

**CIHM
Microfiche
Series
(Monographs)**

**ICMH
Collection de
microfiches
(monographies)**



Canadian Institute for Historical Microreproductions / Institut canadien de microreproductions historiques

© 1997

Technical and Bibliographic Notes / Notes techniques et bibliographiques

The institute has attempted to obtain the best original copy available for filming. Features of this copy which may be bibliographically unique, which may alter any of the images in the reproduction, or which may significantly change the usual method of filming are checked below.

- Coloured covers / Couverture de couleur
- Covers damaged / Couverture endommagée
- Covers restored and/or laminated / Couverture restaurée et/ou pelliculée
- Cover title missing / Le titre de couverture manque
- Coloured maps / Cartes géographiques en couleur
- Coloured Ink (i.e. other than blue or black) / Encre de couleur (i.e. autre que bleue ou noire)
- Coloured plates and/or illustrations / Planches et/ou illustrations en couleur
- Bound with other material / Relié avec d'autres documents
- Only edition available / Seule édition disponible
- Tight binding may cause shadows or distortion along interior margin / La reliure serrée peut causer de l'ombre ou de la distorsion le long de la marge intérieure.
- Blank leaves added during restorations may appear within the text. Whenever possible, these have been omitted from filming / Il se peut que certaines pages blanches ajoutées lors d'une restauration apparaissent dans le texte, mais, lorsque cela était possible, ces pages n'ont pas été filmées.
- Additional comments / Commentaires supplémentaires:

L'institut a microfilmé le meilleur exemplaire qu'il lui a été possible de se procurer. Les détails de cet exemplaire qui sont peut-être uniques du point de vue bibliographique, qui peuvent modifier une image reproduite, ou qui peuvent exiger une modification dans la méthode normale de filmage sont indiqués ci-dessous.

- Coloured pages / Pages de couleur
- Pages damaged / Pages endommagées
- Pages restored and/or laminated / Pages restaurées et/ou pelliculées
- Pages discoloured, stained or foxed / Pages décolorées, tachetées ou piquées
- Pages detached / Pages détachées
- Showthrough / Transparence
- Quality of print varies / Qualité Inégale de l'impression
- Includes supplementary material / Comprend du matériel supplémentaire
- Pages wholly or partially obscured by errata slips, tissues, etc., have been refilmed to ensure the best possible image / Les pages totalement ou partiellement obscurcies par un feuillet d'errata, une pelure, etc., ont été filmées à nouveau de façon à obtenir la meilleure image possible.
- Opposing pages with varying colouration or discolourations are filmed twice to ensure the best possible image / Les pages s'opposant ayant des colorations variables ou des décolorations sont filmées deux fois afin d'obtenir la meilleure image possible.

This item is filmed at the reduction ratio checked below / Ce document est filmé au taux de réduction indiqué ci-dessous.

10x			14x				18x			22x			26x			30x			
										✓									
		12x			16x			20x			24x			28x					32x

The copy filmed here has been reproduced thanks to the generosity of:

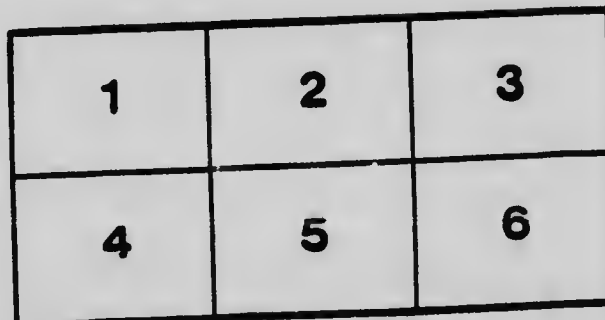
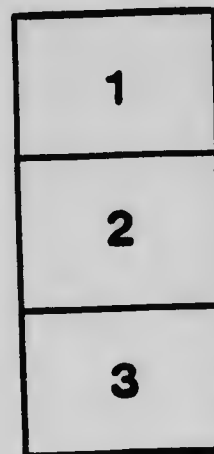
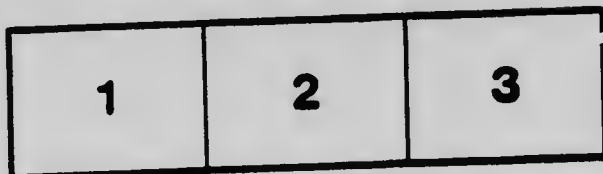
National Library of Canada

The images appearing here are the best quality possible considering the condition and legibility of the original copy and in keeping with the filming contract specifications.

Original copies in printed paper covers are filmed beginning with the front cover and ending on the last page with a printed or illustrated impression, or the back cover when appropriate. All other original copies are filmed beginning on the first page with a printed or illustrated impression, and ending on the last page with a printed or illustrated impression.

The last recorded frame on each microfiche shell contains the symbol \rightarrow (meaning "CONTINUED"), or the symbol ∇ (meaning "END"), whichever applies.

Maps, plates, charts, etc., may be filmed at different reduction ratios. Those too large to be entirely included in one exposure are filmed beginning in the upper left hand corner, left to right and top to bottom, as many frames as required. The following diagrams illustrate the method:



L'exemplaire filmé fut reproduit grâce à la générosité de:

Bibliothèque nationale du Canada

Les images suivantes ont été reproduites avec le plus grand soin, compte tenu de la condition et de la netteté de l'exemplaire filmé, et en conformité avec les conditions du contrat de filmage.

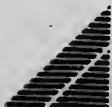
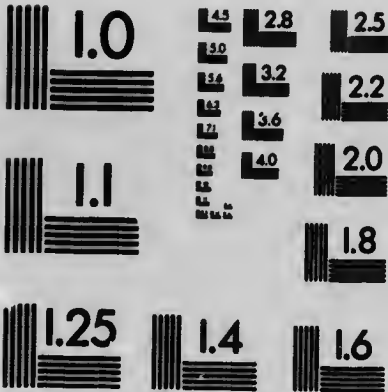
Les exemplaires originaux dont la couverture en papier est imprimée sont filmés en commençant par le premier plat et en terminant soit par la dernière page qui comporte une empreinte d'impression ou d'illustration, soit par le second plat, selon le cas. Tous les autres exemplaires originaux sont filmés en commençant par la première page qui comporte une empreinte d'impression ou d'illustration et en terminant par la dernière page qui comporte une telle empreinte.

Un des symboles suivants apparaît sur la dernière image de chaque microfiche, selon le cas: le symbole \rightarrow signifie "A SUIVRE", le symbole ∇ signifie "FIN".

Les cartes, planches, tableaux, etc., peuvent être filmés à des taux de réduction différents. Lorsque le document est trop grand pour être reproduit en un seul cliché, il est filmé à partir de l'angle supérieur gauche, de gauche à droite, et de haut en bas, en prenant le nombre d'images nécessaire. Les diagrammes suivants illustrent la méthode.

MICROCOPY RESOLUTION TEST CHART

(ANSI and ISO TEST CHART No. 2)



APPLIED IMAGE Inc

1653 East Main Street
Rochester, New York 14609 USA
(716) 482 - 0300 - Phone
(716) 288 - 5989 - Fax

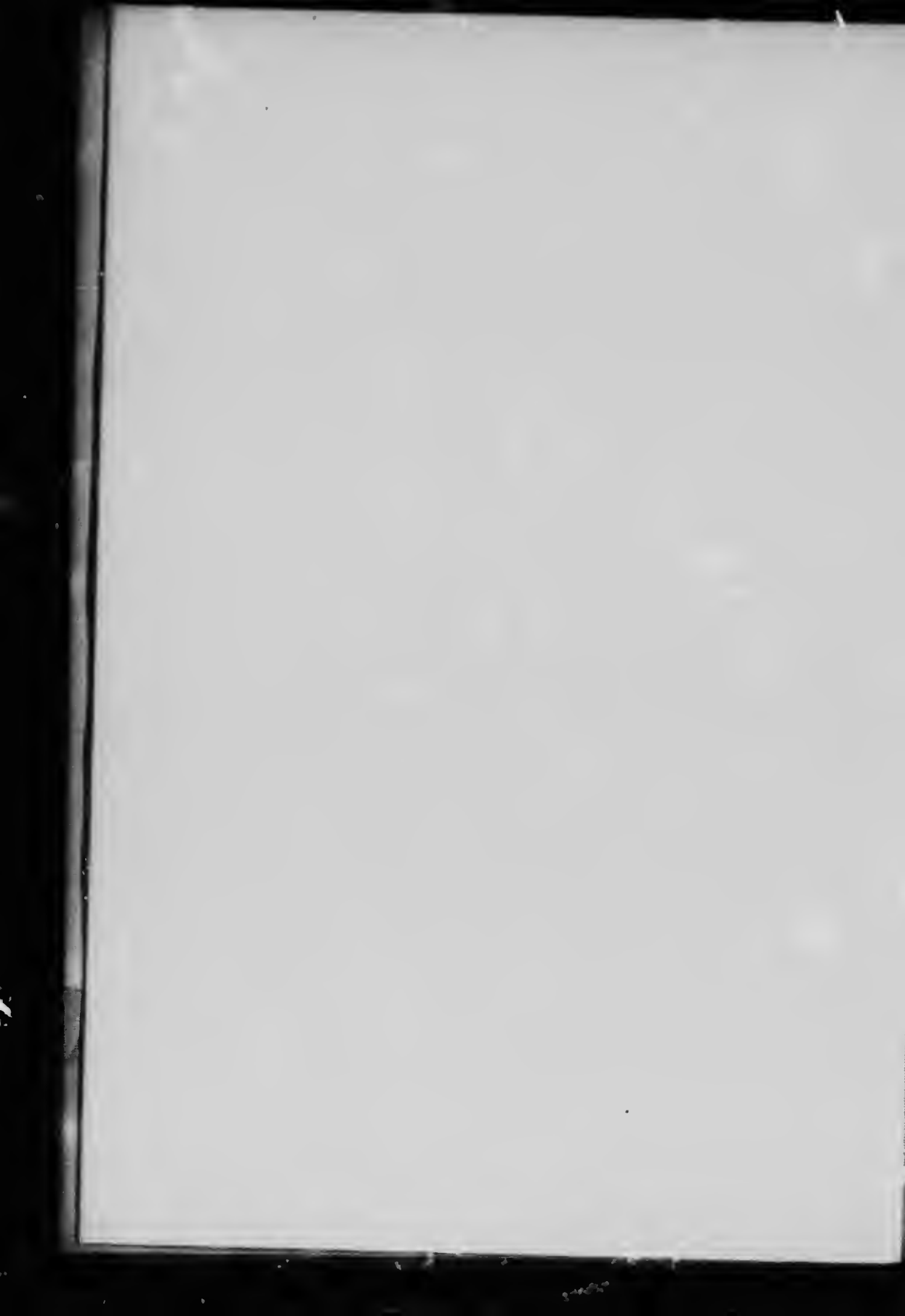




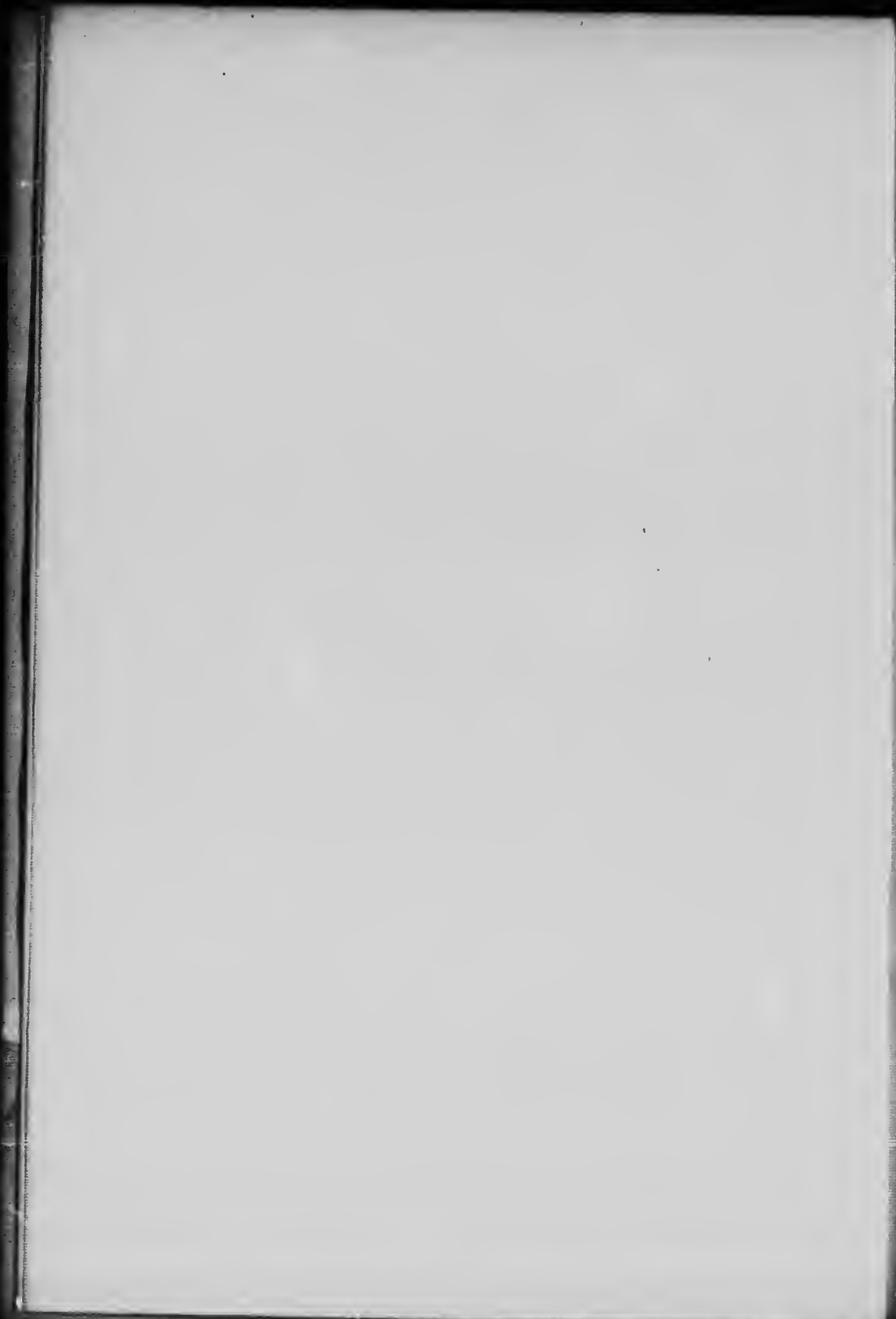
NL4

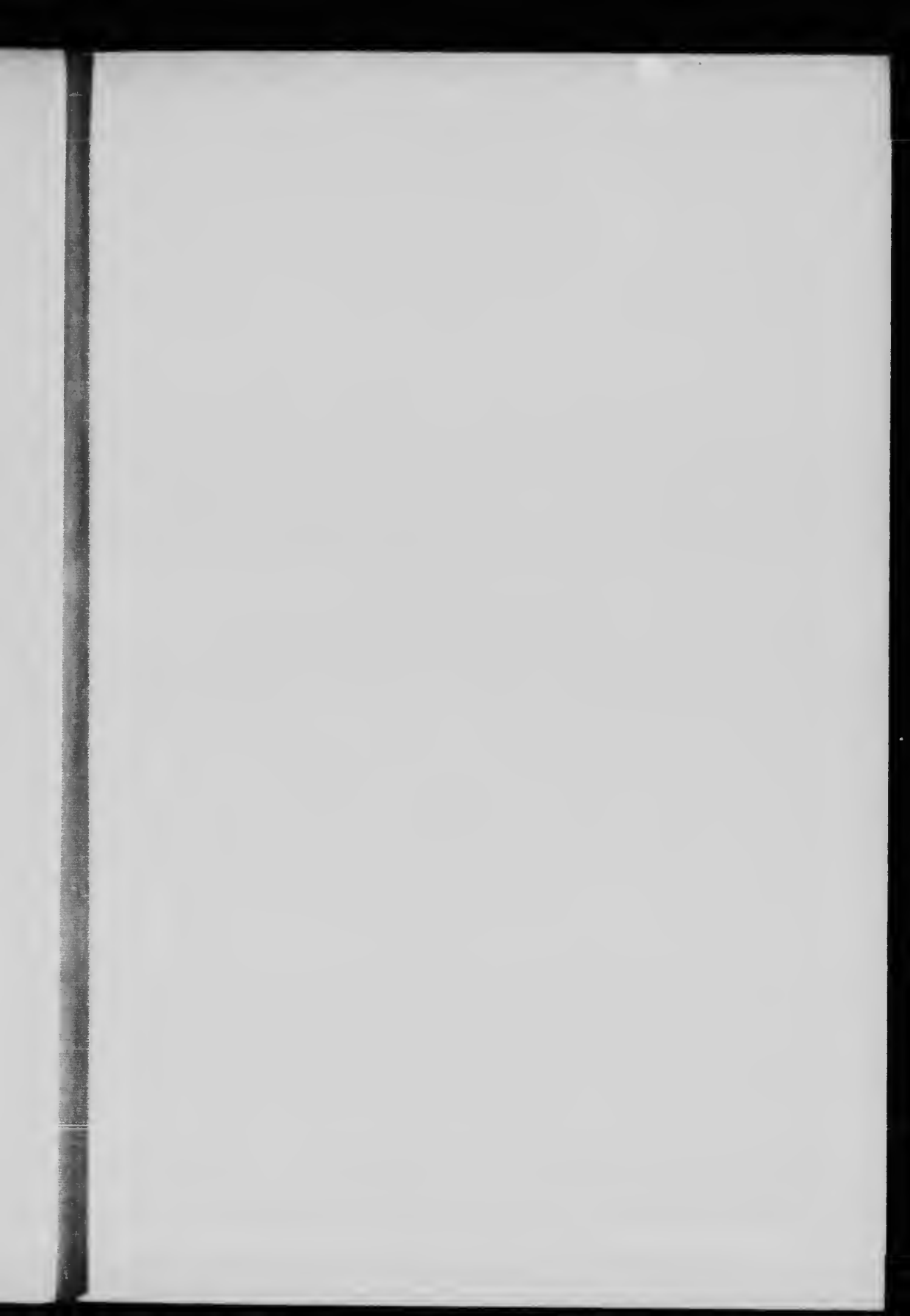
1870

1st June 5/1



FATIMA







And Fatima said to Thout: "If thou wert not a dead one,
thou mightest help me."—FRONTISPIECE. *See Page 58.*

F A T I M A

OR, ALWAYS BE A FOOL
FOR YOUR HUSBAND

Being the strange and surprising History of a Woman who was
the most Perfectly Contented and Quite Agreeable
the Cleverest and most Excellent Wife that ever lived.

BY ROBERT HERRICK

1696

LONDON: Printed by J. Sturges, at the Sign of the Gun, in St. Dunstons Church-yard.



... said to Thot: "If thou wert not dead on
... help of ... FRONTISPIECE. 8. Page 58.

FATIMA

OR, ALWAYS PICK A FOOL
FOR YOUR HUSBAND

Being the Strange Adventures of a Woman who was
the most Beautiful Creature, and Quite, Quite
the Cleverest Creature ever Was, and Knew It

BY

ROWLAND THOMAS

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY

J. DUNCAN GLEESON

TORONTO

Mc ELLAND & GOODCHILD

LIMITED

PS3539

H58

F37

1913

P***

Copyright, 1913,
BY LITTLE, BROWN, AND COMPANY.

All rights reserved

Published, September, 1913

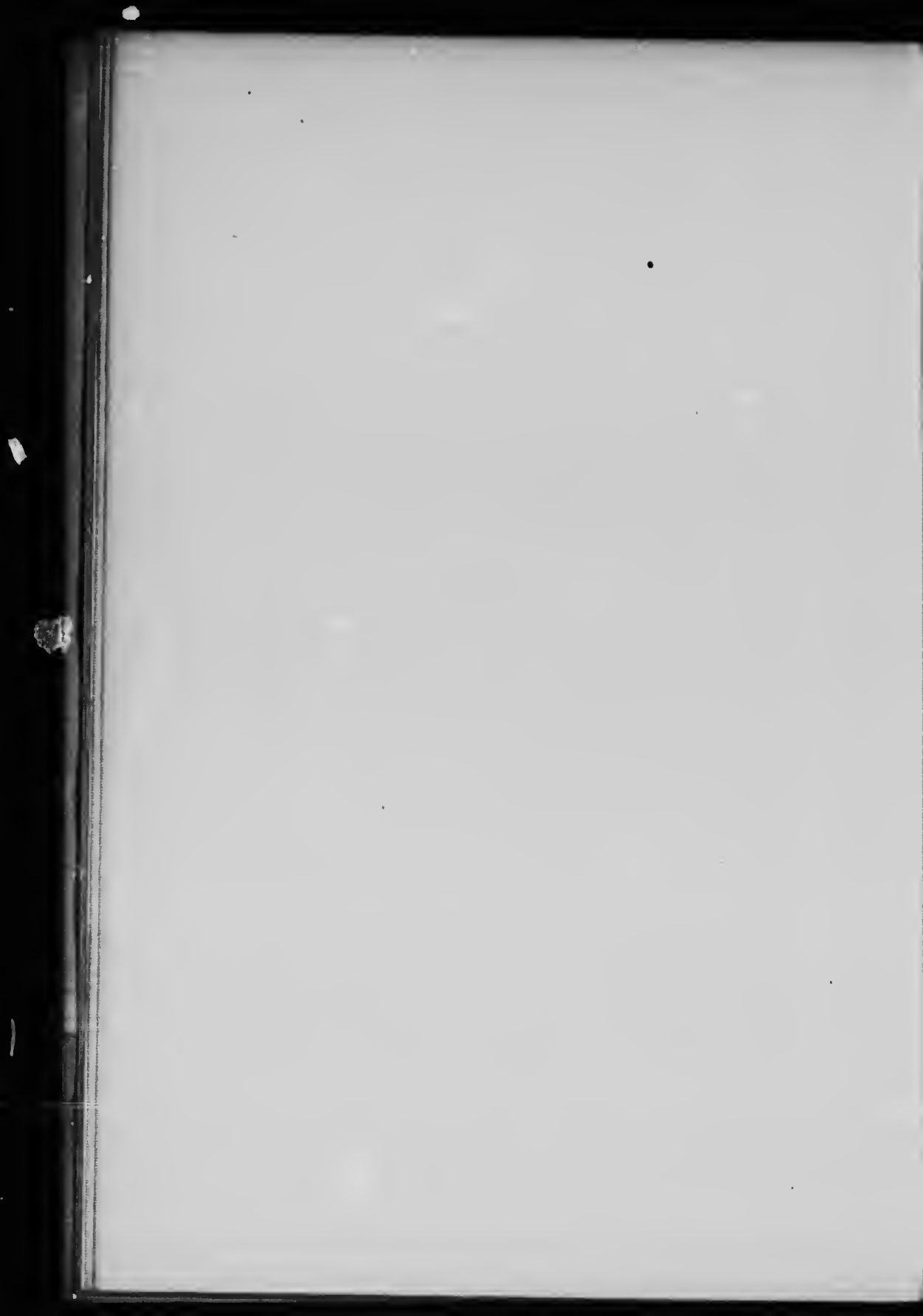
Printers

S. J. PARKHILL & CO., BOSTON, U. S. A.

880614

CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. THOUT	1
II. THE PRIDE OF FATIMA	13
III. THE CROW'S MONEY	25
IV. THE CROW'S TAXES	38
V. SHEIKH OMAR'S ZEAL	46
VI. THE TRUE WORD OF A FOOL	56
VII. WIDOW OF FORTY HUSBANDS	71
VIII. THE CROW'S LEGACY	85
IX. ALI IS FORTUNATE	95
X. HER FRIEND THE KADI	109
XI. FATIMA'S ENDURING PRIDE	120
XII. THE GREAT HUNGER OF FATIMA	128
XIII. MY LORD FATIMA	144
XIV. FATIMA MATRICULATES	159
XV. FATIMA DISCREDITED	170
XVI. FATIMA TRIUMPHANT	192
XVII. INSIDE	213
XVIII. FATIMA THE REBEL	231
XIX. ZULEIKA SMILES	250
XX. MY LORD'S WATCHMAN	263
XXI. THE PRICE	286
XXII. MY LORD	303
XXIII. FUGITIVE	316
XXIV. THE BLESSED COMMONPLACE	331



LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

And Fatima said to Thout: "If thou wert not a dead one, thou mightest help me"	<i>Frontispiece</i>
All day long, all summer long, he spoke no word, nor looked at her	PAGE 14
All the market place of Ashmunein was become a place of laughter	" 111
That door was the Báb el-Harím, the door of the women's apartments	" 213
"That which toucheth my dear lady's honor, that I will not do if she slay me"	" 284
A foal came softly and ate the beans out of her hand	" 338

F A T I M A

OR, ALWAYS PICK A FOOL FOR YOUR HUSBAND

CHAPTER I

THOUT

A GOD by the name of Thout used to be the very wisest person in wise old Egypt. He presided over writing and science, and you can see his counterfeit presentment to-day incised all over the ancient reliefs, with his solemn, ibis beak pointed straight in front of him and his tablets and stylus in either hand, completely absorbed in getting up notes on all that has been said and done in the last few aeons.

But Thout's a dead one to-day, in spite of his businesslike absorption. No one pours libations to him any more. No one's afraid of getting a bad record set down on his tab-

lets. All that's left of ancient Khmunu, chief seat of his worship, is a little mud-walled village baking on a canal embankment amid a vast expanse of cotton fields, a few granite columns, once the colonnade of the Greek Agora; and further to the north considerable relics of the pylon and the court of a sanctuary built three thousand years ago by Merenptah, the son of that great Rameses whose name is kept alive by cigarettes.

By the corner of Merenptah's pylon grows a solitary, stunted, tamarisk tree, and the court inside is carpeted with a rank growth of nettles. It's all so silent, so deserted under the shining blue of the Egyptian sky, that it makes you realize very forcibly what a very dead one Thout is nowadays.

The name of that little dura-thatched village which bakes on the canal embankment amid the cotton fields is Ashmunein, and in spite of its forlorn appearance it is a very busy little place. Half the scarabs that are taken out of Egypt are made there, and when it comes to seasonable novelties, -- whether the rage of the winter be antique stone lamps, or entrail urns of alabaster, or bronze statuettes corroded

by the centuries, or mummied feet of Egyptian princesses, the product of Ashmunein has a touch of artistry that puts it *hors concours*. The village is the abode of fellahin with simple, childlike faces and beguiling tongues, who are nobody's fools; and after dealings with them I have sometimes wondered whether Thout is after all such a very dead one as he seems. A trace of his ancient alertness may still hang about his ancient seat.

But once upon a time there lived one Fool in Ashmunein, her only one. He hadn't a brain in his head. He couldn't tell a plaster scarab from a real one. He didn't know the cartouche of Queen Hatshepsowet from that of Cleopatra. He didn't know anything at all, and the only thing he could do was to make noises, queer noises, with his mouth. He made them all the time. He liked to make them. In them alone he showed some interest.

In most places those noises would have been sheer waste, if not a nuisance. But nothing goes to waste in Ashmunein. There the noises were capitalized.

If ever you went up Nile on one of the steamers which stops at Rôda you must re-

member seeing, at the foot of the gangplank just before the steamer sailed, a blank-faced individual in a white nightgown who began barking like a dog, and braying like a donkey, and bubbling like a camel, and squeaking like a sâkyeh, and tooting like the steamer coming round a bend. That was the solitary Fool of Ashmunein. His name was Ali, just like the Prophet's son-in-law's, and as long as he crowed and brayed and clucked and bubbled, his face shone with interest. As soon as he stopped his face became a blank again, and he would squat down in the dust and scratch himself.

If you remember him, you must remember also another individual, a very intelligent-seeming, kindly individual in a black burnoose, who stood beside poor Ali and watched over him. That was Ali's cousin, and his name was Omar, just like the caliph's who burned the Alexandrian Library. And he was the Caliph of Industry who had had the wit to capitalize the noises of Ali the Fool and make them yield a revenue.

For if you remember Rôda and the noises of Ali, and remember catching Omar's phil-

anthropic eye as he stood there in the mud at gangplank end and tapped poor Ali's head and rubbed poor Ali's empty stomach, begging for Ali a small alms in the name of Allâh the All-Merciful, you must remember loosening up and fumbling in your pocket and tossing across, say, a double piastre. For Omar's philanthropic eye was a compelling one. And if you multiply yourself by all the carelessly generous Christian dogs who come to Rôda in a season, you will know the total in double piastres, say, which Omar, black-burnoosed, took in for Ali, the white-nightgowned, and you will understand how much Omar was doing for his poor cousin. For Ali, left to himself, would never have been a performer at gangplank end. He would have squatted in the dust somewhere, and wasted all his noises on the desert air, and there would have been no double handfuls of double piastres for Omar to take home each steamer day.

For Allâh, the All-Merciful, the Compassionate, prospered the enterprise exceedingly. Handfuls on handfuls of clinking silver Omar gleaned of those who laughed at and pitied the poor Fool who made noises with his mouth.

And if any of the busy people of Ashmunein noticed that it was Omar who waxed fat and prosperous, Omar who began to sport a thick red tarboosh with a blue silk tassel, Omar who always had ready money to lend at highest rates on the best security, while Ali still wore the white nightgown and in summer, when there are no Christians about, dozed on the canal embankment among Omar's goats, — if any noticed that, they must have set it down to Allâh's well-known approbation of a philanthropist. At any rate they said nothing, neither to Omar, nor to Ali, nor to one another.

So the years went by and Omar waxed very fat and prosperous, and grew a nobly bristling crop of whiskers, and took three wives unto himself in succession, and was a magnate in Ashmunein. And it came to pass that the old Sheikh-el-Beled, the village head man, died and was gathered to his fathers, and the people could think of no better man for his successor than Omar of the whiskers and the philanthropic eye and ever-ready money. So Omar became their Sheikh, and bought himself a nâbût, a stave of Carâmanian ash, and strutted with it. And he thought to take

to himself yet one more wife and fill up the complement allotted by the Prophet to true and prosperous believers. And Ali, in his white nightgown, sat in the dust at Omar's door and scratched himself.

Now it chanced that there was in those days in Ashmunein a widow. And being a widow, she went unveiled.

And twice each day, at dawn and nightfall, the widow passed the new Sheikh Omar's door, where Ali the Fool sat in the dust and scratched himself. And as the Sheikh Omar looked on her, with her water jar poised on her head, she found favor in his eyes.

For this widow was hardly turned sixteen, and was very softly dark of eye, and satiny of skin, and plumply slender in the enticing *fausse maigre* way of girls, and gazellely straight and graceful. And she was a maid as well as a widow, for he that was her betrothed had died during their betrothal. And her name was Fatima, just like the Prophet's daughter's name, and she was an orphan as well as a widow, and lived with her uncles, the wheelwrights. And the Sheikh Omar sent an old woman, a match-maker, to speak to her uncles.

Fatima laughed and asked her uncles: "What shall I do?"

And her uncles told her: "If you marry him, he is the richest man in Ashmunein."

And Fatima said: "He is fattish, and whiskerish, and oldish. I have looked over a number of that kind already, and I do not like them."

And her uncles rebuked the words. "Is a woman a bee," they asked her, "to sup always on nectar? To become even as Omar the Sheikh is the fate of the smoothest and slimmest of youths. Look upon us, thy uncles! We be as fat and bewhiskered as Omar, and older."

And Fatima answered them quickly: "But you be men. And this Sheikh is a thing with a blue silk tassel to his tarboosh, and a stave, who struts. But he is rich. Truly I know not what to tell him. I am — not disagreeable to look at. Some younger man —"

"Who would grow older and colder," they told her, "and take to himself younger wives to warm him. Better to be an old man's darling at the start. Thrice hath Omar married for heat of blood. Now will he marry thee for

pride, because you are — not disagreeable to look at. He will call you the Chosen of his House, even as the Lady of the Taj. He will load your ankles with anklets and your arms with bracelets, and his other wives will be your servants. But do as you will. We would not over-persuade you."

"And," they told her, "do not forget that he is a very kind-hearted man. Always he has ready money to loan, for interest, to all those who come to him with security. And look at what he has done for his poor cousin, Ali the Fool."

And Fatima told them: "Thank you. You have spoken the words of wisdom. I will ponder them in my heart."

"A long, long time, I think," said Fatima in her heart. For her mind told her that these were the words of wisdom. But her heart of hearts could not forget that the rich Sheikh Omar was a fattish, whiskerish, oldish thing with a blue silk tassel and a stave, who strutted. And Ali the Fool sat in the dust at Omar's door, and scratched himself.

Now it came to pass one day, as Fatima the Widow pondered the words of her uncles in

her heart, that she walked through Ashmunein and out by the granite columns of the old Greek Agora, and still further north to the considerable relics of the sanctuary built by Merenptah. And she passed by the stunted tamarisk, so solitary under the shining Egyptian sky, and under the crumbling gate of the pylon, and sat herself down on a stone amid the nettles in the court, and asked herself once again whether she should marry the Sheikh Omar, that oldish, whiskerish, fattish thing with the philanthropic eye and kindly heart and ever-ready money.

And she lifted her eyes to the wall of the court. And there, on a decaying *relief en creux*, was Thout, his solemn, ibis beak and eye in profile, working away absorbedly with tablets and stylus at his eternal notes. And Fatima pouted at him, he seemed so tiresomely sensible. "Of course it would be the sensible thing to do," said Fatima to Thout. "He's good-natured, if he is fat. Look what he's done for Ali the Fool."

Thout never stopped his work. He did not wink that absorbed eye at Fatima, or croak out winged words, from that long, solemn-

curving ibis beak. He had no need to. He was quite down to date and used telepathy. "Yes?" Thout suggested dryly. "Why not look again, and look this time at what he's done with Ali the Fool, as well as for him."

And Fatima looked. And she saw what the Sheikh Omar had done with Ali the Fool. He had made himself. "Why," cried Fatima to Thout, "hadn't I seen an easy thing like that before?"

Thout never winked or blinked, but in return for her admiration he sent Fatima the Widow another telepath. It was a hunch he sent this time, a hunch so simple that its very simplicity made Fatima wriggle excitedly on her rock and sting her slender, unclad ankles on the nettles, — a hunch so big that its very bigness froze Fatima the Widow to her rock, a very solitary statue of meditation, there in the empty, silent court under the shining blue of the Egyptian sky. It wasn't till sunset, with its stir of homing water-fowl, that she stirred, and rose, and bowed toward Mecca for a hurried "In the name of Allâh the Merciful and Gracious," and turned toward home. And in her walk was the firmness of decision,

for I suppose Thout's hunch might be translated from the Old Egyptian thus: "What man hath done, woman can do even better."

And that's why, if you happened to go up Nile that winter, and happened to stop at Rôda, and listened to Ali the Fool making queer noises with his mouth at gangplank end, you didn't see beside him his fattish Cousin Omar of the philanthropic eye. Instead, there stood beside him a woman-thing with the slender gracefulness and soft, dark-eyed shyness of a gazelle. You tossed her your double piastre very willingly, taking her for the poor Fool's devoted daughter. But she was Fatima, once the widow, now Ali's wife and manager.

Turn about's fair play, but the Sheikh Omar had much to say, in his beard, about the exchange. As for Thout, he never winked or blinked for all the talk his suggestion caused in Ashmunein. And Ali the Fool just sat down in the dust at Fatima's door to scratch himself.

CHAPTER II

THE PRIDE OF FATIMA

SO it came to pass that Fatima refused in marriage the hand of the rich Sheikh Omar and married Omar's cousin, Ali. And Omar went away to his own house and muttered in his beard.

Now Ali was a fool, and could bray like an ass, and howl like a jackal, and bubble like a camel, and toot like the whistle of a steamer coming round the bend of Nile where Rôda is. And for the rest he could sit contentedly in the dust all day long and stare at nothing.

But from his noises the wit of Fatima gleaned even more and fatter handfuls of double pias-tres than Omar's wit had gleaned, for the rich Christian dogs on the steamers responded more generously to her mention of Allâh the Compassionate. For she was but just turned sixteen, and was very good to look upon, and the

dogs were told that she was the devoted daughter of Ali.

And she took home with her very many handfuls of silver, and replastered the mud walls of her house, and rethatched its roof with dura straw. And she loaded her ankles with anklets and her arms with armbands, even as Omar would have loaded them but she would not let him. And Fatima bought cattle and sheep and goats, and began to wax prosperous, as the Sheikh Omar had done before her.

And in that summer, when there were no Christians, Ali the Fool sat in the dust on the canal embankment among the grazing flocks and herds, and scratched himself and gazed at nothing. And Fatima sat beside him. All day long, all summer long, he spoke no word, nor looked at her. And Fatima counted the increase of her cattle, her calves, and her ewes with lamb, and was content.

But a second summer came, and still Ali sat all day and spoke not, nor looked on her. Then Fatima was not content. For she was dark of eye and hair, and round of shape, and barely seventeen, and she had been the greatly desired of men. And even now, when she



All day long, all summer long, he spoke no word,
nor looked at her.—*Page 14.*



walked through Ashmunein at dawn and sunset with water jar on head, all men looked at her save Ali the Fool, her husband. He sat all day long and spoke no word, and she grew weary of the silence. And she set herself to make Ali the Fool look on her, and to make him speak to her.

And first she taught him to speak, as one teaches a little child. She took him by the hand, to make him look at her, and she said to him: "I am Fatima, and thy wife." And after many trials, Ali the Fool said after her, but without understanding, as a little child might say its *fâtiha*: "Thou art Fatima and my wife." That day she made him say it many times, holding his hand that he might look at her.

And next day she told him: "I am Fatima thy wife, and I am beautiful." And when nightfall came and they led the cattle, released from their hobbles, to water, Ali the Fool could say: "Thou art my wife, and thou art beautiful." But he said the words without understanding, nor did he look on her unless she touched his hand.

And in the days that followed she told him

many things. She told him: "I am thy beautiful wife Fatima, the greatly desired above all women." She told him: "All men have burned with desire of the beauty of Fatima the Widow and thou alone art blessed for she is thy wife and thou art her husband." She told him: "My eyes and my hair are the Night. My throat is as soft as roses, and my lips are twin petals of roses. My flesh is as sweet as roses. My breasts are twin pomegranates and my feet are the feet of a young gazelle upon fields of clover." Many such things she told him day by day, and Ali the Fool held her hand like a little child and retold them to her. And Fatima was pleased to hear her beauty praised so highly, even without understanding by a fool, and the summer days were not so long.

And the days went by, and Ali the Fool became pleased with the sound of his own talking, even as wiser men are. He said one day to a cow: "Thou art Zaida, the bald-faced cow, and my cow," and Fatima was pleased and praised him. One night as he came home with the cattle, he stood in the street before his house, and looked at the house, and said

THE PRIDE OF FATIMA 17

to it: "Thou art my beautiful house, the greatly desired above all houses."

After that day he spoke many things, sometimes without understanding, and his eyes were blank. But sometimes he spoke, it seemed, with understanding, for there was light in his eyes, as in the eyes of other men. And most of all was there light when Fatima made him look on her and praise her beauty in the words she had chosen to praise it. And Fatima was pleased, and her beauty was increased and her eyes grew darker, and she stood erect with pride, and walked swayingly with pride, so that men looked on her and said: "Truly this woman is wasted on a Fool."

Only the rich Sheikh Omar looked askance at her, and muttered in his beard when she passed by. And Fatima saw him look askance, and heard him mutter, and she lifted her chin. For he was an oldish, fattish, whiskerish man whose offer of marriage she had spurned. Now the words the Sheikh Omar muttered in his beard were these words: "Pride goeth before; but a fall followeth hard behind."

And it was a time of rejoicing in Egypt. The month Ramadan was ended. And the

feast of the lesser Bairam was ended. And it was the twenty-and-third day of the month Shauwâl, the day when the Mecca pilgrimage sets out from Cairo. And in Cairo every man who was a true believer spent that day in the streets. And the windows of the harems were thrown open, and the veiled women looked out. In the Rumeileh, below Salâh-ed-Dîn's citadel, the tall tent of red velvet and gold swayed in the wind. The tall caravan camels swayed under trappings of palm branches with oranges, and their masters, the Emir el-Hagg and the Delîl el-Hagg, with the mahmal, swayed upon them. The hundred bands of music played, and the banners of the dervishes fluttered.

All up Nile, even to Ashl. . . , the gladness of that day was felt. Friends embraced friends, masters spoke kindly to their servants, children raced shouting through the streets, and the creak of shadoof and sâkyeh, raising water, was silenced in the fields.

And Fatima decked herself in her richest apparel. A shirt of red silk she put on, — though the Koran forbids it, — and a necklace of blood-red carnelian stones, and wide

THE PRIDE OF FATIMA 19

breeches of silk, and a cloak of silk with wide sleeves, a sableh. And she put on her armlets and anklets, and on her fingers and toes she put rings of gold and silver. She darkened her lashes with kohl, and stained her ten finger-tips with henna. And she swayed with pride, and stood before Ali and asked him: "Now is not the beautiful Fatima the greatly desired above all women?"

And Ali looked at her, and answered her without understanding, like a little child: "Thou art my beautiful wife Fatima, the greatly desired."

And he looked again, and light dawned in his eyes, and he told her: "Thy eyes and thy hair are the Night. Thy throat is as sweet as roses, and thy lips are twin petals of roses."

And he looked yet again, and the light lightened in his eyes, and he told her: "Thou art as sweet as roses. Thy breasts are pomegranates. Now alone am I blessed among men, for I alone am thy husband. And thou art my wife." And he would have embraced her.

