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\*\*\* START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK HI JOLLY! \*\*\*



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By Jim Kjelgaard

Illustrated by Kendall Rossi

Dodd, Mead & Company New York 1960

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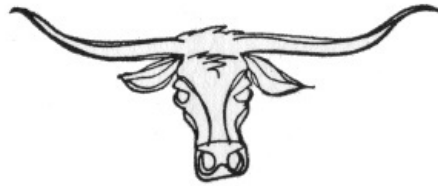
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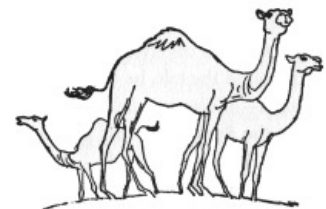
***Dedicated to***  
**DOROTHY AND ED HANSEN**

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### 1. Ali Finds the Dalul

The first gray light of very early morning was just starting to thin the black night when Ali opened his eyes. He came fully awake, with no lingering period that was part sleep and part wakefulness, but he kept exactly the same position he had maintained while slumbering. Until he knew just what lay about him, he must not move at all.

Motion, even the faintest stir and even in this dim light, was sure to attract the eye of whoever might be near. In this Syrian desert, where only the reckless turned their backs to their own caravan companions, whoever might be near—or for that matter far—could be an enemy.

When Ali finally moved, it was to extend his right hand, very slowly and very stealthily, to the jeweled dagger that lay snugly sheathed beneath the patched and tattered robe that served him as burnous by day, and bed and bed covering by night. When his fingers curled around the hilt, he breathed more easily. Next to a camel—of course a *dalul*, or riding camel—a dagger was the finest and most practical of possessions, as well as the best of friends.

As for owning a *dalul*, Ali hadn't even hoped to get so much as a baggage camel for this journey. When it finally became apparent that the celestial rewards of a trip to Mecca would be augmented by certain practical advantages if he made his pilgrimage now, he had just enough silver to pay for the *ihram*, or ceremonial robe that he must don before setting foot in the Holy City. Even then, it had been necessary to provide Mustapha, that cheating dog of a tailor, with four silver coins—and two lead ones—and Mustapha had himself to thank for that! When Ali came to ask the price, it was five pieces of silver. When he returned to buy, it was six.

But the *ihram*, as well as the fifth silver coin which Mustapha might have had if he'd retained a proper respect for a bargain, were now safe beneath Ali's burnous. The dagger was a rare and beautiful thing. It had been the property of some swaggering desert chief who, while visiting

Damascus, Ali's native city, had imprudently swaggered into a dark corner.

Though he frowned upon killing fellow humans for other than the most urgent reasons, and he disapproved completely of assassins who slew so they might rob, it never even occurred to Ali that he was obliged to do anything except disapprove. He knew the usual fate of swaggering desert chieftains who entered the wrong quarters of Damascus, and, when the inevitable happened, he did not spring to the rescue. That was not required by his code of self-preservation. So the assassin snatched his victim's purse and fled without any intervention. Ali got the dagger.

In the light of the journey he was undertaking, and the manner in which he was undertaking it, a dagger was infinitely more precious than the best-filled purse. Mecca was indeed a holy city, but of those who traveled the routes leading to it, not all confined themselves to holy thoughts and deeds. Many a pilgrim had had his throat slit for a trifle, or merely because some bandit felt the urge to practice throat slitting. A dagger smoothed one's path, and, as he waited now with his hand on the hilt of his protective weapon, Ali thought wryly that his present path was in sore need of smoothing.

He'd left Damascus two weeks ago, intending to offer his services, as camel driver, to the Amir of the nearby village of Sofad. He would then travel to Mozarib with his employer's caravan. The very fact that there would be force behind the group automatically meant that there would also be reasonable safety. Located three days' journey from Damascus, two from Sofad, Mozarib was the assembly point and starting place for the great Syrian *Hadj*, or pilgrimage. It went without saying that, if Ali tended to his camel driving and kept his dagger handy, he would go all the way to Mecca with the great *Hadj*, which often consisted of 5000 pilgrims and 25,000 camels.

Thus he had planned, but his plans had misfired.

He reached Sofad on the morning scheduled for departure, only to find that the Amir, at the last moment, had decided to make this first march toward Mozarib a cool one and had left the previous night. Hoping to catch up, but not unmindful of the perils that beset the way when he neared the camp of the Sofad pilgrims, Ali had decided that it would be prudent to reconnoiter first. It had indeed been prudent.

Peering down at the camp from a nest of boulders on a hillock, Ali was just in time to see the Amir and his fourteen men beheaded, in a most efficient fashion, by sword-wielding Druse tribesmen who'd taken the camp. Afterwards, the raiders had loaded everything except the stripped bodies of their victims on their own camels and departed.



It was a time for serious thinking, to which Ali had promptly devoted himself. Unfortunately, he failed also to think broadly, and the only conclusion he drew consisted of the fact that it was still possible for him to go on and join the *Hadj*. Camel drivers were always welcome. Sparing not a single thought to the idea that Druse raiders would rather kill than do anything else, Ali had almost been caught unawares by the one who had slipped hopefully back to see if he could find somebody else to behead. Ali had taken to his heels and, so far, he had proved that he was fleetier than his pursuer. Tenacious as any bloodhound, the Druse had stayed on his trail until yesterday morning. Now he was shaken. Ali knew that he was somewhere south of Damascus and, with any luck, might yet join the *Hadj*.

Help would not come amiss. Ali drank the last sip from his goatskin water flask, shifted his dagger just a little, so it would be ready to his hand should he have need of it, and made ready to

address himself to the one unfailing Source of help.

Though he had no more water, there was an endless supply of sand. Good Moslems who could read and write had assured him that this statement appears in the *Koran*: "When ye rise up to prayer, wash your faces and your hands and your arms to the elbows, and wipe your heads and your feet to the ankles." Though it was commonly assumed that one would cleanse himself with water before daring to mention Allah's name, special provisions applied to special occasions. For those who had no water, sand was an acceptable substitute.

His ablutions performed, Ali faced toward Mecca, placed an open hand on either side of his face and intoned, "God is most great." Remaining in a standing position, he proceeded to the next phase of the prayer that all good Moslems must offer five times daily.

It was the recitation of the opening *sura*, or verse, of the *Koran*. Ali, who'd memorized the proper words, had not proceeded beyond, "In the name of the merciful and compassionate God. Praise belongs to God—" when he was interrupted by the roar of an enraged camel.

Ali halted abruptly, instantly and completely, forgetting the sacred rite in which he'd been absorbed and that had five more complete phases, each with prescribed gestures, before he might conclude it. When he finally remembered, he was a little troubled; Allah might conceivably frown upon whoever interrupted prayers to Him. But Ali remembered also that Allah is indulgent toward those who are at war, in danger, ill, or for other good reasons are unable to recite the proper prayers in the proper way at the prescribed times.

Surely a camel in trouble—and, among other things, the beast's roar told Ali that it was in trouble—was the finest of reasons for ignoring everything else. Not lightly had the camel been designated as Allah's greatest gift to mankind. To slight His gift would be to slight Him. His conscience clear on that point, Ali devoted himself to analyzing the various things he'd learned about when a camel roared in the distance.

The earliest recollection of Ali, who'd never known father or mother, was of his career as a rug vendor's apprentice in the bazaar of The Street Called Straight. His master worked him for as many hours as the boy could stay awake, beat him often and left him hungry when he was unable to steal food. But the life was not without compensations.

Though no longer enjoying the flourishing trade it had once known, Damascus sat squarely astride the main route between the vast reaches of Mohammedan Turkey and Mecca, the city that every good Moslem must visit at least once during his lifetime. The Turks came endlessly, and in numbers, and since it's only sensible to do a little trading, even when on a holy pilgrimage, when they reached Damascus, they stopped to trade at The Street Called Straight. But though the pilgrims were interesting, Ali found the camels that carried both the Turks and their goods infinitely more so.

He knew them all—plodding baggage beasts, two-humped bactrians, the hybrid offspring of bactrians and one-humped camels, and all the species and shades of species in between. But though he liked all camels, he saved his love for the dromedary, the *heira*, the *hygin*, riding camel, or, as Ali called them, the *dalul*.

Invariably ridden by proud men and never used for any purpose other than riding, they were a breed apart. Slighter and far more aristocratic than the baggage beasts, they could carry a rider one hundred miles between sunrise and sunset, satisfy themselves with a few handfuls of dates when the ride ended, and go without water for five days. Their pedigrees, in many instances longer than those of their riders, dated back to pre-Biblical history. The owner of a *dalul* considered such a possession only slightly less precious than his life.

It was when he became acquainted with the *dalul* that Ali invented his own mythical father. This parent was not a nameless vagabond, petty thief, or fly-by-night adventurer who never even knew he'd sired a son and wouldn't have cared if he had, but a renowned trainer of *dalul*. It was he who went to the camel pastures and chose the wild young stallions that were ready for breaking. Though they would kill any ordinary man who ventured near, Ali's father gentled them and taught them to accept the saddle and rein. Ali determined that he himself must go out with the camels and promptly ran away from his master.

Because he was too young to be of any imaginable use, the few caravan masters who condescended to look at him usually aimed a blow right after the look. For two years Ali was one of the numerous boy-vagabonds who infested the bazaars of Damascus. If such a life did not elevate the mind it could not help but sharpen the wits.

Then, just after his ninth birthday, Ali got his chance to go out with a caravan. It was a very small and very poor one, fewer than fifty camels, and the caravan master decided to take Ali only because he was a boy. As such, quite apart from the fact that he could safely be browbeaten, it was reasonable to assume that he had not had time to learn all the tricks of experienced drivers, the more talented among whom have been known to get rich, and leave the owners poor, on just one journey.

Apart from their uses and physical functions, which he learned so precisely that one glance enabled him to cite any camel's past history, age, present state of health, and what it would probably do next, Ali came to appreciate the true miracle of a camel. He was the one in ten thousand, the camel driver who knew everything the rest did—and much they did not—and who

transcended that to understand clearly the nature of the camel itself. So fine was his touch and so complete the affinity between camels and himself, that even beasts thought hopelessly unmanageable responded to him.

Nine years old when he made his first trip, Ali had spent the past nine years on the caravan routes. He'd been to Baghdad, Istanbul, Tosya, Trebizond. He went where the camels went and never cared if it was two hundred miles or two thousand. But though every member of a caravan is entitled to trade for himself, and many a camel driver has become a caravan master or owner, Ali was as poor as on the day he started.

Partly responsible for this was his consuming passion for camels and his negligible interest in trading. Far more at fault was his origin. The men of the caravans knew him as Ali, and only Allah could know more about camels. To the merchants, who saw camels merely as the most convenient method for transporting goods, he remained the orphan waif of Damascus. They turned their backs upon one who had neither family nor prestige, who could point to no achievement other than an outstanding skill with camels. Now, camels were very convenient, but, as every merchant in a perfumed drawing room knew, they also smelled!

So Ali had a most compelling reason for deciding to undertake his pilgrimage at this time. After he'd been to Mecca, like all others who have completed the difficult and dangerous journey, he'd be entitled to add the prefix "Hadji" to his name. That alone would never make him the equal of the wealthy merchants who also had been to Mecca, but it would surely make him the superior of all who had not. And this was a vast number, since the life of a merchant is not necessarily conducive to physical achievement and the journey to Mecca is hard.

Now, in a desert wilderness, while on the way to Mecca, a camel had cried out to Ali, and he could not have helped responding, even if the camel had cried while he was at prayer in the *masjid-al-haram*, the Great Mosque of Mecca.

Its roar had already told Ali many things about the beast, including the exact direction he must take to find it and approximately how far he must go before locating it. The sound had had a certain timbre and quality that hinted of regal things and regal bearing, therefore it was not a baggage animal. However, neither did it have the awesome blast of a fully-grown *dalul*. It was not challenging another stallion to battle, but roaring in rage and defiance at something that it did not know how to fear.

Ali's hand slipped back to the hilt of his dagger. Unmindful of the hot little wind that had just arisen, and that would become hotter as the day grew longer, he started toward the camel. Although he had never been here before, he had traveled similar country often enough to make a reasonably accurate guess as to the terrain that lay ahead.

It was a land of low hills, or hillocks, whose sides and narrow crests supported a straggling growth of Aleppo pine intermixed with scrubby brush. There was more than average rainfall, so the trees were bigger and not as parched as those found in very arid regions. The camel was in a gully between the second and third hills. Ali climbed the hill, slunk behind an Aleppo pine, peered around the trunk and gasped.

There was a camp in the gully—and a string of baggage camels and men—but at first glance Ali saw nothing except the *dalul*. Of a deep fawn color, which stamped it as one of the Nomanieh dromedaries, it was still so young that it had not yet attained full growth. Located apart from the rest, each separate leg was held by a separate rope, and the bonds were stretched so tightly that the beast could hardly move. A fifth rope, that encircled its neck, was equally tight.

Evidently bound in such a fashion for many hours, the young *dalul* was weary, thirsty and choking. But, despite its obvious misery, this was far and away the most magnificent beast Ali had ever beheld. It was the riding camel he'd often dreamed of when, plodding along some lonely caravan trail, he'd conjured up mental images of the perfect *dalul*.

Further examination revealed why the young *dalul* was bound so cruelly. Ali's lip curled in contempt.

The men—he counted nineteen—were part of the same band of Druse tribesmen who'd pillaged the camp of Sofad and massacred its people. Evidently they considered themselves safe here, since they kept no watch at all and seemed to be unconcerned about anything. The twenty-nine camels on the picket line were all stolid baggage animals such as even Druse could handle. The young *dalul* was something else.

There was no telling just how it had fallen into the hands of the Druse; a *dalul* so fine would certainly be carefully guarded. Regardless of how the raiders had obtained the animal, they could not handle it. Obviously, it had turned on them and probably hurt somebody—Ali voiced a fervent hope that the injury was not a light one—and now the *dalul* was tightly bound, to insure that it would hurt nobody else.

Ali whispered, "Have patience, brother."

Slowly and thoroughly, beginning at one end and letting his eyes move alertly to the other, Ali inspected the camp and confirmed an ugly truth that had already been pointed out by common sense. With eight good men at his back, and the element of surprise in their favor, he would have a reasonable chance of storming the camp. But, as things were—

He'd help neither the *dalul* nor himself by joining his ancestors at this moment, Ali decided. He pulled the burnous over his head, drew the dagger from its sheath and settled down to wait.

The light grew, and the heat with it, as the sun climbed higher. Ali risked moving just enough to pick up a pebble and put it on his tongue. He had no water, and if the wait proved a long one, the pebble would help relieve thirst. He must not move again, though. The merest flicker could be one too many, and certainly a Druse tribesman with even a baggage camel could run down a man who hadn't any.

A camel rider, coming into camp from the south, roused not the least interest among the men already there, and Ali took mental note of the incident. Doubtless these raiders were flanking the great *Hadj*, but surely they could not be insane enough to attack it. Probably they intended to waylay small groups coming from various sources to join the *Hadj*, just as they had the camp of Sofad. The very fact that the camel rider came almost unnoticed proved that the raiders had a sentry posted to the south, and the sentry had somehow advised his companions of the rider's approach. Apparently, they anticipated no interference from any other point of the compass.

Sudden hope rose in Ali's heart. The rider might be bringing news of another caravan to be attacked, and, if so, he and his companions would depart very shortly. Since they did not know how to control it anyhow, they would not take the *dalul* with them. Ali's eyes strayed back to the tethered animal.

It must have come from the very choicest of the riding camels of some mighty official. Even the Pasha of Damascus would not have many such, for the simple reason that there weren't many. More than ever, it represented all the perfection dreamed of by some camel breeder—some long-dead camel breeder, since the *dalul* had never been produced in one generation or during the life span of one man—who knew the desert and yearned for the ideal camel.

Watching the *dalul*, Ali found his own mounting thirst easier to bear. The animal had been without water longer than he and probably was desperate for a drink—but refused to show it. Ali had learned while still apprenticed to the rug vendor that camels may be as thirsty as any other creatures. He turned his eyes back to the men.

One, in a rather desultory fashion, was mending a pack saddle. Two or three others were at various small chores and the rest were sleeping in the shade of their own tents. The hardness flowed back into Ali's eyes.

No followers of Mohammed, the Druse were devoted to heathen gods and rituals. It was not for that, or their hypocrisy—a Druse tribesman going among other peoples usually pretended to accept the religion of his hosts—or their thievery, or the fact that they seldom attacked anyone at all unless the odds were heavily in their favor, that Ali now hated them. He'd have hated anyone at all who mistreated such a *dalul* in such a fashion!

It occurred to Ali that he had neglected the prayer he should have offered immediately after the sun rose and probably would have to omit proper ceremonies at high noon, but it did not worry him. Allah, the Compassionate, would surely understand that there are certain inconveniences attached to the observance of prayers while in the full sight of hostile Druse. Nor would He frown upon Ali for refusing to let the *dalul* out of his sight. When Ali left the camp, the *dalul* was leaving with him.

Passing the noon mark and starting its swing to the west, the full glare of the sun no longer burned down on Ali's burnous, and the branches of the Aleppo pine offered some shade. But since the day became hotter as it grew longer, with the hottest hour of any being that one just preceding sunset, there was little relief from the heat.

Ali lay as still as possible, partly because the slightest motion would be sure to excite the curiosity of any Druse who happened to glance his way and partly because moving must inevitably make him hotter. Helping him to accept with grace what almost any other man of almost any other nation would have found an unendurable wait were certain talents and characteristics that had been his from birth.

Though he'd never even known his own father, Ali was of ancient blood. Few of his ancestors, throughout all the generations, had ever had the facilities, even though they might possess the best of reasons, for going anywhere in a hurry. Ali came of people who knew how to wait, and added to his inheritance was his experience with the caravans. Regardless of when a shipment had been promised for delivery in Baghdad or Aleppo, it lingered along the way, if the camels that carried it developed sore feet en route.

In some measure, Ali suffered from heat, and, to a far greater extent, he knew the tortures of thirst, but he accepted both with the inborn fatalism of one who knows he must accept what he can neither change nor prevent. Heat and thirst were passing factors. Unless he died first, in which event he'd join Allah's celestial family, sooner or later he'd be cool and he'd drink.

There'd been little action in the camp all day, but toward night the Druse stirred. They did so surlily, grudgingly, after the fashion of men who do not like what they've been doing in the recent past and have no reason to suppose they'll be doing anything more interesting in the near future. Rather than build cooking fires, they nibbled dates, meal and honey cakes, and drank from goatskin flasks. There was no singing, not even much shouting. The Druse, born raiders who could be happy only when in the saddle and riding to the attack, must now be unhappy and snarl

at each other because their scouts, who were doubtless haunting every caravan trail, had brought no news of quarry sighted.



Night came, and with it a coolness so refreshing that it inspired Ali to thoughts of the heavenly bath that must be enjoyed by Allah's angels. The cool night air fell and enfolded him like a gentle flood, but with no hint of the earth's dross. After a blazing day, it was as welcome as the sight of green palms ringing an oasis.

Ali reveled in the coolness, but not nearly as much as he did in the fact that, with night, the Druse camp quieted. After waiting another hour, he drew his dagger and went forward.

The sky was cloudless, but there was no moon and, at this early hour, very few stars shone. Ali advanced with silent and unfaltering speed, in spite of the fact that he could see almost nothing. A dozen times during the day he had marked the exact route between himself and the young *dalul*. He knew where he was going.

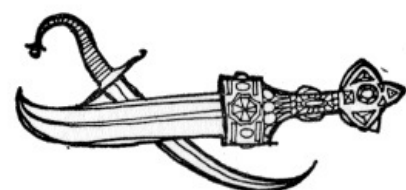
Ali's fingers tightened on the dagger's hilt. If Allah saw fit to reveal him to the Druse, he hoped that the All Merciful would see equally fit to defend himself manfully. When Ali was within a dozen yards of the *dalul*, the peaceful night was shattered by an alarm.

"Ho! Wake and arm! There is an enemy among us!"

Because that was all he could do, Ali began to run. He had cast his lot, and now all depended on the *dalul*. If he could free it, then mount and ride, he and the camel would be safe at least until morning.

Ali was within an arm's length of the *dalul* when it turned and spoke to him. It was a guttural sound, and scarcely audible, but as different from the usual camel's grunt as the scream of a hawk is from the chirp of a robin. Even as he flung himself forward and started slashing at the nearest rope, Ali heard and correctly interpreted.

The *dalul* had just said that it would kill him if it could!



## 2. Fugitive

The picketed camels, that never saw any reason to give way to excitement just because humans

did, shuffled their feet, grunted and went on munching fodder. His warning voiced, the young *dalul* remained silent. He would waste no more breath on threats or further warnings; just let any man who came near enough look to his own safety! His very silence had all the lethal promise of a poised, unsheathed dagger!

Ali said, "I hear, oh lord of all *dalul*, and I understand. But behold, I free you!"

He spoke calmly, and there was no fear to be detected by the young camel because there was none in Ali. This young camel driver, who had seen the shadow of death, or heard death whisper, as frequently as did all those who ventured forth on the lonely caravan routes, now assured himself that he was not necessarily looking upon a forbidding being in this tortured camel. But, be that as it may, he must take the chance. The incurably ill, the weary old, the oppressed, the mistreated, knew no friend more kind than Ali.

However, though he talked slowly and softly, he moved swiftly as a leaping panther while he cut the first rope and went at once to the second. The Druse camp was silent, and had been since that first shouted alarm, but it was alert and the Druse were no fools. Certainly they would know better than to come yelling and leaping, brandishing weapons and mouthing threats.

Far more probable, Ali wouldn't even know an enemy was within striking distance until he saw—or felt—the pointed dagger that was seeking his heart or heard the swish of a descending sword. Then, if Allah so decreed, one less camel driver would return to the caravan routes.

As he cut the remaining ropes, Ali continued to speak soothingly to the young *dalul*. Far from nervous, or even slightly excited, the young rescuer was almost serenely calm. Death would certainly be his portion if the Druse had their way, and, of course, there was also a good chance that he would die if he liberated the young *dalul*. But some deaths are much sweeter than others.



