

BENGE ATLEE

gives us another most thrilling tale of the pilot Burke who flies after a traitor and finds he is trapped

IN THE CLUTCH of the TURK



Hussein moved the heated blade slowly toward Burke's eyes to scorch and cause blindness. "Now," he cried, "I will leave the mark of the Weled Ali upon the Christian pig."

THE Sirhan desert shimmered under the heat. The palms of Azrak moved listlessly in a wind so hot it seemed from hell. In the largest "house of hair" in the Arab encampment three men sat talking earnestly; Colonel T.E. Lawrence, the little Irish leader of the Arab Revolt; Lieutenant Gerald Burke, R.A.F., one and only aviator with the Arab forces; and Auda abu Tayi, fighting sheik of the Howeitat.

Auda, the old warrior, was breathing fire. Outside stood twenty of his men at whose head he had just ridden thirty miles through the genenna of that August day—twenty fagged men and twenty broken camels.

"By Allah and by my very Allah," he cried, little white spots of froth spurring from his cracked lips, "the dog has deserted us! I was riding close by Minifer. And I saw him with his men—may pigs defile their mothers' graves! And he had his face toward the Turks! It was too late then to head him off—though I tried, until the Turkish bullets were tossing up the sand in waves under my camel's feet. He has gone over to them, may he perish! By the face of Allah, did I not say he was a traitor! Did I not warn you against that snake, Hussein ibn Zaid!"

"Aiee, O father of wisdom and strength," replied

the little man in the white *kaftan*, softly. "But that does not alter the fact that he is now on his way to Turkish headquarters at Deraa with his information. No use to cry over the dead camel. We must stop him."

"Stop him!" almost shrieked the furious sheik. "As well stop the eagle! At this minute he must be beyond Nisib on his way to Deraa!"

Lawrence smiled quietly, and there was in that smile the confidence that had won his way for him with these turbulent tribes of Araby. "We can send the eagle to stop the eagle." He jerked a thumb at the airman.

Old Auda's face fell. In his rage he had forgotten that such things as airplanes existed. "Wellah," he laughed sheepishly, "my mind is as a little child's." And then turning eagerly on Burke: "You will go and stop the dog—and save my honor, el Bourque?"

The airman grinned. "Always willing to do anything in reason, O sheik!"

Lawrence turned on him. "If he gets into Deraa with his information of our layout and plans we're lost, Burke. Better get off at once. Take some bombs with you. May be able to stop him with them if no other way."

Burke rose to his feet. "I'm off," he said.

"May the world be wide to you!" cried old Auda, enthusiastically.

"Allah send it," Burke replied, and hurried out of the tent.

TEN minutes later he was aloft and headed westward toward the Damascus-Medina Railway fifty miles away. Hussein ibn Zaid, one of the minor sheiks of the Weled Ali, had come into Azrak a month before with soft words and promises. Although the rest of his tribe still adhered to their Turkish allegiance he, by Allah, had come to throw his lot into the keeping of el Auruns (Lawrence). So he said. But Auda had muttered darkly in his beard over the coffee, growling that the Weled Ali were the sons of liars and deceivers. It had taken the whole of Lawrence's consummate tact to keep the peace, but he had insisted that a Weled Ali repentant was worthy of reception into the Arab cause. For four weeks Hussein had eaten the bread and salt of the Revolt at Azrak, and incidentally used his eyes and ears as only an Arab can. Having drunk to his fill at the well of information, he had slipped away silently in the night, and here was Auda to testify to his treachery. Burke knew full well that if the fellow got to Deraa and poured his story into the ear of Djevid Pasha, the Turkish general there, that not only the advanced Arab force at Azrak, but the whole Revolt itself would be put in jeopardy. For Lawrence, these last few weeks, had been organizing a bold plan of campaign that depended for its success on its secrecy, and which, if the Turks knew about it, they could meet with great peril to the Arab cause.

Burke's old B.E. airplane winged steadily westward. Even at this altitude of five thousand feet the air was furnace-like in one's face. Below, the bare, brown earth was an oven, and he marveled at the fortitude of Auda and his men who had ridden through that hell all day to bring their tidings. And presently, far ahead, the rails of the Damascus-Medina line glimmered through the ground haze. Alongside the railway, Burke knew, lay the camel route to Deraa. And northwards, between Nisib and Deraa, he would find his quarry.

He swung the plane's nose slightly to the right, in a few moments was flying directly above the gleaming rails a thousand feet up. The Turkish garrison at Nisib gave him a nasty five minutes with their anti-aircraft gun, filling the air around

him with the white puffs of shrapnel, but he knew that gun and its gunners. They had potted at him so many times without success that now they couldn't raise his blood pressure one degree. But once out of its range he flew even lower, so that the low hills on each side of the track were level with his wings. Intently he scanned the road below. Odd groups passed—some going north—some south; a detail of Turkish sentries guarding the right of way and on the lookout for one of Lawrence's devastating dynamiting parties; a few small groups of Bedouins. But so far no sight of the cavalcade of Weled Ali. And then, suddenly, rounding a bend in the hills, he saw them a mile ahead. He looked to his bomb release. It was correct. Rattled a few rounds through his Vickers. Shoved the throttle full on.