But Fatima laughed at him. And she smote him across the face, that it bled. For she was

angry and she said: " Shall I yield my beauty to a fool? "

But within her, her heart sang. " For," she said, " no longer am I a married widow, but a wife, for my husband hath seen my beauty and desires it, like other men." But Ali the Fool, after she smote him, wept like a child, and sat down in the dust before the door, and spoke no more words. And Fatima was angry again and said: " Shall I yield my beauty to a fool, because he weeps? " And she heeded not his tears.

The days went by, and Ali the Fool sat in the dust and spoke no words, but gazed at nothing, like the fool he was. And Fatima stepped over his shadow, as she went in and out the door, and heeded him not.

And Nile reached high stage and began to fall, and the people of Ashmunein prepared themselves for their winter's harvest. For with falling Nile come the steamers to Rôda, and the Christians.

And it was the first steamer-day, and all Ashmunein set out for Rôda, bearing with it the scarabs and the bronzes and all the antiquities it had created through the summer. And

THE PRIDE OF FATIMA 21

Fatima dressed herself in the scant, blue cotton gown of a poor fellah girl, and summoned Ali from the dust and clad him in a white night-gown, and went to Rôda, that Ali might glean from the careless dogs double piastres of silver, in the name of Allâh the Compassionate.

And the Dragoman of the steamer saw them coming afar off and said to the Christians: "It is Ali the Fool, of Ashmunein, who makes noises with his mouth, and his little daughter Fatima, who cares for him. Listen and you shall hear it. It is quite unusual, I assure you."

And Fatima stood Ali in the mud at gang-plank end, and faced him toward the steamer, and waited with downcast eyes, as her custom was. And all behind them was a crowd of country-folk. And Ali lifted not his voice, and she whispered to him: "Speak, Ali, speak!"

But he was dumb, and some in the crowd laughed and told each other: "He is stricken dumb." And others said: "He has forgotten his noises."

And Fatima whispered again: "Speak, Ali. I, Fatima thy wife, bid thee." And she took his hand.

And he looked at her. And as he looked, a light lightened in his eyes. And he held her hand, and turned to the steamer, and lifted up his voice. And the crowd of country-folk lifted up its voice, in laughter. And the crew of the steamer laughed, and the Dragoman. For there issued from the opened mouth of Ali the Fool not the braying of asses, or the snarling of camels, or the yelping of jackals, as they had expected, but words in Arabi.

And the Christians asked their Dragoman: "Why do you laugh?"

And the Dragoman said: "My word, but this is curious! By Jove, but this is funny! By George, but this is very laughable!"

And the Christians told him: "Tell us what he says, that we may laugh, too." And the Dragoman told them. "He says: 'This is Fatima the Widow, the greatly desired above all women.' He says: 'All men have burned with desire of her beauty, but I alone am her husband.' He says: 'Her eyes are the Night, her flesh is sweet as roses, her breasts are pomegranates, her feet are the feet of a young gazelle upon fields of clovers.'"

And the Christians laughed with the crowd,

but some of them looked at Fatima, and these said: "The Fool is not such a fool." And one fair-haired, Christian woman murmured: "Would a man be a fool to whisper such words to a woman? Then would God had sent me a fool." And because they saw Fatima standing straight and proud, with downcast eyes, among the crowd that laughed at her, they all flung her pieces of copper.

When Fatima saw the coppers she was angry, and wrenched her hand from Ali's, and left the coppers in the mud for the brats to scramble for, and walked off along Nile bank. And Ali kept on speaking, but the Sheikh Omar followed close behind her, chuckling in his beard.

And Fatima sat her down on a bank of dried Nile mud, and wept, and tore her hair. For she was very angry. And she said: "Now am I the most miserable of women. I have spoiled a good fool and have not made a husband of him. For," she said, "is Fatima a dog and the daughter of dogs, to yield her beauty to a fool?"

And Omar the Sheikh stood close behind her and chuckled in his beard. But his eye

kindled as she spoke of her beauty, and as he saw the roundness of her bowed neck. And he told himself: "To him that waits, Allāh sends. The hart may escape to the desert for a day, but shall not thirst lead her back to the water at nightfall?"

But Fatima dried her tears, and went and took the hand of Ali, and led him back to Ash-munein. "For," she said, "Allāh has made the bed and I will lie in it. And," she said, "is Fatima a dog, too, to heed the laughter of these dogs?"

CHAPTER III

THE CROW'S MONEY

SO Fatima spoiled a good fool and a profitable one by teaching him to talk like other men and to look upon her beauty.

And no longer was the fool content to make meaningless noises with his mouth, for silver, but must needs prate of the beauty of Fatima his wife to all men for nothing, praising her beauty freely in the words with which she had taught him to praise it.

And all men laughed at him, and Fatima was disconsolate, and sat in her house with her hair unbound, avoiding the sight of men. For all men laughed at her as well, and the rich Sheikh Omar chuckled continually, saying: "She has overreached herself, and more hath she bitten off the loaf than she could chew. For pride goeth before; but a fall followeth hard behind." So Fatima sat in

her house, and Ali the Fool tended her flocks and herds and grazed them on the dura stubble in the fields. For it was autumn and the crops were harvested.

And the days of Ali were pleasant days. For the cattle stood and chewed their cud and looked at him, and the ewes lay and looked steadfastly, and they did not laugh at him, as men did, when he spoke to them of the beauty of Fatima his Wife. And because he was a fool, and there was no question or purpose in his eyes, the beasts of the field and the birds of the air came to bear him company. Jackals came out of the desert and sat on their tails before him, and marabout storks came and danced their dances before him, and crows came and sat on the backs of the cattle. And Ali talked with all these about the beauty of Fatima his Wife.

And most of all he talked with one crow, very large and very glossy, which he called My Friend the Crow. To this friend Ali opened his heart and confided to him the secret of his blessedness. "For," he said to the crow, "many men have known desire of Fatima and her beauty. But I alone am her husband

THE CROW'S MONEY

27

and she is my wife." And the crow cocked his head on one side, and looked at Ali, and answered him "Caw! Caw!" And they understood each other and were friends.

Now the dun cow was with calf and out of flesh. And an old man passed by and saw her, and said to Ali: "Friend, that dun cow that is with calf doth not thrive on this coarse dura stubble. You should feed her with a full meal of young nettles, that the pricking of the nettles inside her may prick her appetite, and she will thrive again."

And Ali asked him: "Where are nettles?"

And the old man told him: "How shall I know? Go and see. And Allâh go with thee, brother, for I perceive now thou art a fool."

And Ali told him: "El-hamd-illah" — Allâh's be the praise for that — and gave his flocks in charge of a boy and went to look for nettles with the dun cow.

And he led the cow all round about Ash-munein and found no nettles anywhere till he came to the considerable relics of the sanctuary built by Merenptah, three thousand years ago, for the wise god Thout. And Ali passed under the crumbling pylon of the temple and

entered its silent court, and the courtyard was all grown over with young and tender nettles. The dun cow began to graze on them and Ali sat down on a fallen capital to wait till she was filled. On the wall before him was the image of Thout, his solemn, ibis beak and eye in profile, and his tablets and stylus in his hands. And Thout paid no heed to Ali nor Ali to him.

And in the courtyard, on Ali's right hand, was a single column of the temple that still stood upright. And while Ali sat there and the cow grazed, his friend the crow came flying, and perched upon the top of the column, and said to him: "Caw! Caw!"

And Ali said: "Yes, brother, she is the dun cow, and my cow."

And the crow said: "Caw?"

And Ali answered him: "Yes, brother, I would sell her, for a price."

And the crow said again: "Ca-a-a-aw?"

But Ali answered him craftily: "How much will you give?"

And the crow put his head on one side and looked back craftily at Ali. "Caw, caw, caw, caw, caw!" said the crow.

THE CROW'S MONEY

29

"Five pieces of gold is not enough," said Ali. "But make it six, and the dun cow is yours."

And the crow turned his head about and preened his feathers so long that Ali was almost tempted to let her go for five. But finally the crow made up his mind and answered: "Caw."

"Done with you for six!" cried Ali. "But have you so much money, brother?"

And the crow pecked at the hollow of the top of the column at his feet, and lifted somewhat shining in his beak, and tossed it in the air, and a piece of gold fell at Ali's feet. And the crow said: "Caw?"

"I will leave the cow here now for this, your earnest-money," said Ali. "But you must bring me the rest to-morrow, brother."

And the crow said: "Caw!" And Ali tied the cow by her rope and hurried away to tell Fatima of the hard bargain he had driven with his friend the crow. "For," he said, "the crow did not notice that the cow was thin."

And as Ali went through the market-place of Ashmunein, he met a woman of the Bishârn

Arabs who was wandering through Middle Egypt and hawking trinkets. She had chains of beads, and necklaces, and women's aprons of beads and leather, and bracelets, and armlets, and anklets. And this old woman asked Ali: "Have you a wife, sir?"

And Ali answered: "Thou speakest truth, O my aunt. For Fatima is my wife, and her eyes and her hair are the Night. Her throat is sweet as roses, and her lips are twin petals of roses. And her feet are the feet of a young gazelle. Verily am I the most blessed of men, for I alone am her husband."

And the Arab woman told him: "Messakûm Allâh bil-kheir!" And she showed Ali a necklace of blue beads and white shells, threaded on gazelle-hide, and two anklets of beaten copper. And she told him: "About her soft throat you must hang the necklace, which is a talisman, and about her ankles must you put the anklets, for they are charms. Then will she bless thee and thou wilt be that much more blessed."

And Ali told her: "Why, so I should do, though I had not thought of it. How much is the price?"

Now a fair price for the trinkets was one piastre, but perceiving that Ali was a fool, the old woman told him six.

And Ali said: "Ai! O my aunt, I have but one," and he showed her his one piece of gold. "But," he told her, "to-morrow I shall have five more, if you will keep the charms for me until then?" Now one piece of gold alone is worth one hundred piastres.

And the old woman told Ali: "Nay, I will wait and to-morrow you shall bring me the other five pieces. But take the jewels with you now and I will trust you, for I perceive that you are an honest man and would not deceive a poor old widow with ten children, Allâh be merciful and gracious to her."

And Ali told himself: "Nay, but how honest all the world is and how it trusteth me. For my friend the crow trusted me when I might have taken his gold and kept the cow. And this poor widow trusteth me, who hath never seen my face before." And Ali gave her his one piece of gold, saying: "To-morrow I will come here early with the other five." And he took what he had bought and went to his house. "For," he said, "Fatima will bless me when

she sees what I have brought her for one cow. For are they not charms?"

And Ali said to Fatima: "My beautiful wife, I pray thee put on thy richest apparel. Put on thy shirt of red silk, and thy sableh, and thy habara, and thy markûb of red leather of Morocco, and all thy ornaments and jewels. For I have brought thee what is more than all them."

And Fatima humored him and put them on. For she was weary of sitting all day alone, with her hair unbound.

And Ali drew his gift from his pouch, where he had hidden it, and gave it to her.

And Fatima was angry when she saw the meanness of it. "Doth Fatima wear beads and copper?" she asked him. "Where got you this stuff?"

And Ali told her how he had got them and that they were charms.

And Fatima flung them in the corner, saying: "Truly they were a charm, to charm the money from thee. But where got you a piece of gold?"

And Ali told her that his friend the crow gave it him.

“A crow,” cried Fatima, “will have money when thou hast wit. And if by any chance a crow did have a piece of gold, why should he give it thee?”

Then Ali told her how he had sold the cow and left her tied in the temple, and taken one piece of gold for earnest-money, and how that the crow would bring the rest to-morrow. “For,” he said, “he is my friend, and a very honest crow to boot.”

“The dun cow left out in the evening chill and she with calf!” cried Fatima. “Now. Allâh witness what it is to have a fool for a husband and how it trieth the patience!” And she ran to the temple to fetch the cow home and the cow was there no longer.

Then was Fatima very angry, and wept, and ran back to the house, and upbraided Ali for his folly. And Ali said: “You are beautiful when you are angry. And do not fear for the money. For I will vouch that my friend is an honest crow.”

Then Fatima indeed was angry. “The piece of gold hath followed the old woman,” she told him, “and the cow has followed the piece of gold. Now go you and follow them

all three." And she thrust him from the house.

So Ali slept that night among the cattle, in their shed. And in the morning, early, he arose and went out to the considerable relics of Thout's temple. "For," he said, "my friend is honest, and when Fatima sees the gold, she will be angry no longer and will give me my breakfast, and, besides, I can pay the other five pieces which I owe to the Arab woman, the widow, the mother of ten children."

And when Ali came inside the court of the temple, the crow was perched there already, as it were waiting his coming. And the crow said: "Caw!" and pecked at the hollow in the top of the column.

"Maharbaten!" said Ali. "But if you have not brought the other five pieces, O my brother, Fatima will be very angry with us."

The crow said: "Ca-a-aw!" and pecked again at the hollow of the column.

"Nay, then, throw it me, brother," Ali told him, "and I will carry it to Fatima and prove to her thou art an honest crow, as I have said and she would not believe."

But the crow only pecked again at the hollow

of the column, and put his head very much on one side, and looked at Ali. And he said: "Caw!" and flew away.

"Nay, brother, I can climb up if I must," Ali called after him. "But you might have thrown it me."

So Ali climbed up and all the hollow at the top of the column was full of pieces of gold. They lay there as thick as grains of dura in a basket.

"Now is not my friend an honest crow?" cried Ali. And he counted himself five pieces of the gold, and clutched them in his hand, and slid down the column, and ran to tell Fatima and show her.

"Nay, where got you them?" she asked him.

"It is the crow's money," Ali told her, "which he brought me in payment for the cow. Now is he not an honest crow, but a fool? For he cannot count. He brought a hundred times as much as this. It lay heaped thick as dura in a basket, and I might have cheated him, for he had flown away. But he had trusted me, and I took the five pieces he owed me, though the rest lay heaped up like dura. Look how they shine!"

And Fatima's eyes shone as she looked, for the pieces were very old, as they might be the remnant of some old, forgotten treasure. "Who knows but Allâh?" she said in her heart. "It may be that some man of old hid gold upon the column, and the crow has found it. If that be so, Allâh bear witness that a woman might do worse than have for husband a fool who talks with crows!"

And Ali ran away to the market-place to pay his debt to the widowed Arab woman with the ten children. And when he was gone, Fatima hid a basket under her mantle and set out past the colonnade of the old Greek Agora to the desert edge, where stand the considerable remains of the temple built for Thout by Merenptah, three thousand years ago.

And the court of the temple was very still and empty under the blue Egyptian sky, and only Thout was there, busy with his tablets and his stylus, as he has always been and always will be.

And Fatima could not climb the column, for her flowing garments cumbered her. And she listened and there was no sound. And she looked about her and only Thout was there.

And she laughed and said: "If thy garments encumber thee, cast off then thy garments."

So, in the court of the temple before the column, she cast off her garments, and took her basket, and climbed the column, for she was strong and agile as a boy. And in the hollow at the top she found the gold heaped up like dura, even as Ali ha' said.

And she took the gold, and came down to the ground again, and put on her clothing. "Allâh's be the praise," she said. "Behold what it is to have a fool for a husband!" And though it was heavy, she took the basket under her mantle and went back to Ash-munein.

Now all this while Ali had been seeking the Arab woman, the mother of ten children, to give her the other five pieces of gold which he owed her. And he could not find her. For she had taken her one piece of gold the night before and gone out into the desert with it, to keep it safe.

CHAPTER IV

THE CROW'S TAXES

AND Ali went up and down in the market-place of Ashmunein and asked all men: "Brother, have you seen the Arab woman, the widow, the mother of ten children, who sells jewels which are charms?"

And they laughed at him. And one said: "The charms have charmed her away." And another said: "Her husband came and took her away, for he was not dead but only asleep."

And Ali met the Sheikh Omar in the street and him he asked also: "O my cousin, have you seen the widow woman?"

And Omar asked him: "What widow woman?" and Ali told him. And the Sheikh Omar pursed his lips under his beard and said: "Why seek you this widow woman?"

And Ali told him: "To pay her the five pieces of gold which I promised her." And Omar pursed his lips tighter and said: "Where are the five pieces of gold?"

And Ali told him: "I have them here in my hand."

Then the Sheikh Omar said: "Nay, have you not heard that the ten children of the widow woman are all stricken with the small-pox and are dead, and she has gone away to bury them?"

And Ali said: "No one told me that. Allâh be pitiful and gracious to her. When did she go?"

And Omar pursed his lips and said: "When saw you her last?"

And Ali told him last night about the time of the Maghrib — the first call to prayer.

And Omar said: "Then she set out about the time of the Ashâ — the second call to prayer. She went to Assuân."

And Ali cried with a loud voice: "Now am I a wretched man. For I promised her the gold and did not give it her, and she had trusted me."

And Omar said: "Nay, I will write to her that she will understand!" And he pursed his lips and said: "Nay, am I not the Sheikh? Give me the gold and I will keep it for her, and when she comes here again and asks me for it, I will give it her."

And Ali told him "Thank you," and gave him the gold.

And the Sheikh Omar looked at the pieces of gold and saw that they were very old, as it might be of the time of the Ptolemies, and he said: "Where got you gold like this gold?"

And Ali told him: "It is the crow's money which he gave me for the dun cow which I sold him."

And the Sheikh Omar pursed his lips under his beard, for he saw that men were listening. And he said to Ali: "Come aside into a quiet place."

So they went aside into a quiet place and Omar said to Ali: "Now, I pray thee tell me all, for this seems a curious matter, and am I not thy cousin and the Sheikh?"

And Ali told him how that he had sold the dun cow to the crow and left her in the courtyard of the temple, and how that the crow was an honest crow and had taken the cow and brought the pieces of gold, even as he had promised. "Nay," said Ali, "is not this an honest world, and how all men put their trust in one another! For the crow is a fool and

cannot count, and he had brought gold and heaped it up in the hollow of the column like grains of dura in a basket, and he had flown away and left it. But because he was an honest crow and put his trust in me, I took only the five pieces which he owed me, — and which I owe to the poor widow woman who has lost all her children, — Allâh be merciful and pitious! — and all the rest of the gold I left where it was.”

And the Sheikh Omar pursed his lips and said: “Nay, but this is a curious matter indeed. Let us go to the temple.”

Now on the road to the temple they met Fatima, Ali's wife, and she lifted her chin and looked at Omar the Sheikh. And Omar pursed his lips and looked at her, but they did not halt nor speak. And Omar whispered to Ali: “Seems it not that she bears something heavy hidden under her mantle?” And Ali told him: “So it seems, my cousin.” And Omar muttered in his beard: “Nay, but the matter grows more curious. For what would Fatima be carrying and seek to hide it?”

And when they came to the court of the temple, Omar said: “Climb you up and show

me the gold. For I am — of middle age, and — comfortably plumpish, and it becomes not the dignity of my position to climb.”

And Ali told him: “Nay, but we must not take the money. For it is the crow’s, and he is an honest crow and has trusted us. Else will I not climb.”

And Omar pursed his lips and told him: “Nay, we will not take the money of the honest crow — save what is needful.” And he chuckled in his beard and said: “Am I not the Sheikh, and is it not my duty to collect the taxes? And it comes to my mind that in all the years I have been Sheikh, this crow has never paid his taxes. What is needful for his taxes I will take for Government, for am I not the Sheikh? But no more will I take. Climb up, I pray you.”

And Ali said: “It is but just he paid his taxes,” and he climbed.

And when he came to the top of the column, he uttered a loud cry and said: “Oh, the poor crow! His money is all gone!”

And the Sheikh Omar cursed in his beard and said: “Come down! Come down! For thou art a fool, and I must see for myself.”

THE CROW'S TAXES

43

And he could not climb the column because of the dignity of his years, and because he was encumbered by the flowing garments of a Sheikh, and he was very wroth. And he looked all about him and saw only Ali and the image of the wise god, Thout. And he cursed in his beard and muttered: "If thy garments encumber thee, cast off thy garments." And he cast them off, and Thout kept on working with his tablets and his stylus, and Thout's solemn beak and eye in profile were quite grave, even though Omar was an oldish, fattish, whiskerish man, and the hot sand of the court burned his naked feet, and he capered on the sand in his nakedness. Nor did Ali laugh, for Ali was a fool.

And Omar climbed up the column and saw the hollow in it where the crow's money had been. And he cursed, and slid down to the ground again, and looked on the ground at his feet, where he might have looked before. And he said: "Now is the matter no longer curious, but very plain." And he showed Ali a footprint in the sand and told him: "It is the print of Fatima, thy wife. No other footprint is so small as that one. She is the w

woman who has done this thing and come here before us."

And Ali smote his breast and cried aloud: "O Fatima, thou wicked woman! For thou hast stolen the poor crow's money."

And Omar beat upon his breast and cried: "O wicked woman, Fatima, to steal the money that belongs to Government, for taxes. For am I not the Sheikh? But I will have the money yet."

And Ali said: "Let us go and take it from her, for she is a wicked woman to steal the poor crow's money."

And Omar told him: "Nay, it is not so easy. For she is a woman of wit, and if I come openly to take the money she will have hidden it, and it will be lost to me." And Omar pursed his lips and said: "Now I have thought. Go you quickly to Ashmunein and quietly to thy house, and speak no word to Fatima, but watch her where she hides the gold. And when she has hidden it securely, speak no word, but come and tell me, and I will come with my soldiers and take it from her, for she is a very wicked woman."

And Ali said: "We must bring his money

back here for the crow, for he has trusted us."

And Omar said: "Except what is needful for taxes. Forget not the taxes, I pray you. What is needful for taxes I will take for Government, for am I not the Sheikh? And what is not needful for taxes I will bring back to the crow. Now go quickly, and come back quickly, and tell me, and I will come with the soldiers."

And Ali said: "Before thou comest with the soldiers, cousin, I pray thee put on thy garments. For it is not seemly that a Sheikh should walk without garments in the sight of men."

So Omar beminded himself of his garments and put them on. And Ali ran quickly to Ashmunein, and came to his house, and went in quietly to see where Fatima, his wicked wife, would hide the money of the poor crow, who had trusted them.

CHAPTER V

SHEIKH OMAR'S ZEAL

NOW Fatima came home to her house with the basket of gold under her mantle, though it was heavy. And when she was come there, she said: "What is well hidden is doubly safe," and she set herself to hide the gold.

And in the earthen floor at the corner of her house she dug a hole. And as she dug, it came to her mind how she had met the Sheikh Omar on the road, and how he had pursed his lips and looked at her. And she said in her heart: "As clover draweth the bees, so gold draweth Omar to itself; and is he not as full of zeal for gold as an egg is full of meat? And he is the Sheikh." And Fatima stopped her digging and bethought herself.

And Fatima laughed and said: "Now I have thought," and she dug the hole very deep. And in the bottom of it she did not put the gold. That she put in a bag, and flung it in

an outhouse with a heap of clothing that must be washed. But in the bottom of the hole she put an egg that had been boiled till it was hard. And she laughed to see the egg there and began to put the earth back in the hole.

And she took her time, and tamped the earth down so that it would be hard to dig up again. "For," she said, "there is no haste. For it may be that Omar will not come himself, but will send Ali to spy out where I hide the gold. And Ali is a fool, and will speak to him the truth of what he sees. And then may Omar come and find what he will find."

And as she put the earth back, Ali came and entered quietly, and spoke no word, but sat down. And she spoke no word to him, but put the earth back without haste, tamping it down. And after he had watched her, Ali went out quietly and went to find Omar the Sheikh.

And Omar asked him: "Saw you where she had hidden it?" and Ali told what he had seen.

And Omar pursed his lips and said: "I like it not wholly, for it is not like Fatima. Nevertheless will I take my soldiers and come and see what I shall see."

And he came with his two soldiers and Ali, and knocked at the door, and begged permission to enter. And Fatima stood in the corner of the room so that the skirts of her mantle hid the new-dug earth. And she bade them come in.

And Omar greeted her blandly, but when he saw that she stood so that her skirts hid new-dug earth in the corner of the room, he pursed his lips. And he whispered to Ali: "Was it that corner?" and Ali told him yes.

And Omar asked Fatima: "Why do you stand in the corner?" And Fatima asked him: "Why should I not, O Sheikh? For the corner is cool and the breeze draws through it." Now there was no breeze that day.

And Omar said: "Come forward, I pray thee, and bid me welcome. For am I not the Sheikh?"

And she told him: "Thou art the Sheikh, and if a welcome comes from the heart, what matters it where be the lips that say it?"

Then Omar was angry and asked her: "Will you come out of that corner?" and she told him no, she would not.

And he said to his two soldiers: "Drag her

out," and they dragged her out, but gently, for she was Fatima. And Fatima wept and said: "Now I call Allāh to witness that a Sheikh has used violence against a helpless woman. And if my husband were not a fool, he would smite thee on the nose and on the eye."

And Ali told her: "Silence. It is but thy desert. For thou hast stolen the money of my friend the crow. Dig there, O Sheikh, where the ground is fresh turned and beaten down again, for there I saw her hide the gold. And we will dig it up again and take it back to the crow, save what thou findest needful for taxes, O Sheikh."

And at those words Fatima laughed and taunted the Sheikh Omar, asking: "Do even the crows pay taxes under the zealous rule of Omar?"

But Omar spoke no word, but dug. And she asked him: "What is it you dig for?" and he told her: "Thou knowest what it is I dig for."

Then Fatima laughed so that the soldiers laughed with her, till they caught the Sheikh Omar's angry glance. And Fatima told him:

“Nay, dig then. For thou seemest full of zeal for digging.”

And Omar dug, and found the egg, and took it up, and cursed it in his beard.

And Fatima asked him: “What is it thou hast found?” and Omar cursed her in his beard and told her: “Thou knowest what it is.”

And Fatima looked, and saw it, and said: “Nay, to me it seemeth very like an egg. Is it with their eggs then that the poor crows must pay their taxes to Sheikh Omar?”

And Omar would have flung it on the floor, but she said: “Nay, give it me.” And she took it and said: “It is a very egg! And oh, how like an egg is the zeal of the zealous Sheikh Omar for his taxes!” And she broke the egg and held it to them, saying: “See, even as this egg is full of meat, so is Omar full of zeal for his taxes. And as these shells are full of meat, so full is he of wisdom. Even the crows cannot deceive him, though they lay their eggs under my floor, where no one else but Omar would think to hunt for eggs.”

And Omar cursed her in his beard for a saucy chit of a girl, and said: “This once hast thou befooled me again. But even yet will I have

the gold." And Fatima asked him what gold he meant.

And he told her: "The gold which you took from the top of the column which stands in the court of the temple of Thout."

"Nay," said Fatima, "I remember the column. And was there gold on the top of it?" And she saw that Omar's hands were scratched where he had climbed, and his feet were scratched, and she said: "Nay, but you are an oldish man to do such things. They are not safe for thee at best, and a Sheikh's robes must be cumbersome to climb up columns in," and she laughed at him with her eyes.

Then Omar saw that she had guessed how he had climbed, and would not answer her. And she asked him: "Nay, if there had been gold upon the column, and I had taken it, why shouldst thou seek it here? Is it by any chance thy gold? What right have you to take it from me?"

Omar would not answer her, but Ali told her: "Because thou hadst stolen it from the crow, O wicked woman. We would have taken it back to him, save what was needful for his taxes."

And Fatima said: "Nay, but the taxes! I had forgotten the taxes and the zeal of Omar," and made the soldiers laugh again.

And because she made his soldiers laugh at him, Omar would talk no more with her and told her: "I will take the gold for Government."

And Fatima said: "There was no gold. Did you not climb up and see that there was no gold? But if there had been gold and I had taken the gold, what has Government to do with that, since crows do not pay taxes in gold?"

And Omar told her: "Thou knowest well it was gold of the old times, of the times of the Ptolemies, and an antiquity. And all antiquities belong to Government."

And Fatima said: "But how knowest thou it was gold of the old times? Did thy friend the crow tell thee? For you must be as friendly with the crows as Ali is, to know them apart, which ones have not paid their taxes."

And Omar was angry at her persistence, and pursed his lips, and told her: "Do I not know what I have seen with mine own eyes? And thou shalt see it too." And he drew from

his pouch the five pieces of gold which Ali had given him and showed them to Fatima.

And she looked and said: "Truly, they seem old. Where got you gold as old as that is?"

And Omar would not answer, but Ali the Fool said: "Peace, woman. They are the other five pieces which the crow gave me in payment for the dun cow, and I gave them to my cousin the Sheikh to keep for the poor widow woman who has gone away to Assuân, and all her ten children are dead at once with the smallpox, Allâh be pitiful to her."

And the soldiers laughed again, and Fatima said: "True. I had forgotten that widow woman." And she asked Omar: "Do you keep the five pieces of gold for the widow woman?"

And Omar told her: "When the woman comes back to Ashmunein, I will give them to her."

"Yes," said Fatima, "and when Nile freezes over, doubtless we shall all be skating on the ice. But I see not how you can do the two things at once. For how will you give the gold to the woman, if it be an antiquity and belongs to Government?"

Then was Omar wroth because she made his soldiers laugh so at him, and would talk no more with her. "To-morrow," he said, "I will have you before the Kadi, and the Kadi will have this crow's gold which thou hast stolen. For it is old and Government's."

And she said to him softly: "Bethink thee first, Omar. For if the Kadi once saw the gold, thou wouldst see none of it afterwards."

"Nay," said Omar angrily, "let the Kadi take the gold. I care not who else has the gold, so long as you have it not, you saucy chit."

Then Fatima said: "There was no gold. I swear by the beard of the Prophet that the crow had no gold."

And Omar told her: "Swear it to the Kadi. And I will swear to him that there was gold, and that thou hast it. And I will prove it."

And she asked him: "How will you prove it? Thou hast seen no gold, neither here nor on the top of the column, save only the five pieces thou keepest for the poor widow woman, Allâh be pitiful."

And Omar said: "But Ali saw it, and the Kadi will believe Ali, for out of the mouth of a fool issue only the words of truth, for a fool

knows no better. And the Kadi will believe him, and if thou givest not up the gold, the Kadi will cast thee into prison."

And Fatima said: "Truly I perceive that thou art full of zeal for — Government — as an egg is full of meat." And she laughed and let him go in peace, since the last word was hers.

But in her heart she was thoughtful. "For," she said, "truly out of a fool's mouth issue words of truth, and the Kadi must believe Ali. But," she said, "if he believes Ali, none of the gold, at least, will come to the coffers of Omar. And," she said, "if I have wit, it may be that the gold will go neither to the Kadi nor to Omar, but will remain with me. For after all, what are a fattish Sheikh and a solemn Kadi and a fool, compared to Fatima!"

And Ali the Fool stood over her and said: "Thou wicked woman, to steal the money of my friend the crow!" And she heeded him not but pondered deeply.

CHAPTER VI

THE TRUE WORD OF A FOOL

AND the day drew on to its close and still no thought had come to Fatima how that she might deal with the Sheikh Omar and with the Kadi and with Ali, so that she might keep the gold which she had found on the top of the column. "For," she said, "to-morrow will Omar take me to the court at Assiût, before the Kadi, and he will take Ali for a witness. And he will claim the pieces of gold for Government because they are antiques. And Ali will tell his story, and out of the mouth of a fool issue the words of truth, because a fool knows no better, so that the Kadi will believe Ali's story and will cast me into prison unless I give up the gold. All this must come to Fatima, unless — Fatima should find out a new truth!"

And the time was very close to sunset, and Fatima rose and walked through Ashmunein, and passed the old Greek Agora, and came to

the pylon of Thout's temple, where the solitary tamarisk tree grows in the sand, and passed in under the pylon to the court, and sat down on a fallen capital, and looked up at the old god Thout busy with tablets and stylus on his *relief en creux*. And the court was quite empty and very still under the highness of the sky, which made her realize forcibly what a very dead one old Thout was for a counsellor.

And the sunset came in pink and green and gold above the Libyan Desert, and purpled all the far eastern hills beyond Nile. And in the distance, faintly, rose the voice of a muezzin calling all the Faithful to their first hour of prayer. "Allâhu akbar . . . come to prayer; come to salvation; Allâhu akba-a-a-a-r; there is no God but All-a-a-ah!"

And Fatima knelt down in the sand, and made her ablutions with the sand, and murmured her *fâtiha*: "In the name of Allâh, the merciful and gracious. Praise be to Allâh, the Lord of creatures, the merciful and gracious . . . the right way of those to whom Thou hast shown mercy . . . and who go not astray," for it seemed to her well to take every precaution possible.

And Fatima rose from her prayers and said to Thout: "If thou wert not a dead one, thou mightest help me. For truly I need counsel. For out of the mouth of a fool issue the words of truth, and a fool knoweth no better than to tell truly all that he sees. And when Ali the Fool, my husband, telleth all that he hath seen, then must I give up the gold or else be cast into prison."

Thout never winked or blinked, nor turned nor swerved nor paused in his absorption. But the swift, changing half-lights of the afterglow were poured across him, and in the play of them his severe expression was softened till he seemed almost alive.

And as she looked at him, Fatima cried aloud with joy. For from Thout to her a thought had flashed, a thought so big in its simplicity that it made her wriggle on her capital till the nettles in the court stung her ankles; a thought so simple in its bigness that it held her entranced, a lonely little statue of Meditation there in the great, still court where the evening shadows gathered. And when it had grown quite dark, Fatima rose and went to Thout, and stood on tiptoe to kiss the toe of Thout,

and went to her home, laughing in her heart. Now the thought that Thout had sent her might be translated from the Old Egyptian thus: "A fool telleth all that he hath seen. Let him see what you would have him see."

And Fatima had a hen with chickens. And in the darkness she took her chickens from the hen and put them in a bag of paper. And she had a hive, with bees. And in the darkness she took the clustered bees and put them in another bag of paper. And Ali was asleep within the house, for it was dark. And Fatima took the bags and climbed upon the roof of thatch with them, and parted the thatch of dura straw, so that she made a hole through it, and hung the bags in the hole that she had made. And she came down from the roof and laid herself down on her bed.

And when the great quiet of the mid hour of the night was come, she raised herself on her elbow and made pretense to listen. And she woke her husband and told him: "Listen, Ali! Doth it not seem to rain?"

Now it has not rained in Middle Egypt since the memory of man. And Ali listened drowsily and he said: "Nay, it raineth not," and would

have slept again. But Fatima told him: "Nay, you have not listened. Listen again, Ali, while I count five-and-twenty, and then tell me if it doth not rain."

And Ali listened with all his ears while Fatima was counting five-and-twenty slowly. And when she had reached the number one-and-twenty, counting very slowly, he lost his patience and told her: "Nay, I hear it now. It raineth," and he slept again.

And when he was sound asleep, Fatima rose, and took a stick, and prodded at the roof of her house till she had broken the bags where the chickens and the bees were. And the chickens and the bees fell down on the floor of the house, and the chickens ran about on the floor and chirped, and the bees flew about in the air and buzzed.

And Fatima went back to her bed, and woke Ali again, and told him: "Nay, Ali, it raineth very hard." And Ali told her: "Nay, I have heard it," and would have slept again.

But Fatima told him: "Listen, Ali, for I hear something. It may be the rain leaketh through the roof of the house. Listen while I count six-and-thirty and tell me what you hear."

THE TRUE WORD OF A FOOL 61

And Ali listened, and when she had counted seven-and-twenty, he told her: "Nay, I hear. The rain leaketh through the thatch." And he would have slept again.

But Fatima rose and lighted her lamp, so that the room was light. And chickens ran about the floor of the room and chirped, and bees flew in the air of it and buzzed. And Fatima cried out: "Allâh be gracious to us, Ali! Look what hath happened in our very house!"

And Ali looked and he said: "Yea, Allâh be merciful to us, for it raineth bees and chickens in our very house. But," he said, "it raineth them not on the bed, Allâh be praised, so come back to it and sleep." And Ali slept again, and Fatima blew out her light, and laid herself down on the bed, and slept. And there was laughter in her heart as she slept.

And in the morning came the Sheikh Omar, with his soldiers, to take Fatima before the Kadi at Assiût. And Fatima dressed herself, and put on all her richest apparel and her jewels and her ornaments. And she put on a veil and went with Omar and his soldiers to Assiût in the train. Ali went with them for a witness,

and they came to Assiût about the fifth hour of the day, and went to the court of the Kadi.

And the Kadi, though he seemed a youngish man, was baldish beneath his tarboosh, and the tassel of it hung over his left eye. And his eyes were weary, and he sat cross-legged on a cushion to hear the cases which were brought before him. And he smoked a pipe, and yawned, and gave judgment in the cases wearily. And Omar and Fatima and Ali and the soldiers sat on the floor of the court while he gave judgment.

And when the Kadi had judged all the other cases, he shook the tassel of his tarboosh from before his left eye, and yawned, and asked his clerk: "What does the fat man with the whiskers want?"

And Omar said: "If my Lord the Kadi will listen, I shall tell."

And the Kadi told him: "Speak."

And Omar told him: "I am the Sheikh-el-Beled of Ashmunein. And a woman of Ashmunein found treasure. Gold she found on a column, heaped up like dura. Five hundred pieces of gold it might have been, and it was gold of the old times, of the times of the Ptole-

mies, and an antiquity. And I would have taken this gold for Government. For am I not the Sheikh? But the woman hid the gold and would not give it up. So have I brought her before my Lord the Kadi to have justice wreaked on her."

Now the Kadi's eyes had seemed less weary when the Sheikh Omar spoke of gold. And the Kadi said: "Thou hast done well. Five hundred pieces, say you? Nay, it seemeth a plain case. But I must proceed according to the law, and you must prove to me that there was gold, and that the woman took it and would not give it up. Then will I cast the woman into prison and take the gold, for Government of course. For am I not the Kadi, and it seemeth a plain case and a very wicked one. But have you any witnesses?"

And Omar answered: "Yea, I have six witnesses. For here are five pieces of gold which were of the treasure, and if my lord will look, he will see that they are gold of the old time and an antiquity, and Government's." And Omar showed the five gold pieces to the Kadi and said: "And here is my sixth witness, a fool who is the husband of the woman and hath

seen all and will tell my Lord the Kadi all that he hath seen. This fool is my proof."

And the Kadi said: "Have you no other proof, O Sheikh? For why should I listen to a fool?"

And Omar told him: "There needs no other proof. For a fool is a simple-minded man, not like my lord and me, and telleth all that he knows and all that he hath seen, and out of his mouth issue only the words of truth, for he knows no better."

And the Kadi said: "Thou hast spoken wisdom, O Sheikh. It seemeth a plain case. Let the fool speak."

And Ali spoke, and when he spoke of the pieces of gold heaped up like dura, the eyes of the Kadi brightened. And when he had finished, the Kadi said: "It seemeth a very plain case, and I commend thee for thy zeal, O Sheikh, and for thy wisdom. Which is the wicked woman who hath done this thing?"

And Omar told him and the Kadi said: "Come forward, woman." And Fatima came forward in her veil and stood before him.

And the Kadi yawned and said: "You brazen hussy! Nevertheless must I proceed

THE TRUE WORD OF A FOOL 65

according to the law. What hast thou to say why I should not take the gold and cast thee into prison? There is no reason and I am going to do it, but nevertheless speak, and I will hear thee." And he yawned again.

And Fatima stood before him, and she spoke no word, but she lifted her veil and looked at him. And the Kadi looked at Fatima. And he shook the tassel of his tarboosh from his eye. And he laid aside his pipe, and he said: "Nay, it seemeth not such a plain case after all. Speak, O my daughter, I pray thee."

And Fatima spoke no word, but looked steadfastly upon the Kadi, and in the corners of her eyes were two great tears. And when the Kadi saw the tears, he told her: "Weep not, O my daughter. For I perceive that thou art frightened; and yet the case against thee is not a plain one. But speak to me also with thy tongue, I pray thee, for though thine eyes have told me much in thy defense already, yet may mine own eyes be hard of hearing and may not understand thee fully. So speak to me with thy lips also, that I may not do thee an injustice. For Allâh hateth an unjust judge."

And the tears fell from Fatima's eyes upon

her cheeks, and two more tears replaced them in the corners of her eyes. And she wept, and her voice was low and trembled, and she said: "If my Lord the Kadi will hear me, I will tell him the pitiful story of my life."

And the Kadi told her: "Speak, my daughter, for I perceive that thou art still but a child, and frightened."

And Fatima said: "Yea, am I but a child, and why should a child not be frightened before the terrible eye of my lord's justice? And I am an orphan. For my mother and my father died, and two cruel uncles reared me up, and when the time was come they would have married me to this Sheikh. And when I liked him not to be so fattish and whiskerish and oldish, as my lord can see he is, then were they angry, and for revenge married me to this fool, who hath spoken this untruth against me to my Lord the Kadi. And I am very unhappy."

And the Kadi said: "Nay, I can see that thou art unhappy and I am very sorry. For I am a just judge and a kindly man, and there is no case against thee at all, save only the words the fool hath spoken. But they are hard. For he hath told what he hath seen, and

THE TRUE WORD OF A FOOL 67

the words of a fool are true words, and my clerk hath written them down for my lords the judges to read in el-Kâhira. Nay, but I know not what to do, for I fain would pronounce thee innocent. For I am a just judge and like not to see a child like thee unhappy."

And Fatima lifted her eyes to his and her eyes were smiling. And she said to him softly: "Nay, my lord, but this fool hath seen many things no truer than this gold."

And the Kadi said to her softly: "Nay, but hast thou found a way out of it for us, my daughter?"

And Fatima said to the Kadi clearly, so that all in the court might hear: "Let my Lord the Kadi ask the fool about the rain last night." And all in the court laughed, and the Kadi laughed and said: "Nay, but it hath not rained here within man's memory."

But Fatima told him: "Ask the fool."

And the Kadi asked Ali: "Did it rain last night?" And Ali answered: "Yea, but it rained. And Allâh be merciful to us, it rained bees and chickens, for I saw them fall with my own eyes." And he told the Kadi what he had seen with his own eyes.

