



"Be swift about it. Many of these dogs have keen eyes—"

Night Brings Wisdom

With his lieutenant caught in the net of a vicious money-lender, it was up to gruff Legionnaire Porchot to find—or smash—a way out

By GEORGES SURDEZ

PORCHOT walked slowly, watching the wide shadow of his shoulders, surmounted by the knob of the head, bobbing before him upon the path. To the sweeping horizon, the earth lay sterile and flat, crushed by the intense heat. Behind him were the glittering tiles of the military barracks; before him glaring white walls against a fringe of palm trees, the town of El-Farik.

Startlingly brutal in the vibrating air tore the shriek of a locomotive, eerie,

prolonged, nostalgic. The noon train rumbled from the depot, to slice farther into the Sahara. The man stood still, until the last white puff melted into the steely gray shimmer of the sky.

Then he shrugged, grumbled under his breath, walked on. In appearance he was merely a second-class private of the Foreign Legion, not to be numbered among the smartest; for his fatigue whites were patched, worn thin by too many washings; the blue cloth of the sash-belt was faded.

Propped on short, wiry legs, his great torso swayed as he strode, huge fists dangling at the ends of long arms. His tanned face was beardless, flat, ornamented by a mouth that was too wide and an insignificant wart of a nose.

His shuffling gait, the occasional alert peer of his deeply sunk, brown little eyes, marked him as definitely primitive, animal-like, an impression enhanced by his wide, red ears standing from his skull like the handles on a Spanish jug. No one would have suspected him of grieving, or of debating within his rudimentary conscience a problem of ethics.

Yet, mingling and whirling with fifty less important thoughts, were those of his good friend, Vyrstov, who was dead, of his lieutenant and master, Garnier.

Alexis Vyrstov, Russian Legionnaire, ex-cadet of Petrograd, had been found two weeks ago, quite cold, without a stitch on his body and a horrible slash across the throat. Discovered at the foot of a blank wall near the native quarter, just north of the newly erected arched gateway.

A cursory investigation had shattered itself against the silence of impenetrable natives. No witnesses came forward, no clues were located, no suspicion could be brought against one man more than another.

Of course, Porchot knew the motivating of the murder. Vyrstov had climbed over the barrack wall on self-granted leave of absence, to follow a native woman into the dimness of a lonely street. Ageless lure, ancient trick, but one which succeeded always with such men as the Russian had been.

Lieutenant Garnier was alive, but in serious trouble. He had looked very badly of late, had eaten too little and drunk too much. Porchot knew, for it

was he who disposed of empty bottles. Seven months back, Garnier had gone to France on leave. From his return dated his misery.

Porchot regretted that Vyrstov was dead, for he had been an officer at one time, born into a social class even superior to Garnier's, and what was a closed book to a simple, rough chap, would undoubtedly have been clear to him. But Vyrstov was dead, buried, his murderer safe.

Porchot entered the town, saluted a brace of non-commissioned officers who sat under the awning of the first café on the right, walked on stiffly until he turned from the main avenue into the side street where Garnier had his home. He uttered a rumble of relief; Garnier had ordered him to locate his best friend, Lieutenant Blacher, who had not been at the barracks. And Blacher's horse, Julius, was tied to the iron loop beside the door.

THE private halted, to stroke the shining flanks, to rub the soft nostrils. He felt an odd, definite thrill of pleasure when the superb beast recognized his touch, turned to nuzzle his hand.

"Sugar, eh? I'll get some, old man."

The sugar was in the kitchen; if he were seen by Garnier, he might be sent on another errand. Therefore Porchot swung himself over the light fence of palm leaves and wires, into the sanded yard. He entered the house from the rear. Passing through the small room in which he had his cot—as an officer's servant he did not have to sleep in barracks—he picked up his pipe and the package of tobacco near by.

In the kitchen, he reached on a shelf for the sugar. He stopped short, hearing voices. His first reaction was to close the door completely, but he was

halted by a brilliant idea. If he could learn what Garnier's trouble was, he might be able to help, for what offered immense difficulties to officers often could be straightened out by privates, less burdened with foolish scruples. This was particularly true in the Legion.

"No—I know nothing of your note," he heard Blacher speak. "Porchot did not reach me. No—I am not beating about the bush, old man. I was passing by and dropped in. That's all. But you do look rather shaken up—"

"It was easier to write than it is to speak—"

"You're in a hole of some sort. Money?"

