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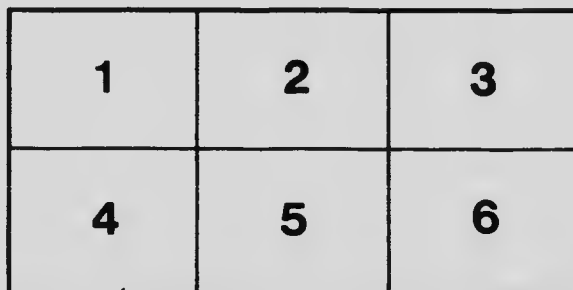
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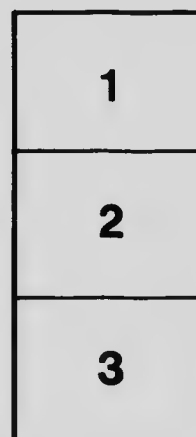
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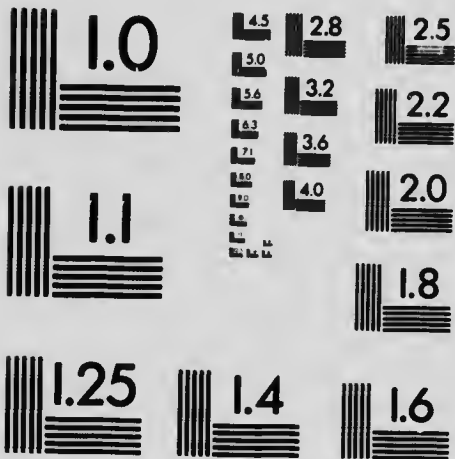
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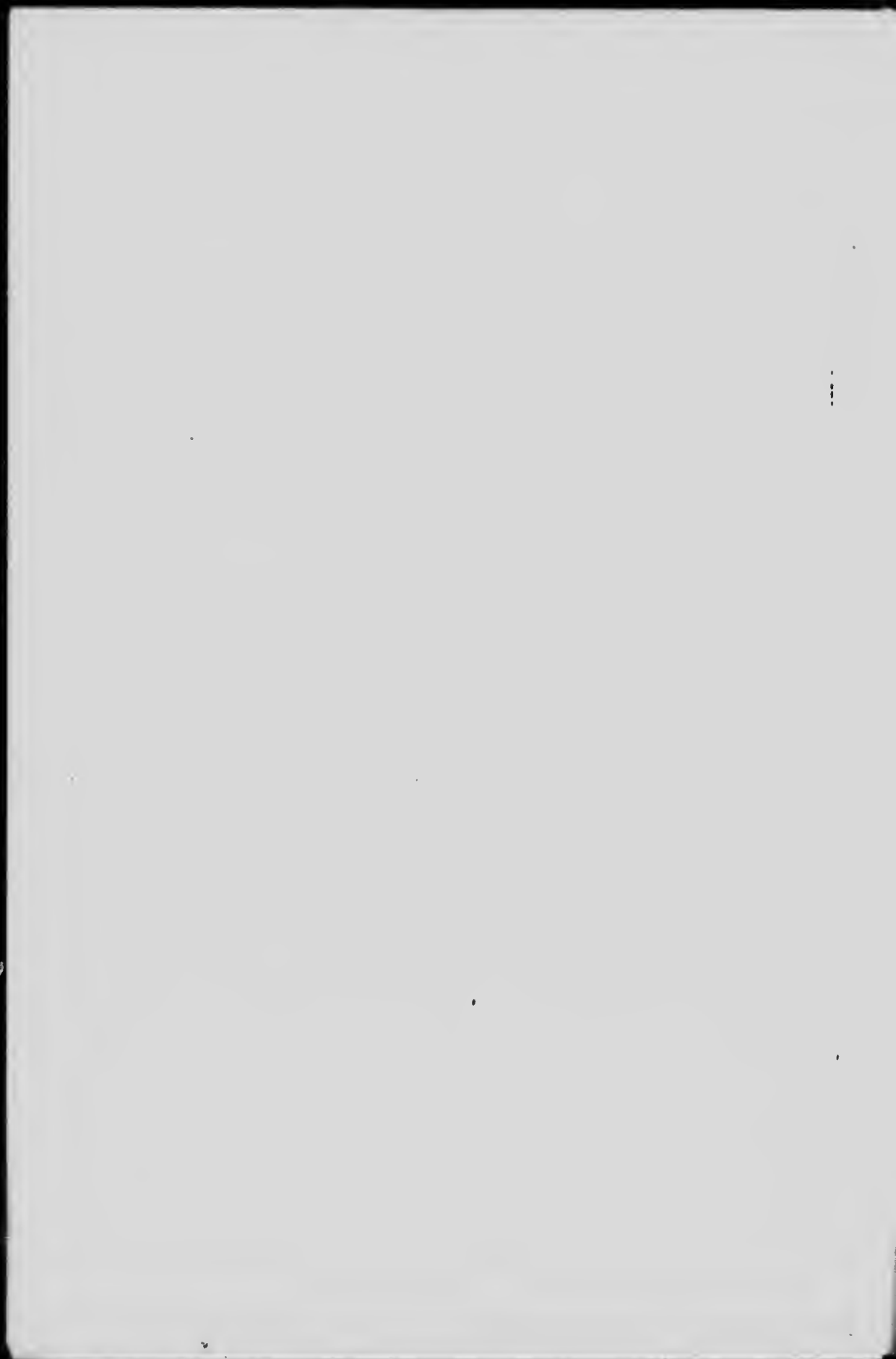


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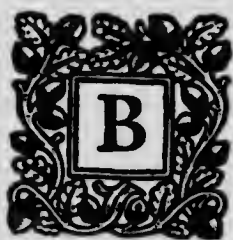




"GRANT WAS SITTING AS CLOSE TO HAIDÉE AS HE COULD."

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Page 55.



Y SNARE *of* LOVE ♥ ♥ ♥ ♥

By ARTHUR W. MARCHMONT

AUTHOR OF "WHEN I WAS CZAR," "SARITA, THE CARLIST,"
"FOR LOVE OR CROWN," "IN THE NAME OF A WOMAN," ETC.

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CHAPTER I

THE RESCUE

"WHAT'S that?"

As Grant jerked out the question in a quick tone of suspicion and pointed ahead into the gloom of the unlighted road, I heard the stealthy tread of rapid footsteps and caught a glimpse of the shadowy outline of a vanishing figure.

"Probably some Palace spy curious about our movements," I said. "Nothing unusual in a land of spies like this. Did he pass us?"

"I don't know. Very likely. I was thinking, and chanced to look up and saw him. Poor devil, he has to earn his living somehow;" and with a shrug of the shoulders he dismissed the matter.

"Plenty of people in Constantinople are curious about you, Cyrus; and when we take to night strolls in unfrequented spots it would be strange if we were not shadowed."

My companion did not respond to the implied invitation of my words, and we walked on in silence.

I had plenty of food for thought. If any other man than Cyrus Dennison Grant, the young American millionaire and my close friend and chief, had conceived the big scheme which had brought us into such intimate companionship in Constantinople, I should have laughed at it as a wild impossibility. But his wealth, his daring brain, his boundless enterprise and

resource, his tireless energy, his dauntless confidence, and, above all, his magnetic personality had overcome so many apparently insuperable obstacles that we were already far on the road to success, and victory seemed assured.

I was deep in his confidence, and we had been discussing our prospects that lovely April night as we strolled and smoked on an unfrequented road between Pera and the dirty suburb of Kassim Pasha. But there was one thing he had not told me—why for the last two or three weeks he had taken every opportunity to bring me out on this particular road at about the same time. And the matter puzzled me.

It was barely ten o'clock, and the lights of the European colony behind us shone brightly, throwing up a glare on the low scudding clouds which the soft south wind from the Sea of Marmara was driving up; while to our left, across the Golden Horn, lay Stambul, dark and solemn in a gloom relieved by scarcely a single light. A sullen contrast typifying, as it seemed always to me, the sullen protest of Mohammedanism against the encroachments of the nations of the West.

Something of the same thought was in my companion's mind, for when a turn in the road gave us a fuller view of Stambul with the intervening water below us, he stopped and stood looking across the great harbour on which the twinkling lights of the shipping showed up against the pall-like shadow beyond.

"Islam sleeping away his strength," he exclaimed, his low sonorous voice deep with feeling. "Think what it might be; aye, and what it shall be before long." As he spoke, he drew himself to his full

height, his great figure towering above me and his strong handsome profile duskily outlined in the gloom of the night, while he drew in a deep breath as though drinking in inspiration for his great purpose. "By God, a scheme fit for a conqueror!"

Admiring and almost reverencing the man as I did his sudden enthusiasm infected me, and together we stood, too full for words, intoxicated with the promise of success, and gazing down on what should be the realm of future great triumphs, in which he was to be the chief, and I but a very minor actor.

Knowing his mood, I did not break the silence even when we resumed our walk and turned from the road into a more unfrequented by-way. We came soon near the spot at which he usually turned, and our footsteps were slackening, when the stillness of the night was broken by a woman's scream.

"Did you hear that?" asked Grant, in a tone of suppressed excitement. "It's a woman's voice. I have dreaded it."

"It's a row somewhere, that's all," I replied, little dreaming how fateful that night stroll was to prove to us all, and puzzled by his last words. "How do you mean you've dreaded it?"

"Listen," he cried, not heeding my question.

"My dear fellow, we can do nothing; and we'd far better get back home than meddle in a thing of this kind." But my words might have fallen on deaf ears for all their effect upon him.

"Listen," he said again, laying his powerful hand on my shoulder while he strained every nerve to catch a sound.

The cry was repeated; now louder and more insist-

ent—a cry for help, unmistakably; and as we were expecting it we could locate its direction.

“Come; there’s a woman in trouble. Quick;” and turning, he rushed off at a pace that made it difficult for me to follow him. “I know the way,” he called to me over his shoulder: and to my further surprise he made good his words by threading his way readily through some devious paths between dense shrubberies, until we came out at the rear of a house of considerable size of the existence of which I had been ignorant.

Some ugly business was going on inside, and as we reached the house the noise of struggling, and of men’s voices raised in threatening altercation, came to us through an open window. A deep groan, followed immediately by the report of a pistol, came next, and then shouts and curses in guttural Turkish; and once more the woman’s screams and loud cries for help, first in Turkish, and then in Greek.

“They are Turk’s and someone’s life’s in danger,” I said hurriedly. My companion had not waited to hear me, however; but with a knowledge of the place that continued to surprise me, rushed to a door, opened it and dashed into the house.

“It’s a fool’s game,” I cried as a caution. I might as well have called to the wind; and fearing I knew not what, I followed and laid a detaining hand on his arm as he was opening an inner door.

“Do you realize what you’re doing, Cyrus?” I asked. “You are forcing yourself into a matter that may ruin everything. In Heaven’s name, be careful, and think of the consequences.”

“If you’re afraid, man, stay outside,” he answered,

fiercely, in a tone he had never used to me before, while he shook off my hand impatiently. "Do you think I don't know where I am?" and as he spoke he opened the door, and we burst in.

It was a strange scene indeed into which we dashed thus unceremoniously. The door opened into a large long hall, very dimly lighted by two lamps at the far end fixed on pillars at the foot of a broad stairway. Standing some three steps above the floor was a woman, her face in shadow, her hair streaming over her shoulders, and her dress disordered, facing three men armed with knives, who were gesticulating and threatening her in loud angry tones. We had arrived at the moment of crisis, for even as they menaced her, they were hanging back in fear of the revolver with which she held them at bay. Between them and the stairway two bodies lay on the ground; one, that of a woman, still with the stillness of death; the other, a man, groaning and writhing as if wounded.

As we entered, the woman fired at her assailants and missed them, and the report of the pistol was followed by a great shout of rage from Grant, who cried as he rushed forward:

"I am here, and will save you. Have no fear."

"The blessed Virgin be thanked," called the woman in response in Greek.

Her assailants had been making too much noise to notice our entrance, but faced about on hearing Grant's sonorous voice, and having no stomach for a fight under such altered circumstances, and taking fright probably at Grant's big muscular form, they hesitated a second, and then bolted like rabbits through a door close to them. As they scrambled through it the

woman fired again, and again missed them, while Grant seeing she was safe and unhurt rushed after them, and flung himself at the door which they had fastened behind them.

Then I had an opportunity of looking closely at the woman, whom I instantly recognised. She was Haidée Patras, the lovely Greek, one of the most beautiful woman in all Constantinople, about whose personality there was a considerable mystery. In a moment I guessed the reasons for Grant's sudden liking for these night strolls.

"You are not hurt?" I asked.

"I am not hurt," she answered, and with a smile of indescribable loveliness and gratitude she moved down into the light and greeted Grant as he approached. "I was only frightened for the moment. You saved me, sir, and I thank you," she said, in English, and coming forward with the carriage of a queen, she laid down her pistol and gave him her hand. He took it and carried it to his lips; and many things were made plain to me as I watched the faces of both while they stood gazing each into the other's eyes, oblivious, as it seemed, of my presence.

With a half sigh she withdrew her hand, and then sank as if exhausted into a low chair, in which she lay back. Only for an instant, however, and then she sprang up.

"I am forgetting my faithful Lelia, and Koprili; shame to me when they may have given their lives for me." She bent over the woman who lay so still, while I turned to the man. I found that he was wounded, and had lost a great quantity of blood judging by the pool which lay all about him on the

floor; and he moaned and groaned dismally at every touch. With Grant's aid I found the wounds, which did not look so serious as the loss of blood suggested; and when we had bound up the hurts we laid him on one of the divans. In the meanwhile the woman had recovered consciousness, and with her mistress's help, delicately, tenderly and lovingly given, she succeeded in getting to her feet and staggering up the stairway.

"This is a queer business, Cyrus," I said, when we were alone.

"I wish I could have caught those infernal villains," he replied, glancing angrily at the door by which they had escaped.

"I didn't know you knew the neighbourhood so well," I added, a little drily.

"If I had not, there would have been murder done."

"True; the murder of a very lovely woman. But what the deuce does it all mean?"

"A pretty easy story to read, I should think."

"I'm not so sure of that. Matters are generally just what they don't seem to be in this sublime land of craft. We're probably only at the beginning of things. What are you going to do next?"

"I don't know. What we have rescued we must keep safe, I suppose."

"H'm! That means you are going to charge yourself with the safe keeping of the Greek?"

"Yes, if it's necessary," he answered, with characteristic decisiveness, as though that ended the matter.

"Women are the devil in Turkey," I muttered.

"This woman is no devil, Mervyn;" and as he said this he looked me straight in the eyes for an instant.

"Well, I'm with you, if it's necessary," I replied,

after a pause. "But for Heaven's sake let us try to bottom the thing and see where we're going."

"Do I generally forget that?" There was a suggestion, scarcely perceptible it is true, of defiance in his manner and words; an unwonted intention to keep me outside his real feelings and thoughts; a wish to fence with me.

"We have never before had to take a woman into the reckoning," I persisted.

"And may, or may not, have to do so now."

"As you will," I returned, with a shrug of the shoulders. "But, in any case, I'm with you."

"I know you are, and so, have patience."

"If you bottom the thing, yes. But if *you* don't I shall. She's coming back."

We caught the sound of her soft draperies on the stairway above, and, when she came down, I observed that she had taken advantage of the interval to array herself beautifully. She was dressed in a clinging gown of soft silk, her hair was done up, and she wore many jewels. She was obviously anxious to look at her best even at a moment of such crisis; and the fact struck me as significant. But her rare beauty of face and witching grace of form needed no rich setting of either costume or jewels. She was the loveliest woman I had ever seen: and I viewed her with quite dispassionate eyes: and she looked glorious and radiant as, with face slightly flushed and eyes aglow with emotion, she repeated her thanks to Grant for having rescued her.

She spoke English fluently, and her beautifully modulated voice gave a piquancy to her slight foreign accent which added to its fascination. She was cer-

tainly a woman to turn men's heads, and I could not wonder that Grant was deeply moved by her irresistible charm. When she turned from him to thank me also, her simple words seemed full of feeling and gratitude, although I did not fail to notice that she placed my services on a very different level from those of my friend. Her rescue had been his work; I was merely a subordinate accessory; and she wished him to see that she understood her chief debt of gratitude was to him.

Grant was strangely agitated. I had never seen him in such a mood. To me he had always been the very type of self-strength and self-reliant confidence; knowing exactly what he meant to do and say; and doing and saying it promptly with clear-cut resolution and calm definiteness; and yet now he was more like a great bashful child, pliant, hesitating, stumbling over his words, and for the moment irresolute and tongue-tied. I knew that his purpose was strong within him, however, and to give him time to recover outward possession, I took up the rôle of questioner.

"You were in great danger, mademoiselle; do you think you are safe now?"

"While you are here, yes; but in future, alas, no," she said, sadly. "My servants have deserted me—except my woman, Lelia, and my faithful Koprili. Is he much hurt? Ah! it was terrible!" and she sighed and glanced to where we had laid the man, her lovely face full of tender solicitude.

"He is not seriously hurt, I hope; but he seems to have lost a good deal of blood. We have bound up his wounds. Do you know the reason for such an attack?"

The question seemed to distress her greatly, for she lay back a moment in her chair and covered her face with her hands.

"The villains shall not go unpunished. I will see to that," exclaimed Grant, finding his voice, impetuously.

At this she uncovered her face, now very pale, and glancing at him, smiled sadly and shook her head.

"You can do nothing, my friend—I may call you friend, after what you have done for me. But in this, even you are powerless. You *can* do nothing; nay, you must not even attempt to do anything. I have brought you into danger as it is. It is that which grieves me."

"Will you tell us the reasons?" I asked

"It is better not—far better not. You had best leave me now, at once."

"No," came from Grant, in a strong decided tone. "That is impossible."

"Spoken as I was sure you would speak—but it must be as I say. If you knew, you would see it as I do."

"Will you tell us?" I again asked.

"It is a long story and a strange one—but better not."

"You may trust us absolutely," declared Grant, emphatically.

"Do you think I doubt that? Ah, no!" and she put out her hand as if to give it to him, but checked herself, and smiled upon him and then sighed.

"But you are in peril here," said my friend.

"Yes, but for myself I do not fear. It is not that.

It may mean so much more—so very much more ;” and she added the last words despondently. “It is that which troubles me.”

“Tell me that I may help. I have influence.”

“I should but bring trouble on you, while you may not save me.”

“It will save valuable time if you tell us at once,” I said.

“It is a long story, but—” she paused and added in a low, almost caressing tone as she looked at Grant, “I should so like to tell you,” and with just a shade of emphasis on the pronoun. Then with a change, as if taking a sudden resolution, she added, earnestly : “I will tell you, and put my life and that of others in your hands.” She paused and put her hand to her brow. “I must collect my thoughts. Oh, I wonder what you will think of it.”

And as she sat thinking for a few moments in silence and we waited for her to begin, I looked at Grant and noted the rapt, intense, expectant look in his shining eyes as he feasted them upon her wondrous beauty. And seeing it, I knew that for good or ill the fortunes of the Greek were for the future linked with his.

CHAPTER II

THE GREEK'S STORY

THE vital significance to us of the beautiful Greek's rescue and of the story which she afterwards told us can only be thoroughly appreciated when the reason of our presence in Turkey is understood.

Grant was a man whose ideas were big, even for an American, and his practical energy was as tireless as his courage was indomitable. "He could think most easily in millions," he used to say; and although he was only a year or two over thirty, he had already been phenomenally successful in piling up wealth. His father had left him more than a million sterling, and in less than ten years he had handled this sum so deftly in New York, that when he came to Constantinople he was worth perhaps ten times as much, while he possessed the absolute confidence of men ready to back him to almost any extent.

His Turkish enterprise was entirely characteristic of him; and not the least of its attractiveness for him was the fact that it was fraught with interests that touched closely the policy of all Europe. He had first come East for a holiday, and in the course of a hurried scramble through the northeast provinces of Turkey, his keen eyes had been quick to observe the vast wealth that lay there undeveloped. He had instantly conceived a plan to develop it; and while

his friends were busy with schemes to capture the industries of Western Europe, he determined to capture those of the East. The project was daringly ambitious, and although commercial in form, it involved political issues of such tremendous consequences as to have daunted any man less resolute than himself.

The pith of it was nothing less than the ultimate solution of the Eastern Question by the gradual Americanization of part of European Turkey and the Balkan States, commencing, of course, with a comparatively small district and then extending the sphere of operations.

The district he selected lay on the northeast seaboard as remote as possible from the capital; and while engaged in the work of industrial development, he intended to introduce a system of good government administered by carefully picked Americans and Englishmen; thus enriching the Turkish population of the place while, at the same time, giving them the blessings of personal security and just rule.

The difficulties were, of course, enormous, but to him no more than incentives; and in the six months he had been at work he had made remarkable progress. He was a born ruler of men, with a profound insight into human nature; he had poured out money with a prodigal hand in a land where bribery is all powerful, until more than half the people of influence about the court were in his pay; and his tact, shrewdness, capacity and personal magnetism had succeeded with many of those whom money could not buy.

With the Sultan, Abdul Hamid, his success had been extraordinary. Utterly opposite as were their characters, the Sultan had been won over completely,

and Grant was trusted by him to a degree that was positively remarkable. He was always welcome at the Palace of Yildiz Kiosk; and the ruler who shut himself from his people so rigidly that he was little better than a state prisoner, received Grant almost with effusion. He entered readily into his plans, or so much of them rather as Grant deemed it advisable to disclose, and without demur accorded him concessions which other men would have given half their lives to obtain. Grant handled him most admirably; and Abdul was so fascinated by the prospects of wealth and prosperity which were constantly dangled before him, that in fact the concessions were in Grant's hands before he was ready to deal with them.

He had, however, hurried forward his preparations, and matters were fast ripening to the moment for action, when Grant had begun to shew his partiality for those evening walks, the last of which had had such dramatic consequences.

Up to that time I do not think that any thought for a woman had ever entered his head; but knowing his exceptional pertinacity of purpose and his headstrong will when once fixed on an object, I could not but be apprehensive of the consequences now when I found him so strangely moved by this beautiful Greek, watched the rapturous looks he cast upon her, and saw how his strong nature was swayed by her words and glances.

"Mine is a strange story, she began in her soft, rich voice. "I am, as you know, a Greek, but, as you do not know, the child of martyred parents. My father was Greek, my mother Armenian, and my earliest recollections are of a home all happiness and

peace. My father was a merchant and prospered—and prosperity brought on him what prosperity always brings to an Armenian—the curse of the Turk's hate. I was but ten years old when that curse began to cloud my life, and before I was fourteen the heel of the oppressor came crushing down upon us. My father was the justest and kindest of men, as my mother was the most loving and gentle; but my father was rich, and the Turks hated him, and they never rested until they had hounded him to death; dogs that they are."

Her eyes flashed fire at this burst from her in a spasm of passion. For a moment she paused and I heard Grant draw his breath quickly, as his manner was when moved.

"I will not harry you with details. I was thirteen when one of the risings came which these beasts of prey instigate as a specious pretext for them to wreak their 'blood lust' on their victims. My father was as innocent of harm as a child unborn, but—they murdered him; and when my mother rushed in a tragic effort to turn their foul purpose, they laughed as they beat out her brains before my very eyes. Oh, God, that fearful memory!"

She paused again, overcome by her emotions, and it was some time before she could control herself sufficiently to continue.

"I was spared, gladly though I would have died with those who were all in all to me; but I was spared—for what? Because they deemed me pretty child enough to be sold into that most infamous of all slavery, the hareem of the Most Illustrious the Sultan, the Padishah, the Shadow of God. Shadow of God!"

she repeated with bitter scorn. "Shadow of Hell, rather!"

The effect of these words on Grant may be readily imagined.

"Go on," he said, his voice low and resonant with passion, his deep chest heaving with tumultuous emotion.

She read his thoughts instinctively.

"No, I escaped that doom. Two of the devils who had me in charge grudged me to their Sublime Master, coveting me for themselves; and while they fought for me I escaped from both in the care of an Armenian. I succeeded in leaving the country. I went, where do you think; not to Greece through fear of pursuit; but to America, liberty-loving America; and there succeeded in getting that part of his fortune which my father, having always the fear of violence before him, had stored with some merchant friends. With them I lived, drinking in the gospel of freedom and nursing the dreams of revenge. Oh that wondrous land of modern miracles! You can understand something of what my young soul felt in your noble realm of perfect freedom; how my instincts of righteousness and right developed in the years that followed—my life saddened always by the memory of that awful past. I brooded on the thought of how bright and glorious and happy would life have been had this land of bane and sorrow and oppression been free like yours. But my purpose had never faltered, and was strengthened by all I saw."

"Your purpose?" I asked as she paused.

"My vengeance—if you prefer it so," she cried, turning to me and speaking vehemently. "Vengeance

upon the doers of wrong, and liberty for the wronged and oppressed in this black hell for us Eastern Christians."

Her sudden vehemence silenced me, and after a pause, she continued in a tone of suppressed bitterness,

"What could a woman do, you will ask; a woman in a land where women are only better than cattle, because they cost more to feed and clothe and house. But I *have* done something. I have plotted and schemed and conspired. I have wealth, and have used it in a land where every man has his price. I have found others who are sick to death of misrule and tyranny; and to-day it is largely by my work and effort that the goal is in sight, that the reign of the blood-thirsty coward of Yildiz Kiosk is drawing to its close, and that the dawn of liberty is at hand." Her cheeks mantled with a flush of enthusiasm, and her eyes shone brightly as she said this.

Neither of us spoke. We might well be silent indeed; for apart from the lovely picture of enthusiasm which this most glorious creature presented, and the influence of her glowing words, we had to think of how such a plot as she indicated would influence our plans. Whether Grant had a thought of the kind I cannot say. He sat gazing at her with the same rapt expression of intense and absorbing admiration; but I saw the rocks close ahead, and a hundred possible complications suggested themselves in the moments of silence that followed.

"And these men we found here to-night?" I asked after a while.

"Need you ask? Someone has betrayed me; and these men were sent to do that for which a thousand

hands can be hired at any moment on the treacherous streets of Stambul—to murder a Christian. They were Palace-hired assassins; and but for your help would have slain me. My servants had been either frightened or decoyed away, or kidnapped—what is that in this land of blood?—and when I was unprotected, these miscreants burst into my house. Had they succeeded, the tale would have been told to-morrow that my servants had risen against me and murdered me for my wealth; and all police and Court officials would have made a fine show of energy in hunting them down and putting them to death for the crime—for they are Christians. As it is—" she stopped abruptly and threw up her white hands.

"As it is?" I repeated.

"They will refuse to believe my story and make another attempt when success will seem more certain. What is one paltry Christian woman more or less to the murderous devils of Islam?"

"By God, it is infamous!" cried Grant, passionately.

"Your God is my God, and only suffers these things to be that His people shall combine to bring about the change. He has saved me now, by your agency, and he will save me again. I have no fear for myself, and when my work is done, and not till then, He will call me to Himself." She spoke with all the thrilling resignation of a martyr.

"But you cannot stay here. It is not safe," cried Grant.

"Where shall I go? I could turn coward and fly the country, putting myself under the protection of my Patriarch. But whatever I may be, I am no coward. I shall stay."

"But not here," he persisted emphatically.

"And why not here? Has not God worked a miracle that it should be you who have saved me? I know something of the task you are about here in Pera. I know that you are working in your way for reform and for the development of some of the neglected wealth of the country. I know you have the arch-monster's ear and favour. You are working in your way, I in mine for the same end—do you think it mere chance that sent you here to-night to save me, and thus brought us two together? The very attempt to murder me has made me the stronger by your friendship. But I am a dangerous friend for any man to have in this land of darkness and evil; and if you will take my counsel, you will leave me, aye now at once, and forget we have ever met and that your courage saved me. I am not afraid."

But Grant had been thinking his way to a decision, and having reached it, announced it with characteristic emphasis.

"I shall see this right through," he said firmly. "Right through. You are right; we are working for the same end by different paths. We'll work together. You will not stay here, but come, at any rate for the present, to us—my sister and aunt will welcome you; and until your plans are better shaped you will stay with them. Meanwhile this scheme of yours to depose the Sulta..?"

"How do you know that?" The question came in a quick tone of alarm.

"You have told me now in almost so many words. It shall be looked into: your secret is safe with us: and we'll see what's inside t. And now it's all settled."

"I cannot leave my two faithful servants."

"Then bring them with you. You can't stay here. Mervyn, will you go and hunt up some kind of conveyance—if necessary a couple of carriages from the White House, while Mademoiselle Patras gets ready. I've made up my mind. I see this thing right through."

And in that prompt and decisive way he took command, and to my not very great surprise the Greek yielded to him, after offering only the smallest and faintest protest.

We all yielded to him, indeed, when he was in one of his commanding moods; for it was useless to attempt to do otherwise. But when she had left us to make her preparations I ventured upon a mild remonstrance.

"She's a very beautiful woman, Cyrus, and she is certainly in a bad strait; but if she's in the thick of a plot to get rid of Abdul Hamid, isn't it a big risk you're running to shelter her at the White House?"

"And if it is?" he asked abruptly.

"Well, you have big things on hand, and they may be easily jeopardised if the Palace gets suspicious."

"Would you have me leave her here to be murdered?" he asked, with a frown.

"I didn't suggest that."

"I'm sure of that, and glad of it, too. You leave this to me, and bring those carriages along, there's a good fellow. I don't freeze to the notion of stopping on here a moment longer than necessary."

I went then and left him sitting at the foot of the stairs, the revolver close to his hand, his arms folded and his face, partly in shadow, wearing a stern, set, determined expression, indicative of his new strong resolve.

CHAPTER III

ENID GRANT

I MAY be pardoned if I say here a word or two about myself and the position of matters at the White House, as Grant had named the building in Pera which served the double purpose of residence and offices.

I had first known the Grants some five or six years before in New York, when I was there with my father, Lord Bulverton, on a somewhat peculiar errand. As a younger son, I was never of much account, and from my childhood had been a very rolling stone. I managed to get into trouble and debt at Harrow, so that when a chance offered of shipping me to the East of Europe, where my uncle, my mother's brother, was consul at Adrianople, my family had seized it eagerly, much to my personal delight.

I had one gift, the power of acquiring languages, and Adrianople gave me full scope for it. I learnt Turkish thoroughly and could not only speak it fluently, but, what is much rarer with Europeans, I learnt to write it well. It takes nine years we are always told to learn to write Turkish; but it did not take me so long; and while I was learning it, I picked up Greek, Arabic, and several other tongues to be heard in that strange polyglot land.

The East had a great fascination for me, and while helping my uncle in business I roamed over Turkey,

Greece, the Balkan States and Southern Russia. The wandering life suited me, and it was with genuine regret that in obedience to my father's wishes I went home to England, in pursuance to his plans for my settlement in life.

He wished me to marry for money I discovered, and for a year I bored myself and all about me by going into society: that miserable make-believe of enjoyment: until he carried me off to New York where his plan came very near achievement.

At the ambassador's I met Miss Grant. I was drawn to her from the first moment and was soon head over heels in love with her. I knew merely that her name was Grant, Enid Valerie Grant, and I neither asked nor cared whether she was rich or poor. She was bright, clever, and, to me, fascinating; a startling contrast to all the women I had ever met; and so long as I knew nothing of her wealth, her companionship was just the sweetest thing in life to me.

But it was very different when my father told me she was the sister of Cyrus Dennison Grant, one of the richest and most successful men in the States, and a millionairess in her own right.

"You have been a great many sorts of a fool in your life, Mervyn," he declared with paternal pithiness; "but you seem to have shewn some glimmer of common sense in this, and you have a chance of redeeming your position now with this Grant girl; and you must marry her. I've spoken to the brother and he's agreeable and says she likes you. So you've nothing to do but propose; and don't waste time about it."

My father meant well, no doubt, but he could not

have taken a step more certain to set me against the thing. My relatives declare I am a fool in money matters and without a scrap of ambition ; most of my friends have taken much the same view, although they have expressed it differently ; and the fact is certain that so soon as I knew she was wealthy, I became self-conscious and uneasy in her presence and began to loath myself for that despicable thing—a needy fortune hunter.

To make matters worse, Grant, having no knowledge of women's ways or their hearts, detached his mind for a moment from his colossal business affairs and spoke bluntly to his sister. The result may be imagined.

My father was anxious to return to London and kept urging me to get the matter settled ; Grant was uncomfortably significant, and Enid herself had so changed that she seemed as ill at ease as I was. Our pleasant comradeship was at an end ; and as ill luck would have it, a very prominent engagement of the kind between an English Earl and a well-known millionaire's daughter was announced just then. By chance Enid told me of it on the very day on which I had intended to ask her to marry me. I was fumbling and stumbling to get to the point, doing it nervously and fatuously like a fool, I admit, when she reduced me to a sort of pulpy silence by asking with a laugh whether I thought English family or American dollars weighed the heavier in the scales of such an engagement as that of the Earl.

I accepted my defeat with a laugh to cover my discomfiture. I did more indeed. I was so out of conceit with my part in the transaction, and so piqued by

Enid's refusal, that without saying a word, even to my father, I bolted from New York by the next steamer, carrying with me a sick heart, a stinging sense of mortification, a crowd of perplexing doubts as to Enid's real feelings, and a firm resolve to be done for good and all with my father's matrimonial plans on my behalf.

For five years I saw and heard no more of the Grants. I went back to Adrianople and to my life of wandering there, looking for a fortune which I never found, and settling down into content with the small income of some few hundreds a year which came to me quite unexpectedly on the death of my uncle, the Consul.

Then, to my intense surprise, I blundered upon Grant one day in the hills not far from Elbassan, at a moment when my arrival must have been profoundly welcome. He had been prospecting with a servant and a couple of guides in the district where he was acquiring his concessions, and his guides, after the manner of the wily Turk, had led him into an ambush which their friends the brigands had prepared for him. They deserted him there, and he and his servant were making a plucky stand; but things were going awkwardly for him, when the arrival of my little party turned the tables, and together we drove the rascals off.

As a result of this he asked me to join him in the big scheme; the companionship soon ripened into a deep and warm friendship; and I threw myself heart and soul into his work. My knowledge of the people and country enabled me to help him in many ways; and he in return gave me his entire confidence. He

was alone then in the great house at Pera, and his sister's name was barely mentioned between us, until one day, without a word of warning and as much to his surprise as to my concern, Enid herself arrived, bringing with her an aunt, Mrs. Constance Wellings.

Our meeting had its embarrassments for me, if not for her; but after a while we established a sort of armed neutrality arrangement; and I am free to confess that although I was not so foolish as to "go back" on the past, I soon began to feel the old charm of her companionship. I had my own apartments and my own servants, and having much to occupy my time I held aloof so far as practicable. I did not forget that I was a poor man and she a very rich girl, and that the past was dead and buried.

How she would view the dramatic introduction of Haidée Patras into the White House was a question which promised to be interesting; and she was not long in giving me an answer and making me acquainted with her opinion. And a very strong clear cut opinion it was, too.

On the evening following the Greek's arrival I was passing through the drawing-room when she stopped me.

"I suppose you are, as usual, too busy to speak to me, Mr. Ormesby," she began in a decidedly aggressive mood.

"I am rather busy, Miss Grant. You see——"

"That's just what I don't, but what I mean to. Why did you bring that Greek woman here, and who is she, anyway?"

"I did not bring her here. Your brother——"

"Well, I just want to speak to you and I'm going

on the verandah." I followed her and sat down feeling, it must be confessed, none too delighted at the prospective cross-examination.

"Now, Mr. Ormesby, who is she?"

"She's a very beautiful woman, her name is——"

"Yes, yes, we know her name and have seen her face; but who is she?"

"For the life of me I can't tell you. I can give you the sketch of her life, but your brother has probably told you that."

"Cyrus has just lost his head—for the first time in his life, and I suppose you know it. But what has she come here for?"

"For shelter in as bad a storm as ever threatened a woman."

"Shelter?" she repeated with a sniff. "You mean she has shifted the storm centre so as to get us all into it."

"Your brother is not exactly the man to go about seeking unnecessary storms."

"Do you mean to tell me you think that woman is here by accident and not by her own deliberate intention? Please answer me that. You know you can speak straight when you wish."

"I have not formed that opinion."

"Oh you men, what bats you can be when a woman has a pretty face. Well, now I've suggested it, what do you think?"

"If you had been through last night's business, I don't think you'd dream of making any such suggestion."

"So you're in the toils too, eh?" and she shrugged her shoulders and smiled pityingly. She has a very

witching smile when she pleased, but there was no witchery in this one. I made no reply, and in the pause her foot tapped the ground impatiently. "She must have done it cleverly to trap you both. Cyrus I can understand, for he is not himself in this, but you—I should have thought you were different. You know these Easterns, and being an onlooker should certainly have caught some sight of the wires."

"I think you are doing her an injustice—to say nothing of me."

"Of course you do; that's what the fly inside the web said about the spider to his critical friend outside. The whole thing last night was just a web, nothing more, and those white hands of hers have woven it. But I'm outside, thank you, and mean to stay there."

"My dear Miss Grant, you haven't a single fact to go on for such a suggestion."

"Fact, rubbish! What are facts to a woman's instincts about a woman? Do you think I can't read her?" She flashed the words at me quite angrily.

"But you forget; we were present when she was attacked; we saw the men who threatened her; we saw her fire at them; and I myself bound up the wounds of her servant whom they nearly killed, and saw the blood he had shed."

"Nearly killed! Why the man's walking about to-day as well as he ever was in his life; and as for that old hypocrite she calls Lelia—can't anyone lie down on the floor and pretend to be dead? Why, a well-trained dog or a donkey can do it, and probably better than she did, if the truth were known. But there were only two men to fool, and there was the

glamour of her beauty to cover up any bad acting! I tell you she is here of set purpose and for a definite object—now what is it?"

"But she did not wish to come."

"Oh, Mr. Ormesby, do try and think seriously. Why she has thrown herself twice right at Cyrus's head."

"Twice?" I exclaimed in surprise.

"Yes, twice; oh, don't you know? Then I *may* be doing you an injustice as you call it. Her first introduction"—this with a fine play on the word—"was something of the same kind. She was being insulted in one of the streets of Stambul, and Cyrus chanced to be at hand to help her. Chanced! What a chapter of chances, isn't it?"

"I did not know that," said I, not unimpressed.