And all in the court laughed, save Omar the Sheikh; and the Kadi laughed and said: "The man is a fool, and even as he saw it rain bees and chickens, so he saw a crow with gold. For there *was* no gold."

And Fatima told him softly: "Nay, my lord, there were five pieces. Forget not the five pieces, I pray thee, which the zealous Sheikh Omar keeps for — Government?"

And the Kadi laughed softly and said: "O my daughter, I thank thee!" And then in a loud voice he said: "It is my judgment that there never was more gold than that which I have seen, to wit those five pieces which this Sheikh keeps for — Government? But give them me, O Sheikh, for they be an antiquity, and I will relieve you of their care!"

So the Sheikh Omar had to give up the five pieces, while all in the court laughed at his discomfiture. And he went away, cursing Fatima in his beard. "For," he said, "she befooleth all men, and she hath befooled my Lord the Kadi more than all the rest. For she hath bewitched him with her beauty."

And the Kadi said to Fatima: "There was no case against thee, O my daughter, and thou

art free to go. But come nearer first, I pray thee, that I may comfort thee for thy fright."

And Fatima came and stood before the Kadi, so that he saw her beauty, for her veil was lifted. And the Kadi asked her: "Where dwellest thou, O my daughter?"

And Fatima laughed at him with her eyes and answered: "O my father the Kadi —"

"Nay," he told her, "call me not thy father, for I am not old. Where dwellest thou?"

And she told him: "I dwell in Ashmunein, O my uncle the Kadi."

And the Kadi laughed and said: "Ashmunein is a mean town, and el-Kâhira" — the capital of Egypt which Christians call Cairo — "is a great city, yet would I swear that in all el-Kâhira there be not ten women who are thy equals for beauty or for wit. Why dwellest thou not in el-Kâhira?"

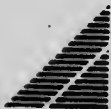
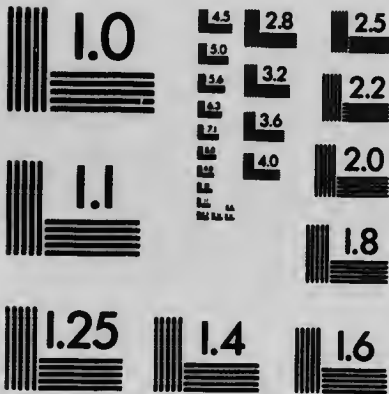
And Fatima told him: "Because in Ashmunein there is not one who is my equal."

And the Kadi told her: "Nor is there one in el-Kâhira, I begin to think. If ever thou comest there, remember that thine uncle the Kadi is not poor, nor without friends, and can amply protect his niece. Now go thy way in



MICROCOPY RESOLUTION TEST CHART

(ANSI and ISO TEST CHART No. 2)



APPLIED IMAGE Inc

1653 East Main Street
Rochester, New York 14609 USA
(716) 482 - 0300 - Phone
(716) 288 - 5989 - Fax

peace to Ashmunein and leave me in peace, for I begin to perceive thou art dangerous to look at."

And Fatima laughed again with her eyes at her uncle the Kadi, and went her way in peace. For she cared not especially for baldish men, though they were youngish.

CHAPTER VII

WIDOW OF FORTY HUSBANDS

NOW her uncle the Kadi had said to Fatima: "There is not one woman in Cairo who is thy equal for beauty or for wit." And this praise was somewhat too measured to please Fatima wholly.

For she was greatly elated when she thought how that by her wit she had kept the pieces of gold which she had found. And she was yet more elated when she thought how that she had taken away from the Sheikh Omar by her wit the five pieces of gold which he had. And she remembered how that her uncle the Kadi had looked upon her beauty and straightway had forgotten his judgments, so that she said in her heart: "Could there be beauty more than this of mine is, which compelleth the judges, when they look on it, to forget their judgments and walk in the way which my wit hath laid for their feet?"

So the words which her uncle the Kadi had spoken pleased her not wholly. "For," she said in her heart, "I am of opinion that there is nowhere any other woman whose wit is equal to my wit. While as for my beauty — cannot any man who is not blind see that for himself?"

But her uncle had spoken other words and said: "Ashmunein is a mean town while el-Kâhira is the greatest of cities." And those words sank into Fatima's heart and dwelt there. And her eyes were opened and she saw the meanness of Ashmunein, that little, mud-walled town which baked on the canal embankment amid the cotton fields, under the great brightness of the Egyptian sky. And she began to dream of the wonders of el-Kâhira, the greatest of cities.

And no more did she dress herself in the scant gown of coarse, blue cotton stuff which fellah women wear, for it did not seem to her becoming to her beauty. But she got herself a handmaiden to do her work, and dressed herself always in her richest apparel, and wore always all her ornaments, so that her arms jingled with bracelets, and her fingers were

WIDOW OF FORTY HUSBANDS 73

stiff with rings, and her feet were heavy with the weight of her silver anklets.

And she went no more in and out among her neighbors as she had been used, bearing her jar of water on her head at dawn and sunset, and watching her flocks and herds grazing in the fields. But she walked aloof, bearing herself in her pride like a princess, so that her neighbors were wroth, and called her "The Princess of Ashmunein," and laughed at her. But she heeded not their laughter any more.

And she sat much alone in her house, and went out much alone to the edge of the desert and sat there, alone in her beauty and the richness of her apparel, so that Allâh must have laughed, if He had looked down from heaven, to see her sitting so, and no man to see her and be pricked with desire of her beauty. And she went much to the ancient temple of Thout and sat there, with no one but Thout to see her, and Thout was a god but not a man. And wherever she went and sat alone, she pondered the meanness of Ashmunein and the greatness of el-Kâhira till her heart was an-hungered for the wonders of it.

And one day as she sat thus alone and

dreamed of the wonders of el-Kâhira and hungered for them, despising the meanness of Ashmunein, a woman passed that way. And she was the woman whom the people called the Widow of Forty Husbands. "For," they said, "she is the widow of twoscore men, yet has she never been a wife. So is she the most pitiful of widows, for she has never had a husband to sorrow for now that he is gone, nor a child. For she scattered the seed of her beauty on the waters, and the waters flowed away and no seed sprang up from it." And because she was pitiful, and her teeth were gone, and she made her living by drying dung-cakes for the fires in the sun, the people laughed at her.

And this Widow passed by the temple of Thout and saw Fatima sitting there, and drew near and said to her: "Nay, O my dear, despise not the meanness of Ashmunein, nor dream of the wonders of el-Kâhira and feed thy heart with hunger for them."

Then Fatima was startled and she said: "Nay, but how knowest thou that I dream of it?"

And the Widow told her: "Was I not once

WIDOW OF FORTY HUSBANDS 75

young even as thou art, and dreamed of it here before Thout, who was then as he is now and will be when thou art become like me? And I went to el-Kâhira, and it made me that which is before thee, and it cast me out then."

And Fatima looked upon her and was curious to think that this woman once was young. And she said: "Nay, it is hard to believe."

And the Widow said: "Nay, I was young once and more beautiful than thou art."

And Fatima looked on her curiously and told her: "Nay, that is a harder thing to believe."

And the Widow said: "Nay, but I was. So beautiful was I then that I verily believe that had I had a case before my Lord the Kadi and my Lord the Kadi had looked but once on my beauty as it was then, he would straightway have forgotten his judgments and walked in the way I laid for his feet with my beauty, and have been an unjust judge. So beautiful was I then."

And in her heart Fatima laughed and said: "Nay, but my uncle the Kadi already walks where I would have him walk, and this widow is a boaster." But to the Widow she said: "Nay, all that is very hard to believe."

And the Widow said: "Nay, but I was. For do I not well remember my beauty as it was then? And I will tell you, that you may know how much more beautiful I was than thou art. For my hair, which is fallen, was the Night then. My eyes, which are now dulled, were the Night. My lips were twin petals of roses, and my teeth, which are gone, were between them white as kernels of milk. And my breasts, which are withered now, were round and firm like twin pomegranates, and my feet, which are so heavy, were then light as the feet of a young gazelle. Do I not remember it, and how should I ever forget such beauty as mine was then?"

"Ai!" said the Widow, "but beauty is a vain thing, and a trap for the feet of her that hath it. For if a woman be beautiful as I was, then will men cluster around her as bees cluster round a flower which hath honey. For beauty is the honey of woman, to draw the bees which are men. And they drink of her beauty, sup by sup, but afterwards draught by draught till they be drunken with it. Afterwards will they wake, and loathe their drunkenness, and laugh at it, and cast aside the empty cup, which is

WIDOW OF FORTY HUSBANDS 77

the woman. But," said the Widow, "though the beauty of a woman is a vain thing, and a trap for the feet of her that hath it, yet is the great beauty of a woman, while it endureth, the greatest of all things, save only Alláh. For all the world lies at her feet. For men move the world, but the great beauty of a woman moveth all men."

With such words did this Widow teach Fatima to despise the vanity of her beauty, and Fatima pondered the words. And Fatima said: "Nay, it may be you had beauty. But you had no wit. For if you had wit, you would not have wasted your beauty so that men became drunk with it and loathed it. But you would have doled it out, as the perfumers dole out their precious perfumes, that men want always more and are never satisfied."

The Widow said: "Wit is not wisdom, O my daughter. I had wit enough and to spare."

Fatima said: "It is hard to believe. For if you had it, you need not tell me you had it, but I should see the fruits of it."

And the Widow said: "Nay, I had such wit as no other woman ever had. Listen, and I will tell thee of my wit."

And the Widow said: "My first husband was a Turk, a rich collector of taxes, and a jealous man. And I had a lover. And my husband came home one day and surprised my lover, and I had but time, before my husband saw my lover with his eyes, to hide my lover in a great chest of wood which stood in the harem.

"And my husband saw that my lover was in the chest. But because he was a jealous man and angry, and would have a great revenge on us, he opened not the chest, but turned the key of the lock of it and ran away quickly to summon his family and the elders of the quarter and the Sheikh of the quarter, that he might expose us openly to the eyes of all men and divorce me. And in his haste, when he ran away, he left the key of the lock in the lock.

"And I might have opened the lock and let my lover go, but I had too much wit. For I said: 'He will come home and see that he forgot the key and he will say: "The man was here, but I forgot the key, and the woman opened the chest and let him go," and my husband will tell his story, and men will be-

WIDOW OF FORTY HUSBANDS 79

lieve him, and I shall be shamed before them.'

"So I bethought myself. And when I had thought, I opened the chest and let my lover out, and took him secretly out of the house. And in the court of the house was a young ass-foal, very small. And I took the foal and put it in the chest, and turned the key of the lock and left it in the lock, and went away to the bath, telling my woman I was going to the bath.

"And when my husband had gathered his neighbors, he came and stood before the public bath, and cried with a loud voice: 'Come out of the bath, woman, that I may take thee home and expose thy shame to all these my neighbors.'

"And when I had let him well cry and become beside himself with anger, I went quietly out by a back way and went to my house, and sat down in the harem.

"And my husband came and burst into the harem with his neighbors. And I said: 'Is it seemly to bring men into thy harem thus?' And I said to his neighbors: 'Nay, you must excuse him, for the poor man seemeth beside

himself. For he came home it may be two hours ago, and found me in the court playing with the young foal of an ass, for I was lonely till my husband came home. And when he saw me, he tore his turban off and cried with a loud voice: "Now have I found thee out with thy lover, thou wickedest of women, and even as I cast this turban off, so will I cast thee off." And he took the foal and put it in yonder chest, and turned the key, and ran away crying: "Wait till I gather my neighbors and expose thy shame!" And I went away to the bath and cannot think what hath come over the poor man, unless it be that my too great beauty hath turned his head.'

"Then all his neighbors looked on me and believed me because of my beauty, which leadeth every man to believe a woman. And I wept and said: 'Alack, the poor man, for his head is turned. Allâh be pitiful to me who loved him.' And his neighbors sought to comfort me, for I was charming when I wept.

"Only my husband was beside himself with anger and cried: 'Nay, let her be, for she is the most deceiving of women. Nay now, look! and I will show you what sort of an ass-foal she

WIDOW OF FORTY HUSBANDS 81

liketh for a pet!' And he ran to the chest, and turned the key, and threw open the top, and the foal lifted his head in the opening of the chest, and lifted his long ears, and shook them, and he brayed. Then would my husband have slain me in his wrath. But his neighbors restrained him and took him away, believing him to be mad through jealousy of my too great beauty, and pitying me who loved a madman. Now will you say that any other woman ever had wit equal to mine?"

"Nay," said Fatima, "that was wit of a sort." But in her heart she said: "I did as much as that to Omar with one egg. And if I did as much as that with one small egg to save a few pieces of gold, how much should I do with my wit to save my lover for me, if I had one? But truly I want no love for who giveth her love to a man to keep a grasshopper the guardian of a treasure." And she said to the Widow: "Tell me now of the wonders of el-Kâhira, that great city."

"Well," said the Widow, "it is a sorry place to live in, for there is nothing but streets of houses, and people crowded together in the streets. People are crowded there, and don-

keys, and horses, and camels swaying under their loads. And the people pass up and down continually, and their garments are a blaze of color, and their many voices are a babble. And weddings pass up and down, and bands of music play, and funerals pass with wailing, and His Highness passes with his mounted men before him. And all the walls of the streets are shops where one can buy whatever one's heart desires. There are streets of shops, streets of goldsmiths, and streets of jewellers, and streets of silk-mercers, and the precious Street of the Perfumers, with its spicy smell. Truly the city is a sorry place to live in, with all those streets.

“And there is nothing there but mosques. Above the Citadel the Mosque of Mehamet Ali raises its thin minarets to heaven. And the Mosque of the Sultan Hasan raises its great arches to the vault of heaven above its courtyard; and outside the Bâb en-Nasr, among the tombs of the Caliphs, and among the dust-heaps of the city, the little Mosque of Kait Bey is like a jewel thrown down on a dung-heap. It is a sorry place to live. For truly there is nothing there but festivals, when

WIDOW OF FORTY HUSBANDS 83

crowds throng the crowded streets, and the windows of the harems are thrown open, and friends embrace friends and give them gifts, and there is music and laughter and feasting everywhere. And in the nights of the month Ramadan there is great feasting all night long, from dusk to dawn, and in all the thousand mosques the thousands of lamps of silver are lighted and hang swaying from the high ceilings, and seem like swaying stars."

With such words did this Widow show Fatima that day the sorriness of el-Kâhira, and the emptiness of wit, and the vanity of beauty. And Fatima laughed and said: "These be hard things you tell me."

And the Widow said: "I admit they be hard. But," she said, "if they be not too hard for thy spirit, and thou art still anhungered and wouldst see el-Kâhira, I could give thee a token to one who may still remember me, Allâh be pitiful to my wretchedness. And he that was my friend would be thy friend, for in thy way thou art somewhat beautiful, and beauty draweth that one as a sweet flower draws the bees. And he is rich and powerful."

Then Fatima was angry. And she said: "Is Fatima a dog, then, to carry tokens from a dog like thee to thy friends the dogs? Nay, if Fatima went to el-Kâhira, she would go trusting to the beauty and the wit of Fatima. For they are enough for her, and besides, doth not her generous uncle dwell also in el-Kâhira, and is not poor? But Fatima goes not to el-Kâhira."

And she gave that Widow a small piece of money and drove her from her sight.

CHAPTER VIII

THE CROW'S LEGACY

IN the days that followed, Ali the Fool reproached his wife, saying to her continually: "O thou wicked woman who hast befooled thy uncle, my Lord the Kadi and kept the money of my Friend the Crow!"

For Omar the Sheikh had instructed Ali how that Fatima had bewitched with her looks the judge whom she called her uncle the Kadi, and had kept the gold pieces; so that Ali became very wroth with her wickedness and very sorrowful for his friend the crow, and sought for the gold when he thought Fatima saw him not, that he might take it away from her privately, by stealth, and give it back to his friend. And Fatima was forced to take it away and hide it in a safe place, which was the top of the column in the court of Thout's temple, where Ali had found it first and so sought no more there.

And he was so wroth with her wickedness and so reproached her continually, that she was weary of it and said: "Would that I had never taught this fool to talk. My wit is great, but when I taught him to talk, then my wit was like the wit of Omar the Sheikh, who dug for gold under the floor of my house and dug up an egg. For I dug for my praises in the mouth of Ali, and what have I found there?"

And Ali sat no more among the flocks as they grazed, and tended them not, but roamed through the fields and through the desert, complaining in a loud voice of the wickedness of Fatima and of the sorrow of his friend. "For," he said, "his money is all gone and he will starve. And he trusted me."

And one day, when the day was well advanced, he came home to his house and said: "O thou wicked woman, thy sin has found thee out. Come into the edge of the desert, and see there the evil which thou hast wrought. O my poor Friend the Crow!" Now Ali's hair was torn, and his garments were rent, and his face bore the marks of weeping.

And Fatima said: "Nay, where is the evil I have wrought?"

THE CROW'S LEGACY

87

And Ali told her: "It lieth in the edge of the desert, beyond the temple of Thout." And he led her there, and a great black crow lay dead upon the sand there.

And Ali cried out: "O my poor friend! O thou wicked woman! For you stole his money, and he had no money left to buy food, but starved and is dead, and the ants are eating him. O my poor friend!"

And Ali wept and began to dig a grave for his friend with a flat slab of limestone which was there. But Fatima looked at the crow and went back to her house.

And when Ali came home again it was dark, and in the darkness of the house sat Fatima on the floor. And she was dressed as women are dressed who mourn. About her head was bound a strip of blue linen and the end of it hung down behind her head. And in her hands she had a blue cloth. And she had thrown dust upon her forehead and upon her breasts, and had stained her hands blue, and her garments were rent. And she was weeping, and as she wept, she cried with a shrill voice: "Ai, Ai! O thou camel of my house! Ai, Ai! O my uncle who is dead!"

And Ali asked her: "Nay, but is one of thy uncles the silversmiths dead?"

And Fatima heeded him not, but cried again: "Ai, Ai! O my poor uncle who is dead and hath left me all his money! Ai, Ai!"

And Ali asked her again: "Nay, but which of thy uncles the wheelwrights is dead?"

And Fatima answered not directly, but cried: "Ai, Ai! O the camel of my house! O my poor uncle the crow!"

And Ali cried aloud with astonishment and said: "Nay! But was the crow thine uncle also?"

And Fatima dried her tears and asked him: "Nay, but whose uncle was he if not mine?" And Ali could not answer her.

And she wept again and cried: "Ai, Ai! For he is dead and has left me all his money!"

And Ali said: "Nay, thou wicked woman, thou stolest the money."

And Fatima asked him, weeping: "Who then shall have the gold and the lands and the cattle and the houses of one who is dead?"

And Ali told her: "His heir shall have them."

Then Fatima wept indeed and cried out

THE CROW'S LEGACY

89

shrilly: "Ai, Ai! For my uncle the crow is dead and hath made me his heir!"

And Ali cried aloud with astonishment and asked her: "Nay, did he make thee his heir?"

And Fatima asked him: "Who else is his heir?"

And Ali could not answer her. And he asked her: "But did the crow have lands and cattle and houses?"

And Fatima dried her tears and said: "Nay, I know not and I care not. For we will make the funeral feast." And she went out and killed a kid, and seethed the flesh of it with milk in a pot. And she took the band of blue linen from her head, and washed the dust from her, and the blue color, and sat down with Ali and supped.

And when they had supped, she took the pieces of gold and heaped them up and ran her fingers through them, so that they fell down clinking and shone in the light. And she said: "Is it not beautiful stuff?"

And Ali said: "Ay, it is very beautiful, the greatly desired of all men." And he put his fingers in it, and let it fall from his fingers, and liked the feel of it and the sound of it. And he

said to Fatima: "Give me five pieces of thy legacy, I pray thee, to replace the five pieces which the Sheikh kept for the poor widow, whose ten children are all dead at once of the smallpox."

And Fatima laughed in her heart when he spoke of the pieces of gold which Omar had and could not keep. And she was minded to be kind to Ali, because she was pleased with her wit that had just befooled him again. And she asked him: "Nay, what wouldst thou do with five pieces of gold? Is there aught that thou desirest with all thy heart?"

And Ali told her: "Ay, I desire with all my heart a pipe with a bowl of crystal glass and a tube of silk, and a mouthpiece of amber yellow like this gold."

And Fatima laughed and told him: "With one piece thou canst buy a better pipe than the houris light for their masters in Paradise. What will you do with the other four?"

And Ali told her: "I desire also an ass, fat and sleek, that I may ride abroad upon him in my pride, before all men, even as my cousin the Sheikh doth."

And Fatima laughed again and said: "Nay,

THE CROW'S LEGACY

91

but a sleek ass also costeth but one piece of gold, and what will you do with the other three pieces? ”

And Ali said: “ I will buy me a nâbût — a stave — of Caramanian ash, that I may strut with it in pride before all men, as my cousin Omar strutteth. For am I not the husband of the beautiful Fatima? And if there be any gold left over from the pipe and the ass and the stave, I will hide it in that hole you digged in the floor there.”

And Fatima laughed greatly and told him: “ Nay, but thou shalt have it, and strut before all men as Omar doth, for all men to see that you are cousins. Take the five pieces.” But before she gave them him, she bethought herself and said: “ Nay, I will not. For when Omar sees thee in thy pride, he will know that I gave thee the gold and that I have it in the house. And he is full of zeal for gold and will find some way to come at it. For he is the Sheikh and my uncle the Kadi is not here. I will not give them thee.”

And Ali wept and said: “ Nay, give me them. For Omar need not know. For my pipe I will smoke here in my house at night, and mine ass

I will ride in the desert at night, and he shall not see me."

And Fatima laughed aloud, for she had be-thought herself. And she gave him five pieces of the gold and said: "Nay, take them. And in the morning buy first thy pipe and bring it home. And afterwards buy thine ass and thy stave, and ride upon the ass openly, and strut with the stave, for all men to see. And it comes to my mind that they will laugh for joy to see thee. And Omar will hear them and will come, and will ask thee questions which thou must answer as I tell thee now. First he will ask thee: 'Where gottest thou these things?' and you must tell him: 'With five pieces of gold which Fatima gave me to get them.' Then he will ask thee: 'Where got Fatima the gold?' and you will tell him: 'It is a gift she made me out of her legacy from her uncle the crow, who is dead.' Finally will Omar ask thee: 'But where is the rest of the legacy?' and you will tell him: 'Fatima has given it to buy back for destitute crows the lands of which the Sheikh Omar dispossessed them because they could not pay their taxes.' Canst thou remember all that to say when he asketh thee

the three questions which it comes to my mind he will ask?"

"Ay," said Ali, "I can remember. But," he said, "will you buy back their lands for those poor destitute crows?"

"Why not," said Fatima, "when I have found the lands?"

And in the morning Ali went first and bought his pipe, as Fatima had bid him, and brought it home. Then he bought a sleek ass and a stave and put the leavings of his gold in his girdle to take home and bury. And he mounted the ass and rode through the town. And he strutted with the stave, so that men laughed to see him and called to each other: "'Way for the great Sheikh Ali, the Prince of Fools! See how he strutteth in his pride."

And the Sheikh Omar heard their laughter, and came and saw Ali, and was wroth. And he said to Ali: "Where gottest thou these things?" and Ali told him. And Omar pursed his lips and said: "But where got Fatima the gold?" and Ali told him that, and the people laughed to hear what legacy Fatima had from her uncle the crow. But Omar pursed his lips mightily and asked Ali the third question.

And Ali told him the answer to Fatima's third question in a clear voice, so that all could hear it, and the market-place became a bazaar where laughter was for sale cheap and found no buyers.

But Omar cursed Fatima in his beard and cried: "Hath the saucy wench made a fool of me this time also?" and he grasped Ali's stave, and wrenched it from his hands, and beat Ali with it about the legs till he cried out: "Nay, beat me not, O Sheikh, for I am thy cousin. And besides, I but told thee the answers Fatima said thou wouldst ask me for."

"I know it," said Omar, "and for that I beat thee about the legs. Had thine answers been thine own I would have beaten thy head and broken it." And Omar beat Ali till he was tired, and then cast the stave on the ground and broke it, and trampled on the pieces and went away, cursing in his beard.

And Ali took up the pieces of his stave and went home, leading his ass. And he buried the leavings of his gold under the floor, and sat down and rubbed his legs. For they were sore.

CHAPTER IX

ALI IS FORTUNATE

NOW at morning and night Ali smoked his pipe in his house, and at midday, when the day was bright, rode abroad on his ass for all men to see. Now the name of this ass was Rameses, and he was big and sleek and mouse-colored, and his ears were very long. And he who had owned him had taught him, when his name was called, to come near and flap his ears and bray mightily, hoping for a handful of clover.

And men laughed to see Ali riding on the ass in his pride, and they called him Ali the Sheikh, and said to one another: "Behold how strange a thing is pride. For it maketh a Sheikh of a fool, and sometimes, as we have seen, it doth make a fool of a Sheikh." But Ali was pleased to hear them cry: "'Way for the Sheikh Ali!" and to see all men look at him. And that they might look the more, he would

dismount from his ass in the midst of them, and walk a little apart and call: "Rameses! O Rameses!" And the ass would flap his ears and bray and stretch out his sleek neck for clover. And Ali said: "Is he not wise as any man?" and talked much with the ass, as his way was, and called him, "O my brother."

And one day when he had displayed the accomplishments of the ass before a kahweh, a café, a man among the bystanders invited Ali into the café to drink coffee, that he might listen to the words of a fool extolling the wisdom of an ass. And Ali went in and sat down with him on the mats of the mastaba, and all the crowd flocked in behind to listen to his words, save only one Arab of the desert, a Bedouin of the Abâdeh tribe, who had stood among the crowd.

And this Arab stole Rameses, because he coveted his bigness and his sleekness and his knowingness, and led Rameses away quietly to a safe place, and came back again and stood before the café, for he had observed that Ali was a fool.

And Ali came out and saw that the ass was gone, and cried with a loud voice: "O Rame-

ses, where art thou? Ho, O my brother Rameses!"

And the Arab asked him: "Seekest thou thy brother, sir? Tell me what he was like, for perchance I have seen him."

And Ali said: "He is sleek and mouse-colored, and his ears are very long, and his voice is beautiful when he brays."

And the Bedouin said: "Then thy brother was an ass, sir?" And Ali asked him: "Hast thou seen him then?"

And the Bedouin said: "He left a message with me for thee."

And Ali cried: "He talked with thee?" and the Bedouin said: "With whom else did he talk?"

And Ali cried: "O Allâh, then was he wiser than I had guessed, for with me he hath never talked."

And the Bedouin said: "This is the message: 'Tell my brother, when he cometh out of the café, that I am weary of standing thus in the sun while he drinks coffee sitting on the mats inside. And tell my brother that I have gone to Assiût, to lay a complaint of him before the Kadi there. For my brother rides upon my

back, and the weight of him is a kantâr and a half a kantâr, and that weight is too heavy for my back to bear.' Now I have told thee thy brother's message, sir," said the Bedouin; "and give me a copper, I pray thee, for the trouble of telling it."

And Ali gave the man a piece of copper. But he said: "Nay, but he might have told me the complaint before he took it to my Lord the Kadi, and if I had been too heavy for him, I would have walked beside him. And for that I am wroth with him, and I will go to Assiût myself and tell my side of it to my lord, and have justice wreaked on my brother Rameses. For he did not even tell me that he could talk."

And the Bedouin told him: "Yallah!" And Ali ran to his house and dug up from the floor the remainder of his gold, which amounted to two pieces of gold and some silver, and set out on the train to Assiût. And the Bedouin went where he had hidden Rameses, and mounted upon him, and set out for Assiût also, upon the highroad.

Now it chanced that my Lord the Kadi, whom Fatima called her uncle, was come to

Assiût again in those days to judge the cases which were brought before him, and sat on a cushion in his court and smoked a pipe. And the silken tassel of his tarboosh hung over his left eye, and he yawned, and listened sleepily to the cases, and gave judgment. And Ali came to his court and the porters would not let him in, because they perceived he was a fool.

And Ali stood in the dust of the street before the court and cried with a loud voice: "O my Lord the Kadi! O mine uncle-in-law the Kadi! Let me in, I pray thee, and listen to my side of the tale which Rameses my ass telleth thee. Listen not to his complaint, for it is unjust. For he did not tell me that he could talk, and besides, I weigh but one kantâr and two-and-thirty rotl, for I have weighed myself. And if I be still too heavy for him, I will walk."

And the Kadi yawned and asked: "What is this noise in the street? For it annoyeth me." And the porters told him: "A fool standeth there and complaineth of an ass that talketh."

And the Kadi yawned and said: "Beat the fool and his ass with thy staves and drive them

away, then." And the porters said: "The ass is not there, my lord," but they beat Ali and drove him away.

But the next day he returned and cried: "O my Lord the Kadi! O mine uncle-in-law the Kadi!" and cried out his complaint again; and the porters told the Kadi: "It is the same fool come back again." The Kadi yawned and told them: "Beat the fool again, then, but harder, so that he cometh not back the third time." And the porters beat Ali and drove him away. But he came back again the third day.

Now it chanced that that day my lord was pleased with himself. For two rich litigants had brought a case before him, and each feared more than anything that his opponent might gain the case, for they hated each other mightily. And the Kadi saw their enmity and heard their case, and decided it in favor of a third person who was not there; and they were each greatly pleased that the other had not won, and each of them gave the Kadi a gift of a purse of gold and praised his judgment loudly. And when Ali cried before the court, the Kadi yawned and said: "Who is this fool

that calleth me his uncle-in-law?" And he shook the silken tassel from his eye and said: "Has not Allâh the Merciful and Just made me his underling to judge mercifully and justly among all his people? Nay, let the fool come in before me. For I fain would hear him complain of this ass that talks."

And Ali came in and told his story to the Kadi, and the Kadi said: "Nay, thou art too much for me. I understand thee not." And he looked closer at Ali and said: "Nay, now I know thee. Thou art the fool who spoke the words of truth in the case which a fat Sheikh brought before me, against the beautiful Fatima, who is witty as she is pretty, if that can be. I remember her well and thee also."

And Ali told him: "Ay, is she not beautiful, my lord? For I am her husband, and her eyes and her hair are the Night. And her skin is soft as roses, and her lips are twin petals of roses, and her feet are the feet of a young gazelle."

And the Kadi said: "Verily, this fool celebrateth her beauty in well-chosen words, but not too prodigal of praise!" And he asked Ali: "Who taught thee then those words?"

and Ali told him: "Nay, she taught me them herself, so they be true words."

And the Kadi laughed and said: "Nay, I can well believe it. But tell me thy story again. Thou hast lost an ass?"

And Ali told him how that Fatima had inherited from his Friend the Crow, and had given him a gift, and he had bought with it an ass which was sleek and wise and had complained against him, and had brought his complaint to Assiût to lay it before the Kadi.

And the Kadi laughed and said: "Nay, now I understand thee. And that would be the first ass who came here the day before yesterday and laid his case before me."

And Ali cried: "Allâh! He hath been here before me and hath gained thine ear over me? Listen to me also, I pray thee. For he never told me that he could talk, and if he had but told me that I was too heavy for his back, — though I weigh but —"

"Nay," said the Kadi, "thou hast come too late. The case is already adjudged, and the complaint has been judged to be a just one, and that ass is gone away, I know not where."

And Ali said: "Nay, O my lord, hast thou

not dealt with me somewhat hardly in this matter? Thou shouldst have waited till I had said my say also. O Rameses, thou ungrateful ass!" And Ali wept.

And the Kadi said in his heart: "Shall I not be generous with this poor fool who hath lost his ass and is the husband of Fatima, and will go home and tell her how generous I am?" And to Ali he said: "Nay, weep not, for because I am a just judge and heard the case of the ass *ex parte* and did not trust his bold eye and tripping speech, before I let him go, I made him give me a bond for the cost of the judgment, in case it proved to be unjust. And the bond I made him give me was — Nay, how much paid you for this ass?"

And Ali told him he had paid one piece of gold.

"Nay," said the Kadi, "that is just the bond I exacted, and here it is for thee." And he gave Ali a piece of gold from his purse and told him: "Nay, weep no more for the ass that is gone but buy thee another with the gold. And go home to Ashmunein, and when thou hast come there, say to Fatima thy wife these words. Tell her: 'My Lord the Kadi, thine

uncle, who is generous to those he loves, sends thee peace and his greetings, and bids Ali say these words: Wit matched with unwit and beauty lost in meanness, are as a garden planted where no water is. For it cometh to naught and men laugh at its emptiness; whenas if there were water, men would praise greatly the beauty of the garden. And el-Kâhira is the greatest of cities and aboundeth with water for a garden of wit and beauty. And thine uncle, who is generous with those he loves and not a poor man, sendeth thee the peace again.' Can you remember to tell her those words?"

And Ali told him: "I can remember them better than I can understand them, for they be hard words. Now I will go and buy mine ass and go home."

And when Ali came out of the court, the Arab of the desert, the Bedouin who had brought him the message from his ungrateful ass Rameses, was waiting for him in the street. And the Bedouin asked Ali: "Nay, my lord, but which of you won the case you carried before my Lord the Kadi?"

Ali told him: "Both of us. For he let the ass go, but took of him a bond, the price of

him, which he gave to me, and I have it here," and he showed the Bedouin the piece of gold. And he said: "Now must I buy me another ass with the price of that one and go home again. But this time I will not buy an ass which talketh, for it causeth me too much vexation."

And the Arab cried: "O Allâh, I believe I have the very pearl of asses for thee! For since it was foaled, it hath not spoken a word."

And Ali said: "That pleaseth me to hear. But," he said, "the ass may not talk and still be wise. And another wise ass I will not have."

"Nay," said the Bedouin, "this ass is a fool and knoweth not even his own name. For though his name is I'timad-ud-daulah-i-Fardausashyani - i - Sani - Shah - Jahan - Mahal, he knoweth it not for his. But if one calleth to him any other name, such as 'Rameses! Rameses!' he taketh that to be his name and answereth to it. Could any ass be a more perfect fool than that?"

And Ali said: "All thou sayest of this ass pleaseth me. Take me where he is, I pray thee."

And the Bedouin led him where the ass was

and said: "Look, he knoweth not his name." And he called to him: "O my ass, I'timad-ud-daulah - i - Fardausashyani - i - Sani - Shah-Jahan-Mahai!" and the ass gave no sign of hearing it. And the Bedouin said: "But look now how he will answer to that which is not his name," and he called to the ass: "Rameses! O Rameses!" And the ass lifted his sleek head, and lifted his long ears and flapped them, and brayed; and the Arab said: "Look how he answereth, sir. Did I not say he was a fool?"

"Ay," said Ali, "he pleaseth me. But can he carry my weight? For the other ass complained that I was too heavy for him, and I will not have another that complaineth of my weight."

"Nay, mount upon his back, sir," said the Arab, "and see if he complaineth." And Ali mounted him and rode him up and down, and the ass made no complaint of his weight. And Ali said: "Nay, but my heart goeth out to this ass. What is the price of him?"

The Arab said: "I think the other cost thee a piece of gold?" and Ali told him yes. And the Arab said: "Is not an ass which talketh not twice better than the other for thee? And

is not one which knoweth not his name, but answereth to 'Rameses' and is a fool, twice better for thee than the other? And is not one which complaineth not of thy weight twice better? And what is twice better is worth twice as much. And twice thrice is six, so six pieces of gold is the price of the ass thou sittest on. Now do not tell me it is not a just price."

And Ali said: "Nay, the price is just, for thrice twice is surely six. But I cannot pay it, for I have only three pieces of gold and perhaps half a pound in silver."

And the Arab said: "Can I trust thee to be kind to the ass?" and Ali said he could. And the Arab said: "Then Allâh be merciful to my women and my children in the black tent in the desert, whose mouths are filled with hunger, but nevertheless, O my brother, give me the three pieces and all the silver, and go in peace with the ass."

And Ali told him: "Thank you; I am almost ashamed to do it," and gave the Arab all his money and went his way to Ashmunein. And the ass and Ali were hungry on the road, for he had no money left at all to buy food for them. And Ali said: "Now Allâh be pitiful

to those women and children whose mouths are filled with hunger, for I know now what the savor of it is." And he said: "Nay, though I be hungry, am I not fortunate to have bought for barely half his price an ass which talketh not, and knoweth not his name, and complaineth not of my weight?"

CHAPTER X

HER FRIEND THE KADI

AND Ali came home to his house and Fatima asked him: "Nay, where have you been these six days past? For I saw you had digged up the leavings of thy gold and gone away."

And Ali told her how that he had been to Assiût to the Kadi, to complain to him of his ass Rameses.

And Fatima said: "Nay, hast thou seen mine uncle the Kadi?" and Ali answered her: "I saw him and he gave me a message for thee which is easy to remember, because it is hard to understand."

Fatima said: "Tell it me then," and Ali told her: "Thine uncle, my lord, sends thee his peace and greeting and these hard words: 'Wit mated with unwit and beauty buried in meanness are like him that planted a garden where no water is; whenas if there were water, men would praise the garden and not laugh

at its emptiness. And el-Kâhira is the greatest of cities and well-watered for one that hath both wit and beauty, and thine uncle, who is generous and not a poor man, sendeth thee the peace again.' Nay," said Ali, "the words be easy to remember but I cannot understand them. Can you understand them?"

"That I can not!" cried Fatima. "For what man ventureth to laugh at Fatima, though her wit be mated with unwit and her beauty buried in the meanness of Ashmunein? Nay, do I not draw the thoughts of men to me even here, even the thoughts of this Kadi who mocketh me with these words? And do I not mock at all men, even him? And shall he then say that men laugh at the emptiness of my beauty and my wit, even as at the emptiness of a garden planted where no water is?"

And Ali would have told her then of his good fortune in getting the ass I'timad-ud-daulah-i-Fardausashyani-i-Sani-Shah-Jahan-Mahal in place of the ass Rameses which talked. But Fatima heeded him not, but said continually in her heart: "Nay, but if it were true that men laughed thus at my emptiness, it would be time that I bestirred myself and laughed at



All the market place of Ashmuncin was become
a place of laughter.—*Page 111.*

their emptiness." And because she heeded him not, Ali, though he was travel-worn and hungry with his journey, and though the ass was hungry and footsore with his journey, mounted the ass and rode forth to spread the news of his good fortune abroad in Ashmunein.

And Fatima said in her heart: "But am I an empty garden of beauty and of wit, so that all men, even these mean men of Ashmunein, must laugh at me?" And the words rankled in her heart, and she wrapped herself in her mantle and went forth to ponder them, and turned her steps toward the considerable relics of the temple of Thout, which stand on the edge of the desert to the north of the town.

And her steps led her by the market-place, and all the market-place of Ashmunein was become a place of laughter. And in the midst of the laughter, Ali her husband sat upon his ass and spoke earnestly to the people, who, when they beheld Fatima coming, laughed the harder and cried: "'Way, 'way, for here cometh the proud wife of Ali the Fortunate!"

And they made way before her, laughing, and some of them said to her: "Nay, but thou

art fortunate too, to have so fortunate a husband!" And others cried: "Nay, is not Ali the fortunate man, who hath bought his own ass from him that stole it, and for only three times its cost, because it neither talketh nor knoweth its name nor complaineth of his weight?" And the Sheikh Omar was among them also, and he pursed his lips and chuckled in his beard and said: "Nay, of me she had to make a fool, but of Ali even she could not make a fool, for he was a very perfect fool to start." And he chuckled in his beard again and said to those that stood near him: "What would we say of one who planted a garden where no water was? Would we not laugh at the emptiness of the garden and call him a fool who planted it? Yet even so is one who linketh unwit with wit, for the unwit undoeth all the wit and bringeth it to naught, as we have seen." And he pursed his lips, and chuckled in his beard, and looked on Fatima and on Ali, who sat on his ass in the midst of the tumult of laughter and wept because the people would not listen to hear him tell again of his good fortune.

But Fatima spoke no word to any of them,

but wrapped her mantle about her and went out from the midst of them and came to the temple of Thout. And she went in under the pylon and sat down among the nettles and wept. For her heart was filled with vexation and with shame. And she said to Thout: "Even these mean people laugh at me because my husband is a fool. Is his folly my folly also, because I have linked it with my wit?"

Thout never winked or blinked or paused in his absorption with his tablets and his stylus. But afar off in the fields, Fatima saw her whom people called the Widow of Forty Husbands drying dung-cakes in the sun. And Fatima called to this Widow, and the Widow came to her, and Fatima said: "Tell me again of the meanness of el-Kâhira."

And the Widow told her: "Ay, it is a sorry place to live in. For it is a noisy place full of streets of houses, and the streets are always crowded, and the grated balconies of the harems almost meet above the streets and shut in the noises. And under the balconies the men and animals throng by continually like a River of Life. And the camels moan, and the donkeys bray, and their drivers call out Ū'a,

Ū'a and crack their whips, and the dogs bark at them. And the money jingles on the tables of the 'changers at every corner of the streets, and the water-carriers thread their way about, and their brazen vessels rattle, and the beggars sit in the dust amid the hurrying feet and whine ' I am the guest of God ' and the vendors cry their cries, and soothsayers read the fortunes of by-passers in the sand, and the call of the muezzin sounds above the roofs of the city: ' Allâhu akbar! A-a-a-llâhu akba-aa-aa-ar! ' Ay, el-Kâhira is an ocean of sound and a river of life. For the stream of turbans flows by beneath the balconies, the white turbans of the Sheriffs, and the green turbans of the Hajji, and the broad turbans of the Ulumas. It is a sorry place.