It would be far easier, and more honorable, to die under the trampling feet of a good Moslem *dalul* than under the sword or dagger of a heathen Druse. Besides, even though the *dalul* first killed Ali, there remained the satisfactory probability that he would then turn upon and kill one or more of the villains.

Ali cut the final rope, the one about the *dalul's* neck, and waited calmly. He lowered the hand holding the dagger. He'd have sheathed the weapon, except that one or more of the Druse might be upon him at any moment and a dagger would be a convenient article to have in hand. But Ali had no intention of fighting the *dalul*, or even of resisting should it attack him.

He said calmly, "You are free, brother."

Not accustomed to freedom after standing so long bound by cramping ropes, the *dalul* shook his head and stamped his forefoot. Then he gave two prodigious sidewise leaps toward the picketed baggage camels and roared.

The baggage camels crowded very close together, as though for the comfort each found in the others, when the *dalul* leaped. His roar robbed them of common sense, so that they began a wild plunging. Even better than Ali, the baggage camels knew the *dalul's* quality. They'd have broken their tethers and stampeded had not some of the Druse taken note of the situation and rushed in to quiet the terrified beasts.

For the first time, Ali had a few fleeting moments to wonder why he still lived. It had seemed



inevitable that, if the Druse did not kill him, the *dalul* most certainly would. Perhaps, during the tortured hours it had stood as captive, it had marked its enemies and knew Ali was not among them. More probable, Ali's gift, his ability to understand and be understood by all camels, had proved itself once again.

Ali shrugged. He didn't know, and probably never would know, just why the *dalul* had not killed him the instant it was free. But Allah knew, and it was not for Ali to question or even wonder about His judgments.

Ali's business was camels. He decided that it was high time he took his business in hand and called the *dalul*.

It responded, but before coming all the way to Ali, it stopped twice to bestow a long, lingering and disappointed look upon the camp of the Druse. Raging, but bound and helpless, the *dalul* had promised his captors a battle as soon as he was free. The challenge still stood, and, even though the Druse were not accepting, the situation rebounded to Ali's benefit. While the *dalul* roamed the camp, the enemy dared not move freely, and Ali's peril was correspondingly less.

After his second inspection of the enemy camp, the *dalul* did not stop again or even look about him but continued straight to Ali. He halted a few steps away and grunted a little camel song. Then he extended his long neck and lightly laid his head on his rescuer's shoulder. Ali embraced the great head with both arms and pressed his cheek close to the *dalul's* neck.

"Mighty one!" he crooned. "Peerless one! Where is a name worthy of such as you?"

The Druse were continuing the hunt, and when and if they found Ali, they'd be overjoyed to kill him as dead as possible in the shortest necessary time. But creeping into an armed Druse camp, his only weapons a dagger and courage, was one matter. Waiting beside the young *dalul*, whom the Druse had every reason to fear, was quite another. Again Ali addressed the young stallion.

"Sun of cameldom! Jewel of the caravan routes! By what title may you be called so that, wherever you may venture, all men shall know your deeds when you are called by name?"

The young *dalul*—and if he had the faintest interest in the name Ali or anyone else might bestow, there was no indication of that—took his head from Ali's shoulder to sniff his hand. Obviously, it was high time for Ali to seek divine assistance in determining a name for the *dalul*, and it would not come amiss to indicate that haste was in order. Even Druse tribesmen, knowing Ali was in camp but failing to find him, must sooner or later deduce that he was with the *dalul*.

Ali faced Mecca. He began his supplication with the customary "*Allahu akbar*—God is most great." He ended it at precisely the same place, more than a little overwhelmed by the speed with which Allah may respond to even the least of His worshipers. Ali had scarcely started when he knew the name he sought. He whirled to the *dalul*.

"From this moment you shall be known as Ben Akbar!" he declared happily. "Ben Akbar!"

Transcending mere perfection, the name was a stroke of genius. Ben Akbar, the unequaled, the peerless, the greatest *dalul* of any. No matter how hard they racked their own brains, regardless of the masters of rhetoric they might consult, no camel rider anywhere would ever hit upon a name that described his favorite in terms more superlative.

Now that Ben Akbar bore the only name that truly conformed to his dignity and power, Ali turned his thoughts to affairs of the moment.

His entry into the Druse camp, audacious though it had been, never would have created other than momentary alarm. Freeing Ben Akbar, a confirmed killer camel in the mind of every Druse, gave a wholly different meaning to the entire affair. The least of the raiders would happily prowl the camp in search of Ali. But while darkness held sway, not even the best of them cared to chance an encounter with Ben Akbar.

In addition, or so the Druse would think, killer camels made no distinction among Moslems, Christians, Jews, or men of any other faith. They killed whomsoever they were able to catch. Since Ali had been near enough to cut the *dalul's* bindings, it followed that the killer camel had been able to catch him.

Regardless of anything the Druse thought at the moment, Ali knew that they would not continue to remain deceived after sunrise. The signs, the tracks, would be there for them to read, and few desert dwellers read signs more skillfully. Despite anything their minds told them, their eyes would leave no doubt that Ali and the *dalul* had gone away together.

For a brief interval, Ali speculated concerning the inscrutable ways of Allah, who had bestowed upon the Druse tribesmen a maximum of ferocity and a minimum of common sense. Obviously, it was his duty to take certain most urgent action if he would live to greet another sunset.

At night, the Druse would have no stomach for attacking, or even coming near, Ben Akbar. As soon as a new day brought light enough so they could see, they'd never hesitate. If Ali happened to be near Ben Akbar, where he had every intention of being, he'd be found.

Ali said softly, "We go, brother." With Ben Akbar pacing contentedly at his shoulder, he faded into the darkness.

Although Ali wanted to go south, where he thought he'd have the best chance of meeting the

great *Hadj*, and the gully in which the Druse were camped ran almost directly north-south, he did not go down that gully. There was at least one enemy outpost stationed there—and possibly more.

Ali climbed the ridge, retracing almost exactly the path he'd followed when he came to the rescue of Ben Akbar. Rather than stop when he gained the summit, he went on down into the next gully and climbed the following ridge. On the summit of that, he finally halted. Ben Akbar, who sported neither tether rope nor rein but who was amiably willing to walk behind Ali where the path was narrow and beside him where space permitted, came up from behind and thrust his long neck over his friend's shoulder. Ali reached up to caress the mighty head.

The baggage animals he'd seen in the Druse camp were just that, ponderous beasts, bred to carry six hundred or more pounds a distance of twenty-five miles at a stretch and to bear this enormous burden day after day. Under ordinary circumstances, they'd be no match for the *dalul*, but Ben Akbar was more than just tired and hungry. An hour of the torment he'd endured was enough to sap more strength than an entire day on the trail. His hump, that unfailing barometer of a camel's condition, was half the size it should have been. There was no way of telling when he'd had his last drink of water.

This last, Ali told himself, was of the utmost importance. Every urchin on every caravan route knows that camels store water in their own bodies, and that it is entirely possible for some seasoned veterans of the caravan trails to plod on, though at an increasingly slower pace, for three, four, or even five days without any water save that which they absorb from their fodder. But those are the exceptions. As noted, given an opportunity, camels will drink as much and as frequently as any creature of similar size, and a thirsty camel is handicapped.

So, although Ali might have laughed in their faces had Ben Akbar been rested and well-nourished, the Druse, who would most certainly be on their trail the instant it was light enough to see, had more than a good chance of overtaking them before nightfall. But before Ali could concern himself with the Druse, there was something he must do.

"Kneel!" he commanded.

Ben Akbar knelt, settling himself with surprising grace. Ali mounted. Though there was no riding saddle, he seated himself where it should have been and placed his feet properly, one on either side of the base of Ben Akbar's neck. There was no rein either, but the finest of the *dalul* were carefully schooled to obey the spoken word without regard to rein. Ali gave the command to rise, then bade Ben Akbar go.

Ben Akbar's gait was as gentle as the evening wind that ruffles the new-sprouted fronds of young date palms. Ali sent him to the right, then the left, relying on spoken commands alone and getting a response so perfect that there'd have been no need of a rein, even if the *dalul* wore one. Ali no longer had reason to wonder if Ben Akbar was the property of a rich man. None except the wealthy could afford the fees demanded by riding masters who knew the secret of teaching a camel to obey spoken orders.

Though he knew he should not, Ali ordered Ben Akbar to run. The camel obeyed instantly, yet so imperceptible was the change in pace, and so rhythmically smooth was his run, that he had attained almost full speed before his rider realized that the change had been made.

Ali sat unmoving, letting the wind fan his cheeks and reveling in this ride as he had delighted in nothing else he could remember. The gait of riding camels varies as much as that of riding horses, but Ben Akbar stood alone. Rather than landing with spine-jarring thuds as he raced on, his feet seemed not even to touch the earth.

Ali had never ridden a smoother-gaited camel...but suddenly it occurred to him that the ride had better end. Bidding his mount halt, Ali slid to the ground and went around to where he could pet Ben Akbar's nose.

"You are swift as the wind itself, and the back of the downiest bird is a bed of stones and thorns compared with the back of Ben Akbar," he stated. "But it is not now that you should run."

Ben Akbar sniffed Ali gravely and blew through his nostrils. Ali responded, as though he were answering a question.

"The Druse," he explained, "tonight they are helpless, for even if they would follow, they cannot see our path in the darkness. But rest assured that they shall be upon our trail with the first light of morning and they know well how to get the most speed from their baggage beasts. If you were rested and nourished, I would laugh at a dozen—nay!—a thousand such! But you are weary and ill-cared-for, so tonight we must spare your strength. Tomorrow, you may have to run away from the Druse!"

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The next day was two hours old, and Ali and Ben Akbar were still walking south, when Ali glanced about and saw the mounted Druse sweep over a hillock.

At the same instant, they saw him and raced full speed to the kill.

Hearing, scenting or sensing pursuit, Ben Akbar swung all the way around. He was very quiet, an

indication that he would look to and obey Ali. But there was about him a complete lack of nervousness, plus a certain quality in the way he faced enemies, rather than turned from them, that betrayed a war camel. He would flee from the Druse, if that were Ali's wish, but he would run just as eagerly and just as swiftly toward them, should Ali decide to attack.

Nervous, but controlling himself, Ali counted the Druse as they raced down the hill. There were twenty-three, three more than had been in camp last night, therefore some must have arrived after he left. They were not the organized unit they would have been if they expected formidable resistance. Since there was only one man to kill, and every Druse burned to kill him, they came in wild disorder, with those on the swiftest camels leading.

Though the charge was only seconds old, three of the Druse had already drawn ahead of the rest. A glance told Ali that all three were mounted on *dalul*. Since there had been no riding camels in the Druse camp, obviously these were the three newcomers who had arrived during the night. The rest were all mounted on baggage camels.

Because he had had a whole night's start, and the pursuing Druse should have been hampered by the necessity for working out his trail, Ali had not expected them before midday. Something had gone amiss. Possibly, during the night, Ali and Ben Akbar had passed another outpost that they had not seen, but that had managed both to shadow them and to send word back to the camp. Perhaps the outpost had even consisted of the three riders of *dalul*.

Ali concentrated on the three *dalul*. All were good beasts, but none were outstanding, and, in an even contest, none could have come near to matching Ben Akbar's speed. No, however—

Ali turned to Ben Akbar and said gently, "Kneel."

Ben Akbar obeyed. Ali mounted and gave the command to rise, then to run. He unsheathed the dagger and held it in his hand. The Druse were armed with guns, which they knew how to use, but there were good reasons why they would hesitate to shoot one lone man. In the first place, powder and shot were expensive and to be used only when nothing else sufficed. In the second, when the odds were twenty-three to one, the Druse who shot when he might have killed his enemy with sword or dagger must lose face as a warrior.

The dagger in his hand was Ali's only concession to the possibility that he might be overtaken. When and if he was, might Allah frown if at least one of the Druse did not join his ancestors before Ali did likewise.

Other than that, the race was not unpleasant. Weary though he was, the power and strength that Ali had seen in Ben Akbar when the young *dalul* stood captive in the Druse camp were manifest now. Ben Akbar flowed along, seeming to do so almost without effort, and Ali thought with wonder of the magnificent creature this *dalul* would be when properly fed and rested. Only when Ben Akbar stumbled where he should have run on was his rider recalled to the grim realities of the situation.

He did not have to look behind him because he knew what lay there. Having been detected when they appeared over the crest of the far hillock, the Druse must still descend it, cross the gulley and climb the opposite hill before they could be where Ali had been when they saw him. Though they must know that Ben Akbar was not in condition to run his best, they certainly knew the quality of such a camel. Looking from the crest of the hill upon which Ali had been sighted and seeing nothing, they could by no means be certain that camel and rider had not already gone out of sight on the hill beyond. A terrified fugitive would logically run in a straight line.

A third of the way down the hill, Ali gave Ben Akbar the command to turn left. He was about three hundred yards from the floor of the gulley and the same distance from its head, where a thick copse of mingled Aleppo pine and scrub brush offered more than enough cover to hide a whole caravan. Reaching the thicket, Ali halted Ben Akbar and dismounted. Then he turned and waited for the Druse to appear.

Led by the three riders of *dalul*, they broke over the crest at the exact spot where Ali had been sighted. They did exactly as he had hoped they would and raced straight on. A smile of satisfaction flitted across Ali's lips as the advance riders swept past that place where he had turned Ben Akbar.

Then something went amiss.

Though the three *dalul* had seemed equally matched, one now led the other two by some ten yards. Reaching the gulley's floor, the leading rider halted his mount, swung him abruptly and shouted, "He has gone another way!"

As the truth forced itself on Ali, his first thought was that the rider of the leading *dalul* must be a very giant among the Druse.

Noted trackers, most Druse would have some trouble trailing a single camel on a sun-baked desert. But, incredible though it seemed, the leading pursuer had been tracking Ali while riding at full speed. He had raced on because he had thought exactly what Ali hoped he would—that Ali and Ben Akbar were already out of sight behind the next hill. But he had stopped when he no longer saw tracks.

While the two remaining riders of *dalul* swung unquestioningly in behind him, and the Druse

mounted on baggage camels halted wherever they happened to be, the tracker trotted his *dalul* back up the hill. His eyes were fixed on the ground as he sought to pick up the trail he had lost.

With Ben Akbar behind him, Ali stole through the thicket toward the far end. He clutched the dagger tightly. He would mount and ride when he was clear of the thicket; nobody could ride a camel through such a place. But it was questionable as to how long he'd ride with such a tracker on his trail.

Ali was almost out of the thicket when a man who swung a wicked-looking scimitar seemed to rise from the earth and bar his path. Ali gazed upon the countenance of an old acquaintance.

The man was a Druse that Ali knew as The Jackal!



### 3. Ambush

Ali took a single backward step that brought him nearer Ben Akbar. The move could have been interpreted as a wholly natural desire to find such comfort as he might in his camel, the one friend he had or was likely to have. But Ali's purpose was more practical.

Unless every imaginable advantage was on his side, the wielder of a dagger hadn't the faintest chance of overcoming anyone armed with a scimitar, but Ali intended to concede no point not already and unavoidably given by the difference in weapons. When The Jackal swung, which he would do when he considered the moment right, he would not miss. But if Ali was agile enough at ducking, and ducked in the right direction, it did not necessarily follow that he must be killed outright.

For a split second immediately following his blow, The Jackal would be off guard. Before he recovered, always supposing he was still able to move, Ali might go forward with his dagger and work some execution, or at least inflict some damage, of his own. All else failing, there was reason to hope that Ben Akbar would trample his foe after he went down. Ali studied The Jackal.

Of medium height and probably middle-aged, he was veiled in a certain mystic aura that defied penetration and prevented even a reasonably accurate guess as to how many years he had been on earth. He blended in a curious manner with the harsh and wild desert background, as though he had been a part of it from the beginning. His hair was concealed beneath a hood, but not even a thick beard succeeded in hiding a cruel mouth. His nose was thin and aquiline, with nostrils that seemed forever to be questing. His eyes were unreadable, but they possessed certain depths that combined with a broad sweep of forehead and a vast arrogance of manner to mark The Jackal as a man apart.

Ali remembered the first time he had run across him, or rather, evidence of his work.

It was Ali's third year with the caravans, and they were going from Mersin to Erzerum, with seven hundred camels and an assorted load, when they overtook all that remained of the caravan preceding them. It had been the entourage of some wealthy Amir, traveling north with his family and a powerful guard of soldiers. When Ali arrived, The Jackal had been there and gone, but he had left his trademark.

All human males, from babes in the arms of his wives to the gray-bearded Amir himself, lay where they had fallen. The older women and the girl children were massacred, too. Only the young girls had been carried away with the remainder of the legitimate booty.

Savagely cruel though it was, the raid was equally audacious. Of the many bandit leaders infesting the caravan routes, few had the imagination to plan a successful attack on a heavily-guarded Amir's caravan or the courage to proceed, once such an attack was planned.

Thereafter, at sporadic intervals, Ali found additional evidence that The Jackal was still at work, and there could be no mistake about his identity. His raids were noted for cruelty and for the fact that he never bothered with any except wealthy caravans. Three years later, Ali met The Jackal.

The caravan for which Ali was handling camels came to an oasis one day out of Ankara and found another caravan already encamped. However, there was ample room for both and no apparent reason for either to challenge the other. Ali took care of the camels for which he was responsible, then set about to do something he would have done before had an opportunity offered itself.

He had been in Antioch, temporarily idle, when he happened across a youngster mishandling some half-broken baggage camels. He had stepped in to bring the situation under control. On

succeeding, he discovered that the young man had disappeared while he was occupied, and an older person was quietly watching him instead. The older man, whom Ali thought was the caravan master, invited him to come along as a camel driver.

Ali had accepted and discovered, too late, that the imperious youngster who'd been mishandling baggage camels was the real caravan master, which position he held solely by virtue of the fact that his father was Pasha of Damascus. He didn't like Ali and he missed no opportunity to demonstrate his disapproval. Ali had stayed with the caravan until reaching this oasis for the simple reason that there was no other choice. If he had left sooner, he would have been one lone man in a land noted for the brief span of life enjoyed by solitary travelers. But he felt that he could make it from here to Ankara without difficulty and he'd had more than his fill of the Pasha's son. He went to the caravan master's tent to demand his pay.

He found the youngster engaged in amiable conversation with the man who now stood before him, The Jackal, who said he was master of the other caravan. Ali also found that, in the eyes of the Pasha's son, his own state was less than exalted. He was ordered out of the tent.



When Ali refused to leave without first receiving his pay, the youngster unsheathed a dagger and advanced with the obvious intention of having him carried out feet first. Unluckily for the Pasha's son, Ali also had a dagger and his skill with the same exceeded by a comfortable margin any adroitness the other might claim. Ali got his due wages, which he took from a moneybag, and the Pasha's son had fainted from a series of dagger wounds in his right arm.

Ali was on the point of leaving when The Jackal, who had offered not the faintest interference, rose, complimented him on a superb bit of dagger work and thanked him for making it easier to sack the caravan. He intended to do this tomorrow, somewhere between the oasis and Ankara, but the Pasha's son had presented an awkward problem. The Jackal, who introduced himself as such, had no fear of soldiers in reasonable numbers but he was not prepared to cope with the armies that must inevitably take the field against whoever molested a son of the Pasha—this despite the fact that the Pasha had no fewer than twenty-nine known sons. The Jackal had been trying to persuade the young man to leave and go into Ankara when Ali's dagger had settled the matter in a most satisfactory fashion.

The Jackal was not ungrateful, and, to prove his gratitude, he would arrange for Ali to ride into Ankara with a small group of his own men, who would leave shortly. After they had gone, The Jackal would see to it that a sufficient number of his own trusty brigands, under such oaths as might be appropriate, would swear that they had seen the Pasha's son struck down by an unknown assailant.

Ali had ridden and so had escaped the next morning's massacre, which several travelers had reported as taking place after the Pasha's son had been "*killed by an assassin.*" Thereafter, he had waited for lightning to strike although he had only injured his attacker in self defense, but so far, it hadn't which meant that The Jackal had kept his lips sealed. Now it no longer mattered. The Jackal would cut his own mother down if by so doing he served his own ends.

Suddenly, "Why hesitate, Abdullah?" somebody growled.

Another man came from the brush to stand beside The Jackal. Then there was another...and more...until nineteen men were grouped about The Jackal and facing Ali. The Jackal stepped aside. Another took his place.

Ali glanced briefly at The Jackal. He looked at the others, all good Moslems and all wearing on their turbans the distinctive emblem that marked them as members of the Pasha's crack personal

soldiery. The present "Abdullah," the former Jackal, wore the same emblem but, until now, it had escaped Ali's notice because, not in his wildest flight of imagination had he dreamed he'd ever see it on a Druse.

The soldier who'd spoken and for whom The Jackal had stepped aside, evidently the commander of this patrol, spoke again and directed his words to Ali, "Where found you the *dalul*, dog?"

Ali answered, "I stole him from some Druse."

The soldier drew his dagger and spoke again, "Die you will, but choose whether you die swiftly or slowly. Why are you found in possession of the finest *dalul* among two thousand such owned by the Pasha of Damascus?"

"I stole him—" Ali began.

At that moment, out in the thicket, one of the camels being led by the dismounted Druse as they made their way among the trees and brush, chose to grunt. The eyes of every man except the officer turned toward the sound.

Ali said, "The Druse from whom I stole the *dalul* are in close pursuit. They are twenty-three in all."

Except for the officer, who thoughtfully kept the point of his dagger pricking Ali's ribs, the Moslems scattered and, a few seconds later, it was as though they had never been.

The officer addressed Ali. "Bid the *dalul* lie down."

Ali gave the order and Ben Akbar obeyed. Unconcerned as though there were no Druse within forty miles, but not forgetting to prick Ali's ribs with his dagger, the officer scorned even to glance in the direction from which the Druse approached. Ali wondered. Some Moslems yearned so ardently for the life to come that they set not the least value on the one they already had, but the officer seemed more practical-minded.

"The Druse number a score and three," Ali ventured finally. "They come from the direction where the camel grunted and they cannot fail to see you should you neglect to hide."

"I did not ask your opinion," the officer growled. "Be silent!"

Since the order was emphasized with a sudden jab of the dagger, Ali remained silent. He composed himself. This, as well as everything else, was now in the hands of Allah and He alone would determine the outcome. But it never harmed anything to ponder.

