the horses and the shelter the men stretched out on blankets, pulling their sheepskins about their heads. So they lay without speaking, occupied with their own thoughts after the disaster of the day before.

Someone handed a blanket to Jacob, who drew it over his head,

turning his back to the wind. A hot copper bowl of broth was thrust into his hand, and he began to sip it slowly, feeling comfort in its warmth and savor.

For a while no one spoke to him. On her cot, warmed by the fire, Michal slept quietly. Beside her cot she had placed her two slippers carefully. It cheered Jacob to see these two white slippers waiting there as if in readiness for Michal to get up and put them on. As if she could do that, and be strong again, and walk out into the snow somehow to a place of safety in evening slippers.

From a tent pole over the fire hung slender haunches of gazelles. Out of a jar the silent women poured curdled milk into bowls for the children. Around them drifted the pine smoke, stirred by eddies of the wind.

Sergeant Daniel, who had been cleaning his rifle barrel, stepped over recumbent men to Jacob. "You should lie down," he muttered. "Sleep."

And he held out his hand, explaining brusquely that he would take back the paper with the family names. It would not be necessary, now, for the American gentleman to remember them.

"Why not?"

The question seemed to surprise the Assyrian. With furrowed brow he considered it. "Now will be no danger." And he nodded at the tribesmen. "Some Baradust men are here. Their *aimak*—their camp for winter is near to Riyat. They will take you, riding horses, to Riyat."

"Why will they do that?"

Again the old Assyrian looked at Jacob in surprise. "Because you wish to go there."

Simply because he and Michal had taken shelter in their tent, these tribesmen would assume responsibility for the two strangers, finding a way down the mountain ridges, providing food, and keeping them from harm.

"What will you do, Daniel?" Jacob asked them.

"I go with him to the church of Mar Giorgios." He pointed at the boy who had been hurt by the glancing bullet. It was as if he were telling Jacob how he planned to take a different train out of a junction. For a moment Jacob wondered if he should not turn

aside with the Assyrians for the nearest refuge. But the monastery would not be in communication with Baghdad.

Taking back his list of names, Daniel explained carefully, "The Baradust say English arrficers are at Riyat, making investigation of happenings. They have good transport." And it flashed across Jacob's mind that Daniel feared that his list of names might in some way involve him with the British.

Jacob reflected that he and Michal alone could not survive two days of this storm. Beside him the shaggy horses, pressing close together, hung their heads, drawn close to the men, seeking the warmth of the tent. "You think we can get down through this storm, Daniel?" he wondered.

"After, you can. Certainly." The Assyrian's dark eyes blinked, and for the first time since Jacob had known him he laughed. "This storm? It is a very little wind. It will hide your tracks. Sixty-three years I have lived, and in all those years the mountains have done me no harm."

CHAPTER VII *Washington*

The first word of Araman came to the outer world over the cables. It was a brief dispatch of the Soviet news agency, Tass, datelined Teheran. Published in many American dailies including those in Washington, it related concisely:

According to the newspaper Rahbar, the conference of the Democratic Kurdish party in the valley of Araman was interrupted by unlawful action of reactionary Kurds. These reactionaries serve foreign imperialism and the Anglo-American oil companies. Some Kurds were killed. Until order is restored in the valley of Araman, the representatives of the Democratic Kurdish party will meet in Sanjbulak.

Jacob and Michal came in touch with the outer world when, in a lull between rain gusts, they rode down into the familiar ravine of Riyat, having said good-by to the Baradust guides beyond sight of the Iraqi sentries at the village approach.

Immediately they felt the change in Riyat. Troops were quartered along the swollen streams; Sir Clement Bigsby's bungalow looked deserted behind its shutters; Mr. Parabat's cherished black car was mud-splashed, with a military tarpaulin stretched over it.

Quickly Michal reined her pony into the courtyard gate and stopped with a whispered, "Oh, Jacob."

The neglected garden was scarred by hoof and wheel prints, the guest bungalow had lost its windows, and one corner of the laboratory had been demolished by a shell. The water wheel churned noisily under the pressure of the flood.

Michal, wet and hungry, had clung to an unreasonable hope that here she might find warmth and dry clothes, if not servants to wait on her.

Two men came out of the undamaged part of the perfume factory, and the one in a squadron leader's uniform quickened his step. He was ruddy and well groomed and he exclaimed, "Michal Thorne, by the gods—missing and found again!"

When he looked up into her face, he reached out to help her down. And she wondered why once she had thought that Aurel Leicester was almost Jacob's twin. They were so different now. Long, long ago she had known officers who wore such immaculate uniforms and made small talk.

"Aren't you a little late, Aurel," she asked curiously, "in arriving?" She had not known she was so tired, until she heard her voice saying things that her mind never meant. "It has all happened, and we are only ghosts."

Aurel was still staring at her gravely. "Then we'll give your ghost a spot of whisky, Michal, and put her into dry blankets. But who's the other ghost?"

Jacob, who had turned off to inspect the car, came back then. "Squadron Leader," he asked, "is that car running? Is the road open to Baghdad?"

The two Britishers had seen extreme fatigue before, and they were cheerfully non-committal as they escorted Michal and Jacob into a drawing room where an elusive sweet odor still clung and newspapers and magazines lay under a lighted lamp. Not until they were sipping a second drink did the older man in civilian clothes question Jacob carelessly. "You've seen something of the Kurds in these seven months, Captain Ide?"

Jacob nodded. This civilian seemed to know his rank. In the next room an impassive sergeant sat by a radio.

"Then what do you make of this?" The quiet civilian showed Jacob a copy of the Tass dispatch that had been repeated to them over the air from Baghdad. When Jacob read it through twice without answering, he insisted a little. "You notice it mentions the valley of Araman. You've been there, Captain Ide?"

They wanted the military angle of it all, Jacob thought, that was their job. They were on duty here, in rooms with warm stoves, and what he said to them would go immediately over the air to officials in Baghdad. The ache of his fatigue separated him from

them; his weariness had no voice to speak to these bright, ruddy, and polite beings. Aurel was insisting that Michal take a sandwich from a clean white plate. Even Michal, with a Kurdish embroidered shawl tucked around her waist and her fur jacket dark with wet, seemed out of place in this room. "Araman? It's more important than—" His voice broke off. "How soon can we start?"

"He means for Baghdad," Michal added. "And the American Legation."

The two Britishers exchanged a quick glance, as if consulting together about the mentality of the exhausted wayfarers.

"But, Michal," objected Aurel, "I shouldn't leave Riyat, and you can't in this beastly weather."

"But, Aurel, yesterday we rode through snow and hail, and to-day in the rain, and I can certainly ride to Baghdad in the sunshine in your luxurious car."

"It's Mr. Parabat's car, you know."

"Mr. Parabat is dead," Jacob said, "and Mullah Ismail is dead. We ought to start in an hour to get out of the ravine before sunset."

Again the officer and the civilian consulted each other silently. "Right!" agreed the squadron leader. "I'll drive you both down, Captain Ide, and you can tell me the story on the way—of course after lunch. We have an omelette with the curry today."

When Jacob came back to the door of the Regent Palace Hotel two days later, in Baghdad, he stopped, feeling that it was not himself but another man who was walking into the familiar lobby. This other man stood there in a pair of indescribable shoes and a stained, torn suit that attracted the gaze of the small doorboy who wore a shining white *'abba*. The real Jacob was listening to Paul, who said he could never leave the people of Araman, and he was watching Daniel carry the wounded boy in the drifting snow.