“ And anon passes a wedding or a funeral through the throng. And anon passes the flashing carriage of a great lord or lady with outrunners in scarlet and gold before it, and all the throng makes way before the shouts of the outrunners — ”

“ Nay,” said Fatima, “ tell me who is a great lady in el-Kâhira? ”

And the Widow said: “ Who but she that

hath great beauty and great wit? For in all the world the wit and beauty of women are great while they endure, for they rule men, and men rule the world. But in el-Kâhira are they the greatest thing of all, and while they endure, she that hath them is the friend of the great ones of the earth, and they do her bidding. And once I was beautiful and was the chosen friend of the great man of el-Kâhira, even I who speak to thee. For he was rich and he was wise, and all men were his friends and did his bidding. Ay, though he was but youngish, even the gray-bearded Sheikhs of el-Azhar the university, even the Sheikh el-Islâm himself, sought out his counsel and his will. And the great lords of the court sought his counsel privily, and the princes and the Sirdar, so that his counsel and his will ran through all Egypt through the hidden ways, and even in Nubia men did his will and knew it not, and the Christians did his will and knew it not. For herein was his wisdom shown most highly, that he was content to be a simple Kadi, holding his power and seeming to have no power. 'For,' he said, 'doth not a brook babble so that men notice it, before it is seeped

up? But Nile sweepeth so quietly all things on its bosom that men forget Nile is there.' And even this great one would be thy friend also, if you bore him a token from me. For in this alone is he weak, that the beauty of a woman draweth him as a sweet flower draws a bee, and in a way thou art beautiful. But beware of the man also, for like a bee which, when it hath sipped the sweetness of one flower, passeth on to another and forgetteth the first, even so is this great one. But I will give thee a token for him."

"Nay," said Fatima, "surely it would be pleasant to ride in a flashing carriage, with outrunners shouting before it and all the people making way before their shouting. But keep thy tokens, for if I needed him I have a friend already there. But tell me more of this great one, that I might know him if I saw him in el-Kâhira."

"Outwardly," said the Widow, "he seemeth not such a great one, but that too is part of his wisdom. For he goeth quietly in the streets, on foot, and is a smallish man and seemeth a youngish one, till one sees beneath his tarboosh that he is baldish. And it seemeth

HER FRIEND THE KADI 117

always that he is sleepy, but he is not. And he sits much on a cushion and smokes slowly, and when he talks, he yawneth between his words. And he is careless in his dress, and the tassel of his tarboosh hangeth much over his left eye, save when he brusheth it out. And always, when the beauty of a woman stirs him, he brusheth it out."

"Nay," said Fatima in her heart, "this woman is an old woman, and mine uncle the Kadi is a young man, though he is baldish." And she said to the Widow: "Tell me how old thou art."

And the Widow said: "Nay, Allâh be pitiful to me, for I am an old woman now, for I am twenty-and-eight years old, and have no husband and no children, and men laugh at me. Yet was I seventeen, as thou art, when I went to el-Kâhira, as thou art going, in the freshness of my beauty. And men drained my beauty dry, as bees drain the sweetness of a flower before it fadeth, and passed on to others, and now I am old and withered. O Allâh, is not the beauty Thou givest us a vain thing! For behold, that great one who made me his chosen friend was ten years older than I, and he still

seemeth a youngish man, even to-day. For I went to Assiût and his porters let me peep in at the door of his court, and I saw him the one time more, and he saw me and shook not the tassel of his tarboosh from his eye for me any more, and knew me not. O Allâh!"

And Fatima said in her heart: "It is the same man." But to the Widow she said coldly: "Nay, I go not to el-Kâhira. But I am sorry for thee, that thou hadst not wit to save thy beauty for thy need, but squandered it. And here is a piece of gold to buy thee warm garments against the winter. Now go, for shall Fatima be seen talking with such as thou art?"

And when the Widow was gone, Fatima said in her heart: "Nay, but I never dreamed he was such a great one." And she said: "Nay, but he shook the tassel from his eye for me, and my wit turned him to my will." And she said: "Nay, shall even a great one laugh at Fatima?" and she was angry.

And in the market-place the people laughed at her again, and she spoke no word, and drew her mantle close, and walked disdainfully among them. But she saw the table of a letter-writer and bade him write a letter for her.

HER FRIEND THE KADI 119

And the letter said: "A fool planteth a garden where no water is. If the fool seeth his folly, shall a wise man then mock at him?"

And Fatima sent the letter to her uncle the Kadi, at his court at Assiût. "For," she said, "truly it will be a pleasant thing to ride in a carriage, and when the shouting of my out-runners quells the tumult of the people, who then shall laugh?" And it was evening and she went to her house.

CHAPTER XI

FATIMA'S ENDURING PRIDE

AND in her house was Ali sitting upon the mats and his pipe stood on the mats beside him. And he laughed for joy when he saw Fatima and said to her: "This night art thou more beautiful than ever. For thine eyes are bright like the stars and the blood courseth in thy veins. And I am the most blessed of men, for I am thy husband. And here is my pipe with its bowl of crystal and its mouthpiece of amber, yellow as gold. And in his stable my new ass I'timad-ud-daulah-i-Fardausashyani-i-Sani-Shah-Jahan-Mahal eateth his clover and talketh not. Truly I am the most fortunate of men. So put on thy apparel, I pray thee, thy garments of silk and thy jewels, thy shirt of red silk, and thy necklace of blood-red carnelian stones, and sit down beside me, and rejoice with me at my great good fortune."

And Fatima said in her heart: "Nay, this

FATIMA'S ENDURING PRIDE 121

one time more will I humor this fool who rejoiceth that he hath a pipe, and an ass which talketh not, and a wife who is no wife to him. And besides, are not those the garments I shall wear when I go to el-KAhira this very night?" For her mind was made up to go. And she said to Ali: "Nay, it shall be as thou wilt," and she dressed herself in the garments and put on all her ornaments.

And Ali said: "Nay, I pray thee put on also the jewels which I got thee from the widow, the poor mother of ten children all dead at once of the smallpox. For the necklace is a talisman and the anklets are charms and will enhance thy beauty."

And Fatima laughed and said: "Nay, I had forgotten that widow. Where are the charms?" and Ali told her she had put them in the corner, and she found them there and put them on. And she knew that she was beautiful as she never had been before.

For she was but just seventeen, and her hair and her eyes were dark, and her eyes shone like stars in the darkness of her face, and her teeth shone like kernels of milk between her red lips. And she swayed before

Ali in the pride of her beauty, and she laughed and said to him: "Now am I not beautiful?"

And Ali told her no woman ever was so beautiful and said he was indeed the most blessed of men to have a wife like Fatima to sit beside him and light his pipe. "For," he said, "sit down, I pray thee, and light it for me."

And Fatima laughed and said: "Yea, thou art blessed!" and sat down. But in her heart she was angry and she said in her heart: "Nay, am I not the most wretched of women, to be no wife but the wife of a fool who rejoiceth in his pipe and his ass that talketh not? Am I not miserable to be so beautiful and have no man to stir with desire of my beauty save this fool, whose desire is satisfied that I should fill his pipe? But it is not for long."

And she filled the pipe. But with the tobacco in the pipe she mingled hashish and lighted the pipe with glowing charcoal, and the smoke of it was sweet and heavy with hashish. And Ali smoked it and said: "Nay, I am the most blessed of men, but the tobacco is very strong."

And Fatima told him: "Nay, it is not

strong," and he told her it was very strong, as she should perceive if she tasted it, and he gave her the mouthpiece. And she smoked the pipe out and filled him another, and he smoked it out and was sleepy, so that when the muezzin called the second hour of prayer, he could hold his eyes open no longer, but said the tobacco was very strong indeed, and laid himself down on his bed and slept deeply.

And Fatima laughed to see him, for she knew that the hour of her deliverance was come. And she stood up and looked at him as he slept, and touched him with the tip of her foot, and said: "Nay, sleep with the other dogs," and she tore from her throat the necklace which he had given her, and from her ankles the anklets, and flung them away. And she gathered together in a bag her jewels and the gold which she had had of Ali's friend the crow, and sat herself down again to wait till the hour of her departure was come.

And she said: "Nay, but the tobacco was strong. My head is heavy with it also," and she laid herself down till the fumes of it should pass from her head. And she fell asleep.

And when she woke, the deep stillness of the

mid-hour of the night was round about her, and in the street the watchman was calling the mid-hour of the night. And she said: "Now is the time come," and rose and lighted a candle. And she moved as one moves in a dream, for the fumes of the tobacco were still very strong in her head.

And she straightened her garments, and took the bag that held the jewels and the gold, and came and stood above Ali where he slept, and looked down at him as one looks at another in a dream. And he was very long beneath the rug that covered him, and very thin, and his breath came heavily through his nose, as a young calf's breath comes, wrinkling the nostrils. And a great displeasure at him seized Fatima, and a great disdain, and she touched him with her foot disdainfully, and said: "Nay, this blessedest of men who has a wife that is no wife and an ass that talketh not and a pipe that is gone out, to him I leave the house and the flocks and the herds, and the hens with chickens, and the bees that leak through the thatch and inspire him with the words of truth, the fool. For what wanteth Fatima with all those? For she hath her jewels and her gold,

FATIMA'S ENDURING PRIDE 125

and more than these she hath the beauty and the wit which lead all men to her feet, even the great ones of el-Kâhira."

And Ali heard her not but slept heavily. And the bag was heavy in Fatima's hand, and she perceived it and said: "Nay, I will make the man another gift, that he may be happy when he wakes," and she put down the bag and opened it, and took out five pieces of gold and laid them by Ali's hand, and said: "Nay, what careth Fatima for gold?"

And she looked at him again, and her disdain for him increased, and she said: "Nay, who shall say that Fatima loveth gold? I will divide with him equally," and she counted out half the gold and laid it by him, and looked at him again. And suddenly she cried: "Nay, take all the gold back to thy friend the crow, then!" and she took all the gold from the bag and flung it at his side. And she saw the jewels that were left in the bag and said: "Nay, but these be mean jewels," and she flung the bag of them at Ali's side, saying: "Fool, keep the jewels too, for they become not Fatima's beauty."

And she looked down and saw her ankles

heavy with anklets, and her arms with bracelets, and she said: "Nay, be not these the trinkets Fatima bought with the silver Christian dogs flung to this dog here because he made noises with his mouth?" and she stripped the anklets and the bracelets off and flung them beside Ali.

And she saw her garments, that they also had been bought with the silver of Christian dogs, and she stood up and stripped the garments off, so that she stood clad in her beauty. And she put on her old, scant, blue cotton gown of coarse stuff such as fellah girls wear, and said: "Now is Fatima dressed aright, for she is dressed in her beauty, and for ornament she weareth the wit Allâh gave her."

And her anger left her and she said to Ali: "Nay, poor fool, the beauty of Fatima was not for thee. Good-by, poor fool," and she went out of the house and shut the door of it behind her. And it was the mid-hour of night and dark, and Fatima moved as one moveth in a dream, for the fumes of the tobacco were still strong in her head. But she cared not, for the wonders of el-Kâhira beckoned to her,

FATIMA'S ENDURING PRIDE 127

and the road to them was free before her feet, and she was young and strong and beautiful and clever, and knew no fear of anything.

CHAPTER XII

THE GREAT HUNGER OF FATIMA

NOW it was the twenty-and-third day of the month Shauwal. That day the pilgrims' caravan sets out for Mecca, and all the city is in festival.

And from far off, before she was come to it, Fatima saw the slender minarets of Mohammed Ali raised into the wide brightness of the sky, as the Widow had told her. And when she had come within the city, it was a river of life and an ocean of sound, even as the Widow had told her.

For the city was all streets of houses, and the balconies of the houses hung over the streets, and their lattices of mashrabiyyeh were thrown open, and veiled women sat inside on the cushions of the divans and looked out.

And all the streets were a stream of people. Egyptians were there, and Copts and Turks and Persians and Armenians, and their garments were of many colors. And a stream

THE GREAT HUNGER OF FATIMA 129

of donkeys passed continually, and at their heads walked farmer-folk who had come in for the festival, and on them sat the women-folk. And the robes of the women were of silk and the clasps of their veils, upon their foreheads, were of gold. And the donkeys shouldered their way through the throng and their masters called out *Ū'a, Ū'a* as they went. And camels passed among the throng, and little dogs ran barking, and little children ran and shouted. And of them all no one paid heed to Fatima, for they were intent on the business of their festival.

For all the throng was pressing through the streets to the Rumeileh, the wide place beneath the ramparts of the Citadel, to see the caravan set out. And Fatima went with the throng. And as she came near the Rumeileh, she heard a hundred bands of music playing, and cymbals clashed and trumpets wailed the music of the desert.

And when she was come to the place, on her left hand the mosque of the Sultan Hassan lifted its great minarets to the skies, and on her right hand the minarets of Mohammed Ali were lifted up, and below the ramparts of the Cita-

del all the Rumeileh was a sea of life, where waves of life were beating.

And in the center of it stood a great tent of crimson velvet. And the velvet was heavy with gold and the heavy folds of it bellied in the wind. And above it and about it bright banners and pennons fluttered in the wind, and all about it the myriad people moved and chattered shrilly in their rejoicing. And beggars moved through the throng whining: "Ana deif Allâh wa'n-nebi," "I am Allâh's guest and the Prophet's," and the bystanders flung them coppers and told them: "Allâh will have mercy on you." And water-carriers passed, sluicing the ground from goat-skins so that a lane opened for them as they passed, and water-sellers with their brazen water-jars, and Hemali crying their water, sweet with orange blossoms and with liquorice and raisins. And in the barber-shops men stripped off their turbans and the barbers shaved their heads. And cooks set down small kitchens in the streets, and people bought meat puddings and fish and bread, and sat down cross-legged in the street to eat their food. And the good smell of the food made Fatima hungry.

THE GREAT HUNGER OF FATIMA 131

And while she looked and hungered, a band of music came, and behind the band tall camels walked swayingly, adorned with gaily colored trappings, and their humps were hidden by palm branches bearing oranges. And there came another band of music with the Takht-tara, the litter of the Emir el-Hagg, and the Emir was an old man with a long white beard who swayed giddily in the litter, while all the multitude cried the blessing of the Prophet on him, and of Alláh. And behind the Emir came another band of music and the litter of the Delfl el-Hagg. And the Delfl was a young man and strong, and he bore a naked sword, and all the multitude cried acclamations on him. And other bands of music came, and crowds of pilgrims, and bands of dervises with fluttering banners.

And Fatima waited till all these had passed and the mahmal had passed, swaying high upon the back of a very tall camel. And she said: "Nay, the Widow told me not the half! And," she said, "this is plainly a very great city, and I am but one among the thousands in it, and am a little lonely here."

And she went up to the Citadel and stood

upon the rampart of the Citadel of Salâh ed-Dîn, and all the roofs of el-Kâhira, the greatest of cities, were laid at her feet. And the city was gray and yellow in the sunshine, and its roofs and minarets and domes were countless. And beyond it was Nile, flecked with the tall white sails of feluccas, for the north wind was blowing. And beyond green Nile valley stood the ancient pyramids of Gizeh, upon the edge of the desert. And Fatima looked on it all and said: "It is plainly very great and Fatima is but one amid the myriad thousands. I will go down into the city and seek food, for I am very hungry."

And she went down into the Shâri'a Moham-med Ali, and saw the high facade of Sultan Hasan's mosque, and its great gateway beside the street, and she took off her shoes and went in under the great arch of the gate and came to the Sahn el-Gâmia, the mosque-court, and the lofty barrel-vaults of the Iwâns rose high above her head. And she went into a Iwân and began to pray.

But a muezzin came and prayed beside her and she could not pray. For the muezzin was fat, and his cheeks were plump with fatness,

THE GREAT HUNGER OF FATIMA 133

and the sight of him made Fatima very hungry. And she went out into Mohammed Ali's street again, to seek for food.

And she came to the Muski and turned down it and took no pleasure in it. For all the shops were filled with clothing and tobacco, and she said: "Doubtless the garments are good to wear but they would be dry to eat. And tobacco is good to smell but bitter to the taste." And she came to the narrow street that leads down to the Khân el-Khalîli, the great roofed bazaar. And she turned down to the Khân.

And the first street of the Khân she entered was the Street of the Silk-Mercers. So she turned to the left, and the street to the left was the Bazaar of the Shoemakers, all hung with red and yellow shoes. So Fatima turned quickly to the right again, and her feet led her to the Bazaar of the Carpet Merchants. And she turned to the right yet again, so that she found herself in the Brass Bazaar.

Then was Fatima angry and she said: "Nay, do the people of el-Kâhira eat brass and carpets? Or do they never eat at all, then?"

And she went on, and before her opened a

narrower street walled with very narrow stalls, and the sight of them was hopeful to her. And she came to the first stall, and it was a stall of books. Books made the walls of it, and the floor of it was books, and on a cushion laid among the books was an old man with a long beard and spectacles, who read in a book and did not so much as lift his eyes from the book for Fatima's sake, when she looked at him in her beauty and her ravening hunger.

And she found the second stall in the street was also a stall of books, and the third and the fourth, and every stall in the street. For she had come to the Street of the Booksellers, and in every stall of it sat an old man among the books and read in them, and looked not through his spectacles at Fatima.

And Fatima cried: "Nay, is Fatima an Imam to feed on books? All these books and as many more would she give for one little radish and one egg!" And she ran from the street, and turned the corner of the street, and there was a mosque before her. And she cried: "O Allâh, first it was books and now it is another mosque, with perhaps another fat muezzin inside!"

THE GREAT HUNGER OF FATIMA 135

Now this mosque she had come to was el-Azhar, which is the University. And as she looked, a troop of the Doctors of the University stepped from the gateway of it, walking solemnly and heavily, two by two. And Fatima saw them and cried: "Nay, but these men too be fat under their black robes," and she turned her back and would not look at them, though they passed close behind her and looked at her.

But she stood till they had gone, and she went back to the Muski and went along the Muski eastward in the direction of the town-gate Bâb Zuweileh. And close by the town-gate was a baker's shop. And Fatima went into it, for the smell of the baking was sweet in her nostrils.

And she asked the baker: "Nay, O my uncle, but what is it in thy oven that smells so savory?" and he told her: "It is a duck that I am roasting," and she said to him: "Give me the duck then."

And he said: "Nay, O my daughter, I cannot. For a hunter brought the duck and told me: 'Cook it, and when it is roasted I will come and fetch it again.' And what would he

say if he came and I told him I had given his duck to a girl?"

And Fatima sighed and said: "O Alláh, how hungry I be!" "Nay then," the baker told her, "here be meat puddings."

And Fatima sighed again longingly and said: "I would rather eat duck to-day. But if the duck is not fully roasted, yet give me a meat pudding."

And the baker said: "Then give me the money first. And the price of a pudding is a nusseh kirsh."

And Fatima told him: "Nay! For I gave all my money to my husband, and I have no money. But give me the pudding, and afterwards I will bring the money. For I have friends."

And the baker laughed at her and said: "Nay then, thy husband is but penny wise and pound foolish, to keep the money and let one like thee run abroad alone. And let thy friends give thee a pudding." And she told him: "Nay, how do I know if they have a pudding?" and the baker laughed at her again and told her: "I know not either and it worries me. So go and see, and if they have a

THE GREAT HUNGER OF FATIMA 137

pudding, I pray thee come back and tell me the good news. But if they have not, come not back, for I would rather be left in doubt," and the baker pushed her from his shop.

And Fatima stood in the street before the shop and was angry because she had no money and because the baker laughed at her. And she was sorrowful also, for she was by that time very hungry. And while she stood there, came a respectable-looking man, dressed in a black robe, and stood before her and said: "Thy name is Fatima."

And Fatima asked him: "How know you my name, then?" and the man told her: "My master told it me." And she asked him who his master was to know her name.

And the man told her: "My lord, whom people call the great one, knoweth all things, I believe. And he is my master and I am his servant."

"Nay," said Fatima, "how knows my uncle the Kadi that I am come to el-Kâhira?"

And the man told her: "He saw thee an hour ago when he came out of el-Azhar with the Sheikhs and with the Imams, but you stood with your back turned and would not

look at him. And when he had come to his house he sent me to speak to thee, but you had gone from there. And he was wroth with me when I told him that, and bade me run throughout all the city, and not come back till I had found thee. And I told him: 'Nay, my lord, how shall I know when I have found her, for is she not one woman of the thousand thousands in this great city?' And my lord told me: 'Ay, she is one, but you will know her. For she is the most beautiful woman of the thousand thousands, and is unveiled to boot, and you will know easily when you have found her. And you will give her this my ring, which is the key that unlocketh all the city, and will bid her, when it is dark, come to my house in the Shâri'a el-Manâkh. And her name is Fatima, like the Prophet's daughter's name.'" And the man bowed again before Fatima and said: "Nay, Madam, I have found thee, and have given thee this signet ring, and have bid thee come to his house when it is dark." And he said to her: "Madam, it is not seemly that your like should walk abroad thus in the dress of a fellah girl," and he took off his black outer robe and laid

THE GREAT HUNGER OF FATIMA 139

it on her shoulders, so that the hood of it covered her head, and he bowed again before her and went his way.

And Fatima looked at the signet he had given her and she said: "Nay, I had rather he had sent me a piece of gold, for I am hungry enough and it is many hours yet till dark." And she said: "He bids me wait till it be dark. Is he ashamed, then, to have me come when it is light?" And she said: "What, he bids me come? Who is this Kadi, that he bids Fatima come, and she comes?"

And Fatima was angry at his assurance. And she was hungry also, for the savor of the duck came out of the oven to her nostrils. And she looked at the ring on her finger and said again: "Why did he not send me a piece of gold instead?" And she looked at the ring a third time and said: "He calls this the key that unlocks all the city. Is he a boaster? Nay, but I have a mind to try it," and she drew the hood of her man's robe close about her face and went into the shop again.

And she said to the baker, in as deep a voice as she could muster: "Nay, my good fellow, is not my duck fully roasted yet?"

And the baker's back was turned and he said to her: "Nay, not yet, sir." And he turned about and saw her and said: "Nay, who are you, that talkest of thy duck? It is the hunter's duck. One might think from your speech that you thought yourself a great one, to be talking thus solemnly of thy duck. Be off with you, for you are the second to try to cozen me about this duck. But the other was a woman."

And Fatima laughed in her heart but said in a very deep voice: "I am what I am. But give me the duck."

And the baker said: "Nay then, be off with you," and he took his stave and would have driven her from his shop. But Fatima laughed at him and said: "Nay then, thou shalt see what thou shalt see. Look now at my ring," and she stretched out her hand out of her mantle.

And the baker no sooner saw the ring than he fell all a-tremble. And he bowed low before her and said: "Nay, O my lord, how could I guess? For, O my lord," he said, "thou art greatly changed since thy servant saw thee last. Thy shape is taller and slimmer, and even

THE GREAT HUNGER OF FATIMA 141

thy voice is changed and become gruff. Nay, O my lord the great one, how could I know thee? ”

And Fatima said: “Nay, my good fellow, I forgive thee. But fetch my duck now to my lodgings.”

And the baker said: “Nay, are my lord’s lodgings changed also? For he was wont to lodge where he dwelt, at his great house in the Shâri’a el-Manâkh.”

And Fatima told him haughtily: “Nay, fellow, I weary of thy questions. Say no more, but bring my duck.”

And the baker said: “My lord commands. But I cannot bring the duck. For it is not mine but the hunter’s, and what shall I say to him when he comes for it and I have it not? ”

And Fatima said: “Nay, we must think of that.” And presently she laughed and said: “I have thought now. Bring me the duck to my lodgings when it is roasted. And when the hunter comes and asks thee where his duck is, you can tell him that just now you opened the door of the oven to see how the duck was roasting, and the duck was roasting beautifully, but when you opened the door, he flew

out and bit you and flew away. That will do the hunter for an explanation."

And the baker bowed and said: "Nay, my lord, it is a heartrending explanation, but this hunter is a stony-hearted man, and it comes to my mind that he may think I am mocking at him, and will be angry with me."

And Fatima said: "Better for him if he believes thee. But if he does not and is angry, let him bring thee before me at my lodgings, and accuse thee before me, and I will look out for the rest."

And the baker said: "My lord has spoken, and I will bring the duck. But where are my lord's lodgings?"

And Fatima looked from the door of the shop and asked herself: "Nay, where might my lordship's lodgings be but where I took them up?" And she saw a house in the street and asked the baker: "Seest thou the fifth house on the other side, beyond the Bâb Zuweileh?" And the baker said: "My lord means the Inn of the Sûk es-Sudân?" and Fatima told him: "So thou hast called it."

"Nay," said the baker, "that is a mean inn for the lodging of a great one, but I will bring

THE GREAT HUNGER OF FATIMA 143

the duck there if my lord wills," and Fatima said: "So thy lord wills, my good fellow," and went out into the street.

And she looked at the inn, and she laughed in her heart, and said: "Lo, the key hath already unlocked the door of the baker's oven. Now let it also unlock the door of this mine inn, and speedily, for I never was so hungry." And she went down the street to the inn, and passed through the door into the inn, and said haughtily to him that sat inside: "O my good fellow, give me thy best room at once, for I require it at once."

CHAPTER XIII

MY LORD FATIMA

NOW the landlord of the inn was a sturdy fellow who sat on the mats and smoked a nargileh. And when Fatima said to him: "My good man, I require thy best room at once," he took the stem of the nargileh from between his lips and held it in his left hand. And with his right hand he scratched his head beneath his yellow turban. And he looked at Fatima.

And when he had well looked he said: "Nay, but suppose my best room be occupied already?"

And Fatima said: "But is it occupied? Then turn the people out of it and give it me at once, for I require it."

And the landlord said: "Nay, it is not occupied. But it comes to my mind that you look like a sprig of a boy and talk like a great one with the voice of a girl, and I pray thee, oblige me by going thy way in peace to hell.

For I like thee not." And he put the stem of the nargileh back between his lips again.

And Fatima said: "Nay, fellow, do you bandy words with me? See then what thou seest and learn that I am what I am," and she stretched out her hand to him, so that he saw the ring upon her finger.

And even as the baker had fallen all a-flutter at the sight of the ring, so the landlord did. And he pushed the pipe from him, and bowed his face on the matting, and said: "Nay, O my lord, how could I guess? For it comes to my mind that thou art greatly changed. Thy shape is changed, and thy garments are changed, and the hood of them hides thy face, and thy voice is changed also. Nay, I pray thee, hold it not up against thy servant that he could not guess."

And Fatima said: "Fear not, good fellow. I forgive thee thy mistake. But prepare the room."

And the landlord said: "My lord commands," and hastened away to make ready the room, and Fatima laughed in her heart and said: "Nay, what was my Lord Aladdin in the Thousand Nights and the One Night be-

side me? For he needs must rub his lamp and I have but to show my ring."

Now shortly after my Lord Fatima was settled in the best room of her inn came the landlord to her again, and bowed before her, and said: "My lord's baker waits with my lord's duck," and Fatima said: "Nay, then, let him bring it up, for I am anhungered."

And the baker brought the duck, on a silver platter which he had borrowed, and covered with a clean napkin which he had borrowed, and set the platter on the mats, and took off the napkin, and said: "Nay, is not the duck brown and savory? And roasted to a turn?" And Fatima told him: "Thou hast done well. Now go thy ways and I will eat it."

And the baker said: "I pray my lord to remember his servant in the hour of trouble when the hunter cometh and findeth not his duck," and bowed before her and went his ways.

And Fatima called for a basin and an ewer, and washed her hands and dried them on the napkin, and ate the duck. And as she was picking the bones of it, a tumult arose in the street before the inn. And she went to the

window of the balcony and looked out, and there was a great crowd gathered in the street, and in the midst of it were four men and the baker. One of the men was a hunter, for he had his fowling-piece, and one of them was a one-eyed Copt in a blue turban, and one was a Hajji in a green turban, and one was a fat merchant. And the baker stood in the midst of them and had the tail of a donkey in his hand. And all five of them called loudly on my lord.

And the landlord of the inn came and said to Fatima: "Nay, my lord's baker is in evil case, for he hath wrought great evil and great scandal in the city, and four men be his accusers and would accuse him before my lord the Kadi."

And Fatima said: "Nay, bring up the baker and the four and they shall accuse him before me."

And they were brought up and Fatima said to them: "Nay, which of you four is the principal accuser of this baker?" And all four pressed forward crying: "I am he," and they quarreled with each other which of them was the principal accuser, and the hunter said:

"It is I, for he stole my duck," and the Copt said: "Nay, but he stole my eye," and the Hajji said: "But he killed my brother at his prayers," and the merchant said: "Nay, but he stole my donkey's tail." And while they quarreled, the baker stood apart and flicked the tail of the donkey, which he had in his hand.

And Fatima said: "Nay, tell me your tales in order, one at a time," and she said to the hunter: "Tell me thy accusation first, that I may judge it."

And the hunter bowed low and said: "Nay, O my lord the Kadi, I had a duck, and it was a fat duck, and I lay all night in the marshes beyond Sâkiyet Makki to take it, and the night was cold. And I brought it to this baker and told him: 'Roast it for me, and when it is roasted I will come and fetch it,' and I went away and invited two friends to dine on my duck with me, and went back and asked the baker for my duck. And he told me: 'Nay, I am all a-flutter. For thy duck was roasted, and I opened the door of my oven to see if it was roasted, and lo, the duck flew out of the oven, and bit me, and flew away!' And I

said: 'The duck would fly when a thief like thee spoke words of truth,' and the baker said: 'O Allāh, and by the beard of the Prophet, but these be words of truth,' and so I seized him and brought him before my lord. And I pray my lord to judge him on these three counts: that he stole my duck; that he lied, which is a grievous sin from a Muslim to a Muslim; and that he swore falsely in the name of Allāh, and is a blasphemer. And I pray my lord to judge him on all three counts, and on every count to mulct him all that he hath and ruin him, because he is a thief and a liar and a blasphemer. My lord has heard me speak."

And Fatima said: "Nay, the charges be grave, if they be true. But I must proceed according to the law. For there be doubts left in my mind."

And the hunter said: "But how can there be doubts in my lord's mind? The case is very plain. For this baker stole the duck, and lied about the theft, and swore falsely to the truth of the lie. So he is a thief and a liar and a blasphemer all three, and there are no doubts of it at all."

And the baker flicked the donkey's tail, which he had in his hand, and Fatima bowed her head under the hood of her mantle, as if she pondered. And she sighed deeply and said: "Nay, there be grave doubts. For," she said, "can not a bird fly?"

And the hunter laughed scornfully and said: "Ay, and so can a fish swim, but not when they be dead."

And Fatima said: "So it seemeth to man, in his little wisdom. But we must proceed according to the law, and doth not the Prophet say in the Koran, which is the law, that Allâh can do all things? And for that reason there be doubts left in my mind."

And the hunter laughed very scornfully and said: "Can He make a roasted duck fly out of a heated oven, and bite a baker, and fly away?"

And Fatima asked him: "Nay, can He not?"

"Nay," muttered the hunter; "He would not if He could. For Allâh is not a fool."

And Fatima told him: "What, hast thou not said that Allâh would be a fool if He made a dead duck fly out of an oven? And is it not rank blasphemy to call Allâh a fool? Nay, it

is thou who art the blasphemer, and before I judge the case of this baker I will judge thine own. And I find thee guilty, and I fine thee ten pieces of gold for thy blasphemy."

Then was the hunter very wroth, and as he paid the gold he cursed in his beard. And Fatima said: "Nay, shall a believer curse in the presence of the Kadi, who is the Prophet's underling? Before I judge the baker's case, I must judge thine own. And because thou hast cursed, I fine thee other ten pieces of gold for cursing."

And the hunter paid the ten pieces and held his peace, though he was very wroth. And Fatima said: "Now will we proceed with the case of this baker."

And the hunter bowed low before her and said: "Nay, O my lord, I will not press the case against the baker before my lord, for I find it too expensive."

And Fatima told him: "What? Art thou of the wicked tribe who seek the law for anger and not for justice, and settest brother against brother in litigation? And will you bring a case before me and not press it? Nay, for that also I fine thee ten pieces of gold. Pay them, and

go thy ways out of my sight, thou litigious man."

And the hunter paid them and went his ways willingly out of her sight. And Fatima said: "What doeth this one-eyed Copt before me? Had he a!so a duck?"

And the Copt bowed before her and said: "Nay, O my lord, but I had an eye and this baker took it from me by force. For I was walking in the street, and behold, that blasphemous and litigious hunter came, leading this baker, and both were crying: 'Way, way, for we go to my Lord the Kadi.' And because I made not way quickly enough in the press, this baker reached out, and seized my eye, and plucked it out, and flung it away. And so I joined the hunter in bringing him here before my lord to be judged. And I pray my lord to judge him severely, for he took away my eye by force, and that is a grievous wrong, and is called Mayhem."

And Fatima said: "Nay, it is a very grievous wrong and shall be severely punished, if he did it." And she said to the baker: "Did you take away the eye of this Copt by force?"

And the baker flicked the tail of the donkey and said: "Ay, my lord, I took it."

And Fatima said: "Then was thy wrong grievous and grievous must thy punishment be also. For we must proceed according to the law, and doth not the law say: 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth?' Baker, thou must lose one of thy eyes. But," she said, "it comes to my mind that this Copt is a Christian?"

And the Copt said: "Ay, my lord, for two thousand years and more have my fathers been Christians."

And Fatima said: "Nay, then, is not one good Muslim eye like this baker's worth two Christian eyes such as this dog of a Copt's? Hear then my judgment which I judge to hold the balance even between the worth of a Muslim and of a Christian. First let the baker pluck out the Copt's other eye, and then let the Copt pluck out one of the baker's eyes, and so justice shall be served to both."

And the Copt bowed and said: "Nay, then, it comes to my mind that I would not press the case against this baker too hard. For doth not the Holy Scripture say: 'If thine enemy

smite thee on one cheek, turn to him even thine other cheek also? ' "

"What?" cried Fatima, "Art thou also of that litigious tribe that seekest the law in anger and will not be satisfied with justice? And will you bring a case before me and then not press it? Nay, for that I fine thee ten pieces of gold. Pay them, and get thee out of my sight, thou litigious man."

And the Copt paid down the ten pieces thankfully. And Fatima saw the man in the green turban and said: "Nay, here is a good Muslim at last, a Hajji and an honest man. What wilt thou here, O my uncle the Hajji, for I perceive that thou hast two eyes? Evil would it have gone with this baker if he had plucked out the eye of a Muslim and a Hajji."

And the Hajji bowed and said: "Nay, O my lord, the baker has done a worse thing. For as that blasphemous hunter and that litigious Copt led him through the street, he broke away from them and ran into a mosque where my brother and I were praying. And as the two pursued him, he ran into the minaret of the mosque, and up the stairway of the minaret,

and they pressed close behind him to take him again. And when he was come to the balcony at the top of the minaret, where the muezzin calls, and could run no further upward, he leaped from the minaret down to the mosque-court. And he fell with great force, for the minaret was very lofty, and my brother and I were at prayers in the court, and he fell upon my brother and killed him. And I seized him and held him, and when the hunter and the Copt had come down the stairs again, the three of us took him to lead him through the streets for judgment before my lord. And as we came, this merchant was before us in the way, riding upon a donkey. And because he did not make way for us quickly, this violent baker seized the donkey by the tail and flung him from our way. And he flung him so violently that the tail of the donkey came off in his hand, and he hath the tail in his hand still, as my lord can see."

"Nay," said Fatima, "let the merchant tell the tale of the tail in his turn. For we must proceed according to the law and thine accusation is very heavy. For to kill a brother Muslim at his prayers is the most grievous of

sins, if this baker did it." And she said to the baker: "Did you kill this man's brother at his prayers?"

And the baker flicked the tail of the donkey and said: "Ay, my lord, I killed him."

"O thou wickedest of men," cried Fatima, "heavily shalt thou pay for this, thy heavy sin. For we must proceed according to the law, and even as a man sinneth, so must he be punished. Listen now to my judgment which I judge against this baker. For it is my judgment that the baker shall go into the mosque and kneel down and say his prayers, and while he prayeth shall the Hajji climb up the minaret, and leap from the balcony of the minaret, and fall upon this baker, and kill him at his prayers, even as the baker killed his brother. Go now and do my judgment."

And the Hajji bowed and said: "Nay, O my lord, I would not press the case," and he quickly laid down ten pieces of gold before Fatima, for he had them ready in his hand, and turned to get himself out of her sight. But quickly as he went, the merchant went before him. And when Fatima saw the merchant go, she cried: "Nay, stop that man, for he

too hath brought a case before me." And the Hajji ran to catch the merchant.

But the merchant ran faster than the Hajji. And he ran down the stairs of the inn, and out of the door of it, and as he ran he cried loudly: "Nay, O my lord! Nay, O my lord! I swear to thee that my donkey was born without a tail," and he ran out into the street and got clean away.

And my Lord Fatima gathered up the pieces of gold which lay on the mat before her and she saw that they were fifty pieces. And she said: "The merchant would have made them sixty!" And she flung a piece of gold to the baker, as he stood apart flicking the tail of the donkey in his hand, and said to him: "There is the price of my duck."

And the baker said: "Nay, my lord, the duck cost me nothing."

"What?" cried Fatima, "will you bandy words with me?"

"Nay, O my lord," said the baker, "I will not bandy words. And if my lord commands me to take all the gold, I will take it and not bandy words." And Fatima laughed, and drew out from under the skirt of her mantle the

platter and the napkin which she had hidden there, and gave them to the baker, and sent him away.

And she gathered up the gold and laughed to feel the weight of it. And she looked at the ring on her finger and laughed to see it there. And she asked herself: "Nay, what door shall I unlock next with this my key which unlocketh all this great city to me?"

CHAPTER XIV

FATIMA MATRICULATES

AND Fatima, with nine and forty pieces of gold beneath her pillow, slept that night soundly in the best room of her inn, and in the morning, when she sat in the balcony of the room to eat her breakfast, she saw many young men robed in black passing through the street beneath the window of it. And she said to the landlord who had brought her breakfast: "Who are those young men?"

And the landlord laughed and told her: "It pleases my lord to jest with me."

And Fatima said: "Ay, I am full of jests as an egg is of meat. But tell me who the young men are?"

And the landlord said: "Who should they be but the students of the University?"

And Fatima looked at the ring on her finger and said in her heart: "Behold, is here another door for my key to unlock?" And she

said to the landlord: "Why should not I also go to the University?"

And the landlord laughed again and told her: "Truly my lord is full of jests, for doth not all the world know that my lord is already wiser than all the University?"

And Fatima said: "But if it pleases me to prove my wisdom in the University? Is there any reason why I should not go?"

And the landlord said: "There is no reason, my lord," and Fatima said: "Come then with me and show me the way."

And the landlord laughed the third time and said: "As if my lord knew not the way!" But he went with Fatima and showed her the way.

And when they came to the gate of el-Azhar, the porters would have stopped them, but the landlord whispered in their ears, and the porters fell on their faces before Fatima. And they said: "Nay, my lord, how could we guess?" so that a group of the students stood by and marveled to see them lie on their faces. For the porters were sturdy fellows and not courteous as a rule.

And Fatima looked at the students through

the slit of her hood and one of them was the comeliest young man she had ever seen. For he was an Arab of the desert, and his features were fine and finely chiseled, and his skin was the clear color of bronze, and his nostrils were sensitive as the nostrils of a blooded horse, and in his dark eyes there was feeling, and his hair fell down over his neck and shoulders. And his body, under his robe, was tall and straight and strong, and his hands were small, and his feet were small, and he stood upon them firmly and lightly, as the horses of the desert stand. And Fatima turned to this young man and said to him: "I pray thee, young sir, lead me to the Sheikh el-Islâm, the head of the University."

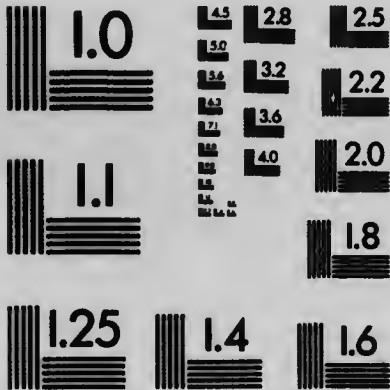
And the young man marveled greatly at her voice and said in his heart: "The porters entreat him as a great one and call him my lord, but his voice is the voice of a girl." But he answered her courteously and told her that he would show her. And Fatima dismissed the landlord of the inn and went with the young man.

And as they passed through the sahn, the court, where all the thousands of the students



MICROCOPY RESOLUTION TEST CHART

(ANSI and ISO TEST CHART No. 2)



APPLIED IMAGE Inc

1653 East Main Street
Rochester, New York 14609 USA
(716) 482 - 0300 - Phone
(716) 288 - 5989 - Fax

of the university were sauntering in twos and threes and taking the air before they went to their studies in the *riwâks*, and disputing with each other after the manner of students, Fatima looked again at her conductor as he walked at her side. And she said in her heart: "Surely this is the comeliest young man in all the world, and if he were as witty as he is comely, this would be the mate for Fatima, and not a fat Sheikh or a fool." And she said to him: "Young sir, I pray thee tell me how old thou art?"

And he marveled again at the softness of her voice, but he answered her courteously and said: "I am but just eighteen."

And Fatima cried in her heart: "O Allâh, is it not marvelous? For I, too, am but just eighteen!" And she said to him: "I pray thee tell me whence thou art."

And he said: "I am from Nowhere. For I am an orphan and I have no home." And Fatima cried in her heart: "O Allâh, the greatness of Thy marvels! For am I not an orphan too?" And she asked him: "Nay, but tell me where thy home was."

And the young man told her: "My father

was a Sheikh of the desert, and his black tents were pitched in the valleys of the desert, beyond Koseir. And he died, and my elder brother inherited the tents and the camels and the horses and the women and the flocks. For I was the younger son."

And Fatima asked him: "Why camest thou here to the University?"

And he told her: "Nay, because I was lonely in the desert, and there was naught for me there, and I felt in me the stirrings of strength to mingle among men and best them. And one passed that way and told me of the greatness of el-Kâhira, and the meanness of the desert was revealed to me, and I yearned in my heart for el-Kâhira. And I came."

