

# Africa Waits

by Ahmed Abdullah  
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THE STORY: Lincoln Elliot, American, has just been made military governor of a French colony in Central Africa. Long ago he had enlisted in the Foreign Legion following a bitter quarrel with his father over a never-do-well half-brother, Raoul, and this is the climax of his career. But as he sits alone that night, reflecting on the important job ahead of him, the chant of the African drums awakens old yearnings.

By HASSANYIEH  
CHAPTER II

HE remembered how, years ago, in this same town of Moundville, promoted to sergeant and with quite a little free time on his hands, he had on occasion deliberately forgotten that he was an American, a Christian. Remembered how he had mixed with the Moslem natives, often, when he was on furlough, for days at a time wearing their clothes, eating their food, fearing their fears, hoping their hopes, dreaming their dreams and—oh, yes—sinning their sins.

Nobody, neither his comrades nor his Moslem friends, had ever known that Lincoln Elliot, sergeant in the Foreign Legion, and Terek el-Medjahiri, the young Arab from far-off Syria—"Allah! Allah! What a queer accent these Syrians have!"—who occasionally wandered into town, were one and the same.

Yes, he remembered. Remembered the color of it. Color of gold. Color of blood. Color of passion.

Remembered the scent of it, a mingling of musk and sweat, rose-oil and garlic.

Remembered the life of it, shameless, untrammelled, savagely, gloriously free.

And, as he remembered, he felt in his heart an unrest that set his nerves to tingling.

He had already poured a generous two fingers of whiskey, when, drowning the chant of the drums, there came from a near Arab house a confused symphony of voices, unrestrained Oriental laughter, high-pitched yells, the tinkle-tinkle-tinkle of a woman's glass bracelets, a Negro's clikety, jingly talk. The sounds leaped up like fragments of some half-forgotten melody; they mocked him—and tempted him . . . and, suddenly, he laughed.

He laughed, perhaps, at Africa. Perhaps at his own self.

"Free!" he thought. "Free, once more, for the last time! To the devil with duties and responsibilities—for the space of one night!"

And he left the veranda and, walking on tiptoe, went to his bedroom.

HE listened. The house was quiet. The servants were asleep. His second-in-command and good friend, Capt. Robert Pelletier, also of the Legion, who had the room next to his, was snoring heartily.

He locked the door, pulled down the window blinds, lit a lamp, undressed.

Feeling very much like a conspirator in some screen melodrama, he opened a trunk which held some of his more intimate belongings. He looked at the contents, smiled, went to work.

Studying his face in the mirror, he found it burned a clear mahogany by the tropical sun of many seasons. Given the right costume, he could pass anywhere for a desert Arab. Only his mustache was too military, too long. So, in the proper Moslem style, he clipped it away from the lips and shaved the corners.

Then, with agile fingers that had not forgotten the trick of it, he crowned his head with a white cotton skullcap and tied over it the *kufiyah*, the large, square silk



Cautiously he left the room, the noise, walked out into the street, lost himself in the dense, trooping shadows cast by the Mosque of Swords.

kerchief of dull red with a bright orange border from which drooped colored tassels that reached his waist. He fitted the *kufiyah* close to the back of his head with the help of the *askal*, or twisted hair rope, and pulled it out in a peak protruding over his forehead so that it shaded his eyes and gave to his countenance that truculent expression on which true desert men pride themselves.

He dressed his body in a simple white cotton shirt, tight-sleeved, open in front, which covered him from head to foot and was girt by a handsome shawl. He struck a crooked, silver-handled *jambiyah* dagger into its folds. Over it all he threw a voluminous burnoose of camel's hair—"good against cold, good against heat," say the Arabs—and inserted his bare feet into yellow leather slippers.

He was about to leave the room; stopped suddenly on the threshold. Something—he thought—was missing from his costume. He frowned, wondered. Then he knew what it was.

IN former years when, for the sake of the adventure, the thrill, he had mingled with the Moslem natives, there had been one thing which had acted as a talisman. It had been important, had opened certain doors. Today its value was merely sentimental. Still, just because it was sentimental, he wanted it.

So again, he groped in the trunk and found a broad bracelet of hammered iron, silver-inlaid with Kufic characters. He took it out, looked at it, a boyish, rather self-conscious smile curling his lips.

He remembered the first occasion on which he had worn it. Remembered how, as Terek el-Medjahiri, the Syrian Arab, he had joined the dervish Lodge of the Bi Hassanyieh, passing with aching limbs and fear-chilled

heart through the initiation ordeal of fire and water, of steel and rope, of scorpion and snake; had thus become a member of the Lodge and learned its secret passwords.

It was—or, rather, had been—a Moslem society, admitting both men and women. For years it had been powerful in Central Africa; had, finally, become too powerful. For its leaders had begun to mix politics with the religious and mystic rites. Relying on the superstitious awe with which the Negroes regarded them, they had taken an active interest in anti-European intrigues.

So the French government had stepped in. The Lodge had been declared illegal. Many of the members had been jailed and more exiled. And when, some weeks earlier, on the eve of his departure, Lincoln had conferred in London with General de Gaulle and Winston Churchill, he had been given a mass of confidential information in regard to the equatorial colony which he was to rule—whom to trust and whom not to trust, whom to flatter and whom to threaten, whom to bribe with gold and whom with honors and whom—oh, yes!—to liquidate, if need be—the Bi Hassanyieh had not even been mentioned.

The Lodge, no doubt of it, had been dispersed. Its power was gone. It was today no more than a pale memory. Still, here was its talisman, the iron bracelet; and why shouldn't he wear it?

So he slipped it on his wrist. He extinguished the lamp. Cautiously he left the room, the house, walked out into the street, lost himself in the dense, trooping shadows cast by the Mosque of Swords.

Once more, for the last time, he would dip into the secret river of Islamic life; would forget, for the space of a few hours, the crushing burden which Fate had put upon his shoulders.

(To Be Continued)

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## Our Boarding House



**Bomber Crash Kills Seven, Injures Two**

BAKERSFIELD, Calif., July 5 (AP)—Seven men were killed and two injured, a sheriff's deputy reported, when a heavy army bomber crashed and partially burned near the banks of the Kern river about three miles northeast of here early Monday.

The deputy, Phil Munding, said one of the injured apparently was in critical condition, and that the other seemed suffering mainly from shock. The pair evidently were thrown clear of the wreckage when the ship crashed, he said. No names were available.

Army authorities immediately took charge and declined all comment. The plane was believed to have been from the Salinas air base, and to have taken off from Kern county airport a few moments before the crash.

**FUNNY BUSINESS**

"It used to be fish, but now it's the cucumbers he's raising!"

