

***PERCIVAL  
CHRISTOPHER  
WREN***

***DRIFTWOOD  
SPARS***

**Percival Christopher Wren**

# **Driftwood Spars**

**The Stories of a Man, a Boy, a Woman, and Certain  
Other People Who Strangely Met Upon the Sea of Life**

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# CHAPTER I.

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## THE MAN.

(Mainly concerning the early life of John Robin Ross-Ellison.)

Truth is stranger than fiction, and many of the coincidences of real life are truly stranger than the most daring imaginings of the fictionist.

Now, I, Major Michael Malet-Marsac, happened at the moment to be thinking of my dear and deeply lamented friend John Ross-Ellison, and to be pondering, for the thousandth time, his extraordinary life and more extraordinary death. Nor had I the very faintest notion that the Subedar-Major had ever heard of such a person, much less that he was actually his own brother, or, to be exact, his half-brother. You see I had known Ross-Ellison intimately as one only can know the man with whom one has worked, soldiered, suffered, and faced death. Not only had I known, admired and respected him—I had loved him. There is no other word for it; I loved him as a brother loves a brother, as a son loves his father, as the fighting-man loves the born leader of fighting-men: I loved him as Jonathan loved David. Indeed it was actually a case of "passing the love of women"

for although he killed Cleopatra Dearman, the only woman for whom I ever cared, I fear I have forgiven him and almost forgotten her.

But to return to the Subedar-Major. "Peace, fool! Art blind as Ibrahim Mahmud the Weeper," growled that burly Native Officer as the zealous and over-anxious young sentry cried out and pointed to where, in the moonlight, the returning reconnoitring-patrol was to be seen as it emerged from the lye-bushes of the dry river-bed.

A recumbent comrade of the outpost sentry group sniggered.

My own sympathies were decidedly with the sentry, for I had fever, and "fever is another man". In any case, hours of peering, watching, imagining and waiting, for the attack that will surely come—and never comes—try even experienced nerves.

"And who was Ibrahim the Weeper, Subedar-Major Saheb?" I inquired of the redoubtable warrior as he joined me.

"He was my brother's enemy, Sahib," replied Mir Daoud Khan Mir Hafiz Ullah Khan, principal Native Officer of the 99th Baluch Light Infantry and member of the ruling family of Mekran Kot in far Kubristan.

"And what made him so blind as to be for a proverb unto you?"

"Just some little drops of water, Sahib, nothing more," replied the big man with a smile that lifted the curling moustache and showed the dazzling perfect teeth.

It was bitter, bitter cold—cold as it only can be in hot countries (I have never felt the cold in Russia as I have in

India) and the khaki flannel shirt, khaki tunic, shorts and putties that had seemed so hot in the cruel heat of the day as we made our painful way across the valley, seemed miserably inadequate at night, on the windy hill-top. Moreover I was in the cold stage of a bout of fever, and to have escaped sunstroke in the natural oven of that awful valley at mid-day seemed but the prelude to being frost-bitten on the mountain at midnight. Subedar-Major Mir Daoud Khan Mir Hafiz Ullah Khan appeared wholly unaffected by the 100° variation in temperature, but then he had a few odd stone of comfortable fat and was bred to such climatic trifles. He, moreover, knew not fever, and, unlike me, had not experienced dysentery, malaria, enteric and pneumonia fairly recently.

"And had the hand of your brother anything to do with the little drops of water that made Ibrahim the Weeper so blind?" I asked.

"Something, Sahib," replied Mir Daoud Khan with a laugh, "but the hand of Allah had more than that of my brother. It is a strange story. True stories are sometimes far stranger than those of the bazaar tale-tellers whose trade it is to invent or remember wondrous tales and stories, myths, and legends."

"We have a proverb to that effect, Mir Sahib. Let us sit in the shelter of this rock and you shall tell me the story. Our eyes can work while tongue and ear play—or would you sleep?"

"*Nahin*, Sahib! Am I a Sahib that I should regard night as the time wholly sacred to sleep and day as the time when to sleep is sin? I will tell the Sahib the tale of the Blindness of

Ibrahim Mahmud the Weeper, well knowing that he, a truth-speaker, will believe the truth spoken by his servant. To no liar would it seem possible.

"Know then, Sahib, that this brother of mine was not my mother's son, though the son of my father (Mir Hafiz Ullah Khan Mir Faquir Mahommed Afzul Khan), who was the youngest son of His Highness the Jam Saheb of Mekran Kot in Kubristan. And he, my father, was a great traveller, a restless wanderer, and crossed the Black Water many times. To Englistan he went, and without crossing water he also went to the capital of the Amir of Russia to say certain things, quietly, from the King of Islam, the Amir of Afghanistan. To where the big Waler horses come from he also went, and to where they take the camels for use in the hot and sandy northern parts."