"Money."

"Much?"

"Five thousand at once. Thirty thousand by the fifteenth—"

"More than a year's pay—" Blacher concluded.

There followed a very long pause, broken by the scratching of a match. Then Blacher spoke again.

"Broke. Afraid I can't help you."

"I understand, and don't blame you," Garnier replied.

"Hard creditors? Likely to make trouble?"

"My career's smashed. A complaint will reach the colonel by the fifteenth. I have made a mess of my life generally, and I shall not get another chance."

"Bah—an officer like you—brave—"

"I do risk my hide willingly," Garnier stated impatiently, "that's my job. I am in the Legion. But make any one understand that it grows hard to be more careful of money than life—"

"I do—"

The silence was unbearably long. There were muffled steps on the thick carpets, and the soft, almost inaudible tapping of a hand on cloth. That big,

clumsy Blacher was trying to comfort Garnier by patting his shoulder. Porchot smiled sadly, shook his head, then started.

"Ben Nouchy?" Blacher had asked.

"Yes."

NO more was said for a long, long space. Porchot could not see them, but he could well imagine those two young men in the half-lighted room, perspiring with agony.

Ben Nouchy, jeweler, watch-repairer, unofficial banker for hard living young officers at El-Farik. An unclean man, but exceedingly clever—his business reached out to embrace all profit-reaping ventures in this small town on the edge of civilization, usury certainly, procuration it was rumored, and the peddling of information to the *fellaga*, bandits of the desert, it was suspected. A score of wrecked lives, two or three suicides, were to be attributed to him, gossip claimed.

Hard to get at, for he had woven a system of blackmail to protect himself, knew all scandals, held the European population through dread of revelations or need of ready cash.

The secret service knew of his activities, but left him alone, for a search at his home would have brought out many shortcomings on the part of Frenchmen. The Saharan border was not Paris, and besides Farel, the young captain who had blown his brains out, there had been more important people mixed up in the forage graft.

"Some one should break his neck," Blacher said, violently. "Offered you money without interest to start with? Told you to come to him for more—and you did, you poor fool, as I did myself once."

"Had loaned me small sums at various times, at four per cent. I owed him

three thousand or so when I went on leave. He pressed two thousand more upon me, told me to send for more. I ran short and wired him for five thousand more. Then I gambled, and went five thousand additional into the hole, thinking I could get them from him and repay in a year of thrifty living out here. I signed notes for all, naturally—and somehow, when he counted it up, there it was in black and white, I owed him thirty thousand. When, really, he had handed over only fifteen thousand."

"The trick of the duplicate receipts."

"I could not pay, and my promotion to captain is announced. He knows that a breath of scandal wrecks my chances. He encouraged me to be a sport, to sign a single, stamped note for the whole and destroyed the doubtful documents. Wait!"

GARNIER'S voice rasped in self-derision: "Here is the best—yesterday, he said that he would wait until the fifteenth for the whole sum, for a consideration of five thousand francs not to count toward the debt. I replied that on the fifteenth I would be as far from having thirty thousand as now—and he said that there were other ways—"

"Farel tried one of them, in the forage graft case," Blacher put in, tensely. "You know how he ended."

"Been thinking of that a lot lately—of Farel. Poor chap. Here's his proposition: He knows that as captain I shall draw up the schedule of patrols, and he wants advance dope. Until the debt is worked off, at so much per report."

"Information to resell to gun smugglers?"

"I suppose. I got sore, but he only laughed and said that many had worked with him before. Officers!"

"Why not tell the colonel?"

"Bah—Ben Nouchy would say I was trying to discredit him to avoid paying him. There is no legal proof—he obtains signatures, but never gives one."

"Some one should kill him!"

"Some one should!"

"The devilish part of it," Blacher resumed angrily, "is that the whole affair is so damned trite. Preposterous, cheap, impossible to believe. Loans, blackmail, treason! You would be told men no longer fall for such obvious tricks. Yet they do. Ben Nouchy's business resembles that of an undertaker in that it is as remorselessly prosperous. For if all men must die, all men must be fools, some time." The officer coughed, spoke with discernible effort: "When must he have that five thousand?"

