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African Romance. A Story.

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A Story,

by K l a u s M a n n

Doris and Marcel didn't know much about each other, although they practically lived together. Their intimacy was natural, indeed, inevitable, under the circumstances. Foreigners made themselves rare in French Morocco, nowadays. Most tourists left as soon as the war broke out, while others stayed until the day France collapsed. ~~According to the~~ Then all sorts of dire rumours began to circulate. According ~~the~~ to the head waiter of the Palace Arabe, Morocco was on the point of declaring war ^{on} ~~to~~ Germany, making an alliance with Hitler, becoming an American colony, an Italian sphere of influence, the headquarter of General de Gaulle and the private playground of Field Marshal Hermann Goering. The conciierge had information to the effect that all British subjects still residing in this part of Africa, would be shortly interned, if not court-martialed and executed.

The French district of Fez - once teeming with gaudy life - gradually assumed the bleak aspect of a ghost town. As for the Palace Arabe - a fancy caravansery situated in the Arabian town proper - it might as well have closed, if it had not been for Doris and Marcel. At luncheon time, they were all by themselves in the vast, empty dining hall. It would have been fatuous, indeed, frightening to eat at two separate tables. So they shared their meals and their apprehension, ~~clinging to each other like a couple of bewitched infants.~~

It was only about the cocktail hour that some people dropped in - natives of high social standing, French officers and officials, and, time and again, a party of mysterious German "tourists." The Arabians looked stately and picturesque in their heavy silk burnous', with motionless, bearded faces, ~~shadowed by the hoods.~~ Compared with them, the French

officers appeared all the more frail and fidgety, and the bumptious vulgarity of the Teutonic visitors painfully contrasted with the taciturn grandeur of the Mussulmen.

"Kind of embarrassing, your compatriots," Doris observed, puffing the smoke of her cigarette in a faintly aggressive fashion.

"What compatriots do you mean?" - Obviously, Marcel was irritated. "If it's by any chance those ludicrous Prussians you're referring to..."

But she interrupted him with one of her bland and ambiguous smiles. "Dear me!" she said. "Don't look so cross, darling! I didn't mean to hurt your feelings - certainly not. Why should I call these Nazis your compatriots? I know that you are French, chéri..."

"When did I ever pretend to be a French citizen?" he muttered. "My country is the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg, as you might remember by now."

She giggled and shrugged her shoulders. "Luxembourg, France, Germany," she said, "what's the difference? It's all the same to me. I don't care, really, if I'll ever see any of those dumps again."

He glanced at her, with suspicion and admiration. She looked disarmingly handsome - a pensive and elegant page in her short, tight-fitting bolero and gray flanel slacks. There was something attractively bold and boyish about the way the back of her head was shaped. Marcel was very fond of studying the changeable colours of her hair and eyes. Sometimes her hair looked strawy, as if dried out and paled by the sun. In other moments it seemed honey-coloured, with rich, golden tones. Her eyes - set wide apart from each other under a broad, musing forehead - had the iridescent depth of placid but incalculable waters. They were not blue, her eyes, but of a radiant gray; an extraordinary gray, indeed, with a tinge of silvery green. At times they appeared limpid and bright like jewels - lustrous with an almost inhuman purity. In other moments, however, they darkened and turned almost black - ^(suddenly) veiled ~~by her deceitful thoughts and~~, as it were, by ominous clouds.

'Funny creature she is,' Marcel thought, while looking at her. 'How does she manage to have such angelic features, and still be such a liar? In what deceitful reveries indulges her mind when she gives me that treacherous gaze? If I only knew what sort of a girl she really is!'

Whatever she told him about her background and activities, she didn't believe a word. She said that she was born in the Swiss city of Bern: which probably indicated that she came from Finland or Australia. Allegedly she was married to a Brazilian diplomat; but Marcel thought it more likely that she was the widow of a Russian general, or the tenth wife of an Indian Maharadsha, or that she belonged to an organization of militant Amazons, who made a point of murdering men, instead of marrying them.

What was she doing in Fez, ~~anyhow~~ anyhow? What irrational whim or secret assignement kept her at the deserted Palace Arabe? She pretended to be in Morocco as a correspondent for some Swedish and Portuguese papers, but never showed him any samples of her journalistic work. Most of the time she seemed idle and faintly bored - until, abruptly, she became very busy, scurried to the telephone, received wires, and undertook mysterious expeditions to the French district or to one of the neighbouring towns. In such moments Marcel was inclined to take her for a spy - a secret agent in the services of Nazi Germany or Great Britain or the Sheik of Tunisia. On other occasions he suspected her to be a wicked and astute adventuress kept by a little army of wealthy lovers in various regions of North Africa. And there were also hours when he thought her just a helpless bit of flotsam as he was himself: one of the many refugees from one of the many war-ridden countries; ^a ~~another~~ derelict creature ~~like no other creature~~ of the dreary, familiar pattern. There were hundreds, thousands of them - in Lisbon, in Zurich, in Casablanca: all haunted by the same fears and illusions; spending their last money in some gloomy pension de famille or pompous Grand Hotel; rushing to the Consulates of Ecuador, Mexico, or the United States; cabling their monotonous SOS cries to ~~their~~ friends

in Milwaukee, Melbourne^e or Montreal; waiting for affidavits, visas, clipper- or boat reservations; always waiting...

Maybe Doris was just one of that wretched lot; or, perhaps, her life was full of vicious and glamorous secrets. At bottom, Marcel didn't care, really. Spy or fugitive - she was charming, and a good sport, too - in her elusive, absent-minded mode. It was fun to saunter, arm in arm with her, through the sultry maze of the Ville Arabe. They would tell each other how passionately they were in love - not with each other, to be sure, but ^{with} this bewitched and bewitching place called Fez. Indeed, the glaring posters of the French travel offices did not exaggerate when they described Fez as the heart and pearl of the Arabian world. The fairy-tale sceneries of these mosques and bazaars lived up to the most rhapsodic promises. No tourist was likely to regret having followed the appeal: ~~sublimely placid~~ "Visitez Fez, la Mystérieuse! Fez, la Reine de l'Afrique du Nord!"

There was indeed something utterly enthralling about the smells and colours, the spectacular bustle in these narrow, shadowy streets. Doris and Marcel enjoyed every minute of their "shopping" promenades. It was by no means the actual purchase ^{of curiosities} that amused and thrilled them: in fact, they bought next to nothing. But they got never tired of rummaging the gaudy junk flowing from the cave-like magazines over the pavement - all those colourful garments, sweetish perfumes, poisoned-looking candy, fancy products of Moroccan leather. ~~The two kindred travellers,~~ Doris and Marcel, chuckled like a couple of kids when the bearded salesmen displayed ^{(in front of them the traditional roster of obvious} ~~their complete repertoire of transparent~~ wiles, along with the tawdry stuff they hoped to sell for an inordinate price. The two ^(of those inspired shopkeepers) childlike tourists relished the glib persistence like a vaudeville act, and had a good time sipping the aromatic concoction called café Turque - offered gratis to the customers. Finally they discovered, to their painful surprise, that they had forgotten to take any money along.

Most of the merchants took the disappointment nicely - with a good-natured grin. Ménalque, the so-called Prince of the Bazaars, was the only exception.

His collection of bric-à-brac was allegedly the finest and most costly one in this part of the country. But, for one reason or another, Doris and Marcel did not feel like inspecting Ménalque's famous treasures. Finally they overcame their whimsical animosity and dropped by to have a look at his much-vaunted antiques. What they saw was indeed impressive. Yet they somehow felt ill at ease in the spacious, dimly lightened magazine crammed with mirrors, pipes, and lamps, grotesque idols and distorted masks, carved work and ivory statues, all sorts of baroque toys and uncanny relics.