"Yes, Australia" I remarked.

"Without doubt, if the Sahib be pleased to say it. And there, having taken many camels in a ship that he might sell them at a profit, he wedded a white woman—a woman of the race of the Highland soldiers of Englistan, such as are in this very Brigade."

"Married a Scotchwoman?"

"Without doubt. Of a low caste—her father being a drunkard and landless (though grandson of a Lord Sahib), living by horses and camels menially, out-casted, a jail-bird. Formerly he had carried the mail through the desert, a fine rider and brave man, but *sharab*[1] had loosened the thigh in the saddle and palsied hand and eye. On hearing this news, the Jam Saheb was exceeding wroth, for he had planned a good marriage for his son, and he arranged that

the woman should die if my father, on whom be Peace, brought her to Mekran Kot. 'Tis but desert and mountain, Sahib, with a few big *jagirs*[2] and some villages, a good fort, a crumbling tower, and a town on the Caravan Road—but the Jam Saheb's words are clearly heard and for many miles.

[1] Wine. [2] Estates.

"Our father, however, was not so foolish as to bring the woman to his home, for he knew that Pathan horse-dealers, camel-men, and traders would have taken the truth, and more than the truth, concerning the woman's social position to the gossips of Mekran Kot. And, apart from the fact that her father was a drunkard, landless, a jail-bird, out-casted by his caste-fellows, no father loves to see his son marry with a woman of another community, nor with any woman but her with whose father he has made his arrangements.

"So my father, bringing the fair woman, his wife, by ship to Karachi, travelled by the *rêlwêy terain* to Kot Ghazi and left her there in India, where she would be safe. There he left her with her *butcha*,[3] my half-brother, and journeyed toward the setting sun to look upon the face of his father the Jam Saheb. And the Jam Saheb long turned his face from him and would not look upon him nor give him his blessing—and only relented when my father took to himself another wife, my mother, the lady of noble birth whom the Jam Saheb had desired for him—and sojourned for a season at Mekran Kot. But after I was born of this union (I am of pure and noble descent) his heart wearied, being with the fair woman at Kot Ghazi, for whom he yearned, and with her son, his own son, yet so white of skin, so blue of eye, the



fairest child who ever had a Pathan father. Yea, my brother was even fairer than I, who, as the Huzoor knoweth, have grey eyes, and hair and beard that are not darkly brown.

[3] Baby.

"So my father began to make journeys to Kot Ghazi to visit the woman his first wife, and the boy his first-born. And she, who loved him much, and whom he loved, prevailed upon him to name my brother after *her* father as well as after himself, the child's father (as is our custom) and so my brother was rightly called Mir Jan Rah-bin-Ras el-Isan Ilderim Dost Mahommed Mir Hafiz Ullah Khan."

"And what part of that is the name of his mother's father?" I asked, for the Subedar-Major's rapid utterance of the name conveyed nothing of familiar English or Scottish names to my mind.

"Jan Rah-bin-Ras el-Isan," replied Mir Daoud Khan; "that was her father's name, Sahib."

"Say it again, slowly."

"Jan Rah-bin-Ras el-Isan."

"I have it! Yes, but *what?*—John Robin Ross-Ellison? Good God! But *I* knew a John Robin Ross-Ellison when *I* was a Captain. He was Colonel of the Corps of which I was Adjutant, in fact—the Gungapur Volunteer Rifles.... By Jove! That explains a lot. *John Robin Ross-Ellison!*"

I was too incredulous to be astounded. It *could* not be.

"*Han*[4] Sahib, *bé shak!*[5] Jan Rah-bin-Ras el-Isan Ilderim Dost Mahommed Mir Hafiz Ullah Khan was his name. And his mother called him Jan Rah-bin-Ras el-Isan and his father, Mir Hafiz Ullah Khan, called him Ilderim Dost Mahommed."

[4] Yes. [5] Without doubt.

"H'm! A Scotch Pathan, brought up by an Australian girl in India, would be a rare bird—and of rare possibilities naturally," I murmured, while my mind worked quickly backward.

"My brother was unlike us in some things, Sahib. He was fond of the *sharab* called '*Whisky*' and of dogs; he drank smoke from the cheroot after the fashion of the Sahib-log and not from the hookah nor the *bidi*;<sup>[6]</sup> he wore boots; he struck with the clenched fist when angered; and never did he squat down upon his heels nor sit cross-legged upon the ground. Yet he was true Pathan in many ways during his life, and he died as a Pathan should, concerning his honour (and a woman). Yea—and in his last fight, ere he was hanged, he killed more men with his long Khyber knife, single-handed against a mob, than ever did lone man before with cold steel in fair fight."

[6] Native cigarette.

Then it was so. And the Subedar-Major was John Robin Ross-Ellison's brother!