They heard him coming. He saw them stop to search the sky, saw the sudden confusion in their ranks as they spotted him so close. But before they could so much as make up their minds what to do he was on them.

He had no bomb sights. Such refinements were beyond the facilities of that old ship, and he had to judge by eye. So he let only one bomb go as a sort of feeler. Splashing the sand up within a dozen yards of the closely huddled camel riders, it sent them flying in all directions. He banked about sharply. He had spotted Hussein ibn Zaid's flaming red *kafieh*, and he knew his quarry. He swept even lower, dragged on the makeshift bomb release again. But the wires did not respond quickly enough and the thing crumped at least a hundred feet beyond the flying rider. Cursing, he swung on one wing and came at it again. Hussein was urging his camel up a narrow, precipitously walled ravine in search of shelter. Burke put the plane toward it.

And suddenly, as he did so, he heard something—an ominous chattering noise that came insistently above the ship's roaring engine. He glanced sharply about. For the moment the blinding light of the sun glared into his eyes so that he could not see. And then he did see! Two Turkish planes—Fokkers—from Deraa, five hundred feet above him and swooping down. Hurriedly he faced front. Below, and a hundred yards or more ahead, the flying, red-topped rider was lashing his *hujun* toward an overhanging ledge of rock at the head of the ravine. He realized that, come what may, he must drive that last bomb at its target. He must do that before he looked to his own skin.

Something splashed the rail of the cockpit—leaden rain—close. But still he held doggedly to his mark. Another half minute. Suddenly, he drew the release wire again.

“Damnation take the bloody thing!” he yelled.

For the second time the ratchet had failed to deliver on time, the bomb dropping impotently on the crest of hill above and beyond the flying Arab. He had shot his bolt and lost. These two Turkish planes, the nearest on his very tail, would drive him back irrevocably into the desert. Hussein ibn Zaid would take his news safe to Deraa.



GRINDING his teeth in annoyance, the airman jerked back the stick and sent the ship climbing. In the next few minutes he would have to fight for his life, for the Germans had not been so niggardly with their Turkish allies in the way of airplanes as the British had with the Arabs. The B.E. was antiquated—slow. These planes that snapped at his tail were late model Fokkers.

But a supremacy in machines is not enough to win an aerial combat. Jerry Burke, through force of circumstances, had had to learn the last and utmost possibilities of that old B.E.—and its kind—by long, hard experience. He could, as a flying officer from Allenby's force in Egypt who once watched him in an aerial combat declared, do more tricks with a dud ship than a monkey could on a yard of grapevine. For ten minutes he dodged those Fokkers, slipping from under their snouts when they seemed to have him cold, leading them into one another so that twice they nearly collided, but all the time climbing. He wanted height. When he had height enough he would give them fight!

But always he kept a weather eye below—saw the Arab cavalcade reassemble beside the railway—saw it move off in a cloud of dust northwards. Was it possible that he might yet slip away from his pursuers sufficiently to drop on Hussein's gang again and give them the benefit of his Vickers? Not likely—but one never knew. Suddenly, at five thousand feet, he reversed sharply on the nearest Fokker which was trying to come up under his blind spot behind. For ten seconds the Vickers chattered madly.

Surprised at meeting fight at last, the Fokker wobbled out of it and banked. But Number Two was coming at him head-on. Bringing the B.E.'s

nose around slightly to get her in his sights, Burke let the gun speak again. For a moment the other ship held its way—until the deadly fire sent her diving out of it.

But Number One was coming up again. Once more the intrepid airman threw the old ship about and let his gun sing. But Number Two had nosed around, was firing at him broadside. The bullets whapped against the fuselage so close that he could hear the sound of them. He held his course, his thumb on the stick trigger, pouring his lead into the plane ahead. Something seared past his shoulder, cutting the cloth of his tunic. The B.E. gave an odd coughing sound. He was about to put her down when suddenly the enemy plane in his path side-slipped dizzily and then went into a spin.

He had no time to watch what happened to her, had to zoom out of the hellish hail that was coming in from the side from the other enemy plane. But two hundred feet higher up, as he eased off the laboring B.E., he glanced down and saw a great streamer of smoke rising from a falling Fokker.

A laugh shot from his lips. He knew it was luck. And yet, if he could drive the surviving Fokker down, or scare her off, there was still a chance that he might get another crack at Hussein ibn Zaid. He banked and dived at her—just as she turned her nose up to meet him. But she had seen what happened to her sister and side-slipped out of it. He had her scared! Jamming on the juice, he swung after her, letting the gun sing as she came into his sights. She put her nose up. He started after her. He was laughing in wild triumph. Another few minutes and he would be—

And then suddenly the old B.E. coughed and went as dead as a brass bull. Some perverse bullet must have got the engine somewhere—the feed-pipe probably—during that last mix-up. A groan escaped him. Ahead, the surviving Fokker was winging swiftly back toward Deraa. Below, and a half mile off to the left, he could still see Hussein ibn Zaid's cavalcade. It was the irony of fate. By Allah, it was worse than that, for out of the mirage Deraa gleamed scarcely half a dozen miles northward.

