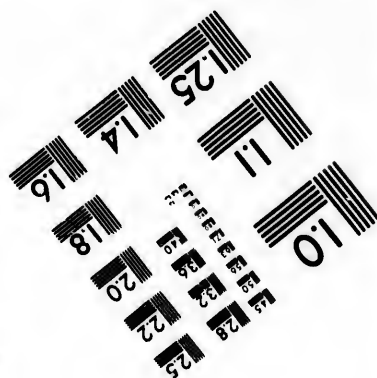
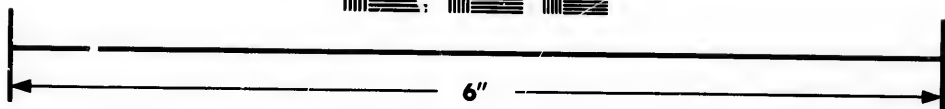
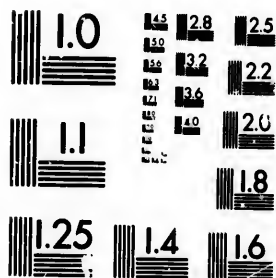


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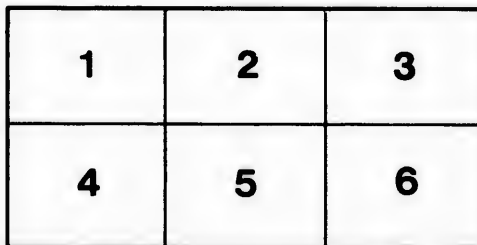
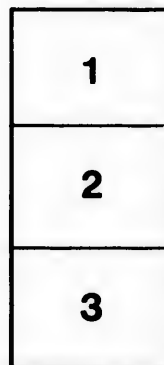
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NEAR THE THROAT

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NEAR THE THRONE

By

W. J. THOROLD

A Romantic Novel

Illustrated with Photographs taken from life
by G. G. ROCKWOOD of JAMES K. HACKETT,
THEODORE BABCOCK, FRANK MORDAUNT,
T. B. BRIDGELAND, CORONA RICCARDO,
MARY MANNERING : : : : : :



New York
MEYER BROS. & COMPANY
Publishers

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Dedication

TO

THE REAL

N A Z I R A

SYNOPSIS OF THE NOVEL

SCENE : CAIRO.

TIME : 1799.

Book One

IN THE GARDEN OF HASSAN

Four months elapse



Book Two

IN THE SURGERY OF BALZAR

Three weeks elapse



Book Three

IN FRONT OF THE PALACE OF SALADIN

Two days elapse



Book Four

IN THE COUNTING ROOM OF HASSAN

One hour elapses.



Book Five

IN THE CITADEL

99.

o

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JAMES K. HACKETT

As Captain Marcel Balzar



THEODORE BABCOCK

As Murad



FRANK MORDAUNT

As Hassan



T. B. BRIDGELAND

As Osman



CORONA RICCARDO

As Worda

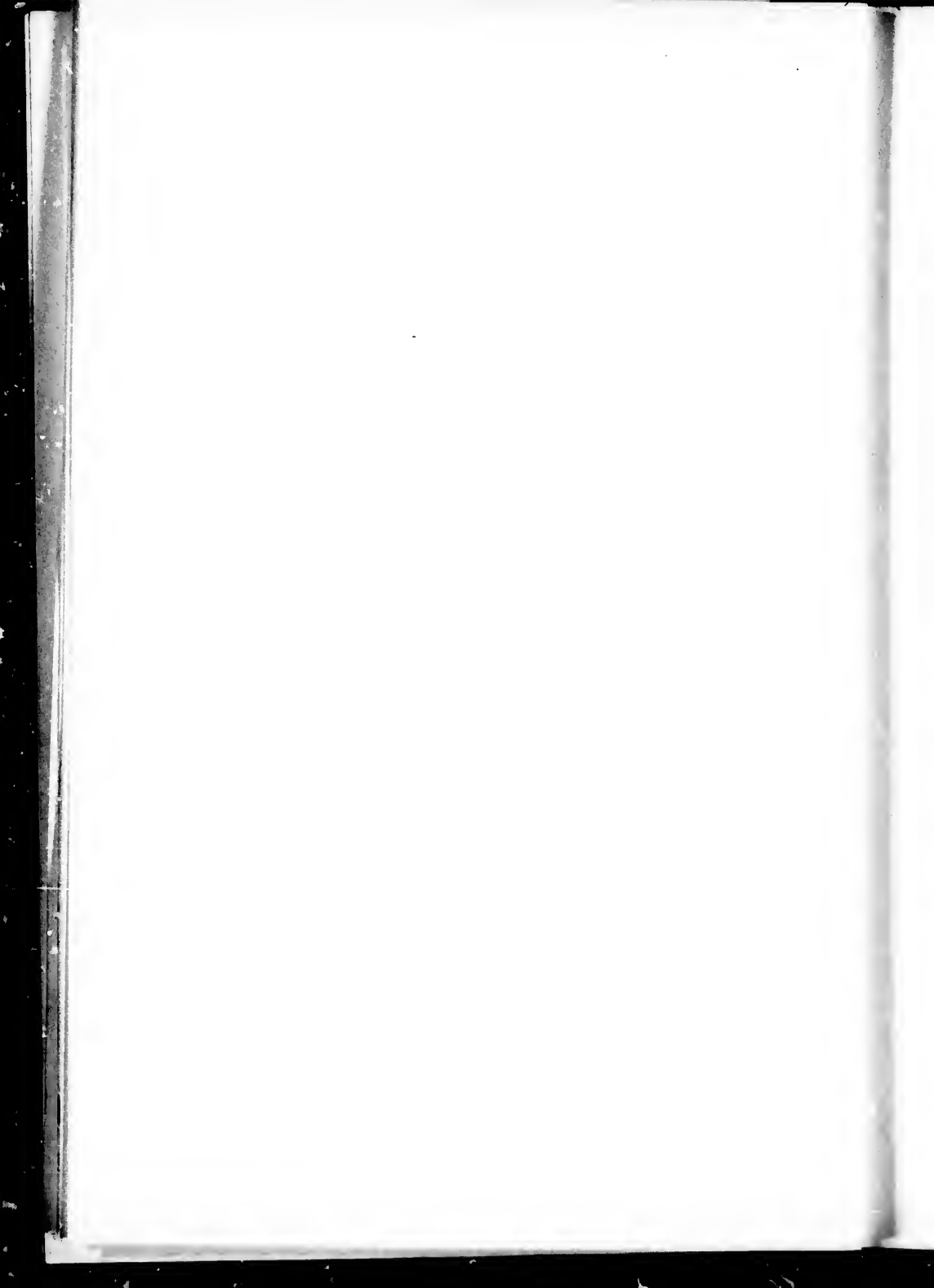


MARY MANNERING

As Nazira

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Book One
TO WIN A WOMAN

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NEAR THE THRONE

CHAPTER I

ADVENTURERS FROM THE NORTH

A garden in Cairo, on the outskirts of the city where there are fewer domes and minarets. The ground plan of the fascinating city which is the essence of all Egypt has not changed very greatly since that eventful winter just one hundred years ago.

Through the garden a stream, looking like an elixir of soft flame and fringed richly with papyrus, winding southerly to the Nile.

Over this stream a bridge leading to a gate in the stone wall. At the opposite end of the bridge three rustic steps; and the length of a couple of scimitars away a mound covered with a rug at one corner of which a pipe was smouldering. Opposite the mound a pedestal upon which a crimson cushion rested in place of a statue.

Above the yellow blossoms of acacias with their leafless stalks tilted toward the sky stately and

Near the Throne

luxuriant palms waving dreamily in the morning breeze, making the place a foliaged and flowery paradise.

Along the western bank of the old river of mysteries a caravan of camels casting their last regretful glances at the bluish-green waters and swaying as they trudged with their burdens of flashily dressed Arabians prepared alike for the smile of the sun or the sweep of the burning simoom.

Farther on, where the waters murmur as they pass, the monuments of ambitious and defiant kings in a sarcophagus of granite seeking an immortality their lives had failed to win: the lonely and stupendous pyramids from whose lofty summits twenty centuries look down upon the myriad secrets of battle and romance that lie hidden beneath the desert sands—secrets of what men have done to gain an empire or a woman.

Past the gate in the wall three water carriers with their leathern bottles were walking, muttering and quarrelling and pushing aside a stooping turbanned beggar who limped along more slowly and upon entering the garden hobbled off in the direction of the house of Hassan. A Moslem priest, paying no attention to any of them, hastened by on his way to the Mosque of Omar. Then from the opposite direction a group of dancing girls came tripping along chattering and laughing

Near the Throne

merrily—without a doubt they had been hired again to dance at the feast of a rich pasha. They went often now to the Palace of Saladin to amuse its lavish Saracenic master and an inscrutable little Corsican, when these two military dissemblers had tired of conferences on further invasions and a new vast empire of the Orient—to which each admitted the key to be Egypt, now lost for good to the Sultan of Constantinople. For ages that strategic country of the Pharaohs, the desire of the diplomats and monarchs of Europe, has been the land of pleasure and ambition. Its sceptre has been battled for because men believed the rod of gold pointed the way to the heart of a siren. General Bonaparte wanted to share it with Josephine, Murad Pasha to lay it at the feet of Nazira—where Captain Balzar was already kneeling and offering, not a crown, but only himself for her hand.

When two soldiers stand near a throne, and a third, who is a firm friend of one and a secret enemy of the other and all on account of a woman whom neither has yet won, stands watching close by with his hand always on the hilt of his sword—it means danger. And the meaning of danger that is written in no dictionary is a chance for glory and love.

After the almehs sauntered a very fat Frenchman rejoicing in a round ruddy face and extremely red hair; he opened the gate and entered the

Near the Throne

garden. This example of geniality had just crossed the bridge when a younger gentleman of the same Gallic race, dressed in creamy lace and glossy satin as faultlessly as a courtier bidden to a function at the Tuileries, met him.

“Carmier!” exclaimed the elder of the two.

“Monsieur Taschereau!” answered the youth, freshly shaven and curled and pomatumed.

“Sapristi! The journalist that used to be, the pedlar that is—Plutarque Taschereau!” the publicist laughingly responded, as the troublesome pack was allowed to slip from his shoulders to the ground and two outspread palms invited a glance at their owner’s dusty roadworn clothes and tri-colour sash that indicated his sympathy with the revolutionists of France.

“P p-precisely,” acquiesced the blond Gascon, eyeing his compatriot through the monocle that caused him much trouble—a habit he had contracted with several other fashions during a brief sojourn in England.

The lame beggar emerged from among the trees. For a moment he arrested the attention of the two Europeans. He was such an odd looking person: his strangeness being accentuated by the flowing costume of his country, frayed and even ragged from long use and hard travel. Crossing the bridge slowly, the aged mendicant went out at the gate and disappeared along the road.

Near the Throne

"Who is that?" asked Taschereau.

"Orde Hafid, the beggar from India," answered Carmier.

"Father Grotesque!"

"You'll never be d-dull in Cairo," Carmier stut-tered out in the clipped precise tones affected by the aristocrats of the day—to escape whose fate the gallant Monsieur Alphonse Carmier had un-necessarily fled from his native land.

"No?" said Taschereau reflectively and glad to be assured of this certainty of entertainment.

"Mademoiselle Antoinette Fleury is here."

"I don't know the lady."

"The lady!" Alphonse laughed. "You don't know Tinette?"

"No," sighed the ruddy Taschereau. "That is a pleasure that has been denied me."

"But you w-w-will."

"Without doubt. And I hope it may be soon."

"Mademoiselle Lucine Chaumont is here too."

"I never heard of her."

"Then I'll tell you of some one of whom you have heard."

"Now in Cairo?"

"Very much here."

"Who?"

"The confidant of General Bonaparte—Captain Marcel Balzar."

"Sapristi! I must see him."

Near the Throne

"And you must see the girl he's f-fallen in love with—a Copt."

"Le Beau Sabreur!"

"She is called the light of the Nile, the most beautiful creature in Egypt!"

"Balzar, you say? The indifferent! Tired of Paris. Sapristi! Her name?"

"Nazira."

"I must see this girl who has worked such a miracle." So saying Taschereau appropriated the lighted hookah at the corner of the rug covering the mound and forthwith began to smoke. But, either from habit or from the dread of again accustoming himself to luxuries, the revolutionist sat on his pack. It was pleasant, like sitting on an old friend.

The Gascon watched him silently and enviously.

"Carmier."

"Yes?"

"Have one with me," suggested the former scribbler, offering the brown morocco covered flask he drew from his pocket. "It's the finest old Burgundy."

"Th-thanks," answered the faultless Alphonse, his nostrils and eyes acknowledging the delicate preliminary whiff that accompanied the unscrewing of the silvered stopper.

"They say Cairo is getting as gay as Paris since Napoleon conquered Egypt."

Near the Throne

"W why, it's empty!"

"What? Egypt?"

"N n no—the flask," Carmier replied, looking up and getting a puff of smoke to console his disappointment. "Who owns that pipe?"

"I don't know," admitted Taschereau with the easy nonchalance that travel begets.

"L-l like to?" asked his companion, adjusting his monocle and assuming an attitude of importance as he stroked his little blond mustache nervously.

"Don't mind," answered the unperturbed revolutionist.

"The owner of this garden, the father of the inamorata of Marcel Balzar, a man who has but t t two objects in life: first to get rich."

"Second?" inquired Taschereau, still unimpressed and enjoying the scented tobacco.

"To g get richer. I'm his t-t-trusted accountant. The wealthiest merchant on the Nile—Hassan."

"What does he deal in?"

"Ivory—and s slaves—with a side line of r r-rope!"

"Sapristi!" ejaculated he of the rubicund countenance, dropping the mouthpiece and kicking over the bowl of the pipe in his haste. "Au revoir," he continued, pack in place, and stumbling over the bridge to the gate. "I don't

Near the Throne

think he's a proper person for me to be acquainted with."

"P-p-precisely," Alphonse laughed, picking up the forgotten flask.

The retreating pedlar disappeared around a turn in the road.

Watching the tricolour sash vanish and going himself in the opposite direction the immaculate youth said:

"That was a clever idea! N-now, Monsieur Plutarque Taschereau, I'll see if I can get you a little drop of B-b-burgundy that will change the colour of your b-b-beard!" Then holding up the flask he added: "Here's to the bravest and best of all the adventurers from the North—Le Beau Sabreur! May he defeat the Saracen—and win the woman he loves!"



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CHAPTER II

SOWING A WHIRLWIND

Monsieur Taschereau must have passed in his haste an Egyptian girl not far from the gate for in a moment a sinuous form entered slowly, looking around cautiously, apprehension in every step, fear in every movement.

"Worda!" exclaimed Lucine, coming into the garden from another direction at the same time. The voice of the young governess was full of the astonishment she felt at seeing her former mistress—especially here so near the house of Hassan.

"I've been watching for you so long," answered the merchant's unfortunate daughter. "But tell me—the children, Ali and Halima, are they well?"

"Both."

"And Nazira, is she happy?"



Near the Throne

"I think so," said Mademoiselle Chaumont.

"How glad I am!" the Egyptian girl replied, her eyes lighting up.

But Lucine went on: "Your father——"

"No," Worda interrupted, "do not talk of him, Lucine. He is so stern and severe. He ordered me to leave our home, never to return; forbade me to speak to my little brother or sister—disowned me. But you will let me see them, won't you?"

"In a few minutes, Worda, I'll take them for a walk in the garden."

"And I shall stand over there in the shadows. O Lucine, if only I might speak to them, have just one tiny kiss!"

"Perhaps you may "

A doubtful form of expression this seemed, but in the glance that went with it there was a promise carried from the blue eyes to the black.

Then Worda whispered softly to something beneath her cloak: "Be still my little pet."

"What a pretty pigeon!" Lucine put in admiringly, watching the bird fluttering.

"Yes, an Antwerp," answered Worda as she ran lighter of heart along the bank of the stream "An officer from the French fort at Balbeis gave it me."

She disappeared just in time, for the next moment Hassan entered from the direction of the house.

Near the Throne

"I thought I saw some one speaking with you, Lucine," he said, watching her eyes that they might tell some tale.

The young Provençal did not reply.

"There is a woman," he continued, in a manner colder than her native mistral, "whose name I would not mention.

She used to be my daughter—I fancied she was near. Answer me: were you speaking with her?"

"No."

"Then with whom?"

"TINETTE," the girl fibbed easily and whitely, looking at him squarely.

He could not contradict her, having seen nothing. Besides the fair-haired governess spoke with such honesty of tone. Before he had time for another question, Halima's voice sounded from the house:

"Lucine—Lucine!"

"The children. See what they want," commanded Hassan.



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Mademoiselle obeyed immediately, preceding him.

His impatient gesture and hesitating step betrayed the disturbing suspicions of his mind. He resolved to wait—and watch.

But he too was observed; and by two men of his own country. They had been walking slowly up the road and now opening the gate to the garden came over the bridge—Osman and Murad, the Pasha of Egypt and the old Bey, who was his closest friend. For some time Hassan had felt that some dread thing was hanging darkly over him. It was the shadow of these two Egyptians.

Osman went on with their conversation:

“Your mother——”

“Don't remind me of it,” interrupted the Pasha. “I know; she was a Frenchwoman. That's my misfortune—and I hate the whole race of them for it.”

“Who was she?” the old man asked, peering up at his master. Though in truth, he stooped but little considering the sixty-one years of his age—at least two score of them years of intrigue and turmoil.

Close observers would have noted the fact that in certain lights the eyes of the Pasha had in them a shade of blue and that he did not possess quite the aquiline nose of the normal Arabian.

“Who was she?” the Bey asked again.

Near the Throne

"A slave of my father's," answered Murad, "who disappeared when I was a few months old—captured."

"Have you ever seen her?"

"No."

"Could you recognize her?"

"Yes. My father had two signet rings—exactly alike. I have one," he said showing it to his companion, "she has the other. She has also the scar of a lash on her left arm."

"And you?"

"I?" Murad exclaimed tossing back his head, his black eyes flashing. "I was nursed by an Arabian. So you see this is my own country. My father was an Egyptian, the milk that nourished me was Egyptian—my veins are full of the blood of Egypt! But this," he sneered, contemptuously hitting with his nails and the back of his hand a five-rayed decoration—"the Grand Cross of the Legion of Honour!"

"Of France."

"From Napoleon!"

"He gave it to you with great ceremony."

"Conferred it upon me! Well, it serves."

"Yes—its purpose."

"My purpose—to pull the camel's hair over the eyes of the artilleryman of Corsica."

Bonaparte pursued a special policy with regard to this powerful Pasha and his adherents. Anx-

Near the Throne

ious to avoid their enmity and obtain their co-operation for the furtherance of his vast designs for an eastern empire he resolved to soothe their prejudices and gratify their vanity. Though leaving none of its sovereign rights unexercised, the French general did not yet assume a title of conquest. He continued to admit Murad to an ostensible share of authority with himself, and by the intervention of a divan affected to govern like the Grand Signior of Constantinople. Bonaparte further endeavoured to persuade the Moslems that he pertained to their religion and was an envoy of Allah sent to earth to confirm and complete the doctrines of the Koran and the mission of Mahomet. But though the Mufti on entering the sepulchral chamber in the pyramid of Cheops announced his belief in the conversion of Napoleon, yet neither he nor the other followers of the Prophet even desired this proselytism to the faith of Islam. They were too shrewd—those Saracens. Murad had already read in a copy of *Le Moniteur* sent him by Sir Sidney Smith that the Abbé de Pradt had distinguished Napoleon by the term of Jupiter Scapin. But circumstances obliged the Pasha for the present to adopt the same policy as the victor and feign an attachment which he would soon scornfully throw off. Accordingly the diplomatic Egyptian lent himself to advance the aims and ambitions of the Man of Destiny and assisted in

Near the Throne

deriving his name from Arabian words meaning the Lion of the Desert. It was, however, the rolling fire of musketry by which Bonaparte achieved his glorious success at the Battle of the Pyramids that procured for him the Oriental appellation of Sultan Kebir—King of Fire.

"Osman," resumed Murad, "I wish our customs would permit me to ask Hassan for his daughter in marriage."

"We cannot alter the laws of our ancestors," was the laconic reply of the Bey to this embryo heresy, that came unconsciously, perhaps, from the European taint that shamed the haughty Murad.

"I know," he replied. "Custom is stronger than the Koran. A man must have a relative or trusted friend to do this for him."

The elder of the two conspirators drew back a step. Frowning, he asked: "Am I not——"

But Murad would not let him finish the sentence. "You are, Osman," he hastened to add. "You are indeed my friend."

"Murad, there is one thing we must do," said the Bey, becoming practical in a moment.

"What is that?"

They drew nearer together.

"Poison Hassan's mind against Marcel Balzar."

"Can you do it?"

True to his Machiavellian principles, Murad

Near the Throne

stood ever ready to use falsehoods as rungs of a ladder to his ends and others as cat's-paws. Every country has its Iagos. And his star had said he was near the throne.

"We will do it together," was the politic response of the astrol-
ogger.



"That's better," the Pasha assented, quickly perceiving the inexpediency of pressing for advantage.

"Begin on the Captain's reputation," Osman suggested tentatively.

Murad at once recognized the wisdom and possibilities of such a

course. "Undermine it," he added.

"The very thing."

"Start a whisper."

Methods are the same for all centuries and continents.

"No more?" asked the old man.

"No more is necessary. Scandal has wings. Balzar's gay career in Paris, his doings in this

Near the Throne

city—and to all the stories add a little. I hope you may find Hassan at home—and win his consent. Speak to the old man wisely.”

“I am not an astrologer for nothing,” replied the Bey with pregnant emphasis and stroking his long white beard.

“Remember that Hassan and his family are Copts—Christians of the oldest type. Therefore avoid any question of religion.”

“I shall—carefully!”

“Mention neither the warrior of Mecca nor the Carpenter of Nazareth. As you speak observe the merchant in the man and show deference to the father.”

“Trust me for that.”

“Tell Hassan of my wealth,” he continued walking toward the bridge and with a sweep of his swarthy arm pointing along the distant river, “tell him of the gold I have hidden in the treasure pyramids on the banks of the Nile—the silver, the ivory, the precious stones that glisten in my palace.”

“I shall.”

Murad was now standing at the centre of the bridge, picturesque and fascinating—a son of the desert, he was a savage endowed with a great intellect. And he had the air imperial as if his swaddling clothes had been of purple.

Osman felt the spell of the Pasha's personality.

Near the Throne

“Tell him,” Murad went on, his eyes aflash with his own eloquence and fixed on the Bey, “tell him of its splendour: the spacious corridors and vast banquet hall, with floors of marble and pillars of granite—the walls bedecked with trophies of the Pharaohs—all lighted by the soft glow of candelabra. Remind him of the luxuries of my palace: a hundred slaves that Nazira might command, chambers hung with richest silks—the colours, music, perfumed fountains.”

“Yes.”



“Mention too my princely blood,” he continued, drawing his damascened scimitar from its scabbard. “Tell him of my past career as a ruler and a soldier—of how as General of the

fearless Mamelukes, mounted on our swift Arabians, I so often led them to battle and to victory. Paint my future, for I shall yet crush this young Napoleon, defy the Sultan as before—win the crown, swing the sceptre, and on the throne of Egypt reign as king.”

They went out: Murad at the gate, Osman to meet Hassan and steal away the good name of Captain Marcel Balzar.

CHAPTER III

MAN'S ONE SHRINE

Before the Bey reached the house, however, he met Hassan emerging from the palms.

"Ah, Osman!" said the merchant greeting him.

"Hassan," the old intriguer returned with much suavity of tone and manner, "my dear friend."

"You are well, I hope?"

"Excellent, and just wishing to see you."

"Indeed?"

"On a most important subject that I think may be of great interest to yourself and family—as it is to my noble master."

"Then," replied Hassan, forgetful of the fact that a fox brings forth nothing but a little fox, "let us go in where we may talk it over quietly and at our ease."

"Thank you," replied Osman very obsequiously, stepping aside that his host might go before.

Together they entered the house, the merchant and the astrologer, that the fate of a daughter might be settled between piastres and planets. It

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is not difficult to draw the path of another's destiny, but to make that other walk therein has been known to be as easy as flying, especially when the object of solicitation is of the sex that keeps all the world greatly wondering. For sometimes the voice of a man may be pleasanter to a girl than the clink of coins, and the heart of a lover more magnetic than the gleam of a meteor.

Music attracted Osman as he entered the house with Hassan. Pausing and looking back over his shoulder, he caught a momentary glimpse of the subject of their conversation and the object of all the plans of Murad, to attain which no scheme was too daring, no chance too desperate. Involuntarily he paused—she was such a glowing incarnation of the world's desire.

A boat resembling less the usual cangia of the Nile than a caique of the Bosphorus, but much shorter and a trifle wider, was coming slowly and gracefully down the stream running through the garden. The splendid palms cast a grateful shade upon the waters. Tamarinds and acacias made the foliage thicker. The white lotus flowers and a thousand magnolias in bloom shook out their perfume as the stars shake out their light. Two stalwart Nubians were propelling the craft; three maids, one of them a Bedouin, the others French, were playing on lutes a dreamy Arabian melody. Beneath a canopy of black and orange, supported

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by quaint Moorish spears from which waved flags bearing the emblem of Egypt, on a profusion of fancy colored cushions embroidered with mystic arabesques, lay Nazira. The clinging gauzy dress in which she was clothed and the wide sash which girdled her hips, together emphasized the sensuous outlines of her form, lithe and svelte; the delicately moulded and tapering arms were bare, the left shoulder was visible through the thinnest silken drapery to which was pinned a large violet lily. She wore no rings, but the bright gold of her bracelets, the bandeau with dangling sequins on her forehead, and the glistening jewels of the necklace on her bosom rising and falling gently with each breath, contrasted well with her skin's dark hue. The features of the girl had that exquisite Grecian contour which distinguishes the more cultured of the Copts. Full of warm blood, her lips were scarlet; full of spirit, her eyes were of a languorous brown. There was a witchery in the curve of her raven brows and the droop of her swarthy lids. And the girl's countenance was so harmoniously framed with her lustrous hair, black as a night on the desert; for its sheen had that strange purple tint which Nature sometimes gives to a child of Egypt. On her shoulder it rested, too abundant to be all coiled above the olive brow that only lacked a crown. How enchanting she looked—beautiful, resplendent, divine—yet a very earthly goddess!

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As the boat neared the bridge Marcel Balzar, habited in the green uniform with white lacings and cords of a captain in the light horse artillery, his regiment being the Twentieth Chasseurs, his



only decoration the plain dull order of the Iron Crown, by his side his greatest friend and most prized gift—the sabre Napoleon wore at the battle of Aboukir—quite unseen by those afloat on the stream entered the garden at the gate. Filled with admiration of the picture presented to his view he could not restrain the exclamation:

Near the Throne

"The lily of the Orient!"

Tinette, one of the maids, laid down her lute to tune a violin Nazira had handed her—accidentally a string broke.

"Oh!" slipped from her mistress's lips. "And it's Marcel's violin! Who will help me fix it?"

"I will," its owner answered, crossing the bridge.

"You here, Monsieur Balzar?" Nazira responded, quickly recovering from her surprise at seeing him. "See what I've done."

"My favourite," he said regretfully, taking the instrument and assisting her out of the boat.

"What will you say to me?" she asked, as the craft went on.

"Nothing," he answered.

"All the morning? That wouldn't be very pleasant," she admitted, handing him the violin.

"You left it here yesterday."

"Did I?" he asked, scarcely thinking of what he was saying.

"You are getting very absent minded," she suggested.

"Am I?" he answered in the same far away manner.

"Yes," she added, toying with the flower which she had removed from its fastening, "so they say."

The last three words, always a synonym for possible omnipotence, seemed to recall him.



"I wish I had such a lily," he said.

Near the Throne

"I wish I had such a lily," he said.

"You?"

"Yes—for my own."

"Why?" she asked, leaning upon the cushion on the pedestal.

"It is so beautiful," he responded, as if the logic of Parthenia should be convincing to a girl who united the Massilian's beauty with her own Egyptian. But when Nazira glanced at him, Balzar looked at the lily, and when she regarded the lily he watched her.

"What would you do with it?"

"Care for it, be its protector," Marcel answered, his adoring gaze following her every movement, as he felt the sweet allurements of her melting eyes—"all a lover does for his idol."

"Have you the intention to start a new religion, Monsieur Balzar?" she asked, giving him the lily. "The adoration of flowers?"

"No, not a new one—but that old religion which is always as young as human hearts. For men worship at only one shrine."

"Do you know," said Nazira changing the subject as the wind changes its course or a butterfly its blossom, "I'm just longing for some music."

"Shall we go to the kiosk?" he proposed.

"Yes," she agreed, sauntering off with him and looking at the violin.

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"Then," Captain Balzar said, "there is that secret I want to tell you."

"I like to hear secrets," Nazira confessed.

"Why?"

Men do ask such foolish questions sometimes.



"Why?" she replied. "A man's query. Because."

"Because—a woman's answer."

"Because," she acknowledged, "I am a woman." And her smile seemed to say that fact should be sufficient explanation of any phenomenon. "You can tell them," she resumed; "can you keep them?"

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"I think," he ventured, "a woman likes a man who can keep a secret."

"Yes," the enchanting Egyptian assented, smiling at him and putting her hands behind her head, which she tossed back as they disappeared together among the palms. "But a woman loves a man who can provide her with a secret to keep."



CHAPTER IV

THE LADY AND THE GARTER

Mademoiselle Chaumont came tripping into the garden with Ali and Halima, as full of life as the two children.

"I can run faster than you, Ali," said the girl to her brother.

"No you can't," answered Lucine for the child.

"Yes I can!" his sister challenged. "Let's race."

"Ready?" said the governess.

"One, two, three—go!"

Scampering past the bridge they disappeared just as Tinette came after them from the direction of the house and Taschereau knocked at the gate.

"It's a fine day," he volunteered, as though the maid were in need of information.

"For crocodiles," she replied, shaking her Titian curls, audacious as a gilded youth on a boulevard. There were stories current in parts of Paris about Tinette Fleury which she never took the trouble to contradict, that until she was nearly sixteen she masqueraded through the Latin quarter

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dressed as a boy—and it was even said that she had aspirations to continue doing so, had not the development of her pretty figure made the disguise impossible.

The effect which this reply had on the doughty inheritor of the Greek biographer's name was as droll as that which music has on the hair of a virtuoso.

"Yes," he modestly assented, making a mental note of the sympathy between his locks and the tresses of which she might be pardoned for being proud.

"What have you?" queried the *ci-devant* danseuse.

"Everything they have in the great Capital," replied the pedlar, putting down his pack.

"Except beauty," the Parisienne remarked to herself. Then aloud she said: "Let me see."

"The very thing," Taschereau announced with confidence, opening one of the numerous packages the bundle contained and handing her some neatly folded papers.

"Poems!" she exclaimed.

"Ah, Mademoiselle!" the itinerant merchant ejaculated. "You are so——"

"But are you quite certain," broke in the arch Antoinette, "they're fit for me to read? You know I've only been married once."

"Guaranteed magnificent," he assured her.

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"Shakespeare's?" she inquired without looking up.

"No."

"Voltaire's?"

"No. I wrote them myself."

"Indeed? What beautiful ribbons!" the danseuse piped up, admiring the pink ornamentation.

"Read it," urged Taschereau, straightening out the manuscript she was holding.

"What's it called?" asked Mademoiselle Fleury.

"Look," he said, pointing to the line.

She read the caption: "Ode to Posterity."