This shining lobby and dusty, crowded Rashid Street outside were no more than the setting of a stage across which the wraith of Jacob Ide moved, speaking when he heard his cue, paying money

at the proper time. This stage had been cleverly lighted and painted, but it would inevitably change with the next act, as Mr. Parabat's garden had changed.

At the legation, in a room blistering hot with the afternoon sun, a *chargé d'affaires*—the minister being absent in Cairo—had suggested sleep and rest, after which Jacob could return to dictate his story to a stenographer, to be forwarded in the next pouch after a week or so to the Department at Washington. The youthful *chargé* had been frank and friendly in admitting that they knew almost nothing about the tribal area in the northern mountains—which was certainly out of the legation's jurisdiction—nor did he personally understand tribal legends. But he had been very explicit in reminding Jacob that the former captain of USAFIME could no longer travel without a civilian passport, now that travel orders were unavailable, since all military commands had been moved out of Cairo. Application for a passport, explained the bored young man in the stifling room, would have to be forwarded to Washington; in which case there would be a delay of a month before Jacob Ide could leave Baghdad.

This other shadowy Jacob Ide, finding his way through the stage setting, could not argue that he had to speak at once with somebody in America, in the Pentagon or the State Department. The fact that he wanted terribly to do so had no meaning in the act that was going on in Baghdad that day. He had walked out of the legation, without taking the long printed application for a civilian passport that would mean a month's delay. . . .

Now he swung himself around and ran up the marble steps to the bedroom floor. A servant carrying a lunch tray drew back respectfully before the impetuous foreigner. Oblivious, Jacob hurried on to Michal's room. For hours he had not been near her, and now he longed for her smile and the warmth of her eyes.

Inside her door he looked around, surprised. He had imagined the room as he had left it, with blinds drawn down and Michal drowsy on the bed, the fingers of one slim hand signing a farewell to him, and her two talismans, the bronze horse and ikon, beside her. Now the windows were open wide. Michal wore a man's gray dressing gown, with a blanket wrapped around her

feet, and, with her hair uncombed, she was chattering to two strangers—one a well-dressed elderly Arab, the other a slight girl with a Sister's blue headgear.

"Jacob," she cried, "they want our passports, the hotel people do. I left mine in the suitcase, and I don't know what you've done about yours, so I said you would tell them. This is Dr. Jemail Ishaq of the Royal Hospital—Aurel sent him—and this is Sister Miriam, and they've both been examining me by turns, and finding a temperature with other things not so important."

"Only a little temperature, Miss Thorne." Dr. Ishaq showed white teeth in a smile. "Really, less than two degrees."

Michal had done nothing to her face, and her eyes looked dark against the whiteness of it; her voice had the brittle edge of excitement. The physician had advised her to come to the hospital for observation for a few days.

"When?" Jacob asked.

"Today is always better than tomorrow. You see we have such a variety of fevers in Baghdad—we don't know ourselves how many. It is always better to find out than to wait and see, Miss Thorne."

The name did not sound like Michal. The strong light showed the walls to be purple instead of soft blue. Flies clustered around the ceiling fan, and the rasp of auto horns rose from the street. Jacob remembered that these people of Baghdad, at least the diplomatic corps, knew Michal—that other Michal who had escaped to Mr. Parabat's garden after the war. He remembered that a physician here would not visit a woman unless someone else were present.

They had conventions here, and for what you obtained you paid. Jacob had no more than a few hundred dollars in creased and waterstained express checks that had been stuck in his hip pocket and forgotten until now. For those bits of paper the hotel clerks handed over dinar notes to him readily. The legation had not been willing to advance him money. Still, with the creased slips of paper he and Michal could pay their expenses in Baghdad for a month. She could stay at the hospital for observation and he could find a room in a smaller hotel.

Fear touched him swiftly, because Dr. Ishaq stood there, smiling inexorably. Michal, coming out of the cold of the high altitudes into the germ-ridden heat of the congested city, might develop pneumonia in her weakened condition. Even if they had had unlimited money, she could not start out in a plane like this.

"Yes," he said to the physician. "Miss Thorne will go to the hospital today."

"But, darling," Michal objected instantly, "I feel very well, and I have no desire to be cooped up in the Royal Hospital."

The Arab doctor and the nurse looked at Jacob in silence. With a nod, he drew them out into the corridor. "Is there danger of pneumonia?" he asked bluntly.

"Possibly, yes," the Arab stated carefully. "It might prove to be malaria. I do not think anything worse. We have merely learned to be suspicious of a temperature until we are certain." And again he waited courteously.

"I'll telephone you if Michal is coming around today."

For the first time Sister Miriam spoke diffidently. "Dr. Ishaq is not easy for you to telephone. I shall wait."

It seemed to Jacob that they wanted Michal to go with them at once. While Sister Miriam seated herself in the corridor, he went back into the door and said, "You should go for this observation they want."

Beckoning him, she made room for him on the bed. "Tell me what happened at the legation first."

"They want me to write a letter about it all."

"Oh, Jacob, you shouldn't do that."

No, he shouldn't do that now. For years in Cairo he had typed long reports which had been carried away in pouches and had disappeared somewhere in a labyrinth of files in offices. He should not do that with the story of what they had seen and heard in the valley of Araman. But what could he do? Telephone? If connection could be made from Baghdad to the Capital, it would be no more than an unknown voice, relating incredible things to strange ears. If he had money enough . . .

"Jacob." She had been waiting for him to speak, lying back, trying not to cough, her hand dry and restless in his. "What should

we do? I feel as if this room was holding us in, like two helpless children, and I want——” She looked up at him, unsmiling. “I know the British Ambassador. Would it help to talk to him?”

He shook his head.

“My stuff can wait.” He was thinking of the hospital.

“Ours—and don’t call it that.” She pretended to think portentously, with brows drawn down. “It’s so real to me now, more real than when I teased you that time at the lake. Wait, Jacob. Give me a minute to think. I’m rather stupid about such things, but I can feel the need of this.”

For a while she was quiet, looking at the bronze Pegasus and beyond through the window where a small balcony opened into the garden. “I can understand a little, Jacob. The mountains of Kurdistan aren’t going to stay as they were, after all that happened at Araman. They may be like the Dardanelles, something to make conflict among the powerful nations unless they are made into something secure. Your idea is to make them inviolate—like a bridgehead toward peace, something that *exists*. You see,” she added proudly, “how I’ve been thinking about it, and about. A dream never comes true, does it, Jacob? But this can be so real and fine.”

Like Dr. Ishaq, Jacob waited, knowing that Michal was talking half to herself, until her mind was made up about something.

“My house didn’t come true, but *something* must come out of what we saw and what you planned.”

“And what Sir Clement sought for.”

She nodded a little. “And Paul and his father. They *knew* what could be done. Where is Daoud, Jacob?”

Although he had tried that morning, he had not been able to reach the young archaeologist at the museum. Daoud had arrived safely, only to be taken away, to Cairo or to England, after he had spent some days at the British Embassy. Even Aurel Leicester had denied knowledge of him, so Jacob reasoned that the British authorities had held his information to be vitally important, and had sent him elsewhere for closer questioning, perhaps to the Foreign Office itself.

“I suppose we’re both idiots about this,” Michal went on in her

judicial manner, "but I can't help feeling that we belong in the valley of Araman. Am I too idiotic, Jacob?"

"No."

"And if people like us can't go back there, it will be worse for the world. You needn't answer that, and I'll be sensible now."

"I haven't been sensible at all today, Michal. This place seems like a stage with everybody dressed up to act a part."

"Perhaps that's just what they're doing. I prefer to think in terms of marionettes." Her low laugh reached him. "I wonder what we'd think up for New York?"

"You'd think first about some new clothes."

"I wonder."

