

## The Interpreter.

CHAPTER XX.

(CONTINUED.)

Women and children were not spared in the general slaughter, and the hideous practice of refusing 'quarter,' which has so long existed between the Turkish and Russian armies, now bore ghastly fruit.

A horse falls exhausted in a cart which contains some Russian wounded, and a woman belonging to their regiment. Its comrade vainly struggles to draw them through the slough in which they are fast. Half-a-dozen Turkish troopers are on their track, urging those game little horses to their speed, and escape is hopeless.

Helpless and mutilated, the poor fellows abandon themselves to their fate. The Turks rush in and make short work of them, the Moscov dying with a stolid grim apathy peculiar to himself and his natural foe. The woman alone shows energy and quickness in her efforts to preserve her child. She covers the baby over with the straw at the bottom of the cart; wounded as she is in the confusion, and with an arm broken, she seeks to divert the attention of her ruthless captors, satisfied with their butchery, they are about to take on in search of fresh victims, and the mother's heart leaps to think that she has saved her darling. But the baby cries in its comfortless nest; quick as thought, a Turkish trooper buries his lance amongst the straw, and withdraws the steel head and gandy pommel, reeking with innocent blood. The mother's shriek flies straight to Heaven.

All the curses she invokes on that ruthless band fall back unheard? Ride on, man of blood—ride on, to burn and ravage and slay; and when the charge hath swept over thee, and the field is lost, and thou art gasping out thy life-blood on the plain, think of that murdered child, and die like a dog in thy despair!

By a route nearly parallel with the line of flight, but wandering through an unrequented district with which the Cossacks seem well acquainted, the Beloochee and myself proceed towards our captivity. We have ample leisure to examine our guards, these far-famed Cossacks of whom warriors hear so much and see so little—the best scouts and foragers known, hardy, rapid, and enduring, the very eyes and ears of an army, and for every purpose except fighting unrivalled by any light cavalry in the world. My original captor, who still clings to me with a most unwelcome fondness, is no bad specimen of his class. He is mounted on a shaggy pony, that at first sight seems completely buried oron under the middle sized man it carries, but with a lean, good head, and wiry limbs that denote speed and endurance, when put to the test. In a snaffle bridle, and with its head up, the animal goes with a jerking, springing motion, not the least impaired by its day's work, and the fact that it has now been without food for nearly twenty-four hours. Its master, the same who keeps his small bright eyes so constantly fastened upon his prisoners, is a man of middle height, spare, strong, and sinewy, with a bushy red beard and huge moustache. His dress consists of enormously loose trousers, a tight-fitting jacket, and high leathern shako; and he sits with his knees up to his chin. His arms are a short sabre, very blunt, and useless, and a long saucy, with which he delights to do effective service against a fallen foe. He has placed the Beloochee between himself and me; it seems that he somewhat mistrusts my companion, but considers myself, a wounded man, in one of their own horses, safe from any attempt at escape. The Beloochee, notwithstanding that every word calls down a thwack upon his pate (wounded as it is by the sabre-cut which stained him, from the shaft of a lance), heards an observation, every now and then, in Turkish. It is satisfactory to find that our guardians are totally ignorant of that language. I remark, too, that Ali hovers anxiously at every halt, and apparently distressed with what he hears, though I for my own part can discern nothing, walks on with a cheerful frame of mind, which I attribute mainly to the Moslem stoicism. His conversation towards dusk consists entirely of curses upon his captors; and these worthies, being of its tenor by the sound, and sym-

and cut the cord that bound our wrists together; his other hand meanwhile, to lull suspicion, carressed the Cossack's horse. That incautious individual blew upon his match, which refused to strike a good light. In a twinkling Ali's shawl was unwound from his body and thrown apparently over the Cossack's saddle-bow. The smothered report of a pocket-pistol smote on my ear, but the sound could not penetrate through those close Cashmere folds to the party in front, and they rode unconsciously forward. The Beloochee's hand, too, was on his adversary's throat; and one or two gasps, as they rolled together on the ground, made me doubt whether he had been slain by the ball from that little though effective weapon, or choked in the nervous gripe of the Asiatic.

I had fortunately presence of mind to restrain my own horse and catch the Cossack's by the bridle; the party in front still rode on. Ali rose from the ground. 'The knife,' he whispered hoarsely, 'the knife!' Once, twice, he passed it through that prostrate body. 'Throw yourself off,' he exclaimed; 'let the horses go. Roll down that bank, and we are saved!'