And Fatima said in her heart: "Nay, how like is his case to mine!" And she asked him: "Thou art glad thou camest?"

And he told her: "Sometimes. For the city is very great and wonderful. But sometimes I am lonely here. For I have no friend here. And in the cities, which are oceans of life, one needs friends, that he be not lost like a single drop amid the waves of life. But in the desert one is one's own friend and sufficient

'to one's self. For the desert is vast and empty, so that men are lost on the face of its vastness, and are alike alone, whether they be one or a thousand. And sometimes," the young man said, "I yearn for the feel of a horse again between my legs, and the feel of a musket butt beneath my arm, and the hotness of the sun beating on the hood of my burnoose, and the stinging of the sand as it blows against my face, despising the weakness of these Cairenes. For two of them could I break with my hands, and a score of them could I cut down with my single sword, and a hundred could I ride over with my horse, as if they were standing corn."

And Fatima was sorrowful for the young man in his loneliness, and she said to him very softly: "Nay, if what is to be shall be, it may be thou hast found a friend," and she took his hand. Now they had passed through the mosque-court, and through the sanctuary with its forest of columns, and had come to the muniment rooms, and it was dark there. And that was why Fatima had taken his hand, because she could not see there and the tile floor was uneven beneath her feet.

But when she had taken his hand she could not let it go again. And she pressed his hand and told him again so softly that her voice was fluted with softness: "Nay, it comes to my mind that thou wilt find a friend."

And the young man, who had marveled at the softness of her voice and the softness of her shape beneath her robe, marveled yet more at the softness of her fingers. And he said in his heart: "Nay, who is this great one whom the rough porters call my lord, and who yet speaketh with the soft voice of a girl, and walketh with the grace of a girl, and the touch of whose soft fingers maketh me all a-tremble?" And he said to her: "Nay, my lord, thy servant is presumptuous, but I pray thee throw back the hood of thy mantle, that I may see thy face."

But Fatima said: "Nay, that I cannot do for thee. For I have taken a vow that for a year and a day I will go hooded, even as the veiled horsemen of the desert, and no man shall see my face."

But he told her: "Nay, I pray thee, throw back thy hood. For if thy face be comparable to the beauty of thy voice, and the beauty of

the touch of thy fingers, then I swear that no man ever wore so beautiful a face."

And Fatima cried: "No man ever wore this face!" And she cried: "Nay, then, thou shalt see what thou shalt see!" And she threw back her hood.

And the young man looked at her and cried: "O Allâh!"

For they had come to the end of the munitment rooms, and a single ray of light came in between the ancient cases of the books, and the young man looked on such a sight as never man had seen before within the ancient walls of el-Azhar. For the ray shone on Fatima's face, and upon her hair and upon her eyes and upon her lips, soft as the red petals of roses, and all else there was darkness, excepting her.

And the young man cried again: "O Allâh," and looked upon her, and in his look was surprise and joy and laughter and tears and longing. All these things were in his look.

And when Fatima saw the look that was in his eyes and saw his comeliness, her heart sang for joy within her and her heart rushed out to him as water rushes when a dam is cut. And her body swayed to his body and their bodies

met each other. And their lips sought each the other's lips and their lips met. And Fatima's soul flowed into her lips and mingled there with his soul, which was in his lips.

And she was frightened. And she pushed him from her and said: "Nay, let me go." But her heart sang within her. And she said: "Nay, lead me now to the Sheikh el-Islâm."

And he said: "Nay, I will take thee to the desert. We shall be lords of the vastness of the desert, thou and I together, alone there together. And we shall be mates, and we shall breed up children who shall be the lords of men."

And before the ardor that was in his eyes, Fatima's own eyes were lowered and she put the hood of her mantle back over her head. And she said in her heart: "He lacks not boldness. It may be that I have unlocked here a door that will be hard to shut again!" And her heart sang for joy, but to him she said: "Who would be lord of a desert, when one can be lord of el-Kâhira?"

And he said to her doubtfully: "Nay, but who am I to be lord of el-Kâhira?"

And Fatima told him: "If thou hast wit,

thou canst be aught thou wilt." And she asked him: "Hast thou wit, as thou hast comeliness?"

And he told her: "I know not. But it comes to my mind that for thy sake even a fool could find wit in himself. O Allâh, how beautiful Thou hast made this woman and hast cast my heart at her feet for them to trample on."

"Nay," said Fatima, "prate not of Allâh, and thy heart, but lead me quickly to the Sheikh, that I may prove what wit thou hast. And woe be to thee if in anything thou betrayest my own wit, which I shall show! For in that case, I promise thee that thou shalt never look upon my face again."

"And if I do not betray thee?" he asked her, and she told him: "Nay, in that case what is to be shall be."

And he said: "Nay, then, I am become already as Suleiman the Wise, and thou art Sheba's Queen." And he led her to the Sheikh el-Islâm, and she walked beside him, and when the hem of his robe touched the hem of her robe, they knew it and their hearts leaped within them. And Fatima said in her heart:

“Nay, whither leadeth me this door which I have unlocked?” And she laughed in her heart and said: “Nay, I care not, for go I not with him?”

CHAPTER XV

FATIMA DISCOMFITED

AND the young man led Fatima, hooded again, before the Sheikh el-Islâm, the Head of the University, and said: "O my father the Sheikh, I bring a stranger before thee at the stranger's own request. And what business the stranger hath with thee must be told by the stranger, for I know it not."

And the Sheikh, who was a venerable man, bowed courteously to Fatima and told her courteously: "Nay, young sir, you are welcome, whatever business brings you. And I pray you sit down, and thou too be seated, O my son Abdallah."

And Fatima and the young man Abdallah bowed to the Sheikh and sat down on the mats before him, and Fatima said: "O my father the Sheikh, if it be acceptable, I would be enrolled as a student in this thy university."

And the Sheikh said: "It is acceptable. For is not this the fount of Islām, from which every true believer may drink his fill without cost?" And he asked her: "What is thy name?" And Fatima told him her name was Hosein, and he said to his scribe who sat behind him: "Write down the name Hosein in the rolls, I pray thee." And he asked Fatima: "Whence art thou?"

"Nay, O my father," said Fatima, "is it important whence I am?"

And the Sheikh told her: "It is important, O my son Hosein. For the division of the university is this. It is divided into riwâks, and each riwâk is apportioned to the students of the same country to which it belongs. There is the riwâk of the Turks, and the riwâk of the Syrians, and that of the Indians, and those of the Meccans and the Sudanese and of the Hanefites, besides many others. And I must know thy country, and see thy face of what country it is, that I may assign thee to live in thy proper riwâk."

And Fatima told him: "My face I cannot show thee, O my father, for have I not taken a vow to keep it veiled from the sight of men

for a year and a day, even as the veiled horsemen of the desert? But I am far from the valleys of the desert, beyond Koseir."

The Sheikh said: "Nay, a vow is a vow and it is not becoming to enquire too closely into it." And he said to his scribe: "Set my son Hosein's name down of the riwâk el-Fashntyn, which is the riwâk also," he told Fatime, "of my son Abdallah, who brought thee to me."

And Fatima said: "Then I have one friend in my riwâk already, and shall not be lonely there." And the Sheikh el-Islâm smiled on her and on Abdallah and said to Abdallah: "Lead my son Hosein now to the Sheikh of the riwâk and beg the Sheikh to entreat him courteously for my sake," and he sent them from him with the blessing of the Prophet.

And as they went along, Fatima said to Abdallah: "Nay, why art thou silent? Art thou not glad at my wit which has made me of thy riwâk?" And Abdallah said: "Nay, I am glad to be near thee. But," he said, "I love not a lie, and therefore am I silent, because I love not a lie."

And Fatima threw back her hood a little, so that he could see the turn of her brow and the

turn of her lips and chin. And she said: "This is my bold friend, Abdallah, whose sword cuts down twenty at a stroke and whose horse tramples over a hundred, and he lets one little lie, a very little one, come between him and his Fatima, who is to go with him to the desert and mother the lords of men! Nay, my friend Abdallah the Bold, go thy ways and I will go my ways. For I am not afraid of anything, even of lies, if lies need be for my purposes."

And Abdallah saw the scornful droop of her lids and the scornful turn of her head upon her neck and cried: "Nay, for Fatima's sake will I eat lies and kiss the father of lies upon the lips!"

And she laughed in her heart and said in her heart: "Behold how for my beauty's sake this bold Abdallah is ready to eat lies from my hand, even as a young kid eats its first blades of grass from the hand." And she said to Abdallah: "Nay, my bold one, lead me to the riwâk now and perhaps I will prove thy wit, whether it moves as impetuously as thy boldness. And that seemeth to me to go by fits and starts."

And Abdallah led her to the riwâk, and led

her to the Sheikh of the riwâk, and lied boldly to the Sheikh, saying: "Here is my brother Hosein, who is come from the valleys of the desert, beyond Koseir, to dwell here in the riwâk and to be a student here. And the Sheikh el-Islâm has seen Hosein, and has admitted him to the University, and sends him to you, begging you to entreat him courteously."

And the Sheikh of the riwâk, whom Christians might call a professor of the university, bowed courteously to Fatima and greeted her, and Fatima bowed to the Sheikh.

And when she bowed, the sleeve of her mantle fell back, and her left hand came out of the sleeve, and her ring shone upon her finger, and the Sheikh saw it. And when he saw the ring, he started violently and said quietly to her: "Nay, young sir, draw near me, I pray thee, that I may see thy ring." And when she had drawn near and he had looked closely at the ring, he said to Abdallah: "I pray thee to draw a little back, for I would speak to this young gentleman somewhat privately." And when Abdallah had drawn back, the Sheikh inclined his head and said in a low voice:

“Nay, O my lord, how could I guess? For the mantle you wear, with its hood in place of the tarboosh, seemeth to change your whole look. But what meaneth this masquerade? And why are you come here into the University as a student, when all the world knows that my lord teacheth wisdom to all the University and to all Islâm? And why does my truthful son Abdallah lie to me and tell me you are his brother from the valleys of the desert?”

And Fatima kept the hood close about her face and said in a low voice: “But suppose this be a whim of mine?”

And the Sheikh started when he heard her speak and said: “Nay, here is something very strange. For even thy voice is changed. And if my lord had this whim, why did he not tell me of it when I sat at meat with him in his house, no earlier than last night?”

And Fatima made pretense of impatience then and said: “Do you question me?” and the Sheikh bowed to her and said: “Nay, I was wrong there. For my lord’s whims are my lord’s whims and who shall question them? Tell me what you wish of me.”

And Fatima said: “Give me a book, then,

and I will sit down among the students. For that is my whim at present." And the Sheikh gave her his own book and she sat down by Abdallah among the students. And the students looked somewhat curiously on this veiled stranger who was come among them and whispered to each other of the stranger, till the Sheikh recalled them to their studies.

Now the study which they were studying was the law. And the Sheikh read from a book of the law and explained each sentence as he read it, and disputed with the more advanced of the students about the meaning, while the rest of the students listened attentively and attentively wrote down notes of the disputes, bending their noses above their books and digging their noses into their books, all save Abdallah, who sat close beside Fatima and held her hand under her mantle. And because my Lord Fatima was there to listen to his learning, the Sheikh explained each sentence at great length and disputed endlessly about the meaning of every word in each sentence, so that in an hour he read but three sentences. And there was a youth among the students who wore spectacles and was sober-minded, and he dis-

puted the meaning of each explanation, and he and the Sheikh disputed their disputes together, and each fresh dispute led to two others.

Now Fatima knew not how to read or to write, and the words of the book of the law were long, and the words of the disputants were yet longer, so that she understood not the meaning of one in ten of them. But the disputes were longest of all and wearied her. And when a second hour was gone, she was very weary, and she yawned, and rose to her feet.

And when the Sheikh saw her rise, he said: "Has my lord had enough of it?" and all the students were curious to hear him call this veiled stranger my lord.

And Fatima said: "Ay, I have had enough of it and more than enough. For this child's play is wearisome. For wisdom lies not in books nor in words, but in the hearts of men and in their acts. And it comes to my mind to change this child's play for something more serious, if the Sheikh permits?"

And the Sheikh bowed his face and said: "My lord commands." And he said to the students: "This great one is now your Sheikh.

His name may not be spoken to you without his wish, but whatsoever he bids you do, do ye that."

And Fatima said to the students: "Put aside your books, I pray you. For I will change this child's play for something more serious. For I have seen what learning you have from books, and now it pleases me to see what wisdom you have in your hearts, and what wit Allâh put into your hearts when ye lay beneath the hearts of your mothers. So put aside these books, for wit and wisdom are not found in books."

So they put them aside and Fatima said to them: "This is the first test I will put you to and it is very simple. And him who cannot pass this test will I call truly witless and a fool. This is the test: that each of you stand before me in turn, and each, as he stands, shall be both laughing and weeping at the same time. Now who will be the first to stand before me?"

And no one stood up. For they looked at each other and asked each other: "Nay, how should a man both laugh and weep at the same time?" And the youth who was sober-

mind and a great disputer spoke aloud and said: "Nay, this is not seriousness he changeth our studies for, but folly." And he said to Fatima: "No man can laugh and weep at the same time and I will prove it to you by an argument. For laughter is the outward sign of joy and tears are the outward sign of sorrow. And joy and sorrow are opposites and cannot mingle, for each of them driveth out the other. And therefore the outward signs of them, which are laughter and tears, cannot be intermingled, and therefore no man can logically both laugh and weep —"

"Nay," said Fatima, "there hath been speech enough already. Now who will speak not, but act?" And she drew a piece of gold from her girdle and said: "To him that is first will I give this piece of gold."

But they stirred not and the youth who was sober-minded asked: "Can a man do the undoable for gold?" And Fatima looked at them and said: "What, is there not one of you hath wit? Cannot even my bold Abdallah meet this test?" And she looked for Abdallah and he was not there. And she said: "Nay, I fear you are all fools, then. And

Abdallah was the greatest fool of all and a coward to boot, for he ran away."

And even as she spoke, Abdallah ran into the room and came and stood before her. And in his hand he held an onion. And he rubbed his eyes with the onion, and his eyes wept at the sharpness of the onion, and the tears ran down his cheeks. And he laughed aloud in his joy, to think that his wit was matched equally with the wit of Fatima, and so he stood before her, indisputably laughing and weeping at the same time, for all men to see.

And Fatima asked the students: "Was it not a simple test?" and they told her Ay it was, and they could not see why they had not thought of an onion themselves. But the youth who was sober-minded was discontented and said: "Nay, these be not real tears, but a mere reflex secretion. For real tears are an index of sorrow. Hath he called us from our studies for this and calleth it seriousness?"

But Fatima bade Abdallah sit down among the other students, after she had given him the piece of gold, and she said to them: "The second test is easier and any one of you can

think of the answer. For I only bid you to stand here clothed and unclothed at the same time." And she took two pieces of gold from her girdle and said: "These will I give to him that first meeteth the test, but him who cannot meet it I will call a fool for sure and have no more to do with him. Who will be the first?"

And the students looked at each other, muttering and asking: "How can this be?" and Abdallah looked at Fatima through his tears and muttered: "Nay, how can this be?" But the youth who was sober-minded said: "Is this more of his seriousness? For the thing is impossible and I will prove it. For to be clothed is to have one's nakedness covered with clothes and to be unclothed is to have one's nakedness uncovered with clothes, and can a thing be both covered and uncovered with the same thing at the same time? It is impossible and folly."

And Fatima said to them: "Nay then, can no one of you meet this test, and are you all fools, born without wit?" And she began to put the gold back into her girdle.

But suddenly Abdallah cried aloud for joy,

though the tears were running down his cheeks. And he leaped up and cried: "Nay, nay, I have thought. Wait but a moment, till I be gone and come back," and he ran from the room, tearing his garments from him as he ran.

And when he came back, he had thrown his garments away, and had thrown over him a fish-net which he had borrowed in the bazaar. So he was clothed in the fish-net and still unclothed, for the nakedness of his skin, colored like fine bronze, was revealed through the net.

And the students laughed to see him and told each other: "Nay, we might have thought of that." And Fatima said to the Sheikh: "Was it not easy?" and the Sheikh, who stood by, laughed and said: "Ay, it was easy, but I should not have thought of it, and one learns not such things from books." But the youth who was sober-minded was very much displeased and said: "He ought not to have the gold, for he did not do it. For a fish-net is not clothing in the proper sense of the word. For it hath no sleeves."

And Fatima said to Abdallah: "Thy wit moved somewhat stumblingly this time, but it moved." And she gave him the two pieces

of gold and bade him sit down again among his fellows, who laughed to see him sitting in his fish-net and laughing aloud for joy, while great tears coursed down his cheeks.

And Fatima said to them: "The third test which I will give you is simplest of all. But because ye have all but failed on the other two, to him that faileth not on this one will I give a greater reward. I will give him what his heart most desireth."

And Abdallah cried: "Nay, will you give me what my heart desireth most?" and she told him: "Ay, if you win it," And he cried: "Tell me the third test then." And she said: "This is the third test. I bid you appear before me mounted and on foot at the same time." And she said to the youth who was sober-minded: "Do it, and I will give you a new pair of spectacles."

And the youth frowned at her through his spectacles and said: "Thy seriousness, sir, is plain folly, and waste of time, and a scandal in the University. To be mounted is to be mounted on an animal's back, and to be on foot is to be on foot, and that is both the plain and the logical meaning of the words."

But Abdallah, the instant Fatima had proposed her third test, leaped up and ran from the room. And when he came back, he had in his arms an ass-foal, which the students were wont to pet as it wandered beside its mother in the court of el-Azhar. And he set the foal on its feet, and bestrode the foal, and rode upon the foal up and down the riw&k. And because his legs were longer than the foal's legs, he walked also upon his own feet, as he rode upon the foal.

And all the students laughed and the Sheikh laughed, to see him going thus upon the foal, clad in a fish-net, with tears still running down his cheeks, while he laughed aloud for joy. And they said to each other: "We might have thought of it. Is he not lucky?" And they said to Fatima: "Now hath Abdallah won whatever his heart desireth most." And they ceased their laughter and stood silent, listening to hear Abdallah tell what his heart most desired.

And Fatima said to Abdallah: "Thou hast shown wit of a sort, though it goeth by fits and starts, as thy boldness doth. Now will I try out thy boldness also. For whatever you

ask of me here and now, that will I give thee here and now. Hast thou thought? "

And he told her: " I have no need to think." And he told her in a clear voice: " My heart desireth most another kiss of thee, and that will I have of thee here and now."

" Nay," said Fatima, " though I cannot look on thee for laughing to see what a fool I have made of thee, thou art bolder than I thought, and in that you please me a little. For I love a man's heart to go straight to the goal of its desire and turn not aside for shadows, for so goeth mine own heart. But," she said, " beware that thou openest not my hood, for I have taken a vow that no man shall see my face for a year and a day."

Then all the riwák fell in a tumult. For Abdallah in his fish-net bent to take a kiss of the veiled stranger, and some laughed, and some were scandalized and cried: " Nay, he asked for another kiss! Hath he kissed this stranger once already then? " And the Sheikh of the riwák cried: " Nay, my lord, this goeth too far even for my lord, for it maketh a scandal in the University." And the youth who was sober-minded flung away his spectacles in

his excitement and cried out: "Oh, there is a scandal in the University. Let me run to fetch the Sheikh el-Islâm to see the scandal! For he is the head." And he ran to fetch him, while Abdallah, unmindful of the tumult, took of Fatima the kiss which his heart most desired and which she, in her laughter, thought not of denying him. And Abdallah kissed her a second time and she whispered to him from beneath her hood: "Be not too bold! For what will you do when the head comes and finds thee thus?" and Abdallah told her: "This will I do," and kissed her a third time.

And the Sheikh el-Islâm came and saw the tumult and the scandal that were there, how that some of the students laughed aloud and others cried aloud: "For shame, for shame!" and how that his son Abdallah stood clad in a fish-net and kissed his veiled son Hosein beneath his hood, and how that Hosein yielded himself to Abdallah's kisses. And the Sheikh el-Islâm was very angry, and cried aloud, and began to berate them all, cursing Hosein and Abdallah in the name of the Prophet, and telling how he would drive them from the University, and scourge them through el-Kâhira for

the scandal they had made. And while he berated them, the Sheikh of the riwâk came and whispered in his ear. And the Sheikh el-Islâm looked at Fatima's hand, and saw her ring, and started violently when he saw the ring. And he came close and looked at the ring, and he inclined his head and said: "I pray you come a little aside."

And Fatima went aside with him and the Sheikh said: "My tongue was rough and my words were angry. But nevertheless this is a great evil and a great scandal which my lord hath wrought, and is not like my lord." And he asked Fatima: "Is my lord a madman, to do a thing like this? For all Islâm will hear of it."

And Fatima would not answer him, and while he waited for her answer, came another Sheikh running, and burst hurriedly into the riwâk, and cried: "O my father the Sheikh! O thou Sheikh of Islâm! Have you heard the news? How that my Lord the Kadi has become a madman? For it seems that late yesterday he stole a duck from a baker, and ran up into the minaret of a mosque, and hurled the duck down and killed a Hajji at his prayers, and came down again and met the baker in the

street, and plucked the tail from a donkey, and beat the poor baker to death with the tail of the donkey. And after that he plucked the eyes from the heads of four Copts, and what he did with them I know not, for he ran out into the country then, and men are pursuing him to take him and lock him up in safety. O the poor man! O the poor man! For he was my friend and the friend of all Islâm."

And the Sheikh el-Islâm and the Sheikh of the riwâk looked at each other, and they looked at Fatima, and they looked at the third Sheikh, the news-bearer, and spoke to him in a low voice and pointed to Fatima. And the third Sheikh looked at Fatima and asked them: "Is this indeed my lord?" and they told him: "To be sure his face is veiled, but doth that signet ever leave my lord's own finger?"

And the third Sheikh approached Fatima, and bowed courteously, and greeted her as one friend greeteth another, and Fatima answered him not, but stood dumb and inclined not her head to his greeting.

And the third Sheikh said: "O the poor man! He is mad indeed, for he knoweth not his friends." And he looked about him and said:

“What madness is this, and what doeth this young man standing here, clad in a fish-net?” And Abdallah could not answer him, for he was dumb with fear.

And the Sheikh of the riwâk said: “Nay, I think this boy is mad too. For a moment ago he asked my lord for a kiss! And my lord gave him three kisses and I could not stop him.”

And the third Sheikh cried: “O the poor men! They be both mad together.” And the students cried out: “O the poor men,” and none laughed any more, for they were sorrowful, and they cried: “O poor Abdallah, for they are mad together.” And the three Sheikhs stood apart and said: “O the poor men,” and debated how they should lead them away and lock them up till they were cured. And they spoke soothingly to them, and begged them to come away with them, and they answered them not, for Abdallah was dumb with fright, and Fatima was dumb with striving not to laugh in their faces.

And while they coaxed them and while they debated, the door of the riwâk was burst open, and a porter ran in and cried: “’Ware thief!

'Ware thief!" and they asked him what he meant.

"Why," said he, "this morning there came into the University a stranger and I would not let him pass the gate, for he was veiled. But he had upon his finger that one's ring and so I let him pass, for I thought no one but that one ever had that ring. And now this moment came that one himself to the gate! So it comes to my mind that the other with the black-hooded robe is an impostor and a thief and I must search him out." And he saw Fatima then and cried: "Nay, thou impostor, come hither till I tear the clothes off thee and hurl thee out into the city!" And the man was very angry and would have laid violent hands on her.

And the Sheikh el-Islâm was angry and cried: "Nay, thou art no madman, but a vile thief!" And the other Sheikhs cried: "O the vile impostor, who stirreth up a scandal in our University!" And all the students cried: "O the impostor, who hath driven our poor Abdallah mad!" And it would have fared very ill with Fatima if they all had laid their hands on her.

But the door of the riwâk opened again and

a man came quietly into the riwâk. And the Sheikh el-Islâm saw the man and cried out joyfully: "Nay, who cometh but my lord himself!"

And my lord himself came in and stood in the midst of the riwâk, and the tassel of his tarboosh hung down over his left eye, and he smiled sleepily at the Sheikh and asked him: "Who else should I be?"

And Fatima knew him through the slit of the hood of her mantle and was a little frightened. "But," she said in her heart, "how good it all was while it lasted, and the memory of it will last for many a day, for Fatima hath made all Islâm laugh with her prank." And she betrayed not the fear she felt, but stood straight and still, and waited for that which should happen next.

CHAPTER XVI

FATIMA TRIUMPHANT

AND my Lord the Kadi stood in the riwâk, and smiled sleepily at those who were there, and asked them: "Who else should I be save myself?" And the silken tassel of his tarboosh hung over his eye.

The Sheikh el-Islâm said: "Nay, my lord, thou art thyself. But who then is this veiled stranger who weareth on his finger thine own ring, which never leaves thy finger?"

And my lord stretched out his hand and there was no ring on the finger of it. And he made great pretense of curiosity, as if he perceived Fatima then for the first time, and he shook the tassel of the tarboosh from his eye, and said: "What, hath this young gentleman my ring on his finger? Nay, who is this — young gentleman?"

The Sheikh said: "That we know not, for as you see, his face is veiled." And the Kadi

laughed sleepily and said: "There is an easy way to find out who it is," and the Sheikh asked him what way, and the Kadi laughed again and told them: "Ask him to take away the veil, that you may see his face."

"Nay, my lord," said the Sheikh, "I have asked him and he would not. But he said he had taken a vow that for a year and a day no man should look upon his face."

And the Kadi was amused at that and said: "Nay, what is one vow among so many friends? For ye be many and he is one, and if he will not show you his face, surely it will be easy to strip his hood off and look upon his face."

The Sheikh said: "Nay, let us do it, for he is plainly an impostor." And he bade the porter: "Tear off the hood of his mantle from this impostor's face."

Then Fatima spoke for the first time, and she spoke hurriedly, and said: "Nay, O my uncle the Kadi, what need is there to shame me before all this gaping crowd?"

And the Kadi laughed sleepily and said: "What, thou who art proud deignest to make the request of me that I show not thy face to these my friends?"

Fatima spoke again and answered him: "My lord may call it my request or what he will. But I would not be shamed thus publicly."

And the Kadi shook the tassel of the tarboosh from his eye again, and laughed again, and said to her: "Nay, I will not shame thee. And yet would I have these men look upon thy face." And he said: "Sit down upon the mats again, I pray ye all. Before this matter goeth further, I have a story to tell ye." And he turned to Fatima and said, bowing to her: "I pray thee, young — gentleman, sit down among us and listen to the story."

Fatima told him shortly: "Nay, my lord, I prefer to stand."

And my lord saw Abdallah standing also while the rest sat, and he made pretense of seeing Abdallah for the first time, and he shook the tassel of the tarboosh from his eye to examine Abdallah curiously. And he said to the Sheikh of the riwâk: "I pray thee tell me who is this young man in the fish-net?"

The Sheikh said: "Nay, it is Abdallah, one of my students. And that impostor there hath befooled him."

The Kadi examined Abdallah curiously again and said: "Ay, he hath all the look of one who hath been befooled." And he said to Abdallah: "At least sit down among us, young sir, and listen to my story."

Abdallah told him: "Nay, my lord, I too prefer to stand."

"Nay then," the Kadi said, "at least let some one put a robe over him, for his garments at present seem but thin," and one of his fellow students threw his mantle over Abdallah's shoulders.

And when they were all sat down but Fatima and Abdallah, the Kadi smiled sleepily upon them all and told them: "This is the story I will tell you. It is the story of one who had a wonderful garden planted where no water was, so that the garden was empty. For it is the story of a lady who is in a way a niece of mine, and she had great beauty and much wit, and a great pride in her beauty and her wit, which were as a garden planted where no water was. For this lady dwelt not in el-Kâhira, but in a village far up Nile, where were none to see her beauty and her wit save only a fat Sheikh el-Beled and a fool and

the mean people of the village. And as it were the wonderful garden of her wit and beauty was but empty, for there were none to see it.

“And this lady despised the meanness of the village and the emptiness her life was and said in her heart: ‘Is not el-Kâhira the greatest of all cities and full of the water of Life for one who hath such beauty and such wit as mine are? And why should I not go to el-Kâhira and lay el-Kâhira at my feet for them to walk on?’”

“Nay, my lord,” said the Sheikh of the riwâk, “was the woman a fool? Or had she truly such wit and beauty that she might boast so of them?”

The Kadi laughed sleepily and said: “That you shall judge for yourselves, as my tale goes on. The lady came to el-Kâhira, and because she was a great lady and very proud and cared naught for the opinions of men, it suited her whim to come as a fellah girl from the country might have come, dressed in the garments of a fellah girl and without ornaments and without even gold to buy her food. And she came to el-Kâhira only yesterday, when the streets were full of people intent on the business of the

festival, so that they heeded her not even when she walked close among them, with her beauty unveiled to their sight. But she heeded not their heedlessness, for she was proud, and though in outward semblance she was but a fellah girl and though she was penniless, she knew in her heart that she was a great lady and that el-Kâhira lay at her feet already, and they walked on it. So she heeded not the heedless people. And her name was Fatima, like the Prophet's daughter's name."

Now when my lord spoke the name Fatima, Abdallah started violently and looked at my lord and at Fatima. And Fatima stirred not nor looked at him. But my lord laughed sleepily, and shook the tassel from his eye, and looked at Abdallah, and said: "Are you cold, young sir? I pray one of you, give him another mantle, for when I came in, truly his garments seemed to me of the thinnest for this weather."

Abdallah told him: "Nay, my lord, I am warm enough."

And the Kadi laughed sleepily and said: "So the lady walked lonely through the streets in her pride. But there is one thing which

assails the great ones of the earth even as the least, and no man can escape from its pursuit for more than a very few hours, and that is hunger. And hunger assailed even this lady and dogged her steps, and she went through the city seeking food and found no food, nor had money to buy food if she had found it. And when at last her hunger was very great, she bethought herself of me, who am in a way her uncle, and she began to seek for me."

Fatima interrupted him then and told him: "Nay, my lord, she of whom you speak sought thee not nor will she ever seek thee. For others may fear thee and tremble before thee, and call thee a great one, and cringe for thy bounty as the other dogs cringe for the bounty cast carelessly from their masters' tables. But she fears thee not, nor cringes before thee nor seeks thy bounty; nor will she ever seek thee out, for she knows you what you are, and hates you for it. Never will she seek thee out, my lord."

And my lord laughed very sleepily and said: "Nay, then must I cast all pride aside and seek her out." And he said to those who were in the riwâk: "Nay, I must disagree with this

very positive young — gentleman. For she did seek me out at last, though her pride would not let her know what she sought. And I became aware that she was seeking me at last, as all along I had known she must seek me, and I said in my heart: 'I know her beauty, how great it is, for I have seen her beauty. And I have seen somewhat also of her wit. But now will I test her wit out, and if it be such as I suspect it is, then will I make her, by grace of the love of my many friends who love me, even though I be but a humble Kadi, a great lady indeed. For by grace of my friends' love, will I lay el-Kâhira at the feet of her beauty and her wit, and they shall trample on it.'

"So I spoke in my heart, and I sent throughout the city to all the bake-shops and the food-shops and the eating-houses and the inns, and said to the keepers of them: 'I pray you of your love for me, do this. Shortly will there come a lady to one of you seeking food, and you will know her because she will be the most beautiful woman you have ever seen, and because she will be unveiled, and because, though she will be penniless, you will be sorely tempted to give her the food she seeketh. But I pray you

of your love, give her no food, but send her away with an excuse. And shortly afterwards she will return, having on her finger the ring that never leaves my finger. And when you recognize the ring, then I pray you do whatever she bids you.' This word I sent to them, and I sent also my servant with the ring to find the lady and bid her come to my house after it was dark, as if I were ashamed that she should come when it was light. So would I stir her pride, and so would she be angry with me, and so would her wit be stirred to its utmost that she might make a fool of me. For this lady loveth ever to make men seem fools." And when he had finished this part of his tale, the Kadi looked at Abdallah and laughed sleepily. And he looked at Fatima also.

And Fatima said to him: "Nay, my lord, it needeth not a woman to make some men seem fools." And she said to him: "It pleased my lord to play with that woman's anger and to make a plaything of her, but surely my lord remembers that a woman's anger is more easily awaked than it is lulled to sleep again?" And she tore the ring from her finger and dropped it on the floor.

My lord picked up the ring, and put it on his own finger, and twirled it on his finger, and said: "Nay, this seems to be the very ring. What doth it on this young — gentleman's finger?" And he laughed and said: "But I was telling my tale of the lady. Now shortly after I had sent the ring to her, came a baker to me hastily and told me that the lady had come into his shop with the ring and veiled with a man's mantle, and pretended to be myself, and he asked me what he should do. And I told him: 'Nay, do what she bids, for she is a witty lady.' And he told me: 'What she bade me, I have done. And now what else shall I do?' And I asked him: 'What else would you do?' Then this baker told me that he was somewhat witty himself and had four witty friends who fain would amuse themselves at this witty lady's expense, who pretended to be me, and spoke like a great one, and ordered them about. And his idea amused me and I told him: 'Nay, if you be witty enough to amuse yourselves at this lady's expense, in Allâh's name do it and come afterwards to tell me. And saving the lady's honor, make your entertainment as expensive as you

can, since it will be at her expense and not thine.' And this baker went away very merrily and with his friends amused himself at the lady's expense. For with his friends he contrived a fol-de-rol of a roasted duck and a one-eyed Copt and a Hajji and a merchant and a donkey's tail and some other matters. And when the five of them had thoroughly amused themselves with this fiddle-faddle, they came to tell me of the amusement they had had.

"And they seemed no longer merry, as when they went away. 'For,' they told me, 'we have amused ourselves thoroughly at the lady's expense and the cost of it, to us, was fifty pieces of gold, not counting one piece more which she graciously gave back to the baker. And that is the least of our loss. For the tale runs throughout all the city like wild-fire and we shall not hear the last of it. And in every café, when one of us goes in, men say to him: "Nay, what news now of the duck that flew out of an oven, and nipped from the purse of the baker fifty pieces of gold, and flew away to my lady the Kadi with them, having them in his bill?"' And they asked me: 'How shall

we get the gold back, then?' and I told them: 'Nay, when the lady gives it back to you, will you not have it?' and they said Ay, and when His Highness turned Christian every mosque would have a watch-dog. And they went away ruefully, saying: 'Surely we could have made all the city laugh at us for less than fifty pieces of gold? We can never hold up our heads again.'

"And I went out into the city and found that they spoke truth. For last night all the city spoke of nothing save that lady's wit. For the fame of it has spread like wild-fire through the city and in the cafés all men tell each other how that the five notorious wits of that quarter amused themselves at her expense. And my heart went out to her when I heard that and I said: 'Nay, now will I go and fetch her honorably to her house, which is mine also, for she has proved her wit upon el-Kâhira, and the city lieth at the feet of her wit.' But I said: 'Nay, I will give her one more day for her wit's sake and the city's sake, that it may see how that her wit surpasseth the wit of every other woman, and then will I fetch her to my house and reveal her beauty

also to men, how her beauty surpasseth that of every other woman. For she is as beautiful as she is witty.' So now," said the Kadi, "I go seeking my Lady Fatima to fetch her honorably to my house and make her the greatest lady in el-Kâhira." And my lord looked steadfastly on Fatima.

"Nay, my lord," she said, "hath it not yet dawned on my lord that this lady may decline the honor he would do her and may say: 'Nay, who is this man to send and to fetch and to make great and to make small according to his whim?'"

And the Kadi laughed sleepily and said: "That too hath dawned on me. But I hope to prevail upon her." And he looked again at Fatima and he asked the Sheikh of the riwâk: "Who is this young gentleman who had my ring upon his finger and now seems so proud and touchy? What doth he here?"

The Sheikh told him how that the young gentleman had come with the ring and enrolled himself in the University, and how that he had exchanged the child's play of their studies for somewhat of seriousness, and had befooled Abdallah so that he rubbed his eyes with an

onion, and dressed himself in a fish-net, and bestrode an ass's foal, and how that finally the young gentleman had created a great scandal in the University and made Abdallah kiss him three times.

"Nay!" cried the Kadi, "my compliments to Abdallah then! For though he was befooled, he seemeth to me to have gained more from the matter than all the rest of you, to wit, his three kisses which he had." And the Kadi was very greatly amused and said: "Nay, but a young gentleman with wit like this one's wit might almost be my Lady Fatima's brother." And he said to Fatima: "Will you not unveil your face, young sir, and let me see if you be not the lady's brother?"

Fatima told him: "My face seemeth well enough to me with that it is." For she was still angry to think that while she had thought to walk in the path her own wit had laid for her feet, she had been walking in the path my lord's wit had laid for them. So she was angry and would hardly answer him.

Then the Kadi said: "Nay, what needs be must be, and I must humble myself to thy pride." And he rose, and went where she

stood, and took her hand very courteously, and said: "Nay, my Lady Fatima, I pray thee to unveil thy face. I ask thee not for mine own sake only, but for all these gentlemen, that they may see thee."

"Nay," said Fatima, "doth my lord in his pride deign to request me to unveil my face?" and the Kadi told her smiling: "It is not a request, it is a prayer. For since you have amused yourself at their expense, be generous and reward them with a sight of thee."

"Nay," said Fatima, "I must allow my lord is courteous," and she put up her hands and drew the hood away from her face.

And all of them who were there could find no word to say when they looked upon her first, more than "O Allâh!" For Fatima was still angry and her face was very proud. And yet was laughter dancing in her eyes, because she remembered how she had befooled them all. And her head stood very proudly on her neck, because she saw how greatly she moved them. For they were stricken dumb by the loveliness of her face and of her look.

And when they could speak, they said to each other again: "O Allâh!" And the Sheikh

el-Islâm said: "Nay, she is a very child still! What then will she be when she is become wholly a woman! But," he said, "for all that, she hath done very wrongly, and made a great scandal in the University, for which Allâh, who regardeth no woman's beauty, will yet reckon with her. For the University is the fount of Islâm, and all Islâm will hear of the scandal she hath made here, and will not bear the end of it."

Then the Kadi turned to his servant who stood behind him and said: "Where be the purses which the Lady Fatima gives to be an endowment for this riwâk? For," he said to the Sheikh, "though she liketh now and then to amuse herself at others' expense, she liketh not always to have them pay the expense of her entertainment." And the servant gave my lord ten purses of gold, which he gave to the Sheikh, saying: "The Lady Fatima asks you to take them and to overlook her indiscretion, if there was any." And the Sheikh said: "Nay, I can remember no indiscretion of the lady's," and he bowed to Fatima and took the gold.

And the Kadi said to Fatima: "I pray thee

come now with me. For I have gone through all the city seeking thee."

But Fatima was still angry with him and said she liked it well enough where she was.

"Nay," said my lord, "I ask it not for my own sake only. For they who talk of nothing but thy wit, have they not also a right to see thee and be glad? Come, I pray, and be the guest of the ladies in my house, and let all the city rejoice in thy beauty."

Fatima told him: "That is very courteous in thee and I will go." And he asked her if there was aught else she would do before she went and she laughed and said: "Yes. For there is a youth here whose sober-mindedness I did greatly offend, so that he flung his spectacles away, and I fain would give him a new pair of spectacles." And she said: "I would also speak apart for a moment with my bold friend Abdallah."

And she stepped aside with Abdallah and saw that his eyes were full of tears, so that she laughed and asked him: "Nay, weepest thou for Fatima or only for the onion?" And he said sadly: "I weep because Fatima has be-

trayed me." "Nay," she said, "how hath Fatima betrayed thee?" And he told her: "Because you go with this lord and come not with me to the desert." And she asked him: "Why should I go with thee to the desert?" and he told her because his wit had met the three tests she set for it. "Nay," Fatima cried, "what is thy wit compared with my lord's? Thine didst move thee stumblingly through a rigamarole of an onion and a fish-net and an ass, but my lord's moved even my wit in the way he would have it go, though mine had befooled thee easily enough, and the Sheikhs, and the five wits of the quarter. Nay, what is the small matter of thy wit?" and she laughed again at his tears and told him: "Nay, but if I were a man, and a woman betrayed me as you complain I have done, know you what I would do? I would take that woman's soft throat in my fingers and tear it from her neck." And she looked him in the eyes and laughed.

"Nay," said Abdallah sadly, "I could not hurt thee." And he asked her very sadly: "Nay, then, shall I never see thee again?"

And she laughed at his sad tone and said:

“ Why not? For I shall drive abroad often and you can stand and see me pass.” And he wept again and said: “ Nay, that is somewhat, to see thee. But shall I never hear thy voice again and shall my lips never again come near thy lips? ”

Then Fatima told him: “ My voice speaks to all who have wit to come within its sound and even my lips are not denied to him that hath boldness to make them his.” And because he liked not the words, and wept, she laughed at him scornfully and cried, “ Nay, this is my bold Abdallah!” And she made her farewells then to the Sheikhs and the students and went away with my lord, leaving Abdallah disconsolate behind her.

There was a carriage before the mosque, with out-runners, and the Kadi seated Fatima in the carriage and got in with her, and the out-runners cried *Ū'a, Ū'a*, and the horses ran. And the carriage came to the street where the bake-shop was and Fatima said to the Kadi: “ O mine uncle, are there more purses of gold? ” and he told her: “ There be more.” And she said: “ There is the bake-shop and the baker is it, and it comes to my mind that it would

be courteous to repay to the five wits the expenses of the entertainment they had at my expense!" And Fatima laughed so merrily that the Kadi laughed and told her: "Nay, in all things thou art a woman after mine own heart!" and bade the carriage be stopped.

