

***JOAN
CONQUEST***

***DESERT
LOVE***

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Desert Love

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CHAPTER I

Jill looked at the East!

At her feet sat huddled groups of women, just bundles of black robes, some with discs about their necks, some with chains or golden crescents upon the forehead, all wearing the *burko* [yashmak or face veil] covering the entire face with the exception of the eyes, and held in position between the eyebrows by the quaint tube-shaped *se/va*, fastening it to the *tarhah*, the flowing black veil which nearly touches the ground behind, covers the head, and pulled down to the eyebrows leaves just the beautiful dark eyes to be seen, glancing up timidly—in this case—at the golden-haired, blue-eyed girl above them.

Men of different classes stood around, or squatted on their heels upon the ground, all in flowing robes of different colouring and various stages of cleanliness, some with heads covered in turbans, some with the tarboosh, others with the kahleelyah or head handkerchief, all chattering with the exception of the higher classes and the Bedouins, the latter clothed in white, with the distinctive thong of camel's hair wound about the head covering, arms folded and face passively serene, looking as though they had stepped right out of the Old Testament on to the fly-ridden, sunbaked station of Ismailiah; whilst vendors of cakes, sticky, melting sweets, and small oranges, wandered in and out of the crowd screaming their wares. Shouts of laughter drew Jill's attention to the other side of the station, where, with terms of endearment mixed with blood-curdling threats, a detachment of British soldiers getting ready to start en route for Suez were urging, coaxing, striving to make that most obstinate of animals, the camel, get to its feet some time before midnight.

From them she looked at a group of native dwellings made of sunbaked clay. Small square buildings, looking in the distance like out-houses, with scarcely perceptible windows, and flat roofs given over to poultry. Near them the patient bullock did its monotonous round, drawing the precious water from the well with which to moisten the arid little patch of earth from which the fellah extracts the so very little necessary to him in his life.

A clump of slender palms, like forgotten scaffolding, stood out clear against the intense blue of the sky; the desert, that wonderful magnetic plain, stretched away in

mile upon mile of yellow nothingness, until as minute as flies on a yellow floor, growing more distinct at every step, with solemn and exceeding great dignity stalked a string of camels, each animal fastened by a rope to the saddle of the one in front, each apparently unconscious of its seemingly overwhelming burden, as with heads swaying slightly from side to side with that air of disdain which the dame of Belgravia unsuccessfully tries to imitate when essaying to crush the inhabitant of Suburbia by means of long-handled lorgnettes resting on the shiny arch of her aristocratic nose, they responded without fail to the soft musical voice of the Arab seated cross-legged on the leader.

Then her eyes turned to the West.

To the mixed mob which had rushed from the *Norddeutscher Lloyd* at Suez, leaving the great liner to the wise few, while perspiring and querulous, and altogether unpleasant, they had filled the little train which chuffs its way along the edge of the canal to Ismailiah, and through the dust and fly-laden miles to Cairo, where it turns its burden out to clamour and argue vociferously with the wily dragoman who would take a herd of elephants to "do" the Pyramids in one hour if the backsheesh proved substantial enough.

With absolute loathing she gazed at those with whom she had passed so many weary days on the return journey from Australia.

There were of a certain type of English women not a few, sunburnt, loud of voice, lean of breast and narrow of hip.

Their sisters, wiser and better endowed by nature, had remained on the liner, taking advantage of the empty

conditions of the boat to repair the ravage done to complexion and wardrobe by the sizzling, salt-laden wind which had tortured them since Colombo had been left behind.

Two daughters and a mother stood aloofly in the shade thrown by the indescribable waiting-room; the mother still labouring under the delusion that if you can't afford to send your girls properly wardrobe on a visit to relations in India, the next best method of annexing husbands for them is to take them hacking on a long sea voyage. For has it not been known that many a man driven to the verge of madness by the everlasting sight of flying fish, and the as enduring sound of the soft plop of the little bull-board sandbag, has become engaged to "a perfectly im-*poss*-ible person in the second class, you know," so as to break the deadly monotony of his surroundings.

They did not want to see Cairo or any other part of Egypt, for the East said nothing to them, even a rush view of the Pyramids failing to stir their shallow hearts; but they knew to a shade the effect on their less fortunate friends when in course of time they should murmur, "You remember, dear, the winter we were in Cairo."

