

# A Passion In The Desert

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## A PASSION IN THE DESERT

*(Une Passion dans le Désert)*

“THE sight was fearful!” she cried, as we quit M. Martin’s menagerie.

She had seen that fearless wild-beast tamer going through his marvelous performance in a cage of hyenas.

“How can it be possible,” she went on, “to so tame those creatures as to be sure of them?”

“It is an enigma to you,” I replied, “yet still it is naturally a fact.”

“Ah!” she exclaimed, her lips quivering incredulously.

“You think, then, that beasts are without feeling?” I asked. “Be assured by me that they are taught by us all of our vices and virtues—those of civilization.”

Amazement was expressed in her look.

“At the time I first saw M. Martin, I, like you, exclaimed my amazement,” I went on. “It happened that I was seated alongside an old soldier, his right leg amputated, who had attracted my notice by his appearance as I went into the show. His face showed the dauntless look of the Napoleonic wars, disfigured as it was with battle’s scars. This old hero, besides, had a frank, jolly style which, wherever I come across it, is always attractive to me. Undoubtedly he was one of those old campaigners who are surprised at nothing, who can make a jest on the last grimaces of a dying comrade, or will bury his friend or rifle his body with gayety; give a challenge to every bullet with composure; make a short shriving for himself or others; and usually, as the rule goes, fraternizing with the Devil. He closely watched the proprietor of the exhibition as he entered the cage, curling his lip, that peculiar sign of contemptuous satire which better informed men assume to signify how superior they are to the dupes. The veteran smiled when I exclaimed at the cool daring of M. Martin, he gave a toss of the head, and, with a knowing grimace, said: ‘An old game!’

“‘Old game,’ said I, ‘what do you mean? You will greatly oblige me if you can explain the secret of the mysterious power of this man.’

“We came to be acquainted after a while and went to dine at the first cafe we saw after quitting the menagerie. After a bottle of champagne with our dessert, which burnished up his memory and rendered it very vivid, he narrated a circumstance in his early history which showed very conclusively that he had ample reason to style M. Martin’s performance ‘an old game.’”

When we arrived at her house she so teased me, and was withal so charming, making me a number of so pretty promises,

that I consented to write the yarn narrated by the veteran hero for her behoof. On the morrow I sent her this adventure, which might well be headed: "The French in Egypt."

During the expedition to Upper Egypt under General Desaix, a Provençal soldier, who had fallen into the clutches of the Maugrabins, was marched by these marauders, these tireless Arabs, into the deserts lying beyond the cataracts of the Nile.

So as to put a sufficient distance between themselves and the French army, to insure their greater safety, the Maugrabins made forced marches and rested only during the night. They then encamped around a well shaded by palm-trees, under which they had previously concealed a store of provisions. Never dreaming that their prisoner would think of escaping, they satisfied themselves by merely tying his hands, then lay down to sleep, after having regaled themselves on a few dates and given provender to their horses.

When the courageous Provençal noted that they slept soundly and could no longer watch his movements, he made use of his teeth to steal a scimitar, steadied the blade between his knees, cut through the thongs which bound his hands; in an instant he was free. He at once seized a carbine and a long dirk, then took the precaution of providing himself with a stock of dried dates, a small bag of oats, some powder and bullets, and hung a scimitar around his waist, mounted one of the horses and spurred on in the direction in which he supposed the French army to be. So impatient was he to see a bivouac again that he pressed on the already tired courser at such a speed that its flanks were lacerated with the spurs, and soon the poor animal, utterly exhausted, fell dead, leaving the Frenchman alone in the midst of the desert.

After walking for a long time in the sand, with all the courage and firmness of an escaped convict, the soldier was obliged to stop, as the day had already come to an end. Despite the beauty of an Oriental night, with its exquisite sky, he felt that he could not, though he fain would, continue on his weary way. Fortunately he had come to a small eminence, on the summit of which grew a few palm-trees whose verdure shot into the air and could be seen from afar; this had brought hope and consolation to his heart.

His fatigue was so great that he threw himself down on a block of granite capriciously fashioned by Nature into the semblance of a camp-bed, and, without taking any precaution for defense, was soon fast in sleep. He had made the sacrifice of his life. His last waking thought was one of regret. He repented having left the Maugrabins, whose nomad life seemed to smile on him now that he was far from them and from all hope of succor.