"Day after to-morrow. Gave me three days."

"I'll sell Julius and get a cheaper horse."

"You'll sell Julius?"

"Yes—he—he—" Blacher stammered: "He's only a horse."

"That horse knows too much—it'll break his heart—"

"He's only a horse. You and I, we have seen some tight places together, to the end. I just can't let you slide—any farther. The Kaid of Manarf offered me ten thousand—"

"But—I can't let you—"

"And for the rest, I'll get busy—write to my family. Wouldn't be here to-day if you had quit me once or twice. Returned favor, that's all—buck up—"

THE voices receded, and Porchot knew that Garnier was taking his guest to the front door. He lighted his pipe, settled on a stool before the clay range of the stove. He

was frankly shocked. Blacher had no more right to sell Julius than he would have had—to sell his wife.

It was immoral, sinful; that beast knew too much. And an Arab would dig his flanks with long spurs, rake long gashes on his ribs with the sharp edge of stirrups, mangle his jaw with a cruel bit. Natives loved their horses as they loved their women, selfishly.

Yet Garnier must be extricated from his plight.

Porchot rose and entered the living room. Garnier turned brusquely, laid some object down, while the orderly noted that the table drawer was ajar. The lieutenant was twenty-six or seven, but appeared very boyish now in spite of big shoulders and height, for there was a childish, aching emotion in his bewildered eyes.

"What do you want?"

"I saw Lieutenant Blacher leave here," Porchot lied easily, "and thought I didn't need to give him the note. Here it is."

"All right."

"Anything else, lieutenant?"

"No."

"That automatic needs cleaning," the orderly said, indicating the gun on the table. "I'll take it now."

He reached out, picked up the weapon, a dark, compact, small-calibered gun with a shiny circle of bright steel for a mouth. He feared there might be a scene, but he felt it his duty to seize the automatic. But Garnier did not move, grew very pale. He stood with his back to the light, so that the enlarged shadow of his hand was thrown on a sheet of writing paper, which bore three scribbled lines and a signature.

And Porchot noted that that shadow quivered alarmingly. Although Julius was only a horse, Garnier would have

done much, obviously, to keep him and Blacher together. Too much . . .

When the door closed behind him, Porchot stood still, breathed deeply and wiped his face with the back of one hand. Luckily, there had been no scené—even a man as brave and determined as Garnier could not refuse a reprieve. The Legionnaire took out the cartridges, then to make doubly sure, removed the firing pin, which he dropped into the vinegar cruet. Before he found it, Garnier would have time to reconsider.

But this was merely a delay. Abraham Ben Nouchy must be taken care of. Had Vyrstov been alive, that would have been easier. The Russian was harsh, but extremely clever in handling such men. As a matter of fact, when women were not concerned, Vyrstov had been very intelligent. As it was, Porchot had to find a way of escape for his chief, and saw only one opportunity.

Not a pleasant plan to brood upon, for it would mean misfortune for himself. But he had no reputation to lose and only a minor dread of prison. He had spent eight of his thirty-five years in jails, three of them in North Africa, before enlisting in the Legion. And no one would mourn, for he had never known anything of his father, while his mother, now dead for all he knew, had been rather worse than she might well have been.

PORCHOT owed Garnier gratitude, for the lieutenant had hauled him out of bad messes in the past. The old man in Porchot had not died all at once and completely. Porchot owed Garnier friendship as well, for they had fought in some hot corners side by side, against more Berbers than were strictly needed to make life comfortable.

But it must be made clear that these personal emotions were but minor arguments, swamped by a higher, more sweeping loyalty to the Legion itself. Garnier and Blacher were Legion officers, Porchot was a Legionnaire, and it was his faith that he owed them service publicly and privately, without consideration of himself.

For example, Blacher was a Legionnaire—and would have sold Julius to help a comrade of the Legion, sold Julius to a native. No, Porchot did not fear prison enough to allow Julius to be sold.

With an effort, he cleaned his mind of the searing thoughts, of the white-hot rock piles, crackling in the din of pounding sledges, of the cloying sweat, the thirst, the sick stomach, the rum-mad guards who kicked and flayed prisoners. He had lived through one term, he could live through another.