Added to these there were raucous Australians, clumsily built guttural Germans, in fact the usual omnium gatherum, unavoidable, alas! on a sea voyage, clothed in short skirts, shirt waists, squash hats, and thick boots as "they were going tramping about the sands," and each, of *course*, loaded with the inevitable camera which gives dire offence to many an eastern of higher rank, who hates being photographed willy-nilly along with all the other "only a

native" habits of the westerner, who with the one word "nigger" describes the Rajah of India, the Sheik of Arabia, the Hottentot and the Christy Minstrel.

Free for one day from the restraining manners of those others who at that very moment were doubtless returning thanks on deck to Allah for his manifold blessings in the shape of some few hours of perfect peace, a few men of different nationalities were either boisterously chaffing the less plain of their companions, or ogling the shrinking Eastern women, crouching on the edge of the platform. Mr. Billings in fact, in unclean canvas shoes and a frantic endeavour to find favour in the bistre enlarged eyes of a certain slim black figure, was executing the very double shuffle which had "brought down" the second class dining saloon honoured for the nonce by the presence of the first class, on the occasion of one of the purgatorial concerts habitual to sea life as known on board a liner.

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Jill stood by herself!

Personally I consider as infinitely boring those descriptions written at length anent the past lives of the characters, male and female, which go to the building of a novel, so in as few words as possible will try to outline the years which had brought Jill Carden to the dreary task of waiting hand and foot upon the whimsies of a neurotic German woman of great wealth, and still greater disinclination to part with the smallest coin of any realm she might be travelling through.

Jill, an only child and motherless, had led a glorious care-free existence.

Adored by her father and her two friends, Moll, otherwise the Honourable Mary Bingham pronounced Beam, of the neighbouring estate, and Jack, otherwise Sir John Wetherbourne, Baronet, of the next county, big brother to Jill and worshipper at the shrine of Moll. Jill was also loved by all who waited on her, and sought after by not a few on account of her great wealth, and had laughed her way through seventeen years of life, to find herself suddenly minus father and money, with nothing left in fact but an estate mortgaged to the smallest pebble, and a heart-whole proposition from her chum Moll to "just come over the wall" and restart laughing her way as her adopted sister through

the bit of life which might stretch from the moment of disaster to such time that she should find a life companion with whom she could settle down and live happily ever after!

But although Jill's head was outwardly covered with great plaits of auburn hair, through which broke riotous, frivolous curls, the inside held a distinctly active and developed brain, which had acquired the habit of thinking deeply upon such subjects as woman, wife and motherhood.

Added to this, which is already quite enough to put out of gear the life of any girl brought up in convention bound England, she had a heart as big as her outrageous longing for, and love of adventure, neither of which bignesses she had so far been able to satisfy.

As I have said this was quite bad enough, but through and above all, her whole rather exceptional being was desirous of love. Not the shape which clothes its diseased body in soiled robes of imitation something at one and elevenpence three farthings per yard, and under ferns in conservatories, in punts up back-waters, in stifling tea-rooms, hotels, theatres and night-clubs, exchanges sly look for sly look and soiled mouth for soiled kisses, in its endeavours to pass itself off as that wonder figure which, radiant of brow and humorous of mouth, deep of breast and profound of thought, stands motionless in high and by-ways with hands outstretched to those futile figures, blindly hurrying past the Love they fondly imagine is to be found in the front row of the chorus, the last row of the cinema, or the unrestrained licence of the country house.

Jill had never flirted and therefore had known no kiss excepting her father's matutinal and nocturnal peck. She looked upon her beautiful body as some jewel to be placed in the hands of the man she loved upon her wedding-night, so it was as unsoiled and as untainted as her mind, although she knew that once she loved she would go down before that mighty force as a tree before a storm. Dull, you will say all this. May be! but mighty refreshing in these days when amourette follows amourette as surely as Monday follows Sunday, the only difference in the stock being the trade mark, which stamps the one with the outline of a perfect limousine, and the other with the front seat on the top of an omnibus; though believe me the Mondays and Sundays differ not at all.

Jill's ideas on franchise and suffrage, and a "good time" as seen from the standpoint of the average society girl or woman were absolutely nil.

She wanted first of all a master, then a home, and then children, many of them.

Her idea of love was utter submission to the man she should love. Her ideal of happiness his happiness, and although she had no fixed idea of her home, she was positively certain she did not want lodge gates and forelock-pulling peasantry, nor tame deer inside elaborate palings, nor the white-capped nurse stiff with starch trundling a perambulator with a fat, ordinary, rosy heir to the palings, deer, and pullers of locks.