He was awakened by the sun, whose pitiless rays fell with their intensest heat on the granite, and produced a most intolerable

sense of torridness—for he had most stupidly placed himself inversely to the shadow cast by the verdant and majestic fronds of the palm-trees. He looked at these solitary monarchs and shuddered—they reminded him of the graceful shafts crowned with waving foliage which characterize the Saracenic columns in the cathedral of Arles.

But when, after counting the palm-trees, he cast his eyes around him, the most horrible despair took possession of his soul. The dark, forbidding sands of the desert spread farther than sight could reach in every direction, and glittered with a dull luster like steel struck by light. It was a limitless ocean that he saw. It might have been a sea of ice or a chain of lakes that lay mirrored around him. A fiery vapor carried in streaks formed perpetual heat-waves over this heaving continent. The sky was glowing with an Oriental splendor of insupportable translucence, disappointing, inasmuch as it leaves naught for the imagination to exceed. Heaven, earth, both were on fire.

The silence was awful in its wild, tremendous majesty. Infinitude, immensity, closed in upon the soul from every side. Not a cloud in the sky, not a breath in the air, not a rift on the bosom of the sand, which was ever moving in ever-diminishing wavelets, scarcely disturbing the surface; the horizon fell into space, traced by a slim line of light, definite as the edge of a saber—like as in summer seas a beam of light just divides the earth from the heaven which meets it.

The Provençal threw his arms around the trunk of one of the palm-trees, as though it were the body of a friend; and there, in the shelter of its slender, straight shadow cast by it upon the granite, he wept. Then sitting down he remained motionless, contemplating with awful dread the implacable scene which Nature stretched out before him. He cried aloud to measure the solitude. His voice, lost in the hollows of the hillocks, sounded in the distance with a faint resonance, but aroused no echo—the echo was in the soldier's heart. The Provençal was two-and-twenty; he loaded his carbine.

“Time enough yet,” he muttered to himself, laying on the ground the weapon which alone could give him deliverance.

Looking by turns at the burnished black expanse and the blue immensity of the sky, the soldier dreamed of France—he smelt with delight, in his longing fancy, the gutters of Paris—he remembered the towns through which he had passed, the faces of his fellow-soldiers, the most trivial incidents of his life.

His Southern imagination saw the stones of his dearly loved Provence in the undulating play of the heat which spread in waves over the outspread sheet of the desert. Fearing the dangers of this so cruel mirage, he went down the opposite side of the knoll to that up which he had come on the previous day. How great was

his joy when he discerned a natural grotto, formed of immense blocks of granite, the foundation of the rising ground. The remains of a rug showed that this place had at one time been inhabited; a short distance therefrom were some date-palms laden with fruit. There arose in his heart that instinct which binds us to life. He now hoped to live long enough to see the passing of some wandering Arabs, who should pass that way; perhaps, who should say? he might hear the sound of cannon; for at that time Bonaparte was traversing Egypt.

These thoughts inspired him with new life. The palm-tree near him seemed to bend under its weight of ripe fruit. The Frenchman shook down some of the clusters, and, when he tasted the unhopd-for manna, he felt convinced that the palms had been cultivated by some former inhabitant—the rich and luscious flavor of the fresh meat of the dates was an attestation of the care of his unknown predecessor. Like all Provençals, he passed from the gloom of dark despair to an almost insane joy.

He went up again, running, to the top of the hillock, where he devoted the remainder of the day to cutting down one of the sterile palm-trees which, the previous night, had served him as a shelter. A vague memory made him think of the wild beasts of the desert. He foresaw that they would most likely come to drink at the spring which was visible, bubbling through the sand, at the base of the rock, but lost itself in the desert farther down. He resolved to guard himself against their unwelcome visits to his hermitage by felling a tree which should fall across the entrance.

Despite his diligence and the strength which the dread of being devoured in his sleep lent him, he was unable to cut the palm-tree in pieces during the day, but he was successful in felling it. At eventide the monarch of the desert tumbled down; the noise of its falling resounded far and wide like a moan from Solitude's bosom; the soldier shuddered as though he heard a voice predicting evil.

But like an heir who mourns not his parent's decease, he stripped off from this beautiful tree the arching green fronds, its poetic adornment, and used them in forming a couch on which to rest.

Fatigued by his labors, he soon fell asleep under the red vault of his damp, cool cave.

In the middle of the night his sleep was disturbed by an extraordinary sound. He sat up; the profound silence that reigned around enabled him to distinguish the alternating rhythm of a respiration whose savage energy it was impossible could be that of a human being.