And the baker came out of his shop, bowing ruefully, and went away ruefully and fetched his four friends, and the five wits stood ruefully beside the carriage, so that the crowd laughed to see them, and Fatima gave to each of the five wits a purse of gold, saying to each of them: "I have not paid yet for the entertainment you had at my expense." And all the crowd laughed to see them and to hear her, and men said to each other: "Nay, though she hath a sharp wit, hath she not also open hands? And beyond all these, behold what beauty and what graciousness she hath, so that this must be the very greatest lady in all Egypt. And why hath her fame never come to our ears before?"

And the carriage went on again and rolled through the city, flashing in the sunshine, and the out-runner ran before it, shouting: "'Way! Way!" And all the people opened a way for

Fatima gladly, and looked up and saw her beauty, and cried aloud, praising it.

And the carriage came into the Shāri'a el-Manākh and stopped before a house. And when Fatima saw the house, she said in her heart: "Nay, is this a palace where Fatima is to lodge?" And she admired the house and said in her heart: "Nay, let my lord imagine his wit leadeth me. For doth not my own wit lead his where it will, and lead him to give me this flashing carriage with outrunners, and the acclamations of the people? And how many purses of gold hath he not disbursed this day for my sake? and the tassel hath not hurg in his eye this hour past."

But to my lord she said: "Nay, is this my lord's house? Nay, it seemeth to me a pretty house enough, but I could hope it was not long till luncheon. For it comes to my mind that I ate little breakfast." And my lord smiled sleepily to hear her speak thus.



That door was the Bâb el-Harâm, the door of the women's apartments.—Page 213.



CHAPTER XVII

INSIDE

A GATE - KEEPER drew open the heavy gates of iron which were in the wall of the fore-court, and the carriage rolled inside the fore-court and drew up at the gate of the house.

And the watchman bowed his face on the ground, and my Lord the Kadi took Fatima by the hand, and led her within the house, and led her across the hôsh, the great court of the house, which was itself as large as a house and was paved with marble and had within it a bower of marble, with a fountain, where my lord might receive his visitors in summer. And at the rear of the court was a high and narrow door and a curtain of bright silk hung in the door. That door was the Bâb el-Harâm, the door of the women's apartments and the gate of the earthly paradise, as men say, and a tall eunuch stood by it and kept it.

And my lord lifted the bright curtain of the door with his hand and called to them inside the house: "Is it permitted to come in?" And women's clear voices answered: "My lord entereth where he listeth," and he said: "I bring a guest to be the guest of my ladies," and the voices answered him: "Then is the guest the guest of our house, and welcome."

My lord lifted the curtain of bright silk and behind it was another curtain of pierced leather, carved. And he lifted the curtain of leather and the stair to the harem was before Fatima. And the stair was of creamy marble, very soft, and worn where feet had trodden, and the string-board and the ceiling above were of marble adorned with mosaics of colored marble.

And my lord led Fatima up the stair, and at the top she stood in the vestibule of the Kâ'a, the great saloon of the harem. And the walls of this vestibule, too, were of soft, cream-colored marble, and the floor was colored marble, and the door of the saloon before her was filled with a curtain of soft silk the color of cream.

At this door, too, my lord waited and asked

permission to go in, and the voices asked him again: "Entereth not my lord where he listeth?" And he lifted this curtain too and held it aside courteously, that Fatima might pass in before him. And she passed in, and stood in the saloon of my lord's harem, and said in her heart: "Truly this is a palace where I am come to lodge, and not a house."

For the saloon was very long, and narrow for its length, and by the arches of its ceilings it was divided into three divisions. And the central division of it, where Fatima stood, was the *durkâ'a*, and lower by a step than the two *ltwâns* at either side of it, and square, and paved with beautifully colored marbles, cool to the feet, and in the center of it was a little fountain that played softly and murmured in the stillness as it played. And the roof of the *durkâ'a* was a small dome, and in it were windows pierced in the shape of written characters and filled with softly colored glass. And the light of the bright sky above came through the glass and was softened, and fell softly upon the mosaics of the floor and upon the tinkling jet of the fountain, and upon the *suffeh*, the broad shelf of creamy marble at one side,

whereon were set many vessels of brass and of red copper, and of silver and of gold and of crystal glass. And the light was dim and soft. And the air was soft and still, and heavy with perfumes and with the smoke of perfumed cigarettes that floated there.

On either side of the durkâ'a, to right and left of Fatima and the one step higher, were the two lîwâns. And they were long rooms and narrow for their length, and a soft light was in them from the mashrabîyehs and from the kamarîyeh windows of colored glass, which were in the cornices of the walls. And the floors were slabs of marble, but spread with precious rugs, and the walls were panels of precious woods to a man's height, and above that was a broad cornice shelf, where ornaments of porcelain and bronze and of chased metals stood on the shelf. And all along the bases of the paneled walls were low and wide divans, covered with thick silken mattresses and heaped up with silken cushions.

And on the divan at the end of the broader lîwân, in the place of honor, sat four ladies, and their maids sat on the precious rugs at their feet. One of the ladies was tall and very

fair, and regal in her bearing. She was a Turkish lady. And the second was yet taller than the first, and more fair, and graceful as a palm tree swaying in the north wind, for she was a Circassian. The third was but a little creature, and plump, with merry eyes and a merry voice, but she was my lord's principal wife, an Egyptian lady, a princess, and the mother of my Lord the Kadi's son. And the fourth was the most beautiful creature Fatima had ever seen. For she was still a girl and seemed to Fatima lovely beyond believing. She was my lord's favorite and her name was Zuleika. Now these four ladies were my lord's four wives and they were magnificently clad.

And Fatima was a little awed by the magnificence of these great ladies, and by the magnificence of their apartment, and for the space of a long breath she stood quite still, so that the still air was sweet and heavy about her, and the tinkling of the fountain very loud in the stillness.

But my lord took her again by the hand, most courteously, and led her up the one step of the *lwân* and across the soft carpeting of precious rugs to these four ladies, and said to

them: "Here is the Lady Fatima, your guest. Entreat her kindly for my sake. For she is the wittiest woman in el-Kâhira and the fairest in all the world."

"Nay," said Fatima to him hurriedly and softly, "speak not so of me to them. For you will make them jealous of me and they will hate me." And my lord laughed at her, sleepily, and asked her: "Is Fatima afraid then of their jealousy?" so that she laughed too and told him: "Nay, I will make them jealous, to amuse me."

And my lord told her: "Now you are a woman after my own heart." And he told the ladies: "I pray you lend her of your garments. For she is come somewhat unexpectedly to el-Kâhira. And have a dinner prepared for us, and when it is ready send for me, and I will come and dine with you." And they told him smilingly: "Our lord commands," and he took his leave of them all and went away.

And when he was gone, my lord's principal wife and the mother of his son, that Egyptian lady who had the merry eyes and the merry voice, laughed merrily and said to Fatima:

“ My dear, my dear, it would be womanlike of us to be very jealous of thee, thou art so very beautiful. But how can we be jealous of such a one as thou art? For thou art still a very child to look at and so very lovely. And who giveth her beauty to a woman save Allâh Himself, and shall women be jealous of Allâh’s wisdom that to one He giveth more and to another less? ” And she laughed again, in her merry voice, and said to her companions: “ Is not the Lady Fatima the most beautiful creature that ever was? ” so that they all praised Fatima’s beauty roundly. And she said: “ And we will not be jealous of her beauty? ” and they all agreed. But Zuleika, the youngest and loveliest of them, laughed a little ruefully and said: “ Nay, I fear lest I am a bit jealous of her already. For it comes to my mind that the Lady Fatima is almost as beautiful as Zuleika herself! ”

They all had to laugh at her words, and Fatima laughed and said: “ Nay, who could be as beautiful as Zuleika is? ” And Zuleika laughed less ruefully, and came and kissed Fatima, and told her: “ My dear, my dear, I love thee already. Come with me and I will

lend you of my dearest garments till your own be come. And could any woman love another woman more than that? ”

But at that all the four ladies rose and fell to disputing with one another. For each one said: “ I will lend her mine,” and they could come to no agreement, so finally they laughed and said: “ Nay then, let her choose for herself,” and led Fatima to their rooms that she might choose what garments she would wear.

Now each of the ladies had a room of her own, and each room had balconies with windows screened with mashrabtyeh lattices, and some of the mashrabtyehs looked down to the hôsh, the great court of the house, with its marble pavement and its gushing fountain and its multitude of serving-folk, who passed to and fro across it. But others of them looked down to the garden, very beautiful and great, and full of tinkling rills of water, which lay behind the house. And a great number of gardeners were at work within its walls.

And each of the rooms had another room beside it, a cabinet full of precious garments, and full of jewel-boxes filled with precious jewels. And the ladies bade Fatima make her

choice among the garments and the jewels, and she would not choose. And that Egyptian lady laughed and said in her merry way: "Nay, she is wise and will not make three of us jealous by her choice." And she said: "Nay then, let the maids take her to the bath, and while she is gone, we will choose for her." And she said to the maids: "I pray you lead the Lady Fatima to the bath." For my lord's house was so great that it had a bath even within its own walls, as a palace hath, that the ladies of the house need not go out of it to a public hammam.

And the maids led Fatima to the bath, and bathed her and perfumed her, and when she came back again the ladies had made a choice of garments for her. And they began to dress her in the garments and cried out over the beauty of her skin and the beauty of her shape. And the lady with the merry voice said: "Nay, I am a princess because my father was a prince, but she is a princess because Allâh Himself made her for one. Shall we therefore be jealous of Allâh's handiwork?" And they all laughed and agreed not to be jealous, but Zuleika said: "Nay, I am jealous. For it

comes to my mind that she is every whit as beautiful as I am!" And so they all laughed again, and dressed Fatima like a princess, and made her stand before them to be admired, and clapped their hands to see her, and cried: "This time will not my lord's tassel stick in his eye. For his eyes will stick out of his head when he sees her now!" And they led her to the saloon again and found the dinner was prepared. So they sent for my lord.

And he came, and admired Fatima, and sat down with them and dined, and they were all very merry together. And singing-girls sang and played music in the grated recess in the wall. And when they had finished dining, my lord said: "I have ill news for the Lady Fatima," and all the ladies looked sorrowful. And he said: "It seemeth that the caravan which came behind her, bringing her garments and her treasure, hath been lost by the way. So," he said, "I have bidden the merchants to bring their wares, that she may choose fresh garments and new jewels, and the merchants are waiting in the court till my ladies will admit them."

Then all the ladies clapped their hands and

cried: "What fun! What fun! Now we will go a-shopping!" And the merchants came up to the harem and spread their wares on the rugs of it.

And there were heaps on heaps of wares. For the silk-mercens had brought their silks and the cloth-merchants had brought the linens and the wools and the precious fabrics. And the jewellers brought their jewels, and the gold and silver-smiths brought their metal wares, their Damascene work and their enamelling, and the cordwainers brought their fragrant wares of carved leather, and the perfumers brought their precious phials. And the wares were so many that Fatima could make no choice, but wandered up and down, and no sooner made a choice than she preferred another choice, and then preferred again her first choice to her second. For she feared to choose too hastily, lest her shopping should too soon be ended. And the other ladies had the same fear, and so the whole afternoon wore away and was gone before they had finally made their choices, and the merchants had gathered up what was not required and gone away.

And the other ladies were weary then and

went to their rooms to lie down. But Zuleika, who was young, was not weary, and said to Fatima: "Nay, come and sit here on the divan with me, and let us talk together, for I have learned to love thee." And Fatima sat down willingly, for Zuleika had a clear, sweet voice and seemed to Fatima in all ways the loveliest creature she had ever seen. And Fatima looked about the saloon, and listened to the tinkling of the little fountain in the stillness, and she sighed with content, and said: "Nay, this is the most beautiful room my eyes have seen!" And she said to Zuleika: "If you are not too tired, I pray you walk with me a little, that I may admire the beauty of all the apartments again," and Zuleika was not tired and they walked again. And Fatima admired each apartment greatly and said of each: "Nay, this is the most beautiful room mine eyes have seen!" And they came to a mashrabiyyeh that opened above the garden, and knelt by the mashrabiyyeh, and looked down into the garden.

And it was sunset. And a light air was stirring and was sharp with the sweet, light scent of the evening fires of the city. And it was very still, and on the Island of Roda a

sâkyeh was at work raising water, and even at that distance they could hear the groaning of its axle and the splash of the water falling from its earthen jars. And the garden was very still below them, and the shadows were long in it, and the gardeners moved very slowly in it, for they were weary with their day's work, and now were gathering up their tools, and their day's work was done for that day.

And below the garden's foot was Nile, flowing steadily, and upon her bosom a great felucca drifted, and the great wings of the sails were slack, because of the light air. And beyond Nile was the green cropped land, and beyond the cropped land was the dark rim of the desert, with the ancient pyramids of Gizeh standing dark upon its edge. And the sunset was all pink and green and gold above the Libyan Desert. And high above the ancient pyramids and the desert and the glory of the sunset, was a vulture, a single black speck soaring above the stillness of the nightfall.

And Fatima sighed with content and said: "Nay, I had never dreamed the world was like this!" And she said to Zuleika: "Nay, is it not beautiful?" And Zuleika answered her

not, and in the stillness she heard Zuleika sobbing softly, as she knelt beside her at the grating of the *mashabiyeh*.

Then Fatima's heart smote her and she said: "Nay, Zuleika dear, what have I done to anger thee with me?" And Zuleika said: "Nay, you have not angered me." And she threw her arms about the neck of Fatima, and pressed her cheek to hers, and cried: "My dear, my dear, I could not be angry with thee, for I have learned to love thee dearly." And she said: "Oh, my dear, my dear, what be we, you and I together, but two girls here inside this grating, while all the world is beautiful and wonderful outside? And that is why I weep, because it is so beautiful and wonderful, and we be inside."

"Dear Zuleika," Fatima told her, "I understand thee not. Indeed it is beautiful outside, but cannot we kneel here and see it?"

And Zuleika cried: "Ay, you can talk so! For you have been outside and as yet can go outside again. But wait till that is changed and my lord has made you his wife." "What?" cried Fatima. "Dreams my lord of making me his wife?"

"Ay," said Zuleika. "And he will do it, for there is no opposing him. For he is like Nile yonder, which flows so noiselessly, yet what man can swim long against her current? Then will you know what our life is like inside, — how that each day is like each other day. For every day we deck ourselves for my lord's sight, waiting to have him pleased with us, for be we not his puppets and his toys? And the day drags on and we sit together, each upon her cushion, and tell each other stories, and let our maids be gossips to us. For the maids go outside, and that is our chiefest amusement, to listen to the gossip of serving-women, unless it be to kneel behind a mashrabyeh and watch the goings and the comings of serving-people in the hôsh. Such is the emptiness our life is."

"But," said Fatima sadly, "is not life empty everywhere?" and Zuleika answered her: "No! It is full of joy and wonder! For listen! I was a singing-girl in the cafés when my lord found me, and I was happy, for my life was full. For I knew many folk, and had much to talk of with them, and all el-Kâhira to see, which is the most wonderful of all cities. For I wandered where I listed. And my lord took me

from all that and brought me here! But," she said, and laughed, "why do I weep, remembering that? For soon all that will all be mine again and I should be joyful to think of going back to it."

"Nay," said Fatima, "how mean you, going back? For my lord would not let you." And Zuleika laughed at her. "Nay," she said, "indeed you are a child. For have you not seen how that my lord findeth thee more beautiful than me, and for that matter I myself can see thou art twice more beautiful, and I should be jealous. But I cannot, but love thee and weep over thee instead. But my lord hath seen what I see, so now will he take thee, and send me away and divorce me, because I am his favorite."

"Nay," said Fatima, "surely that would be too great a scandal? And even if my lord were foolishly minded to be so scandalous, surely it would not be his favorite wife he sent away from him."

And Zuleika said: "Ay, but it will be just his favorite. For the others are his wives, the mothers of his children, whom he took for his family's sake and for the heat of his youth.

But I am his favorite, a toy, to be cast easily aside when its freshness is gone for him. Even as he cast another aside for me, and as it may be some day he will cast thee aside for another also, though how he could cast thee aside outruns my guessing. But men are kittle cattle, and she who entrusteth her heart to their keeping maketh the grasshoppers guardians of a treasure. Nay, dear Fatima," she said, "weep not. For truly I am glad to go, and I love thee and could be sorry only that I am to go and you go not with me. Nay," she said, "kiss me now and bid me farewell, for I may not see thee again. For there will be no scandal, but some day I shall be gone, and my name will be spoken in the house no more. And it may be this very night. Kiss me, my dear, my dear."

And Fatima kissed her, and wept, and said: "Nay, how I hoped we were to be companions, dear Zuleika. For truly I love thee."

And Zuleika smiled at her through her own tears and said: "Who knows but we may be companions in some day to come?" And she very earnestly said to Fatima: "Promise that if that ever cometh to thee which cometh now to me, thou wilt seek out thy Zuleika. For

she will be somewhere in the city and truly she will love thee till her dying day."

And Fatima promised, and Zuleika kissed her the one time more, and told her: "My dear, my dear," and went away to her own room. And Fatima went very soberly to the room which was her own. "For," she said, "I cannot believe it of my lord. For Zuleika is the dearest thing, and the sweetest thing, and the loveliest thing mine eyes have seen." And she said: "Nay, if my lord did that, I would not do his will though he laid Egypt in my hands for a bridal gift and hung Nile on my neck for a necklace.

"For," she said, "who is my lord to take all women for his puppets, to go and to come and to run to and fro at his bidding?"

CHAPTER XVIII

FATIMA THE REBEL

“IF my lord sent my Zuleika away,” said Fatima, “I would not be his wife though he gave me the world for a bridegroom’s gift and hung Nile about my neck for a necklace. For,” she said, “Zuleika is the loveliest thing, and the sweetest thing, and the dearest thing in all the world, and I love her.”

Yet did my lord send Zuleika away from him, and Zuleika’s name was no more spoken in his house, and within a month of her going was Fatima my lord’s wife. For he was like Nile, silent and unceasing in his purposes; and she could no more oppose them forever than a man can swim long against Nile’s tawny current. Within a month she had put on the ceremonial cap, and been wrapped in the shawl of cashmere, and ridden in the carriage through the streets under the silken canopy, while bands of hautbois and of drums sounded before her carriage and behind it, and bands

of singers sang, and crowds of people lined the streets, and the zaghârit, the Cry of Joy, was raised, and all the people wished her happiness.

For in that month had Fatima lived many months and had become the favorite of all el-Kâhira. For she had driven daily through the streets with her face unveiled, so that all men saw her beauty and marveled at it. And the fame of her beauty and her wit ran through all the city. And daily my lord made festival of the nights, and brought guests to his house to dine, and filled his harem with his friends, that all his friends might look on her and listen to her. And they all spoke of naught but Fatima's beauty and her wit, to praise them; until that Egyptian lady laughed with her merry voice and said to Fatima: "It would be womanlike in us to hate thee. For no man looketh on us, but on thee. But how can we be jealous, when thou art still a very child, and art so wonderfully beautiful?" And Fatima loved her for her merryness and her gentleness, but not as she loved her Zuleika, who still seemed to her the loveliest creature and the dearest she had ever known.

In that one month did Fatima live many, for she learned sorrow and hate in that month. For when the festival of the night was ended, and she lay alone in the stillness of the night, in the deep quiet of the harem, the thought of Zuleika came into her heart, and longing for her friend ate at her heart. And she remembered how that Zuleika had been the ornament of the house and its most precious adornment, and how that between two days she had vanished from it, and her name was spoken no more in the house, and it was as if Zuleika had never been. And she cried: "Oh where is my Zuleika now?" And she thought of my lord and hated him.

And she scrupled not to let him see her hate, and sometimes avoided his presence coldly, and sometimes sought it to sharpen the tongue of her wit on him. And my lord heeded neither her coldness nor her sharpness with him, but let the current of his purpose flow on silently and steadily, that it might bear Fatima with it. And Fatima felt the steadiness of his purpose, and hated him the more for it, and said in her heart: "Nay, is he Allâh then, to mind not my hatred and my coldness and my mock-

ing? And who is this man to think that every woman, even Fatima, will come and go at his nod, and fawn upon him like a shameless dog fawning for her master's favor?"

And my lord's purpose ran, and Fatima's hatred ran beside it, till at last she said: "Nay then, let him have his way and rue it. For I will be his wife and make him sorry that I am his wife, and so shall my Zuleika be revenged, whom he made sorry that she was his wife."

And she said to my lord bluntly, and her eyes were bright with hatred: "My lord, if I married thee, it would be because I hated thee so deeply that no lesser thing could show my hatred of thee. Would you have Fatima on those terms?" And he told her, laughing sleepily: "Ay, on any terms would I have Fatima. For Fatima's hatred is dearer to me than the love of every other woman and she hath a spirit in her which makes her in all things the woman after mine own heart." And he looked at her, and ceased to laugh, and shook the tassel of his tarboosh from his eye, and told her: "Nay, it comes to my mind, that, if it be possible, Fatima is more beautiful when she hateth than at any other time. For

then there flickereth a light in her eyes which is like the very lambent flame of love!" And he laughed again and let the tassel fall back over his eye.

And Fatima was dumb with anger that he spoke so to her, and looked so at her, amusing himself with her hatred as if it were a toy. And he laughed again and told her: "Nay, thou consentest? When then shall it be?" and she told him, coldly: "What care I when it be?"

And he cried: "Nay, then, let it be this very day." So that very day was made Fatima's marriage day, and she rode in the carriage under the silken canopy with hatred of my lord in her heart, and sat beside him at the wedding feast, and hated him, and was joyful. "For," she said in her heart, "all that Fatima hath done here-to-now to make a mock of men is nothing to what she shall do to this man, to mock him, and to make a fool of him, and to make all men laugh at this her husband."

And when the day of marriage was over, and the night of marriage came, Fatima lay that night in the apartment which had been Zuleika's and was now her own, and lay with

clenched hands, and thought of Zuleika. And the door of the apartment was shut, and her maid, who loved her, lay across the door. And in the quiet of the night there came a soft tap at the door, and Fatima unclenched her hands, and laughed in her heart, and called out clearly, so that her maid could hear her, and the watchman who was in the court beneath the window: "Nay, my lord mistaketh his steps. For this is not the apartment of Zuleika, who is his favorite and his toy, but of his wife Fatima, whose hatred he loveth more than the love of other women." And she laughed again, clearly, so that all could hear her who were listening.

And when the morning of that night was come, she rose and dressed herself and said: "Now beginneth the morrow of my lord's penance," and she went out to the Kâ'a, the saloon of the harem, and found her lord there with his other wives and with their maids. And she laughed when she saw my lord and called out to him merrily: "I hope that my lord rested well last night, but I fear the contrary." And my lord's face changed not, but he smiled sleepily and asked her: "Why?"

And Fatima laughed again and told him: "Nay, it seemed to me that my lord looked a bit seedy this morning and even a trifle more middle-aged than he is used," and she asked the other ladies: "Seems it not so?" and they durst not answer her.

But my lord's face did not change and he told her courteously: "Nay, it is easy to see that the Lady Fatima rested well! For even her beauty hath been refreshed in the night and is, as it were, increased." And he took her by the hand and led her courteously up the step of the *lŵân*, saying: "I pray my Lady Fatima to sit down with the other ladies." And she sat down with them and they durst not look at her. And they were silent.

And when the silence had endured for a while, Fatima laughed and said: "Nay, why is my lord so silent? He might be pondering some wisdom in his heart." And my lord laughed sleepily and said: "Ay, I ponder somewhat, but it is not wisdom." And Fatima asked him what it was then.

And my lord said: "It might be some such matter as this. For I have a friend who, for his whim, amuseth himself by taming the

young cubs of lions, and training them to do his will, and to love his will. And he hath on his hands a lion cub, a woman cub, that groweth not tame in his hands, but wilder than it was before, so that when he would pet it and stroke it, it scratcheth and biteth at his hands. And for his taming, it yieldeth him not love, but hatred, and hates to do his will. And he hath asked me what to do with it."

And Fatima laughed and said: "Nay, then, is my lord, too, a tamer of lion cubs?"

And he told her: "In a way, but only when they are very wild, as this one seemeth. For then it amuseth him. For he loveth wild things."

And she laughed again and said: "Nay, hath my lord not thought that there be things so wild that they will not be tamed, even by my lord?" and my lord told her: "Yea, I have thought of that." And Fatima laughed at him with her eyes, and leaned toward him with her eyes, so that he might look into them, and told him: "My lord, know you what Fatima would do in such a case? She would not bother with the cub but would kill it out of hand." And she laughed at him again and

asked him: "Is not my lord, who is a great one, stronger than one single cub of a lion, and a woman cub at that, even though it scratcheth and biteth at him?"

And he said: "Ay, I am stronger. But," he said, "it seems to suit my purpose better to tame it to my will." And Fatima laughed and said to him: "Nay, then, speak to Allâh of it, that it is thy purpose. For doubtless Allâh, when He knows it is thy purpose, will alter the spirit of that cub which He made, so that it no more shall bite at thee, and scratch at thee, and spit at thee as it doth now. For it spitteth at thee?" she asked him.

"Ay," said my lord, "just now it even, as it were, spitteth at me. But," he told her, "nathless I shall tame that cub, for it is my purpose."

And Fatima laughed and told him: "What, then, is the cub against thy purpose? Nathless," she told him, "I could love that cub for the spirit that is in it."

And my lord said: "Nay, I love it, for its spirit is like my Lady Fatima's, and do I not love her spirit?" And Fatima yawned and said: "Will my lord forgive me if I linger not

to listen to his compliments? For even his compliments can grow flat and stale, as the air of this room seemeth. I would take the fresher air of the city." And she said to her maid: "I pray you, tell them to make ready a carriage."

And when the carriage was come, my lord rose and made to take her hand and lead her to the carriage, and Fatima told him: "Nay, my lord must excuse me that I prefer to drive alone with my maid." And my lord said: "Nay, I would but lead thee to the door of it," and took her hand. And he looked at her, and smiled sleepily, and said to Fatima's maid: "I pray you, fetch the Lady Fatima's veil. For I see she hath forgotten it."

And Fatima said coldly: "It was not forgotten. I care not to wear a veil." And my lord heeded not her coldness, but smiled again, and told the maid: "Haste and fetch her veil."

And Fatima asked him: "Why should I wear a veil?" and he told her: "Because it is the custom of my wives to wear the veil when they go abroad, and art thou not my wife?" "Ay," said Fatima, "I am thy wife, and I prefer not to wear the veil."

And my lord laughed sleepily and said to his servant, who stood near him: "It seems my Lady Fatima is indisposed. I pray you, run and tell the coachman that she will not drive to-day." And he made his farewells courteously and went away. And the other ladies hardly durst speak to him, and Fatima would not speak to him again, and so he went away in silence.

And when he was gone, the Egyptian lady raised her eyes and said: "My dear, my dear, I tremble for thee. Not thy wit driveth thee now, but folly. Be wise and yield to him in the little things, that the great things may be thine. For thy beauty and thy wit drive him as it were outside himself, and if you please him but a little, then all that he hath is yours, and you may do whatever else you will."

And Fatima said: "Nay, I hate him and I hate to please him even in the littlest thing." And the lady said: "But the matter of the veil was such a little thing." And Fatima said: "Nay, and because it was so very little, I hate him all the more for having the better of me in it!"

And because it was such a little thing, and

he had bested her, she hated him even more than ever, and was more cold to him than ever, and mocked at him more than ever, and whenever there was company in the harem and there was a youngish man in the company, she would seek him out with her eyes, and speak principally to him, and tell him in a clear voice, so that all might hear: "Nay, young sir, it wondereth me greatly that so young a man should be chosen companion of my lord. For you seem in the very freshness of your youth." And she would sigh softly and say: "Nay, how beautiful the very freshness of a man's youth is, while it endures. And how soon it passeth into dry middle-age." So she spoke, until no youngish man dared any longer be a guest in my lord's harem, lest he might earn my lord's enmity.

And for all her mockery, my lord's face changed not, but he smiled at her sleepily, and laughed sleepily at her wit, until she asked herself: "Nay, hath the man no blood in him? For the sting of my mockery buzzeth about his ears even as a bee might buzz about a statue, and he heedeth it no more than the statue heedeth the bee's sting." And she said: "If

only I could make him jealous. For of all men is a jealous man the least self-controlled and most laugh-worthy to those who look at him." And she devised a plan to make him jealous.

For my lord visited her sometimes, in the apartment which had been Zuleika's, when her maid was with her. And one day when she knew of his approach, she sent her maid into the cabinet beside the room, which was hung full of garments, and sent her in there to hide hurriedly, so that the garments might be yet stirring when my lord came in.

And when my lord entered, the folds of the garments were yet stirring, and he saw them, and Fatima made great pretense to be confused, and spoke to him hurriedly, and she asked him: "Hath my lord yet killed the cub which will not be tamed?"

And my lord said: "Nay, he will tame it yet," and asked her: "What stirs the garments in thy cabinet? For I feel no wind here."

And Fatima made yet greater pretense to be confused, and went and looked in the cabinet, and said: "I swear there is no one there," and asked him: "Did my lord think perchance there would be any one there?" And my lord

said: "Nay, who would be in the cabinet?" And Fatima answered him: "Who?" and still making great pretense of being confused, she invited him to sit on the divan. And he sat down beside her, with his back to the cabinet. And she laughed nervously, and glanced over her shoulder at the cabinet nervously, and said: "My lord's question reminds me of the story of the jealous man," and my lord asked her what that story was.

"Why," said Fatima, "there was once a very jealous man, whose continual fear was that his wife might have a lover. And she had one, and he came home one day and surprised them together, so that the wife had but time to hide her lover in the cabinet of her room behind the garments, which were still stirring when her husband came in. And he asked her why they stirred, and she looked in the cabinet, and swore she knew not, for no one was there. But she would not let him look, but made him sit down beside her and listen to a story, even the story I am telling to my lord, how that another woman had been in the same fix and had told her lord this story, and at the climax of it had flung a cloth over her husband's head,

and bade whoever was in the cabinet be gone whence he had come. And the lover ran and got out clean away. And at the climax of her story, this wife of the jealous man flung a cloth over his head, and held it, and cried to her lover, who ran away, and the jealous man knew not whether the story was a story or the truth of his own case, for he saw the garments stirring again when she snatched the cloth from his eyes." And Fatima laughed nervously, and glanced nervously over her shoulder at the cabinet, and cried: "Nay, my lord, let me show you what she did," and she caught up a piece of cloth, and flung it over his head, and cried: "Whoever is in my cabinet, come out of my cabinet and go whence he came," and though my lord strove to tear away the cloth, he was the weaker and Fatima was the stronger, and she held him till her maid had come out and gone away. And she took away the cloth, and my lord looked, at her and at the cabinet, and saw the garments there still stirring, where the maid had brushed them. And he went and looked in the cabinet.

And Fatima laughed at him then and said: "Nay, what looketh my lord in my cabinet

for? That was but a story I told my lord," and he told her: "Ay, it was a story, and so it came to my mind that while a clever woman might have hidden her lover so and got him away, a very clever woman might have hidden both a maid and a lover and sent the maid away and kept the lover hidden. For," he said, "I should know thy maid's step among ten thousand, for it is light, but halting, and I heard it come out of the cabinet at the climax of your story."

And Fatima said: "Nay, my lord too is very clever!" And in her heart she laughed and said: "Nay, now at last I have touched him! For he could not guess how far I spoke the truth and he guesseth it not surely now." And she said: "I have often wondered what a man would do whose wife made a cuckold of him."

And my lord said: "A jealous man might commit any folly, but a wise man, I think, would say: 'Nay, she hath preferred another to me; let him then have her,' and would send the pair of them away out of his sight."

"Nay," said Fatima, "I think I would kill them both, but quietly. Else if they went

away together they would spread the story in all the city, and the man would be a laughing-stock. And I love not to be laughed at. But my lord is so wise he mindeth not laughter. But," she said, "suppose that a man loved a woman very greatly, more than his life. Think you even then a wise man would let them go so easily, and give up his treasure so easily, and seek no revenge?" And my lord said: "Nay, in that case even a wise man might forget his wisdom and seek a revenge." And Fatima asked him: "What would be the sweetest revenge a wise man could take? Would he kill them both?"

And my lord said: "Would not a wise man remember that death, which leveleth all, would take them from his power? His sweetest revenge, I think, would be to cast the woman out naked into his city, that she, who had been a great lady in it, might be the meanest, and be the mock of the meanest, so that even her lover, who had loved her in her greatness, would despise her meanness. That would be the sweetest revenge a wise man could take."

"But," said Fatima, "suppose this woman

were of the sort which preferred meanness with her lover to greatness with a husband whom she did not love, but hated? And suppose her lover loved not her greatness only, but herself, and they clave to each other even in their meanness? How then could a wise man get his vengeance on them? ”

“ Nay,” said the Kadi, “ then he could part them, so that all their lives should each yearn for the other, and neither should be satisfied.”

And Fatima laughed and said: “ It is plain that my lord hath meditated upon vengeance to some purpose, so that if he ever takes it, it will be great.” And he asked her: “ If vengeance is worth taking at all, is it not worth taking very greatly? ”

And she told him: “ Ay, so I think. For if, for any reason, I hated very deeply, I should take care that my vengeance was very great, like my hate.” And she said: “ My lord hath told me that he loves me very greatly? ” and my lord said: “ More than my life.” And she said: “ My lord yearneth very greatly for me? ” and he told her: “ More than for life itself. For when I love, I love, and go not the half-way to it and halt there.”

Then Fatima laughed at him with her eyes and said: "Then must I take good care that my lord never hath reason to seek revenge on me."

And my lord looked in her eyes very steadily and told her: "Ay, it might be well for my Lady Fatima to take good care of that," and he shook the tassel back, and laughed sleepily, and bade her farewell.

And Fatima laughed, when he was gone, and said: "Now have I not given him that to think of which he will not soon forget? And of all folly is not the folly of a jealous man most laughable?"

CHAPTER XIX

ZULEIKA SMILES

NOW after that day, my lord's face changed not outwardly toward Fatima, and he still smiled sleepily at her wit and at her sharpness, and let the tassel of his tarboosh dangle into his eyes, but behind the tassel and behind their smilingness his eyes were watchful of Fatima.

And he brought no more guests into his harem, but guarded it closely, as if the Bâb el-Harîm were indeed the gate of the earthly paradise. And when Fatima drove abroad, she drove no more alone with her own maid, who loved her, but with one of her fellow wives, and she wore the veil, even as her fellow did. And Fatima was joyful at all this, and laughed in her heart, and said: "Nay, now have I given my lord yet a fifth wife, and that is Jealousy. And she shall go with him to his bed at night, and he shall rise up from her bed

at dawn, and she shall be his companion through the day, yet will he take no joy in her." And Fatima was very joyful when she thought of that.

And one day, as she drove with my lord's wife, the Circassian lady, their carriage was stopped in a press of carriages, and while they waited, a voice spoke from the throng beside the carriage and said to her reproachfully: "Nay, Fatima! Nay, Fatima, thou saidst truly that thou shouldst drive in thy carriage and I should stand and see thee pass."

And the Circassian lady asked Fatima: "Nay, who is it speakest thus to thee?" And Fatima looked, and saw her bold friend Abdallah in the crowd, and told the lady: "He is a bold friend of mine, who once had the boldness to kiss me four times in one day." And she looked on Abdallah again and laughed to see him, as Allâh Himself must have laughed too, had He seen him. For Abdallah's black student's robe was gone, and the thick plaits of hair which had hung over his shoulders were gone, and his clothing was of the meanest, and his turban was dingy, and tears stood in his eyes. And the Circassian lady looked at him

also and did not laugh, but said distastefully: "Nay, the man may be bold enough, but I think I should not like him to kiss me even once."

And Fatima laughed again and said: "Nor should I." And she said to him: "It seemeth to me the fashions must have changed since I was at the University."

And he told her: "Nay, I am at the University no more. For," he said, "all the university laughed at me, and besides, how could I be where Fatima had been and was no more? And," he said, "I left the University and became a porter as you see me, that I might be always in the streets when she passed by." And the tears stood in his eyes and the Circassian lady said: "Faugh, this is a sentimental fellow!"

"Ay," said Fatima, "he is sentimental enough." And she told Abdallah: "Nay, did I not promise thee more than the sight of me, if you had wit and boldness to hold me to my promise?"

"Nay," said Abdallah sadly, "who am I to aspire so highly? And besides," he said, "it has come to my ears that you have be-

trayed me, and have made my lord the happiest of men, and are now his wife."

And Fatima laughed so greatly to hear him say those words that she was past speaking. But when she could speak, she said: "Ay, my lord is beyond doubt the happiest of men, for is not Fatima his wife and his treasure and his joy?"

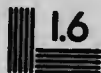
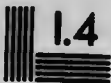
And Abdallah cried reproachfully: "And you can say that to me, who thought he had thee and instead hath lost thee? Nay, now is Abdallah the wretchedest of men!" And Abdallah wept.

And the carriage drove on and the Circasian lady said: "That is the most sentimental fellow I ever saw in my life. I wonder, my dear, how you could endure his kissing you even once." And Fatima told her: "I wonder too, now. Yet once the fellow seemed to me bold and of a like spirit with myself." And she laughed and said: "Yet even now would I endure willingly his kissing me a hundred times, if my lord could hear of it. How he would laugh at the merriness of the jest!" And she said: "Nay, but I have a mind to go back now and make him kiss me now, that all the



MICROCOPY RESOLUTION TEST CHART

(ANSI and ISO TEST CHART No. 2)



4.5

5.0

5.6

6.3

7.1

8.0

9.0

10.0

11.2

12.5

14.3

16.0

18.0

20.0

22.5

25.0

28.2

31.5

36.0

40.0

45.0

50.0

56.2

63.0

71.2

80.0

90.0

100.0

112.5

125.0

143.2

160.0

180.0

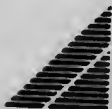
200.0

225.0

250.0

281.2

315.0



APPLIED IMAGE Inc

1653 East Main Street
Rochester, New York 14609 USA
(716) 482 - 0300 - Phone
(716) 288 - 5989 - Fax

city may see him and tell all the rest of the city how that a beggar kissed the Lady Fatima in my lord's carriage, for that would be a jest after my lord's own heart, who hath told me often how he loveth a wild spirit."

The Circassian lady looked at her curiously and said: "My dear, my dear, it is curious to me how greatly you dislike our lord." And Fatima said: "Nay, say rather how greatly I hate him, and thou hast said the truth."

And Fatima drove abroad another day, but this time with that Egyptian lady, the princess, who was the mother of my Lord the Kadi's son, and who was no longer young, but yet had so merry a voice and such great gentleness that Fatima loved her dearly. And again the carriage was stopped in a press of carriages, and while they waited, a voice called them: "My dears, my dears!" And the Egyptian lady said: "Nay, who among these people calleth us 'my dear?'"

"Nay, that was my Zuleika's voice," said Fatima, "which I should know among a thousand thousands." And she looked and could not see Zuleika, and the voice laughed to her and said: "Nay, my dear, you must look

lower," and Fatima looked, and at the corner of a house, at the corner of the street, she saw a woman seated in the dust of the street, who had in her hand such a stick as fortunetellers use to draw fortunes in the dust with. And this woman looked at her, and laughed, and called: "Nay, my dear, if you will come down, I will tell my dear's fortune for her." And the woman was Zuleika and her garment was of the meanest. And her beautiful hair was dragged with the dust and wind and she was smiling.

And Fatima jumped from the carriage, and ran to her, and knelt in the dust beside her, and buried her face in Zuleika's bosom, and could not speak for sobbing. And when she could speak, she cried: "O Zuleika, my dear one, my beloved, that I should see thee thus!" and wept again.

And Zuleika wept a little too, for joy. But she laughed too, for joy, and cried: "O my dear, that we should see each other again! Kiss me, that I may show thee how my heart hath hungered for thee." And they kissed each other and all the crowd thereabouts marvelled to see a lady run from her carriage

to kiss a beggar woman in the dust of the street.

But Fatima heeded not the throng, but kissed Zuleika again, and wept again. And Zuleika told her: "Weep not for me, for I have seen thee again and am the happiest of women."

And Fatima said: "Nay, I could weep my heart out through my eyes to see thee thus, who was my beautiful darling and the adornment of the house. O thy hair! O thy soft, bright hair, and the dust of this street is in it!" And she wept again to see Zuleika's hair and asked her: "Why is it I see thee thus?"

And Zuleika said: "Weep no more and I will tell you. For when my lord sent me away, he gave me all my jewels and my garments, and I went back to the cafés to be a singing-girl again and to taste the spice of living. But I was splendidly arrayed and beautiful, and all men knew my story and they said in their hearts: 'Hath she not been my lord's favorite and his toy till he tired of her? Now will she become the toy of some other man that hath her price,' and men made their proposals to me. But could I, who had been a great lady in el-Kâhira, become less? So I said: 'I will

go no more to the cafés to sing, but will live on my jewels and my garments, for they be many and precious.' And one by one I gave my garments and my jewels to mine uncle the Jew, till I had no more and no more food. Then I knew hunger.

"And then," she said, "I remembered mine own people and turned to them.

"For," she said, "I remembered then how that there be here but a few hundreds of great ones, at most, who are rich, but there be thousands of thousands of the common folk, who are poor and knew not my story, or knew it and cared neither the more nor the less for me for it. And I came to my dear common folk and they kept me. For I came out into the streets, and sat down at the street corners, as you see me, among my own dear folk, and sang to them, and told them the good stories of the old days, and drew their fortunes in the dust. And they are kindly pleased with me, and when they have coppers to spare, they share them with me and give me wherewithal to live my happy life. For I am happy, and am free to go to and fro among my people, and all my days are full.

“And this day,” said Zuleika, “am I made the happiest thing that ever was, that I have seen my friend again.” And she kissed Fatima again and smiled into her eyes.