I obeyed him with the energy of a man who knows he has but one chance. I scarcely felt the pain as I rolled down amongst the brushwood. I landed in a water-course full of pebbles, but the underwood had served to break my fall; and though sorely bruised and with a broken ankle, I was still alive. The Beloochee, agile as a cat, was by my side.

'Lston,' said he; 'they are riding back to look for us. No horse on earth but one can creep down that precipice; lie still. If the moon does not come out, we are saved.'

Moments of dreadful suspense followed. We could hear the Cossacks shouting to each other above, and their savage yell when they discovered their slain comrade smote wildly on our ears. Again I urged the Beloochee to fly—why should he wait to die with me? I could scarcely crawl, and a cold sickness came on at intervals that unnerred me totally.

To all my entreaties he made but one reply, 'Bakaloun' (We shall see), 'it is our destiny. There is but one Allah!'

The Cossack's shouts became fainter and fainter. They seemed to have divided in search of their late prey. The moon, too, struggled out fitfully. It was a wild scene.

The Beloochee whistled—a low, peculiar whistle, like the cry of a night-hawk. He listened attentively; again he repeated that prolonged, wailing note. A faint neigh answered it from the darkness, and we heard the tread of a horse's hoof approaching at a trot.

'It is Zuleika,' he observed, quietly; 'there is but one Allah!'

A loose horse, with saddle and bridle, trotted up to my companion, and laid its head against his bosom. Stern as he was, he carressed it as a mother fondles a child. It was his famous bay mare, 'the treasure of his heart,' 'the corner of his liver,'—for by such endearing epithets he addressed her—and now he felt indeed that he was saved.

'Mount,' he said, 'in the name of the Prophet. I know exactly where we are. Zuleika has the wings of the wind; she laughs to scorn the heavy steeds of the Giaour; they swallow the dust thrown by her hoofs, and Zuleika bounds from them like the gazelle. Oh, jhanum!—oh, my soul!' Once more he carressed her, and the mare seemed well worthy of his affection; she returned it by rubbing her head against him with a low neigh.

I was soon in the saddle, with the Beloochee walking by my side. His iron frame seemed to acknowledge no fatigue. Once I suggested that the mare should carry double, and hazarded an opinion that by reducing the pace we might fairly increase the burden. The remark will-nigh cost me the loss of my preserver's friendship.

'Zuleika,' he exclaimed, with cold dignity, 'Zuleika requires no such consideration. She is not like the gross horse of the Frank, who snuffs and snorts, and struggles and fails, under his heavy burden. She would step lightly as a deer under three such men as we are. 'No, light of my eyes,' he added, smoothing down the thin silky mane of his favourite, 'I will walk by thee and carens thee, and feast my eyes on thy starlike beauty. Should the Giaour be on our track, I will mount thee with the Tercevan-

a fowl she carried on her back only such children as had a chief's blood in their veins.

'From my youth up I have been a man of war, Effendi, and the word of command has been more familiar to my lips than the blessed maxims of the Prophet; but the time will come when I too shall be obliged to cross the narrow bridge that spans the abyss of hell. And if my naked feet have no better protection from its red-hot surface than deeds of arms and blood-stained victories, woe to me for ever! I shall assuredly fall headlong in to the depths of fire.

'Therefore I bethought me of a pilgrimage to Mecca, for he is indeed a true believer who has seen with his own eyes the shrine of the Blessed Prophet. Many and long were the days I passed under the burning sun of the desert; wearisome and slow was the march of the caravan. My jaded camel was without water. I said in my soul, 'Is it my destiny to die.' For behind the long array, almost out of hearing of their bells, my beast dragged his weary steps. I quitted his back and led him till he fell. No sooner was he down than the vultures gathered screaming around him, though not a speck had I seen for hours in the burning sky. 'Thou! I beheld a small cloud far off on the horizon; it was but of the size of one of these herdsmen's cottages, but black as the raven, and it advanced more rapidly than a body of horsemen. Ere I looked again it seemed to reach the heavens, the skies became as dark as night, columns of sand whirled around me, and I knew the simoon was upon us and it was time to die.

'How long I lay there I know not. When I recovered my consciousness, the caravan had disappeared, my camel was already stripped to the bones by the birds of prey, my mouth and nostrils were full of sand. Nearly suffocated, faint and helpless, it was some time ere I was aware of an Arab horseman standing over me, and looking on my pitiable condition with an air of kindness and protection.

'My brother,' he said, 'Allah has delivered thee into my hand. Mount and go with me.'

'He gave me water from a skin, he put me on his own horse till we were joined by his tribe; I went with him to his tents, and I became to him as a brother, for he had saved me at my need.