A terrible terror, increased yet more by the silence, the darkness, his racing fancy, froze his heart within him. He felt his hair rise on end, as his eyes, dilated to their utmost, perceived

through the gloom two faint amber lights. At first he attributed these lights to the delusion of his vision, but presently the vivid brilliance of the night aided him to gradually distinguish the objects around him in the cave, when he saw, within the space of two feet of him, a huge animal lying at rest. Was it a lion? Was it a tiger? Was it a crocodile?

The Provençal was not sufficiently well educated to know under what sub-species his enemy should be classed; his fear was but the greater because his ignorance led him to imagine every terror at once. He endured most cruel tortures as he noted every variation of the breathing which was so near him; he dared not make the slightest movement.

An odor, pungent like that of a fox, but more penetrating as it were, more profound, filled the cavern. When the Provençal became sensible of this, his terror reached the climax, for now he could no longer doubt the proximity of a terrible companion, whose royal lair he had utilized as a bivouac.

Presently the reflection of the moon, as it slowly descended to the horizon, lighted up the den, rendering gradually visible the gleaming, resplendent, and spotted skin of a panther.

This lion of Egypt lay asleep curled up like a great dog, the peaceful possessor of a kennel at the door of some sumptuous hotel; its eyes opened for a moment, then closed again; its face was turned toward the Frenchman. A thousand confused thoughts passed through the mind of the tiger's prisoner. Should he, as he at first thought of doing, kill it with a shot from his carbine? But he saw plainly that there was not room enough in which to take proper aim; the muzzle would have extended beyond the animal—the bullet would miss the mark. And what if it were to wake!—this fear kept him motionless and rigid.

He heard the pulsing of his heart beating in the so dread silence and he cursed the too violent pulsations which his surging blood brought on, lest they should awaken from sleep the dreadful creature—that slumber which gave him time to think and plan over his escape.

Twice did he place his hand upon his scimitar, intending to cut off his enemy's head; but the difficulty of severing the close-haired skin caused him to renounce this daring attempt. To miss was *certain* death. He preferred the chances of a fair fight, and made up his mind to await the daylight. The dawn did not give him long to wait. It came.

He could now examine the panther at his ease; its muzzle was smeared with blood.

"It's had a good dinner," he said, without troubling himself to speculate whether the feast might have been of human flesh or not. "It won't be hungry when it wakes."

It was a female. The fur on her belly and thighs was glistening white. Many small spots like velvet formed beautiful bracelets round her paws; her sinuous tail was also white, ending in black rings. The back of her dress was yellow, like unburnished gold, very lissome and soft, and had the characteristic blotches in the shape of pretty rosettes, which distinguish the panther from every other species *felis*.

This formidable hostess lay tranquilly snoring in an attitude as graceful and easy as that of a cat on the cushions of an ottoman. Her bloody paws, nervous and well armed, were stretched out before her head, which rested on the back of them, while from her muzzle radiated her straight, slender whiskers, like threads of silver.

If he had seen her lying thus, imprisoned in a cage, the Provençal would doubtless have admired the grace of the creature and the vivid contrasts of color which gave her robe an imperial splendor; but just then his sight was jaundiced by sinister forebodings.

The presence of the panther, even asleep, had the same effect upon him as the magnetic eyes of a snake are said to have on the nightingale.

The soldier's courage oozed away in the presence of this silent danger, though he was a man who gathered courage at the mouths of cannon belching forth shot and shell. And yet a bold thought brought daylight to his soul and sealed up the source from whence issued the cold sweat which gathered on his brow. Like men driven to bay, who defy death and offer their bodies to the smiter, so he, seeing in this merely a tragic episode, resolved to play his part with honor to the last.

"The day before yesterday," said he, "the Arabs might have killed me."

So considering himself as already dead, he waited bravely, but with anxious curiosity, the awakening of his enemy.

When the sun appeared the panther suddenly opened her eyes; then she stretched out her paws with energy, as if to get rid of cramp. Presently she yawned and showed the frightful armament of her teeth, and the pointed tongue rough as a rasp.

"She is like a dainty woman, (*petite maîtresse*)" thought the Frenchman, seeing her rolling and turning herself about so softly and coquettishly. She licked off the blood from her paws and muzzle, and scratched her head with reiterated grace of movement.

"Good, make your little toilet," said the Frenchman to himself; he recovered his gayety with his courage. "We are presently about to give each other good-morning," and he felt for the short poniard that he had abstracted from the Maugrabins. At this

instant the panther turned her head toward him and gazed fixedly at him, without otherwise moving.