So she sweetly but very definitely said no to a certain millionaire, who had earned his banking account and the thanks of many thousands by his invention of a non-popping

champagne cork, and who, adoring the girl, had hastened the very day the news of the smash had spread through the country, like fire on a windy day, to lay his portly self and all that thereunto adhered at her beautiful feet. The disgust of her relatives upon her want of common sense was outspoken; for having overstocked their respective quivers with commonplace female arrows, they quite naturally looked with dismay upon an almost beautiful and *quite* penniless and homeless girl about whom, *after* having read the will they referred to as "poor Jill, for whom I *suppose* we *must* do *something* don't you know?" with a quavering inflection at the end of the phrase.

But Jill did not stop on refusing the eligible owner of an unmortgaged estate. No! she set out to look for work off her own bat, and actually found it in that occupation which, far less paid than more, opens up a perfect vista of possible adventures under the guise of a travelling companion.

She spoke French, German, and Italian like natives, which was all to the good. She danced like a Vernon Castle, knew almost as much about fencing as a Saviolo, shot like a George V., and rode like a cowboy, all of which qualifications she erased from her list on the termination of the freezing half-hour of her first interview with her first would-be employer, who, until the enumeration of the above sporting qualifications, had seemed desirous of taking her along with a bronchitic pug to winter in Bath.

Since then she had done Europe and Africa pretty well with never the suspicion of an adventure, and, when you meet her on the station of Ismailiah, where you change for Port Said, she was returning from Australia, with a wardrobe

at last beginning to fret about the hem, and shine around the seams, a condition accounted for by the emaciated condition of her purse; a memory of good things and hours worn thin by the constant nerve-wracking routine of capsules, hot drinks, hot water bottles, moods and shawls; and a fully developed rebellion in her whole being against the never-ending vista which stretched far into the future, of other such hours, days, months, yea! even years!

But everything was capped by a still more fully developed decision to brave it out, and out, and out, rather than return to ask the help of those whose hand-clasp had weakened in ratio to the dwindling of the gold in her coffer.

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And why did she stand by herself?

This is no riddle, the answer being too easy. Men would have answered, "Guessed in once, she was pretty!" And the women would guess in once too, but would keep silent, the pretty ones merely smiling, having sampled the Coventry-sending powers of plain women in the majority on board, and the plain ones from that unwillingness inborn or inherited in every woman to admit good looks, or good anything for that matter, in a member of her own sex.

And she *was* pretty, with the prettiness of youth allied to genuine red-gold hair, and the bluest of blue eyes, which looked at you in disconcertingly straight manner from between the longest black lashes you ever saw.

She sounds very much like a "Dainty Novel heroine," but I have met her and I know, and she also had a mouth turned up at the corners, and the loveliest teeth, a nose which also turned up, not unduly, and a skin on which lay the merest suspicion of powder like dust on a butterfly's wings, also two jet black *grains de beauté*, one at the corner of her mouth and the other on top of the left cheek, just under the outside corner of the eye.

Ravissante! Her beauty was nature's own, and she had the loveliest, longest, narrowest feet ever shod and silken hosed by Audet, and as lovely out of the silken hose as in.

But all that, though it pleased the eye, did not really constitute her real charm. It was more the idea of strength, and buoyancy, and the love of humanity she gave out, that attracted young and old, rich and poor, dogs, children, and the sick of soul and body to her.

The type of woman who owns the husband of a roaming disposition and has not got accustomed to the disposition, or the woman eager to acquire a husband of any disposition whatever, liked her not at all, failing to see that she was genuinely uninterested in other people's male belongings.

Those who think to lure men by the mystery of a tobacco cloud permanently around the head, or to stimulate by the sight of a glass which looks like lemonade but isn't, nestling among the everlasting cards and cigarette debris, disliked her *intensely*, not so much because she did not ally herself *with* them, as for the fact that she did not range herself *against* them, having even been heard to remark that the world would be a deadly dull place if everyone enjoyed the same pleasure and the same wickedness. Just three more items to add to the long list against her on this particular voyage.

Firstly, had she not one sizzling Red Sea day appeared with her hair hanging in two great plaits reaching below her knees? Which escapade might have escaped uncensored if accompanied by the whitish eye-lashes, forceful freckles, and pungent aroma usually allied to reddish hair, but as it was, the combination of the red-gold glory with blackest curling lashes, skin like satin, and the faintest trace of Devonshire lavender, created a perfect scandal among those whose locks were either limply curtaining their

owner's cheeks or blinding the eye, or câchéd under some head covering were acquiring a wave which might with luck last out the dinner and bridge hours.