He put the plane's nose down and let her ride earthward. And for the next minute he scanned with anxious eyes the terrain below. East of the railroad, low basalt hills cut the earth up into scarred, uneven surfaces on which no plane could land. It was too far to the level desert for the ship to

glide before making ground. He must find a place somewhere in the tortured hills below.

Suddenly Burke caught a gleam of white in the broken black hills—a sandy valley—a tiny, narrow interval in the desolation. A perilous place to land a plane, but he must make the attempt. He spiraled slowly down toward it—couldn't get into the wind, had to take it with the wind under his tail. God, it looked narrow! He held his breath as the precipitous walls swept up. It seemed his wings brushed them on each side. She bumped—bumped—

He let out a sharp cry. A jagged rock lay fair in the path of the wheels. He let his body go limp.

Crash!

The old B.E. leaped into the air like a startled hen—one of her wing tips struck the ravine wall. She turned about. And bang, she put her nose crashing into the basalt. For a matter of some minutes Burke sat in the cockpit seat trying to get his wind. He had put his weight against the safety belt to let it take the strain—a trick he had learned from previous crashes—but in spite of that the impetus had all but knocked him out.

Unfastening the belt, he climbed dazedly out of the plane, gazed at her ruefully. She was a hopeless wreck.

“And, by God,” he growled, “I'm in a hopeless mess.”

FROM where he stood it was a matter of seventy miles to Azrak oasis, with the burning Sirhan between. To attempt that on foot was suicide. But Jerry Burke had long ago planned what he would do if he were ever brought down in these parts. In the fuselage behind the flying seat were stored certain articles after which he now went. Item, one cotton cloak; item, one camel-hair *kaftan*; item, one brown *kafieh* with *agals*.

Having dragged these out, he proceeded to divest himself of his uniform and array himself in them. Then he took off his shoes and stockings. His feet and legs were as brown as an Arab's, for he had followed Lawrence in training to live exactly the Arab life. Having flung his uniform into the cockpit of the ship, he took his revolver, glasses, water bottle and iron rations from her, and having wet his tunic sleeve in gasoline, struck a match to it. Before he was clear of the valley the old B.E. was in flames.

He struck up over the hills in the direction of the

railway, looking for all the world a son of Ishmael. His intention was to return to Minifer and, in the guise of a native, steal or purchase a camel on which to make Azrak. He had also the hopes of running into Colonel Oldfield, who, with Abdulla el Zaagi, the captain of Lawrence's bodyguard, had gone off the night before on a raid against Amman, which town lay ten miles south of Minifer.

He was still a quarter of a mile from the line, and not yet in sight of it, when he heard far to the south the whistle of a locomotive. The daily train moving north. Evidently Oldfield's party hadn't been able to detain her. He pressed on. Finally, from the top of the hill overlooking the railway, he could see smoke some distance below. He clambered down the long, steep bank to the line, started southward along it. There was quite a stiff south to north grade here and he was not surprised when he finally caught sight of the oncoming train to see that she was laboring badly. He stood aside and watched her as she panted up and past. Two engines drew a long line of empty box and flat cars with three passenger cars away down at the end.

As the second engine passed the driver yelled something at him—the Turk's insult to the Bedu. Burke grinned back at him. His disguise was evidently good. But suddenly, as car after empty car went crawling by a thought leaped full-born into his brain. This train was going to Deraa. Once clear of the rise ahead the line ran downhill all the way. She would get there before Hussein ibn Zaid!

He leaped suddenly forward, grabbed the iron handrail on the rear of a passing truck and swung himself aboard. A few minutes later, between two cars, he was hanging on for dear life as the long train rattled and clanged down the grade toward Deraa. There was a wide grin on his dust-grimed face. He knew Deraa. He'd been in Deraa more than once. Hussein ibn Zaid hadn't got clear of him yet!



BUT though the scene from Deraa Station had all the familiarity of an old haunt, Burke could feel his nerves tingling as he dropped from the now stationary train and started across the wide, munition-piled square to the town. In spite of the fact that he had done all this before and had passed many a time for a native because of his familiarity with the Arab speech, it remained in the back of his head that if he were

recognized his fate would be swift and certain. Every sense wary, he entered the crowded streets of the busy Trans-Jordanian town and pressed through the mob of Turkish soldiers and bawling natives that surged in every direction. All the time he moved toward the southern suburbs of the town, and at last found himself in the long rue behind whose high stone walls lived the more prosperous merchants.

Finally he stopped in front of a gate and knocked. It swung open presently, and the gate man, recognizing him with a start, stepped back quickly and let him in. The door clanged to abruptly.

"Is Ali Bender within?"

"Yes, Sidi."

