

"But, my lord doctor," cried the Mussulman, "Fatima is not old; on the contrary, she is young and beautiful enough to be the bride of a Sultan!"

"I know it; but she may become old. I wish to see her. Remember, Sidi Houmaïum, all your promises of service to me."

"Since such is the will of my lord," replied Sidi Houmaïum, "return hither at the same hour. But let him remember well what I say to him; Fatima makes a shameful use of her beauty."

"Do not be uneasy on my account; I will not forget what you have told me."

After presenting my hand to the good man, I took my departure with the same slow and majestic step as that with which I had arrived. You may imagine how impatiently I awaited the hour of my rendezvous with Sidi Houmaïum; I could not control my impatience; a hundred times I listened for the cry of the *muetzin*, and even clattered with a sentinel to kill time. At length the verse of the Koran sounded in the air, from minaret to minaret, over the indolent city. I flew to Sidi Houmaïum's and found the worthy coffee-shop keeper closing his establishment. "Well?" I inquired, out of breath.

"Fatima is waiting to see you, my lord," replied Sidi Houmaïum.

He fastened his shop, and then, without further explanation, walked off ahead of me. As he went forward without once turning his head, and with his bournous almost sweeping the ground, I could hear him reciting I know not what litanies, in Arabic.

After a while, quitting the main street, he entered the narrow passage of Suma, in which two persons cannot walk abreast. There, in the black mire of the gutter, under wretched stalls, swarm a population of shoemakers, morocco embroiderers, dealers in Indian spices, aloes, dates, and rare perfumes; some going and coming with an apathetic air, others squatted with their legs crossed under them, dreaming of heaven only knows what, in the midst of an atmosphere of blue smoke, which escapes from their mouth and nostrils at one and the same time.

Suddenly, in one of the innumerable turnings of the passage, Sidi Houmaïum stopped before a low door, and raised the knocker.

"I shall want you to come in with me to act as interpreter," I said to him in a low tone.

"Fatima speaks French," he answered, without turning his head.

At the same moment the shining face of a negress appeared at a wicket in the door. Sidi Houmaïum spoke a few words in Arabic; the door was then opened and quickly closed behind me, the negress vanishing by a side door, and Sidi Houmaïum remaining outside the passage. After I had waited for some minutes, and was beginning to grow impatient, a door on the left opened, and the negress reappeared, making me a sign to follow her. I mounted a few steps, and found myself in an interior court, paved with small China tiles in mosaic. Several doors opened into this court. The negress led me into a low room with open windows, furnished with silk curtains of arabesque pattern. A large amber colored mat was upon the floor, round the sides of which there were a number of Persian cushions; the ceiling was ornamented with arabesques of interminable fantastic fruits and flowers. But that which at once attracted my attention was Fatima herself, seated on a divan, her eyes veiled by long, black lashes, her upper lip slightly shadowed, her nose long and thin, and her arms loaded with heavy

bracelets. For a few moments the Moresque looked at me out of the corner of her eye; an arch smile then half parted her lips.

"Come in, my lord doctor," she said, boldly; "Sidi Houmaïum told me you were coming to see me. I know what brings you here. You are good enough to interest yourself in poor Fatima, who is growing old, for she will soon be seventeen. Seventeen! Yes; poor Fatima will soon want to have the beauty of her youth renewed!"

I did not in the least know what answer to make; I was confused; but I suddenly remembered the object which had brought me.

"You joke delightfully, Fatima," I said, seating myself on the divan. "I have heard your wit praised not less than your beauty, and I see that it was justly praised."

"Ah, indeed!" she said. "And by whom, pray?"

"By Raymond Dutertre."

"Raymond!"

"Yes; the young officer who recently fell into the abyss of the Rummel.—Your lover, Fatima."

She opened her large eyes with surprise. "Who told you that he was my lover?" she cried, looking strangely at me; "it is false!—Did he tell you so?"

"No; but I know it. This letter proves it—this letter, which you wrote to him, and which was the cause of his death; for it was in attempting to come to you in the night that he risked himself on the rocks of the Kasba, and perished in the attempt."

I had hardly pronounced these words when the Moresque rose abruptly, her eyes glittering with sombre fire.