The rest of the Moslems and The Jackal had disappeared as suddenly and completely as morning dew when the sun turns hot. Though they could not be very far away, neither was the end of the thicket. Once out of the brush, Ali could mount Ben Akbar and ride. If the pursuit were resumed, and, regardless of who won the forthcoming battle, it would be, it must still be delayed while the fight was in progress. If Allah would only see fit to make the officer take the point of his dagger out of Ali's ribs and go wherever his men had gone, it would be worth Ali's while to try to break away.

But the officer entertained no ideas about going anywhere or of using his dagger for any purpose except to remind Ali how swiftly a painful situation could become fatal. Ali looked at Ben Akbar, still lying where he had been ordered to lie, but not liking it. Though reclining, he was anything but relaxed. His head was up, his eyes missed nothing, his nostrils quivered, and tense muscles indicated both a readiness and an ability to spring instantly to his feet.

Ali decided that Ben Akbar did not like these strange Moslems any better than he had the Druse who captured him, and that he tolerated them at all only because Ali commanded him to do so. It occurred to Ali that none of the Moslems had been eager to venture too near Ben Akbar, and, suddenly, he knew something he hadn't known before.

Certainly no killer, Ben Akbar was most discriminating when it came to a choice of human companions. Incapable as the Druse of handling him properly, the Moslems were wisely leaving him alone. The fierce little officer never would have told Ali to make Ben Akbar lie down if he thought the *dalul* would obey him instead.

That being so, and if Allah smiled and the Moslems won the forthcoming fight, Ali felt that he had some hope of staying alive, at least until the soldiers returned to whatever headquarters camp they had left to go out on patrol. It would reflect little credit on any emissary of the Pasha of Damascus to bring a favorite *dalul* before the eyes of his master as a raging brute at the end of ropes. If the Moslems could not take him in except by force, but Ali could, there were reasons to suppose that Ali would.

When they appeared on foot, the Druse were led by a sinewy man who advanced at a trot, and who, in turn, led a *dalul*. Evidently the same talented tracker who'd followed Ali's trail while riding full speed, the man strained like a leashed gazelle hound that sights its quarry. The remaining Druse grouped behind him.

Ali glanced at the officer.

That fierce Moslem, who certainly knew the Druse were coming, contemptuously refused even to look around until the leader was within thirty yards of him. Then, maintaining enough pressure

on the dagger to remind Ali that he was not forgotten, he swung and shouted insults.

"Dogs!" he spat. "Eaters of pork! Spawn of flies that infest camel dung! I have your prisoner and your *dalul*! Come take them if you're men!"

The leading Druse dropped the reins of his *dalul*, shouted fiercely, drew his sword and rushed. His followers did likewise, and, even though some were delayed by frightened camels that plunged to one side or the other, Ali counted nine sword-waving Druse hard on the heels of their leader and all too close for comfort. He stole another glance at the officer.

Neither taking the dagger from Ali's ribs nor making any move to draw his sword, he seemed to regard the attacking Druse as he might some particularly repulsive vermin that might soil his shoes if he stepped on them. Then it happened.

From both sides of the trail, where they had concealed themselves as soon as they knew the Druse were coming, Moslem swordsmen rose. So complete was the surprise and so overwhelming the shock, half the Druse were down before the rest even thought of rallying. Ali acknowledged his approval—and even some admiration—for an officer who could plan so well.

The ambushed Moslems must have seen Ali and Ben Akbar when they were at least as far off as the Druse had been when they were sighted. They had marked the exact route, which made it unnecessary to do any second-guessing about the Druse. If they were following Ali, they were tracking him. So an ambush on either side of the track, an officer to act as bait and convince the Druse that there was only one man and—

The last Druse went down. The Moslems ranged out to catch the scattered camels and bring in any loot that was worth bringing. Some wounded, but all on their feet, they arranged themselves and their booty before the officer.

"You fought like old women," he sneered. "It is well that there were no real warriors to oppose you. But now that we have the *dalul* we set out to find, we may return."

"The prisoner?" someone called.

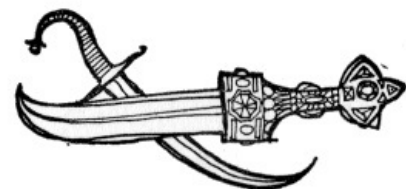
"He stays." The officer pushed his dagger a quarter inch into Ali's ribs.

Because it was an ideal time to think of something else, Ali speculated about The Jackal. Whatever else he might be, The Jackal was a brave man. What would happen, if he were detected, to a Druse who not only joined the *Hadj* but the Pasha's personal soldiers too, and who was obviously representing himself as a Moslem, Ali couldn't even imagine.

He did know that one false step would be one too many for the deceiver. If The Jackal took that step, he would live a very long while in agony before voicing his final shriek. Of course, it was a true Moslem's duty to tell what he knew, but The Jackal had only to speak and Ali would face the torturers with him. Whatever purpose had brought The Jackal here, he must be playing for tremendous stakes.

Ali was considerably relieved, but not greatly astonished, when the officer withdrew his dagger and sheathed it. He addressed Ali as he might have spoken to a stray cur.

"On second thought, we will take you to Al Misri, The Egyptian, and let him kill you. Bring the *dalul*, dog, and, for your own sake, see that it does not stray."



## 4. The Hadj

As soon as possible, which was as soon as their own riding camels could be brought from wherever they had been hidden, the Moslem soldiers mounted and prepared to set out. On the point of mounting Ben Akbar, Ali was knocked to the ground by the flat of the fierce officer's sword and informed in terms that left no room for doubt that he was Ben Akbar's attendant. Nobody except the Pasha of Damascus was to be his rider.

Despite clear grounds for argument, Ali smothered his anger and comforted himself with logic. There are times to fight, but on this specific occasion logic indicated clearly that one man armed with a dagger can hope for nothing except a very certain demise by defying twenty men who are armed with everything. Ali walked beside the *dalul*, a rather simple process, since the speed of all must necessarily be regulated by the pace of the slow baggage camels, and Ben Akbar refused to leave his friend's side, anyhow.

With nightfall, they made camp at a water hole too small to be dignified by the title of oasis. After he had finished eating, the officer contemptuously tossed Ali the remains of his meal and a silken cord. He said nothing, apparently he had no desire to degrade himself by speaking unnecessarily to anyone who was so clearly and so greatly his inferior, but the implication was obvious. Ben Akbar must not stray.

Knowing the cord was unnecessary, Ali chose the diplomatic course. He tied one end of the cord to his wrist and the other around the young *dalul's* neck. While Ben Akbar grazed, Ali sat quietly and devoted a few fleeting thoughts to the various possibilities of a social position that is approximately on a level with the fleas that torment camels—and sometimes riders of camels.

While it was true that the soldiers, grouped about their evening fire, ignored him as completely as though he didn't even exist, Ali saw no good reason why he should ignore them in a similar fashion. He breathed a silent thanks to Allah for blessing him with sharp ears. What those ears heard as Ali sat pretending to doze, but alert as a desert fox, might have a powerful influence on his plans for the future.

There were diverse possibilities. One that had already been considered most thoroughly and at great length was rooted in the pleasing thought that Ben Akbar was no longer a tired, hungry and thirsty *dalul*. Given as much as a five-second start, there wasn't another camel on the desert that could even hope to catch him.

If this was to be Ali's choice, tonight was the time for action. But before committing himself to anything, he wanted to consider everything.

The patrol, as Ali had learned from the conversation at the campfire, was one of several dispatched from the great *Hadj* six days ago. Their only purpose was to find Ben Akbar; their orders were not to return without him.

Ben Akbar had been lost, so Ali learned, through the laxity of a seven-times-cursed camel driver from Smyrna. His only duty, a task to which he'd been assigned because he was one of the very few men Ben Akbar would obey, was to watch over the Pasha's most-prized *dalul*. Somehow or other—a soldier voiced the opinion that he'd been in collusion with the very Druse from whom Ali had taken him—he'd managed to lose his charge. All the soldiers gave fervent thanks to Allah because their mission was successfully completed. Hunting lost camels was not their idea of interesting diversion.

Ali digested the food for thought thus provided and decided, to his own satisfaction, that his previous deduction had been entirely correct. He had not been spared because the Moslem soldiers were compassionate, but because not one among them knew how to handle Ben Akbar without resorting to force. Furthermore, if Ben Akbar were not greatly esteemed, several patrols of soldiers who might at any time be needed for other duties never would have been charged with the exclusive task of recovering him.

While Ben Akbar moved so carefully that the silken cord was never even taut, Ali lay back to gaze at the sky and consider the most profitable use of the information at his disposal.

If he rode into the desert on Ben Akbar, a possibility that retained much appeal, he need have no fear of successful pursuit. However, the Pasha's soldiers would certainly continue their search. As long as Ben Akbar was with him—and Ali had already decided that that would be as long as he lived—he must inevitably be a marked man. Unless he rode into a country ruled by some sultan or Pasha who was hostile to the Pasha of Damascus—in which event there was a fine chance of having his throat cut by someone who wanted to steal Ben Akbar—he would lead a harassed and harried life.

On the other hand, if he stayed with the soldiers and went into camp, he'd be doing exactly what he'd set out to do in the first place—he'd join the great *Hadj*. As there seemed to be few camel drivers who knew how to handle Ben Akbar, there was more than a good chance that Ali would make the pilgrimage as his attendant. Since he'd already determined that Ben Akbar would be a part of his future, regardless of what that was or where it led him, this prospect was entrancing. In addition, once his holy pilgrimage was properly completed, he would be entitled to call himself Hadji Ali and to take advantage of the expanded horizon derived therefrom.

Only one small cloud of doubt prevented Ali from choosing this latter course without further hesitation or thought. The Moslem officer's voice had been laden with more than casual respect when he referred to Al Misri, or The Egyptian. The casual pronouncement that The Egyptian was to have the pleasure of executing Ali might be, and probably was, just another attempt to intimidate him. But this was the Syrian *Hadj*. As such, it differed distinctly from the Moslem pilgrimage that originated in and departed from Cairo, Egypt. Every Syrian knew that Egyptians are inferior. The very fact that a responsible and high-ranking officer of the Syrian *Hadj* possessed the sheer brazen effrontery to call himself The Egyptian, plus the strength and authority to command respect for such a title, was more than enough to mark him as a man apart. Doubtless he was a man of firm convictions that were translated into action without loss of time. If he had, or if he should develop, a firm conviction that Ali dead was more pleasing than Ali alive—

Ali finally decided to go in with the soldiers and trust Allah. His decision made, he lay down, arranged his burnous to suit him and went peacefully to sleep.



In the thin, cold light of very early morning, he came awake and, as usual, lay quietly before moving. The silken cord that was tied to his wrist and Ben Akbar's neck was both slack and motionless; the *dalul* must be resting. The dagger and pilgrim's robe were safe. Reassured concerning the state of his personal world and possessions of the moment, Ali sat up and looked toward Ben Akbar.

No more than a dozen feet away, the young *dalul* was standing quietly where he had finished grazing. An ecstatic glow lighted Ali's eyes. Ben Akbar's recuperative powers must be as marvelous as his speed and endurance. He scarcely seemed to be the same spent and reeling beast that Ali had led into ambush yesterday morning. After only one night's rest and grazing, even his hump was noticeably bigger.

Ali joined the other Moslems at morning prayer, stood humbly aside as they saddled and mounted and started the baggage camels moving and fell in behind with Ben Akbar. Nobody paid the least attention to him; if he planned to escape, he would not be fool enough to make the attempt by day.

Four hours later, the travelers looked from a hillock upon the great *Hadj*.

A sea of tents, like rippling waves, overflowed and seemed about to overwhelm a broad valley. There were no palms or any other indication of water. Obviously, this was a dry camp—one of many on the long, dangerous route—and dry camps were the primary reason why so many baggage camels were needed. But even with thousands of baggage camels burdened with food and water, often there was not enough. Falling in that order to thirst, bandits, disease or hunger—or succumbing to the desert itself—a full third of the pilgrims with any *Hadj* might die before reaching the Holy City.

Save for a few tethered camels and some horses, there were no animals in sight. Ali knew that the majority had been given over to herders and were in various pastures. The picketed camels and horses were for the convenience of those who might find it necessary to ride.

For the most part, the camp would rest all day. Only when late afternoon shadows tempered the glaring sun would it come awake. Then, guided by blazing torches on either flank, at the mile-or-mile-and-a-half-an-hour which was the swiftest pace so many baggage animals could maintain, it would march toward Mecca all night long.

Impressive as the camp appeared, Ali knew also that it was just a small part—though one of the wealthier parts or there would not have been so many tents—of the great *Hadj*. There was not a single valley in the entire desert spacious enough to accommodate the five thousand humans, and the more than twenty thousand beasts, whose destination was the Holy City of Mecca.

After a brief halt, the officer led his men down into the camp. There were few humans stirring, and those who were regarded the returning patrol with complete indifference.

In the very center of the camp, before a huge and luxurious tent that, together with its furnishings, must require a whole herd of baggage camels just to transport it, the officer dismounted, handed the reins of his riding camel to a soldier and entered the tent. The remainder of the patrol formed an armed circle around Ali and Ben Akbar.

Wishing he could feel as unconcerned as he hoped he appeared, Ali sought to ease the tension by observing and speculating. This tent, he presently decided, was not headquarters for the Pasha himself. Though the Pasha's tent couldn't possibly be much more luxurious, it would be surrounded by the camps of other dignitaries, and the whole would be so well-guarded by soldiers that nobody could have come even near. Ali guessed that this was the headquarters of Al Misri, and that they were in a camp of officers and lesser notables.

Twenty minutes after he entered the tent—Ali guessed shrewdly that he had been allowed to cool his heels for a decorous interval—the officer backed out. He bowed, a curious and somehow a ludicrous gesture for anyone so fiery, and held the tent flaps open. When a second man emerged, the officer stepped humbly to one side and waited whatever action the other might consider.

Short and squat, at first glance Al Misri seemed a shapeless lump of human flesh that has somehow been given the breath of life. His silken robe hung loosely open. Uncovered, his massive head seemed to be supported directly on his shoulders, without benefit of or need for a neck. It was bald as an egg. He plopped a date into his mouth and chewed it as the soldiers moved respectfully back to give him room.

Yet Ali needed only one glance to tell him that Al Misri was far more than just a funny little fat man who chewed dates in a rather disgusting manner. His grotesque body was enveloped in an aura not unlike that which enfolded Ben Akbar. Al Misri commanded because it was his destiny to command.

He came near, spat the date pit into Ali's face and spoke to the officer. The latter conveyed the message to Ali.

"Even though Al Misri prefers to kill vermin, you are granted your life. You win this favor, not through compassion, but because you are able to ride a *dalul* that kills other men."

Ali remained silent, as was expected of him. Al Misri gave the officer another message for the captive camel driver.

"The other keeper of the *dalul* let it stray," the officer announced. "The keeper died in a fire, a very slow fire that was kindled at dawn, but the keeper still nodded his head at high noon. You are now keeper of the *dalul*. Take care that it strays not."

Without another word or a backward glance, Al Misri turned and waddled back to his tent. The officer disbanded his men.

Ali led Ben Akbar to pasture at the edge of camp.

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The travelers came to Tanim, far enough outside Holy Territory so that there was no possibility of desecrating it, but near enough to furnish a convenient stopping place for donning the *ihram*, in the cool of early morning. Not all who had been with the *Hadj* when Ali finally joined it—and not all who had since come from one place or another—were still present. Many good Moslems who would never see the Holy City had died trying to reach it.

Ali reflected curiously that some of the more devout were dead, while some who seemed to regard this holy journey in anything except a pious light were very much alive. A merchant who had come all the way from Damascus, and who was about to don the *ihram*, deferred the ceremony so that he might bargain about something or other with another merchant from Smyrna. Though they were all Moslems—except for The Jackal, Ali thought quickly—obviously the true light burned brightly for some and dimly for others.

Ali wondered uneasily about the category in which he belonged. He worried about the fact that he did not feel greatly different from the way he had felt while out on the caravan routes or in the bazaar of The Street Called Straight. He thought he should feel something else.

Though many had died, his pilgrimage had been almost luxurious. He had nothing at all to do except watch over Ben Akbar, which was simplicity itself because the powerful young *dalul* wanted nothing except to be where Ali was. Though Ali was forbidden to ride, the Pasha of Damascus, the only human worthy of riding Ben Akbar, had allowed himself to be carried all the way to Mecca in a sedan chair. Seeing the Pasha once, and from a distance, Ali decided, to his own satisfaction, at least, that he had not asked to ride Ben Akbar for the simple reason that he couldn't. Judging by the Pasha's looks, he'd have trouble riding an age-broken baggage camel.

Always together, Ali and Ben Akbar had walked all the way. It had still been the easiest of walks since, as long as he took care of Ben Akbar and kept himself in the background, Ali was assured ample food and water. With the finest of care and nothing to do, Ben Akbar was at the very peak of perfection.

With appropriate ceremony, Ali donned the *ihram* and ran a mental tally of the things he must not do until the *Hadj* came to an end. He must wear neither head nor foot covering. He must not shave, trim his nails—But there was nothing in the entire list that forbade taking Ben Akbar with him. Ali remained troubled, nevertheless because, try as he would, he was unable to achieve what he considered a necessary level of piety.

Rather than feeling spiritually uplifted by what had been and what was to be, he could think only that, very shortly, he would have the right to call himself Hadji Ali.

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## 5. The Unpardonable Sin

Mecca, Holy City of the Moslems, spoke in a strangely subdued whisper when this particular night finally enfolded it. The great *Hadj* was ended—the official termination announced when the wealthier pilgrims sought barbers to shave them and those without money shaved each other.

The unofficial, but more realistic, termination came about in a different manner.

Whatever their motives, or degree of zeal, an inspired army had gone to Mecca. With the *Hadj* ended, suddenly weary human beings thought with wistful longing of the homes they'd left and the beloved faces that became doubly precious because they were absent. Thus the sudden silence in Mecca, where—every night until this one—lone pilgrims and bands of pilgrims had gone noisily about various errands. However, not all pilgrims had chosen to spend this night in their beds.

Ali, now Hadji Ali, stood very quietly in the darkest niche he'd been able to find of The Masa, The Sacred Course between Mounts Safa and Marwa. Ben Akbar, never far from Ali's side, stood just as quietly beside him and Ali wanted no other companion. Hoping to ease a troubled conscience, he had sought this lonely and deserted spot to try to find the true significance, which he was sure must exist but had so far escaped him, of the ceremonies in which he had just participated.

Perhaps, he thought seriously, he was now confused because he had had no real understanding of any part of anything from the very beginning. Nobody had told him why the *ihram* must be donned and adjusted in a certain way, with certain prescribed motions, and in no other fashion.

With Ben Akbar, who followed like a faithful dog but aroused little comment in this city where camels were the commonest means of transportation, Ali had entered Mecca in the prescribed fashion, though he hadn't the faintest idea as to who had prescribed it or why. At intervals, and solely because all his companions were doing likewise, he had shouted "*Labbaika*," a word whose meaning he had not known and still did not know.

At this point, Ali became so hopelessly entangled in matters he did not understand that it was necessary to start all over again. However, he decided not to begin with the *ihram* this time. The Sacred Course was also a part of the ceremony, and, being near at hand, it might yield clues that could not be discerned in that which was far away.

The Sacred Course, connecting the eminences of Safa and Marwa and locale of the liveliest and most unmanageable bazaar in Mecca, was four hundred and ninety three paces in length. It was the Trail of Torment imposed on Hagar, who ran it seven times in a desperate effort to find water for her infant son. Pilgrims arriving in Mecca accepted as part of their own ceremony a seven times running of The Sacred Course. This, as Ali had seen with his own eyes, was subject to various interpretations. Some pilgrims ran the prescribed seven times but some would have difficulty walking it once, for despite the hardships of the journey, some of the afflicted, aged and the simply lazy arrived with every *Hadj*. Then there were always the eccentrics. Ali himself had been an astounded witness when one fat Amir reclined in a cushioned sedan chair which six sweating slaves carried over The Sacred Course the requisite number of times.

Ali tilted his head and stared miserably into the darkness as the utter hopelessness of his quest for understanding became increasingly apparent. It had been important that he earn the right to call himself Hadji Ali, but, in his heart of hearts, he knew that he'd wanted far more than that from his holy pilgrimage and he had not received it. Since millions of Moslems who found all they hoped for in Mecca could not be wrong, it followed that the fault was personal. So—

Ali's meditations were interrupted by that which he understood perfectly.

Ben Akbar, swinging his head in the darkness as he turned to look toward something that had attracted him, gave the first sign that they were no longer alone. Ali had not seen the move, but he knew Ben Akbar had moved because he always knew everything the *dalul* did.

Presently, he knew that a man, or men, were approaching because Ben Akbar always breathed in a certain cadence whenever men came near. Ali held very still, hoping the strangers would pass without noticing him. He knew by their footsteps that there were two of them.

Ali sighed in disappointment when the pair halted only a few feet away. He was about to call out and make his presence known, for those who have reason for silence in the darkness also have reason to expect violence, when someone spoke.

"All know of the plan then, Ahmet?" It was the voice of The Jackal!

"All know," a second man replied.

Ali stood very still, holding his breath. The fact that The Jackal, whose intentions were anything except holy, was with the *Hadj*, had caused Ali some uneasy moments. But, he reminded himself once more, if it was the obvious duty of a good Moslem to reveal a Druse or anyone else traveling with the *Hadj* and pretending to be a Moslem, it was equally true that The Jackal was in an excellent position to do some revealing of his own. Ali had decided he would not be the first to speak. Evidently The Jackal was not talking either.

"When is the exact appointed time?" the man named Ahmet asked.

"In another hour, when the followers of Mohammed and the worshipers of Allah will be enjoying their deepest dreams."

The Jackal voiced a low laugh, and, despite his anxiety, Ali had to wonder. In the heart of Mecca, surrounded by thousands of Moslems and certainly with no hope of fighting his way clear, The Jackal could laugh as easily as though he were in a Druse stronghold. His companion was less assured.

"Speak gently," he cautioned. "Someone may hear!"

"*Pouf!*" The Jackal scoffed. "The Moslems hear nothing tonight save the hot wind that shall sing about their ears until they are once again safe in their homes. The city sleeps, Ahmet."