"Cyrus told me, and she has taken care to let him see her several times since; until he was seized with the sudden longing for those night strolls of yours—near the house. Did you suppose she did not know what he was doing?" she asked triumphantly, and then changing quickly to great earnestness she added; "I tell you she has set herself to win upon him and to be brought here for some purpose; and what that purpose is, someone must find out. Can you? Who is she? What is it she wants? She is a dangerous, treacherous woman, and is here for some dangerous, treacherous purpose. But I tell you more—she shall not stay here. Cyrus is blind for the moment where she is concerned; but at least I thought you would have eyes to see and ears to hear, and I am disappointed."

I had no reply ready and sat for some moments in

considerable uneasiness. The suggestion, that the whole scene of the previous night was just a carefully rehearsed fraud which had succeeded so far as to delude both Grant and myself, was an exceedingly disquieting one. Nobody cares to feel that he has been fooled; and I was naturally unwilling to believe it. If it was true, then the question as to the Greek's motive was one of absolutely vital importance, considering the critical position of affairs. I had had plenty of proofs of Enid's acumen, moreover; and her vehement words and manner impressed me. I never could understand women at any time, and now I was profoundly puzzled.

"What you say is very important, but hadn't we better wait a bit before jumping to conclusions?"

"I shall not wait; I've jumped already," she answered stoutly. "She sha'n't stay here."

"I don't know that your brother contemplates her staying here permanently; but she is for the time in considerable danger . . ."

"Which means you won't help me?" she interrupted.

"I really don't see what to say. She is your brother's guest, and for me to do anything would be extremely invidious. I can only suggest that we allow matters to develop a little.

"Until Cyrus is outwitted, and his plans smashed."

"Don't you think he can be trusted to take care of them?"

"Where this woman is concerned?" and she laughed impatiently.

"Yes, where any one is concerned," said I.

"Which shows how little you understand about

men in love, and Cyrus in particular. I suppose you can see that he *is* in love with her?"

"She is a very beautiful woman, and very fascinating," I admitted, recalling certain parts of the previous night's scene.

"And perhaps you can carry your imagination a step farther, and think what is likely to be the effect of such a passion upon a nature like his?"

"Yes, I think I can."

"Then exercise it still farther, and tell me what will most probably be the effect upon Cyrus' work here if we assume that my view of this Greek woman, and not yours, is the correct one?"

"It might be, I admit, disastrous; but——"

"Never mind the buts," she broke in with quite the Grant directness. "On that assumption, don't you think it would be well to satisfy ourselves about her true motives and intentions?"

"I think it is a matter for your brother."

"And I don't—and so I suppose there's no more to be said. In my opinion she's a fraud, and if you won't help me to prove it, I must find someone else. At any rate she shan't stay here, if I have to insult her and drive her out of the house."

"Put my cushions in the verandah, Lelia, I am weary and will sit there," broke in at that moment from the room behind us the dulcet tones of Haidée Patras, speaking in Greek, and the next instant she came out through the window and gave a start of surprise at seeing us. I would have given a good deal to know how much she had overheard, and I threw a glance of warning at Enid Grant as I arose to offer my chair.

"Ah, I am disturbing you," said the Greek, sweetly.

"Not in the least, mademoiselle," returned Enid, stiffly. I murmured something conventional, and stood while the old woman arranged the cushions, into which her mistress sank with the easy grace that marked all her actions and attitudes.

I felt very awkward and would have fled from the threatening storm had I not feared that an abrupt departure would have led Haidée to draw wrong conclusions as to my conference with Enid. I brought out another chair, therefore, and lighted a cigarette.

"It is a lovely view from here," murmured Haidée.

"We were not admiring the view, mademoiselle, but were speaking of you," replied Enid, with appalling directness.

"Of me?" and the shapely eyebrows were raised as if in surprise.

"Yes, I was asking Mr. Ormesby to tell me all that he knows about you. We Westerners go straight to the point, you know."

"But why not ask me first, then? Monsieur Ormesby has only had the outline of my life, and could tell you little. I will tell you all if you take an interest in my story. It is not a happy one—but it is not yet finished. It is not like the placid lives of your more fortunate compatriots in the land of true liberty; for it began in bloodshed, and will end, where we Eastern women would have it end—in revenge."

"My brother told me you had been in America—how long have you been back in Turkey?"

"Two or three years, in the East that is, as measured

by time; but more than half my life as measured by my work."

In Constantinople, how long?"

"Most of the time, but broken by visits to other places."

"And have you lived alone all that time?"

"I am always alone. Until yesterday, I had no friends here, as you understand friendships in the West."

"And where have you lived?"

"Sometimes here, sometimes there, as the circumstances of my life and work dictated. I have enemies, and could not live as you live in the West in one abode." It was excellently answered. A most natural explanation; but I was once more, as Enid had said, an onlooker, and I saw it might be no more than a plausible cover for facts intentionally concealed. Enid's distrust was beginning to infect me.

"In the West," said Enid, very pointedly "we like more direct answers to direct questions."

"The West does not yet understand the East, Miss Grant; but I should like you to understand me. Your brother has been so kind to me, so brave, so helpful, so generous, so good in offering me a shelter for a few days, that I hope you and I will be friends."

"'For a few days.' Where are you going then?" a note of unquestionable hostility, and spoken sharply.

"I go wherever my work calls me. Where that may be I cannot say yet."

"Nor when?" the question came almost like a sneer.

"I am ready to leave at any moment," answered Haidée, placidly, but with a hardening of tone which was the first symptom of antagonism she had shown.

Then the unexpected happened.

"Who talks of leaving?" This from Grant, who had joined us without our hearing his approach.

"Your sister was asking me when I was leaving, and where I am going, Mr. Grant, and I was trying to make her understand how my movements depend on matters I cannot control. You will understand me, however," she added almost caressingly, and with a glance at his face which made Enid move uneasily in her chair.

"I wish you and Mademoiselle Patras to be great friends, Enid," said Grant, with quiet assertive significance, and in a tone which told me he had quite gathered the meaning of the scene. His sister held her head erect and met his look with one quite as resolute and firm as his, and I thought she was going to make some reply which would have set the highly combustible elements in a blaze; but after a pause, she got up and said merely:

"I am chilled and am going in, Cyrus. I bid you good evening, Mademoiselle Patras," and with a very stately bow she swept past us into the room.

Grant followed her, and I heard him say in a low tone:

"What is the answer to my wish, Enid?"

"I choose my own friends, Cyrus;" was the reply spoken of intention loudly enough to reach us in the verandah. A glance at the Greek's face showed me she had heard and understood, and the curve of the

lips, the hardening of the lines of the face, and the momentary lowering of the brows told of the fire of anger and mortification the words had kindled. But when Grant returned, himself looking stern and angry, she greeted him with a smile, soft, gentle, and loving.

"Your sister is very reserved and hard to know, and I fear she has taken a dislike to me. I am so sorry; but perhaps my instinct was right, I ought not to have come here to sow discord." And she sighed and shook her head sadly.

"My sister is probably returning to America in a few days, mademoiselle," he replied, and I knew how much might lie behind the words. For an instant a light of triumph sprang to her eyes, to be quenched as quickly with one of her ineffable smiles as she glanced in my direction.

Had she forgotten that I was, as Enid had said, an onlooker; and did she fear I had read her expression? Was she no more than a clever actress; and was Enid right in her woman's intuitive judgment? Who could tell? I could not; and the questions baffled me, as I sat there smoking in silence, and feeling very much in the way, while the two talked together in low tones.

CHAPTER IV

COUNT STEPHANI OF PRISTINA

I WAS very busily engaged during the next few days and saw very little of either Enid or the Greek, but I had daily and almost hourly evidences of the change in Grant. He was not like the same man.

We had reached that point in the development of our scheme when many things had to be decided, all requiring care, foresight, and deliberation; and he seemed unable to decide anything. A dozen different intricate negotiations were in progress at the time of supreme importance in which promptness and despatch were vital; but they were all hung up; and when I endeavoured to get him to consider them, he either put me off, or, if we started to discuss them, would break away and lapse into abstracted silence from which I could not rouse him.

One of his most distinctive gifts was his remarkable power of concentration of will and thought upon any matter in hand: the work of the moment was the work of his life: and that had no doubt been the secret of his extraordinary success. But now he could scarcely force himself to think connectedly upon any one part of the great scheme for ten minutes together. And without his directing hand and brain, I could, of course, do nothing.

But if I turned the talk upon Haidée, as I did sometimes by way of experiment, he was all attention

instantly; his face would light up and he spoke with all his wonted pith and undivided interest. It seemed to me, therefore that his love for her had taken the same absorbing hold upon him that his huge business schemes had before she came into his life, and that it monopolized his mind and thoughts.

I was not entirely right, however, in my conclusions, as events were to prove later on. That he was infatuated by Haidée's beauty was certain, but there was more than mere infatuation to account for his indecision and abstraction. He was most probably tortured by those doubts of success in his love affairs which are the common portion of all lovers—the heritage of pain or pleasure according as we regard them. But the Greek was exerting influence of another kind upon him; and I got an inkling of this in an indirect manner.

Associated with us at the White House were, of course, a crowd of those adventurers who are always to be found fortune-hunting in Constantinople. Many were spies and go-betweens, some set on us by the Palace, others by various of the embassies; and the remainder playing for their own hand only. It was one of my chief tasks to classify the different individuals composing this interesting and interested group, and by means of my own spies to find out all about them; and I had and still have a very significant register of that genus of rascality.

Among them, perhaps the most picturesque scoundrel of all, was a man who called himself Count Stephani of Pristina. I had found out a good deal about him, and very little of it to his advantage; but he had what was in my eyes the great advantage of frankness.

He had been many things in his time, and among them, a brigand. That was, of course, nothing to his discredit in Turkey, where most of the residents in the outlying vilayets are farmers, or peasants when they have anything to farm, and brigands when safe opportunities offer. Lest this may be doubted, it should be remembered that one great pasha and minister, who at one time enjoyed a European reputation, was well-known to be in league with many bands of brigands, to give them information which might be of value to them in the way of "business", to share the results of their enterprise, and to secure immunity for those who were clumsy enough to fall into the hands of the police.

My own opinion of Count Stephani was that at this time he was still closely connected with brigands and that his business in the capital was to watch their interests.

He was a clever, handsome, dashing dare-devil, ready, as he once said to me frankly, either to take office under Government or to turn brigand again; and having heard that we were going to develop a district in which he was interested, he had at first come to me to offer his services.

That he was able to get hold of excellent information I had had several proofs, for I had made use of him; and it was from him I had had the first hints of the plot to depose the Sultan, of which the Greek Haidée, had spoken so freely.

I was not, therefore, surprised when, some three or four days after her arrival at the White House, he came to me obviously to speak about her, although, like an Eastern, he began talking for half an hour on

different subjects. Then he rose as if to leave me, and said casually:

"By the way, Mr. Secretary, your great White House has a new inmate—and a fair one." We always spoke Turkish except when he was excited and lapsed for a few words into Hungarian, a language which he thought I did not understand.

"Our servants are constantly changing, count," I answered, purposely misunderstanding him. He turned upon me a sidelong glance of smiling cunning.

"Servants are servants and—Greeks are Greeks," he said.

"As you have come to speak about her, hadn't you better sit down again and say what you want to say?"

"Oh, you Westerners; you think the only way to reach a spot is to go straight to it."

"It's the quicker plan, and you would have saved half an hour if you'd chosen it this morning; and you wouldn't have deceived me any the more." He laughed and threw up his hands as he brought his chair nearer to my table, sat down, and, leaning forward, asked quickly and earnestly;

"What does her coming mean?"

"It means that we found her in trouble with some scoundrels and brought her here for safety."

For a moment he did not reply, but stared hard into my face as if seeking some hidden meaning in my words.

"Do you know who she is?"

"Mademoiselle Haidée Patras, a very beautiful woman; a Greek, as you say." He waved the reply aside with an impulsive sweep of the hand.

"And what else?"

"Nothing else, count," I said stolidly.

"You are in an uncommunicative mood this morning, my friend, very uncommunicative."

"Or ignorant, which you please."

"No, friend, not ignorant. You have too many good spies. Those hands and eyes and ears of yours are not muffled and blinded and deafened by ignorance. You know—and do not trust me, Stephani, your friend and well-wisher."

"I trust you as much as I think it necessary."

"By Allah, but you are blunt—blunt, but not ignorant."

"Tell me what you have come to say." He laughed loudly, throwing himself back in his chair to enjoy his merriment to the full.

"You are always the same you Mr. Secretary, with your straight questions and blunt words. Blunt, but not ignorant. You know—you know well enough."

"I am very busy this morning, count."

"And if I won't speak I am to go, eh? Not ignorant, but yet not knowing everything, Mr. Secretary," and he glanced at me with a look of indescribable cunning.

"Yes, if you won't speak, you are to go." His eyes flashed and for a moment he was angry. But it passed instantly. He couldn't afford to be angry with me, and he knew it.

"And the sweet American, does she like her new sister?"

"I am very busy this morning, Count Stephani," I said again, drily. He always irritated me by his references to Enid, and they had become unpleasantly frequent of late.

"So I must not even speak of her, friend Secretary; but at any rate I may think of her, and the day may come when she may need a friend quick to see, prompt to act, and strong to strike. I may be that friend yet. When a man plunges suddenly into swift, unknown rapids, he may be a powerful swimmer and still fail, and those he leaves or leads may lack help."

"Which means?" said I.

"The rapids of intrigue in this country are easier to enter than to leave, and many swimmers are drowned." He spoke with the air of an oracle and a mystic.

"Suppose you put that into plainer terms, count."

"Only the fools speak to plainly in a land where language is a veil and not a vehicle of acts. Your American, rich, strong, powerful, and clever as he is, is—in the current which flows quickly to the rapids. The Greek is a very lovely woman; and it is possible his strength and energy may turn a weak to a winning cause."

"It is possible also that I don't understand you," I said, with a smile of unconcern.

"And in that case I don't understand *you*. But I think I do. I hope he will take the plunge; for I am in it, too, Mr. Secretary; and no man would be a more welcome ally than your American. Just the man of all men to turn the scales."

"Who has told you to come and say this to me?"

"A man you know well, friend, none other than—Count Stephani of Pristina." He laughed lightly and then quickly closing his eyelids till the black pupils glanced at me through mere slits, he added earnestly: "But you have rendered me services and I am not ungrateful. Let me warn you, then, Remember, and

let him remember, too, that this is the East and not the West: that here in the East the tree of revolt must be watered with blood;" and with that striking and somewhat enigmatical sentence he left me. He had a weakness for dramatic sentences and exits.

He had succeeded in impressing me more than I allowed him to see, however; and the longer I thought of his words the less I liked the outlook. It was clear enough that others beside Haidée herself were watching the result of her influence upon Grant, and building hopes upon it. It was thus possible that Enid's conclusion as to the Greek's rescue having been carefully arranged might be correct, but yet that Haidée's motive might be nothing worse than a desire to use a dramatic incident to weld closer the bonds of his fascination.

Stephani was obviously expecting that she would succeed in getting the influence of the White House thrown into the cause of the political conspiracy, and that those for and with whom Stephani was working hoped great things from such an alliance.

That Grant was infatuated I could not doubt any more than I could fail to perceive the critical consequences to us if we threw in our lot with the revolutionary party.

Such a change meant everything to us. Thus far, Grant's plans had been entirely pacific and commercial, and our preparations had been made on that basis. His aim was first to establish himself firmly in the district of Macedonia over which the concessions had been obtained, to develop its immense natural resources, to colonize it by introducing American and other picked residents, and to build up gradually an

autonomous and independent state. In return for the concessions he was to pay a tribute to the Sultan far greater than the revenue at present derived by the Turkish Government; and the tribute was to be increased under certain agreed conditions as the prosperity of the district developed.

He had, as I have before said, won over the Sultan to his views; but I knew that in his heart he entirely distrusted Abdul Hamid's good faith; and it was this feeling which I now thought might impel him to the critical step of joining the Young Turkey party in the attempt to depose the Sultan.

One consideration in favour of this lay in the character of the Heir to the Throne, Rechad Effendi. As most people know, the extraordinary policy prevails in Turkey of keeping the possible heirs to the throne in a condition of virtual imprisonment, in order that they may not conspire against the Sultan. In earlier days it was the custom for the Sultan, immediately upon his accession, to put to death all his male relatives so as to clear the way for his own sons to follow him; and when this custom was abandoned, that of shutting them up in palaces away from all contact with the outer world was adopted in its place.

Rechad Effendi, the Sultan's next brother, had been secluded in this way; but he was known to be a man of some breadth of view, and Grant had found means to communicate with him and to ascertain that, in the event of his succeeding to the throne, he would help our plans. And at one time Grant's distrust of Abdul was so deep that he actually had in contemplation to postpone the commencement of operations until Rechad became Sultan.

It is necessary to explain this point to understand the many influences at work in Grant's mind when his infatuation for Haidée Patras began to take effect; and I could not fail to see the probability that she would prevail upon him.

Such a development must, however, be full of danger. Stephani's words kept ringing in my ears—"the tree of revolt must be watered in blood." Whichever party won in the end there must be bloodshed. The Sultan, in character timid, vacillating, irresolute, and consumed with an overpowering dread of assassination which kept him a close prisoner in Yildiz Kiosk, was just the tyrant to exact a terrible vengeance upon all concerned in the plot, if it failed. On the other hand, if it succeeded, those who came to power would act as Ottomans had always acted at similar crises, and would take the lives of all who had had power before them.

In such a time of violence and tumult, what would be the fortunes and fate of us all? What chance was there that the undertaking, the pith and marrow of its hopes of success being its entirely commercial character, would escape shipwreck? None that I could see; and I had lived long enough in the country to learn much of its undercurrents. There was, moreover, the certainty of personal hazard and danger for all: and this sent my thoughts to Enid. Stephani's words about her had roused my alarm; but my gloomiest fears for her would have been infinitely darker could I have guessed, what I was afterwards to learn, the fate already settled for her.

It will be perceived, therefore, in what a mood of distracting doubt, suspense and fear I passed the days while I was waiting for Grant's decision.

CHAPTER V

WHAT HAPPENED ON THE GOLDEN HORN

THE atmospheric conditions at the White House during the week or ten days that followed the rescue of Haidée Patras were very unsettled. There was a strong depression indicating that a storm was imminent. The temper of most of us suffered in consequence, and the only one who maintained a consistent serenity was Haidée herself.

Grant and his sister had more than one heated discussion, and my opinion was that Enid acted with very poor judgment. Misled by her strong prejudice against the Greek and her powerful distrust, she put herself in violent opposition to her brother, tried to force her views upon him and, as it were, to talk him into sharing her own suspicions. Surely the feeblest of all courses to adopt.

Like most strong natures he could not brook opposition on any subject touching his personal inclinations. In business matters it is true his mind was always large and receptive enough to consider any opposing point of view; but love is not business; and in his headstrong infatuation for the beautiful Greek, he was all passion, enthusiasm, and concentrated obstinacy. There is really no other word so applicable; and the result of the discussions was always the same: the two parted in anger with a blunt statement from Grant that if Enid did not like the position, she had better go home to America.

"But I won't go, I declare I won't. She shan't drive me from the house," she said to me more than once after an interview of the kind. It seemed in some way to relieve her to come and protest to me. Indeed, in that highly charged atmosphere I became a sort of lightning conductor; and they all appeared to regard me as a person of neutral temperament through whom the electric currents could be safely dissipated. "Since you brought her here everything seems changed."

"A good many things are changed," I said, in a soothing tone. "But don't you think that fallacy about my having brought her here is a little thin and unjust to me?"

"She shan't drive me away, anyhow, just or unjust."

"Has she ever shown any desire to do that?"

"Oh, how foolish you are, Mr. Ormesby. But you all are where she is concerned. Of course she has; she's always trying to do it through Cyrus. Are you suddenly blind? But of course you take her side."

"It must be a great relief to you to have someone to blame for all this; and I suppose it doesn't matter whether the blame is merited or not. But why don't you try Lord Angus? He had more to do with her coming here than I had, for he didn't protest and I did."

"Lord Angus Markwell isn't always trying to put me in the wrong by posing as immaculate," she answered, almost angrily.

"It might be a different pose, perhaps," I said, quietly.

"You're real horrid, talking in that way against my one disinterested friend in all the world."

Lord Angus Markwell, like myself, was the younger son of a none too wealthy peer, and the object of his presence in Constantinople, was as well-known as its nature was certainly not to be called disinterested. He was doing what I had once been supposed to be doing, wooing Enid and her million; and my opinion about him made me cringe and wince sometimes as I reflected that it was just about what other people must at one time have held about me. Moreover, if the truth must be told, I did not like him, and did not care to think that Enid did.

"I am sorry if I offend you; but I would rather have you angry with me for speaking of him than angry with your brother."

"How ridiculous you are; I am not angry with Cyrus. I guess I've no anger to spare from that ex-Greek slave. Ugh! the treacherous creature."

"Has it never occurred to you to try another tack?"

"No, and I don't want to try another tack. What I think I like to say. I think she's treacherous, and I shall say it."

"But do you think that by saying it a thousand times over, or, for that matter, a million, you will convert your brother to the same opinion?"

"Of course I don't."

"Then why go on saying it?"

"Do you mean you'd have me fall upon her, and kiss her—Ugh!—and say my soul thrilled with delight at the prospect of having such a beautiful, innocent, sweet sister? You make me tired when you talk in this way."

"What does Lord Angus think of her?"

"Mr. Ormesby, you'll make me do something desperate if you go on in this way. I come to you for help and advice in this awful trouble and you can talk about nothing but Lord Angus Markwell."

"Well, don't you regard Lord Angus and good advice as a happy collocation of ideas?"

She made a gesture of impatience and then looked steadily at me, a smile beginning to show in her bright blue eyes and on her mobile lips.

"Do you?"

"I don't know so much of his lordship as you do."

"I'm very angry with you, although I smile," and smile she did then, so broadly and brightly, that I joined her.

"Lord Angus can do what I could not, you see; his mere name can chase away your anger and make you laugh."

She paused a moment or two, her head averted, and then said:

"Will you be serious and tell me what we are to do?"

"Serious? I am rarely anything but serious just now; but we can do nothing or next to nothing except wait and see what is to happen."

"And it's just this suspense that is so killing," she cried, impetuously; although in truth she little guessed, and I could not tell her, how infinitely serious the suspense was, and how much more grave was the impending crisis than she dreamed. But she left me in better heart and spirits; and I had thus succeeded in dissipating one more current of electricity.

On the following day my services in the same capacity were again in requisition. It was Friday, the Islam Sabbath, and some one had planned an excursion to the Sweet Waters of Europe. I think it must have been Lord Angus Markwell's suggestion; the tact was significant of his handiwork.

It was Grant himself who caused me to be of the party. He came into my room, as I hoped for the transaction of some of the host of matters that remained unattended to, but instead of speaking of them, he said, abruptly:

"We are going up the Horn this afternoon in the 'Stripes,' and probably back to The Home; I wish you would come with us, Mervyn."

The "Stripes" was one of our fast steam launches and The Home was a house on a small island which had been leased for use in connexion with our work. It lay in the Sea of Marmora some miles below Stambul.

I may mention here that Grant had acquired a much larger island in the north of the *Ægean* Sea, not far from Thasos. It was sufficiently close to the Macedonian coast to form a sort of base of operations for the new colony.

We had accumulated there a great quantity of stores and arms—the latter, of course, unknown to the Turkish authorities. No one, indeed, except Grant, myself, and the man in charge on the spot, an American named Cluffer, knew the nature of the "stores." The nearer island, The Home, was intended to be more a place of temporary refuge should any sudden emergency arise for us to scuttle from the capital. Grant always believed in what he termed

"plenty of back doors;" and The Home was one of them.

"Don't you think we should be a little wiser if we stopped here and got through some of these?" I asked, lifting a handful of the neglected documents.

"Yes, very likely," he said, "but not to-day. I heard Enid was going up with the aunt and Lord Angus, and so I determined to go, and Mademoiselle Patras will go as well. It's a family affair."

"It seems to me that Mademoiselle Patras goes a rather long way and is filling a biggish space, Cyrus," I said, quietly.

"Why, do you think she'll take up too much room on the 'Stripes?'" Grant rarely joked even feebly, and was never flippant, so that such a remark was itself enough to mark the change in him.

"A beautiful face may take up much more room in the world than the biggest body," I answered, sententiously.

"True, quite true, Mervyn—and it is a lovely face, isn't it?" he said, with sudden enthusiasm: and after a pause, not quite at ease: "But the fact is, I'm a bit flat and hipped and—oh, I'm so damned anxious, I'm not myself."

"I've noticed that, of course."

He was standing at the window, staring out, his hands thrust in his pockets, his face pale and wearing a look of great anxiety, while a frown of doubt drew his rather bushy eyebrows over the deep-set, thoughtful eyes. I was concerned to see how ill and harried he looked; but I reckoned that when a man of his strong mind was being forced or drawn to a decision which his judgment condemned, the tussle must be

sure to leave its marks. The view from the window was over the big cemetery; the Little Field of the Dead as the Turks call it, away across the Stambul. Not a cheerful one for a man in his mood; but I doubt if he saw anything of it.

"I can't think what's come over me," he said, with a deep sigh, breaking the long silence suddenly, and turning to walk up and down the room. "This has all become so distasteful," with a wave of the hand to indicate the neglected work.

"It comes over most of us at some time or other, Cyrus."

"What do you mean?" he asked quickly, almost vehemently.

"That which most men laugh at in others and either revel in or swear at in themselves, and yet think nobody ever really felt before."

"It's torture." The words slipped from him like an unconscious aside.

"What are you going to do?"

"I'm going to marry her," he cried in his energetic masterful way.

"And things here?"

"Ah, that's where the squeeze comes."

"You'll have to decide soon—the sooner the better."

"Decide what?" and he wheeled round suddenly and faced me, almost fiercely, as though I had insulted him, his eyes fixed on my face piercingly.

"I think you know what I mean," I answered, meeting his look calmly. "We needn't pretend to one another. If both you and I know what you have to decide, I know perhaps better than you what it must mean to us all."

"By Hell, do you suppose I don't think of that?" he cried vehemently. "But what if there's no other way?"

"There is another way—but only one."

"What's that?"

"Pull up the sticks, cut the loss, and get out."

"Are you mad?"

"It may be more than a question of sanity—it may be a matter of life or death."

"Are you against her, too? Are you all in league together?"

"I think things should be settled, one way or the other. Turkey's an infernally dangerous place to go on drifting in."

He laughed, not heartily, or mirthfully, or pleasantly; not even bitterly, but as one who is desperately ill at ease with himself and is impatient at finding it difficult to blame someone else.

"She seems to have confidence in me, eh?"

"I should never cease to have confidence in you—alone," I said pointedly.

"Then you *are* against her. I told you so just now."

"I heard you; but repetition isn't proof, Cyrus."

He uttered an exclamation of irritation with a hasty shake of the head.

"I'll take your advice, anyway. I'll settle it to-day," he said with another uneasy laugh.

"Will you take my advice as a whole?"

"What's that?"

"If you decide to marry, will you cut this thing?"

"What and go back on myself to be the laughing stock of every fool of a busybody?"

"No, only go back on that change in things which you've been pondering the last few days."

"But what if I think it's the right thing to do?"

"Why then I shall pray to have as clever and beautiful an influence on my side when I want to ruin somebody."

"I won't hear any more of this," he retorted, angrily, and went out of the room, showing me that I had rubbed an acid into a smarting wound.

But a minute afterwards he came back, and although usually a singularly undemonstrative man, he held out his hand and said with evident feeling:

"Don't let this come between us, Mervyn; we've kept step so well together so far."

"My dear fellow, nothing can ever come between us," I declared, and I gripped his hand warmly.

"Decide as you like, we shall still keep step." That was all that passed, but it was enough to let us understand each other, and with a laugh, this time easier and lighter, he broke off and said:

"The 'Stripes' will be at the Outer Bridge landing stage at two o'clock. You won't forget."

It wasn't probable I should forget, anticipating as I did something of what was likely to occur during the afternoon.

We can scarcely have been called a very jovial party on the "Stripes" and if the merry people in the hundreds of caiques that covered the waters of the Golden Horn that gay afternoon were disposed to envy our party as the smart, powerful, rapid steam launch swept up the winding water way, we on our side might well have envied them some of their light spirits.

There is no lovelier spot in the world for a water jaunt than the Golden Horn at that time of the year, at the point where the river narrows into channels that go twisting and winding and meandering along between green meadows, dotted with clumps of trees, and carpeted here with white patches of snowdrops, there with a golden blaze of jonquils, and warmed everywhere with the soft sweet tone of the violets.

The fleets of caiques, surely the most picturesque boats that man ever fashioned, the gondolas of Venice not excepted, carried up a vast crowd of merry-makers and gossip-mongers. Women, gaily dressed—no longer, alas, in the Oriental fashion—and wearing the yashmac as a coquettish head-dress to set off rather than to conceal the features, filled most of the caiques. They sat chattering together in the stern with ever an eye for the occupants of other boats; while that lingering concession to old time custom, the eunuch, was perched cross-legged in the prow. A scene of almost typical Eastern pleasure-making.

But we were taking our pleasure on the "Stripes" much more in English fashion; that is to say, sadly. Grant and Haidée were in the stern; Enid and Lord Angus forward—where his lordship did not appear to be having at all a merry time of it; and Mrs. Wellings and myself, representing propriety and neutrality, were amidships.

Mrs. Wellings was not a cheerful person at the best of times. She had married an Englishman of position, and her years in London society had stiffened her. She had some lingering respect for my prefix of "Honourable," but the respect was largely tinged with contempt of my position as a paid employee at the White House.

"I don't know why you've brought us out like this, Mr. Ormesby," she said, once or twice. It seemed to be an easy habit with every one to lay the responsibility on me for everything they did not like. A tribute to my usefulness, perhaps; but not always welcome.

"We've come out to enjoy ourselves, Mrs. Wellings," I replied, blandly.

"Poof!" she ejaculated. She had a habit of poofing. "We might be going to a funeral."

"A love-feast, rather," I said, with a glance in each direction.

"Don't talk about it," she cried impatiently.

"*They* are doing that, probably."

"That's a very indelicate and uncalled for remark, I think."

"I can't hear them, I'm glad to say." It was one of my innocent recreations to banter Mrs. Wellings.

"I didn't mean what *they* said, but what *you* said."

"What did I say? That they were talking about love-feasts? Well, don't you think it probable?"

"I don't want to think about it."

"But Lord Angus is in some ways a very desirable *parti*, surely," I remonstrated, with an air of innocence.

"I was speaking of Cyrus and his new folly—as you know perfectly well."

"Well now, do you know, folly is the last term in the world I should associate with Mademoiselle Patras."

"I wish you'd get me a paper or a magazine or

something to read. When you're in this flippant mood I don't care to talk. But if you'll be serious—"

"My dear madam, we have not come out to be serious. Who could be serious amid such a gay crowd?" But I got her a magazine and so ended the conversation.

All the rest of us found it easy enough to be serious, judging by looks. Grant was sitting as close to Haidée as he could get, and both his and her looks shewed that they were almost painfully in earnest, while Enid's face, whenever her eyes were turned upon her brother, as they were constantly, flashed very ominously. Even placid and self-complacent Lord Angus was not enjoying the fruits of his diplomacy to anything like the extent he had anticipated.

No storm broke out during the run up, and when we landed among the pleasure-seekers, Grant and Haidée went away alone, Mrs. Wellings joined Enid and Lord Angus Markwell, and I was thus left to myself and my own thoughts.

The fine weather had brought out a large motley crowd, and the people were scattered far and wide among the trees. The ways of a Turkish crowd are always peculiar. The women were, of course, separated from the men, like sheep from the goats, and strolled or sat about together, whispering incessantly in the low tones characteristic of the East. Most of them were probably talking dress and scandal, but there were many groups huddled closely together on the grass, listening enthralled to the quaint, wily hodjas, or fortune-tellers, relating their strange, weird fables, weaving love-legends crammed with mystery, intrigue, and terrors, and telling a thousand lies to

work upon the superstition and fears of their hearers. The influence of these hodjas is supreme in the superstition-ridden members of the hareems.

A long line of smart, well-appointed modern broughams drawn up under the trees, each with its sombre-looking eunuch on the box, engaged the attention of many inquisitive strollers; for in them were the ladies of the Royal Hareem whom the eccentric etiquette of the Court forbids to drive in any but a closed stuffy carriage. And dotted all over the green-sward sat the men, keeping severely aloof from their women folk, smoking and taking their pleasure with full Ottoman gravity and self-complacence.

It formed altogether an odd picture of the unblending blends of East and West, typified aptly in the costumes of both sexes alike: the women arrayed in the smartest gowns of the latest Parisian or Viennese fashion, tempered by the coquettishly worn yashmac: the men garbed everywhere in frock coats and baggy trousers, with the everlasting fez, that most crudely inappropriate head gear of the Sultan's special choosing. One was almost tempted to think the Ottomans had started to become Europeans, and had stopped short in the process; keeping the fez and the yashmac as reminders that even in dress the change was far from complete. And not in dress only, as the world has had many fearsome proofs. And yet there are those who think that the Turk, in putting on the second-hand trousers of Europe, has become as civilized as the original wearers of them.

I had not come out to moralize, however, and was glad when the time arrived to return. As I stepped on board the launch, a glance at Grant's face sufficed

to show me something had happened. I could guess what ; and a confirmation of the guess lay in the light of triumph in the Greek's bright eyes, and the soft, peachy colour on her cheeks.

Grant himself was slightly flushed and looked more like himself than for some days past, wearing much of his accustomed air of conscious strength and reserved masterfulness.

Enid was already on board, for I was the last to arrive, and was sitting near her brother with Lord Angus and Mrs. Wellings. She looked pale, and her resolute expression as she sat biting her under lip and looking away at the people on shore, savoured of anything but the olive branch of peace.

Grant had a bottle of champagne in his hand, and he smiled and nodded to me.

"A toast, Mervyn," he said, "which we will all drink. The happiest day of my life ; my betrothal. We drink to Mademoiselle Patras, my promised wife."

I put the glass to my lips, as did all but Enid, whose face was now quite white, as she held the wine conspicuously untasted and stared angrily at the Greek.

"You don't drink, Enid?" asked her brother, his tone gentle, but his brows frowning over his eyes that seemed almost to flash with anger.

She stood up then, and met his look with one to the full as firm as his own, and when she spoke her tone like his was low, but strained, and the words clear cut.

"No, Cyrus, I do not drink to your ruin. I would sooner see you dead." Then, as if overcome with a suddenly uncontrollable burst of passion, she dashed

the glass down on the deck, cast one glance of disdain at the Greek, and crossed the gangway to the shore.

Grant was promptness itself in action. His anger was hidden instantly.

"Mervyn, oblige me by seeing my sister back to the White House," he said to me, as though nothing unusual had occurred; and turning to the man in charge he ordered him to cast off at once, and make the run back with all speed. As I hastened after Enid he sat down by Haidée's side, and they began to talk together in low tones.

CHAPTER VI

GRANT'S DECISION

DESPITE my unsought office of lightning conductor, I am not as will have been seen, a very tactful person, and I neither relished my present mission nor saw any practicable way out of the mess which Enid's outburst had caused. My usual procedure was to try and turn the anger of whoever had to be appeased either upon himself or upon anybody else who was convenient and safe, and let it vent and exhaust itself in causeless reproaches and vapourings.

But this was far too serious a matter for treatment of that elementary kind; and I therefore resolved to let Enid walk some distance alone, and thus get over the first flush of passion. I calculated that as she did not know how to get back to Pera, she would welcome my presence a little more warmly when she realized the fix into which her impulsive act of leaving the launch had led her.

Moreover I wished to think over the problem. I knew perfectly well how Grant would resent the insult to Haidée. He was very fond of Enid; but when a man has to choose between his sister and his sweetheart there is no difficulty in foreseeing what his choice will be. His determination was no doubt already taken; and that would be that Enid should leave the White House at once. The very openness

of the insult would make that inevitable, I felt. Had the thing occurred privately, it might have been possible to smoothe it over ; but not only the servants and crew on the "Stripes" had seen and heard it all ; but, probably, some of the people in the passing caiques and on the shore. Grant would have to be more than human to overlook it.

For the act itself, apart from its unfortunate publicity, there could be but one justification—that Enid was right in her opinion of Haidée and her motives. And of that there was not a tittle of proof. Was she right? Could we get proofs? Could I help her? These were the questions I began to ask myself most earnestly, and with an increasing fervent zeal in her cause.

Her happiness was very much more to me than I allowed anyone about the White House to imagine ; and as I watched her now, keeping some fifty yards or so in the rear, I thought I could conceive something of the tumult of feelings that must be raging in her mind. She walked quickly, with head slightly bent like one plunged in thought, looking neither to right nor left ; ignorant, I was sure, of where she was going, and just as heedless, probably ; seeing nothing, and caring for nothing, but just eating out her heart in bitterness, pain, and fear for her brother.

When we had walked in this way for about a mile, I saw her stop, put her hand to her forehead, and glance about her with the air of one roused suddenly and striving to identify strange surroundings.

I hastened my steps then, and overtook her. Her eyes welcomed me with unmistakable relief ; but her first words had reference to the scene on the launch.

"How could you do it, Mr. Ormesby?" she asked indignantly. I guessed what she meant, but temporized.

"We thought you might have difficulty in finding your way back to Pera, and Cyrus asked me to come after you."

"You know I don't mean that, and if you are here as Cyrus's delegate I do not want your help, thank you."

"I am here as your friend, I hope, Miss Grant."

"Then how could you do it?"

"Do what?"

"Drink that woman's health?" she cried, bitterly.

"Hadn't we better talk it all over? And just see about getting back to the White House?"

"Yes, I am going back. I have decided:" and she threw her head up, and looked the very type of defiance.

"Of course, you are," I assented, as though it were a matter of no question at all. "In point of fact I let you come this part of the way alone so that you might have time to think a bit. But I'd better see now if I can get hold of a carriage."

"Wait a moment, please. Are you with Cyrus or with me in this?"

"I am with you both."

"No, that's impossible, and you must choose between us."

"Isn't that a little unnecessary at this early stage?"

"Not in my opinion."

"It is in mine, so you must excuse my answering—yet."

