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Three Pomegranate
Trees

They Were Interlaced With His Future

By CLARISSA MACKIE

"It means something," insisted Paul Bellaires, staring at the door.

"Still at your Persian rug puzzle?" asked Denton, lazily blowing more smoke into the hazy atmosphere of Paul's room.

"Yes; so would you be puzzled if you had to live with the confounded thing."

"Why live with it? Sell it to the junk man."

"Junk? Dan," said Paul solemnly, "that rug is priceless."

Denton blew more smoke and grinned at his friend. "If it is priceless, how came you by it, old man?"

"Luck—sheer luck," cried Paul enthusiastically. "One day when I was in Ispahan—"

"I protest!" interrupted Denton. "I emphatically decline to listen to the story of how a wily old Persian hoodwinked you into buying that moth eaten bit of carpet under the thin pretense that as an astrologist he could read in the stars that the possession of this particular rug would influence your life to an astonishing degree. So far as I can see, the only influence its possession has exerted on you is to make you more abstracted than ever. You are everlastingly trying to solve the puzzle of those hieroglyphics on the rug."

"They do puzzle me," confessed Paul, quite unabashed by his friend's rebuff. "What do they look like to you, Dan?"

Denton tossed his cigar into the fire and, leaning forward, gazed down at the ancient carpet spread under his feet. It was a rich maze of faded

blues and reds and golds with dim traces of some pattern showing here and there.

"Well," asked Paul expectantly, "what do you make out of it?"

"Same as usual," announced Denton dubiously—"three drunken pomegranate trees sheltering a probably once beautiful damsel who appears to be leaves remain, and it is easy to see its tail!"

Paul made no immediate reply. He sat and stared at the closely woven pattern faded almost to obliteration by years of wear. The same motif was repeated in various stages of clearness all over the rug. What Denton had frivolously described really were groups of three conventionalized pomegranate trees. To one of Paul Bellaires' imaginative temperament the prediction of the old Persian, wily impostor though he undoubtedly was, could not help having its effect.

All at once Paul looked up and met Denton's amused gaze. "Laugh if you want to, Dan. Some day I shall expect you to apologize for your sleep-ticism."

"I'll do that cheerfully when the occasion arises. I'll even admit the fish is a rose, if I am convinced it is."

"I won't forget to remind you of it when it happens," said Paul, and so the conversation ended.

The next day Paul Bellaires fell in love.

It happened so quickly and so unexpectedly that he was unprepared for the attack. He had never cared much about women. He had been more interested in the marvels of the far east—history. Art and literature of all times possessed more charm for him than did the loveliest woman.

He was entering an art gallery one afternoon just as the doors pushed out

ward, and two women emerged. One was stout and elderly and prosaic looking. The other was a goddess. Paul had a vision of graceful figure glowing in dark velvet trimmed with fur, a perfect complexion, deep blue eyes fixed on his for one startled moment, red hair sweeping up to be concealed beneath a black velvet hat, and she was gone, leaving the fragrance of fresh violets worn at her breast.

Paul turned and stared after her. He saw a handsome motorcar at the curb, saw the chauffeur open the door, saw them enter and roll away. Then he turned away from the picture gallery and went back to his office.

He entered his private office, flung his overcoat on a chair, and with hat pushed to the back of his head, he sat and stared at the waste paper basket. Denton, coming in to consult him, found him in this attitude.

"Good heaven, man," he cried, "what's the matter? Moths eaten up the rest of the heaven sent Persian rug?"

Paul looked up and shook his head dazedly. "Dan," he asked, "would you recognize a girl from a mere description?"

Denton was plainly interested. He seated himself on the table and lighted a cigar.

"That is a lucid question," he jeered. "Would I recognize a girl from a mere description? Answer: I might if I knew the girl."

"Oh!" said Paul blankly. "It's a serious matter," observed Denton, "when you inquire so solicitously concerning a lady. May I ask if you are in love?"

"I don't know," returned the inexperienced one frankly. "I've seen the most—the most—Dan, she is perfect!"

"Then you are!"

"Are what?"

"In love."

"I can't be when I don't even know her name."

"At least you may discover whether it is written in the stars that she is to be yours. Did she carry a pomegranate tree along?"

"No. Let me describe her in a few words. She may be among your acquaintances." Paul was serious.

Thereupon Paul proceeded to describe his meeting with the beautiful stranger in so many words and with such vivid word painting that Dan Denton at last called a halt.

"Enough!" he cried in desperation. "If that's what you call a few words protect me from what you'd describe as a short conversation!"

"Do you recognize her?" asked Paul eagerly.

"Your description sounds like a half dozen perfect girls rolled into one. Come to that little dance at my sister's tonight. She might be there."

"Really, do you think there's a chance?"

"Why not? No harm in coming. You've a better chance if you are properly introduced to her than if you walk the streets looking for her."

"That is very true," said Paul. "I'll come, thank you."

"Good for you," chuckled Dan, slipping down from the table. "and now I think I'll trot along home. See you later."

He closed his own desk, put on his hat and overcoat and went down into the street, good nature irradiating from his round face.

He rode uptown, chuckling all the way, and when he went into a fashionable florist shop he was literally shaking with some inward amusement. When he emerged he was laughing outright.

While Paul was dressing to go out that evening he suddenly glanced down at the Persian rug under his feet. "I wonder," he mused—"I wonder if meeting that girl was written in the stars. I'd like to know where the pomegranates come in. Perhaps it means a journey to a foreign country. A wedding trip, eh?"

"Haven't seen any goddesses that came up to the one you described, old man," was Denton's greeting, later on, when he arrived at Mrs. Margrave's dance. "We've blondes and brunettes and all the types that come between, but I'm afraid you're bound to be disappointed."

Paul looked disappointed, but he bore it with good grace and went to talk to the few people whom he knew there. Later on he wandered about, looking for Denton, who had disappeared. The Margrave house was a large and rather rambling structure, but Paul was quite familiar with its byways, for he was often a guest there. He knew that the last alcove of the conservatory was a quiet nook where he might indulge in a smoke, for Mrs. Margrave always kept the little glass doors closed from the other alcoves of the long stretch of conservatory.

The conservatory was practically deserted as he walked down the tessellated floor. There was a strong lure for the dancers in the sweet, wild music of a Hungarian orchestra in the distant rooms, and it seemed as though he had the place to himself.

The little glass doors into the last alcove were wide open, and he paused there for an instant, halted by the picture before him.

Against a dense background of tan green plants stood three pomegranate trees in full bloom, the rich scarlet of their flower petals flaring out with startling beauty and unexpectedness to one who had seen them only in distant lands.

That was not the strangest sight. In front of the potted trees was a semi-circular marble bench. On the bench sat Dan Denton in the very act of offering the girl a rose. The girl was the red haired beauty Paul had seen that afternoon. She was lovelier than ever in a simple white satin gown with pearls.

Denton looked up, saw Paul and smiled. He was on his feet at once. "Come on in, Paul," he said cordially. "I want to introduce you to Miss Ewing," and when the introduction had been made he excused himself and went away, casting one backward glance at the absorbed couple on the bench.

"After all my trouble in setting that pomegranate scene I don't believe he saw anything except the girl. Oh, I say, Paul," he called back, "it wasn't a fish after all!"

But Paul never heard him. He cared nothing for astrologers or what was written in the stars or in his Persian rug.

He was looking into a pair of wonderful dark blue eyes.

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