Ahmet said uneasily, "Some are always awake."

"Have you turned lily-livered?" The Jackal asked sardonically.

Ahmet answered, "I do not think so, but better a lily than a sword-pierced liver."

"Have I not planned well?" The Jackal demanded.

"One who can select thirty-four men, scatter them throughout a Moslem *Hadj* and bring all safely to Mecca, has planned as wisely as he chose men," Ahmet commented. "Just let there be no mistake at this late hour."

The Jackal said, "The only mistake of which we can be guilty now is in leaving this place without The Black Stone."

Ali clapped a hand over his mouth to stifle a gasp. The Jackal was indeed playing for big stakes, one of the most colossal prizes in the history of brigandage, and he seemed in a fair position to get it. Fixed in the wall of The Kaaba, an edifice so ancient that some claimed it was here even before Mohammed, The Black Stone was possibly the holiest of Moslem shrines. In common with all other pilgrims, Ali had dutifully kissed it. As far as its physical aspects were concerned, it was a small, dark mass that at one time might have been part of a meteor. Should anyone ever succeed in stealing it, the Moslem world would pay a fantastic ransom for its safe return. If nobody stopped The Jackal and his accomplices, each of them could be so wealthy that the Pasha of Damascus would seem a beggar by comparison.

Ben Akbar swung his head to nudge Ali's shoulder with an inquiring nose, and Ali stroked the *dalul's* soft cheek. Accustomed to spending his nights in some peaceful pasture, Ben Akbar had no liking for this confined place, and he was telling his friend so.

Ali tried to conjure up a mental image of The Sacred Course, but he couldn't do it, in spite of the fact that he had run its length the stipulated seven times. Because he had hoped to find that in their faces which would tell him just why they had come to Mecca, and thus furnish some sure basis upon which he could build his own right motivation for coming, Ali had studied his fellow pilgrims and ignored the street. Who could imagine that he or anyone else might have to leave The Masa by the nearest and quietest path?

There had to be a way because there was always a way, but Ali was still seeking it when Ben Akbar, increasingly eager to be out of the city that he did not like and into the desert he did, expressed his impatience in a racking grunt.

Then there was just one way. Ali drew his dagger and waited.

Out in the night, there was sudden silence, but the very lack of noise was as lethal as and somehow remarkably similar to the desert adder that awaits its prey in complete silence and, in striking, makes no noise that is ever heard by the victim. Ali considered the situation.

Since it was most improbable that there'd be a camel at this place and hour without a camel driver, the conspirators knew they had been overheard. In addition, since every camel has its own distinctive voice, The Jackal had probably recognized Ben Akbar. Therefore, he knew that Ali had overheard him.

Swiftly, Ali weighed the advantages and disadvantages and considered possible ways to make the best use of the former, while yielding as little as possible to the latter.

Beyond any doubt, The Jackal knew that Ben Akbar accepted certain favored human beings and rejected all others, unless they foolishly tried to interfere with him. Then he showed his resentment, often violently. So only a fool would rush in, and The Jackal was no fool. Neither, Ali told himself, was he a coward who'd be swerved from his determined purpose by a threatening incident. He'd face a dozen Ben Akbars before he'd abandon his plan to steal The Black Stone and seek refuge in flight, but he'd face them in his own way. Ali took a calculated risk.

"Kneel," he whispered in the *dalul's* ear.

Ben Akbar obeyed. Stifling a sigh of relief, Ali slipped five paces to one side and turned so that he was again facing the *dalul*. There had been a certain unavoidable rattling of pebbles and other small noises when Ben Akbar knelt, but no sound of a camel leaving the scene. If Allah were kind, The Jackal would know that Ben Akbar remained where he had been and would expect to find Ali with him. Rushing in from an unexpected quarter at the right moment, Ali would have the advantage of surprise and some hope of victory, in spite of two to one odds.

Ali thought, but very fleetingly, of calling out an offer to negotiate. He'd go his way and maintain his silence, if the pair would promise no interference. But The Jackal had come too far and risked too much to incur the further risk of a knowing head and a possibly loose tongue; he'd never accept the offer. Nor could Ali really have brought himself to make it.

Even though he had failed to find the assured spiritual awakening he'd earnestly hoped to discover in Mecca, he could not be disloyal to a Faith he'd voluntarily accepted. Even though he himself failed to appreciate the significance of The Black Stone, as a good Moslem, he could not see it defiled.

Dagger in hand, Ali stood very quietly in the darkness. Though he was looking toward Ben Akbar and the *dalul* was only a few paces away, the darkness was so intense that he could barely discern the camel's outline. He neither saw nor heard anything else. It was as though Ali and Ben Akbar were the only inhabitants of a world suddenly turned black.

Ali battled the illusion, for the very silence and the feeling that he was alone were sufficient evidence that he faced deadly danger. The Jackal was no amateur who would seek to cow his enemy by hissed threats, mislead him by thrown stones or other ruses, or indulge in any other melodrama. He compared favorably with the tawny-maned lion who lays his ambush at a water hole where gazelles drink. Having decided that killing was in order, The Jackal would kill with a maximum of speed and efficiency, brought about by a lifetime of experience.

Ben Akbar did not even move. He would remain exactly as he was and where he was until Ali himself gave permission to get up or until circumstances beyond his friend's control forced him to arise. A lump rose in Ali's throat. Ben Akbar was far more than just a magnificent *dalul*. He was Ali's other self, a true brother and to be loved as such. Ali renewed his vow that, so long as Allah saw fit to spare him, just so long would he and Ben Akbar face the same winds, traveling side by side.

Suddenly, seeing his pilgrimage in an entirely new light, it was no longer a disappointment but more than rewarding. Perhaps, in His infinite wisdom, Allah bestowed different gifts upon different pilgrims, according to their true intentions. Ali knew that he was contented now, for, because of his pilgrimage, he had Ben Akbar. He would no longer stand alone against the world.

Presently, Ali became aware of great and immediate danger.

It was no sudden perception accompanied by sudden shock, but a complete and whole revelation, the ripening of each separate incident since The Jackal and Ahmet had appeared. Unless he did something about it, Ali's senses told him, he would be dead very shortly. At the same time, so clear was the light that bathed his mind, he was instantly able to understand exactly how this had come about.

He had underestimated The Jackal. Hearing Ben Akbar grunt, the man had identified him instantly. But he had also identified the tiny sounds made by a camel kneeling and he'd known why Ben Akbar was made to kneel. The Jackal, had decided, not only that Ali would not await directly beside Ben Akbar, but also exactly where he would be found. It was what The Jackal himself might have done under similar circumstances. Now, dagger poised, he stood directly behind Ali and needed only one more silent step to carry him into a striking position.

When Ali moved, he did so swiftly, bending at the knees even while he swiveled the upper portion of his body forward to make a smaller target. At the same time, he pivoted on the balls of his feet, so that he made a complete turn and faced his enemy. He thrust with all his strength.

The dagger's point found resistance, but not unyielding resistance. It bit hungrily into something that was both soft and warm. There was a gasp, a strangled grunt, then an almost gentle rustle as The Jackal wilted backwards and his own burnous enfolded him.

A shout cracked the darkness as a hammer blow might crack a pane of glass. "Now then! Close in!"

Bloody dagger still in his extended hand, Ali only half heard either the shout or the patter of running feet that immediately followed. Aghast at what he'd done but never intended to do, he remained rooted in his tracks. This was Mecca, The Holy City, and shedding blood within its borders was one of the very few sins for which there was no pardon. Mohammed himself, when making prisoners of some enemies who sought to hide in Mecca, could carry out his own death sentence only by locking them in a building and letting them starve. No Moslem was wealthy or influential enough to attain forgiveness for shedding blood in Mecca.

So complete was his horror and so shocking, for a short space Ali was only vaguely aware of rough hands that gripped him. Then someone spoke. Ali recognized the voice of the fierce officer who had ambushed the Druse.

"It is the camel rider who was made keeper of the *dalul*, and he too has let his charge stray."

A groan sounded in the darkness.

"He has done more than that," someone whom Ali could barely see said in an awed whisper. "He has shed blood in the Holy City."

"Fool!" the officer said to Ali contemptuously. "We knew who they were and were ready to take them! I would not care to wear your burnous at this moment!"

The single reason why he was not already lying beside the wounded man, Ali told himself, could be ascribed to the fact that the fierce officer dared not shed blood in Mecca. Certainly his execution would not be delayed when they no longer stood on Holy Ground.

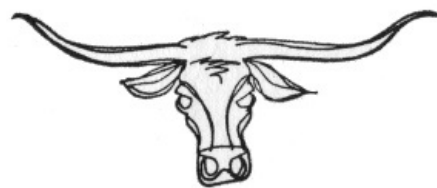
Then the fog that had dulled Ali's brain when he stabbed The Jackal faded away. He thought of words voiced by the officer, 'the camel rider who was made keeper of the *dalul*, and he too has let his charge stray.' Obviously, the soldiers were unaware of Ben Akbar's nearness. Ali saw his one hope of escape.

"Ho!" he called loudly and clearly. "Ben Akbar! Come to me! Run!"

There was a rattling of pebbles as Ben Akbar hastened to obey. Astonished soldiers, who hadn't even suspected this and needed a moment to decide what it might be, dodged out of the *dalul's* path or were knocked out of it.

Side by side, Ali and Ben Akbar ran on until the friendly mantle of night hid both.

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## 6. The Strange Ship

The first light of day was followed almost at once by the first blast of heat. Then the sun rose, a burning red ball that seemed to roll across the eastern horizon with steadily increasing speed, as though to gain momentum for leaping into the sky.

The rein hung slack and Ali dozed in the saddle as Ben Akbar paced steadily onward. When the bright sun flashed in his eyes, Ali awakened and halted his mount with, "Ho, my brother! Let us stop."

Ben Akbar halted, knelt when commanded to do so, and Ali dismounted.

As the sun climbed higher and grew hotter, Ali pondered his present situation, the immediate past and the probable future. In his mind's eye, he drew a map of the general area and of his approximate position.

At a rough estimate, Mecca was halfway down the east shore of the Red Sea, a great sweep of water whose most northerly waves break on the Sinai Peninsula and whose southern extremity mingles with the Gulf of Aden, a thousand or more miles away. Directly to the east was the land of the Arabs. Ali's native Syria was northeast, and beyond Syria lay Turkey.

Since it was manifestly impossible to cross the Red Sea without a suitable ship, Ali's choice of directions were north, south and east. It was a difficult choice, for, wherever he went, he would still be in a land of Moslems. Even if he might somehow contrive to cross the Red Sea, he must necessarily disembark in Moslem Egypt.

Because he had shed blood in Holy Mecca, he was and forever must be outcast by all true Moslems. Moreover, with thousands of home-going pilgrims and each one an indignant bearer of the tale of desecration, very shortly Ali would be a marked man throughout the Moslem world. Any Moslem who killed him would be honored, not prosecuted.

Now all that belonged to the dead past. This was the living present, and Ali wondered curiously why he was unable to regard that present in the grave light cast by facts as they were. He'd gained in Mecca the coveted right to call himself Hadji Ali, and, considering the turn of circumstances that now meant nothing whatever. It made not the slightest difference what name he carried. But, far from surrendering to despair or even giving way to anxiety, Ali felt that the *Hadj* had brought him a whole new future and that it had never been so hopeful.

He stroked the *dalul's* neck with affectionately understanding hands. Ben Akbar made happy little noises with his mouth and the rein trailed in the desert sand. Ali stooped to pick it up. The rein was not necessary because he could still guide Ben Akbar by voiced commands, but, since he was setting out on what would most certainly be a long journey, he had felt that it was desirable to have proper trappings for his mount.

As soon as Ali began to plan ahead after his flight from Mecca, he decided that he must reach the camp of Al Misri, the most accessible source of camel harness, before the soldiers were able to bring their news there. He accomplished that by making Ben Akbar kneel when both had run a safe distance, then mounting and riding at full speed until he was within a discreet distance of the camp. There—even if he has completed the *Hadj*, a camel's groom must not be caught riding a *dalul* reserved exclusively for the Pasha of Damascus—Ali dismounted and walked the rest of the way.

Familiar figures about the camp, the pair attracted only indifferent glances from the sentries. As though he were acting under orders, Ali went directly to the supply tent to choose a proper saddle and bridle. The bridle presented no problem, but Ali was able to find a saddle only after rejecting a dozen of the biggest ones and finally hitting upon the largest of all. In superb condition, Ben Akbar's sleek hump seemed ready to burst. None but the biggest saddle would fit.

However, foreseeing probable hardship, and the consequent shrinking of the *dalul's* hump, Ali gathered up a sufficient supply of saddle pads. Finally, he chose a goatskin water bag and, as payment for all, left the single coin that had remained to him after paying for his *ihram*. It was not enough, and he knew it, but it was all he had.

Leading Ben Akbar, Ali filled his water bag at the oasis and went on. The sentries who watched

all this but failed to act were lulled partly by the fact that Ali was a familiar part of the camp and, as far as the sentries knew, above suspicion. They were further disarmed by the very audacity of the scheme. Nobody, certainly not a camel's groom, would walk brazenly into a camp commanded by Al Misri and steal trappings to equip the Pasha's prized *dalul*, which he also intended to steal!

A safe distance from camp, Ali mounted and rode. He struck inland, veering away from the route that would be selected by most of the home-going pilgrims, letting Ben Akbar choose his own moderate pace all night long. Nobody could follow him in the darkness, anyhow, and it was wise to spare his mount.

Now, as he stood beside the reclining *dalul* and the burning sun pursued its torrid course, Ali considered that which was as inevitable as the eventual setting of the sun.

It was a foregone conclusion that some tracker had taken the trail as soon as he was able to see it, and the pursuers would waste no time. Nor would they ever give up. Who stole a *dalul* from the Pasha of Damascus might escape only if he sought and found asylum with one of the Pasha's powerful enemies. But who desecrated Holy Mecca would never find safety in any Moslem land. In addition, Ali thought, the officer and all the men who'd been with him would now make a heretic's punishment a point of honor, a blood quest from which only death would free them.

Ali still saw hope that could not have been without Ben Akbar. As individuals, either was assailable. Together, they were invincible.

Counting from the time they'd left Al Misri's camp to the first light of day, Ali gave meticulous consideration to the pace set by Ben Akbar and the type of terrain they'd traveled. When finished, he knew within a few rods either way just how far they had come and within a few minutes, plus or minus, when pursuers could be expected. Ali turned to Ben Akbar.

"Rest," he crooned, as he removed saddle and bridle. "Rest and forage, oh Prince among *dalul*. Come to me then, and you shall teach the Pasha's soldiers the true speed of a *dalul*."

Ben Akbar wandered forth to crop the coarse desert vegetation. Choosing the doubtful shade offered by a copse of scrub, Ali lay down and drew his burnous about him. He slept peacefully and soundly, as though he'd somehow managed to purge his mind of certain grim prospects for the immediate future and rest alone mattered. A bit more than three hours later, as Ali had planned when he chose his bed, the blazing sun shone directly upon him and its glare broke his slumber.

He did not, as had been his habit, lie quietly and without moving until he determined exactly what lay about him and what, if anything, he should do about it. Ben Akbar, who always knew long before his master when anything approached—and always let Ali know—made such precautions unnecessary. The great *dalul* was grazing quietly and only a few feet away.

"To me, my brother," Ali called softly.

Ben Akbar came at once and Ali replaced the saddle and bridle. About to take a swallow of water, he decided to wait until Ben Akbar could also have a satisfactory drink or until thirst became unbearable. In the latter event, they'd share the contents of the water bag.

Ali thought calmly of the journey before him. A novice attempting such a trip would invite his own death, and even an experienced desert traveler would find such an undertaking very precarious. However, Ali, who'd spent most of his life on the caravan routes, thought of it as just one more journey.

The merciless sun spared nothing. Waves of heat rolled along with monotonous regularity, as though the heat blanket were a mighty ocean beset by a steady wind. Ali turned his back to the sun's direct rays and watched Ben Akbar. He was hot and thirsty, and becoming hotter and thirstier, but so had he been before and would be again.

The sun was almost exactly where Ali had decided it should be when Ben Akbar raised his head and fixed his attention on the western horizon. It was the direction from which they had come, that from which pursuit should come. Ali turned to face the same way as Ben Akbar.

A few minutes later, they rode over a hillock and Ali saw them. They were a little group of the Pasha's crack troops, superbly mounted on magnificent *dalul* and maintaining tight formation behind a tracker. Ali reached up to fondle Ben Akbar's neck but kept his eyes on the riders. They were seven, including the tracker, and Ali knew at once why there were no more than seven and no fewer.

He was no ordinary outlaw, but a direct affront to all that Moslems held most dear. He must be brought to justice, and no effort would be spared to do so. Thus the tracker was the best to be found. The six soldiers were picked men. Finally, the seven *dalul* were the very elite of the almost thirty thousand camels with the *Hadj*. There were no more than seven pursuers because there was not another *dalul* to keep pace with these seven.

Ali did not have to ask himself if the seven *dalul* were fresh or weary; their riders would know how to conserve their mounts. Ben Akbar had had less than four hours' rest.

Standing quietly beside Ben Akbar, Ali told himself that he had wanted and planned to have the pursuit take form in just this way, and he would not change now if he could. He himself might

have ridden much farther in the hours that had elapsed since leaving Al Misri's camp, but he'd have done it at the expense of Ben Akbar. The test had to come, and it was better to meet it in this fashion.

The soldiers sighted him and urged their mounts from an easy trot to a swift lope. Ali waited until they were within two hundred and fifty yards, well beyond effective range of smoothbore muskets, before he turned to Ben Akbar and said quietly, "Kneel."

Ben Akbar knelt and Ali mounted. At ease in the saddle, he turned to watch the soldiers sweep nearer. A momentary doubt assailed him as a close-up inspection of their *dalul* revealed the full magnificence of such animals. Ali put the doubt behind him and told Ben Akbar to run.

At home in a camel saddle as he seldom fitted in elsewhere, Ali did not waste another backward glance as Ben Akbar flew on. He knew what lay behind him, and that he could expect no mercy whether his back or his face was toward the pursuers. Wherever it struck, the blade of a sword would be equally sharp and bite as deeply.

After fifteen minutes, and the blade not felt, Ali knew he'd chosen wisely when he gave his very life into Ben Akbar's keeping. He still did not look behind him. *Dalul* such as the soldiers mounted were not easily outdistanced, but there was a mighty vein of comfort in that very thought. Ben Akbar would never again be pursued by swifter *dalul* or more skilful riders. If he won this race, he'd win all to come.

An hour and a half afterwards, Ali finally looked around. With less than a two-hundred-yard lead at the beginning of the race, Ben Akbar had doubled that distance between himself and the three swiftest pursuers. The remaining four, in order of their speed, straggled behind the leaders. Ali slowed Ben Akbar so that his pace exceeded by the scantiest margin that of the three leaders.

When a cool wind announced the going of the day and the coming of the night, the nearest of the seven pursuers was a mere dot in the distance.

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The bitter autumn wind that snarled in from the Mediterranean had sent a herd of tough, desert-bred goats to the shelter of some boulders and made them stand close together for the warmth one found in another. Riding past on Ben Akbar, Ali gave the shivering herd the barest of glances and turned his gaze to the horizon. He missed nothing, a highly practical talent whose development had been markedly accelerated by necessity.

Behind lay an incredible journey. Eluding the soldiers, Ali rode on into the very heart of the Arabian desert. Always he sought the lonelier places, shepherd's or camel herder's camps and the smallest villages. At first his experiences had conformed strictly to what any solitary traveler might expect. As the news spread and Ali's ill fame became part of the talk at even the most isolated campfires, his fortunes changed accordingly.

He seldom met anything except cold hatred and outright hostility. Normally it was accompanied by dread, not entirely a disadvantage since, whatever else they thought, trembling natives who recognized Ali feared to refuse him food and other necessities. He fought when he could not avoid fighting, but much preferred to run. Ben Akbar had shown his heels to more soldiers, tribesmen and just plain bandits than Ali could remember.

With an almost desperate yearning for anyone at all who'd exchange a friendly word, eventually Ali turned to his native Syria, where he hoped to find a friend. He found a hatred more bitterly intense than anything experienced elsewhere; every Syrian seemed to think that he must bear part of the shame for a countryman who had defiled the Holy City. Now Ali was farther north, in the land of the Turks and riding toward the port of Smyrna.

Rounding a bend that brought him in sight of the Mediterranean, Ali halted Ben Akbar and stared in amazement.

He was on the shoreside wall of a u-shaped rock ledge that extended into the sea and formed a natural harbor. Some distance out, a great sailing ship that flew a foreign flag rode at anchor. Though he could not read it and had no more than a vague notion that it might be read, Ali could make out her name. She was the *Supply*.



Halfway between shore and ship, a scow propelled by oarsmen and carrying a kneeling camel that seemed to be strapped in position, was making toward the *Supply*. On the shore beneath Ali, a number of other camels were tethered. One had lain down, and eight Egyptian camel handlers seemed interested in making it get up again.



With a fine contempt for Egyptians generally, and Egyptian camel handlers specifically, Ali had decided to his own satisfaction that these last fell back on forceful crudity simply because they were too stupid to master the right ways of handling camels. Ali's curiosity mounted because, contrary to their usual procedure, these handlers were gently trying to make the camel get up.

Then the scow reached the ship, the men who had been on the scow disappeared on the *Supply* and took the camel with them, whereupon the Egyptian handlers abruptly changed tactics. Kicking together a pile of rubble, someone started a fire. A pail appeared from somewhere and was put over the fire. A raging Ali leaped from Ben Akbar and toward the group.

He had not intended to interfere. If the Egyptians were stupid enough to abuse their own camel, then let them be deprived of the beast that much sooner. Ali would not have interfered if the Egyptian handlers had done almost anything except what they were obviously about to do—make the camel get up by pouring boiling pitch over its tail. Hearing Ali, the eight turned as one and greeted him with hostile stares.

"Swine!" Ali snarled. "Offspring of diseased fleas! Eaters of camel dung!"

He emphasized his insults with a blow to the midriff that sent the nearest Egyptian spinning, and immediately the seven were upon him. Ali delivered a smart kick to the shin that left one hopping about on one foot and howling with pain, landed a clenched fist squarely on the jaw of another, and then a sledge hammer collided with his own head.