"Grand title, isn't it?" he declared, enthusing as authors are reputed to do like mothers over their own babies

"But," Tinette responded, tossing back her curly head, "it will never reach its destination."

"Eh?"

"I'll take the ribbon," she decided tearing it off brusquely and putting it around her neck, then throwing the manuscript into the bag, "you take the poem."

Taschereau the rhymer looked mortified, but Taschereau the pedlar was not a man to let literature interfere with business.

"Haven't you anything for girls? Something to wear?" his so far unprofitable customer inquired.

"Yes," Plutarque returned handing her a small

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box as he went on carelessly looking through some of the other packages and remarking, "poets are born, not made."

Opening the box she of the Titian hair ejaculated: "It's paint."

Still searching through the pack, the touring merchant ran on: "But beauties are made, not born."

"If this is all you have?" Mademoiselle Fleury wanted to know, putting it in her pocket, "you might as well——"

"Wait a minute," her countryman said eagerly; then he quietly added to himself: "I'll suit her this time." For he had surmised that her disposition was likely to be as fiery as her hair was auburn.

"Well, be quick."

"There," he declared, giving her a hand mirror; "there's something for girls—for men, too—and ladies."

"How pretty!" the Parisienne marvelled, looking at the frame and not listening to what he was saying.

"How lovely!" he acquiesced, regarding her image in the glass.

"What? The mirror?"

"No! The picture in the mirror."

"Have you anything else for girls?"

"Isn't it sweet?" he inquired, with an affirmative inflection and handing her a ring

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"Yes," she agreed losing no time in putting it on.

"And that?" he proceeded, giving her a bracelet.

She tried impatiently but could not unfasten the clasp.

"Let me help you?" he proposed, suiting the action to the word.

"What else have you?" she deigned to ask, holding her hand in front of the glass.

"I'm sure you'll like these," he answered, passing her a pair of earrings.

But the maid was unable to get the thin wire of the circlets through the piercing in either lobe.

"Let me help you put them on," Plutarque suggested, again coming at once to her assistance.

"Oh, they make such things in Paris!" Mademoiselle sighed, ecstatically admiring herself in the glass.

"And they do such things!" Monsieur Taschereau added.

"What?"

"That is," he said apologetically, "they know what girls like." And at the same time he gallantly handed her a silver belt. "Bewitching, isn't it?" he remarked. "Shall I help you put it on?" And he did so—taking rather a long time.

"How nice!" Tinette exclaimed.

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"The sensation?" asked Plutarque, giving her a squeeze.

"No—the belt!"

"That was made for a princess," fibbed the wearer of the tricolour sash, showing her a coronet—then adding beneath his breath, "it was made for three francs."

"How does it go?" she piped up, puzzled as to the most appropriate way to wear the insignia.

"Let me help you put it on," he responded, correctly assuming that she wished his aid.

"Just sweet. Oh!" she gurgled with almost childish delight.

"In fact a couple of ohs!" ventured Taschereau, picturing the profit on this easy sale of most of his stock of alleged jewelry.

"I never knew," she continued, "that jewels suited me so well."

"Oh—oh!" he warned her laughing.

"And haven't you anything else for girls?"

"Let me think," he reflected, falling easily into quite a philosophic pose—his weight resting on the left leg, the right crossing it; forefinger and thumb wandering over the stubble on his chin till they touched his underlip; his eyes looking seriously at his somewhat roseate nose. "Ah, here they are!" he concluded, stooping down and offering her a pair of trinkets composed of yellow buckles and blue elastics.

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"I always like blue."

"Me too."

"And gold."

"Me too."

"But what are these?" Antoinette demanded, opening them out.

He did not enlighten her.

"Garters!" she exclaimed.

"Shall I help you put them on?" he volunteered.

Fortunately—though Taschereau thought otherwise—Lucine came up at the moment. Tinette quickly put the garters behind her back.

"Oh, how beautiful!" burst out the Provençal, noticing the jewelry with which the maid was arrayed. "Where did you get them?"

"From that gentleman."

Taschereau felt that he had won indeed. "Gentleman now," he murmured to himself. Then noticing Tinette tripping off he called: "Wait! You haven't settled for those yet!"

"You say that to me?" she retorted with mock indignation.

"Yes," he assented.

"To Mademoiselle Antoinette Fleury?"

"Yes."

"Then I'll pay you," she declared, "in the coin of the realm."

"Which?"

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"Mine!" she replied with an emphatic feminine pose.

"What's that?"

"The café chantant—of the Latin quarter—of gay Paris!"

"Then a kiss!" he proposed. As an old newspaper man he should have known better. If you want anything from a woman, do without it—or take it. He who asks is lost.

With marvellous grace and abandon she showed a knowledge of the light fantastic that many a man would consider ample compensation for a flagon of sapphires—and whirled off to the house.

"Yes, really you can," said Lucine reassuringly.

"But I won't."

"Oh, do! And me too!" she urged. "Have you any more?"

"Lots."

"To fit me?"

His eyes wandered down and up her figure.

Mademoiselle Chaumont thought this a strange proceeding and took a step back.

"Just your size," he decided.

"Won't it be nice?" She could not be expected to perceive his meaning

"Oh, yes," he agreed, with a second's hesitation.

"Let me see them."

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"Not here. Over there—let me see them," he importuned with a different emphasis.

"Eh? Do you think they'll suit me as well as Tinette?"

"Oh, yes!"

"And will you help me put them on?"

"Yes—oh, yes!"

But Lucine dismissed the gallant Plutarque at the gate—the children were coming. Monsieur Taschereau went down the road, lighter of pack and heavier of heart—crestfallen.

Halima and Ali came running to Lucine.

"Didn't you see Nazira?" It was Halima that spoke.

The Provençal answered very doubtfully: "No—no."

"O Lucine!" went on the child, "and she looked so——"

"And Marcel," interrupted their governess, "Captain Balzar, didn't he——"

"He looked that way too," replied Halima, quick of perception and trying to imitate a mixture of sheepishness and happiness, which is usually the resultant appearance of a certain state of soul to third persons.

"But Worda?" asked Lucine.

"She was so sad," Halima responded. "She just came up and kissed us, Ali and me, and ran away again."

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"Don't teli that to your father," cautioned the girl. "Do not forget: don't say anything about Worda to your father. Come."

And she led them toward the house, passing Osman and Hassan among the trees. As Lucine, who always, like most metropolitan people, attended strictly to her own affairs and never meddled with nor inquired into those of others, saw the Bey with her master she could not avoid the reflection that it was for no good to Nazira and wondered what base proposition this man had made on behalf of the subtle Murad.



CHAPTER V

THREE MAGIC WORDS

“And what I have told you in regard to Balzar?” Osman was saying interrogatively.

“Is in strict confidence,” answered Hassan. “Besides I am not at all willing that Nazira should marry a European.”

“Perhaps,” went on the Bey, listening to the music of a violin floating through the palms, “perhaps he is with her now—in the kiosk.”

“Murad is worthy of my daughter’s hand,” was the careful reply. “I shall consider all you have said, Osman. And your master shall know my answer before many days have passed.”

“I thank you, Hassan,” the Moslem said bowing profoundly. “Farewell.”

“Farewell,” the Copt responded returning the salutation. Then to himself with brows knit as he returned to the house he meditated: “There are reasons why Balzar should be forbidden. Is it true?”

Osman watched the merchant from the bridge. Seeing him disappear he drew out a folded paper, which he had stolen from a table in the merchant’s

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counting room and concealed under his robe, muttering:

"Hassan, such a letter you should keep locked in your vault. I wonder if we can make use of this? I'll take it to Murad."

The astrologer went quickly out the gate in the direction of his master's residence, which was now in the Palace of Saladin.

"I am so fond of music," said Nazira coming with Marcel from the kiosk. "Aren't you, Monsieur Balzar?"

It is strange how two people will talk of anything that is farthest from their minds at the moment when both are thinking of what is nearest.

"Yes," he answered.

"That was such a pretty waltz we played."

"Very—A Dream of Happiness."

Lucine came up at the moment with a tray of refreshments.

"Thank you, Lucine," said Nazira. "Here, on this mound."

The Provençal obeyed and returned to the house.



Near the Throne

"That sherbet looks tempting," remarked Balzar.

"You must have some. I prefer coffee."

"Will you permit me?"

So he poured the coffee for Nazira, putting four or five heaped teaspoonfuls of sugar into the overflowing cup, forgetful of everything as he looked into those fathomless eyes—instead of attending to what he was doing. She, seeing the fun of his imminent embarrassment, added to the mischief by tearing off and dropping into the sugar the petals of the lily—so that in a minute he had a queer mixture to account for.

"I'm sure that will be delicious," laughed Nazira, standing the spoon where the liquid ought to be.

"Oh, I beg your pardon!"

But the deed was done. She enjoyed his predicament, then relieved him by saying:

"I shall punish you by drinking some of your sherbet."

He handed her a cup—delicious as they know how to make that beverage only in the East.

Leaning forward, Marcel said:

"Nazira."

"How you repeat my name," she answered, "as if it were a remark by itself."

"There is something you must have noticed."

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"Yes," she responded, questioningly sipping the sherbet. "Where?"

"Have you?"

"I have noticed a great many things."

"But I mean one."

"Which?"

"Something I have tried to conceal from you," he persisted, growing so earnest that any one would see his meaning—except a girl who had decided to be blind.

"Then how could I have noticed it?"

"Only tried to."

"You? From me? Why, I have always thought you very frank—and honest."

"Yes, I know, but I haven't been."

"What do you mean?"

"I have been keeping something back from you—something I should have told you months ago," he said, looking intensely at her and asking with his gray eyes if she did not understand. "I love you, Nazira; I love you!" he continued, watching for the slightest indication of favour.

But there was none.

"Tell me," he pleaded, "may I—may I hope that you—love me?"

"I cannot give you the answer you would wish."

"Do not say that."

"But I have said it."

"After a time you might grow a little fond of

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me. Grant me a word, a look, Nazira, to tell me that by waiting——”

“I cannot,” she replied without giving him the opportunity to finish.

He knew that the maid who smiles is half taken, but of this truth the Copt seemed an alluring contradiction.

“I would be patient,” he prayed her, scanning the ground hopelessly and listening to the music from the boat coming nearer.

Glancing shyly at him, the young Egyptian slowly and timidly took his hand. Before his surprise had time to crystallize into a word he heard her saying:

“You may do more than hope. They say I have no heart, but I have—and it’s all for you!”

She was in his arms now. The strains of the lutes floating through the palms, softer than the songs of birds, came to them as sweet messengers.

“Fond of you?” she added, “I love you, Marcel!”

Nazira placed all her faith in the passion that is the root of all the good and evil in the world; and she was not afraid nor ashamed to avow it. The woman who does not believe in love is either a eunuch or a courtesan.

“My precious!” he responded, in the ecstasy of hearing from her those three magic words, and kissing her and slipping a ring on her finger.

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"I so love you!"

"Nazira!"

At that same moment the boat passed the landing and Lucine entered the garden

"Your father," she said to Nazira, "wishes to speak with you."

"I shan't be long," said Nazira to Balzar, her voice full of new happiness.

And he answered:

"I'll wait for you in the kiosk."

As they went their separate ways, two Egyptians appeared at the gate—and in their scowl there was unscrupulous and fearless malignity.



CHAPTER VI

A NEW USE FOR A STAR

"The course of custom is too slow," Murad complained as he entered the garden with his companion. Then, as if seeing a possible way out of the difficulty, he added: "But Nazira's family does not adhere to all our laws."

"She will be back in a few moments," continued Osman, observing Hassan through the foliage talking to his daughter on the steps of the house.

"I'm going to speak to her myself," the Pasha resolved crossing the bridge. "With such a letter," he continued, withdrawing it from beneath the folds of his robe and giving the Bey an approving glance, "this may be the time."

"She is coming," said the old man.

"Watch for a signal," suggested Murad confidentially tapping him on the shoulder. "I may need you."

"I shall be waiting," was the answer of the wily astrologer, with a gesture indicating a secluded spot behind a cluster of palms near the gate.

"Take care," said his master. "The lover may return."

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Osman sought his hiding place.

Seeing Murad, who greeted her with a salutation that had all the respect of an Oriental salaam united with the polish of a courtier of the first Empire, Nazira bowed and would have passed on, being eager to reach the kiosk, had not Murad stopped her.

"Nazira," the Pasha said, "would you like to help your father?"

"Help my father?" the girl answered in surprise, unenlightened by the faintest glimmer of his meaning.

"You may be able to," he went on with much insinuation.

"How?" she asked.

"It is always dangerous to hate a conqueror," he said very suavely. Then with a searching directness of glance and assertion he added: "Your father hates Bonaparte."

"How do you know?"

"His money is all invested in English securities."

"That is no proof."

"But this is," he argued, producing the letter and holding it just near enough for the daughter to recognize her father's writing and to read a few of the incriminating words.

Naturally the girl tried to take it.

"Oh, no," Murad replied, putting her hand

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away. "It's a letter—you recognize the signature?"

"Give it to me," she said.

"To Admiral Nelson," he pursued, "of the British fleet at Alexandria—giving the plans of



Napoleon's fortifications and the future movements of his army."

"Of what use is the letter to you?" she questioned.

"None," he admitted.

"Then——"

"But—to you? Nazira, that scrap of paper

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placed in the hands of Bonaparte—and your father would be at once court-martialled and shot.”

“But you are not going to do it?”

“No—because I want his daughter for my wife. I would have no other, but her alone. Nazira,



I'm mad for you—I love you! Come with me to the garden—and I'll give you the letter. Come!”

“Do you think I am a courtesan?” she demanded.

“No!” he replied. “But I think you would be willing to save your father.”

“At such a cost?” she retorted, becoming more indignant.

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"Is marriage with me so great a sacrifice? Then this letter goes to Bonaparte!" the Saracen announced, walking rapidly toward the gate without a look behind.

But as he crossed the bridge Nazira called:

"Murad! Murad!"

The Pasha glanced over his shoulder to listen.

"I'll buy the letter!" she offered. "I'll get you any price."

"My price?"

"My father has money!"

"Money?" he rejoined turning on her with laughing scorn.

"Yes!"

"Of what use is that to me? I have millions!"

The Pasha hastened as far as the gate, knowing neither mercy nor pity. The girl in despair for her father ran after him and cried:

"Murad! I'll do it!"

He met her with a look of victory mingled with suspicion. Together they retraced their steps, her hand in his—she loathing his touch, yet smiling upon him out of her tempting eyes with the long lashes like rays of darkness. Such eyes, when the time comes, can be treacherous.

"To hold you in my arms," said Murad. "You'll keep your word?"

"I always do."

"It's not gold I want," he resumed in low

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carnal tones, as they sat down upon the mound where the rug lay spread—"it's love—such love as you can give."

Osman was watching.

Then Nazira, fully conscious of the stake she was playing for and the risk she was running,



twined her soft warm arms about Murad's neck and breathing all her passion into the words, answered:

"I'll love you!"

She was so sensuous, this ravishing creature, Murad gave her the letter.

Instantly the girl's whole manner changed.

The Pasha frowned, but said nothing.

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"I'll take it to my father—to destroy," she said, laying the paper safely at her side remote from Murad. And the enchanting tones had left her voice.

"Not yet," he urged.

"Let me go now," she begged and promised reassuringly, "I'll return to you."

Murad signalled to Osman. The old astrologer crept slyly toward the letter.

But Balzar, with that weakness characteristic of lovers, had grown impatient, and returning to look for Nazira, strolled into this part of the garden just in time to see what was happening. His immediate thought was to rush forward, strike Murad, and denounce the traitress who was so false to her vows. But the action of Osman suggested a second theory—which was confirmed on observing the Bey purloin the small document, so that the captain's enmity was all for the Pasha when he heard him, with a gesture toward the more secluded portion of the enclosure where there was much shadow and thick foliage, say to his own betrothed:

"Come further into the garden first."

"Afterward," she demurred.

Osman, with his eyes fixed on Nazira, in order to be sure she did not see him, was slinking backward. This was Balzar's opportunity to step to the bridge and intercept the Bey. He was always

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ready—therefore took the risk. Osman backed right into Balzar. This case was to be won now not by wit, but by force. Marcel grasped the old man's wrists with a grip of iron, quickly and silently wrested the letter from him, then left him to recover from his astonishment sprawling on the bridge, while he himself walked forward—and waited.

“No, no,” Murad importuned—“you have filled my blood with passion.”

“I'll just give it,” she pleaded. Then missing the paper she burst out: “The letter!”

“I gave it to you.”

“And I put it there. Where is it?”

“I don't know.”

“For once you told the truth!” said Balzar with quiet intensity, and stepping between them “Here it is.”

“Then you stole it!” replied Murad.

“Did I?” replied the Captain, giving it to Nazira and checking her impulse to tear the compromising thing into fragments. “For what purpose?”

“We shall see.”

Nazira opened out the letter. Balzar saw the inkless sheet.

“It's a blank!” he exclaimed.

And the girl added contemptuously:

“The trick is——”

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"Mine!" interrupted Murad with an air of triumph.

Both looked at him in surprise and anger.

"The letter is here!" the Pasha gloried, holding it up.

Instantly Captain Balzar's sabre leaped from its



scabbard. In any question that was to be decided by a fair and open fight he was the last man to hesitate.

But in the same second Murad, pointing proudly to the star of the Cross of the Legion of Honour on his breast, retorted in warning:

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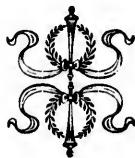
"And I serve Napoleon."

Balzar, forced by his knowledge of this fact to refrain from the attack, replied simply as he tightened his hold on the hilt of his sabre:

"You viper!"

But this brought to an issue a feud that could end only with the death of one of them. Balzar determined that it should not be the soldier of France. Murad resolved that it should not be the prince of the Mamelukes of Egypt.

It had begun in terrible earnest, the mortal struggle between these two enemies—for the crown—and for a woman.



FIRST INTERLOGUE

FOUR MONTHS HAVE ELAPSED

Love is the only good in the world.
Henceforth be loved as heart can love,
Or brain devise, or hand approve.

—ROBERT BROWNING

With time all lovers are prodigals. Yet to them lightning does not pass more quickly. Four months glided by swiftly. Yet in that brief period how much progress may be made by conspirators for empire or by victims of Cupid! Ambition was afoot in Cairo—and throughout the realm. But even that relentless tyrant, to which the greatest give homage as the one supreme god of life, is worshipped only that the prize cast to the kneeling devotee may help that poor toiler to win some woman's love. For all man struggles for, he struggles but to lay it at her feet—hoping she may smile with eyes and lips and that her arms may be soft to him. Murad, subtle, diplomatic, knowing well that the people are the final arbiters on all questions of power, was assiduously becoming more popular every day and was now awaiting a suitable opportunity to make a dash for the

Near the Throne

throne. But he was ever under the watchful eye of Balzar. And he and Nazira—the hours they passed, Marcel and the Egyptian—the moments they lived—earthly enough to be divine! Sometimes hand to hand, lip to lip, they felt the sweet magic of the warm touch of flesh to flesh—and wandered far along the paths of paradise.



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Book Two
TO BREAK A HEART

CHAPTER I

A SPARKLING INSPIRATION

The surgery of Marcel Balzar, a French house with Parisian furnishings—not far down the road from the garden of Hassan.

On two walls several shelves with many bottles and small boxes ranged in rows.

In the third wall a very large open window led up to by five steps. The white lace curtains decorated with eagles and the walls with scarabees. Here and there a wreath of laurel encircling the letter N.

Rather scant foliage growing in a narrow garden outside. Beyond this the road, along which an occasional dromedary swayed.

The window commanding a fine view of Cairo: the citadel with its splendid dome, the Eastern houses with their flat roofs, the mosques with their towering minarets.

Just to the right of a door leading to the rest of the house a steep and narrow staircase on the wall running up to the private apartments of the physician. It had a low and very ornamental balus-

Near the Throne

trade that looked as though it might have been stolen from some old Italian palace and brought here to adorn the temporary residence of an officer in the army of the Great Devastator.

Across the room a small open desk with a bullet hole through it. Close to the chair behind the desk three muskets with their bright bayonets fixed and stacked as in a camp. And leaning against them a fourth without the weapon of the charge.

In a cage on a plain oak table standing in a corner between the window and the staircase, a parrot, arranging its feathers with much contemplation, remarked:

“Polly! Pretty Polly!”

Madame Balzar entered the room at the moment carrying on a tray her son's lunch, plain but dainty.

“Marcel is too tired,” she said half aloud to herself, with motherly solicitude, “after coming from the hospital.”

Then the pet of the family in the cage cocked its head to look at her.

“Polly wants a cracker?” she asked.

“Foo-wit!” came the answer in a whistle.

So she robbed her son of a trifle—and another—to reward the green and hungry little despot.

“Foo-wit!” it whistled its thanks as she left the room. “Foo-wit—foo-wit!”

Just then Monsieur Carmier entered the sur-

Near the Throne

gery with the blustering Plutarque Taschereau. The pedlar had lately become the private secretary of Balzar. He was better dressed, but rejoiced in the same patriotic sash and the same chronic thirst. As usual he was chaperoned by a black bottle, which was now empty. His employer ostensibly censured this weakness of the journalist, but for the sake of old acquaintance really connived at it. Just at present Plutarque felt exhilarated—that was all—but eager: the full effects had not yet appeared from his appreciative draughts of Burgundy. Both paused a moment and listened.

From a mosque across the way came the call of a Moslem priest and the weird chanting of dervishes to the tap of primitive drums, accompanied by sweet piping:

“Allah, allah, allah, ai!”

“The c-c-call to prayer,” said Carmier. “Noon.”

“Didn’t know it was so late.”

“G-g-going?”

“I thirst,” said the genial Taschereau, sitting down to the table, unfolding the napkin and throwing it across his knee.

“Was there ever a time when you didn’t?” questioned the more abstemious Alphonse, looking very quizzically through his monocle.

“Never!” was the prompt admission. “My thirst’s my best friend—never deserts me.”

Near the Throne

"What a c-c-clever idea!"

"I think his mother might give Monsieur le Docteur a better lunch. It's a charity to eat it up."

"Why?" asked the Gascon, expecting to see the sash expand, so rapidly did the ruddy Taschereau devour the fowl.

"This chicken is thirteen years old."

"Unlucky. H-h-h-how can you tell?"

"By the teeth."

"Ch-ch-chickens don't have teeth."

"No, but I have."

"You've been reading Sophocles again!"

"Sapristi!" exclaimed Plutarque, ignoring this accusation of plagiarism as every good journalist should. "I wouldn't offer that to Murad," complained the philosophic revolutionist tossing the wish-bone out of the window.

"Indeed?" smiled Alphonse.

"I wouldn't throw it to a poodle."

"But you did," laughed the faultless blond, looking down the road. "There g-goes Osman."

"Carmier."

"Yes."

"Why is this rooster like a riddle?"

"R-r-rooster, r-r-riddle — r-riddle—r-r-rooster. Why is that r-rooster like a riddle?" he struggled out, the words apparently being as difficult as the enigma, Taschereau accompanying and exaggerat-

Near the Throne

ing the stutterer's grimaces, when Carmier finally admitted: "I d-d-don't know."

"Because," Plutarque replied, wrapping the remainder in the napkin and pushing it from him, "I give it up."

"P-p-precisely," agreed Alphonse, making for the door in disgust.

"Nobody knows how dry I am—my throat's like—the Sahara!" wailed he of the terrible yearning.

"Foo-wit!" whistled the parrot as Carmier slammed the door.

"Hello, Poll!" said Taschereau sauntering around the surgery and scanning eagerly all that came within his range of vision. "Bottles, bottles everywhere—and not a drop to drink. I have such a thirst, it's just burning me up," he confessed to the bird, at the same time taking down a decanter. "Water! Saprستي!" Next a wine bottle with a preliminary glance at the label: "Soothing syrup!" Then another, first removing the cork and smelling the contents: "More of the stuff. I wonder if Balzar takes me for twins—or a baby farm?" Looking over a row of bottles, one seemed promising: "Ah, here's something!" he ejaculated anticipating the fluid he revelled in and removing the cork: "Castor oil! Worse!"

"Polly!" said the parrot, as if twitting him on his disappointment.

Near the Throne

But Plutarque Taschereau, like those explorers who search for the North Pole, was not to be discouraged.

"I wish—I wish I could get some of those nice mixtures they have in Paris," he sighed taking down another bottle and reading the label: "Paris Green. Sapristi! I'm not a cabbage head—even if I wasn't born in Ireland. Since Balzar made me his private secretary I've never been in good spirits—or they've never been in me. He's too strict," he ran on sniffing something in the air as a camel sniffs an oasis. "Where is it?" he questioned, following his nose to a bottle of Benedictine at the other side of the room and clasping it with joy. "This needs no label," he declared, drinking again and again. "Needs nothing—not even a cork."

"Wine for a king!" chimed in the wise parrot, evidently having heard the phrase often.

After a few minutes of blissful imbibition, Plutarque blurted out the discovery to himself. "Nearly empty!"

"Another!" struck in the observer in the cage.

The tippler filled up the bottle with water from the despised decanter.

The parrot joined his whistle to Taschereau's yell just as Carmier returned and remarked:

"T-t-two of them."

"Yesh," acquiesced Taschereau.

Near the Throne

"Do I interrupt?" asked the faultless Alphonse stroking his waxed mustache.

"Not an interrupt," answered the owner of the tricolour sash swinging the ends. The Burgundy was now uniting forces with the Benedictine, and the two liquids were evidently having a banquet of their own in the interior of the Frenchman.

"Ah!" exclaimed the young accountant.

"Ah!" repeated Taschereau, with a smack of the lips as he swallowed another drink.

"What are you up to, T-t-taschereau?"

"'S that Carmier, old fellow? It'sh warm day. Have some," he said handing the bottle. "And thish dry wine," he ran on not knowing by this time just exactly what it was.

"And this," answered Carmier, returning it, "is a d-d-dry b-bottle."

"The cat's-paw!" muttered Taschereau pointing at Osman passing the window, as he himself stumbled toward the door.

"Is Monsieur Balzar at home?" asked the old trickster putting his head in.

"Not preshent," answered the surgeon's private secretary, his tongue a bit thick.

"Are you sure?" queried the Bey suspecting the statement.

"By the beard of the Prophet!" swore Taschereau.

"Is he expected soon?"

Near the Throne

"Any moment," was the hiccoughed answer.

"Then I shall call again this morning."

"May the blessing of Allah always follow you," replied Taschereau—then, when the door was shut behind the astrologer, he added, "and never overtake you."

"Amen," responded Alphonse, fervently.

"What'sh on thish label, Carmier?" asked the elder man, changing the subject and reverting to the question that he had found puzzling.

"L-latin," answered the younger, following the custodian of the coveted bottle up the steps to the window.

Taschereau replied with a look of disgust: "What's it mean?"

"I th-th-thought you were a scholar."

"Me scholar?" he roared hiccoughing and laughing. "They tried me with their books. But learning isn't in my line. They taught me Latin—tried to. Sapristi! It was no go. All the Latin I construe is: amo, I love. Have shome more," he implored, stretching the bottle out, but returning it to his own lips.

Monsieur Carmier had dropped his monocle and was staring out into the street.

"Whatsh matter?" asked the jolly convivialist rolling down the steps. They never seem to hurt themselves.

"Mademoiselle Tinette Fleury!" answered Al-

Near the Throne

phonse running to the door and opening it with avidity and every evidence of satisfaction. "She's coming here with the other girls."

In they came merrily, attired so that they looked like dainty Parisian confections, four of them, Lucine last.

"A shong!" Taschereau shouted at once, being in just that humor.

"But first a toast!" put in the polite Alphonse quickly filling glasses for all. "To the girls from the banks of the Seine!"

The glasses clicked and were emptied.

"Fill again!" shouted Tinette.

"Fill!" echoed Taschereau.

"The toast?" asked Carmier. He himself wanted to suggest the Lily of the Orient, but did not dare.

"To the daughters of the Nile," proposed Mademoiselle Fleury.

They drank with vim—for they're liberal, those Parisiennes. To the men it was irresistible: in the sparkle of the wine they saw black eyes stealing shy glances over the top of thin veils, felt the enticement that lurks in a yashmak.

"Now then," ventured the rather timourous Lucine, "another!"

"What is it?"

"To Le Beau Sabreur!" she answered.

And Tinette added:

Near the Throne

“ Captain — ”

Then Carmier :

“ Marcel — ”

Finally Taschereau :

“ Balzar ! ”

Again the brimming glasses clicked as they repeated the popular toast :

“ Le Beau Sabreur ! ”

“ You should be in good voice after your swim,” suggested Monsieur Carmier to the girls.

“ Early this morning in the Nile,” added Taschereau jogging their apparently failing memories.

They looked surprised. It is a feminine right.

“ Oh, I saw you,” Plutarque protested, not at all willing to regard them as innocent fawns.

“ And Mademoiselle Chaumont.”

“ So did Carmier.”

“ Imitating the f-fair daughter of Pharaoh.”

“ But,” laughed Lucine acknowledging their outing and referring to the same renowned maiden, “ we have no fairy tales.”

“ What did you think of my new bathing suit ? ” asked Tinette.

And Taschereau replied :

“ There washn't 'nough of it to form an opinion on.”

“ But the song ! ” said Carmier.

“ I'm going to a teacher,” announced Taschereau ; “ to have my voice tried.”

Near the Throne

This was the opportunity for the Titian hair to prove its colour. Winking to Lucine she turned and said to the aspiring vocalist :

"Why don't you go to a magistrate? He might give you a year in the Bastille for it!"

"The song," insisted Carmier, "from Mademoiselle Chaumont!"

"From Tinette!" seconded the young governess, who, according to report, had once herself done small parts at the opera in Paris.

"No," replied the former chanteuse, who, notwithstanding spasmodic efforts in that direction, had never been able to obliterate entirely from her manners the traces of the soubrette that through a long and thorough apprenticeship seemed to have gotten insidiously into her corpuscles. "From Lucine first."

"A song from Mademoiselle Lucine!" echoed Carmier, secretly glad and preferring to second this request. "Mademoiselle Lucine!"

"After Tinette!" answered the Provençal.

"Tinette!" called Taschereau. "And a dance!"

"Tinette!" came in chorus from the rest.

"And a dance!"

They expected Mademoiselle Fleury with all her abandon and verve to burst forth in one of those somewhat naughty ballads, jingling with lingerie and gaiety that are turned on in the café world of the radiant Capital when the cigarette

Near the Throne

smoke curls thick along the ceiling—but instead she mounted the table, and, holding up a brimming glass of the sparkling inspiration, proposed their health in a verse of her own :

“ Now here’s to the girl who’s a rollicking boy,
Here’s to the lads when they’re youthful,
Here’s to the dashing carouser’s gay toy,
Here’s to the flirts that are truthful.”

Holding up a brimming glass and swaying with the rhythm she sang the chorus :

“ Pass the canteen, drink to the queen,
Toast dimpled chins, without any sins;
Pass the canteen, drink to the queen,
Toast to the man who wins!”

Raising daintily just the edge of her skirt she went on, the toes of the others beating time :

“ So, here’s to the hoyden whose capers you prize,
Now for the speech that’s witty;
Here’s to the nymph with the naughty blue eyes,
Now to the ankle that’s pretty!”

They all picked up the chorus this time, as their lifted glasses clinked :

“ Pass the canteen, drink to the queen,
Toast dimpled chins, without any sins;
Pass the canteen, drink to the queen,
Toast to the man who wins!”

“ Bravo!” they shouted. “ Bravo! Tinette!
Encore! Encore!”