The rigidity of her metallic eyes and their insupportable luster made him shudder. The beast approached him; he looked at her caressingly, staring into those bright eyes in an effort to magnetize her—to soothe her. He let her come quite close to him before stirring; then with a movement both gentle and amorous, as though he were caressing the most beautiful of women, he passed his hand over her whole body, from the head to the tail, scratching the flexible vertebrae which divided the yellow back of the panther. The animal slightly moved her tail voluptuously, and her eyes grew soft and gentle; and when for the third time the Frenchman had accomplished this interested flattery, she gave vent to purrings like those by which cats express their pleasure; but they issued from a throat so deep, so powerful, that they resounded through the cave like the last chords of an organ rolling along the vaulted roof of a church. The Provençal, seeing the value of his caresses, redoubled them until they completely soothed and lulled this imperious courtesan.

When he felt assured that he had extinguished the ferocity of his capricious companion, whose hunger had so luckily been appeased the day before, he got up to leave the grotto. The panther let him go out, but when he reached the summit of the little knoll she sprang up and bounded after him with the lightness of a sparrow hopping from twig to twig on a tree, and rubbed against his legs, arching her back after the manner of a domestic cat. Then regarding her guest with eyes whose glare had somewhat softened, she gave vent to that wild cry which naturalists compare to the grating of a saw.

“Madame is exacting,” said the Frenchman, smiling.

He was bold enough to play with her ears; he stroked her belly and scratched her head good and hard with his nails. He was encouraged with his success, and tickled her skull with the point of his dagger, watching for an opportune moment to kill her, but the hardness of the bone made him tremble, dreading failure.

The sultana of the desert showed herself gracious to her slave; she lifted her head, stretched out her neck, and betrayed her delight by the tranquility of her relaxed attitude. It suddenly occurred to the soldier that, to slay this savage princess with one blow, he must stab deep in the throat.

He raised the blade, when the panther, satisfied, no doubt, threw herself gracefully at his feet and glanced up at him with a look in which, despite her natural ferocity, a glimmer of good-will was apparent. The poor Provençal, thus frustrated for the nonce, ate his dates as he leaned against one of the palm-trees, casting an interrogating glance from time to time across the desert, in quest

of some deliverer, and on his terrible companion, watching the chances of her uncertain clemency.

The panther looked at the place where the date-stones fell; and, each time he threw one, she examined the Frenchman with an eye of commercial distrust. However, the examination seemed to be favorable to him, for, when he had eaten his frugal meal, she licked his boots with her powerful, rough tongue, cleaning off the dust which was caked in the wrinkles in a marvelous manner.

“Ah! but how when she is really hungry?” thought the Provençal. In spite of the shudder caused by this thought, his attention was curiously drawn to the symmetrical proportions of the animal, which was certainly one of the most splendid specimens of its race. He began to measure them with his eye. She was three feet in height at the shoulders and four feet in length, not counting her tail; this powerful weapon was nearly three feet long, and rounded like a cudgel. The head, large as that of a lioness, was distinguished by an intelligent, crafty expression. The cold cruelty of the tiger dominated, and yet it bore a vague resemblance to the face of a wanton woman. Indeed, the countenance of this solitary queen had something of the gayety of a Nero in his cups; her thirst for blood was slaked, now she wished for amusement.

The soldier tried if he might walk up and down, the panther left him freedom, contenting herself with following him with her eyes, less like a faithful dog watching his master’s movements with affectionate solicitude, than a huge Angora cat uneasy and suspicious of every movement.

When he looked around he saw, by the spring, the carcass of his horse; the panther had dragged the remains all that distance, and had eaten about two-thirds of it already. The sight reassured the Frenchman, it made it easy to explain the panther’s absence and the forbearance she had shown him while he slept.

This first good luck emboldened the soldier to think of the future. He conceived the wild idea of continuing on good terms with his companion and to share her home, to try every means to tame her and endeavor to turn her good graces to his account.

With these thoughts he returned to her side, and had the unspeakable joy of seeing her wag her tail with an almost imperceptible motion as he approached. He sat down beside her, fearlessly, and they began to play together. He took her paws and muzzle, twisted her ears, rolled her over on her back, and stroked her warm, delicate flanks. She allowed him to do whatever he liked, and, when he began to stroke the fur on her feet, she carefully drew in her murderously savage claws, which were sharp and curved like a Damascus sword.