"Then I will go back alone, if you please."

"Certainly. It's only a matter of getting two carriages instead of one ; or, if we can't get two of my riding by the driver instead of inside with you."

"Why do you try and trifle with things in this way ? You know you don't think it trifling, God help us."

"No, I don't make the mistake of thinking it a trifle. I would willingly give what little I have in the world to have the thing blotted out. But I can always think best in common-place terms ; and there's no use in inflating things. I'll get a carriage."

"Is it far to walk ?"

"From here about three and a half miles, but some of the way's nasty."

"I'd rather walk then."

"Shall I walk with you ; or in the Turkish etiquette style, a few yards behind you ?"

"Oh, how can you talk like that at such a time ?"

"I can do or say anything to relax the strain of your thoughts. We'll walk together, of course, and equally of course we'll try to see some way out of the tangle. For it's a deuce of a tangle, and no mistake ;" and with that we set off at a smart pace.

For quite twenty minutes not a word more passed between us. I did not see how to handle the matter at all. Enid's blunt declaration that I must take one side or the other in the quarrel was disconcerting, not so much because I thought it necessary in the sense which she implied, that I must split with one of them, as because I saw that she thought it necessary. If it did really come to a split, I felt that I should side with her ; but that was a step in reserve, and meanwhile the outline of a plan was beginning to form in my thoughts.

She grew tired of the silence at last, and turning to me, said with some abruptness:

"Has the enormity of my conduct struck you silent?"

"No, though it was pretty bad."

"Perhaps you're thinking how best to lecture me?"

"No, again, and I don't suppose you'd care very much if I did!"

"Then why don't you speak?"

"As I'm only here on your sufferance, I thought it best to hold my tongue. The more you think of things the better. But I'll talk if you like. There's going to be a gorgeous sunset."

"You make me tired with your nonsense."

"There's a good deal to be said for getting tired, sometimes."

"I don't see any kind of point in that."

"There is none. Don't bother to look for it. It's rather a relief now and then to hear and say things that have no point. Some of us are apt to be too pointed—quite barby."

"That's a hit at me, isn't it?"

"Yes. You've made a horrible mess of things."

"Thank you. But if you mean that I was to hold my tongue and show by word or deed that I didn't just hate the notion of that—ugh!—that woman ever being Cyrus's wife, you needn't say any more. I—I loathe her."

"Very well. But if I didn't like my sister's lover it doesn't strike me that I should improve matters much by slapping my sister's face in public."

"We won't speak any more about it, if you please. Mr. Ormesby," she answered, quickening her pace

and getting a step or two in front of me. But I caught her up quickly.

"And if a friend made me feel my mistake, I shouldn't feel I was justifying myself *to* myself by trying to shut him up."

"A friend, indeed!" with a scornful laugh.

"That's me," I said, with more terseness than grammar. She stopped, faced me, stamped her foot angrily and opened her lips to retort; but the words were not uttered and we went on again; and presently she said, with less vehemence:

"I suppose you know how hateful it is to be put in the wrong?"

"It's a frequent mishap of mine, unfortunately, but one gets used to it in time. And after all it's a splendid tonic, like a good many other bitter things one has to swallow; and it clears the head wonderfully when one wants to think about repairs. And now, by the way, my lecture's over."

"You mean you blame me, then?"

"Unquestionably I do."

"Then you'll be surprised to hear I'm not a bit sorry."

"Pardon me, but you are."

"I am not, Mr. Ormesby."

"Then you will be. No one with your head and your heart and the love you have for Cyrus could help being sorry for cutting him to the heart. He is too good a fellow to have his face rubbed in the mud in public."

"What would you have had me do, then, when he tried to bluff me—in public, as you keep saying with such emphasis?"

"There were fifty things you could have done. Said you weren't well, pretended to drink his toast, spilt it over Lord Angus and called it an accident, drank to Cyrus's happiness—oh, fifty things, and none of them theatrical. Yours was melodrama—and melodrama is such beastly bad form."

"He shouldn't have tried to bluff me."

"Don't blame him. Heaven knows I'm no friend of the Greek woman, and I wish her at the deuce; but if old Cyrus asked me to make him happy by drinking her health I'd drink a bottle, or a hogshead for that matter, if I could hold it, to please the best fellow in the world and the best brother a girl could have, too."

"You'll make me just hate you, or myself, if you go on like this."

"Not a bit of it. You're only just beginning to see that out of all the possible things you could have done, you chose the worst. We all lose our heads at times—but the world goes on just the same. We don't hate anyone in consequence—and certainly not ourselves."

"I wish I hadn't come."

"It's more to the point to wish to see some way out of the muddle."

"I'm going to Cyrus the moment I reach home to tell him all I think of that woman."

"Like the man who burnt his finger-tip, and then plunged his whole arm into the fire to ease the pain a bit. Very well."

"I think your the most unpleasant man I ever saw."

"Unfortunately that's no cure for the mischief."

"I shall not take any advice you may give."

"I'm inclined to differ there, but then I know the advice and you don't."

"It's sure to be something humiliating to me; I know that."

I made no answer, and we walked a while in silence, until the question came for which I was waiting.

"What is the advice?"

"Either to climb down and eat your words——"

"I'd die sooner, with that woman," she burst in vehemently. "Didn't I say it would be something humiliating."

"Or make them good," I concluded. "There's no middle course, except, perhaps, flight. You could go back to New York."

"Run away and leave him in her clutches. Thank you."

"If you weren't in quite such a hurry, I'd put the matter a bit more explicitly."

"I am listening."

"In spasms, yes; but they don't help any one to think clearly. My opinion is this. If you're wrong, or, shall I say, if we're wrong, there's nothing humiliating in owning up. But if we're right and can get proofs, if, I say, then we can justify your distrust, even if we cannot justify your manner of showing it."

"I *know* I'm right."

"I've no doubt you do: we all do in that sort of mood; but can we get facts and proofs? If you care for my help, I'll do what I can; but I'm not a genius, even as a spy. And I make one condition—and it isn't perhaps exactly what you'd call a sweet one either."

"What is it, anyway?"

"We'll have a square talk with Cyrus. You'll tell him you're sorry——"

"I won't; I won't. How dare you ask such a thing?"

"For having made a fuss in that theatrical way and publicly insulted the woman he has chosen to be his wife. Then we'll tell him together that we both believe she is not worthy of him, and say frankly we are going to work to prove it, and that there must be a certain interval of neutrality while we prove her either an angel or the other thing."

She heard me out patiently, to my great surprise, and said nothing in reply. The silence had lasted a minute or more, and then I looked at her, and to my consternation saw that her eyes were moist with tears, which she was making a gallant effort to repress. She forced them back, and presently, in a voice that touched me with its softness, she said:

"You would risk a quarrel with him then for my—for this?"

"Cyrus and I can't quarrel. He's too great a man not to understand me. I take no risks. There'll be more risks from the Greek."

We were now getting near the White House, and I was anxious to have her assent to the proposal; but she kept silence until the gates were in sight, when she stopped.

"I'll do what you wish, Mr. Ormesby, and I—I think it's real good of you. I—I . . ."

"Never mind me. I don't count. But I'm glad you'll do it. It's the only way out;" and then we pushed on into the house and said no more.

When I reached my own rooms I was somewhat surprised to find Grant there waiting for me. He looked very much upset, sitting with knitted brows, smoking furiously.

"Hullo, Cyrus, back first then. Didn't go to the Home?" I said lightly, as I threw down my hat and took a cigarette.

"Has Enid come back with you?"

"Come back? Of course she has. Where else in Pera could she go?"

"I shall never forget that, Mervyn," he said angrily.

"Never runs into a good many years, my dear fellow; but I told her she'd made a beastly mess of things. Women do, you know, sometimes."

"She'll have to leave here. My future wife shall not be exposed to the chance of such insults."

"It would be impossible, of course, absolutely impossible, but——"

"There are no 'buts,' " he cut in brusquely.

"There are always 'buts' and 'ifs,' at all events in Turkey; and you see a thing of this sort——"

"Well?" impatiently, as I stopped.

"Confound this cigarette, filthy thing. I believe I lit it at the wrong end. Always a right and wrong end to a thing, aren't there, even to a Turkish cigarette—or to any damned thing in Turkey."

"What do you mean by that?" he asked sharply, with a rapid glance.

"Truth is I don't think I myself quite know—what would be the right end." And I made a gesture of irritation and flung the cigarette away viciously and lit another.

"Don't let us get off the point, Mervyn. Whose side do you take in this?"

"Oh, that's delicious," I cried with a laugh. "The family brain seems to run on exact parallel lines. That's precisely the question your sister put to me, and with even greater insistence; and when I told her I took both or neither, she said, as I suppose you'd say, that was just impossible. Of course I laughed at such a thing."

"It *is* impossible," he declared emphatically.

"Then I must be content to be regarded as an impossibility, Cyrus. I know you can see a deuced sight farther through a brick wall than I can, but I can read small print quite as far off as you can; and, what's more, I can read it when its in Turkish characters—and you can't."

"Which means you can see a way out and I can't? Go on."

"In the first place I told your sister you and I were never likely to quarrel, whatever happened."

"You're working round to it in a big circle, Mervyn."

"Too small a one's apt to make a man giddy."

"I like straight paths. If you're going to say you're against the woman I am going to marry, say it plainly."

"That's all right. But if you want to get to the top of the house you don't need to sit on a gun and be fired up; it's apt to make you forget there's a staircase to come down by: see?"

"I'm in no mood for metaphors, but what's your staircase?"

"That your sister should have time to see that there is no reason for what she did this afternoon—she knows now there was none for how she did it."

"Do you ask me to be a party to a secret inquiry into the conduct of my future wife? Do you want

to force the very quarrel between us two you spoke of as impossible just now? Are you mad?"

"I propose no secret inquiry. I should prefer that Mademoiselle Patras knew everything. If your sister is wrong, she loves you too well not to repent her mistake; but if she's right——"

"Tush, man. I won't even hear of it. I have made up my mind. Enid must leave here; and the matter is closed."

"As you will—but it isn't closed for me."

"Do you mean that, knowing all that must go with it. Please to think."

"Am I the only one of us who needs to think?"

"My mind is made up."

"Then I shan't answer you this afternoon. A cigarette tastes none the sweeter because we jab the burning end in a friend's face, Cyrus."

"To the devil with your cigarettes," he cried impatiently.

"That's exactly what one would say afterwards," I returned, quietly.

"I don't want to hear any more about it."

"And that's exactly what you can't help doing." I got up as I spoke and went over and put my hand on his shoulder. "Cyrus, old man, we're not going to quarrel and part over this thing, just because you love a woman and I don't—one of the most beautiful women on earth, and, for all I know to the contrary, as good as she's lovely. We're men, you know, not children, and there are two sides to this thing; one's business and the other's personal. Unfortunately they've got mixed a bit; but haven't we wit enough between us to disentangle them?"

"I won't hear a word against her."

"Have I said one? Look here, let's drop it for a time and think of some of these other things. If I'm to cut the painter, there are heaps of things I must explain either to you or to whoever follows me. And I must really get them in order."

He made no reply for a minute or two and then said suddenly: "I've thrown in my lot with the Young Turkey party."

"Of course you have. I expected that would be the condition of her—of the engagement. That's what I mean by the business side. You've taken some days to think it over—you, who generally take fewer minutes; and yet you jib when I don't say ditto in a moment because, knowing a thundering lot more about things here and not being in love, I want to see a bit of the road ahead. Hang it, Cyrus, it isn't reasonable, is it?"

"What did you mean, that you expected it would be the condition of the engagement?"

"I heard Mademoiselle Patras that night on the subject of the conspiracy, and, as a matter of fact, Stephani told me how much they counted on getting your help and money and influence. Stephani's in it."

"Damn Stephani."

"There'll be no trouble about that. His whole life has earned it. But it won't help us much. And it's a pretty big thing we're taking on. Of course you've thought of that?"

"I've thought of scarcely anything else for days."

"Abdul has been fairly good to us so far, doesn't it strike you as rather rough of us to turn against him?"

"You don't understand it. Nothing can save him

from this conspiracy. Half the country's in it, and the other half would be glad to see him deposed. Deposed he will be, and, unless something happens, put to death. But I mean that that something shall happen and his life be saved. There shall be no bloodshed."

"You think you can stop it."

"It is my one imperative condition."

"And you think you can prevent it?"

"I know it. I would not join on any other terms."

"And Mademoiselle Patras agreed and pledged the rest?"

"I am to see Marabukh Pasha to-morrow."

"It should be an interesting interview," I said, drily. "And in view of it, all these other things are mere nothings. We'll have another talk to-morrow; I should like to turn it all over."

"What will you do?" he asked.

"We shall keep step, Cyrus, as you said to-day; but it may be a long, and is sure to be an exciting, if not dangerous march." And so in all truth I saw it must be; and I sat far into the night, forgetting all about Enid and the Greek and their quarrel, just face to face with the perilous course that lay ahead for us all, as the result of this mad decision. For some lovers are mad indeed.

CHAPTER VII

THE SHADOW OF GOD

THE disturbing incidents of the day, the rash decision which Grant had announced, the half sleepless and wholly anxious night, and too many strong cigars consumed in my hours of meditation, combined to upset me on the following morning. I had a fit of depression accompanied by that exceedingly unpleasant presentiment of impending calamity which comes sometimes from a disordered liver, and sometimes, one is tempted to think, from far subtler causes.

I wished the Greek at the bottom of the Ionian Sea, and could easily have found it in me to curse the arts and beauty which had cast a spell over Grant great enough to blind him to anything like a true appreciation of the course he meant to take.

Nor were matters improved when a special messenger from the Palace came to summon Grant to an audience with the Sultan at noon.

Noon was the time we were to have gone to Maraboukh Pasha, and the interview with him was accordingly postponed until the afternoon; and as we drove to Yildiz Kiosk, I saw that Grant was not in a much better frame of mind or body than I. I was always present at these audiences with the Illustrious One as dragoman or interpreter; an interpreter being necessary because of one of the idiotic fallacies of the most

extraordinary court in the world. This particular fallacy was that His Majesty could speak no language except Turkish or Arabic, whereas, as everybody knows, he is in reality an excellent French scholar.

Neither of us referred to the events of the previous day; and indeed, beyond a few speculations as to what the Sultan wanted to know, we scarcely spoke at all.

Yildiz Kiosk is probably the most beautiful prison, or palace, whichever you please to consider it, that a coward ever built for his own protection. Palace it is by name, but prison in fact, for the ruler who has more personal power over his subjects than any living monarch, is so abjectly afraid of assassination that he never stirs out of it except on certain state occasions, when he is guarded by a host of soldiers, and is careful to rush through the ceremony at headlong speed so as to be away as short a time as possible.

The grounds of the Kiosk are some twenty thousand acres in extent, covering one of the most beautiful sites in the world, on the height of Yildiz, sloping down to the banks of the Bosphorus: and as the various buildings house several thousands of people, there are a great number of them, large and small, linked together by terraces and gardens and bridges. The palace itself is surrounded by three rows of walls, and between each pair of them are kiosks inhabited, some by officers of state, and others by servants. There are three large barracks with some five thousand soldiers, the flower of the Turkish army. The Hareemlik, the women's quarters, is beautifully

situated in flower gardens within the park; and the Selamlık, or men's quarters, the place whither we were going, is another fine square mansion with innumerable spacious rooms and broad staircases.

It is in this building that His Majesty receives ambassadors, other notabilities, and privileged visitors, and when we had proved our right of entry to the grounds at the Kultuk Kapu—that one of the three gates which is open all day long—we drove to the Selamlık, and amidst the salutes of the sentries, the salaams of the servants, and the profuse ceremonial which prevails, we were ushered in the August Presence.

I had been, as I have said a number of years in Turkey, but I had never been admitted to a sight of the Sultan until Grant's arrival. I could not, therefore, know much about him; but he impressed me always not only as a man of exceptionally winning and courteous graciousness, but also as gifted with exceptional ability, tempered and oppressed, however, with a never-absent timidity. But for that constitutional fear he would be a great man.

There is a flattering proverb in Islam that "Time stands still for the Padishah," who therefore never grows old; and to play up to the part it is a cardinal point of his etiquette to dye his hair and beard a deep black. The effect, in the case of any other man, would be incongruous and ludicrous; but there is that in his personality and surroundings which makes against any incongruity.

In other respects—and indeed in that respect too—he is like many another European old gentlemen of suave manners and dignified bearing. He dresses

almost always in the frock coat of modern cut, with his breast ablaze with orders, and, as Grant used to say, he is almost as easy of access as the American President himself.

With any guest of distinction or favour—and Grant was one—he was the embodiment of perfect courtesy. He placed him on the sofa beside himself, lighted with his own hands a cigarette and handed it to Grant, took another, and then disposed himself to listen or to speak as the case might be. Such attendants as were present he waved away out of hearing, and indeed treated Grant with as much suavity as if he had been a fellow sovereign.

The only formality was the use of myself as dragoman; but even this was helped out of the way by a suggestion which Grant had made at the first interview, that he and I should speak French, not English, so that His Majesty himself should understand every word that passed between us, although etiquette required that he should appear ignorant. Simple thing as it was, I believe it had much to do with winning the Sultan's confidence, while it certainly suited his convenience, because it gave him time to consider his reply while I was getting through with the translation.

Grant's opinion of Abdul may be worth mentioning, perhaps. He considered him a man the key to whose life was fear. Ability to judge he certainly had, between good men and bad, between good policy and bad policy, between right and wrong; but pluck to back his judgment was utterly lacking. He knew perfectly well when he ought to say yes or no with all the autocratic power that went with either decision; but courage to say the right thing had not

been given him. He would listen to any and every counse. of fear that any one could get a chance of offering, and whoever drew the most fear-compelling picture had the Shadow of God in his pocket. In every word spoken to him, every proposition made, and every act and deed suggested, his one instinct as to estimate what he had to fear from it. In the twenty years of his reign this feeling had grown and been nurtured until it had become a ruling passion on which the favourites, parasites, and other innumerable court hacks around him could play so as to produce any harmony or discord they pleased. And in that lay the secret of the fearsome acts of horrors, oppression, massacre and foulness which have made some portions of his reign read like a phantasmagoria of blood.

On the occasion of this visit the audience was a very short one. His Majesty wished to have an account at first hand of the progress of matters, and he listened attentively while Grant told in French, and I translated into Turkish, the various steps that had been taken.

"Then if they tell me you are at a standstill, they are mistaken?" asked His Majesty, and I translated.

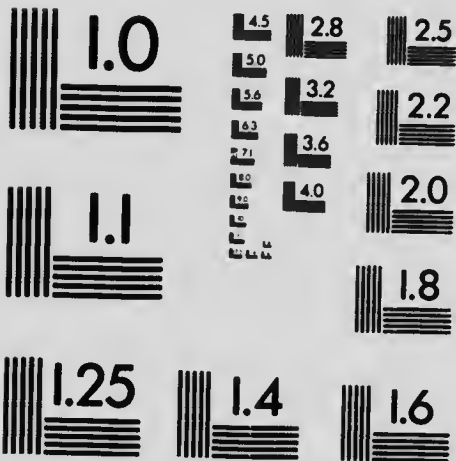
"Tell His Majesty," said Grant, with a smile of abounding contempt for the tale-bearers, "that Americans are never at a standstill. I have already spent millions of dollars upon the preparations."

"And when do you leave Pera for the Western Province?"

"In a sense, we have left already," was Grant's reply; "for much of my work here is finished, and already my agents are taking possession, landing



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stores, organizing arrangements, sending out surveying parties and starting in to work on the spot ; " and this was the preface to a glowing description of the benefits which His Majesty's province would derive from the undertaking.

" Yet you have critics in some of the Embassies who are almost enemies. But I trust you, Mr. Grant ; you are a man of your word ! I trust you ; and I shall support you through all, whatever may be said against you."

I could have wished that His Majesty had omitted that expression of confidence, for it made me feel uncomfortable as I thought of the new turn of Grant's plans ; and Grant himself did not like it any more than I.

" It made me feel real mean," he said, with a frown, when I referred to it.

" Why do you think he took the trouble to send for you to the Palace just to say that ?" I asked.

" He wanted to know what progress we were making."

" My dear Cyrus, you will never know the East. The very fact that he plunged headlong into the question of the progress, listened so attentively to every word you said and was so profoundly interested, shews that that was not his motive for the audience. He has heard something, and he sent to put you on your honour. Now, what can he have heard ?"

" I don't think so. No, no ; someone's been talking down the plan and me, and he wanted to know the truth. That's all."

" It's more comfortable to think so, I dare say, and I hope you're right. Don't you think his spies can

keep him posted as to our progress? It is not that they know too little in that direction, I fear, but that they know too much in another and may have given him a hint. That's the best of this delightful land—it is so consistently not just what you think it is. But what can he have heard, and how, and from whom? Frankly, I don't like it."

"No one knows anything except you and me—and one other."

There was a momentary hesitation in speaking of the Greek.

"Plenty know who are inmates of the White House." He shook his head and frowned irritably.

"Well, I'm not responsible for the plot, and my chief part in it will be to save his life."

With a man who could talk sophistry of this kind in order to quiet his own thoroughly live judgment, it was no use to argue; so I made no reply, and for the rest of the drive back gave myself up to my thoughts.

Grant went straight to Haidée, I think, and told her what had passed at Yildiz Kiosk, and he must also have told her the pith of my interview with him on the preceding day, for when I was sitting in my office waiting for the hour of the interview with Maraboukh Pasha, I was not a little surprised to see her enter the room.

"May I come in?" she said, with a smile. "I wish to speak to you, Mr. Ormesby."

"Certainly; why not? Let me put you a chair," and I rose and did so, taking care that her face should be to the light.

"You will think this a strange step of mine?" she asked as she sat down.

"Pretty women do strange things with impunity, mademoiselle."

"Ah, you do think it strange then, and stranger, no doubt, that I wish to speak to you of Mr. Grant's sister?"

"I should very much rather you did nothing of the kind," I said, firmly.

"But I want you to help me in making peace between brother and sister." She spoke with the utmost sweetness, and with a little gesture to indicate her pain and regret for what had occurred.

"That I would do very willingly, but unfortunately I have already tried and have failed. Your influence with Grant can, however, succeed, I am sure. Shall I ask him to come here?" And I rose as if to summon a messenger; but she checked me so quickly that I gathered this was a pretext for the interview and not her real object. I made a little further experiment. "I think it's awfully sweet of you to take in this way an insult so publicly offered and to forget what most women would consider a bitter humiliation." I emphasized the terms insult and humiliation, and although she controlled her features so far as to smile, her eyes flashed angrily and her hands clenched. My experiment answered. I know how a Greek usually forgives an insult.

"Miss Grant dislikes me," she said. "I do not know why. I have done her no harm."

"She does not like your influence with her brother, mademoiselle, and the change in the plans here which you have made."

"And you?" She was not so good an actress as I thought. She was too impulsive; and the eager tone

of the flashing question told me very easily that this was the reason of the interview. I saw no cause for misleading her."

"I do not like it either. I believe it will ruin my friend's plans."

"And why?"

"We have kept free from plots and politics so far—the only safe course, in my opinion, for men of business in this country."

"But you do not understand. This Abdul Hamid will break faith with you; you are not safe for an hour in the hands of a man who does to-day the very things he vowed yesterday should never be done; and will exile or execute to-morrow the favourite of to-day."

"We have not found him so, mademoiselle, and hitherto we have acted on our own judgment."

"And now Mr. Grant is acting on mine, you think?"

"Grant commands here," I answered, generally.

"And don't you believe things will be far better under Rechad Effendi as Sultan, than under Abdul?"

"Grant didn't start this thing in order to play Sultan-making."

"But you yourself; you know this wretched country and all the horrors it has endured under Abdul, what do *you* think?"

"I do not think about it in that way. If I were an Ottoman subject, I might be restless and discontented; and if I were a Greek or an Armenian with half your wrongs to remember, I might harbour a love for revenge. But I am not; and a policy of vengeance or of revolt won't run smoothly with our plans."

"Then you also dislike my influence with Mr. Grant? I like to know who are with and who against me."

"It's very good of you to have come and put the question straight to me," I said, equivocally.

"But you have not answered it?" she retorted.

"You are a very beautiful woman, Mademoiselle Patras, and as charming and able as beautiful, and you are going to be the wife of my closest friend and chief; and I trust I shall never have to do anything which would make you think I am against you in the sense I speak."

"But you are already in opinion against our plans."

"Do not many men work loyally in causes they dislike?"

"Then you are going to work with us? You speak in riddles," she cried, with a gesture of impatience.

"I have been in Turkey some years, and the habit grows on one here."

She got up with another gesture, irritation as well as impatience this time.

"Mr. Grant trusts you so entirely," she exclaimed.

"That is a habit bred more in the West than in the East, mademoiselle."

"You will make me regard you as an enemy, Mr. Ormesby," she declared, now quite angry.

"When Grant shares that view, no doubt he'll send me packing," and she seemed to read the words and the look as a kind of challenge.

"I think you had better not see Maraboukh Pasha to-day, if those are your views. If he were to suspect your enmity to the cause, the consequences might be very serious for all."

The dominant note in this annoyed me ; it was almost as if she had taken over the command and was issuing her orders.

"I was going merely as an interpreter ; but if you think you had better cancel Grant's arrangements, I, of course, can have no objection." She bit her lip and saw she had gone too far, and was angry with herself for the mistake and with me for having noticed it.

"I came to you as a friend, Mr. Ormesby."

"As peace-maker, mademoiselle," I corrected, with a glance. "And you leave as—what?"

"As an——" she commenced, vehemently, but checked herself with a shrug of disdain: "It is not necessary to say."

"Curiosity, even on such a matter, is not one of my weaknesses," I answered, with a bow and smile, as I opened the door for her.

"Nevertheless, it may interest you to learn I read your thoughts sufficiently to know you have labelled me dangerous ;" and with that parting shot she went away.

"It certainly required very little intuition on her part to make that discovery ; and the only interesting query was why she should have thought it necessary to warn me by stating it so plainly. Perhaps she was angry, and so, theatrical. Angry women, even clever ones, often make that mistake.

I had labelled her dangerous—very dangerous indeed ; but it struck me as a very foolish step for her to have come to sound me or pump me, quite so openly. And when clever women take foolish steps, and apparently needless ones, there is sometimes a much deeper reason underneath.

Could there be such a reason here? Was I in any kind of personal danger? Could someone have warned me against her so that she came to test me in order to satisfy that someone? It was possible—but then, all things are possible in such a business. And then by a trick of ideas, Stephani flashed into my thoughts. Was I to look for his hand in this?

CHAPTER VIII

MARABOUKH PASHA

MARABOUKH PASHA was a man who had had a very varied life, having pushed his way up by means of those qualities which stand for so much in Turkey. He was cunning, capable, subtle, without a shread of scruple, a fawning sycphant to those above him, and a brutal bully to his inferiors.

He was a Turk of the old school, as it is termed; a strict Mohammedan, a very Moslem of Moslems, indeed, with a vigorous contempt of reforms, and a hatred deep, bitter and intense of Europeans.

He had begun life in the Karagheuz, those obscene puppet shows which in the days when he was young were a by-word for their astounding indecencies: and had gradually risen, as men can rise from the gutter in Stambul, by clinging to the skirts of greater people, until he had amassed wealth, become powerful, attracted the attention of the Sultan, and obtained the command of a province and with it his title of Pasha.

His administration of his province had been a scandal even for Turkey, where notoriously the provincial governors are left to their own devices for extorting money out of the unfortunate peasants, farmers and traders. Knowing their term of office is uncertain and may be very brief, the Pashas bleed the unfortunate people under them unmercifully to fill

their own pockets with the least practicable delay. Maraboukh had proved a past master in the work, until the whole province being in all but open revolt, he was recalled and a less callous tyrant put in his place.

He took his recall to heart, and came back to Stambul to plot against the Government. He had been instrumental in pulling down many men—most of them among those who had helped him in old times, that being his principle of gratitude—but he had never succeeded in lifting himself; and on this he brooded. He saw men promoted who were his inferiors both in capacity and rascality; and this rankled until his pique and jealousy drove him to handle the dangerous and inflammable materials of the plot to dispose the Sultan and put his brother, Rechad Effendi, with whom Maraboukh was believed to have influence, in his place.

How Haidée Patras became associated with him I do not know, but he had apparently persuaded her that he could revenge her wrongs—if the tale she told us were true and she had any—although it was much more probable that he would make use of her so long as she was useful, and sacrifice her when she ceased to be so, as he did everyone.

We did not know all these things about him at first. He was a man who knew how to hide his acts behind many veils, and very different representations were made to Grant. When we found out the truth, it was too late; and as I was the head of our secret intelligence department, I must accept the responsibility for the mistake.

I went to the interview with him despite the Greek's

intervention, but throughout it I was a mere onlooker, as the conversation was carried on in French. My services as interpreter were thus not required, a fact which was to turn out fortunate.

The Pasha lived in a large square ugly house in Stambul, and the interior was, like that of nearly all Mohammedans, untidy, ill-kept, dirty and slovenly. The afternoon was wet, and as we drove up through the splashing pools of the vilely kept roadway the two servants who were stationed at the door, as sentinels are stationed on stools outside the houses of Ministers, made us salaams instead of military salutes, and ushered us into a large hall, sloppy with the footmarks of people, to the number of a dozen or so, who were lounging and squatting there for gossiping.

We were escorted to the foot of a broad staircase, where a servant came forward and took our goloshes. Upstairs we were shown into a spacious ante-room, a fine apartment with large high windows, but frowsy and dirty to a degree. The curtains to the windows, like the cushions and coverings of divans, were of rich and costly silk, but soiled and begrimed with dirt, the ends all ragged and filthy and squalid.

There we were kept some minutes and an attendant brought us coffee, which it is ill-manners ever to refuse; and I was amused to see that it was served on a cheap common brass tray which came from much nearer Birmingham than Benares. The servants were dressed in ill-fitting shabby frock coats and baggy trousers; and looking at them one could readily appreciate the report that the Turks now buy up all the second-hand clothes of the Continent and wear them whether they fit or not.

Grant soon grew very impatient at the delay in reaching the Pasha's presence; and I could see he shared my belief that we were being kept waiting intentionally in order that we might be more convinced of the Pasha's importance.

We were shown in at last, however, and Maraboukh came forward, and with the customary elaborate salutations greeted Grant and made little of me.

"I have been kept waiting a long time, your Excellency," said Grant, in French, haughtily, whereupon the Pasha, a short, thick-set, unctuous, oily man, spread himself into apologies, and his black, beady, cruel eyes were fixed on his visitor, greedily reading his looks, as he thought what line he had better adopt. In the meantime I placed myself well in the background. Grant accepted the apologies, and waving his hand to two men, dressed in Oriental costume, who stood like statues on either side of the door:

"Our interview is to be private."

"They are merely mutes, monsieur, deaf and dumb;" and he touched his mouth and ears to signify that the tongues of both had been split and the ear drums pierced, after the gentle fashion of the East. They were the Pasha's personal guards.

I saw Grant shudder at this confirmation of what I had once told was still the custom in the houses of Ottomans of importance.

"And your attendant?" said the Pasha, shooting an inquisitive glance at me.

"He is in my confidence, and is with us. He is my interpreter."

"That is well," was the reply, with a bow and wave

of the hand, dismissing me from consideration. "Well then, Mademoiselle Patras has told me that you have decided to throw in your lot with us, monsieur, to my infinite pleasure," said Maraboukh in his quiet suave voice; "and that you desire to have guarantees from us as to the future." I noticed that throughout the interview he dropped all the circuitous flowery methods of speech, which no doubt he would have used in speaking Turkish. He felt instinctively that plain straightforward language would appeal more directly to an American.

"I have made one condition, your Excellency. There must be no violence, and also no bloodshed. The life of His Majesty must be inviolate."

"Violence, bloodshed!" exclaimed Maraboukh, with a gentle laugh as of astonishment. "Of what use would either be? What violence need there be? Fifty, or perhaps twenty, years ago such a condition might have been necessary; but to-day is to-day—and I hope we Ottomans have learnt enough from the West to change our Government without it."

"Some twenty years ago, there was an accident to Abul Azid, which the world outside read as murder, your Excellency," said Grant bluntly.

"Misread, monsieur; misread, entirely."

"Well, there must be no 'accidents' now;" and again the Pasha spread out his hands and shrugged his broad shoulders in deprecation.

"There shall be no accidents either, Monsieur Grant; I swear it to you by the beard of the Prophet."

"I am glad to hear it, because at the first sign of violence I shall withdraw and throw what influence I have on the other side."

"I should be with you, monsieur, on my honour," declared the old Turk, impressively, as if he was painfully shocked at the bare idea.

"Will you tell me, then, exactly, what your plans are?"

"You give me your assurance that you join us and that every word uttered now is in absolute confidence."

"I give you my word on both points, subject to the condition I have named."

"Certainly, subject to that condition. Well, I need not tell you now the grievances of our people—they are, alas, common knowledge. The country stands on the verge of ruin, of public bankruptcy indeed. The army is not paid, the officials from top to bottom are not paid, the navy is rotting from mismanagement, the people are ground to the earth by taxation, and Turkey to-day, alas, is bleeding to death internally, and has not a friend left in Europe. And what is the cause, except misrule? The reforms which twenty years ago were putting new blood into our veins have been stopped. By whom, and why? Our land is one of magnificent natural resources; and these by peace and good government could be developed until we should be ten times as strong as in the strongest years of the Empire. Who leaves them neglected, nay, who prevents their development, and why? There is but one answer to these questions. The cause of all and the curse of all is the present Sultan and his madness."

"His madness!" echoed Grant in a tone of surprise.

"It is his madness that spells the hopelessness of his subjects. The secrets of Yildiz Kiosk are well kept; but not so well as to prevent those, who have means of gaining information, knowing of his fits of

madness. His mind, like that of his ill-fated brother, Murad, has given way under the strain of the wild fear of assassination that ever possesses him. All we propose, therefore, is that like his brother, he shall be set aside, confined, treated gently, as you know we Easterners always treat the infirm of mind, and that his place shall be taken by Rechad Effendi, a man just, upright, broad minded and liberal. And that will be done."

"Your Excellency pledges yourself for his personal safety."

"Absolutely. We do not war with the insane; but we cannot be misruled by them to ruin and national bankruptcy—and that is Turkey's one alternative."

"I can join such a scheme freely," said Grant, in a tone of unmistakable relief. As he spoke my eyes were on the Pasha, and his face lighted with satisfaction and triumph. But he lowered his eyes directly, and began to finger some papers on his desk.

"Nothing can prevent our success, monsieur," he said, a moment later. "Most of the influential men in the country are on our side, and we have but to pay the army their arrears for every officer and soldier to be with us too."

"Are you in want of the money for that?"

At the question I saw the Pasha start quickly as though with surprise at some fresh turn of thought it suggested. He paused while his fingers still played absently with the papers before him.

"Is it possible you would have found it?" he asked then, slowly. "I had not thought of you in such a connection; and it is now too late."

"Too late?" echoed Grant, struck, as I was, by

the words, and much more by the curious tone in which they were spoken. If ever the voice of a man had in it a note of intense and overpowering regret, Maraboukh's had then. Yet what cause could he have for such a feeling? I distrusted him so entirely that his every word and look and gesture were objects of suspicion to me.

"I mean merely that our arrangements are made, monsieur, and I fear cannot now be altered." His manner was all that of a man dismayed by some sudden discovery, and the expression of his face as he looked at Grant presented a baffling puzzle. "I had no conception you would join us so wholeheartedly. However, there it is," he added, throwing off the feeling with an evident effort, and shrugging his shoulders. "Had I known, the advantage should have been yours. The money will be a mere temporary loan, of course! but to those who find it great concessions will be made—and I would gladly have seen them in your hands." Whatever his real thoughts were in the matter, he had them under control now, and he spoke in his usual tone. "Rechad Effendi himself would, of course, have confirmed them."

"But I thought Rechad Effendi was a close prisoner in the Tcheragan Palace?" asked Grant.

"Our friends are everywhere, monsieur," answered Maraboukh, with a smile, and a widespreading lifting of the hands. "And we are in close touch with His Highness; his very attendants are our men, as indeed are more than half the officials of Yildiz Kiosk itself;" and he enlarged at considerable length upon these ramifications of the plot, and the certain success awaiting him.

To me he seemed overplaying his part; and I half guessed that he was conscious of having made a slip and was anxious now to cover it and redeem the position.

"In any case, monsieur, you will be a great gainer by the change," he concluded. "As I have said, your present concessions will be confirmed, and in place of the present vacillating, suspicious, treacherous Government, you will be dealing with one that is stable, sympathetic, and reliable. Should a way open for you to help the Government further, of course corresponding returns will be made to you."

"I am taking plenty of risks as it is, your Excellency," answered Grant, "and presume that some guarantee of all this will be given me in advance."

"That will be easy, monsieur. Indeed it is arranged already. Your position and attitude have been considered, of course; and in preparation for this interview I have provided myself with a document from Rechad Effendi, signed by His Highness' own hand." He turned over his papers, selected one, and held it up for Grant to see.

"It is in Turkish, I suppose," said Grant, bending forward as if to read it.

"In Turkish, of course," was the reply with a smile. "I have to get a copy made of it." Then Grant did a shrewd thing. He took hold of one end of the paper, and leaning forward to look at it, pushed his chair from under him as though it had slipped away, and clutching at the table to save himself, dragged the document out of the Pasha's hand.

"I beg ten thousand pardons, for my awkwardness, your Excellency," he cried, with well-assumed confusion, as he picked up his chair and sat down. He had the paper now, and made a pretence of examining it. "I do not read Turkish, but I will have this examined;" and to my great pleasure and the old Ottoman's obvious dismay, he put it in his pocket.

"Your interpreter here could examine it now," said Maraboukh.

"Not to my satisfaction," answered Grant quietly and firmly. "Your Excellency need have no fear, I shall keep it safe, and will see that you have a copy. It means everything—to me, of course."

"I am in your hands, monsieur," said the Pasha, with a smile, which did not however hide his chagrin.

"There is only one other question I would put to your Excellency. If I should desire an interview, you could arrange it?"

"It would be difficult. We are surrounded by spies, as perhaps you know. Have you never seen His Highness?" The question was asked casually, but the sharp old eyes were very much in earnest.

"Never, but it might be necessary."