Near the Throne

So Mademoiselle Vivacity sang on :

“ Well, now on the happiest day of my birth,
Here’s to the man who misses!
Now on the merriest night of our mirth,
Here’s to my witching kisses! ”

Without waiting for them to join in she changed the chorus a bit, the others swinging with the music :

“ Pass the canteen, drink to the queen,
Toast future bliss, and never dismiss ;
Pass the canteen, drink to the queen,
I give you my good-bye kiss. ”

Jumping down from the table Tinette touched her fingers to her lips again and quickly ran out of the room, while they all clapped their hands with convivial enthusiasm and called :

“ Bravo ! ”

“ Bravo ! ” bawled the parrot.

Carmier went after the favourite and brought her back.

“ Garçon ! ” shouted Taschereau apparently thinking he was back in his old haunts again.

“ Garçon ! More absinthe ! ”

With the dashing refrain of the song they started the dance—the six—when suddenly Tinette cried in warning :

“ Monsieur Balzar ! ”

A glance out of the window sufficed for proof.

Near the Throne

"With Nazira!" added Lucine.

Plutarque was suddenly filled with a sense of duty and a burning anxiety to clear the surgery.

"Thish way!" he said pointing to the door leading to the rest of the house.

They went out dancing. They probably finished the step in another room, but they disappeared just in time.



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CHAPTER II

THE LIFE OF A KISS

"Every one speaks well of you," said Nazira coming into the surgery from the street with her fiancé.

"I hope not," he answered with a deprecating smile. "It's bad form to have a good reputation."

"Marcel!" she exclaimed surprised at this frank avowal of cosmopolitan unconventionality. But his glance and laugh were reassuring. She knew his penchant for saying certain things merely for the expression's sake.

Even had she wished, Nazira could not have helped observing the increased ornamentation of this Gallic room. It all tended toward the imperial. The savants who accompanied Bonaparte to the Orient busied themselves with the invention of new emblems and insignia for the empire he dreamed of founding. But for the monogram the young Corsican esteemed most highly, Balzar had a meaning of his own: to his heart it stood for Nazira—the wreath of laurel encircling the letter N.

Near the Throne

Leading her to a chair, the Captain changed the subject by remarking :

“ You heard that Napoleon is leaving Cairo ? ”

“ Today ? ” she asked, always eager to hear of new developments in the campaign.

“ Yes, ” he replied. “ For Palestine. ”

What the little Corsican's designs were on the Holy Land was of small moment to Nazira. Her interest was in her own country and its fate. This was quite evident from her immediate inquiry :

“ Who is to govern Egypt ? ”

“ Murad. ”

“ Really ? ” said the girl, astonished at what she regarded as a weak streak of gullibility on the part of the ambitious young artilleryman that he should be so easily ensnared by the artful blandness of the Pasha.

“ He has apparently gained great favour with Bonaparte, ” explained Captain Balzar, “ and our General seems to consider it a wise stroke during his own absence to make Murad supreme. ”

“ Why so ? ” she questioned.

“ Because of the prestige of the Pasha, ” was the prompt reply. But it was unsatisfactory. Being a physician Marcel should have known the folly of assigning the real reason. If you ever want a woman to disbelieve you, tell her the truth.

Nazira tossed back her head with a frown followed by a gesture of impatience. The intuition

Near the Throne

of a feminine mind often brings a quick perception of the credulity of a masculine mind. Woman has a geometry that in the art of war—for hearts or sceptres—derides that of Euclid and draws new charts for occupants of thrones and pullers of triggers, knowing that Cæsar and Tommy Atkins are brothers under the skin and remembering always that an arrow from the bow of Cupid is often more accurate of aim and deadly of effect than the torpedo from a gun of Krupp. But no woman ever knew all the plans of Bonaparte, the arch strategist.

Had Nazira turned her head a little farther she would have seen Murad and the astrologer standing and watching them through the window at the back of the surgery. They had come to see the doctor, and the path to the door led past the window. There they stood in the flitting gleams of sunlight that filtered through the leaves of the gently swaying trees to the casement—two men whose hearts were as swarthy as their faces, and who had never been drawn away from any purpose or desire by any principle or fear.

“You have not forgotten,” continued Captain Balzar, “that before Napoleon crossed the Mediterranean, Egypt was ruled by twenty-four beys, and the twenty-four beys were ruled by Murad and Ibrahim.”

“And shall be again,” muttered the crafty

Near the Throne

conspirator beneath his breath to Osman—"by Murad alone."

"At the head of the Mamelukes," answered Nazira with warm patriotism; "the best and most invincible cavalry in the world."

"Ibrahim is dead," Marcel reminded her—"destroyed with the Mamelukes at the Battle of the Pyramids. As for Murad, he professes to have been won over to the cause of Napoleon."

Murad laughed in derision.

"But surely——"

"Ah, that's just it," Marcel said, anticipating her exclamation of wonderment and glancing around.

But the two men had disappeared.

"The little Corsican is no fool," the Parisian resumed. "He has hold of a wet eel by the tail—and he knows it. He has left Murad to look after Egypt, but he has left a French soldier to look after Murad."

"And the name of that French soldier is?" she asked, surmising the fact.

"Balzar," he admitted.

She looked at him with an expression of mingled surprise and disapproval.

"I am here to care for the wounded in the hospital," he maintained, then with a subtle intonation added—"and to watch the crafty in the Citadel."

Near the Throne

"Secret service is dangerous," said Nazira, fearing as all girls do for the safety of her lover.

"I know," he replied.

"Murad is daring," she cautioned.

"Others are too," answered the Captain of the Twentieth Chasseurs. "My sword is at my side, and with it I shall go far. I have a great trust to fulfil."

Nazira was apparently satisfied—at least of the futility of warning. Then she said:

"Father is coming to see you today, and he wants me to call with him. I don't know what he wishes to speak with you about."

"I shall be at home all morning."

"Marcel."

"Yes."

"I promised to show you a little portrait."

"Of your mother," he added as she withdrew an ivory miniature from beneath the folds of her dress.

"There it is," she said handing it to him.

He looked at it a moment, while she regarded his countenance.

"It is the image of yourself!" he exclaimed.

She smiled at his *enthusing* so much.

"Will you give it me?" he asked.

"Oh!" she responded. "I could not part with it. She was so fond a mother."

"For a little while then?" he begged sitting down beside her. "Until to-morrow?"

Near the Throne

"It seems so long now, Marcel, to wait for each tomorrow," she confessed, answering his caress.

"I want to be in your presence all the time."

"And I in yours, dearie."

Then thinking perhaps of the bags of gold and silver in her father's vault in the counting room, Nazira continued:



"Love is not like pieces of base coin that we can spend or hoard up."

"No," he agreed, his arm encircling her.

"Love is our life," she went on. "We lavish or withhold it all."

"And you have given——"

"All I have," she replied.

"Nazira!" Marcel exclaimed rapturously.

"But I wish I had not."

"Nazira!" he said again in astonishment, drawing away his arm and looking her full in the face. It was the coming of a speck of cloud on the horizon.

"For then," she gloried, "I should have more to give."

Near the Throne

This was the swift dissolving of the cloud as if in the warmth of the noonday sun. He pressed her closely to him, so that she must have felt the quick throbbing of his heart.

At that moment the two Egyptians appeared again just outside the window.

"Ah, Murad!" marvelled Osman, anxious to make his master more eager. The astrologer knew well how highly the counsellor is esteemed who advises the pursuit of a client's own inclination.

"Sweetheart," Marcel added smoothing Nazira's hair.

"Look upon her," urged the Bey. "What a perfect woman!"

"And do you really love me, Marcel?" asked Nazira, seeking over again the assurance that a surrendered heart demands so frequently.

"Think," continued the old man as he perceived the Pasha's interest increasing and his blood mounting, "that face——"

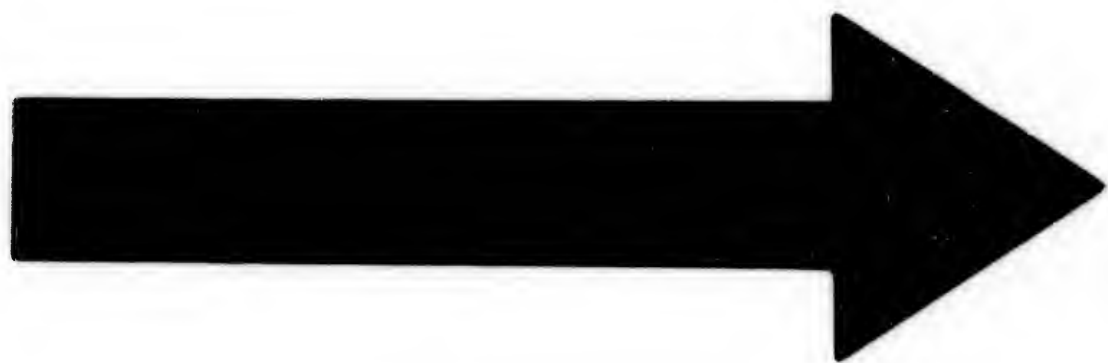
"O Nazira!" said Balzar, "you know I do. Do you not?"

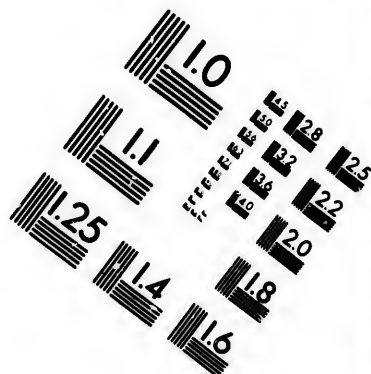
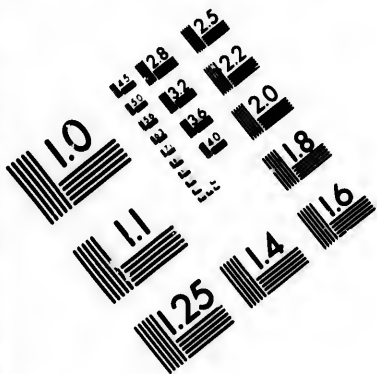
"Yes," she answered, nestling closer.

"Those eyes——" Osman pursued, himself contemplating their languorous glow.

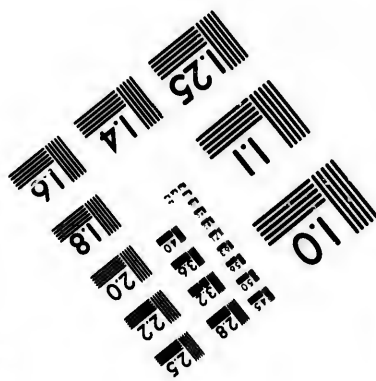
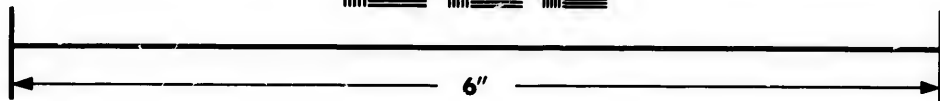
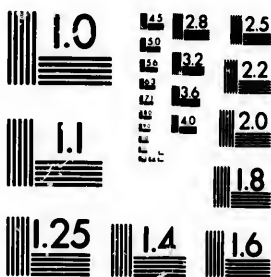
"But sometimes," replied Nazira, "a woman likes to be told the things she knows."

The astrologer took his master's arm, almost as





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Near the Throne

if he would make to hold him back as he kept on in his enumeration :

“Those lips——”

“There would be passion in their kisses,” Murad said, the fire of his black eyes revealing what he took no pains to conceal and felt that his companion observed.

“Dearest,” Balzar whispered, still unconscious of any other presence but Nazira's.

Osman kept on adding more fuel to the fire that was consuming the shameless Saracen.

“Her smile.”

“And sometimes,” the soldier of France allowed, “a man likes to tell what is in his heart. You are all my world. Waking I think of you and sleeping I dream of you.”

The two at the window heard this with a start back. Both were incensed at the sway the foreigner had acquired over their countrywoman. But Murad's was the anger of jealousy, which the cunning astrologer fanned by persisting very softly while he let his hand slip down Murad's sleeve :

“Her form, so voluptuous——”

Then they heard Marcel say :

“You are always in my thoughts.”

And Murad himself this time added :

“That bosom.”

“The pillow of Balzar,” frowned Osman, noticing his master's scowl.

Near the Throne

"Darling!" sighed Nazira, her arms clasped tightly around her lover's neck as she rested in his close embrace.

"Think," urged Osman, "what it would be worth to——"

"Oh!" answered Murad as they disappeared together from the window, "a night worth a world!"

Forgetful of all else it had been to Marcel and Nazira as if their caresses and confessions had been looked upon by no other eyes and listened to by no other ears than each other's. Nor did he cease from pouring out his soul to her :

"You are so beautiful and pure and true, dear one. Four days more and you will be my bride."

"O Marcel!" she responded in the very ecstasy of that passion that is most divine, "is it not lovely to love and lovely to be loved?"

"Yes," he replied—"it changes earth to paradise."

Then after a moment she said :

"I must go now. Father may want me."

And he kissed her again.

"Sometimes," she went on, letting her hand remain motionless in his, but dropping her head, "sometimes I have wondered how long a kiss may last. Everything that is sweet or beautiful seems to pass away so soon : the colour of a rose, the perfume of a violet, the song of a nightingale—they

Near the Throne

are pretty. You see, you smell, you hear—they are delightful—they are gone.”

“But,” he replied taking a flower from the lapel of his coat, “a kiss is not a joy of so brief life. It alights upon the lips like the drop of dew upon the blushing petal of this rose and slips silently into the heart. O Nazira, how long may a kiss live?”

“Mine? A kiss from me?”

“Yes.”

“As long as memory lives, as long as the soul lives—forever.”

He gave her the rose. Then looking into her eyes with all the earnestness and intensity of his nature he pressed his lips to hers in one long

endearment of forgetfulness and passion, kissing her again and again and saying:

“I love you—I love you—I love you!”

But the drop of dew was a tear upon the petal.

“An Egyptian’s lover,” Nazira said half interrogatively, but in the sweet certainty that he belonged to her—body and soul.

“For all eternity,” he vowed.



Near the Throne

Resting her head on his breast and looking up at him she answered:

“ My own—my very own!”

A few moments passed.

Then kissing the rose to him she went out the door into the street and left him standing watching there alone.



CHAPTER III

PAID IN HIS OWN WINE

Recovering from the sweet intoxication of Nazira's presence Balzar sat down by the table, remarking to himself :

"There are so many wounded in the hospital it gives me nearly all I can do."

Presently he took a wine glass and poured it full from the bottle his private secretary had filled with water. He held it to the light—tasted it. "Rather weak," was his opinion as he threw the liquid away. "Most likely it was——"

At that instant the door opened.

"Taschereau!" the physician said, concluding his sentence and greeting his amanuensis with the same word.

"Monsieur," answered the genial tippler somewhat thick of tongue.

"Well?"

"Murad and Osman called shee you," he said. "I told them you were out."

"Out of what?" asked the doctor very quizzically.

"Oh, I'm not drunk!" Plutarque protested,

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trying very hard to stand perfectly straight but with varying degrees of success. Then studying his boots and finally putting one out a bit he ventured the decision: "Thish my right foot."

Marcel could not but admit that he had guessed correctly. "You're all right," he said with an approving slap on the shoulder which nearly proved serious.

"That'sh jusht my weaknesh," acquiesced the honest revolutionist, looking hard at one foot and trying in vain to induce the other to go forward and at the same time withdrawing a flask from his pocket, "if I only had a little left."

"Have a drink?" said the Captain offering him the bottle.

Monsieur Plutarque Taschereau looked at it in disgust.

"With me," coaxed Marcel.

"I've sworn off," averred he of the tricolour sash, endeavouring to brush the bottle aside, but only turning himself around on his heel instead.

"Since when?" inquired Captain Balzar pouring two glasses in proof of the sincerity of his hospitality and good-fellowship. "Ha, ha, ha! Sworn off? You? Nonsense! Since when?"

"Not a drop," swore the temperate Taschereau, "has passed my lips shince——"

"Here!" interrupted Balzar giving him one of the glasses. "Drink that!"

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"No!" the rubicund gentleman protested, though there was no record of his ever having refused before. "No!"

"What's it to be?" the Captain asked, raising his own glass and compelling Plutarque to lift his by force of example and the courtesy due to a host.

Taschereau made an effort to chime in and propose a toast:

"To-to-to——"

"To Paris!" proposed the soldier.

The glasses clicked.

"To Parish!" replied the journalist, drinking with great effort, while Balzar smilingly emptied his share into the centre of a rather hollow seat of an antique chair. It seemed to be the most convenient place—and there was no time to look for anything.

"Again!" said Balzar laughingly filling the glasses.

"To-to——"

"To the Latin Quarter!"

Click!

Balzar poured his in the same place.

"To the Latin Qua——" repeated Taschereau, taking his share with every expression of swallowing something exceedingly disagreeable to the taste.

"Again!" shouted Balzar enjoying the joke and pouring out the third.

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"No!" came in hiccoughed protest. "No more for me!"

"To our old café—La Fille d'Or!" proposed the Captain.

Taschereau could not refuse.

Click! Click!

Balzar dashed his in the same convenient place.

"To-to-our old ca——"

"Fé!" the surgeon concluded for him.

"Café!" repeated Plutarque. "La Fille——"

Taschereau stopped short and hiccoughed. He could struggle no further. Then he forced the liquor down as though he were loading a gun.

"Bravo!" shouted Captain Balzar.

"Not a drop hash pashed!" reiterated Taschereau in the manner of a man taking a serious oath. "Not a drop of anything," he stumbled on, sitting down in the chair of which the seat was running over, "but washer!"

"But water!" echoed Marcel, holding up his glass as if his embarrassed companion had proposed a toast.

Plutarque jumped up with even more alacrity than he had ever accepted a drink.

"Quite true!" agreed Balzar, rubbing it in. "Quite true!"

Feeling to learn the nature and extent of the damage done, Plutarque endeavoured to hasten from the surgery as quickly as his unsteady legs could

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carry him, but he fell over that foot he was so sure of. Picking himself up he stumbled out muttering :

“Noshing but washer--washer.”

Captain Balzar, tired with his labours in the hospital, for the wounded soldiers seemed to be greatly retarded in their convalescence by the climate of Egypt, lay down on a camp bed to rest a while. He was just beginning to doze when Madame Balzar entered.

“Marcel!” she said gently drawing aside the curtains and stopping in the doorway. “Marcel!”

He heard her. But there came over him a temptation to pretend not to be awake. He did not try to resist it.

The mother came over quietly and watched him for a few seconds. He was breathing heavily.

“Asleep,” she said stroking his brow. “My boy.” Then placing a screen around the stretcher so that he might be shielded from the window and any possible draughts, she kissed her son and tip-toed from the room.

Marcel sat up and looked after her. “Mother,” he said, “you are so loving.” Then he arose and went slowly and wearily up the stairway to his own room.

Just as he disappeared from the landing there was a knock at the street door. No one answered it. There was no person present. The knock

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was repeated more loudly. The door was pushed open from the outside, and Murad came in accompanied by Osman. Taschereau wobbled in the other door at the same time, apparently having heard the summons and being on his way to find out what was wanted.

"We have called," said Murad to him, "to see your master, Monsieur Balzar. Is he at home?"

"I can't find him," replied Taschereau.

"Are you quite sure?"

"By the beard of the Prophet!"

"Where is he?"

"I think he is attending a patient."

"A patient," sneered Murad. "Hu! A woman."

"No doubt," added Osman, sitting down at the side of the room where the camp bed was with the screen around it.

"Possibly," admitted Taschereau, "physicians do attend women." And he stumbled out the door, just missing a serious contact with his roseate nose.

"And that woman is Nazira," said Murad to Osman.

"Beyond a doubt," the astrologer agreed.

Walking across the room and seating himself the Pasha showed the elder Saracen a small envelope, adding with sarcastic emphasis:

"Here is a note from Balzar saying he would be at home, if——"

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"If!" exclaimed Osman.

"Read it," said Murad, handing the missive.

Osman read the words aloud:

"If the business is official!"

He tossed the paper across the table to his master.

"Could you forge that signature?" asked Murad, holding the paper up and pointing to Balzar's name written in bold heavy characters at the foot of the page.

"I'll try."

"Then write."

Osman took up a pen and followed Murad as he dictated:

"Words: Come to me now, to the surgery, as soon as you receive this note. I am alone—and we shall be happy in our love.

"Marcel."

"Marcel," repeated Osman as he added the brief flourish to the final letter, just as it was in the original. He passed the paper to Murad.

"Excellent!" pronounced the Pasha regarding the signature critically and comparing it carefully stroke by stroke with that in the note addressed and sent to himself. Then dusting and folding the paper, he passed it to Osman and, without paying any definite attention to the old man's inquiring glance, went on with his instructions: "Send this

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at once to Hassan. Say you intercepted Balzar's messenger."

The astrologer perceived immediately the plan of campaign, and as he tucked the forged missive beneath his cloak and patted the spot answered:

"I'll do it."



CHAPTER IV

ONLY A PARROT

“But, Murad,” resumed Osman after putting the pen carefully away just where he had found it and shutting the ink-well.

“Well?”

“What do you think of woman anyway?”

“Oh! What do I think of the angels?” was the laughing and equivocal response.

“He’s got it bad,” said the parrot very indistinctly—so much so that only an ear accustomed to the bird’s sallies would have been able to say whether this particular effort was a series of half-swallowed words such as a baby teething might attempt to utter or merely a succession of ornithological gurglings. This was the usual result when the parrot was endeavouring to perfect itself in a new phrase even when it heard it often and essayed it a score of times.

“But there are differences in angels,” added Murad qualifying his last statement.

“So they say,” smiled Osman.

“You have noticed that?”

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"Yes—when I visited Paris."

"Eh?" said Murad forgetting for the moment Osman's visit to the French Capital.

"And I have noticed another thing."

"Yes?"

"Many men seem to prefer the fallen angels."

"Feu-u!" whistled the parrot.

There was a knock at the street door. The Pasha opened it.

"Hassan," said he suavely in greeting and making a salaam in which the Bey joined as the merchant entered the room.

"Murad," answered the visitor equally respectful.

"Coming!" called the late Plutarque from the next room.

"Osman," added Hassan recognizing the astrologer at the opposite side of the room and bowing again.

Taschereau came in at the moment of the obeisance.

"Monsieur has not returned," he announced, still muzzy, "but he'sh shpected every minute. Will you not be seated Messieurs, and wait for the physishian?"

The Frenchman did not regard these three Egyptians as friends of his and was utterly indifferent even when sober as to what they did or thought, therefore without waiting for their answer

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and tripping only once, he backed out as gracefully as his condition permitted.

"How brightly the sun is shining this morning," remarked Hassan going to the window.

"Allah is good," said Murad with a devout uplifting of his brows.

Then from the distance came a tremendous shout, that instantly drew the attention of all three:

"Napoleon!"

Hassan left the other two men standing near the desk and went quickly to the window. Osman frowned and seemed waiting for his master to declare himself. Murad stood erect with anger, his shoulders set firmly and his head tossed proudly back. They heard a band where the shout had come from playing with all the spirit that victory and bright anticipations beget: "Le Chant du Départ," then another farther off pouring out the strains of "En Route Pour La Syrie." Both were coming nearer. In a moment Hassan's heart was filled with shame and his mind with resolution: he saw the approaching battalions, but they were the soldiers of France—in his city and in his Egypt.

"This should not be," said Osman glancing around at the passing regiment of infantry whose bayonets they could just see going by the window in waves of conquest as the men marched to beat of drums coming and vanishing in the opposite

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direction. Now and then an officer on horseback would ride past. Then came the crunching and rolling sounds of the gun carriages as the artillery dragged by, the splendid black Arabians pressed into its service prancing as though in rebellion and longing once more to champ the bits of Murad and his matchless Mamelukes.

"Should not be?" repeated the Pasha regarding Osman with astonishment. "Wait." The man had the air of magnetism and conviction. "And that," the Moslem went on pointing off toward the East, "should be torn down—that cross glittering in the sunlight. Our scimitars must uplift the crescent."

"There is," added Osman with a steady gaze full of meaning, "one man who can do it—one only."

"Osman, you are right," was the reply. "In time to come it must be said: Murad reigned over Egypt, sole sovereign of the land of Isis."

"It shall be said," answered the old astrologer.

"You are indeed my friend," responded the conspirator, speaking low that Hassan might not hear.

"The crown waits for Murad."

"Up to the present," agreed the young Pasha, "I have succeeded in climbing near the throne. But now, this Balzar would push me back. He is here as an agent of Bonaparte——"

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But the sentence was interrupted with a swelling shout from the street :

“Hurrah! Hurrah!”

They paid no attention to it beyond a gesture of impatience.

“Well,” resumed Osman, “the power of your astrologer is not gone. Can I not prepare some fragrant fruits—similar to those you sent that fellow, I forget his name, three hours before his death?”

“But,” replied the far-seeing and cautious Murad, “Balzar is a physician. He might examine the fruits. And if he found the poison——”

“That would never do,” acquiesced the elder man perceiving that his master wished something either bolder or cleverer. “Some other means must be devised.”

Murad quickly thought of his plan.

The Bey glanced over his shoulder at Hassan.

“I’ll strike Balzar through his mother,” the young Mahometan resolved.

Osman at once recognized the desirability and possibilities of this course, but wanting Murad to be more precise he asked :

“How?”

“Imprison her.”

“Then?”

“Then have some one tell him,” the Pasha proceeded.

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"That will keep him in Cairo."

"In case we should need him."

"Or his head," suggested the astrologer.

"What prison? Let me think. In the secret dungeons beneath my Palace."

"Our own Bastille."

Murad considered a second or two, then said:

"Cell thirty one."

"Cell thirty one," repeated the astrologer.

"Polly!" exclaimed the parrot, who had been observing them with a wise silence. Both the conspirators glanced around in alarm.

"Only a parrot!" both laughed together when they saw the bird.

"Polly sell!"

"Hush," said Murad in caution, noticing Hassan coming down from the window.

"Egypt is the sufferer," remarked Osman, immediately adapting himself to the situation and apparently continuing a conversation intended for Hassan's ears.

But it was not so suitable for those of Balzar, who at that very moment opened the door of his room and appeared at the top of the stairway, looking a trifle sleepy and smoking a cigarette. However, the trio in his surgery interested as well as surprised him, so he flicked the ashes away, and leaning over the balustrade lazily watched the Copt and the two Mahometans.

CHAPTER V

THE TRAIL OF THE SLANDERER

"We were just speaking of Napoleon," continued Murad as Hassan walked between them.

"Pretty Poll," interrupted the parrot in mockery of the diplomatic falsehood that fell so easily from the lips of the Pasha.

Then came a shout from the crowded street to accentuate the aggravation of the Egyptians :

"Vive la France!"

"Indeed," said Hassan, taking no pains to conceal his displeasure.

"Yes," replied Murad, "we must be at the gates as the General——"

"The oppressor," put in Osman, observing the cumulative effect of the insults to the patriotism of the merchant.

"And the army depart," concluded Murad.

"Why so?" asked the merchant.

"To bid him farewell."

"But little time remains," suggested Osman.

"Feu!" whistled the parrot becoming wide awake at the same time as its medical owner.

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Murad went on warming to his subject :

“Bonaparte pretends to have become a servant of Mahomet.”

“To catch the rabble,” added Osman with a shrug of impatience and disgust. Some men always feel both impatience and disgust when other men adopt their own methods.

“Already,” said Murad, “the man of the heavy artillery is called the Lion of the Desert.”

“And the King of Fire,” added Hassan.

“Feu-u-u!” whistled the parrot as if it understood and was more astonished than before.

“A transparent scheme,” said Murad.

“The sun shines through it,” broke in Hassan.

This was what the other two had been working for: to arouse the resentment of the merchant against the Corsican and then, by this somewhat circuitous but sure way, against the surgeon in the adventurer's army.

“Yes,” acquiesced Murad willingly and with a glance of indication, “but leaves a shadow.”

Osman did not wish any doubt to exist in Hassan's mind as to what or who this shadow might be, so he came out with the blunt statement :

“Balzar.”

“How droll!” that gentleman remarked to himself, puffing his cigarette leisurely and sending a cloud of smoke curling to the ceiling.

The parrot either had a remarkable perceptive

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faculty or else was rehearsing its entire repertoire, though it jumped at a bound from Touchstone's retort courteous to the same philosopher's fifth degree and launched into the countercheck quarrelsome, shouting:

"You're a liar!"

This cheerful piping up was to the embarrassment of at least two of the men on the floor and to the intense amusement of the physician at the top of the landing.

Murad pretended not to notice the parrot, going on with the vilification:

"A man who, like his master, poses as the friend of the people of Egypt."

Balzar smiled with easy nonchalance at this and leaned forward a little, contenting himself with sending a few rings of smoke circling upward and remarking beneath his breath:

"What a villain I am."

A shout came again from further down the street:

"Hurrah! Hurrah!"

Murad spoke through it:

"But tear off the mask——"

"And you find the spy," finished Osman.

"I never thought I was quite so black as that," said Balzar almost audibly, wishing that he could write down this vivid description of himself for he thought it would make a graphic and entertaining pen picture.

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"The traitor!" added Murad, with his brows contracted and his eyes flashing with anger.

"You're a damn liar!" screeched the parrot.

"We never see ourselves as others see us," quoted Marcel, disappearing into his room as Murad turned and scowled at the innocent looking bird perched on one leg and looking more than green.

The parrot answered with a gaze as blank and expressionless as that of the Sphinx.

"We need to guard him well," the Pasha continued as Balzar reappeared.

"And very cautiously," said Hassan. "He is fearless."

"And clever," added Osman.

"He goes about as a harmless physician," said Murad. "But once a soldier, always a soldier."

Tumultuous shouts from the streets broke in again:

"France! And Napoleon!"

Hassan took a step toward the window and listened.

Murad took this opportunity for a private word to Osman:

"The note should do the business. But I'll supply him with another motive."

The astrologer nodded comprehension as the merchant came to them.

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"Hassan," said Murad to him, "you have heard the proverb: one good turn deserves another?"

"Yes."

"By chance," the conspirator continued, watching for the effect of the statement, "I have in my possession a letter addressed to Admiral Nelson."

"I have known that for some time," the merchant answered, with polite disdain.

"It bears your signature," the Pasha went on with sudden directness, then with polished subtlety: "I have thought you might like to have it in your possession. It's a dangerous scrap of paper, you know."

"What do you want me to do?" the man asked, anxious to learn without useless delay the purpose of this manœuvre.

Murad responded with equal frankness:

"End the betrothal of Nazira to Balzar."

This was a plain offer but not easy of immediate acceptance or declination. Besides, for so decisive a stroke, was there a sufficient motive?

The Pasha, noticing Hassan's hesitation and divining the cause of it, added:

"The hour I learn that you have done so, I'll send you this letter."

"I could wish," said the perplexed father, blaming the general circumstances for his particular predicament, "that these French had never set foot in our land."

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This was the very declaration Murad wanted. It gave him the opportunity to say with much significance of tone and manner :

"Ah, Hassan, you have good reasons for such a wish."

"They have injured my trade," complained the



merchant, walking toward the door leading to the street from which came another and more vociferous shout :

"Hurrah! Hurrah!"

"More than that," said the slanderer, with malignant insinuation.

"What do you mean?" Hassan questioned.

"One of them has ruined your daughter."

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"What!"

"Words."

"You are sure of that?"

"Positive."

"If I knew the man I'd strangle him."

"You do know him."

"Who?"

"A physician."

"His name?"

"It's true."

Hassan was now aroused—he was prepared to go any length.

This was the Pasha's desire.

"Four months ago," the Copt answered with threatening emphasis, "your Osman put suspicions in my mind."

