

We buried the mine only shallowly as we were disturbed midway through the operation by the vibrations rumbling down the tracks which signalled an approaching locomotive. Hurriedly we brushed the device over with sand and scurried down the embankment to the shingle bed of the wadi. Hamad trailed the wires and Asaf kicked dust and dirt over them. It was a poor job and if we had had the time I would have had them take up the whole apparatus and begin again. Unfortunately we lacked the luxury. The Turks on the train would surely have seen us if we had tried to defuse the device and wait for a later train. Cursing the Hejaz Railway that seemed these days to be my constant goad and irritant, I ushered the excitable Arabs into hiding behind a row of low vegetation. Though I could see them itching for the off, no-one broke cover before the moment came.

I took a position on the ridge to the south where I had a good view of the sweep of the tracks. The column of steam from the locomotive shone magnificent gold in the afternoon sun. Adhub brought me the exploder and together we watched the train approach. The locomotive was one of the bad wood-fired ones, clanking with difficulty up the slope and straining to drag along its train of trucks. The first seven were open-topped and crowded with Turkish troops. They slouched either through ill-discipline or tiredness in the afternoon heat, their rifles held loosely. Behind were a number of box-waggons and officers' coaches. I pushed down the handle of the exploder and was delighted by the terrific explosion. Mud and sand spouted into the sky and the noise of shrieking and tearing metal was tremendous.

Scrabbling to the brow of the ridge I squinted through the smoke and dust of the explosion. To my great satisfaction the blast had caught the locomotive perfectly and thrown it from the rails. It lay draped on its side down the slope of the embankment, its boiler torn into a ragged tangle of sooty ironwork by the force of the explosion. The drivers and several Turk officers lay dead around it. Much of the rest of the train was badly derailed behind it. It lay all at angles along the track, zig-zagging into the distance. Soldiers began to spill dazed and sluggish from the upturned trucks. I got to my feet and waved the signal to Hamad. With a thrilled cry of 'God is great!' he led the Beni Sakhr from their hiding place and they fell upon the enemy in huge uproar and excitement. As ever they wasted ammunition terribly in their onslaught and spared neither living nor dead as they ransacked the stricken train for gold and loot.

Annoyed by their disorder, I ran down the slope, shouting at them. Some of the Turks had recovered their senses enough to take shelter behind debris and in the remains of the coaches, from where they took pot-shots at us with their rifles and pistols. The Arabs quickly fell back into cover and swiftly found their own range. The exchange of fire went on for several minutes, during which time I felt a number of bullets graze my shoulders and arms. When I came to check afterwards I found the drapery of my robes riddled with holes and had recourse once again to wonder at my luck - good or ill. Among the Turks I spied a fat officer with prodigious moustaches hiding in the shattered remains of a saloon-car decorated with flags. Whenever one of Hamad's men got close he would snipe at him with his pistol, but for the most part, like a sensible coward he kept his head down. I pointed him out to Adhub and we plugged away at him until he dropped. Taking the opportunity to advance, I recognised his insignia and

reckoned him to be Emre Mehmet Pasha, a colonel in the Eighth Army Corps and a trusted adviser to Mehmed Jemal Pasha.

It was then that I spotted what I took to be German officers cowering within the saloon-car. Even at this distance and begrimed as they were with dirt I could make out the whiteness of their skin. As they realised Emre Mehmet was dead, one took the other by the arm and started to lead them out into the sunlight, waving a white handkerchief aloft. To my surprise I saw that both were civilians, the one an elderly gentleman with a fearsome shock of white hair and the aristocratic look I knew well from my time among the senior staff at Cairo. The other was a girl - barely more than a child she seemed to me at first glance, though I quickly realised she could not be all that much younger than myself. She was small, with yellow hair and a finely-featured face that made me at once nostalgic for the more subtle lands of Europe.

Adhub raised his rifle to shoot them down, but I forced his aim down, cursing his stupidity and shouting at him that these were obviously not Turks. I saw no other civilian passengers among the survivors of the train so assumed that the pair must be emissaries from Berlin. Probably sent by the politicians to keep an eye on their Ottoman allies. I realised at once that Allenby would welcome the opportunity to question two such captives. Apart from that, I must confess, after so long alone among the Bedu the prospect of any European company filled me with excitement. I trained my pistol on them and called in German for them to remain still and raise their hands. The girl did so at once. The man scratched at the back of his neck and pulled a face of irritation before calling back in cultured English tones,

‘Yes, well there’s really no need for that, old fellow. We’re as much enemies of the Kaiser as you are. In fact, if you hadn’t come along when you did we were facing a rather sticky situation.’

‘But he’s English!’ the girl exclaimed in surprise. This caught me off-guard, for I had gathered there was hardly a white man in Arabia who had not heard of the fabled English officer sent to rouse the Arab revolt. The man too was evidently surprised, for he reproached her, albeit with evident affection:

‘Really, Jo? Don’t you know your history? This is the Hejaz, 1917.’ He turned to me and smiled respectfully. ‘And you must be Lawrence of Arabia. It’s an honour to meet you, sir. I’m the Doctor.’

T.E. Lawrence
Extract from ‘Seven Pillars of Wisdom’, first draft.

DOCTOR WHO

LOVED EGYPTIAN NIGHT

**By
Philip Boyes**

Episode 1

A Note on Pronunciation

This novella is set during the Ottoman occupation of Arabia and so includes some Turkish names and terminology. At the time this would have been written in Arabic script, but I've used the Roman orthography adopted for Turkish after the War. The pronunciation of this isn't always entirely obvious:

C is pronounced 'j', as in 'Jo'.

Ç is pronounced 'ch' as in 'Change'.

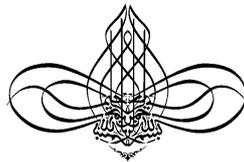
J is pronounced as in French 'je'.

Ş is pronounced 'sh' as in 'Sheep'.

Ü is pronounced like French 'u' or German 'ü', halfway between English 'u' and 'ee'.

İ (with the dot in both upper and lower case) is pronounced 'i' as in 'Pin'.

I (without the dot in both upper and lower case) is pronounced as a schwa, like the final syllable of 'Doctor'.



*Take up the White Man's burden--
And reap his old reward:
The blame of those ye better,
The hate of those ye guard--
The cry of hosts ye humour
(Ah, slowly!) toward the light:--
"Why brought he us from bondage,
Our loved Egyptian night?"*

Rudyard Kipling

Naqbah (1948)

Palestine has but a small population of Arabs and fellahin and wandering, lawless, blackmailing Bedouin tribes. Restore the country without a people to the people without a country. (Hear, hear.) For we have something to give as well as to get. We can sweep away the blackmailer—be he Pasha or Bedouin—we can make the wilderness blossom as the rose, and build up in the heart of the world a civilisation that may be a mediator and interpreter between the East and the West.

Israel Zangwill, 1901

Dawn rose over Deir al-Hamra as red and bloody as the night which had preceded it. Abdul-Malik al-Belawi sat on his roof in the shade of a cypress tree and sipped coffee from a copper cup. Across the valley smoke was rising from Ras al-Haram and Beit Kabara. The olive groves were ablaze. The groves where he'd courted Yael, a lifetime ago. Back when politics had seemed an irrelevant game played by distant old men.