Now Michal had done with her thoughts; she brushed back her obtrusive hair and smiled up at him importantly. "You're going there at once, Jacob darling."

"Not I, and not at once."

"The only thing you *can* do is to go right away to Washington and talk to the people who can get things done. And you shouldn't lose a day."

That, she said flatly, was the unanswerable logic of facts. They had not money enough for the two of them to go, even if she were able to make the trip.

"Can't you see me boarding a plane in this garment, Jacob? But I'm dressed perfectly for the hospital."

After he had made his report, she insisted, and had started the mills of the gods grinding in the State Department for safeguarding Kurdistan, he could cable her money and she could follow him—after Dr. Ishaq had finished with his observation and had christened her fever.

"It's a nice dream, Michal," he admitted fondly; "one of your best, in fact. The stubborn fact is that without cash enough for air transport all the way, or any American plane, or passport, I can't go now."

"Of course you can. All you have to do is call Aurel. British Security and the British Army can still move marionettes about, if so inclined."

She insisted until, to please her, he went down to the telephone;

without expectation he labored with the instrument and in time heard Aurel's modulated voice say, "Squadron Leader Leicester speaking." As if the war were still on.

And Michal was justified in her confidence. There was a BOAC aircraft leaving the airdrome in two hours, and a place could be had for Jacob. Under the circumstances he would need pay only a minimum fare, to be transported to Cairo, Malta, Marseilles, Croydon, and across the Atlantic to Gander, where he could be ferried over to the American planes. A special order could take care of the matter of the passport, since Jacob still had his military identification. . . . "It's rather important that you should be sent through without delay, Captain Ide."

When Jacob went back to the bedroom, Michal glanced at his face and said, "You see?"

When she heard the British plane was leaving in two hours, she turned her head away on the pillow and rearranged the ikon and the bronze horse on the bedside table. "At least it won't take you very long to pack, will it? But don't you think we should divide up our household belongings? That won't take long, either. You'll need Pegasus to exhibit, and I may need Nikolka, so he'd better stay here with me." Her fingers held to the winged horse, and her eyes half closed, hiding, as she tried to smile. "I hate for you to remember me like this, in a dull gray coverall."

"I won't, Michal."

Suddenly she held out both her arms, crying, "You must come back to me soon, Jacob."

Flying into the west, over white cloud surface and dark land patched into squares of growing things, over the green blue of the Mediterranean and the hard green gray of the Atlantic, Jacob changed the hands of his watch, as the official time changed, lengthening as he pursued the sinking sun. These days passed, and more must pass before he could have word of Michal by cable.

The first sight of his own continent was no more than a glimpse through clouds of drifting ice, like scattered sheep below, and then a faint line that grew into a snowbound coast beyond the ice. That

coast perhaps at this point of land had been discovered a thousand years before by the long ships of Icelanders seeking what lay to the west.

Seen from the plane, far off, it bore no sign of change from that early time.

Jacob met his first delay at the pine-covered shore of the inlet where he waited three days for a place in a New York-bound plane. The wartime barracks where he slept was deserted except for him. To buy his ticket from there, he had to cash most of his remaining express checks.

There was a glorious moment when he came down through the overcast and the motors slowed their beat, and he saw through gusts of rain the myriad lights of his own city overspreading the ground and rising ahead of him in pinnacles against the darkness. These lights traced patterns of avenues, bridges, and pyramided skyscrapers.

At La Guardia Field he was held through that night and most of the next day by an affable man, an immigration inspector at the counter by which the passengers passed into America. This individual, never losing his good humor, had pointed out that Jacob had neither travel orders as an officer nor a passport as a civilian, and furthermore that the military identification of a certain Captain Jacob Ide of USAFIME in no way proved that the passenger presenting it was the officer in question—especially as he bore little resemblance to the photograph in the identification. Moreover, Jacob had no baggage. He had, in fact, nothing except the bronze horse that might be anything in the way of a curio. Failing positive proof that he was Jacob Ide, American citizen, the only alternative was official acknowledgment from United States Army authority of his identity and his presence at the field.

The next morning Jacob spent two hours laboring with a telephone in a booth under observation of a tranquil cop, getting the proper silver coins to put calls through to strange voices in the War Department offices in Washington. No one there knew of a Captain Ide who had been authorized to return home; there was

a record of a missing Captain Jacob Ide, with an AWOL queried on it; there was a discharge awaiting a Captain Ide of G-2 upon proper completion of medical examination in the Cairo headquarters, since removed. As far as the War Department was concerned, the Jacob Ide at the other end of the telephone did not exist, because there was no account of him in written orders on hand.

Jacob was released in the end by a scrap of paper. Very tired after his bouts with the telephone, still under scrutiny of the policeman, he went to the lunch counter for a glass of milk. Since he had spent all his change in the slots of the telephone, he had presented an express check for payment, and this had been refused. The policeman, wandering over to listen to the discussion, had taken the check and Jacob back to the affable immigration inspector, who eyed the bedraggled paper with interest and had asked the officer of the law if he had seen Jacob sign it. "Where and when did you get these?" he had demanded of Jacob.

"Five years ago at the Times Square branch of the Bank of the Manhattan Company," Jacob had explained wearily.

The affable inspector sauntered over to pick up a phone, and in five minutes he came back to say without change of expression, "You were certainly here, and you had an account with that bank in nineteen forty-two, Captain Ide." After noting down the foreign news office of the New York *Transcript* as an address, and instructing Jacob to forward a photostat of his army discharge within a week, he said, "Now you can go along and play," and took up the passport of the next in line.

But when Jacob in a taxi joined the Manhattan-bound traffic, it was too late to reach Washington before the government offices would be closed. The next day, Saturday, they would be closed, and the next.

When the taxi snarled to its first stop, Jacob felt a twinge of dread before he noticed that the cars beside them had stopped, and a traffic light showed red across the way, where a stream of human beings pressed past the machines. Following the afternoon crowd into the depths of the subway, he was pushed close to the tracks,

and found himself tense and chilled when the first train roared toward him out of the maw of the tunnel.

It was not the traffic lights, or the thunder of trains underground, or the rush of human beings in and out of doors, but the feeling that they were moving blindly toward something unknown that made Jacob uneasy. While he waited to cross Fifth Avenue he looked up at the ascending mass of the Empire State Building, and felt as if he himself were poised at the edge of a height.

He looked forward to his old offices as a haven, something understanding and familiar where he could say whatever was in his mind.

A strange girl at a desk outside the elevator asked him who he wanted to see, and—after a curious glance at his clothes—on what business. He said Ed McMahon would know him, and in five minutes he was stepping through the familiar swing door.

There he stopped dead. The outer room met him with almost physical impact. Strange faces affixed to telephones, the full glow of fluorescent lights, the hammering of typewriters that he had not heard for so long, snatches of staccato words flung out, the distant deep purr of revolving presses—

Through this he moved unheeded, sighting familiar faces bent away from him over machines. He moved on limping, bewildered by the crescendo of sound, toward Ed McMahon's open door, where he could see his old editor, unchanged by five years, cleaning out an odorous pipe while he nursed a phone receiver on his shoulder and muttered into it fragments of speech—"no animal crackers in the soup; no subhumanity." Glancing up rapidly and then carefully at Jacob, he said across the phone, "Ready to work again, Jake?"

"I have a story."

"Cairo is fat and purse-proud; it has riots but no story in it."

"This is not Cairo's story."