And Fatima wept softly and said: “Come to the carriage with me, for there is another who loveth my Zuleika dearly and will weep over her,” and she led Zuleika to the carriage and said: “Dear princess, look on our Zuleika now!” and the Egyptian lady looked, and took her in her arms, and wept over her, so that all the bystanders marveled.

But the lady heeded them not and said: “My dear, my dear, come into the carriage, that we may take you where you will be more comfortable.” And Zuleika shook her head at her, and laughed gently at her, and said: “How could I be more comfortable? For I have my lodging with a widow woman who hath three children, and the oldest of them careth for the other two through the day, for their mother is a washerwoman. But when night is come, we go home together, and with the money which my widow has earned with her work, and with the pennies my dear folk give me for my stories and my songs, we buy food and

feed our children, and hush them to sleep, and are very happy. Nay," she said, "even for you, my dears, I would not leave my widow and my three children."

And Fatima wept to hear her speak and to see her smile, and she stripped off all the jewels from her arms and from her throat and from her ankles, and gave them to Zuleika, saying: "O my dear, take these pennies also for those thy children." And that Egyptian lady stripped off her jewels too and begged Zuleika to take them. And all the bystanders gaped at the preciousness of the jewels the two of them thrust into the hands of this beggar woman as if they had been pennies.

But Zuleika shook her head, and laughed gently at them, and said: "Nay, that would be a superfluity, for already Allâh giveth us all that we need." And from among the jewels she selected a small ring and the poorest of the necklaces and said: "These two things will Zuleika keep for your love's sake. And when Zuleika lieth dead, Fatima's ring will be on her finger and her dear princess's necklace will be round her throat, because they loved her."

And she gave the other jewels back to them, and turned, for tears were in her eyes, and saw in the press a woman who bore a heavy bundle on her back, and said: "There is my widow now, who goeth home to our children," and she told them her farewells, and ran after the woman, and said to her: "Give me the washing, O my mother, for I am the younger and stronger." And she took the bundle on her back and went off with the woman through the press of people.

And the carriage went on and the two ladies wept softly in it. And Fatima said: "Nay, is she not the loveliest thing, the dearest and the sweetest, ever lived?" And the princess said: "Ay, and the bravest too. She smiled at us."

And Fatima said: "That my lord should send such a one as her away and keep such a one as me in her place!"

"Nay, blame not thyself for that," said that Egyptian lady to her gently. "For thou art but a child and knew not what you did. And the blame for it is no man's. For what Allâh willeth, that happeneth."

"Nay," said Fatima, "the blame is Allâh's

and my lord's. And I hate Allâh for it and hate my lord still more." And suddenly she ceased to weep and said: "Doth not a great wrong merit a great vengeance?"

"Nay, my child," said that Egyptian lady, "think not of vengeance, but of pity. For she smiled at us."

"Nay," said Fatima, "if vengeance is worth taking at all, it must be worth taking very greatly. For my lord himself has told me so." And she sat straight in the carriage and would weep no more.

And as the carriage moved slowly through the press of people in the street, Fatima saw a man among them keeping pace with the carriage and looking steadfastly at the carriage. And she laughed when she saw that man.

And she said to the Egyptian lady: "Presently I shall speak with a man who will walk alongside the carriage as it moves, and I pray you, of your love for me, to look not at the man nor to hear what words we say."

The lady said: "Nay, dear child, our lord would be very wroth that you spoke to a common man. But," she said, "I love thee and cannot say thee nay in anything, and for thy

sake now are my eyes blind and my ears are deaf."

And Fatima beckoned slightly to the man, so that he came close alongside the carriage and kept pace with it, for it was moving slowly. And Fatima said to him guardedly: "Know you who speaks?" and he answered her also guardedly: "I know who it is that speaks." And she said: "Would you give all that you have to have what thy heart desireth most, and would you be bold even to the stake of your life for what thy heart most desires?" and he told her he would. And she said: "Then be bold and come to-morrow to a certain house. And come in the dress of a beggar man, and push thy way into the court of the house, and beg loudly for food. And I will look out for the rest." And the man said: "I will come to-morrow early," and was lost in the press again.

And the man was Abdallah.

CHAPTER XX

MY LORD'S WATCHMAN

AND when the carriage went on again, that Egyptian lady sighed. "Nay," she said, "I fear I did very wrong. For you are angry, and it comes to my mind that in your anger you may do some great folly which will involve you in some disaster. For though he smileth, my lord is a stern man and ruthless when his purpose is aroused." And she said: "I would not be curious, yet I fain would know why you spoke with that man. For it comes to my mind that I did very ill to let thee speak."

Fatima said: "Nay then, I will tell thee, since naught will come of it. I am angry, and the man I spoke to was my distant kinsman, whom his family hath cast out because he is a reckless fellow and violent. And I asked him to kill my lord for me and bring me his heart, that I might watch a dog eat it. And he would

not do it for me," Fatima cried, " but laughed at me, and called me a little fool, and would not do for me the little thing I asked!" And she made a great pretense of bitter anger, and railed against all men and their timidity, and because the carriage moved slowly in the press, she spoke sharply to the coachman, so that he was surprised. For she was used to be very courteous to those who served her, and saved her sharpness for my lord, and even with him was courteous in it, that it might be the sharper.

And when she spoke so to the man and abused him for his slowness, the Egyptian lady chided her gently and said: " My dear, my dear, he doeth the best he can, for the street is crowded."

Fatima cried: " Nay, let him drive over the crowd then! Who are these people that we should mind their limbs or lives?" and she abused the coachman more roundly than before and railed bitterly at the people, so that the Egyptian lady said: " Nay, child, you are beside yourself, and strove to soothe her.

At first Fatima made pretense to be the angrier and railed the more for all the lady's

soothing words. Then she made pretense to be soothed by them, and wept a little, and asked the lady's forgiveness, saying: "Nay, truly, I think I was beside myself. But when I think of my lord's cruelty, and how that our Zuleika was our darling and the pride of his house and now sitteth in the dust, with the dust of the street in her beautiful hair that was our pride — Oh! I can think only of how great a vengeance our lord's cruelty meriteth! And of how I hate him for it."

"Nay," said that lady, "think no more of hate and of revenge. But think of dear Zuleika and how that she was not angry, but joyful to see us who love her. And how she smiled at us, so that we who had not suffered had to weep over her, because she wept not. Think of Zuleika, who is the dearest lady, and the loveliest and the bravest thing that ever was, and so forget hatred, which never leadeth to a good end."

So Fatima let the lady soothe her, and the lady took her back to their house, and took her to her room, and came that night and lay with her in her bed to comfort her. And Fatima seemed to be comforted.

And on the morrow the lady and Fatima sat at their breakfast in the room of Fatima, which had a balcony above the great court of the house, with lattices of mashrabiyeh, so that the ladies of the harem could look down unseen into the hôsh, the court. And while they made their breakfast of cool fruits and of sweet water and of bread, a voice was raised in the court beneath the balcony and spoke whiningly, demanding food in the name of Allâh the Merciful. And the din of the voice was so great that it rang through all the house.

And Fatima said: "Nay, what noise is that?" and the Egyptian lady said: "It must be a beggar hath got into the court, and the poor man must be very hungry, to judge by the noise he maketh." And Fatima said: "But what doth a beggar there? Hath not the house a watchman to let no beggars come inside it and disturb us with their whining?" and the lady said: "Nay, the watchman should not have let him in, but it may be the poor man was so hungry he pushed by the watchman and got in." "Nay then," said Fatima, "the watchman should have broken his head with-

out ado, for he deafeneth our ears. What a harsh voice he hath!"

And the ladies peeped through the lattice and saw in the hôsh the watchman, who had by the shoulders a man clothed in dingy rags, whose head was wrapped in a dingy cloth. And the watchman strove to shove the man out of the court, but the more he strove, the man heeded him not, but lifted up his voice and whined for food in the name of Allâh the Compassionate, so that the house rang with his whining.

"Faugh!" cried Fatima, "what unseemliness is this in a decent house? Hath the fellow no pride at all, to make a scene like this? Is life then so dear that a man should beg for food like a whining dog, in order to sustain it a few days longer? Better, I think, he lay down in the dust and died there quietly at once. So a proud man would do. Faugh, the fellow maketh me sick with his whining."

And the lady reproached her gently, saying: "Nay, my dear, forget not that even to the poorest their lives are dear. It must be the man is beside himself with hunger, else would he not make such a scene as this." For con-

stantly the whining of the man rang through the house, and all the servants were running to the hôsh to see what it boded, and a throng was gathering in the street before the house.

And Fatima said: "The man may be hungry, but I cannot forgive his shamelessness, and the scene he maketh maketh me sick. Faugh!" she said, "the sight of the both of them maketh Fatima sick. For if the watchman let one beggar get by him, will he not let a score, and there will be no more peace in the house." And she turned to her maid and said to her angrily: "Why stand you gaping here, you fool? Run and tell the servants the Lady Fatima bids them fall on the both of them and beat the both of them from the court and from the house. And if they break a few of their bones, so much the better. It will be a lesson to them not to come back."

And the maid was frightened, for Fatima was used to be gentle with her maid. And the maid knew not what to do and stood hesitating, so that Fatima called her a fool again and bade her be quick.

Then the Egyptian lady said: "Nay, my

dear, this hath gone far enough. You are beside yourself." And as she spoke, though she was no longer young and was a little thing and plump, she was all a princess. And she said to Fatima's maid: "I pray you, my dear, take of our food and carry it to the beggar man, and courteously bid him eat it, and when he hath eaten it, to go quietly away. And say to the watchman that I will speak with him. For," she said, "the man is plainly beside himself with hunger, and never shall it be said that whom Allâh sent hungry to me I drove hungry away from me. But," she said, "I must chide the watchman. For thou speakest truth, my dear, and if he letteth one get by him, he will let another, and there will be no more safety for the house. For a trollop often weareth the garments of a lady and thieves may hide them under a beggar's rags."

And she smiled kindly on the maid, so that she went away comforted. And when she was gone with the food, the lady said: "Forgive me that I interfered, but truly you were beside yourself." And she sighed, and put her arms about Fatima, and pressed her to her bosom, and reproached her gently, saying: "O my

dear, what hath come over you? For you were used to be so gentle with us all, and loving."

And Fatima's own heart reproached her, saying: "Nay, will you make this gentle lady sorrowful?" And her heart answered her heart, saying: "Nay, if a thing be truly great, its price must be just as great," and she steeled herself and told the princess coldly: "I know not what has come over me. But I will ask my maid's forgiveness."

So when the maid came back, Fatima went to her, and threw her arms about her neck, and whispered in her ear: "Dost thou still love Fatima through thick and thin?" And the maid sobbed and answered her: "Through thick and through thin must I always love my own dear lady," and Fatima kissed her and whispered: "Hath the beggar man gone yet?" and the maid told her not yet, and Fatima bade her: "Go then and tell him privily: 'A lady approveth of thy boldness so far. Be still bold then, and go away now but come back again tomorrow.'" And the maid went away and told the man, and the Egyptian lady went away also to chide the watchman gently for his remissness.

And the next morning, early, a voice was

raised in the court of the house and rang through the house, so that all the house was roused by the whining of it, demanding food in the name of Allâh the Pitiful. And Fatima laughed when she heard it and cried softly: "Nay, he showeth some boldness after all!" And she ran from her bed, and knelt and peeped from the grating of her lattice, and saw the beggar man again in the court.

And the watchman was striving with him and cursing him, while all his brother servants looked on and laughed at him. For the beggar was a sturdy fellow and heeded him not, but kept up his whining. And the watchman cursed him soundly and ran and fetched his stave to beat him. And the beggar ceased not to whine, but he wrenched the stave from the watchman, and beat the watchman, and between every blow he called aloud on Allâh the Mild and Merciful to send him food. And all the servants laughed and would not stop him, for servants love not a watchman. And Fatima laughed too, softly, and clapped her hands softly.

But she ran swiftly, and burst into the saloon of the harem, and found all the ladies there,

and my lord there among them, and all wondering what the tumult was in the court of the house. And Fatima saluted them and said coldly to the Egyptian lady: "See now whither a little kindness with such fellows leadeth. For that pestiferous fellow you fed yesterday hath come back to-day, bolder than ever, and bawls for food beneath my window fit to deafen the deaf." And she said coldly to my lord: "It will go hard with the beauty of thy ladies if our sleep is to be broken at the very dawn by fellows who bawl and whine for food within the very house."

And my lord told her courteously: "I am distressed that my lady's sleep is broken and I cannot understand how such a fellow got by my watchman."

And Fatima laughed scornfully and said: "Oh, thy watchman, my lord! He is a treasure. For he doth not watch. It may be madam's kindness yesterday hath made the beggar over-bold, but at any rate he forced himself past the watchman and got into the court, and when I peeped down, the watchman had run and got his stave to beat him. And the beggar wrested the stave from him and

beat him with it, while all thy servants laughed to see. For he beat the watchman soundly and between the strokes he ceased not his begging whine. And so it went: Thwack! In the name of Allâh — Thwack! — the Merci — Thwack! — ful — Thwack! Thwack! Thwack! — and Mild — Thwack! Thwack! — while the watchman begged the beggar for mercy and for mildness and all the servants stood and laughed to hear him! Ay, it was laughable, though somewhat unusual in my lord's house, and it broke our sleep. And now," said Fatima, "I suppose there will be a stream of these fellows all day and all night long, for if the watchman letteth one by, he will let another by him. And Allâh send that no thieves choose to visit us in the guise of beggars. And I suppose the servants will be laughing and quarreling all day long now, for what authority hath the watchman over them now? Still," she said, "I cannot blame them for laughing. For truly the scene was very laughable, and even I can laugh at it, now that I am two-thirds awake." And she mingled her merry laughter with the boisterous laughter that came up from the court.

My lord did not laugh but said: "I will see those two fellows myself," and it was plain to them all that he was angry, and the Egyptian lady said to him: "Nay, my lord! I pray my lord to do nothing in haste, for when my lord is stirred he is evere, and the two poor men merit not too severe a punishment. For I am sure the beggar was beside himself with hunger to be so shameless, and as for the watchman, it was only the kindness of his heart that made him too easy for the once. I pray my lord let me go to them and chide them as they deserve. And I warrant my lord that the servants will laugh no more when I am come into the court nor will such a scene be again in my lord's house."

"Nay, my lord," cried Fatima, "what availeth madam's gentleness with such pestiferous fellows? Go thyself, and bid thy servants fall upon them, and beat them, and break their bones, and cast them out of the house, to be a lesson to all who would come in. And I will come with my lord and watch, for truly I should love to see them beaten."

And my lord looked at her sleepily, and laughed sleepily and said: "Thou spitfire!"

And he said to the Egyptian lady: "Is not my house my lady's to do what she willeth in?" And he shook the tassel of the tarboosh from his eye and cried to Fatima: "O thou little wildcat!"

And the Egyptian lady went away joyously, and came back again, and told them how she had arranged the matter, and that the beggar was to come every day for his food and whine not, and the watchman was to let him in quietly, and there would be no more scenes. And my lord thanked her for her courtesy in arranging the matter. But Fatima said: "Nay, gentleness doth no good with such fellows, and the watchman will let in another if he lets one in. And though it would have been a waste to spoil the beggar, who seemeth the makings of a better watchman than the watchman is, and is a sturdy fellow, yet I would have loved to have them both beaten till their bones stuck through their skins! For I am very dull here."

And all of them laughed to hear her, she seemed so like an angry child, and my lord laughed, not sleepily at all, and shook the tassel from his eye, and cried: "O thou spit-fire, what a spirit is in thee! And how I am

sorry to leave thee!" For that day was my Lord the Kadi going from el-KA'hira to be gone for a month and a day about the business of his court.

And Fatima seemed to be very angry with them all, and would not speak to them, but went away to her own room and shut the door, and would not open it when that Egyptian lady came to be reconciled with her. And she wept inside the room and said: "Is even the love of my dear princess part of the price I pay?" Then she thought of her Zuleika, and ceased to weep, and said: "Nay then, I will pay the price."

And the beggar man came into the hôsh each day for his food and one day Fatima made herself reconciled with the princess and had her breakfast with the princess. And the beggar man came for his food while they were breakfasting, and Fatima contrived to send the food out by her own maid, and to send it on one of the dishes belonging to the harem, a very costly platter of gilt and silver. And with the food she sent the beggar man a message, which she had arranged beforehand with her maid.

And the next day after that, all the ladies were breakfasting together, and word was brought to them that the beggar man would see madam the princess and insisted on it, and all the ladies said: "Let him come up then," for they were curious to see this sturdy beggar.

And the man came up, having somewhat under his garment, and waited till all the servants were gone, and drew from under his garment the platter which had been sent out to him the day before, and he gave it to the princess, saying: "Nay, madam, take it quickly, for I would be free of the responsibility of it. For it is very costly, and all day and all night have I guarded it and slept not, fearing lest one might see me with it, and steal it from me, or else accuse me for a thief."

And Fatima cried: "O you impudent fellow, what tale is this? Why brought not you the platter back at once?" And the beggar told her humbly: "Nay, my lady, I tried and could not. For I could find none of the servants of the harem, and the servants of the house I could not trust, for as I ate I saw several of them looking at the platter greedily, and they seemed to me ill-looking fellows.

And I dared not go out of the house with it, lest I be accused of theft. So I hid me in a corner of the hōsh, guarding the platter, and I have been there all yesterday and all last night, and have not slept."

And Fatima cried: "A pretty tale!" And she said to the eunuch who had brought the man: "Take him down into the court and have him flogged for this lie. For he tried to steal the platter, and could not get away with it, and invents this lie to fetch it back."

"Nay," said my lady, "he shall not be flogged. He seems an honest fellow and I da swear he speaks the truth. But he might have given the platter to the watchman."

And the beggar laughed and immediately begged her forgiveness for laughing. "But," he said, "would a man choose a crocodile to keep his dinner safe? And it has come to my ears that this watchman is the most notorious gamester in the city, and deep in debt, and hard pressed. And to tell truth I was not sorry to be in the house last night, for it has also come to my ears — though I would not frighten my ladies while my lord is away — that this same watchman intendeth some night

soon to let a gang of thieves into the house and share the plunder of it with them. And do I not love my ladies for the food they have given me, and I am stout, and handy with a stave, and I might have given that watchman a surprise. So last night had the house two watchmen, one watching against the other."

"Nay," cried my lady, "it had but one, and that was you, my faithful fellow!" And the other two ladies praised his faithfulness and dispraised the treachery of the other, and were afraid of him. And the Turkish lady said: "Nay, I would this faithful fellow were the watchman!" and the Circassian lady said: "Nay then, why shall he not be, for we can send the other away and keep this one," and my lady said: "Would my lord were here, for I am sure he would make the charge. But he is gone for a month and a day and has left his house in our keeping." And the other ladies asked her: "Shall we not keep it, then? Or shall we leave it to be robbed? For doubtless this gang knoweth of my lord's absence and planneth to come this very night." But Fatima scoffed at them and said: "This is all a fol-de-rol, and if there be a robber, doubtless

this fellow is the robber himself. A pretty watchman this fellow would make for my lord's house!"

And they heeded her not and were all agreed to make the beggar the watchman of the house. "Nay, then," cried Fatima, "you must account to my lord for it and bear the responsibility with him. For I will have no share in it. For I tell you plainly that my lord will not be very pleased when he sees what man his wives have made the faithful watchman of his house in his absence." And the ladies said: "Nay, we will bear the responsibility," and Fatima had to run away to her own room, that she might not laugh in their faces, and they thought her angry with them again, and said: "How is our Fatima changed, that was so loving with us all!"

And all day she durst not leave her room, lest she laugh in their faces, and she asked herself: "Nay, are they not all like putty in the hands of my wit? For it was they who chose the watchman and Fatima had no share in it!" And she laughed more than ever.

And she laughed most of all when that day was over, and it was night, and all the house

was still. For in the court beneath her room she heard the pacing of the watchman's steps. And it was moonlight, and she peeped between the lattices, and saw my lord's watchman pacing his rounds of my lord's house, and she laughed silently till she would split. "For," she said, "how pleased my lord will be when he learneth what a watchman his wives have chosen for his house, against the true advice of Fatima."

And she ceased to laugh. And the blood flowed into her cheeks, and burned hotly in her cheeks, and stung them.

For the watchman had ceased to pace and stood beneath her lattice, looking steadfastly up at it, and Fatima knew she had not paid half the price yet. And she put up her hands to her cheeks that burned and cried: "O Allâh!"

And she remembered Zuleika, her friend, and she remembered the smile of Zuleika, and she said: "Is she not the dearest lady, the sweetest, the loveliest, and the bravest, ever was?" And Fatima took her hands from her cheeks and said: "Fatima will pay any price it costeth her."

Now above the great court of my lord's house there was another court raised at one side, a smaller one, which in the language of the country was called the Mak'ad, and the word meaneth that which Christians mean when they speak of an entresol. And from the great court of the house a flight of steps led up to this entresol, and from the entresol another flight of steps led up to a door, and this door opened into the women's apartments, the harem of the house, and was the sole other door to the harem save only the Bâb el-Harîm, with its silken curtain, which a tall eunuch kept always both day and night, in my lord's absence and in his presence. And sometimes, at times of great festivity, as at the time of the great Bairam, and on the night of the Falling of the Tear, and in the nights of the month Ramadân, this second door was opened, and my lord's ladies came out of their harem through it and mingled with my lord's most favored guests on the Mak'ad, which was then spread with soft rugs and was lighted with the soft light of many lanterns. But all times else this second door was closed and guarded by a key and no eunuch was needed to keep the

door safe. For the key of it hung about my lord's neck on a golden chain, which never left his neck.

And this night the watchman stood beneath Fatima's mashrabiyyeh lattice and looked steadfastly up. And the watchman looked up at the Mak'ad, and turned, and bent his steps to the stair of the Mak'ad, and in the deep stillness of the house was heard the light shuffling of the watchman's feet, as he mounted the stair of the Mak'ad.

And presently, at the door which led from the Mak'ad to the harem and was locked, there came a tapping. And when Fatima heard it, she shivered, and her cheeks burned again, and she covered them again with her hands, and her maid, who was with her and who loved her, sobbed to hear the tapping. And when her maid sobbed, Fatima took her hands away from her cheeks and said: "Then is Fatima a dog of a Jew, or a dog of a Christian, to chaffer about the small matter of a price and say it is too great for her?"

And the tapping came again at the door, and Fatima reached up to the neck of her shirt and opened it, and about her throat hung a thin

chain of gold. And she drew the chain from her neck and drew from her bosom a key, which hung at the end of the chain. And she reached the chain and the key to her maid and told her: "I pray you, unlock that door for me."

But the maid would not take the key, but came and clung to Fatima's feet, and said: "Nay, my lady! Nay, my own dear lady! All else I have done for thee, willingly, and I would die for thee, willingly. But that which toucheth my dear lady's honor, that I will not do if she slay me. For I cannot do it."

But Fatima laughed at her and said: "Nay, in whose keeping is Fatima's honor but in her own and her lord's!" And she asked the maid, very gently: "Nay then, would you have Fatima unlock that door herself?"

Then the maid sobbed. And she took the key, and went and unlocked the lock of the door, and opened the door, and the watchman of my lord's house came into my lord's harem.

And the name of my lord's watchman was Abdallah and he stood and looked at Fatima. And Fatima looked back at the watchman

her
hich
hed
told
for

but
aid:
ady!
nd I
hich
not

ay,
her
the
ave

the
the
ch-
rd's

was
ma.
nan



“That which toucheth my dear lady's honor, that I will
not do if she slay me.”—Page 284.

MY LORD'S WATCHMAN 285

very steadily and proudly. But her maid, who loved her, fell on the cold tiling of the floor, and sobbed as though her heart were breaking.

CHAPTER XXI

THE PRICE

AND when the month and the day of my lord's absence were passed, he came back to el-Kâhira, and when they heard of his coming, his ladies dressed themselves magnificently to welcome him. And Fatima they dressed more magnificently than any of themselves. For she had been gentle with them of late, and loving, like a loving child, and she had begged them: "Nay, make me pretty for my lord!" And they laughed at her childishness, and petted it, and disputed among them who should dress her, and when she was dressed, they cried out to each other, praising her loveliness.

For Fatima was lovelier that day than she had ever been before, and in her eyes there was a light and laughter, so that they were almost too bright to look upon for long. And when the ladies had dressed her, so that she

was like a princess of princesses, they admired their handiwork and Allâh's. "But," they said, "who could look upon her eyes for long? And how our lord will look upon her when he sees her thus and have eyes for naught else." And they pretended to be very jealous of her loveliness, and Fatima had to laugh at their mock jealousy and was very loving and gentle with them all.

And when my lord was come, she was very gentle and loving with my lord, and sat down beside him on the divan of the saloon of the harem, so that he had eyes for naught but her. And he saw her exceeding loveliness and cried: "Nay, what has come over you? For even I, who dream of thee by day and by night, had never dreamed thou wert like this." And he cried again: "Nay, what hath come over thee? For never was there such a light even in thy eyes as is there this day."

And Fatima leaned toward him, so that he breathed the fragrance of her garments and the fragrance of her, fresh from the bath, and asked him softly: "Nay then, could not even Fatima be joyful that her lord who was absent is returned to her?"

And a longing came in my lord's eyes as he looked at her. And he said: "Nay, if only I durst believe thee? For Allah knoweth how my heart yearns to believe thee. For surely never the heart of a man yearned over the loveliness of a woman as mine hath yearned over thine and yearneth still. Nay, Fatima, if I only durst believe thee!"

And Fatima laughed at him softly and asked him softly: "Nay, may not even the cub of a lion become tamed at last?" And she asked him: "Is not a bold man bold to believe what he wisheth to believe?" And she leaned yet closer to him, that he might look into her eyes, and asked him very softly: "Doth not my lord believe his Fatima?"

And my lord cried: "Nay, if I could believe that my beautiful lion cub, my spitfire, were tamed at last and loved me!" And he looked into her eyes, and saw the light and laughter there that made them bright, and he cried: "Nay, I will believe it!" And in the light of her eyes he forgot himself and cried: "Nay, my beauty, nay, my spitfire, nay, loveliest, kiss me, and I will believe aught thou tellest me!"

And Fatima exulted in her heart to see him,

so that her eyes were very bright, and said in her heart: "What a power I have over this cold-hearted man! And if I gave him the one kiss out of all the years, would not the memory of it stick in his heart through all the years to come, and the memory of it would be a sword through his heart." And she leaned very close to him and murmured to him: "Nay, then!" And she gave her lips to his lips, and pressed her lips to his, so that he was drunk with the soft pressure of her lips.

And his lips clung to hers until for very confusion's sake the other ladies must laugh, and that Egyptian lady laughed in her merry way and said: "Nay, the impetuosity of these young lovers! For shame, my lord, for shame, for you are not alone."

And Fatima took her lips from him then and laughed, and even my lord laughed, though sheepishly, and said: "Nay, forgive me this one time, and all the rest of my days I will walk circumspectly. But this day hath Fatima made a red-lettered day of her own free will." And he cried: "Nay, we will make a feast together this day," and he gave orders to his servant to have a feast prepared. And he

sat down among them and said: "Nay, this day am I happy as a boy again and a great load hath been taken from my heart." And they all asked him what the load was.

And he drew a thin, golden chain from under his shirt and asked them: "Know you what this is?" and they told him: "Upon it hangs the key of the outer door, which never leaveth my lord's neck." And he told them: "Nay, but it hath left my neck at last but how I know not. For this key is a false key and openeth not the door. And where the true key is I know not. For some one hath changed them, and I perceived the change early in the days of my absence, and was sorely troubled, and would have come home again, but could not for shame's sake. For could I let men know that I had carelessly lost even the key to that door? And I would have sent a messenger, but I said: 'The messenger will talk, and doth a wise man hide his carelessness in his own heart or doth he publish it to his neighbors?' So I hid it in my heart, but the days of my absence were long days, for truly I was sorely troubled. But now am I reassured, for I have seen what I have seen, and am the happiest man alive

to-day, and like a boy. But," he said, "I fain would know where the true key is," and all the ladies wondered where it was and were afraid. "For," they said, "some one hath a key to our door and there will be no more security for us now." And my lord reassured them, saying he would change the lock that very day.

But Fatima asked him what kind of a key it was, and parted the neck of her shirt, and drew up a golden chain, and drew up a key from between her breasts, and asked him: "Was the key like this, my lord?" And my lord cried: "Nay, it is the very key on the very chain! Now who hath changed them?" And he asked Fatima how she came by the key.

And she told him how that she had found it in a corner of the court, as if some one had dropped it there, and had kept it for my lord. "For," she said, "I thought it might be my lord's key to his strong box. And I said: 'I will keep it for my lord.' And I wondered where I could keep it safe and I said: 'Where but where no man, save my lord, could come at it?'"

And the Egyptian lady chided her gently,

saying: "Nay, my dear, you should have brought the key to me, for I am the eldest." But my lord was pleased and praised Fatima's devotion, so that she smiled at his praise, and I think my lord would have forgotten himself again for her devotion's sake, if she had not laughed at him.

But she laughed at him again and said: "After all, my lord had no need to worry over the key, for hath he not now a faithful watchman in his house?" And my lord looked at her surprised and said: "Nay, I have always had a faithful watchman in my house, but would I commit the keeping of that door to any watchman?" "Nay," said Fatima, "but this is a new watchman and wonderfully faithful!" and my lord asked: "What, is there a new watchman in my house since I am gone? Why was I not told of this?"

"Nay," said Fatima, laughing, "blame me not, for I had no hand in choosing him!" And she said to the other ladies, laughing: "Is not this time, while we are waiting for my lord's feast to be brought up to us, a good time to settle our dispute?" And she told him: "My ladies were all for the change, praising this new

watchman's faithfulness, and would have him, though I opposed them and knew that my lord would not be pleased when he saw what man they had taken into his house. And we disputed the matter but they took him against my advice. Is it not so?" And the other ladies said that it was, and Fatima said: "I pray my lord have the man up and decide our dispute for us. And I say my lord will not be very pleased when he sees the man."

And my lord said: "Nay, it will be an amusement while we wait," and sent to fetch the watchman. And he laughed and said to the other ladies: "Nay, I must warn you that you have lost your dispute already. For this day what Fatima liketh I like and what she disliketh I dislike." And Fatima laughed and said: "Nay, my lord, the watchman pleaseth Fatima well enough. Yet am I sure that he will not please my lord when he seeth him!" and she laughed so very merrily that all the ladies laughed to hear her. And my lord laughed and said: "Nay, that we shall see."

Now when they brought Abdallah the watchman within the door of the saloon, into

the Durkâ'a, my lord was laughing like a boy and his face was the face of a boy and bright with youth.

And when he had looked once at Abdallah and known him, his face was the face of an old man, for all the life went out of it and the skin of it became like old leather where the dust has lain. And he looked very steadily at Abdallah, so that Abdallah trembled with fear at his look, and the men who brought Abdallah, and the ladies. For my lord's face was very terrible to see then. And he turned at last to Fatima and asked her quietly: "Nay, what have you done to me? Or is this all but some mad jest of thine?"

"Ay," cried Fatima, "what I have done is a mad jest indeed, and my lord guesseth not half the madness of it yet. But I will show my lord," and she bid Abdallah: "Show my lord what you have about your neck beneath your garment," and Abdallah trembled with fear so that he could not obey her. And she said: "Nay then, I must show my lord," and she went to Abdallah and drew from beneath the neck of his garment a bit of string that had a key at the end of it. And Fatima showed my lord the

key and asked him: "Guesseth my lord yet half the madness of the jest? Nay, tell my lord then, my bold Abdallah!" And Abdallah was dumb with fear and spoke not.

"Nay then," cried Fatima, "since this bold man is reticent for once, I will speak for him. My lord asketh him: 'What key is this?' and I tell him it is a key to my lord's harem. My lord asketh: 'What doth this common fellow with a key to my harem?' and I tell my lord the fellow goeth in and out of the harem when he wills, even as my lord goeth. And now, I think, my lord hath understood me?" and Fatima looked at my lord.

Now my lord's face moved not, though it became gray and, if that could be, even more terrible to look on. And he looked at the pair of them a long while and at last asked Fatima: "Why have you done this thing to me?" And he said: "This one time in my life will I give a way to my anger." And he said quietly to the men who had Abdallah: "Take the fellow down into the court of the house and let my people beat him till his bones come through what was his skin."

And the men seized Abdallah firmly, whose

legs shook beneath him and who wailed with fear. But Fatima stopped them and said: "Nay, my lord understandeth not the matter. The man is not to blame, but Fatima. For the man is here of Fatima's will, who brought him not because of the madness of youth and for a prank, as a wild girl might, but of her set purpose, as any woman might seek to have her lover with her. For this very man, though he seemeth a sorry fellow, is Fatima's lover. Look at him, my lord, and laugh at the mad jest Fate hath played thee.

"For," she said, "I hate my lord with an abiding hatred and I love this man with an abiding love, and I tell my lord plainly that if a man is beaten, Fatima is beaten too. For she will cling to him and shield his body from the blows with her body, that all the world may know of her love for him. Take us away, my lord, and beat us, for our love for one another is as strong as our unlove for thee, and we care not what comes to us if we be together."

"Nay," said my lord, "the fellow cringeth now," and Fatima told him: "Ay, he is sentimental and for the moment is frightened by the fear of death. But death passeth quickly and

hath he not Fatima's love to bear him through the pain of it?"

"Nay," said my lord, "you love him not. But I see well enough at last how greatly you hate me and cannot understand it. For what have I done that you should do this to me?" And he said: "Nay, because it maketh her no difference what cometh to this fellow, this once will I glut my anger on him." And he bade the men again to take Abdallah away and they said: "My lord, we cannot, for the lady clings to him." And my lord said then, with sudden heat: "Nay, then, are you not strong enough to take him from her?"

And the men advanced to take him. And Fatima looked them in the eyes and asked them: "Which of you fellows will lay his hand on me?" And their look fell before her look, and they fell back, and would not touch her nor lay their hands on her. And Fatima said to my lord: "Now my lord sees what he seeth."

And my lord said: "Nay, it mattereth not, for this fellow's pain would quickly pass and Fatima would care naught for it." And he looked at her curiously and steadily and told

her: "Nay, if I could but think what punishment for him and thee would touch thy spirit as you have touched my spirit, and what I might have of thee that would make thee suffer as I suffer?"

And Fatima told him: "Suppose I proposed a challenge to my lord? For I remember how that once my lord spoke to me of a revenge a wise man might have in just this case, how that he might send the woman and the man away together to dwell together in meanness and in poverty and to be a laughing-stock and to tire of each other. Now I love this man with my whole heart and he loveth me, though he is a sentimental fellow and showeth it not just now through momentary fear of my lord's anger, which hath also so cowed the heart of Fatima! But she retaineth yet enough of spirit to propose this challenge to my lord: that he send us out together to dwell together and see what comes of it. For I promise my lord that I will cleave to this man through thick and thin, and he to me, while my lord in his wisdom prophesieth otherwise. But," she said, "perhaps the challenge is unfair. For it comes to my mind that while all the world will

laugh at us very greatly in our meanness, yet it might also laugh a very little at my lord himself, seeing what manner of man hath, in his meanness, her whom my lord in his greatness thought to have, and did not. And I know that my lord is a proud man and loveth not even a little laughter at his own expense. Natheless," she said, "I propose the challenge to my lord, to be a climax to our jest."

And my lord looked very curiously and steadily at her, heeding not the ladies, who wept in their fear and their shame behind him. And suddenly all the anger passed from his face and left him as he always was, though subtly changed and very old and gray. And he let the tassel of his tarboosh fall into his eye, and smiled, and said: "Nay, my dear, we be two of a kind. and shall thy spirit call out a challenge to the spirit that is in me and not be answered? Go then, with this thing thy hatred is pleased to call thy lover. I care naught for him, for shall a man be jealous of a cur? But," he said, and shook the tassel from his eye again, "I prophesy you this: that the man will not cleave to you, nor you to him, and that you will be left alone and will

remember all, and see all, and know how great a pother thy wit, befogged by this hatred of me which I cannot understand, hath raised over so little matter. And that will be the sweetness of my revenge, to wait the day when Fatima shall come to me and say she sees at last how cruelly she wronged me for how little cause. For then can I say: 'Nay, I can remember no wrong that Fatima ever wrought,' and from that day can entreat Fatima with all love and honor, as I long to do." And my lord smiled on her, faintly and not unkindly, and said: "Go now, my dear, with this thy cur that whimpereth at thy heels, and I will wait here for that day to come."

And his ladies wept at his magnanimity and Fatima herself was moved by his quietness and his smile and said in her heart: "Nay, this is a man." But she remembered what he had done, and her anger came to her help, and she told him coldly: "My lord will have long to wait. For before that day comes, cometh a day when my lord seeks my Zuleika out where she sits in the streets in her mean clothes, with the dust of the streets in her hair, and tells Zuleika how cruelly he wronged her, and before

all the gaping people lifts Zuleika from the dust, and kisses her, and entreats her to come back to that place she has of right and of merit in his house."

And my lord started when she spoke Zuleika's name, and looked at her very steadily and curiously while she spoke, and when she was done, he asked her very gently: "Did you all this to me for Zuleika's sake?" And she would not answer him, and he told her: "Nay, what was obscure is made plain now, and I tell thee now that for such a spirit as is in thee the spirit that is in me will wait for a thousand years, for we be two of a kind."

And Fatima told him coldly: "A thousand years will be one day of my lord's waiting which he will wait," and she took Abdallah by the hand and said: "All I have done I have done because I liked not my lord but loved this man and would have him for my beloved for ever and a day." And she said to Abdallah: "Come, that we may begin our happiness together," and she bowed in farewell, and went out of the harem with Abdallah and left the harem very quiet behind her, for my lord and his ladies sat silently and saw their going.

And in the court of the house they met a great number of servants bearing costly dishes. And Fatima laughed when she saw the dishes and said: "They will be the feast my lord maketh to celebrate this day!" But her laughter caught in her throat, and she could laugh no more, but said: "Nay, I dare wager my soul that my lord will bravely eat of his feast though it chokes him, rather than send it away untasted." And she sobbed and said to Abdallah: "Nay, my bold friend, why laugh you not for joy? For I assure you that this day thine eyes have seen a man."

Abdallah answered her not and they went out of my lord's house silently together, and out into el-Kâhira together, Abdallah cringing in the mean garments of a watchman. But Fatima walked proudly beside him in the dress of a great lady.

CHAPTER XXII

MY LORD

AND all the people who saw them laughed to see a pair so ill-sorted walking in the streets, but Fatima heeded it no more than one heeds laughter in a dream. For she walked as one in a dream, and all the people, and the streets of houses, and tall Abdallah shambling beside her, were vague to her, and the sole reality was the image of my lord. For she saw him still as she had seen him, a small, old man sitting and looking quietly at her, with the splendor of the great saloon of his harem, its precious, paneled wood and its cushions and its precious rugs, about him, and the great patience of a purpose on his small, gray face.

And she was angry with that image, with its patience and its quietness, and cried in her heart: "Nay, shall this man balk me of what I would have of him, and can I not touch him

at all? For I have not touched him at all and have had nothing at all of him. For I would have made him angry and I would have made him sorrowful, and instead, it is I who am sorrowful and angry. But I will have my vengeance of him yet, for my Zuleika's sake, and I will touch his pride!" And at the corner of a street where the crowd was thickest, she halted, and made Abdallah halt, and began, like a story-teller, to tell all the crowd in veiled words the mirthful story of a certain great one and a woman who made a fool of him, that all the crowd might laugh at the mirthfulness of it. And the crowd gaped at her, to hear her in her magnificence and her loveliness, speaking to them on the street.

And she could not speak to them. For the words faltered on her lips and in her heart she said: "Nay, the matter lieth between my lord and myself and shall I thrust it into the gaping mouths of these dogs?" and she could speak no more to them. And the crowd laughed to see her so suddenly struck dumb, and jeered at her, and said: "Behold, she hath bought a pennyworth of fine clothing, and come to el-Kahira from the country to be a

story-teller, and cannot tell a story!" and they laughed at her.

But Fatima minded it not, for still she walked as one who dreams, and their laughter was not real to her, but the sole reality was the image of my lord's gray face, set with the patience of a steady waiting.

And she could not endure it, but cried: "Nay, we will go and seek out my Zuleika, and will tell her what we have done together for her sake, and we will all rejoice together over it, laughing at my lord together." And she took Abdallah by the hand again, so that the crowd laughed again, seeing her lead him, and went and sought Zuleika out, and found her, and said to her: "My dear, my dear, now there be two of us, for my lord has cast me out as well."

And Zuleika was so joyful at seeing her friend again, and so sorrowful to know my lord had cast her out, and clung so about her neck, laughing and weeping and smiling and sighing at one time, that Fatima could not tell her why my lord had done it. "For," she said, "if I tell her it was for her sake, she will weep the more, and I shall make her sorrowful

and not glad with what I have done for her. That must I keep for mine own heart to feed upon with joy." And she laughed and told Zuleika airily: "Nay, it is only the usual matter. For I loved not my lord's dry middle-age and took a lover in the freshness of his youth, and my lord found us out, and that's all to it," and laughed again.

But Zuleika wept and cried: "Nay, my dear, what have you done? And what means thy lover in letting thee walk abroad alone?" And she saw Abdallah and said: "Faugh, what sort of an escort is this his servant which thy lover giveth thee!"

And Abdallah's face was very rueful at her words, so that Fatima, seeing it, had much ado not to split her ribs with laughing. And when she could speak, she said: "Nay, Zuleika! Nay, my dear! What words are these for us to hear, for this is my lover's self!"