"That were well founded," replied Murad exultant over his success.

"But the time for that has gone," Hassan retorted. Then coming up close to the Pasha, so that their shoulders touched and their eyes met in a searching defiant gaze, he demanded: "No hints—be plain!"

And the traducer, leaning on the balustrade, coldly responded:

"Balzar."

Shaking his head slowly, one hand clutching the other nervously, Hassan repeated the name mechanically: "Balzar—Marcel Balzar."

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Instantly the surgeon on the staircase made a start down the steps, but restrained himself, saying between his teeth :

“I could kill him now.”

To think that it was the man in whom he had placed such absolute confidence and to whom he had given Nazira in betrothal—suspicions that had been gnawing his mind for weeks had been confirmed—this was a blow more than Hassan had expected. The distracted father walked with unsteady step to the door, muttering incoherently.

“Balzar! I trusted him. Balzar.”

Without a look behind he went out into the street, still muttering. As the door closed Murad laughed—a cynical victorious laugh that had the bitterness of the demon in its ring.

The surgeon's sabre grazed the balustrade. The sound attracted the Saracen. Turning quickly he saw Captain Balzar standing on the landing at the top looking down upon him with contemptuous anger. Murad rushed up. Balzar



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coolly folded his arms—and before him, step by step the Pasha backed down the stairs.

“You are right, Murad,” said Le Beau Sabreur, pointing to the window where a troop of cavalry was flashing by, “once a soldier, always a soldier—of Napoleon!”

At that moment Bonaparte galloped past to tremendous shouts:

“Long live Napoleon! Napoleon!”

Without waiting for the acclamations to die away or the music in the distance to vanish Balzar, turning the key in the door and observing that the two men with him noted the click of the lock, continued:

“Listen. When I was a boy I lay down one day to rest myself beneath a tree in an open field. I fell asleep. And while I slept filthy slimy things came crawling over me. I felt their foul touch—clammy, defiling. I wakened—saw them binding me with their webs, strings spun from corruption. I watched them and laughed. They kept on, crossing and recrossing, making me more secure in their meshes, binding me tighter and tighter in their unclean network till they thought they had me in their power. Then I arose and shook myself.” And Balzar followed Murad up as a lion might follow a wolf, muscle to muscle, eye to eye, observing every twitch of the Pasha’s features. “They shrank from me,” he went on, “I trampled

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upon them. They squirmed. I crushed them beneath my heel." Then he paused a moment, and knitting his brows into a threatening frown, asked with intense irony: "Do you read the riddle? I lay there asleep when you came. You wakened me. I heard you speak of poison and plots. I laughed at you. I listened while you besmeared my good name—saw you bind me in your web of lies. But now—I'm going to shake myself!"

Murad who had backed almost up to the door tried to interrupt, saying:

"Balzar——"

The French soldier would not permit it. Drawing his sword and advancing he said:

"You crawling viper——"

Murad's hand was slipping slowly toward his belt.

Marcel stopped an instant. A thought occurred to him. He put his blade back in its scabbard.

"Sitting here yesterday," he resumed, "some one shot at me. It was you!"

"Monsieur!"

"A poniard in that desk stopped the bullet."

"And you think——"

Opening the drawer and taking up the flattened piece of lead, Balzar added:

"Here it is! But I'll send it back to you!"

"Captain——"

"Soon you'll find it," he continued.

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"Find what?" said Murad.

"What you're looking for!"

"Where?" the Pasha asked excitedly as he grasped his pistol.

Quickly taking the fourth one of the arms leaning against the three in the stack and putting the muzzle right up to the eyes of the Egyptian, Balzar replied:

"Down the barrel of a musket!"

Murad's hands dropped to his side.

"Go," Marcel went on, opening the door—"your time has not come. But I'll kill you yet—in my hour of triumph!"

Without a word Murad and Osman went out—to devise some speedy plot to rid themselves of this outspoken foe, the Corsican's musketeer, Le Beau Sabreur.



CHAPTER VI

THE SUMMER AND A ROSE

Balzar closed the door and locked it again. Placing the musket back in the stack he heard the swift clattering of hoofs on the rough pavement and knew that the two Egyptians were galloping to bid Bonaparte a false farewell. The noises that accompanied the departing army were very faint now. He looked around the room. The surgery was as tranquil and clean as ever. There had been throwing of pitch and quarrelling, but not a powder was spilled and not a phial was broken. The blasting of a reputation leaves no débris behind. The blood that is drawn from the scratch of a pin lurking in the way of the purest kiss will soil more whiteness than the scattering of the blackest calumny. The bacillus of a lie has never been discovered—and the breathing of the vilest slander does not pollute the air any more than the whispering of the devoutest prayer.

Marcel stood thinking a moment. The atmosphere was as before. But Hassan was the father of his betrothed. He had heard that defamation. Would he give it credence? Surely not—without

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further evidence. And none existed. At any rate nothing could be done at present. Worry was useless. He must wait—and try with a laugh to induce a light heart.

“Feu-u-u-u!”

It was a prolonged whistle from the parrot.

Marcel went over to the cage.

“We fixed him,” said the bird, repeating a phrase it had picked up from some one and practised daily—and this time the remark was certainly apropos.

“Polly, you’re a bird,” answered Balzar, with as much appropriateness as truth.

“You’re another,” replied the parrot.

“What?” the Captain exclaimed, as if about to strike the bars playfully.

“You’re all right,” explained the green imp rattling off another sentence from its memory.

“Oh! I see—that’s better.”

“Polly!”

“Have a cracker.”

“Cell,” responded the parrot indistinctly, as if trying to learn something new.

“What?”

“Cell,” it said again, a little more plainly.

“Cell—cell!”

“Sell? Oh, yes, sell,” repeated its owner, puzzled and amused with this vague and enigmatic utterance of the feathered philosopher.

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"Cell," it said again, with some improvement in enunciation but with the same ambiguity in meaning.

"I have nothing to sell, Polly, unless it's you."

"Cell thirty," went on the parrot with persistence, one word very much run into the other.

"Sell thirty what?" said the physician, much confused by this equivocal addition. "If I had thirty parrots I think I'd sell them."

"Cell thirty," continued Polly, evidently determined to learn its new lesson and go on with the riddle. "Cell thirty one."

The bird seemed relieved and relapsed into the serene silence of alterations in its toilet: one wise eye on its deft beak, the other on its perplexed master, apparently wondering if the latter understood the oracular phrase.

"Sell thirty one? What does that mean, Polly?"

There was a knock at the door. This interruption stopped further thought.

It sounded a second time—a stealthy knock.

To answer it the physician walked across the surgery and stood a moment with his fingers on the key.

Very gently the knock was repeated.

Balzar turned the lock, the click was very audible, so quiet was the room. The door was opened from the outside—and a girl looked timidly in.

"You Worda?" said the Captain, surprised and

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taking her by the arm and drawing her into the room. "I am glad you have come."

This reassured her, the tone of his voice and the grasp of his hand.

"Are you, Marcel?" she answered, evidently not expecting such a welcome. "It is so strange."

"Why so?"

"Nobody seems glad to see me—except my little pigeon here."

Its head could just be seen nestling in her bosom.

"I shall always be," he responded.

"You know why I do not live at home?" she asked.

"No person ever told me," he replied, in avoidance of a direct answer.

"Marcel," she said slowly, her voice trembling and her head sinking in shame, "you are a physician. You read human secrets—read mine."

"We are all weak and liable to err," he said, with manly sympathy in every word. "Some handsome fellow, I suppose—and you—a woman. Well, you yielded?"

"At a banquet one evening—a cup of sherbet—it was drugged—I fell."

"O Worda!"

"But I was to blame. I was even glad of the sherbet. My mind was drugged, too. I loved him. He swore he would make me his wife."

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"But now?"

"Now, Marcel, I despise him, and I am afraid of him."

The confession came as a blow to Balzar. His face lit up with anger. This frail girl had been suffering for another's evil-doing; that very moment a vow was registered by the young swordsman that he would remember the good and not forget the bad.

Worda raised her eyes to Marcei's.

"No," he decided, with infinite pity and tenderness, "you wrong yourself. You did not fall. Like many another girl you were thrust down."

"O Marcel," she said, "once I was so different—my soul was white. But now, the stains, the blots upon my heart. Lost to all the joys of innocence, I am an outcast—despised——"

"Not by me," he interrupted. "And not by Nazira. You are her sister—and mine."

"Thank you for that word," she said, meeting his glance. "But I am by my betrayer."

"Who?"

"Murad."

Balzar was filled with astonishment. Then indignation took possession of him.

"It was the Pasha," she said.

"Murad?" he repeated.

"He is so wicked," she continued—"he is the kind of man that some women love."

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"But not you, Worda; not you any more?"

"No. He cast me off. Then I realized the truth—the cruel truth, Marcel: I was his plaything for an hour. Ah, why was I so blind? To think of it makes me mad. But some day for all his treachery he will pay the penalty!"

"Yes."

"But you won't kill him, Marcel? You're such a swordsman."

Balzar's answer was slow and firm:

"He shall pay the penalty."

"But Murad could not have succeeded alone."

"Who helped him? Who drugged the sherbet?"

"Osman."

"Then," Marcel replied, "Osman shall die with this," tapping the poniard concealed in the desk.

Worda made a gesture of deprecation.

"It would be but justice," Captain Balzar continued. And his heart meant death—for it was the heart of a soldier of France. "Count on me, I shall fulfil that trust—the hour my duty is over to Napoleon."

"I do not wonder that you are Nazira's knight," she answered.

"But for yourself, Worda," he resumed, coming quickly to the immediate and practical, "you should return to your home. You do not know how Ali and Halima love you, and Nazira is so fond of you."

Near the Throne

"But my father——"

"He will forgive."

"I fear not. I begged him to let me remain—to give me another chance."

"Yes?"

"But he refused."

"Refused you that, Worda?"

"And said that I might return when he sent for me—not till then, that if I came unbidden, he would assert his rights as a father—he is hard, strict, severe, knows no mercy—his heart is marble. But I should not say these things, even to you—for he is my father."

"I shall never repeat them."

"Not even to Nazira?" she questioned.

"No."

"And I do not wish her nor any one else to know that you tried to persuade me to return home."

"Worda, not a syllable of this interview will ever be mentioned by me."

"Not even to Nazira?"

"Not even to her."

"Never?"

"Never," he swore. "You have my promise."

"That's all I want," she responded with absolute confidence.

"Agreed. But think well—your own home is where you should go now," he said, with a glance

Near the Throne

and an inclination of the head in its direction, which was diagonally across the way.

"I have gone too far astray."

"Nazira will plead for you."

"I have no desire to go."

"Why not?"

"Because I should always be conscious of the mark of sin—and feel the scarlet flush of fallen womanhood. No, no—I cannot go. People would hear of my shame."

"No, they would not," he replied, with conviction. "It is a secret."

"They would call me a courtesan. I could not endure their glances—their whispers."

Hassan and Nazira appeared at the door. They were unseen and stopped still in utter dismay.

The music of lutes came floating across from their own house, probably it was Lucine and some of the slaves playing an Egyptian melody that would remind a modern European of the soft plaintive strains of "The Last Rose of Summer"—just as Balzar with all the persuasion at his command, continued:

"Come, Worda, do—no one will ever know."

"He lies!" said Hassan with terrible earnestness, coming forward and leading Nazira who followed reluctantly—for it was to the darkening of her soul that she was going.

"My father!" exclaimed Worda, fearful of his

Near the Throne

wrath and hastening quickly past him through the door into the street. If he had only known the tragedy for which these three words often stand—into the street!

Nazira stood motionless as a statue of bronze,



the only sign of life the tears in her wide brown eyes.

"Now my daughter," asked the father addressing her, "are you convinced?"

"No," she said—and one of the tears dropped down into the rose that was still in her gown. "Perhaps he can explain. Give him a chance."

"He has it now," the Copt replied. Then turning to Balzar he asked: "Will you answer me?"

Near the Throne

"Not a word," was the reply.

"Speak, Marcel," begged Nazira.

"Silence suits guilt," said Hassan with bitterness.

"Clear yourself," she pleaded.

"Impossible," retorted her father, resenting the conscious power of the man who met his rage with calmness.

"I can not believe what they say of you," cried Nazira.

"Was this not proof enough?" demanded Hassan.

But to the inference of the question and the gesture, Balzar said only with firmness:

"You make no charge. How can I reply?"

"Was there no evidence in what I saw?"

"None."

"Did I not come in just as you were——"

"No!" Balzar would not permit him to finish that sentence. "By my faith in——"

"Oh, spare your faith."

"There was nothing that should not be."

"Because I prevented it," said the father, becoming more irate. "But this note to Worda," producing it, "asking her to meet you here today. It was intercepted." And he handed the paper to Nazira that she might see the proof of her lover's despicable falseness.

Nazira's hands trembled as she read the abom-

Near the Throne

inable message and she handed it quickly back to her father as if it were an unclean thing.

Hassan gave it to Balzar.

"It's a forgery!" the Captain exclaimed as soon as he had glanced at it—and then he tore it up.

"How you lie! When you know it was you who —"

"Of what do you accuse me?"

"You ruined Worda."

"Stop!"

"How dare you deny it?"

"Stop, I say!"

"You know you did!"

"Oh, you—unsay that—or," advancing and drawing his sabre on the swift impulse of his heated blood, "I'll—damn you, I'll——"

Nazira clung closely to her father.

This caused but a moment's delay, but in it a wave of self-control swept over Balzar.

"Ah!" he said, throwing his sword on the floor, "I forgot your age and the presence of a woman."

"Monsieur Balzar," said Hassan with cold deliberation, "my daughter Nazira was betrothed to you. She is no more. From this hour I forbid her to see or speak to you."

The two Copts started for the door.

"O father—I——" sobbed Nazira, leaning on

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her father's arm and taking the rose from its fastening in her gown and the ring from its place on her finger and putting it among the petals—while the music from the lutes still came floating in.

“Come, my daughter!” commanded Hassan.



Recovering slightly her self-possession and brushing away her tears she said, dropping the flower :

“The summer of my life has ended—the winter has begun.”

Marcel answered, and his soul was in his voice :

“Good-bye, Nazira, good-bye.”

Hassan led his daughter out.

Near the Throne

"Good-bye," repeated Marcel going after her to the door.

But the Egyptian girl did not look behind.

Stooping low, Marcel knelt down and picked up the flower. The sword was lying at his feet. Picking it up too, he sank into a chair near by, grasped the weapon more tightly—and a vow was on his tongue and in his will. The music ceased. In bitter realization that his love had gone from him to the home of her relentless father, Balzar said again :

"Good-bye—sweetheart."

And perhaps he prayed that the kiss his lips hid among the petals of the rose might find its way to the heart of Nazira.



SECOND INTERLOGUE

THREE WEEKS HAVE ELAPSED

To die and part
Is a less evil—but to part and live,
There, there's the torment.

—LORD LANSDOWNE.

Some men there are—and women too—who exist for eighty years and never live for one. They are the dullards of the earth who merely vegetate. But others have hearts that live months in minutes and breathe a soul into every passion. They are the conquerors who keep aflame the love that makes the world go round. And the revolutions it describes, forced along by this fierce heat, whirling like a great wheel of fortune! Many clinging to it and hoping to be lifted to happiness are dashed to an abyss of misery. A few who are always ready and upon whom the capricious goddess looks with smiling favour are borne on serenely and raised to their own elysium. But even paradise has its gates; and the dwellers there are not prisoners: at any time they may pass out of their own free will, or at the instigation of some fiend may be hurled in disgrace away from the music

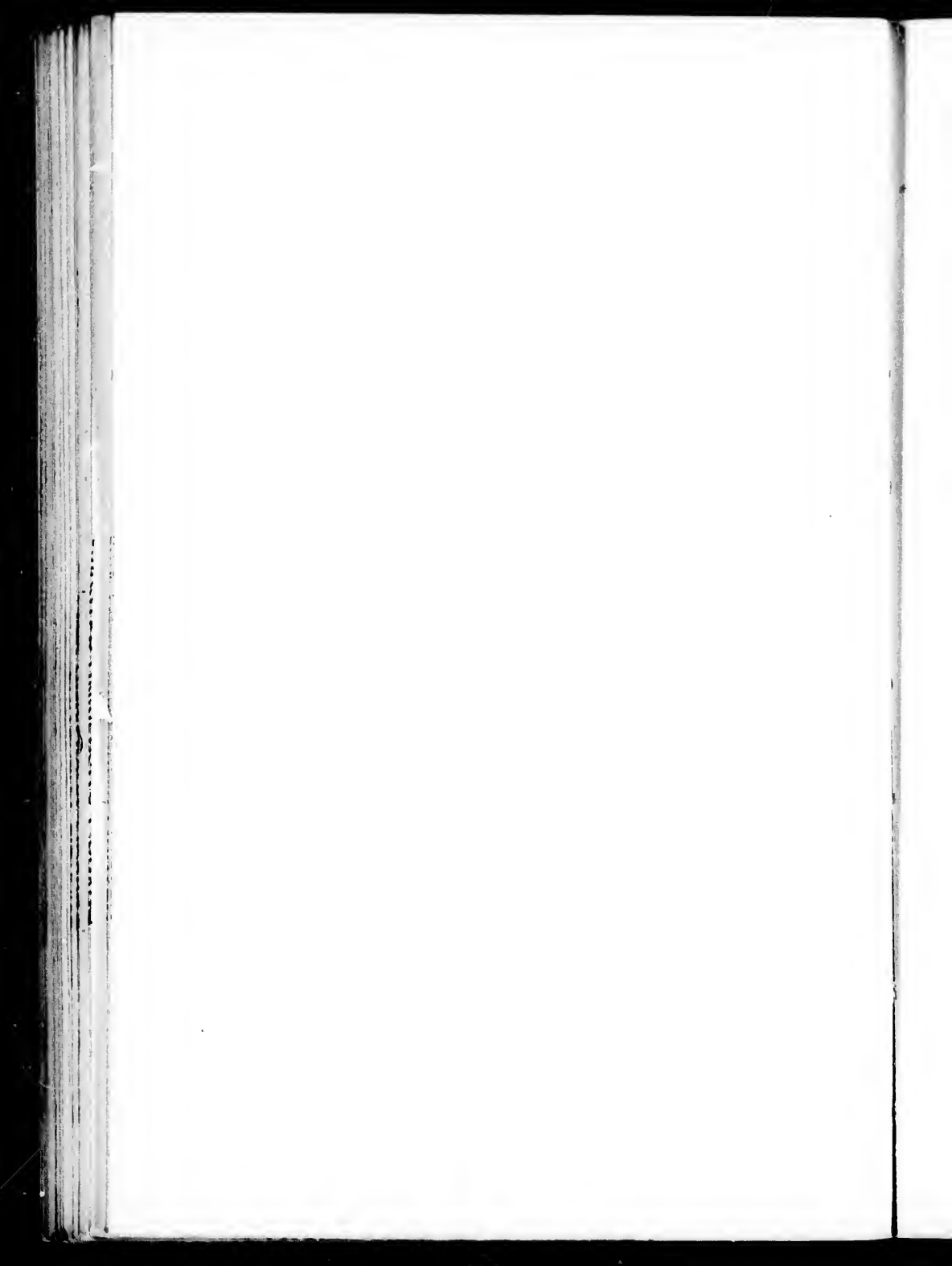
Near the Throne

and light into outer darkness. Three weeks is a short period in all realms except that ruled by the sprite with a bow and arrow, for to a lover, especially to one like Marcel Balzar with a nature so deep and so intense, who is in love with such a superb and fascinating an example of womanhood as Nazira, it seems an æon, and like paying for the moments of heaven in centuries of hell.

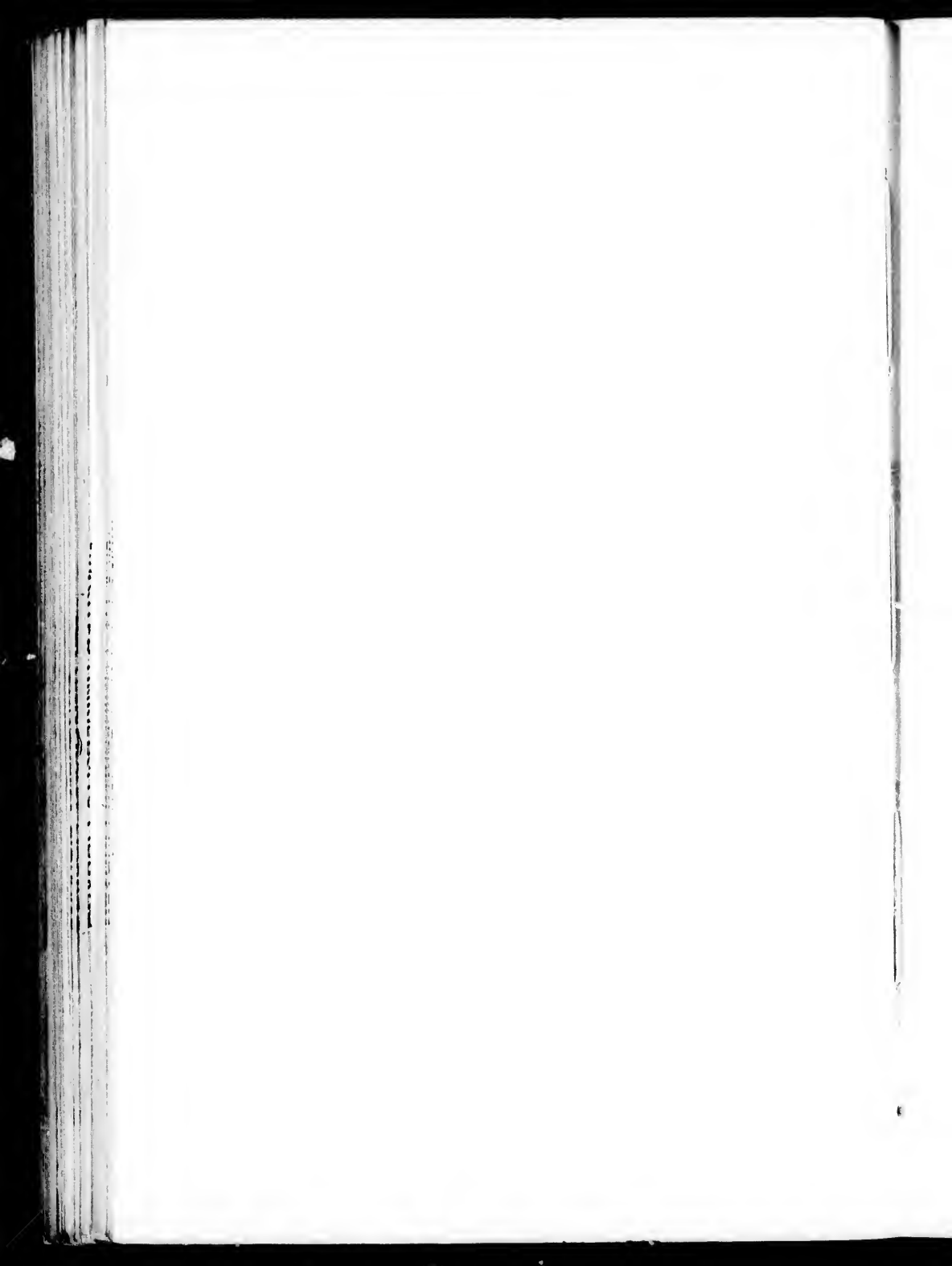


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Book Three
TO GAIN AN EMPIRE



CHAPTER I

THE BASTILLE OF EGYPT

A paved terrace on the western bank of the Nile in front of the Palace of Saladin—now owned by Murad.

Along the edge of the river, whose waters flowed several feet below, a massive stone embankment running not quite breast high.

In the parapet through a movable slab that swung heavily on an iron pivot, its existence known only to the sentries beside the astrologer and the Pasha, a passage leading to the secret dungeons—the Bastille of Egypt.

A wide flight of white marble steps, over which had passed many a prince never to return, ascending to the imposing entrance of the Palace, renowned as well for its machinations as for that vast hall in which were treasured so many relics of the pristine glory of the land of Isis.

The magnificent portico supported by columns of rose granite once in the ancient temples of Memphis and carved with strange symbols of the Pharaohs.

Osman was coming down the steps. He reached

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the last but two, and paused a moment in admiration of the violet beauty of the twilight and the splendour of the eastern sky.

"My mother used to say," he mused, "that when so many myriad stars shine so brightly they portend some tragedy."



A noise a short distance down the embankment attracted his attention.

He stopped to listen. It was the rattle of chains. A sinister smile that was half prophetic came over the old man's features as coming down another step he remarked: "The old saying may prove true tonight."

And the chains rattled again.

The sentence had scarcely dropped from his lips when Sebah and Fuad, the two most trusted of Murad's former Mamelukes, appeared with a woman, whose wrists were securely fastened in irons unnecessarily heavy, and whom they were roughly dragging, unmindful of her struggles or her cries.

"Have mercy!" she begged of them.

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On going nearer, Osman noticed that the prisoner was Madame Henri Balzar, the mother of Marcel. The two minions had succeeded in their mission. But he did not observe a lithe figure slinking in the shadows close to the stone wall and watching all that was happening---the figure of Worda. She could see only indistinctly, but this was as near as she could safely venture.

"I have done no wrong," the wretched lady cried. "Pity me!"

"Come on!" said Sebah, holding the chain and giving her a pull forward with his brutal hands. "Come on!"

Her appealing to them was like throwing roses to monkeys, for the cruelty of a Turk is to be preferred to the clemency of an Arab.

"To the secret prison!" directed Osman, touching the spring and pushing the slab around on its rusty pivot.

Sebah went down first, leading Madame Balzar, followed by Fuad and Osman. The astrologer shut the slab after them, saying as he did so:

"The stars made no mistake to-night."

From the inside he shook it to see that the spring had caught.

The rattle made the figure in the shadows start back a step, but kept her eyes riveted on the stone that swung. It seemed that one of the three was about to return. She waited a moment. But evi-

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dently it was merely to make certain that the fastening was secure.

Worda ran quickly to the place of the opening in the parapet. It would be so easy to forget which stone it was: and one might search for a long time without making any discovery, so perfect was the joining in the masonry.

"A French woman," she said beneath her breath. "Marcel must know of this. The secret prison. How shall I tell him which slab?"

She was about to mark it, but reflected that Murad or one of his sentries might see it in the mean time, immediately make a surmise and an erasure—then wait for the person who dared to know their secret. And Worda was well aware that this would inevitably lead to the death of the wrong man. Therefore she began to count the blocks in the wall to the right of the opening: "One, two, three, four, five—the fifth slab—counting from—I must mark it." She looked cautiously about to see that no one was watching, then tried her ring. It only made an imperceptible scratch. "No use," she concluded, without wasting more time. "The eyebrow pencil Tinette bought from the pedlar," she bethought herself, taking it from her pocket and trying it. "Too black," she decided, smudging the mark over the stone with the palm of her hand.

A footstep sounded.

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"The henna," said Worda without losing another second, and making a yellow cross from her finger tip on the stone. The eastern custom of staining the nails is not altogether devoid of practical uses in emergencies. Slinking into the shadow again and keeping close to the wall, the girl disappeared just as the spring of the slab clicked and Osman came up from the passage with Sebah and Fuad close behind him.

"Be careful of the keys," the old man warned them.

They saluted in answer and walked away between the wall of the river and the steps of the Palace.

"A great stroke of policy," mused Osman, observing a small crowd of people coming from the direction opposite to that the two soldiers had taken—"a feast for the populace."

The old astrologer laughed quietly and waited.

But Murad's was not the only plot afoot that night in front of the Palace of Saladin.

CHAPTER II

THE BEGGAR AND THE KEYS

As the people came nearer and the Bey saw who they were, he stood aside to watch them pass and to listen to their conversation, that he might observe if there were any straws in it indicating the direction of the wind. There were a number of guests coming to the banquet upon which Murad counted so heavily for the increase of his popularity.

Mademoiselle Fleury was walking between Monsieur Taschereau and Monsieur Carmier.

Plutarque said to her:

“There is a rumour——”

“I know,” she broke in, laughing vivaciously, and looking archly from one to the other; “that I’m going to the bad.”

“P-p-precisely.”

“I started it myself.”

Both gentlemen looked at her in surprise.

“I want to be adored,” she added in explanation and went ahead a little to join some friends who were already on the steps.

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"Now," said the faultless youth adjusting his monocle and staring after her, "th-there's something that ought to be l-l-looked after."

Mademoiselle Tinette glanced back over her shoulder as if she knew it, then entered the Palace.

"I am going to have a good time at this feast tonight," remarked Monsieur Plutarque Taschereau in a chummy and confidential manner.

"Your w-w-wife coming?" Carmier asked.

The man of many trades looked at him a moment, wondering if the Gascon were really to blame or his parents. Then with the air of a man who clinches an argument, he said:

"Didn't I tell you that I expect to have a good time?"

"I say, Taschereau, are you r-really married?"

"Married? Me married!"

This exclamation came with such a patronizing gesture that the blond Alphonse was in doubt whether his friend meant to say that of course he was, or that the idea was too absurd.

But to relieve the stutterer's uncertainty Plutarque added:

"I take a bird's eye view of matrimony."

Monsieur Carmier was not much enlightened by this confession, therefore he inquired: "What's that?"

"Look down on it," was the prompt reply. "Married! Am I baldheaded? Have I that

Near the Throne

tired look? Are all the buttons off my shirt? Me married? What's the use of having a wife when you can have worry without one?"

"P-p-precisely," Carmier agreed. "Th-that's a c-clever idea! But——"

"I'll tell you a secret," put in the genial philosopher, as if he were the speaker who had not been permitted to finish his sentence. "My wife——"

Carmier grasped him by the hands and shook them warmly. "Then you're not a b-b-bachelor?" he said evidently pleased to hear it—though Monsieur Taschereau had never done him any harm.

"No," was the satisfying answer.

"Where is she?"

"Don't know. I'm a widower."

The truth was that Monsieur Carmier was looking for a sympathizer, but he might have concluded that interrogation in this quarter would not end his quest. Evidently he caught sight of Mademoiselle Fleury, for without another remark he left his companion and hastened up the steps and in among the gay and colored lights of the Palace.

Plutarque Taschereau was not left long alone. Another and larger group of guests came up immediately. Among them were Hassan and his daughter. Near them a lame beggar hobbled;

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his back was stooped with the misfortunes and hardships of many years, so that you could see less of his face or whatever of it was not hidden beneath his long white beard, than of his hair which was snowy and combed in spite of his mendicancy. As Nazira walked across the pavement with her father, she dropped a small coin into the beggar's uplifted palm. As if in deep gratitude for her kindness the old man tried to kiss her hand. She allowed it—he was so old and was clean. He barely touched her delicate skin with his lips but as he withdrew she felt where the tips of his fingers were a piece of paper pressed against her hand. Instinctively she closed her hand upon it, then Osman came up and spoke to her father. It was a note. The two men engaged in conversation. She took this opportunity to turn aside and read it. The writing was scarcely decipherable—it faltered so unevenly from the trembling pen of the lame beggar. If Nazira had only known with what it trembled! But she managed to make out the words:

“I can tell you of some one of whom you might like to hear. He sends a message by me. Come out soon from the Palace.”

She quickly slipped the note away as her father and Murad came up.

“You heard the betrothal is ended?” said Hassan, as if the remark were a preliminary step,

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and not noticing that the beggar was listening with an eager carelessness.

"Yes," answered the Pasha.

"You remember you promised me that letter?"

"I sent it to you."

"You sent it to me?"

"By Captain Balzar. He has been acting as my aide."