'He was a sheikh of the wild Bedonins; a better warrior never drew a sword. Rich was he too, and powerful; but of all his wives and children, camels, horses, and riches, he had two treasures that he valued higher than the pearl of Solomon—his bay mare and his daughter Zuleika.'

The Beloochee's voice trembled, and he paused. For a few seconds he listened as if to satisfy himself that the enemy were not on our track, and then nerving himself like a man about to suffer pain, and looking far into the darkness, he proceeded—

'I saw her day after day in her father's tent. Soon I longed for her light step and gentle voice as we long for the evening breeze after the glare and heat of the day. At last I watched her dark eyes as we watch the guiding star by night in the desert. To the sheikh I was as a brother. I was free to come and go in his tent, and all his goods were mine. Effendi! I am but a man, and I loved the girl. In less than a year I had become a warrior of their tribe; many a foray had I ridden with them, and many a herd of camels and drove of horses had I helped them to obtain. Once I saved the sheikh's life with the very sword I lost to day. Could they not have given me the girl? Oh! it was bitter to see her every hour, and to know she was promised to another!

'A few days more and she was to be espoused to Achmet. He was the sheikh's kinsman, and she had been betrothed to him from a child. I could bear it no longer. The maiden looked at me with her dark eyes full of tears. I had eaten the sheikh's salt—he had saved me from a lingering death—he was my host, my friend, my benefactor, and I robbed him of his daughter. We fled in the night. I owned a horse that could outstrip every steed in the tribe save one. I took a leathern skin of water, a few handfuls of barley, and my arms. I placed Zuleika on the saddle in front of me, and at daybreak we were alone in the desert, she and I, and we were happy. When the sun had been up an hour, there was a speck in the horizon behind us. I told Zuleika we were pursued; but she bid me take courage, for my steed

CHAPTER XXI.

ZULEIKA.

'Man to man, and in the desert, I had but little to fear; yet when I saw Achmet's face, my heart turned to water within me. He was a brave warrior. I had ridden by his side many a time in deadly strife; but I had never seen him look like this before. When I turned to confront him, my horse was jaded and worn out—I felt that my life was in the hand of mine enemy.

'Achmet,' I said, 'let me go in peace; the maiden has made her choice—she is mine.'

'His only answer was a lance-thrust that passed between Zuleika's body and my own. The girl clung fainting to my bosom, and encumbered my sword-arm. My horse could not withstand the shock of Achmet's charge, and rolled over me on the sand. In endeavoring to preserve Zuleika from injury, my yataghan dropped out of its sheath; my lance was already broken in the fall, and I was unarm'd, with the gripe of my adversary on my throat. Twice I shook myself free from his hold; and twice I was again overmastered by my rival. His eyes were like living coals, and the foam flew from his white lips. He was mad, and Allah gave him strength. The third time his grasp brought the blood from my mouth and nostrils. I was powerless in his hold. His right arm was raised to strike; I saw the blade quivering dark against the burning sky. I turned my eyes towards Zuleika; for even then I thought of her. The girl was a true Arab, faithful to the last. Once, twice, she raised her arm quick and deadly as the lightning. She had seized my yataghan when it dropped from its sheath, and she buried it in Achmet's body. I rose from the ground a living man, and I was saved by her.

'Effendi, we took the bay mare, and left my jaded horse with the dead man. For days we journeyed on, and looked not back, nor thought of the past, for we were all-in-all to each other; and whilst our barley lasted and we could find water we knew that we were safe; so we reached Cairo, and trusted in Allah for the future. I had a sword, a lovely wife, and the best mare in the world; but I was a soldier, and I could not gain my bread by trade. I loathed the counters and the bazaar, and longed once more to see the horsemen marshalled in the field. So I fed and dressed the bay mare, and cleaned my arms, and leaving Zuleika in the bazaar, placed myself at the gate of the Pasha, and waited for an audience.

'He received me kindly, and treated me as a guest of consideration; but he had a cunning twinkle in his eye that I liked not; and although I knew him to be as brave as a lion, I suspected he was as treacherous as the fox; nevertheless, "the hungry man knows not dates from bread," and I accepted service under him willingly, and went forth from his presence well pleased with my fate. "Zuleika," I thought, "will rejoice to hear that I have employment, and I shall find here in Cairo a sweet little garden where I will plant and tend my rose."