"He may have been foolishly kind to women, servants and dogs, and of a foolish type of honour that taketh not every possible advantage of the foe—but he was very brave, Huzoor, a strong enemy, and when he began he made an end, and if that same honour were affronted he killed his man. And yet he did not kill Ibrahim Mahmud the Weeper, who surely earned his death twice, and who tried to kill him in a manner most terrible to think of. No, he did not—but it shall be told.... And the white woman prevailed upon our father to make her man-child a Sahib and to let him go to the *maktab*<sup>[7]</sup> and *madressah-tul-Islam*<sup>[8]</sup> at Kot Ghazi,

to learn the clerkly lore that gives no grip to the hand on the sword-hilt and lance-shaft nor to the thighs in the saddle, no skill to the fingers on the reins, no length of sight to the eye, no steadiness to the rifle and the lance, no understanding of the world and men and things. But our father corrected all this, that the learning might do him no harm, for oft-times he brought him to Mekran Kot (where my mother tried to poison him), and he took him across the Black Water and to Kabul and Calcutta and showed him the world. Also he taught him all he knew of the horse, the rifle, the sword, and the lance—which was no small matter. Thus, much of the time wasted at school was harmless, and what the boy lost through the folly of his mother was redeemed by the wisdom of his father. Truly are our mothers our best friends and worst enemies. Why, when I was but a child my mother gave me money and bade me go prove—but I digress. Well, thus my brother grew up not ignorant of the things a man should know if he is to be a man and not a *babu*, but the woman, his mother, wept sore whenever he was taken from her, and gave my father trouble and annoyance as women ever do. And when, at last, she begged that the boy might enter the service of the Sirkar as a wielder of the pen in an office in Kot Ghazi, and strive to become a leading *munshi*[9] and then a Deputy-Saheb, a *babu* in very fact, my father was wroth, and said the boy would be a warrior—yea, though he had to die in his first skirmish and ere his beard were grown. Then the woman wept and wearied my father until it seemed better to him that she should die and, being at peace, bring peace. No quiet would he have at Mekran Kot from my mother and his father, the Jam Saheb, while the

woman lived, nor would she herself allow him quiet at Kot Ghazi. And was she not growing old and skinny moreover? And so he sent my brother to Mekran Kot—and the woman died, without scandal. So my brother dwelt thenceforward in Mekran Kot, knowing many things, for he had passed a great *imtahan*[10] at Bombay and won a *sertifcut*[11] thereby, whereof the Jam Saheb was very pleased, for the son of the Vizier had also gone to a *madresseh* and won a *sertifcut*, and it was time the pride of the Vizier and his son were abated.

[7] School. [8] Mohammedan High School. [9] Clerk.

[10] Examination. [11] Certificate.

"Now the son of the Vizier, Mahmud Shahbaz, was Ibrahim—and a mean mangy pariah cur this Ibrahim Mahmud was, having been educated, and he hated my brother bitterly by reason of the *sertifcut* and on account of a matter concerning a dancing-girl, one of those beautiful fat Mekranis, and, by reason of his hatred and envy and jealousy, my mother made common cause with him, she also desiring my brother's death, in that her husband loved this child of another woman, an alien, his first love, better than he loved hers. But / bore him no ill-will, Huzoor. I loved him and admired his deeds.

"Many attempts they made, but though my mother was clever and Ibrahim Mahmud and his father the Vizier were unscrupulous, my brother was in the protection of the Prophet. Moreover he was much away from Mekran Kot, being, like our father, a great traveller and soon irked by whatever place he might be in. And, one time, he returned home, having been to Germany on secret service (a thing

he often did before he became a Sahib) and to France and Africa on a little matter of rifles for Afghanistan and the Border, and spoke to us of that very Somaliland to which this very *pultan*, the 99th Baluch Light Infantry, went in 1908 (was it?), and how the English were losing prestige there and would have to send troops or receive *boondah*[12] and the blackened face from him they called the Mad Mullah. And yet another time he returned from India bringing a Somali boy, a black-faced youth, but a good Mussulman, whom, some time before, he had known and saved from death in Africa, and now had most strangely encountered again. And this Somali lad—who was not a *hubshi*, a Woolly One, not a Sidi[13] slave—saved my brother's life in his turn. I said he was not a slave—but in a sense he was, for he asked nothing better than to sit in the shadow of my brother throughout his life; for he loved my brother as the Huzoors' dogs love their masters, yea—he would rather have had blows from my brother than gold from another. He it was who saved Mir Jan Rah-bin-Ras el-Isan from the terrible death prepared for him by Ibrahim Mahmud. It was during this visit to Mekran Kot that Mahmud Shahbaz, the Vizier, announced that he was about to send his learned son, the dog Ibrahim, to Englistan to become English-made first-class Pleader—what they called —'*Barishtar-at-Lar*' is it not, Sahib?"