Between the interludes of the telephone Jacob told the cable editor of the *Transcript* the story of Araman. Because he had so much to tell, he found it hard to make clear. McMahon listened, while he seemed to be doing several other things. Finally he shoved the telephone away and squared his elbows on the littered desk. "It's the sort of thing—" He shook his head. "I believe it, Jake,

but how many others will? You haven't any pictures. Now, if you had been at the Dardanelles. The great American reading public knows about the Dardanelles by now, and any story would be good."

Jacob had seen the word Dardanelles spilled across the newspaper headlines in the street.

"It's time they heard about Araman."

"You're Dutch enough to stick to that one idea. I'm not arguing with you. The discovery angle is good, and London is bound to play it up soon or late. All right." He hesitated. "Center on the discovery of one of the earliest civilizations. But wait a minute." He fumbled through a pile of clippings and pushed one over to Jacob. "The Araman thing has been tied up in a package already. I didn't recognize the name."

The clipping, dated four days before, was an international news agency story from Istanbul under headlines:

ANCIENT CITY FOUND IN KURDISTAN

Soviet archaeological expedition uncovers
early culture of mountains near Armenia.

It was coldly factual, relating that a special mission from Tiflis had discovered hitherto unexamined sites of primitive culture among the Armenians and the Kurdish tribes near Lake Urmiah. The discovery indicated that both an Armenian and a Kurdish nation had existed from early Babylonian times, as proved by the remains of buildings and rock inscriptions in the sacred walled city of Araman, which had no doubt been the residence of great kings of the Armenians and Kurds unrecorded by history. The Soviet mission had made a transcript of the saga of Araman given by the surviving patriarch of the city and confirmed by inscriptions carved in the cliffs. These findings tended to support the claim of both Armenians and Kurds to national existence, now as in the past. Those claims had been presented by the Kurds and Armenians to the Soviet Union. The Kurds were erecting a monument to the Red Army on the peak of Araman.

As Jacob read, he thought of Dr. Anna scribbling honestly in her notebook. Someone else had edited her story.

"True or not true?" McMahon questioned, across the telephone.

"Both. It's a part of the truth, and it buries Araman entirely under politics. It wipes out the vestige of the first endeavor of human beings to be free. It says nothing about their faith that has survived war, or the chance of restoring it."

Putting down the telephone, the editor looked at Jacob impassively.

"Any political angle is for Washington, not for our columns. Why not take it to Washington first?"

McMahon guessed that Jacob was bound for Washington, and he felt relieved that the *Transcript* would not have to cope with a story that was neither ordinary news nor an archaeological find, but a matter of survival of human beings. And he suggested that Jacob relax and go through with his medical examination and discharge, and get fixed up at Walter Reed Hospital or somewhere before returning to work. "You look like Banquo's ghost, Jake. Where are you putting up?"

Absently Jacob named a hotel that he had liked before the war. His editor laughed. "Beds in this city don't exist over the week end." Scribbling a note, he handed it to Jacob, telling him to take it to a small hostelry between the office and Times Square, and give it to the manager, who would take care of him somehow. "Get yourself some clothes, or you won't get in anywhere. And try to see Armistead Marly in Washington."

And he yanked the buzzing telephone back to his ear.

The idea of the overcoat was a mistake. Jacob had not really wanted one, but with an overcoat and perhaps gloves and a neck scarf, he could carry out McMahon's injunction, and would appear respectable as far down as the knees. For some time he wandered by the glowing windows where surprising amounts of costume jewelry and arrays of bottles shone. Turning in past a window that displayed sport shirts and bathrobes, he found himself in a small glittering room where two men in striped suits bent over the sporting page

of an evening edition, arguing about the racing results at Miami. Left to himself, Jacob inspected the few overcoats hung on a rack in the rear, picking out one that looked like tweed and seemed to be about his size. One of the racing *cognoscenti* moved over to him, extinguishing a cigarette, and said, "Soivn'ty-fi," and when Jacob hesitated he added carelessly, "It's a buy."

Without trying it on, Jacob fingered it irresolutely, thinking that seventy-five dollars would take almost all his remaining traveler's checks. Finally he decided to buy a sweater instead, for twelve dollars and eighty-five cents. It would not hide the shabbiness of his blue suit, but it would keep him warm.

Going out into the swift-moving crowd, he went in search of the hotel McMahon had named, and he realized that it was not the price or the dubious appearance of the overcoat that had made him reject it. Rather, he did not want to discard his old clothes. These battered shoes and the torn blue cloth had belonged to Araman. If he threw them away, he would be losing them and be unprotected by them.

At a congested crossing he turned the wrong way. He felt the sting of hard snow on his face and glanced up in surprise. From the murk above the window lights flakes were drifting down, to vanish underfoot on the pavements. Only when they passed the flashing, colored lights did they show white. At the next corner he peered up at the lampstand to read the street sign. It said that he was on the Avenue of the Americas—a name that was unfamiliar to him. When he stood still the people behind, hurrying through the snow flurries, jostled into him. It may have been the snow, but he had a strange feeling that he was there alone in the glare of the lamp, apart from these people, who saw nothing of him. As if there lay upon his shoulders not a cloak of invisibility but a need peculiar to himself, unrecognized by these groups hurrying to stores and to theaters and dinner tables.

That night, while the hour hand moved around on his watch, he could not sleep. It was the first time in months he had stretched out in an ordinary bed; the room smelled of lacquer and stale perfume.

He had had to wait in the lobby while it was made up, and he had gone down to a cafeteria where men and women jostled trays against the counter, calling out orders in heavy voices and pointing at steaming trays of food. Not feeling hungry, Jacob had avoided the crowd by drawing himself a glass of milk from a faucet, after pushing a coin into a slot; he had picked up some buns from a clear space on the counter.

The metal scrap basket contained a pint bottle, empty of whisky. Over the washstand one of the towels had been rumpled and streaked with bright lipstick. In spite of the falling snow, the neon signs of the street below colored the window opening and sent wraiths of red and green across the ceiling. Through the thin wall by his head he could hear the rumble of voices punctured by laughter. Remotely, elevator doors clashed open and shut.

The reasoning part of his mind said: you need about four stiff drinks at the corner bar; you've had precious little sleep for a week, and you're still shy of the blood you lost more than two weeks ago, and that does things to your head; this is Times Square, and it's strange only because you haven't seen it in five years.

Something unreasoning in him stirred and cried out because the snow was falling, and this room shut out the snow, and separated him from Michal. In that other room, before the embers of the fire vanished, Michal would be blowing out the lamps, holding the edges of her robe out in her fingers, dancing a step or two between the lamps, in time with the melody of the wind and the silence beyond it, then turning suddenly, her head on one side, to smile at him. In this room Michal did not exist; she could never be here. . . . Sister Miriam had known there was something to worry about; Michal had told him he must come back if anything happened, and now he could not go back as he had come. Not without a passport, and foreign visas, money and plane accommodations all to be extracted bit by bit from official routine.

Jacob counted all the obstacles to his boarding a plane to fly eastward and kept thinking of new ones. So the room closed in on him, holding him in the cold bed, until his mind numbed and he slept restlessly, his chest wet with sweat.

At the opening of the bank next morning he went to his safe-deposit box and arranged for a thousand dollars to be cabled to Michal at the hospital. Since his bank had no means of sending dollars to the sterling zone in the Middle East, it had to be done through a British bank, and it took all the morning to arrange.

In the cable he inserted a message to Michal asking her to wire immediately how she was and how soon she could catch a plane for the States. Since he had no address, he gave her the office of Armistead Marly, the name McMahon had mentioned. Marly, he learned at the bank, was head of the Division of Near Eastern Affairs in the State Department. Once this message had gone off, Jacob's sense of unease relaxed. In the nine days since he had left her, Michal's fever might be ended, under Dr. Ishaq's care. In two days more, by Monday, he might have her reply at the office in Washington.