He scratched at his greying beard and took another sip of the coffee. The bitterness made him grimace. His thoughts were still on Yael. What would she make of the grizzled and creased old man he had become? In his mind's eye she was still as young and beautiful as the last night he'd seen her. He spooned the last of his sugar into the black liquid and stirred it away until it dissolved. See what becomes of all youth's vain hopes: sweet words and promises gone to black bitterness in the mouth.

Down in the village, someone started shouting. A deep rumbling from the valley drew the men from their houses. Women came to the windows. There was nothing to see. Not yet, anyway. The noise was still faint, muffled by distance and the vegetation. It grew louder with every passing minute until it drowned out even the cicadas. Everyone knew what it was. Motor engines. A column of Jewish armoured vehicles. Within moments there was a rifle in every man's hands. Old Lee Enfields, many of which had been here longer than Abdul-Malik. A band of youths were shouting patriotic slogans and anti-Zionist war-cries. Raising an *Allah-u-akbar*, they ran down the track into the valley, firing shots into the air. Young men never changed. As they did so often these days, Abdul-Malik's thoughts returned to the desert, to Aurens and Auda and Sherif Ali. To childish dreams of an Arab nation.

All men dream, el-Aurens had written. His book lay abandoned on Abdul-Malik's shelf; he had never been able to finish it. Like his other English hardbacks it gathered dust, a memorial to a younger man who still believed the promises.

All men dream: but not equally. Those who dream by night in the dusty recesses of their minds wake in the day to find that it was vanity: but the dreamers of the day are dangerous men, for they may act their dream with open eyes, to make it possible. This I did. I meant to make a new nation, to restore a lost influence, to give twenty millions of Semites the foundations on which to build an inspired dream-palace of their national thoughts.

Like Musa, Lawrence had led them from the desert. For a few gruelling, terrible, wonderful months all had seemed possible. Thirty years on and Lawrence was dead. Feisal's kingdom hadn't lasted a year. Across the valley, the last remnants of their dream-palace were burning.

Abdul-Malik knew he would never see those youths again.

It's over, Yael. For the first time since he'd come on to the roof-top, Abdul-Malik allowed his attention to stray to the Webley revolver which lay neatly among the coffee things. Another relic of the first War. Two bullets remained in the drum.

So what do I do now?

'Abdul-Malik! Abdul-Malik!' The cry jolted him from his reverie. His fingers recoiled from the gun. Yusuf was running along the path towards the house. 'We need to get out! We need to leave. The Jews are here! We need to leave *now!*'

The Jews. He says it like they're monsters. I'm glad you're not here to see this, Yael.

He picked up the gun. So easy to imagine using it. One bullet through Yusuf's skull. The second for himself. Dark thoughts, not worthy of him. He slipped the revolver into his waistband.

The sound of the engines died. The sudden silence was even worse.

Abdul-Malik was getting to his feet as the first shell exploded. The blast tore through one of the houses near the well, filling the air with dust and flame and fragments of mud-brick and almost knocking him flat on his back. The screaming had barely had time to begin when a second artillery shell blew apart the little square building that served as school to the village's dozen children. Gunfire rattled out from houses up and down the slope of the village. What were they even shooting at, Abdul-Malik wondered. He still hadn't seen so much as a glimpse of a Jew.

Stumbling slightly and coughing on the dust-filled air, he hurried down the steps and out to where Yusuf was waiting. His old friend's face was ashen.

'Hibah's dead,' Yusuf said without preamble. 'They shot her in the fields.'

Abdul-Malik didn't know what to say to that. He found himself just nodding. Yusuf and his wife had been having problems lately; everyone in the village knew that. Their failure to have children had been a strain on both of them. Now Abdul-Malik wondered if it wasn't a blessing.

'My cousin is in Ishwa,' Yusuf said. 'He has a car. If we can get to him we can drive east to Jordan.'

Leave Palestine. The thought left Abdul-Malik peculiarly numb. His boyhood had been far to the south in the sandy expanses of the Hejaz; he wasn't a Palestinian by birth. Whatever that meant. It was not a word that would even have made sense to him a few years ago. He was an Arab, a Muslim, a Howeitat; a child of the desert and of Wejha on the Gulf of

Aqaba. *We never had nations. Not until the Europeans brought them in the name of freedom and progress.* Another shell ripped through houses on the next tier down. *They brought a lot else besides.*

But Palestine had been the only home he had known for three decades. Despite the indignities and frustrations of life under the British Mandate, it was somewhere he'd been happy. More than anywhere else, he'd felt he belonged. Like everyone else he had watched with concern and anger when the Zionists began to arrive in their droves. The British feigned even-handedness, but it was no secret they'd favoured the establishment of a Jewish state. Yael had shown him things weren't as straightforward as he'd imagined. For the British, realisation of the situation's complexity came more painfully. Frustrated with the violence and messiness of it all, they'd packed up their things and got on their ships. Frightful business, but when all's said and done there was plenty more of the Empire; England lay green and timeless far across the waters. Abdul-Malik imagined the frustrated nation-builders pitching up in London and cursing Jew and Arab alike. *They're as bad as each other. Just not civilised.* They'd tut and commiserate and go back to their cribbage and G & Ts.

In their wake they'd left a war that was not. The Zionists had declared that Palestine was now *Eretz Yisrael* – the Land of Israel, that God had promised to them, and only them, in ancient times. After the horrors which had been visited on them by the Europeans in the War and in the centuries which had preceded it, they'd returned home to reclaim their birthright. A safe haven where they need never be threatened or dispossessed again. And Israel, they pronounced to the world, lay empty and waiting for them. A land without people for a people without land. The rest of the world nodded approvingly and congratulated each other on the justice of it all.

The presence of a million Arabs whose ancestors had lived and worked in these unpeopled lands for nearly two millennia was a trifling detail, and one they had wasted no time in setting about tidying up. With superior numbers and superior weapons they fell upon the villages of fellaheen, burning and murdering and driving families from their homes. The radio and the newspapers spoke of massacres. Abdul-Malik didn't know how much of that was true, and he'd spent enough time around politicians at the end of the Great Revolt to wonder whether the Arab leaders were quite as blameless as they painted themselves. But he didn't doubt that the new Israeli government meant to drive every Arab from the borders of their fledgling state. Ethnic and national purity writ in Palestinian blood.

I have two bullets. What can I do with those? Nothing, besides run.

'If we go to Jordan, the Zionists win,' he told Yusuf. They were running through the olive-groves, up the hill away from the fighting. Abdul-Malik's heart was pounding painfully in his chest. He was too old for this. War came. Again and again, it always came. But why couldn't it come just for the young men? Why couldn't it leave those who'd already done their turn in peace?

'So what else? We stay? They burn down the villages and lay mines so we cannot return. That's if we even survive the war at all. You heard what happened at Deir Yassin!'

'They're people! Like Yael. They're the Jews! *They* won't wipe out an entire people,' Abdul-Malik reassured him, trying to out block the sounds of carnage and the smell of burning that rose up from the village.

'Ever the optimist,' Yusuf said, flashing Abdul-Malik a grim half-smile.

A moment later a bullet burst his head.

Abdul-Malik shook, blinking gore from his eyes. Even time seemed to forget to move forward as he struggled to comprehend what was happening.

Then Yusuf's body hit the dry earth and a second bullet blew splinters out of the olive tree beside Abdul-Malik's head.

With an energy he thought he had long-since lost, he threw himself aside, scouring the grove for signs of the shooter.

