

AN EGYPTIAN ROMANCE.

A Story of Love and Wild Adventure, founded upon Startling Revelations in the Career of Arabia Pasha.

By the Author of "NINA, THE Nihilist," "THE RED SPOT," "THE RUSSIAN SUT," ETC., ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER LIV.

THE MOST TERRIBLE OF ALL PERILS, AND HOW NELLIE WAS PRESERVED.

Leaving the two Europeans in pursuit of six thousand Egyptians, who were executing a retrograde movement, we will revert to the fortunes, or rather the misfortunes, of our lovely Nellie and her parents.

The trio were closely guarded and not even allowed to hold speech with one another. Nellie could not help perceiving how the idol of an hour had fallen in the common estimation.

She heard his conduct being discussed in audacious tones, but in no measured terms, on all sides of her.

Such grumbling created in her heart a new alarm, for did the war minister lose his high position he would be no longer able to protect her and her parents, and they would all three assuredly lose their lives.

Whilst these fears and apprehensions disturbed her mind Arabi Pasha himself had quite enough to endure in turn.

He was continually beset by some officer of distinction or other proffering his advice, and sometimes almost insisting on his counsel being followed.

After a monotonous fourteen miles' march over the level, sandy, treeless plain, the little village of Kafr Dawa was reached, where, though well-nigh exhausted, the troops were at once set to throw up earthworks across the narrow isthmus, as a safeguard against any possible landing and advance of the British in that direction, while not far in the rear of the working parties Arabi had a gorgeous pavilion erected, which had been brought for his special use from Alexandria.

It was furnished with an abundance of Turkish rugs and cushions, the dressed skins of different wild animals and with every other appurtenance that would render both imposing and luxurious the tent of an Oriental commander-in-chief.

After he had perused sundry dispatches and issued all necessary orders, to this splendid pavilion was brought Nellie Donnelly by one of the guards.

The war minister received her with the utmost deference, and when her conductor had taken his departure he turned to her with a smile and, holding her meanwhile by an arm, exclaimed:

"How does my wife like our quarters? Are they not very comfortable?"

The fair girl caught his meaning in an instant and her heart seemed to stand still.

"Oh, where are my father and mother?" she cried. "I thought that they also were being brought hither."

"A wife's place is at her husband's side, both night and day, and when she marries she is understood to leave both father and mother and to cleave only unto him."

"But I am not your wife. I was no consenting party. I was already married."

"Those wild statements have been refuted again and again, even from your father's and mother's lips. We Orientals cannot understand parents not being able to dispose of their daughters as they list, nor is such an anomaly comprehended in Christian countries in which I have sojourned. Besides, the priest of your faith declared that you are were not rightly married to your countryman who ran away with you, while I am very sure that you are rightly married unto me. For these several and good reasons I call you my wife, and from this morning I swear by Allah and the prophet that you shall share the same tent and the same couch with me. I have said it."

An expression of stony despair came into Nellie's face.

She gazed for a moment distractedly round at all the Oriental pomp and splendor by which she was surrounded, but they failed to fire her ambition or to dazzle her imagination, as her Moslem lord had doubtless hoped that they would do.

The carved bamboo poles bent to the desert wind that had just sprung up and the crimson damask lining of the magnificent tent glittered till the myriads of bunches

of forget-me-nots that were embroidered thereon seemed to be instinct with life and, as they met her view, Nellie remembered that a blue forget-me-not was the last flower that Frank Donnelly had ever given to her.

This recollection it was which restored to her the courage and resolution that was an essential part of her character, and she plucked from Arabi's belt the revolver that was carelessly thrust therein, and presenting the muzzle at his very forehead, declared in a voice which desperation rendered firm that she would pull the trigger if he did not let her go.

"Is your hatred to me so great as all that?" demanded Arabi as he recoiled.

"My love of my husband and my honor is as great as that and greater. I care little whether I destroy you or myself. If it really is a noble cause which you are supporting and your life is indispensable to its success, tell me so and I will point the weapon toward my weak and worthless self. Well come death a thousand times rather than a life spent with you in the character of your third or even your second wife."

An involuntary admiration of her conduct seized upon the war minister then. He felt instinctively that such a girl must possess a soul, no matter though the tenets of his creed declared to the contrary, and his brows contracted more with the weight of thought than under the influence of anger as he said in scarcely audible accents:

"You have doubtless disarmed me. You are safe. You may lower that weapon."

