

The Red Mirage

A Story of the French Legion
in Algiers

By I. A. R. WYLIE

All rights reserved. The Bobbs-Merrill Co.

SYNOPSIS.

—6—

When Sylvia Omney, a beautiful English girl, returns from a search in Algiers for her missing brother, her lover, Richard Farquhar, finds she has fallen in love with Captain Arnaud of the Foreign Legion. In Captain Sower's room Farquhar gets deliberately drunk, but when young Preston loses all his money to Lowe, a shady character, Farquhar forces Sower to have Preston's L. O. U.'s returned to him. Farquhar is helped to his rooms by Gabrielle Smith. Sower demands an apology. Refused, he forces Farquhar to resign his commission in return for possession of Farquhar's father's written confession that he had murdered Sower's father. Gabrielle saves Farquhar from suicide. Farquhar tells his mother that he is going to find his father if the latter is alive. To shield Arnaud, Sylvia's fiance, he professes to have stolen war plans and tells the real culprit why he did so. As Richard Nameless he joins the Foreign Legion and meets Sylvia again. Mme. Arnaud meets Colonel Destinn. Farquhar meets Sylvia and Gabrielle, and learns from Corporal Goetz of the colonel's cruelty. Arnaud becomes a drunkard and opium smoker. Sylvia becomes friendly with Colonel Destinn. Arnaud becomes jealous of Farquhar.

Why should Richard Nameless refrain from telling Sylvia the blunt truth about his great honor sacrifice for her sake? She is a shallow woman who ruthlessly threw him over for another. Do such women deserve the fine consideration the world owes its best women?

CHAPTER VI—Continued.

Richard Nameless turned back to the desert. The Arabs had risen and an elder was praying aloud, his aged, tremulous voice leading the richer unison of the worshipers behind him.

"With my face to Mecca and with a sincere heart I offer my prayers to Allah!"

Mirage! For those dark-faced desert children Mecca opened the gates of Paradise; for this dream of unknown happiness they waited and prayed, and when their time came passed through the great shadow with fearless, triumphant confidence.

He went back to his work. With fierce, dogged energy he pulled away the deep-rooted weeds and brought a pathetic look of care and order into his corner of the wilderness. For a moment he lingered over the grave which Goetz had tended. The bald yet eloquent inscription touched him. He wondered vaguely who Philip Grey had been; if he, too, had paid a price and in the last hours of horror had still been satisfied.

Two women had entered the cemetery. Their white-clad figures flashed



You a Traitor! Why?

gaily in between the dark graves, and a clear, silvery laugh mingled with the final Arab prayer—

"La Ilaha illa 'Ilaah."

The younger woman stopped an instant and pointed with the tip of her parasol at the broken remnant of a cross.

"Look at these beads! Aren't they ridiculous? And the inscription—just a number, like a convict's." She glanced back over her shoulder at her companion. "Miss Smith, I believe you are frightened. Do you think there are ghosts here? Well, perhaps there are, but I don't mind."

As yet the man standing immobile, hidden amid the forest of crosses, had escaped her notice. But he had heard her now, and shadowy and ghostlike

enough in the dying light, awaited her approach. At the foot of the Englishman's grave she hesitated. The inscription attracted her. With puckered brows she spelled out the badly cut letters, her soft voice touched with just the faintest ironical interest.

"Philip Grey—No. 3112—Foreign Legion."

Then she looked up involuntarily and saw the man who watched her, his hand gripping the head of the cross.

It was very quiet now. The Arab prayer was silenced, and the white figures of the worshippers had vanished in the long olive grove leading back to Sidi-bel-Abbes. Sylvia Arnaud's voice, when she spoke at last, sounded strained and harsh in the absolute quiet.

"Richard?" and then again, "Richard Farquhar!"

He shook his head. "Not Richard Farquhar now," he answered. "Richard Nameless."

She seemed not to understand. Her lips were a little parted in the expression that he remembered. She looked pitifully frightened and incredulous.

"I am sorry to have frightened you," he said gently. "I did not mean that you should ever see me—but you came so suddenly, and out in this desolate place you were the last person I expected. Forgive me."

"Yes—yes, it is a desolate place—it makes me frightened. But I was told it was something I ought to see—and a few minutes ago I wasn't frightened at all. Now—I see ghosts everywhere."

"I am one of them," he said.

She brushed her hand over her forehead as though indeed trying to dispel some terrifying specter. Her feeble effort to regain her previous laughing courage failed. She was white and trembling.