It cannot be claimed that he failed to derive a certain bitter-sweet pleasure from this thought of self-sacrifice. He saw the beauty of his gesture, its worth, its sheer nobility. The deed appealed to his sentimental side, bred and nurtured by the reading of cheap novels. His life had been tawdry and drab, save for the too brief moments when he had been lifted above himself in combat. This was a chance to bring into it the sacred touch of martyrdom.

He would break Ben Nouchy's strong-box, destroy the papers. After, he would take whatever came his way. Deftly he prepared Garnier's lunch, served him. Then he washed the dishes and went out.

While he did not expect to find the looting of Ben Nouchy's shop difficult compared to other undertakings of the sort he had carried out as a civilian, there were certain things he must discover.

He walked along the path edging the oasis, under the imperfect shade of the palm trees. Then he swung into Goldsmiths' Street, lined with many little open-air shops, where black-capped, scraggily-bearded brown men with big noses were at work, chiseling, melting, weighing and bartering.

BEN NOUCHY'S shop, without a front, a mere recess in the wall of a house, was marked out by a sign in Arabic and another in French. Porchot entered, rested one shoulder against the wall, lighted his pipe. Ben Nouchy was doing business with a native customer.

The Legionnaire's eyes roved with reborn professional acuteness, but to his dismay he did not see the expected safe. Ben Nouchy had looked up at his arrival, seen that he was a private of the Legion, hence of no importance. He bent his keen, wrinkled old face which hung like a mask from the high forehead under the black skullcap, and examined the objects which the other had spread on a piece of old newspaper.

His black-rimmed nails wandered jerkily into the graying beard, his lips moistened with a frothy scum as he uttered little sounds of absolute disgust.

"Tshtsh—tshtsh—worthless trash—fifteen francs as a gift, my friend—" he spoke in the Druya dialect.

"Whatever I may be, I am not thy friend, impurest of impure men. Does not the Book state that he who lends money ranks below a cur? Give me a hundred, and be one-tenth honest for once in thy usurer's existence."

Idly Porchot gazed at the trinkets, then his eyes opened wide for an instant. He knew those trinkets. He peered warily at the native.

The man was very tall, gaunt, black-

bearded; the brown wool burnoose swung just below his knees, leaving his slim, muscled calves bare, burned dark, hairy. From the dingy rag twined about his swarthy brows, from his speech, he was a Moroccan. Two strings circled his neck, the lighter one holding an amulet of scarlet leather in plain view; the other, thicker, stronger, doubtless supporting a concealed *koumia*, the curved blade knife of the Sahara.

"The chain is plated, the watch is nickel, Noble Rider of Boundless Space," Ben Nouchy retorted with irony. "I said fifteen, I add ten because of thy handsome face, thy polite speech. Have I called thee here to sell me these things? Are they not worse than live coals to have in one's hand? Dost thou dream I know them not?"

The Moroccan turned uneasily, looked at Porchot, and was reassured. While many Legionnaires spoke broken Arabic, he had no reason to think Porchot understood Druya. But Porchot's eyes were averted now.

"Son of many, the penknife is gold as to handle, steel as to blade; this little box, is it not of silver? Cannot it be melted? Twice a fool am I to come to thee, need the money though I may. Thou then knowest these things? I have no fear—I am the lion, thou—the jackal. And the jackal thinks too much of the morrow and an empty belly to lead the hunter to the lion. Ninety francs? Eighteen *douros*?"

"Thirty, my last bid. I, the impure, the dog, say thirty, and swear to give no more by my impurity and my dog ancestors! For every minute that passes, I withdraw a *douro* from my offer."

"Eighty—" the Moroccan suggested.

"Enough prating—" Ben Nouchy

shrugged, pretended to turn his interest elsewhere, addressed Porchot in French: "Soldier, what is there you seek in this shop?"

"I have time. Finish with this Druya—"

"Sixty francs," the Moroccan snapped quickly, after a second glance toward the Legionnaire, who appeared to be too interested and knew his origin. "But be swift about it. Many of these dogs have keener eyes than one believes."

"Fifty. The profit is great for the labor they cost."

"*Youdi*, for a man of scales and money, thou dost understand me—there *was* pleasure! Fifty, agreed!"

He counted the grimy five franc notes given him three times. Then he carefully wrapped in a newspaper the trinkets he had sold, pushed them toward Ben Nouchy with a warning clucking of the tongue. Leaving, he stood aside to permit a European woman to enter.