They didn't like the place, nor were they favourably impressed by the man who owned it. There was something unpleasant about Ménalque's lean, intelligent face - greenishly sallow under a scarlet ~~face~~ fez. His eyes were hidden behind enormous blue glasses. He talked beautifully, in a deep, unctuous voice.

The round little box of black metal he tried to ~~obstinately~~ ^{less valuable} to sell them, was evidently one of his ~~most worthless~~ objects. He could hardly be interested in the 250 Francs he claimed, ~~for the modest item~~. In fact, his repeated assertion that it was not the money he cared for, sounded fairly convincing. But why, then, did he go out of his way, for the sake of such a trifling affair? All he wanted, ostensibly, was that "our magnificent lady" and "divine young woman" - as he addressed Doris - possess the metal box, which, according to Ménalque, carried a magic charm and was altogether indispensable to discover the real secrets of the Orient.

Doris seemed half-amused, half-nauseated by his flowery compliments. She listened, blushed, laughed, then frowned; listened, and smiled again. At one point, she appeared willing to buy the box: there was

a strange greed and tenderness in the way her hands clasped the casket. But suddenly she changed her mind and declared, with a certain nervous haste, that she'd love to have the thing but, alas, couldn't afford it just now. Ménalque's features were frozen when he accompanied his ~~other~~ visitors to the door - all glacial politeness and unsmiling dignity. "I feel sorry for you, Madame," was all he had to say, while Marcel and Doris mumbled ~~their~~ apologies. Already in the street which received and soothed them with its familiar noises, they heard the merchant's sonorous voice repeat behind them, with somber emphasis: "... very very sorry for you, young woman."

It sounded ominous and rather frightening - almost like a curse.

They didn't talk much on their way home from this unpleasant visit. Or rather, it was the first part of this walk during which they remained gloomy and taciturn. About halfway between Ménalque's bazaar and the Palace Arabe they met Salem and made friends with him. Marcel noticed him first, - a little Arab ~~man~~ shadowing them, noiseless and nimble like a cat or a baby panther. Marcel asked him, somewhat gruffly, what the hell he wanted? The little one - he couldn't be more than ten or eleven years old - shrugged his shoulders - repeatedly, in a dramatic mode: writhing, as it were, in a fit of coquettish embarrassment. "Rien," he whispered - still convulsed with ^{bashfulness} ~~playful fear~~ or with inward laughter. "Nothin'. Salem want nothin' at all of Monsieur. Just look at Madame - that's all Salem is after." His ~~bashful~~ timid smile was disarming - with strong, immaculate teeth flashing in his thick-lipped, innocent mouth.

He was as cute and clever as could be. The golden-brown complexion of his pretty face contrasted with the almost black colouring of his body, whose ^{svelte} ~~supple~~ nakedness became visible between the pitiful rags he wore. Doris was presently taken with his roguish and savage charm. She kissed him and almost cried when he told her that he was an orphan - penniless, forlorn, with nobody to look after him.

Her maternal instincts responded⁷ to his inarticulate but expressive appeal. After a few days she called Salem "my little son." Marcel laughed, but she meant it seriously. "We have adapted⁸ him as our child, haven't we?" she said, with solemn determination.

Their child kept tagging behind them all day long. Doris pampered and petted him. He was her toy and her fetish. She allowed him to sleep in her antechamber. Every morning he would tiptoe to her bed and awaken her with his kiss. She adored him. He was the only one able to cheer her when she was sad or moody. One of his shiny looks sufficed to make her feel better. When Salem found her despondent, he would woo her with his childish jokes and compliments. "Madame - plus jolie que jamais," he announced, in that raucous little voice of his: whereupon Doris⁹ ~~looked~~ promptly looked at her best - refreshed, bewitched, as it were, by the touch of his dirty and dexterous hand.

"I want you to look pretty, too," she said to him, one day. "Why should my son walk about in rags? I'll make a little gentleman of you!"^d

She bought him a gaudy outfit - yellow knickerbockers, a crimson jacket, and a fez with a handsome tassel. Salem beamed and capered. "Moi - ~~maintenant~~ - aussi beau que Madame!" he ranted and jubilated. And, again, while prancing through the room: "Salem - now the most finest man in whole city! Le beau Salem, the Prince of the Bazaars!"

Doris, surprisingly, seemed irritated, indeed, hurt by his last words. "Ca suffit," she said curtly. "You'd better run now, and ask the chef for your supper."

~~Evidently~~, Salem's new clothes and familiar capricious suddenly palled on Doris, on account of his ^{allusion} ~~reference~~ to Ménalque's pompous title. For one reason or another, the incident with the magic box was considered unmentionable; neither Marcel nor Doris ever referred to it. Salem's unwitting offence against the ~~taboo~~ taboo evidently meant quite a shock to Doris.

During the meal she was talkative, but in a forced, almost hysterical

way. Her eyes more iridescent and mendacious than ever, she dwelled on all sorts of minor nuisances that ostensibly spoiled her life - the increasing heat, the poor food, the annoying mosquitos. But Marcel suspected all these casual complaints to be just as many contrivances designed to conceal her actual worries from him. It was with anxiety that he watched her as she lied and suffered. What mysterious anguish clouded her lovely brow? No doubt, the state of her nerves and health had deteriorated ⁱⁿ during the last few weeks. Also, she had lost weight, which she could hardly afford, considering her utter slenderness. How deplorably meager she looked in her white evening gown, which seemed a trifle too dainty and effeminate for her boyish type. Marcel thought that she resembled an aristocratic youth disguised in his sister's clothes as he escapes by night from the family castle, for some romantic but dire reason. There was something touchingly awkward about her appearance, this night. Marcel liked her more than he had ever before.

After supper, they walked arm in arm through the dark, sultry garden. As she clinged closely to him, Marcel began to wonder if she expected, perhaps, a more palpable ^(comfort) from him than just his chivalrous words and attentions. He caressed her hand, but she withdrew it - terrified, as it were. Obviously, it was not that sort of solace she wanted.

Doris asserted to be half-dead with fatigue and headache. He accompanied her to her suite. Before they separated, she looked at him askance and said - hastily, with a faint, transient smile - the saddest smile Marcel had ever seen: "Don't be mad at me, dear, for being such a bore! It's not my fault, really. Things are so messed up, nowadays - my personal things, I mean, and the big, public things, too. It's kind of difficult not to go astray, when everything cracks and trembles and tumbles." She made a wide, swinging motion indicating the chaotic conditions of her private life and the world at large. Then the expression of her face altered and became strangely cold, almost hostile, as she added, in

a dead, tinny voice: "Never mind. Sorry I talked so much."

The nervous strain from which she suffered proved contagious. Marcel, left alone, felt almost unbearably restless and apprehensive. He tried to calm down in the garden; but the sultry sirocco - laden with dust and perfumes - only exacerbated his state.

A raucous whisper startled him from his ~~dis~~ reveries. It was Salem - suddenly emerged from the fragrant night. Grinning at Marcel's aghast expression, he revealed vigorous, flashing teeth and, simultaneously rolled his big, lustrous eyes, which made him look droll but also ravenous and even a little mad. His voice, too, sounded somehow disquieting as he addressed Marcel with these rugged remarks:

"Happy to meet Monsieur. Monsieur - ^τworried about Madame. Salem - worried himself. Poor Madame - sick and sad; no sleep, no fun, nothing. Salem feels sorry for Madame. Very very sorry. Something must be done."

"But what?" Marcel asked - with desperate seriousness ; as if talking to a grown-up, responsible person.

