needed Abdur Rahman. The Rashid had grown so strong that he had become a menace both to the Turks and to Kuwait. Abdur Rahman would be the best counterpoise to the Rashid: he could use the Saudis against the Rashids and so quiet the Rashid. Knowing Abdur Rahman's pride he agreed secretly with Mohamed of Kuwait to invite Abdur Rahman and his family, and he guaranteed Mohamed an allowance from the Turkish Government to keep his guests.

Abdur Rahman accepted the invitation gladly, collected his family from Bahrain, and with a tired sigh of satisfaction settled down in Kuwait.

PART II
CHAPTER VI

KUWAIT lay at the head of the Persian Gulf, an Arab town of sun-dried bricks of yellow clay and twisting alleys, crouching on a low shore—the houses coming down to a sandy beach and a shallow harbour protected by some primitive breakwaters. In the sunlight it lay a patch of staring yellow between the sea glare and the red desert that stretched away beyond it into the heat haze. There was not a garden nor a patch of green nor even a tree to rest the eye—except a few stunted tamarisk trees which fought with the sand.

The Saudis lived in a small one-storied house of three rooms grouped round a courtyard. The rooms were low, with windows of unglazed glass and heavily barred and shuttered. The roofs were flimsily built of thin rafters on which were laid palm-mats covered with beaten mud. It was in a street which was a twisting alley that ran down to that end of the foreshore where the shipwrights and the sailmakers worked and where the pearl fishers hauled up and beached their boats. The filth of the town and the offal of the harbour covered the shore and stank under the sun and the flies.

The Saudis were crowded in their three rooms, for they were a large family. After the spacious palace at Riad with its servants and slaves and the open life with the Murra, this drab town existence weighed heavily on them, and they were very poor.

The Sheik rarely paid the allowance he had promised because the Turkish Government rarely paid him, and
though he was friendly he was also close-fisted and had no intention of supporting the Saudis. Eventually the allowance stopped altogether, for the Turks once more offered to send Abdur Rahman back to Riad with Turkish soldiers, and when he refused as bluntly as before they took no further interest in him. When Abdur Rahman heard from whence his allowance had come he was furious. He would have paid it back if he had had the money, but he had none, and often the family were so short of food and clothes, that he had to swallow his pride and borrow money.

When Ibn Saud was fifteen his mother found him a bedouin girl to marry, but when the time came Abdur Rahman could not pay for the celebrations, so the marriage was postponed until a rich merchant put up the money.

It was a dreary life, full of such humiliations: the empty, loafing, objectless life of exiles living under a cloud, not wanted, homesick for Riad with its clean air from the desert, and hating the dankness and the fever of the Gulf and the mud and stench of the port.

In the town were many men of Nejd and Riad. A number lived in Kuwait as shopmen and traders. The rest came and went with caravans for the Interior or to man the pearl-fishing fleet when it set out for the season at Bahrain. They brought the news of Riad, but they brought no hope: the Rashid held the land in a firm grip: no one dared rise against him.

For Ibn Saud, Kuwait was full of new experiences. Hitherto all he had known had been the sour puritans of Riad and the brutal wild Murra of the Great Waste.

Kuwait was the Marseilles of the Persian Gulf. Its population was good natured, mixed, and vicious. As it was the outlet from the north to the Gulf and hence to the

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Indies, merchants from Bombay and Teheran, Indians, Persians, Syrians from Aleppo and Damascus, Armenians, Turks and Jews, traders from all the East, and some Europeans came to it. From Kuwait the caravans set out for Central Arabia and for Syria.

Ibn Saud lived the ordinary life of an Arab youth. He loafed in the harbour and listened to the sailors. He sat on the edge of the cafes and sucked in the talk of the traders, the travellers, the sheiks from the desert, and picked up the news of Baghdad, Damascus and Constantinople. He played knuckle-bones with the other youths in a corner, quarrelled and fought with them or went down the alleyways of the bazaars holding hands with his friends in the easy, intimate friendship of Arab with Arab, and played jokes on the shopmen until chased away. At the hour of prayer he joined his father in the mosque, and when the Fast came he kept it devoutly. The town was full of the vices of a seaport. Ibn Saud was intensely virile, but his puritan upbringing and his early marriage saved him from the harlots.

He was big-built for his age and very strong, with a quick wit and an open, frank manner.

CHAPTER VII

AMONG those who often visited Abdur Rahman was one Mubarak, the brother of Mohamed the Sheik of Kuwait.