The falsehood slipped easily and gracefully from his lips. Surely Allah must love a prevaricator so adroit and so cheerful! Then there is always something artistic about a good honest liar. Fabrication is the link between the Orient and the Occident.

"I have not received the letter yet," the merchant replied.

"The Frenchman must have opened it."

"And to avenge himself——"

"Sent the document to Bonaparte," added Murad.

"Poor Orde," whined the beggar who was right beside them. "Poor deaf Orde Hafid—so hungry, poor Hafid—deaf."

"Get out of the way," said Osman brusquely coming up and seizing the cripple by the shoulders, shoving him roughly to one side as the three Egyptians engaged in a subdued but animated conversation.

That piece of brutality was nearly being the

Near the Throne

astrologer's last. The beggar suddenly straightened himself up to his full height, at once lost all his lameness, quickly drew something shining and sharp from his belt; but the next second Marcel checked this impulse of resentment and shrank back again to the dimensions of the deformed pauper—just in time, for Osman glanced around. And the hour was not yet.

Putting the poniard back in its sheath, his features hard set and his steel gray eyes glistening, Marcel said to himself:

“I have a great trust to fulfil.”

And he watched Nazira and her father enter the Palace with Murad, and saw her look back at him.

“Here!” said the old trickster, assuming a generosity which he did not possess and tossing a coin. “Poor fellow!”

Orde Hafid hobbled toward it with some fears as to whether his disguise had been discovered.

“Heuh!” said Osman beneath his breath, ascending the stairs and smiling as the cripple picked up the piece of counterfeit money. “I've got rid



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of that!" Then to the beggar who bowed in mock gratitude he added: "Now be off—or else—the Nile!"

He too went into the Palace.

"For your master!" added Captain Balzar, with determined emphasis and looking after the Bey until the massive doors were closed by the Arabian servitors. Then flicking the coin into the river he went on: "Murad, that's where you're going!"

Monsieur Taschereau, who had been quietly watching his chance, came up at this moment to Orde Hafid's double.

"A woman taken to the secret dungeons," whispered Balzar to him hurriedly—"the fifth slab, counting in a straight line from a yellow cross on a stone in the river wall? Was that what you told me?"

"That's it," answered Plutarque, as they found the mark and followed the very explicit directions to the opening.

"A Frenchwoman?"

"So said Worda. She was looking for you."

"What cell?" inquired Balzar, feeling for the spring.

Taschereau shook his head.

"What cell?" the Captain asked again.

"I don't know," answered Plutarque.

"What cell?" Marcel repeated in a hesitating way, pushing the stone around on its pivot. He

Near the Throne

thought a moment. Then, as if a light dawned upon his mind, he exclaimed: "Cell thirty one!"

Taschereau looked the wonderment that he would have denied. How did it happen that the surgeon was so omniscient?

"Parrots are useful," admitted Captain Balzar.

The observation was enough for the quick penetration of the old journalist. The possibilities of the green bird before which Murad and Osman had been talking immediately occurred to the wit of the Latin Quarter. Besides, was he not himself fond of all things green: the green grass, the green fields, and the green Chartreuse?

"Dangerous!" Marcel acknowledged, as he peered into the darkness of the passage through which big rats were scampering and stepped down—"but everything worth doing is dangerous. Watch."

The order was obeyed wisely. Monsieur Taschereau walked a few steps toward the Palace, listened carefully for the slightest sound of any one coming, kept one eye on the narrow parade to the east between the wall, and the other on the black distance to the north. From the opening he could just distinguish a faint noise—it was Balzar hammering on the iron doors below. Then he thought he heard a footstep approaching—perhaps one of the sentries. He ran to the opening of the passage.

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“Monsieur!” he shouted.

No answer came—nothing but the hammering.

“Monsieur!” he shouted the second time and more loudly.

In less than a minute Balzar was up and out.

“The door is fastened,” he said, clicking the lock. “I must get the keys.”

The warning was given none too soon, for the quick limbed Taschereau had barely time to disappear by the friendly aid of the shadows which the moonlight fortunately made more dense, when Murad and Osman came out from the Palace.

Balzar, still thinking of the woman in the secret dungeons and of the impregnable iron of the thick doors below, said again to himself as if repetition would smooth away the impossible and enable him to think of a plan of action:

“I must get the keys.”



CHAPTER III

A WINGED MESSENGER

As the Pasha and the astrologer came down the steps the latter said with a questioning glance:

"You excused yourself from the banquet?"

"By urgent work of state," answered Murad, contracting his brows and placing his forefinger to his lips so that his countenance assumed an expression of malign subtlety—"for a short time."

"I have been considering the question we were speaking of."

"And your conclusion?"

Neither noticed how intently the lame mute was listening.

"The best thing to do now is to massacre every Frenchman in Cairo."

"You're a statesman. Brands, bayonets, night—and we're rid of the pests. Every Frenchman? By Allah! English, Italians, Germans and all! I'll kill every foreigner in Egypt! The massacre's the thing!"

Osman was wholly gratified with this hearty adoption of his policy and was eager to outline his scheme for the bloody undertaking.

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"That's my doctrine," he replied. "Egypt for the Egyptians—to the crocodiles with the rest!"

"How soon can it be done?" asked Murad.

"One week hence."

"Too long."

"Let me see—three days."

"One day," said the Pasha, being himself a man of quick and decisive action.

"To make complete arrangements? Impossible. Give me two days."

"All right," Murad agreed. "Within forty-nine hours from now." Then with a gesture of caution toward Orde Hafid, he added: "Beggars have ears."

"Tie up the bag when the cat is out," muttered Balzar with grim satisfaction.

It is very droll, the ease with which an honest man may dupe a consummate rogue. Bravery may be opposed to daring and defeat the boldest adventurer in open combat, but knavery must often be met with chicanery.

"A man will never tell what he has not heard," answered Osman, as they went up the steps to the Palace. Both were conscious of their cleverness and power. This was their dangerous weakness.

"What about these Carthusian monks now in Cairo?" asked Osman.

"They say they've never been out of their cage

Near the Throne

before. They're making a pilgrimage to Jerusalem."

"And expect the protection of Bonaparte in Palestine."

"They're harmless. They may wander about this city, but not one of them shall ever leave it."

"They die with the rest?"

"Why not? There's nothing that I respect in their blood."

"But their habit?"

"I'll hang them all with their own girdles."

As the two Egyptians disappeared, Worda approached cautiously from the opposite direction.

"I'm rather poor myself," she said, going up to the beggar, "but I think I have——"

"Sh!" warned Balzar, as she recognized him and sounds of music came from the half-open doors.

"Marcel!" the girl exclaimed. "What are you doing in that disguise?"

"Where have you been during the past three weeks?" he asked, not heeding her question. "I could not find you anywhere. Keeping my promise to you ended my betrothal to Nazira."

"I heard of it only today, from Lucine."

"I would have broken it, had I got the chance."

"You tried?"

"Yes."

"How?"

Near the Throne

"I called upon Hassan. He refused to see me. I wrote Nazira four times. Her father returned my letters unopened. Everything I sent her was returned except one: a little faded flower she dropped one day—a rose, and in among its petals—a ring. What more can I do?"

Worda thought quickly. "Leave the rest to me," she replied, forming a decision.

"You will do it?" he said, understanding her expression and divining her purpose. "Speak to her for me?"

"Tonight," she answered.

He knew Worda always meant what she said and did what she promised and that her loyalty would find the way. She was aware of his confidence; it pleased her and nerved her.

"I wish," Marcel went on, "you would do something else to help me."

"What?"

"Can you think of any means to send a message to Napoleon?"

"Where is he now?"

"Near Belbeis."

She smiled and took the glossy breasted pigeon out from beneath her robe. "My little pet will take it."

"How?"

"By flying there. That is his home."

"An Antwerp—the best carrier pigeon!" ex-

Near the Throne

claimed the Captain, observing with a fancier's eye the well defined wattles on the bird's short beak and the chocolate bars on its dun wings, noting at the same time that from the convexity of its head



and the tapering of its body toward the tail that it was of the true Belgian breed and likely to possess keenness of sight, strength of wing, speed of flight.

"The pigeon is trained to fly to Belbeis," Worda responded.

"What shall I write the note on?"

"It must be very light," she admonished him.

Near the Throne

Marcel took a letter from his pocket intending to write on the unused side.

"Oh, that will never do!" she said. "It's too heavy!"

"Some cigarette paper," he suggested.

"Excellent!"

"But there are no pens around."

"They wouldn't do anyway."

"You'd scarcely believe how vain I am," the young Copt said, as if making a confession. "I pencil my eyebrows every morning."

The Captain naturally wondered a moment what this little matter of an Egyptian girl's toilet had to do with the present problem.

"Here," she added, handing him the tiny pencil.

"The very thing," he said.

"Be quick!" she urged, fearing one of the sentries might appear.

Leaning on his knee the surgeon wrote in very small characters:

"Bonaparte: Murad has usurped everything—is near the throne. Come quickly and prevent massacre. Balzar."

"Let me tie it on," said Worda.

Both simultaneously went into their pockets. The search was futile.

"No string," she announced in a tone that asked what they were to do now.

But while Balzar was puzzled Worda was busy.

Near the Throne

She deftly ripped a pretty feminine undergarment and pulling out a silk thread tied the message under the carrier's wing.

"Is it secure?" inquired the Captain.

"Perfectly," she assured him, giving the pigeon into his hands.

"Now then—away!"

He threw the bird with its precious despatch off toward the north so as to avoid the sentinels who might be around the Palace.

They watched it circle until its flight could no longer be distinguished in the twilight that had deepened into night.

"Look!" said Marcel, handing his companion a miniature. "Do you like that picture? Nazira gave it me."

Worda stared at the face on the ivory and kissing it cried:

"My mother!"

Marcel Balzar, with his physician's knowledge that all women are sisters beneath the skin, could not help remarking to himself: "There is often more honest worth in an unfortunate girl's heart than there is beneath the snowy robes of saints."

"Marcel," said Worda, looking up and pressing the portrait to her breast, "you have won. I am going home—for her sake."

As she started off Murad walked out from the Palace.

Near the Throne

"Worda!" he called.

Not observing him and kissing the picture again, she repeated the word: "Mother."

Balzar, quickly perceiving her danger, went between them and lifting his right arm to a position that pretended to be apologetic, but was really protective and threatening, begging all the time, prevented Murad from touching her.



The instant Worda saw the Pasha she ran, and so escaped.

Murad could not wisely have followed, even had he wished, as three water carriers who had been invited to the banquet just then came in view.

"Poor Orde," begged Balzar. "Poor Orde Hafid, so deaf and lame."

The guests went into the Palace. Murad walked off slowly on the parade between the building and the wall of the river.

Balzar hobbled after him as far as the marble steps. As the soft sensuous strains of an Egyptian love song floated from the Palace of Saladin, he saw coming out the door the woman he had been waiting for all the evening, who was more to him than life—Nazira.

CHAPTER IV

THE DESIRE OF THE HEART

Intently watching Nazira slowly descend the steps, Orde Hafid hobbled up, anxious yet dreading to speak lest his voice or the glance of his eyes might betray him too soon to her who knew both so well.

"You gave me this note?" she said, very close to his ear so as to avoid the necessity of speaking loudly.

He bowed assent.

"You have a message for me?"

"Yes," he answered, keeping his face downward as if his back were bent very much, and assuming the feeble tones of the beggar from India.

"From whom?"

"From Marcel Balzar."

"What is it?" she asked, forgetting to restrain her eagerness.

His head lifted involuntarily as if to reply. That was the movement he should have controlled.

"Ah!" she exclaimed staring at him. "You are not Orde Hafid, the deaf beggar. You are——"

"Sh!" he said, removing the beard from his chin and straightening himself to his full height.

Near the Throne

"Why have you done this?" she demanded.

"I wanted to see you, Nazira, and could not."

"Because you should not."

"I longed for a sight of your face," he answered, "for the sound of your voice, the caress of your arms—so often I have felt upon my own the sweet touch of your lips and your eyes are always looking into mine."

She started to leave him and return to the Palace, realizing not only her revulsion at meeting this man again and her duty to her father, but the danger she was in.

"Nazira," he entreated. "Listen to me."

"I must not," she replied with decision. "Your past in Paris. Your life in Cairo."

"Well," he said, waiting for the inference from these phrases. This line of attack was certainly unexpected.

"Is it true?" she questioned with firmness and fear and indignation all mingled in her voice. It is strange how a woman will argue against herself and her hopes.

"Surely," he responded, "you are not one of those who believe a man's past life should be immaculate!"

"And a man's present?" she retorted. "Words—that afternoon—my father—your refusal to explain."

"Do not speak of that."

Near the Throne

"The evidence was so much against you."

"Evidence!" he repeated with astonishment on every feature.

"Yes."

"There was none."

"My father thought there was—so did I. And you did not even try to clear yourself."

"Clear myself!"

"My father gave you the chance."

"There was nothing to——"

"Do now."

"Trust me, Nazira."

"No—that will not satisfy me."

"See how unreasonable you are."

"Unreasonable?"

"Could I not easily lie to you? I ask only one thing: you have said you are willing to believe in my word—believe in me."

"You refuse then? Be it so."

"Trust me—for a little while."

"Why should I?"

"For the sake of our love."

"The past is dead."

"But surely——"

"You can have nothing to say that I care to hear."

"Do not cut me off like——"

Her whole body made a gesture of intense impatience and disgust.

Near the Throne

"Then I deny it," he said—"it was not true! There was nothing between Worda and myself that was wrong. Now are you content?"

"No! I agree with you: you could easily lie to me. I believe you," hesitating and looking earnestly at him—"guilty."

After a moment of surprise and mental darkness Balzar took her wrist and answered with authority:

"No!"

"This is the end," Nazira replied, releasing herself from his grasp.

"It cannot be," he urged, pleading with the Egyptian. "For a long time now you have been my hope. As we walked in the shadows of the old pyramids and among the ruins of the crumbling palaces my soul was filled with you. You have been my guardian spirit, my angel, my goddess! Your image made my breast a chaste temple—and there my heart has worshipped you. When in your presence and listening to your voice my soul seemed lifted up as if on music's wings. When you smiled upon me I felt it sweet to live, to love, in the light of your kindly eyes—and longed to call you my own. You are all the world to me. For months your glance has been a soft chain—I am your slave, and you my queen! O Nazira, be my bride—through all our days—till death—forever. For I love you more than life or duty—or God!"

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"Surely," he responded, "you are not one of those who believe a man's past life should be immaculate?"

Near the Throne

"It is no use speaking further," the girl replied looking him straight in the face, utterly indifferent to his prayer.

"Yes, Nazira."

"I have said it is not. Love is too near to hate. There was a time when you could do anything you wished with me. But you can never win me back again. This is false—like all you have said. And I hate you!"

Balzar answered passionately with his hands outstretched beseechingly, but not venturing to touch her:

"You do not. You love me still, Nazira—you do—you do—you love me now!"

Their eyes met squarely—such an unswerving piercing look, as if they were trying to search each other's souls. Then as if in half denial of the last sentence which she had spoken with such vehemence, the girl's eyelids drooped and she regarded him with a strange gaze through her long black lashes. But neither moved an inch either forward or backward.

Finally Nazira, bowing her head, said slowly; and there was fear and even shame in her tones:

"I want you, Marcel. In spite of all I love you—I believe in you. These weeks have been so dreary without you, dear one. I have been in misery. At night I waken and cry out for you. Why do you suppose my cheeks are pale and my eyes are

Near the Throne

sunken? It is because my whole being longs for you, my heart's life—and you have been away from me. Oh, I want you, for my husband!"

"Nazira!" exclaimed Marcel breathlessly to her and starting a step. But his surprise and perplexity quickly changed to resolution before Nazira, putting her arms around his neck, said as he kissed her:

"It is true, Marcel, every word, every word—my Marcel!"

All the repressed intensity of her nature was poured into those two last words—the words that Marcel would so often have given the world to hear. As he put his arm around her waist she removed it and said:

"But—I cannot."

"You must," he answered, so near to her and with intense fervour.

Nazira felt again what numberless times she had longed in vain for: his warm breath upon her cheek and the sound of his soft pleading voice, full of richer music to her ears than the strains of the waltz drifting from the Palace.

"You know," she reminded him, "the authority parents have over their children in France?"

"What of that?"

"It is greater in Egypt—it is absolute."

"Disobey!" he responded in mingled supplication and command, taking her tightly in his arms.

Near the Throne

"It is impossible."

"We are our own law!" he urged.

"My love," she answered in his embrace and twining her arms about his neck, "I cannot—or see you any more."

Just at that moment Lucine appeared and said excitedly:

"Your father is looking all over for you. He is coming."

Balzar instantly slipped on his beard and assumed the attitude of the decrepit Orde Hafid. Nazira pointed in the direction opposite the Palace and said:

"Quickly!"

Lifting her hand to his lips, Marcel responded:

"We shall meet again—my wife!"

Then he hobbled into the darkness.

Hassan, coming down the steps in a few seconds, demanded of his daughter:

"Where have you been?"

"Taking the air, father."

"With me," added Lucine.

Nazira pressed the maid's hand in acknowledgment of the favour and said with a shrug of her shoulders:

"It was so oppressive inside." Then she continued lightly, "Come, Lucine—to the music. Will you give me your arm, father?"

Hassan took them in just in time to miss see-

Near the Throne

ing Murad and Osman. But the merchant had noticed the absence of the two conspirators, and wondered if it meant a pistol or the river, whether the night would end with a shot or a splash—and who was destined to be the man.



CHAPTER V

THE PRISONER AND THE CHOICE

"I want my throne to be founded," said Murad as he and his companion stopped a few paces from the opening to the secret passage, "on the good will of all Egyptians."

"Philanthropy or patriotism?"

"Neither. Policy."

"A wise precaution."

"There are many not at the feast who should be here."

"True."

"Send for them, Osman."

"Fuad?"

"No. One of themselves."

"Who?" Immediately catching sight of the beggar he added: "Orde Hafid?"

"He will do," answered Murad.

"It looks as if it were time to go," thought Captain Balzar, starting off slowly and not observing the approach of Taschereau down the steps.

"Invite the people," proceeded Murad, which continuance of the discussion gave the strategic

Near the Throne

Plutarque the opportunity to walk slowly across unobserved behind all three. "Camel drivers, cobblers, fish mongers, pedlars—river rats—everybody."

"Orde," called Osman, going after him.

Marcel was hastening as much as was consistent with the lameness of the mendicant whose infirmities furnished him with so effective a disguise.

"He's deaf," said Murad.

Osman called more loudly:

"Hafid!"

Balzar quickened his steps. The noise had brought in Sebah and Fuad.

"Orde Hafid!" shouted Osman again, as Murad caught up to him and caught hold of the old beggar's cloak. "Orde! You——"

The Pasha pulled the cloak off.

Seeing his disguise ruined, Marcel instantly threw off his wig and beard.

"Balzar!" exclaimed the Pasha.

"The beggar from India!" laughed the Captain, who had already drawn his poniard.

Murad's scimitar leaped from its scabbard.

Marcel rushed furiously upon the Moslem. Le Beau Sabreur's hand was uplifted, every muscle and sinew strained. This seemed to be his only chance now, and he was desperate. The blade was descending, aimed at the Pasha's heart when his arm was gripped from behind by Sebah. In

Near the Throne

an instant Fuad seized his left. He had tried to kill this enemy and failed.

"Chains for him," commanded Murad.

The two Mamelukes quickly disarmed the Chasseur and placed him securely in irons.

At this moment Plutarque Taschereau disappeared in the darkness toward the city.

"Keep the sabre," Murad said after examining the weapons of the prisoner.

Sebah took the trophy eagerly.

The Pasha himself appeared to desire a smaller souvenir.

"Give me the poniard," he said.

Fuad obeyed.

"It is strange," continued Murad, eyeing Captain Balzar with a sneer. "Strange the son should so quickly follow the mother."

"What do you mean?"

"Just what I say."

"My mother in prison?"

"She is safe below." And he tramped exultantly upon the pavement.

"I saw her at home an hour ago," answered the Frenchman, though the argument was more to convince himself than his opponent.

"Much may happen in an hour," remarked the Pasha sententiously. "Would you know her voice?"

"My mother's voice?"

Near the Throne

"Lead him into the next cell," replied Murad addressing the soldiers, and taking a whip from Sebah. "Then touch the woman with this."

"That'll make her speak," added Osman in approval.

"I want no proof," protested Balzar.

"But you'll have it now," the Arabian replied.

"I believe you."

"Go on!" commanded the Pasha.

"The cell——" put in Osman.

"Thirty one," said Murad thinking the astrologer meant they should be reminded of the number.

"Is not far along the passage," added the old Saracen suggestively.

Murad was quick of perception. He said:

"He could listen from here. Let him."

Sebah had already opened the entrance to the secret dungeons and he at once descended. Captain Balzar struggled hard, but all in vain: Murad held him and the chains were strong and heavy. In a few seconds screams were heard.

"Again!" called Osman down the passageway.

"Stop!" shouted Balzar, indignant and enraged—but powerless.

As another crack of the lash sounded out cruelly he heard his mother crying:

"Mercy!"

Near the Throne

"Now do you believe?" asked Murad mockingly.

"Yes," was Marcel's reply, his nails pressed into his palms.

"Call Sebah," ordered the Pasha to Osman.

Turning away from them Marcel Balzar made a vow for whose fulfillment he believed heaven would lend its power:

"The trust is threefold now. And I will not forget them—Sebah, Osman, Murad. The first for vengeance, the second for justice, the third for triumph!"

The Pasha was gazing down at the river when a rattle of Balzar's chains attracted his attention. Then he turned and stood with folded arms in safe defiance, looking upon his foe as a hunter would regard a frenzied beast in a cage. The French Captain, like a madman who yet has method, turned to him and repeated the words of the trust with an emphasis born of fury and determination:

First:

"Vengeance!"

Murad took a step forward.

Then:

"Justice!"

There was still more of the taunt in the smile of the Egyptian.

Finally:

"Triumph!"

Near the Throne

This threatening enigma Murad met with the masterful indifference that he had cultivated so assiduously.

"Balzar," he said resuming the subject that had been occupying his mind, "I shall be liberal with you."

Swinging open the door of the secret dungeons, Osman in obedience called down :

"Sebah!"

"You may select your own sentence," continued Murad, after a moment's thought. "I shall give you a choice: your mother's freedom——" the Pasha paused a moment, as a click of bolts below seemed to accentuate the necessity for the acceptance of this offer—"and," he went on, "her safe conduct to the French army, with your imprisonment for life."

"Or death," remarked the astrologer beneath his breath.

Sebah, entering in time to hear the last sentence, exchanged glances with Fuad.

"Or else," continued Murad, giving the option: "your freedom, with your mother's immediate sale to an Arab slave dealer, leaving tonight for the Soudan."

"A most liberal offer," said Osman making more marked his master's sarcasm.

"It is no choice!" replied Marcel.

"Your reason?"

Near the Throne

“There is but one alternative for a man to take—the first.”

“Will you take it?” Murad asked with feigned eagerness. “And give for her——”

Captain Balzar’s answer was instant and unequivocal:

“My life!”



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CHAPTER VI

A VEILED MESSAGE

Murad immediately gave his orders to Sebah and Fuad, who were quick to obey, not so much because they delighted to mete out cruelty to any European but because of the despicable servility of their natures.

"Remove the prisoner," commanded the Pasha with an ostentatious show of honesty in carrying out his compact, "to the dungeon under the north wall. Release Madame Henri Balzar at once and provide her safe escort as far as the army of Bonaparte."

"But," interposed the Captain, "you will grant me one request?"

"Name it."

"Permission to see my mother before she departs and I go to," hesitating as though in doubt how to characterize his sentence—"to what I have earned."

Murad, touching Osman on the shoulder and walking a few steps away with him, called the Mameluke:

Near the Throne

“Sebah!”

The Pasha's move was to give a contemptible instruction to that sycophant, though he intended it to have the appearance of wishing to carefully consider the question with the astrologer before making answer.

The soldier came quickly to his superior's side.

“Take the woman away,” was Murad's order to him, “while Balzar is speaking with her—back to her own cell—thirty one.”

Sebah saluted in obedience.

“There's some one coming,” said Osman in warning, and looking into the darkness toward the east. “It's Taschereau.”

“Give him the opportunity to speak to Balzar,” replied Murad surmising that that was probably just what the old Frenchman wanted and at once conceiving a plan to turn the interview against the Captain and his secretary and to his own advantage.

“Fuad!” called Osman.

The Mameluke immediately joined them and the four engaged in earnest conversation. Taschereau imagining he was unobserved or at least unheeded stole cautiously to Balzar. Marcel harboured no such delusion but having little to lose and everything to gain was prepared to take chances and run risks.

Near the Throne

"Here's a file," whispered the practical Plutarque. "And a letter."

Captain Balzar took them quickly and hid them under his coat. But as he did so, he perceived that his action had been seen. To cover his possession of the file, which he was extremely anxious not to lose, he withdrew the paper and glancing at it with well feigned caution, said to Taschereau, being careful to speak loudly enough for the listening Murad to hear:

"From Bonaparte."

The Pasha, with his customary quick intelligence, made a correct surmise and whispered to Osman:

"A despatch."

Balzar recognized the familiar writing at sight, the strange and characteristic hand of the little Corsican.

Monsieur Taschereau by this time was endeavouring to make good his escape. His athletic days at the Sorbonne now served him well.

"Arrest him!" ordered Murad a trifle perfunctorily. In reality he cared little for the custody of the old journalist—just yet.

Sebah and Fuad ran in pursuit.

Turning to Captain Balzar, Murad said as if nothing had happened:

"Your request is granted."

"I thank your Excellency," answered Marcel

Near the Throne

with as much courtesy as such a phrase should be delivered with were it addressed to the first gentleman of Europe.

The two soldiers returned at this moment, but without Monsieur Taschereau; evidently he was fletcher of foot or knew intimately some of the dark and tortuous byways among the ruins of this part of the city.

"I hold you responsible for your prisoner," said Murad to them. "But Balzar, that letter—very clumsily done."

"It's a private letter," answered the Captain.

"From Napoleon," retorted the Egyptian. "So much the better. Make haste."

Captain Balzar knew there was no use endangering his wrist in an unequal struggle. He expected to need it the next time his hand grasped a sabre. And he hoped that time would be soon. Therefore he reluctantly handed the document as demanded.

"Take the prisoner to his cell," continued Murad to Fuad and Sebah, opening the letter and reading—a favour Marcel had scarcely expected:

"Dear Doctor: Please call at once. My toothache is worse."

There was no signature.

It was with difficulty that Balzar concealed his surprise and Murad his chagrin.

"A letter in cipher!" the Chasseur said to him—

Near the Throne

self beneath his breath, translating it from their code: "Left Belbeis noon today. Wait for the roll of the drum."

The young Saracen was plainly enraged.

Then Balzar spoke aloud to the usurper:

"Murad, when you want me, send for me."

"I shall."

"With my sword as a pen I could write a prescription for you that would cure you of all aches and pains."

"Away with him!" commanded the Pasha endeavouring to appear indifferent to this bold affront.

"Murad," continued the Captain, though held securely in the custody of Sebah and Fuad and going toward the opening to the secret dungeons, "Napoleon has a message for you."

"Where is it?"

"He will send it."

"How?"

As Marcel disappeared with the two soldiers his reply rang back:

"Wrapped round a bullet!"

CHAPTER VII

THE TEMPTATION OF THE PURPLE

Left alone with Osman and looking after the irrepressible though vanquished soldier of France whose receding footsteps were still audible, Murad said rather testily for a man endowed with so comprehensive a mind :

“His name sickens me. Wherever I go I hear it: in palace, on street, in hospital, in camp, in trench—nothing but Balzar, Balzar, Balzar!”

“Yet,” suggested the astrologer anxious to turn his master from the contemplation of so unpleasant a subject, “with Balzar out of the way——”

Seeing the vista unfolding plainly before him, the Pasha responded warmly :

“I am near the throne.”

“Tomorrow morning——” the old man went on with insinuation in the raising of his brows and the wrinkling of his forehead.

“The coronation!” answered the youthful conspirator, his voice swelling with enthusiasm. “Then I shall begin—to build again the empire of the Pharaohs!”

“And tomorrow night?”

Near the Throne

"Nazira!"

"Yes, Murad!"

"Here—in the Palace of Saladin!"

"A creature beyond all dreams!"

Breathing faster the younger Egyptian walked toward the river wall, but his eyes were fixed on the entrance as if he saw the vision approaching, for the doors swung open as he continued:

"Oh, for such a woman—my crown, my sceptre, my kingdom!"

At that moment Hassan and his daughter emerged from the Palace.

"You have quite forgotten Marcel Balzar?" the merchant was saying as they came down the steps.

"Father, do I not always obey you?" the daughter replied evasively, though apparently he did not notice it, her manner was so assuring.

"You should be ashamed of such a man," he said, half in caution, half in reprimand.

"Ashamed of Marcel?" she exclaimed as they disappeared. "No. When I blush it will not be for him!"

Then the two Mamelukes returned and resumed their sentry duty, pacing up and down the full length of the wall.

"You have not read the heavens for some time, Osman," said the Pasha. "Do so."

"Yes, your Excellency."

Near the Throne

The astrologer bowed and went into the Palace.

With all Murad's craft and daring, with all his heartless cruelty and consuming ambition, he had a lofty intellect: for he loved the song of a nightingale as well as the clash of battle—he was a highly educated and cultured Oriental, endowed with the mind of a Teutonic philosopher and the soul of an Arabic poet.

“How beautiful!” he said scanning the eastern sky. “The evening is like a lovely maiden: the stars are the pearls upon her neck, the dark clouds her braided hair, the deepening space her flowing robe. For a diadem she has the heavens where the seraphs dwell. Her eyes are the white lotus flowers, which open to the rising moon. And her voice is the rippling of the waters. I wonder why this lovely maiden comes arrayed so divinely—sultana of the night?”

Osman came back with a telescope, a compass, and a large book under his arm. “Perhaps Balzar——” he suggested.

Murad read his thought before it was uttered. “Good!” he said. “Have him brought.”

The two sentries were just passing. The astrologer gave them the order:

“Bring your prisoner—Captain Balzar.”

They went down quickly to the dungeons.

“Those locks are in good repair?” asked Murad, as a click was heard. “See to it, Osman.”

Near the Throne

"I shall," answered the Bey.

"We want no escapes."

Sebah and Fuad now returned with Captain Balzar.

"Osman was just going to read my fortune in the stars," said Murad to Marcel with mockery in every tone. "He is a great astrologer."

And Osman added:

"Perhaps Balzar would like me to reveal what the shining sybils say of his destiny?"

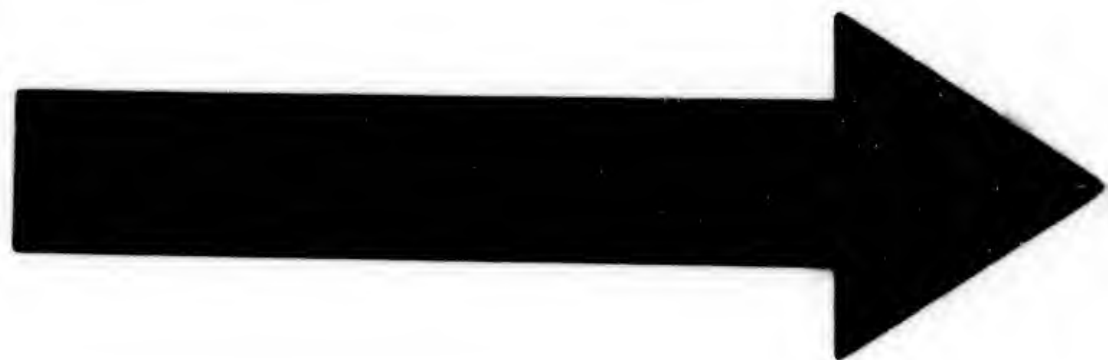
"Oh," retorted the Captain holding the chains on his wrists to keep them from breaking where he had filed them. "I can do that trick on my own account."