Secondly, although a penniless companion, she allowed no familiarity from the men and no condescension from the women; and thirdly, her shoes gave reason for envy, hatred, malice, and all uncharitableness, being on the day you met her exquisite champagne coloured things, her critics little guessing that the reason she wore them was that she had none thicker, and no money wherewith to buy any.

This last point sounds almost absurd, but those who know will any day back the woman with dainty ankles, pretty feet, the glimpse of white lace and a plain face, against the really beautiful countenance up above the shapeless ankle-calf combine, and the foot that in two days gives a shoe the shape of the bows of a dinghey.

So because of all these reasons, also because all the nice, wise people who loved her having stayed behind, she stood alone, her heart clamouring for life and adventure, which comes to about the same thing, and which she sensed is to be found so much more easily in the East she was leaving behind in the space of a few hours. The rest of her rebelling against the West, the monotonous days on the boat racing her back to England in November, with nothing to do, too much to eat, and the trail of medicine glasses, cushions, gouty, dyspeptic, and neurotic employers lengthening into the drab future.

"Allah! help me!" she whispered, and really meaning it, as she turned to look again at the camels stalking on into

the desert, and finding herself instead looking straight into the eyes of an Arab standing behind her.

And here, I hope, endeth the dullest part of the book.

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Arabs as a race are tall, most of them having a grave look of nobility, all without exception, inheriting from their forefathers Ishmail or Johtan that air of studied calm, that seldom smiling, never restless attitude, which expresses the height of dignity and gravity. There were many of them in this motley station crowd, also Bedouins, smaller of stature, and the members of the many other tribes which go to populating the great Egyptian desert. But not one of all the men, magnificent though some of them were, could compare with Hahmed the Camel King, who, standing alone and motionless with folded arms, let his eyes rest upon this most fair woman from the West.

Jill was accustomed to being looked at, from the impudent stare of Frenchmen, the open look of admiration, both male and female, of the Italian, to the never-to-be-forgotten look of Berlin that had seemed to undress and leave her naked in the street.

But now under grave scrutiny she felt the colour, which made her even more lovely, rising from chin to brow, and longed to cover her face or to run away and hide, though there was nothing but a wondering respect in the Arab's eyes.

For one moment his eyes met hers, then she slowly lowered the heavy white lids with their fringe of curling lashes, and, turning, stood looking out over the desert, where she no longer saw the stretches of yellow sand, nor the airing of camels stalking away into the distance, nor the mud houses and patient bullocks. No! nothing of all these, but instead, just one man's face, oval, lean-featured, eyes brilliantly black and deep-set under thick eyebrows, an aquiline nose, the lower part of the face covered in a sharp pointed beard, and the thick virile hair by a snow-white kahleelyah, bound by a band to the well-shaped head.

A man was he indeed with a width of shoulder rarely seen in an Arab, standing well over six foot, in spotless white robes sweeping to his feet, a cloak of finest black cloth falling over all in swinging folds, failing, however, to hide that look of tremendous strength which impresses one so in some of the long-limbed, lean, muscular inhabitants of the desert.

Jill walked over to the edge of the platform which, as a rule is only raised a few inches above the rail, and after a few seconds beckoned her employer's special dragoman, who had annexed himself at Cairo and presumably would only be shaken off on deck.

He came immediately, all smiles.

All the so-called lower classes smiled upon Jill, from the coster in Whitechapel to the Kaffir at the Cape. And why? Why, because she smiled when she asked a service.

"Be more dignified!" she would indignantly reply when remonstrated with about the native. "They certainly show a varied degree of blackness in their skin, and have less

brains than some of us, but they are human, so I shall continue to smile if I like," and smile she did, and they smiled too and ran to do her bidding.

Not that she indulged in the "our dear black brother" views of those people who, from utter lack of knowledge upon the subject, believe that with the exception of a certain difference in the pigment which embellishes the skin, the lowest type of Hottentot has the same ideals, desires, and outlook on life as the highest born, or, as I think to be more correct, I should say, the cleanest living individual in the Western Hemisphere.

She did not approve of the promiscuous mingling of the white and black as is so often and so unhappily seen in London, where a servant girl maybe, will ecstatically spend her evening out under the protection of some ebony hued product of Africa and, labouring under the delusion that the dusky swain is the direct descendant of Cetewayo, also totally lacking all knowledge of African history, will fondly imagine herself a queen in embryo, instead of which she is merely the means to feed the lustful longing for the white in some Cape boy, who believes he hides the roll of his native walk under an exaggerated skirt to his over-padded coat.