There, on the far side. Two Zionist fighters. The shooter still had his rifle raised, his eyes keen as he waited for another opportunity. The other had been interrupted while dousing the trees with petrol, to judge from the jerry cans at his feet. He dragged a man from bushes and began beating him with the stock of his rifle. At first the victim resisted but his defiance soon crumbled under the barrage of blows.

He wasn't from the village, Abdul-Malik realised. Looking closer, he wasn't even Arab. He wore the traditional robes of a Bedouin Arab at the time of the Great Revolt but this poor fellow was European. Italian or Spanish, perhaps?

I know this man.

The realisation came out of nowhere. A distant memory he couldn't recall ever having remembered before. He struggled to place where they could have met.

The Jew with the rifle advanced slowly through the grove towards Abdul-Malik. His comrade showed no sign of tiring of his violence.

Abdul-Malik's fingers tightened around the Webley. *Two men. Two bullets. I can't do anything for Palestine, but I can do this.*

He could hear Yael's voice in his mind, telling him this was stupid and pointless. More killing would achieve nothing. Nations weren't built this way.

I'm sorry, he told her.

Like the foolish youths from the village, like the foolish youth he'd been thirty years ago he burst out of hiding, shouting '*Allah-u-Akbar!*'

The Webley kicked in his hand and the Jew beating the European went down. For a moment Abdul-Malik saw a flash of fear in the other Jew's eyes. He brought the Webley to bear.

The rifle fired first.

Abdul-Malik didn't feel the pain immediately. Just confusion and embarrassment as he tumbled forwards into the dust, the pistol flying uselessly from his hand. The gunshot had caught him in his leg, blasting it out from under him.

What was I thinking? Useless old man. Always too optimistic. Should have listened, Yael.

The soldier approached, keeping the rifle trained on him. He was young, but probably didn't think it. Twenty-five, thirty maybe. A sensitive face and thoughtful eyes.

'Why?' Abdul-Malik grunted. 'This was done to you. Why do you do it to us?'

The young man looked at him quizzically. New arrival, Abdul-Malik realised. He didn't speak Arabic. He waited a moment, as if to see if Abdul-Malik would say anything more. When he didn't, the Zionist pointed the rifle at his head. Abdul-Malik strained to lift his head, to make eye-contact. *Do this, boy,* he thought. *But do it looking into my eyes.*

The Jew's finger tightened on the trigger.

The olive-grove resounded to a shot.

Abdul-Malik realised with some surprise that he was still alive. The Jew lay in a pool of blood in front of him, a wound in his chest and an expression of surprise on his face.

Across the grove, the European stood braced against an olive-tree. Smoke curled from the end of a Luger in his hand.

With effort he staggered over to Abdul-Malik.

‘Are you all right? It seems I owe you my thanks.’

The pain was finally making itself felt in the wound in his leg. He twisted where he lay, tried to look down to see how bad it was.

‘Don’t worry about the leg. I have medical equipment. I can make it better.’

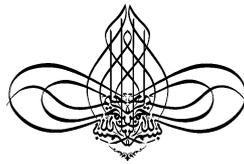
Abdul-Malik nodded gratefully. ‘*Alhamdulillah,*’ he gasped. ‘Thank you. Are you... Are you a doctor?’

This seemed to amuse his rescuer. A slight, sardonic smile played across his dark, neatly-bearded face.

‘No. No, I’m afraid not. But you might say I’m the next best thing. And I think, Mister al-Belawi, that we can be of very great help to one other.’

He reached out a hand to help lift Abdul-Malik to his feet.

Abdul-Malik smiled, and took it.



Sealed Orders (1917)

In the heart of the desert even the most mundane sights take on a strange and unsettling air. The dog sat perfectly still on the crest of the ridge, watching the patrol with dark eyes. It was a grey mongrel, the kind of tattered and wretched creature that slopes despondently around meat-souqs hoping to make off with a scrap of mutton or chicken before the trader beats it from his stall.

‘I don’t like it,’ grumbled Najid, shielding his eyes against the sun. ‘How did it get here? Why’s it so still?’

Najid abu Rasil was the oldest of them. His beard was more grey than black and when he smiled that impudent, insouciant grin of his, half his teeth were missing. Those that remained were crooked and stained from decades of shisha-tobacco. Najid was not a man easily perturbed, except by the prospect of real work.

‘It’s just a dog, Najid,’ Abdul-Malik laughed. ‘Probably belongs to some herdsman and wandered off.’

‘If I was a shepherd and my mutt wandered off to sit in the desert miles from anywhere I’d have whoever trained it’s head! Besides, have you seen any flocks round these parts?’

Abdul-Malik had to admit he hadn’t. Between leaving the camp and arriving in this dry wadi, they had seen not a single living thing, nor any sign of human habitation. Abdul-Malik still couldn’t decide whether it was depressingly barren or magnificent.

He looked again at the dog. It still didn’t move. Such stillness. Perfect, unnatural stillness. Was it even alive? He felt foolish for even entertaining such an absurd thought. Why would anyone stuff a dog and pose it atop a ridge in the middle of the desert? Besides, it was staring back. Those dark, motionless eyes smouldered with patient intelligence.

Another thing unnatural. Whoever heard of an intelligent dog?

‘We’re wasting time,’ said Ali bin Shatam, fidgeting impatiently with his rifle. ‘It’s hot and I’m thirsty and we’re wasting time.’

Bin Shatam was always thirsty. The smug young Circassian had had a privileged upbringing; some obscure connection to the sharif, so he said. Not that anyone had ever seen Sharif Ali pay him the slightest hint of attention. He’d never got the hang of moderation or rationing. He always gulped down his water too quickly and then went crawling round the others begging a share of theirs. ‘Bin Shaitan’, the men called him behind his back – *Son of the Devil*.

‘You’re welcome to go on alone,’ Najid snapped, his attention never wavering from the dog. ‘They say the djinn sometimes appear as dogs and lead men to their doom in the desert.’

‘If you go around following random dogs you deserve all you get,’ Abdul-Malik replied with a chuckle. ‘Come on now, Najid. You don’t believe in djinn.’

‘Oh, I don’t, do I?’

That surprised him. ‘Do you?’

The older man shrugged.

‘We’ve got to be rational,’ Abdul-Malik said firmly. ‘If we want the British to take us seriously we can’t go around believing in *ghūls* and *ifrits* and all those superstitions. We’re not credulous savages. It’s the twentieth century.’

‘Hmm. The British can keep their reason. We’re *Arabs*, my boy. Sooner you realise that, the happier you’ll be.’ He shouldered his rifle and hauled himself back up into the saddle of Barirah, his camel. ‘Come on, bin Shatam’s right. We’re wasting time here.’

Bin Shatam sighed with relief and made a great show of remounting his own camel. Abdul-Malik lingered. Until now he’d wanted nothing more than to be on their way. It was well past noon but the sun overhead was still merciless. As far as he was concerned, the sooner they completed their circuit of the area and got back to the camp, the better. But somehow leaving now felt like a mistake. Like they were shirking their duty; leaving a mystery unresolved.

‘What if it’s a Turkish dog?’

‘Unlikely suggestion,’ bin Shatham said. ‘Animals don’t have nationalities. They can’t get issued with passports.’

‘Is that a fact?’

‘I have a degree from Cairo.’