Mubarak was on bad terms with his brother. Many years before, when he was still a young man, they had quarrelled, and Mubarak had gone to Bombay. There he had spent all his substance in gambling and riotous living.
He had even sold his mother's jewels to pay his debts, and he had lately returned penniless.

His brother still hated him. Being mean himself he hated his generous, free-handed ways. He was afraid of him too, for the people of the town liked him. He kept him short of money and humiliated him whenever possible.

Mubarak took a great liking to Ibn Saud. He treated him as a son, invited him often to his house, talked much to him, and taught him much worldly wisdom during these empty years of exile.

Suddenly, when Ibn Saud was seventeen, all was changed. Mubarak, stung into action by humiliations and insults and being ambitious, crept one night with a cousin and an Ajman servant into the palace, murdered his brother, and made himself ruler of Kuwait. The people, tired of his skinflint brother, who had taxed them heavily and spent nothing on the town, accepted him gladly.

A few weeks later Mohamed ibn Rashid died. With wisdom and a strong hand he had ruled a great area from north of Hail down to the Great Waste south of Riad. His successor, Abdul Aziz ibn Rashid, was, however, no more than a filibustering chieftain out for loot, and in a short time he had set all the tribes by the ears.

At once the Saudis became persons of importance: they were the friends of Mubarak; they were the enemies of the Rashid. Soon from Riad came messengers to say that the town was ready to rise, and that throughout Nejd the tribes were restless and would revolt if led.

Ibn Saud was in a fever to be off. He borrowed a camel, persuaded some friends to join him, and went raiding towards Riad. The messengers had been over-optimistic. The tribes did not rise. Mubarak gave no help, for he did not want a quarrel with the Rashid. Ibn Saud's camel was old and mangy. It went lame, fell, and refused to get up, and he was forced to start walking home until a passing caravan gave him a lift back on a baggage camel, and all Kuwait laughed and sneered at him.

Then, almost in a night, Kuwait became of world importance. For a generation Germany had been overcrowded with men and vitality. The Kaiser saw that she must expand or explode, and that the only road for expansion was to the East with India as the objective. But the English held all the roads to the East except the one that ran by Turkey through the Arab countries into the Persian Gulf. So the Kaiser allied with the Sultan of Turkey, proclaimed himself the friend of the Caliph of Islam and Protector of the Arabs, sent out his agents and pressed eastwards out of the West. As the backbone of his expansion he planned a railway from Constantinople through Aleppo down to Baghdad and with its terminus at Kuwait, for Kuwait held the door to the Persian Gulf.

For a century the English from India had been pressing up the Gulf from the East, allying with the local sheiks of the coast and so obtaining control. At Kuwait in 1897, the year that Mubarak became sheik, the two great World Powers came face to face, for the English were determined that the Germans should not come that way.

Mubarak listened to both. He received the consuls, and the representatives of England, Germany, and of Russia also, for the Russians, too, wanted a hand in the Gulf. He talked with secret agents of all sorts who came to him with offers.

He was shrewd. Position and power had changed him. He had ceased to be the wild, gambling, roystering spend-
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thrift. He was as generous as ever, but he had become staid, steady, calculating, a crafty manipulator, an elusive diplomat and a strong ruler, and he knew what he wanted. Nominally he was a subject of the Sultan of Turkey; but he was determined to keep Kuwait independent and for himself.

He saw that the English, like himself, were on the defensive and not out to annex, but that if the Germans with this railway came there would be an end of Kuwait. He played for time, giving nothing, postponing with empty promises, until the Germans, tired of this, eager to press on with the railway, urged the Turks to depose Mubarak. He was their subject, they said, he had murdered his brother and seized power: they had never recognized him: there was every justification for replacing him with someone more amenable.

Word of this came to Mubarak. Without delay he agreed with the English, and when the Turks threatened him they found the English behind him and were afraid to act.

Outmanoeuvred, the Turks took a new line. They decided to rouse the Rashid to attack Mubarak. They would tell the Rashid that whoever ruled Central Arabia must have Kuwait: they would give him arms and money and promise him Kuwait, and he should agree to the railway: they would point out that Kuwait was full of his enemies, and that Mubarak was protecting his rivals, the Saudis. The English would have no valid reason for interfering between two Turkish subjects; and the Rashid, always ready for a fight, agreed at once and began to prepare.