[12] An insulting and contemptuous gesture.

[13] A class of negroes, much employed as sailors and boatmen, and called Seedeeyboys.

"That's it, Mir Saheb," replied I, sitting alert with chattering teeth and shivering ague-stricken body. "Barrister-at Law.... Sit as close to me as you can, for warmth.... Hark! Is that a signal?" as a long high wavering note rose from the dry river-bed before us and wailed lugubriously upon the night, rising and falling in mournful cadence.

"'Twas a genuine jackal-cry, Huzoor. One can always tell the imitation if jackals have sung one's lullaby from birth—though most Pathans can deceive white ears in the matter.... Well, this made things no pleasanter, for Ibrahim crowed like the dung-hill cock he was, and boasted loudly. Also my mother urged him to do a deed ere he left Mekran Kot for so long a sojourn in Belait.[14] And to her incitements and his own inclination and desires was added that which made revenge and my brother's death the chiefest things in all the world to Ibrahim Mahmud, and it happened thus.... But do I weary the Sahib with my babble?"

[14] Europe.

"Nay—nay—far from it, Mir Saheb," replied I. "The sentry of talk challenges the approaching skirmishers of sleep. The thong of narrative drives off the dogs of tedium. Tell on." And in point of fact I was now too credulous to be anything but astounded.... *John Robin Ross-Ellison!*

"Well, one day, my brother and I went forth to shoot sand-grouse, tuloor,[15] chikor,[16] chinkara[17] and perchance ibex, leaving behind this black body-servant Moussa Isa, the Somali boy, because he was sick. And it was supposed that we should not return for a week at the least. But on the third day we returned, my brother's eyes being

inflamed and sore and he fearing blindness if he remained out in the desert glare. This is a common thing, as the Sahib knoweth, when dust and sun combine against the eyes of those who have read over-many books and written over-much with the steel pen upon white paper, and my brother was somewhat prone to this trouble in the desert if he exhausted himself with excessive *shikar* and—other matters. And this angered him greatly. Yet it was all ordained by Allah for the undoing of that unclean dog Ibrahim Mahmud—for, returning and riding on his white camel (a far-famed pacer of speed and endurance) under the great gateway of the Jam's fort—high enough for a camel-rider to pass unstooping and long enough for a *rê/wêy*-tunnel—he came upon Mahmud Ibrahim and his friends and followers (for he had many such, who thought he might succeed his father as Vizier) doing a thing that enraged my brother very greatly. Swinging at the end of a cord tied to his hands, which were bound behind his back, was the boy Moussa Isa the Somali, apparently dead, for his eyes were closed and he gave no sign of pain as Ibrahim's gang of pimps, panders, bullies and *budmashes*[18] kept him swinging to and fro by blows of *lathis*[19] and by kicks, while Ibrahim and his friends, at a short distance, strove to hit the moving body with stones. I suppose the agony of hanging forward from the arms, and the blows of staff and stone, had stunned the lad—who had offended Ibrahim, it appeared, by preventing him from entering my brother's house—probably to poison his water-*lotah*[20] and *gurrah*[21]—at the door of which he, Moussa Isa, lay sick. My brother, Mir Jan, sprang from his camel without waiting

for the driver to make it kneel, and going up to Ibrahim, he struck him with his closed, but empty, hand. Not with the slap that stings and angers, he struck him, but with the thud that stuns and injures, upon the mouth, removing certain of his teeth,—such being his anger and his strength. Rising from the ground and plucking forth his knife, Ibrahim sprang at my brother who, unarmed, straightway smote him senseless, and that is talked of in Mekran Kot to this day. Yea—senseless. Placing the thumb upon the knuckles of the clenched fingers, he smote at the chin of Ibrahim, and laid him, as one dead, upon the earth. Straight to the front from the shoulder and not downwards nor swinging sideways he struck, and it was as though Ibrahim had been shot. The Sahib being English will believe this, but many Baluchis and Pathans do not. They cannot believe it, though to me Subedar-Major Mir Daoud Khan Mir Hafiz Ullah Khan of the 99th Baluch Light Infantry of the Army of the King Emperor of India, they pretend that they do, when I tell of that great deed.... Then my brother loosed Moussa Isa with his own hand, saying that even as he had served Ibrahim Mahmud so would he serve any man who injured a hair of the head of his body-servant. And Moussa Isa clave to my brother yet the more, and when a great Sidi slave entered the room of my brother by night, doubtless hired by Ibrahim Mahmud to slay him, Moussa Isa, grappling with him, tore out his throat with his teeth, though stabbed many times by the Sidi, ere my brother could light torch or wick to tell friend from foe. Whether he were thief or hired murderer, none could say—least of all the Sidi when Moussa Isa, at my brother's bidding, loosed his teeth from the man's throat. But all men



held that it was the work of Ibrahim, for, on recovering his senses that day of the blow, he had walked up to my brother Mir Jan and said:—

[15] Bustard. [16] A kind of partridge. [17] Gazelle. [18] Bad characters. [19] Long staves. [20] Brass cup or vase. [21] Basin or pot.