There was a twinkle in the child's lovely and cunning eyes. "Salem knows!" he boasted. "Salem's uncle - great doctor. Has magic herb to make Madame laugh and sing. Uncle says magic herb is only medicine that can do the trick. Wishes to see Monsieur."

What uncanny spell made Marcel follow this impish guide into the Arabian city? Dazed and bedeviled, half unwittingly, he allowed Salem to lead him through the labyrinth of dingy and fetid streets. The agile page stopped in front of a dark, delapidated house. With fumbling, fidgety ~~gestures~~ ^{motions} - suddenly mute, as it were - he invited Marcel to enter. While the little one still gesticulated, the heavy door flung open - Salem withdrew - silent, with a wry, anxious grin. Marcel entered the house.

There was no lobby nor staircase; just a vast, empty room. First the murky light prevented Marcel from recognizing the man who received him squatting on the floor - strangely isolated and motionless in the center of the bleak, spacious scene. But the deep and unctuous voice was unmistakable.

"Welcome, my friend," that Ménalque, the Prince of the Bazaars. "I am Salem's uncle."

Out of an irrational vagary, he pretended to be unaware of their former acquaintance. The purple hood which now replaced his fez was ~~perhaps~~ supposed, perhaps, to disguise his identity. As for his huge, coloured glasses, they could hardly serve such a purpose; for they belonged to his traditional outfit. Why did he wear them - by night and in his home? "Maybe his eyes are disfigured by some ugly disease," Marcel thought, with a transient shudder. "Or else, his gaze is so hideous and so powerful that he cannot risk to look at any man, except at those he intends to kill."

"Be seated, stranger!" said Ménalque, with a grandiose gesture offering the bare floor. He added, in a discreetly lowered voice: "My little nephew has told me all about you." ~~It sounded as if Salem's reported reports were overflowing with astounding details as to the vicious goings-on at the Palace Arabs.~~

"Now, what sort of crazy stuff has Salem made up about us?" Marcel asked, with a brief, ^ouncomfortable laughter.

Ménalque failed to answer, ^{but just} ~~he~~ nodded and smirked, ~~and~~ After a little while, ^{he} mumbled, cryptically: "I know, I know..." ~~Thereupon~~ ^{And} ~~there was~~ another stillness.

It was Marcel who began to speak again: "Salem - your nephew -

I mean, our little friend..." he said in a faltering voice; then

^(He had to) clear ~~his~~ throat, ^{then} continued: "He mentioned some medicine - a tonic herb, if I am not mistaken, ~~which you recommend again~~ to cure nervous

disturbances - that is to say, depressions, fits of melancholia, and the like."

"That is what Salem told you?" Ménalque produced a soft, ~~but~~ sonorous chuckle. "Smart little fellow, all right!" he exclaimed ~~very~~ cheerfully, as if dropping at last his cumbersome mask of weirdness and dignity. He continued, in a matter-of-fact way - almost cynically: "I am dealing in Hashish, among other things."

Marcel felt relieved and at the same time disappointed. 'That's what it boils down to,' he ~~felt~~ thought. 'An ordinary merchant of narcotics...' Aloud he said, rather gruffly: "I am not interested in drugs."

Ménalque - solemn and demoniac, once again - raised his oily, melodious bass: "But the young woman might be," he said, with ominous emphasis. "Your magnificent lady ~~might~~ need it. Oblivion - that's what we are seeking, all of us, my friend. Oblivion...oblivion..." he repeated in a ringing, hypnotizing voice. "Hashish grants it to you, the celestial balm of oblivion. One little spoonful of the magic drug, my friend, and you will forget the lies and sorrows of this wicked world - lifted up to paradisiac heights, thanks to the miraculous herb."

Even while talking, he produced the ~~little~~ black little box, out of one of his sleeves or his hood, with a swift and inconspicuous motion, like a magician who pulls a pigeon or a bunch of roses out of his shoes or nostrils.

"Here it is!" he announced, triumphantly. "Only two hundred and fifty Francs, including the pretty box. It's a bargain, my friend! And what quality! A quality for princes!"

As Marcel still hesitated, the Prince of the Bazaars stripped up his huge, coloured glasses, and revealed his eyes.

Marcel bought the Hashish for 250 Francs - the same price Ménalque had claimed for the yet empty box.

"Ménalque is a dirty liar," Doris complained. "I don't feel the faintest effect.* His quality for princes consists of chocolate powder mixed with ~~sugar and~~ cinnamon."

"Isn't it too bad," said Marcel. "Let's have another spoonful, anyway. It couldn't do any harm."

The magic herb did not look appetizing - a sort of greenish-black dust. ~~Marcel had been reluctant even to taste the stuff; but Doris insisted. At this point,~~ They had already consumed three times the quantity suggested by Ménalque. Now they swallowed another substantial dose, regardless of his warnings.

After a little while they grew exceedingly gay. Everything made them giggle - the shape of the carafe or the tassels of Doris's slippers, the name of the hotel whose furniture was so funny, or the name of the Arabian town in whose laughable center this comical caravansery was situated. "Fez!" they chuckled, with nonsensical merriment. "What a name! Visitez Fez, la Mystérieuse! Why don't you visit Fez, la Reine de l'Afrique du Nord, where every man wears a fez and every fez has a tassel? Why don't you pay your homages to the tasselled Queen of Northern Africa and her princely bazaars? Visit the heart and the pearl of Ménalque's fez with the tassel! Why don't you pay 250 Francs for the oblivious box of the princely Bazaar? Mes princes, my reines, et mes bazares! Visitez donc - your magnificent lady ~~may~~ need it! - le mystère de la qualité Ménalquienne; la Reine aux principes Hashishaux; le Hashish royale aux qualités mystérieux..."

They shrieked with laughter about the most preposterous puns. Whatever they touched or mentioned turned out to be irresistibly humorous. They had an excellent time, for an hour or so. Then they fell abruptly asleep.

Doris lay on the bed; Marcel sprawled on a armchair, in the midst of the messy room. Her outcry penetrated his trance-like sleep. "Oh!

my Lord! Oh!" she groaned - flinging through the apartment, her eyes fixed and widened in a white, horrified face. "I must die! I am through!" ~~she lamented - pacing desperately between bed and window.~~

"What is wrong?" he asked - starting from his narcotized slumber.

"That devilish stuff!" she moaned. "That hashish! We're poisoned - both of us...Oh! my Lord..."

"I am all right, so far," he said, and began to tremble. His mind - at once reeling and uncannily awake - tried frantically to grasp the ~~various~~ ^{various} potentialities inherent in the situation. Maybe Ménalque attempted to kill Doris who was, perhaps, in the service of a Government hostile to Ménalque's. Or else, Doris might be involved in the grisly plot herself - in fact, might have staged it in order to do away with him, Marcel, whom she took for a British or Free-French agent. Being a Nazi spy, ~~she~~ she had order to liquidate him. Salem and Ménalque were her tools, as she was the tool of those dire powers in Berlin. This most unpleasant possibility was also the most probable one. Every detail fitted. Her odd behavior in Ménalque's bazaar; her immoderate affection for Salem; her surprising willingness to partake in the Hashish adventure...

But her tormented groans refuted ~~the~~ Marcel's suspicion. No doubt, her dread and anguish were genuine. No master mime could ever feign ~~the~~ ^{the} indescribable expression of horror that numbed and distorted her face. Constantly ~~pacing~~ ^{the} the room, she tried to explain what had happened to her in her sleep - the ~~violent and~~ overpowering shock she had passed through. "I've been too deep," she ~~kept~~ ^{ed} mumbling - impelled by some sinister force to ~~move~~ ^{(keep) ing} from ~~one~~ the bed to the window and back, incessantly, like an insane animal in its cage. "Much too deep below..." she continued her rugged account. "It was almost death... Oh! my poor Marcel! We must die..."

