

after another, approaching the new hill with ever slower steps, and thinking at every place where tamarisks grew that I would come to a halt, when I plainly heard a distant shout which broke through the silence and died away. I shouted back with all the power of my lungs. It was, no doubt, one of my men, but he could not have heard my answer, for soon another gun-shot resounded nearer than the first.

Now I went on again, hurrying up the dell in which I found myself. It was incased in perpendicular, and sometimes even overhanging walls of clay-slate, but sooner or later it must lead to a small bridge. All very fine! It ended suddenly like a bag, a *cul-de-sac*, a small apse surrounded on all sides by vertical walls which even a cat could not have scrambled up. There was nothing for it but to turn back, hurry down, and try another dell, perhaps as deceptive as this. It was at any rate pleasant to go downhill a while, but I did not think much of it. When I came out of the dell I went up another at haphazard. There was no other shout, no gun-shot, and perhaps I had gone away from the scouts. But this time, clambering up a steep projection, I succeeded in reaching the top of a hill and saw at length two men, a long distance off, ascending a small height to look round.

I called to them, and they came jumping down to meet me, but were soon lost to sight in one of the deep hollows. To get round all this misleading bundle of open cuttings, which run at right angles through the slates, we had both to make long *détours*, and when at last we met on a ridge the darkness was intense, and we caught sight of one another only just in time.

It was Abbas Kuli Bek with his gun, and Habibullah who now, breathless and astonished, informed me that they had been greatly troubled about me. They had travelled by the only direct road to the spring, which along the foot of the mountain follows a valley invisible from the course I took. They had not thought of me and my lost trail till they had reached the spring and found I was not there. Then they had become uneasy, had understood that something was wrong, and had gone out to