After that Jacob had his first bit of luck. He had walked through the park, where snow still lay on the earth between the pavements, to the museum. He had wandered in, past the gray rooms that held Egyptian tomb façades and sarcophagi and erect statues of beast-headed gods, to the offices where he had found one of the curators, although it was Saturday afternoon. This particular curator, as Jacob knew, had a deep knowledge of pre-Islamic art in western Asia. He had a few minutes to spare because he was awaiting the arrival of a collector with a rare piece of Rhages pottery.

During those few minutes he listened with frank curiosity to Jacob's account of the archaeological finds in Araman. And he stared with even more curiosity at his clothing. In cold silence he examined the winged horse.

"You do not know its provenance, Mr. Ide," he commented at last. "The dealer in Cairo might have picked it up anywhere. Many such pieces, stolen during the war, have been coming on the market. This must be seventh-century Greek work, and quite valuable—unless, of course, it is a good imitation. I cannot give you an opinion on archaic Greek objects."

Jacob explained that he had no wish to sell the horse—the curator had taken notice of his clothing at the first—but wanted to ask if

the museum could not interest itself in joining with foreign archaeological societies to explore the mountains of Kurdistan for all the remains of the Araman culture.

Decisively the curator shook his head. The museum already had concessions to excavate, he explained, in the vicinity of Nishapur in northern Iran, where valuable medieval pottery had been uncovered, and in Palestine, to excavate Biblical sites. "Even upon those sites we cannot undertake anything under the present very uncertain political situation."

"It might help the political situation," Jacob ventured, "if American and British and Russian archaeologists got together to really examine Araman."

The curator smiled judiciously. He had the manner of a professor explaining very simple points to an imaginative student. "By your own account, Mr. Ide, the Russians are at work already in the field."

"What they are reporting isn't very reliable."

"That's it—that's exactly it. No one can work with the Russians without conforming to their ideology. I regret it, but——"

"I've tried to work with half a dozen of them. It can be done—if we try."

The other only shook his head. Outside the door the dog's head on an Egyptian god stared at Jacob blindly. And a sudden sense of failure made him exclaim, "How do you know it can't be done unless you try? The Russians respect scientists, but they're still suspicious——"

"Of what?"

"Of us. Of the outer powers that have invaded them with superior weapons in the past."

"Nonsense!" The curator's ruddy face turned a shade darker.

Jacob leaned across the desk. "I know it's unheard of to get cooperation from the Kremlin. But this is a chance that may never come again. Politically speaking, the mountains of Kurdistan are still open to us. If we can only throw an expedition into them—*be* there—make clear that we have an interest——"

"The museum has interest only in the proper advancement of science." The man at the desk seemed to savor his words. "We are not adventurers——"

"When I say we——"

"Please, Mr. Ide!"

Another visitor approached, holding carefully a package of wrapping paper and cotton wool. Handing Jacob back the bronze horse, the curator turned with marked attention to examine the fragment of a blue bowl lying in the wool.

All Monday morning Jacob put nickels in the slots of telephones in the drugstores on Washington streets, trying to speak with Armistead Marly. The voices of women secretaries assured him that Mr. Marly was in conference, that Mr. Marly was on the other telephone, that if he could state his message, a memorandum would be given Mr. Marly. But Jacob could not explain his message to the voice of a busy secretary.

He was startled, when at noon the receiver clicked in his ear and a quick, clear voice said, "Yes? Marly speaking."

Jacob's muscles tensed, and he forced himself to say deliberately, "I'm Jacob Ide. You wouldn't know me, but I have some important information to give you."

There was a brief pause, and the quick voice asked a question. "Are you Captain Ide?"

"Captain or Mister, I don't know"—Jacob's nervousness assailed him—"but I've come back——"

"In what branch of the service, Captain Ide?"

"It used to be G-2. I mean, I was in G-2."

"Did you know an Englishman named Clement Bigsby?"

"Yes." Relief flooded Jacob like a warm bath. This man at the other end of the wire knew something about him and Sir Clement.

"You say you've just come back. From Calcutta, isn't it?"

"No." Jacob laughed. "From Araman."

Again the brief pause, and the quick voice changed in tone.

"Can you lunch with me, Captain Ide?"

"Can I—— When?"

"Now. In half an hour."

And Marly's voice directed him to a club a few blocks from the drugstore, as if it were a most ordinary part of a day's work to invite a stranger to lunch because he had come from Araman.

Marly did not glance twice at Jacob's clothes. Slender and obviously under strain, he explained casually that he had slipped out of another engagement so they could have a quiet chat together. At the table he proved a courteous host, ordering little for himself, asking few questions. Although he must have been pressed for time, he waited until his guest had finished and most of the other visitors had left the tables before he allowed Jacob to plunge into his story. By then the statesman's dark eyes had summed him up thoroughly. "So the British posted you through to Washington," Marly observed. "They must have thought it important to do that. You look tired."

"I'm tired of waiting."

"I can understand that. We've had very little news and a great many rumors from the Kurdistan area. Tell me what you wish, in your own way."

He had given Jacob no lead to go on, and he turned to look out the window as Jacob talked, excited and relieved by the attention of the other man who could piece together a picture of the distant mountains out of memory and imagination. Only once did he break in to say, "This is vitally important, to me at least."

At the end he murmured, "I wonder what our cousins the British are doing about it." Then he moved a salt shaker in silence between his fingers while Jacob waited. "It's a chance to do something at last," he almost whispered.

Jacob waited.

"You know that you've brought us a new headache," Marly said curtly at last, "and a big one. We've been through smashing crises over the Dardanelles, Outer Mongolia, the railroad out of Harbin, and Iran. Greece and Trieste also—all avenues of the new Soviet expansionism. They've left our heads aching, and they're not settled yet." He looked up, reaching a decision. "What you have to tell is fantastic, except perhaps to me, and other people here consider me slightly mad. I've no political backing. The best thing for you to do is to talk with the Secretary himself. And he has just flown to London for the ministers' conference." He thought for a moment. "You'll have to wait a week for the chance of seeing him. It's not certain then."

Rising, he went with Jacob to the door. When they passed the uniformed attendants at the entrance desk, Marly seemed oblivious of the fact that his guest looked like a tramp. "Keep in touch every day with my office," he said at parting. "It's important."

Not a word about Jacob's status as an officer absent without leave or dictating a report to be typed out. Marly had time only to think of what was important to the country. Although he spoke so quietly, he was as exhausted as Jacob.

"I'll be in every day," Jacob choked out, "to look for a cable."

There was no cable from Michal that Monday. Jacob had hoped she might send a fast cable to say when she was leaving. But even with the British helping, it would take a little time to arrange for a place on a plane. Two days, after all, was not much time.

When Tuesday passed without a word, Jacob worried silently. Even a delayed cable should have been in by then.

After two days Jacob risked asking Marly to let him telephone through to the legation at Baghdad—a difficult operation because it required connection through London and Cairo. He had a wild hope that in some way he could speak with Michal herself . . . instead the unemotional voice of the chargé at Baghdad answered him, and requested him to spell Michal's full name. The chargé knew nothing about such a person at the Royal Hospital.

"Then get the hospital," Jacob snapped. "Ask for Sister Miriam—she'll tell you."

"My dear fellow, that might take twenty minutes." The flat voice rose in protest.

"Let it. I'll wait."

It seemed to him longer than twenty minutes while the wires hummed and clashed as if in the grip of a distant storm, until the other's faint voice reached him. "I couldn't get your Sister Miriam——" The humming drowned out the words. "These telephones . . . hospital . . ."