Burke strode across the flagged court and into the house. In the *makad* he found the corn merchant seated on the floor smoking an afternoon pipe. Ali leaped to his feet and greeted the airman cordially, yet with an uneasiness, realizing that danger had come to roost on his hearth again. In brief, terse sentences Burke explained the reason for his coming, and said in the end:

"We must prevent Hussein ibn Zaid from getting to Djevid Pasha. Hussein and his followers will be close to Deraa by this time."

Ali flung out his hands in a gesture of hopelessness. "Who am I, el Bourque, to cope with the jackals of the desert? I am a corn merchant—a man of peace."

Burke repeated grimly: "He must not get to Djevid with his information."

Suddenly the merchant's face cleared: "*Wellah*, Djevid is in Damascus today and will not return until the train arrives at midnight."

"That won't present Hussein spilling his soul to the Turkish staff in the meantime," growled Burke.

Ali Bender shrugged his shoulders again. If it was the will of Allah that the jackal was to talk he, Ali, could do nothing.

"Can't you get a crowd of your friends together and go out armed to meet him? He has only twenty men. You could seize him and bring him here," cried the airman.

But again Ali Bender shrugged. The peaceful citizens of Deraa were not of a kidney to go on such an expedition against lean Arab fighters from the desert.

From pacing the floor anxiously Burke let out an oath and said brusquely: "I will go up to the roof

and watch for his coming."

"Go with Allah," said Ali piously.

Leaning against the parapet of the flat-topped roof the airman gazed southward along the road. But though he stayed there an hour there came no sign of the Weled Ali. Finally, realizing that they must already have gotten into the town, he went below, growled at the still smoking merchant:

"They have slipped in while we were talking. Go, Ali, and get the talk of the bazaars. Find out where the devils are."

Not without reluctance the corn merchant rose and waddled away. Burke began to pace the *makad* again like a caged lion, fretting at the delay. From time to time he took a dried date from the bowl on the stand and munched it. Somehow, somehow he must put a spoke in Hussein ibn Zaid's wheels, but how he did not know. After an hour Ali Bender returned.

"The dog entered from the west, el Bourque," he said, "and came alone, leaving his men encamped beyond the railway in the hills. Rahail, the contractor, was at headquarters when he arrived there and heard his encounter with the chief of staff. 'Ho, fellow,' the dog cried, 'where is thy master, Djevid?' And when the Turk answered, 'In es Shem,' Hussein cursed into his beard. 'I have information from el Auruns,' he bellowed, 'all that is in el Auruns' mind I know.' The Turk said: 'Speak, O sheik!' But Hussein cried: 'I speak only to Djevid. And I speak only when Djevid lays gold at my feet.' They have given him lodging in the palace of Abd el Kader until Djevid returns. Verily, el Bourque, there remain four hours in which a man may work to stop his tongue."

Burke's eyes gleamed. Four hours! In that time he must find some way to stave off this disaster that faced the Arab Revolt. He swung sharply on Ali.

"Where is the palace of Abd el Kader?"

"Beyond the bazaars, to the north, el Bourque. A large house with lions at the gate."

"Come," said the airman, "show me the way."

THEY went out. Darkness had fallen by this time and with muffled heads they made their way through a maze of narrow, twisted lanes that were practically deserted save for mendicants already settling down for the night in the more sheltering doorways. At length they were through the bazaar, beyond which stretched an open square, and beyond this again a row of pretentious native

mansions surrounded by the inevitable high walls.

Halfway across the open space Ali Bender stopped, pointed with his staff and said: "That is Abd el Kader's palace." It was plain that Ali considered he had now done his bit.

Burke turned on him. "If I do not come back by dawn make inquiries of me in the morning and send whatever tidings there are to el Auruns."

"May Allah grant it that you return to el Auruns yourself with such tidings, el Bourque."

They shook hands. Ali Bender slipped away, wraith-like, into the darkness. Burke moved on toward the wall of the house that had been pointed out to him. He had still no plan in his head, was simply moving on toward some crisis which he would have to meet as best he could when it arose. But in the grim set of his jaw was evidence that he had made up his mind to tie Hussein ibn Zaid's tongue or perish in the attempt.

A Turkish sentry plodded along the wall that faced the row of mansions, for many of the Turkish staff had their quarters in this neighborhood. Burke waited until the fellow had got well down to the end of his beat and then, crouching low, dashed forward. With a leap that took him several feet into the air he got a grip on the top of the wall and quickly dragged himself over its parapet. Dropping into the garden beyond, he proceeded to push his way through palm trees, acacias and shrubbery toward the house.

A light shone from a window whose shutters had been thrown wide to let in the cool night breeze. Toward this he crept, but on reaching it found it some distance above his head. A vine climbed up the side of the house. He took hold of it, found it bore his weight, drew himself carefully up, peered in the corner of the window. On the floor within sat two men, a short, squat, evil-featured Arab, who would be el Kader, and Hussein ibn Zaid. They were smoking bubble-pipes and chatting. Burke caught odd words, but realized more from Abd el Kader's manner than from what he said that he was trying to pump the Bedouin. Hussein wasn't being pumped. That wily one trusted no man and knew that his host would doublecross him with the greatest of pleasure.