"I am No. 4005 of the Foreign Legion," he said. "Is there anything else that you need understand?"

"Yes—I must. I feel as though one of us two were mad. The Foreign Legion is just the last resort for all the riffraff of the world—criminals, gamblers, cheats—"

"I am one of them."

She was silent a moment, looking at him with large, thoughtful eyes, out of which the fear had passed. When she spoke again her voice was full of a smothered tenderness.

"I have thought of you so much lately, Richard. I couldn't understand why it was. You haunted me. It was as though something in the place made me think of you. I remembered all your little movements, the way you looked. I seemed to see you in others. I grew almost—how shall I say?—homesick for you."

"You should have forgotten," he interrupted roughly. "I have gone out of your life. Look upon me now as what I am now—a mere shadow."

"Richard, what have you done?"

The tenderness had deepened. He clenched his hands in a movement of uncontrollable pain.

"Hasn't your husband told you?"

"No. We never mention your name. To me it is sacred."

"For God's sake, Sylvia—" He straightened up, his black brows marking a straight line across his face. "I was turned out of the army for betraying my country's secrets."

"You—a traitor! Why?"

The monosyllable was like the stab of a knife in the silence.

"For a woman."

She drew back. Her eyes were dark pools in which he saw no expression.

"What woman?"

He bowed gravely.

"Madame Arnaud, I have still honor enough left to remember the discretion imposed upon honorable men."

She turned away from him. He could see nothing but her profile, the exquisite, almost flawless profile, cut against a background of mingling gold and emerald. Her hands rested crossed on the handle of her parasol. She had grown suddenly very calm and deliberate.

"I told you that I had thought of you, Richard," she said quietly. "I did not tell you how I thought of you. Do you remember our last meeting, or has that been eclipsed by other more lovely memories?"

"Sylvia, be silent! I dare not listen to you. You don't know what you are saying—"

"I know what I am saying, and you must listen. When a man destroys something, it is no more than just that he should see what he has done. You have destroyed something—an ideal, a dream, my faith in honesty and goodness. You were the one man I be-

lieved and trusted. And now you are like the rest—nothing—nothing." She turned away. "I wish to God I had not met you, Richard."

He did not attempt to detain her. He stood there like a man struck to death by a treacherous blow, and she went on down the path to the gate where her companion waited for her. There she paused for a moment.

"I want you to go back to that man," she said carelessly. "He is an old acquaintance who went wrong, and it might be rather unpleasant for my husband if he grew importunate. Tell him that on no account must he speak to me again. It is very regrettable, but mistakes of that sort bring their own punishment. You understand, Miss Smith?"

"Yes, Madame Arnaud."

"Thank you. I will wait for you outside the public cemetery. It is getting dark—"

Miss Smith went slowly back along the narrow gravel path. The man had not moved. He was gazing out on to the fiery waste now dying beneath the extinguishing mantle of the night, and neither heard nor saw. She touched him on the arm.

"Mr. Farquhar?"

He turned slowly and stared at her. Though he recognized her, his face was blank and hard and terrible.

"Miss Smith?"

"Yes, Gabrielle Smith. You see, after all, we have met again. Won't you shake hands?"

His eyes wandered past her down the path.

"No. You ought not to be speaking to me. A respectable woman does not speak to a common soldier of the Legion."

"Doesn't she? How interesting! One is always learning in this wonderful

place."

"I am sorry to have frightened you," he said gently. "I did not mean that you should ever see me—but you came so suddenly, and out in this desolate place you were the last person I expected. Forgive me."

"Yes—yes, it is a desolate place—it makes me frightened. But I was told it was something I ought to see—and a few minutes ago I wasn't frightened at all. Now—I see ghosts everywhere."

"I am one of them," he said.

She brushed her hand over her forehead as though indeed trying to dispel some terrifying specter. Her feeble effort to regain her previous laughing courage failed. She was white and trembling.

"I am No. 4005 of the Foreign Legion," he said. "Is there anything else that you need understand?"

"Yes—I must. I feel as though one of us two were mad. The Foreign Legion is just the last resort for all the riffraff of the world—criminals, gamblers, cheats—"

"I am one of them."

She was silent a moment, looking at him with large, thoughtful eyes, out of which the fear had passed. When she spoke again her voice was full of a smothered tenderness.

"I have thought of you so much lately, Richard. I couldn't understand why it was. You haunted me. It was as though something in the place made me think of you. I remembered all your little movements, the way you looked. I seemed to see you in others. I grew almost—how shall I say?—homesick for you."