"What?" Jacob cried.

"Miss Thorne left . . . hospital last week."

And the voice stopped, while others uttered broken words over the cacophony of the wires. Jacob put down the receiver helplessly.

For a moment he had the feeling that Michal, like himself, had ceased to exist in the city of Baghdad. If he could have talked with Sister Miriam! Michal had left the hospital. *She must have sent a message.*

All the next day, Friday, he made excuses to stop in at Marly's office, without result. There was no trace of a cable, although toward the end of the afternoon he phoned the other offices connected with the Near East, in the hope that it might have been left elsewhere.

One chance sent a flash of hope through him. While he was waiting at the telephone a department courier came in, sorting out long sealed envelopes from his unlocked portfolio. This government messenger had flown in from Cairo, and he was distributing his charges hurriedly because closing time was at hand. Jacob lingered, knowing that anything sent by special pouch from Baghdad would be in the Cairo mail. Out of the large manila envelope the first secretary drew three smaller white missives, and, looking them over, shook her head at Jacob sympathetically.

"Don't forget to call in early Monday, Captain Ide," she reminded him. "Mr. Marly requested that you keep well in touch."

It was a little thing, the courier who had delivered no letter, yet it drove Jacob to wander the streets for hours after the battleship-gray State Department had released its employees flooding through the doors. His thoughts raced, telling him that Michal might have been too sorely sick to cable, and who else would do it for her?

He felt very tired, and he walked aimlessly downhill past the towered Pan-American Building to the level stretch of Constitution Avenue, where taxis and cars were speeding away the personnel of the huge war and navy structures. The rush of the cars on the wet pavements was like the sigh of a heavy wind. Going on alone, isolated from the human currents that had kept in motion the machinery of government until the hour hands of the clocks touched five, he tasted the bitterness of failure. He had witnessed an incredible thing, the shaping of the future world—for that he knew it to be—and now he could do nothing but wait around an office door, like any place hunter.

It was not like Michal to be silent. He told himself again, what

he had thought long ago, that she belonged to the caste of the Britishers such as Sir Clement and Aurel Leicester, who had been so solicitous of her health. That caste might be passing, yet it had its splendor and generosity—and what would replace it?

"Nothing that I am or have," he told himself.

By now he might not only be absent without leave on the army records but sought by the F.B.I. contact with La Guardia Field. Deliberately, he had not sent in the copy of his discharge, because he had not dared to report himself at the G-2 section of the Pentagon nor confront the medical examiners who might send him to hospital. He had to be ready when Marly called for him. He had to wait.

His head down against the rain, Jacob was moving through a park, and no cars passed him now. In the near darkness he became aware, half consciously, of the absence of lights. There was no flickering glare here of marquees and billboards, and for a moment he felt as if he were walking through the country roads he had known long ago, when houses showed only a few lights and he had sailed his sloop between the hills of the upper Hudson.

You could not bring back the past. It left you forever, and became petrified within tombs, embalmed in museums . . .

He was passing a single light that glowed through the rain without being seen. It hung a little above him within the shape of a stone house, and when he looked at it, he saw a man sitting there, unmoving.

"That must be the Lincoln Memorial," he told himself drowsily, and went on, wondering a bit that no living person was there, or nearer to the sitting man than the flickering lights of distant cars hurrying out to Arlington or the airport in the rush of Friday night.

There was something odd about the park and the building with a glow of light, like a home of long ago. Jacob stopped a moment and looked back at it. But still no one went near it, and he limped on.

The faint, unmistakable whirring of motorcycles cut through the darkness, and he thought that some riders were speeding through the park to reach the bridge ahead of the traffic. Why should anyone care to visit the memorial within the park on a rainy week-end

night? Under a tree he stopped and tried to make out the hands of his watch. The quivering of his chilled body kept him from seeing the faint hands, but he thought it was after nine, and he would have more than sixty hours to pass before the government offices would open again and he could ask if there was a cable from Baghdad for him. If you loved anyone so much that every minute of uncertainty brought the ache of pain, you ought to get drunk and sleep or try to forget. If you had strength to walk back for miles through the darkness to the lights of a bar.

A shaft of light passed across him. A motorcycle had swung by the memorial building without stopping. Instead of passing him, the motor dwindled to slow chattering and the headlight beam came to rest beside him.

There was only one rider, although the machine had a sidecar. He did not seem to be in uniform, and he asked sharply, "Captain Ide?"

Startled, Jacob hesitated. No one except the authorities would be looking for him. Fleetinglly he thought of his missing passport and discharge papers, and laughed because it was fantastic to be cornered like this in the darkness of an empty park. "Yes," he said, "what of it?"

"Will you get in, please? I'll take you back."

When Jacob moved awkwardly into the wet seat beside him, the rider started at once, not speaking until he swung out on Constitution. "You couldn't be reached by phone. You were seen walking along here, and we've been looking for you on the bridge."

Yes, they might have identified him as a man without an overcoat but with a cane, who limped slightly with one foot.

"We just tried the parkway for luck," grunted the rider. "It's no night for a walk. Mr. Marly gave orders to find you."

Jacob laughed. After waiting all week, the machinery of government had reached out to find him hidden in a park. They drew up at a side entrance of the dingy State Building where two policemen loitered. His companion showed a pass and Jacob was admitted. It felt like five years before, after the war had crashed on Washington. "You know the way," said the rider, and turned back.

It felt strange going down the empty corridor and pushing open

the white lattice door. At her desk, the first secretary gave an exclamation of relief and smiled as she pressed a buzzer.

"There's no cable, Captain Ide," she said quickly, "but they are waiting for you."

Marly came out, closing the door behind him and speaking in his incisive way. "You took some finding. Iverson's here from the British Embassy. His news is about as bad as could be."

The Secretary was in conference elsewhere and could not be present; but someone else had arrived from Jacob's part of the world by plane that evening.

Marly's quick glance searched Jacob's face. "Do you feel well enough to tell them the situation at Araman?"

"Yes."

"This evening's news has made your information important." The statesman hesitated. "I won't try to tell you how important. But you should know that we are failing in the Anglo-American attempt to neutralize the Dardanelles—to make them an open sea passage without fortification. Iverson reports that Moscow is moving to control your Kurdish mountains. There is a rumor in that the Democratic Kurdish party has sent a petition from Sanjbulak to form a Soviet out of their mountains."

"Yes," said Jacob, thinking of the passenger from that evening's transatlantic plane.

Inside Marly's large room three men sat not at the desk but around the open fire, stretched out as if tasting to the full a few minutes' relaxation. One he recognized as Macomber, a department specialist in western Asia; another—looking like a lean crewman who had trained too long—Marly introduced as Iverson, the Englishman.

The third, the largest of them, appeared to have slept in his clothes and to be still drowsy. But the slitted eyes that examined Jacob briefly were alert and thoughtful. In that moment Jacob had a flash of recognition. This man was unknown to him, yet he had seen the lounging figure before in a different semblance. It might have been one of the passersby on Rashid Street, or by the Golden Gate at Jerusalem. In any case, the other, like himself, had been alone.

Marly did not introduce him by name, saying only that he had just arrived from the East. "You see, the United States has its wanderers also, Jacob."

Iverson smiled fleetingly. "David Khalid happens to be in London at this moment, Captain Ide. You call him Daoud, I believe."

"Then your people have Sir Clement Bigsby's notes," Marly flashed.

"I see no need to deny it here."

It was easier to talk to them after that, by the crackling fire, with the patter of rain against the windows, and the bronze Pegasus on the table between them. Jacob stood by the fire and could see Paul's face again; the saga of the Watchman came back in words to him, and centuries of time fell away, from the walls of Washington, to the distant ranges of Araman.