Abdul-Malik didn’t believe for a moment that bin Shatam had ever even been to Egypt. If he had any been on the receiving end of any education beyond how to pose and preen his beloved fair hair, it had assuredly not extended to manners or social skills. Abdul-Malik ignored him and spoke to Najid.

‘Maybe it belonged to someone in a Turkish scouting party?’

‘I don’t care if it’s Kaiser Willy’s dear little puppy Otto so long as it keeps sitting there minding its own business.’

‘You said you didn’t like it.’

‘I don’t. I don’t like arse-face here either.’ He nodded at bin Shatam. ‘Some things you just have to put up with and move on.’

‘I’m going for a closer look.’

Abdul-Malik hadn’t known he was going to say that till the words crossed his lips. He cocked his Enfield and began advancing cautiously up the slope towards the dog. Somewhere behind him he heard Najid utter a theatrical, long-suffering sigh.

‘Hey there, boy. You’re a nice dog, aren’t you? Not an enemy spy. Certainly not a djinni.’

The creature regarded him dispassionately. When he was about halfway up the incline it turned and slowly sauntered away.

Typical.

As it turned out, it hadn’t gone far. When Abdul-Malik reached the crest of the ridge he found it was waiting a few dozen feet away. There was something sprawled on the stone beside it.

‘Najid! Ali! Get up here! There’s a man. The bloody thing’s got an owner!’

He ran over and checked the fellow while he waited for his companions to arrive. It was a young man, older than him but younger than Aurens. Clean-shaven except for a skinny moustache across his upper lip. Pale, sunburnt skin and khaki drill marked him out as a

British soldier. Abdul-Malik wasn't expecting much when he felt at the man's jugular but was surprised to find a pulse, faint but steady.

The man's eyes opened the barest crack. He muttered something but Abdul-Malik's English wasn't yet good enough to discern meaning in the slurred sounds. He fished out his goatskin and offered water to the Englishman's lips. He choked and spluttered most of it down his chin, but the second time Abdul-Malik raised the skin he was able to swallow it down.

Najid and bin Shatham arrived.

'*Ya Allah!*' Najid sighed. 'As if one Englishman wasn't enough trouble. Is he dead?'

The man murmured something, his eyes closed.

'Not far off, I think. He must have been in the desert all day. Maybe even since yesterday. It's a miracle we found him.'

'*Alhamdulillah,*' Najid retorted, not, Abdul-Malik considered, entirely sincerely.

'Where'd that dog go?' asked bin Shatham.

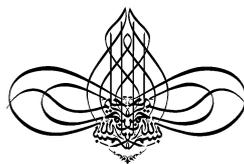
'It's right th-' Abdul-Malik broke off. The creature had vanished. The ridge was a few score feet higher than the surrounding desert. The view was uninterrupted as far as the big jagged rock outcroppings near the camp. Wherever the mongrel had slunk off to, they ought to have been able to see it.

'Never mind that,' said Najid. 'We'd better get this halfwit back to camp. What in God's name was he doing out here by himself anyway?'

Between them, Abdul-Malik and Najid hauled the Englishman to his feet. They had to support his weight; the man was still limp and delirious. As they lifted him a sealed manila envelope fluttered from a fold or pocket of his uniform. It was addressed in English to General Allenby.

'What's this?' asked bin Shatham. 'What does it say?'

'Mind your own business,' Najid said, snatching the paper and stuffing it into his thawb. 'Are you going to help us or just stand by and watch?'



To Abdul-Malik's relief, the Englishman was still alive when they rode the camels into the camp. The tribesmen rose from their shishas and games of backgammon to stare at the new arrival. Najid waved sarcastically at the spectators. Aurens, it turned out, was not yet back from his attack on the railway. They delivered the soldier to Sharif Ali, who sent an attendant out to find someone with medical experience. That was that. Their role was complete and the foreigner was no longer their responsibility.

'This should get us in Aurens' good books, anyway,' Abdul-Malik said as he and Najid walked back from the Sharif's tent to their own corner of the camp. God knew where bin Shatham had got to. Abdul-Malik couldn't find it in himself to care. 'Reckon he'll reward us?'

‘Yeah, and maybe we’ll find a *hammam* full of houris at the next well we stop at. That’s your problem, my boy. You’re too damned optimistic.’

‘Better that than a cynical old grump like you. Look, the raiding party’s coming back.’

Raiding was their *raison d’être* at the moment. Rumour was that the ultimate goal was to push north and take al-Quds and Damascus before the British could, but for now Allenby and Lawrence had them tied up waging a *guerrilla* campaign against the Hejaz Railway. It was the only artery connecting Medina and the other scattered Ottoman holdings that still held out in Arabia to the empire in Palestine and Anatolia. Their job was to harry the supply line, to keep blowing up tracks and trains as fast as the Turks could repair them. Sometimes they’d pull down telegraph wires too while they were at it. Just for larks. The more soldiers and engineers were bogged down trying to keep the railway operational, the fewer there would be to hinder the northwards advance of Allenby’s army when it made its push into the Levant.

Most of the men, of course, cared not a fig for strategy. They were in it for the loot.

Emerging from a cloud of dust, the raiders thundered down the hillside on camels laden with boot. They made, it had to be said, more noise and fuss than was strictly necessary. Those left behind gathered round to see how jealous they ought to be. Abdul-Malik saw Turkish rifles and officers’ ornamental *kilijes*; paintings and old books; what looked like a large pile of silken *şalvar*.

‘Ahh,’ said Najid wryly. ‘Another successful day!’

‘It’s kind of reassuring to know that even in wartime the Ottoman Empire feels the need to load its trains up full to the brim with junk. Shows they’ve still got standards.’

‘I’m starting to see a pattern. Today people ride off into the desert; they come back with useless crap.’

El-Aurens rode in at the back, as he often did. Like all Europeans he was stiff-necked and aloof. He didn’t like to get caught up in the excitement like an Arab. Well, didn’t like to show it, anyway. That famous English reserve, people would say with knowing nods. Famous it might be, but Abdul-Malik didn’t think it could be much fun. Aurens never brought back any loot. His paymasters must be keeping him well.

Today, though, he didn’t ride into camp alone. There were two more Europeans riding at his side.

‘Who are *they*?’ asked Abdul-Malik, squinting for a better look.

‘*Ya allah!* Has God decided today to flood Arabia with Englishmen?’

‘Maybe they’re Germans?’

They didn’t look like prisoners, though, riding casually along beside Aurens. The older of the pair was chatting with him casually.

Others spotted them. The raiders and their looted Ottoman wardrobes were forgotten. By the time Aurens and his companions arrived at the camp, a small crowd had gathered.

Now that they were closer, Abdul-Malik saw that the newcomers were a man in his middle years, white-haired and craggy-faced – a nose made for peering haughtily down – and a fair-haired girl of around Abdul-Malik’s age. He stared at her, everyone did. There couldn’t be many men in the camp who had ever seen a European girl. She, for her part, didn’t seem to

have noticed the attention yet. All her concentration was spent trying to stay in the saddle of her camel. Even after riding all the way from the railway, she clearly hadn't got the hang of the animal.

As she passed Abdul-Malik she slipped. Lost her balance and pitched sideways in the saddle with a hapless shout.

Abdul-Malik reached up instinctively and caught her as she slid, gently shoving her back upright before she could fall properly.

She flashed him a smile of rueful embarrassment and rolled her eyes at her own foolishness. There was something endearingly childish about the gesture. 'Thanks!'

She spoke Arabic!