"For that blow will I have a great revenge, O Jan Rah-bin-Ras el-Isan Ilderim Dost Mahommed Mir Hafiz Ullah Khan, descendant of Mirs and of *mlecca* dogs, this year or next year, or ten years hence, or when thou art old, or upon thy first-born. By the sacred names of God, by the Beard of the Prophet, by the hilt and blade of this my knife, and by the life of my oldest son, I swear to have a vengeance on thee that shall turn men pale as they whisper it. *And may Allah smite me blind* if I do not unto thee a thing of which children yet unborn shall speak with awe.'

"Thus spake Ibrahim, son of Mahmud, for though a dog, a mangy pariah cur, he was still a Pathan.

"But my brother laughed in his face and said but 'It would seem that I too have tortured a slave' whereat Ibrahim repeated again 'Yea—*may Allah smite me blind!*'

"And something of this coming to the ears of our father, now heir to the Jam of Mekran Kot, as his brothers were dead (in the big Border War they died), he prayed the Jam Saheb to hasten the departure of the Vizier's cub, and also told the Vizier that he would surely cut out his tongue if aught befell Mir Jan. So the Vizier sent Ibrahim to Kot Ghazi on business of investing moneys—wrung by knavery, doubtless, from litigant suitors, candidates, criminals, and the poor of Mekran Kot. And shortly after, the Jam Saheb

heard of a new kind of gun that fires six of the fat cartridges such as are used for the shooting of birds, without reloading; and he bade Mir Jan who understood all things, and the ways of the European gun-shop at Kot Ghazi, to hasten forthwith and procure him a couple, and if none were in Kot Ghazi to send a *tar*[22] to Bombay for them, or even, if necessary, to Englistan, though at a cost of two rupees a word. With such a gun the Jam hoped to get better *shikar* when sitting on his camel and circling round the foolish crouching grouse or *tuloor*, and firing at them as they sat. He thought he might fire twice or thrice at them sitting, and again twice or thrice at the remnant flying, and perchance hit some on the wing, after the wonderful manner of the Sahibs. So he sent my brother, knowing him to be both clever and honest and understanding the speech and ways of the English most fully.

[22] Telegram.

"Now it is many days' journey, Sahib, across the desert and the mountains, from Mekran Kot in Kubristan to Kot Ghazi in India, but at Kot Ghazi is a fine bungalow, the property of the Jam Saheb, and there all travellers from his house may sojourn and rest after their long and perilous travel.

"Taking me and Mir Abdul Haq and Mir Hussein Ali and many men and servants, among whom was the body-servant, the boy Moussa Isa Somali, he set forth, a little depressed that we heard not the cry of the partridge in the fields of Mekran Kot as we started—not exactly a bad omen, but lacking a good one. And sure enough, ere we won to Kot Ghazi, his eyes became red and inflamed, very sore and

painful to use. So, he put the tail of his *puggri*[23] about his face and rode all day from sun-rise to sun-set in darkness, his camel being driven by Abdulali Gulamali Bokhari—the same who later rose to fame and honour as an outlaw and was hanged at Peshawar after a brave and successful career. And being arrived, in due course, at Kot Ghazi, before entering the bungalow belonging to the Jam Saheb, he knelt his camel at the door of the shop of a European *hakim*—in English a—er—"

[23] Turban.

"Chemist, Mir Saheb," I suggested.

"Doubtless, since your honour says it—of a *kimmish*, and entering, to the Eurasian dog therein said in English, of which he knew everything (and taught me much, as your honour knows), 'Look you. I need lotion for my eyes, eye medicine, and a bath for them' and the man mixed various waters and poured them into a blue bottle with red labels, very beautiful to see, and wrote upon it. Also he gave my brother a small cup of glass, shaped like the mouth of the *pulla* fish or the eye-socket of a man. And my brother, knowing what to do, used the things then and there, to the wonder of Abdul Haq and Hussein Ali, pouring the liquor into the glass cup, and holding it to his eyes, and with back-thrown head washing the eye and soothing it.

"'Shahbas!'[24] quoth he. 'It is good,' and anon we proceeded to the gun-shop and then to the bungalow belonging to the Jam Saheb. And lo and behold, here we discovered the dog Ibrahim Mahmud, and my brother twisted the knife of memory in the wound of insult by ordering him to quit the room he occupied and seek

another, since Mir Jan intended the room for his body-servant, Moussa Isa Somali—the servant of a Mir being more deserving of the room than the son of a Vizier! This was unwise, but my brother's heart was too great to fear (or to fathom) the guile of such a serpent as Ibrahim.