'I thought to rejoin my love, where I had left her, in the bazaar; but she was gone. I waited hours for her return; she came not, and the blood thickened round my heart. I made inquiries of the porters and water-carriers, and all the passers-by that I could find; none had seen her. One old woman alone thought she had seen a girl answering my description in conversation with a black, wearing the uniform of the Pasha; but she was convinced the girl had a fawn-colored robe, or it might have been lilac, or perhaps orange, but it certainly was not green; this could not then be Zuleika, for she wore the color of the Prophet. She was lost to me—she for whom I had striven and toiled so much; my heart sank within me; but I could not leave the place, and for months I remained at Cairo, and became a Yuz-Bashi in the Guards of the Pasha. But from that time to this I have had no tidings of Zuleika—my Zuleika.

The Beloochee's face was deadly pale, and his features worked with strong emotion; it was evident that this fierce warrior—man of blood though he had been from his youth upward—had been tamed by the Arab girl. She was the one thing on earth he loved, and the love of such wild hearts is fearful in intensity. After a pause, during which he seemed to smother feelings he could not command, he proceeded in a hoarse broken

these I turned a deaf ear; now that she was gone, what had I in the world but Zuleika? and I swore in my soul that death alone should part us. At length the Pasha offered me openly whatever sum I chose to name as the price of my mare, and suggested at the same time that if I continued obdurate, it might be possible that he should obtain the animal for nothing, and that I should never have occasion to get on horseback again. My life was in danger as well as my favorite. I determined, if it were possible, to save both.

'I went to the Pasha's gate and demanded an audience, presenting at the same time a basket of fruit for his acceptance. He received me graciously, and ordered pipes and coffee, bidding me seat myself on the divan by his side.

'Ali,' said he, after a few unmeaning compliments, 'Ali, there are a hundred steeds in my stable. Take your choice of them and exchange with me your bay mare, three for one.'

'Pasha!' I replied, 'my bay mare is yours and all that I have, but I am under an oath, that never in my life am I to give or sell her to any one.'

'The Pasha smiled, and the twinkle in his eye betokened mischief. "It is said," he answered, "an oath is an oath. There is but one Allah!"

'Nevertheless, Highness,' I remarked, 'I am at liberty to lose her. She may yet darken the door of your stable if you will match your best horse against her, the winner to have both. But you shall give me a liberal sum to run the race.'

'The Pasha listened eagerly to my proposal. He evidently considered the race was in his own hands, and I was myself somewhat surprised at the readiness with which he agreed to an arrangement which he must have foreseen would end in the discomfiture and loss of his own steed without the gain of mine. I did not know yet the man with whom I had to deal.

'To-morrow, at sunrise,' said the Pasha, 'I am willing to start my horse for the race; and, moreover, to show my favor and liberality, I am willing to give a thousand piasters for ten yards' start you may choose to take. If my horse outstrips your mare you return me the money, if you win you take and keep all.'

'I closed with the proposal, and all night long I lay awake, thinking how I should preserve Zuleika in my own possession. That I should win I had no doubt, but this would only expose me to fresh persecutions, and eventually I should lose my life and my mare too. Towards sunrise a thought struck me, and I resolved to act upon it.

'I would hold the Pasha to his word: I would claim a start of fifty yards, and a present of five thousand piasters. I would take the money immediately, and girth my mare for the struggle. With fifty yards of advantage, where was the horse in the world that could come up with Zuleika? I would fly with her once more into the desert, and take my chance. Better death with her, than life and liberty deprived of my treasure. I rose, prayed, went to the bath, and then fed and saddled my favorite, placing a handful of dates and a small bag of barley behind the saddle.

'All Cairo turned out to see the struggle. The Pasha's troops were under arms, and a strong party of his own guards, the very regiment to which I belonged, was marshalled to keep the ground. We were to run a distance of two hours\* along the sand. Lances pointed out our course, and we were to return and finish in front of a tent pitched for the Pasha himself. His ladies were present, too, in their gilded arabas, surrounded by a negro guard. As I led my mare up they waved their handkerchiefs, and one in particular seemed restless and uneasy. I imagined I heard a faint scream from the interior of her araba; but the guard closed round it, and ere I had looked a second time it had been driven from the ground. Just then the Pasha summoned myself and my competitor to his tent. I cast my eye over my antagonist. He was considerably lighter than I was, and led a magnificent chestnut stallion, the best in the Pasha's stables; but when I looked at its strong but short form, and thought of Zuleika's elastic gait and lengthy stride, I had no fears for the result.

'I saluted the Pasha, and made my request. "Highness," I said, "I claim a start of fifty yards and five thousand piasters. Let the money be paid, that I may take it with me and begin."