Suddenly Burke heard a sound behind him. Dropping from the vine, he flung himself on the ground close to the wall and lay there palpitating. The crunch-crunch on a stick on the gravel walk came ever nearer. The muttering of a voice in

guttural Arabic. Scarcely daring to breathe, he turned his head slightly, saw approaching a native with a long staff, one of those night watchmen the wealthier Arabs keep to guard their inner approaches. The fellow stopped directly opposite him, scarcely two yards away, and looked up at the window. The faint sound of voices within stirred in him that curiosity that is the mark of your true easterner. He took a couple of steps nearer, put his hand to his ear.

Supposing he, too, decided to climb the vine and further satisfy his curiosity! Tense, breathless, Burke's grip tightened on his revolver barrel. If need be that he had to come to grips with this fellow he must knock him out silently, and before he could make an outcry. There ensued a horrible two minutes of uncertainty. And then, still muttering under his breath, the fellow moved off.

Rising to his knees Burke wiped the cold sweat from his dripping face and let out a sigh of relief. Once more he climbed the vine. Abd el Kader and his guest had risen, the former was saying: "In the morning, O sheik, we will go to Djevid Pasha and you will tell him your story."

"*Aiee*, by Allah, and he will spread gold before the Weled Ali!" answered Hussein, wetting his narrow lips.

Abd el Kader took up the lamp and the two men moved out of the room. Hardly had the heavy curtains fallen behind them than Burke had drawn himself half in the window. A moment later he was standing in the dark room, listening tensely. He slipped across the floor stealthily, put his ear to the curtains. Voices were sounding fainter up the stairs and along an upper hall. He pushed through the curtains, crept along with a hand against the wall, until he came to steps.

Above a door opened.

"The sleep of Allah, O sheik."

"And the bounty of forgetfulness, O Abd el Kader."

The door closed. The light moved further along—disappeared.

Suddenly Burke saw his problem unwinding itself. Presently he would ascend the stairs, enter Hussein ibn Zaid's room, wake the fellow with his revolver to his head, bind and gag him and carry him back to Ali Bender's place. Ali would produce camels. Then away out of Deraa. One snag, and one only, continued to trouble him. Hussein's followers lay encamped beyond the railway. They,

also, must know Lawrence's plans. How could he deal with them single-handed?

It was a question he could not answer. He must go on with what lay at hand and let the more distant problem rest in the meantime.



A QUARTER of an hour later he stood outside the door that he had heard open and close in the hall above. The house lay shrouded in silence. Guest and host slept.

The airman's heart pounded against his breast. So much depended on the next few minutes. The slightest accident could spoil everything and put him into direst jeopardy. His hand went out stealthily toward the door, feeling for the handle. Suddenly he drew it back again, held his breath, listened intently. Had something moved behind him or was it his overstrained imagination? A minute passed. And slowly he got that ominous impression, that sensation that strikes some other than the ordinary senses, that he was not alone in that upper hall, that someone else in that upper hall knew he was there. He swung slowly around, his grip tight on his revolver.

Not a sound broke the silence. His straining eyes saw no movement. Minutes passed. Finally, he told himself that he was fancying things. And then the urgency of his business faced him toward the door again. This time his hand reached out, touched the handle—and then again he heard that faint flutter of movement. Too late he swung. A pair of iron arms went about him, pinioning his own arms to his side. A voice hissed:

"Yusef!"

Curtains parted up the hall. An Arab servant appeared carrying a lamp in one hand and a long-bladed knife in the other. At the same moment the door alongside opened and Hussein's face appeared in it.

"By the life of Allah, what is this?"

Although Burke had exerted his strength to the fullest he had not been able to break the grip of those iron arms. Suddenly they loosed—a hand found his wrist, twisted it, his revolver clattered to the floor. To his astonishment he found himself staring down into the evil face of the squat Abd el Kader. This potbellied, middle-aged town Arab had handled him as though he had been a child!

The servant held the light into his face.

Suddenly Hussein yelped: "By Allah and the

prophet of Allah, it is the Inglezi birdman, el Bourque!"

"What!" cried Abd el Kader. "That one?"

"No other, O father of miracles!"

"Then Allah be praised, the reward that Djevid has offered for his capture alive or dead is mine! Bind him, Yusef! And you, O sheik, watch the prowling Christian dog while I go to the headquarters of Djevid. By this time he has returned from Damascus. *Wellah*, I will not wait until morning lest he slip through my hands!"

Five minutes later Burke found himself standing in the *makad* below, his arms bound tightly to his side. In front of him on the divan sat the Arab sheik, and Hussein's crafty eyes were etched in cruelty. Abd el Kader had gone some minutes since into the night to bring a squad of Turkish gendarmerie. Under his breath the airman cursed steadily the damnable luck that had gotten him into this hole. He had failed utterly and disastrously. Within an hour he would pay the penalty of that failure.