He wanted to call the doctor, but Doris decided: "Let's go!"

In her dressing-gown and Arabian slippers? He hesitated; but she

pulled him towards the door - out into the perfumed blackness of the African night.

They had to cross the whole width of the garden to reach the central part of the extensive hotel. There were no lights, except the dim shimmer from Doris's room and the distant shine from the main lobby, where the night clerk slumbered behind the switch board. The many odours of the plants and flowers were alarmingly sweet in the humid, velvety air. Even more intoxicating than the scent of roses and jessamine was the monotonous concert produced by the frogs and crickets. Their unending litany almost drowned the familiar noises wafted into the park from behind the stone wall - from the Arabian city. These sounds were always the same: the guttural cries with which the half-grown lads communicate from one hiding place to another; the saturnine bells announcing the approach of a leprosy-stricken outcast; ^(the bark of an angry dog) the bleak song of a drunkard. The bewitched city, Fez la Mystérieuse, sent every night its immutable invocations up to a starless and motionless sky.

"Say something!" Doris begged, in a strangled voice, while they stumbled side by side through the maze of flower-beds and bushes. "If you don't talk," she whimpered, "I'll fall again... oh! into the bottomless.... Why don't you say something?"

But Marcel did not know what to say. He was haunted by ^{the} sudden fear that they might miss their way to the central building. His reeling mind repeated - desperately, automatically - the words he had heard from Doris: "It's kind of difficult not to go astray when everything cracks and trembles and tumbles..."

There was a long stillness before he whispered - helplessly, tonelessly, like a frightened child: "Something extraordinary has just happened to me. I don't feel my right arm any more. It must have disappeared. And now the left one is off..."

"What is the matter with your arms, Marcel?" She shook his shoulders

while she shouted at him: "Oh! that devilish stuff!"

What Marcel experienced during the following moments was ghastly beyond words. It was insanity. It was hell.

First his arms flew away; then the legs; then his neck, his head, his body. He burst literally asunder. He exploded, dissolved, broke into thousand pieces. His identity cracked: the fragments of his organism fluttered throughout the park. The unspeakable sensation he underwent was that of complete physical disintegration. His hair ached and ~~ached~~ ^{burned} - entangled in thorny thicket. His estranged, terrible mouth stammered prayers and blasphemies from the top of a cypress tree. His feet - aimless and derelict - ran through the flower-beds: while his heart - a lump of throbbing, disconnected nerves - fell into the abyss of purple, fathomless night.

During all this time, however, Marcel's innermost consciousness never ceased to realize and observe the appalling spook. This was, perhaps, the most horrid thing about the infernal adventure: that he remained aware of what he was passing through - watching, with infinite dismay and disgust, the process of his own disruption. His brain - isolated but by no means darkened or paralyzed - hovered somewhere in the midst of the schizophrenic mess.

He heard Doris's voice: it came, surprisingly, from the roof of the central building. "Why do you jump all the time?" she asked, rather angrily. "Why do you dance? Stop dancing!"

Marcel's lonely brain noticed, not without irritation, that Marcel's voice - defying all rules of logic and decency - came from the tip of the fountain. "I don't dance, if you please," asserted the fugitive voice, on behalf of the being that had once been Marcel. "You must be seeing things. If I did dance, however, it would not be I who did it. How can I stop dancing, since it is not I who would dance, if I danced?"

The night clerk thought they were drunk, and suggested they should go to bed. They kept yelling and jumping about in the lobby, until the manager interfered. More subtle and experienced than his employé, he conjectured that his respected clients had unfortunately lost their minds. He ordered the night clerk to call the ~~driver~~ ^{his} chauffeur who, in his turn, was to drive the insane gentleman and ~~the~~ ^{his} crazy lady to the ~~Military~~ ^{the} Hospital - the only institute competent in emergency cases.

It took about thirty minutes before the driver showed up: ~~he~~ ^{he} had to be rescued in an Arabian brothel. Naturally, he was in a grim mood, on account of the interruption. So he kept scolding his queer passengers, throughout the whole ride from the center of the Arabian city up to the hills, where the Hôpital Militaire was situated.

The car swam through clouds. Doris sang; Marcel attempted to dance. The driver said ~~that~~ they ought to be ashamed of themselves. Marcel yelled with fear as his head daringly hopped about, at the roof of a big mosque. "Shut up, crazy foreigner!" the driver shouted at him. "I'll beat your head off if you do that again." Doris, meanwhile, wrung her hands so violently that one could hear the joints crack. During the entire trip she sang and wrung her hands - maybe in order to stay ~~wake~~ awake, or out of despair, or simply because she was mad.

It was almost three o'clock in the morning when the chauffeur delivered them at the entrance of the Military Hospital. The air had abruptly chilled or, perhaps, was always cooler up here than in the maze of the Arabian city. It was still fairly dark, but the darkness was not black and velvety any more. A gray, creeping glimmer around the tops of the palm trees already announced the coming of the dawn.

The soldiers heckled and teased the two hopping dervishes, while the driver reported to an older man in a white linen coat. "An overdose of hashish," Marcel heard the old man say, from immeasurable distance. "Silly kids they are. Well, we'll give them something to make them sleep."

They are young: they'll overcome the shock. Good thing you brought them here."

His voice sounded jovial and soothing. Marcel liked the man.

"No, we are not gipsies," Doris assured the soldiers, who were greatly amused by the colourful rags she wore. "And we are not nuts, either," she added, rather annoyed and haughty.

At this moment Marcel noticed that Salem had followed them. There he was - squatting in front of the iron gate, a lonesome, pathetic figure. He had exchanged his fine new clothes for ^{his old,} ~~the~~ shabby mantle - wearing, as it were, mourning for his demented friends, Doris and Marcel. He looked extremely wretched and despondent, with bluish lips in a wan, trembling face - a freezing little monkey in the chill of this pallid hour. As the two ~~patients~~ prisoners passed by - escorted and propped by the guffawing soldiers - he raised his ^(dirty little) hands, with a helpless, beautiful motion, as if begging them to forgive him.

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They brought them to ~~the little room~~ a bleak cell furnished with nothing save a large twin-bed. The administration of the hospital apparently took the newcomers for a married couple, or else they thought Doris a boy - a frail, dishevelled youth with greenish-black, eyes full of fear.

The ~~kindly~~ ^{let them have} elderly man in white ~~injected them~~ a sleeping medicine - strong enough to knock out a giant. Doris protested at first - reminding the doctor of her experiences as to the weird attraction of the bottomless. The doctor smirked understandingly. He kept smirking when Marcel insisted that, alas, it was impossible to make any injections into his arm: for the cogent reason that there was no arm. He received the injection, all right. The ~~man~~ ^{old} man ~~withdrew~~ withdrew, with a last paternal smirk at the two dazed young people.

~~xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx~~

They were alone - very close to each other, and not afraid any more. They had gone through hell together, and had survived it, together: from now on they could depend on each other; they were comrades, for good. Ménalque had lost his sinister grip of them: the metal box - hitherto charged with the sweetish herb of undoing - was deprived of its evil charm. Doris did not fear the maelstrom of darkness and death any more: ~~she~~ ^{she} knew that there was ~~some~~ a friend to protect her from falling. Marcel, in his turn, felt that his identity reorganized itself once again - by degrees and slowly; yet the worst of the worst was over. Doris had picked up, mercifully, a throbbing lump of disconnected nerves hanging somewhere in the bushes - Marcel's lonely heart.

"Doris," Marcel whispered. "Are you asleep?"

"Fast asleep."

"So am I,"

Bondage and burden, the entanglements and lies of their homeless lives seemed graciously transfigured as they relaxed in their common ~~number~~ - the first secret they shared with each other.