PORCHOT recognized Mme. Lusian, wife of a sergeant of *Tirailleurs*. She was frail, blond, usually seen with her anæmic baby. But she had come alone to Ben Nouchy's, and stared at the soldier, who took the hint and politely went out to sit in the shade and wait—to wait tensely, stretching his ears.

After a vague mumble of voices, Ben Nouchy's voice rose sharper:

"You cannot settle—but you wanted jewels and gowns. Your baby? More went on your back than into his belly. Your husband shall pay—bah, three thousand francs is not a fortune, and he will forgive you."

"He cannot pay—he owes—"

"Oh—in that case, we must seek elsewhere—" Ben Nouchy chuckled.

"The Kaid of Manarf has spoken of you, in the most flattering terms. He has helped my lady clients several times, for he is generous. True, he is an elderly man, a native, but fond of beauty, and wealthy. I shall arrange an interview, privately, and you can talk things over."

"No."

"How quickly a woman says that. What do you fear? I am interested solely in my debt, and later a mere ten per cent of the gifts the Kaid cannot fail to produce will make old man Ben Nouchy blind, deaf, and what is best, utterly mute."

"You pig!"

"I hold your note in my box, in the room above us."

"I'll tell my husband, and he'll fix you—"

"I disagree—I have bought his gambling slips, and I sleep beside them. Would you believe me, *madame*, if I told you his papers are tied with yours by one single string? You see, I have been taking care of this for the Kaid a while. I am not angry with you. Let me know to-morrow afternoon what to say to the Kaid, when he asks for news. He is very gentle, very understanding, but impatient for one of his years."

Mme. Lussian came out without another word. Porchot caught a glimpse of her face, looked away. She undoubtedly was not the first, very unlikely to be the last. In El-Farik, Ben Nouchy's shop was employed for many bizarre transactions. In a room above the shop, near his own bed, Ben Nouchy had said—

Porchot walked in, and the trader winked at him cheerfully, for he suspected the private had heard.

"And now?"

"I want a gift for a native jane, not

over twenty francs—" Porchot announced.

"Twenty francs? A pretty pin—that looks just like gold, with the small diamonds a woman likes—very well imitated—" Ben Nouchy scratched his chin, nodded. He did not scorn the sum. Twenty francs or twenty thousand really differed little. What he enjoyed was to sit in his dingy shop, among his grimy cases, pulling the strings labeled desire, greed and need, setting the prideful Roumi and the scornful Moslem alike to dancing a despairing dance.

"Something fancy, eh?" Porchot insisted.

"Yes, you know what you wish, my friend—" Ben Nouchy knelt, rummaged in cardboard boxes below the counter.

MEANWHILE, Porchot, his hands atremble, fingered the paper on the table, absent-mindedly. The flaps suddenly opened, his fingers touched a cold metal surface. It was the parcel left by the Moroccan, forgotten by Ben Nouchy during Mme. Lussian's visit. Porchot stiffened.

The chain, the penknife, the match safe, were familiar. And the watch had been his own; he knew it by the crack in the enamel of the dial, that widened and obliterated part of the trade name: "... *koff, Genève*—"

He had bought that in Ouessant, before joining the Legion, out of the first installment of his enlistment bonus. He had traded it later, to Vyrstov, against the silver-banded pipe he now smoked.

Before he could recover from his shock, Ben Nouchy had taken the parcel away, shoved a tray forward. Their eyes met for a fraction of a second, then the trader laid the property of the murdered Vyrstov away.

Porchot sighed. It was too late. Ben Nouchy was alert, and knew where to dispose of suspicious objects. The watch and the other things would not be seen again until they appeared in the shop of some dealer beyond the French Zone, in one of the Tafilalet cases. The Legionnaire's unsupported word was worthless, with his record in civil life; in any case, any action taken now would interfere with his actual plans. And, before avenging the dead, one had to think of the living.

But he was so excited that he could talk no longer, and left the place, with a mumbled statement that everything was too dear for his purse.

"Night brings wisdom, soldier. Return to-morrow."

"I may," Porchot shouted back. But he laughed and thought: "Earlier than to-morrow I shall return, dog."