The Frenchman kept one hand on his poniard, and thought to watch his chance to plunge it into the belly of the too confiding

animal; but he was fearful lest he might be strangled in her last convulsive struggles; besides this, he felt in his heart a sort of remorse which bade him respect this hitherto inoffensive creature that had done him no hurt. He seemed to have found a friend in the boundless desert, and, half-unconsciously, his mind reverted to his old sweetheart whom he had, in derision, nicknamed "Mignonne" by way of contrast because she was so furiously jealous; during the whole period of their intercourse he lived in dread of the knife with which she ever threatened him.

This recollection of his youthful days suggested the idea of making the panther answer to this name, now that he began to admire with less fear her graceful swiftness, agility, and softness. Toward the close of the day he had so familiarized himself with his perilous position that he was half in love with his dangerous situation and its painfulness. At last his companion had grown so far tamed that she had caught the habit of looking up at him whenever he called in a falsetto voice "Mignonne."

At the setting of the sun Mignonne, several times in succession, gave a long, deep, melancholy cry.

"She has been well brought up," thought the light-hearted soldier; "she says her prayers." But this jesting thought only occurred to him when he noticed that his companion still retained her pacific attitude.

"Come, my little blonde, I'll let you go to bed first," he said to her, counting on the activity of his own legs to run away as soon as she was asleep; to reach as great distance as possible, and seek some other shelter for the night.

With the utmost impatience the soldier waited the hour of his flight. When it arrived he started off vigorously in the direction of the Nile; but hardly had he made a quarter of a league in the sand when he heard the panther bounding after him; at intervals giving out that saw-like cry which was more terrible than her leaping gait.

"Ah!" said he, "she's fallen in love with me; she has never met anyone before; it is really flattering to be her first love."

So thinking he fell into one of those treacherous quicksands, so menacing to travelers, and from which it is an impossibility to save one's self. Finding himself caught he gave a shriek of alarm. The panther seizing his collar with her teeth, and springing vigorously backward, drew him as by magic out of the sucking sand.

"Ah, Mignonne!" cried the soldier, enthusiastically kissing her; "we are bound to each other now—for life and death! But no tricks, mind!" and he retraced his steps.

From that time the desert was inhabited for him. It contained a being to whom he could talk and whose ferocity was now lulled into gentleness, although he could not explain to himself this strange friendship. Anxious as he was to keep awake and on

guard, as it were, he gradually succumbed to his excessive fatigue of body and mind; he threw himself on the floor of the cave and slept soundly.

On awakening Mignonne was absent; he climbed the hillock and afar off saw her returning in the long bounds characteristic of those animals, who cannot run owing to the extreme flexibility of the vertebral column.

Mignonne arrived with bloody jaws; she received the wonted caresses, the tribute her slave hastened to pay, and showed by her purring how transported she was. Her eyes, full of languor, rested more kindly on the Provençal than on the previous day, and he addressed her as he would have done a domestic animal.

“Ah! mademoiselle, you’re a nice girl, ain’t you? Just see now! we like to be petted, don’t we? Are you not ashamed of yourself? So you’ve been eating some Arab or other, eh? well, that doesn’t matter. They’re animals, the same as you are; but don’t take to crunching up a Frenchman, bear that in mind, or I shall not love you any longer.”

She played like a dog with its master, allowing herself to be rolled over, knocked about, stroked, and the rest, alternately; at times she would coax him to play by putting her paw upon his knee and making a pretty gesture of solicitation.

Some days passed in this manner. This companionship allowed the Provençal to properly appreciate the sublime beauties of the desert. He had now discovered in the rising and setting of the sun sights utterly unknown to the world. He knew what it was to tremble when over his head he heard the hiss of a bird’s wing, which occurred so rarely, or when he saw the clouds changing like many-colored travelers melting into each other. In the night-time he studied the effects of the moon upon the ocean of sand, where the simoom made waves swift of movement and rapid in their changes. He lived the life of the East; he marveled at its wonderful pomp; then, after having reveled in the sight of a hurricane over the plain where the madly whirling sands made red, dry mists, and death-bearing clouds, he would welcome the night with joy, for then fell the blissful freshness of the light of the stars, and he listened to imaginary music in the skies.

Thus solitude taught him to unroll the treasures of dreams. He passed long hours in remembering mere nothings—trifles, and comparing his past life with the present.

In the end he grew passionately fond of his panther; for some sort of affection was a necessity.