[24] Bravo! Excellent!

"And when he had bathed and prayed, eaten and drunk and rested, my brother again anointed his eyes with the liquid—which though only like water, was strong to soothe and heal. And our servants and people watched him doing this with wonder and admiration, and the news of it spread to the servants of Ibrahim Mahmud, who told their master of this cleverness of Mir Jan,—and Ibrahim, after a while, sent a message and a present to my brother, humbling himself, and asking that he too might see this thing.

"And Mir Jan, perhaps a little proud of his English ways, sat upon his *charpai*, [25] and bathed his eyes in the little bath, until, wearying of the trouble of pouring back the liquid into the bottle, he would press the bottle itself to his eye and throw back his head. So his eyes were quickly eased of pain, and in the evening we all went forth to enjoy.

[25] Native cot or bed.

"On his return to the room, Mir Jan flung himself, weary, upon his *charpai* and Moussa Isa lay across the doorway.

"In the morning my brother awoke and sitting on the *charpai*, took up the blue bottle, drew the cork, and raised the bottle towards his eyes. As he did this, Moussa Isa entered, and knowing not why he did so, sprang at his master and dashed the bottle from his hand. It fell to the ground but broke not, the floor being *dhurrie* [26]-covered.

[26] Carpet.

"In greatest amazement Mir Jan glanced from Moussa Isa to the bottle, clenching his hand to strike the boy—when behold! the very floor bubbled and smoked beneath the touch of the liquid as it ran from the bottle. By the Beard of the Prophet, that stone floor bubbled and smoked like water and the *dhurrie* was burnt! Snatching up the bottle my brother dropped drops from it upon the blade of his knife, upon the leather of his boots, upon paint and brass and clothing—and behold it was liquid fire, burning and corroding all that it touched! To me he called, and, being shown these things, I could scarce believe—and then I cried aloud 'Ibrahim Mahmud! Thine enemy!... Oh, my brother,—thine eyes!' and I remembered the words of Ibrahim, '*a vengeance that shall turn men pale as they whisper it—a thing of which children yet unborn shall speak with awe*' and we rushed to his room,—to find it empty. He and his best camel and its driver were gone, but all his people and servants and *oont-wallahs*[27] were in the *serai*,[28] and said they knew not where he was, but had received a *hookum*[29] over-night to set out that day for Mekran Kot. And, catching up a pariah puppy, I re-entered the house and dropped one drop from the blue bottle into its eye. Sahib, even I pitied the creature and slew it quickly with my knife. And it was this that Ibrahim Mahmud had intended for the blue eyes of my beautiful brother. This was the vengeance of which men should speak in whispers. Those who saw and heard that puppy would speak of it in whispers indeed—or not at all. I felt sick and my fingers itched to madness for the throat of Ibrahim Mahmud. Had I seen him then, I would

have put out his eyes with my thumbs. Nay—I would have used the burning liquid upon him as he had designed it should be used by my brother.

[27] Camel-men. [28] Halting-enclosure, rest-house.

[29] Order.

"Hearing Mir Jan's voice, I hurried forth, and found that his white pacing-camel was already saddled and that he sat in the front seat, prepared to drive. 'Up, Daoud Khan' he cried to me 'we go a-hunting'—and I sprang to the rear saddle even as the camel rose. 'Lead on, Moussa Isa, and track as thou hast never tracked before, if thou wouldst live,' said he to the Somali, a noted *paggi*, [30] even among the Baluch and Sindhi *paggis* of the police at Peshawar and Kot Ghazi. 'I can track the path of yesterday's bird through the air and of yesterday's fish through the water,' answered the black boy; 'and I would find this Ibrahim by smell though he had blinded *me*,' and he led on. Down the Sudder Bazaar he went unfaltering, though hundreds of feet of camels, horses, bullocks and of men were treading its dust. As we passed the shop of the European *hakim*, yes, the *kimmish*, my brother leapt down and entering the shop asked questions. Returning and mounting he said to me: 'Tis as I thought. Hither he came last night, and, saying he was science-knowing failed B.Sc., demanded certain acids, that, being mixed, will eat up even gold—which no other acid can digest, nor even assail....'"

[30] Tracker.

"*Aqua Regia*, or vitriol, I believe," I murmured, still marvelling ... *Ross-Ellison!*

"Doubtless, if your honour is pleased to say so. 'He must have poured these acids into the bottle while we were abroad last night,' continued my brother. 'Oh, the dog! The treacherous dreadful dog!... 'Twas in a good hour that I saved Moussa Isa,' and indeed I too blessed that Somali, so mysteriously moved by Allah to dash the bottle from my brother's hand.

"'Think you that Ibrahim Mahmud bribed Moussa and that he repented as he saw you about to anoint your eyes with the acid?' I asked of my brother.