Night came suddenly. Then light shone through the dark curtain, and Ali looked up at two men who stood before him. One, a native interpreter, was foppish in garment and manner. The other, arrayed in clothing such as Ali had never seen, commanded instant respect. Tall, slim, strong and young, he had the same air of strength and authority that marked Al Misri. He spoke in a strange tongue to the interpreter, who addressed Ali.

"Lieutenant Porter demands to know why you attacked his men."

Ali gestured toward the kneeling camel. "They would have made it rise by pouring boiling pitch on its tail."

The interpreter conveyed this information to Lieutenant Porter, who whirled at once on the Egyptians.

"I've told all of you that I will tolerate no cruelty," he began.

Not understanding a word, nevertheless Ali listened with mingled awe and admiration as Lieutenant Porter continued to speak. His words, Ali thought happily, were a lion's roar, and it was better to be whipped than to endure them because a whip could not remove skin nearly as well. The eight Egyptians, like eight beaten dogs, slunk away. Lieutenant Porter addressed the interpreter, who conveyed the message to Ali.

"Can you make the camel rise?"

Ali got to his feet, smoothed his burnous and went to the stubborn camel. He took hold of the tether rope while he stooped to whisper in its ear, "Rise, my little one. Rise, my beauty. The trail is long and the day is short."

The camel rose and began to lick Ali's hand. Ali addressed the interpreter. "Where are these camels going?"

"To America," the interpreter assured him.

"But—" A bewildered Ali looked from the stately ship to the tethered camels. "Is a land wealthy enough to have such a ship, so poor as to have no camels?"

Treating this question with haughty disdain, the interpreter relayed another message. "Lieutenant Porter wishes to know if you will go to America with the camels?"

Ali hesitated, then asked, "Is America a land of Moslems?"

The interpreter conferred with Lieutenant Porter and turned to Ali. "There are no Moslems."

Ali indicated Ben Akbar, silhouetted on top of the ledge. "May my *dalul* come, too?"

"He may," the interpreter assured him.

Ali said joyously, "Then we will go."

He didn't know where America was or what he might find on arrival, but he was sure that he and Ben Akbar, together, could make their own way anywhere at all.

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## 7. Another Pilgrimage

Beginning at her stern and bearing to the starboard side, Ali set out to become more intimately acquainted with the ship. Almost every step brought to light a fresh marvel. As a camel driver who traveled with caravans, at one time or another he had been in every port that a caravan can visit, and he was not unfamiliar with ships. But never before had he seen anything to compare with the *Supply*.

A hundred and forty-one feet over all, the wooden three-master had a main and a quarterdeck. An official United States Navy ship, she was armed with a battery of four twenty-four pounders. One glance revealed that her crew of forty officers and men believed in and strictly adhered to the rules of first-class seamanship; the *Supply* was as spotlessly clean as she was trim.

Had she been a conventional ship, Ali would have considered her impressive enough. As it was, he found her overwhelming.

Jefferson Davis, United States Secretary of War, was one of several outstanding Americans who'd long cherished the notion that camels might very well help solve some of the troublesome problems of transportation involved in settling America's vast, arid and little-known Southwest. Finally, granted official permission to subject this theory to a practical test, the *Supply* had been rebuilt for the sole purpose of importing an experimental herd.

A well-built stable, sixty feet long, twelve feet wide and not quite seven feet six inches high, extended from just behind the foremast to just in front of the quarterdeck. On either side were twenty portholes that could be left open when weather permitted, but each porthole was equipped with a panel of glass that closed from the inside in cold weather and wooden shutters that swung from the outside and were to be used during violent storms or in heavy seas. Midway was a hatch that offered direct entry to the stable, and that could be lowered for loading or unloading and raised when the ship was at sea.

Front and rear, high enough above the main deck so that even the most turbulent waves would not wash over them, were other hatches fitted with wind sails—canvas funnels—that admitted air but excluded everything else. Thus, even when it was necessary to close the portholes, there was no danger that the camels would suffocate.

Every stall was fitted with a harness, so arranged that the stall's occupant might have complete freedom of movement when the *Supply* was in smooth sailing, or be strapped firmly in a kneeling position and unable to move at all, when the ship was in stormy seas. Further to minimize injuries that might result from being tossed about, bags filled with hay were secured to every beam and anything else that a camel might bump. The stable floor was covered with clean, fresh litter. Reflector lamps would illuminate the stable if it should be necessary to attend the camels at night.

A supply of fresh water was contained in two huge tanks, each holding thirty thousand gallons, and a fire extinguisher was arranged so that it could draw on either tank or both. A sterile cabinet held an ample supply of every known remedy for any ailment that might afflict a camel. The hold of the *Supply* was filled to the bursting point with a store of the finest and cleanest hay and grain. No necessity or luxury that a camel might need—or that somebody fancied a camel might need—had been omitted.

There were twenty camels already in the stable and they were making themselves at home there. Twenty-four, including Ben Akbar, remained to be brought on board.

Thirty-seven of the herd were young females, many of which were with young. Every one of the forty-three beasts that the American buyers had selected was an outstanding creature, all in their prime and none with any blemishes or deformities. But even though he must concede that the Americans knew how to choose camels, Ali was both baffled and dazzled by their sending of the *Supply*, obviously representing a tremendous investment, to carry a mere forty-four of even the finest camels all the way to America. Few of the desert-roving camel breeders of Ali's acquaintance would consider it worth their while to drive so small a herd to market, not even if the market was only four miles away.

Rounding the front of the stable and continuing sternward on the opposite side of the *Supply*, Ali felt a tense ripple travel up his spine and reassured himself that his dagger was at hand when he saw another camel handler approaching. Eight natives in all, seven besides Ali, had been retained to accompany this herd to America and Ali hadn't the faintest doubt that each one knew all the details of his story. But far from any hostile gesture or incident, nobody had even mentioned Mecca, to say nothing of the punishment sure to attend any who shed blood in the Holy City. There was a variety of possible explanations for such forbearance. Maybe the seven were

lukewarm Moslems, who simply didn't care; perhaps, like Ali, they had personal reasons for wanting to go to some land where Moslems were few; possibly they intended to take action but were waiting for the right moment.

When he was near enough to his fellow camel handler, Mimico Teodara, Ali said decorously, "I greet thee."

"And I thee," the other replied.

Ali relaxed. If Mimico knew his story—and beyond doubt he did know—and if he were a strict Moslem, he would not have spoken to Ali at all. For a moment they remained side by side and both glanced toward the tethered camels that remained on shore. Ali, who somehow felt that Mimico might become his friend, spoke of the riddle that had been puzzling him.

"It is strange, almost past understanding, that Americans would send such a ship, at vast expense, to carry only forty-four camels to America."

"Strange indeed," his companion agreed. "Even more to be wondered at is the fact that, the first time they came, they returned with only thirty-three camels."

Surprised, Ali asked, "They have been here before?"

Mimico nodded. "This is their second voyage."

"Come," the foppish interpreter said, "this is not a time for idling."

Ali and Mimico walked silently to the lowered hatch through which the camels were brought on board and took their places in the boat that was moored against it. The device employed to bring camels from shore to ship, Ali felt, was another startling example of American ingenuity. Twenty feet long by seven wide, the boat used as a ferry was fitted with a hinged door at each end. A wheeled truck, sturdy enough to support the biggest camel, could be pushed through either door and secured in such a manner that it neither moved nor unbalanced the ferry.

Of very shallow draft, the oarsmen had no difficulty in running the ferry up on any beach. Then the hinged door was lowered and the truck run out. A camel was led onto the truck, made to kneel and strapped in place. The truck was pushed back onto the ferry, the door was raised, and the launching accomplished. Reaching the *Supply*, the door on the opposite end was lowered and the ferry brought squarely against the lowered hatch. Then it was necessary only to push the truck and its helpless passenger onto the deck of the *Supply* and into the stable.

Ali, who thought he knew all the methods of moving camels, had to admit that he'd never even heard of this one.

Mimico, who had a fine touch with camels, brought the next passenger. It was a great Bactrian, or two-humped male. As it was led onto the truck, made to kneel and strapped in place, Ali wondered. Bactrians were enormous beasts, some weighing a ton or more, and this was an especially fine specimen. There was no doubting the strength of a two-humped camel, but caravan trails were usually long ones. Often, what with delivering one cargo at one point, picking up another for a different destination, and there getting still another, a year or more might elapse before a train of camels finally returned to the home from which they had set out. Such wandering was certain to be attended by conditions that varied from lush browse and ample water to scant forage and near drought. A camel's hump changed accordingly, so that often nothing except the very skilful application of pads made it possible to keep a firm saddle on a beast with only one hump. Naturally, a beast with two humps could be twice the trouble. In addition, Ali thought, Bactrians were less hardy.

Under the skilful direction of Ali and Mimico, all the camels except Ben Akbar were finally loaded. On the final trip, Mimico leaped out as soon as the ferry was beached and went to bring Ali's *dalul*.

Ali waited, saying nothing. The more they were together, the better he liked Mimico, who handled camels with consummate skill and never used words when deeds were in order. Ali waited now to find if his judgment was sound. If Mimico passed what Ben Akbar considered a respectful distance, the *dalul* would show his resentment. If Mimico was the camel man he seemed to be, he would recognize Ben Akbar for what he was and halt before he was dangerously near.

Before Ben Akbar lunged, Mimico halted, turned and beckoned. Ali strode forward to lead his *dalul* to the ferry.

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All sails spread to a stiff and favorable wind, the *Supply* skimmed along at a fast eight knots an hour. Leaning against an outside wall of the camel stable, beside the porthole near which Ben Akbar was tethered, and through which he was thrusting his nose, Ali kept anxious eyes on the horizon where land should appear.

Since that day when the *Supply* had sliced into the Mediterranean and the haze-shrouded coast of Turkey had slipped always farther behind and then disappeared, almost three full months had come and gone. By no means had they passed swiftly.

One furious storm followed another while the *Supply* pursued her course in the Mediterranean. Much of the time it had been necessary to strap the camels in place, to keep them from being tumbled about as the ship listed one way or another. It had been impossible to prevent all injury, but only three of the forty-four camels had died.

Two of them were Bactrians, the only two-humped camels in the present cargo. This gave additional support for Ali's theory that they were less hardy than their Arabian cousins. He did not draw any positive conclusions because Lieutenant Porter disagreed with him, saying that species had nothing to do with it and the two Bactrians merely happened to be less hardy individuals. Ali offered no argument because of an ever increasing respect for Lieutenant Porter's knowledge and wisdom.

In part, Ali was influenced by the fact that Porter was the only man on board besides Ali himself who had succeeded in winning Ben Akbar's friendship. But more than that was involved.

As the *Supply* lay at anchor off the Turkish coast, it was evident that Lieutenant Porter was not an authority on camels. But in sharp contrast with some men Ali had known, the American had proven himself both willing and eager to learn, and he included the eight native camel drivers among his teachers. But from the first, to Ali's vast astonishment and then to his boundless delight, Porter did not find it necessary to base his behavior upon that pursued by haughty sheiks and amirs who conversed with camel drivers.

Nobody on the *Supply* ever forgot that Lieutenant Porter was in command, but nobody ever had reason to feel that the officer considered them inferior. Ali nursed a happy conviction that America must be a wonderful land indeed if many Americans were like the skipper of the *Supply*.

A little distance from Ali, Mimico was also leaning against the camel stable and waiting for the first sight of land. The pair had become friends during the voyage, but, after so many days at sea, neither Ali nor Mimico wanted to do anything except look at some land.

Presently Ali saw it, the sea rolling up on a flat and treeless shore and the waves falling back. Then it disappeared, a tantalizing vision that first enticed and then crushed. But it came again and did not disappear. Ali's eager eyes drank in as much as possible of this first look at America.

The shore was flat and treeless, but not by any means was it deserted. A great crowd of people, everything from officials come to receive the camels to the curious who wanted only to look, awaited. There was a wooden pier and a group of buildings that comprised the town of Indianola, Texas.

A lighter that had been lingering at the pier was now making toward them. The ship met the *Supply* and drew alongside. A camel was brought from its stall and a harness was strapped about and beneath it. A cable dangling from the lighter's boom was attached to the harness and the kicking, frightened camel was transferred from the *Supply* to the lighter.

Lieutenant Porter gestured to Ali and Mimico, ordering, "Go aboard the lighter and help out."

The pair entered a small boat that took them to the lighter, where they received all the camels as they came. With gentle touch and soothing voices, they calmed the frightened animals and averted what might have become a catastrophe.

Busy with the camels, Ali had time for only the briefest of shoreward glances. His first close-up impression of America was a restricted one—a small section of the pier which they were approaching. Standing on it were two horses, hitched to a light wagon. A red-faced, red-haired man who had come to see the unloading occupied the wagon seat and held the horses' reins.

There was no time for a prolonged scrutiny; the camels must be put ashore as soon as possible. Mimico climbed from the lighter to the pier and made ready to receive them. Ali strapped the harness about the first camel to be unloaded. The boom lifted it.

Then the horses screamed, the red-faced man roared, and a full scale upheaval was in progress!



## 8. Trouble

As soon as the horses began to scream and the man to shout, the camels quieted. It was what they should do, and Ali would have been astonished if they hadn't. Taken from familiar stalls and immediately thereafter swung on the boom, they had been roused to the verge of stampede. But they had not been hurt and saw no indication that they might be hurt when the new danger

threatened.

The camels had not detected this fresh peril and were not directly aware of it, but the screams of the horses and shouts of the driver were evidence enough that it existed. The camels responded as though they were part of a caravan under attack. Whatever peril lurked, it might pass them by if they stood quietly.

The herd again tractable, Ali put a companionable hand on Ben Akbar's shoulder and turned toward the pier. His eyes widened in astonishment.

Mimico had received and was holding the tether rope of the single beast that had been transferred to the pier. It was one of the young females, and, like all the rest of the herd, it was standing very quietly. But on the pier and within a wide radius, Mimico and the young camel seemed to be the only living creatures that were quiet.

The terrified horses, bereft of all reason, had wrenched control from their driver. Whirling crazily, they had missed dashing off the pier and into the water by no more than a wagon wheel's width. Now, with the red-haired driver still trying with all his strength to stop them, they were running away at top speed. As Ali watched, a wheel struck a boulder and the wagon bounded high in the air.

To one side, a black-bearded man had been indolently sitting on a gaunt dun mule, with one foot in a stirrup and the other cocked up on the saddle, while his chin rested on the upraised knee. Suddenly and obviously to the man's complete surprise—the mule began an insane bucking. The startled rider dropped his upraised foot, groped for and couldn't find the stirrup, and missed the dangling reins when he snatched at them. He leaned forward to wrap both arms about the mule's neck and clung desperately.

Two saddled horses whose riders were among the crowd reared and danced in a mad effort to break their tethers. A horse that had not been picketed whirled and, tail high over its rump, galloped away. Everybody on shore except Mimico seemed to be shouting or screaming, or shouting and screaming.

A small boat moved up beside the lighter and more men came aboard. Four were native camel handlers but the fifth was a quiet young American named, Ali remembered, Gwynne Heap. With a taste for adventure and a knowledge of Eastern languages and customs derived from previous residence in the East, Heap had contributed at least as much as anyone else to the successful purchase and importation of the camel herd. Now he took competent command.

"You have no trouble?" he asked quietly.

"No trouble," Ali told him.

Gwynne Heap called to Lieutenant Porter, who had remained in the small boat, "Everything's under control."

"Keep them coming," Lieutenant Porter called back. "They must be unloaded."

Lieutenant Porter and the men who remained with him joined Mimico and made ready to help receive the camels. Ali began to harness the next animal scheduled for unloading.

He became absorbed in what he was doing, adjusting each strap and fastening each buckle with a fussy attention to detail that was both unnecessary and so time-consuming that it drew reprimanding glances from Gwynne Heap. Ali refused either to hurry or to look toward the shore, but refusing to turn his eyes toward it in no way obliterated the ugly thing that awaited there. The resentful crowd was still in an uproar. Ali thought sadly of the joyous welcome his imagination had created for these camels, so vital to his own country, when they finally reached America.

The harnessed camel was finally swung away on the boom, and, still refusing to glance shoreward, Ali began to help prepare the next in line. He tried to console himself with the thought that Lieutenant Porter was still in command and nobody would dare challenge him, but in his heart he knew that it was not so. If camels were not wanted in America, they could not be here. Nobody could force their acceptance.

Then, as always when facing a problem that seemed to have no solution, Ali stopped thinking about it. He knew from experience that it was not wise to borrow trouble. The rising sun shone on not just one but many different paths that led in many different directions. One could always find the right way if he was properly diligent in the search.

One by one, the camels were landed until only Ben Akbar was left. Ali finally glanced shoreward, to discover that Lieutenant Porter and his men had rigged a picket line, a long rope stretched across the pier, and they were tethering the camels to it as they were lowered and unharnessed. Ali saw also that the herd was again becoming restless, but this time there was no cause for concern.

The crowd was still in an uproar and such horses as had not already broken away were trying their best to do so. The camels had definitely decided that whatever might be bothering everything else would not disturb them. However, after many weeks at sea, at last they were once again on firm footing. That was very exciting.

His companions stood back while Ali alone harnessed Ben Akbar, then took hold of the boom and rode with him as the great *dalul* was transferred from the lighter to the pier. He saw, even as he descended, that the tethered camels were fast becoming unmanageable. They both smelled and saw the earth that lay just beyond the pier and they were frantic to feel it. For all his skill, not even Mimico would be able to maintain control much longer.

The spectators—those with horses had wisely left them behind—had come nearer and were arranged in a rough U at the end of the pier and on either side. Lieutenant Porter, who looked more worried than he had during the stormiest part of the voyage, paced nervously back and forth. Again and again he searched the crowd, as though expecting to find someone who should be present but was not.

Keeping a firm grip on Ben Akbar's lead rope, because he knew that big *dalul* was as anxious as any of the rest to feel earth under his feet, Ali turned to study the crowd, too. Except for a group distinguished by their uniforms, and further marked as soldiers by their arms and precise formation, he learned nothing except that Americans wear outlandish clothes.

Gwynne Heap came onto the pier and Porter asked anxiously, "Will you see if you can find Wayne? He should have met us."

"Right," the other assented.

Gwynne Heap walked to the end of the pier and mingled with the crowd. A second after he disappeared, Ben Akbar shivered convulsively and Ali knew what to expect.

"I know you long to feel the earth, for I have a similar yearning," he said. "But wait until the time is here and the word is spoken. Do not break and run as a half-trained baggage camel might. Do not shame me, my brother."



Ben Akbar quieted, but the rest of the camels would not be soothed. They surged forward, and there was no way to know which one broke the picket line because all were lunging. Tether ropes slipped off either end of the broken line as the herd ran forward.

Maintaining a firm grip on Ben Akbar's tether rope and keeping pace with the *dalul*, Ali ran with them. He was not worried. This was no reasonless stampede that might be expected to overrun whatever lay in its path because fear-crazed camels would take no reckoning of obstacles. These camels were running for the same reason that a young horse runs when, after a winter spent in a confining stall, it is finally freed in a green pasture. The people on the pier were in no danger.

The spectators, however, thought otherwise. Most of them were thoroughly familiar with horses and mules, but camels were as alien as dinosaurs. Obviously, these berserk beasts were bent on destruction.

A man shouted in fear and the contagion spread. Those directly in the path of the running herd surged away, crowding those on either side and compounding the confusion. Some idiot, fortunately he was too excited to take proper aim, drew and fired a revolver. Then Ali's eyes widened in horror.

Through the gap left open when the crowd parted, the soldiers came on the run. Their arms were ready. Their obvious intention was to avert catastrophe by shooting the camels before they overran the crowd. Ali heard Lieutenant Porter's outraged bellow.

"No! No, you fools!"

If they heard the command, the soldiers ignored it. Dispersing smartly, those in front knelt and those behind were preparing to shoot over their heads when a newcomer appeared.

Riding a sleek black horse which he handled so skillfully that somehow it seemed an extension of himself, he came through the same gap the soldiers had used. Unmistakably a professional soldier, his present actions proclaimed that he was accustomed to emergencies. He wheeled his horse in front of the troops and snapped an order.

Though they had ignored Lieutenant Porter, either because they hadn't heard him or because Porter wore the Navy uniform, the soldiers gave this officer instant obedience. Falling back to either side, they formed a lane that let the running camels through but kept the spectators out.

Seconds after the run started, Ali and Ben Akbar left the pier and stood on the soil of America.

Back on the pier, Lieutenant Porter heaved a mighty sigh of relief. He gave formal command of the camel herd over to Major Henry Wayne, of the United States Army. Arriving in the nick of time, Wayne's prompt and vigorous action averted the massacre of these animals and insured establishment of the most colorful and most unique method of transportation ever attempted in the United States—the Camel Corps.

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At the very rear of the caravan, where he had been posted by Major Wayne so that he might keep a watchful eye on all the other camels, a puzzled and apprehensive Ali sat lightly in Ben Akbar's saddle. Watching the caravan, only forty-one animals in all, imposed no strain. From Yusuf, the belled leader who swung along as placidly as though the seven hundred and fifty pounds he bore on his pack saddle had no weight at all, to Iba, the little female who walked just ahead of Ben Akbar and had been relieved of all pack-carrying because of anticipated motherhood, none had any rebellious ideas or any inclination to do anything except walk along until they came to their destination.

Ali saw them as one learns to see the very familiar. With no need for the fussy solicitude and anxious fretting that marked the soldiers assigned to duty with the camels, he would instantly discern any departure from the normal and immediately thereafter he would be making the proper countermove. Not required even to think about the camels, Ali's thoughts were occupied by more troublesome matters.

In this America, to which camels had been brought with so much trouble and at such vast expense, they had been granted a hostile reception and, with very few exceptions, there had been nothing but hostility since. Even those who came only to stare—and throngs of the curious appeared wherever the camels were taken—did not like what they saw.

It was true that camels just naturally frightened horses and mules, and thus were responsible for an unrehearsed but extremely lively rodeo wherever they made an unexpected appearance. In an attempt to avoid such incidents, a rider preceded the caravan and warned all that camels were en route. But the rider never succeeded in warning everyone, and some of those he did advise insisted on staying around with their horses or mules, to see for themselves whether he spoke the truth.