And she equally hated to see the social butterfly smile upon the high-born native of India, angling for his lakhs with the bait of a fair white skin upon which to fasten a string of priceless pearls, gathering her fastidious skirts about her at the sign of any feeling more human than that which she would allow from a respectable bank manager, recoiling disdainfully from a man whose ancestors were mighty in the land, when hers were just beginning to break through the

crust of serfdom, as a toad will crack and throw back the caked mud under which it has blissfully slept.

As a preventative to social and racial mishaps she thoroughly endorsed the theory that "East is East and West is West, etc." But in her heart, or rather in her somewhat searching brain, she had often wondered if there could be no exception to the ruling, if half of the East and half of West could never combine to make a perfect whole.

All smiles the dragoman ran forward, saluting her with hands to forehead, mouth, and breast.

"Do you know who that man is?" she asked, indicating with a scarcely perceptible movement of the head the Arab who had not moved a muscle since she had turned away from him to look at his homeland, the desert.

"'Im! My lady!" replied the native, eyes and white teeth flashing as he essayed in his best Anglo-French to please the beautiful foreigner who so graciously spoke to him. "'Im? Oh, 'im! is Hahmed the Camel King. 'Im provide the camels for Government 'Camels Corpse," pointing to the Camelry Corps, where perspiring Tommies and a seething mass of brown beasts were literally raising the dust on the other side of the railroad. "'Im," he continued, "is ze great man, from far away over ze Canal from ze greates' and best part of South Arabia. Is rich, oh! rich! Oh! so very rich—*riche comme le diable, Madame*. Is master of many villages, many peoples, but is 'ow say, my lady—*est étrange*—and feared. 'Is word is ze law and 'is arm is ze iron and 'e can also shoot ze fly on ze top of Cheops!"

The man paused, literally from want of breath.

"He is evidently a very fine man," said Jill, it must be confessed a little disappointedly, having expected something a little less ordinary in the way of history, "but I can't say I see anything strange about it all!"

The dragoman, slightly downcast by the lack of enthusiasm on the part of his audience, took in a huge quantity of the absolutely stifling air and started afresh.

"Oh! *mais, Madame*, ze strange zing is zat wiz all 'is rich, all 'is camel, all 'is 'ouse—ah! I forgot zat is 'is Ismailiah 'ouse," pointing a long, brown finger to a huge pink edifice, standing like a huge pink birthday cake under the blazing sun on the edge of the town—"e 'as no woman—no not an one—not wife—not lady—zere is tales of one wife long ago over zere," pointing vaguely in the direction he imagined South Arabia might be, "but feared, we say and ask nozing—no! ze great Hahmed live alone—not zere———" Once more pointing contemptuously to the pink abode. "Zat but a business 'ouse—ze most beautiful place in one oasis! Ze Flat Oasis! Ah Madame! *comme c'est 'belle*—I who 'ave been on camel business can tell, ze 'ouse, ze shade, ze water—but no lady, no children, no son, no one—'e go and sleep and live all by self alone—*triste*, Madame, because 'e is ze great, ze just, but go always alone in ze night to 'is oasis *bien aimée* and———"

And here the uplifting of an angry guttural voice caused him to turn and run hurriedly towards a figure vehemently signalling with a huge fawn-coloured sun-shade lined with green.

And as he ran the soul of the desert, born of the sun, palms, ennui, flies, the sand, and Allah knows what besides,

suddenly sat up in Jill's eyes and laughed, and as she laughed the words "Go always alone in ze night to 'is oasis *bien aimée*" rang in the girl's ears, as a strange and startling idea flashed across her mind.

For and against the idea ranged her thoughts; upheld one moment by the insistent clamouring of her whole soul for freedom; combated the next by the inherited deference to convention planted by long dead generations in the mind soil of almost every British subject.

Why should she not break away and strike out on her own, if only for a few hours? But would she not be running into positive physical danger if she did so? Still it would only be for a few hours—a swift ride into the desert—a glimpse of a desert home—a break anyhow in the deadly, soul-stifling monotony of her daily round. Yes! but what did she know of the man outside the eulogies of the dragoman, who for all she knew might be leagued with him in nefarious schemes.

And yet, no one cared if she lived or died in soul or body. Marry she would not for years, and years, though of a truth that prospect would become more and more remote as youth vanished and the waters of her wealth remained at low tide. But the most irresistible argument in favour of the mad idea was that so far she had not had one single real adventure.