Sleep

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AFRICAN ROMANCE

A Story,

by K l a u s M a n n

Doris and Marcel didn't know much about each other, although they practically lived together. Their intimacy was natural, indeed, inevitable, under the circumstances. Foreigners made themselves rare in French Morocco, nowadays. Most tourists left as soon as the war broke out, while others stayed until the day France collapsed. ~~According to the~~ Then all sorts of dire rumours began to circulate. According ~~to~~ to the head waiter of the Palace Arabe, Morocco was on the point of declaring war ^{on} ~~to~~ Germany, making an alliance with Hitler, becoming an American colony, an Italian sphere of influence, the headquarter of General de Gaulle and the private playground of Field Marshal Hermann Goering. The concierge had information to the effect that all British subjects still residing in this part of Africa, would be shortly interned, if not court-martialed and executed.

The French district of Fez - once teeming with gaudy life - gradually assumed the bleak aspect of a ghost town. As for the Palace Arabe - a fancy caravansery situated in the Arabian town proper - it might as well have closed, if it had not been for Doris and Marcel. At luncheon time, they were all by themselves in the vast, empty dining hall. It would have been fatuous, indeed, frightening to eat at two separate tables. So they shared their meals and their apprehension. ~~clinging to each other like a couple of bewitched infants.~~

It was only about the cocktail hour that some people dropped in - natives of high social standing, French officers and officials, and, time and again, a party of mysterious German "tourists." The Arabians looked stately and picturesque in their heavy silk burnous', with motionless, bearded faces, ~~shadowed by the hoods.~~ Compared with them, the French

officers appeared all the more frail and fidgety, and the bumptious vulgarity of the Teutonic visitors painfully contrasted with the taciturn grandeur of the Mussulmen.

"Kind of embarrassing, your compatriots," Doris observed, puffing the smoke of her cigarette in a faintly aggressive fashion.

"What compatriots do you mean?" - Obviously, Marcel was irritated. "If it's by any chance those ludicrous Prussians you're referring to..."

But she interrupted him with one of her bland and ambiguous smiles. "Dear me!" she said. "Don't look so cross, darling! I didn't mean to hurt your feelings - certainly not. Why should I call these Nazis your compatriots? I know that you are French, chéri..."

"When did I ever pretend to be a French citizen?" he muttered. "My country is the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg, as you might remember by now."

She giggled and shrugged her shoulders. "Luxembourg, France, Germany," she said, "what's the difference? It's all the same to me. I don't care, really, if I'll ever see any of those dumps again."

He glanced at her, with suspicion and admiration. She looked disarmingly handsome - a pensive and elegant page in her short, tight-fitting bolero and gray flanel slacks. There was something attractively bold and boyish about the way the back of her head was shaped. Marcel was very fond of studying the changeable colours of her hair and eyes. Sometimes her hair looked strawy, as if dried out and paled by the sun. In other moments it seemed honey-coloured, with rich, golden tones. Her eyes - set wide apart from each other under a broad, musing forehead - had the iridescent depth of placid but incalculable waters. They were not blue, her eyes, but of a radiant gray; an extraordinary gray, indeed, with a tinge of silvery green. At times they appeared limpid and bright like jewels - lustrous with an almost inhuman purity. In other moments, however, they darkened and turned almost black - ^{Suddenly} ~~by her deceitful thoughts and~~ veiled, ~~by her deceitful thoughts and~~ as it were, by ominous clouds.

'Funny creature she is,' Marcel thought, while looking at her. 'How does she manage to have such angelic features, and still be such a liar? In what deceitful reveries indulges her mind when she gives me that treacherous gaze? If I only knew what sort of a girl she really is!'

Whatever she told him about her background and activities, she didn't believe a word. She said that she was born in the Swiss city of Bern: which probably indicated that she came from Finland or Australia. Allegedly she was married to a Brazilian diplomat; but Marcel thought it more likely that she was the widow of a Russian general, or the tenth wife of an Indian Maharadsha, or that she belonged to an organization of militant Amazons, who made a point of murdering men, instead of marrying them.

What was she doing in Fez, ~~anyway~~ anyhow? What irrational whim or secret assignement kept her at the deserted Palace Arabe? She pretended to be in Morocco as a correspondent for some Swedish and Portuguese papers, but never showed him any samples of her journalistic work. Most of the time she seemed idle and faintly bored - until, abruptly, she became very busy, scurried to the telephone, received wires, and undertook mysterious expeditions to the French district or to one of the neighbouring towns. In such moments Marcel was inclined to take her for a spy - a secret agent in the services of Nazi Germany or Great Britain or the Sheik of Tunisia. On other occasions he suspected her to be a wicked and astute adventuress kept by a little army of wealthy lovers in various regions of North Africa. And there were also hours when he thought her just a helpless bit of flotsam as he was himself: one of the many refugees from one of the many war-ridden countries; ^a ~~another~~ derelict creature ~~like all these creatures~~ of the dreary, familiar pattern. There were hundreds, thousands of them - in Lisbon, in Zurich, in Casablanca: all haunted by the same fears and illusions; spending their last money in some gloomy pension de famille or pompous Grand Hotel; rushing to the Consulates of Ecuador, Mexico, or the United States; cabling their monotonous SOS cries to ~~their~~ friends

in Milwaukee, Melbourne, or Montreal; waiting for affidavits, visas, clipper- or boat reservations; always waiting...

Maybe Doris was just one of that wretched lot; or, perhaps, her life was full of vicious and glamorous secrets. At bottom, Marcel didn't care, really. Spy or fugitive - she was charming, and a good sport, too - in her elusive, absent-minded mode. It was fun to saunter, arm in arm with her, through the sultry maze of the Ville Arabe. They would tell each other how passionately they were in love - not with each other, to be sure, but ^{with} this bewitched and bewitching place called Fez. Indeed, the glaring posters of the French travel offices did not exaggerate when they described Fez as the heart and pearl of the Arabian world. The fairy-tale sceneries of these mosques and bazaars lived up to the most rhapsodic promises. No tourist was likely to regret having followed the appeal: ~~of these placards~~ "Visitez Fez, la Mystérieuse! Fez, la Reine de l'Afrique du Nord!"

There was indeed something utterly enthralling about the smells and colours, the spectacular bustle in these narrow, shadowy streets. Doris and Marcel enjoyed every minute of their "shopping" promenades. It was by no means the actual purchase ^{of curiosities} that amused and thrilled them: in fact, they bought next to nothing. But they got never tired of rummaging the gaudy junk flowing from the cave-like magazine over the pavement - all those colourful garments, sweetish perfumes, poisoned-looking candy, fancy products of Moroccan leather. ~~The two aimless travellers,~~ Doris and Marcel, chuckled like a couple of kids when the bearded salesmen displayed ^{in front of them the traditional repertoire of} ~~their complete repertoire of transparent~~ wiles, along with the tawdry stuff they hoped to sell for an inordinate price. The two ^{of those inspired shopkeepers} childlike tourists relished their glib persistence ^{obvious} like a vaudeville act, and had a good time sipping the aromatic concoction called café Turque - offered gratis to the customers. Finally they discovered, to their painful surprise, that they had forgotten to take any money along.

Most of the merchants took the disappointment nicely - with a good-natured grin. Ménalque, the so-called Prince of the Bazaars, was the only exception.

His collection of bric-à-brac was allegedly the finest and most costly one in this part of the country. But, for one reason or another, Doris and Marcel did not feel like inspecting Ménalque's famous treasures. Finally they overcame their whimsical animosity and dropped by to have a look at his much-vaunted antiques. What they saw was indeed impressive. Yet they somehow felt ill at ease in the spacious, dimly lightened magazine crammed with mirrors, pipes, and lamps, grotesque idols and distorted masks, carved work and ivory statues, all sorts of baroque toys and uncanny relics.