By the time that he had finished speaking not only had they quitted his own sumptuous pavilion, but they had also gained a lesser tent, behind the flaps of whose canvas Nellie could plainly distinguish the voices of her father and mother.

"I will not come in a 'th you," said Arabi. "I have lost all esteem for your parents, and I care not to hold converse with those whom I have ceased to respect. You can tell them that within a quarter of an hour you will all three be journeying by special train to Cairo, for the station is not a hundred yards away, and whither you will be taken when you arrive there. The protectors that I shall give unto you may be perfectly relied on, for they are men who know that their future rests with me, so even their selfish interests will make them faithful to their trust. And now farewell."

As he concluded the war minister raised the lovely girl's hand to his lips and kissed it fervently—almost, indeed, reverentially. Then he raised the flap of the tent for her to enter it thereunder, and when she had disappeared from his sight he sighed and returned alone to his gorgeous pavilion, muttering to himself the while:

"I wonder if I have acted as an honorable man or simply as a fool."

CHAPTER LV.

LOST AMONGST MOUNTAINS—NEARLY RUN TO DEATH.

Two Europeans, wan, half starved and in every way wretched, beset by many perils as ever was the Apostle Paul, are wandering alone in the desert, attempting to make their way overland toward some part or other of the Suez Canal.

Not to make a mystery of the matter, they are none other than Frank Donnelly and his devoted follower, Pat Monaghan, whom in the chapter before the last we beheld setting out from Alexandria in the dead of night on a most Quixotic and hopeless errand, as any but a lover and an Irishman would have perceived from the very first.

At last, one moonlight night, they had been perceived prowling in the neighborhood of an advanced picket, actually in the rear of the Egyptian lines (a hanging matter according to every military code in existence), so that a troop of horse had been sent in pursuit of them, and these, turning their flank and cutting them off from Alexandria, had chased them for fifteen miles out into the desert, and from that time whenever they had sought to return they had encountered

some body of Bedouin horse or other, who drove them first in one direction and then in another, till at last (although they as yet had managed to keep clear of hostile lead and steel) they were altogether lost, and no more knew the way back to Alexandria than the way to reach the moon.

They had been lost for more than a month now, and all that while they have wandered to and fro in a wild region of hill and mountain, with large stretches of desert between hills rounded at the tops, bare of verdure and hideously monotonous of aspect, so that one can hardly be distinguished from another, which makes it all the more difficult to get out of this apparently enchanted region, and often after attempting it for a whole day they have found themselves at sunset close to where they started from at sunrise.

Even in this terrible region, however, there is an oasis to be found at intervals wide apart, each with a natural spring in its centre (whence, undoubtedly, its existence) and adorned at the least with fig and date trees, fruit than which in a clime like Egypt nothing more is wanted to support life.

One morning just at dawn, Frank Donnelly started as they were in the act of adding their horses and exclaimed in excited tones to his companion, "Did you not hear it?"

"Bogorra, an' had oast to that same, I can only hear the barking of a fox."

"You are," trembling to listen. I wish you would, for I want your opinion about it."

"Be jabers, I can hear it now, your honor. There must be a nest of 'em close by."

"A nest of what, Pat? What on earth do you make it out to be then?"

"Why, if it ain't the buzzing of the most thundering bumble bees or hornets I'm blessed."

"It sounds to me a deal more like the rush of steam through the 'scope pipe of a distant steamer. It seemed familiar to me the instant that I heard it."

"I wish it was, yer honor, but steamers don't come tearing across deserts."

"No, Pat, but in many places the desert stretches to the very banks of the Suez Canal, which is traversed by ocean steamers continually. Let us up and away and at once make in the direction of the sound. There is hope for us yet, my boy."

"If there is, bogorra, here comes a pack of those brown Bedouin devils determined to do their best to cut us off from it. We've not a moment to lose, yer honor."

There was no need to lose even half a minute, for the horses were already saddled, and they had but to leap upon their backs, gather up the reins and kick the corners of their shoe-shaped stirrups against their bony ribs in lieu of spurs.

This done away they sped with the speed of the very wind out of the fertile oasis and across the brown desert sand, whilst the Bedouins, who had evidently hoped to steal down upon them unperceived, rent the air with their shrill and angry cries and brandished their long spears on high.

The monotonous sound still continued, and the fugitives guided their horses in its direction. If it was what Frank Donnelly supposed it to be 'twas still a long way off, and by the time they had reached the canal the steamer, from which he almost hoped against hope that it proceeded, might have passed quite out of sight.