CHAPTER VIII

Mubarak saw his danger. He had no army: the people of Kuwait were not fighting men: even the town walls had been allowed to fall into ruins. He must find allies to meet the Rashid, and he sent out messengers across the desert and found many of the tribes disgruntled with the Rashid. The Murra and the Ajman with the Mutair, joined him, and then Sadun the Sheik of the Muntafik who lived up on the Basra frontier. He saw that Abdur Rahman and Ibn Saud might become important allies to be used to rouse Nejd when the time came, and he brought them into all his plans and conferences.

Abdur Rahman had, however, grown to disapprove of Mubarak for he had heard of his past life. He had learned that he was unorthodox in his manner of praying and, by Wahabi standards, his life was lax and immoral, for he had many foreign ways and habits. He wore fine clothes of silk. He prayed irregularly. He kept up a great state, riding through the bazaars in a carriage with black stallions and liveried coachmen, and ordering all to bend and salaam to him or be beaten by his guards. In his palace he had luxurious furniture, sofas covered with brocade, coloured windows, and worst of all, panelled ceilings inset with pictures of naked girls. He received his guests and presided at his conferences seated in a gilded arm-chair like a European king; and he smoked tobacco; and when he wanted entertainment he sent to Basra for dancing women and musicians to amuse him.

All these things—dancing, music, tobacco, pictures, especially of women, luxury in clothes or furniture, and this haughty pomp—were anathema to Abdur Rahman. He would not go to the palace. He disapproved of Ibn Saud
visiting Mubarak, so that Ibn Saud, who went often, had to do so in secret without telling his father.

Mubarak however, developed a great affection for Ibn Saud. He encouraged him to visit him. He took him with him in his work, his audiences, and his conferences, and for Ibn Saud it was a fine schooling.

Of ordinary schooling, reading, writing and book-learning he had done none since he left Riad. But here with Mubarak he was surrounded by new ideas, new people, novel customs and ways of thought, many of which were forbidden and unknown in Riad. He met foreigners of all sorts, traders, merchants, travellers, representatives of the French, English, Russian, and German Governments. He saw how Mubarak handled them and how the problems of the outside world affected him. Moreover, Mubarak taught him much of the art of ruling.

To rule Kuwait was no easy task. The population came from all the tribes of Arabia. The caravan-followers were lawless. The pearl-fishers were the worst rapscallions in Arabia. The traders of all nationalities would cheat, quarrel, and brawl if he gave them the chance, but Mubarak knew how to deal with them. He was severe, and a dictator; his pomp was calculated to impress them. He did justice, quick and emphatic justice, to all alike. Under him in Kuwait there was absolute security of person and property, and the town prospered exceedingly.

Ibn Saud learnt quickly and readily. He was intelligent and shrewd and with a judgment beyond his years. Usually he was good-tempered and genial, but sometimes silent and depressed and with occasional bursts of wild anger. When with his companions of his own age, he often boasted, struck attitudes, telling them how he was the heir to Riad and Nejd: how he would one day chase out the Rashid and force the tribes and villages to accept him until he ruled the whole Empire of Saud the Great. They laughed at him, jeered at him, reminded him of his one attempt with the mangy camel that went lame. Their jeers made him angry, but they did not affect his belief in himself.

When with Mubarak he was always quiet and reserved. At audiences and conferences he would sit in a corner, his feet curled up under him, his brown Arab cloak drawn round him, playing steadily with the amber beads of a prayer-chain, but watching always, alert, absorbing all that happened, learning always.

CHAPTER IX

Mubarak decided to strike before the Rashid was ready, so he called up his allies. From Nejd came many volunteers. When he had collected 10,000 he marched out. With him he took Abdur Rahman, but he sent Ibn Saud south with a small force to rouse the country and create a diversion by attacking Riad.

Ibn Saud took with him Jiluwil his cousin and a number of men of Nejd from the town. Here was the chance he had hoped for. At last, after all these years, the tribes were rising against the Rashid. At the head of them he would smash the old enemy. He would prove to those who had laughed at him that he was not merely boasting. At last he was on the move, fighting and leading his own men.

Sweeping wide across the desert and travelling very fast he roused the villagers and the tribesmen of Nejd who answered him gladly. They were tired of the Rashid, and they were overjoyed to see a Saud, and they came swarm-
ing in to help him, so that by the time he reached Riad he had a large force.