They didn't like the place, nor were they favourably impressed by the man who owned it. There was something unpleasant about Ménalque's lean, intelligent face - greenishly sallow under a scarlet ~~face~~ fez. His eyes were hidden behind enormous blue glasses. He talked beautifully, in a deep, unctuous voice.

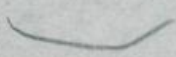
The round little box of black metal he tried to obstinately to sell them, was evidently one of his most worthless objects. He could hardly be interested in the 250 Francs he claimed for the modest item. In fact, his repeated assertion that it was not the money he cared for, sounded fairly convincing. But why, then, did he go out of his way, for the sake of such a trifling affair? All he wanted, ostensibly, was that "our magnificent lady" and "divine young woman" - as he addressed Doris - possess the metal box, which, according to Ménalque, carried a magic charm and was altogether indispensable to discover the real secrets of the Orient.

Doris seemed half-amused, half-nauseated by his flowery compliments. She listened, blushed, laughed, then frowned; listened, and smiled again. At one point, she appeared willing to buy the box: there was

a strange greed and tenderness in the way her hands clasped the casket. But suddenly she changed her mind and declared, with a certain nervous haste, that she'd love to have the thing but, alas, couldn't afford it just now. Ménalque's features were frozen when he accompanied his ~~guests~~ visitors to the door - all glacial politeness and unsmiling dignity. "I feel sorry for you, Madame," was all he had to say, while Marcel and Doris mumbled their apologies. Already in the street which received and soothed them with its familiar noises, they heard the merchant's sonorous voice repeat behind them, with somber emphasis: "... very very sorry for you, young woman."

It sounded ominous and rather frightening - almost like a curse.

They didn't talk much on their way home from this unpleasant visit. Or rather, it was the first part of this walk during which they remained gloomy and taciturn. About halfway between Ménalque's bazaar and the Palace Arabe they met Salem and made friends with him. Marcel noticed him first, - a little Arab ~~man~~ shadowing them, noiseless and nimble like a cat or a baby panther. Marcel asked him, somewhat gruffly, what the hell he wanted? The little one - he couldn't be more than ten or eleven years old - shrugged his shoulders - repeatedly, in a dramatic mode: writhing, as it were, in a fit of coquettish embarrassment. "Rien," he whispered - still convulsed with playful fear or with inward laughter. "Nothin'. Salems want nothin' at all of Monsieur. Just look at Madame - that's all Salem is after." His ~~bashful~~ timid smile was disarming - with strong, immaculate teeth flashing in his thick-lipped, innocent mouth.

He was as cute and clever as could be. The golden-brown complexion of his pretty face contrasted with the almost black colouring of his body, whose fragile nakedness became visible between the pitiful rags he wore. Doris was presently taken with his roguish and savage charm. She kissed him and almost cried when he told her that he was an orphan - penniless, forlorn, with nobody to look after him. 

Her maternal instincts responded ⁷ to his inarticulate but expressive appeal. After a few days she called Salem "my little son." Marcel laughed, but she meant it seriously. "We have ^Q adapted him as our child, haven't we?" she said, with solemn determination.

Their child kept tagging behind them all day long. Doris pampered and petted him. He was her toy and her fetish. She allowed him to sleep in her antechamber. Every morning he would tiptoe to her bed and awaken her with his kiss. She adored him. He was the only one able to cheer her when she was sad or moody. One of his shiny looks sufficed to make her feel better. When Salem found her despondent, he would woo her with his childish jokes and compliments. "Madame - plus jolie que jamais," he announced, in that raucous little voice of his: whereupon Doris ^Q ~~looked~~ promptly looked at her best - refreshed, bewitched, as it were, by the touch of his dirty and dexterous hand.

"I want you to look pretty, too," she said to him, one day. "Why should my son walk about in rags? I'll make a little gentleman of you!"

She bought him a gaudy outfit - yellow knickerbockers, a crimson jacket, and a fez with a handsome tassel. Salem beamed and capered. "Moi - maintenant ^{maint} - aussi beau que Madame!" he ranted and jubilated. And, again, while prancing through the room: "Salem - now the most finest man in whole city! Le beau Salem, the Prince of the Bazaars!"

Doris, surprisingly, seemed irritated, indeed, hurt by his last words. "Ca suffit," she said curtly. "You'd better run now, and ask the chef for your supper."

~~Evidently~~, Salem's new clothes and familiar capricious suddenly palled on Doris, on account of his ^{allusion} ~~reference~~ to Ménalque's pompous title. For one reason or another, the incident with the magic box was considered unmentionable: neither Marcel nor Doris ever referred to it. Salem's unwitting offence against the ~~arbitrary~~ taboo evidently meant quite a shock to Doris.

During the meal she was talkative, but in a forced, almost hysterical

way. Her eyes more iridescent and mendacious than ever, she dwelled on all sorts of minor nuisances that ostensibly spoiled her life - the increasing heat, the poor food, the annoying mosquitos. But Marcel suspected all these casual complaints to be just as many contrivances designed to conceal her actual worries from him. It was with anxiety that he watched her as she lied and suffered. What mysterious anguish clouded her lovely brow? No doubt, the state of her nerves and health had deteriorated ⁱⁿ during the last few weeks. Also, she had lost weight, which she could hardly afford, considering her utter slenderness. How deplorably meager she looked in her white evening gown, which seemed a trifle too dainty and effeminate for her boyish type. Marcel thought that she resembled an aristocratic youth disguised in his sister's clothes as he escapes by night from the family castle, for some romantic but dire reason. There was something touchingly awkward about her appearance, this night. Marcel liked her more than he had ever before.

After supper, they walked arm in arm through the dark, sultry garden. As she clinged closely to him, Marcel began to wonder if she expected, perhaps, a more palpable ^{comfort} from him than just his chivalrous words and attentions. He caressed her hand, but she withdrew it - terrified, as it were. Obviously, it was not that sort of solace she wanted.

Doris asserted to be half-dead with fatigue and headache. He accompanied her to her suite. Before they separated, she looked at him askance and said - hastily, with a faint, transient smile - the saddest smile Marcel had ever seen: "Don't be mad at me, dear, for being such a bore! It's not my fault, really. Things are so messed up, nowadays - my personal things, I mean, and the big, public things, too. It's kind of difficult not to go astray, when everything cracks and trembles and tumbles." She made a wide, swinging motion indicating the chaotic conditions of her private life and the world at large. Then the expression of her face altered and became strangely cold, almost hostile, as she added, in

a dead, tinny voice: "Never mind. Sorry I talked so much."

The nervous strain from which she suffered proved contagious. Marcel, left alone, felt almost unbearably restless and apprehensive. He tried to calm down in the garden; but the sultry sirocco - laden with dust and perfumes - only exacerbated his state.

A raucous whisper startled him from his dismal reveries. It was Salem - suddenly emerged from the fragrant night. Grinning at Marcel's aghast expression, he revealed vigorous, flashing teeth and, simultaneously rolled his big, lustrous eyes, which made him look droll but also ravenous and even a little mad. His voice, too, sounded somehow disquieting as he addressed Marcel with these rugged remarks:

"Happy to meet Monsieur. Monsieur - ^{or}worried about Madame. Salem - worried himself. Poor Madame - sick and sad; no sleep, no fun, nothing. Salem feels sorry for Madame. Very very sorry. Something must be done."

"But what?" Marcel asked - with desperate seriousness, as if talking to a grown-up, responsible person.

There was a twinkle in the child's lovely and cunning eyes. "Salem knows!" he boasted. "Salem's uncle - great doctor. Has magic herb to make Madame laugh and sing. Uncle says magic herb is only medicine that can do the trick. Wishes to see Monsieur."