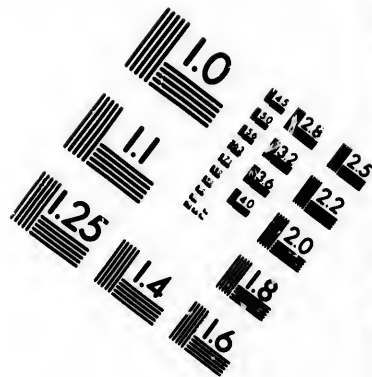
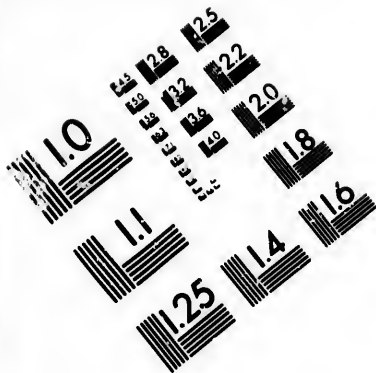
"Indeed?" questioned the old charlatan.

"Besides," continued the prisoner, "my fortune is with myself—not with the stars! And my right arm," he continued, assuming the attitude of the beggar when he stepped in between Worda and her betrayer, "can do what all the gods in the universe refuse to do in the hour of peril—protect a woman."

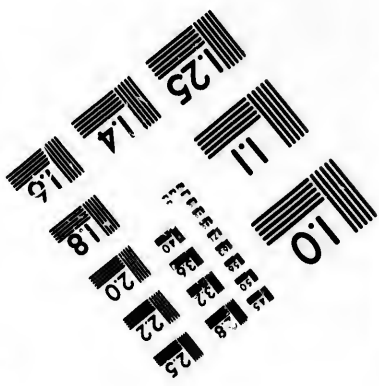
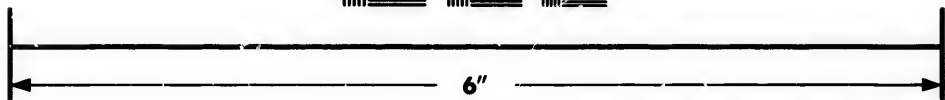
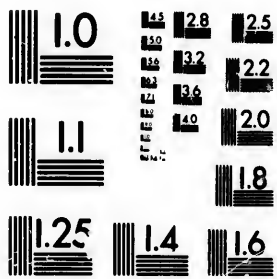
"Where?" inquired Osman with sarcasm, "did you learn the science of deciphering the heavens?"

"When I was decapitating the earth—shooting Mamelukes!" was the quick retort. "Perhaps Murad would like me to read what the twinkling sentinels reveal of him. It is fitting that they shine at night. Do you see that star—just above the Citadel?"





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Near the Throne

"The small one?" asked the Pasha looking in the direction to which Balzar pointed as accurately as the weight of the irons that bound him would permit.

"Yes, your Excellency," answered Marcel endeavouring to be more specific. "Beneath that brilliant planet."

"I do."

"Can you distinguish toward the east a dark cloud?" the Captain continued. "A mere speck upon the horizon?"

"What of it?" asked the Saracen.

"In forty nine hours," replied Captain Balzar with pregnant emphasis and fearless directness, "the star will have disappeared beneath the cloud. The star is yours!"

"To the dungeon with him," ordered Murad to Sebah and Fuad, becoming choleric.

They proceeded at once to obey.

"Wait!" commanded the Pasha led on by the temptation of the purple, and reflecting a moment. "The Nile would be better."

"He would make good food for fishes," suggested Osman with a sinister smile.

"Put him in the beggar's rags again," said Murad.

The Mamelukes quickly did as they were bidden.

"Fuad, a sack!" resumed the Mahometan observing the prisoner stoop a little and fortunately

Near the Throne

not divining the reason. "Balzar seems a little weary."

Fuad went with eager haste.

"But," put in Osman, "the water will refresh him."

"And he will find the sack quite a soft bed in which to lie," sneered Murad.

"And sleep," added Osman.

"And dream," said the Pasha to complete the taunt. Then, handing Balzar the coveted piece of paper that his stratagem had retained, he said: "This letter is no use to me now. Take it to Nelson at Alexandria—the current will carry you that way."

"You think so?"

"Yes," said Osman with well feigned patriotism. "Tonight begins a new era for the people of Egypt."

"New eras do not begin with treachery," declared Balzar.

"What do you mean?" inquired Murad.

"That the people of Egypt must wait," was the abrupt reply which was at once an announcement and a threat.

"Wait for what?" asked Osman.

Looking straight into the eyes of Murad, Balzar responded:

"For the death of a traitor who is—near the throne!"

Near the Throne

Fuad returned with the desired sack and placed it on the pavement in front of the other four men.

"Put him in this," ordered the Pasha to him and Sebah, touching the cloth with his sandal. "Then toss him over that," pointing to the wall. "They say crocodiles have a weakness for Europeans."

"No doubt they would relish a little white meat," said Osman.

"But I think," ventured Balzar seeing that a species of repartee was in order, "they would like a little dark meat better—though they might prefer it without dressing."

"Osman," said Murad dismissing the jest, possibly because he had gotten the worst of it, probably because he was anxious to despatch his enemy without further loss of time, "see that no one comes to the windows of the Palace. We want no witnesses."

The astrologer went immediately up the marble steps and into the house of Saladin, closing the doors after him.

Murad, addressing Balzar, continued:

"We are playing a fatal game, Monsieur. It is for your life or mine."

"You have said it," replied the Captain sullenly.

Then turning to his two soldiers the Pasha said:

"Sew him up tight—stab him and then to the

Near the Throne

Nile. I will go down the river bank and watch for the splash. As soon as I see it, I'll shoot in recognition that you have done your duty. Then, Sebah, as a signal that all is well you fire one shot."

"Yes," said Sebah.

"You understand?" asked Murad anxious to make sure that there should be no mistake in carrying out his plans.

"We put him in the sack," answered Fuad.

"I stab him," went on Sebah.

"Over he goes into the river," added Fuad.

"You see the splash," continued Sebah.

"I shoot, well done," said the Pasha.

"I will answer, all's well—with one shot!" answered Sebah almost impatient for the work.

And Balzar, the least disconcerted—so forcibly did the droll in even the most serious things appeal to him—remarked to himself:

"I wonder what I do all this time?"

Murad was evidently well pleased that his faithful and willing minions knew the details of his method so thoroughly.

"Bon voyage, Monsieur Le Beau Sabreur!" he said with a laugh.

"In forty nine hours—to your Excellency!" returned Marcel.

As the Pasha disappeared in the darkness of the passageway between the Palace and the wall of

Near the Throne

the river, his eyes aglow and his whole frame aquiver, he called to the Mamelukes simply the word:

“Begin!”

But yet those two small syllables were spoken as the prince of demons might say them to the evil spirits that are swift to fulfil his fiendish purposes. In it there was victory and malediction. And it was the signal.



Sebah said with a sneer:

“Now, Balzar, are you ready?”

“Ready?” he replied breaking the chains asunder where he had filed them. “Ready? Damn it—I’m always ready!”

The Mamelukes were unprepared for this move.

Grasping the hilt of his own sabre which was in Fuad’s scabbard the Captain drew it forth like a flash of lightning and gave the challenge:

“For years I’ve been a fighter, so one fight more—come on!”

Sebah alone having a sword now, rushed quickly upon the rebel, but was no match for the skilful blade of Balzar: he was thrust through the heart

Near the Throne

and fell writhing upon the stones and in an instant the Arabian was dead.

"Vengeance!" shouted Marcel, pointing with one finger at his fallen enemy and holding up the gleaming steel.

Then, seeing the danger he was in, the Chasseur picked up Sebah's sword and threw it violently into the river. But Fuad, being left without any other arm, was already drawing his pistol. Balzar closed in upon him. They struggled fiercely for possession of the loaded weapon of death. The Mameluke got the soldier of France on his knees, but he held on with a grip of iron, then with one mighty wrench that wellnigh broke Fuad's wrist he forced the pistol from the Egyptian's grasp and threw him to the pavement. Marcel, realizing there was no time to lose, even though he seemed to be master, pointing to the dead man, said:

"He will make good food for fishes. Be quick—into the sack with him! But first—the keys!"

The sentinel appeared not to understand.

Pointing below to the subterranean dungeons, Balzar added: "Cell thirty one."

Fuad hesitated.

"The keys," repeated Marcel, "or," raising the sword even with the Arab's throat and drawing it with a hissing sound through the air.

Fuad understood: he immediately got the desired and valuable pieces of metal from the cloth-

Near the Throne

ing of the bleeding Mameluke and gave them to the victor.

With the happiness of anticipation Marcel ejaculated:

"You are free, mother!"

Together they put Sebah into the sack and carried it to the wall, Marcel saying:

"His fortune is with the stars—they leave him to the crocodiles. My fortune is in my heart and the sabre of Aboukir!"

As they climbed up by four projecting stones to the top of the wall and lifted the sack, Fuad, trembling for his own safety, said:

"Black night on the river."

"Yes," answered Captain Balzar ominously, "and under it too!" Then looking into the blackness past the Palace, he said: "The game, my Pasha—for your life or mine? You think you've killed me! But you're wrong. For I live——" swinging the sack with the assistance of Fuad and tossing it into the river where the moonlight streamed—the loud splash being answered by the deceived Pasha's pistol in the distance—"to win!"

The terrified Mameluke could only slink down from the wall and look on in amazement at the daring figure outlined against the sky. In quick, confirmatory answer rang out Captain Balzar's shot:

Ping!

THIRD INTERLOGUE

TWO DAYS HAVE ELAPSED

The war of elements no fears impart
To love, whose deadliest bane is human art :
There lie the only rocks our course can check.

—LORD BYRON.

The unseen is often the most potent. The mightiest forces do not come within the scope of human vision. And the powerful is the more to be dreaded when it is hidden, especially by those against whom it is directed with wrath guided by reason. For two days Marcel Balzar kept assiduously under cover; yet no man in Cairo was so active or occasioned the watchful Murad more concern. The rage of the Pasha knew no bounds when he heard of the escape of the Captain. Men on horses and camels were sent along the river and out on the desert, with promises of rich reward if they should bring back the head of Le Beau Sabreur. The hospitals were ransacked, the pyramids were searched. He could not be found. Murad had the gates guarded and went on with his secret preparations for the massacre, but was ever conscious of the danger from a daring foe within

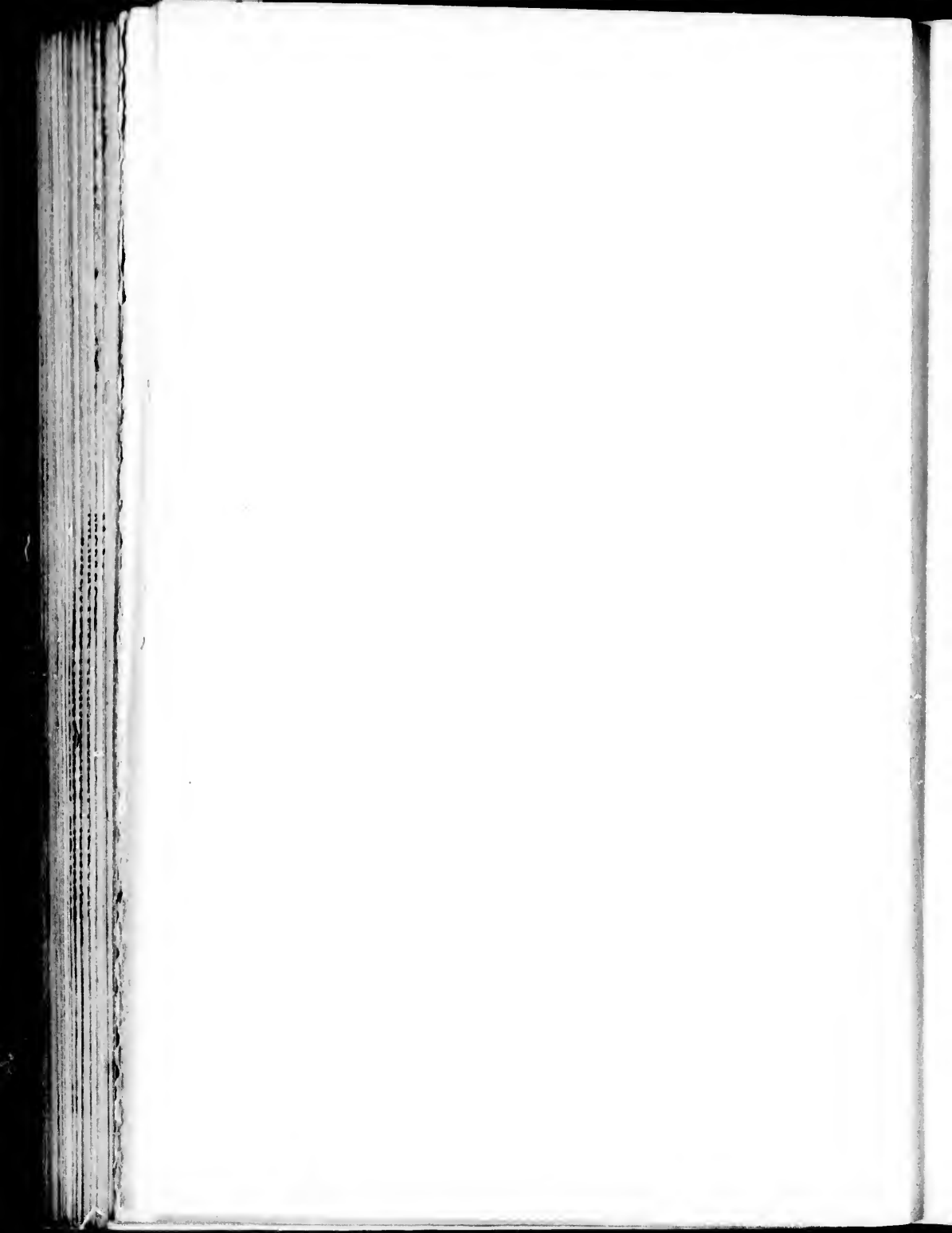
Near the Throne

a city. He had now grasped the sceptre of the Pharaohs. Announcing that he was the chosen servant of Mahomet, the new King vowed that no force in earth or heaven would wrench one jewel from his crown. The Egyptian felt sure the soldier of France must dread the light, yet he saw him with the avenging sabre of Aboukir in every shadow by day and by night—and realized that no stratagem would be left untried to get a message to Bonaparte which would bring the little Corsican back to drag the usurper from the throne.



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Corsican

Book four
TO SAVE A COUNTRY



CHAPTER I

THE RIGHT TO HAPPINESS

A chamber in the house of Hassan, furnished elaborately but used by the merchant as a counting room.

The architecture that circular style distinguished by the Moorish arch which renders so picturesque the more pretentious dwellings of mediæval and modern Egypt.

The green tinted walls ornamented with quaint symbols in violet and gray, and draped with heavy silken hangings of rich yellow and softest red.

In hollowed niches and on carven shelves rare treasures in stone and bronze of the splendid age of Seti and the less ancient but more brilliant epoch of Cleopatra.

The hard wooden floor seen only here and there between the oriental rugs that accentuated the atmosphere of comfort and affluence.

Near the centre of the room a table with a number of commercial papers and several piles of coin upon it, which Hassan was carefully counting and entering the amounts in a ledger.

Near the Throne

Almost behind this to the right a latticed window with a minaret seen through it and to the left a curving staircase near which were four tabarets inlaid with mother of pearl.

Diagonally to the left the open door of iron to a vault, inside of which a candle was burning, casting its glimmer upon numerous small chests and bags of money.

Straight across the room a curtained multifoil archway leading to a door swinging toward the street below.

Hanging lamps suspended on fancy ropes shedding their soft and coloured glow over all the room; and a burnished tripod surmounted by a brazier from which curled fragrant incense, spreading its aroma through the room.

Just in front of the window with the moonlight flooding through it and tinging a divan, a number of pillows upon which reclined Nazira. Three Nubians fanning her. Nearby the Parisian governess playing on a harp a French march.

“No, not that, Lucine,” said Nazira. “I am not merry today.”

The musician drifted into a waltz. But she had played only a few bars when Nazira said, raising herself to the window and looking out into the languorous night:

“Sing to me. Some music like the great world out there, dreamy and dark and beautiful.”

Near the Throne

In her soft rich contralto the Provençal sang a serenade:

“Wherefore should I pause to listen
To yon birds of the grove,
When the bird whose song is sweetest,
Sings in thy voice, my love!
Though the stars were hidden,
In yon azure skies,
Brighter stars are shining,
In thy earnest eyes!

“Though April brings once more the flow’rs
From out their earthly tomb,
The flow’r whose perfume sweeter is
In thy true heart doth bloom;
This bird thus like the phoenix,
That bright star above,
And the soul’s sweet blossom
Have all one name, ’tis love!

“Ah! this blossom of the soul is call’d love!
Yes, bird and star and blossom,
Have all one name, ’tis Love,
Yes, bird and star and blossom,
Have all one name, ’tis Love!”

Looking up from his papers, Hassan remarked:

“Songs disturb me—when I’m busy.”

“You may go, Lucine,” said the daughter, not wishing to trouble her father.

Lucine went out by the staircase, followed by the three Nubians.

“Five, ten, twenty, fifty, one hundred,” went

Near the Throne

on Hassan, counting and lifting the appropriate piles of coins and putting them into one of the leathern receptacles. "The last bag full. Silver. I wish it was——"

"Father."

"Just a minute," said he, moving the bags over as he spoke. "One hundred, two hundred, three, four, five. Yes, it is time you should be thinking of marriage."

"Not yet," answered Nazira.

"But be wise," continued the merchant. "Choose well; be careful to secure gold."

With all his wisdom and skill in accumulation, this man forgot one thing—that truth which is written alike in guarded bank and perfumed boudoir; clicking in every safe, rustling in every gown, sparkling in every diamond—that in the long run money always finds its way to a woman.

"But, father," the daughter answered, "it is not wealth I am seeking. It is happiness."

"Happiness!" he exclaimed.

"Yes," she responded.

"Ah, you forget: the gates of paradise are built of gold, its streets are paved with gold, its——"

"Then," she interrupted, leaning on her elbows, "I do not wish to go there."

"I fear your association with foreigners has made you too much of a European."

"Me?" she answered in astonishment.

Near the Throne

"You, daughter!"

"I am too proud to be of our own race," she averred, sitting up. "My blood is Coptic—so is my heart. I am a true Egyptian."

Hassan was well pleased with this outburst. Nazira had come honestly by her temperament. Her father knew it, and even gloried in her inheritance.

"I have decided," he said, "to give your hand in marriage."

"I am listening, father," replied the girl with eagerness in her manner.

"To one with whom union would mean fortune, fame, power."

"Who?"

"He was crowned yesterday."

"Murad?" she inquired.

"The King," he answered hoping for reinforcement from the word.

"I cannot marry him," Nazira declared without hesitation.

"Think what you're saying."

"It is true," she urged.

"Why can't you?"

"I do not wish to."

"But I want you to."

"It is impossible," she protested.

"What!" the father said leaning forward across the table and amazed at his daughter's rebellion.

Near the Throne

"I have no desire to marry Murad."

"What do you mean?"

"I will not."

"But I say you shall."

"And I decline. I have said it!"

"I command you!" he ordered striking his hand upon the table.

"Then I refuse!" she answered rising from the divan and turning upon him in passionate defiance.

"Nazira! Am I not your father? Have I no rights?"

"In all else I am your daughter," she replied, totally disregarding the reprimand, "dutiful, obedient—but when it comes to marriage, then I reserve the right to dispose of my own heart."

Hassan walked away. "Quite a tigress," he thought. "Perhaps she is not far wrong this time. The self-willed are often more than half right." Returning he said very gently: "Well, Nazira——"

"Yes, father," she said taking her tone from his. And there was patience with filial affection in every note of her voice.

It cost Hassan much to make the statement, but with answering love he said:

"His name shall be banished from our home."

"Father," Nazira responded putting her arms about his neck, "how good you are!"

Near the Throne

With her grateful eyes still looking into his, he continued:

"I had set my mind upon this alliance; but I



love you, my child, too well to bring any sorrow into your young life."

"Now you are my own father."

As he walked toward the vault Hassan made no effort to avoid the reflection: "How like her mother she looks." Then turning to his child he said: "Nazira, you have your mother's eyes, her hair——"

"Have I?" she asked, glad that the father saw

Near the Throne

in her anything that reminded him of the wife he had loved so dearly.

“And her smile,” he ran on. “And her temper. I had a picture of her—I haven’t been able to find it lately. Go, put on those robes I like to see you in—and the coronet. I gave it to your mother on her bridal day. I used to call her—Egypt.”

Nazira, anxious to grant her father’s slightest wish, obeyed. “I shall be back in a few minutes,” she said disappearing up the staircase. But the girl stopped and looked back. Always now there was present in her unquiet mind the image of the Saracen, who desired her and whom she feared—Murad.



CHAPTER II

A MONK AND HIS MISSION

When Nazira had passed from the room it was like the ceasing of a melody or the going out of a light.

"It would break my heart," Hassan reminded himself, "if anything should happen to her. It looks as if a storm were coming," he observed glancing out the window at the clouds drifting by, for northward down the river the sky looked very threatening.

There was a knock at the door.

"Come in," said Hassan drawing aside the curtains at the archway.

Murad entered, taking the precaution to quietly lock the door after him.

"Your Majesty," said Hassan. "Good evening."

"I am glad to see you," was the answer.

"You have called——"

"For two purposes. First, to learn if you are ready to make the proposed loan to our Government."

"I am sorry that I am unable to do so," replied

Near the Throne

the merchant. "I regret I have so much out at present in English securities that——"

"You have none for your own country?"

"Though it is not as I would wish, yet it is the fact."

"My second object," resumed the usurper, "was to see if Osman has been here."

Hassan, perceiving at once the ulterior meaning of this remark, for he knew the purport of the astrologer's visit, replied:

"The Bey said he would call tonight, but has not come yet."

"Indeed!"

"It is just as well, though."

"Why so?"

"Because I fear I cannot grant his request."

"What!" exclaimed Murad astonished beyond measure.

"That is my conclusion."

"Have you considered all my——"

"She is not for sale," said the father with indignant determination.

"You affront me like this!" said Murad taking a menacing stride forward while Hassan retreated a step.

"No," asserted Hassan, but without the slightest apology in tone or manner. "Nothing was further——"

"Fling my offer of marriage back in my face!"

Near the Throne

the Saracen muttered, quickly advancing upon the man whose words assured him but whose eyes despised him.

"I beg of you that——"

"You insult me—the King!"

Seizing the elder man by the shoulders and throat, Murad thrust him violently into the vault. Hassan fell senseless upon the floor.

"Stunned!" said the Moslem hoarsely, regarding the result of his anger. Then shutting the iron door, and shoving the bolt, he added: "Let him smother!"

There was a slight flash of lightning: the storm was approaching. Hearing a faint noise just outside, Murad went hastily to the window.

"Osman!" he whispered to himself surprised, noting the old man was below.

"Murad," came in the voice of the astrologer.

Then the young usurper called low: "Osman!"



Near the Throne

"I am waiting."

Going quickly to the table, Murad looked hurriedly through the papers with the evident intention of seeing if there was anything among them of value to himself, and of returning to the customs of the Mamelukes—taking by force the loan that had been refused on request. Picking up two documents with large blue seals upon them he read the first: "Thirty days after date? Too long to wait," he said in disgust tearing it in half and throwing away the pieces. "Sixty days!" he read on the second. "Worse and more of it." Then seizing a bag of coin he walked to the window saying: "Osman, catch!"

"Ready!" came in the voice of the Bey.

Murad threw it. There was a sound of scattering coins on the pavement below. The bag had broken.

"Spread your cloak!" suggested Murad, returning to the door of the vault and listening before drawing the bolt. He opened it slowly.

Hassan was lying on the floor unconscious. This was Murad's opportunity. He took it—and also a number of bags of gold from the shelves and threw them out the window to Osman. They would serve as part reprisal to replenish his coffers. There was no sound: they were caught and conveyed safely and immediately to the Palace of Saladin.

Near the Throne

"Balzar has a pretty taste in poniards," remarked Murad drawing Marcel's from his belt and sitting down—"that's a beauty."

"Father," came gently from the staircase.

"That's a beauty, too!" he repeated turning in the direction of the voice.

"Father!"

"Nazira!" he said to himself, rising in his interest and brushing a paper over the weapon on the table in his eagerness to close the door of the vault. Having done this he removed his cloak and sat down again.

"Are you waiting, father?" said the girl coming into the room radiant and regal in the jewelled robes and the gleaming coronet. Not seeing Hassan and observing Murad and his attitude, she at once demanded: "What have you done with him?"

"I? With whom?" he said feigning bewilderment and rising to his feet with the grace of a courtier. He motioned her to be seated.

"With my father," she replied.

"Nothing. He went out."

"Where?"

"Hassan said he would be back in a few minutes and asked me to wait."

"Had I known you were here," answered Nazira in doubt whether or not to believe this assertion, but quite certain that she ought and

Near the Throne

desired to be away from the presence of this man, "I should not have intruded."

"You need not go," he said in an entreating way, and moving toward her.

But she replied simply: "You will pardon my——"

"Come, Nazira," he interrupted—"you are always so cold and those lips are so tempting."

He tried to put his brutish arms about her. She had noticed the handle of the poniard beneath the papers on the table. Wrestling herself away from him the girl picked the weapon up and clutching it tightly said, fixing him with her furious flashing eyes:

"Do not touch me, Murad! Or I'll——"

"You?" he laughed grasping her uplifted wrist and with the other hand twisting the poniard roughly from her weaker fingers and throwing it disdainfully on the floor. "You could not."

"Father!" she called divining his purpose.

"He can't hear you," retorted the King closing the lattice of the window near which they were—man and woman alone together.

"Marcel!" she screamed struggling to free herself from his embrace.

"Monsieur Balzar is dead," said Murad, his face close to hers and her warm breath setting his blood afire.

"Dead?" she cried. "I see him!"

Near the Throne

"Oh, no! I saw him thrown into the Nile—two nights ago."

He tried to press his feverish lips to hers.

"Marcel—Marcel!" she shrieked again in despair.

There was a knock at the door, but neither heard it.

"O Nazira——"

A second knock!

"Who's there?" questioned Murad infuriated.

A Carthusian monk burst open the lock and entered the room. Throwing back his hood and stepping quickly between the two, he said:

"It is I!"

"Balzar!" exclaimed Murad.

"Your Nemesis!" was the Captain's reply.

"You!" said Murad. "Alive?"

"Very much alive. Does it trouble you?"

The strain being over, Nazira relaxed in a faint on the divan. But neither of the men observed her.

"The last time I saw you," resumed Murad, "you were in the clothes that fit you best—those of a beggar, a rascal!"

"I had the rascal's coat," replied Marcel—"but you—you had the rascal's heart!"

"So you're still spying?" asked the Egyptian crowding a query and an accusation into one sentence.



A Carthusian monk burst open the lock and entered the room.

Near the Throne

"No!"

"Still intriguing to upset my plans?"

"Yes!"

"The plans of the King!"

"No—of a traitor!"

"Monsieur!"

"What the devil else would you have me do?"



"Remain in the city. Attempt to leave—and my Mamelukes will shoot you on sight!"

Turning away from his foe for a moment, Balzar noticed Nazira ill or wounded and at once went to her assistance.

"By Allah!" muttered the usurper, as the wind howled like a loosened spirit of evil and he went

Near the Throne

out into the night. "I'll begin the massacre with Balzar!"

And the Chasseur said, looking after the Arabian:

"Murad, you shall buy dearly the tears you have made her shed."



CHAPTER III

INTO THE TRAP

"Nazira," whispered Marcel anxiously, discovering her arm was bleeding.

The delicate flesh had been grazed by the poniard in the struggle. The Captain tied his handkerchief around the wound as a first precaution. Then he heard a noise in the vault. What was it? Who could be there imprisoned? He drew back the bolt—there was Hassan on his knees as if he had been trying to open the lock from within.

Though still weak from the harsh treatment he had been subjected to and the brief confinement he had endured, the merchant managed to struggle to his feet.

"You here?" he said angrily to Balzar. "This is my house."

"Permit me to explain," responded Marcel.

"And I order you to leave it at once," continued Hassan ignoring the courteous request.

"Will you not allow me to —"

For reply the incensed Egyptian pointed peremptorily to the door, saying:

"At once!"

Near the Throne

No self-respecting man could disregard such contumely unless he wished to resent it. This, under the circumstances, the physician had no desire to do. So Marcel simply looked at the in-



sulter, smiled, bowed politely—and left the room without a word.

“He must have tried to force her,” reasoned Hassan, seeing the dishevelled state his daughter was in.

She turned over wearily.

Then he called:

“Lucine! Tinette!”

The governess and the maid came in immediately.

Near the Throne

"Run for a doctor, quickly!" said the distressed father to them.

Mademoiselle Fleury obeyed

"My poor Nazira," moaned Lucine stroking her mistress's forehead.

"Some water!" ordered Hassan.

Lucine went to one of the tabarets to bring it.

"Bleeding!" exclaimed the father noticing his child's arm. "The scoundrel!"

"Who did it?" asked Lucine pouring the water from a pitcher into a goblet.

Hassan did not take the time to answer, but gently moistened his daughter's lips and brow. Picking up the stained poniard and looking closely at the blade and hilt, his suspicions were confirmed:

"With blood on it—and a name—Balzar."

"This is his handkerchief," added Lucine examining the initials on the corner and hoping in an unobtrusive way to furnish her master with what seemed to be at least a partial refutation of his conclusion.

"Oh!" gasped Nazira returning to consciousness under her father's tender ministrations.

Throwing the poniard aside, smoothing his daughter's hair with one hand and studying the handkerchief in the other, Hassan changed his opinion and agreed with Lucine's thoughts, saying:

"It was Murad!"

Near the Throne

Just then Tinette came back and announced:

"The physician across the way is out, but I noticed Monsieur le Docteur Balzar going to his office."

Neither Hassan nor those of his household knew



anything of what had happened the night before last on the wall in front of the Palace of Saladin.

"I will not have him," replied the Copt, averse to the slightest attempt at persuasion.

But just a sigh issued from Nazira's parted lips as he accidentally touched the wound on her outstretched arm.

"She is suffering," said Lucine.

Near the Throne

"I must get someone," the perplexed father decided.

"The pain," breathed Nazira.

"I'll go," Hassan resolved noticing with relief that his daughter was falling into a gentle sleep as Lucine fanned her. "If I send Balzar," he continued, "remain in the room, both of you. There must be no conversation between him and Nazira."

He started slowly for the door, but stopped before reaching the archway—turned back, as if he had resolved not to call Marcel, no matter what might be the cost. But he looked at Nazira, a fond solicitous look; then putting aside all his personal prejudices and racial pride, he went out with a firm step.

Nazira, now comfortably reposing on the cushions of the soft divan and with a restful far away smile on her countenance such as limners give to a sleeping beauty, was apparently in some distant and peaceful dreamland.

As her father crossed the street he little thought that he was on an errand that would bring Captain Balzar back to a trap.