Suddenly there came news from the north. Mubarak had found the Rashid before the village of Sarif. He had attacked. His allies had failed him. The Muntafik had bolted. The Ajman, as treacherous as ever, had left him in the lurch. He had been defeated. Only a sudden storm of rain had saved his army from being wiped out. He was retreating helter-skelter to Kuwait.

Ibn Saud’s force broke up at the news. The tribesmen slunk home: the villagers bolted in panic: the fear of the Rashid was on them. Ibn Saud with a few men hurried back to Kuwait to find that Mubarak and his father were organizing resistance.

After them came the Rashid, and as he came he burned the villages of Nejd as punishment. In the town of Buraidah he hanged 180 of the head-men and placed heavy fines on all. Having cowed the people back into submission, he turned on Kuwait, beat Mubarak’s last troops at Jahra, a village close outside the town, and prepared to storm the town itself.

Mubarak was finished: he was without troops: his town unfortified: his allies dispersed: his confederacy broken up. Kuwait was all but in the hands of the enemy. For the Saudis there was no hope: they could expect no mercy. Once more Abdur Rahman prepared to be up and away before the enemy came on them.

At that moment the English stepped in. Mubarak was their ally, they said. They warned the Rashid back. They sent a cruiser to enforce the warning. The Rashid halted and retired. Once more they had saved Mubarak and also shut this door to the East in the face of the Germans and their Turkish allies.

CHAPTER X

The Rashid had defeated them, but Ibn Saud refused to accept defeat.

He was a man now, twenty years old, a great swaggering, rough bedouin buck, full of fire and spirit and spunk, spoiling for a fight, a giant of a man, a foot taller than the average Arab, and broad, with a big manner, and of great strength. He had brown eyes that usually were steady or smiling, but when he was roused were full of fire. He cursed the Ajman: they were treacherous curs. He spat with fury at the news of the Rashid murdering his men in the villages round Riad. He blamed Mubarak for mishandling his army. He tried to rouse Mubarak to fight again, and when he failed looked for helpers among the neighbouring sheiks, but without success. They had all had their bellyful at Sarif. They would not stand up to the Rashid.

Abdur Rahman tried to dissuade him. The time was not yet. He had better wait. Later on they could organize something new.

But Ibn Saud refused to listen. Proud as Lucifer, he was afire to be up and doing. He had had enough of idling. For six years he had sat in Kuwait, loafing, eating out his heart, listening to the hopeless grumbles of the exiles. That was no life for a man. It might do for shopmen and clerks, but not for a Saud. He was a fighting man. This mooning café-life drove him to fury. He wanted action. To be up and out in the desert, with a camel or a horse between his knees. The desert was full of chances. With God’s help he would win. He was sure of himself and of the people of Nejd. If he gave them the lead they would
rise and join him and throw out the Rashid. Only he must have camels, money, and arms; and he had none of these.

Week after week he argued with Mubarak, using all his persuasion. He approached the English representative in the town asking for help but got no reply. At last Mubarak gave way. After all it would be good to harry the Rashid and he could always disown Ibn Saud if it were necessary. So he gave him thirty camels, some of which were bitten with the mange, thirty rifles with ammunition, and 200 riyals in gold and let him go.

Ibn Saud wasted no time. Since his marriage he had lived in a separate house. His first wife, the little bedouin girl, had died six months after their marriage. He had taken two more wives, and by the first one he had a son whom he had called Turki, and he arranged with his father that they should stay with him.

He quickly found thirty of his friends as eager as himself and ready to let him lead them. Jiluwi and his brother Mohamed joined him, and he distributed the arms and ammunition. Then he went to the house by the harbour and said good-bye to his family. His mother, like his father, would have persuaded him against going. With tears she begged him to wait awhile. She was sure he was going to his death or at least to ignominious failure, but his sister Nura urged him with every encouragement to act. She was as ambitious and turbulent as himself. Now that he was decided to go, Abdur Rahman gave him his blessing.

It was late summer when he started. One hot night before the moon was up he went silently and without ad-

vertising the fact, with his companions, through the twisting alleys to where the open market led to the encampments of the bedouin and then out into the country beyond to the rendezvous where the camels waited crouched, with the slaves squatting beside them. A fighting man to a camel, the lurch of the rising camels, and they were away in the dark, making for the open desert.

CHAPTER XI

At first Ibn Saud had success. He had learned from the Murra to move with speed, and his men had each only a raider's kit, a blanket under the camel saddle, a rifle with ammunition, a handful of dates, and a bag of dried curds for a week's ration.