Ali managed a flitting grin as he thought of an incident that had followed the unloading. The excited camels, savoring their first happy taste of land after such a long time at sea, were permitted to race about and frolic as they pleased until they tired themselves out and could again be herded. Then they were taken to a corral built especially for them.

The corral was large enough, and as an enclosure for horses or mules it would have been satisfactory enough. In this land, however, conventional building materials were both scarce and expensive. Since prickly-pear cactus was abundant, the builders had used it to construct their fence. Far from being repelled by such a thorny barrier, the camels happily ate it!

Regardless of other considerations, the very fact that they could eat such fodder was another indication that they were well adapted to this American Southwest. Ali already knew that, although he might encounter problems different from any previously experienced, there'd be none incapable of solution. Nor was there anything horses and mules could do that camels couldn't do better. A good pack camel was capable of bearing five or six times as much as the best pack horse or mule, and, day for day, he'd carry it farther. He would keep on going, at the same steady pace, past dry water holes or across drought-shriveled areas where lack of water would drive a horse or mule to madness. Although it was often necessary to carry hay and grain for other beasts of burden, a camel would always live off the country.

These camels would do all anyone expected from them and then surpass expectations, but Ali sighed dolefully as he thought of what had been and what was. Even Major Wayne had been unable to counteract a spontaneous public rejection of these beasts from a far land. Accosted by skeptics who doubted a camel's ability to pack anything at all, Wayne had bales of hay packed on a kneeling camel. The enormous load totaled more than twelve hundred pounds, but, with no hesitation and no visible strain, the camel rose and walked away with the load when ordered to do so.

Compared with the pack animals they knew, it was an incredible feat. But, although they themselves were eyewitnesses, the onlookers seemed to regard what they had seen as the trick of some circus master. Seeing, they neither accepted nor approved.

The real trouble, Ali thought sadly, was nothing that had yet appeared or would appear on the

surface. Although this country was markedly similar to his own native land, there were fundamental differences that had nothing to do with topography. They lay in the hearts and traditions of people who, for past generations, had looked to the horse, the mule and the ox for help in building up their land.

With very few exceptions, even the soldiers assigned to the Camel Corps resented their new duties. For the most part, they were former mule skinnners who had been chosen because of their outstanding ability to handle mules. Almost to a man, they yearned to be rid of camels and back with their mules. Only Major Wayne and a very few others had complete confidence in the proposed Camel Corps. Fortunately, some of these were so influential that they must be heard.

Presently, Ali caught his first glimpse of Camp Verde, the military post where the camels were to be held until a major expedition was organized. His heart grew lighter and his troubles less.

Obviously, Camp Verde had been planned by someone who knew camels. Glancing briefly at a cluster of adobe buildings, Ali centered intent scrutiny on the khan, or camel corral. Constructed of stone, wood and timber, it was patterned after the time-tested khans of Ali's native country. Rectangular, the north wall angled outward. The gate was in this wall and a house for the chief camel handler stood beside the gate. Spacious enough for five times as many camels, the corral differed in a notable respect from most khans Ali had seen. It was sparkling clean.

A few camels, some with pack and some with riding saddles, stood here and there about the camp and more were visible in the khan. Evidently this was the herd Mimico had mentioned, the thirty-three previously imported. The new arrivals were halted, stripped of their burdens and herded into the khan.

With an affectionate parting slap for Ben Akbar, Ali turned to face a strange camel handler. Arrived with the first camels and presently serving as interpreter, he already had Mimico and the six other handlers in tow.

"You are to come with me," he announced.

He escorted the newcomers to a building and lined them up before a desk, behind which sat a bored-looking clerk. The clerk inscribed each man's name in his records while the interpreter told each about the wages he would receive. Ali, last in line, presently faced the clerk.

"You are to be paid twenty dollars a month and receive full rations," the interpreter said.

Without looking up, the clerk asked, "Name?"

"Hadji Ali," Ali answered.

"What?" the clerk asked.

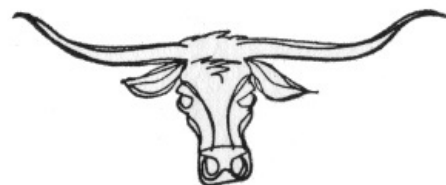
"Hadji Ali," Ali repeated.

The clerk wrote with his goose quill, and, still without looking up, he flipped the book around for Ali's inspection. Unable to read or write, but with no intention of admitting that while the interpreter might overhear, Ali scanned his written name.

"Right?" the clerk asked.

Ali nodded approval. Thus did Hadji Ali cease to be. From that moment, not only as long as he lived but as history would record him after his death, Ali would be known by the name the clerk had written.

It was *Hi Jolly*.



## 9. Lieutenant Beale

Except for the camels, that never seemed to be affected by any weather, everything at Camp Verde had sought the nearest shade. It was hot, Ali admitted to himself. The Syrian sun at its fiercest was not more savage than this blazing sun of Texas. But it was not unendurable.

Since for the present there was no reason to endure it, Ali and Mimico sat cross-legged in the shade of the camel khan. Wan and weak, Mimico was still recovering from some devastating malady that had almost cost his life. For an interval neither spoke. Then Mimico broke the silence.



"I came to this thrice-cursed camp while winter was still with us," he growled. "I have been here since, doing the work of a stable boy and as a stable boy regarded. All this I endured without complaint—"

Ali smothered a quick grin. Throughout a very monotonous period of doing nothing worthwhile, as they waited for somebody to decide what should be done, no voice had declared more loudly or more frequently than Mimico's that camels and camel men belonged out on the trails. They should not be restricted to a rest home for obsolete Pashas—Mimico's personal title for Camp Verde—who could do nothing except talk because they had grown too old or too fat to ride.

Mimico saw the grin and lapsed into a sulky silence. Then he resumed, amending his narrative to conform with truth.

"All this I endured with little complaint, for I knew that it was a passing thing. Sooner or later, there would be work for men, and men would be needed. Now that the opportunity is here—"

Mimico's voice trailed off into silence, and he gazed moodily at the sun-shriveled horizon. Ali's heart went out to his friend.

Camp Verde had indeed proved dull. Ali would have taken Ben Akbar and gone elsewhere weeks ago, except that he, too, foresaw a need for both camels and camel men. Now that time was not only at hand, but it promised to be the most exciting caravan of Ali's life.

A full-scale expedition was to be commanded by a Lieutenant Beale, an officer Ali had not met. The object was to survey a wagon road. According to rumor, a great deal of the proposed route lay through wilderness, of which none was well-known and much was unknown. There was more than a fair chance of encountering Indians, America's own savage tribesmen!

Most important and most exciting, the expedition was to provide a major test for the camels. Twenty-five were to go along, with Ali as a sort of overseer-teacher. Besides handling the camels, he was to instruct others in their proper handling.

Ali could well understand his friend's disappointment. Mimico, who otherwise would have accompanied the expedition, had been declared physically unfit by the post surgeon and ordered to remain at Camp Verde.

Ali offered such comfort as he could. "It is the will of Allah."

"Save your pious lectures for fledglings who may be impressed!" Mimico snapped. "If the will of Allah were truly what men proclaim it to be, you would have been shriveled by His wrath on a certain night when you left Mecca in a very great hurry."

Ali said nothing. Gray November skies had prevailed when he joined the company on the *Supply* and had his first meeting with Mimico. This was June in a new land, and never once had Mimico even intimated that he knew of the incident in Mecca. Mentioning it now was a breach of etiquette, but Ali did not forget that Mimico was both sick and heartbroken.

After a moment, "Forgive me, my friend!" Mimico implored. "I shall not make my own hurt less painful by inflicting hurt upon you!"

Ali said, "It is forgotten."

"I care not what you or anyone else did in Mecca," Mimico went on. "None of us may truly know what lies beyond this mortal life until we have taken leave of it and may find out for ourselves. Getting back to earthly matters, which are the only ones I admit to understanding, I hear the journey will be long."

"I have heard the same," Ali declared. "But the longer it is, the better. I do not like this place."

Mimico said fervently, "Nor do I! Aside from being wearisome, it has been most absurd. I wonder at the Amirs who have made it so."

Ali told himself that that was also true. Major Wayne, in command at Camp Verde, was a thoroughly competent officer who maintained a smoothly running organization when left alone. But various officers who ranked Wayne, of whom few had any real knowledge of camels but all cherished pet theories, had visited from time to time and insisted on trying their ideas.

One had convinced himself—and submitted an official report that he hoped would convince others—that camels were greatly inferior to horses. He arrived at such a conclusion by arranging a race, a quarter-mile sprint, between a racehorse and a riding camel. The horse finished before the camel was fairly started, it is true, but the officer in question refused to recognize the sound fact that quarter-mile sprints would not be especially valuable to the proposed Camel Corps. Nor could he be convinced that, although a good horse may outdistance a camel in the first half day of travel, the camel will overtake and pass the horse before night. Furthermore, the camel will be fresh for the next day's start and will be going on long after the horse is worn out.

Another officer had proved conclusively that, due to peculiarities of the terrain, camels would be worse than useless in the Southwest because they quickly became sore-footed. This officer derived such an opinion by requisitioning six camels that hadn't been outside the khan for six weeks, having them packed and sending them off on a fifty-mile trip. The camels went lame solely because they had had no trail work to harden their feet.

In a similar fashion, it had been demonstrated that the gait of a riding camel is so stiff and jarring that Americans couldn't possibly get used to it; that camels are subject to a bewildering variety of ailments; that they are too vicious to be practical, and that there were a few dozen other reasons why the whole project couldn't possibly work and the camels had better be disposed of right now! Throughout, those who had originally had faith in a camel corps persisted in battling all skeptics and going ahead.

At long last, this proper expedition was organized and a true test was at hand. What happened afterward, Ali told himself, depended in great measure on Lieutenant Beale. If he was one of those officers whose every thought is already written in the Manual of Regulations—Ali had seen for himself that the American Army has a full quota of such—his report might very well doom future expeditions. If Beale was able to think for himself, if he was capable of honest analysis and could adapt to new situations, it was wholly possible that his favorable report would remove all obstacles and be the making of the Camel Corps.

Mimico asked wistfully, "What think you of the savage tribesmen, whose country you are to enter?"

"I have never met them," Ali answered seriously. "But I have met and fought the Druse, and I know well the bandits of the caravan routes. It is difficult to suppose that these savages are more fierce."

"Difficult indeed," Mimico said. "I am most envious, Ali."

Ali said, "There will be a chance for you."

"There is already a chance for you," Mimico pointed out, "and it is better to have one honey cake in the hand than to yearn for twenty and have none. It is said that you will enter desert country."

"I am no stranger to the desert," Ali said.

Mimico asked, "Have you no fears at all?"

"Only fools go without fear," said Ali. "To fear the unknown is to be prepared for it."

"Some have so much fear that they refuse even to be prepared," Mimico grunted. He named various other camel drivers who found the existence of Camp Verde ideal, since they had the finest of care and nothing to do. Asked to accompany the expedition and honestly informed of its nature and probable dangers, they had promptly terminated their employment and requested passage back to their native land.

When Mimico finished his appraisal of this worthless lot, Ali said simply, "They are Egyptians."

"They are cowards," Mimico amended. "I have known many old women with more courage. When does the leader of this expedition arrive, Ali?"

"I do not know the day, but it will be soon. I have been asked to be present at all times, for this man is expected to tarry only long enough to choose his camels."

Mimico said, "I wish you luck, Ali."

"And may fortune attend you," Ali responded.

Halfway across the camel khan, Ali stood grimly unmoving and silently awaited that which Allah had ordained. At any rate, none but Allah could now direct the tide of destiny, for Ali himself had tried.

A former Navy officer whose title derived from that service, and not now attached to the military, Lieutenant Beale had arrived late yesterday afternoon. Ali knew that because he had remained at a respectful distance and witnessed the arrival. It was what he had expected; camel drivers do not participate in formal welcomes for caravan masters.

Beale was accompanied by two companions, men so young that they were hardly more than boys, and all were greeted by and escorted to the house of Major Wayne. Ali drew his rations and retired to his own house, a lean-to behind the camel khan. Two hours ago, while the light of a new day was only a dim promise in the sky, he had been routed out and told to make ready.

Shortly thereafter, he met Lieutenant Beale. Again skipping formality, which did not bother Ali, the introduction consisted of a good look at his future chief. Ali liked what he saw.

Edward Beale looked older than his mid-thirties, but it was a look that experience alone had imparted. A trained surveyor and veteran of numerous excursions into the wilderness, Kit Carson was one of his many friends. Beale's knowledge of dangerous situations resulted from facing danger and finding his own way out. One of the original few who had conceived the idea of a Camel Corps and then worked tirelessly for it, Beale was a demanding taskmaster, with a touch of the martinet. However, Ali had seen enough men to know Beale as very much of a man.

The sun was just rising as Ali followed Major Wayne's party to the khan, so Lieutenant Beale might select the animals he wanted. He rose considerably in Ali's opinion when his first choice was Old Mohamet, the wisest and best baggage camel in the herd. Beale followed with Gusuf and, without a single error selected twenty-four of the best animals in the herd. Finally, he fixed his eyes on Ben Akbar.

"That's as fine a *dalul* as I've seen," he remarked. "We'll take him."

Ali nodded, not even slightly surprised. Could anyone who chose camels with such a discerning eye fail to choose Ben Akbar? The expedition certainly had the right commander.

Lieutenant Beale looked from Ben Akbar to Sied, an all-white animal previously chosen and, next to Ben Akbar, the best *dalul* in the herd. A soldier came to advise Major Wayne that he was wanted elsewhere and the commanding officer of Camp Verde left. Lieutenant Beale, his young companions and Ali were left alone in the khan.

After studying Sied thoroughly, a time-consuming process if correctly done, Lieutenant Beale turned to subject Ben Akbar to the same intense scrutiny. Ali discarded all doubts he might still have concerning Beale. Anyone could look at a camel, but few had the knack of looking, seeing and understanding.

Ali had known cameleers of great experience who would never bother with such preliminaries. Faced with two apparently equal *dalul*, they would accept either, after assuring themselves that both were good. But the best of the camel men never chose lightly. Among them, an elite few were entirely willing to spend as much time as necessary to study every beast in a herd, so that they might finally select the one best fitted to their requirements.

Finally, Beale gestured toward Ben Akbar and turned to his companions. "That red Nomanieh dromedary is superb," he said. "I want a closer look."

He started toward Ben Akbar, who was standing quietly near the far wall of the khan. Ali, who had understood none of the conversation but who knew all too clearly what Beale's gesture indicated, felt his heart catch in his throat.

He whirled toward the gate, and eyes already worried became desperate when there was no evidence of Major Wayne. Ali turned back to Lieutenant Beale, already a third of the way across the khan, and he shivered in terrible indecision. A camel driver did not presume to give orders to his leader!

The two young men seemed to have forgotten Ali and kept fascinated eyes on Lieutenant Beale. Ali ran forward. A camel driver did not command his chief, but neither did he let him go to certain injury and possible death.

Running up behind the officer, Ali grasped his arm. Lieutenant Beale stopped and swung about, but his eyes were questioning rather than angry, and he arched interrogatory brows.

"Well, boy?" he asked.

Ali remained speechless. Though he could have voiced a warning in Syrian or any of a dozen Arabic dialects, he did not know how to speak in a tongue Beale might understand. Presently, and happily, he found the perfect solution in one of the bits of English he had mastered but sadly misinterpreted.

The fists of a constantly brawling soldier had hammered out an unbroken string of victories. As a result, his companions trod with appropriate wariness and offered proper respect. Obviously, therefore, the name bestowed on their pugnacious brother-in-arms indicated that which was better left alone. Ali gestured toward Ben Akbar.

"Sad Sam," he pronounced.

"What?" Lieutenant Beale's quizzical frown became an engaging grin.

"Sad Sam," Ali repeated.

Lieutenant Beale turned to glance at Ben Akbar. "Sad Sam, eh? He does look a bit melancholy at that. I'll see if I can make him smile."

Pulling away from Ali, he resumed walking toward Ben Akbar. Ali waited in his tracks, unable to think of anything else he might do. Lieutenant Beale passed Ben Akbar's point of no return, and only Allah could help now.

Then, even as Ali drew each quick breath with a dreadful certainty that it must mark Ben Akbar's quick lunge, the *dalul* stepped forward. He thrust his head over Lieutenant Beale's shoulder and waited in shivering ecstasy for his neck to be scratched.



Ali caught his breath and the look in his eyes was one of profound respect. This man was indeed to command. There would be no failure.

Major Wayne shouted suddenly, "Ned! Watch yourself!"

Still scratching Ben Akbar's neck, Lieutenant Beale glanced toward the returning Major. "What's up?"

"That's a killer dromedary. Didn't anybody warn you?"

"Somebody tried but I guess I didn't understand." The look Lieutenant Beale gave Ali meant that one man recognized another. "I won't be so stupid again," Lieutenant Beale promised.



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## 10. The Expedition

Ali awakened in the dim light of very early morning. For a startled moment, he reverted to old habit and lay perfectly still, for he was not at once sure as to what lay about him. Then came comprehension.

The many nights he had slept in his lean-to shelter behind the camel khan marked the longest uninterrupted period of his life ever spent in any one house. He had become accustomed to it and was momentarily bewildered to awake in unfamiliar surroundings. Then the days at Camp Verde seemed to fade away and it was as though he had never slept anywhere except on bare earth, with the sky his only roof. The fact that he was wrapped in a blanket rather than his burnous was the only difference between this and the life he had always led.

Ali preferred the burnous, but his was becoming tattered and a new burnous seemed to be almost the only article one could not hope to find in the rich markets of vast America. Putting the garment away against some vague future when nothing else would serve, Ali had taken the first step toward becoming an American by accepting American clothes.

He raised on one elbow and looked toward the corral. All was peaceful there, so he settled back down. His plan had worked.

The camels had not had enough trail work to toughen their feet, and the journey from Camp Verde to the expedition's base camp near San Antonio had necessarily been a slow one. Arriving with some sore-footed camels, in spite of a leisurely pace, the horses and mules that were also to be part of the expedition promptly took the usual violent exception to these trespassers from a

far land.

In any other circumstances, Ali could have corrected all trouble simply by going on with his camels. In this instance, it was not only impossible to go on, but the camels must travel with the rest of the expedition's livestock for many days and miles and a full-scale rodeo every day and every mile was not the way to assure success. Since a definite and final settlement was obviously indispensable, Ali requested and received Lieutenant Beale's permission to put the camels in the same corral with the horses and mules.

The immediate result was pandemonium. Though the camels again refused to give way to excitement, just because everything about them was hysterical, and remained serene, the horses and mules did everything except tear the corral apart. Since no flesh and blood could maintain such a pace, eventually they had to quiet down because they were too tired to do anything else. Now, although the camels formed their own group and stood apart from the rest, all was still peaceful. East and West had finally met, and, even though neither considered the other socially acceptable, at least they had become acquainted. What might have been a major problem was already solved.

Some distance away from the corral, a herd of more than three hundred sheep were bedded under the watchful eye of a Mexican herder and his dog. The sheep were also to go with the expedition, Ali neither knew nor cared why. There were to be eight big freight wagons, each drawn by six mules, and two smaller wagons for personal effects and Lieutenant Beale's engineering equipment. There was a total of fifty-six men, most of them soldiers who had discarded conventional uniforms in favor of more practical buckskin garb. There was a miscellany of livestock, to serve wherever extra animals were needed.

Some of the soldiers were to help with the camels. Ali knew nothing about any of them except that they knew nothing about camels. Some, as usual, resented such duty but, for once, resentment of Ali and his charges posed no problem. Though relations were on a congenial and informal basis, nobody had the faintest doubt but that Lieutenant Beale commanded.

Foremost among the enthusiastic advocates of the proposed Camel Corps, Beale had taken a strong liking to Sied, the white *dalul*, and Ali had already given him a few riding lessons. In addition, whenever he could spare the time, Beale was sitting at Ali's feet and doing his best to learn Syrian, so that he might address the camels in a tongue with which they were already familiar.

Known as a fair-minded man, Beale also had a reputation for meting out deserved punishment with anything except kid gloves. Thus there was small probability that smoldering resentment would be expressed in hostile action, as had been the case at Camp Verde. One of the camels, that had somehow escaped from the khan and strayed, died shortly after she was recovered. Subsequent examination disclosed that she had been hit on the neck with sufficient force to fracture the bones. Nobody ever found out who did it.

Presently, Ali got up and carefully folded his blanket. He laid it beside the spare clothing and few personal articles that belonged to him and wrapped all in a square of canvas. Though he hadn't the least trouble carrying all his worldly goods in one hand, it never even occurred to Ali that he lacked anything. On those rare occasions when he gave the matter any thought, the contents of his bundle were wealth indeed compared with what he'd had on the night he rode Ben Akbar away from Al Misri's camp.

Leaving the bundle where it lay, Ali devoted himself to the first solemn duty of every morning. He walked toward the corral. Seeing him, Ben Akbar detached himself from the little herd of camels and came to the fence. Ali dug in his pocket for a lump of sugar, a delicacy that only the wealthy could enjoy elsewhere but that was available to even the poorest in America. Ben Akbar licked it from the palm of his hand and made gusty smacking noises as he chewed. Ali scratched the big *dalul's* neck.

"We are on the way," he murmured. "The camp of idleness lies behind, and once more the caravan routes are ahead. It is well."

Only the cook, a sour individual who must necessarily be astir long before anyone else if breakfast was to be eaten in time for an early start, had been up before Ali. He greeted the young camel driver with a grunt, but heaped a plate with food and filled a mug with coffee. Ali had finished his breakfast when the rest of the camp began to stir.

Returning to the corral, Ali looked past Ben Akbar to the remaining camels. A troubled frown creased his brow.

The horses and mules were none of his responsibility, for which he was duly thankful. The camels were, and Ali's frown deepened as the problem he must solve assumed its correct proportions. On the trip from Camp Verde, the camels had carried little except their bells, harness and a few gay trappings to add color. In spite of that, and a leisurely pace, some had come in sore-footed.

