

Ageyla had risen, was advancing to him. "Let us part as man and wife," she said. "Let's make believe you're just going away on a journey."

"Oh, my darling!" he said and clasped her tight. It was she who opened the door, thrust him forth.

"You must," she said. "I'd be untrue to myself if I kept you."

Then she shut the door, and he was alone in the snow.

He was approaching the first pass to the north when Sidi Ibrim overtook him. The school-master called his name in a long shout, waved his hand. Hubert halted and waited for him.

"You're leaving us?" Sidi Ibrim asked, a film of sweat glistening on his cheek-bones.

"Ageyla's sent me away. She and I have decided my place is with my own people."

"You're wrong," Sidi Ibrim said. "Stay here, in peace. Now you've lived in our mountains, you'll always want to come back. It's an old saying, soldier, that a man must be true to himself before he can be loyal to others. And you love Ageyla; you love your son. They're the greatest things in your life."

"But they can't be," Hubert said. "*Au revoir*. Take care of yourself."

Sidi Ibrim made no reply. He rested unmoving, hunched on his crutch. The snow caught him, covered him white from head to foot. When Hubert turned on the next ridge and tried to see him, where they had stood together seemed barren, empty.

VI

COLONEL GRELLIER was in command of the Legion base at Meknes. He dismissed his aides and questioned Hubert alone. "You tell a

simple story, Lieutenant," he said. "Because of your past record, I'm given to believe you."

"But it would be unwise to assign you to further service here in Morocco for a time. Some of your brother officers might be a bit too curious about your stay in the mountains."

"All I ask," Hubert said, "is to be sent on active duty as soon as possible."

Grellier smiled. "The Legion still has plenty of that to offer. I'll see that you're attached to one of the units going out to Syria. You'll have a very fine chance to get back your soldierly self-respect fighting against the Jebel Druse."

"Thank you, sir," Hubert said.

"Thank the Legion, not me," Grellier said. "It's made you what you are."

The years between that day and the day when he returned to Meknes all seemed very much the same to Hubert. He made conscious effort to fill his thought with the complex detail of military existence, to keep out memory of Ageyla and Rakeil, Sidi Ibrim.

He received his captaincy when the last conquest was made in Syria, was sent home on leave to France; then to Indo-China. There was fighting there as severe as any he had seen in the Syrian desert, and he distinguished himself many times in combat. But during the intervals between campaigns he slipped into the habit of deep, nostalgic remembrance of his life with Ageyla.

He still considered her as his wife, and that he must be true to her. At the officers' parties at Saigon and Phnom-Penh he was uneasy; he stayed away from the women present, often remained solitary at the bar. When his tours of duty took him into the interior, he was happier, for then he could think about her at will.

The hot, moist nights of the jungle heightened the effects of his reverie. It would be winter now in the High Atlas, he thought. Sidi Ibrim would have his crutch out as he limped down the street to Ageyla's house to give Rakeil his morning lesson.

Rakeil had become quite a big boy, of course, and as tall as Ageyla. Ageyla would sit by the fire as teacher and pupil went over the lesson. She'd smile once in a while as Rakeil made a slip, and the firelight would bring a gleam from her dark gray eyes. The years hadn't touched Ageyla; she was just as beautiful, just as young. . . .

Hubert went to sleep some nights with that vision of Ageyla in his brain. Once, when he had the fever, he thought that she was beside him, at the edge of his bed, and the orderly got frightened, went running for the doctor.

"You've had enough of this," the doctor told him after he had brought him through the fever. "How about a transfer to a colder climate?"

"I like this fine," Hubert said.

"Maybe you do," the doctor said. "But I know you've done ten years straight out here, and before that you served four more in Syria. You're due to get your rank as *commandant* next month, anyhow. A leave should go with that, and you can spend it in France."

Hubert found Paris a city he hardly knew. There were sandbags along the boulevards, and all the shops had their windows taped against bomb concussion, heavy-shaded for a blackout. That was the month of August.

The papers were full of war talk; the people in the cafés discussed reservists just called up and on their way to the Maginot Line. Then it came; Hitler struck Poland.

Hubert reported to the Ministry of

War the next morning, was given orders to join the staff of the Third Regiment of the Legion at Meknes.

He crossed to Africa held by a strange mood of apathy. War, he kept telling himself, international war all over again. My father was killed in the last one, and that was supposed to be the end of it.

Grellier was at Meknes, with the gold stars of a general on his sleeves. "Glad to see you," he told Hubert. "You're the kind of man we need. I'm supposed to keep North Morocco safe, but with less than half of my present force. We'll have to recruit new troops. I'm going to ask you to go up in the High Atlas to make levies from among the mountain clans."

Hubert made his voice sound calm. "You couldn't find another man for that job, *mon général*?"

Grellier squinted at him. "Why, you're the best," he said. "I remember very well the last time I saw you here, when you'd just come down from your junket with the Ait-Alal. Go see them first. Have a talk with that woman, Ageyla. The Native Bureau agents tell me she's grooming her son to be *kaid* and run the whole show. You should have some slight personal interest in that."

"*Oui, mon général*," Hubert said. He could protest, he knew, ask Grellier not to send him. But if he did that Grellier would simply detail another officer to the same mission. It had become his hidden, subconscious desire to see his wife and son once again, and here was his chance. . . .

HE RODE into the mountains with a section of Spahis as guard. The people of the Ait-Alal had not given any trouble in fifteen years, the Spahi sergeant told him, but still believed