He knew how to cover his tracks and how to camp so as not to show against the skyline, in some hollow, the men in a circle, the camels hobbled and crouched within the circle, and outside the sentries squatted, each with a camel saddle for cover and with rifle ready, watching for danger.

Working across the trackless sandhills he would come swooping down on to a caravan or a village, his men behind him yelling his battle-cry, raid, loot, and be away fifty miles by the following evening to raid again somewhere.

Nothing tired him. When the others slept exhausted, he was often away scouting out on his own. He slept little, just lying down, making a place for himself in the warm sand for an hour or two, and then up and on again. He was in his element in a fight. He loved fighting, especially hand to hand. Bellowing like a bull he would come racing into a crowd, towering above them, hacking and laying about him with his sword, scattering them this way and
that with his great strength, so that no man dared to face him, and he inspired his men with his own energy and courage.

Skirting down the Hasa he first raided an Ajman and then a Rashid encampment and found good loot. News of his success went out, and, as he had gold and was liberally-handed, the bedouin joined him in numbers, and he harried the allies of the Rashid half across Arabia.

But he had not come raiding just for loot or the intoxication of fighting. He was not a common freebooter. He knew the bedouin themselves were of little value to him. He had come out to rouse his people of Nejd and Riad to revolt against the Rashid.

But they did not rise. They had risen when he had come in the previous year. They had made a mistake and they had suffered. Ibn Saud must prove his worth before they would rise again.

Then came a lean time: Ibn Saud’s raids failed; his money came to an end; his camels were overworked and in poor condition; his ammunition was getting short; the bedouin, seeing neither gold nor loot, deserted him; the Rashid sent men to Nejd who chased him out. He turned into the Hasa and was chased from there by the Ajman and by the Turks who pressed Mubarak to recall him. Cursing the Ajman and the Turks, and finding all roads closed to him, he turned south towards the Great Waste. A messenger from his father and from Mubarak found him. “We are anxious about you”, they wrote, “and advise you to return to Kuwait. The time is not ripe for action”.

In the palm-groves at Jabrin, Ibn Saud called his men together and put the facts before them; he was himself determined to go on; nothing would persuade him to give up even if he had to fight on alone; with the help of God he would take what chances the desert brought to him; those who wished might go.

Some left him. There remained with him only stout-hearted, taciturn, grumpy Jiluwi, Mohamed his brother, the original thirty who set out with him from Kuwait, and ten new men from Riad. Some fifty in all with their slaves. These Ibn Saud bound by oath to stand with him to the end.

His position was precarious. He had set out with high hopes, believing that he had only to show himself and all Nejd would join him against the Rashid and that he would be leading an army. Yet he was no more than an outlaw: there were spies watching him and reporting on his moves, and scouts out in every direction to see which way he went; he was an outcast to all the tribes; the hand of every man in the desert was against him, for, in the desert, failure made an enemy of every man.

But he did not lose heart. He was always most dangerous when things went wrong. His belief in himself was as strong as ever.

"Go back", he said to the messenger, "go back and tell my father what you have seen and heard. Tell him that no more will I endure with patience that our country be under the heel of the Rashid and that our family be trodden in the dust. I will gamble success against death. I will not return until I have succeeded. Death is better than failure. All things are in the hands of God the Most Merciful".
CHAPTER XII

IBN SAUD considered carefully what next to do. He saw that this raiding was useless, especially with only a handful of men: it could effect no definite result. His one hope was to make a coup so dramatic as to startle. He decided to make a dash at Riad itself.

He sent one of his men to spy. The man reported that there was a strong Rashid garrison in the town which was holding the Almasmak fort and the principal points: the Governor, a Shammar sheik named Ajlan, lived in a house opposite the fort. The people of Riad and of all Nejd were dissatisfied; they hated the Rashid and prayed for a Saud to come back to rule them, but they would never rise by themselves. They must have a leader.

It was clear that with his few men Ibn Saud could not attack openly. His attack must be a surprise.

The first thing was to hide his intentions. He must disappear and lie low. Giving out word that all his men had deserted him, he made with them into the empty, peopleless country to the south.