"Well, I would do my best to secure you an interview, I think I can;" and there was a clear note of relief in the reply. "His Highness knows of you and your work."

"Then that's all," said Grant, as he rose. We bowed ourselves out, and each took a keen look at the two silent, motionless figures by the door, although I was careful to keep my face turned from them and from the Pasha as much as possible.

"What do you think of it all, Mervyn?" asked Grant, as soon as we were in the carriage; and it was easy to tell from his manner that he was in high spirits, and had been favourably impressed. "You see your fears about violence were all moonshine."

"I shall say more when I have had a look at that document which you annexed," said I.

"If they mean to go straight, it will be just the making of things," he declared, and for the moment I did not see how to contradict him. So I held my tongue.

When we reached the White House I proposed that we should at once examine the document which the Pasha had handed him; but he declared that Made-moiselle Patras would be very anxious as to the result of the interview, and that he would come to me the moment he had seen her.

"She will know in an instant whether it is all right," he said, and he did not ask me even to be present at the examination. Knowing his feelings for her I ought not to have been surprised, perhaps; but it was the first time since we had been associated together that he had preferred anyone's judgment to mine on such a matter; and I admit that I was chagrined.

It seems a strange thing to blame that feeling of unreasonable anger of mine for what happened: I say unreasonable, because a man under the spell of a woman will do anything: but I have often blamed myself bitterly for not having pressed my point and made it difficult for him to refuse me a sight of the document there and then. So much would have been different.

Instead of doing that, however, I turned away, feel-

ing huffed and hurt ; and I changed my clothes and went out and spent the evening with an old friend. I did not return to the White House until late at night to find myself face to face with a startling development in the grim drama which was now threatening to overwhelm us all.

CHAPTER IX

"CYRUS HAS BEEN POISONED"

AS I was turning in to the great gates I met Lord Angus Markwell rushing out in a condition of breathless excitement.

"Is that you, Mr. Ormesby?" he cried, as he all but ran me down. "Where the deuce have you been?"

"About my own business," I answered, curtly, anything but pleased by his inquisitiveness.

"I've been looking for you in every bally place in Pera I could think of."

"That's very interesting."

"There's the devil to pay here."

"Then pay him. Good-night," I said in a surly tone, and moved on.

"Wait a second. Grant's been taken ill and Miss Grant sent round for me to try and hunt you up. I'm positively done up."

I did not wait to hear him out, but dashed up to the house.

"What has happened, Stuart?" I asked my own servant who always waited for me in the hall when I was out.

"Mr. Grant was taken suddenly ill this evening, sir, and Miss Grant has been asking most anxiously for you. I have been out looking for you, but——"

"Tell her I have come in," I interrupted; "and ask where I can see her. Bring me word to my room."

"I beg your pardon a moment, if you please, sir," said Stuart, in a low voice. "Something has happened in your private room, and thinking you might wish to see it for yourself, I locked the door. Here is the key." I took it and hurried to the room, and the instant I entered I saw something that caused me intense surprise.

A number of papers which I had left on my table in their usual order had been disarranged, and in the middle of them lay a small heap of ashes as if some of the papers had been burnt, and close to the heap was a half-smoked cigar.

I was staring at this in bewilderment when Stuart came to say that Enid was waiting for me in the drawing-room.

"Get your mind quite clear about this, Stuart," I said, waving my hand toward the mess on the table; "and tell me presently exactly what has occurred." I locked the door behind us and went off to Enid.

"Oh where have you been, and why were you away at such a time?" she cried, in a tone of distraction. She was ashen pale and wringing her hands. "Thank God you have come. Cyrus has been poisoned by that Greek woman."

"You must be calmer than this and not make such wild random assertions," I said firmly.

"Calm! Would you have me calm when my brother has been murdered?" She was almost hysterical and spoke in high pitched, excited tones.

"Please tell me all there is to tell, Miss Grant, so that I can judge what to do. You are only making bad worse by this." I spoke very sharply.

The collapse came then, and she broke down and

falling into a chair commenced to gasp and sob vehemently and wildly. I called Stuart, sent for restoratives, and then, after some minutes, she recovered; the shedding of tears seemed to have given her relief, and she soon grew calmer.

Then she told me with many breaks and interruptions what had occurred so far as she knew. Grant, it appears, had been with Haidée for some time after our return from Maraboukh Pasha, and had then asked for me, to learn, of course, that I was absent. He and Mrs. Wellings and Haidée Patras had dined together, Grant being apparently in very high spirits. Enid had dined by herself in her own rooms, as after the scene on the launch she and the Greek had not met. After dinner, Grant had gone to my room for some purpose Enid did not know, and very soon afterwards a servant had come rushing to her to say he had fallen down in a fit.

She had gone to him at once and had taken command; acting very promptly, but in one thing with amazing indiscretion. She had Grant carried to bed, sent for a doctor, Dr. Arbuthnot, and despatched Stuart for me with orders to get Lord Angus Markwell to join in the hunt. Having done so far very well, she had lost her head and launched into a violent denunciation of the Greek, and given the servants peremptory instructions not to allow Mademoiselle Patras near her brother's room, asserting her belief that Grant had been poisoned, and that the Greek was responsible. After that she had waited in feverish impatience for my return.

It was a nice cauldron of troubles, and woman-like she finished with the extremely unfair reproach that

it would probably not have happened had I been at home.

"What does Dr. Arbuthnot think?" I asked.

"I don't know. He won't say it's poison; but I know it is. He's with Cyrus now."

"Then I'll go up and see him," and we went up together.

Grant certainly looked so ill that I thought he was dying. His face was grey, the lips were livid, the closed eyelids were almost purple as were the sockets, he was bathed in most profuse perspiration, and his breathing was short, fearfully laboured and stertorous, while now and again his limbs twitched under the bedclothes, and his huge frame shuddered spasmodically.

Mrs. Wellings and a nurse were assisting the doctor who did not take our intrusion at all kindly.

"Miss Grant, if you remain here I shall have two patients instead of one," he said sharply; "and you, Mr. Ormesby, can do no good here. I don't like the room crowded."

"One word, doctor," I returned, as I drew him aside, "Will he recover?"

"I hope so now. I think so. He is a very powerful man, fortunately.

"What is the cause?"

"Apoplexy, Mr. Ormesby," he answered, loudly enough for the rest to hear, but giving me at the same time a significant look and whispering, "I'll see you when I come down. Take Miss Grant away, please;" and he went back to the bedside.

Enid was standing at the foot of the bed staring fixedly at her brother with a strained look of pain and

distress, through her eyes, her very soul was speaking of her love and fear for the sick man with an intense and consuming passion of sorrow. I touched her arm.

"Dr. Arbuthnot would rather we did not stay here," I said.

"For Cyrus' sake or mine," she asked, her eyes hungry with desire to stay.

"For your brother's sake, Miss Grant," said the doctor, who had caught the whisper.

"Then I will go. Oh, if he should die!" It was a whisper to herself and she sighed heavily and trembled.

"He will not die," said the doctor again, quietly.

"Thank you, doctor," she answered. "I can go now." She went to the bed head and kissed her brother and then came away with me. As soon as we were outside the door she stopped, leaning for support against the wall, her face the very presentment of white anguish.

"Wait one moment," she said; and I stayed in silence, marvelling. How I had misread her! I had never conceived that this depth of feeling lay beneath the even surface of her usual bearing. It was a revelation and helped me to understand her passionate treatment of Mademoiselle Patras. "How weak you will think me," she said, presently, with a faint wan smile; and then we went on down to the drawing room.

I was anxious to hear what Stuart had to tell me and to go to my room, but I did not see how to leave Enid. She sat with clasped hands, in an attitude of deep dejection, her head bent and her eyes fixed on the floor, listening, as I guessed, for the foot-

steps of the doctor with news from the sick room. I watched her very anxiously, wishing I could do or say something to ease the strain, and yet unable to do anything; and presently she raised her head quickly, listened, and then sprang up and looked eagerly toward the door.

"The doctor, at last," she cried, and a moment afterwards the door was opened.

But it was not Dr. Arbuthnot. To my consternation Mademoiselle Patras entered, looking not a whit less distracted and anguish-riven than Enid herself. On seeing the Greek, Enid started and drew a deep breath, while a flush of pink rushed into her pale cheeks. The Greek on her side was equally moved, and the two stood for a space facing each other in silence. Then Haidée closed the door and turned to me.

"What is this terrible news, I have just heard, Mr. Ormesby? Is Mr. Grant ill? Where is he? I wish to go to him."

"That you cannot do; you shall not," said Enid, instantly.

"Mr. Ormesby, I implore you to tell me the truth."

Enid laughed: a little, scornful, scoffing laugh.

"You act well, mademoiselle, but we were not all blind here. I can understand your anxiety. You have done your work and now are anxious to know that it was well done; and, but for the blessing of God, you would have succeeded."

"What do you mean?" asked the Greek, turning then to her, and speaking in a low tone of pain.

"Mr. Grant has been taken ill suddenly," I began, when Enid interrupted me almost fiercely.

"My brother has been poisoned, Mademoiselle Patras, poisoned by you, and he is now battling for life."

"Poisoned!" It was no more than a whisper, and for a moment she reeled and had to clutch the back of a chair to save herself from falling. I made a step forward to help her; but with a great effort she rallied her strength. "Holy Mother of God, it cannot be true!"

"Cyrus is not here to see you act, mademoiselle," said Enid, in the same hard scornful tone. "Is not this a little—superfluous; this emotion?" But Haidée appeared too overcome by the news to heed Enid's scorn.

"It cannot be true; surely, it cannot," she murmured in her own tongue. "What can it mean? God, can it have come to this?"

"Mr. Ormesby understands your language. You should be careful," said Enid in the same tone.

"Can I not see him?" asked Haidée in English.

"No. You shall not go to gloat over your work. I have given the servants orders that you shall not be allowed to see him."

"Oh God, how cruel you are!" came like a cry from the Greek's heart.

I confess I was deeply moved; and to me her anguish had all the look and ring of genuine feeling. But Enid was untouched.

"You had better return to your rooms, mademoiselle," she said, coldly. "Unless you would prefer to leave the house while the way is still open."

"I must see him, I must," cried Haidée. "I know he would have me go to him, if he knew."

"If he knew, mademoiselle!" retorted Enid, catching her last words and repeating them with pungent significance. "If he knew, you would never have had the chance to do this."

Anger began now to come to the Greek's aid as the first sharp sting of the blow abated. She met Enid's scornful look firmly and taking a step or two nearer to her answered in a tone of concentrated feeling.

"Do you dare to charge this terrible thing to me? To me, who love your brother with a passion that would make death for his sake welcome?"

"He is not here to listen to you and be cheated, and I understand you too well."

"And you are his sister? His flesh and kin: born of the same mother; nurtured at the same breast; and yet are—this!" Her indignation was almost magnificent as she drew herself to her full height and flashed her eyes, all ablaze with anger, upon her accuser. But as if perceiving suddenly the futility of any anger, she changed in a moment to a tone of suppliant entreaty. "Ah do not heed my anger. I call back the words. I am sorry I spoke them, but you goaded me. I would not anger you. You are his sister and you must have a heart. See, I am overwhelmed by this fearful thing. Holy Mother of God, what can I say to touch your heart and make you feel something of the tempest of grief in my own? I love him so. I love him so. I must go to him."

The scene was getting past bearing.

"He is quite unconscious, mademoiselle," I said; and your going——" but Enid broke in upon me again.

"Is impossible. She shall not see him," she de-

clared vehemently, stamping her foot; and then to the Greek: "It was a pity to interrupt you. You would appeal to my heart, you say. I will answer the appeal. I love my brother with a love you do not understand, perhaps; and the very depth and strength of that love it is that fills me with passion against his—murderess."

"Ah!" Anger, indignation, protest, pain, all were in that one exclamation, and Haidée winced and shrank as from a blow, until with a strength of will that surprised me, she crushed back all feelings in the one consuming desire to gain her end. Knowing the fiery temperament of the Greek, her passionate resentment of insult, and the impatience of restraint and control which was the dominant note of her character; and believing as I did that she hated Enid and harboured a love of revenge for the former insult; her conduct seemed a supreme effort of self-restraint. If acting, then surely magnificent in its consummate realism.

"If you believe your own cruel words oh, so deadly cruel, how can I hope to prevail with you?" she said, her voice vibrating with intense feeling. "But I would forget your cruelty; my ears would be deaf to your charge; I would have you think what you would suffer were you in my place, if the man you loved, if love you do, lay dying and you were kept from his side. You are a woman and you know how a woman's heart yearns to succour the man she loves in the hour of darkness, suffering and pain. It may be but little we can do, but how gladly is not that little done; what comfort it gives us to do it; what heart-rest there is in the mere acts of ministering! I urge you,

therefore; I beg of you, nay, I supplicate you here on my knees before you, do not deny me;" and throwing herself on her knees she tried to take Enid's hand and when that was hastily withdrawn, to clutch her dress.

If this was not genuine feeling and grief, surely it was a marvellous presentment of sincerity; and the motive must be powerful and absorbing indeed which could drive a woman of such self-strength, courage and pride to abase herself in this way. But Enid remained, outwardly at least, unmoved. She drew back from the kneeling urgent woman and in a voice as firm as before said.

"I do not wish you to kneel to me, Mademoiselle Patras. If this sorrowing of yours is genuine, it will give you the measure of my own suffering. And so long as I can prevent it, you shall never see my brother. You have done harm enough."

"God knows it, God knows it, I fear I may," and she rose from her knees and stood, one hand on a chair, looking at Enid, like one half distracted, as she sought to think how she could prevail. "I am not guilty of what you think; but how can I make you believe this. You look so hard and unyielding, as though I were an outcast. I have abased myself to you as I never dreamed to do to any one of God's creatures on this earth—and you are like a stone. I do not appeal to your pity; of that you have none, or you would understand me. I cannot touch your heart; for that you have hardened against me with hatred and despising. But you may not be deaf to justice: you cannot be, for you are of the West where justice is the air you breathe and the highest

attribute of the God you worship ; the God we both worship in common, for I am no heathen, but a Christian like yourself ; even as I am a woman like yourself ; while we have that in common which should make us close friends and not enemies—our love for the man who has been thus dealt by and lies battling for his life, as you say. Do at least justice to me then ; let me help to unravel this mystery, if mystery there be ; join hands with me and I swear by all I hold sacred that I will help you loyally, earnestly, and if need be with my life itself."

"Thank you, I do not seek and do not need your help, *madem iselle*," said Enid, in the same calm, clear-cut, measured tones. The Greek half raised her hands as if in protest or entreaty but let them fall again instantly, sighed and shook her head slowly with a gesture of utter despair. Some moments passed in a silence which I found infinitely trying. Then Enid broke it.

"This scene has lasted too long already, *mademoiselle*. May I ask that you retire?"

"I have urged every plea that I could think of to try and make you understand my feeling and suffering, and you answer by sending me from your room. Do you think what it may cost you to do this? If the man I love and who loves me recovers, will he thank you, do you think, for having accused me of being his would-be murderess?" Her voice was stronger now and her manner hardening.

"You have already used your influence to turn my brother against me, and would no doubt use it again. Do so."

"It is you who make me your enemy."

"I would rather have your enmity than your friendship."

"Do you mean that?" the question was asked fiercely and almost threateningly.

"I do not fear you in the least," said Enid, proudly.

"Yet you may have bitter cause to regret your acts and words of to-day."

"Your empty threats have no more weight with me than your false entreaties. There is no more truth in one than the other. Mr. Ormesby, I wish you would see Mademoiselle Patras to her rooms. These theatrical displays tire me." And with an ostentatious shrug of contempt, Enid turned away and threw herself on a chair with her back to the Greek.

Haidée winced and trembled with rage at this last act of contemptuous insult, and I looked for a violent outbreak; but it did not come, on fire though she was. She paused, still trembling with her passion, and then said:

"As you please, but remember it is your own act and choice that makes us enemies—and we Greeks do not forget." The tone was one of concentrated, vengeful passion in full accord with the look of hate she directed at Enid. Then after another pause she turned to me: "Mr. Ormesby, you are Mr. Grant's secretary and I am his affianced wife, I demand in his name that you shew me to him. I will see him. I have every right."

"Mr. Ormesby," said Enid, instantly. "You know the instructions I have given to the servants. No one is to see Cyrus, and certainly not Mademoiselle Patras."

"I have the right, and will see him, Mr. Ormesby."

"I am not a court of appeal from Miss Grant, mad-

emoiselle," I answered. "I have neither the right to take you to my friend nor to keep you from him; but if I had, I should not let you see him at present."

"I expected some such answer, for I know you are no friend of mine," replied the Greek haughtily. "But remember that I made the request, and you refused it."

"I am not likely to forget it." I had felt genuinely sorry for her, but this overbearing tone of hers was more than I could stand complacently.

"I shall see him, sir, nevertheless," she said angrily; and so indeed it proved. For at that moment, just as I had opened the door for her to leave, Dr. Arbuthnot came downstairs to us.

"How is Cyrus, doctor?" asked Enid excitedly. "Can I go to him?"

"I'm glad to tell you, much better. The crisis is over, I believe, and he will recover."

"Is he conscious? Has he asked for me?" she cried eagerly.

"He is quite conscious, but I regret he has not asked for you. He wishes to see Mademoiselle Patras."

The blaze of triumph in the Greek's eyes was a sight to see.

"I am Mademoiselle Patras," she said. "Will you take me to him, sir?"

The doctor glanced in turn at her and at Enid, and then looked questioning to me for some explanation.

"Mademoiselle Patras is engaged to Mr. Grant," I said quietly.

"And has tried to poison him, doctor, remember that," said Enid, interposing in a cold cutting tone

that bit like an acid. "His life may not be safe if she goes near him,"

The doctor was sadly disconcerted for a moment.

"I have only to deal with the medical aspect of the case, of course," he answered after a pause. "Mrs. Wellings and the nurse are there, and I am afraid I must say that in my opinion it would be highly inadvisable not to comply with his request. Of course, nothing must occur at the bedside to distress or excite him unduly; or I cannot answer for the consequences in so critical a case."

"Then I will go as well," declared Enid.

"I am deeply pained, Miss Grant," said the doctor, interposing, "but I regret to say my patient expressly asked that you should not go to him for the present."

Poor Enid. The blow must have struck right to her heart; but she would not flinch nor show a sign of vexation. Haidée, however, was almost brutal in her triumph, and cried with a sneer:

"That is good. It shows indeed how completely Mr. Grant has recovered. Will you take me or shall I go alone, doctor?"

"Can I see you the moment I come down," Mr. Ormesby?" whispered the doctor.

As Haidée left the room she turned a last glance of smiling triumph on Enid, who met the look firmly, taking her defeat without the least outward discomposure. But as soon as the door closed, she threw up her clenched hands high above her head and let them fall with a long-drawn, half-suppressed cry of bitter mortification and suffering. Then her quick ear having caught a sound, she stopped abruptly as she was in the very act of throwing herself despairingly on to

"CYRUS HAS BEEN POISONED" III

a couch, and coming to me, said in a quiet, natural voice and with a smile:

"Is it not splendid that Cyrus is better?"

I did not understand until, hearing the door softly opened behind us, I turned and saw the Greek look in.

She had come back to feast her eyes on her antagonist's humiliation, and Enid, hearing her, had vamped instantly this little bit of by-play and so cheated her of her moment of triumph.

Need I say I was glad?

CHAPTER X

THE PROBLEM OF AN UPSET TABLE

OF all Haidée's actions in that trial of strength between her and Enid, nothing produced a greater impression upon me than this return to try and catch her antagonist in a moment of weakness; and to me it seemed an almost irresistible proof of her insincerity. She had been bitterly disappointed and angry that Enid had taken her defeat with such upstanding calmness; and the desire to witness her humiliation, to see her cast down, had dominated for the moment all the passionate wish to be at Grant's side, of which she had made so much in the interview.

Enid would not allow her feelings to again get out of hand even before me, and when the Greek had gone for the second time, she said, with quiet significance:

"Scarcely the act of a woman absorbed by a passion for Cyrus. What was the real meaning of all that display of hers?"

"It will intensify her hatred of you; and I wish you had not been so quick to denounce her. It was a terrible charge."

"You don't believe it?"

"I don't know what to believe yet."

"But you yourself said you would not have let her go to Cyrus. Do you know I did thank you for that?"

If you wish to scold me, I will listen to you for the sake of that."

"We can't unsay what's been said, and I never care to thrash a dead horse."

"But you believe I made a mistake? I suppose I did," and she sighed. "I shall be real sorry if it makes things harder for you. But if you had only been at home!"

"That's another dead horse," I said, shaking my head regretfully.

"What are you going to do next?"

"Find out things if I can; but it's a ghastly tangle."

"I can't help you to-night. I can't think. I suppose I'm just mad. I shall be better in the morning. Had I better go to bed? Cyrus won't see me, so there's nothing to do."

"I may have some news for you by the morning."

"If only that woman were not with him," she cried despairingly.

"I fancy the doctor will see to that. His head's on quite the right way."

"Does he suspect her?" She flashed the question at me.

"He says it's apoplexy, and of course he won't have his ;atient excited."

"Then I shall go."

"I'll send you up a line by Stuart, if you like, when I've seen Arbuthnot."

"Oh, do! You are so thoughtful. You've been awfully good to me in all this. Don't think I don't see that; I shall never forget it."

"You're a bit upset to-night." I spoke as indiffer-

ently as I could ; for the look in her eyes moved me more than I wished her to see, and I had to put the curb on. She stood a moment in hesitation, then said, almost nervously :

" I—I am sorry I lost my head about that woman. I can see you are right. I—I ought to have held my tongue, but I couldn't. But for the future, I'll—I'll try and do what you think best."

" That's all right. It is a beastly muddle, but we shall pull together all right now. And by the way, you'll be careful for a bit ? "

" How do you mean ? "

" I mean, have your maid to sleep in your room and be a bit careful what you eat and drink for a while." She turned with a swift questioning look.

" Then you do agree Cyrus was poisoned ? " she asked under her breath. " And you think——"

" We don't want to think too far at a time ; but it's always best to be careful. I only meant it as a general hint. You see, this isn't quite like New York or London, and queer mistakes are made sometimes ; and—well, there's no harm in being on one's guard."

" But what of you, yourself ? "

" Oh, I'm nobody ; not important enough to draw danger in my direction ; besides, I do keep a lookout."

I did not wish to alarm, but merely to warn her ; and when I saw to my surprise how scared she was, considering what tough nerves I knew she had, I rather regretted I had said even so much. But the truth was I was vastly puzzled by the whole business, and did not quite see the road ahead.

When the doctor came down, his first words showed me that I had guessed pretty correctly his line with the Greek.

"Did you leave Mademoiselle Patras with your patient, doctor?" I asked.

"No. I'm afraid I've kept you waiting, but I thought it best to remain while she was there, lest Mr. Grant should be excited. She has left him now, and I have requested that she shall not go to the bedside again until I have seen Mr. Grant in the morning.

"Excitement is very bad, isn't it, in—apoplexy?"

"Yes, some kinds of excitement in that form of—apoplexy. We're alone here, I suppose?" he asked, glancing about him.

"Oh, yes. What is it upstairs?"

"I'm afraid it's poison of some kind. I shall be certain after an analysis I'm going to make, but I'm virtually certain now."

"You think he'll be all right now?"

"Oh, yes, if no complications ensue."

"Such as—any more of it?"

"Such as any more of it," he repeated. "I was called in time, fortunately, and his magnificent strength and constitution enabled me to save him."

"I suppose if he had been in bad health or a weaker man, like myself say, or a woman, the thing might have been different?"

"I don't think anything would have saved him."

"I see, well, it's a good thing for me I didn't get it then. You'll see him early in the morning, I presume?"

"Yes, but—have you any idea as to the cause?"

"I was out and didn't get in till nearly midnight."

"You've been some years in the East, haven't you ;

long enough to know that queer things of this kind do happen at times?"

"If I hadn't known it before, this would tell me. If I should want your help and—and confidence, I may rely on you?"

"Certainly. Poisons are rather a speciality of mine; and if you find out anything, I should like to know. Good-night."

"Good-night, doctor; and of course we all understand this is only apoplexy."

I did not think it necessary to tell him any more at the present stage. It was enough for my purpose so far the attempt had failed, and as soon as he was gone I went to my rooms and took Stuart with me, first scribbling a note to Enid to tell her what the doctor had done in regard to the Greek.

While Stuart was away I made a careful examination of my room. Very few things had been disturbed. The papers on my table, which I had left neatly arranged; for in those matters I am a person of some method and order; had obviously been moved, and some few of them were tossed about in confusion. A closer scrutiny led me to think that this had not, as I had at first thought, resulted from some one searching among them for any particular document. They had rather the appearance of having been tumbled over hastily.

I remembered, of course, that Grant had been to my room, and it was quite possible that he might have wished to find some particular paper and in the hunt for it had tossed the rest over impatiently. But there were not any papers of any real consequence on the table; they were all locked away; and he knew

this as well as I. I didn't think, therefore, that he had done the work.

Then there was the little heap of burnt papers, with the half-consumed cigar lying near it. It was cleverly planned, to suggest that the cigar had caused the mischief; but here again there was a flaw which looked like the result of hurry. The cigar lay quite three inches away from the heap of tinder, and it had burnt itself out on the document—an old legal draft—on which it still lay. I jumped at once to the conclusion, therefore, that the cigar had not caused the fire, but had been placed there afterwards to suggest the cause.

Before I examined the burnt ashes more closely I looked round the room. My desk, drawers and safe were all locked, and had not been tampered with; and it was therefore clear that whoever had been at work had either been interrupted before he could get to them or had wished only to deal with the papers, or one of them, on the desk.

But I found that the small table, by the side of my writing-desk, on which my coffee was usually placed by Stuart, had been upset, and the coffee, milk and cup were lying on the floor. A dozen suggestions to account for this jumped into my mind; and then gradually an extremely disquieting thought began to take shape.

I should explain that not liking the thick coffee in which the Turks delight, it was my custom to have some made by Stuart, who had picked up the knack in Paris, and a small pot holding about two cups was always put ready for me in the evening. Grant had also a great liking for the coffee as Stuart made it, and frequently, when he came to my room in the evening,

would have a cup of it with me. Now, it was after leaving my room that he had been taken ill; and with this in my thoughts, I became suddenly intensely interested in the little problem of the upset table.

I picked up the cup which was broken and found coffee stains in it, but no drain of coffee; but in the coffee-pot itself, which was fortunately undamaged, there still remained perhaps a table-spoonful or more of liquor; and there were also a few drops of milk in the jug. I smelt them both, but could detect nothing unusual in either, and it occurred to me as exceedingly unlikely that any one would be so clumsy as to tamper with either. I put them both away carefully under lock and key, however, and then another fact struck me. There was no sugar. I was speculating whether this could have any significance, when Stuart came back from delivering the note to Enid.

"Now, Stuart, tell me what made you lock my door to-night?"

"There's not much to tell, sir, only that some one came in here to-night. I brought your coffee as usual, sir, at half-past eight, and not seeing you here, I just left it as usual, and lit the lamp, and went out into the big hall, where McPherson told me you had gone out before dinner. Then somewhere between nine and ten, sir, Mr. Grant passed through the hall, and seeing me, asked if you were here. I said I didn't think so, and he said he would come and see; and I came along with him. He was carrying a paper of some sort in his hand; and when he saw you weren't in, sir, he said it would be all right, that he'd stop and have a cigarette, and was going to leave a paper on your table which I

was to call your attention to when you came in, and that I needn't wait."

"Was my coffee here then, did you notice?"

"Oh, yes, sir, because I asked him if I should make him a cup, as he often likes to have one, sir, as you know; but he said no, it didn't matter; and then I left him here. He didn't stay very long, sir, perhaps a quarter of an hour or so, and when he passed me in the hall again, he said: 'Don't forget to call Mr. Ormesby's attention to the paper, Stuart;' and I said I'd be sure and remember it; and then almost directly, not ten minutes, I'm sure, I thought I'd go and see where he'd left the paper, as I thought it was so important. And when I got near the room I heard some one in it. I thought it might be you, and that you'd come in by the private way; but the door was open and then I heard something fall down. I called out: 'Is that you, sir?' but no answer was made, and just as I reached the door the light went out. I felt sure something was wrong then, and ran in and struck a light. I heard a rustling and was so startled that, foolish-like, I let the match go out; and when I'd struck another, the room was empty, and in the mess you saw it, sir. So I locked the door and came away, and directly afterwards I heard that Mr. Grant had had a fit and was ill."

"Was Mr. Grant smoking when you saw him?"

"Not at first, sir. He lit a cigarette in your room."

"Cigar or cigarette? Can you be certain?"

"Quite, sir; it was a cigarette."

"One thing more, Stuart. Be quite certain. Did you forget to bring any sugar with the coffee to-night?"

"No, sir, certainly not. I had to get it specially."

"Some one has taken a fancy to it, then ; there's none left, Stuart."

"Perhaps it's got spilt, sir."

"Did you make any noise of any kind when you were coming to the room after Mr. Grant had been here? I mean a noise which any one in here could have heard."

"I'm afraid I was whistling, sir ; not loudly, but I'd got a tune in my head and I think I remember stopping when I first heard some one and thought it might be you, sir."

"Ah, I wish you hadn't begun ; but still, you did, and we can't help it. Now, take a light and look closely about the floor—there may be a stray lump of sugar. Search carefully." He did search very carefully, and I helped him ; but we found nothing, to my mortification. "Take the light and look along the corridor, and in the hall, and wherever it occurs to you to look," I said, and a moment later he came hurrying back.

"I've found one lump, sir ;" and he laid it on the table. "It's a very extraordinary thing."

"Well, go on looking, and if the servants say anything to you tell them you are looking for a gold coin, or lira. It will be quite true. I'll give you that if you find another lump."

He looked at me in surprised mystification, rather scared, I think.

"Is it anything serious, then, sir ?"

"You don't find me generally buying sugar at a lira the lump, do you? And look here, not a word about anything here."

"No, sir ;" and he went away puzzled, turning at

the door to glance round at me with the same half-fearsome, quite baffled expression.

When he had gone I turned to the little heap of burnt paper and the cigar. The cigar was one of Grant's. I knew it well enough ; and this fact showed that whoever had got this thing up for me had done it realistically. These Easterns are great at realistic stage-craft—off the stage.

The paper was entirely consumed—mere tinder ; but nevertheless that part of the business had been bungled—probably through haste. It had been burnt on the table as it lay ; but the burner had made a mistake. He was either careless or had been disturbed and had neglected to crush the tinder, leaving the leaves as they had been folded. With much care I managed to get off the outer envelope, and then by careful examination of the little sheets, holding them up gingerly to the light, I could distinguish Turkish characters and on one of them part of a signature, "Reçhad."

Then I sat down, and, lighting my pipe, set to work to put the pieces of the tragic puzzle together ; and to see how they would fit in with the solution already in my thoughts—that all this trouble had been taken, not on Grant's account, but on mine ; and that, but for an accident, I, and not Grant, would have been at that moment battling for life against an insidious poison.

I recalled Dr. Arbuthnot's words, too—that had I had that kind of apoplectic fit, in all human probability I should have died ; and the recollection of Grant's grey death-like pallor when I had seen him, set me shuddering as with a chill of frost. I could not drag

my thoughts away from the look and the words ; and, if I own to the truth, I think I was for the time just horribly afraid.

I was still in the cold clutch of this phantom fear when Stuart came back.

"I have found another lump of sugar, sir, but I don't know whether it's out of the same lot ;" and as he gave it to me he startled and said : "Excuse me sir, but are you ill? You look quite white, sir. Can I get you anything?"

"Yes, mix me a brandy and soda, strong ; I've had a shake-up of my nerves. But where did you find this?" holding up the sugar.

"On the stairs of number three staircase. It's the back way up to the rooms of Mademoiselle Patras and her servants, sir."

"Then it's not very likely it's part of the same lot, as you say, Stuart."

"No, sir, perhaps not, but—" he was pouring out the brandy and stopped and turned to look at me—"it's funny, for it has the same queer faint smell."

"So it has," I answered, sniffing it. "It may be as you put it—funny—but it's a kind of fun that doesn't exactly make me laugh." And, indeed, I had never felt more serious in my life.

CHAPTER XI

THE RESULT OF THE ANALYSIS.

WHEN I had packed up carefully the coffee, the milk, and the two lumps of sugar, I sent Stuart off at once with them to Dr. Arbuthnot calculating that he would be at work still on the other analysis ; and then turned to consider my next step.

My theory was that the attempt had been made on my life, and not on Grant's ; and that the medium of the poison was the sugar. Probably, after Stuart had placed the things in my room the poisoned sugar had been substituted, in the expectation that I should return, take my coffee, as usual, notice nothing in the sugar, and so—exit.

Grant's visit to my room had, however, upset the plan altogether. He had no doubt helped himself to a cup of coffee, and this had been immediately detected, the poisoner being on the alert ; and what had occurred in my room afterwards had been hurriedly done. The poisoner must have come back to the room almost the instant Grant left it—unless, indeed, as was possible, he lay concealed there all the while—with the object of securing the doctored sugar, and then had had to deal with the paper on the table.

That paper was without doubt the Turkish document which Maraboukh Pasha had handed to Grant in the afternoon ; unquestionably it was a forgery which any one knowing Turkish would discover ; and

consequently instructions had been sent to his spies in the White House that it must not come into my possession. Thus the first idea was to use the lump of sugar to put me out of the fight altogether; and when Grant upset that scheme, the paper had been burnt on my table and the lighted cigar left there, as if to suggest the cause of the accident.

While this was in the doing, Stuart had come whistling down the corridor, thus giving the alarm; a scramble had been made to get the doctored sugar, the light had been extinguished, and the table upset in the excitement and hurry of the moment.

Who, then, was the spy-poisoner? The answer was easy enough, I thought. It was certainly not Haidée. She would never risk two secret visits to my room, and was far too conspicuous a person to move about the house unobserved. She could not have done it had she wished, indeed. But the case was very different with her two servants—the woman, Lelia, and the man, Koprili; and I set it down to the man.

That poison should have been used did not in the least surprise me, and will surprise no one who knows anything of the undercurrents of life in Stambul. Does not every one know of the case where an English governess had unwittingly roused the jealousy of an inmate of a certain well-known Pasha's hareem, and who was only saved from taking poisoned coffee by the whispered warning of an intelligent little slave boy who was handing it to her? Murder in that case was attempted as an incident in a mere conventional visit. And I could recall a score of cases of a similar kind.

The question which really concerned me was how to bring it home first to Koprili, who was but the tool

of some one else, and then to ascertain whether that other was, or was not, Haidée the Greek. I could better understand her attitude now in the interview with Enid. Her horror and emotion at Grant's sudden illness might be perfectly genuine, because of the mistake that had been made; and yet she might have been privy to the whole thing. On the other hand, this might have been wire-pulled without her knowledge and by some one influencing her servant directly.

But, in any case, it was clear we might all be surrounded by very real danger and that some decisive step must be taken.

I got no farther that night, and went across first thing in the morning to Dr. Arbuthnot. Like myself, he had had no sleep, having been engrossed by the task I had given him.

"I'm puzzled, Mr. Ormesby. I've completed a rough analysis, and there's no doubt it's poison. That coffee and milk were all right, but I found it in the sugar, and found distinct traces in what I brought from the sick room. I'm not yet quite clear as to its exact nature, but I suspect it's a subtle and very powerful preparation with strychnine as the main basis."

"In both lumps of sugar, doctor?"

"Yes, certainly in both: but you needn't have sent two."

"It was rather a point in the case; that's why I sent both," I answered. It was a great point of course. It was clear that Koprili had dropped both lumps in his hurry—one in the corridor by my room and one on the stairs near his own.

"I shall go on with my experiments as soon as I've time," said the doctor, "and will let you know the results."

"It will be a satisfaction, but it isn't really important now, as I know enough; and of course this thing won't come out. By the way," I added, as a thought occurred to me, "the sugar had what my man termed a queer smell."

"Nothing in that; it was a faint, very faint, scent of musk intended to neutralise the odour of one of the drugs."

"Could you doctor a couple of lumps for me so as to deceive any one who knew what the sugar might contain?"

"Easily, of course; but what do you want them for?"

"Merely for a little experiment I'm going to make;" and in a few minutes he had complied with my wish. I returned to the White House, and my own opinion of the poison theory being thus confirmed by the doctor's analysis, I gave effect to a step I had had in contemplation.

"While Mr. Grant is ill, McPherson," I said to the porter, a dry dour Scotchman, an old soldier and a staunch, invaluable servant who Grant had brought from America, and who was ready to lay down his life for his master, "we must keep the house as quite as possible. I leave the matter in your charge, therefore. Lock all the doors but this, and yourself keep the keys, and allow no one to pass either in or out without a permit signed by me. We want no disturbance made and no exaggerated stories carried outside."

"No one at all, sir?" he asked.

"No one except Miss Grant and Dr. Arbuthnot. Refer every one to me. You will, of course, take all messages, and let me have them by Stuart. You understand it is only because the house must be kept quiet while Mr. Grant is ill. And you will not leave your post on any consideration."

"I understand, sir."

There was a large door shutting off the wing where the offices were from the rest of the house; and this I locked, taking the key.

When I got to my room Stuart was laying my breakfast, and giving him one of the lumps of sugar, I asked him in a casual tone whether it was one of those he had found. He seemed to know it instantly; and I was satisfied, and put the stuff carefully away under lock and key.

After breakfast, which Stuart made a point of telling me he had prepared with his own hands, I went to Grant's room, but as Mrs. Wellings told me he was asleep still, and seemed better, having passed a satisfactory night, I did not see him. She was disposed to question me about poison, but I put her off with Dr. Arbuthnot's theory that the illness was really a slight attack of apoplexy; although I gave her a hint that Grant was never to be left alone in the room, and that she or one of the nurses must always be with him.

Then I sent Stuart to enquire after Enid, and he came back with an urgent request that I would go to her in the morning-room at once.

"Have you found out anything, Mr. Ormesby?" she asked eagerly. "You look dreadfully pale and worried."

"I have not slept much. You see, your brother's

illness will throw a great deal on me for a bit, and I've been thinking about things."

"Have you found out anything?" she repeated.