With a crowbar, he would be able to force his way in easily. Only it would make things harder that Ben Nouchy slept near his safe. Not that the money-lender did not deserve death a hundred times, if only for hounding Garnier, if only for what he was trying to make of Mme. Lussian, for what he had made of other women, for protecting Vyrstov's murderer.

He reflected with some dismay that his sacrifice would be greater, for his resolution had not wavered. Perhaps, before he was discovered, arrested, he might have time to settle with the Moroccan, in a private fashion.

Strolling through the Arab quarter, he soon found the man he sought. The Druya sat in an open restaurant, gorging on a gigantic dish of *couscous*, copiously drenched with pepper sauce and bits of boiled beef, drinking from an earthenware pitcher containing sour milk. He was so engrossed that he did not notice Porchot, who passed by with-

out hesitation, to return when he saw the native leave.

The Legionnaire, like many of his comrades, patronized the restaurant, where much could be bought for little. He knew the *kawaji* who owned it. He sat down, braced his elbows on the greasy table top, ordered mint tea and those crumbly, brittle honey cakes which he had grown to like. All that for less than a franc. And with the meal went gossip, as usual.

"**B**EN NOUCHY'S married?" he asked.

"Widower—and loves naught but gold."

"Ah? Wasn't that a Druya man here a while back?"

"Yes. Came a month ago with a caravan from Tajout. Mabrouka, the dancer, is his woman. He has no other work save to beat her. But he is going away soon, for he is very jealous—jealousy of such a woman is like an umbrella against lead balls. But the girl is pretty—the moon and stars combined—and dances beautifully."

"Jealous?"

"Yes—she dances until midnight at old Rachele's place, and he waits for her in the hovel he rented. Where? Oh, inside the courtyard of the auto company's sheds. A lonely place, but he is strange, and likes solitude."

Porchot smiled suddenly, a wide smile. His little eyes gleamed like diamond tips. Ben Nouchy, Mabrouka, the Moroccan, Vyrstov, all linked in one chain. Could it be possible to link them even closer? And should he fail, in what way would he be worse off?

His plan ripened throughout the balance of the day. He had little work to do, as Garnier ate at the mess evenings. But when the lieutenant returned, after eight o'clock, Porchot had

an unpleasant moment. For his chief called him with loud shouts.

"Cleaned that automatic?"

"Needs a new firing pin."

Garnier looked at him oddly.

"Where's my service revolver?"

"Took it to the armorer's. Rifling is bad."

The officer snapped his fingers, smiled wanly. The private read his thought: Reprieve after reprieve; fate did not wish him to hasten. And Blacher came, out of breath, somewhat tense in expression, but with much surface amusement.

"Raking up a few fellows, you're one. Mabrouka'll dance her last night for us. There's ice—came on the noon train." He added in a lower voice: "Snap out of it. Get tight and forget. It will come all—all right—"

Garnier left with Blacher.

Alone, Porchot glanced at the clock, was satisfied that he had all the time needed. He masked the windows with the wooden blinds, drew the thick curtains snugly. Then, from his master's wardrobe, he selected a great brown cloak such as natives wore.

He stripped to the hide, fastened his military belt around his naked waist. From the leather band he hung a bag in which he placed the crowbar, pliers, an electric torch. He slipped his feet into camel's hide slippers. Standing before the shaving mirror, he wound a strip of white cotton about his head.

Over the whole, he slipped on the burnoose, drew up the hood. From a set of walking sticks owned by his chief, he selected a *matraque*, a long club of elastic wood with a heavy knob at the end.

Then he blew out the kerosene lamp, opened the door, saw the street deserted and slipped outside. Three feet farther, none could have known from whence

he had emerged—he was merely a native strolling off on his own business.

Avoiding the widely spaced street lights was easy. He gained the street of Goldsmiths easily, without chance meetings. The merchants had already retired, to arise and work with the first light of day. There was no near-by sound—but from the reserved quarter came the rhythmic beat of tom-toms, where Mabrouka was dancing.

THERE was scarce a complaint of tortured wood under the bite of the crowbar. Porchot slipped his arm inside to loosen the iron bars from their brackets. He closed the double panels behind him quickly, paused for breath. Then, for a brief moment, he flashed the beam of the electric torch about and found the narrow door opening on the narrow stairs leading upward. He drew on an old pair of uniform gloves, private's gloves, made of thick cotton. Unneeded precaution, perhaps, but who could be certain?