Half consciously he was aware that Macomber, who had been fidgeting with papers in a brief case, put away his case to sit back intent; Marly, who had gone to answer the faint buzz of the telephone, spoke into it quietly and it did not ring again. Instead, the secretary came in, to sit at Marly's desk and take down what Jacob was saying.

Two hours later, tired, he still spoke to them.

"I know it seems like a mad idea here in Washington, but not if you had been there in those mountains. They were a paradise once. Call it the cradle of civilization, or anything you like—it was there.

"Those mountains can be set apart as a sanctuary of the nations. It can be done. We've done as much in this country for bison and Indians. We wouldn't have to *build*—we'd only be keeping what is there. Those mountains have known peace until now, because they were remote. What is to prevent keeping that peace by international agreement?

"In Araman the first systematic attempt was made to wage war against war by influencing the minds of human beings. That's just what our existing agencies of international accord profess to do, without being able to accomplish it. The men of Araman showed

us a line of action, and God knows we ought to be able to do better than they—not by merely creating a theater for study, but by establishing a center for the ablest scientists of the nations, Russians as well as Chinese and Indians and Westerners, as a first step for destroying warfare itself.

“You have such a centering of refugee scientists in the United States today, out of the last war. You can have more in Araman. You would draw the best type of volunteer brains to Araman from the outlying nations. Police its frontiers, if you must, with the guards of the small nations around it, Turkey, the Armenian Soviet, Iraq, Iran, and the Soviet of Azerbaijan—but protect it with the might of the United States. At long last let our nation, let all of us, *do* something instead of talking about it.

“Asia would understand it. Asia remembers the meaning of sanctuary, which we have forgotten—almost. Paul said that the influence of religion in Asia is fighting now against the overwhelming power of arms made in the West. Those religions are scattered now—give them a meeting ground, the Hindus, the Zoroastrians, the Kurds, the Jews, and the Moslems. The Christians may wait at the monastery at the gate, but they are there too.”

The listeners sat quiet. Jacob felt a sense of weariness in trying to put into words the longing that drove him to speak.

“What have we in the West that could equal Araman? The council of the United Nations debates like the League of Nations, moving from city to city, among hotel accommodations. Seat it in Araman, and the Asiatics would know that it belongs to them too. Build a new city, belonging to no nation but to humanity in the mass. Asia, that has had its sacred palaces and forbidden cities, would wake to the grandeur of that.

“It can be done, because Araman was real once. If we are ready to put our lives into the scale against armaments, we can accomplish what was done in the time of Paul of Tarsus and Mar Giorgios.

“And if it is not done—if the vestiges of Araman are carried off, mined, exploited, turned into national monuments and strategic bases for war—how will you answer the question, what can be done? If you can’t do this, what *can* you do?”

When he had said his last word, the three at the fire put ques-

tions to him, probing for details, seeking out uncertainties. Their questions touched what he had seen and heard—not his dream of a sanctuary. And in his weariness he could not tell what they might be thinking as they pondered. Macomber, he knew, was skeptical.

Marly put an end to the questioning by asking their opinion in turn. "Before Captain Ide leaves, have you any comment, Mr. Macomber?"

The expert shrugged. "It's really not I, but the Russians who have a comment. They have established a *fait accompli*. In other words, they have absorbed Araman into the Russian zone."

And Iverson murmured, "If they lose Araman, it would break their new frontier line from the Dardanelles to India by which they hope to control Asia. Will they do it?"

Macomber said: "Their line runs through to Dairen now."

"In wild surmise," Iverson quoted softly, "silent, upon a peak in Dairen."

Marly said, looking into the fire, "They are the youngest of the great nations, afraid, and blundering in their efforts at statecraft."

Jacob exclaimed: "Yes. Don't you see? It's not the Russians alone. It's something else. It's the power politics of all the great nations, closing in on Araman like a vise."

There was a moment of silence. Jacob tried to gather himself together. "I know you think I'm crazy about this," he said then. "But aren't the Russians—the mass of them—afraid of us because they don't know us as we really are? Set up Araman right next door to them, and they'll know about that. Make it the first force for peace, and they can't help but learn it is just that."

"It's in the Kremlin's area of influence. Would it be permitted?" demanded Macomber.

"No!" cried Jacob. "Not if you sit here and write papers about it. Go there, and do it!"

A slight shake of the head from Marly warned Jacob that these men knew far more about the Russian enigma than he, and he was silent.

"Mr. Iverson," Marly said then, "would you care——"

"Of course I'll give my opinion as an individual." Surprisingly, the Englishman smiled. "You know our great oil fields at Kirkuk,

Masjid-i-Sulaiman, and elsewhere, are within artillery range of your mountains, Captain Ide. Five years ago we should never have agreed to such an allocation of neutral territory. Now I can say that we should be most happy to agree to it, most happy. But now I feel, as an individual, that it cannot be done."

"Is that all?" Marly asked.

"All, except a whimsy." Iverson paused, but Marly still waited for him. "Ah, you want that? Your President, Abraham Lincoln, once made a most remarkable speech in a few words. In it he asked men to dedicate themselves to something."

Nodding at Jacob, he added, "In the manner of youthful Paul, to dedicate themselves to a task. My thought is merely that if he had made that speech let us say on the steps of the White House, it would indeed not have been long remembered. But he spoke on a certain space of ground, set aside, the battlefield of Gettysburg. His words invoked what had happened on the earth beneath his feet. I believe they have always been known as the Gettysburg speech. My thought, I repeat, is that our own declarations to dedicate ourselves to make an end of war should have less weight here or in London than if they were spoken on the battlefield of Araman, with the first earth dedicated to peace beneath our feet."

"The last, best hope of earth," repeated Marly.

Then he came over to Jacob. "You should be in bed now, Captain Ide, and resting."

By that Jacob understood that the others would carry on the discussion among themselves, and that, his part having been played, his usefulness had ended. Marly still held his arm. "Kurdistan is now the spot of greatest potential danger on earth," he observed. "I do not know, of course, but I think the United States Government will move urgently in the next hearing of the Security Council to create a sanctuary of the nations there."

Iverson moved slightly. "In that case, His Majesty's Government would concur." And the stranger, who had been looking out the dim window, turned curiously.

"And I am certain," Marly said quietly, "we will fail. But we shall have made the first attempt. The next generation may succeed where we have failed."

The stranger broke his long silence: "If there is a next generation like ours."

When no one spoke after that, Jacob realized they were waiting for him to leave and that he had done all he could.

Taking the bronze horse, he went with Marly to the door, and alone into the outer office. As he was leaving, the secretary called from her desk: "Captain Ide, there's a letter for you."

And she gave him a small blue envelope, saying that it had come by the hand of the last courier. It was not sealed and it had an Iraqi stamp.

Michal's writing flashed up into his eyes in diminutive words. He pulled open the flap and took out a single sheet of paper, then stepped through the door, to read in the quiet of the corridor.

For a moment he had to steady his hand holding the paper.

DEAREST JACOB,

I am going away. My temperature is better, and Dr. Ishaq is quite proud of me. But I do not feel well in this room. My head roars when the planes pass overhead. Aurel is the kindest soul alive, and my affection for him grows. He questions me so often, though, about the tragic things at Araman. And when the other British officers probe me like something on the dissecting table about politics I feel as if a chill hand had been laid on my heart.

Jacob, it's foolish of me, and I know—you don't have to scold me, darling—that I ought to try to get back my strength and some clothes and arrange for a place in the plane to the westward. But there's something in me I can't change, after these last months, and it cries out against starting west.