And Zuleika laughed and said: "Nay, my dear must always be a-laughing!" And she said: "Come with me to my widow's house. For though it is mean, we will love thee and you can lodge with us for a day or two, until this matter is straightened with my lord."

And Fatima said: "Nay, truly, this man is my lover, and I love him dearly, and my lord hath cast us out together to forget our love in the meanness which awaiteth us. But we shall not forget it, but shall balk my lord, for we go seeking a house where we may be together and be happy. For this man loveth me dearly, and I love him, and he will keep me with the money he earneth by his work, and my lord shall hear of it and be balked of the revenge he seeketh."

And Zuleika looked at her very steadily, and looked at Abdallah, and shook her head, and said: "Nay, there is some deeper matter here. For you never loved such a man as this, and such a man as this never came between two such as you are and my lord." And Zuleika looked at her very sorrowfully and said: "Nay, my dear, I wish I understood you."

And Fatima heeded not even her Zuleika's sorrow, for even her Zuleika had become a part of the unreality in which she moved, where the only real thing was my lord's gray face. And she could not endure it, and said farewell to Zuleika, and went to seek a house for Abdallah and herself. And Abdallah

moved shamblingly beside her, and Zuleika called after her, weeping: "Nay, my darling, when this fol-de-rol is finished, come to me. For if indeed you have broken with my lord, my widow and our children will love thee and we will all be happy together. For Allâh will send us enough to fill one mouth the more."

But Fatima went away, and in the meanest quarter of el-Kâhira she found a house and took it, and she and Abdallah lived there together. And Fatima minded not the meanness of the place, for its meanness was part of the unreality in which she seemed to move, and its meanness was a help to her purpose. "For," she said, "surely my lord can get no hold on one as mean as I, and his waiting shall endure forever."

But Abdallah minded the meanness and complained of the hardness of his lot, when he had come home from his work to his house, and Fatima lost her patience with him and told him: "Nay, but you are the sentimentalest fellow I ever saw! For what is a little meanness beside the thought that in his splendor my lord sitteth and waiteth patiently for what will never be? And are you not glad that what

my lord yearneth so greatly for is thine and no man's else in all the world? "

"Nay," said Abdallah, "how can a man be glad when he worketh heavily all the day, and sleepeth heavily all the night, that he may be strong enough to work another day? Would my lord were me and I were he, for he might have thee if he wanted thee, and I would wait very patiently. For the very thought of waiting resteth my bones that ache with working. Nay, Fatima, I am very tired," and he wept a little with weariness and went to his bed, and Fatima cried: "Faugh, this is the most sentimentalest fellow ever was! For whatever he hath not he wanteth, and what he hath he wanteth not. But my lord shall never take him from me."

And Abdallah spent his days heavily about his work, and the night of one day he came not home from it, and when Fatima sought news of him, her neighbors told her how that men had come that day where he was working, and had taken him for a thief, and had cast him into prison.

And Fatima said: "Nay, the man never was a thief, for he is too sentimental a fellow

to be a thief and would think of the sorrow of him he had robbed." And she said in her heart: "Nay, this is my lord's doing. For he groweth impatient of his waiting, and knows that I will never give him up, and so will take him from me." And she cried: "But never will I give him up," and she sought for the prison where Abdallah was, and found it.

And she visited Abdallah in his prison, and Abdallah wept and told her: "Nay, I am not a thief," and Fatima told him: "Nay, you are not," and explained to him how it was and what my lord meditated against them. And Abdallah said: "Nay then, I wish my lord would let me alone. For he is great and I am small and can do nothing against him. Go you to him and tell him to let me alone, and tell him how it is not seemly for a great one to persecute a small one thus." And Fatima cried: "Faugh! Have you no pride then, to go whining to my lord whom you have wronged?" and Abdallah said: "Nay, I have pride, but I have feelings also, and this prison is very uncomfortable." And Abdallah wept over the uncomfortableness of the prison, and Fatima comforted him and said: "Nay, but a little

while and you will be outside, and my lord can trouble us no more. For why should we not go into the desert as you wished, and surely my lord cannot touch us there?" And Abdallah was a little comforted and said: "Ay, we will go into the desert. But," he said, "the food is very bad here." And Fatima said: "Nay, I will bring thee better food." And every day she brought Abdallah food, and he ate it, and was comforted, and said: "Nay, we will go into the desert." And for the food she brought him, Fatima spent all the substance of her garments and her jewels she had brought there with her, and there was nothing left in her house.

But she heeded not its emptiness, but sat alone there in the evenings, and it was all unreal about her, as in a dream. For she saw only my lord's gray face, and the patience of it made her impatient, and she mocked at it and said: "Nay, my lord, though we run away from thee into the emptiness of the desert and die there, you shall not have the best of us. For rather would I run away from thee than to thee."

And one evening as she sat there, came Ab-

dallah unexpectedly to the house, for she had talked with him that day, and he had still a week to spend in prison. And Abdallah was greatly changed, and wore the robes of a Sheikh, and bore the nabût of a Sheikh, the stave, and walked proudly with it. And Fatima cried out when she saw him and asked him what it meant. And he told her: "Nay, it was all a mistake and I was not a thief at all. And now I am going to the desert to be a Sheikh there as I always deserved to be. For my father was a Sheikh."

And she asked him sharply: "Nay, what fiddle-faddle is all this?" and he told her: "Have you not heard the news? How that my elder brother is dead, and I am his heir, and have inherited all that he hath, and am now a great man and the Sheikh of a tribe? Nay, the news came only late to-day, but sure it was such wonderful news I thought it would be spread all over el-Kâhira by now, and I am surprised you have not heard it."

"Nay," said Fatima, "I heard it not." And she looked very steadily at him and asked him how he got the news. "Nay," cried Abdallah, "how but from my lord? And how I

have misjudged him, and what a noble man he is, and what a gentle man, and how I could weep when I think that once I wronged him! For the news came this very night, and it came first to my lord himself, and what think you? He came himself to tell me it in my prison! Yea, though he is great, he visited me in my prison, though for that matter, of course I myself am great now in a way. And he congratulated me, and asked my forgiveness for the mistake that had been made in thinking me a thief, and because I had no money for the present, he loaned wherewithal to buy these proper garments, which I will repay him. And now," cried Abdallah, "I am a Sheikh again, and my own man, and I go to the desert and mine inheritance."

"Nay," said Fatima, "I guessed it was my lord. Inshallâh," she said, "I know not what his purpose is in this, but since he hath laid down the card, we will take it up, and go to the desert, and see what we shall see."

"What, woman," cried Abdallah, "think you to go with me? What, think you I have no feelings and no pride? That I should take my mistress to be my wife, and I a Sheikh!

Nay, I go to the desert, but you go not. But," he said, "think not that I will be ungenerous with thee. For I will leave thee money to live on, for I thought of thee, and borrowed also of my lord money to leave thee till I had my own, and here is the money," and he took a purse of gold from his bosom and would have given it her.

And Fatima struck the purse from his hand. And she looked steadily at him, and smiled at him, and at last told him gently: "Poor dog! Poor cur! Why should I be angry with thee for what thou art? But now hear this one thing from me before you go, for my own pride's sake, that you had from Fatima what you had of her because you were too poor a thing to her to seem a man to her at all. Now go, poor cur," and she looked at him so steadily and so proudly and so smilingly, that Abdallah was abashed before her gaze, and picked up the purse of gold she had struck from his hand, and went slinking from the house.

"O my lord," cried Fatima, when he was gone, "if but for one moment of his life the dog Abdallah could have had thy purpose and thy patience! But he was born to be a dog,

as thou wast born to be a man." And she said: "How steadily thy purpose runs and will not be balked by anything!" And she cried: "Nay, my lord, how Fatima might have loved thee! For of all men she has seen, thou alone art the man, and thy spirit only calleth to her spirit and is answered."

And she thought of her lord, and all else, the meanness of her house, and the meanness of Abdallah, and the meanness of her life, and everything save my lord became unreality to her and as a dream. And she saw only his small, gray face set against the greatness of his harem, with its patience set upon it, and its quiet smile. And she looked into her lord's face, and bowed her own face in her hands before it, and a sob wrenched her throat.

And while Fatima wept alone, in the emptiness of her house, her child stirred for the first time, close underneath her heart.

CHAPTER XXIII

FUGITIVE

AND her tears of sorrow were turned to tears of joy. For in that land women count it a joyous thing and a proud thing that a woman should be the mother of a child. And she cried: "Now will I go and tell the news to my Zuleika, that she may rejoice with me and may weep with me."

And she said: "Nay, but shall I go to her? For there be five mouths in that house to feed already, and how would they let me go from them when they knew? For my dear Zuleika would never let me go out of her sight, and would love me more dearly than ever, and there be mouths enough to feed already." And she said: "Now must Fatima be sufficient unto herself, and must learn what it is to work, for now hath Fatima two mouths to feed."

And she slept that night, and went out next day to look for work, and in all the city could

find no work. But men laughed at her when she asked them for work, and looked at her face, and said: "Nay, what need of work for such as thee?" And they laughed at her, and would give her no work, and some of them made their proposals to her. So Fatima could talk with them no more and could find no work to do in all the city.

But outside the city gate, outside the Bâben-Nasr where the dust-heaps are, and the little Mosque of Kait Bey is like a jewel fallen into the dust, an old man made his living drying dung-cakes for the fires. And because the dung-cakes were very many, and lay on the dust-heaps drying in the sun, and had to be turned that the sun might dry them thoroughly, he kept many old women at work for him, and he gave Fatima work among them.

And so Fatima, who had driven through the streets of the city in her pride, and been the greatly desired of the city, was forgotten of the city, and got her living among the dust-heaps outside the city gate, working with the old women, and lodging with the old women in a hut they had among the dust-heaps.

And the days and the weeks went by, and the

wind blew and the sun beat down upon her, and her hands grew rough and coarse with her work, and her feet were roughened, and the wind blew dust into the skin of her face and dried out its freshness, and the sun beat down upon her hair and scorched it, and the soft roundness of her shape was gone, and Fatima's beauty dropped from her as a garment drops from a woman's shoulders when she layeth it back and shrugs her shoulders. And Fatima heeded not the fading of her beauty, though it faded in the sun and wind as a tender flower fades, but thought only of her work and of her hunger. For her hunger was very great, and with all her work she could hardly earn enough to satisfy her hunger, and it was the harder for her to do her work, and she had two mouths to feed instead of one.

And one day when the sun was very hot, she fell down in the dust, under the sun. And when she tried to rise and go about her work, she could not rise, but lay there. And the old woman who worked beside her said: "Nay, my dear, you can work no more for the present," and she called the old man and told him: "She must work no more for the pres-

ent." And the old man looked at Fatima and said: "Nay, that is true." And he drew out his wallet and paid Fatima the wage he owed her. And over and above her wage this old man made her a gift of a copper, and patted her hand kindly, and said: "Nay, Mistress, go away now. But when thy child is born, come back and I will give thee work again. For you have been faithful to me, and have worked well, and I will be faithful to thee."

And Fatima wept at his kindness and took his gift. And she looked at the copper and said: "Nay, now can I go to my dear Zuleika without shame, for now have I seen how the poor are kind to each other in their extremity, and have no shame at giving or at taking, since their need is so very great."

And she went into the city and sought out the house where Zuleika lodged with her widow and her three children, and found it, and went in. And the widow was there and the children, but not Zuleika. And Fatima asked them where Zuleika was. And when she spoke the name, the widow cried out and said: "Nay, who is it seeks Zuleika?" and Fatima told her who she was, and the widow looked at her

curiously. "For," she said, "I had understood that you were but a girl."

And Fatima smiled a little sadly and said: "Nay, have I aged so then in a few months?" and asked again where she might find Zuleika. And at that the widow cried out again and burst into tears, and all her children wept loudly with her. And the widow said: "Nay, have you not heard? For it may be a week ago a sickness stalked through the city and came into the houses of the city. And it came into this house and took from it the fairest thing, the dearest thing, and the gentlest, ever was. And never shall we hear Zuleika's laugh again nor the softness of her voice when she sang to us. Ai! Ai!"

And Fatima cried: "Ai! Is my Zuleika dead then?" And Fatima sat down upon the floor of the house and said: "Then is the sun blotted out of the day, and the moon and the stars out of the night, and there is no more light in the world for Fatima," and she sat and wept her heart out, till her sorrow was so great that in Fatima's sorrow the widow forgot her own and strove to comfort her.

"Nay, dear," said she, "nay, Fatima, weep

not so for her. For she wept not for herself, but was always happy. And she thought of you, and loved you till the end, and at the very end she thought of you, and told me: 'If ever the time comes, tell my Fatima that Fatima's ring was on her finger, and her dear princess's necklace was round her throat till the end of her life and afterwards, and she was happy because they loved her. And if there were a paradise for women, Zuleika would be happy in paradise because they loved her.' Nay," cried the widow, "was she not the gentlest creature and the kindest, ever was?" and she wept again to think of her, and all her children wept.

But Fatima wept no more. For suddenly all this became unreal to her and as a dream. And she said dully: "Nay, what more is there in the world for Fatima?" and left the house, though the widow would have kept her there.

But she went out into the streets and walked in the streets that were not real to her. For she said continually in her heart: "Nay, is this the end of all things for Fatima? For Zuleika is gone, and what availeth all that Fatima did for her sake, and all the sorrow she

brought to many hearts, and my lord's punishment, and my lord's own sorrow?" For always, amid the unreality, my lord's gray face was distinct before her eyes, and the patience in his face. And she remembered how he had said: "This shall be my sweet revenge, that Fatima shall come and say she wronged me cruelly, and I cannot remember any wrong she did, but will entreat her with all love and honor as I long to do." And my lord seemed to say the words again, and a voice said within her: "Nay, you did him a cruel wrong. Be just and go and tell him, for he waiteth."

And Fatima said: "Nay, I wronged him, and he may have his revenge for all of me, but I will never go to him." And she said: "What matters it now what comes of Fatima?" and because she was very weary, she sat down where she was, in the thick dust of the corner of a street, unheeding the feet of those who passed by. And they stepped kindly over her, and took care that their feet disturbed her not.

And at length hunger, which dogs the steps of all men, rich and poor alike, through all their joys and sorrows, and will not be escaped, came

to her in her wretchedness. And her own hunger she would not have heeded, but the hunger of her child cried from within her. And she said: "What mattereth it now what Fatima doth?" and she rose and begged of the first man that passed a copper to buy food. And the man laughed at her and asked her: "Why should I give you a copper?" And Fatima said: "Because my child needeth food," and he said: "But where is the child, Mistress?" and Fatima asked him: "Have you no eyes?"

And the man looked at her in surprise and said: "Nay, mother, but you are an old woman!" and she told him: "I am not just eighteen. But give me the copper."

And the man cried: "Nay, mother, are you out of your wits, or what?" and because there was a mirror in the window of a shop there, he led her to the window and bade her look. And Fatima looked in the mirror, and saw the face of an old woman in the mirror, and heeded it not, and told the man: "Nay, I am but just turned eighteen, and give me my copper, I pray you."

But when she had the copper and the man

had gone, she looked in the mirror again, and her eyes were opened, and she saw her face as it was, and that her beauty was gone out of it. And for a moment, even in her dullness, it gave her a pang, and she said: "Now at last have I paid all the price, and all my bridges are down behind me, for I could not go back to my lord now if I would. For it was my beauty that he yearned for and that he waited for, and my beauty is all gone."

But the pang passed and she said: "What matters it now what cometh to me?" And she said: "I have no place any more among these people and in this great city, so why go I not back to my own place?" And she said: "I will go back to my own place."

And Fatima, who had come to el-Kâhira in the pride and the freshness of her beauty, to conquer el-Kâhira, and laugh at it, and be loved of it, left el-Kâhira behind her wearily and took up wearily the road to Ashmunein.

And the road was long, and her feet were heavy, and she was many days upon the road. And it ran alongside Nile, where the great sails of feluccas were flashing white in the sunshine. And it ran through villages and on canal

embankments above great fields of cotton, and the fields were busy, for it was the season when men pick cotton. And the road was busy with groups of trampers, and pack-trains of asses, and with flocks and herds and with great camels swaying under heavy burdens. And the road was merry, for over it was the sunshine and the wide brightness of the Egyptian sky. And the road was long.

And Fatima followed it day by day, and when she could endure her hunger no more, she begged food of the passers-by, and sometimes they gave it her. But she got more curses than coppers, for these men were not the kindly poor people of the city, but peasants, and prosperous and surly.

And after many days, she came to Ashmunein, worn with the weariness of the road, and entered her own town, and in the marketplace begged her own people for food. And they did not know her, and some of them gave her a copper. But one man stood apart, and looked at her, and suddenly said to his fellows: "Nay, why give you this woman anything?" And he said to Fatima: "We might have known that you would come back now."

And he said to the others: "Was it not like her to come back now, when she learned that her husband was rich? And is it not like her to beg from us who are poor, when she hath a rich husband? For she was always impudent." And they listened curiously to his words and asked him who she was. "Nay," said he, "who is she but Fatima, the wife of Ali the Fool?"

And they recognized her and a tumult rose in the market-place. For they jeered at her, and asked her why she had not come back sooner, seeing that her husband had been rich for almost two weeks. "Ay," they told her, "it was thy cleverness to leave him when he was poor and cleave to him when he is rich, but why have you wasted two weeks?" And they mocked at her and told her: "Nay, has the air not been good where thou wert? For you are truly greatly changed." And they were angry with her and told her: "Nay, you should be beaten, begging the coppers of us poor men when thy husband has all he needs and a thousandfold more."

And Fatima told them: "Nay, I am tired. Tell me plainly what you mean by this talk of

a rich husband. For Ali was my husband, and no other." And they laughed at her and told her: "And is it not Ali and no other who now is rich, now that Omar the Sheikh is dead, and Ali was his cousin and his only kinsman and his heir? Go to Ali, if you are hungry, and doubtless he will be pleased to feed thee. For are you not his darling wife?" And they laughed at her and said: "Run and tell Ali that his darling has come back to share his riches with him! For he was always very proud of her." And some of them ran to tell Ali.

"Nay then," said Fatima, "this then is the end of all things for Fatima, and she has no more to do but go out into the desert with her child and die there. And she is glad there is no more to do, for she is very tired." And she rose up, and made her way through the press of them, and turned her weary feet toward the desert.

And to the north of the town she came to the considerable remnants of the temple built for Thout by Merenptah, three thousand years before. And because she was so weary, she turned into the temple for a moment to rest, and sat down on the ground at the foot of a

column which she once had climbed when she was young. And she looked up at the wall and saw Thout there, busy with his tablets and his stylus, as he has always been and always will be. And they heeded each other not, for the god was busy and Fatima was weary....

And while she sat there resting, came a tall man running, and called out at sight of her, and cried to her: "Nay, my darling. Nay, my beautiful wife Fatima, art thou come back to me at last? Nay, have you heard the good news and come back to me? For I am rich now! Nay, my beautiful wife —"

"Nay," said Fatima, "mock me no more now. I know I wronged thee, but I am now too weary —"

"Nay," cried Ali, "art thou weary? Then come home! For just outside the temple waiteth the ass I'timad-ud-daulah-Fardau— oh, call him Rameses! — to bear thee home."

And Fatima said: "Nay, Ali, look up at me, that I may read thy meaning in thy eyes. For thine eyes have never lied." And Fatima saw his eyes and they were full of honesty and full of joy. And her breath caught a little and she said: "Nay, are you truly glad to have

me home again, and do you want me home again? ”

And Ali's clear eyes were puzzled and he asked her: “ Are you not my wife? ”

And she said: “ Nay, Ali, but look at me, for I am sadly changed from thy beautiful wife Fatima. Nay, look at me and tell me what you see, and I can bear it.”

And Ali looked at her with his honest eyes and told her: “ Nay, I see my beautiful wife Fatima. And her eyes and her hair are the night, and her lips — ”

And Fatima said: “ Nay, Ali, say no more, for I could not bear it.” And she laid her hand on his lips that he might say no more. And she rose, and laid her hands upon his shoulders, and looked at him steadfastly. And when she saw the honesty and the joy that were in his steadfast eyes, a little sob escaped her. “ Oh! ” she cried, “ I fear you will always be a fool! But you are a dear fool and a faithful fool, and a steadfast fool, and a gentle fool, and Fatima is not fit to be thy slave. But take her home with thee and let her be thy slave.”

“ Come on then,” said Ali. “ For outside

the temple waits I'timad-ud-daul— oh, call him Rameses! — to bear thee home.”

And she went with Ali. And outside, the ass I'timad - ud - daulah - i - Fardausashyani-i-Sani-Shah-Jahan-Mahal, having heard his name called Rameses, brayed lustily in the hope of clover. And —

call
the
ani-
his
the

CHAPTER XXIV

THE BLESSED COMMONPLACE

AND when the ass I'timad-ud-daulah-Fardausashyani - i - Sani - Shah - Jahan-Mahal brayed with a rich suggestion of clover in his voice, Fatima opened her eyes and said: " Good Heavens, how long have I been asleep? "

For she knew that she had been asleep, for she had just waked up. But of how long she had been asleep she had no notion. And she tried to guess.

And she said: " Good Heavens, when did I go to sleep and how long have I been dreaming? Was it before I seemed to make that weary journey on the road and before my dear Zuleika died? Nay, I hope it was before Zuleika died, for I could not bear that. But it was perhaps before that night when Abdallah came to me in his magnificence, and went to the desert to be a Sheikh, and left me alone to

look into my lord's face and weep that I had wronged a man? Or did I perhaps fall asleep in my lord's harem, before he cast me out of it? Or can it be," she said a little wistfully, "that I have not made my lord angry with me at all? Nay, I hope I have not, for my lord is a man. Or could it be by any chance — " and then she bethought herself of that she might have thought of somewhat sooner, and raised herself on her elbow, and looked about her.

And she saw what she saw, and cried out with dismay, and said: "Good Heavens, I have been asleep all night!"

For the familiar room of her house at Ashmuncin was all in the disorder of the night before, and beside her bed stood Ali's splendid pipe with the bowl of crystal glass and the mouthpiece of amber yellow as gold, which she had filled for Ali the night before and smoked herself. And she herself was dressed in those garments which she had put on to go to el-Kânira in, and the splendor of her richest apparel was all rumpled by her having lain in it all night long.

Then Fatima saw it all, and lay on her elbow and took it in, and was so sorely disappointed

THE BLESSED COMMONPLACE 333

that she could have wept. "Why," she said, "it has been all a dream then, and I have been asleep all night! And I have been asleep in Ashmunein, and am still in Ashmunein, and have never been out of Ashmunein at all! And I have never seen the wonders of el-Kâhira, that greatest of cities, and have never been the pet and the pride and the wonder of el-Kâhira. For I have never tilted with my wit against the five wits, and never have been at the University, and never have been a great lady in my lord's harem, but always plain Fatima of Ashmunein. I might as well have been nothing at all! For I have never known my lord at all, nor my lord's ladies. I have never known my gentle princess, nor the fair grace of the Circassian lady, nor my own Zuleika, who was the dearest thing, the loveliest and the sweetest, ever was.

"Good Heavens," Fatima cried, and wept a little that time in her disappointment, "I have never known my dear Zuleika, and to think how I loved her! For did I not endure all things for her sake, the meanness of Abdallah, and the meanness of my life with him, and the weariness of my life among the dust-heaps

outside the city gate, and the heaviness of my child, and the sorrow of the long road to Ashmunein, and the jeering of my neighbors? And did I not give up all things for Zuleika, my splendor and mine ease, my lord's love, and my pride and my honor and even my — ” just then, even in her disappointment, Fatima be-thought herself of something else she might have thought of somewhat sooner.

And she rose quickly from her bed, and ran to a chest that stood in the corner of the room, and took from the chest a mirror, and looked anxiously in the mirror, and cried out at what she saw there. And she looked again and again, less anxiously and more eagerly each time, and at last cried out: “ Thank Heaven, that was a dream too! And upon my word I believe I am prettier than ever I was before in my life! ” And though the tears of her disappointment still hung on her thick lashes, her eyes danced and her lips were wreathed with smiles. And the mirror very generously gave her back her smiles and the dancing of her eyes and she gazed at them with the greatest admiration and content.

And while she was gazing into the mirror, the

THE BLESSED COMMONPLACE 335

ass I'timad - ud - daulah - i - Fardausashyani-i-Sani-Shah-Jahan-Mahal in his stable brayed again so impatiently for his breakfast, that Fatima laughed aloud to hear him. For she was very happy all at once and the sound was a very pleasant, homely sound to hear. And she laughed and said: "The poor thing ought to have his breakfast. Ali ought to get up and give the poor thing his breakfast." And she turned and saw Ali still sleeping in his bed.

And he was sleeping very comfortably, and because she was happy, the sight of him was very homely and comfortable to Fatima. And because her wonderful dream that had betrayed her was still very real and vivid in her mind, and she remembered how that Ali, after el-Kâhira had cast her out and all other men had mocked her, had said to her only: "If you be tired, come home and rest," she felt very gently disposed to Ali. And she went and stood above him and said: "Nay, he is such a dear fool and sleepeth so like a tired child, it seems a pity to wake him up. But surely that poor ass needeth his breakfast." And she said to Ali very gently: "Ali, Ali!"

And Ali opened one eye at her sleepily and

said: "I am Ali." And she told him: "Nay, you have overslept, my dear. But now it is time that you got up."

And Ali did not stir, but asked her: "Nay, why is it time? And I am very sleepy, for the tobacco I smoked last night was very strong. But it was very good tobacco," he added drowsily. "And I have a very fine pipe."

And Fatima had to laugh at his sleepiness, but she told him: "Nay, Ali, you have overslept and it is late, and the ass Itimadusi-gahusi-shirusi-mahali-Shah-Mahani-Jahali —"

"Nay," said Ali, "call him Rameses, for he answereth to that name even better than to his own."

"Nay then," said Fatima laughingly, "Rameses brayeth for his breakfast and you must get up and give it him."

"Is that all?" said Ali. "Nay then, let him bray for it a while longer. For hath he not all day to eat his breakfast in and I am still sleepy." And he shut his eyes again.

And Fatima laughed again, but told him: "Nay, Ali, I want you to get up now," and Ali opened both his eyes and asked her: "Do you really want me to get up?" and Fatima

THE BLESSED COMMONPLACE 337

told him yes. "Then," said Ali, "I will get up," and rose from his bed so promptly that Fatima had to laugh once more. "Nay," she asked herself, "is he not a dear, obedient fool?"

And when Ali flung open the door to go and give Rameses his breakfast, the sweet morning air came into the house and flooded it, and because she was happy, Fatima noticed the sweetness of the air, and breathed it deeply, and cried out: "Oh, but the air is good!"

And she went and stood in the door, and breathed the air, and looked out at the street where she dwelt. And because her dream was still vivid in her mind and it seemed that she had been a long while away from the street, and because she was happy, it looked a very pleasant street to her, and she cried: "Oh, what a pleasant street this is! And how very lively it is this morning."

For six or seven women were moving in the street, bearing their water-jars on their heads to the neighborhood well for water, and across the street the young foal of a camel, a slim, upstanding, kittenish thing with a soft, gray coat, stood and looked at Fatima with in-

quiring eyes. And because Fatima was happy and it seemed she had not seen the women for a long time, she was glad to see them and greeted them as they passed. And because she was pleased with them they were pleased with her, and stopped and gossiped with her, standing straight in their long, black robes, with the slender jars poised on their heads. And after they were gone, Fatima saw the foal still watching her, and went in, and got a handful of beans, and offered them to the foal.

And after it had looked her over, and sniffed the air, and made sure she was not dangerous, the foal came softly and ate the beans out of her hand with its soft muzzle. And Fatima petted the foal, and called it "O you dear!" and laughed aloud for sheer happiness.

And Fatima went to the stable and found Ali there admiring the ass Rameses, who munched his clover, and stopped now and then to lift up his head and shake it, and shake his long ears and flap them for sheer content. And Fatima laid her hand on his soft, mouse-gray muzzle, and petted him, and said: "Nay, Fatima is glad it tastes so good to thee." And the ass, impatient for his food, pushed her hand



The foal came softly and ate the beans out of her hand.

Page 338.

THE BLESSED COMMONPLACE 339

out of his way with a toss of his gray nose and went on eating, so that Fatima laughed to see him.

And she said: "Come in to thine own breakfast now, Ali," and they went in, and because Fatima was so very happy that day and was seeing, as it were for the first time, the little things that were close round about her and too familiar for her eyes to see, it pleased her mightily to see Ali eat his breakfast and to see how he enjoyed his breakfast. And she said: "Do something for me," and he asked her what then he should do, and she told him: "When you have eaten every last bite you can, come out into our town with me. For it is strange to me how good everything is to me this day, and new, and I would go out into our town with you and see all the good newness of it with you. For I am very happy this day."

And Ali said he would go. "And," he said, "we will saddle up Rameses and I will ride on him and you can walk beside us. Or," tall Ali said a little wistfully, "you can ride on Rameses and I will walk beside you, and it may be Rameses will not complain, even if thy weight

is a little heavier than my weight is. For I gave him a very good breakfast."

And he looked so wistful that Fatima had to smile at him and tell him: "Nay, you ride and I will walk. For I would not have Rameses complain of me!" And she said in her heart: "Nay, is he not a dear, generous fool? For he would give me what he most desireth and is ashamed to ask for what he most desireth himself." And she told him again: "Nay, Ali, you ride," and Ali looked relieved. "But, Ali," she said, "make sure you do not come till you have eaten every last bite you can eat, for I love to see you filled," and Ali said he would make sure of that, then, and he made sure of it.

And when Ali was filled, they went out together and saddled up Rameses, and Ali mounted on him and Fatima walked beside them to see the goodness of Ashmunein. And Fatima saw the goodness of it and liked it. And there were many people stirring, for it was a market day, and because these people seemed to her like old friends long unseen, and because she was happy, Fatima greeted them all like old friends long unseen. And

THE BLESSED COMMONPLACE 341

because she was pleased with them they were pleased with her, and greeted her and Ali, and told each other: "Nay, Fatima is not so proud as some jealous people try to make her out. And no wonder some are jealous, for look how beautiful she is, and truly this day she seemeth even prettier than ever she was."

And after they had gone through all the town, Fatima and Ali went out to the edge of the desert to the north of the town, and came there upon the considerable remnants of the temple built for Thout by Merenptah three thousand years ago. And they went in under the pylon and sat down together in the court of the temple. And it was very quiet there, and the Egyptian sky was very wide and bright and blue above them.

And Fatima fell to thinking in the quiet of the place and all her dream became suddenly vivid before her eyes again. And she reviewed her dream again and upon the brightness of the sky of her day there came a small cloud of disappointment. "For," she said, "though all this here is very good in its way, is this all Fatima shall ever have of life? And shall she never know the wonders of el-Kâhira, and the

admiration and the love and hate of men, and the love of her dear Zuleika? Nay, all this is good to Fatima in its way, but is all this all she shall ever have of life? ”

And as she mused in her disappointment, Fatima looked up and saw above her on the wall Thout's solemn-curving ibis beak and his absorbed eye in profile. And though Thout never winked or blinked or cast a look at Fatima, Fatima looked at Thout with eyes that suddenly were very bright. “Nay,” she cried, “this is the most wonderful thing that ever was, and surely this is the very most wonderful thought even Fatima ever had!

“For,” she said, “I have had all I dreamed I had! I have loved, for I have had my dear Zuleika, the loveliest and the dearest thing that ever was, and she loved me till the end of her life, and I loved her as no other woman ever loved a woman, for I gave her my beauty and my honor and my pride. And I have hated as no other woman ever hated. For truly it was a splendid hatred I had for my lord and worthy of me and him, and sure no other woman ever hated half so hard. Nay,” she cried, “I have lived very splendidly! For I

THE BLESSED COMMONPLACE 343

have loved and hated very splendidly, and have known joy and pride and shame and sorrow through and through, and have been young and beautiful and old and poor, and have done all things and been all things and seen all things, as sure no other woman ever did or ever will."

And Fatima clapped her hands and cried to Ali: "Nay, is it not the most wonderful thing! For I have eaten my cake all up and still have it, and I have lived all my life and am still alive and young and beautiful. To think how that I have lived! What other woman ever was clever enough to do that before? Tell me that, Ali. Nay," said Fatima frankly, "I have often said that I am the most clever woman that ever lived and that others cannot compare with me. But now I am sure of it."

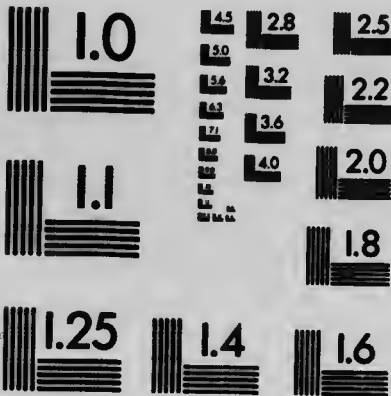
"Ay," said Ali admiringly, "you are beyond doubt the cleverest of them all."

"Nay," said Fatima in her heart, "is not a fool a comfort? For he thinks always what one would have him think, and says what one would have him say, and never contradicts." And she looked at Ali and smiled at him, and



MICROCOPY RESOLUTION TEST CHART

(ANSI and ISO TEST CHART No. 2)



APPLIED IMAGE Inc

1653 East Main Street
Rochester, New York 14609 USA
(716) 482 - 0300 - Phone
(716) 288 - 5989 - Fax

because her dream was still very vivid and she was still a bit wistful and curious about it, she looked at Ali curiously and asked him: "Nay, Ali, if it had all been true, would you have been like the dear Ali of the dream? Tell me, Ali, what would you have done if I had left you and gone away —"

"Nay," said Ali, "but you would not go away."

"Nay," said Fatima, "I do not think I should, now. But suppose I had, what would you have done?"

"Waited till you came back, of course," said Ali.

"I believe you would," said Fatima softly. "But, Ali, suppose I went away, and when I came back I was not the beautiful wife Fatima you waited for, but an old woman; an old, bent, wrinkled, ugly, hopeless, tired woman —"

"Nay," said Ali, "how could you ever be all that, when every one knows you are the most beautiful woman in the world?" And he asked her: "Don't you think you'd like to have me tell you how beautiful you are?"

And Fatima had to laugh at his eagerness,

THE BLESSED COMMONPLACE 345

but she told him: "Tell me, Ali. But," she told him, "try to tell me some new way, for I have heard the old way so many times."

"Nay," said Ali eagerly, "I have thought of a new way this time. Listen!" And he began with her eyes and her hair, which he said were like the night, and compared her lips to the soft red petals of roses, and ran through quite a catalogue of her perfections, ending with her feet, which he said were the feet of a young gazelle upon fields of clover.

And Fatima listened thoughtfully and did not laugh at him, but said, when he had finished: "Nay, perhaps the old way is the best way. For it is so — descriptive!" And she looked thoughtfully at Ali and said in her heart: "Nay, is he not a child and a dear fool?"

And she was very thoughtful after that and sat silent for a long time. And at last she looked up where Thout was and said: "Now I have thought. And though it was very clever of me to eat my cake and have it, yet am I not sure that was my very cleverest stroke. For I think my cleverest stroke was to think of what no other woman ever thought of doing,

and pick a fool for my husband. For what other woman does not look first for a clever man, or a wise man, or a handsome man, or a sentimental man, or a young man? And look how witless her choosing is. For is not a clever man uncomfortable for a husband, because he is always suspicious of his wife's greater cleverness? And a wise man is too fixed in his own purposes, and she cannot turn him to her own purposes save by cajolery. But she cannot hold a sentimental man to her purposes, for he flitteth always from one purpose to another purpose. And a handsome man grows unhandsome, if not downright fat, and a young man grows old. Give me a fool for a husband every time! For when you tell a fool to go, he goeth, and to come, he cometh, and to eat, he eateth, and to get up, he getteth himself up. And he is never obstinate, and never angry, and never jealous or impatient, and he never answereth back nor argueth, but is quiet and peaceable and patient and gentle and loving, and in all things a very perfect husband and a great comfort to have in the house. Nay," said Fatima to Thout, "that was indeed my greatest stroke, and clever as I am, then was I

THE BLESSED COMMONPLACE 347

cleverest when I picked a fool for my husband."

And though it was Thout's self who had suggested the desirability of Ali to Fatima, he was magnanimous as became a god, and never winked or blinked or stopped or paused, nor did the slightest thing that could detract from Fatima's enjoyment.

And Fatima clapped her hands and cried to Ali: "Nay, I have often said that I am the cleverest woman that ever lived and that others cannot compare with me. And now I know it. For what other woman ever was clever enough to think of half the advantages of picking a fool for her husband? Tell me that, Ali, if you can."

"Nay then," said Ali, "am I a fool then?"

Fatima told him truthfully and a little sadly: "Nay, Ah, I'm afraid you are," and Ali said apologetically: "I'm sorry you don't like me to be a fool." "Oh," cried Fatima, "I don't mind it in the least," and Ali brightened and told her: "Then I don't mind it myself. For it's not at all uncomfortable."

And Fatima had to laugh at him for that, but

very gently. And she told him: "Nay, Ali, though you be a fool, you are a dear besides." And Fatima kissed him.

And Ali said: "Nay, but I'm glad I am a dear, besides." And he asked her: "I pray thee call me a dear again, besides."

"Nay," cried Fatima, "not twice in the one day. But perhaps to-morrow, if you are very good."

"I'll be very good then, besides," Ali told her, so that she cried: "Nay, is not this the perfectest husband ever was! Promise me one thing, Ali, and I'll call you the very perfectest husband ever was." And he asked her what and she told him: "Promise me you'll never get fat."

"Don't you like fat men?" said Ali. "Then I will be very careful," and Fatima laughed and told him: "Now it's getting late and we must be going home. But first we have to catch I'timashusi - kardushi - yani - Mahali - Jahali —"

"Nay," said Ali, "call him just Rameses." So they called him just Rameses, and caught him, and Ali mounted him, and Fatima walked back to her home beside Ali and Rame-

THE BLESSED COMMONPLACE 349

ses. And as they came into the market-place, Ali told Fatima: "Now you'd better shut your eyes. For I see my cousin Omar, the Sheikh, ahead of us, and I think he must be about the fattest man there is anywhere."

"Nay," cried Fatima, "is Omar still alive, then? I thought he was dead!" "How could he be dead," said Ali, "when he is still alive? But you'd better shut your eyes, if you don't like fat men."

And Fatima laughed and said: "Nay, this once will I keep them open," and she looked and saw Omar, and laughed to see him again, and greeted him friendlily. And though he pursed his lips and muttered in his beard and would not speak to her, Fatima could not be angry that day, even with him. For he was truly the fattest man she had ever seen. And she said in her heart: "Surely a man as fat as he is hath not very long to live. And now it cometh to my mind that my husband is his cousin and his only kinsman and his heir." And so she greeted even Omar very friendlily and went on merrily with Ali to their house.

.

And now, my lords and ladies, — or should I name my ladies first, since you all be Christians more or less? — Now, such of my ladies and my lords as have had patience to be also my gentle readers to this length, I must thank you one and all for your kind attention and tell you that here ended the strange adventures Fatima had, who was the most beautiful and the very cleverest creature ever was, and knew it. For after this she had no more adventures in her life than you have or I have.

For she and Ali lived happily forever after and one day more than that. And they had simply scores and scores of children. Naturally half the children had the wit of their mother Fatima, which was superlative, and the other half had the wit of their father Ali, which was no wit at all, so that the average wit of the children was just plain average wit.

And with her first child, Fatima, who had been slim, grew plumpish, and with the second, stoutish, and with the third, fattish, and long before even the first score had finished being born, she, who had so hated fatness, was quite undeniably fat and short of breath, and alto-

THE BLESSED COMMONPLACE 351

gether the last person to be a figure in adventure or romance.

But for a long time her face, which truly had been very lovely, retained a certain comeliness, so that strangers seeing her for the first time were likely to look a second time and tell each other: "There's a woman must have been quite good-looking once."

And for even a longer time her mind retained a certain native liveliness, so that in the evenings, when at last her scores and scores of children were in bed and she had an hour to herself, with nothing to do but straighten out her children's clothing and mend what needed mending and tell Ali where his pipe was and his tobacco, she liked to give free rein to her imagination and live over in her mind the strange adventures she might have had.

And once in a great while, for the road was longish and her breath was shortish, she liked to walk out where, to the north of Ashmunein, stand the considerable remnants of Thout's temple. And she liked to sit down in the quiet court of the temple, for its quiet was a help to thought, and she could indulge in a placid reverie there and dream over the

dreams she had dreamed there when she was a girl.

And 'Thout, under whose solemn-curving, haughty beak and absorbed eye in profile a thousand generations have dreamed out their dreams, as a thousand more perchance will dream theirs, never winked or blinked or paused or turned or swerved from his occupation with his tablets and his stylus. He must be quite busy if he takes notes on all the dreams. And after all Fatima was just a woman and Thout was a god, so why should he not be haughty with her?

But it is a comfort to know that Fatima did not mind Thout's haughtiness. She had her reveries to occupy her, and besides, her fatness had smothered most of the old impatience in her.

There, my ladies and my lords my readers, sits Fatima, and if any of you have loved her youth a little, as I loved it, you can say good-by to her now without too much regret. For most of what was interesting in her, the quick, impatient responsiveness of youth, has gone out of her.

As it goeth out of most of us, and leaveth us

THE BLESSED COMMONPLACE 353

only the over-mellow lees of life, without tang or surprise or sprightliness, which we pretend to prize so high! and call wisdom. And when this wisdom alone is left, there be no strange adventures left for any of us. For this wisdom is a reliable, sober-stepping brute for hacking on the hard highroad, but a timorous and uncertain beast for taking adventurous fences with.

Al-hamdu li 'l-'llâhi! Allâh's be what praise we owe Him for our wisdom.

THE END.



D.



2/25