"You should have forgotten," he interrupted roughly. "I have gone out of your life. Look upon me now as what I am now—a mere shadow."

"Richard, what have you done?"

The tenderness had deepened. He clenched his hands in a movement of uncontrollable pain.

"Hasn't your husband told you?"

"No. We never mention your name. To me it is sacred."

"For God's sake, Sylvia—" He straightened up, his black brows marking a straight line across his face. "I was turned out of the army for betraying my country's secrets."

"You—a traitor! Why?"

The monosyllable was like the stab of a knife in the silence.

"For a woman."

She drew back. Her eyes were dark pools in which he saw no expression.

"What woman?"

He bowed gravely.

"Madame Arnaud, I have still honor enough left to remember the discretion imposed upon honorable men."

She turned away from him. He could see nothing but her profile, the exquisite, almost flawless profile, cut against a background of mingling gold and emerald. Her hands rested crossed on the handle of her parasol. She had grown suddenly very calm and deliberate.

"I told you that I had thought of you, Richard," she said quietly. "I did not tell you how I thought of you. Do you remember our last meeting, or has that been eclipsed by other more lovely memories?"

"Sylvia, be silent! I dare not listen to you. You don't know what you are saying—"

"I know what I am saying, and you must listen. When a man destroys something, it is no more than just that he should see what he has done. You have destroyed something—an ideal, a dream, my faith in honesty and goodness. You were the one man I be-

lieved and trusted. And now you are like the rest—nothing—nothing." She turned away. "I wish to God I had not met you, Richard."

He did not attempt to detain her. He stood there like a man struck to death by a treacherous blow, and she went on down the path to the gate where her companion waited for her. There she paused for a moment.

"I want you to go back to that man," she said carelessly. "He is an old acquaintance who went wrong, and it might be rather unpleasant for my husband if he grew importunate. Tell him that on no account must he speak to me again. It is very regrettable, but mistakes of that sort bring their own punishment. You understand, Miss Smith?"

"Yes, Madame Arnaud."

"Thank you. I will wait for you outside the public cemetery. It is getting dark—"

Miss Smith went slowly back along the narrow gravel path. The man had not moved. He was gazing out on to the fiery waste now dying beneath the extinguishing mantle of the night, and neither heard nor saw. She touched him on the arm.

"Mr. Farquhar?"

He turned slowly and stared at her. Though he recognized her, his face was blank and hard and terrible.

"Miss Smith?"

"Yes, Gabrielle Smith. You see, after all, we have met again. Won't you shake hands?"

His eyes wandered past her down the path.

"No. You ought not to be speaking to me. A respectable woman does not speak to a common soldier of the Legion."

"Doesn't she? How interesting! One is always learning in this wonderful

place."

"I am sorry to have frightened you," he said gently. "I did not mean that you should ever see me—but you came so suddenly, and out in this desolate place you were the last person I expected. Forgive me."

"Yes—yes, it is a desolate place—it makes me frightened. But I was told it was something I ought to see—and a few minutes ago I wasn't frightened at all. Now—I see ghosts everywhere."

"I am one of them," he said.

She brushed her hand over her forehead as though indeed trying to dispel some terrifying specter. Her feeble effort to regain her previous laughing courage failed. She was white and trembling.

"I am No. 4005 of the Foreign Legion," he said. "Is there anything else that you need understand?"

"Yes—I must. I feel as though one of us two were mad. The Foreign Legion is just the last resort for all the riffraff of the world—criminals, gamblers, cheats—"

"I am one of them."

She was silent a moment, looking at him with large, thoughtful eyes, out of which the fear had passed. When she spoke again her voice was full of a smothered tenderness.

"I have thought of you so much lately, Richard. I couldn't understand why it was. You haunted me. It was as though something in the place made me think of you. I remembered all your little movements, the way you looked. I seemed to see you in others. I grew almost—how shall I say?—homesick for you."

"You should have forgotten," he interrupted roughly. "I have gone out of your life. Look upon me now as what I am now—a mere shadow."

"Richard, what have you done?"

The tenderness had deepened. He clenched his hands in a movement of uncontrollable pain.

"Hasn't your husband told you?"

"No. We never mention your name. To me it is sacred."

"For God's sake, Sylvia—" He straightened up, his black brows marking a straight line across his face. "I was turned out of the army for betraying my country's secrets."

"You—a traitor! Why?"

The monosyllable was like the stab of a knife in the silence.

"For a woman."

She drew back. Her eyes were dark pools in which he saw no expression.

"What woman?"

He bowed gravely.

"Madame Arnaud, I