For fifty days he made no raid nor showed himself; but it was a difficult time. His men, like all desert Arabs, were easily swayed by passing events. Success stimulated them to any heights and failure dragged them down to the depths. Inaction they could not stand. It needed all Ibn Saud's personality to keep them together. They had lived hard before, but with the excitement of loot and raiding to spur them on. Now they almost starved. For food they had a few dates rationed out and occasionally some meat when they shot a sand-deer. Water they got from the rare desert wells. They would creep up—taking all precautions that they were not seen—uncover a well, fill their skins, cover up their traces and creep away. The water they rationed carefully. By the time it was finished it was slimy and stank of the skins. Where they could find a little scrub for the camels they halted, sleeping in the open, but all the time they had to be on tiptoe, watching and scouting out to see that they were not observed, as the news would travel at once through the tribes.

As day passed day without action the men grew restless, muttered and argued. They wanted action or to get back to their women. A life without fighting or their women was not worth living. But Ibn Saud refused to let them go home even for a day or two: they might talk: or they might never come back. He strove with them. With all his persuasive skill he argued with this one, threatened that one, appealed to the pride of another, and gripped them all so that he held them to the one purpose. He had the quality, rare among desert Arabs, of persistent, sustained, dogged effort. Nothing would turn him once he had made up his mind.

The strain was all the greater, for the Month of Fasting had begun. Ibn Saud, Jilwi, and many of the men kept the Fast rigidly, neither eating nor drinking for an hour before the dawn until the sunset.

On the twentieth day of the Fast, after they had said the evening prayer and broken bread, Ibn Saud gave the order to move. They travelled cautiously, moving by night, avoiding any tracks or parbs, and halting by day. The moon was in the last quarter, and the nights were black dark, so that they put out scouts well ahead to avoid stumbling into an encampment or across stray shepherds.
ROUGH MAP TO SHOW KING IBN SAUD'S CONQUEST OF ARABIA

Notes on areas in order of conquest

1. Riad Town and districts.
2. Asfaj and Harj districts.
3. Area north of Riad.
4. 
5. Hasa to the Persian Gulf.
6. The Ataiba country towards the Hedjaz and part of the Asir.
7. Hail.
8. Country beyond Hail up to northern frontier.
9. The Hejaz and half Asir.
10. At various times.
“It is our master”, he cried as soon as he saw Ibn Saud, and all his family crowded in to do obeisance. He had the information they required.

The fort, he said, was full of Rashid soldiers. They took no special precautions and did not appear to expect an attack. The Governor usually went to the fort to sleep the night. A little after dawn his horses were brought for his inspection. After that he either went riding or walked over to his house. He never moved out without guards round him. His home was two doors off, and there were no sentries on it.

Reconnoitring stealthily, Ibn Saud and his men crept up and over the flat roof-tops. In the next house was a man and his wife asleep. Muffling them in their bedclothes they tied them up.

The Governor’s house was next door and joined this house, but stood a story higher so that to get on to it they had to clamber up over each other’s shoulders. Once up, they lay stretched out on the flat roof, listening. There was no sound of alarm. They had not been seen or heard.

Moving silently on bare feet down into the house, they found the servants in the basement and locked them together in a room under a guard. On the second floor they found the Governor’s bedroom.

Ibn Saud slipped a cartridge into the breach of his rifle. Leaving his men at the door and with Jiluwi beside him carrying a lighted candle, which he shaded with one hand, he tiptoed across the room to the bed against the farther wall. There were two people in it, but they were both women. They were the Governor’s wife and her sister.

The wife sat up in terror. Ibn Saud clapped a hand over her mouth while Jiluwi dealt with her sister.

The Governor’s wife was a woman of Riad called Mutliba, whose father had worked in the palace for Abdur Rahman, so Ibn Saud knew her.

“Be quiet, Mutliba”, he said, “or I will kill you. I see you have played the slut and married one of these Shammar swine”.

“My lord”, she replied, when he had released her, “I am no slut. I only married after you had left us. And for what do you come here?”

“I have come to kill Ajlan”.

“Ajlan is in the fort”, she replied. “He has at least eighty men with him; so escape before he finds and kills you”.

“When does he come back to the house?” he asked.

“Not until the sun is an hour up the sky”, she replied.

“Then keep quiet, for if you make a sound we will cut your throats”, he said, and locked the two women in with the servants.

The night was now far spent and there were but four hours before the dawn. He reconnoitred to see what to do.

In the front of the house was a large room, and in the room an alcove with latticed windows. Below the windows was a square, and opposite, across the square, the fort with a big double and iron-studded door in a high wall. Above the wall a sentry paced. Ibn Saud decided to rush the Governor when he came out and then in the confusion to burst into the fort.