CHAPTER IV

FROM THE FLOWER TO THE HEART

Lucine, concluding that her mistress did not need her immediate care, joined Tinette at the window where she had been watching the approaching storm.

"Lucine," said the maid, "I haven't seen you to speak to since yesterday."

"I wish," answered the Provençal abstractedly. "I didn't think of him so often."

"Him! What him?"

"Tinette, what is a good thing to help a girl to forget a man?"

"Another man," was the prompt and laughing solution offered with a kiss.

"You're a true Parisienne."

"Why, you're engaged to be married!"

"How do you know?"

"By the way you kiss."

"Antoinette!"

"Who is he?"

"Can't you guess?"

"Monsieur Carmier?"

"Don't tell."

Near the Throne

"Girls never do."

"I think it was very unfair of Hassan to discharge him."

"So do I," acquiesced Tinette, "without any reason."

"I think it was because he knows Monsieur Balzar."

"I wish," confided the maid, "that I'd bought a parasol yesterday before this rain began."

"Can't you buy one yet?"

"Yes, but parasols are up today. Isn't it fearful?"

"What?"

"The large number of blacklegs in Cairo."

This, or rather these, the ingenuous Lucine did not see.

"I wonder," she mused interrogatively, "what it's like to be married?"

"I don't know," confessed her companion. "But I'm sure I couldn't bear to be neglected."

"Nor I. It must be awful if your husband never comes home when you expect him."

"But," the vivacious Mademoiselle Fleury ventured, "not so bad as to have him come home when you don't expect him."

"Tinette!" exclaimed Lucine quite shocked. "You say such naughty things—and I know you don't mean them. I must see if the children want anything."

Near the Throne

As Mademoiselle Chaumont left the room Tinette went again to the window—a tempestuous night had for her a fascination.

“I wish the stars were out,” she said following the course of the bluish streaks of electric splendour and listening to the rumble of the distant thunder. “I’m almost afraid of all this lightning.”

So intent was the maid that she did not notice Worda draw aside the curtains slowly and come silently into the chamber.

“I am sure,” the young Egyptian reasoned with herself, “Nazira wants to be absolutely certain. And I am going to tell her the truth.”

Her sister was still lying on the divan. A floating end of drapery hid the wounded arm.

“Sleeping,” Worda whispered crossing over and marking the sweet slumber. Kissing Nazira she lisped one lingering word: “Sister.” Then she went quickly to the table, and picking up a quill scratched a few words quickly on a piece of paper. “There,” she said with a satisfied inflection as she finished. Returning to the divan and gently placing the note in Nazira’s bosom the faithful little exile breathed wistfully: “Happy dreams!”

Lighter of heart than she had been for weeks Worda started for the door but had taken scarcely four steps when she succumbed to the temptation to kiss her sister again, so she slipped to her side,

Near the Throne

and kneeling touched her lips to Nazira's brow, for fear of waking her. Then gathering her robe about her she started in good earnest, but on reaching the arch paused. "Someone coming," she said in caution to herself, thinking she heard



footsteps and running across and out of the room into the vault. She extinguished the candle and drew the door shut after her in order to be safely concealed.

Just as the young girl disappeared Balzar, having knocked in vain at the outer door, entered, and Antoinette came forward from her rapt contempla-

Near the Throne

tion of the storm. The maid inferred immediately that Hassan had summoned the physician.

"An hour's rest," remarked the doctor comprehending the case exactly from his own knowledge and Hassan's explanations, "and I think the patient will be quite well. Antoinette, would you mind bringing a glass of water?"

The Parisienne thought she understood more than these bare words expressed and felt the inner meaning of Marcel's desire. A woman knows when to trust her intuitions. Tinette went for the water—with every intention of taking some time to bring it.

"Though the hope that is in one's heart," mused Marcel, "sometimes sends a falsehood to the mind, I know our romance is not over yet, for our love was the truest."

Almost falling from out the embroidery at Nazira's bosom was a faded flower. As Marcel saw it, and the gloom of the past came upon his mind once more just as the darkness comes over the sea, he said mournfully:

"The last rose."

And he heard Lucine singing to the soft accompaniment of lutes in a room near by that plaintive Egyptian melody whose strains were borne to him that unfortunate day he tried to persuade Worda to return home.

Recalling an autumn in the North—the pathos

Near the Throne

in the music—it sounded like the lament of a soul. But he had not seen all yet, for beneath the dead leaves there is always something hidden. Another glance revealed a ring down among the withered petals and it seemed to send him a golden ray of sunlight. Breathing more quickly and taking it slowly with all its sweet memories coming back to him, he lifted the tiny circlet to his lips and held it there a moment wondering how faithfully it had carried back the message from his heart to hers.

“Ah!” sighed Nazira as she lay dreaming.

“She speaks,” he said.

“Marcel!” she breathed.

“Of me.”

“I despise him. He betrayed my sister.”

“Those are not your words, Nazira,” begged Marcel taking her hand and kneeling beside her.

“I must forget him,” she sobbed, and the tears in her voice told all the grief of her heart and all the anguish of her soul.

“Those words were taught you,” entreated Balzar in despair—“they must have been.”

“Why did he not try to explain,” her distracted mind wandered on. “Father, there is some mistake. I am sure there is. I love him!”

Those three words, the syllables Marcel had longed for—and he had lived to hear Nazira speak them once again. To him they were worth years

Near the Throne

of heaven; and he would have given it all to kiss her now, but feared to waken her.

Just then Lucine and Tinette came into the room with a fresh pitcher of water. Their footsteps aroused their mistress from her sleep. Balzar was behind her, standing motionless and silent by the curtains at the window. Not turning she did not see him.

“I like to hear you sing, Lucine,” the Egyptian said sitting up and drinking from the goblet the maid poured and offered her. “Ah,” she sighed, “I feel so tired.”

The Provençal offered her arm.

Leaning upon it Nazira went up the staircase, preceded by Antoinette—and followed by Marcel’s eyes aglow with hope and adoration.



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CHAPTER V

A LITTLE TROOPER

As the sound of their garments died away the door of the vault stealthily opened. A slight creak of one of the hinges reached Balzar's alert ears and he saw the form of a girl steal cautiously out.

"Worda!" he exclaimed.

"Marcel!" she answered running over to him.

"I have news," he said at once, wasting no time on preliminaries because aware of the need for wise and prompt action.

"From Bonaparte?"

"A cypher despatch."

"Yes?"

"Came two days ago. He's hastening back to Cairo by forced marches."

"But the massacre?"

"I know—at midnight."

"Not far off—and Murad's soldiers are gathering already."

"Where?" inquired the Captain.

"At the Palace, the Citadel, around the mosques in all quarters of the city."

Near the Throne

Balzar thought an instant. Then throwing aside his Carthusian scapula and habit, he took out his watch and said:

"In less than two hours the great bell in the dome of the Citadel will strike twelve."

"The signal," Worda reminded him. "What is to be done?"

"We must send word to Napoleon—to hasten or all is lost."

"But you can't go, Marcel."

"Why not?"

"How long would your mother live," the girl reasoned, "if the usurper finds that you have gone? Is she not in prison?"

"Oh, no! I got the keys."

"You did?"

"From Sebah—then unlocked the door of cell thirty one. My mother is now at the house of a friend."

"But," Worda argued, "you can't speak our language. It will be difficult for you to pass the sentinels."

"You're right—impossible," he submitted. "They're watching for me by this time. They've been searching for my mother these two days."

"Then," maintained the girl, "it is your duty to remain. Someone else must go. An Egyptian."

"There is none."

Near the Throne

"Yes. There is one."

"Who?"

"Send me."

"You, Worda?" replied Marcel.

"Why not?"

"Send you?"

"Certainly," she answered pluckily and as if



she were surprised at his astonishment. "Me!"

"It would not be safe for a girl to go."

"Like this," she agreed throwing open her arms and looking down at her clothes—"of course not."

Perceiving her meaning and her questioning resolve, Marcel said without comment or further question: "You'll do it?"

Near the Throne

"Where can I find a suit?" she asked in reply, glancing at his Chasseur uniform.

"In my surgery across the street," he responded.

Worda was already in the archway.

"It was made for a lieutenant in my own regiment."

"Where is it?" she asked impatiently.

"Hanging in the closet."

"And a horse? Where can I find a horse?"

"My black Arabian's tied to the surgery door."

"Just a minute," she said and ran blithely out.

"Marcel," cried a child's voice from the stairway; and a second later Halima tripping down, exclaimed as she entered: "You here?"

"Ah, Halima!" said he greeting her.

"I haven't seen you for a long time," ran on the little one as the Captain sat down and put his arm around her and she nestled close to his side, "and I've been wanting to so much."

"Have you?"

"Yes."

There was a rumble of thunder.

"I'm afraid!" cried the child hiding her head in Marcel's breast as he stroked her glossy hair.

"I wouldn't let it touch you, Halima," he assured her.

"And you don't come to see Nazira any more, do you?" she said regaining confidence.

Near the Throne

"I should like to, though."

"You look so sad, Marcel."

"I was just thinking," he said smiling, "how happy we all might be if—if——"

"I'm so fond of you, Marcel," the child responded climbing upon his knee. "Ali and I were just talking about you. But you did not hear us, did you?"

"How could I?" he laughed.

"And Ali likes you too, Marcel. Tonight when Lucine put him in his cradle he cried: 'Wants to see Marcel! Wants to see Marcel!' And then he fell over and went to sleep, and began to dream—dream—dream. And such a pretty smile came over his little face. So I suppose he's dreaming about you, Marcel. You're so good and kind to him and me."

"Halima!" called the governess.

"I'm coming, Lucine!" answered the child. Then kissing her sister's lover, the little one added: "Goodnight, Marcel."

"Goodnight, Halima," he replied kissing her again—perhaps for the sake of Nazira, "you're like a ray of sunlight."

"Goodnight!" she repeated and ran away.

The same instant the curtains at the archway were drawn quickly aside and a flash of lightning shone brightly on the form of Worda, making the prettiest boy the eyes could wish for as she stood

Near the Throne

there as if on parade in the uniform of a lieutenant of the Twentieth Chasseurs.

"How will this do?" she asked with that sweet pride in her figure which every girl feels and denies.

"Capital!" declared Captain Balzar.

"But these?" queried Worda standing there helplessly in a pair of sandals with her pretty limbs encased in the thongs, and holding up the leggins as well as the riding boots she had brought from the surgery. "What shall I do with them?"

"Put them on," Balzar promptly answered, omitting the opportunity to be facetious though appreciating the humour of his position.

"Which?"

"The boots."

"But how?" the girl inquired. "I've tried. They won't go on."

"Make them."

"I can't. What am I to do?"

"You heard what Taschereau said to Tinette?"

"Yes, the old reprobate."

"Well?" the Captain questioned, waiting for her to decide.

Worda hesitated.

"Let me help you put them on," he urged.

"If there's no other way—well, be quick!" she said throwing the leggins down and reluctantly putting her foot up.

Near the Throne

So Marcel knelt and lent his assistance to complete the uniform. And it must be admitted that for over a minute his was a duty that no man would find onerous. First he had to take her shoes off, next pull the refractory boots on.

"They make my ankles look thick!" she objected.

"Riding boots always do."

"Oh! That's different!"

"Now then for Napoleon!"

"I have the horse," she broke in exultingly.

"Good!" he agreed. "Once out of the city and all's well!"

"But to get out," she said aware of the problem and its dangers.

Catching sight of Murad's forgotten cloak, Marcel exclaimed: "The very thing—until you get beyond the gates."

Worda quickly threw it around her.

And there was the Captain's own poniard lying where the cloak had been an effective covering.



Near the Throne

"And this?" the girl ejaculated.

"Use it," he suggested placing the weapon in her belt, "if the moment comes."

Neither surmised how ominous was this caution—nor how soon that moment was ordained to arrive as a link in the restless chain of destiny that no man can break nor any human ear perceive its avenging rattle.

Feeling in the pockets of the cloak as he fastened the clasps about the shoulders of the charming young officer, Marcel made a discovery and an exclamation:

"A blank pass! That will satisfy the sentinels."

Worda was certainly well equipped: armed with a passport from the King and disguised in an Egyptian cloak until she passed the soldiers of Murad, then a uniform that would at once command recognition as soon as she reached the lines of the army of France.

Balzar sat down at Hassan's table and drew out of a drawer a small sheet of paper.

Worda, yielding as any girl would to such a temptation, went over to the mirror and spreading the cloak out said:

"I wonder where this was made?"

Balzar wrote rapidly.

Glancing down her figure displayed in the uniform, her knees trembling a bit and her eyes growing larger, just as Marcel, hearing the clank

Near the Throne

of a sword and turning his head quickly, saw his courier engaged in that feminine and pardonable occupation, Worda admitted to him: "These feel so funny."

Taking a moment more to add his signature and to dust some powder on the ink, Captain Balzar folded the paper and rose from the table.

"Are you ready?" he said.

"Is my hat on straight?" Worda asked.

"Perfectly. Don't stop until this letter," Marcel continued giving it to Worda, "is in the hands of Bonaparte himself."

"These are good spurs," she replied stamping her foot to make them jingle.

"Now then," he proceeded, wishing her all speed and good fortune as she ran to the door—"swifter than the wind!"

"For liberty and glory," she replied. "Oh, I'll ride like the devil!"

And the girl without a fear dashed into the night.

Hastening to the window and concealing himself in the draperies, Marcel watched Worda cross the street, mount his Arabian and gallop off into the darkness and the storm—to serve a sister and to save a country. He could not restrain the admiring reflection:

"You may depend upon a woman to be brave when the time comes."

Near the Throne

The clattering hoofs were vanishing in the black distance.

Balzar looked after the little trooper and knew she was putting the spurs to the horse. She was nearing the gates now. A doubt entered his mind. Yet he felt confident that she would safely pass the sentinels. But he could not banish that doubt.



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CHAPTER VI

THE SEAL OF FIRE

Captain Balzar peering intently into the blackness as if it would aid him to devise and mature some further plan, was quite oblivious to the almost noiseless entrance of Monsieur Taschereau from the street and of Tinette down the staircase.

"Have you seen Captain Balzar?" asked the physician's clerk of Mademoiselle Fleury.

"Not for three weeks," she fibbed, and added with assumed and mischievous petulance: "Nor you either."

"He left the house to come here. I want to find him. Murad's soldiers are after him."

"Well," the maid admitted, "he was here a few minutes ago."

"Where is he now?"

"Gone," she replied. "Find him, quickly!"

Taschereau was already several yards in the way of obedience, but he turned back and taking the girl's hands said:

"You're pretty enough to kiss."

"Don't you dare!" she cried.

Near the Throne

But he tried the more. Where is the man who wouldn't?

"I'll scream," she responded.

"Sapristi! Don't," he cautioned her, tightening his tricolour sash. "Somebody might hear you."

"I never thought of that," the arch Parisienne replied, as if mingling a confession with an announcement.

Plutarque gave her a good hug and a second kiss for keeping him waiting, and then ran out to find the refugee and warn him while he thought it was yet time.

Tinette had not the slightest intention of going an inch with him, but hearing her master's footsteps, disappeared immediately after the revolutionist—then came in through the curtains of the archway at the same time that Hassan came down the stairs with Nazira, supported by the faithful Provençal, who led her charge to the divan.

"How is the patient?" inquired the solicitous father in a low voice of the physician, as Monsieur Balzar held aside the portières.

Hassan and Lucine had been careful to stand between Marcel and Nazira, so that she had neither seen him nor heard the question—as was her parent's intention.

"I feel so much better now," said Nazira. "I like to lie in this room, father."

Near the Throne

"She answers for herself," replied the doctor.
"I shall return in the morning."

"It may not be necessary. I shall let you know."

"Then for the present," said the physician, bowing and retiring as though he had not noticed the unrelenting sternness of the merchant, "I take my leave."

But as he drew aside the curtains in the archway, there stood—Murad.

And a flash of lightning illumined the room.

"You see, Balzar," said the King with that mocking smile of his, "I have done you the honour of coming for you myself."

Instantly Marcel's right hand was on the hilt of his sabre. He realized that once again face to face with his foe, he had little more to lose, except his life—and everything to gain.

But Murad no sooner saw the first movement of Marcel's wrist than he sounded a shrill whistle. It echoed through the shrieking wind. And as the thunder rolled along the sky, two Mamelukes appeared at each doorway and two more at the window—eight of them in all. It was nine men against one, for his two companions were unarmed and were not fighters. So the soldier of France bowed to the inevitable—and to the usurper—with the politeness of a courtier of Louis XIII. and said with the suavity of Talleyrand:

Near the Throne

"I appreciate the honour, I assure your Majesty."

"You escaped me once," retorted the Saracen.
"I have determined not to give you the chance
again."

"You are kind, Sire," acquiesced the surgeon.
Upon entering Murad had seen lying on the



divan the woman he so intensely desired. Now he missed her. She had crossed over unseen that she might be sheltered.

"Where is Nazira?" he demanded.

"She is here," replied Captain Balzar—"behind my sword!"

Then Murad gave an order to his soldiers:

"Arrest them all."

Near the Throne

The three men and the three women were placed in the line of arrest, and Fuad held out his hand to receive the surrender of Captain Balzar's sword.

"I knew, Monsieur," continued Murad, "you were fond of high living—so the jailer has provided some very choice game for your supper, to be served with paper sauce."

The last two words came with such contemptuous sarcasm that Balzar started back.

Addressing his minion, Murad said:

"Permit Monsieur to see the bird."

Fuad handed a dead Antwerp to Balzar. The blood was clotted on its dun feathers.

"You recognize the pigeon?" asked Murad.

"The carrier!" exclaimed Balzar—a flood of horrible possibilities crowding his brain.

"Fuad is a very good shot," remarked Murad.

Looking at the paper Balzar added beneath his breath:

"And my note to Napoleon!"

"You sent another messenger also," went on the usurper. "But it is dangerous to try to deceive our sentinels. Two of the best marksmen shot the little trooper as he," repeating the pronoun with a sneer,— "as he galloped through the gates."

"Can it be true?" begged Balzar.

Ignoring the question and proceeding, the King asked, holding up the mantle torn as though in a



"You have seen the cloak before?"

Near the Throne

struggle: "You have seen the cloak before?" Then showing the paper, he added: "And this passport?"

Furious at thought of the cruelty Murad was exulting over, Balzar broke in:

"You killed——"

"Silence!" shouted the tyrant, his scowl conveying to Marcel the consideration that this was neither the time nor the manner for Hassan to be informed of the fate which had befallen Worda.

Marcel obeyed.

Turning to Fuad the King gave order:

"Take the prisoners to the Citadel. Their trial will take place just before midnight."

It seemed to the Captain that every effort to send word to Napoleon had been futile—and fateful.

Then to the Chasseur Murad continued:

"As for you, Balzar, you need not remain in doubt—the Nile! For sure this time."

"Murad," replied Marcel undaunted, "you can pursue me, you can put me in irons—but you cannot kill me."

"By Allah!" laughed the King. "My word will do it, a wave of my hand."

"No! You cannot, with all your power!"

"You seem confident."

Captain Balzar answered quietly with a deep and subtle meaning which a sudden intense gleam of lightning appeared to accentuate:

Near the Throne

"I have a great trust to fulfil."

"Well," returned the Egyptian, "we shall see about that."

"Yes, Sire—you spoke the truth that time!"

And a peal of thunder crashed, as if powers



above the earth were in sympathy with the veiled prediction.

"Balzar, the next time you meet me, it will be near the throne."

"No—Napoleon is king."

"Of what?"

"Egypt."

"Who crowned him?"

"Conquest!"

Near the Throne

And the thunder rattled and rumbled along the sky like the cannon of the army of France. Everyone present seemed to hear again the roar of the guns of the little Corsican.

"Monsieur," resumed Murad.

"Your Majesty," answered Balzar, making obeisance, apparently in deferential interruption, but really in scornful contempt.

"Everything is against you—even the storm."

"But it shall turn against you."

Another and more deafening thunderbolt was taken by some of the prisoners as the confirming of this daring fulmination.

"Who will make it do so?" asked the King.

"I will."

"You! Ha, ha!" was Murad's Satanic sneer.

"Yes, I—by the aid of heaven!"

"Heaven! Ha, ha, ha!" repeated the Egyptian with more contempt in his mocking laugh.

"And Napoleon!" replied Captain Balzar, adding as the lightning forked with portentous fierceness: "They fight together! God and the heavy artillery!" A sharp tremendous crack of thunder shot out and in the moment's pause Marcel went on: "They will tear from your heart that to which you have forfeited the right."

"What?" demanded Murad, not immediately perceiving the meaning of this ambiguous and threatening boast.

Near the Throne

But Balzar's quick reply made every doubt vanish as he tore the decoration from the Egyptian's breast :

“ The Cross of the Legion of Honour ! ”

As the words left his lips three terrific chains of flame dashed through the black sky accompanied by a direful glare of supernatural light and a triple crash of thunder. It seemed as if the elements were commencing to bombard a world—booming and blazing forth the league against that monstrous usurper, with the seal of fire !



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FOURTH INTERLOGUE

ONE HOUR HAS ELAPSED

Come, fill the cup, and in the fire of spring
The winter garments of repentance fling:
The bird of time has but a little way
To fly—and lo--the bird is on the wing.

--OMAR KHAYYAM.

Just after and just preceding a time of intense action there is in the affairs of men, as on the sea, a brief space of simple waiting. But the smoothness of the waves and the normal movement of the tide merely emphasize the turmoil that has gone and seem to gather force for the storm that is to come. Power may be latent, but as it is never lost so it is never idle: somewhere it is always the servant of a creator or the slave of a destroyer. Both Balzar and Murad, having exerted themselves to the utmost for the accomplishment of their opposite purposes, were resting from their work and submitting to the temporary calm—one knowing and the other fearing that it was only for a little while that the tempest had subsided. Balzar's faith in himself and his destiny did not desert him even in his darkest moments, and he

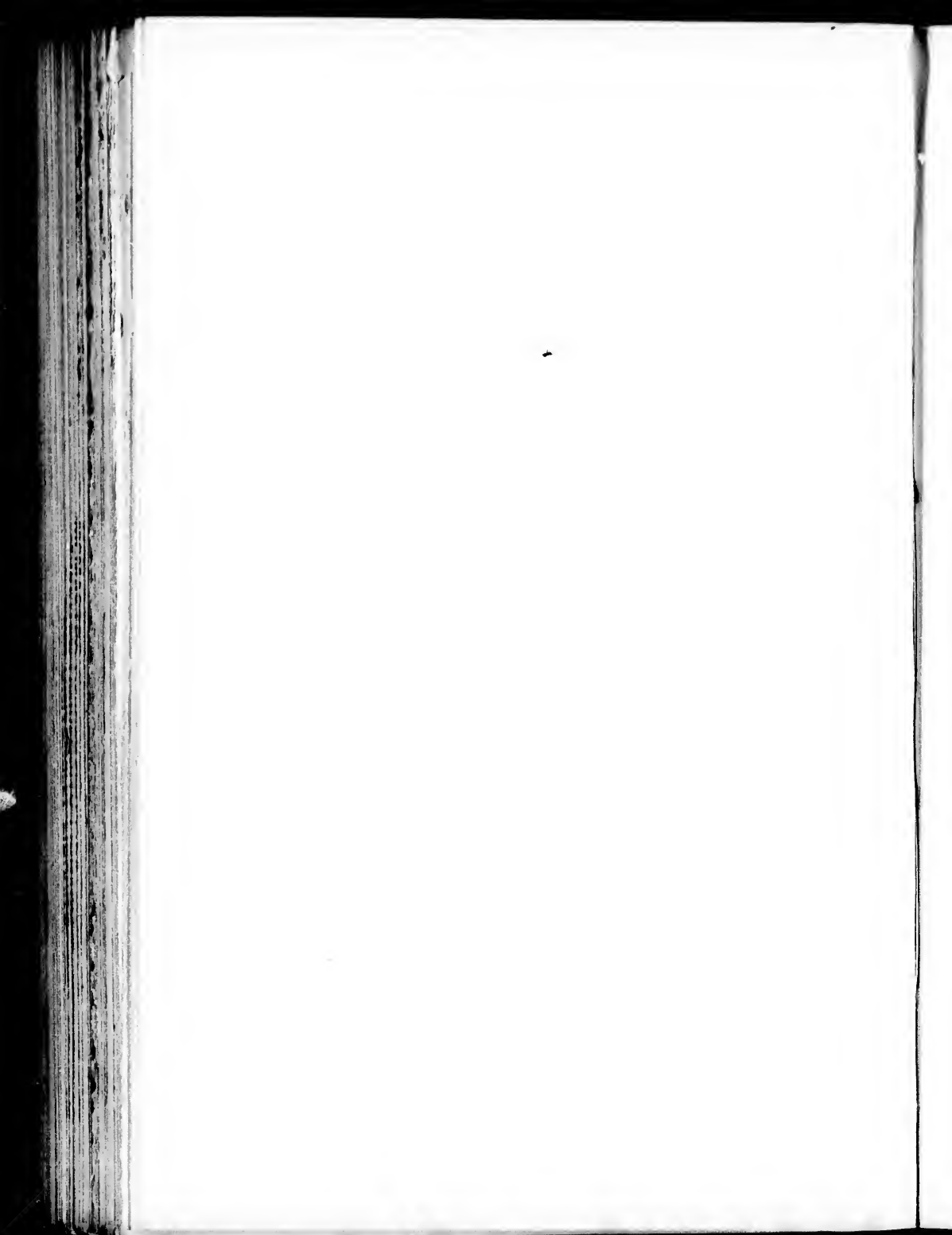
Near the Throne

firmly believed that if this was the hour of his final breath he would yet be able to bring about the punishment and death of the two still remaining as a curse to the earth of the three murderers. He had a mighty motive and it was an irresistible inspiration: to win the woman he loved, to serve the General he honoured and to save a kingdom. Murad, having completed with consummate ability every detail of his diabolic plan, was possessed with a feeling that in very truth he was at last the monarch absolute of all Egypt—and, filled with dreams of becoming emperor of the Orient, he occupied this one short hour by complacently waiting for the massacre.



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Book Five
TO STOP A DESPOT



CHAPTER I

THE JUDGE AND HIS DESIRES

A grand hall in the Citadel built on the rocky eminence overlooking the panoramic city.

At the farther end of this room, made more vast by the height of its ceiling, coloured faintly by some forgotten artist with scenes of historic Egypt, an imposing entrance guarded on each side by a miniature Sphinx of basalt.

Near each of these figures two fluted pillars of polished granite, and a small window of stained glass in the frescoed wall. Just in front of the windows two splendid golden candelabra blazing with light. Around the walls statues in Parian and veined Italian marbles. The intricate mosaic floor designed from a painting of the Palace of Ptolemy.

Beyond this entrance and across a corridor a flight of seven steps leading to the massive doors, strengthened by great bolts and bars of iron, that swung open on the crest of the hill. They were locked tonight.

To the left of the entrance to the hall the hidden opening to a secret passage winding away underground down to a large crack in a huge boulder

Near the Throne

where the declivity is steepest, looking out upon the tombs of the Caliphs.

Directly opposite this hidden opening the throne with its many folds of silken canopy embroidered in gold with the star and crescent. Near by to the right a gilded table at which Osman, raised to the position of Chancellor of the realm, was writing as though there were little time and much to be done. A few inches from the ink jar a bell that tinkled with a silvery sound. The length of a musket in front was spread the skin of a huge tiger, its claws clutched, its eyes glaring. Murad, proud of mien and regal in purple, the crown of the Pharaohs on his brow and their sceptre in his hand, was seated on the throne.

As an immediate bodyguard four Nubians, in skins of leopards, stood ready with pointed spears. And beside each pillar stood a Mameluke.

It was the King who spoke as his loyal minion looked up from his congenial work to listen with a servility that was at once fawning and fraternal:

“This will be a great night, Osman.”

The astrologer looked acquiescence and answered in a congratulatory tone:

“It will, your Majesty. The trial, the death of Balzar, the massacre—after that?”

“Nazira!” was the usurper’s reply. “Away with crowns and things of state, we’ll give the hours to pleasure.”

Near the Throne

"But for the present, Sire?"

"Yes, the prisoners. Send for them."

"Fuad," ordered Osman, "bring in the prisoners."

"All except Balzar," added Murad, as the Mameluke saluted and left the room.

"While we wait," said the King—"some music."

Osman rang the bell on his table. A slave instantly appeared.

"Send the dancers and musicians," commanded the Chancellor.

Making a profound salaam the slave hastened to obey.

"Everything is ready for the punishment of these foreign rats?" inquired the King.

"Yes, Sire—everything."

"The signal?"

"The twelfth stroke of the great bell in the dome."

"Allah is good!"

Then the tripping of sandalled feet was heard along the corridor and the musicians and dancing girls came in. To the seductive melody of the lutes fairylike houris, thinly veiled and draped in bright coloured silks with dangling bells on their anklets, glided and swayed.

The King applauded.

In response they threw aside their veils and going through new evolutions danced with the

Near the Throne

most graceful and enchanting abandon, never unmindful of the truth that suggestion is always more tempting than revelation.

As the dance concluded Fuad returned with the prisoners: Nazira, Hassan, Lucine, Antoinette, Carmier, Taschereau.

“Refreshment for the dancers and bring Balzar,” ordered the King.

Fuad hastened to bring the Captain.

Hassan and his daughter were standing close to the seven steps.

Murad motioned the girl to draw nearer.

She obeyed, thinking that conciliation was the wisest if not the only course.

“Nazira,” he said to her so low that neither her father nor anyone else could hear, “in a little while I intend asking you some questions. I want you to answer yes to everything. If you do, it will be well. But the instant you give any other answer your father will be shot.”

“Your Majesty,” she replied, “this is not fair. It is some injustice you wish to——”

“I have no time to discuss the matter,” he answered.

“But, Sire——”

“Remember,” he said with finality.

Nazira was helpless and almost hopeless, though she recalled the rumour of what Marcel was reported to have said to the Pasha that evening in

Near the Throne

front of the Palace of Saladin—that he had a great trust to fulfil; and sometimes with a shudder the young Egyptian imagined what her lover meant by the threat. And she knew his pledge was not yet redeemed.

Murad turned from regarding Nazira. For a few moments the Saracen seemed to be in deep and earnest thought: his forefinger crept to his lips and a faraway look came into his eyes. It may have been that he was wondering what this decisive night was destined to show him of his fate, or it may have been that he was thinking of the injury he had done to this girl's sister—and perhaps thereby to himself. More than half the trouble in the world is caused by a man loving the wrong woman or a woman loving the right man at the wrong time.

The slave reappeared with a tray of goblets of sherbet which were served as Murad, turning to Osman, asked:

“Have you the names?”

Handing a scroll the Chancellor answered:

“I have prepared a list of the accused.”

“Of the guilty,” corrected the usurper.

“It was an error of the tongue, Sire.”

Murad read the document carefully, pausing a moment over each name to think of the sentence that in each case would best serve his sinister ends. And he looked long at the name of Marcel Palzar.

CHAPTER II

THE LUCK OF THE MERRIEST

Taschereau and Carmier were standing together at the other side of the room, unconsciously near the panel of the secret passage.

"These are worse than tight boots," complained the elder Frenchman glancing at the chains that held him securely. "Sapristi!"

"What's the matter?" said the Gascon, nervously trying to adjust his monocle.

"Do you know a good cure for corns?"

"Yes! D-d-drop this on them," laughed the blond Alphonse lifting the weight fastened to his own ankle.

"I don't like that young man," remarked the old journalist to himself.

"I say, Plutarque—do you know a g-g-good cure for th-th-thirst?"

"A sure one," returned the genial secretary, anxious to even accounts and noting his companion's inquisitive look.