From what Abdul-Malik heard, even at Allied headquarters at Cairo, most of the Europeans barely knew enough of the language to complain that their drinks weren't sufficiently chilled. El-Aurens was a strange creature in that respect and was regarded with suspicion by his comrades, as if the occasional *shukran* or *min fadlak* were a sign that he was already most of the way towards betraying his nature and going native.

So what on Earth was a blonde-haired European girl who could speak Arabic with only the barest hint of an accent doing on an Ottoman train in the middle of the Hejaz? Abdul-Malik's head immediately filled with fanciful notions, most of them the kind of outlandish fantasies his grandfather used to spin when pressed into keeping the little ones out of their mother's hair. Was she an odalisque in some Ottoman harem? He'd heard about the Turks and their appetites. It was said they often had a special predilection for well-educated European girls. And boys.

But no, this girl didn't have the look of a harem slave. For all the casual insouciance with which she had addressed a man, there was an almost childlike innocence about her. Besides, no odalisque would dress so demurely. Her clothes were brightly-coloured and well made from finely-patterned silks in the Ottoman style, but she showed little skin apart from her face and hands; her head was properly covered.

'My name's Jo,' she told him. 'Jo Grant.'

Seemed a strange sort of name. 'Abdul-Malik al-Belawi,' he replied.

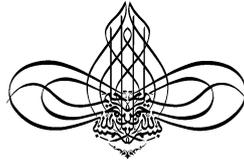
'Come on, Jo!' her companion called back. Engrossed in their conversation, he and Aurens had managed to get a little way ahead before they'd noticed Jo wasn't with them. 'Don't dawdle!'

In his way, the white-haired man was easily as striking as Jo. He had the look of importance about him but Abdul-Malik couldn't decide whether he was a sharif or a sheikh. His costume was bizarre. Snug black trousers that seemed to be made of velvet, of all things; a loose, pale-blue shirt that was a cascade of frills and ruffles. He wore it open at the neck to reveal just a hint of greying but virile chest-hair. Abdul-Malik could only assume this was what was fashionable in London, Paris and Berlin at the moment, though he'd never witnessed Lawrence wearing anything of the kind. He wasn't sure what it did for his mental image of King George and the Kaiser.

Jo Grant smiled apologetically. 'Duty calls,' she said, and gamely tried to encourage her camel in the general direction of the others.

As Abdul-Malik watched her go he felt Najid's firm hands on his shoulders.

'I know what you're thinking,' the older man chuckled. 'What did I say? You're a hopeless optimist.'



'Well I have to say, this is a deuced coincidence, you two and him both showing up on the same afternoon.'

One of the Arab leaders – a young, serious-looking man who, the Doctor whispered in Jo's ear, was called Sharif Ali – had met Lawrence at his tent when they arrived with news of the Englishman from the desert. Lawrence had wasted no time in going to visit the fellow. The Doctor seemed happy enough to accompany him, so the question of their status never arose. They weren't exactly being treated as prisoners, but some of the Arabs looked distinctly suspicious of them. Jo didn't much like the way they stared at her. Maybe this is what travelling with the Doctor does to you: you get so used to being attacked and captured and locked up left, right and centre that even when you're greeted politely you end up just kind of assuming you're some sort of captive by default.

Lawrence looked at his unconscious fellow-countryman thoughtfully. 'You say he'll be all right?' he eventually asked the Arab who seemed to have been charged with looking after him.

The Doctor stepped forward before the man could answer. 'I'm a Doctor,' he said. 'May I?'

Lawrence considered a moment, then nodded.

'Severe dehydration,' the Doctor announced after a brief examination. 'Heatstroke, a touch of sunburn. So long as you give him plenty to drink, he should be fine.'

'As we said,' Sharif Ali said, a little stiffly. Poor chap. The Doctor never does realise when he's stepping on someone's toes. Or maybe he realises and just enjoys it.

'And you say he had no papers on him?' Lawrence asked Ali. 'No identification?'

'It seems not.'

'How odd. What the devil's he doing out here?'

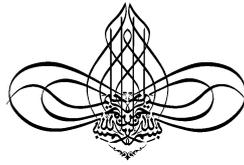
'Perhaps Allenby sent him?'

'I should say that's a certainty. But for what? What's Allenby's game?'

'You're English. Surely you know?'

Lawrence smiled. 'I'm English to you, my friend. As far as the chaps back at HQ are concerned, the jury's still out.' To the attendant he said, 'It seems to me there's nothing we can do until this fellow regains consciousness. Look after him, see that he gets all the water he needs, and let me know the moment there's any change. Doctor, Miss Grant, if you'd accompany me? I'd like a word with you in my tent.'

He nodded farewell to Ali and swept from the tent, his white robes billowing behind him.



Lawrence's tent wasn't far. He and the Doctor continued to ponder the unconscious Englishman on the way, advancing cautious theories about how he might have got there. Each thought the other knew more than he was saying, Jo realised. She had to smile; the Doctor never could resist a sniff of a mystery. Mind you, it'd be hard to resist a sniff of anything with his nose...

She was content to let them stride on ahead and natter away. She hoped the poor fellow from the desert would be all right, of course, but it wasn't exactly 'plesiosaur in the 1920s' or 'invisible man in a glam shag-pile' levels of intrigue. Besides, it was all she could do to vaguely keep up with them as she hobbled along. Her legs and back and bum ached like she's gone five rounds with an Ogron.

They reached Lawrence's big white bell-tent and the Doctor held the flap open for her.

'Feeling tender?' he asked gently.

'I think I'll be sore for a week!'

'You're not used to riding a camel, that's all.'

'Yes, well guilty as charged. There weren't exactly a lot of them about in Surrey. Just ponies mostly.'

'Don't worry,' he told her. 'You'll get used to it,' the Doctor assured her.

'That's easy for you to say. I noticed *you* didn't seem to be having any problems.'

'Well, I've had a little more experience, that's all,' he admitted. 'King Antiochus dragooned me into his *dromedarii* for the Battle of Magnesia.'

'Huh.'

The tent at least was comfortable as these things went. The white linen did something to keep the heat of the sun off and the floor was covered with admittedly rather threadbare Ottoman rugs and a couple of cushions. A British army uniform hung neatly washed and pressed from a hanger suspended from one of the tentpoles, while an assortment of various bits of Arab dress were scattered around the place.

'I say,' said Lawrence, slightly embarrassed as he rounded up his laundry and bundled it out of the way, 'sorry about the mess. Wasn't exactly expecting civilised company.'

Jo had to laugh. Typical young bachelor. *Lawrence of Arabia*. The name wasn't a man, it was a legend. It was distant times and far-off places. It was heroism and adventure. It was Peter O'Toole and a sweeping Hollywood score.

It was a skinny young man with a big chin and slight sunburn, who didn't clear up his dirty clothes if he thought he could get away with it and wore his Bedouin robes with the unselfconscious enthusiasm of a little boy raiding a dressing-up box.

A space cleared, he gestured for them to sit down on the cushions. The Doctor passed his cushion to Jo. She accepted it gratefully.

Lawrence considered for a moment before he spoke. He was a cautious, thoughtful man. There was a slight feyness about him that put Jo a little in mind of Mike. As he pondered how to approach their discussion, he reminded Jo of the teachers back at school. One of those trendy teachers who'd much rather try and be your mate and then got uncomfortable and hesitant when there was a telling-off that needed to be administered. Not that Jo had ever been in trouble at school. No, sir! Pure as the driven snow, she was.