First, he sent off two men to fetch Mohamed and his party, and when they had come he set watchers by the windows, and with his men settled down to pass the hours that move on leaden feet before the dawn. Squatted round on the floor they listened to one who recited passages from
the Koran. They prayed, each man to himself, sat in contemplation, and settled any quarrels there were between them. After that they slept a little.

When it grew towards morning the servant brought them coffee, bread and dates. After they had eaten they performed the morning prayer softly, drawn up in two lines across the room with Ibn Saud in front leading and did their obeisances towards Mecca. Then they looked to their arms and got ready for what the day should bring them.

CHAPTER XIV

A LITTLE after sunrise one of the watchers called. Ibn Saud crept to the window. Outside in the square some slaves were leading up the Governor's horses. In the fort there was movement.

Ibn Saud gave his final orders. Four men were to stay at the window and as soon as they saw him running across the square to open fire on the guards at the fort gate. The rest to follow him.

He watched while the double gates were thrown open, and the Governor, Ajjal, came out with his guards behind him and walked across to his horses.

Now was the time. With a call to his men, Ibn Saud ran down the stairs, out of the house into the square, and with a great shout raced straight at Ajjal, who whipped round, drew his sword and struck at him. Ibn Saud parried the blow with his rifle and grappled with Ajjal and both fell fighting to the ground.

The guards scattered and ran for the fort. One made a

thrust at Ibn Saud and was cut down by Jiluwi. Ajjal fought back furiously. He struggled free and made a run for the fort gate, shouting the alarm. Ibn Saud snatched up his rifle and fired at him, wounded him in the arm so that he dropped his sword, dived at him, and caught him by the legs as he got to the gate and clung hold of a post. The sentries from inside rushed to the gate. Ibn Saud's men rushed up from the outside. On the steps they fought, a mob of men struggling, shouting, slashing at each other. From above on the wall and through the loopholes the garrison opened fire and hurled down blocks of stone.

A man next to Ibn Saud went down shot: another was wounded and lay writhing. Ajjal's guards grappled with Ibn Saud. Ajjal got one leg free and kicked back, hitting Ibn Saud a tremendous blow in the groin, which sent him reeling in pain. He let go of Ajjal and the guard dragged him through the gateway and tried to swing to the gate. Jiluwi with three men hurled himself on to the gate and heaved it open. Ajjal was running for the mosque across the fort courtyard. From all the walls the garrison was firing down. After Ajjal went Ibn Saud and Jiluwi, with their swords drawn, and Jiluwi cut him down on the steps of the mosque.

Then they made for the staircase. They were completely outnumbered. Two of Ibn Saud's men lay dead: four were seriously wounded. They were thirty against eighty, but they had the drive of victory behind them. Led by Ibn Saud and Jiluwi they stormed their way up to the parapets, killed or wounded half the garrison and threw their bodies down into the courtyard where they were dashed to pieces, and drove the rest into a room where they surrounded them.

At once Ibn Saud sent criers through the town, on
the mosques and the fort wall, to warn the people that he had captured the fort.

The population of Riad rose. They were tired of the Rashid and his injustices. They wiped out the other posts of Rashid soldiers in the town, and welcomed Ibn Saud with open arms. The remainder of the garrison in the fort surrendered. Ibn Saud was master of Riad.

PART III
CHAPTER XV

Ibn Saud had taken Riad, but he held little else. The villagers and tribesmen of Nejd still would not rise and join him. They had often before seen a town taken by a raid and lost within the same day. For twenty years the Saudis had been continually beaten by the Rashid. They waited cautiously. Only a few hundred hardy ones joined him. With these, his old companions, and the people of Riad he could not hope to stand up to the Rashid with his prestige and all his thousands of fighting men of the Shammar tribes behind him.

Riad he was determined to hold at all costs, so he set to work to make it impregnable before the Rashid counter-attacked, and the whole population turned out to help him. In many places the walls were broken. They built them up with feverish energy, expecting an attack at any moment. They re-dug the moat and built towers and loopholes for rifles. They brought in provisions and stored them, and unearthed rifles and ammunition which had been hidden during the rule of the Rashid. Ibn Saud worked out the details of the defence and organized the men into a garrison.

When the news of this came to the Rashid he sneered.

"The poor fool", he said, "he is as a bird that has flown into the snare". For the moment he was busy with other things. He considered Ibn Saud of no great importance. As soon as he was ready he would come down and teach