Am I being a coward? I was never brave about some things. I am only a woman, who does not know how to escape pain except by running away.

Father Hyacinth came in the other day, with a basket of walnuts. He said the winter wheat was doing well at the monastery, and I have bought some peony seed and jonquil roots. Sergeant Daniel is there with his family, at Saint George's, and Mr. Svetlov took refuge there. He is reading Hamlet now. And they are going to bring back the bell. I can't help it, Jacob—it's not like our paradise,

is it? But it's the only real refuge for me. And, Jacob, I'm going back with Father Hyacinth, to wait there. I went there our first night, Jacob, and if I don't have something around me to remember by, I feel afraid.

She had written *Write me soon how you are* and had scratched it out to scrawl instead *Jacob, come quickly!*

Without seeing it, he stared at the sheet of paper in his fingers. The date was a week ago. If she had gone by car with the officers to Riyat, she would be up the mountainside now and waiting in the shelter of Saint George's.

Suddenly a flash of dread touched him—the most dangerous spot on earth, Marly had said. Over the cloud level, in the home of Mar Giorgios, Michal had found her sanctuary. Then he heard her telling him of it, gaily, and of the garden she would plant when the snow melted. There was her portion of land, dedicated to peace, with the children and the strays of the mountainside, the refugees from war gathered there, even studying. This was no dream, but reality. And Michal had made it real.

"Michal," he cried, "you blessed idiot!"

The four men gathered around the desk glanced up in sharp surprise when he hurried through the door. Marly frowned, then asked courteously, "Is there anything I can do for you, Captain Ide?"

Now Jacob had no doubt about that. His fingers clung to the paper. "Yes," he said in a breath. "I'm no use here after tonight. I might be useful out there. In the mountains, Marly. I only left them to report here."

"I had no idea you meant to go back," Marly protested.

"But I'm going."

The stranger by the window looked up once, with something like assent.

Iverson felt a need to warn the impulsive American whose imagination seemed to run away with his sense of values. "It's hardly the safest place to select at the present moment, Captain Ide."

"I'm not so sure about that."

Macomber broke in impatiently. "But what possible use is there in your going? The Department couldn't be responsible for you. Not," he added carefully, "that we would not be glad of an observer in Kurdistan."

"What use would I be here, or in New York?" Jacob felt confident of his answer. "I can't tell you in so many words what I might do. Nor could Paul tell me in Cairo. But he believed an American would be able to help."

Iverson smiled, while Armistead Marly studied Jacob curiously. "It would take several weeks," he observed, "to arrange for your passport."

Something broke loose in Jacob, shouting in derision. He felt as if a wind of the heights had swept through the room, touching him, sending the blood pulsing through him, making him warm and certain. "Damn the red tape, Marly, and put me on a plane tonight. You can do it."

When the statesman, exasperated, glanced at his watch, Jacob cried out. "At eleven-thirty at night in the rain you can do it. I've done something for you. Any department courier rates passage without delay, even if he's carrying last year's statistics of sterling transactions in pigskins from Aleppo. Fix me up as a special courier—give me blank paper sealed up—anything. There'll be planes leaving soon or late."

The gaunt man by the window spoke again. "A C-54 leaves New York at five forty-five."

Marly hesitated. "If you'll wait until we have finished, I can see——"

"Forget departmental procedure for once, until afterward. Don't you understand? You must let me go. *Let me go!*"

In the silence that followed, three out of the four men wondered at the change in this quiet officer who stormed at a night's delay in going to a destination of danger. The fourth, who had just come from the East, understood.

In the high rotunda of the air terminal only a few passengers waited drowsily with their bags or newspapers or children, scat-

tered along the benches facing the great plate-glass window that was like the transparent curtain of a stage. Beyond that curtain extended the vista of the air through which an unseen wind drove a mist of rain, lighted fleetingly by the green and red glimmers of ascending planes and the flash of a landing light.

When the mechanical summons of the loud-speaker called them, groups rose obediently from the benches and departed down the passageway into that other world of the elements.

Against the window Jacob rested his shoulder, moving his hand upon the cold glass, feeling still the wind that had followed him out from the streets in a speeding taxi. The policemen who watched the entrances eyed him with some curiosity, taking due note of his worn suit, the absence of even an overnight bag or raincoat. And it seemed to them that he looked hungry. He looked as if he had not sat down to a meal in days.

Many strange figures passed through this terminal of the air, but Jacob at the window did not move away or get himself a copy of the morning papers. Stubbornly he kept in his place, his eyes following each giant machine that turned and trundled away, reverberating, as if there could be joy in the sight of them.

One of the policemen, stirred by languid curiosity, made his way toward the man at the window who might have no other business here than the likelihood of picking up someone's neglected bag, or even taking advantage of the warmth of the rotunda for the night. The policeman thought he should not be there.

Then something happened. The man left the window.

The loud-speaker was intoning a name. "*Captain Jacob Ide, please. Captain Ide, passenger, wanted at the information desk.*"

The man hurried, in spite of a slight limp, past the policeman. He hurried as if it was important to him not to lose a minute. And his thin face was transfixed with joy.

The policeman, vaguely disturbed, watched him go up to the information counter where a government messenger waited with a small pouch. The loud-speaker fell silent.

It was all right, the policeman thought—it looked queer, but it was all right.

C'est la tragédie du monde moderne . . . les vieilles civilisations qualitatives, qui avaient pour but la perfection et non la puissance, sont notre paradis perdu.

On trouve encore en Asie ce qu'on ne trouve presque plus en Europe, des restes vivants de ce grand passé.

GUGLIELMO FERRERO

This is the tragedy of the modern world . . . the old finer civilizations which had for their fulfillment perfection and not power, are our lost paradise.

You can still find in Asia what can hardly be found in Europe now, the *living* remains of this great past.

ABOUT HAROLD LAMB

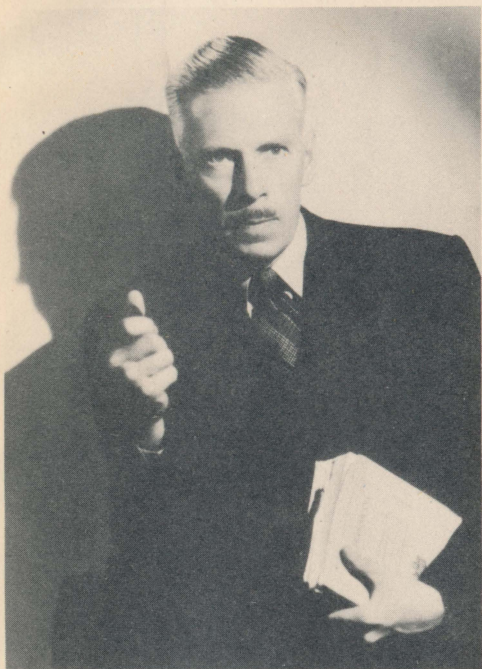
HAROLD LAMB's father was an artist, which may help to explain the author's own artistry with words and his remarkable ability to see people and the history they made as an integrated whole. For Lamb does with words what an artist does with colors and form—combining, blending, emerging with a central beauty.

He has been writing "as far back as I can remember. In college, Columbia University, I had already been drawn toward digging up the past in the Central Asia field. The kind of thing you can't let go, once you begin it." First there were stories in *Adventure*, and in *Collier's*, with Central Asia as the theme. Then the memorable *Genghis Khan*, written in four weeks, which has been translated into most of the European and some Asiatic languages. *Tamerlane* followed.

It took two years, during which Mr. Lamb traveled and studied in Asia and the Near East, to write *The Crusades*. And it took two volumes to publish it. It became a best seller immediately.

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