'You're a long way from England, Doctor,' Lawrence said eventually. He said it lightly enough, almost tentatively, but there was an edge to his curiosity. He wanted to think well of them, but he clearly hadn't quite made up his mind.

The Doctor parried the remark imperiously. 'Yes, well we like to travel.'

'When there's a war on?' A slight raised eyebrow.

'The war hasn't been on for ever, you know. Things were all rather quiet when we set off.' He was having a whale of a time. No wonder he'd got so antsy during his exile. When your greatest pleasure in life is bandying words and showing off to authority figures, the endless cavalcade of grey civil servants Whitehall kept sending their way must have been such a drag.

Lawrence looked as if he was about to say something, to take issue, perhaps with the idea that a man and a girl might blithely set off on a jaunt on the eve of war and somehow fail to beat a hasty retreat home when Europe erupted into a bloodbath. Whatever had been on his lips, it went unsaid. An Arab boy scurried into the tent with a steaming copper teapot and a tray of cups, which he set down between them.

'Thank you, Farraj.'

The boy nodded to Lawrence and departed.

'Shall I be mother?' the soldier asked, pouring a cup and offering it to Jo. 'There's only camel milk to go with it, I'm afraid. Not too bad once you get used to it.'

Once politeness had been satisfied and they all had drinks, he tried again. 'So, what exactly *were* you doing on an Ottoman troop train?'

His increased directness seemed to irritate the Doctor. His reply was calm but a little testy. 'I told you. We were prisoners.'

'So you say. But you can see my predicament. How did you come to *be* prisoners?'

How do we ever *not* come to be prisoners, Jo wondered to herself. She was sure it mustn't be like this for other people. The Grand Bazaar at Constantinople was a sprawling warren, filled with people from all over the Ottoman Empire, and more than a few from Europe besides. It was heaving with sights and sounds and smells, a thousand-and-one distractions. Common sense surely dictated that it ought to be possible to wander around minding your own business for hours without attracting the attention of anyone at all, even if a group of rowdy Turkish naval officers on shore leave did happen to be passing. Common sense surely dictated that even if they *did* start making pointed comments and asking unwelcome questions, it ought to be possible to resolve the situation with something other than a loud cry of *hai!!!* and a flurry of Venusian aikido that would bring every soldier and *jandarma* in the area hurrying to investigate.

They'd been in custody within ten minutes of stepping out of the TARDIS. The Doctor's relationship to common sense, it seemed to Jo, was at times barely more than tangential.

The Doctor delivered a summary of these events to Lawrence which somehow succeeded in making them sound somewhat less ridiculous than they had felt at the time. His description of the month they'd subsequently spent locked up in the bowels of the justice ministry dwelled rather more heavily on his verbal sparring with the *Adliye Nazırı* over chilled ayran and baklava than on the elements Jo remembered as having characterised the vast majority of their stay, such as hours of mindless tedium and endlessly repetitive accusations of spying. Eventually, out of the blue one day they had been summoned up from their cells and told they were being sent south.

'You are wanted in Mada'in Saleh,' the minister had said with the stiff sulkiness of a man whose authority had been overruled. That had been that. He would not elaborate on why. Jo had got the distinct impression that the officious little fellow didn't know himself.

Within hours they were at Sirkeci Garı being bundled on to a train. Several changes and several days later they were on the Hejaz Railway on the final stage of their journey. On a train that would never reach its destination.

Lawrence listened thoughtfully. 'Mada'in Saleh,' he mused. 'There's not much there. There's the Ottoman railway depot, and the old Nabataean ruins, of course... I don't suppose you have any idea why they might have wanted you there?'

'The chap on the train didn't seem very talkative,' the Doctor admitted apologetically.

'Yes, well that's the problem with Turks,' Lawrence agreed with twinkling irony. 'Bloody unhelpful at times.'

'I still think it might have something to do with the TARDIS,' Jo blurted. The Doctor shot her a warning glance.

'TARDIS?' asked Lawrence, suddenly intrigued.

'Our... boat. The one we arrived in Constantinople in.'

'When you were blown off course.'

'That's right.'

'What does a boat have to do with Mada'in Saleh?'

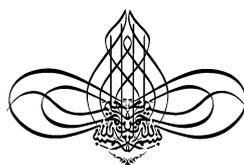
'Nothing, probably.'

'Except?'

The Doctor sighed. 'It's no ordinary boat. And when I escaped briefly a couple of weeks ago it wasn't where I'd left it.'

'They probably just impounded it. It's hardly likely to be in Mada'in Saleh, Doctor. The place is almost a hundred miles from the sea and there's not a river to be had in the whole of Arabia.'

'Like I said, it is a *very special* boat.'



*Take up the White Man's burden--
Send forth the best ye breed--
Go bind your sons to exile
To serve your captives' need;
To wait in heavy harness,
On fluttered folk and wild--
Your new-caught, sullen peoples,
Half-devil and half-child.*

Abdul-Malik stared at the words intently, trying to focus on the unfamiliar letter-forms as they danced in the firelight. English was still a struggle for him, but not quite so much as it had been. He understood most of the words, but the sentiment of the poem still mystified him somewhat.

'English poems again?' asked Najid as he sat down beside Abdul-Malik. At least he'd brought his shisha. He began setting the pipe up. 'What's wrong with our stuff? You want to read some – what's his name? – Hafiz Ibrahim or whatever.'

'You know who Hafiz Ibrahim is?'

Najid grinned. 'There you go, lad. Don't believe everything those English say. We're not all ignorant camel-jockeys out here in the desert.'

'Is that a fact? Don't suppose you feel like reciting a verse or two to while away the night?'

'The urge may take me some day, my boy. But not, I fear, tonight.'

'Of course not.'

The shisha bubbling away happily, Najid took an experimental puff on the pipe. It met with his approval and he sucked a longer, deeper drag, visibly sinking down into his cushion as the tension in his shoulders ebbed away.

Abdul-Malik turned back to his book. He barely made it through another line before Najid interrupted again.

'So what's the appeal? Why d'you bother? It can't do your eyes any good.' He squinted suspiciously at the page, the roman letters jittering and jostling in the firelight. 'I can't make head or tail of those weird letters of theirs.'

'They're civilised. I want to understand it. So we can be civilised too.'

'We *are* civilised.'

'Yeah, we are. But not like them. We scrape a living out here in the desert. England has the greatest empire in the world.'

'So civilisation's measured in how many people lick your boots and call you master? Time was when the caliphate stretched Persia in the east to al-Andalus in the west. Where were the English then? Where were any of the Europeans? Scrabbling around like barbarians in their dark ages, that's where.'

Abdul-Malik blinked. He'd underestimated Najid. The old man knew a bit of history. Enough to make it sound convincing, anyway. The past had never interested Abdul-Malik so much as the future. He knew there'd been a great caliphate once, centuries ago, but those days were long gone. As for European dark ages, he had no idea.

‘It’s not like that,’ he told Najid. ‘They’re trying to make the world better. To bring progress...’

‘Progress,’ Najid repeated sceptically, and spat a gobbet of something on to the sand. After a moment’s thought he pulled something from his *thawb*. ‘You want to translate something?’ he asked. ‘Tell me what this says.’

He thrust the envelope into Abdul-Malik’s hands. He saw the English words carefully typed on it.

OHMS.