Because Lieutenant Beale was determined to forestall any possible accusations to the effect that there had been no fair test, every camel was to carry a full load from this camp on. Though all were in superb condition in every respect save one, that single lack could be serious and perhaps disastrous. Since their feet were still soft, sore-footed camels were not only to be expected but were practically inevitable. Until such time as they were again trail-hardened, camels that might

otherwise have left a favorable impression on a highly-skeptical public would make a dismal showing indeed.

Ali shrugged. There was nothing for it except go on, hope for the best and trust Lieutenant Beale.

Entering the corral, Ali saddled and bridled Ben Akbar and tied him to the top rail. It would help nothing if some soldier who decided he could handle Ben Akbar as he might a fractious mule were trampled and mauled for his pains.

Presently the soldiers came. All had considerable experience in conventional Army transport and all would have known exactly what to do if they were about to deal with conventional beasts of burden. As it was, none had the vaguest notion of the correct procedure with camels, and their lack of knowledge was expressed in a lack of confidence. They were awkward and self-conscious, and, at the same time, they were trying to conceal their uncertainty beneath a mask of indifference.

"Here we are, pal," the leader informed Ali. "What's next?"

Ali grinned, understanding nothing but having been previously informed that his helpers would need instruction. Before anything else, he pointed to Ben Akbar. As Lieutenant Beale had instructed, he said, "Bad one. Stay away."

The soldiers regarded Ben Akbar with respect plus challenging interest. All had met the bad ones and none had stayed away, but they had been handling beasts with which they were familiar. This time, at least until they had a better idea of what they were doing, it might be well to take this camel driver's advice. They turned expectantly back to him.

Ali saddled Mohamet, seeming to do so with a few deft motions, but years of experience and great skill were his invisible helpers. None knew better than he that a camel must be saddled with absolute perfection. If anything less, a slipping saddle will be certain a chafe a tender hump. It was an unwise practice, even if one had no regard for the animal itself; sore-backed camels cannot carry packs.

When Ali finished, each soldier selected a saddle and set about to practice the lesson he had just learned. Busy with a second camel, Ali pivoted when the air was split with a thunderous, "You ornery, slab-sided, no good, devil-begotten son of nothing!"

One of the aspiring cameleers was reeling back with both hands over his eyes. The camel he had been trying to saddle was standing quietly, apparently interested in nothing but a dreamy contemplation of the horizon. The soldier wiped his eyes.

"The critter spit at me!" he ejaculated. Again, and as though he didn't quite believe, "The critter *spit* at me, and got me square in the eyes!"

Ali went patiently to the aid of the agitated soldier. If he had known how, he would have explained that improperly handled camels will not only spit, but are uncannily accurate. Wilder beasts than these would bite.

Two hours later, an anxious Lieutenant Beale entered the corral. "How's it going?" he queried.

Ali indicated the few saddled camels that were tied to the rail and the many unsaddled ones that were presently dodging about the corral and rather deftly eluding amateur packers. It would be necessary to catch every one. Since nobody except Ali had yet succeeded in bringing a camel and a camel saddle together, it followed that Ali would have to saddle every one after he caught it.

Lieutenant Beale nodded and left.

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Back pillowed against a boulder, Ali sprawled in the warm sun and watched the camels browse. Far more than a pleasant sight, he thought, it was a vision that could not fail to lift the heart of anyone not too dull to be inspired. For to see the camels as they were—and where they were—meant that a great victory was won.

It was no small victory.

The camels had arrived at the expedition's base camp on the twenty-first of June. Departure was scheduled for the next morning. But with camels already driven wild by inexperienced help and rapidly getting wilder, they hadn't even succeeded in saddling all of them on that day or for several days thereafter.

Not until June the twenty-fifth were they finally under way, and Ali could not recall a sorrier caravan. The soldiers had acquired just enough skill so they could put a pack on a camel and have some assurance that it wouldn't fall off. In accordance with Lieutenant Beale's wish for a thorough test, the minimum load for any baggage animal was seven hundred pounds. That was far more than should have been carried by animals whose exercise in recent months had consisted of shuffling about the khan.

There were immediate complications. Freight wagons drawn by six mules, conveyances not noted for speed, whizzed past sore-footed and overloaded camels and seemed swift in comparison. To the unrestrained hilarity of those who came to watch—and presently of the country at large when

news sources got hold of the story—the camels functioned in every way except efficiently. Far from reaching the Colorado River at the California border, the end of the survey, it became increasingly apparent that Beale and his camels would be fortunate indeed if they were trapped in the suburbs of a growing San Antonio.

Then the outlook changed.

Though it did not happen overnight, eventually the camels became trail-hardened. Weary and sore beasts that had plodded into camp hours after the mule wagons were already there during the first harassed days began arriving at the next night's camp hours before the wagons were even sighted. Two camels so ill that they were abandoned on the trail, rejoined the caravan, apparently as well as ever, a few days afterwards.

Baggage camels that staggered under over-heavy loads on the day of departure, now bore equally-heavy burdens without the least effort. They proved as indifferent to drenching rains as they had been to blazing sun. They not only ate but thrived on any forage they found; the expedition's store of grain never had to feed starving camels.

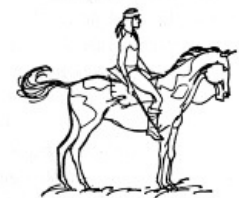
Soldiers who hadn't known the first thing of camel transport had acquired a liberal education. Most had come to like these strange beasts. Some turncoats had even been heard to declare that camels were far better than mules in any way anyone might compare the two species.

Probably the outstanding triumph belonged to Lieutenant Beale. Growing ever fonder of Sied, Beale had ridden the white *dalul* at every opportunity and even Ali admitted that he had become a very skilful rider. Near Albuquerque, Beale had news that a friend, Colonel Loring, was in the vicinity.

Mounting Sied, Lieutenant Beale set out to find his friend. The camel, whose only nourishment since leaving San Antonio had consisted of whatever forage the trail offered, not only carried his rider to Colonel Loring, but when Loring accepted an invitation to visit the expedition's camp, outdistanced the grain-fed horses of the colonel and his men on the return trip.

All was well, Ali thought dreamily, and may Allah have mercy on whoever was unable to see sublime beauty in the camels as they were and where they were. For they were still fat and healthy and they were at Fort Defiance. The pedestrian and least interesting part of the journey was behind. Fort Defiance was a true frontier post. Unless they turned back, which was unthinkable, they must go ahead.

And ahead lay the unknown.



## 11. The Wilderness

The trail was rough, but Ben Akbar's saddle remained a veritable bed of feathers as the big *dalul* continued at the same swift trot he had started two hours ago. Ali turned in the saddle to look behind him.

There was nothing there, but neither was there anything ahead except the same boulder-strewn, scrub-grown, sun-baked land that he saw when he glanced around. The place had no visible attractions, but it did furnish reason anew to marvel at the vastness of America. Ali knew some self-contained nations, complete from Pasha to slaves, that were not as large as this forbidding corner of America wherein the entire expedition was presently lost.

Never jarring his rider, Ben Akbar continued without a noticeable variation in gait. Ali turned back to face the west.

The anxiety that clouded his eyes deepened, but it was not for himself that he worried. As far as he personally was concerned, by far the happiest days of his life began when the expedition left Zuni, west of Fort Defiance and the last settlement this side of California, on the thirty-first of August. That day, a lifelong dream finally came true.

Illiterate, Ali had developed skills vital to those who may never consult written records. When necessary to do so, he had only to close his eyes and see in memory a map of all the caravan routes he'd ever traveled. It was invariably in proper detail—the shortest route was never omitted and the longest was never extended beyond correct proportions. Every mile of every trail was again as it had been when Ali went that way with the camels.

For various reasons, some of those journeys had been very exciting. But this promised far more

than any other trail Ali had traveled.

Wild and dangerous though they had been, and some still were, the camel trails of Ali's native country were almost as ancient as the land itself. Caravans had certainly been traversing them since recorded history, and fable told of camels on the march long before any recording. Thus there had never been even a faint possibility of doing anything that had not already been done over and over, or of going anywhere not already visited by multitudes.

This route must forever stand apart. Even though people had come this way, with very few exceptions, they were wild as the wild beasts that slunk from their path. Certainly there had never been a caravan, and for that reason alone there must be the challenge of the mysterious and unknown. In addition, Ali found something else he'd never known before.

Here were no petty Amirs, with an endless array of petty decrees. Confining Camp Verde was far behind; there wasn't even a camel khan. Space was limitless, and freedom was restricted only by a need for caution. Obviously, when at last one had all the room he needed for growing and roaming, he would not do a great deal of either if he fell prey to either the savages or the elements.

Ali knew that even this parched and barren country was not repulsive to his eyes. He must consider it forbidding, or at least undesirable, because of its current threat to the expedition.

Fighting a sudden powerful notion that he had missed something and had better turn around again, Ali looked steadfastly ahead. He hadn't missed anything and knew it, but he would anxiously grasp any straw as he neared the place where he must turn about and hope faded.

Largely because, in Ali's eyes, Lieutenant Beale's stature had long since exceeded that of any other man and was rapidly nearing heroic proportions, Ali could not blame his leader for the present dilemma. The signs had been present; any man who had good camels should think seriously as to the wisdom of bringing horses and mules too into a land where water was uncertain.

Ali was unable to blame his leader for anything, and, anyhow, the guide was directly at fault. After leading the entire expedition astray—as yet nobody knew how far—the guide offered only a sheepish grin as an excuse when he finally admitted choosing the wrong landmarks. He'd risked everyone's life but he'd never know, Ali thought, how close he'd come to paying for his carelessness with his own life. Ali had been watching Lieutenant Beale's eyes when the guide confessed his error. The guide had been looking at the ground.

Except for the strict rations allotted each man, they had run out of water shortly afterwards. The camels were in no trouble, but the horses and mules were already frantic with thirst. Had Ali been in command, he would have shot the horses and mules and gone on with camels only. But Ali was not in command, and because Lieutenant Beale wished to find water for his suffering beasts, Ali could not wish otherwise. Even though they still had rations, some of the expedition's men were already apprehensive.

The sun was almost at that point where Ali must turn Ben Akbar and go back. His heart grew heavier as it became increasingly evident that he would have no news of water. Such failure was all the more galling because he never doubted but that he'd been close to success.

There was no use in comparing this with his own country, since this specific problem could never arise there. All the water holes were known. A thirsty traveler who found one dry, simply went on toward the next one. If he got there, he drank. If he did not, he died. However, it was reasonable to suppose that some fundamental rules applied in America, even as they did throughout the rest of the world.

Where there was water, there should be green foliage. Of course, he must not expect to find familiar date palms. There must be some other trees indigenous to this parched area, and any that received water would be green, and any color at all in such drab surroundings would glow like a candle at midnight.

Reaching the place where he had been ordered to turn around, a reluctant Ali halted Ben Akbar. For a moment he sat the saddle, searching everything still ahead and hoping desperately to see a splash of green that must mark an oasis. He saw only more desert. The last feeble spark of hope almost flickered out.

Then, suddenly, it flared. Though Lieutenant Beale had told him when he must return, he had not said that Ali must come back by the same route. Some distance to the south was a series of rocky ridges from whose crests it would surely be possible to see much new country. Ali swung south.

With a much clearer understanding of the expedition's true purpose, Ali lauded the wisdom that had prompted it. If some of this Southwest was bleak and forbidding, some was as fine and rich as anything Ali had ever seen. Villages and even cities might thrive here and there would still be ample grazing for flocks and herds.

Almost without exception, however, the few white men who had dared enter the region cared for nothing except high adventure and possible riches, with high adventure accorded a definite priority. Far from taming the wilderness, they much preferred it untamed. Their opposites, who would bring settlement and civilization, must first be provided with some means of access. Though the wild men could live by their rifles and from their saddlebags, families could not.



Following the 35th parallel, except wherever circumstance, such as terrain unsuited for wagons, made it wise to deviate from that line, the expedition was to lay out a wagon road between Fort Defiance and the California border. Besides opening new country, the road would close the final gap in a transcontinental highway.

Ali, who knew something about roads, had only unstinted admiration for the course so far. That camels could travel it was not open to question, for camels were breaking the trail. Lieutenant Beale, however, was choosing the route so carefully and with such skill that the heaviest and clumsiest wagons could hereafter follow where the camels led.

It was an admirable road, and the fact that the entire expedition was lost at the moment would be of no consequence if it were not for lack of water. Even that would be no more than a minor annoyance, except that horses and mules must drink or find it impossible to go on.

Ali's hopes, that had burned brightly when he turned south to swing along these ridges, flickered dimly as time passed and no oasis was sighted. The appointed rendezvous for this evening's camp—at least it would be a rendezvous if the struggling mule teams were able to come so far—was only a few miles ahead and night would fall soon. Ali put Ben Akbar to a fast lope.

Suddenly he wheeled and rode back. He'd seen something—or thought he had—for it was so faintly traced that he could not be sure. It was worth a second look. Returning to the place where something had caught his eye, Ali halted Ben Akbar, dismounted and knelt to study the ground.

He had seen something, but it was not to be wondered that he had almost passed without seeing it. A small, unshod horse, traveling at a fast trot, had passed this way within the hour and gone directly southeast. Ali frowned thoughtfully.

Every one of the expedition's horses was shod and none had so small a hoof. This animal was either separated from its companions and trying to find them, or it carried a rider. Wandering horses do not travel fast and straight.

Ali rose and remounted Ben Akbar. Since the horse did not belong to the expedition, obviously it was the property of someone else. The only human inhabitants of this forsaken waste were Indians. Though he had seen nothing except the track of one horse, Ali knew the Druse and the brigands of the caravan routes too well, and had fought them too often, to shrug it off as meaningless. One Druse going somewhere in a hurry could either be running from enemies or going to join some companions bent on raiding.

Since there was no indication of pursuit, obviously the Indian was not fleeing. But in Ali's opinion and experience, there was every reason to believe that any group of brigands anywhere would sack the expedition if they could.

So a group of bandits were assembling for the purpose of attacking the expedition. Or, Ali admitted, they were not assembling. He was certain only that there was at least one horse in the area and equally certain that there was water not too far away. The whole thing should properly be reported to Lieutenant Beale, but Ali remained indecisive.

If Beale knew what Ali knew, he would most certainly insist on a personal investigation at the earliest moment. Never doubting that his chief was a renowned and experienced warrior, Beale was also one to rush in where anything else feared to tread. Should one with so many distressing problems already on his mind be further burdened? Finally, and conclusively, the expedition might do very well without Ali. It couldn't possibly succeed without Lieutenant Beale. Therefore, who should logically run the risk? There was only one choice.

Ben Akbar trotted into camp where the remaining camels were contentedly feeding on greasewood. Sied was among them. Lieutenant Beale, who had also scouted for water, must have returned. He proved to be one of the little group who stood watching the agonized approach of the mules. Nobody had found water; if they had, they would not appear so downcast.

Dismounting, Ali removed Ben Akbar's trappings and the big *dalul* joined the feeding herd. Ali turned toward the oncoming wagons.

Heads bent, tongues lolling, the mules swayed in their traces and moved at a slow crawl. When the wagons finally drew up, the mules remained as they were when halted and did not so much as glance to one side or the other, even when stripped of their harnesses.

His mules unharnessed, but so nearly finished that they retained their team positions, the first driver went to his wagon and lifted down the water keg. He turned to Lieutenant Beale and spoke in a husky whisper, "Nary a drop left. Must of sprung a leak and—"

The mules came alert with a frantic rush and were upon him in a wild scramble. Surrounding the driver, their eager grunts and harsh gasping seemed the voice of madness itself as they fought each other for the privilege of licking the dry keg's bung hole. Unable to look, the soldiers turned away. Lieutenant Beale remained the leader.

"We can't move from here without water," he said quietly. "We'll try again tomorrow."

Ali offered, "I'll go again at dawn."

Beale continued to speak softly. "Any preferred direction?"

Ali gestured toward the horse track and Lieutenant Beale nodded permission. "Be back by

sundown."

It was so early that the dim gray light still made for uncertain observation when Ali halted Ben Akbar and dismounted. He bent very near the earth, unable to see until he did so. The track was here, he had not erred. Leading Ben Akbar, he followed, slowly at first, then faster as the strengthening light permitted. From the crest of one hill, he looked over the top of another and finally saw what he so desperately wanted to see.

It was the topmost branches of a full-leafed tree, and here, in this place of no color, it was startling as snow on a naked cliff.

Ali turned his mount and said softly, "Kneel."

The big *dalul* knelt. Ali crawled forward. On the summit of the hill over which the tree top appeared, he crouched in a nest of boulders and verified his preconceived opinion that he would see more than water when he finally beheld the oasis.

Water there was, a limpid pool, shaded by one great tree and a cluster of small ones, and seeping underground to bring life to a patch of grass. Sixty-one horses cropped the grass, and sixty-one Indians lazed about.

Though he knew where he was and who these men were, Ali felt as he had when spying on the Druse tribesmen. Even external differences between burnous-clad Druse and half-naked Indians did not set them so very far apart. If the Indians were not bent on raiding, there would be women and children among them. The expedition was the only prize worth the assembly of so many warriors. At present, they were idling away their time until a scout reported.

The scout appeared, as Ali was sure he would, from the direction in which the expedition was encamped. Ali waited for the scout to reach his companions. When he did and began his report, Ali returned to Ben Akbar. He rode first toward the camp, so that he was between the warriors and the expedition. Then he put Ben Akbar up a hill, but not quite over it. He wanted only to look down on the path taken by the scout and which, by all reason, should be the path of the warriors.

Presently they appeared, as Ali had prayed they would, and, obviously, the scout had reported well. In no hurry at all, it was clear that the Indians knew of the distress in camp. The time to take it was now, with most of the animals unfit, all of the men uncertain, and some so near the breaking point that a little more stress would break them. When the Indians were directly beneath him, Ali spoke to his mount. "Ho! Now!"

Ben Akbar shot over the crest and unhesitatingly did as Ali wished, he charged the mounted column. The leader, a fiercely painted young warrior whose thoughts were pleasantly filled with an easy conquest and ample loot, had time for only one good look before his horse took charge.

The panic spread like wind-driven fire in dry grass. Ali halted Ben Akbar and gave himself up to complete enjoyment, for indeed it was enjoyable. Sixty-one horses, as was customary with horses of America, took instant leave of their senses when confronted by a *dalul* of Syria. For the first time since arriving in America, and the last, this was one unscheduled rodeo for which a camel would never be held to accounting.

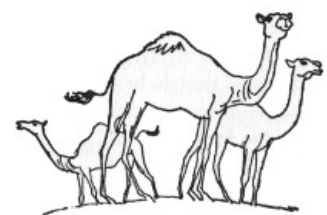
Two hours later, bulging water bags tied wherever Ben Akbar's saddle offered a buckle or knob to tie one, and two more over his shoulders, Ali rode back into camp. He halted near Lieutenant Beale, who had just come in on Sied, and grinned amiably as teamsters snatched at his load and ran to their parched animals.

When he and Ali were alone, Lieutenant Beale asked, "How did you locate it, Ali?"

"First," Ali said, "I saw a green tree."

"What next?"

"Then I saw some Indians," Ali reported, "but they all ran away and are not at the water now. We may go take as much as we need."



## 12. The Road

When he came to the California bank of the Colorado River, Ali halted Ben Akbar and surrendered to complete astonishment. Reason told him he had been this way before, but so

drastic were the changes and so little was as he remembered it, that he challenged reason itself. Ali took a deep breath and tried vainly to assure himself that this really was Beale's Crossing where, two years ago and fifty days out of Fort Defiance, the expedition's work had been successfully completed.

Ali and Lieutenant Beale, on Ben Akbar and Sied, had reached the river on the seventeenth of October. They were met by a horde of Indians, all of whom were so deliriously excited at their first sight of camels that any English they might have known was submerged in the shock. Two days later, Ali had proved that camels can swim by swimming Ben Akbar across the Colorado. The rest of the expedition had followed. Some horses and mules, which the Indians promptly retrieved and ate, were drowned. All the camels had crossed safely.

Ali's dazed mind strove to reconcile that scene of the past and this one.

On the opposite bank, where the Indians had grown their corn and melons, covered wagons with canvas tops that billowed in the little wind that stirred were lined up as far as the eye could see. Horses, mules and oxen rested in the traces while awaiting their turn on a ferry that was presently in mid-river, its cargo a wagon and a six-mule team. Adults gossiped and children played about the waiting wagons. There was a barking of dogs, a cackling of fowl, a lowing of cattle, all the noises that accompany a nation on the march.

Transfixed, Ali could not move. Then the spell that gripped him was broken by a shout.

"Hey you! Move that blasted camel!"

Glancing toward the ferry, Ali saw the six mules dancing skittishly and two men trying to quiet them. Ali moved downriver. In some ways, all had changed and in some, nothing had; camels still panicked livestock.

Presently, Ali halted and turned back to watch, appalled by this monster that he had somehow helped to spawn. The road had seemed a good thing, but all the people who would ever use it, or so Ali thought, were not half as many as the multitude awaiting the ferry.

For a while he sat entranced as a wild deer that cannot turn its eyes from some fascinating thing, then his flight was sudden as the deer's when the intriguing but unknown object is abruptly recognized as a dreaded enemy. Wheeling Ben Akbar, Ali rode downriver at top speed. He did not dare look around, and he did not think of slackening the pace until even Ben Akbar could no longer maintain it and slowed of his own accord. Instantly contrite, Ali drew his mount to a halt.

"I'm sorry, oh brother, that I could let you run so far and fast," he apologized. "Great fear stole my senses. Perhaps I am becoming craven."

The panting Ben Akbar nosed his arm and accepted and ate a lump of sugar. Ali dared look back up the river. He heaved a mighty sigh of relief.

Not only had Ben Akbar run far beyond the sight of any wagons, but far beyond hearing. Here was only the peaceful river, its tule-lined banks disturbed by nothing except a horde of waterfowl and an occasional ripple that marked the wake of a great fish hunting smaller ones in the shallows.

Ali grinned sheepishly. Certainly there had been no real danger; he had fled from shadows. Tongues would wag along many caravan routes if it were known that Hadji Ali had run away from nothing. Just the same, Ali liked this better. He decided to ride farther down the riverbank before crossing.

The farther he went, the lonelier it became and the better he liked it. Presently, his wild flight seemed more amusing than otherwise, and Ali chuckled throatily, but he had no thought of going back up the river. He rounded a bend and saw a dwelling.