Whether it was that his own will powerfully projected had modified that of his companion, or whether, because she had found abundant food in her predatory excursions in the desert, she respected the man’s life, he feared no longer for it, for she became so exceedingly tame.

Most of his time he devoted to sleep, but he was compelled to watch like a spider in its web, that the moment of his deliverance might not escape him, in case any should come his way over that line marked by the horizon. His shirt he had sacrificed in the making of a flag, which he attached to the top of a palm-tree from which he had torn the foliage. Taught by necessity, he found the means of keeping it spread out, by fastening twigs and wedges to the corners; for the fitful breeze might not be blowing at the moment when the passing traveler was looking over the desert.

Nevertheless there were long hours of gloom, when he had abandoned hope; then he played with his panther. He had come to understand the different inflexions of her voice, the expression of her eyes; he had studied the capricious patterns of the rosettes that marked her golden robe. Mignonne was not even angry when he took hold of the tuft at the end of her tail to count the black and white rings, those graceful ornaments which glistened in the sun like precious gems. It afforded him pleasure to contemplate the supple, lithe, soft lines of her lissome form, the whiteness of her belly, the graceful poise of her head. But it was especially when she was playing that he took the greatest pleasure in looking at her. The agility and youthful lightness of her movements were a continual wonder to him. He was amazed at the supple way in which she bounded, crept, and glided, or clung to the trunk of palm-trees, or rolled over, crouching sometimes to the ground and gathering herself together for her mighty spring; how she washed herself and combed down her fur. He noted that however vigorous her spring might be, however slippery the block of granite upon which she landed, she would stop, motionless, at the one word "Mignonne."

One day, under a bright midday sun, a great bird hovered in the sky. The Provençal left his panther to gaze at this new guest; but after pausing for a moment the deserted sultana uttered a deep growl.

"God take me! I do believe that she is jealous," he cried, seeing the rigid look appearing again in the metallic eyes. "The soul of Virginie has passed into her body, that's sure!"

The eagle disappeared in the ether, and the soldier admired the panther again, recalled by her evident displeasure, her rounded flanks, and the perfect grace of her attitude. She was as pretty as a woman. There were youth and grace in her form. The blond fur of her robe shaded, with delicate gradations, to the dead-white tones of her furry thighs; the vivid sunshine brought out in its fullness the brilliancy of this living gold and its variegated brown spots with indescribable luster.

The Provençal and the panther looked at each other with a look pregnant with meaning. She trembled with delight (the coquettish creature) when she felt her friend scratch the strong

bones of her skull with his nails. Her eyes glittered like lightning-flashes—then she closed them tightly.

“She has a soul!” cried he, looking at the stillness of this queen of the sands, golden like them, white as their waving light, solitary and burning as themselves.

“Well,” said she, “I have read your defense of the beasts, but now tell me the end of this friendship between two beings who seemed to understand each other so thoroughly.”

“Ah! there you are! I replied. “It finished as all great passions end—by a misunderstanding. I believe that both sides imagine treachery; pride prevents an explanation, the rupture comes to pass through obstinacy.”

“And sometimes on pleasant occasions,” said she, “a glance, a word, an exclamation is all-sufficient. Well, tell me the end of the story.”

“That is horribly difficult. But you will understand it the better if I give it you in the words of the old veteran, as he finished the bottle of champagne and exclaimed:

“I don’t know how I could have hurt her, but she suddenly turned on me in a fury, seizing my thigh with her sharp teeth, and yet (I thought of this afterward) not cruelly. I imagined that she intended devouring me, and I plunged my poniard in her throat. She rolled over with a cry that rent my soul; she looked at me in her death-struggle, but without anger. I would have given the whole world—my cross, which I had not yet gained, all, everything—to restore her life to her. It was as if I had assassinated a real human being, a friend. When the soldiers who had seen my flag came to my rescue they found me in tears. Ah! well, monsieur,’ he resumed, after a momentary pause, eloquent by its silence, ‘I went through the wars in Germany, Spain, Russia, and France; I have marched my carcass well-nigh the world over, but I have seen nothing comparable to the desert. Ah! it is most beautiful! glorious!’

“‘What were your feelings there?’ I asked.

“‘They cannot be told, young man. Besides, I do not always regret my panther, my bouquet of palms. I must, indeed, be sad for that. In the desert, see you, there is all, and there is nothing.’

“‘But wait!—explain that!’

“‘Well, then,’ he replied, with an impatient gesture, ‘God is there, man is not.’”

PARIS, 1832.