"Allah!" she whispered, clasping her hands involuntarily. "Where is my path? Show me the way out!"

And even as she unclasped her hands, she heard a faint tinkle of coins in the well-worn little bag hanging from her wrist.

"Allah has heard!" she murmured to herself, as she fished for a coin.

"Heads I speak—tails I go back to England," she continued, placing the silver coin on her thumb nail, flipping it into the air, and catching it on the back of her hand. "Heads. Oh!"

And giving herself no time to think, whilst the soul in her eyes first frowned and then laughed in glee, she turned and crossed the few yards covered by the sand which for centuries blown hither and hither had been waiting to make a carpet for her lovely feet to tread when Allah in his graciousness should show her the path, which would lead her to the way out.

CHAPTER V

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Jill had an entrancing speaking voice. She spoke on a low note, and having trained the muscles of the throat to relax or tighten at will, she was able to throw all manner of inflection into the words, and all shades of tone and melody into the chords of the beautiful musical instrument which is so terribly neglected the world over.

So that when she spoke, her words sounded like the chiming of distant bells in the ears of the man, and his heart seemed likely to be engulfed in the golden stream of a voice through which continuously rippled a gentle laughter.

"Monsieur will forgive me for speaking in this abrupt way, but the moments are few in which to make my request. I hear that in the desert is a beautiful oasis, and many beautiful Arabian horses. I have never seen an oasis, for you see I know nothing of Egypt, but I once had an Arab mare. She was wonderful and white. Perhaps Monsieur has some of her brothers or sisters? And just for once I should like to see the desert stars at night, and the desert sun at dawn. Could Monsieur take me to see these things if——" And then the golden voice stopped short, and the girl involuntarily took one step backward.

Those who know the race know that the Arab has a tremendous control over his emotions. He can love and kill in one moment, but until the woman is literally swept off her

feet, or the man or woman is dead, in a heap, neither by voice or gesture will he betray the passion consuming him.

The voice, the greatest betrayer of mankind, is especially under control of these exceedingly strong men. No matter what paroxysm of rage, revenge, or desire may be shaking the man to the innermost depth of his being, his voice flows on just as musically, just as softly.

But Jill, being observant, had noticed that although the hands lay folded on the crossed arms, the nails were dug into the palms, and raising her eyes to the sombre face for explanation, had encountered two eyes blazing with a mighty anger.

There are many ways in which to incite the Arab to wrath, but believe me, the way which will most surely lead to sudden murder, or to long bloody feud drawn out over many years, passing from generation to generation, is the way of *ridicule*.

Let him think that you are laughing at him, and I should advise you to take the nearest camel, train, or boat, or any other means of locomotion to hand, and fly the country.

The *country* mind you, for hide you ever so craftily, he will find you, even though your hair be white, and your figure bent with the passage of years, and then, only *then* will he be appeased, when the real or imagined jest at his expense has been lost in the deep colour of your rich red blood.

So that when the Arab spoke a light of understanding dawned upon Jill, for, touching his forehead, mouth, and a spot on his raiment just above his heart with his right hand, and murmuring the customary salutation, "May peace be

upon you," he paused for a moment, and then continued, "But it pleases Madame to jest with me. She awaits the train to take her to the boat, how therefore could she come into the desert to-night?"

But Jill was absolutely unafraid! Having known no master, she cared not one *sou* for any son of man, or any untoward position she might find herself in, so opening wide her very beautiful eyes she simply smiled back into the angry ones which looked down upon her from some considerable height, and, with a little shrug of her shoulders, a habit acquired from one of a succession of foreign governesses, she made reply in her turn, and in words which though absolutely common-place served as the golden key with which to unlock the bejewelled, golden casket of this man's love.

In any Western country the situation would have been *absurd!* An English girl, minus scenery and every accessory due to a book heroine, capable in five brief minutes of smiting the heart of one of Egypt's most renowned men!

Ridiculous!

Perhaps in the lands of fogs and fires, grey skies and east winds, but not in Egypt, where the sun, sky, winds, and memories serve rather to force the growth of the love-plant and hasten the budding of the passion-flower.

Studiously buttoning up the last button which she always left undone on her last pair of suede gloves, smooth as a newly born whippet puppy, and as yet unruffled from the cleaner's manipulations, she spoke with a ripple of laughter which made it impossible to decide if she was speaking seriously or not.