What uncanny spell made Marcel follow this impish guide into the Arabian city? Dazed and bedeviled, half unwittingly, he allowed Salem to lead him through the labyrinth of dingy and fetid streets. The agile page stopped in front of a dark, delapidated house. With fumbling, fidgety ~~motions~~ ^{motions} - suddenly mute, as it were - he invited Marcel to enter. While the little one still gesticulated, the heavy door flung open & Salem withdrew - silent, with a wry, anxious grin. Marcel entered the house.

There was no lobby nor staircase; just a vast, empty room. First the murky light prevented Marcel from recognizing the man who received him squatting on the floor - strangely isolated and motionless in the center of the bleak, spacious scene. But the deep and unctuous voice was unmistakable.

"Welcome, my friend," that Ménalque, the Prince of the Bazaars. "I am Salem's uncle."

Out of an irrational vagary, he pretended to be unaware of their former acquaintance. The purple hood which now replaced his fez was ~~supposed~~ supposed, perhaps, to disguise his identity. As for his huge, coloured glasses, they could hardly serve such a purpose; for they belonged to his traditional outfit. Why did he wear them - by night and in his home? "Maybe his eyes are disfigured by some ugly disease," Marcel thought, with a transient shudder. "Or else, his gaze is so hideous and so powerful that he cannot risk to look at any man, except at those he intends to kill."

"Be seated, stranger!" said Ménalque, with a grandiose gesture offering the bare floor. He added, in a discreetly lowered voice: "My little nephew has told me all about you." ~~It sounded as if Salem's repeated reports were overflowing with astounding details as to the vicious goings-on at the Palace Arabe.~~

"Now, what sort of crazy stuff has Salem made up about us?" Marcel asked, with a brief, uncomfortable laughter.

Ménalque failed to answer ~~he only~~ ^{he} ~~nodded and smirked, and, after~~ ^{but just} a little while, ^{he} mumbled, cryptically: "I know, I know..." ~~upon~~ ^{And} ~~there was~~ another stillness.

It was Marcel who began to speak again: "Salem - your nephew - I mean, our little friend...", ~~he said in a faltering voice; then~~ ^(He had to) clear ~~his~~ ^{then} his throat, ~~and~~ continued: "He mentioned some medicine - a tonic herb, if I am not mistaken, which you recommend ~~in~~ ^{again} to cure nervous

disturbances - that is to say, depressions, fits of melancholia, and the like."

"That is what Salem told you?" Ménalque produced a soft, ~~but~~ sonorous chuckle. "Smart little fellow, all right!" he exclaimed ~~very~~ cheerfully, as if dropping at last his cumbersome mask of weirdness and dignity. He continued, in a matter-of-fact way - almost cynically: "I am dealing in Hashish, among other things."

Marcel felt relieved and at the same time disappointed. 'That's what it boils down to,' he ~~said~~ thought. 'An ordinary merchant of narcotics...' Aloud he said, rather gruffly: "I am not interested in drugs."

Ménalque - solemn and demoniac, once again - raised his oily, melodious bass: "But the young woman might be," he said, with ominous emphasis. "~~But~~ Your magnificent lady ~~might~~ need it. Oblivion - that's what we are seeking, all of us, my friend. Oblivion...oblivion..." he repeated in a ringing, hypnotizing voice. "Hashish grants it to you, the celestial balm of oblivion. One little spoonful of the magic drug, my friend, and you will forget the lies and sorrows of this wicked world - lifted up to paradisiac heights, thanks to the miraculous herb."

Even while talking, he produced the ~~black~~ black little box, out of one of his sleeves or his hood, with a swift and inconspicuous motion, like a magician who pulls a pigeon or a bunch of roses out of his shoes or nostrils.

"Here it is!" he announced, triumphantly. "Only two hundred and fifty Francs, including the pretty box. It's a bargain, my friend! And what quality! A quality for princes!"

As Marcel still hesitated, the Prince of the Bazaars stripped up his huge, coloured glasses, and revealed his eyes.

Marcel bought the Hashish for 250 Francs - the same price Ménalque had claimed for the yet empty box.

"Ménalque is a dirty liar," Doris complained. "I don't feel the faintest effect.* His quality for princes consists of chocolate powder mixed with ~~sugar and~~ cinnamon."

"Isn't it too bad," said Marcel. "Let's have another spoonful, anyway. It couldn't do any harm."

The magic herb did not look appetizing - a sort of greenish-black dust. ~~Marcel had been reluctant even to taste the stuff; but Doris insisted. At this point, they had already consumed three times the quantity suggested by Ménalque. Now they swallowed another substantial dose, regardless of his warnings.~~

After a little while they grew exceedingly gay. Everything made them giggle - the shape of the carafe or the tassels of Doris's slippers, the name of the hotel whose furniture was so funny, or the name of the Arabian town in whose laughable center this comical caravansery was situated. "Fez!" they chuckled, with nonsensical merriment. "What a name! Visitez Fez, la Mystérieuse! Why don't you visit Fez, la Reine de l'Afrique du Nord, where every man wears a fez and every fez has a tassel? Why don't you pay your homages to the tasselled Queen of Northern Africa and her princely bazaars? Visit the heart and the pearl of Ménalque's fez with the tassel! Why don't you pay 250 Francs for the oblivious box of the princely Bazaar? Mes princes, my reines, et mes bazares! Visitez donc - your magnificent lady may need it! - le mystère de la qualité Ménalquienne; la Reine aux principes Hashishaux; le Hashish royale aux qualités mystérieux..."

They shrieked with laughter about the most preposterous puns. Whatever they touched or mentioned turned out to be irresistibly humorous. They had an excellent time, for an hour or so. Then they fell abruptly asleep.

Doris lay on the bed; Marcel sprawled on a armchair, in the midst of the messy room. Her outcry penetrated his trance-like sleep. "Oh!

my Lord! Oh!" she groaned - flinging through the apartment, her eyes fixed and widened in a white, horrified face. "I must die! I am through!" she lamented - ~~pacing desperately between bed and window.~~

"What is wrong?" he asked - starting from his narcotized slumber.

"That devilish stuff!" she moaned. "That hashish! We're poisoned - both of us...Oh! my Lord..."

"I am all right, so far," he said, and began to tremble. His mind - at once reeling and uncannily awake - tried frantically to grasp the ~~various~~ ^{various} potentialities inherent in the situation. Maybe Ménalque attempted to kill Doris who was, perhaps, in the service of a Government hostile to Ménalque's. Or else, Doris might be involved in the grisly plot herself - in fact, might have staged it in order to do away with him, Marcel, whom she took for a British or Free-French agent. Being a Nazi spy, ~~however~~ ^{therefore} she had order to liquidate him. Salem and Ménalque were her tools, as she was the tool of those dire powers in Berlin. This most unpleasant possibility was also the most probable one. Every detail fitted. Her odd behavior in Ménalque's bazaar; her immoderate affection for Salem; her surprising willingness to partake in the Hashish adventure...

But her tormented groans refuted ~~the~~ Marcel's suspicion. No doubt, her dread and anguish were genuine. No master mime could ever feign ~~the~~ ^{the} indescribable expression of horror that numbed and distorted her face. Constantly ~~pacing~~ ^{the} the room, she tried to explain what had happened to her in her sleep - the ~~weird and~~ overpowering shock she had passed through. "I've been too deep," she ~~kept~~ ^{kept} mumbling - impelled by some sinister force to ~~move~~ ^{keep moving} from one the bed to the window and back, incessantly, like an insane animal in its cage. "Much too deep below..." she continued her rugged account. "It was almost death... Oh! my poor Marcel! We must die..."