**FA.O. Maj. Gen. EHH Allenby
To be delivered BY HAND ONLY**

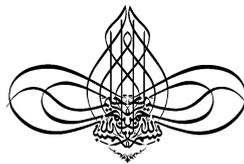
UTMOST SECRET

‘The Englishman’s letter! You should have given this to Sharif Ali!’

‘Forgot.’

Abdul-Malik looked at him sceptically. He saw the firelight twinkle in the older man’s eyes.

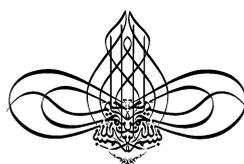
‘Besides,’ Najid went on, ‘don’t you want to know what it says?’



With a final flare of vermilion and gold on the undersides of the sparse clouds, the sun dipped beneath the rocks of the horizon, done tormenting the earth for another day. As night settled over the Arab camp it brought with it a certain stillness and quiet. Camels folded themselves down on to the still-hot sand to sleep. Men settled down to talk for a while by the firesides or to suck on their shishas and stare at the brilliant stars overhead, the arch of the Darb al-Tabbana like sand grains across black silk.

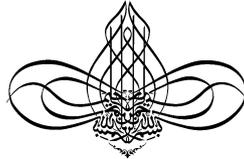
On a ridge overlooking the encampment, a man watched through field-glasses.

The creature at his side seemed briefly to resemble a ragged dog before its shimmering, protean form altered once again and no words this world presently had could have described it.



Outside his tent, Sharif Ali discussed strategies and politics with his lieutenants in low voices as they finished off the last scraps of rice and flatbread. The attendant emerged from within, yawning. There was no more he could do for his patient tonight, he told them. He begged permission to retire to his own, bedroll. The Sharif dismissed him with an idle wave and the fellow gratefully disappeared into the dark.

So there was no-one around to see when, a moment later, the Englishman's eyes flicked suddenly open.



Somehow the interrogation had drifted imperceptibly into a genial discussion of the merits of Crusader castles in the Levant. Lawrence favoured Krak des Chevaliers, pronouncing it 'the best preserved and most wholly admirable castle in the world'. Jo had laughed out loud at his face when the Doctor had announced that he'd been present during the last siege, but as the conversation wore on, she found she had little to contribute. She'd never been much into castles as a kid – her brother had been more into all that but she'd usually begged off traipsing round dungeons and keeps to have a wander round the shops in town. Pretty much the only occasions when she remembered spending much time in at all in castles were Windsor – where Dad had taken them all for a day out when she was very small – and a school trip to Bodiam. Not counting Stangmoor, of course, but that was barely recognisable once you got past the mediaeval façade. Her recollections of those visits served as little more than springboards for the Doctor to embark on wholly grander and more outlandish anecdotes, which Lawrence seemed to lap up eagerly while evidently not believing a word of them.

She found her attention wandering. She thought about the TARDIS and the unconscious Englishman from the desert and about the long, tedious months in the Ottoman gaol. She thought about the war, about all those young men arrayed in their trenches from one end of Europe to the other. Grandpa had been in the Somme. She remembered asking her mum about it once – she'd had to do a school project on it and she wondered if she could ask him about it. *Best not*, the reply had come. Even forty-odd years later the memories were still raw. It had seemed unbelievable at the time. All that time... Jo could barely remember what Beth had done to upset her so much in the playground the month before. How could anything still hurt after many child's-lifetimes of years?

The Somme had been last year.

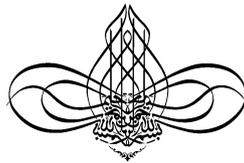
Somewhere out there, Grandpa was a shell-shocked kid struggling to get through the days in an army convalescence hospital.

It was a weird thought.

The Doctor and Lawrence burst out into laughter at some witticism Jo hadn't paid attention to.

'I'm going for some air,' she said. They didn't seem to hear her; if they noticed when she slipped out, they gave no sign.

The figure huddled outside in the dark beside Lawrence's tent noticed, though. Half-curious, it watched Jo vanish into the night. It didn't follow. It had business elsewhere for now. The service revolver in its hand gleamed under the starlight.



'What if it's important?' asked Abdul-Malik. 'It could jeopardise the war effort!'

Najid shook his head wearily. 'If it was that important they'd hardly have left it to one man alone in the desert to deliver, would they? They'd have telephoned. Or sent a telegram.'

That made sense, he had to admit. But still... The envelope sat in his hands, his finger half-inserted into the flap to tear it open. He hadn't yet been able to pluck up the courage to do so. His mind kept throwing up worries and objections. What if Ali found out? What about Aurens? What if it contained something they couldn't ignore and they had to take the letter, opened, to their superiors? They'd be flogged, and that was if they were lucky. And beyond that, they were meant to be the British's allies. How could they ever hope for their partners to trust them and treat them as equals if they went around doing rascally, untrustworthy things like opening secret correspondence? That was the kind of thing savages did, not civilised people!

And yet, he couldn't deny the temptation he felt. There was nothing like labelling something 'secret' to make you want to know what it said.

Najid was impatient. '*Ya allah!*' he exclaimed for the tenth time. 'Just open it! You can't keep me waiting like this. You're worse than my wife on our wedding night!'

'Oh, what've you got there?' The unexpected voice made both men jump. Abdul-Malik nearly fumbled the letter into the fire, but managed to clumsily stuff it into a fold of his robes. Najid recovered from his surprise more quickly and welcomed the English girl with a warm and phony grin.

'*Ya anisa!* You honour us. All the army's abuzz tonight with chatter of you and your friend. What brings you to our humble fireside?'

'Oh, you know. Just out for a stroll and thought I'd come and say hello properly. After you helped me out before,' she added, with a smile towards Abdul-Malik. 'The Doctor and Lawrence are getting on like a house on fire. Chatting away in there like it's a university common room or something. It doesn't matter where we go, the Doctor always manages to find something in common with the bigwigs to reminisce about.'

Abdul-Malik nodded, still tongue-tied. He wasn't sure whether to be astonished that she'd remembered him and come to talk or just terrified that she'd seen the letter. Did she

know what it was? Would she tell el-Aurens? In the end he just proffered the shisha-pipe lamely.

She looked for a moment like she was about to decline, but then she shrugged. 'What the heck. You only live once.' The first suck had her spluttering and coughing out sweet-smelling smoke. Abdul-Malik couldn't help laughing. By the third drag, she'd got the hang of it.

'Funny,' she said after a while. 'These were really popular a few years back. Where I come from, I mean. When the Beatles went east and all the Age of Aquarius stuff was going round. I wouldn't have gone near one then. I sometimes wonder if I haven't spent far too long being a good girl.'

Abdul-Malik had met women where a line like that would be a blatant come-on. The kinds of women his mother had warned him about. His father's views on the subject were somewhat different, but then they seldom did agree. From Jo, though, it was utterly guileless. She was so straightforward and innocent that Abdul-Malik found it difficult to guess exactly how old she was. Younger than she looked, perhaps, and that was far from old.

'You were prisoners of the Turks?' Abdul-Malik asked. 'El-Aurens rescued you?'

'El-Aur... Oh, I get it! That's cute. Uh-huh. They were sending us to Mada'in Saleh, wherever that is. Heaven alone knows why. Maybe they've got the TARDIS, but it is pretty unlikely they'd take it there.'

'Mada'in Saleh.' Najid repeated the word darkly, his lip curling in a sneer.