"Yah!" the Arab taunted him. "The Inglezi are fools and the sons of fools—may their plans come to destruction! I, Hussein, have made a laughing stock of that little cock of the dunghill, el Auruns. And now I will see you, the dropper of the eggs of death, hang on the gibbet."

Burke forced a mirthless laugh. "The stupid talk in their pride, O sheik," he said, grimly. "But one day el Auruns and his followers will requite you fully for your treachery, dog that you are."

The Arab leaped to his feet, eyes blazing, the saliva slobbering from the corners of his thick-lipped, ugly mouth. In his hand he brandished his knife. "By Allah," he bellowed, "I'll cut your impudent tongue from your head!"

Suddenly his eye lighted on the lamp. A sinister grimace swept across his face. "*Aiee!*" he cried. "*Aiee!*—I shall have amusement! I will teach you to talk in folly to Hussein ibn Zaid!"

Crossing to the lamp, he laid the blade of his knife across the top of the chimney and turned the wick up further. With a start of horror Burke realized what he was up to. Torture!

He said grimly: "By the head of thy father, Hussein ib Zaid, if this comes to el Auruns' ear the terrors of gehenna will fall on you and your people!"

The Arab laughed, his lips twisting sinisterly over his dirty fangs of teeth. He lifted the knife

from the chimney, tested its heat, put it back again. The watching airman knew what was in store for him. When that knife had taken on sufficient heat it would be used to mark him, and in the process he would suffer the tortures of hell. The Arabs were past masters in this sort of thing, had nothing to learn.

Finally, Hussein took the knife up again, held it near to his cheek—chuckled—turned. “Now,” he cried, “now I will leave the mark of the Weled Ali upon the Christian pig!”

HE CAME closer. Standing a yard away, he moved the blade slowly toward Burke’s eyes. He would move it closer and closer until the heat seared through even closed eyelids, scorched the cornea, brought blindness.

Burke stood his ground, realized that to struggle would be only to increase the agony. Nearer—nearer—already the pain was beginning to strike in toward his brain. Another minute or two and—

Something moved beyond the Arab. Because of the burning knife so close to his eyes Burke saw only a shadow against the ceiling. But suddenly the knife blade was swept away. He found himself staring wide-eyed at the scene being enacted before him. A muffled gasp had croaked from Hussein ibn Zaid’s throat. His eyes darted from their sockets. And then a long knife blade flashed beneath his chin, opening his neck from ear to ear.

As he plunged forward at Burke’s feet, a well-known voice cried:

“*Wellah*, I am become a deliverer, el Bourque!”

Beyond the fallen Arab stood Abdulla el Zaagi, the captain of Lawrence’s bodyguard and one of the wildest, quick-witted rascals in Arabia, showing his teeth in a wide grin.

“How did you get here?” the astonished airman gasped.

“*Wellah*, el Bourque, this afternoon when I was returning with el Ollafeel and his party from Amman we saw your bird fighting two Turkish birds. We were then on the other side of the hills to east of the railway and on our way back to Azrak. When your bird came down we hurried into the hills to succor you, but, *wellah*, you had vanished and there was nothing but that burning bird. Then I saw your footprints on the sand and I said to el Ollafeel: ‘El Bourque has gone in disguise to Minifer to get a camel!’ And then I mounted my *hujun* and set off after you. By Allah, I stood

overlooking the railway shouting at the top of my voice when you leaped aboard the train. To el Ollafeel I said then: ‘He has gone to Deraa, on what business Allah knows, but I go after him!’ So I rode. And I rode straight to the house of Ali Bender, who told me you were here! But come, el Bourque, we must go!”

He stooped, picked the lifeless Weled Ali up and heaved him over his shoulder.

“What are you going to do with him?” Burke demanded.

“Bear him as a gift to el Auruns!” chuckled the grinning Arab. “To the end, *wellah*, that the Weled Ali hear of it!”

Out through the window. Through the garden. Over the wall. They were hurrying across the square when the sound of voices behind halted them. A group of shadows moved toward the house of Abd el Kader. Djevid and his staff! Before they reached the far side of the square the hue and cry rose behind them. The airman’s escape had been discovered. They hurried on to the house of Ali Bender.

A quarter of an hour later they started out of the corn merchant’s yard on foot, and leading the Zaagi’s camel, across whose back, trussed up in a large canvas bag, rode Hussein ibn Zaid. But they had hardly got their nose through the gate when the shouts of soldiers hurrying down the road toward them drove them back. Ali Bender shot the gate to nervously behind them, and the Zaagi, turning on Burke, hissed: “You shall have to ride, el Bourque, as Hussein rides. Go, my uncle”—he swung on Ali—“and fetch another bag.”

Burke had ridden in strange fashions, but never in one so strange as this. Tied up inside the big canvas bag and swaying against the *hujun*’s ribs, he was balanced on the other side by the Weled Ali sheik—the living and the dead—a grim cargo!

Up the street the Zaagi led his mount “Yakh, O my uncle!” he encouraged it.