He felt his way into the upper room. The odors choked him, smells of unwashed body, of sodden clothing, of dusty carpets and defiled rags. He listened for breathing, heard Ben Nouchy turn.

The rest was quickly over, a lunge, the drawing up of a wad of blankets and a long wait until the squirming ended, a wait filled with the distant pounding of the drums. He straightened, relaxed. He could see the faint outline of the window, and screened it with old clothing before flashing the torch.

Ben Nouchy's face had settled back into a mask devoid of particular expression. Only the eyes stared in astonishment, as they would go on staring endlessly now. Astonishment? Didn't he know he should be killed?

Even Blacher, an officer, had said he should.

Porchot looked about, found what he expected, another *matraque*. Calmly, he compared the knobs, and saw no difference in size.

With deliberation, he lifted the stick, brought it whistling upon the dead man's skull. The bone gave way, and the effect wished for by the Legionnaire was achieved, for the club broke in half. Then he disarranged the blankets a little more, artistically disposed the legs like those of a man trying to get up from bed.

"You're no prettier dead than alive," he whispered. "And you haven't been dead long enough for the blood not to flow. A little bit, just enough. A bargain, Ben Nouchy! That choking may have been for Garnier, but that smack was devoted to Mme. Lussian!"

Porchot was not impressed, not shaken. It must be recalled that he had legally slain a dozen men more worthy of life than his last victim. Men who, after all, despite their ferocity and cruelty, were defending their land. He was not sufficiently keen of mind to establish an absolute dividing line between slaying for others and slaying for the government.

He had killed a man without giving him a chance to fight—why not? He was sincere in his actions, and did not believe Ben Nouchy should have had a chance. His point of view was not ordinary. He had eaten strange foods, drunk strange drinks, and mingled with strange men.

BEN NOUCHY'S strong-box did not resist thirty seconds to the persuasion of the crowbar. It was a weak, despicable tin affair. There were thick sheaves of small papers lashed together, two hundred or so,

Porchot judged. The misery of El-Farik.

He knew that these represented a grave danger—that their disposal must seem natural. Incidental to the burglary, their destruction must be, not an obvious motivating. He selected fifty or so, scanning the signatures previously. The rest he slipped into the bag at his belt. Then he replaced the picked bunch among the money bags, and scattered them naturally as he completed the looting of the safe.

"Hurried search," he said lazily, "hasty departure."

Then he laid the torch on a box, selected a large piece of cloth, and into the center of it piled money and objects of value. The chugging clash of gold teased him, and he balanced keeping a few coins against the morality of the deed. And took nothing, sacrificing greed to honor. He went downstairs with his burden, without another glance at the body. With the nasty soul loosed upon another sphere, he did not hold rancor against it.

Below, he was somewhat disappointed, for the crafty trader had concealed most of his valuable stock in an unknown cache. But he cleaned out the cases, the shelves. Extinguishing his torch, he peered into the street, then slid outside, satisfied he was not seen. He adjusted the smashed panels cleverly, without hurry, and knew that only in broad light would the infraction be noticed.

Porchot knew the native town well, dodging patrols in the narrow streets on pay nights had made him familiar with the rear of the buildings as well as the front. Ten minutes later, he rapped on the Moroccan's door. He called:

"*Ya! Kruya—*"

The door opened immediately: "*Ya, Kruya-menwa?*"

Porchot held out a silver coin, and the door swung wide. Thereupon, the Legionnaire pushed it back with one heel and before the Moroccan had seen anything save the gleam of the metal disk, smote him between the eyes with the knob of his club, a nicely timed blow. In a very few, precise gestures, the felled man was trussed securely, his head swathed in smelly cloth.

Porchot then went to the stove, removed the teakettle. Unhurriedly, he fed the papers to the flames, on the glowing coals. He scanned the signatures until he was certain that he had destroyed Garnier's note. The rest was swiftly disposed of, the thin ashes stirred, mixed with the clinkers at the bottom of the sheet-iron cylinder. The soldier then replaced the kettle carefully and turned to the Moroccan.

He battered at his jaw many times with the hard heel of his right hand. Then he loosened the bonds, removed the gag. The Druya was unconscious, although he had no mark save that left by the *matraque's* impact. And all men would understand what had happened.