'You know it?'

'I've been,' he said, lowering his voice an octave. 'Before the war. An evil place. Ancient ruins. Unislamic; thick with djinn.' Abdul-Malik rolled his eyes. Was it unislamic to be a ham?

'What is it with you and djinn today?'

'Give the punters what they want. You'd know if you'd ever done an honest day's work in your life.'

'I worked for my uncle!'

'I said *honest* work.'

'I'm confused,' said Jo. 'Have you been to Mada'in Saleh or not?'

'I knew someone who had,' Najid admitted with a shrug. 'Before the Turks built the railway through it. Not interested in ruins myself. Wouldn't catch me anywhere near the place these days.'

'Djinn?' she asked.

'Please! I'm Najid abu Rasil, feared camel-lord of the Hejaz! I'm not some *jadda* who believes in spooks around every corner.'

Abdul-Malik coughed pointedly, remembering the dog in the desert.

'It's Turks I'm worried about,' Najid went on. 'There's some new bey at the railway depot, they say. Rabid dog of a man. Been torturing any Bedu they capture to try and learn our secrets.'

'The Turk's a foul creature,' Abdul-Malik confided in her. 'You're lucky you got away.'

To his surprise, Jo didn't swoon at the thought of her fortunate escape. She looked disappointed. 'The Turks aren't monsters, Abdul. Most of them don't want to be here any

more than you do. They're just kids. Conscripts from all over the Empire. They're as scared as you are.'

'I'm not scared of anything!' Abdul-Malik proclaimed boldly, punching his chest to emphasise it.

Najid stifled a snort of derision. 'You're scared of that,' he said, nodding at the envelope, which had fallen out of the folds of his *thawb*.

Abdul-Malik panicked. What in the Prophet's name – peace be upon him! – had possessed Najid? Jo was English! Her friend was at this very moment inveigling himself deep into Aurens' confidence! It was bad enough that the letter had fallen where she might see it, but to deliberately point it out. Jo would tell – of course she would. Like all Europeans, her loyalty was to her countrymen.

He made a token attempt to hide the letter, but he knew it was too late.

'What is that?' Jo asked, reminded of her earlier question. She noticed the English script on it. 'Secret? Where did you get it? Wait – that Englishman in the desert. You were the ones who found him!'

'We were going to take it to Aurens,' Abdul-Malik insisted. 'It fell out of his pocket. We found it... by accident.'

'Hmm. A likely story. You two should be ashamed of yourselves! Poor Lawrence comes out here into the desert to help you out, to try and free you from the Turks and get you a country of your own and you go around stealing his mail!'

'Lawrence came out here to be a hero,' Najid snapped back. 'He wants to be the Musa of Arabia. The British don't want to help us, any more than they've helped the Egyptians or the Indians or the Negroes!'

'It won't be like that,' Abdul-Malik protested. 'Not with us. We're *civilised*!'

Najid scoffed. 'What do you think Lawrence sees when he looks at me? You think he sees a father and a warrior, a man who has worked to make a life for himself in the desert? A man who has loved and hated and pondered philosophy with scholars? You think he sees a man who has read the Qur'an, al-Jahiz, al-Tafis, Marrash and Haykal? A man whose ancestors preserved the learning of Greece and Rome when the European barbarians would have burned them in the fires of plunder? Or do you think he sees a toothless old comic pirate on a flea-bitten camel? A grizzled old crook not to be trusted?'

Abdul-Malik was taken aback. He scrambled for words to answer. Jo just looked bewildered and uncomfortable.

'Either way, you'd be wrong,' Najid said bitterly. 'He doesn't deign to look at me at all. We matter less than a grain of sand to the English, my friend. When we drive the Turks out, it is not we who will inherit this land.'

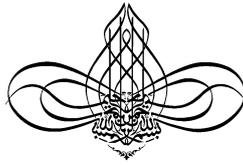
He snatched the envelope from Abdul-Malik and tore it open, shoving the page of typewritten text within into the hands of the startled Jo.

'Read it!'

'I...' She glanced down at the letter.

'What does it say?'

In a voice that faltered at first, and then grew stronger with horror and outrage, Jo Grant began to read.

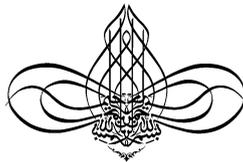


'I think of what we're doing as *intrusive*,' Lawrence pontificated, lounging back on a cushion and sipping at his tea. 'Britain has a certain way of doing things. Her foreign policy runs along tracks every bit as predictably as the Hejaz Railway. Those tracks were laid down by our ancestors, all the great generals and industrialists and entrepreneurs of the Empire. And I mean to blow them up, Doctor. The British think I lied to Prince Feisal, leading him and his men along with empty promises of an Arab nation. Sometimes I even believe that myself. But I mean to do it. By God, I mean to do it! I call us intrusive because I mean to break into the accepted halls of British foreign policy and establish a new people here in the East. I'll write my will across the sky in stars!'

'I'm afraid not, old man,' said the English soldier, stepping into the tent. The Doctor saw the Webley in the man's hand. He moved fast, faster than a man of his age and ungainly frame should have.

It wasn't fast enough.

The gunshot caught Lawrence in the chest. His eyes were wide with surprise as he toppled backwards in a confusion of tentcloth and drapery.



Dear Edmund (Jo Grant read),

Further to the discussions between Mr Sykes and M. Picot, and on-going discussions since, it has become quite apparent that French intentions in the region would seem utterly incompatible with our ideas of liberating the Arab nation and of establishing a free and independent Arab State. The British Government, in authorising the letters despatched to King Hussein before the outbreak of the revolt by Sir Henry McMahon, would seem to raise a doubt as to whether our pledges to King Hussein as head of the Arab nation are consistent with French intentions to make not only Syria but Upper Mesopotamia another Tunis. If our support of King Hussein and the other Arabian leaders of less distinguished origin and prestige means

anything it means that we are prepared to recognise the full sovereign independence of the Arabs of Arabia and Syria.

Without the defending presence of another European power to protect Arab interests and constrain French imperial ambitions, the establishment of French imperial control over the whole region, would be a swift inevitability. Such a situation, I need not remind you, would be as detrimental to British interests in the Near East as it would be undesirable to the Arabs themselves. His Majesty's Government has therefore determined that the only course of action which would be in the best interests of all would be the establishment of those parts of the Levant detailed under the Sykes-Picot agreement, viz Palestine, Mesopotamia and Eastern Arabia as a protectorate under British supervision.

Moreover, His Majesty's government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object, it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine, or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country.

We are aware that your man Maj. Lawrence has in mind certain plans of his own for the Arab people. You are reminded of the necessity to do all that is required to ensure that, despite his undoubted value in organising the Arab Revolt against the Turks, Lawrence does nothing to jeopardise the delicate diplomatic balance of the situation.

All congratulations on the progress in the campaign, etc.

Yours sincerely,

Lord A. J. Balfour
Foreign Secretary

ps. Burn this letter after reading.

'So it's true,' said Najid, all his former anger deflating into resigned weariness. 'They mean to divide the East up among themselves. French and British and Jew. They're selling us out.'

'But they *can't!*' Abdul-Malik protested. 'They promised us a nation! An Arab nation from Syria to Arabia!'

'They *can,*' said Najid. He looked at Abdul-Malik, and then across to Jo. 'The real question is, what are we going to do about it?'