Swaying with the camel’s movements and sweating from the close confinement, Burke kept wondering if after all he should have allowed the Zaagi to tie him up this way. He felt absolutely helpless—was absolutely helpless—could do nothing. A sense of apprehension—of dread—took possession of him. Through the night he could hear in various parts of the town the cries of the Turkish soldiers who were searching for him. The approaches to the town would be guarded. Could

they get through?

The Zaagi, under the guise of talking to his mount, cried out: "A stout heart, O my uncle! We are close to the square by the railway station. A little further now and there will be rest for tired bones."

And then suddenly the rattle of a gun and a voice: "Who goes?"

"Bedu!" the Zaagi replied.

"Halt!"

The camel jerked to a stop.

"Who are you?"

"I," replied the quick-witted Zaagi impudently, "am of the Weled Ali and return to my encampment beyond the railway." Burke had told him about the Arab encampment and the clever fellow was using it after his own fashion to their advantage.

"What have you got in those bags?"

"Forage! Men must eat, O soldier!"

Suddenly Burke got an awful prod in the stomach—a prod that almost knocked his wind out. The sentry had banged the butt of his rifle against the bag in which he was trussed.

"You are Weled Ali, eh?" exclaimed the Turk. "By Allah, your sheik has disappeared with a captured Inglezi birdman—and there has been blood spilt."

"What!" yelled the Zaagi. "By the truth of Allah, I go to the encampment to rouse the tribe. They shall know whose blood it is that has been spilt. *Yakh*, O my uncle!" He gave the camel a thump on the rump, and the beast lurched forward, the soldier's derisive laugh following.

"*Aiee*, O my uncle," said the Zaagi softly a little further on, "for stupidity, the Turk!"

Presently the beast lumbered up and over the railway embankment, and Abdulla jerked her to a stop. A minute later Burke was free, wiping the sweat from his face. With a gasp of relief he said: "Thank God, that's over!"



THEY were at the foot of the hills beyond the railway. Suddenly he said: "We must find the Weled Ali, Abdulla! You say el Ollafeel and his men are on the other side of the hills. Let us hurry on and join them. They will help us search."

Abdulla shook his head. "It is too late for that, el Bourque. We cannot come by them short of

another hour. By that time it will be dawn. Let us leave these Weled Ali to their dreams! Have we not got their sheik?"

But Burke said grimly: "We can't leave them while they have tongues in their head. If we do not take them with us all my work has been in vain."

The Zaagi shrugged impatiently. Arab-like, now that the excitement of the escape was over, he was all for the easiest way out. Burke stood there for a moment with his chin in his hand. And then he said: "Give me your rifle. We go to find the Weled Ali. Come softly after me."

There were three likely places on the western slopes of these hills where the Arab tribesmen might be encamped—three sets of wells. Burke led the way to the nearest, left the Zaagi a quarter of a mile short of it, and crept on his hands and knees. No houses of hair encircled the hard-baked hollow. Returning to the Arab, he ordered him to follow and made his way up the jagged basalt rocks towards the higher well. But it, too, was vacant. By this time a full half hour had passed and the sky above them was taking on the faint transparency of the dawn.

Time was pressing. A little while now and the Arabs would waken—when that happened it would be too late to carry out the plan he had in mind. He hurried on up the hill to the third well—the Zaagi coming up well in the rear with the camel. And suddenly, topping a slight rise, he saw what he wanted. Tents in the shallow valley below. Camels tethered off to one side. He hurried back to the Zaagi, told him to leave his *hujun* there and led the way up again.

"We'll creep in on them while they sleep and put the gun to their heads. But first, before we waken them, we must snaffle their rifles. Come!"

On hands and knees they made their way slowly towards the tents below. Every minute the sky was getting lighter. A slip now—a prematurely wakened Weled Ali—and the game would be up with success a hair's breadth away. At the opening of the first tent Burke turned, pointed on to the next one, and, when the Zaagi slipped past him, stuck his head gingerly inside. Three shadowy figures slept side by side. He crawled further. The air was fetid from sleeping breath.

He could hear his heart hammering again, could feel his body trembling. One thought kept ringing through his brain: "You mustn't fumble now!" On he moved. At the sleeper's heads he found what he

sought—three rifles—Lee Enfield's supplied by Lawrence to these treacherous devils. With infinite caution he took hold of them, started dragging them towards the entrance. He was almost out when one of the sleepers grunted—turned uneasily on his side. He flattened out—waited with taut breath. Would the fellow wake?

With a gorgeous sensation of relief he heard the fellow's breathing become regular again—crept outside. Ten minutes later they had a pile of rifles in the open ground between the tents—nineteen of them.

"What now—into the well?" The Zaagi pointed towards the three holes a dozen yards further on. But Burke shook his head. These Lee Infield's were too valuable to throw away. He said: "Come on—we'll waken them now!"

The Zaagi leapt with a laugh to his feet. "*Ayah ho, ya Weled Ali!*" he cried.

Commotion within the tents. A voice: "It is Hussein returned!" Men with sleep in their eyes tumbled out—let out sudden squawks of amazement at the sight of Burke and the Zaagi—and came to a halt.