Then all at once it struck him: Was the canal still open?

He was aware that the war minister had threatened to destroy it on the firing of the first hostile cannon against Alexandria.

If he had kept his word, the supposed steamer was a myth, and the strange humming noise was caused by something that might be hostile instead of friendly to them.

These were anything but agreeable doubts and fears.

As a drowning man clutches at a straw, so, however, did Captain Donnelly and Pat Monaghan hang on desperately to this, their almost remaining hope, as they sped on and on across the level plain and around one hill after another, the continuously humming sound alone enabling them to steer a tolerably straight course.

The Bedouins hung as purposefully on their trail, however, as grim death spurs his white horse hard on the track of plague, pestilence or famine, and every time they ventured to look back their pursuers seemed to have gained on them, whilst that they themselves were aware of the fact was evident from their frequent exulting shouts and the continual frantic brandishing of lances and matchlock.

A wild and ferocious looking set they were, with their long beards, floating scarlet head-dresses, bronzed, hair naked forms and enormous swords along over their backs; whilst their horses looked almost equally ferocious, with their tossing heads and streaming manes and tails, and those other tails dyed bright red that dangled and swayed from their picturesque harness.

"Pat, unless Providence is especially looking after us, they'll run us to earth."

This at last, in almost despairing tones, came from Pat's master; but Monaghan's thoroughly characteristic reply was:

"Bedad, yer honor, an' it's hard to say; but for myself, I feel in better spirits now that there's something more to rouse me up than the flies an' other stingin' an' worritin' creatures. An' besides, we've pulled through almost as bad before."

"Well, Pat, we can but do our best; and, by Jove, that we will do to the last gasp."

They spoke no more, but strained every nerve to prevent the Bedouins gaining ground.

Their sole comfort was that that half humming and half shrieking noise was more plainly audible than ever in their front, and decidedly very much nearer.

But sound is very uncertain in some states of the atmosphere, and the still, balmy air of Egypt bears sound at all times a long way, so that it might be still miles distant.

And now the Bedouins along their lances and handled their matchlocks, the next instant discharging them whilst at full gallop, according to their usual custom.

The bullets buzzed past the ears of the fugitives like wasps and they made the most unpleasant discovery that they were already within range.

To turn at bay upon more than a score of foes would, however, have been positive madness, and so they still continued their flight, a flight that now appeared to be hopeless.

A big hill was directly before them, obstructing all view behind.

"If there's no encosure on the other side of that we will sell our lives at the best price we can get for them, Pat," said Frank Donnelly, as he carefully examined his revolver.

"Ye may well say that," was Monaghan's response, "for my nag is about dead beat as it is."

The Bedouins perceived this as well, and their cries became like those of hungry wolves.

Donnelly involuntarily drew in his own stead somewhat, determined that he wouldn't place himself by so much as a single yard in a safer position than that occupied by his brave and faithful follower.

The horses were both reeling rather than galloping now, but in another minute, as the base of the rocky hill was rounded, both officer and man almost shrieked with delight at what they beheld, for not five hundred yards in front of them was a narrow strip of red water, and an enormous white-hulled transport flying the British Union Jack lying motionless in the centre, whilst her bulwarks were crowded with red-jacketed, white peak-helmeted soldiers, gazing with eager curiosity in their direction, doubtless owing to the report of the Bedouin matchlocks having reached their ears.

Three minutes later Captain Donnelly and Pat had gained the bank of the canal, whilst the Bedouins, swooping round the base of the hill, in turn received such a deadly carbine fire from the deck of the British transport that half of their saddles were emptied, whereupon the survivors shrieked, wheeled round and disappeared behind the hill again with a quickness that did more credit to horse than man.

CHAPTER LVI.

THE DEATH RIDE AT EL MAGGAR—THE FIRST VICTORY.

Ten minutes later Captain Donnelly and Pat Monaghan were safe aboard the British transport *Grocco*, which had been waiting for as much as a couple of hours in the Narrows of Atabet for a pilot to navigate her through Lake Timash to the town of Ismailia, where, according to instructions of the commander-in-chief, her living freight was to be put ashore.

Both officer and man were glad enough to find themselves amongst fellow-countrymen, and more especially red coats, but how was their satisfaction increased when, directly they set foot on the transport's decks, the "Fourth D. G." on the shoulder straps of the soldiers who thronged around informed them of the most agreeable fact that they were with the Royal Irish Dragoon Guards,