Built of driftwood and roofed with adobe, it was a one-room affair. Glassless windows had been cut in such a manner as to admit the morning sun. An adobe fireplace was built against an outside wall and an adobe chimney rose a little above the flat roof.

Ali halted Ben Akbar. He was no longer afraid. There had never been anything about such houses to frighten him. However, if there was any livestock about, he would avoid argument by circling around. If not, it was safe to go directly past.

Then a man came from the house and hailed him, "Come on, stranger! Come on an' light!"

Ali rode ahead to meet a wiry, fierce-eyed man whose uncut hair and long beard were snow-white, but who fought the advancing years as furiously as he had once battled advancing Indians. Everything about him, from his buckskins to the way he had built his house, marked him for what he was. Here was one of the wild men, who had gone where he wished and done as he pleased, and never fretted about anything if he had a gun in his hands and a knife at his belt. Grown too old for such a life, he had chosen to spend the rest of his days here in this isolated spot.

Ali dismounted and the old man extended his hand. "I'm Hud Perkins an' you're welcome."

"I'm Hi Jolly." Ali gave the Americanized version of his name.

Hud Perkins said, "I looked out an' saw a man comin' on a camel, I couldn't believe it! Of course, lots of men come, hardly a week passes but what somebody goes up or down river, but not on

camels. Is he tame?"

"Tamer than he was at one time," Ali answered. "He has been among so many people that almost anybody can pet him now."

Hud Perkins said, "Don't know as I'd hold with pettin' him, but such a critter sure makes a man think. On my way out here, I run across a passel of 'em."

Ali's interest quickened. "You did? Where?"

"On the Heely River," Hud Perkins stated, "an' there wasn't rightly a passel. There was five, but five such critters look like a passel. Will yours stay about or do you picket him?"

"He'll stay."

"Then take his gear off an' let him fill up. Plenty of grass hereabouts an' nary a critter to eat it most times."

Ali removed Ben Akbar's saddle and bridle and the big *dalul* padded out to forage. Intrigued by his host's reference to five camels on the Heely River, Ali straightened to ask for more information and found Hud Perkins staring at Ben Akbar.

He turned to Ali. "What's wrong with him?"

"What do you mean?"

"Is he good's a horse or mule?"

"Much better," Ali stated.

The old man shook a puzzled head. "That don't hardly jibe with those camels on the Heely. Wasn't nobody payin' them no mind, 'cept some heathen Papagoes that was fixin' to eat 'em. I was tempted to ketch one an' see how it rode, but a cowboy said they wasn't worth ketchin'. The Army fetched 'em from some place in Texas, he said, an' turned 'em loose on the Heely on account they was more fuss than worth."

Ali's heart sank at this first news in more than two years of the camels left behind at Camp Verde, but he told himself that he should have expected nothing else. He drew some comfort from a quick assurance that neither Mimico nor Major Wayne could possibly have accompanied any expedition that would abandon camels. Whoever had loosed those five in the Arizona desert, where they would certainly find conditions to their liking, knew nothing of camels and cared less.

Ali said, "Who left those camels did not know what he was doing."

"Might be I ought to have caught me one anyway, eh?"

"You'd have found it worth your while," Ali assured him.

"Well, I didn't an' I don't know as it would of been doin' me or the camel any favor if I did. Ridin' anythin' don't set like it used to. Come on in, Hi. I'll rouse up some rations."

Ali walked with the old man to his house and sat down on a wooden bench while Hud Perkins busied himself preparing fish from the river and vegetables from his garden. He queried, "If I might ask, where ye been?"

Ali answered, "For the past two years, I've been here in California."

"*Hmm-ph.* Didn't know they landed any such critters out thisaway."

"They didn't," Ali informed him. "Lieutenant Beale brought twenty-five camels with him when he surveyed the wagon road from Fort Defiance."

"*Wagh!*" Hud Perkins ejaculated. "Then 'tis so!"

"What's so?"

"I heard tell of such when I was leavin' Santa Fe to come here," his host informed him. "Some fool, 'twas said, was goin' from Fort Defiance to Californy, usin' camels to lay out a road. Not many believed it. Of them as did, nobody thought the camels would get a pistol shot from Fort Defiance."

"It's true," Ali said. "I was with the expedition."

"Well tie that one!" Hud Perkins marveled. "So camels did come to Californy! What happened to 'em?"

Ali had no immediate answer, for after reaching California, nothing worthwhile had happened. The camels had been shown in various places, including Los Angeles, and had attracted the usual onlookers and sparked the usual stampedes. A few months after arriving, Lieutenant Beale took fourteen of the animals and started back along the surveyed road.

The rest of the herd, with Ali as keeper, had been sent to and was still at Fort Tejon, where Army brass amused itself by putting camels through the usual meaningless paces. Seeing no opportunity for a change, and with all he could stomach of Fort Tejon, Ali had taken Ben Akbar and departed.

Ali answered his host, "They're at Fort Tejon."

Hud Perkins snorted. "Don't blame you for leavin', got no use for Army posts myself. You goin' east?"

"Not all the way," Ali said. "Too far east is no better than too far west. I think I'll go back along the road. I saw a lot of free country there."

Hud Perkins was silent for a long while, then he said quietly, "You saw it two years ago."

"But—" Ali was startled. "It isn't all taken?"

"I don't know," Hud Perkins spoke as a bewildered old man who no longer knew about anything. "Was a time when I figgered the West'd never settle an' a man would always find room. But— Anyhow it's two years since I come out."

Ali asked gravely, "Have there really been so many others?"

His host answered moodily, "I've seen a passel of wagon roads opened up. Whenever there was one, people boiled along it like water pours out of a busted beaver dam."

The specter Ali had seen lurking behind the wagons at Beale's Crossing was again present and again threatened panic.

"Perhaps," he said doubtfully, "I'd better go somewhere else."

"If you can still find such a place," Hud Perkins replied. "Still, like I said, it's two years since I come out. I could be wrong. Why not find out?"

"How?" Ali asked.

"Ride back along the road," Hud Perkins advised him. "See for yourself if it's what you think it is. It's the one way you'll ever know."

Ali said, "I'll do it."

When the leading team of mules swung around the sandy butte, Ali turned Ben Akbar away from the road. It was somehow different from the numerous times he'd swung to one side or the other, so that wagons might pass without the panic that always resulted when livestock met a camel. This time there would be no turning back.

Ali and his mount were swallowed up in a pine forest before anyone saw them. Except for the leading mule team, that spooked when they smelled Ben Akbar's fresh tracks, nobody in the whole train suspected that a camel had been here.

Riding due south, Ali did not look around even once. Again he was fleeing, but this time he knew why. At one time, the wagon road had offered everything he wanted. Now it offered nothing.

The wagons lined up and awaiting their turn on the ferry at Beale's Crossing had seemed an overwhelming multitude only because there had been no basis for comparison. After nineteen days on the wagon road, Ali was able to fit them into their proper niche, one small ripple in a surging tide. He still did not know how this had come about, although he could not have believed unless he saw it. Two short years after the camels had composed the first organized caravan to come this way, everybody seemed to be following.

Besides an endless stream of wagons on the road, there were ranches beside it. The flocks and herds that were sure to come some time seemed to have grown overnight, as though they were mushrooms. There were homes, villages, towns, even the cities that, Ali had once thought, might arise after several generations.

Swimming Ben Akbar across the Colorado at Hud Perkins' house, Ali circled to come back on the road well east of Beale's Crossing—and found more people. Unwilling to believe what became increasingly evident and hoping to find even one place that was as it had been, he rode east. Hope died when he found a village in the very heart of the desert where the expedition had been lost. The village's source of water was the same water hole from which Ben Akbar had stampeded the Indians. He rode on only to find a better place for leaving the road, and now he had left it.

When he finally halted Ben Akbar and made camp, Ali knew that he had acted wisely. Once again he was at peace, for, even though the old trail was closed, nothing was ever lost as long as a new one beckoned. The next morning, he resumed his southward journey.

The pine forest was long behind him, the desert all about, when Ben Akbar mounted a hill from whose summit Ali finally saw the Gila River. He dismounted, standing a bit in front of the big *dalul* and holding the camel's rein lightly as he studied that which he had come so far to see.

Here in the desert, the Gila was sluggish, lazy and silt-laden. It had nothing in common with the clear and sparkling streams that have inspired poet and artist alike, but it belonged in this hot desert, even as the others fitted their rugged valleys. Who could not see beauty in the Gila, could not see.

For no special reason, Ali glanced at the rein in his hand and a vast mortification swept over him. While working for the Army, he had never even thought about certain essential needs because Army pay and rations provided all he needed. Now he had neither, though food was still no

problem because everybody in this land was happy to share whatever food he might have. But man could not live by bread alone.

True, not a great deal more was necessary and Ali attached little importance to his own threadbare clothing and battered shoes. But his very soul revolted when he looked at Ben Akbar's worn rein, a sorry thing, unfitted for even the poorest baggage camel. Ali must somehow contrive to earn some money. But the peace that had come to him when he finally turned from the wagon road did not desert him when he remounted. He had come to the Gila with a plan. He would find and catch the abandoned camels and hire out as packer—and surely packers were needed. All would be well.

Two days later, in a delightful little haven where the Gila periodically overflowed its banks and ample water brought luxurious growth, Ali found the camels. He smiled with happiness when he noted Amir, an old friend from Camp Verde, and two more old acquaintances in a pair of the young Camp Verde females. The herd numbered seven and not five, as Hud Perkins had told him, but Ali remembered that the old man had come this way two years ago. All five camels he'd seen must have been from Camp Verde. Two had been killed by something or other—Hud had mentioned Indians—and the four were Amir's daughters and son.



They watched nervously—and probably would have run if approached by anyone else. Ali, who knew how to converse with camels, advanced slowly, talking as he did so.

Amir himself finally trotted forward to renew old friendship.

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Riding Ben Akbar and trailed by his string of camels, there were eleven now, Ali did not look back. The eleven would follow, just as they always followed him. Nor were they at fault because their sorry rewards had never equalled their unswerving devotion and loyalty.

Maybe nothing was really at fault, but the mine owners to whom Ali had offered his services and that of his camels were either too poor to hire any packer; or so rich that they might hire what they chose, and they chose mules. There was no use in going even near the ranches, camels terrified cattle, too. Finally, reduced to packing water, Ali found that those whose need was most desperate were almost never able to pay. Unable to go on because of maximum expense and minimum income, Ali must now do the best he could for his baggage animals.

When he came to the meadow on the Gila where he had found the original seven, he led his herd far into it. Then, still not looking behind, he whirled Ben Akbar and was off at top speed. Though they would still try to follow, the baggage camels could not match Ben Akbar's speed for very long and must soon fall behind.

There must be another journey along a new trail. Ben Akbar's rein was no longer even a rein, but a piece of rope found at a water hole. His saddle was falling apart and Ali must do something, but this time he would.

He had heard of much gold in the northern desert.

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### 13. Reunion

The village of Quartzite was never calculated to overwhelm with metropolitan sweep or impress with architectural grandeur. Completely surrounded by the Arizona desert, sometimes it was oddly like a captive village, a prisoner of the desert. But in a very real sense Quartzite was a true monument, a tribute to the human beings who first had the courage to trespass in such a forbidding land and then dared build homes and live there.

The men gathered at a Quartzite inn varied in various ways, but all bore the stamp of the desert. Tiny wrinkles etched the eyes of each man, and, though none were aware of it, even here in the cool and shaded inn, they squinted. That was something they learned in the desert, where they faced a blazing sun for hours on end and squinted to shield their eyes, until the habit became so ingrained that they never forgot to practice it. The door opened and another man entered. One of those present greeted him with, "Welcome, stranger!"

The newcomer grinned. "Thought I'd best have me a look at civilization, been away so long that the other day I found myself talkin' with a pack rat. Saw the darndest thing when I walked in."

"What?"

"A camel." At once the newcomer was the center of interest. "A big red camel."

"Go on!" his friend exclaimed.

"It's true," the newcomer insisted. "He's right where Boney Wash crosses Skull Canyon. Layin' down, he is, like he might be sick or hurt. But he's there."

The only man present who did not gather around the speaker had been sitting alone and unnoticed. He rose. An old man with snow-white hair and beard, there was that about him which spoke of many burdens carried, and yet he bore the weight of his years with a certain assurance. When he walked to and opened the door and slipped into the overcast early spring afternoon, his absence went as unnoticed as his presence had been.

Ali closed the door behind him. Safe from prying eyes, he quivered with excitement.

The last arrival was a prospector, one of many original optimists who constantly roamed the desert, engaged in prodigious labors that were seldom granted the smallest reward and never once doubted that they had only to keep on and all the desert's dazzling riches would be yielded up to them. Recently, he'd been working in hills to the north, and his best way to Quartzite would be down Skull Canyon.

A red camel, the man had said, lay at the junction of Skull Canyon and Boney Wash. Ali couldn't remember how many times his own prospecting trips had taken him up Skull Canyon. He left the village and started to run, but his legs were no longer capable of running far, so he dropped back to a walk. The increasingly cooler evening wind, one of various reasons why Ali had finally turned his back on the desert to live with generous friends at Quartzite, he scarcely noticed.

He had gone to live at Quartzite six years ago, three years before the turn of the century and a few days before his seventieth birthday. Ben Akbar was old too, but even if he'd been welcome in Quartzite, he wouldn't have been happy there. Ali's last trip into the desert had been for the sole purpose of taking Ben Akbar to the most isolated spot he knew—and no man knew more than Ali about the wildest and most inaccessible areas—and leaving him there.

Escorting camels into the desert and turning them loose was nothing new. Twenty times in years gone by Ali had thus disposed of beasts he was no longer able to support. Invariably, however, he either went and got them again or found some new herd for some new venture. Though not one other person in the entire Southwest shared his conviction that camels would eventually triumph—Ali's faith never flickered.

He'd loosed all the camels in the best places he knew. Ben Akbar, however, was a special case.

Though camels thrived in the desert and might have multiplied, as far as anyone knew, only camel ghosts had come to the water holes in recent years. Finding them gentle and easy to approach, Indians and white men alike killed them for food, and sometimes merely for killing's sake. Many had been captured and were with various circuses or zoos. Ben Akbar was both the last to have been in any active and useful service and the last American camel not in confinement.

There were still rumors of desert-roaming camels, but all such were born in somebody's imagination and there were no reliable reports. Nor had there been since Ali loosed Ben Akbar, which might mean that Ali had succeeded in taking him so far away that nobody had yet found

him. Or it might mean that he was no longer to be found; passing years had probably not spared the camel any more than the master.

Just before nightfall, the wind lulled and then died down. A bright moon rode high, lighting the path but softening harsh angles and shadowing into gentle harmlessness all that was seen as hard and harsh under the sun's pitiless glare. Presently, every cactus was bedecked in a sparkle of rare jewels as moonlight glanced from frosty branches. Ali's thoughts went to a snug cave he knew, plenty big enough for a camel who was no longer as restless as he once had been.

Ali walked on, resentful of both his necessarily slow pace and a growing skepticism that came over him as he drew farther from the town and deeper into the desert. A red camel, the prospector had said, but there had been several red camels with the herd and there was still seventy miles of desert to cross before reaching the place where Ben Akbar was freed. Though there had been a time when seventy miles would have meant no more than a pleasant jaunt, could an aging Ben Akbar walk so far?

Then Ali came to the junction of Skull Canyon and Boney Wash. He stopped—and instantly he knew!

At this point, Skull Canyon was about fifty yards from the base of one rocky wall to the foot of another. Boney Wash had been born when torrential rains crumbled a rift in the east wall. The flood that had poured through then had ripped a ragged ditch in the canyon floor. Above the ditch, the canyon was level, for the most part pebble-strewn, but here and there was a boulder or cove of cactus. Under the gentle moonlight, the canyon became gentle.

All four legs curled beneath him and head cushioned against his flank, apparently Ben Akbar had been on his way down the canyon and had lain down to rest when forbidding Boney Wash gaped before him. Ali's eyes softened, for it seemed no accident that on this night the moon should glow in such a fashion. The Ben Akbar Ali had last seen had shown the sunken cheeks, shriveled neck, worn teeth and stiffened joints of the aging. Under the magic moon, the Ben Akbar he met might have been the proud young *dalul* he had rescued from the Druse and who, in turn, had rescued him. Even the many hairs that were no longer red, but white, could have been sparkling with frost.

Ali went a step nearer and crooned, "I greet thee, oh prince among *dalul*."

There was a ripple along flanks and ribs, but only after a marked interval was Ben Akbar able to raise his head. Ali dropped beside him and eased the proud head into his lap. He stroked it gently.

"We meet again, oh, brother," he murmured. "It is well."

He continued to caress Ben Akbar, and, under the soft moon, a thoughtful expression came over his face. There had been a very long time and a very long journey since he had boarded the *Supply*. Now he sat in the desert, comforting the last remaining camel of all that were brought to America. How could such an auspicious beginning lead to this end?

The failure could not be charged to the camels. Lieutenant Beale himself had declared that any one of them was worth any six mules. Then who, or what, was to blame? Ali considered various explanations that had been advanced.

Some declared that the entire experiment was fore-doomed by anonymous but invincible forces interested in perpetuating large profits derived from horse and mule trading. Their combined strength overwhelmed the advocates of camel transport. These reports were partly right, Ali conceded, but not entirely so. He could not imagine Major Wayne or Lieutenant Beale yielding to the combined power of anything. Anyhow, it went without saying that these forces had done all they could to prevent the importation of camels in the first place. They had not succeeded.

It was true that neither Major Wayne nor Lieutenant Beale had been active in the Camel Corps for years, and Jefferson Davis no longer mattered after the Confederacy he headed lost the War between the States. But adverse influence alone had never defeated the camels.

Many contended that the War itself was responsible. Nobody had time for camels while the battles raged and nobody was interested when peace came. Another part truth, Ali decided, but by no means a whole truth. To say that the War between the States doomed camels was as absurd as declaring it doomed railroads.

Even the popular refusal to accept camels—that sometimes mounted to flaring resentment against them—was not to blame for their downfall. That which has practical worth cannot forever remain unnoticed and camels had proved themselves superior to any other beast of burden.

Ali bent his head and crooned softly in Ben Akbar's ear. The big *dalul* sighed softly and pressed his chin hard against his friend's knee. Ali resumed caressing the camel.

What ill wind, he wondered, had blown the day these camels were finally aboard and the *Supply* set sail? They had come and they had proven themselves, but far from any conquest they had found only oblivion. Why?

Ali straightened unconsciously as he thought of the day Lieutenant Beale's expedition had left Fort Defiance and started west. His mind became a screen upon which appeared a complete review of every single day that had followed. Ali lived again, as he had before, the whole exciting



caravan into unknown wilderness.

Then, skipping his two years in California, Ali rode Ben Akbar back to the Colorado and the massed wagons awaiting ferry transport. There followed, in complete detail, his return ride over the road. Again he saw the burgeoning civilization that had overrun a virgin wilderness. Finally, he knew the right answer, and knowing, must question no more.

The camels had not yielded to any petty thing, but had bowed to a force so powerful that nothing could stand against it. All the armies of all the world could bring human progress to no more than a temporary halt, and not even the swiftest *dalul* could hope to keep pace with the breathtaking march of civilization as America knew it. If the camels had been imported fifty years sooner, or if America had been satisfied to wait fifty years longer to develop her wilderness, then indeed would all Americans know the true worth of camels.

As the course was run, most Americans would know camels only as legendary ships of the desert or exotic imports whose proper abode was the circus or zoo. Those few who did learn about the Camel Corps, might hear of it as a glaring example of the hare-brained schemes that may be dreamed up by scatter-brained people. Nevertheless, Ali was suddenly happy and again knew a complete peace.

He and Ben Akbar were reunited never to be parted again, and he, at least, knew the true story of the Camel Corps. Nothing anyone might say or do could change in the smallest detail what had already been done. The people who spilled over Lieutenant Beale's wagon road might never know that the pillars of their churches, the foundations of their schools, their homes, their very way of life, were anchored on long-forgotten camel tracks. But they would not be there if camels had not led the way.

Given only one real opportunity, the camels had contributed more than their full share. Ali knew finally that, if he might return over the years and once more look at camels being taken aboard the *Supply*, and if he might also look ahead and see all the future, he would again do as he had done and come to America.

The journey had not been in vain. What had seemed to be heartbreaking failure showed its true colors under the correct light. Triumph was complete.

Ali stood up. "Rise," he said.

Slowly, Ben Akbar rose to his feet and the two started along the silvery path together.

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## JIM KJELGAARD

was born in New York City. Happily enough, he was still in the pre-school age when his father decided to move the family to the Pennsylvania mountains. There young Jim grew up among some of the best hunting and fishing in the United States. He says: "If I had pursued my scholastic duties as diligently as I did deer, trout, grouse, squirrels, etc., I might have had better report cards!"

Jim Kjelgaard has worked at various jobs—trapper, teamster, guide, surveyor, factory worker and laborer. When he was in the late twenties he decided to become a full-time writer. He has succeeded in his wish. He has published several hundred short stories and articles and quite a few books for young people.

His hobbies are hunting, fishing, dogs, and questing for new stories. He tells us: "Story hunts have led me from the Atlantic to the Pacific and from the Arctic Circle to Mexico City. Stories, like gold, are where you find them. You may discover one three thousand miles from home, as in *Rescue Dog of the High Pass*, or, as in *The Spell of the White Sturgeon*, right on your own door step." And he adds: "I am married to a very beautiful girl and have a teen-age daughter. Both of them order me around in a shameful fashion, but I can still boss the dog! We live in Phoenix, Arizona."

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## Books by Jim Kjelgaard

Big Red

Rebel Siege

Forest Patrol

Buckskin Brigade

Chip, the Dam Builder

Fire Hunter

Irish Red  
Kalak of the Ice  
A Nose for Trouble  
Snow Dog  
The Story of Geronimo  
Stormy  
Cochise, Chief of Warriors  
Trailing Trouble  
Wild Trek  
The Explorations of Pere Marquette  
The Spell of the White Sturgeon  
Outlaw Red  
The Coming of the Mormons  
Cracker Barrel Trouble Shooter  
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