"What there is to find out. I've seen Arbuthnot again, and he says that in cases of apoplexy, rest and freedom from excitement——"

"You won't tell me, then?" she interposed. "How hard it is not to be trusted. And you promised."

"I know very little for certain yet."

"Yes, yes, but what do you think?"

"I think the position's a very grave one, and will be much graver for our plans here if your brother doesn't make haste and get well. I expect the doctor over directly."

"Oh, please don't talk in that conventional way," she cried impatiently. "Can't you see I am half beside myself? I haven't slept a wink all night, thinking, thinking, thinking of it all."

"I have satisfied myself completely that your brother was not poisoned intentionally—if poisoned at all. I am quite certain."

"Why do you think that? Why do you think that?" she asked, almost feverishly, looking at me intently.

"In the first place, it is nobody's interest in the whole of Turkey to injure him just now. Only yesterday some most important negotiations were virtually arranged that makes his active help in—in the matter here of the most urgent value to—to every one, especially those with whom Mademoiselle Patras desires him to act. Turks are not such fools as to kill geese which can lay real golden eggs."

"Ah, then I am right ; I knew it ; I saw it all in the night. It came to me quite clearly. This thing was aimed at you."

I started ; I could not help it in my surprise at her guess.

"Isn't that rather a wild supposition?" I asked, with a smile, to cover my momentary astonishment.

"No, no, it is true, it is true," she cried, her eyes rivetted upon my face. "Cyrus was all right before he went to your rooms ; I have found that out. And he must have taken something there which caused this—and it must have been meant for you. Oh, it is horrible, horrible," and she covered her face impulsively with her hands in deep agitation. "I saw it all in the night ; I'm sure."

"I am scarcely a person of sufficient importance, Miss Grant," I answered, smiling again.

"Did he take anything there? Tell me ; I will know ; I will find it out. I know he often has coffee and whiskey and cigarettes with you, and—oh, Mr. Ormesby, please tell me."

"I was not there, Miss Grant, and I don't think he stayed more than a minute or two."

"Do you think you are doing me a kindness by trying to hide this from me?"

"I think you will be very foolish to make a mountain of a mole-hill."

"Very well, perhaps I am doing that ;" and she smiled, to my great relief, as if quite reassured. "One does make such foolish mistakes in excitement, doesn't one? I must try not to worry ; it would be so foolish to do that when there's nothing to worry about, wouldn't it?" And she laughed nervously. It was

such a causeless laugh and was so unlike her to laugh at such a moment, that I ought to have been on my guard. "And Aunt Constance tells me Cyrus is better this morning. That's good news, isn't it?"

"Dr. Arbuthnot doesn't think there is any danger now," I answered, watching her curiously as she fidgetted nervously with her handkerchief. "Will you excuse me if I say I think you ought to see him about yourself? You are looking anything but well."

"There is nothing the matter with me. I've had an excellent night's rest."

"Just now you said you hadn't slept."

"Did I? What a memory you have. I shall do now—now that there's nothing more to worry about, and as you're sure no harm was meant to Cyrus."

"I shall ask Arbuthnot to see you."

"I don't see that my health concerns any one but myself—and certainly not you,"

"That's not exactly what I should have expected you to say, Miss Grant; I think every one about the White House cares about that."

"I didn't know I was a person of such importance," she said, almost flippantly, and with another forced smile, "but if that's so, I must take care of myself; "and, by the way, there is one thing you can do for me." She spoke lightly as of a trifle, and passing me, went to the window and pointed out. "What is that building over there?"

I looked at her in astonishment at such a question, and to humour her, went to the window.

"Do you mean that red mosque?"

"No, stand a bit closer, there," she said in the same tone of half banter, and before I could guess her intention, she turned on me, my face being full in the light, and in a tone of concentrated energy, she asked rapidly, "Now, Mr. Ormesby, on your honour as a gentleman, was not this an attempt to poison you?"

The swift change of tone and manner and the fierce directness of the question and look caught me quite unprepared, and she read the answer in my looks and blundering unreadiness of words.

"I think you tried to take me at a very unfair disadvantage."

"You need not fence any more; I read the answer in your face. Now, perhaps you will tell me all about it?"

"I have nothing to tell," I replied, angry with myself for having been caught in such a way.

"Do you mean to allow these poisoners to remain in the house so that they may make another attempt?"

"I do not say there has been one attempt yet."

"Mr. Ormesby, why won't you trust me? Can't you, or won't you?"

"Of course I would trust you."

"Would, but don't, is that it? I would have trusted—but there, I can't force you, of course. Very well, I cannot urge you more than I have." The reproach in her tone was hard to bear.

"If I thought there was anything you ought to know, I should tell you, of course."

"Of course," she repeated, with a shrug of mortification and disappointment. "But I am a woman, and so, I suppose, not to be reckoned able to help you."

"I should be very stupid if I thought any such thing," said I.

"As if I don't know why you won't trust me," she answered quickly. "As if it wasn't because you think I might do something indiscreet—something like that on the launch, or yesterday with that woman. But I have deserved it, and now perhaps you'll issue your orders for my behaviour and conduct to-day. What am I to do, if you please, Mr. Ormesby?" she cried with mock humility. "I suppose you have come with some orders for me?"

"The first thing appears to be for us to quarrel, although I don't know that that will help us very far."

"And having quarrelled, what next?"

"Make it up and resolve not to do such a useless thing again."

"And then?"

"Just keep on guard, both eyes wide open, as I suggested last night."

"And if I promise to wait patiently, and show you I can really keep my head and not blunder, as you have taken care to tell me I have done hitherto, will you tell me everything?"

"I will tell you all that I know for certain the moment it becomes necessary for you to know it. I promise that."

"It is not much, considering my impatience and anxiety. But you *do* think I wish to help you?"

"I am sure of it."

"Ah, it's only my capacity and discretion you doubt," she said, shaking her head.

"You have done one or two rash things, and have

made mistakes." She smiled deprecatingly, and shrugged her shoulders.

"You are frank, at any rate."

"This is a very difficult business, and it's best to say what I think. I hope sincerely you won't make any more." I spoke as earnestly as I felt.

"You mean I must be careful to keep my temper for the future—with that Greek woman for instance?"

"I did not put it so; but we have an ugly country to negotiate, and none of us can be too cautious for a while."

"You make me feel horribly mean and small," she said ruefully.

"I wish to do no more than put you on your guard."

"And you? You will be careful? You are in the worst danger; and if anything happened to you, I should—I mean, just now when Cyrus is ill, it would be disastrous." She did not look at me, and spoke hurriedly and rather nervously; as if the temporary importance of my safety was something that ought to be impressed upon me, although rather a delicate ground to touch upon.

"I have had a lesson, and shall not forget it, I assure you."

"And we are quite friends again, Mr. Ormesby?" She was still nervous I thought.

"We can never be anything else, Miss Grant—especially if you will leave the development of things to me for a time."

"As if I did not trust you—whatever I said, and although you won't trust me"; and with that I went away to resume my work of investigation.

I was glad to feel that Enid trusted me, and I caught myself more than once recalling little incidents of the conversation; her looks and expression and chance gestures, many of which pleased even while they puzzled me. And at times I was half sorry I had not told her everything at once, and enlisted her woman's wit in the work of enquiry. It might have been much better if I had; but I was really afraid lest she should do something indiscreet. But we all make bad blunders at times; and I think I did then.

CHAPTER XII

THE ORDEAL BY SUGAR

MY hands were very full of work that day, as may be imagined, and the detail was considerably increased by the step of making myself the one medium of communication between the house and the world outside. A large catch of trivialities were swept into the net thus spread, but only one or two of them were of any consequence. A Turk, who gave no name, called for Koprili, and a woman brought a letter for Mademoiselle Patras. The man I immediately had shadowed by one of my spies, and the letter I put aside, determining to deliver it with my own hands. In the meantime Dr. Arbuthnot saw Grant twice, in the morning and afternoon, and the result was not satisfactory. After the morning visit he enjoined absolute quiet, refusing to allow any one but Mrs. Wellings and the nurses to see the patient; and when he came to me in the afternoon he admitted that he was uneasy.

"I don't like the look of him at all," he said, with a shake of the head. "I can't understand it. He ought to have thrown off all the effect by this time and be well on the up grade: but he is worse this afternoon, if anything."

"I wish to see him as soon as practicable, doctor; there are fifty things to be discussed and settled, and all important."

"My dear sir, it's out of the question to-day, absolutely. Indeed I have been thinking I should like a consultation. There's something wrong that there oughtn't to be. He has a lot of pain he oughtn't to have; he can't take even the light food, can't retain anything—a preposterous state for a man of his strength. A gastic condition that worries me"

"By all means call in any one you think of. I needn't tell you his life is a very precious one; and if there's any one in Europe you think should see him, we'll wire at once." His manner alarmed me. "You've *carte blanche*, of course."

"There's no one here," he replied, with airy criticism of his local medical colleagues; "but if Vienna were nearer, I should like old Eberhardt to see him. Not that I believe in the German school of treatment as a rule, but Eberhardt does know a good deal about poisons. He'd come for me."

"We'll wire for him," I answered, and we drew up the telegram there and then and the doctor said he would send it off. "In the meantime, is no one to see Grant?" I asked.

"No one, of course. If he asks for Mademoiselle Patras, send over for me, and I'll see about it. I'm very anxious."

The news was very grave and disturbed me profoundly, plunging us back into a mist of doubt just when I thought we were beginning to feel a way out. Why should there be this set-back in Grant's progress? It was not possible that anything given to him since the attack could have been tampered with. Mrs. Wellings and the nurses in attendance were beyond suspicion; and Enid herself had so arranged that noth-

ing for the sick room should pass through any but absolutely trusted hands. In such a case the cause must be looked for either in Dr. Arbuthnot's treatment: an improbability to be scouted: or in some conditions already existing in Grant himself. Could he have been the victim of any attempt previous to that of the night before?

Did Haidée know anything? Could this infernal business have been in progress before our suspicions were thus roughly roused? It was possible of course: anything was possible in this land of intrigue and treachery, where cases of slow poisoning were anything but unknown.

But then why should they wish to poison Grant at the very moment when they were seeking his help and hoping to use his money and influence? The thing was inconsistent. I had probably got the idea of poison on my brain, I told myself, and was frightening myself with a bogey. I began to feel as if I was letting my wits get out of hand and making a fool of myself in consequence.

If anything was clear at all, it was that Grant's life was as precious as any life could be to Maraboukh and the whole gang of conspirators; and so I was tossed back into the surf of distracting thoughts and baffled speculation.

While I was pondering this there flashed back into my thoughts the strange impression which Maraboukh's conduct had produced at that point of our interview when the money needed for paying the troops had been mentioned. That suggestion of some belated unavailing regret with which he had declared it too late for Grant to find the money. Could that

feeling have any connection with this horrible development? Could he have known that already the work he had planned had been done by his spies in the White House? The thought frightened me intensely.

The truth was the thing was altogether beyond me. It was too big for me to handle, and the mystery too great for my wit to solve. And yet there was no one whom I could consult. I could not open my mouth to a soul without a gross breach of faith to the sick man; and while he lay ill, all I could do was to go blundering along in my own way. Had he been well, his own vigorous clear-headed self, he would have solved the whole problem readily enough; but without him, I was like a rudderless ship, drifting any way and all ways at the mercy of winds and waves.

I was in the midst of the most depressing uncertainty, and was debating whether I ought not to take the drastic course of bundling Haidée Patras and her two spies of servants out of the house, when Stuart came in to say she wished to see me at once.

"Good-evening, mademoiselle," I said, and then ordered Stuart to light the lamps, the dark having fallen during my meditations. While he was lighting them she sat without saying a word.

"You will know why I am here, Mr. Ormesby," she said, the moment he had withdrawn, and her voice was a sufficient indication that she was angry.

"There might be several reasons, mademoiselle."

"I wish to know why you dare to keep me and my servants prisoners in the house?"

"Prisoners? How do you mean?"

"You have presumed to give orders that no one is to leave or enter the house without permission

from—you." She spoke with a fine contempt and scorn.

"There can be no objection whatever to your leaving the house when you wish. You are not a prisoner in any sense."

"Yet the servant refused to allow me to pass with my servant just now."

"McPherson is a Scotchman and an old soldier, and thus apt to interpret his orders very literally,"

"Then he is wrong, and we are free to go?"

"I shall be happy to go to him now and explain that so far as you are concerned the door is to be open."

"And my servants?"

"None of our servants are excluded from the order; and to make any exceptions in the case of yours might lead to trouble. You will see that, I am sure," I said blandly.

"I see only the insult in this, sir," she answered, blazing up.

"I think you misunderstand the position, mademoiselle. My object, as McPherson should have explained to you, is to secure that the house shall be kept perfectly quiet while Mr. Grant is so ill; and for this end all coming and going has been stopped."

"That is all hypocrisy: nothing else. You have aimed this blow at me, and at me only; and it is only following up the dastardly charge made against me yesterday by Miss Grant."

"Pardon me, it has no connection whatever with that charge. I myself have told Miss Grant her statement was absolutely without any foundation. I have proofs of that."

"Proofs?" she asked quickly, with a start. "Or do you say that only to try and blind my eyes? I do not believe you."

"As you please, mademoiselle;" and then we sat for perhaps a minute in silence, until she asked, angrily:

"What are your proofs, pray? What do you pretend now was the cause of Mr. Grant's illness?"

"As you do not believe me, it will save time if I do not say any more," I answered; not that I intended the interview to end there.

"I did not mean that. Oh, Mr. Ormesby, why do you play with words when you know I am almost beside myself? Why will you always misunderstand me? Why insist on being my enemy? Of course it is your doing that I am kept from seeing Mr. Grant."

"I myself am not allowed to see him, mademoiselle. He is too ill. The matter is now entirely in Dr. Arbuthnot's hands."

"Is that true? I mean, is he really so ill? Oh, it will kill me!" she cried distractedly.

"You will best understand the gravity when I tell you that we have to-day telegraphed to the great Vienna specialist, Dr. Eberhardt, to come here at once." At this she caught her breath and stared open-mouthed at me, her face drawn in agitation and distress, and leaning forward, asked in a low tense tone:

"Is he really in such danger?"

"There is I fear no doubt of it, mademoiselle." At this she closed her eyes and sank back in her chair, and put her hands to her face, and I heard her moan under her breath in her own tongue:

"Oh, God, if he should die, if he should die!" followed by a long shuddering sigh of agony. It was impossible not to see, not to feel indeed, that this agony was no pretence. The pause that followed was very painful.

"But he was so much better?" she said presently, as if trying to find reason to ease her sorrow and doubt my statement.

"I know no more than Dr. Arbuthnot tells me; and, like you, I wish I could persuade myself that he exaggerated the danger. It is terrible news for us all."

"I can't believe it, I won't believe it," she cried wildly. "Why, up to the moment of his being taken like this, he was so strong, so well. Oh, Mr. Ormesby, give me some crumb of comfort, some ray of light and hope. You would, if you knew what it meant to me." And when I was silent, for I could give no satisfying reply, she threw up her arms and pressed her clenched hands to her face like one in a frenzy of despair. And another embarrassing and painful pause followed until she had collected some measure of self-control.

"And can I do nothing? Cannot something, some little thing be given me to do to help him? I don't care what it is, anything, anything, anything, rather than sit with empty idle hands, parted from him: waiting, fearing, thinking, thinking, oh, God, ever thinking, and doing nothing. May I not even share the watching? Who can watch and nurse and tend like one whose heart and hands are inspired by love? Mr. Ormesby, you have power to do this for me. Pray, pray let me be with him."

"I am sorry, but I can do nothing, it is entirely in Dr. Arbuthnot's hands." I was sorry for her; I could not help it, as I saw her bitter suffering." "I cannot interfere: and indeed I have not the power to do so."

"But you know that Mr. Grant would have me with him. If you had seen last night how he greeted me, how his face lighted, and the smile he gave as our hands touched. Oh do, do help me—help us to be together. It is such happiness for him! Think of that and of him, even if you are dead to my feelings."

"If Dr. Arbuthnot——" I began, but she cut me short,

"He will not, he will not. He has been set against me. I urged him last night to let me remain and share the watch. I prayed him; but he would not: he turned me away on the pretence that my presence caused excitement. You are ail against me, all, all: now he is ill and helpless, I have not a friend in the house;" and once more her agitation overcame her."

"But if I may not go near him, can you not suggest some other way in which I can be doing something to help him? I am not like other women. I cannot sit down and do nothing."

"I think that this is possible," I answered slowly.

"Tell me, and I will do it. I will do it readily. Do you think Dr. Arbuthnot is doing all he should? Who is this specialist you spoke of, this Dr. Eberhardt?"

"I think you could help me, and, helping me, help Grant at the same time, of course; but you must be prepared to hear unpleasant things."

"Tell me, tell me quickly. Compared with what you have already told me, what can matter?" she said excitedly.

"You can probably help to throw light on the cause of the illness?"

"What do you mean?" she cried, her face alight, intent and eager.

"Dr. Eberhardt is the greatest living authority on poisons, mademoiselle, and Dr. Arbuthnot is anxious to have his opinion on that account."

"You are mad, Mr. Ormesby. Miss Grant has infected you. Mr. Grant is not suffering from poison. If you think that, and the doctors think it too, you are all blind and you will kill him."

"It is the doctor's opinion, not mine only; and—it is true. I know it."

"Put that delusion aside. It is a mere cobweb that must be brushed aside. Stay, listen," she said, as I was about to reply. "Who would take his life do you think? Would I? Do you think my love for him is the love of a vampire seeking his blood? If not I, who in this house: nay, who in all Constantinople? Has he not just joined us and become one of us? Was not his help eagerly sought, was it not as eagerly welcomed? You were present yesterday, only yesterday, within a few hours of this illness, with the Pasha when the arrangement was made? You heard what passed; you know the help he promised to give. Do you think the Pasha so blind and so foolish as not to see that of all, Mr. Grant is the one whose life is the most precious?"

"Nevertheless——"

"Wait, I will tell you more, what should not pass

my lips had not a crisis like this come upon us. But you must know it now. The chief reason of my coming here was that I might persuade Mr. Grant to join us; and it was done at the Pasha's wish and instigation. He is necessary to our success—and should we thus sacrifice his life? Why there is no one whom we would one and all more carefully guard and protect. You are mad when you talk of poison."

"Then you will help to prove I am wrong."

"I will do anything you wish."

"Will you tell me then precisely who is this man in your service, Koprili, and the woman, Lelia?"

"They are my servants, nothing more—except that they both know of the conspiracy and are ardent workers in the cause."

"How long has Koprili been in your service?"

"Some months, and a faithful, confidential, reliable servant he has been."

"Did he come to you on the Pasha's recommendation?"

"No: certainly not; but the Pasha knows his whole life, and when he found him in my service, told me all about him. Shall I tell you?"

"It is not necessary yet. And the woman, Lelia?"

"I can vouch for her in the same way. They would both give their lives for me. I don't understand your questions; they mean nothing to me."

"If I tell you that my friend Grant was poisoned by your servant Koprili, what would you say?"

"That you are mad, as I have said before. Oh, it is impossible."

"Nevertheless, it is true and I will prove it to you."

"You cannot," she cried incredulously and disdainfully. "I will answer for him as for myself."

I rang my bell and summoned my servant.

"Stuart, tell mademoiselle's servant, the Turk, Koprili, that his mistress is here and has asked for his permit to leave the house, and that he is to come here for it. Do not leave him until you reach the room; and when he is here, place the woman, Lelia, under lock and key, and then return to be within call should I need you. And stay, you had better have a couple more with you—Mr. Grant's man, Dennison, for one and Millward."

"What does this mean, Mr. Ormesby?" asked the Greek when he had gone.

"It means that I am going to prove my words to you, and that when I have done so, your servants will have to remain for a time at least in safe keeping."

"It is almost infamous," she said, indignantly.

"One thing more, mademoiselle. I must ask you to be merely a witness of what passes." With that I got out the lumps of sugar which the doctor had given me and kept them in readiness, and we waited without speaking until Stuart returned with Koprili.

He came without a suspicion of what was in store for him, as I had intended by the form of my message; and as he entered he salaamed to his mistress and then to me.

"Stand there, Koprili, will you?" I said in Turkish, putting him so that the light of one of the lamps was full on his face. He was a man of about my own age and height and, except that his complexion was bronzed, the cast of his features was European and he had unusually light eyes for an Ottoman. They were fixed on me now with a light of expectation, but not of fear or suspicion; and of the two of us I think I was the more nervous;

"Your mistress has told me you wish a permit?" I said.

"That is so, your Excellency," he answered, salaaming.

"Where do you wish to go?"

"To do the commands of my mistress and then to return."

"What are they?"

"May the light of your Excellency's life ever burn strongly, they were but to purchase some few trifling things in the Bazaar."

"That is all?"

"By the beard of the Prophet, that was all."

"Before giving you the permit I have a question. You came to this room yesterday, what did you want me for?"

He smiled and spread out his hands to cover the start which the question provoked.

"Some one has misled your noble Excellency, whose justice is known to all. It is not for me, who am but as a dog in your Excellency's sight, to question your words. But as Allah is my judge, I was not here."

"You are lying to me, Koprili," I said slowly; "and that makes me think there was some reason in your coming which you would hide from me and from your mistress. She wishes you to tell the truth. Now, why were you here?"

There was an instant's pause before he answered, during which he shot a quick furtive glance at the Greek.

"By the tomb of the Prophet, your Excellency has been misled, I was not here."

"Say so, if you were, Koprili," said the Greek.

"My words are words of truth, madame," he declared, with an elaborate gesture and profound salaam. "By the beard of the Prophet, I swear it." He was a good liar, and had I not known, he would have impressed me.

"Then we'll go a step farther," I said, slowly. "You were here not once only, but twice, Koprili; once, before Mr. Grant came here, and once afterwards. Nor is that all; when you left the second time you left something behind you," and I picked up the little packet and began to undo it. I caught the gleam of his eyes as they fastened upon it for a moment, but he covered them quickly and drooped the lids over them.

"I am but a thing in your Excellency's hands; but, as I live, I know nothing of what you say."

"You are still lying, Koprili," I said sternly. "But you will have to tell the truth." Again as I paused and seemed to glance down at the twisted paper in my hands, I caught the gleam of his eyes as he stared at it. Your Turk is intensely curious, and he was just on fire to know what I was fingering. Intentionally I paused, and then looking up swiftly let him see that I had intercepted his glance. But he crossed his hands on his breast, and bowed his head, as though he were a martyr, ready for torture.

Mademoiselle Patras herself was scarcely less curious than the surly scoundrel in front of me.

"When you came in the first time my servant had just placed my coffee ready for me—for me, Mademoiselle, you notice," I broke off to say to her. "And you brought with you some sugar," I paused and glanced at him to emphasise this, but he made no

sign. "Some sugar which you substituted for that which Stuart had placed with the coffee." He looked up now and made a gesture of complete denial and ignorance of the whole thing. "When you came the second time, you had more to do and were doing it when you were interrupted. You then seized the sugar you had brought before, and put out the light, because you didn't wish to be found in the room. In the darkness, you overturned the little table on which the coffee stood, and in the confusion of escaping from the room you—" I paused again, took out the two lumps of sugar—"you dropped these, Koprili;" and I held them up.

My lengthy description of his acts had given him time to think and he allowed no sign of confusion or astonishment to escape him.

"Your Excellency is of the just of the earth and would blame no man, not even a servant, causelessly. Someone has, I repeat, misled you and lied about Koprili to you. I repeat I know nothing of this: I swear it by the tomb of my fathers."

"I quite thought you would," I said calmly; "but you are lying, Koprili, and I know that as well as you." Then I changed and spoke with all the sternness I could put into my manner. "Now, I am going to have the truth: you have sought to take my life and I give you a chance to prove your innocence if you can. This is part of the sugar you placed here last night—you will know the scent of it and why it's there—you shall swallow that sugar to prove it is harmless or I'll put you to the torture to drag the truth from you. Quick, decide," and I set it in his reach.

The light was full on his face as I stared into it fixedly, and the blood rushed from it as he looked at the two small lumps as though they were things accursed. The sweat came out on his forehead, his hands were clenched and unclenched in turn, and his features began to work convulsively. He tried to speak but his lips were dry and refused to obey his will. He stood half paralysed, speechless with the fear of death in his staring eyes. A ghastly sight he made.

"Come, quick, decide," I thundered out. "That or the truth, or the torture."

His panic was heightened by my tone, and he started and stretched out a hand hesitatingly half-way to take what he believed was the deadly poison, but drew it back again shuddering, with a quick convulsive movement, while his breath came fast and thick from his labouring chest. Again he tried to nerve himself; and again failed: and then, with a wild cry of despair, he seized one of the two white lumps and hurled it from him as he fell on his knees and begged for mercy.

The ordeal had answered. I was to get the truth out of him.

CHAPTER XIII

STEPHANI AGAIN

THE scene had effected Haidée Patras almost as deeply as Koprili himself, and her confident defiance of me gave place to horror and loathing of the man. She sprang to her feet and commenced to pour out a fierce and vehement denunciation of his treachery and deceit, when I interposed and checked her.

"You are to be a witness only, mademoiselle, if you please;" and I would not allow her to proceed. "Stand up, you, Koprili," I said sternly; and he got up like a surly dog, hanging his head and glinting now and then at me from under his pent brows.

Then I made a last use of the invaluable lumps of sugar. There is one quality of the common Turk on which you can always play with a certainty of success—his superstition. Everyone who knows Stambul knows the power of the wizards or hodjas over the people; men and women alike. I drew his attention to a little Maltese cross which I wore on my watch chain and said in as impressive a tone as I could command:

"You are not only a liar and a poisoner, Koprili, but you are a blunderer. You should have seen that I wear this amulet and should have asked your wizard what it means. He would have told you I am proof against every form of poison. See"; and I took up

the piece of sugar which still lay on the table and put it in my mouth.

This simple act seemed to move him quite out of himself. He started back staring at me with wide open eyes as though I were some evil spirit, and his lips moved as they formed the word of incantation; but no sound came. There was no mistaking the effect. In his eyes I had become a semi-supernatural being; and his superstitious fear made him believe I had gained my knowledge of his actions by occult and mysterious means.

That was exactly the impression I wished to create; for I knew that even as he had lied in denying his crime, so he would lie now, as much as he dare, in giving me the reason for it. And lie he certainly did throughout the long examination to which I subjected him in the effort to drag something of the truth out of him.

I need not give it in detail. He denied all knowledge of the burnt paper, swearing by the tomb of his fathers and every other oath which occurred to him that he had seen no paper and knew of none and certainly had burnt none; and that as he could not read he could not have distinguished one from another had he seen them. He admitted having put the poisoned sugar with the coffee, and owned he did so to make me ill, not to kill me; and that his motive was hatred of me for having treated him harshly on one occasion and because I was hostile to his beloved mistress. When I told him I knew that some one had instigated him, and who it was, he swore again that I was mistaken; and no threats of torture nor the assumption of knowledge of my own, nor offers of pardon, nor any

means I could think of could get any admission of the kind from him. It was just his own act, he swore, and nothing more.

I had to give in at last.

"I know the truth," I said sternly, at the close ; "and I know you have lied to me again, and when the time comes you will pay a bitter price for every lie you have uttered. You will be kept here a prisoner, and if Mr. Grant dies, we shall take your life for his ;" and with that I called in the servants and gave him into their hands with full instructions for his safe-keeping.

He had recovered his self-possession, and feeling no doubt rather proud of having succeeded in deceiving one whom he credited with occult powers, he stalked out defiantly between his gaolers.

"Now, mademoiselle, can you read me the riddle?" I said to the Greek, who had listened to the scene with intense interest.

"There is no riddle to read, Mr. Ormesby. Koprili has told you the truth. It is terrible ; but you know all that is to be known."

"You see at last, however, the cause of poor Grant's illness. He came here and took what was meant for me ; and Dr. Arbuthnot told me that had I taken it, I should be now a dead man. Grant has a strong frame and physique and he may recover, although, as you know, that is still uncertain."

"It is horrible," she said under her breath. "But you do not hold me responsible for the private animosity of my servants. This fearful deed does not lie at my door." Her casuistry sickened and angered me.

"At least you brought the man here ; but I leave

to your own conscience the apportionment of responsibility and blame. I am not your judge. This villain is however your servant, and you will now understand why I, knowing what I do and believing what I do, am anxious that you should not be allowed to see my friend."

"You dare to think that I would harm one hair of his head," she cried, angrily and haughtily. "You dare to suspect me?"

"I think, mademoiselle, that you will do the best in all interests if you leave the White House and do not return to it."

"You insult me, Mr. Ormesby," she said, rising, "I will not be driven away."

"As you please ; but if you remain it will be under conditions I shall impose on my own authority. Your servants will be kept from you ; you yourself will hold no communication with those outside ; and if you leave the house, the door will be closed against your return."

"You dare to make me a prisoner, sir?"

"No, because you can free yourself at any moment by crossing the threshold."

"We will see what your master says to this, Mr. Ormesby," she flashed.

"You will not be allowed to go near him, mademoiselle."

She faced me at first in a magnificent pose of haughty indignation ; then changed, and her features softened ; she made a movement towards me as if to speak, but checked herself, and with a gesture of mingled dismay, defiance and despair, went out of the room. She left me, if the truth be told, not a little

anxious and nervous as to the results of the line I had taken in regard to her, into which I seemed to have been in a manner forced.

My ill-temper never lasts very long, and when it wore away I could not help a feeling of pity for her. She loved Grant ; I was sure of that : I had seen the unmistakable evidence of it in the earlier part of the interview : and I had a disquieting consciousness of having been rather cowardly in some of the things I had said. She had known nothing of the attempt on my life which had had such disastrous results for the man she loved ; and the discovery that she had been indirectly the cause of bringing Koprili into the house must have been stinging enough without my rubbing it in so harshly.

But on the other hand it was impossible to treat her just as an ordinary visitor. There was obviously some treachery behind, whether she knew of it or not ; and to allow her to come and go freely was out of the question. She seemed to have been the passive agent for all this mischief. If she did not know what was planned, then there must be some one behind working through her without her knowledge ; and if she were quite free in the house, that some one would certainly continue to make use of her.

Then I remembered the letter for her which had been brought to me, and I picked it up and examined it curiously. I would have given a good deal to know the contents ; but we had not yet come to the pass which would justify any tampering with private letters ; so I pitched it into my safe. She should neither send nor receive letters until this crisis was past.

Nor should she see Grant, unless the doctor declared such a step to be absolutely necessary. I had burnt my boats in that matter. If he knew what I had done in making her virtually a prisoner while in the house, he would certainly not forgive it. And the sense of responsibility lay heavy upon me.

The doctor came again late in the night and told me that Grant seemed a little easier, and on the whole better, and had asked for the Greek.

"I said, however, that she must not be sent for just then as I wished for him to be perfectly quiet. Like many men of strong will he makes a good patient, Mr. Ormesby, and when I explained things, he acquiesced readily."

"I don't wish her to see him, doctor, unless it becomes positively unsafe to keep her away."

"Then you had better arrange that she sends him messages of some sort. He seems to think of little else but her, and his eagerness to get well is largely on her account."

The safest person I could think of as a medium for the messages was Mrs. Wellings; and when the doctor had gone I saw her about it, giving her a hint that they must be just personal wishes and so on, no reference to exciting topics to be allowed.

I had also a brief interview with Enid, and then being as tired as a dog, I went to bed.

In the morning I had a short note from Count Stephani saying he wished to see me on urgent business; and as I had to go out I left word that he was to be admitted to the house and shown to my rooms when he called. I was detained longer than I anticipated, and on my hurrying to my room I was

surprised to hear voices there raised in heated altercation.

They were those of Enid and Stephani; and when I threw open the door, I found Stephani blocking the way with a smile upon his handsome wicked face, against Enid, who looked very angry as she ordered him to allow her to leave the room.

"How dare you attempt to stop me—ah, here is Mr. Ormesby," the change of indignation to relief on seeing me had a welcome ring in my ears. "Count Stephani has had the insolence to——" she began to me, but stopped abruptly, while a flood of rich colour spread over her face. "He dares to keep me here against my will, Mr. Ormesby," she substituted.

"This has nothing to do with your brother's secretary, Miss Grant," said Stephani, turning on me, and using a tone of authority which jarred. "It is between you and me only."

"You will have the goodness to stand aside and let Miss Grant pass, Count Stephani—and at once please," I said firmly.

"And if I will not?" he answered, defiantly. "What will you do, little man?" This with a galling contemptuous sneer. Never in my life have I so bitterly regretted my small physique as at that moment. I would have given the world to have been able to fling him out of the way, and have punished him for his insolence. He stood over six feet, however, and was broad and strong and lithe as a mountaineer; but big as he was, I was not going to stand this.

"I will throw you into the street for a scoundrel," I answered.

"Peace, little man, peace," he said, with another

laugh, as he drew aside. "I have not come to quarrel. I was but over anxious to enjoy more of the sweet society of a gracious lady—a far too rare pleasure;" and he made Enid a most courtly and graceful bow, as she passed him, trembling and angry, and went out.

"You can go, Stephani," I said, curtly, "I've done with you."

In reply he looked at me, smiled, and held out his hand, and when I would not take it, laughed the louder, and threw himself into a chair.

"Did you hear me? I will have no more to do with you," I said.

"I heard you, little man; and on my soul I like your courage; for I believe you meant to come at me just now, and then, alas, you would have been hurt, and I sorry. So I gave way, and that closes the chapter."

"No, the close will be when you leave the room."

"Just as you please, but I am not going yet; so we'll call that the first portion of the chapter, and will now turn to the second." He spoke imperturbably, lighted a cigarette, and lolling back in his chair, gazed at me with a smile. Then seeing by my looks that I was in earnest, he jumped up quickly and came to me with his hand again held out. "Take my hand, Mr. Ormesby; if I made you angry just now, I am sorry, and beg your pardon. By the Cross, I do;—I, Count Stephani, of Pristina, who never yet took back a word in my life, and care for neither frown nor favour of any living man, I beg your pardon. Come, shake hands;" and he looked down on me with a winning smile.

He was a most engaging scoundrel and, as I have said before, he had a special attraction for me, and I found it difficult to be angry.

"No, I won't take your hand, Stephani. I have done with you after this. I don't want to see you or speak to you again. Don't come here again."

"You English are devils for stubbornness," he cried, with a laugh. "But I have said I'm sorry; I have asked your pardon. Hell knows what more I can do. *I am* sorry: I like you; I have come here to-day to do you a special service; and here you are turning your back on me, just because I made a fool of myself when speaking to that pretty American, and because I taunted you for being a smaller man than I am. I *was* a fool; and if I hadn't been one, I shouldn't have done it. But don't let us carry it any further. I sha'n't do it again; and if I'd known how you'd take it I shouldn't have done it once. For my part, I won't let it come between us."

"I am busy, if you please, Count Stephani," and I sat down to my desk.

"Well, then, I'll wait;" and he threw himself back again into his chair, with complete self-complacency, crossed his legs, and gazed up at the ceiling, watching the smoke as it curled from his cigarette.

"If you do not leave the room, I shall send for my servants."

"By all means," he answered, smiling, but as I stretched my hand to the table bell he started up. "Stop, Mr. Ormesby," he said very earnestly. "Wait at least till you've thought it over and thrown off your ill-temper. Now that Mr. Grant has been poisoned and is going to die, I may be of some use to

you;" and he looked at me with piercing significance.

"What do you mean?" I asked, drawing back my hand involuntarily.

"I have come to be frank with you. Your friend, this man of millions, this forceful American with the great scheme, has been shamefully betrayed, and he will die."

The intense conviction of his tone and look chilled me.

"What do you know, Stephani? Why did you not come before?"

"I knew it only last night, days too late to warn you."

"Days?"

"Yes, days—the thing was done days ago. That fiend, the man who calls himself Koprili, has been days in the house here—though the devil himself alone knows why you ever let him come. Ah, my friend, you English and Americans are no match for the devils who are against you. You cannot fight with their weapons; and when beautiful women come beguiling you, instead of strangling them as they ought to be strangled—yes, by hell, they ought—you take them to your house and, simple souls that you are, you fall in love, and want to marry them. That's how West meets East, Mr. Ormesby, and how East meets West, too," he said with deliberate significance.

"You must speak in plainer terms, Stephani," I said.

"Plain speaking is no good now, friend secretary. It's too late to save, but not too late to punish and avenge." The dead conviction of his tone and words appalled me, and for some moments I sat buried in troubled thought.

"What chance do you think you could ever have against the Turks? What was your scheme? How were they likely to view it? Think man, think. You were to take a tract of land and develop it; only commercially you said, and wished them to believe. Do you think they believed it? You got your concessions and laid your plans. Do you suppose they did not watch you? Are there no spies in the land save those of the Palace and those in your own employ? What did they find? What is on your island away there near your concessioned lands? Do men plough land with rifles, dig for minerals with guns, make roads with cartridges? Oh, you men of commerce."

"Go on, man, go on," I said impatiently when he paused.

"Do Americans make good sons of Islam? Were the men in your employ to develop your lands for America or Turkey? Bah, I have no patience. Were the Turks likely to look on with delight while their country was invaded, peopled with Giaours, fortified against themselves, and changed into a European colony to serve the God they hate, and dethrone the God they love with a love and passion no man but a Mohammedan can understand? What is your Turk first, last, and at all times, but a son of Islam, ready to cut the throat of his dearest friend if he be deemed the enemy of Islam? Ah, friend secretary, I have heard you boast that you know this country and its people, and yet you don't know that."

He smiled derisively, and paused again while he rolled a cigarette deftly and gracefully, as he did all things.

"And what chance *could* you have? Suppose you

had succeeded, had founded your colony, had developed the land, and all had prospered exceedingly. What then? Have you never heard or read the history of Sidonia? What you wanted to do here was done there; not by Western but Eastern Christians, mark you; and what happened? When was your Turk wanting in a reason for a massacre? It was found then, and would have been now—had the scheme been allowed to go on. But there was a simpler means ready to hand. It is easier to kill one man by treachery than hundreds by massacre; and the death of one man was enough in this case. And that one man was your chief—the man of millions. And Islam decreed his death."

"It is not true, Stephani; it can't be," I cried, rebelling against the ever-growing and tightening conviction.