A few minutes later, Porchot was back in the kitchen, dressed in his uniform the burnoose in place, the club back among the canes, with its knob carefully polished. The orderly lighted his pipe, read an old paper for a while and fell asleep.

GARNIER and Blacher awoke him, long after, to fry them eggs and brew black coffee. And it was when they came in after drill the next day that Porchot learned the official version of Ben Nouchy's demise. He sat by the door, peeling potatoes for frying. The officers were so excited that they forgot his presence.

"If you had not been with us all evening—" Blacher said.

"You'd have had your doubts—"

"Not long—what a fool that chap was—to try to make off—they got him and his woman ten miles from here and brought him back immediately. Mabrouka went back on him—said he had killed that Legionnaire from your section—Vyrstov?"

"Afraid they'd make her an accomplice—say, who'd have thought Ben Nouchy would struggle? But when it came to protecting his stuff, he did. What a nasty lump—didn't I sweat ice until I learned that my note was among those he had burned and not among those he dropped!"

"Others looked sicker than you."

"Still, I legitimately owed him fifteen thousand—"

"Pay him when you next meet—"

"That's the best course—" Garnier laughed: "What a yarn that poor chap thought up—somebody forcing the loot upon him—and a native who called him 'brother', at that! What a poor liar, for a Moroccan! Just the same, I won't forget you'd have sold Julius for me."

"I might have backed out at the last moment—"

"Rightly. He is the finest thing in horses—while I—"

"Shut up, you fool. Think they'll guillotine that chap?"

"For murdering Vyrstov, yes. But for killing of Ben Nouchy, every one feels he should have a monument in the public square. He certainly is El-Farik's benefactor."

"Oh, there'll be another Ben Nouchy soon enough—there always is."

"Not for me—I'm cured."

"The providential fool—"

Porchot could hold out no longer, he must see their faces, relieved from anguish. He grabbed a handful of sugar and walked through the room. He

looked at Garnier and was satisfied that he had done a good deed.

"The automatic is all right—lieutenant."

"No hurry, Porchot—no hurry—"

Blacher had started, then smiled in answer to Garnier's glance. He looked at Porchot.

"What are you going to do? Ruin Julius with that sugar?"

"Oh, he can stand lots of it, lieutenant."

"Behold—" Garnier said, "here's a man who would do anything for a cat, a dog, or a horse. But for all he really cares, I could starve to death and the rest of humanity with me. Come, Porchot, isn't that a fact?"

"Right, lieutenant, men are not dumb and need no help."

And Porchot went out, fed the sugar to Julius. He wiped his eyes because they grew moist when the horse nuzzled him and appeared grateful.

THE END.



Enduring Cold

JUST as there are certain individuals or races who can endure extreme heat there are others who can endure temperatures so low that the average human would freeze to death in a short time were he subjected to it. In Russia men and women work with their arms and chests uncovered in a temperature many degrees below zero and think nothing of it! In the most severe winter some of the people living in the Alps work with bare chests and their children are taught to do the same. Gmelin, the famous scientist, held that man has lived on this earth when temperatures fell as low as -157 degrees Fahrenheit!

Every winter brings to light instances in which individuals are exposed to great cold without suffering any lasting after effects. An inmate of an asylum escaped one cold January day when the thermometer showed eight below and, without clothes, lay for an hour in the snow until he was found by attendants! He was injured in no way and later made repeated attempts to escape and go through the same performance!

A man named Berlinger was once lost in a storm in the Rockies and for two days wandered about with the temperature hovering near the ten below zero mark! Only the tip of one ear was frozen when he was found by the rescue party. He stated that the cold did not bother him at all and that he could have remained outdoors for days longer. This case is remarkable in that Berlinger had no food or drink during the time he wandered about and because of lack of matches could build no fire.

In contrast to the Russians and Alprians who can work bare-chested in low temperatures there is in histories an account of the siege of a Norwegian stronghold by Swedes in 1719 when seven thousand of the former perished in the snows and cold of their neighboring country. The French army, in their retreat from Prague in 1742, lost four thousand men in ten days in the cold weather of Bohemia. Napoleon's campaign in Russia in 1812 was halted when thousands died from the low temperatures of that country.

Egon A. Schilling.