"I was sure of it!" she cried. "Yes; when the negress came and told me of what had happened, I said to her, 'Aïssa, it is he who has done this—it is he. the wretch!' And as I looked at her, unable to divine the meaning of her words, she came to me, and said in a low voice, 'Will he die?—do you think he will die soon? I should like to see him beheaded!'"

She had seized me by the arm, and looked wildly into my eyes: I shall never forget the look of her passion-lighted face.

"Of whom are you speaking, Fatima?" I said, greatly moved. "Explain yourself; I do not understand you."

"Of whom?—of Castagnac! You are the hospital doctor—give him poison! He is a villain. I know that he had a grudge against the young man, and I refused to lure him; but Castagnac threatened to come from the hospital and to beat me if I did not obey him in writing that letter. 'See!—here is the letter he wrote to me.'"

I will not shock you by repeating all that Fatima told me of Castagnac—how, after betraying her, he had brutally ill-treated, and occasionally even gone so far as to beat her. I left the Moresque's house with a heavy heart. Sidi Houmaïum was awaiting me in the passage, and he wound our tortuous way back to the spot whence we had started.

"Take care, my lord doctor," said the worthy fellow, looking at me from the corner of his eye, "the Angel of Evil is hovering over your head!" I shook his hand, and bade him fear nothing.

My resolutions were taken. Without losing a moment I entered the hospital, and knocked at Castagnac's door.

"Come in!" he cried.

The expression of my face must have told him that I came for no good to him; for the moment he saw me enter, he rose as if he were stupefied.

"Oh!—is it you?" he stammered, put-

ting on a forced and sickly smile; "I did not expect to see you." The only answer I made was to show him the letter he had written to Fatima.

He turned pale; and after looking at the letter for several moments, would have sprung upon me; but I stopped him.

"If you move another step," I said, putting my hand on my sword, "I'll kill you like a Joz! You are a scoundrel! You have murdered Dutertre! I was in the dissecting-room below, and heard all. Do not deny it. Your conduct towards this unfortunate woman is odious. Listen! I might give you up to justice, but your dishonour would redound upon us all. If you have any courage left, destroy yourself. I will give you till to-morrow; to-morrow, at seven o'clock, if I find you living, I will myself drag you before the commandant."

I left him without waiting for any answer, and hastened to give orders to the sentinel to prevent Lieutenant Castagnac from leaving the hospital on any pretext. I gave the same order to all the attendants, and made them responsible for any negligence or weakness. I then took my way to the place where I was accustomed to dine, as if nothing had happened; I was gayer than usual, indeed, and sat at table till past eight o'clock. Since Castagnac's crime had been materially proved to me, I felt pitiless; Raymond cried to me for vengeance, and I was determined that he should not cry in vain.

After leaving the dinner table, I went to a rosin seller and bought a large torch, such as our spahis carry on the occasion of their night fetes. I then went back to hospital, and directly descended to the dissecting room, taking care to double lock the door after me. The voice of the *muetzin* announced the tenth hour, the mosques were deserted, the night was profoundly dark.

I seated myself before one of the windows, breathing the mild gusts of wind, and giving myself up to the reveries which had always been so dear to me. How much suffering, how many iniquities, I had gone through during the past fortnight! I had endured nothing like it during the whole of my previous existence; and now I felt as if I had escaped the claws of the Spirit of Evil, and was enjoying the first taste of my reconquered liberty.

Time passed thus; the patrol had already twice relieved the sentinels, when suddenly I heard the sound of rapid but stealthy steps on the stairs, then a knock at the door. I made no answer. A febrile hand groped for the key. "It is Castagnac!" I said to myself, while my blood ran cold.

At the end of a couple of seconds, a voice cried: "Open the door!" I was not deceived—it was he. He listened for a while, then tried to force open the heavy oaken door.

A short silence followed, then a second attempt. I kept myself motionless, and held my breath. Something fell upon the steps, and then I heard the sound of retreating feet. I had escaped death. But what would he do next? For fear of a new and more violent attempt to burst open the door, I drew the two heavy iron bolts with which it was furnished.

I then went back to the window, whither a strange and alarming sound had attracted me. I looked cautiously out. A shadow was moving in the darkness along the ledge from which poor Dutertre had gone to destruction. The moon had risen on the side of the city, and the shadow of the hospital was thrown broadly over the abyss; but I had no doubt that the form moving towards the window at which I was standing