"You Westerners make poor plotters, for you plot with hands that shrink from the only means possible here—violence. See how you have been beguiled. Lest the man of millions should escape the death that surrounded him from the moment his scheme was understood, they lured him into this plot against Abdul; a plot that is indeed a plot and will succeed—perhaps. It is always perhaps, here. But if it failed, who think you would be the first to be denounced to Abdul? Who but your man of millions; a hated Giaour, who came with his innocent commercial scheme and then turned conspirator? And if it succeeded, what think you would be the measure of reward for the man whom his fellow plotters hate with the hate which only a son of Islam can feel for a Giaour? And yet, behold, a woman was given to him and he

fell. What do you think now of your chances, Mr. Ormesby?"

I sat biting my fingers in distress and pain and shame and useless regrets.

"But all is not lost if you are man enough to play a part?" and he questioned me with a look of consummate cunning. "You cannot save your friend's life, but you can have revenge. Play your own hand; there are fine cards yet in it. You don't know all their scheme as they know yours; but you know enough. Go to the Sultan; warn him; tell him all you know and more that I can tell you; much more. Make him your friend and save him and save yourself and those with you before it is too late. You are surrounded by spies; but that one course is still open to you. Dare you do it? There is nothing that you could ask of Abdul that he would not grant to the man who saved his life and throne. You can be anything you will in this strange country. Now, dare you do it?"

I listened to him intently, and held in check the rising flood of wrath and indignation.

"Why do you counsel this?" I asked.

"Because that arch villain Maraboukh has insulted and scorned me; and because no man shall do that with Stephani and not pay the price. By the God of my fathers, I swear it."

"Why not carry the news yourself to Yildiz Kiosk?"

"Am I a fool that I should throw my life away? Who would believe me? No, no," and he laughed and shrugged his shoulders. "I prefer to keep my life while I can. I'm not swimmer enough to cross

the Bosphorus in a sack with my feet and hands tied as they know how to tie them in Yildiz ? ”

“ And why do you come to me to do it ? ”

“ Because they would believe *you*, and you would rise, and I should get my share for helping you. ”

“ And what’s your price ? ” I asked, shortly, scarcely able to trust myself to speak.

“ Money—and what I am to have if the plot succeeds—the woman I desire for my wife. ”

“ Who is that ? ”

“ The sister of the man of millions and her money. ”

The cup of my anger was full indeed to overflowing at this wild and monstrous demand.

“ By God you are the most daring villain I ever met. Go, ” I shouted : “ go ; before I have you turned out or before I forget myself and shoot you where you sit. ”

He jumped up to his feet and stared at me like a man bereft of his senses.

“ Oh, that is—— ”

“ Go, ” I shouted again, beside myself with passion as I flung the door open, “ and take your lies and your insolence elsewhere. ” And when he had gone I slammed the door after him in impotent rage.

CHAPTER XIV

IBRAHIM, THE JEW

SO enraged was I by Stephani's infamous proposals, and so disturbed and alarmed by what he had said in leading up to them, that I paced my room, my thoughts a very maelstrom of seething anxiety, panic and grief; and before I had half regained my self-control, Enid was shown in by Stuart.

"You seem to have had very long confidences to exchange with that—gentleman," she said, with an angry sarcasm. "I came down twice only to learn that you were closeted closely with him. And pray have you arranged your terms?"

"I have just turned him out of the house," I answered.

"You were going to do that when I left," she said, significantly. "And had you had any thought for me would have done it." This very indignantly.

"I don't know yet whether I'm glad or sorry I did not."

"Of course you do not. It was only an insult to me," she cried quickly.

The sight of her anger had a singular effect upon me. Personal anger was so futile in face of the perilous crisis of things that I mastered mine there and then.

"He will not insult you again, Miss Grant. He will come here no more."

"Did he tell you his infamous—insolence? Ugh, I cannot think of it without a flush of shame."

"No, he told me nothing of that."

"He dared to ask me to marry him, and when I tried to get from the room he had the hardihood to prevent me—as you saw. But of course that is nothing to you, compared with your business here. You bring this nest of spies and scoundrels and vagabonds here, and we have to suffer."

"Yes, I suppose that's how you look at it in your anger. I can only say I am deeply grieved you should have been so insulted."

"Perhaps I ought to have agreed to marry him? It might have helped your schemes, I daresay."

"If it's any relief to your feelings to be so scathingly unjust to me, I won't stop you—but of course you know that it is very unjust."

"How do I know it? The creature comes here and makes his miserable offer; you find him insulting me and actually preventing me from leaving the room; you order him out because of his insult, and then—you remain closeted with him for over an hour in close confidential talk. Ask yourself, what am I to think?"

"I know that if a wrong construction can be put upon my action in relation to yourself, you generally manage to put it. So I ought not to be surprised at this—but I am."

"Will you tell me what passed between you, then?"

"I regret that I cannot."

"No, I thought not. I am nobody in this house. Will you give me your word of honour then that my

name was not mentioned between you in any such connection."

"I cannot speak just yet of what passed?"

"I am not asking what was said, but what was not said."

"I cannot answer that question either."

"Then what am I to think, Mr. Ormesby? Ask yourself."

"Well, perhaps the simplest thing will be for you to think I am just an unprincipled rogue, contemptible enough to make your marriage and future happiness the subject of barter with a villain like Stephani, and that I have promised him my help in getting you for his wife. That is at any rate what you do seem to think of me."

"You know I don't think anything of the sort. How dare you even suggest such a thing?" she cried, angrily, flushing crimson.

"I know I'm beastly clumsy sometimes in putting things; but if you knew all, I'm sure you wouldn't choose this time of all others for quarrelling."

"Yes, but that's just what I don't know—all, as you call it."

"And I really can't tell you. But Heaven knows there are enough troubles we can't help to make us mighty shy of creating more." I suppose I looked worried, as I said this, for her manner changed and softened.

"I know you don't care what I say or think, but——" she stopped, and there was quite a solicitous look in her eyes.

"I don't *care*? You know that?" I asked.

"Do you care then?" She put the question quite

gently, and I was going to answer rather impetuously when I pulled myself up short, and fiddling some papers about on my table, replied indifferently:

"Most of us care a bit what others think of us; but we can't exactly order these things as we would. Of course, I should be sorry to think that you thought that I could think—I'm getting a bit mixed I'm afraid," and I stopped with rather a lame laugh.

"Are you very troubled, Mr. Ormesby?" she asked kindly after a pause.

"Yes, I'm very troubled indeed. Things are in a ghastly mess, you see, and I haven't the wit to get them out of it, I'm afraid."

"Can't I help you?"

"The help I should like would be to see you all on board the next steamer with your backs turned to the East for good."

"And you?"

"I don't count, Miss Grant, and besides I can look after myself."

"Yet the attempt that was made was on *your* life."

"But your brother suffered. I mean, if there *was* any attempt?" I said, quickly trying to recall the slip.

"You needn't try to hide it any longer. Oh, I do wish you'd tell me more."

"I wish I knew it myself, indeed."

"Do you think I don't know you are personally in danger?"

"I am not. I have shut the door against that chance."

"By making prisoners of that Greek woman's two servants? Did they do this? Did she set them on?"

"You are cross-examining me, aren't you? I don't

think she did—in fact I'm sure she didn't. She knew nothing about it."

"You believe in her?"

"I believe that at any rate. The truth seems to be the man fancied that he had some kind of grudge against me and—well, that's all."

"And I am to be satisfied with that, and to know that you are in this danger and just hold my tongue and be comfortable?"

"It won't do any good to be uncomfortable—about me. But I'm going to make an effort to find out things. I daresay I shall do it. And meanwhile there is something you can do. If the doctors think your brother can be moved, I should like him to be taken to The Home. Everything is in order on the island and in the house there, and he'd be quieter and safer perhaps; and so would you."

"I? Am I in your way here? I shall not go."

"Why not? There's nothing cowardly or weak in going with Cyrus."

"Not in running away from danger?"

"I wish you wouldn't put it so."

"But I do put it so and think it so. But can't *you* tell the doctors this. Are you going away too? You are positively frightening me."

"I know I'm a fool at putting things. The fact is there's a biggish row in the making for Constantinople and I'd much rather you were out of it. I'm only thinking of your safety."

"Then I'll go—if you'll go."

"But that's impossible, for a while at least."

"And you think I shall be a useless sort of encumbrance? I'm much obliged to you, Mr. Ormesby."

"I thought we'd agreed tacitly just now not to misunderstand each other wilfully. I am really very anxious for your safety ; very anxious indeed," I said earnestly. "I put things oddly, perhaps, but do at least believe I am sincere in this."

"I do," she answered quietly. "I wish I was as sure of everything else."

"Everything else?"

"That you were equally anxious to take care of yourself. Can't you see——" she began impulsively, and then stopped.

"I wish I could, a bit farther than I can at present."

"I will go, Mr. Ormesby, if you really think it necessary ; but I must make a condition. Will you promise to send for me if I can be of the least assistance?"

"Yes, if I think it's safe for you to come."

"Then we'll shake hands on that," and she held out hers. "You try me very much, sometimes," she said as our hands touched ; "But I know how staunch a friend you are to us all."

"That's all right, Miss Grant," I answered, awkwardly. The grasp of her hand and her evident good-feeling confused me. I cared so much for her that I was afraid lest some sign of my feeling should betray me and embarrass her. So I turned away and pretended to be busy with some papers.

"You are very odd, Mr. Ormesby," and she stood a moment looking at me. I could feel her eyes were on me although I did not meet them. Then she sighed softly, and turned to the door. I looked up to catch a last glimpse of her and found her looking back at me.

"Oh, I thought you were gone," I said, nervously, with a feeble smile.

"You find it easy to send me away," was her reply, spoken slowly and as if reproaching me for not having trusted her more completely; and I couldn't get that look of hers out of my thoughts for some time. She was a bright, brave girl, with far greater trouble ahead than she guessed; and I—well, I had too many grave matters to think about to spare time to play the sentimental ass.

And with that I tried to settle myself to face the problems; but it was very hard at first. It was so good to know she had such confidence in me, and that all her angry words came only from her mortification that I wouldn't tell her more. Yet how could I? What good would it do?

I am afraid there was a lot of truth in what my candid friends said to me—that I should never do much good for myself and hadn't the head to cope with any big difficulties. I felt hopelessly handicapped now, and the mere sense of responsibility weighed upon me intolerably. Everything had gone so smoothly—so long as Grant was at the helm, directing and controlling matters, that it had appeared just the easiest thing in the world to go right; and I hadn't a doubt that had he been himself and well, these new complications would have disappeared like magic, just as a hundred others had in the past.

But the misfortune was that his almost magic gift of cutting knots and solving problems was lost to us at the moment when it was of critical importance. He had no doubt made a mistake in allowing himself to be won over by the Greek's influence into joining

this confounded political intrigue; but then he was just the man of all men to have grappled with the mistake and have made of it a stepping-stone to further success.

I could not, however. I felt baffled, beaten, overwhelmed; and I sat in hopeless confusion of thought trying to see what to do. It was the more humiliating to me, too, because if Stephani's extraordinary story were true, it was just in my own share of the work—what I called the intelligence department—that we had failed conspicuously.

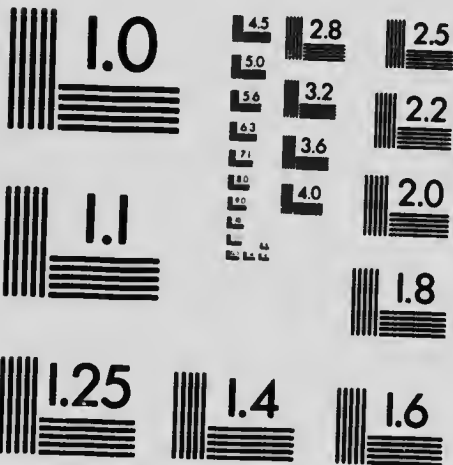
I had had a perfectly free hand in this and had always been disposed to plume myself on the completeness of my arrangements. And yet they seemed to have broken down absolutely in a vital crisis; and a most dangerous movement directed specially against us had been going on without even a breath of suspicion of the truth reaching me. I might well be mad at it.

The first thing to be done was clear, therefore. I must find the means somewhere and somehow of getting at the truth. I must get it at first hand, too, even if to do that involved some little risk; and it was then that a plan first occurred to me. It was to go in some disguise to the house of Maraboukh Pasha himself and try to ferret out the facts. This was not so difficult as it would have been to many, for I had frequently had to pass myself off as a Turk. My years of travel and residence in the East had tanned my complexion so that very little make up was necessary for the part, while my colloquial knowledge of the language had got me round more than one very ugly corner.



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It was essential that I should gain admittance to the Pasha's own presence, of course; and I turned over half a dozen ideas as to the character in which I could do this. I might play on his religious feeling as a half mad fanatic or fakeer; or work on his superstition as a wizard, pretending I had some occult message or mission to him; or again I might go as a provincial from his old vilayet, and warn him of a plot against his life. But I liked none of these.

Then all suddenly, the very thing occurred to me. I would personate the dog, Koprili, himself, and report to the Pasha the progress of events here. Many things lent themselves to the plan and promised to help me greatly. Koprili, for instance, unlike the vast majority of Turks, always wore the old oriental dress, and this would form an excellent disguise for me, while it would render it the more unlikely that Maraboukh, who was probably accustomed to interview Koprili secretly, would recognise me as Grant's interpreter.

Although I thought I could carry through the impersonation successfully, I had of course to face the risk of discovery; and I thought long and carefully over the business: what steps I could take in the first place to minimise the risk, and in the second to prevent mischief resulting to those at the White House if I failed and got into trouble.

There was one obviously rotten strand in the thread of my plan—I did not really know who Koprili was, or what were his real relations with the Pasha. I had been so short-sighted as never to suspect he was other than just the Greek's servant, and had never bothered my head about him. But Stephani's hints in regard

to him had startled me, and I resolved to ascertain all I could before taking the plunge. If I went in ignorance, I might make a fatal blunder at the very threshold and so ruin everything.

Two means suggested themselves. One was to prey on the fellow's fears and force the information out of him by torture and the threat of instant death; and the other to see whether any of the spies in my employment could identify him. I chose the latter as the quicker and surer course, and because one of my men was very likely to know all I needed to learn.

This was a certain old Jew named Ibrahim, who had played many parts in his time, and most of them ugly ones. He had been for some years engaged in a certain kind of horribly depraved and nefarious traffic which had brought him into vicious contact with all sorts and conditions of people in the capital, and as he was utterly without scruple, he had used it to acquire a fund of information for the purpose of blackmail.

I had once rendered him a service by rescuing his grand-daughter, who lived with him, from a very dubious fate, and he had shewn his gratitude in a hundred ways since. That has always struck me as one of the most singular characteristics of the Easterns. Let them be what they will, thieves, rogues, liars, cut-throats, anything; render them a service and touch them in some way that rouses their vivid sense of gratitude, and they will serve you with the fidelity of a dog.

Old Ibrahim lived in that most terrible slum in the world, Balat, the Jew quarter of Constantinople; and not wishing my visit to be too public, I stopped the

carriage on the confines, and walked through the loathsome byways to his house. No pen can adequately describe that home of pestilence and stench in which the Jews of Constantinople swarm together and manage somehow to exist. Filth is everywhere—filth in the streets; filth in the open drains that run down them; filth in the houses and all over the houses; filth on the people—men, women and children alike reek with it; filth in the very air you breath, noisome, noxious, and utterly revolting. They eat, drink, sleep, in it, and to the marvel of all who have seen it for themselves, they thrive and multiply on it.

And Ibrahim's house was only a little less filthy, though larger, than those about him, and his granddaughter who admitted me was as dirty as the surroundings.

"Ah, the Effendi," he exclaimed, when he saw me, and rose and made me a sweeping salaam. He was a grand-looking old fellow, upright and clear-eyed, and if his beard and hands and clothes had only been washed, would have presented a fine type.

I returned his greeting, and for a few minutes we sat making flowery speeches. I always gave him substantial cause to be glad of my visits, for although I believed he would have served me without payment, I knew his weakness for money and paid him accordingly.

"I want your assistance, Ibrahim," I said, at length.

"My lord has but to ask and all I have is at his disposal."

"I haven't come to borrow money," I returned; he was a usurer, I knew, and did a large business in small loans at big interest among his fellow Jews.

"My lord has but to speak. Ibrahim is only poor, but he never forgets."

"It's your memory I wish to borrow, Ibrahim. I wish you to come with me to the White House." His face fell at this. He was chary now of shewing himself in too frequented places.

"My lord, your servant is old; my steps are feeble and my strength is small;" he was, in fact, as hale as a man five and twenty years his junior, but I let him run on with his string of excuses, and then quietly repeated my words, adding that in no other way could he serve me, and that I would give him half a gold lira for every quarter of an hour he was absent from his house, and would double the amount if he could give me the information I needed.

His bright old eyes glistened at this, and his next string of excuses was much shorter. Of course I paid no heed to them.

"I wish you to identify a man named Koprili, who has tried to poison me. I have my carriage close to Balat; no one shall see you, not even the man you are to identify; and I'll make it full lira instead of a half. No one else can serve me, and, mark this, my life may be in danger if you refuse."

"My lord has but to speak and it is for his servant to obey." In other words, the last considerations clinched the business and decided him; and we were soon on our way together.

I took him into my room, and having carefully concealed him where he could see Koprili without being seen, I sent Stuart and another man to bring my prisoner in.

I put a few questions to the scoundrel, and myself

took advantage of the interview to study his gestures and particularly his voice and intonation; and then sent him away, telling Stuart to strip him and bring the clothes to me, and find something for him to wear meanwhile.

"Well, Ibrahim?" I asked the old Jew eagerly, and found him labouring under deep excitement.

"What does my lord say the dog calls himself?" and the old man's tone was full of hate.

"Koprili, the servant of Mademoiselle Haidée Patras, the Greek."

"The dog lies to my lord," was the reply, uttered fiercely, with kindling eye. "He is Hamdi, the son of Sarim, and a creature of the tyrant, Maraboukh Pasha, that man of blood;" and he gave a long and detailed account of Koprili's vigorous and very unsavoury past.

"Is he still one of Maraboukh Pasha's men, and likely to be in communication with him?" I asked.

"My lord may count upon that surely—why else should he be here, or anywhere?"

"You are quite sure?"

"Does Ibrahim forget those who seek to injure him and his?"

"I see, you have a little account to settle with him."

"He is a dog, fit only for a dog's death," cried the old Jew, vindictively.

"Have you any friends in the Pasha's house, Ibrahim?"

"I have many friends, my lord, as well as enemies."

"That means you have; well, I'm going to trust you with my life, possibly. I am going to personate Hamdi, or Koprili, as I call him, and am going as

Koprili to the Pasha's house to find out what I can find out in no other way. I hope to do it without being recognised; but if I am discovered, there may be trouble of some kind. Can you get your friends there to help me if the trouble does come?"

"My lord is surely mad!" exclaimed the old man.

"I daresay it looks like it, but I'm going all the same, and I'm going at once. Send some one here to-night to ask if I have got back, safe and sound, and if not, you'll know how to act to get me a friend there. I may need one badly."

"Of a certainty my lord is mad," he said again.

"Will you do this? I shall pay liberally."

"My lord has but to command, and all I can I will."

"There's still something more, Ibrahim. There's some devilment going on in regard to His Majesty the Sultan. If I get into a mess at the Pasha's, I shall not be able to do anything; but I want you to watch with the eyes of a mountain wolf, and with all the spies you can safely employ, and bring straight here to this house all the news you can ferret out. Maraboukh, the man of blood, as you call him, is in it all and probably at the bottom of it, and you must dog everything that is done and bring word here."

"My lord's word is his servant's law, but the task is heavy and his servant is old."

"And the pay will be heavy too, Ibrahim. You understand, it must be done, and I hold you to your oath to serve me."

For some minutes he stood in silence, his head bent, thinking deeply.

"It shall be done, as my lord wishes, to the best of his servant's power."

"Good, I want no more than that," I said; and I paid him for the present business, gave him a liberal sum on account of the much higher task, and sent him away.

There was no man in all Turkey I would rather have had for the work; and none more to be relied upon in a time of need such as this.

CHAPTER XV

MY SPY ENTERPRISE

WHEN Ibrahim had left me I had only to complete the arrangements necessary to provide for the contingency of my being discovered by Maraboukh Pasha and detained. While Grant lay ill, our plans had perforce to remain at a standstill; and thus, although my absence might cause inconvenience, as I had in a manner taken over the direction of the White House affairs, yet it was not likely to be really serious. Even if I did not return at all, the worst result would be to cause temporary confusion.

Some one must, however, be ready to give the necessary orders, and as Grant was out of the question, that some one would have to be Enid. This necessitated my giving her some kind of hint that I might be away for a time, and I therefore sent Stuart to ask if I could have five minutes' conversation, and whether I should go to her or she would come to me.

My chief wish was that, pending the troubles in the city which I gathered from Stephani were now imminent, Grant and Enid, with the chief part of the household, should be removed to The Home, as they would be safer from any risk of disturbance on the island than even in Pera. My intention was to remain by myself at the White House and watch events, keeping up constant communication with the island.

Our arrangements in this respect were already complete. A steam launch, with steam up night and day, was kept at the Galata landing stage, another at the island, and a third boat, a beautiful electric launch which Grant had brought from America, was also at Galata. I wrote notes for Stuart to deliver to the men in charge of all these, giving them instructions to be specially vigilant.

I had just finished them when Enid came.

"Stuart says you wish to see me, Mr. Ormesby. Is anything the matter?"

"You needn't have bothered to come to me; I could have come up to you. I'm sorry. No, there's nothing the matter; but I haven't seen Dr. Arbuthnot to-day, and I wanted to know his report."

"He's coming again this evening," she said quickly, as if guessing there was something behind my words. That woman's instinct of hers was embarrassingly quick at times.

"I'm afraid I may have to be out," I answered, indifferently. "But what is his report?" She kept her eyes on me with a sharp, penetrating, inquiring expression.

"He thinks Cyrus is better. The doctor asked for you. I think it was about the Vienna specialist, Dr. Eberhardt."

"He is coming, I hope."

"Yes, he will be here to-morrow morning."

"Good. Did you mention about moving Cyrus to The Home?"

"Yes, and he seems to approve. I told him you were very urgent about it. But what is going to happen? You are very peculiar."

"Aren't you a little suspicious?" I asked, with a smile.

"No, I am simply reading what I see in your face and manner."

"You mean I'm a bit worried: I daresay I look it a bit."

She paused, and then replied slowly: "No, I don't mean that. You are meditating some fresh step. What is it?"

"Nothing that need call so earnest a look to your face. You might be trying to hypnotise me;" and I tried to carry things off with a laugh again.

"Well, you sent for me to tell me something in connection with it," she replied, waving aside my pretence.

"All I wish to say is that, as I have to go out, I thought you ought to know it, in case I should be detained, and any matters call for attention in my absence."

"Detained," she repeated, catching at the word, "why detained?"

"Oh, I don't suppose I shall be, but I thought some one ought to know."

"Who is likely to detain you?"

"No one, of course; but one can never tell." Her steady, questioning eyes made me uncomfortable.

"But if you don't think you will be detained, why make such a point of telling me—of warning me, rather?"

"You would make an excellent cross-examiner."

"But you are not a communicative witness, Mr. Ormesby. Just say plainly what you mean: are you going into any danger?"

"Danger! Absurd," I returned, lightly. "The only thing is that, as I may have to be absent some hours perhaps, or perhaps even longer, and some of the many little arrangements here will need some one's attention, you would naturally see to them, and ought to know, therefore, that you might be called upon. I don't want you to be worrying yourself if I'm not here. That's all."

"All, is it? All that you mean to tell me, I suppose. I presume you don't mean me to believe that, when things are at this critical pass with us, you are going out for a little pleasure jaunt, and would leave us to shift for ourselves. I don't believe that of you."

"It isn't altogether pleasure. It's business, in fact, and these business interviews last no end of a time in this dilatory land sometimes."

"Do they run into days, Mr. Ormesby?"

"I may have to go on somewhere else, a bit of a journey perhaps."

"And you wish me to see to things here in your absence?"

"Yes, that's about it."

"And yet at the same time I'm to be at The Home?"

"No, you haven't caught me," I said, annoyed at my slip, but covering it quickly with a laugh. "It's that I mean—just to see after the arrangements for the removal there."

"Because you try to explain away a discrepancy, it does not alter the fact that it *was* one. But I will do as you wish." She showed such sudden compliance that I on my side was suspicious.

"You will go with your brother to The Home?"

"Yes."

"And remain there?"

"I will do what you asked me."

"What does that mean?"

"That I will not let you be the only one of us to take risks. I will go to the island with Cyrus, and then I shall return here to see to things, as you say, until you return."

"But you can do no good here, and may greatly add to my embarrassments. I hope you will do nothing of the kind."

"Suppose you should need help urgently and suddenly, and there was no one here to send it? Are you to be left in the lurch?"

"But there is no possibility of it, and you might be in real danger here. I ask you, Miss Grant, not to do this."

"You may ask anything but that."

"But I do, I press it. I beg of you most earnestly not to do anything of the kind."

"Do you think none of us care about your safety? I mean," she added hurriedly, "that while Cyrus is ill, is not your safety a matter of genuine concern to all of—to all the interests here?" Then impetuously: "I could not stay here and know you were in danger—I could not."

"But if I were in any danger—which will not be so—I could as easily send to the island as here to the White House."

"I could not do it; I could not," she repeated.

"May I venture to put it as a personal favour? Of course I have no sort of claim to do that, I know;

but it would be a genuine kindness. I won't hide from you what you seem to have guessed, that there is just a chance of some trouble coming out of this thing for me, and it would make it so much easier for me if I knew you were all right at The Home. Believe me, your safety is so much to me that——." I pulled up short, not seeing quite where I might be led.

"Is it?" she asked, glancing at me and then as quickly lowering her eyes.

"I am going into this thing with no object but to try and clear matters up a bit," I said, after a moment's pause to get my wits in hand again; "but I should never forgive myself if the result were to be any danger to—to anyone at the White House."

"Do you think we don't believe that? But I can't promise you. You must leave me to act as I think best in your—in all interests. I will stay at The Home, if I can. Don't ask me to promise more. I shall be so anxious."

"You will help me best by remaining there; really you will."

"I can't promise any more," she said deliberately, after a pause.

"Well, I shall hope to find you there on my return—unless I manage to get back this evening before you go. And that's most probable."

"And if you don't, good-bye, and I wish you success;" and to my surprise, she held out her hand. "I am glad you have told me," she added, as we shook hands.

"I'm not sure that I am, for I believe we're making a mountain of a molehill," I answered, smiling. But

she had none but a ghost of a smile in reply, and indeed looked very serious.

The moment she had gone I hurried my preparations. With Stuart's assistance I dressed myself in Koprili's clothes, made the few slight but necessary touches for my make-up, wrapped a bandage across my forehead as if I had been hurt, thus concealing a part of my face, slipped a loaded revolver and some spare cartridges into an inner pocket, and was ready. Stuart was obviously very curious about it all, and had some difficulty in hiding his feelings.

"Like old times, sir," he said, at length; he had been with me some years, and had seen me disguised many a time as a Turk.

"Yes, Stuart, and, as in old times, silence is necessary."

"Yes, sir. And I am to stay here?"

"Of course. Let me out the private way and expect me back in about three hours or so. If I don't come back to-night or to-morrow, just keep the fact of my absence secret, as far as you can. You may tell Miss Grant, if she is here, but no one else if you can help it. I expect Mr. Grant will be moved to The Home this evening, and most of the servants will go with him; but you must wait here. And mark this, if Miss Grant returns here, I trust largely to you to see that she comes to no harm. Mind that—I look to you."

"I'll do my best, sir," he promised. "But if anything happens can I communicate with you?"

"No, for I don't quite know where I shall be."

With that he let me out through a private door leading from my room into the grounds, and I heard him bar and bolt it behind me as I set off at a smart

pace down the hill to the old bridge, taking the shortest route to Maraboukh Pasha's house. The wind was blowing up fresh from the Sea of Marmora, and I folded the caftan closely about me until I got under the shelter of Stambul.

Wily and sharp as I knew Maraboukh to be, I was not so much afraid of his penetrating my disguise as that some of the people of the household might do so. There were sure to be some who knew Koprili well; and if by ill-luck I stumbled against one of these, my mission might come to an untimely end before it had been of the slightest use to us.

In this matter, however, I had a point in my favour. Ibrahim had told me that Koprili was thoroughly detested by Maraboukh's men, by whom he was regarded as a spy. He had at one time occupied a somewhat important secretarial position in the household, but had been degraded on account of some rascality, and had been allowed to remain on sufferance to do any black and dirty work from which the rest shrank. But the eyes of an Eastern's hate can be very piercing; and on my way to the house I thought of a trick that might meet the difficulty.

This was to sham illness as the result of ill-treatment, to declare that I had been bastinadoed, and to assume the stiff limping walk of a wounded man. This would also serve to give colour to my statement that I had urgent news for the Pasha's own ear, and probably get me to him without delay.

My heart began to beat uncomfortably fast as the house came in sight, and I crawled limping up to the door, speculating with much anxiety as to the manner of my reception.

The two servants who stood on watch outside, as soldiers stand before the houses of high officials, evidently did not know me as Koprili, and my heart fell in consequence. I feared my make-up was a failure; but to my intense relief and gratification the janitor on catching sight of me hailed me by name, and began to jeer.

"Ah, illustrious Hamdi, worthy son of Sarim, thou spitter upon tombs, what ill news bringest thou here?"

I shot a glance of anger at him, and growled out a curse in Koprili's guttural tone. As he caught fuller sight of that part of my face which was exposed, he started and looked sharply at me, but my imitation of the voice seemed to reassure him.

"So the Giaour dogs have been snapping at thee, thou thing of loveliness," he cried with a coarse laugh, as he turned to two or three other loungers in the hall. "Here is Hamdi the brave, the swift, the essence of truth, the noble favourite of our lord the Pasha, with his pate cracked and his feet tired with a well-earned bastinado, or I am a dog. Well done, Giaours, say I," and the others laughed.

He could not have done better service; for the men taking cue from him, never doubted my identity, and came round to jeer and scoff.

"Dogs; dogs all," I snarled, in a tone that Koprili himself could not have improved upon. "Out of my way; my hour is not passed. I have news for the Pasha; and if you are not quick to let him know I am come with news of urgency, part of my tidings shall be an account of how his dogs receive a faithful servant, wounded and bruised in his service. You know me." And I growled out another fearful imprecation,

as I staggered to a corner and crouched low, cross-legged, nursing my feet and groaning.

"Know you, Hamdi, thou prince of liars, whose name will be blessed when rogues are made prophets of Allah for their roguery?" cried the porter, a sturdy fellow of more independence and pluck than the rest who had moved away from me at my threats. "That we do right well. Go you, Ulmet, to the Pasha with the message," he added to one of the men. Then to me, not unkindly, he said: "Art thou badly hurt, Hamdi?" I turned and snarled at him again, swearing viciously.

"Thou wert ever a beast, Hamdi, whether in favour or out of it, and ever wilt be one; but if thou carry tales of me, thou wilt find Achmet can strike harder than ever any dog of a Giaour. So beware;" and with that he left me to myself. After some minutes the man Ulmet returned to say the Pasha would see me at once; and I dragged myself as if in pain and with much labour up the broad stairway to Maraboukh's presence.

The little scene in the hall with the servants had been of excellent service to me as a rehearsal. I seemed to have settled down, as it were, into my assumed character; to feel the part more completely and have thrown off the sensation of strangeness and unreality that had for the moment oppressed me. My nervousness left me, and I felt my character as Koprili was already half established; and I played with greater confidence and sureness of touch.

I crept into the room where Maraboukh was awaiting me, sitting at the same table where he had received Grant and myself, and as I did not know how

the Pasha generally received Koprili, I enacted a little scene of my own making, when I was well into the room so that my back should be to the two mutes. I made a deep salaam, and then purposely fell with a groan on the floor as though the pain and stiffness of my hurts were unbearable.

"My lord's pardon," I moaned, "His unworthy ill-fated servant is sorely hurt, and in suffering."

CHAPTER XVI

STALEMATE

IN my ignorance of how best to enter the Pasha's presence I over-acted my weakness a little, so that instead of giving me time to recover myself, he made a sign to one of the mutes to help me; and this was precisely what I most disliked.

It is a well-known characteristic of these unfortunate people that the destruction of their powers of speech and hearing has the effect of rendering their sight especially keen, and memory particularly retentive; and I was afraid that they would be very likely to detect my imposture.

But I had to submit to the test, as any attempt now to shirk the assistance might have aroused suspicion. The man who came to me was a great, broad-shouldered, muscular fellow, capable of picking me up as easily as he would a baby; and he seized hold of me roughly by the arm, and set me on my feet in a fashion that would have caused me excruciating torture had my hurts been real. So I groaned and winced and clung to him, taking care, however, to keep my face as much averted from him as possible.

Maraboukh was entirely unmoved by my apparent suffering, except perhaps that it caused him some amusement; for there was just the wraith of a grim contemptuous smile about his mouth at my contortions. He would not have been a true Ottoman had

he shown any concern. The Turks appear to have become so inured to scenes of horror and brutality that indifference and contempt of human suffering are all but instinctive characteristics.

"When your tongue is loosed, speak," he said, callously. "What is this news you bring?"

I continued my little pantomime of suffering, and then as if making a vigorous effort, I stood up and tried to get away from the big mute's touch. Noticing it, the Pasha waved the man back, and beckoned me forward. I was fervently thankful to have escaped the ordeal of his scrutiny without discovery, and I shuffled forward a step or two nearer the table, and stood with bowed head, avoiding the light so far as practical.

"Quick, Hamdi, your news," he said, sharply.

"Thy servant's tongue is dumb with fear of his lord's anger," I said, in a trembling tone of agitation.

"Would you have me find means to loosen it?" asked the bully, threateningly. "What has happened?"

"Thy servant has been beaten, and put to the torture; much has been discovered; but thy servant held his peace." He made a quick gesture of frowning impatience.

"Who tortured you?"

"The secretary of the wealthy Giaour, the dog, Ormesby," and I made a pretty hash of my own name, as though it were unpronounceable in the mouth of a true son of Islam. "He is a wizard and knew I sought his life."

"It was your own bungling, Hamdi. Does he still live?"

"He is a wizard. Thy servant saw him take the poison—with my own eyes I saw it—I swear it by the tomb of my fathers; but it harmed him not—and he lives."

"Did he see that paper about which I sent you word?"

"Thy servant burnt it——" and I described what Koprili had done in my room. He listened closely, and the cunning which Koprili had shewn seemed to please him; but when I said that Grant had taken the poison meant for me he changed to anger.

"You are a bungling dog, Hamdi, and if they had killed instead of whipping you, it would have served you right."

"My lord's anger is worse than death to his faithful servant," I murmured, bowing my head, but watching him furtively all the while. He sat for some moments buried in thought, giving now and then little starts of impatience and mortification.

"What else does that secretary, Orn. sby, suspect?"

"I fear much, my lord. He questioned thy servant closely between the blows of the bastinado, as to the attempt against the life of the wealthy Giaour, the American. But thy servant was dumb."

The Pasha looked his doubts of this.

"But you have done as I ordered you in that?"

"The American is sick to death and will die, my lord?" I replied, not quite seeing what kind of answer to make.

"You mean you gave him what I sent you?"

"Is not my lord's word as the law of the Koran to Hamdi, his servant?" This made it definite at any rate. He had not only ordered Koprili to poison

Grant, but had himself sent the drugs; and as I mumbled out the false confession of the crime, my blood ran hot with rage against the Pasha; Stephani was right it seemed; and they had made their plans against Grant before the attempt against me. But why, when as Haidée herself had declared, they held his life as more valuable than that of any other man in the plot because of the money he could command? What was this baffling double treachery? The thoughts flashed through my mind as I stood with lowered head waiting upon this villain's words.

"Does the Greek, your mistress, know of all this, Hamdi?"

"Does my lord mean as it concerns the American?"

"Have they tortured the wits out of you that you ask such a fool's question?" he returned, angrily, "Have you betrayed me?"

"Is thy servant a dog to bite the hand that feeds and protects him?"

He looked up at me sharply and suspiciously as I thought, and to my surprise muttered to himself in French.

"Have I trusted you too far I wonder?"

I could put that thought into plainer terms, for I knew what accidents could happen to the rogues of powerful Turks when they were held to know too much for their master's safety.

"Did my lord speak?"

"I was thinking that you have been a faithful servant, Hamdi, and have blotted out that unfortunate past of yours," he said, smoothly, with a very evil smile.

"My lord's favour is as the sun of Hamdi's life; to

please him and to do his will is his servant's one desire."

"Tell me then and speak frankly like a faithful and favoured servant, had this secretary of the American taken any steps to prove his suspicions?"

"I overheard him say that he should find means to reach Rechad Effendi."

"You have let no word of him escape your lips?"

"Thy servant's lips were sealed as with the seal of the tomb."

"He has no suspicion that Rechad is nothing to us?" he asked in a tone that shewed how important he held this to be.

"May my lord's anger be turned from his unworthy servant for speaking the words, but I fear he knows it."

I had hit him hard now and got well beneath the cold, impassive surface.

"By Allah, this must be seen to!" he exclaimed, striking the desk with his clenched fist and speaking impetuously. "Tell me all you know, Hamdi, as you value my favour."

"My lips speak but of the things I have seen. He charged me with destroying the paper, and when I denied all knowledge of it he answered: 'You are lying, Koprili'; the dog of a Giaour to call me liar! And he said he knew the paper was but a forgery, my lord; that His Highness, Rechad Effendi, had never seen it; that his master the American knew this too; that he had learnt all my lord's plans by wizarding, and knew them; and that to any document there must be another name than that of Rechad Effendi."

This was all pure bluff on my part of course; and I

answered as slowly as I could, calculating the effect of every word, and so judging how far I dared go with him. But every syllable told; and the effect of the last sentence showed me how plainly I had struck right home again.

"Do you mean he spoke of His Highness, War-ed-in Effendi?"

In that instant I saw the whole plot like a flash of light, and for my life could not entirely restrain a start of surprise. He had spoken impulsively, and the name had slipped from him without thought and against his intentions; and the start I gave made him aware of the dangerous slip. In a second I had myself in hand again and answered:

"Thy servant can but tell his lord the truth. He said he knew all concerning War-ed-in Effendi."