He wanted to call the doctor, but Doris decided: "Let's go!"

In her dressing-gown and Arabian slippers? He hesitated; but she

pulled him towards the door - out into the perfumed blackness of the African night.

They had to cross the whole width of the garden to reach the central part of the extensive hotel. There were no lights, except the dim shimmer from Doris's room and the distant shine from the main lobby, where the night clerk slumbered behind the switch board. The many odours of the plants and flowers were alarmingly sweet in the humid, velvety air. Even more intoxicating than the scent of roses and jessamine was the monotonous concert produced by the frogs and crickets. Their unending litany almost drowned the familiar noises wafted into the park from behind the stone wall - from the Arabian city. These sounds were always the same: the guttural cries with which the half-grown lads communicate from one hiding place to another; the saturnine bells announcing the approach of a leprosy-stricken outcast; ^{*the bark of an angry dog,*} the bleak song of a drunkard. The bewitched city, Fez la Mystérieuse, sent every night its immutable invocations up to a starless and motionless sky.

"Say something!" Doris begged, in a strangled voice, while they stumbled side by side through the maze of flower-beds and bushes. "If you don't talk," she whimpered, "I'll fall again... oh! into the bottomless.... Why don't you say something?"

But Marcel did not know what to say. He was haunted by ^{*the*} sudden fear that they might miss their way to the central building. His reeling mind repeated - desperately, automatically - the words he had heard from Doris: "It's kind of difficult not to go astray when everything cracks and trembles and tumbles..."

There was a long stillness before he whispered - helplessly, tonelessly, like a frightened child: "Something extraordinary has just happened to me. I don't feel my right arm any more. It must have disappeared. And now the left one is off..."

"What is the matter with your arms, Marcel?" She shook his shoulders

while she shouted at him: "Oh! that devilish stuff!"

What Marcel experienced during the following moments was ghastly beyond words. It was insanity. It was hell.

First his arms flew away; then the legs; then his neck, his head, his body. He burst literally asunder. He exploded, dissolved, broke into thousand pieces. His identity cracked: the fragments of his organism fluttered throughout the park. The unspeakable sensation he underwent was that of complete physical disintegration. His hair ached and ~~ached~~ ^{burned} - entangled in thorny thicket. His estranged, terrible mouth stammered prayers and blasphemies from the top of a cypress tree. His feet - aimless and derelict - ran through the flower-beds: while his heart - a lump of throbbing, disconnected nerves - fell into the abyss of purple, fathomless night.

During all this time, however, Marcel's innermost consciousness never ceased to realize and observe the appalling spook. This was, perhaps, the most horrid thing about the infernal adventure: that he remained aware of what he was passing through - watching, with infinite dismay and disgust, the process of his own disruption. His brain - isolated but by no means darkened or paralyzed - hovered somewhere in the midst of the schizophrenic mess.

He heard Doris's voice: it came, surprisingly, from the roof of the central building. "Why do you jump all the time?" she asked, rather angrily. "Why do you dance? Stop dancing!"

Marcel's lonely brain noticed, not without irritation, that Marcel's voice - defying all rules of logic and decency - came from the tip of the fountain. "I don't dance, if you please," asserted the fugitive voice, on behalf of the being that had once been Marcel. "You must be seeing things. If I did dance, however, it would not be I who did it. How can I stop dancing, since it is not I who would dance, if I danced?"

The night clerk thought they were drunk, and suggested they should go to bed. They kept yelling and jumping about in the lobby, until the manager interfered. More subtle and experienced than his employé, he conjectured that his respected clients had unfortunately lost their minds. He ordered the night clerk to call the ~~driver~~ ^{chauffeur} who, in his turn, was to drive the insane gentleman and ~~the~~ ^{his} crazy lady to the ~~Military~~ ^{Militar} Hospital - the only institute competent in emergency cases.

It took about thirty minutes before the driver showed up. ~~He~~ ^{he} had had to be rescued in an Arabian brothel. Naturally, he was in a grim mood, on account of the interruption. So he kept scolding his queer passengers, throughout the whole ride from the center of the Arabian city up to the hills, where the Hôpital Militaire was situated.

The car swam through clouds. Doris sang; Marcel attempted to dance. The driver said ~~they~~ they ought to be ashamed of themselves. Marcel yelled with fear as his head daringly hopped about, at the roof of a big mosque. "Shut up, crazy foreigner!" the driver shouted at him. "I'll beat your head off if you do that again." Doris, meanwhile, wrung her hands so violently that one could hear the joints crack. During the entire trip she sang and wrung her hands - maybe in order to stay ~~wake~~ awake, or out of dēspair, or simply because she was mad.

It was almost three o'clock in the morning when the chauffeur delivered them at the entrance of the Military Hospital. The air had abruptly chilled or, perhaps, was always cooler up here than in the maze of the Arabian city. It was still fairly dark, but the darkness was not black and velvety any more. A gray, creeping glimmer around the tops of the palm trees already announced the coming of the dawn.

The soldiers heckled and teased the two hopping dervishes, while the driver reported to an older man in a white linen coat. "An overdose of hashish," Marcel heard the old man say, from immeasurable distance. "Silly kids they are. Well, we'll give them something to make them sleep."

They are young: they'll overcome the shock. Good thing you brought them here."

His voice sounded jovial and soothing. Marcel liked the man.

"No, we are not gipsies," Doris assured the soldiers, who were greatly amused by the colourful rags she wore. "And we are not nuts, either," she added, rather annoyed and haughty.

At this moment Marcel noticed that Salem had followed them. There he was - squatting in front of the iron gate, a lonesome, pathetic figure. He had exchanged his fine new clothes for ^{his old} ~~the~~ shabby mantle - wearing, as it were, mourning for his demented friends, Doris and Marcel. He looked extremely wretched and despondent, with bluish lips in a wan, trembling face - a freezing little monkey in the chill of this pallid hour. As the two ~~patients~~ prisoners passed by - escorted and propped by the guffawing soldiers - he raised his ^{dirty little} hands, with a helpless, beautiful motion, as if begging them to forgive him.

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They brought them to a ~~bare little room~~ - a bleak cell furnished with nothing save a large twin-bed. The administration of the hospital apparently took the newcomers for a married couple, or else they thought Doris a boy - a frail, dishevelled youth with greenish-black, eyes full of fear.

The ~~kindly~~ elderly man in white ^{let them have} ~~injected them~~ a sleeping medicine - strong enough to knock out a giant. Doris protested at first - reminding the doctor of her experiences as to the weird attraction of the bottomless. The doctor smirked understandingly. He kept smirking when Marcel insisted that, alas, it was impossible to make any injections into his arm: for the cogent reason that there was no arm. He received the injection, all right. The ~~old~~ ^{old} man ~~and~~ withdrew, with a last paternal smirk at the two dazed young people.

they were alone - very close to each other, and not afraid any more. They had gone through hell together, and had survived it, together: from now on they could depend on each other; they were comrades, for good. Ménalque had lost his sinister grip of them: the metal box - hitherto charged with the sweetish herb of undoing - was deprived of its evil charm. Doris did not fear the maelstrom of darkness and death any more: she knew that there was ~~some~~ a friend to protect her from falling. Marcel, in his turn, felt that his identity reorganized itself once again - by degrees and slowly; yet the worst of the worst was over. Doris had picked up, mercifully, a throbbing lump of disconnected nerves hanging somewhere in the bushes - Marcel's lonely heart.

"Doris," Marcel whispered. "Are you asleep?"

"Fast asleep."

"So am I,"

Bondage and burden, the entanglements and lies of their homeless lives seemed graciously transfigured as they relaxed in their common slumber - the first secret they shared with each other.

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