"'Nay—Moussa was with me until I returned,' replied he, 'and returning, I put the bottle beneath my pillow. Besides, Ibrahim had fled ere we returned to the bungalow. Moreover, Moussa would lose his tongue ere he would tell me a lie, his eyes ere he would see me suffer, his hand ere he would take a bribe against me. No—Allah moved his heart—rewarding me for saving his life at the risk of mine own, when he lay beneath a lion,—or else it is that the black dog hath the instincts of a dog and knows when evil threatens what it loves.' And indeed it is a wonderful thing and true; and Moussa Isa never knew how he knew, but said his arm moved of itself and that he wondered at himself as he struck the bottle from his master's hand. And, in time, we left the city and followed the road and found that Ibrahim was fleeing to Mekran Kot, doubtless to be far away when the thing happened, and also to get counsel and money from his father and my mother, should suspicion fall on him and flight be necessary. And anon even untrained eyes could see where he had left the Caravan Road and taken the shorter route whereby camels bearing no heavy load could

come by steeper passes and dangerous tracks in shorter time to Mekran Kot, provided the rider bore water sufficient—for there was no oasis nor well. 'Enough, Moussa Isa, thou mayest return, I can track the camel of Ibrahim now that he hath left the road,' quoth my brother, breaking a long silence; but Moussa Isa, panting as he ran before, replied: 'I come, Mir Saheb. I shall not fall until mine eyes have beheld thy vengeance—in which perchance, / may take a part. He called me "*Hubshi*".'

"'He hath many hours' start, Moussa,' said my brother, 'and his camel is a good one. He will not halt and sleep for many hours even though he suppose me dead!'

"'I can run for a day; for a day and a night I can run,' replied the Somali, 'and I can run until the hour of thy vengeance cometh. He called *me* "Hubshi" ... and he ran on.

"Sahib, for the whole of that day he ran beside the fast camel, my brother drawing rein for no single minute, and when, at dawn, I awoke from broken slumber in the saddle, Moussa Isa was running yet! And then we heard the cry of the partridge and knew that our luck was good.

"'He may have left the track,' quoth my brother soon after dawn, 'but I think he is making for Mekran Kot, to get money and documents and to escape again ere news of his deed—or the suspicion of him—reaches the Jam Saheb. We may have missed him, but I could not halt and wait for daylight. He cannot be far ahead of us now. This camel shall live on milk and meal and wheaten bread, finest *bhoosa*[31] and chosen young green shoots, and buds, and leaves—and he shall have a collar of gold with golden bells, and reins of



silk, and hanging silken tassels, and he shall——" and then Moussa Isa gave a hoarse scream and pointed to the skyline above which rose a wisp of smoke.

[31] Bran.

"'It is he,' said my brother, and within the hour we beheld the little bush-tent of Ibrahim Mahmud (made with cloths thrown over a bent bush) and his camel, near to which, his *oont-wallah* Suleiman Abdulla had kindled a fire and prepared food. (Later this liar swore that he made the fire smoke with green twigs to guide the pursuit,—a foolish lie, for he knew not what Ibrahim had done, nor anything but that his master hastened.)

"Moussa Isa staggered to where Ibrahim Mahmud lay asleep, looked upon his face, and fell, seeming to be about to die.

"Making a little *chukker*[32] round, my brother drove the camel between Suleiman and the tent and made it kneel.

[32] Circuit, course.

"'*Salaam aleikoum*,[33] Mir Saheb,' said Suleiman, and my brother replied:—

[33] A Mussulman greeting.

"'Salaam. Tend thou my camel and prepare food for me, and my brother, and my servant. And if thou wouldst not hang in a pig's skin, be wise and wary, and keep eyes, ears, and mouth closed.' And we drank water.

"Then, treading softly, we went to the tent where Ibrahim Mahmud slept and sat us down where we could look upon his face. There he slept, Sahib, peacefully, like a little child!

—having left Mir Jan to die the death 'whereof men should speak with awe,' as he had threatened.

"We sat beside him and watched. Saying nothing, we sat and watched. An hour passed and an hour again. For another hour without moving or speaking we sat and Moussa Isa joined us and watched.

"'Twas sweet, and I licked my lips and hoped he might not wake for hours, although I hungered. The actual revenge is very, very sweet, Sahib, but does it exceed the joy of watching the enemy as he lies wholly at your mercy, lies in the hollow of your hand and is your poor foolish plaything,—knave made fool at last? Like statues we sat, moving not our eyes from his face, and we were very happy.

"Then, suddenly, he awoke and his eyes fell on my brother—and he shrieked aloud, as the hare shrieks when hound or jackal seize her; as the woman shrieks when the door goes down before the raiders and the thatch goes up in flame.

"Thus he shrieked.

"We moved not.