"And this is the man you have let escape!" he cried, in a voice of thunder, while his eyes gleamed with angry menace. "You have betrayed me shamefully, Hamdi, and may have ruined everything."

Then he lapsed into deep thought, and I stood as if bowed down by the weight of the anger I had roused, but pondering closely all that this disclosure meant to us.

I had got all I needed. War-ed-in Effendi was the much younger brother of Abdul Hamid. Common report gave him a very different character from that of Rechad; and some years before he had been said to be in sympathy with Maraboukh, who had been one of the officials in charge of him. Rechad Effendi was thus the mere stalking horse used to cover the conspiracy in War-ed-in's behalf. Rechad was, as we had always counted upon, a man likely to favour such a

scheme at Grant's; while the younger man, if Maraboukh was to be his favourite and chief Minister, was just as certain to cancel every concession made the instant he was on the throne. Like Maraboukh himself, he was reputed an Ottoman of the Ottomans, and hated the Westerns with intense hate.

With the knowledge of this inner plot in my possession I could do all I needed, and my anxiety now was just to get safely out of the house; and my fear lest Maraboukh, having spoken too freely, would deem it unsafe to let me go.

I would have given something to know the drift of the Pasha's thoughts as he sat, heavy-browed and stern, revolving what I had told him and what it meant to his schemes; and probably what he had better do in regard to me.

After a long trying silence he looked up.

"How did you manage to get away and come to me?" he asked, suspiciously, and I could understand his doubt. Koprili being known as the poisoner was not likely to be let free by people whom the Pasha deemed as shrewd as those of the White House. While if I said I had escaped, it would be a plausible excuse for not letting me return.

"The Greek, my mistress, in pity for my sufferings found the means for me to bring the news to my lord," I said, after a moment's hesitation.

"Your sufferings, dog. What are your sufferings to me?" he thundered, noticing my hesitation. "How could she do it, since they had found out what you had done?"

"My lord knows she is all powerful with the American, and all but rules there in his name."

"Is that the truth? Beware, how you seek to deceive me, Hamdi," he cried again, in his sternest tones.

"Thy servant is but a thing of naught in his lord's hands. By the beard of the Prophet, it was as I say: and the Greek charged me to return with my lord's commands: and old Lelia waits to admit me secretly."

"Lelia, Lelia, who is Lelia?"

"I but speak of her by the name she bears in the house where she is about my lord's commands." I answered readily enough, but it was plain I had made a bad blunder.

"Whom do you mean?" he asked, in the same angry tone.

"The anger of my lord and the torture have clouded his servant's recollection of her name," I answered, cursing myself roundly for the dangerous blunder.

"Forgotten your wife's name, have you? You must have suffered, my poor Hamdi." It is impossible to convey an impression of the subtle cunning with which this was said, or the significance of the cold cruel smile that accompanied the words. What he thought, I know not; but what he meant to do I was very soon to know. "So you are really ill?"

"The countenance and sympathy of my lord have strengthened me. I can return and do his bidding."

"That's just what you won't," he muttered, in another French aside; and adding aloud in Turkish, in a tone of compassion: "You are too ill to do any

more good there. You have earned rest and you shall have it."

My blood chilled as I heard this. I knew it meant a prison at first, with worse probably to follow.

"It is as my lord wills," I answered, submissively, racking my wits how to get out of the mess; and conscious that all the time the keen cruel eyes were fixed intently upon me.

Another minute would probably have settled that part of my fate, but then there came an interruption. A messenger entered and handed Maraboukh a paper, standing while it was read. The Pasha made no sign while reading it, except that once, all suddenly, he looked up at me, and caught me staring hard at him. Then he smiled again, ominously as before, and sent the servant away.

"Do you know what this is?" he asked, holding up the paper, his tone quiet, but his eyes stern and menacing.

"How can thy servant know his lord's affairs?"

"Yet you might have recognised it, Hamdi, thou man of faith and truth, for it is thine own letter."

Every pulse in my body seemed to leap at the words, to stop suddenly, and then to go beating and thumping on furiously. I went closer to the table as if to examine the letter.

"It must be the letter I wrote to send to my lord before I knew I could come myself."

"No doubt that is it, Hamdi; it has been delayed," he said, with a suggestion of positively devilish cunning in his manner; and he paused as if enjoying in anticipation the trap he was going to set while he

looked at me over the letter. "Just repeat to me what you say here."

I was beaten, of course; completely out-manœuvred and trapped; and there remained only force as offering a last hope of escape. Surely a faint, forlorn hope considering where I was.

I moved my hand concealed by the caftan round to my revolver, and while making a slow bow of submission, slipped it out.

"Come," he said, as if indulgently; playing with me as a beast with a bird. "Not a difficult thing, Hamdi."

"I have explained that my memory has failed me," I answered, dropping my flowery subservient form of speech in my confusion. The inconsistency of the mode of speech did not escape him: nothing escaped him in those few tense moments.

"Then I'll find means to make you recollect."

I chose that moment to declare myself.

"Stop," I cried, speaking in French. "A word, a sign, a movement, and you are a dead mean. I am covering you;" and I let the muzzle of the revolver peep out between the folds of the caftan. I dared not make an over show of force, lest the mutes behind should see and rush upon me.

His self-command was magnificent. Not a sign even of passing surprise escaped him, but he held the letter as before in fingers that did not show a single tremor. To do him justice he was no coward. He knew how near he stood to death; but was as calm, placid and collected as at any moment of the strange interview.

"This is very interesting," he said, slowly, after a pause. "You are—who?"

"I am Mr. Grant's secretary, Mervyn Ormesby."

"And have come as a spy to my house."

"And mean to leave it," I returned.

"Pardon me, Mr. Ormesby, but there you are wrong. You will only leave it at my time and by my consent. You are now too dangerous."

"If you move a finger to have me detained I will fire."

He paused a moment, regarding me steadfastly and thoughtfully, weighing the situation, then shook his head slowly.

"No you won't," he answered, with his evil smile. "If you were to kill me, my servants would either pull you to pieces or hand you over to be tried for murder. In either case you will be powerless to do the harm you meditate. I invite you therefore to fire; and if you do not fire in one minute, I shall give you into the care of my servants."

And with supreme coolness and pluck, he took out his watch, glanced at it, and then turned to me, looking me full in the eyes, as though daring me to fire.

CHAPTER XVII

THE TABLES TURNED

HE had turned the tables on me completely, and had read me much better than I had read him.

My threat was a bluff and he knew it. Had I been as callous as he, and as able to do murder in cold blood, it would still have availed me nothing. Those grim silent guards behind me had served their purpose; their mere presence saved their master's life, and rendered my chance of escape hopeless.

As the sixty seconds ran out I stood thinking in desperate perplexity, and the snap of his watch-case as he closed it told me the time was up.

"You do not fire, Mr. Ormesby," he said, in the same cool, collected voice. "You are prudent and understand the uselessness. Will you hand me that revolver?"

"No," I replied, shortly.

"I have but to give the sign and it will be taken from you."

"The six chambers are loaded, and one is all I need for myself."

He shrugged his shoulders.

"Need we play this any further?"

"Your Excellency will find me in very deadly earnest."

"And what then do you propose to do next?"

"I am resolved not to be kept here."

"And if I say you cannot be allowed to leave?"

"I am a very fair shot at close range," I returned.

"You mean you will resist capture, and in the last resort will blow your brains out."

"It would be an easier fate than trusting my life to you."

"I am not so sure of that, Mr. Ormesby. You would at any rate be out of my path, and you shall have an opportunity of making your brave words good;" and with this sneer he sounded his table bell vigorously.

It was a desperate pass, but I resolved to make a fight for it to the end; and with this object I drew aside and put my back to the wall.

"The blood of any man who touches me will be on your head, Pasha," I said.

"I am prepared for that, of course," was the reply; "but I cannot allow you to retain that weapon. Send Ulmet here at once with half-a-dozen men," he said to the servant who came in then, and he made some sign to the two mutes who began to approach me warily.

By chance I had backed to one of the high French windows of the room, and reckoning that it would lead to some balcony, I turned and with swift eager fingers unfastened, threw it open and darted out into the darkness. But my intent had been guessed and I felt a hand clutch the back of the caftan. Turning instantly I found it was the mute who had had hold of me before, and as quick as thought I fired point blank at the fellow's arm. But quick as the thing passed, it lasted too long for my safety. He grabbed my caftan with his uninjured hand, and his comrade coming to his help at the same moment, together they

hauled me back into the Pasha's presence as easily as if I had been a mere child, and wrenched the revolver from me.

Maraboukh sat quite unmoved throughout the brief struggle. He signed to the men to place me where I had stood before and to give him my revolver; and when the men he had sent for arrived, he dismissed them at once, telling one of them to take the mute I had shot to have his wound dressed. The other he waved back to his usual place by the door.

"It would have saved trouble to have given me this at once, Mr. Ormesby," he said, as collectedly as before, touching the revolver; "but perhaps it is best so, since now you must recognize the uselessness of resistance."

"For the moment you have the best of it. I admit that."

"Not a very large admission, either," he retorted. "But perhaps you see how much worse you have made your position by your rashness. You came here as a spy; you threatened my life when your disguise was discovered; you tried to run away; and when my servants sought to prevent you breaking your neck by jumping from the balcony there, you turned and shot one of them. That is a heinous crime even for an Englishman in Stambul—you are English, I think?"

"Whatever you believe you can do with me, Pasha, do it and do it quickly," I answered, firmly and with an air of resolution; although inwardly I was intensely alarmed at the turn matters had taken. In fact, I was convinced that my life was in danger and I was certainly very unwilling to die; but it would have been the height of folly to let him see my cowardice.

"I do not wish you any harm, Mr. Ormesby; on the contrary nothing would give me more pleasure than to let you go at once; but you will of course see you have made that difficult, if not impossible."

"I have had abundant evidence of your Excellency's kindly intentions, in the attempt which Koprili made—the bungler, as you termed him."

"I should withdraw that term, I think, seeing that he was after all the cause of this—this visit, I will call it. But now I will put some questions to you and you will answer or not as you think best. It would on the whole be more prudent of you to answer," he said, his tone mild but the threat unmistakable. "You are very much in the confidence of the American, Mr. Grant?"

"Yes."

"What then was his real and ultimate object in this plan of his in regard to the conceded lands in Macedonia?"

"A business venture to develop the resources there, and make money in doing so."

"That was the avowed object, you mean. What was the secret one?"

"We English and Americans set our objects out in full sight. The place will be well governed and properly organized, and the security of the inhabitants assured. A novel experience in Turkey, no doubt, and perhaps distasteful to officials accustomed to govern the vilayets as your Excellency governed yours, for instance."

"You are playing with words, Mr. Ormesby. When this one district had been organized, as you term it, what next?"

"If your Government approve of what will be done, and consent, another district will probably be developed in the same way. It is entirely a commercial matter for the Government to sanction or not, as they please."

"And the arms that you have stored on that island of yours on the coast there, and the men who have been collected there?"

"The meaning is perfectly plain. The company must have agents and servants to do the work until the residents can do it; and as parts of the district are infested by brigands we must have arms to protect ourselves. If you will look at things with Western eyes, instead of through Eastern glasses, they are simple enough."

"Ah, you do not mean to tell me, and I am not surprised. Nor are we blind, Mr. Ormesby. Your object was in reality to make a colony there in the first instance, then to spread to other districts, and in this way to obtain a footing and oust us Mohammedans altogether."

"That is what I mean by coloured Eastern glasses—coloured by racial and religious prejudices. We have neither. Your country is one of the richest in the world and yet is on the edge of bankruptcy, because you neither govern it properly nor stir a hand to develop it. We shall merely shew you the enormous possibilities and advantages of doing both."

"Would have shewn us, you mean?" he said drily, "Or would have tried."

"If what you have admitted to me is true—that you have poisoned my friend, you are right and the scheme is dead."

"You must know a good deal of the East, judging by your fluency in speaking the language and your almost successful impersonation to-day. Yet, do you think we Ottomans would deign to be taught Government by Giaours, the over-bearing enemies of Islam?" His hate of us came out in his tones here.

"If you don't learn from someone and that very soon, Islam will find its worst enemies in its most faithful sons."

"Silence!" he cried, for a moment losing self-control.

"You said you wished to question me. If you don't like the reply, stop the questions, Pasha," I retorted, rather enjoying his anger. It was genuine at any rate, while his assumption of cool interest was mere unctuous hypocrisy.

"You angered me and I spoke hastily," he said, when he had regained self-command.

"I accept your apology," I put in quickly and hastily, with a smile; and again he had to pause to check his anger.

"Let us understand one another, Mr. Ormesby."

"I think we are beginning to do that," said I, but he brushed the words away with a gesture.

"You are in Mr. Grant's employment?"

"In a sense, yes."

"And are looking for higher employment, for promotion in fact, as this scheme develops?"

"In a sense, yes," I said again.

"You are a young man with hopes and ambitions; you have a wide acquaintance with our country; you know these modern and European ideas and methods; and you have come to this country to make your

fortune, having been for some years engaged in the task. Has it ever occurred to you that there might be a great sphere, a great career, from one so situated and gifted?"

"Many things have occurred to me," I answered, somewhat flippantly, not catching his drift.

"We are on the eve of great changes, great developments in all directions in which the old might and glory of our Empire will flourish again and her greatness be restored. In that work there will be need for men of varied parts and attainments; and men like yourself might well find a congenial sphere to the mutual advantage of themselves and the Empire." He spoke deliberately, choosing his words carefully and watching their effect upon me.

"I don't think I understand your Excellency," I replied, as he paused.

"Such men would rise to high station and influence, and would possess privileges and power unknown to men in alien lands and of other faith than that of Islam?"

"Again I say I do not understand your Excellency."

"Wealth, influence, power, the consummation of almost every desire, the obedience of thousands, the respect and admiration of millions,—all these things would be within the reach of such men, who as sons of Islam should help in building up again the fallen fortunes of our Empire, reinvigorating her strength, and gilding once more her tarnished glories."

I understood him now well enough; and the colossal infamy and double cunning of his proposal astounded me. He would bribe me to betray Grant and all at the White House, with a promise of a big career,

while tacking to it the condition that I should turn Mohammedan and enlist in his service.

"It seems to me," I answered, after pausing, and as though weighing his proposition deliberately, "that the first thing such men would ask for would be some guarantee of good faith, some assurance that things would be as you say."

"They would not be the cautious men we seek if they did not. But such assurances would be given."

"By which of their Royal Highnesses, Rechad or War-ed-in?"

"After what had passed what need of concealment. By my master, War-ed-in. As His Highness's future Grand Vizir, I am empowered to pledge his word."

I paused again and appeared to think.

"Shall we suppose for a moment that a man like myself were to offer his services in some such capacity as you suggest?"

"I was addressing myself to you, especially, Mr. Ormesby," he answered at once.

"But I am an Englishman, a Giaour, and a Christian, Pasha."

"You would become by nationality an Ottoman. That of course."

"But my religion?"

"That would be for your after-consideration. The men who rise to the highest eminence must be Moslems. There can be but one God for the true friends of our Empire."

"And you think I could easily change my faith?"

"Your countryman have done it before."

"Your Excellency has the merit of speaking plainly."

"I am speaking to a man of affairs; besides;" and

he spread out his hands and smiled blandly ; "you are not just now a free agent, and can scarcely carry my words far."

"I think I understand you. And the price I should have to pay at once for—for His Highness's favour?"

"You would, of course, devote yourself at once to the true Ottoman interests."

"And that means?"

"In regard, for instance, to this American scheme, you would view it at once from the point of advantage to the Empire instead of from that of your present employer."

A neat wrapping this for an act of dastardly betrayal. My indignation was so hot that for a moment I could not trust myself to speak ; but it was a play at fence, and temper was useless.

"You have spoken frankly as to the one side," I said next. "Now, as to the other. What if I refuse?"

"I should be sorry."

"I have no doubt of it," I snapped drily. "But what would happen?"

"We should lose a man we would gladly have, while your scheme would benefit—nothing. Your employer or friend, whichever you consider him, will not live ; and thus, as you yourself said, his scheme will die with him. You, yourself, well—" and he shrugged his shoulders expressively — "you know enough of us to understand you cannot be at liberty and eventually must answer for this attack upon my faithful servant. But our criminal courts do not move swiftly, as you know, and in the meantime"—he

paused again—"our prisons are not pleasant places. And they are not yet full."

He spoke with deliberate malice, hoping to frighten me thoroughly by the mention of prisons which, as the world knows, must find their parallel for horror, cruelty, and abominations in hell rather than on earth. But he was surprised and, I think, disconcerted and angered when, instead of showing the fear I really felt, I laughed lightly. I had done a good deal of acting that day, but no stroke taxed me more than that laugh and the light tone in which I replied.

"There seems to be a fairly glaring contrast between the two pictures. Your Excellency uses vivid colouring."

"And the palette is not quite exhausted yet, Mr. Ormesby. It may or may not touch you closely, but your employer has a sister, rich, I am told, and accounted beautiful?"

"What of her?" I asked sharply.

"A high mission has been accorded to her. She has succeeded in attracting the attention of a man high in our counsels and destined to rise much higher. She will be his wife—or at least one of them." His eyes glittered in the lamplight as he rivetted them on me to mark the effect of this crowning foulness; but he had been too long in reaching it, and I was prepared to shut down every sign of feeling.

"I have heard of that. I know the Count Stephani; and no doubt he will rise high—to the branch of a tree probably with the help of a rope and a pair of strong arms at the end of it."

"Such carrion as that is not worth a rope," he said with bitter contempt. "I was not speaking of carrion."

"Let that be as it will, I have the whole picture now, I presume, as you would paint it. But there are two colours you have not used. In the first place Miss Grant is under the protection of the American Embassy, and they will know how to protect her. The second affects me. The British Embassy knows all about my presence here and will know where to look for me; and its eyes and ears are sharp and keen enough to find me, even in a prison. This means that I can at least consider your proposals dispassionately. How long will you give me?"

"Until to-morrow. After that it will be too late."

"And until then I am to be your guest, I suppose."

"You must remain here; but if you will give me your word of honour to make no attempt to escape, it will be a mere show of restraint."

"But I will not," I returned promptly.

"Then you leave me no alternative," he said, as if regretfully.

With that the remarkable interview closed; and sending for his servants, he gave me into their charge with instructions which I could not overhear.

Any thought of forcible resistance was, of course, out of the question, and I went away in their custody. In the Pasha's presence, no indignity was offered me; but the moment we were out of his room I was seized, my arms were bound tightly behind me, a bandage was placed over my eyes, and in this condition I was pushed and hauled with considerable violence along

passages and down staircases, until I was thrust into some place, and heard a door slammed and barred behind me.

And in that plight I was left.

CHAPTER XVIII

DELIVERANCE

MY first sensation was one of almost paralyzing helplessness. The bandage across my eyes had been so skilfully adjusted that I could see absolutely nothing, while the pressure of it was so tight as to cause actual physical pain. The bonds on my arms had also been tied by those well practised in the work; and my hands were already swollen and aching with that peculiar bursting sensation which follows when the circulation is stopped and the extremities have not yet become deadened to feeling.

Knowing all I did of the unspeakable horrors which have been enacted at times in that city of crime and violence, and of the devilishly ingenious traps often laid for unfortunate prisoners, I was at first afraid to move an inch from where I had been left, lest I should only fall into some worse plight.

To add to my discomfort and alarm, I had a constitutional dread of such pitchy darkness as that which seemed to envelop me; and my nerves, which had been sorely tried by the experiences of that critical day, now threatened to collapse altogether. And although I am anything but an emotional man, I was so overcome that I nearly burst into tears. It was only the instinct of a coward, I am afraid, and no doubt, very contemptible; but the confession will at

least convey some idea of my distressing frame of mind.

I remained rooted to the spot, overwhelmed by the sense of helplessness and fear for a time that seemed hours to me; until indeed the physical fatigue of maintaining one fixed position began to tell upon me, and my head and eyes throbbed with the pressure of the bandage with intolerable pain.

Yet it was the fatigue and the pain that led to my bettering my condition. They drove me to make some kind of effort, and in this way drew away my thoughts even from my distracting fears.

I began very cautiously. Putting out my right foot with utmost care, I felt first in front of me and then at the side, to ascertain whether the floor was sound and to make sure that there was no treacherous opening. Then I did the same with my left foot, and having satisfied myself as to what was immediately in front of me, I drew my feet together and turned as a soldier turns at drill, and went through a similar process in that direction.

Finding that all was clear and safe, I took one step forward, and in this way, feeling the ground almost inch by inch, I continued until I found my advance stopped by a wall. There I sat down, resting my hands and shoulders against the wall, and leant back with a sigh of intense relief.

Simple and easy as all this may seem, yet my nerves were so unstrung that the exertion brought the perspiration out over all my body, and I felt tired out.

My next efforts were directed to loosening the bandages across my eyes. The knot was at the back of my head, and after many attempts I succeeded, by

rubbing my head against the wall, in slightly forcing it upwards until, after many efforts that caused great pain, I managed to get it over my head.

But the darkness seemed just as dense as when my eyes were covered, and I guessed that I had been brought to some underground room or cellar. Wherever I was I felt much less uncomfortable now the bandage was off; and feeling my way carefully as before, I sidled and slid along the floor until I came to a corner, and settling myself into it as best I could, since my hands were tied behind me, I fell asleep.

I must have slept soundly, for when I awoke it was to find a couple of men hauling me up unceremoniously to my feet, and I stood blinking and winking at a light by which, held close to my eyes, they were staring hard into my face. They then refastened the bandage over my eyes, dragged me away, and hurried me up some stairs to another room. There they unfastened the bonds from my hands; tore the bandage from eyes, and laid me on a couch; and one of them went away, taking the cords with him, while the other sat down on guard close to the couch.

"My lord is coming to see you," he said gruffly. "If he asks any questions, you must say you have been here all the time"; and he emphasized the instructions with a savage threatening gesture.

I knew then that my confinement in the other place had not been authorized by Maraboukh, but that the men had taken me there to save themselves the trouble of watching me. Soon afterwards the door was thrown open and the Pasha entered. I lay still as if unable to move; and indeed there was very little pretence in this; for I was stiff and sore in all my joints, and the

released blood in my arms and hands gave me excruciating pain.

Maraboukh looked at me in surprise and then questioningly at the fellow in charge of me, who held himself bolt upright with his arms to his sides like a soldier standing to attention. Then the Pasha had the room cleared, and when we were alone, asked :

"Are you ill, Mr. Ormesby?"

"No; but it's no thanks to you that I am not;" and with much effort and strain, as I could not yet use my arms, I contrived to struggle up into a sitting posture. "Your Excellency has a merry wit," I said bitterly.

"I do not understand this," he answered, his face darkening.

"Here are some signs pretty easy to read;" and I held out my hands which were swollen and bruised, the skin broken in several places where the cords had cut into it. "They are true Turkish characters."

"This is no doing of mine," he said angrily.

"Easy words, your Excellency," I answered with a sneer.

"Do you doubt me?"

"I don't doubt these, at any rate. As soon as I was out of your sight your men blindfolded and bound me, and in that pligh: pitched me, like a trussed fowl, into a cellar to consider calmly your offer of high place in the Ottoman Court. I repeat, your Excellency has a merry wit;" and I sneered again, and added, "We shall see whether the British Embassy appreciates the point of this kind of joke."

"By the Prophet, I knew nothing of this," he protested, vehemently.

"I hear your Excellency," I said, with intentional aggravation.

"My word is not to be doubted, sir."

"Then either your memory is conveniently short or your servants fool you behind your back—and that is scarcely the reputation which His Excellency Maraboukh Pasha commonly enjoys."

With an oath he threw the door open and ordered the men who had treated me with such scant ceremony to be brought to him, and while he waited he paced the room like a caged beast. They came, trembling like craven bullies, and I had the satisfaction of hearing them ordered off in charge of some of their fellows to be bastinadoed.

I could understand his object in this. He was without doubt still hoping that I should consent to accept his offer and turn traitor, and was anxious that I should not think he had acted in such bad faith as to have me treated in this outrageous manner. It was moreover quite possible that the ill-treatment was the work of the servants who had either continued to mistake me for Koprili and had rejoiced at a chance of paying off old scores, or had been actuated by feelings of revenge for my having wounded the mute.

"You will believe me now, Mr. Ormesby, and accept my regrets?" he said, when the room was again cleared.

"Yes. Your men evidently disobeyed you. It is a lesson for me."

"A lesson? In what way?"

"A lesson that, however excellent your intentions may be, Pasha, those about you are not to be trusted." He frowned.

"I have come to ask you if you have yet decided?"

"Yes, my experiences have decided me. I will not trust your people."

"Nothing of this will occur again. You have my word. I mean you no harm."

"And I have had proof of the practical value of your desires when your back is turned."

"You will regret this attitude."

"Your attitude, you mean? I have already done so," I retorted, with a laugh.

"I will see you again in the morning. Meanwhile, I will answer personally that no harm befalls you; and with that he left the room, and a man I had not before seen came to keep watch over me.

There was nothing left for me but to make the best of the ugly situation; and, after rubbing my arms until the circulation was thoroughly restored, I settled myself on the comfortable divan and was soon asleep.

I was left undisturbed for the rest of the night. In the morning coffee and food and cigarettes were brought me, and after I had breakfasted the Pasha again visited me.

He was less cool, and appeared, indeed, somewhat excited. He told me I must now make my decision, and that he could give me no more time for reflection; urged me insistently to accept his offer, and declared that if I refused he would be compelled to place me in greater restraint.

"It may be necessary even for your own safety," he concluded, significantly.

"I have not yet made up my mind," I answered. It was obviously my course to appear to dally with the thing as long as possible.

"We are not children or women," he returned, angrily. "I must know now."

"As you please, of course; but it means so much to me that I can't decide in a hurry."

"It must be now or not at all, sir," he exclaimed, very sternly.

"Well, it can't be now," I answered, with a shrug.

"If your hesitation costs you your life, it is your own doing;" and without more he turned on his heel and left me.

Shortly afterwards I was taken out of the room to one in the lower part of the house; a gloomy place with one small strongly-barred window high up. To all intents a prison cell, but larger, and containing a not uncomfortable divan. There I was kept a close prisoner all that day and night and until late the following day; food was brought to me at intervals; and servants, or gaolers, whichever they may be termed, looked into the room frequently to see that I made no attempt to escape.

I could make none, of course. Had I been able to reach the little window, I could not have forced the strong bars; so I accepted the inevitable and waited, curbing my fretting impatience as best I could. I had the one hope still left, that old Ibrahim's spies in the house might yet effect a release; but it grew fainter and fainter with every hour that passed.

During all the time of my confinement my mind was filled with feverish anxiety as to the position of matters at the White House; and in particular about Enid. What the Pasha's motive had been in bringing her name into the matter and speaking of her as one

of the objects of his crafty machinations, I could only surmise. But after the almost reckless audacity of the attempt on Grant's life I could well believe him capable of any devilment directed against Enid.

I hoped with all my heart she had gone to The Home, as I had entreated her. She would be comparatively safe there, unless indeed the conspiracy plot came to a head and Maraboukh became Grand Vizir, with his puppet, War-ed-in, on the throne. In such an event no one could say what might happen. Even if he were in power for no more than a day or a few hours, he was capable of doing anything.

The knowledge of her danger warped every other consideration in my thoughts; and I believe that it was then I realized fully for the first time how dear she was to me. Grant's grievous illness, the now almost certain wrecking of his scheme and with it of my chances in regard to it, my own danger—all these were nothing in my eyes then compared with the distracting pain of the consciousness that she was in peril and that I could do nothing to help her. That was the thought which made my prison like a hell to me.

As the second day wore wearily to a close I became gradually aware that something unusual was astir, affecting the whole of the Pasha's household. The visits to my room were less frequent in the morning; and the men who came, instead of entering leisurely and examining the room carefully, were hurried, and their glances at me vindictive and threatening. Then the visits ceased, and I was left without food for some hours. It was almost as though I had been forgotten in the pressure of more important affairs, and when the light from my small window faded and the room grew

dark, I began to speculate whether I might not after all make some attempt to escape.

I had not got beyond the stage of speculation, however when I heard someone fumbling with the lock and bars of my door as though ignorant of the fastenings. I immediately threw myself on the divan and pretended to be asleep, my pulses quickening at the thought that if the man were alone I might tackle him and make a dash for my liberty.

There was no need for anything of the kind, however. The door was opened slowly and cautiously, and a voice that I did not know said in a low tone:

"Effendi, I am a friend." The door was closed, and a light was kindled. My visitor was a tall, powerful fellow, with anything but a prepossessing face, and I recalled having seen him among the longers in the hall on my arrival.

"Who are you?" I asked, but not without qualms of suspicion.

"I am Ben-ulral, the nephew of Ibrahim. If you will be quick we can get away. Put on these clothes. Great things are in the doing."

I stopped to ask no questions then, but peeled off Koprili's clothes and dressed myself rapidly in those he had brought—a pair of old baggy trousers and a seedy frock coat and fez, the usual costume of a Turk of the lower classes. As I finished, he handed me a loaded revolver, and he could give me no more sterling proof of his good intentions.

"I think we can get away without trouble, but if not, the Effendi knows that life or death for both of us will depend upon our acting promptly. You will

pass with me as one of the servants, but if we are stopped there is only one course to take. Come."

We stepped out into the corridor then, stayed while he fastened the door behind us, and then walked rapidly along the passage and through a door out on to the main staircase of the house.

"There is only Achmet and perhaps one other on duty at the door. All are away at the fire. Shew no hesitation; we are going to the fire also, if any questions are asked.

He was a clever, ready fellow indeed; and he now took my arm familiarly and began to laugh and talk as we ran down the stairway to the great hall.

He was right. The big porter and one comrade were the only occupants of the great place, which looked gloomy and desolate in the dim light of a couple of lamps.

"You haven't lighted the other lamps, Ben-ulral, you Jew dog," said Achmet, the porter, gruffly, as we appeared.

"Dog, yourself, Achmet; hold your peace. Who thinks of lamps when a Palace burns to make light? We go there."

"Who's that with you?"

"My brother, Ben-azrul, who came to us but yesterday."

"Well, let him help you with the lamps, and then you can go. I'm not here to open doors for all the Jew scum of the city"; and he growled something into the ear of his fellow, who rose and came toward me.

"I don't take orders from you. We are going to the fire, I say; and if you try to stop us, look to

yourself," replied my rescuer, in a very angry tone, and we went on towards the door.

"Shall a beast of a Jew threaten a true son of Islam? By the Prophet," cried the porter fiercely, and, snatching up a thick stick, he rushed upon my companion, while the other was for laying hands on me.

I was loth to fire, and contented myself with drawing my revolver and threatening my assailant, who fell back at sight of it. Ben-ulral would have had less compunction, probably, but fortunately had no revolver. He waited for the attack with courage and cunning, and dodging the heavy blow which the burly porter aimed, sprang on him, and with strength that impressed me, wrested the stick from his grasp and struck him some three or four tremendous blows, knocking him down.

Meanwhile the other man sent up a loud cry for help, and I heard answering shouts from other parts of the house.

"Keep them off while I open the door," cried Ben-ulral, and in a few seconds more, just as three fellows came leaping down the stairway to the rescue, the door was open and we darted out into the dark and set off running at top speed.

"It is well, Effendi," said Ben-ulral, pulling up presently. "They will not follow now. The streets are thronged, and you will pass without notice."

"You have done me a service I shall never forget, Ben-ulral."

"You can send me such reward as you think right to Ibrahim."

"You may be in sore trouble through it, I fear."

"I have been there before," he answered, with a careless shrug. "We shall do better to part here than to keep together—if you feel safe."

"I shall be safe now."

"Then I have done my work"; and without another word he was going.

"Stay," I cried. "What is the fire, and where?"

"The Yildiz Kiosk, and it means more than fire"; and with that somewhat cryptic reply, he swung away in the darkness, leaving me full of amazement at his words.

CHAPTER XIX

"HUANGEN VAR!"

THE fire at the Yildiz Kiosk is still too recent to have slipped from even the short memory of modern Europe, and that the fire was the result of a very wide conspiracy aimed at the Sultan's life and government is, of course, matter of common knowledge. But the circumstances of His Majesty's "illness" at the time have not yet been, and probably never will be, all made public.

Nor is it known to any, except those who took part in the exciting episode and to some few in very high places in Constantinople, that the plot came within an ace of being entirely successful, with results that must have shaken the whole fabric of the Turkish Empire to its very base, and probably have set half Europe in a blaze.

That it failed was due to what looks like the merest accident—to the actions of one man, old Ibrahim the Jew, and to the self-sacrifice of another, who gave away his life in the work. That other was my friend Grant.

To those who like to trace very great events to their indirect and infinitesimal causes, the history of that night in Constantinople offers a very interesting study.

The plot had been conceived and organized with consummate cunning and skill, and the chief weaver

of the intricate web was the man I have termed Maraboukh Pasha. He had masked his plans with true Oriental duplicity, and by keeping his real object entirely out of sight had succeeded in welding together in the conspiracy a large number of opposing parties and interests until the plot had assumed dimensions more threatening to Abdul Hamid and his Government than any which had ever been projected.

He had first laid his plans with his own intimates; Pashas, who, like himself, were Turks of the old school, hating all Europeans and European methods with fanatical hatred. They had abused their position and power in every way for their own aggrandisement; but while thus presenting in their own persons and practices insuperable obstacles alike to all real reform and to the re-establishment of the former greatness of the Ottoman power, they, at the same time, longed ardently and passionately for the recovery of that vanished power, and set out to achieve it in their own way.

Abdul Hamid they hated, not only because they had fallen out of his favour, but also because they saw for themselves, as Maraboukh had truly declared to Grant, that his rule was hastening the end of all things in Turkey; and they resolved upon his deposition. But Rechad Effendi, the next heir, would, in their view, make a worse ruler than Abdul. He held the same views as Abdul himself on certain matters of reform: such as education: but he lacked the old full-flavoured Ottoman instincts which Abdul had shewn in such matters as the treatment of Armenians, Jews, and other, to them, infidel dogs.

Rechad, therefore, they would have none of, but looked to Abdul's much younger brother, War-ed-in. Maraboukh himself had once been his chief guard and believed he had gained great influence over him. He had apparently satisfied himself, and others, that, under War-ed-in, the condition of the Empire would be just that which was desired.

In this, there is no doubt he had either been deceived, or had deceived himself: an easy matter, perhaps, seeing that if his plot succeeded he must unquestionably have become, for the time being, the most powerful man in the Empire.

But the most influential and numerous reform party in the Empire, the Young Turkey Party, were to a man in favour of Rechad Effendi; and, accordingly, by making Rechad the stalking-horse of the conspiracy, Maraboukh and his friends secured the enormous advantage of their help.

That Maraboukh deceived the leaders of this section, there is no doubt whatever. They were against Abdul; but their opposition was what in the West would be termed more constitutional than personal. They desired what is unattainable in Oriental politics, a change of Government without violence.

Maraboukh, therefore, pandered to this desire, but, at the same time, was heart and soul for the old methods. He knew his countrymen too well not to be certain that the man with force behind him wields the power, and that might, and might only, could prove wrong to be right. Step by step, he had felt his way with marvellous dexterity; promising, bribing, suborning, intriguing, and corrupting, until half the Palace officials themselves had been drawn into

his wide-cast nets, and the time to strike drew near.

His method in dealing with the White House is alone sufficient to show the reach of his cunning and his consummate unscrupulousness in attaining any desired end. Grant had roused not only his deadly animosity, but, also, his even more dangerous fear. His spies had told him much of what we were doing, and he was quick to read in the scheme of pacific commercial colonization the same enormous possibilities which Grant himself saw. In his eyes, it became a menace to all his future plans; a plot threatening the interests of Islam; and thus a project to be thwarted at all costs and by any available means which fanaticism could devise and execute.

But his fear of Grant was an even more potent motive for destroying him. And the fear had its origin in Grant's acknowledged influence with Abdul, and, in a scarcely less measure, in his wealth and American energy and knack of achieving success. Many of the Young Turkey Party who were in the conspiracy were, as I learnt afterwards, strong adherents of the American scheme, believing that it would prepare the way for the complete ultimate regeneration of the Empire; and Maraboukh regarded this sympathy as full of risk and peril. He dreaded lest some of these men should be led to divulge the secret to Grant prematurely, or to drop such hints of it as would cause a man of Grant's perspicacity to suspect and ascertain the truth, and send him hotfoot with the story to Yildiz Kiosk.

He had then formed the resolve to destroy the man he feared and regarded as so dangerous and powerful

an enemy to himself and Islam. To this end he had thrown the Greek Haidée, across his path, and had manœuvred to get his own creatures, Koprili and his wife, into the White House to do the foul work of murder.

Haidée had, however, succeeded in doing what he had never anticipated. Her disastrously powerful influence had won Grant over to the conspiracy; a fact which had been the cause of Maraboukh's undoubted surprise and dismay in the interview. He had not counted upon this, and had not intended, indeed, ever to see Grant; and in that hastily arranged interview, which Haidée had offered without his authority and upon which Grant had promptly insisted, had come the first infinitesimal cause of the huge fiasco. It was merely that during the interview Maraboukh had held the paper with Rechad Effendi's forged name to it just a few inches too far across his table, so that Grant could get hold of it and put it in his pocket.

That was the first tiny link in the chain of failure. That paper had to be regained or destroyed before it could get into my hands, and Maraboukh had thus sent swift instructions to Koprili. Another tiny link was the irritation I had shown when Grant would not let me see the paper before he took it to the Greek, which led to my being absent from the White House when Koprili put the poison in my room. My discovery of Koprili's act had then led to my seeking old Ibrahim's help in indentifying Koprili, and so to my setting the wary old Jew and his sleuth hounds on the Pasha's trail.

Ibrahim, I found out afterwards, hated Maraboukh

as only a Jew can hate the Moslem who has bitterly wronged and oppressed him; and he threw himself body and soul into the task I set him. But even with all his will and cunning, he would have been powerless, but for the chance incident to which I have above referred.

This was nothing more than a mere slap in the face which one woman in a temper gave to a servant who offended her.

We hear a great deal, and not without cause, about the subordinate and degraded position of women in Turkey; but this notwithstanding, their influence, even in political affairs, is at times little, if any, less than that of the women of Western Europe. It is not so apparent, of course, but it is none the less real, and no one who really knows the undercurrents of life in the East will think of denying this.