Burke said grimly, his rifle pointed at them: "We march, O Weled Ali, back to Azrak! And you go on foot!"

In the rapidly increasing light the cornered tribesmen glanced furtively from side to side for some avenue of escape. The presence of the Zaagi told them plainly that they were in for trouble, but, used to trouble, these sons of the desert were ready to seize any loophole.

"Go and lose the camels," Burke said to Abdulla, "We will drive them before us."

While he kept the tribesmen covered with his rifle the Zaagi moved towards the camels. Suddenly, the latter let out an exclamation of alarm. He got close to the edge of the plateau in which the wells lay and could look over it down the narrow ravine that led towards Deraa, a hundred feet down which his own camel stood browsing at the dead shrubs of acacia. Up that ravine, and less than a quarter of a mile away, came a company of Turkish cavalry that had evidently been sent from the town to search the hills for Burke. He rushed back and told the airman. A tremor of excitement passed through the listening Weled Ali—and their dark eyes gleamed at the thought of approaching revenge.

"Come," cried Abdulla, "we must seize two of

their camels and fly!"

Burke backed away from the watching Arabs and glanced over the edge. At the first sight of the approaching Turks it seemed that there was nothing else to do but follow the Zaagis' advice. They certainly couldn't get away with the Weled Ali, who would have to travel on foot, since to allow them to mount their camels would be folly. He turned and said to Abdulla: "If we run away now we have failed. These fellows will tell the Turks of el Auruns plans. By Allah, if we didn't have the treacherous devils at our backs we might hold those Turks for a while!"

THE Zaagis' face screwed itself into thought. He turned—measured the waiting tribesmen with a fierce glance—and then suddenly he dashed towards the wells, and glanced over the rim of the nearest. It was the dry season and not more than a few feet of water remained in their bottoms fifteen feet down.

Suddenly he turned with a laugh. "Come, Weled Ali!" he yelled.

The Weled Ali glanced at one another doubtfully, held their place. Abdulla rushed at them furiously with clubbed rifle. "*Wellah*, have I not spoken!"

While the bewildered Burke watched, the Zaagi drove the tribesmen to the edge of the nearest well. "Jump!" he cried.

Suddenly Burke knew—and a chuckle rumbled from him. Within the next minute there was not a sign of Hussein ibn Zaid's followers. They stood to their knees in water cursing at the bottom of the three wells.

In the meantime Burke had dragged the seized rifles to the edge of the plateau. By the time the Zaagi reached his side he was leaning over the edge. As the quick-witted Arab dropped beside him his gun spoke down the defile. By this time the Turks were little over a hundred yards below, and coming single file up the narrow high-walled path that was the only approach to the wells. As Burke's shot splashed against the rocky wall beside him the officer at their head halted, holding up the line. As the Zaagi's rifle spat his horse crumpled under him.

Burke turned to the Zaagi grinning: "With a dozen like you, Abdulla, I'd guarantee to outwit the whole Turkish army."

"Verily, there was a wise midwife with my mother when I was born," retorted the Zaagi with a

laugh.

The Turks began to spread out, clambering up the walls of the ravine. It was quite obviously their idea to creep up in a wide semicircle, finding what shelter they could. For the next ten minutes the two rifles at the edge of the plateau barked steadily—and more than one still figure on that scarred hillside attested to the soundness of their aim. Yet all the time the Turks came steadily nearer. Outnumbered forty to one, Burke realized at the end of the half hour that sooner or later the enemy would get close enough to rush, knew that the weight of numbers would inevitably tell. And yet he kept there firing, hoping against hope.

Another quarter of an hour. Six more Turks lay stiff under the risen sun, but that semicircle of doom came steadily closer—was now at the nearest point, little more than a hundred feet away. He cursed the scattered boulders that hid them, behind which they were able to make their approach. Suddenly, a shout rose—a cry of command. The Turks rose to a man, started forward on the dash up the remainder of the steep slope.

The two defenders poured a steady volley of lead into them. The sweat rolled down their faces. They had no time to reload now and as soon as the

magazine of one rifle was emptied they threw it aside and snatched up another from the pile beside them. For another minute it was desperate fighting, but finally the attackers, unable to stand longer under the murderous fire, dropped to what shelter they could get fifty feet below. Another rush and they would reach their objective.

And then suddenly, out of the hills behind him, rose a wild Arab yell.

"Beni Sakr . . . Beni Sakr!"

The battle cry of Lawrence's Arab allies. Down the hill they rushed with an English Colonel at their head—Oldfield! It was the party the Zaagi had left last night on the other side of the hills, and who had come this way in the hopes of picking him up on his way out of Deraa. A moment later they swept on to the succor of the two defenders just as the nearest Turk was within a yard of the swinging butt of Burke's rifle. Presently, the remnants of a company of Turkish cavalry was on its way pell-mell towards Deraa. And then the long cavalcade of victorious Arabs rose eastward, with nineteen bound Weled Ali and a dead sheik riding before them—and the wild song of the warrior on their lips.