"What is it?"

"Stop drinking."

Near the Throne

"Do you think there's any danger?" the fearful Antoinette chimed in.

"Danger?" repeated the revolutionist.

"Didn't you hear her?" snickered the faultless youth.

"With me here?" asked the philosopher. "Well, I should—but——" glancing at the balls attached to his feet—"there's such a weight on my mind—understand?"

"No, I don't," admitted Mademoiselle Fleury.

"I'll wager five francs," Taschereau ran on, "I can guess the colour of the top stripe of your stocking."

"Done," she answered promptly.

"Blue," he ventured.

"Wrong!"

"Prove it."

"There!" she returned giving him a sound box on the ears.

Monsieur Carmier had been edging nearer to Mademoiselle Chaumont.

"I thought," the Provençal said to him interrogatively, "you were such a timid sort of a man?"

"P-p-precisely. N-n-not particularly. Why?"

"Tinette said you were afraid to kiss a girl."

Lucine was so naive that such a frank remark from her called up all Carmier's reserve fund of astonishment. He endeavoured to refute this accusation, but not quite satisfactorily though they

Near the Throne

were at court. Taking her hand he gently touched it with his lips.

"There's a place for everything," Lucine suggested.

Alphonse took the hint. Then he asked:

"Why do you l-l-look so s-s-sad?"

"That may be the last," she sighed.

"Oh, n-n-no!" he protested, convincing her that he had learned his lesson quickly. Then standing back a bit, and contemplating her with a grateful expression, he dropped his monocle and said: "Th-that was a c-clever idea!"

At this moment Fuad and another Mameluke returned with Captain Balzar. Le Beau Sabreur stopped still a moment at the foot of the steps. He looked sullen, but determined; despondency never masters such a mind. He glanced at the King and at Nazira. Then he came forward and stood near the throne—ready.



CHAPTER III

A COURT WITH NO APPEAL

"I heard Monsieur admires the dance," said the King as the prisoner waited for him to speak.

"Sometimes, Sire," replied Marcel.

"Very well, Monsieur. This shall be one of those times," answered Murad. "And better than the prettiest revel you ever saw—even in Paris at the Café La Fille d'Or." Then to the houris he added: "Again."

The girls took a few steps, but at a signal from the throne the fingers on the strings soon quickened their touch and they formed a whirling rainbow. And their swaying—the captivation of it, the rhythm, so beautiful: it was poetry revealing its soul in movement and colours.

Then one of the ghawazzie entered with a cobra, which she had charmed, twined around her body. Gliding to the centre of the circle she fastened her sensual eyes upon Marcel, and to the low chanting of the almehs and the carnal music of the lutes, danced with a writhing motion that was full of suggestion, while the crawling snake wound itself about her neck and outstretched wanton arms.

Near the Throne

As she drew near Balzar, he turned away and said:
“The emblem of poison and death.”

“Monsieur does not seem to enjoy the dance,”
remarked Murad.

“Not when your hired assassins are already——”

“Not assassins,” interrupted the usurper—
“soldiers.”

“In such an hour as this,” replied Balzar,
“when murder is the game, the soldier’s but the
bloodhound of the King.”

“Then we must lose no time.”

The astrologer waved to the dancers and musi-
cians to leave the chamber.

They obeyed.

“Osman,” said Murad, “read the names and I
shall pronounce the sentences.”

The Chancellor took up a sheet of paper from
his table and commenced the list:

“Hassan.”

“Discharged,” said the King, “I grant him full
liberty.”

“Discharged,” repeated the old man writing
slowly with his scratchy quill opposite the first
name. Then he resumed the reading:

“Taschereau.”

“And the next?”

“Carmier.”

“And the rest of the brood,” Murad broke in,
“what shall we do with them?”

Near the Throne

"Ah——" reflected Osman hesitating, "You might——"

"Banish them—that's it," decided the arbitrary judge.

Osman took his pen again, writing opposite the second and following names :

"Banishment for——"

"For life," Murad said in answer to his glance of inquiry. "Except Nazira and Balzar."

"Yes," said the Chancellor waiting with his quill dipped in the ink to hear what he should set down for them.

"For Nazira——" continued Murad.

"Nazira," repeated Osman, the point of his pen at the end of her name.

"Imprisonment," was the sentence.

"Murad!" exclaimed Balzar.

"You dare not," said Nazira.

But they and their protests were ignored.

"Imprisonment," wrote Osman. Then looking up to his master, he said questioningly : "Balzar?"

"Balzar!" repeated Murad. "The adventurer from the North disguised under a score of names : the gallant, the physician, the soldier, the deaf beggar, the holy monk—the spy, the prisoner, my enemy who from the shores of the Seine has journeyed to meet his fate on the banks of the Nile! What would be suitable?"

"You said——"

Near the Throne

"I remember. There's only one thing for him—and he will get it—death."

"Oh, no!" said the Captain with courteous confidence. "Not yet. After you, Sire."

"Balzar," wrote Osman, "death."

"To be shot——" Murad went on, pausing to think a moment.

"There will be metal in me then," laughed Marcel to Carmier.

"At sunrise," said the King.

And Osman wrote opposite the name of Captain Marcel Balzar:

"To be shot at sunrise."

"No," added Murad on second thought, "change it. That is too far off."

"Yes," agreed Osman, waiting for the decision.

"At midnight," resolved the tyrannous King—"on the last stroke of the bell in the dome."

"Yes, Sire."

"Write that."

"Yes, Sire."

"Perhaps, Monsieur," continued Murad, "would like some refreshment before going to his execution?"

"Your Majesty is most kind," said Balzar.

"A drink for Le Beau Sabreur," ordered Murad.

And Balzar added to Taschereau:

"There's one thing about Murad's wine."

"What's that?" asked Plutarque.

Near the Throne

With a shrug the physician answered :

“ You always know what you're drinking.”

Having filled the goblet the slave handed it to the Captain.

He raised it to his lips, then hesitated.

“ Are you not thirsty ? ” asked the King.

“ Yes, Sire.”

“ Then drink.”

Looking right into the eyes of Murad and throwing the liquid away, Marcel replied :

“ No—thank you. I might miss the execution.”

“ Give me the wine,” said the King.

The slave poured two more goblets and obeyed.

Murad drank from the second.

“ Now, Monsieur,” he said.

Balzar took the third goblet.

“ You shall propose the toast ! ” said the Saracen.

Both men lifted the cups, and Captain Balzar replied :

“ To Napoleon ! ”

CHAPTER IV

TWO PRACTICAL DREAMERS

“Are you prepared?” asked Murad indignant at this impudent affront, but waiting his time.

“I am always ready,” replied Balzar with cool composure and glancing at Fuad as if to remind him of the night when he heard that same answer in front of the Palace of Saladin.

“One question,” said Murad. “Do you know if Bonaparte has reached Palestine?”

“I do,” was the straightforward reply.

“Tell me.”

“Why should I?”

Murad was never slow in supplying motives.

“I will change your sentence,” he said. “Come—tell me that.”

But Balzar replied quietly though firmly:

“I am neither the valet nor the spy of your Majesty. I am a Captain in the army of Napoleon—who is to be the Emperor of France!”

“Your Corsican,” replied the King, “may have already found the sands of Syria as fatal as he may yet find the snows of Russia.”

Near the Throne

Both men had seemingly quite forgotten the night the little artilleryman forced the remnant that still lives of their cavalry to retreat by Gizeh into upper Egypt and the Sahara, leaving to the conquerors the rich alluvial provinces irrigated by the Nile.

Osman was waiting, pen in hand.

The tyrant turned to the Chancellor.

"Monsieur's sentence," he said, "remains as it is written."

"Am I to be shot like a common assassin?"

"As you are such—yes!"

"Do you fear me?"

"Why should I?" coolly responded the Egyptian, repeating the Frenchman's own words.

"You do," insisted Balzar.

"I?" answered the King with a gesture toward his guards. "Fear you? Ha, ha, ha!"

"Then let me die like a soldier."

"I will let you die like a dog!"

"Call out your best fighters and I will meet them all, man by man."

"No!" was the unhesitating announcement.

"You are to be killed my way. I am going to humble you all to the dust."

"You have almost humbled us already," admitted Marcel. "Are you content?"

"Not yet. But I shall be soon. In half an hour you will be among the great ones," the

Near the Throne

usurper said sarcastically, "who have gone before. And Nazira shall be here with me to enjoy."

"Never!"

"Because?"

"It is my will," said Balzar with a smile.

"This is absurd."

"Absurd or not," the surgeon responded tossing back his head and with every muscle tense: "It is my will! You shall not touch her. I forbid you!"

"You," exclaimed Murad rising with indignation, "a prisoner—forbid the King?"

"It's not the crown that makes the King. It's the heart."

"What I wish, I do," said the Arabian resuming his seat and unmindful of the truth that has found verification in many a royal palace that he who climbs high falls heavily.

"Have you no humanity?"

"Nothing but equity."

"You use the wrong name, Sire."

"I should say?"

"Lust!"

"You waste our time. Three minutes now and our soldiers begin to blot the name of France from Egypt. Fuad, remove the prisoners."

The Mameluke proceeded at once to do so.

"A moment," interposed Balzar appealing to Murad.

Near the Throne

The King granted his request, and waved Fuad aside.

"You will not do this thing," continued the Captain, "massacre all those innocent people?"

"Men, women, and children."

And Osman added:

"That was the order to our soldiers."

"And they always obey," said Murad casting an approving smile at the line of Mamelukes. "They will cut the French up like gourds!"

As if in confirmation of this statement there sounded from the distance the shrieks of the helpless and the yells of the heartless. The Arabians could not wait for the signal.

"Think again," said Balzar placing close together his hands with the fingers and thumbs clutched and glancing at the astrologer's throat, "near the throne are many flatterers."

"May Allah change you into a dog!" burst out the angered Moslem, casting aside his dignity as Chancellor.

"And may he——"

"This man should be silenced," the Bey exclaimed again, appealing to Murad.

"Surely," Marcel began to plead.

"I have said it," replied the King.

"Murad——" the Captain continued trying again to make an appeal.

"That is my decree."

Near the Throne

“Murad!” burst out Balzar, advancing menacingly.

Instantly the spears of the four guards were pointed in defense of the King and the muskets of the Mamelukes were levelled.

“Calm yourself, Monsieur,” said Murad lolling back in conscious security. “Let me tell you of a dream I had—it may help you to be more resigned.”

“I am a prisoner, Sire. I am listening. I too had a dream.”

“Sleeping last night in the Palace of Saladin,” Murad went on, “while you were in the subterranean dungeon, I dreamed I saw a black coffin. On it, dressed in the ragged uniform of a Captain of the Twentieth Chasseurs, was a man shot through the head. Above it perched a black hawk called—Defeat. And on the coffin was written: Marcel Balzar. The dream widened. Defeat was swooping down and alighting upon the forces of Bonaparte. I saw your navy afire at Alexandria, its ships destroyed by the British; your army imprisoned in my country, starved, poisoned, dying by thousands. The streets of our cities were strewn with the tricolour, the sands of the desert were spotted with the bones of your soldiers, bleaching in our tropic sun. I saw the eagles of France crushed by the hoofs of the Mamelukes with their plumed turbans galloping to victory, the cross

Near the Throne

thrown down, the crescent uplifted—every European in the land, under the curse of Allah, massacred, and floating over all the conquering flag of Egypt and her King."

"With such a prospect," reasoned Balzar, "surely you can afford to show mercy."

"I said no mercy," answered the relentless Saracen. "But I pity you and the poor wretches with you."

"Pity them?"

"Yes."

"While you are waiting for the signal from the dome?"

"Certainly. Why not?"

"When your hands are eager for the shedding of their blood?"

"Yes."

"You pity them? As a cat pities the mouse bleeding beneath its paws. As a serpent pities the bird trembling beneath its fangs. As a vulture pities the squirrel struggling beneath its talons. As a tiger pities the babe torn beneath its claws. As a demon pities a mortal thrown to hell! Oh! how you do pity them!"

"You grow warm, Monsieur. Again I say: calm yourself."

"And your Majesty believes his dream?"

"Why not?"

Balzar, like many an astute parliamentarian on

Near the Throne

the side of the minority, knew his only hope lay in gaining time by delay and in this way postponing action on the part of his adversary.

“Think, Sire,” he proceeded, “to what heights and depths dreams have led. Those unreal beckoners have inspired men to greatness and lured them on to ruin. Nero dreamed beside the Tiber, and Rome burned. Cleopatra dreamed beside the Nile, and Egypt flourished. Dreamers! A soldier dreams: he hears foaming horses rush to the charge and sees a score of glittering medals on his breast. A lawyer dreams: he hears a universe squabbling and sees a cyclone of briefs. A showman dreams: he hears the rattle of a hundred chariot races and sees a wilderness of tinselled monkeys. A musician dreams: he sees his hair grow three feet long and hears an orchestra of virtuosi play his opera. A farmer dreams: he hears the sweet grunting of his greasy pigs and sees a thousand leagues of ripening cornfields. A lover dreams: he sees two melting eyes smile into his and hears a soft voice whisper. Dreamers! Mahomet dreamed: he thought he built up a new shrine for mankind to bow before. Voltaire dreamed: he thought he tore down an old altar for the world to scoff at. Dreamers!”

“Go on, Monsieur, you amuse us,” interposed Murad.

“Julius Cæsar dreamed,” said Balzar obeying

Near the Throne

willingly: "he heard the tramp of legions, saw the glisten of their spears—and he made his way to empire. But our own Louis dreamed: he saw oppression crowned, heard the knell of freedom ring—and he made his way to the guillotine."

"Enough, Monsieur," said the King.

"May I tell your Majesty of my own dream?" asked Marcel, still anxious to gain time by any means.

"Go on," said Murad. "It may entertain us while we wait for the hour."

"True—while you wait for the hour."

"Go on with the dream, Monsieur."

"When you were sleeping last night in the Palace, your head resting on a pillow of down and silk, and while I was lying in your prison, my head on a stone, I could not sleep for the drip, drip, drip of the water. So mine was a waking dream. I heard the deadly crack of our muskets and the cannon of Napoleon booming at your frontier. I heard the songs of our battalions marching past the pyramids, and saw their plumes waving up your crimson streets. I saw the colours of France flying on your walls, her eagles glittering on your Citadel. I saw a blood red glare—it was the flames licking upward on your gilded palaces. I heard a ponderous crash—it was the tumbling of your minarets and domes. Then my dream narrowed. I saw a throne—this throne; at one side was a broken

Near the Throne

sceptre, at the other a shattered crown. Before the throne a dead king was lying head downward on the stained steps, for the curse of God was on him and his star had set forever. Above, with his heel tramped to the heart of that bleeding body and holding on high a sword of vengeance, was standing a soldier of France. And the name of that king was—”

“Let the jest end!” shouted Murad.



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CHAPTER V

SABRE AGAINST SCIMITAR

Suddenly the usurper's attention was arrested by a noise from across the room—it sounded like the moving of an iron grating. The Bey and others noticed it too.

“The entrance to the secret passage, Osman. Is it shut?” inquired Murad.

“Shall I send Fuad?”

“See to it yourself.”

The Chancellor went quickly to the hidden panel.

There was so much mystery and plotting and murder in this Palace, Nazira's hand involuntarily clutched her bosom, as she stepped back to make way for the astrologer.

Osman pressed the spring, the panel opened slowly, and he disappeared in the darkness of the passage.

Nazira's fingers felt something of a different texture from her dress—sought it—a note—glanced furtively at the writing. It was from her sister.

Her father was watching her.

Near the Throne

One brief look sufficed to scan its contents.

"It was Murad!" she exclaimed beneath her breath.

As she put the paper back in the bosom of her gown an awful yell came echoing from the winding secret passage, and Osman stumbled into the room scarcely able to stand.

"Worda!" he declared, half fainting and clinging to a short blade which he had evidently wrested from his assailant. "She has stabbed me—with——"

"My poniard!" said Balzar completing the sentence.

The astrologer sank to the floor trying hard to crawl nearer the steps.

The Mamelukes and Nubians stood motionless but prepared.

"She has killed me!" gasped the old fox. And he fell dead at the foot of the throne.

"Justice!" said Balzar pointing to the body with two fingers.

The King came down to the thing that had served him so faithfully, placed its cloak over the face, and two of the Mamelukes bore it away.

While this was going on Nazira gave the note to her father, saying:

"From Worda."

Looking at it, Hassan said to himself:

"Marcel innocent." Then he read again the

Near the Throne

message to his daughter. "It was Murad who betrayed me."

From a distant part of the city came sounds of Egyptian music. Murad knew it was his bands arousing to the work of assassination and carnage.

"Come, Nazira, come," he said advancing toward the girl.

"No!" she said shrinking back from him.

"Tonight—tonight!" urged Murad.

"Father," she pleaded, "you will not let him take me from you."

"No, my child."

Hassan took his daughter's hands in his. Her eyes moistened and there fell upon his trembling wrist a burning tear of gratitude.

As if in mockery the great bell in the dome of the Citadel rang out—stroke one.

"The hour has come," said the King rejoicing as he listened a moment to the shrill sound of the distant shots and shouts:

"Allah! Mamelukes! Murad!"

"It is the signal," said the tyrant.

Balzar was listening too.

Then to Fuad, Murad added:

"Conduct her to the chamber of the King."

"Let them dare!" broke in Balzar springing forward. "Bear witness, all. Before heaven, I swear that I will kill this viper!"

The guards stood ready to thrust the prisoner.

Near the Throne

"Put up your bayonets," said Murad to them, "Le Beau Sabreur forgets."

"I remember much, your Majesty."

"But you forget one thing."

Again the bell in the dome rang out—stroke two.

"And that is?" asked the Captain.

"An Egyptian prerogative," was the answer of the monarch, rising to his feet and unsheathing a gleaming piece of steel—"the poisoned scimitar of the King."

"No, I remember—all. And to let you live is treason against mankind."

Murad merely laughed.

The great bell again clanged—stroke three.

"I would kill you now—near the throne," continued Balzar, "if I only had a sword!"

"Take mine!" shouted Worda jumping in through the secret passage.

It was the work of a second. Balzar grasped the sabre and was already pushing up his sleeve, having thrown off his coat.

Murad made a gesture to his guards not to fire. But they stood with muskets loaded. No sooner did Hassan hear Worda's voice than, forgetful of all his bitterness, he held out his arms, exclaiming:

"My daughter!"

"My father!" she cried rushing to him.

Again the bell rolled out its sound—stroke four.

Near the Throne

As Worda showed Hassan a picture, he sobbed :
" Your mother."

" If you will die," said Murad coming down the steps of the throne.

" You forget my famous thrust," answered Balzar.

" We have met at swords before," replied Murad frowning and glancing at his hand.

Marcel added :

" And I think you bear a mark of my esteem."

Again that dreadful bell—stroke five.

" If you are not a coward," said the Egyptian, " come on !"

This was the moment Captain Balzar had been waiting for. It was an unequal contest; his only weapon being a sabre, but it was his own from Aboukir—his adversary having a heavy scimitar poisoned, and a pistol in his belt, and being surrounded by his bodyguards and Mamelukes.

" On guard !" Marcel shouted coveting this chance even if the odds were a hundred to one against him and determined that if he could make it so the duel would be to the death.

They crossed swords, the sovereign and the prisoner, the Saracen and Le Beau Sabreur—and the fight began. For a few seconds the game was to Balzar, his thrusts and cuts were so swift and tellingly aimed. The Egyptian parried them skilfully, with the ring of the steel clipping fire—yet

Near the Throne

he retreated. He had fought, though only in practice, in that same room before—and knew the tricks. He was retreating as a ruse toward the two pillars. Then by a sudden turn he had his foe down on his knees in the narrow space.



“Marcel!” cried Madame Balzar seeing her son's imminent danger.

With studied intent Murad made a furious slash at Balzar's head. There was a lightning upward movement of the Chasseur's blade. Recovering, he parried the blow, but the heavy scimitar descended with such force its very weight broke a sharp piece of steel from the hilt of Marcel's sabre, which cutting across the flesh of his arm

Near the Throne

severed a small artery. The blood spurted out, but the physician saw at once it was an ugly though harmless wound, and without relaxing his guard an instant ripped off his cravat and tied it above the gash.

"Have you had enough, Monsieur?" shouted the King.

"Not yet, Sire!" replied the Captain making a feint.

Murad advanced and fell into the trap. In a moment more the Arabian attempted the desired lunge—then stood disarmed and chagrined with his opponent's foot upon his scimitar.

And the bell in the dome rang out—stroke six.

The soldier of France stooped down, picked up the poisoned blade, and handing his own weapon to the King, shouted:

"Now then, again!"

"Marcel, stop!" begged his mother who was standing close to the steps of the throne.

"I will kill him," was the reply she received. "That's a French prerogative."

"No, Monsieur," retorted Murad, "for you die first!"

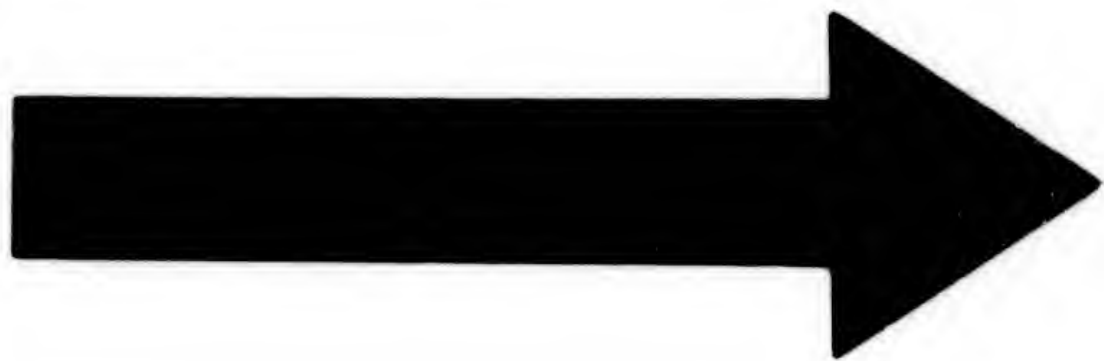
"Come on!"

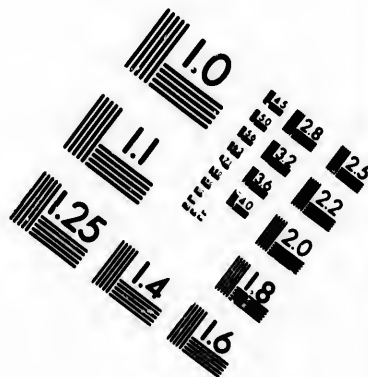
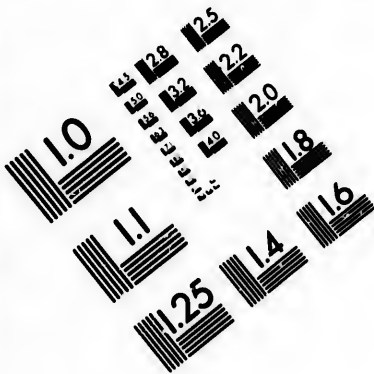
"On guard!"

"You must not kill him!" cried Madame Balzar.

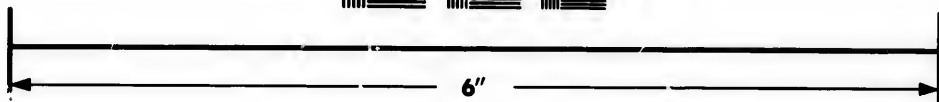
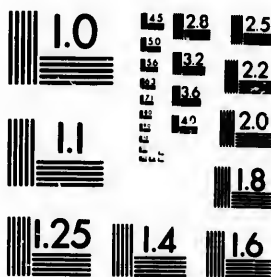
"Why?"

"Because—he is—your brother!"





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CHAPTER VI

THE QUESTION OF A KING

"The proof!" demanded Murad.

"The signet ring!" asserted the woman holding forth her hand.

"What more?"

"The scar!" she added baring her arm.

And the great bell clanged again—stroke seven.

At this revelation Murad and Balzar were astonished beyond expression. Both stared at the evidence as if they were witnessing a miracle. Murad took her hand that he might subject the tokens to a more searching scrutiny.

To Marcel her word would have been sufficient; to the Arabian these vouchers of her identity amounted to an absolute establishment: they were conclusive and irrefutable.

"Disarm the prisoner," commanded Murad.

Fuad and two of his subordinates did as they were bidden and assisted him on with his coat.

To Madame Balzar Murad continued:

"I pardon you."

"And Marcel?" she asked beseechingly.

Near the Throne

"Dies," he answered pointing to the paper on Osman's table.

"Murad!" she cried in supplication.

"It is written," he replied.

Again the bell rolled out its dreadful sound—stroke eight.

Noticing Worda the King remarked to Fuad:

"Without chains. She had better stand alone."

The Mameluke placed her in the corner indicated, which was beyond the two pillars and near the entrance to the secret passage. The rest of the prisoners were at the same side of the room, but in front and to the left of this mysterious panel.

To Worda Murad said:

"The slightest movement and you will be shot."

The bell reverberated again—stroke nine.

The shots heard in the southeastern quarter of the city increased, as if there were resistance to the massacre—or a conflict, and a new sound was borne in on the winds from the opposite direction. It was very faint at first like distant grapeshot and cannister.

"Listen!" said Murad imposing silence.

"What is that?"

"The roll of the drum," replied Captain Balzar.

"Napoleon—bringing your message!"

The bell seemed to ring louder—stroke ten.

"Napoleon?" repeated the usurper.

Near the Throne

"You are no more a King!" shouted Marcel, as the sound of the drums drawing nearer assured him of the meaning of the fierce rattle of musketry.

"Napoleon!" said Tinette clapping her hands and speaking to the group around her. "I know him, I do—we were boys together!"

"You are wrong," returned Murad, after listening a moment to distinguish the sounds. "It is the massacre—of the French!"

The bell above clanged louder still—stroke eleven.

"He is coming," shouted Balzar, "the Lion of the Desert! Soon he will speak to you from the mouth of a cannon!"

As Marcel listened to the booming of the little Corsican's guns he almost fancied he recognized the voices of his own three shining fellows cast from the bells of the Augustine Convent at Avignon which had so often pealed their silvery sweetness over the hills to the ears of peasants and popes. But his ears desired nothing more sweet or silvery now than their welcome thunder.

A bugle call echoed through the night.

Noting it was from the trumpeter of the Twentieth Chasseurs the Captain continued:

"Murad, the next time we meet will be," pausing and pointing upward, "near the throne!"

Again the great bell in the dome of the Citadel rang out to all the city—stroke twelve.

Near the Throne

"Twelve! Huh!" laughed Marcel to Taschereau and Carmier. "And I'm not dead yet!"

"Hassan," said the King, "there is a reason why your daughter Nazira should become my wife. Her own words will be proof. Perhaps Balzar would like to listen too."

The Captain turned expectantly. He noticed that three Mamelukes were standing just a little out of the line and immediately in front of the massive doors, though he did not observe particularly that the space between them and Worda was clear.

Looking at Nazira and pointing to Worda Murad resumed with a frowning inclination of the head:

"Instead of your father—you understand?"

The girl shuddered, for she understood only too well.

"Nazira," he went on, "were you not once very favourably inclined toward me?"

"Yes."



Near the Throne

"Much more than that? You promised to go to a garden with me?"

"Yes."

"To love me?"

To what was this accursed serpent leading her? But fearing for her sister, she answered:

"Yes."

"To give yourself wholly to me?"

"No!"

"Is it so?"

She glanced at Worda and the three Mamelukes and was unnerved and said:

"Yes."

"With all your passion?"

"Yes."

"And you did it?"

"I refuse to——"

"Remember," threatened the King, for from his point of view virtue was only successful temerity. "You yielded?"

"I re——"

"Did you not?"

"Yes."

"Soon you will become a mother?"

The girl was so frenzied at this abominable falsehood that for a moment she weakened and there issued from her parted lips a sound so near to silence it was like the faint sigh of the last wave upon the shore of the farthest sea. And she

Near the Throne

scarcely knew that to his iniquitous question she replied again :

“ Yes.”

“ Am I not the father of your child? ”

“ How can you dare? ”

Is it true? ”

“ And yet God does not strike you dead? ”

“ Answer! ” he said pointing to her sister and the three Mamelukes in his endeavour to force her affirmative to his infamous demand.

“ Yes,” she said.

To all this Marcel was obliged to listen. Glancing toward Worda and seeing Nazira's agonized looks in the same direction he walked behind the prisoners as if anxious to hide himself from sight, he was so stricken with grief.

Filled with shame and despair Nazira screamed out :

“ No—no! ”

So engrossed were all present in the base Egyptian and his vile requests that no one noticed yet the faint and distant martial strains of the Marseillaise. No one, except Balzar—nothing escaped him. But he was determined that nine people in the room should escape that nameless demon—that viper.

Murad's black eyes were fastened upon Nazira and his swarthy arm was outstretched toward Worda.

Near the Throne

Hastily giving Hassan the incriminating epistle that Osman had stolen from him, Marcel said :

“ This letter belongs to you.”

“ Monsieur !” said the merchant in confused gratitude.

Then glancing at the panel in the wall Balzar added to Carmier :

“ If he should miss me !”

“ Give me your coat and hat,” said the young beau, whom the emergency made brave.

They exchanged. This was the work of two seconds.

“ Keep your back to Murad,” said Balzar in caution. “ This is too small, but I’ll get rid of it outside.”

Carmier obeyed and kept the other prisoners close together, so that Marcel might be unseen.

Stooping low Balzar crept stealthily to the panel, opened it slowly and slipped into the secret passage.

“ Answer me !” commanded the King again.

Nazira remained obdurate.

To the three Mamelukes Murad said :

“ Ready !”

They obeyed the order.

“ It’s a lie !” vowed Nazira.

“ I will give you one chance more.”

“ I don’t want it.”

“ Remember,” Murad persisted, pointing again

Near the Throne

to Worda. "Be careful. Am I not the father of——"

"No!" she shrieked.

"Present."

The muskets clicked.

And a ringing voice—the voice of Marcel Balzar outside the gates shouted:

"Fire!"

This word was followed instantly by an explosion of terrific violence. The massive gates were blown to pieces and their huge iron bars twisted as though they were straws. The wall was in ruins. The pillars were wrecked, and in their crash hurled down and extinguished the candelabra. There was an immense rent in the ceiling and the roof through which the moonlight shone. The floor of the corridor was torn as if by an earthquake, and from its depths the place was lighted by the red glare of flames. And the throne was shattered. Murad, head downward, was lying dead on the crimsoned steps; strewn near him were the lifeless bodies of his fated Mamelukes.

There, where the gates had been, but where flags and standards were flying now and bands playing at the head of the army of France, in the very flush of youth and victory—stood Napoleon.

Straight in the gleam of the moonlight shining full upon his white shirt, his foot upon the heart



His foot upon the heart of the fallen King, his hand uplifting the avenging sabre of Aboukir—stood Balzar.

Near the Throne

of the fallen King, his hand uplifting the avenging sabre of Aboukir—stood Balzar.

“The trust!” he shouted, holding up three fingers. “With my bullet! Triumph!”



“Dead!” exclaimed Nazira looking at Murad, as Marcel hastened to her and took her in his arms.

With a piercing shriek of anguish Worda ran and knelt at the dead Egyptian's side; the girl's soul had risen now and conquered in spite of all this man's cruelty and treachery—and with a great broken sob she fell upon his neck, crying:

“Murad—Murad! He was my king!”

Near the Throne

Then as the soldiers of the future Emperor sang and the bands poured forth the martial strains of the Marseillaise, Captain Balzar shouted above the echoing music:

“Near the throne!”



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