"'Why cryest thou, dear brother?' asked Mir Jan in a soft, sweet voice.

"'I—I—thought thou wast a spirit, come to—' he faltered, and my brother answered:—

"'And why should I be a spirit, my brother? Am I not young and strong?'

"'I dreamed,' quavered Ibrahim.

"'I too have had a dream,' said my brother.

"'Twas but a dream, Mir Jan. I will arise and prepare some —' replied

Ibrahim, affecting ease of manner but poorly, for he had no real nerve.

"'Thou wilt not arise yet, Ibrahim Mahmud,' murmured my brother gently.

"'Why?'

"'Because thine eyes are somewhat wearied and I purpose to wash them with my magic water,' and as he held up the blue bottle with the red label Ibrahim screamed like a girl and flung himself forward at my brother's feet, shrieking and praying for mercy:—

"'No, No!' he howled; 'not *that!* Mercy, O kingly son of Kings! I will give thee—"

"'Nay, my brother,—what is this?' asked Mir Jan softly, with kind caressing voice. 'What is all this? I do but propose to bathe thine eyes with this same magic water wherewith I bathed mine own, the day before yesterday. Thou didst see me do it—thou didst watch me do it.'

"'Mercy—most noble Mir! Have pity, 'twas not I. Mercy!' he screamed.

"'But, Ibrahim, dear brother' expostulated Mir Jan, 'why this objection to my magic water? It gave me great relief and my eyes were quickly healed. Thine own need care—for see—water gushes from them even now.'

"The dog howled—like a dog—and offered lakhs of rupees.

"'But surely, my brother, what gave me relief will give thee relief? Thou knowest how my eyes were soothed and healed, and that it is a potent charm, and surely *it is not changed?*' Mir Jan Rah-bin-Ras el-Isan was all Pathan then,

Sahib, whatever he may have been at other times. I could not have played more skilfully with the dog myself.

"At last, turning to Moussa Isa he said:—

"'Our brother seemeth distraught, and perchance will do himself some injury if he be not tended with care and watched over. Bind him, to make sure that he hurt not himself in this strange madness that hath o'ertaken him, making him fancy harm even in this healing balm. Bind him tightly.' And at that, the treacherous, murderous dog found his manhood for a moment and made to spring to his feet and fight, but as he tried to rise, Moussa Isa kicked him in the face and fell upon him.

"'Shall I serve thee as I served thy *Hubshi* hireling, thy Sidi slave?' he grunted and showed his sharp strong teeth.

"'Perchance 'twould cure him of his madness if we bled the poor soul a little,' cooed my brother, putting his hand to his cummerbund where was his long Afghan knife, and Ibrahim Mahmud lay still. Picking up his big, green turban from beside his rug, I bound his arms to his sides and then, going forth, got baggage-cords from the *oont-wallah* and likewise his *puggri*, and Moussa Isa bound his feet and hands and knees.

"Then my brother called Suleiman Abdulla the *oont-wallah*, and bade Moussa Isa sleep—which he did with his knife in his hand, having bound his foot to that of Ibrahim.

"'Look, thou dog,' said Mir Jan to Suleiman, 'should this rat-flea escape, thy soul and thy body shall pay, for I will put out thine eyes with glowing charcoal and hang thee in the skin of a pig, if I have to follow thee to Cabul to do it—yea, to Balkh or Bokhara. See to it.' And Suleiman put his head

upon my brother's feet, poured dust upon it and said 'So be it, Mir Saheb. Do this and more if he escape,' and we slept awhile.

"Anon we awoke, ate, drank and smoked, my brother smoking the cheroots of the Sahib-log and I having to be content with the *bidis* of Suleiman as there was no hookah.

"And when we had rested we went and sat before the face of Ibrahim and gazed upon him long, without words.

"And he wept. Like a woman he wept, and said 'Slay me, Mir Saheb, and have done. Slay me with thy knife.'

"But my brother replied softly and sweetly:—

"'What wild words are these, Ibrahim? Why should I slay thee? Some matter of a quarrel there was concerning thy torturing of my servant—but I am not of them that bear grudges and nurse hatred. In no anger slay thee with my knife? Why should I injure thee? I do most solemnly swear, Ibrahim, that I will do thee no wilful hurt. I will but anoint thine eyes with the contents of this bottle just as I did anoint my own. Why should I slay thee or do thee hurt?'

"And I chuckled aloud. He was all Pathan then, Sahib, and handling his enemy right subtly.

"And Ibrahim wept yet more loudly and said again:—

"'Slay me and have done.' Then my brother gave him the name by which he was known ever after, saying:—

"'Why should I slay thee, *Ibrahim, the Weeper?*' and he produced the bottle and held it above that villain's face.

"His screams were music to me, and in the joy of his black heart Moussa

Isa burst into some strange chant in his own Somali tongue.