Prominent in Maraboukh's inner ring, as it may be termed, and as deep in his confidence as that wily individual allowed any one to be, was a certain Pasha whose wife was that black swan, a highly educated Turkish woman. He had had two others, but, with the easy facilities offered by Ottoman law in such matters, had divorced them. The remaining wife was a keen advocate of the plot, because she had been led to believe that the whole position of women would be vastly improved as the result of it; and her Pasha, the reverse of a self-reliant man and greatly under her influence, had been glad to share with her some of the burden of his responsibility in the affair.

What goes on in the Hareem is not always known even to the master of it; and it had come about that one of the lady's servant's, a Jewess, had found out something and guessed more, and had begun, after the

manner of her class, to presume upon this knowledge of her mistress's affairs. Just at the time when the crisis in the plot was approaching and the suspense was trying the tempers of all concerned in it, this woman and her mistress had a violent quarrel; and the mistress, who had a very sharp temper, had slapped the woman's face and threatened her with a far worse punishment.

The woman, mad with anger and resentment, had carried the tale of her wrongs to her friend, old Ibrahim's grand-daughter, and, vowing she would be revenged, talked wildly about getting some drug from a hodja to make the mistress ill, or to subject her to her power, or, if need be, to poison her outright. In the course of her wild tale, she dropped hints about what she knew, and the grand-daughter, having a good deal of old Ibrahim's shrewdness, had taken her to him. What means of persuasion or coercion he used with her I do not know; but the tale she told him he believed and acted upon, and it led to results of the most critical concern.

These things had been occurring while I was a prisoner in Maraboukh's house, and the crisis had been reached when I found myself liberated in the way I have described, and was hurrying with all haste to the White House, in the midst of an excited throng of people rushing in the direction of a great red glare in the sky away beyond Pera, and screaming, "Huangen Var! Huangen Var!" (Fire, Fire,) with the mingled delight and awe which only a Turkish rabble can display at a big fire.

I made for the new instead of the old bridge, in the hope of finding some kind of conveyance there to take

me to the White House; but I might as well have looked for a Christian in a Mosque at Ramazan as for a carriage in the streets that night. They were all away at what appeared to be the common rallying ground for all Constantinople, and I pushed and squeezed and shouldered my way across the bridge as quickly as the huge throng would permit. And what a throng it was! Moslems, Jews, Armenians, Europeans, Greeks; soldiers, police, porters, seamen, workers of all classes; a motley of all dresses, hustling, jolting, quarreling and protesting, all eyes directed to the one great red glare ahead; and all pressing forward as eagerly as though the red were gold, and they who were first would secure it.

Soon after crossing the bridge the swarm turned to the right, along the lower road, while my path lay straight up the hill, and, getting free from the press, I hurried on, wondering anxiously how I should find matters at the White House and what this grim event at Yildiz Kiosk might mean to us all.

I had a momentary difficulty in gaining admittance, for MacPherson, not recognizing me in my shabby garb, was for shutting the door in my face. He bade me "Be off for a dirty Turk," as I tried to push my way in without speaking. My voice reassured him somewhat, but he had a good, hard stare at my face before he recognized me, and his pleasure then was sincere and unequivocal. I didn't stop to listen to him, however, and hurried to my room, where, to my intense surprise, I found Grant himself.

I could not speak for astonishment, and he, like MacPherson, not recognizing me, asked pretty sharply what the deuce I meant by coming in in such a way.

"Cyrus, my dear fellow, what are you yourself doing here?" I said, finding my tongue.

"By God, Mervyn, it's just worth a pile to see you; shake," and we shook hands, most warmly, each I think, a little too full for words. But my heart fell as I looked at his face; gaunt, haggard, worn, grey, and oh, so sad; the face of a man whom grief has struck, and on whom death has begun to breathe.

"Why are you here, Cyrus?"

"I've come to see the thing through," he answered, his voice grievously weakened, but yet with the ring of his old determination.

"And Enid, is she safe?"

"Enid?" he repeated, and smiled. I had used her name unthinkingly, and it was the first time I had ever done so to him. "I'm glad it's so with you. You ought to have married her years ago in New York. You've given her a bit of a shake up over this, she came and told me; but now you're safe, it'll be all right."

"It's an odd time to talk of this, Cyrus."

"A man can't help his nature, Mervyn. What's topmost in the heart comes out first, and the way you spoke of her showed me."

"And she's safe?"

"Yes, at the Home. At least, I guess so. I came over this evening, and we must have crossed each other."

"But why did you come out?"

"Because I couldn't stay there. But tell me first, what has happened to you. Quick, too, for we may have to be off at any minute." I told him in as few words as I could what had occurred at the house of Maraboukh Pasha.

"He's a wily devil, and I was blind ; but I'm going to checkmate him. This fire at Yildiz Kiosk is his work, and it's intended to cover the abduction of the Sultan.

"I more than half guessed that ; but what are you going to do?"

"That old Jew, Ibrahim, found out the thing, somehow, and came here to-day for you ; and when you weren't here, he came over to The Home and saw me. They're playing a dangerous game ; but then the stakes are big, too. They've got some of the Palace people with them, and when the fire broke out, they were going to knock Abdul on the head, dress him as a woman, and carry him off by water ; and hold him in pawn till they see how the thing pans out."

"By water?" I exclaimed in astonishment.

"Exactly. Your surprise just illustrates the shrewdness. Who would dream of looking for His Majesty behind the yashmac of a woman who had fainted in the excitement of the fire? But I said no harm should come to him, and I'll keep my word if it's my last act on earth. I've been bluffed, I know ; but it's a tough deal that finds me euchred. I'm going for the pool, and I'm a dude if I don't scoop the lot."

"And we are waiting now?"

"For news of that caique, the caique that carries His Majesty. That old Ib's a sleuth, and he's frozen on to this thing just up to his hair parting."

"But you're surely not going out to-night yourself, Cyrus. Now that I'm back, I can go."

"I shall see it through myself."

"But you're not strong enough, yet, man."

"I can't get stronger, Mervyn, in time for the deal, even to oblige you. But I'm going all the same. You'll come along, of course; and hadn't you better put something else on in the way of clothes?"

A minute or two, with Stuart's help, saw me changed, and when I went back to Grant he was sitting at the table, with his head bowed in his hand.

"There's one name we haven't mentioned, Mervyn—Haidée,"

"Where is she?" I asked.

"I don't know." The words were firmly spoken, but he winced and closed his eyes involuntarily, as if in deep pain. Then with an effort he opened them, and looking at me, added: "You've seen this devil, Maraboukh: what's the truth about her? I want the truth—and can bear it."

"I believe she has been used as a tool by him—and a tool only."

"On your honour, Mervyn?" he asked, his eyes lighting, and his great, gaunt face just alive with eagerness.

"On my honour, Cyrus."

"God be thanked it's no worse than that," he said, fervently. Old Arbuthnot tells me I was poisoned, and Enid—but she was mad—declared that Haidée had done it. But I'd swear to her innocence, if it was my last breath."

"The poison was meant for me, Cyrus—to stop me from seeing that lying paper you brought away from the Pasha's—I know that;" and I kept to myself my knowledge of the first attempt on him.

"Rather I than you, Mervyn, for the mess is my making."

"We were hard on her, both Enid and I, for we both believed her guilty—at first."

"My God, if that drove her away, I could never forgive you," he answered, in a low tone, intense with feeling.

"I will find her and get the truth," I declared, earnestly.

"It may be too late, Mervyn. I am a dying man, and may die in ignorance." He paused and added under his breath: "And without seeing her."

I could make no answer, my heart was full at the sight of his suffering; and we sat on thus in silence, until, to the relief of both of us, someone knocked at the door, and opening it, ushered in a messenger.

The news of the caïque had arrived.

CHAPTER XX

A NIGHT ADVENTURE ON THE GOLDEN HORN

THE messenger had come at full gallop from Ibrahim, and brought a scrap of paper, with the words: "All as arranged."

The form of message had been agreed, and meant that the caique, for news of which we were waiting, had started and was being watched. The plan of Maraboukh's party was that the boat with the Sultan on board was to make for the Golden Horn, and land at a certain point some little distance above the Sweet Waters of Europe. There a carriage would be waiting to convey him to a lonely house in the hills, some twenty miles to the north-west of the Capital, belonging to one of Maraboukh's friends; and in that house he was to be kept, pending developments.

Our intention was, of course, simply to cut off the caique at some convenient spot, rescue the august prisoner, and take him to The Home. And for our work the swift silent electric launch was an ideal boat. She was well named "The Silence."

I made another attempt to dissuade Grant from facing the risk of exposure to the night air, but my protest was useless.

"I'm going to see this through myself," was his one inflexible answer.

We drove down to the Calata landing-stage at a quick speed, got on board, and at first turned the

boat's head up the Bosphorus, thinking to cut off the caique before she entered the Horn. But we were disconcerted to find that quite a number of caiques were out, people having discovered that a view of the flames at Yildiz from the water was likely to be grander than from the shore.

There was a double danger from this. The men in the caique for which we were watching might take alarm, and be driven to change their plans, with the result that we should miss them; while if they came on, it would be impracticable for us to tackle them without attracting an embarrassing amount of attention from those in other boats.

"They'll never face this crowd of boats, Cyrus," I said. "It would be rank madness to attempt to carry such a prisoner through them."

Grant was sitting with me amidships, huddled up in rugs and furs from the cutting night wind, which was sweeping up from the Sea of Marmora.

"I think the crowd will help them. There's less chance of attracting notice than if they were alone."

"But my dear fellow, a Mohammedan woman is never seen out of doors after sunset, except during Ramazan, and if they've rigged him out as a woman, the very fact would cause suspicion."

"They've only to slip the yashmac off, and clap a fez on his head, to change him back to a man."

"Then we shall never recognize the caique among so many. I think we'd better push on at all speed and find old Ibrahim, and hear what he says. Besides, we shall have some one on to us if we don't look out." We were lying motionless close to the shore, and under its shadow.

He thought a moment, and then decided quickly.

"No, you're wrong, Mervyn. I shall stand to win on my opinion. Put her about Norman," he said to the engineer, "creep back along the shore, and lie up under the shore above the Old Bridge, and wait. We should risk too much if we took your plan, Mervyn. I'm glad I came."

The launch was turned and we crept along right in the shadow of the shore, so quietly that the slight whirr of the propeller was scarcely audible even to us on board. Silently, we moved under the Outer Bridge, between the lights of Pera and the dark mounting shadow of Stambul, stole through the Port of Commerce, and came to rest just in the gloom of the Inner Bridge, and waited.

Some of the crowd had begun to stream back from the Palace as we passed under the Outer Bridge; and although the shouts of "Fire" had died away, the people were too busy discussing the one exciting topic to spare attention for us.

As we lay still, we could catch the occasional voices of men on some of the steamers and ships at anchor; and now and again the clanking of a chain and the hauling of a rope reached us to the accompaniment of an oath in some European language. We showed no light of course and the dim shadow of the launch was all but invisible in the gloom.

I soon began to grow very uneasy. I doubted the correctness of Grant's view altogether, and feared that while we were waiting in this way for the caique that tarried beyond all calculation, we were running a big risk of losing it altogether.

I had, indeed, been sceptical from the outset about

this caique business. It seemed so hugely improbable that men capable of planning such a dangerous conspiracy and carrying it to the verge of success were going to risk it by such a scheme. They were far more likely, if they got hold of the Sultan while the Palace was on fire, just to knock him on the head and throw the body into the flames, leaving the remains, if found, to suggest that he had perished by accident.

"I don't believe we shall see any caique at all," I whispered after a while.

"Why not?"

"I believe Abdul's dead."

"No, he had to be kept alive. There were others beside me against violence."

"Then they've got him off by some better means than this."

"Not so loud, Mervyn—voices carry far in this stillness. What better means would there be?"

"Horses and a carriage."

"Ten times as risky. You forget the distance. The very simpleness of this dodge is the strength of it. We shall have them, don't fear. But better not speak."

His confidence was absolute and astonished me. I could not share it; and as the dragging minutes passed, my impatience began to ripen with positive irritation, while the necessity for silence added to my uneasiness and disquiet. Grant's confidence became dogged obstinacy in my view, and I began to wish I hadn't come.

But Grant, who had a pair of powerful night glasses, kept them fixed upon the Outer Bridge, waiting with a patience that no delay could tire and a vigilance nothing could distract.

Then suddenly his hand was laid on my arm.

"They are coming," he whispered. "Silence now, as death," he added to the men.

There was a caique, sure enough; and presently I could make it out coming slowly up in a direction that would bring them close to us. Grant saw this too.

"Lie down, every man. They must think the launch is at anchor," he said; and down we all went almost holding our breath in expectancy.

Then we heard the oars. The rower was pulling with extreme caution; long, steady, sweeping strokes, with scarcely a splash; and the rowlocks had been muffled so that every possible sound should be minimised.

"There's a launch ahead, look out," said a low voice in Turkish; and the next minute the caique passed us so closely that it seemed we might almost have laid hold of the gunwales, and I dreaded lest some one might have curiosity enough to take a peep on board us.

But no one did; and when the boat had passed and we heard it shoot the bridge, Grant raised his head cautiously and slowly, and looked after it with his glasses.

"It's all right," he said quietly, his voice shewing not a trace of excitement, while I was so anxious I could scarcely keep still. "We'll let them get through the harbour and then we'll be after them. Creep slowly under the bridge, Norman; that'll do; keep well in the shadow. They're putting out into mid-stream to get out of the way of the Admiralty; no, they've crossed right over."

Some minutes passed while we all strained our eyes through the darkness to catch a glimpse of the caique, until Grant said:

"We've given them rope enough. Half speed only, Norman, and get across to the Stambul side; I'll tell you when to let her rip."

I'm sure every soul on the launch except Grant was excited as we turned and stole like a shadow across the harbour and then commenced the work of pursuit.

"You were right, Cyrus, and I was wrong," I said. "We shall have them."

"Better not speak," was his reply, as impassively as ever. "You'll have to speak presently when we catch them up. We shall stop them under pretence of looking for smugglers."

On we went then in dead silence along the port of war, past the Admiralty, looming in the faint distance on the opposite shore relieved here and there by a twinkling light; then followed the even darker outline of the big prison. The launch had to dodge in and out as we rounded the steamboat piers, until the Horn narrowed suddenly, and we crept right under the lee of the left shore, to keep as far as practicable from the Arsenal opposite; and so on up until the pier at Balat, the filthy Jew quarter, was passed, and we were coming to the spot where the pursuit could best be brought to an end in the winding narrowing waters of the upper reaches among the hilly ground.

We kept on dogging them in this way for another mile or so, keeping all the time out of sight and sound, until Grant gave the order for full speed ahead, when the launch seemed to jump away like a hound loosed from the leash.

"We shall go up to them quite openly," he said to

me. "I don't want them to have a thought that we suspect whom they have on board. There's just the fear that if they suspect, they may do some harm to the prisoner before we get up. Ask them whether they've seen anything suspicious, and while you're talking, Norman will put us right alongside. Then each man must be marked off; there are only two of them; one at the oars and one in charge; and, if need be, jump right into the caique. We must risk upsetting it—anything to prevent a chance of violence."

We had four men on the launch, beside Grant and myself, and were thus far more than a match for them; and we were, of course, armed.

We soon began to overhaul the caique; and when they saw us coming, the rower stopped and waited, and I hailed him.

"Have you passed a boat or seen one with a couple of English sailors in it?" I asked. "The dogs are out smuggling."

"No, we've seen no boat since we passed the bridge," declared the man at the oars.

"Their vessel's lying outside and the men must have pulled in somewhere."

"Who are you?" asked the man sitting aft.

"From the Customs House, Excellency," I answered, as though recognising his as a voice of one in authority.

"Well, we can't help you," was the reply, followed by a quick protest as Norman brought our launch along side.

I had already seen enough to know that this was indeed the caique we sought, and that huddled on the

floor of the boat was something covered by rugs which the man sitting aft was endeavouring sedulously to conceal.

"I am sorry, but we must search your boat, Excellency," I said, preparing to get into the caique.

"You insolent rascal, do you know who I am?"

"Look out, sir," cried a voice from the launch, Stuart's I think; and the words were instantly followed by the crashing thud of a heavy blow, while the caique rocked dangerously as the man who had been rowing fell full length stunned. In the meanwhile the man aft had drawn a revolver and was levelling it at me when Norman, seeing his intention, felled him with the heavy iron end of the boat hook with which he had been holding the caique to the launch.

It was all over in less than half a moment and I was out of danger even before I knew I had been in any, thanks to the promptness of those on the launch; and the whole thing was done without any noise.

Being unwilling that our men, who knew nothing of the real object of the enterprise, should see the features of the Sultan and perhaps recognise him, I stepped gingerly into the caique, for they are the merest cockle shells for stability, and telling the men to steady her, I first satisfied myself that he was alive and then covering his face carefully, had him lifted out and laid under the awning of the launch.

"What shall we do with the caique; sink it?" I asked Grant, when the two stunned men had also been lifted aboard.

"No, it may be useful as evidence. Let one of the men row it quietly to The Home. And, Mervyn,

have a look to the two fellows. They mustn't talk to our men, you know."

I told off one of the crew to row the caique back, giving him his orders what to do and say if anyone interfered with him, and then had a look at the two injured. They were both men of some importance, judging by their looks; but I did not know either. The man Norman had hit was pretty badly hurt and had lost some blood; so we dressed his wound as best we could and, deeming it best to make things sure, I had both of them bound hands and feet, and improvised gags to stop them making any noise. Then I rejoined Grant who had given Norman orders to run with all practicable speed back to The Home.

We were by no means out of danger yet, and should any one stop us and discover the illustrious passenger we were carrying, we should have a very awkward job to explain.

We ripped along at first at a great pace, keeping in the centre of the Horn; but as soon as the pier at Balat came in view, we ran in close under the shore, and reduced speed, creeping down much as we had gone up, and dodging in and out to take the fullest advantage of every speck of shadow.

Suddenly we came to a dead stop, and Grant and I, who were sitting together close to our passenger, started and pushed back the awning to peer out.

"There's something going on in the harbour, Sir," said Norman, "I can make out a couple of boats cruising around across by the Arsenal yonder. Had I better hold on or lie low awhile?"

"What boats are they? Here, I'll see for myself,"

said Grant, and he took a long careful look through his glasses. "One's a ship's boat of some sort, four oared I think, but the other's a launch, confound it. You must get through somehow, Norman. Creep on slowly on this side, and if they catch sight of us, you must make a bolt for it. Cautiously, mind."

We were now passing the ancient Greek quarter, Phanar, and forged on slowly at a snail's pace for some minutes; and very anxious minutes they were, as we had to creep out round the steamboat pier there. Then I heard Grant draw breath quickly in annoyance.

"There's another infernal launch coming up on this side, Norman. Run in on the shore side of that vessel ahead and wait for it to pass. Great thunder it'll be a squeak."

We did as he said, staying the launch with boat hooks and waited, holding our breath in suspense.

The stuttering snort of a steam launch and the loud whirr of its screw were heard, and came closer and closer until the sounds were muffled as the boat passed on the other side of the vessel, and then grew louder astern of us.

We drew breath again then.

"Go on, now, Norman. Feel your way, man."

We got past the Arsenal and reached the prison with the Admiralty in view ahead; but still had the greater part of the harbour to clear, while the movements of the two boats we had first seen puzzled and alarmed us. Searching for something they certainly were; the launch with her nose down stream, and moving very slowly. I was watching her every movement, and when suddenly she sounded her whistle,

giving three long shrill weird blasts, I nearly jumped off my seat in alarm.

The launch that had passed us going up answered the signal; and to our consternation another answer came from far ahead of us away down the harbour.

"There's another of the brutes somewhere," growled Norman.

It began to look as if we should have to make a bolt for it, and trust to the speed of our launch to out-distance them. We were going now very slowly, just keeping pace with the boat in mid stream, and if we kept on at this rate we should only find ourselves cut off by her companion lower down the harbour. This difficulty was in Grant's thoughts at the same moment.

"You must let her rip, Norman, or we shall be cut off. Keep in as near the shore as you dare, but get on, full speed."

The launch near us was, fortunately, such a noisy brute that the sound of our propeller was not overheard, and we drew ahead rapidly, and had covered three-quarters of the distance to the inner bridge before the scream of her whistle told us we had been observed.

"Forge out into mid-stream now, Norman, and do the best you can," said Grant.

As we slipped out of the gloom of the Stambul shore, the boat below, which was lying close to the bridge with her nose up stream, caught sight of us, and we heard some orders shouted by the man in command, and saw her swing round as if to intercept us. Perceiving that he couldn't do this, however, for we were rushing down stream at a tremendous pace, the

captain of the launch changed his plan and put his boat through the bridge, with the object of heading us off at an angle between the two bridges; while the boat behind came clanking and puffing after us, waking echoes on both shores with the incessant screeching, screaming din of her whistle.

As we shot the bridge, our fix looked desperate. The distance between the bridges is somewhere about three-quarters of a mile, and the launch that was for racing us was at least a hundred yards ahead, going well and forging rapidly out into mid-stream right in our path.

"Can you do it, Norman?" asked Grant, coolly.

"I can't race him, sir, though I may dodge him; but it'll be a close call," was the reply.

"You must do it. I rely on you."

Norman turned our heads to the Pera side, as if making for the landing stage, and slackened the pace a bit; and those on the launch ahead, seeing this, altered their course accordingly, and some one hailed and ordered us to stop. We held on, of course, making no reply, and the boats were rapidly nearing each other when Norman, judging his distance beautifully, swept our boat round to pass under the other's stern. She could not turn in twice the distance that sufficed for us, and with another shout to us to stop, her engines were reversed, and she came backing right at us.

It was a close call, as Norman had said, so close that those on board her were able to get a long boat-hook on to our port gunwale, while a couple of men jumped on board us.

A better thing for us could not have occurred.

The boat-hook was knocked off, instantly, and another turn of the helm set us past them; while the two men were seized instantly by our crew.

"Pitch 'em overboard," said Grant, quietly; "then they must stop to pick 'em up," and overboard they went in a trice, making a nice noise over the unexpected bath. "Now, Norman, as hard as you can go for the bridge before any boats can put off from shore;" and a few minutes saw us out on the Bosphorus, tearing along for The Home at a pace no launch in Turkish waters could equal.

CHAPTER XXI

THE "SHADOW OF GOD"

WE reached The Home without any further interruption, and while the Sultan, who was still under the influence of the drug, was carried to the rooms prepared for him, I looked after the safe-keeping of our prisoners.

Then I went in search of Enid, and learned to my intense dismay and alarm that she had not returned to the island. On carrying the news to Grant I found him in a condition verging upon collapse, so ill that I dared not tell him.

I found from Mrs. Wellings that he had risen from his sick bed directly after old Ibrahim had seen him, and despite all the protests and warnings of Dr. Arbuthnot and the specialist from Vienna, had insisted on going to the White House.

The excitement of the night's events had kept him up, but now that the strain was over, a relapse had followed, and he looked just like what he had described himself to be to me, a dying man. But go back to bed he would not, insisting to me that his work would not be completed until he had seen His Majesty and explained to him what had occurred.

Leave him even to go in search of Enid I dared not, so I sent Norman off in the "Silence" with an urgent note to Dr. Arbuthnot requesting him to come at once, and to bring Dr. Eberhardt with him.

When I went back to Grant, I found he had rallied after taking some brandy, and then I told him of Enid's disappearance. We were discussing this and the position generally, when news was brought that his Majesty had recovered consciousness.

"We must go to him. And you must come because you'll have to take my place now—I'm very nearly done; but I've kept my word."

The Most Illustrious One, the Shadow of God, cut a very sorry figure as we bowed ourselves into his august presence. He seemed shockingly ill, and had much the look of a man recovering from a very long and heavy drinking bout. He was dressed in an extraordinary medley of male and female clothes. A dirty fez was on his head, a long feridje hung round his body, beneath which his trousered legs and booted feet showed—a picture so comical that I could not restrain a smile, although I bowed low and long enough to prevent him seeing it. He was, moreover, in a condition of almost speechless terror; and I am convinced he believed his last hour had come.

When his eyes fell on Grant he started and trembled so violently that his lips refused to utter even an exclamation of surprise. We stood waiting for him to give us permission to address him, Grant having in the meanwhile sent the nurses out of the room. The silence lasted some minutes, until at length he managed to falter out some incoherent words, which Grant accepted as an invitation to speak.

"Under the mercy of the God we worship in common, your Majesty," he said in French, "We have been the means of saving your life. I assure your Majesty,

you are as safe here as at any time at your Palace at Yildiz."

While I put this into Turkish—for etiquette had to be observed even at such a time—he was staring hard into our faces in turn, as if to read whether the good news could really be true; and something of his old confidence in Grant began to revive.

"Where am I?"

"In the house on the island which your Majesty graciously leased to me," replied Grant; "and, with your permission, I will tell you how this has come about."

Abdul was so eager that he interrupted my interpretation of this with a hasty permission for Grant to speak. My poor friend was so weak that he could scarcely stand any longer, and, getting permission to sit, he told the story of the rescue. He kept carefully out of sight the fact that we had ever been in any way connected with the conspiracy, and ascribed the presence of the launch in the Golden Horn to accident, or, as he put it, the Providence which watched over the life and safety of the Illustrious Padishah; all the other details were, in the main, correct; but he suppressed the fact that we had taken two prisoners; and he ended by begging His Majesty to decide what he would do next.

That the relation of the story had a vastly reassuring effect was very obvious, and by the time it was finished, it had done more to restore the Sultan to self-possession than anything else could have done. One sign of this was that he assumed at once his ignorance of French, and spoke through me.

"How came the Palace on fire?" he asked.

"I have no knowledge, tell His Majesty," said Grant, discreetly.

"It must have been set on fire by those who—who would have murdered me." He spoke with the hushed voice of fear. "But there shall be a reckoning," he added and his eyes glittered ominously.

"Perhaps Your Majesty can recall some of the facts?" suggested Grant.

"I remember the alarm being raised, but something happened. I must have been struck down. I remember, too, being carried through the open air; yes, and wondering vaguely what strange dress I was wearing. He glanced down then at his singular garb, and tore off the feridje and cast it from him with an expression of loathing. "My face was covered, too," he said, recalling the facts one by one; his hand to his head, and his manner half-bewildered. "And I called out; and, yes, I was in a boat, and someone poured something into my mouth. They held me down and I was half suffocated. And that was the last until I awoke here."

"It is clear that a villainous and treacherous attempt was made upon your Majesty's sacred life, which we have providentially thwarted. And now I must crave your gracious permission to retire. I am ill and weak.

"Do not leave me, Mr. Grant," was the quick, frightened reply. "I feel safe while you are with me."

"Have no fear; no harm can possibly happen to your august person here; and my friend, Mr. Ormesby, who is entirely in my confidence, will answer for your safety with his life, even as I would with mine."

His Majesty did me the honour then to scrutinise me very closely indeed; not altogether, perhaps, without some lingering suspicion, and certainly with a decided preference for Grant's presence; and was quite unwilling to let him leave.

"I need your help still, Mr. Grant," he said irresolutely.

"I am, of course, at your Majesty's commands, but myself can do little more, I fear. Will you return to Yildiz; my launches are at your orders; or can we send for any of your advisers? If I may suggest, something should be done at once."

"Yes, of course, but what?" he cried, timorously. "I cannot move about without my guards. What is happening at the Palace? What have these villains done? Are my ministers safe? I might be going to my death if I were to return until we know what has occurred. I am helpless." He was too unstrung at the fear of the possible danger to be able to think connectedly; and I was now so anxious on Grant's account, whose reserve of strength was visibly failing fast, that I interposed with a suggestion.

"If your Majesty feels safer here until we have definite news of matters at the Palace, I will go and ascertain what has occurred, and can see and bring to your Majesty any of your advisers; or I can carry to them any commands you may wish to issue."

He heard me quietly, and then sat in silence, looking every now and then very closely at me, until presently I saw an expression of subtle cunning come into his eyes and spread over his face.

"You say I'm quite at liberty to leave here?"

"Most assuredly, your Majesty," replied Grant.

"Then I will return to the Palace."

"Save that I fear that I cannot accompany you for lack of strength, every soul here on the island is at your Majesty's absolute disposal."

"Mr. Ormesby will accompany me?" he asked.

"As your Majesty pleases," said I bowing. He took leave of Grant, thanking him profusely for his help and promising him great rewards, and went with me on board the large launch, which lay ready at the landing stage. In his hearing, I gave the order to make for the landing place, close to the farther gate of Yildiz Kiosk. At his request I stayed with him in the deck house, where he sat wrapped up closely, exchanging not a word with me, except when I asked him for precise directions as to the spot where he would land.

There was a faint glare in the sky, from the lights about the Palace, and possibly from lingering remnants of the fire, and he peered at them mournfully and steadfastly through the windows of the deck house, buried in his thoughts. And in this silence we ran until we were within a mile of the point for which we were making.

"Will you stop the boat Mr. Ormesby, and turn now towards Stambul? I have altered my mind."

"As your Majesty wishes;" and without questioning his intentions, I gave the necessary orders, and we began to run back for the Horn, and had continued this course for some ten minutes, when he said with the same abruptness:

"I owe Mr. Grant, and you also, Mr. Ormesby an apology. Forgive me if the events of to-night have made me suspicious even of my real friends, as I see

you are. This was to test you merely. I have so many enemies. I see now I shall be safe indeed among you on your island, and I wish to return there. Will you give the orders to return?"

"Your Majesty need not have doubted us," I answered quietly, as I went away to have the boat's head turned for the island.

"I have been sorely tried, Mr. Ormesby," he said, when I rejoined him; "but I shall trust you now absolutely, and put my life and more into your hands unreservedly."

"I am glad your Majesty is now convinced, I replied, drily. "And I think it is well you do not propose to land at Yildiz to-night."

"I have been thinking, but my head is not yet clear. I shall stay at your house on the island certainly until the arrangements for my safe return to the Palace can be made. In the meantime, you will go to the Palace and ascertain all. I will give you all necessary powers and authorities, with secret proofs that I am alive and well, to be given as I will instruct you fully. There may have been violent deeds done there; but the hour of retribution is about to strike, and those who have dared to raise their hands against me may beware."

"The sooner I am at work, the better, your Majesty," I said, overpoweringly anxious to get away, on account of Enid.

"Do you know anything of this plot, Mr. Ormesby?" he asked next.

"I have knowledge of it, gained almost at the cost of my life, your Majesty;" and I gave him such an account of what had happened during my visit to

Maraboukh Pasha as I deemed advisable; and a very powerful impression the recital created.

"Then it was my deposition they plotted for. That may prove very important, and, as you say, urgency is vital. You know our language so well, do you also know our laws—I mean as to that?"

"So far as His Highness the Sheikh-ul-Islam is concerned? Yes, your Majesty." The law he referred to is a curious one. The Sultan has absolute power in appointing and discharging all the officers of State: the two chief of these being the dignitary, the Sheikh-ul-Islam—virtually the head of the legal and religious bodies, and the Grand Vizir: while a somewhat anomalous law prevails that no Sultan can be deposed without the consent in writing of the former. When Sultan Abdul Aziz was deposed by Midhat Pasha in the seventies, the Pasha took good care to make sure of the consent in advance. Without it the army would in all probability have refused to acquiesce in the deposition, and a revolution followed. So now, if the Sheikh-ul-Islam were not in the plot, his action would prove the pivot on which everything would turn. Hence the imperative need to see him at once and convince him of the Sultan's safety.

It was therefore decided that I should seek him first, even before going to the Palace, and after him, the Grand Vizir; and his Majesty's commands were to both to do nothing except to maintain the Government, until hearing further from him.

I was then to go to Yildiz, seek out a certain commander, and carry to him full authority to take any measures necessary to restore order. The whereabouts of his Majesty was to be kept absolutely secret; a report

that he was ill was to be made public, if necessary. A large body of the household troops were to be kept ready to march at a moments notice, and three cruisers were to be anchored off the Horn, midway between there and the island.

As we ran back, all these things were discussed in detail, and I then took occasion to speak of my fear for Enid's safety, and what I had heard from Maraboukh concerning her, taking care to connect the matter with the plot.

"Her safety shall be my especial care, Mr. Ormesby, and you shall find that if I know how to deal harshly with my enemies, I know also how to treat the friends I trust. You shall have full powers."

He was as good as his word. The preparation of the necessary documents and proofs took some little time after we had reached The Home, and when he had given them to me and had repeated carefully his instructions, he drew up with his own hand a special authority for my use in seeking Enid. This declared that I was engaged on urgent special service of State; that all officials of every rank whatsoever were to assist me in any way I required, and to obey instantly any orders I gave; that I was representing him directly; was to be regarded as armed with all his power and authority; and that anyone disobeying or neglecting my orders would incur his personal displeasure and be liable to heavy fines and imprisonment.

When the special order was completed, he paused and said with much emphasis:

"This is an earnest of my confidence and favour, your Excellency."

"Your Majesty means?" I asked struck by the mode of address.

"This authority is to my special delegate, Ormesby Pasha. It is only fitting that one who carries so high a mission as yours should hold suitable rank. From now, your Excellency will be one of my most trusted Pashas."

"I am grateful to your majesty;" I answered, with a low bow.

"The obligation is yet on my side, your Excellency; and my endeavours will not cease until I have redressed the balance. For Mr. Grant there will be other considerations."

"If I am to do my work well, your Majesty, I must start about it at once," I said; and with a fresh expression of thanks, and assurance of a wish to serve him, I bowed myself out of his presence.

Thus unexpectedly equipped and prepared, I set out on my extraordinary mission, carrying with me, however, a double load of anxiety. I was in the first place full of fear for Enid's safety: Norman, who had come back with the doctors, having brought word that she was not at the White House: while in the second, the report as to Grant's condition was of the worst. I saw him a moment in bed before I left, but he could do little more than give me a feeble pressure of the hand as I clasped his, while he whispered into my ear.

"Find Haidée, old friend; let me see her."

"How is he?" I asked Dr. Arbuthnot, when I was out of the room.

"He has killed himself, I fear," he answered, shaking his head. "I warned him, but it was no use. He might have recovered; we both thought so, but now—" and he threw up his hands with a gesture of intense regret.

CHAPTER XXII

AS THE SULTAN'S ENVOY

AS the launch ripped through the night carrying me back to the mainland, I had many disquieting thoughts. In the first place my self-distrust made me uncomfortably doubtful of my power to perform the task set me. It had seemed simple enough when the instructions were given me: just see this official and find that one, and tell them so and so: but big events were in the making on that fateful night for Turkey; the city was trembling on the very lip of the earthquake of revolt, and my mission was nothing less than to prevent that tragic catastrophe.

When Constantinople is in the throes of such a struggle the one safe place for a European is indoors under the protecting shadow of his country's flag. A Turk has immense respect for a flag. But I had to be rushing into the very thickest of the ugly business, and the prospect was the reverse of fascinating.

My first resolve was, therefore, to take the precaution of dressing up to the part of my new dignity as Pasha. I landed at the Galata stage and went to the White House, where I carefully arrayed myself in the regulation frock coat and clapped a fez on my head. Then I had out the brougham and took a half dozen of the servants for a mounted escort, as it is in this

fashion that the Pashas are accustomed to impress the crowd with their importance.

This little act of apparently flippant arrogance—flippant compared with the weighty matters in hand—was really of the utmost practical value. Under the belief that a State official of the first rank must be in the carriage, the crowds in the streets gave way before us, as the throng in the streets of London will clear before a fire engine, and we drove along at top speed.

The people were out in thousands. The fire at the Yildiz Kiosk had brought them out at first; and now the vague rumours of strange doings seemed to have spread everywhere, setting up that condition of turbulent unrest and feverish excitement to which the Turkish mob can be so readily swayed at the prospect of any vast political and religious upheaval.

As the carriage flashed through them the lights fell on men gesticulating wildly and fiercely; upon faces eager with anticipation, fanaticism, and anger; upon hands raised aloft in passion; and upon heavy staffs and more deadly weapons flourished menacingly in strenuous grip. The hum and roar of vehement voices were loud enough at times to drown the rattle of the carriage, and all the wild elements of a night of uproar and violence were present in the streets.

There was, moreover, the sinister and significant fact that not a Jew nor an Armenian was to be seen abroad. They had read the omens of tribulation sure enough, and had rushed like one man to cover; hiding and covering in shelter with shuddering foreknowledge of what might come at any instant, should the vague things which men were whispering really have occurred, a revolt against the Sultan be actually in

progress, and the mad frenzy of thousands of Turks have been sharpened on the blood stones of fanaticism and hate.

In all this it was easy to see the crafty hand of Maraboukh. His spies had been abroad from an early hour in the evening among the people, with a whisper here, a hint there, insinuations, suggestions, inuendoes everywhere, feeding the ever-ready appetite of the crowd for violence, and goading them to acts of wrath and tumult. Let the city once rise and the fact of the Sultan's disappearance be known, with the Empire thus left headless, and the Government would be powerless to stay the torrent. The call for Abdul's successor would be fierce and imperative, and with Rechad Effendi disposed of, nothing would stand between Maraboukh and complete success.

There was indeed a dire necessity for haste; and I was thankful enough when my carriage drew up at the great house of the Sheikh-ul-Islam.

Assuming all the air of importance I could, I entered and bade the servant say that I must see His Highness at once on matters of State Importance; and in anticipation of some difficulty in getting an audience I sent up a short note I had written at the White House stating I came from His Majesty Abdul Hamid.

It proved an immediate passport; and with many obsequious salaams from the servants I was ushered into the great official's presence. He was a fine handsome old man, wearing oriental dress—a wide flowing caftan or robe of fur and the green fez, indicative of his office and high rank. He was looking very pale and anxious, and had apparently been in close conference with a man dressed in a kind of semi-military

uniform, cut somewhat after the German style, whom I recognized as the Grand Vizir. The latter appeared more disturbed than his colleague, and stood a pace behind him, scanning me very closely and curiously. In the background were two or three others, whom I did not know.

I made the customary number of formal bows, and then addressing the Sheikh-ul-Islam said :

"My message is for your ear alone, and that of his Highness the Vizir," and I bowed to the latter. The rest were instantly dismissed.

"Your Excellency brings news of my august Master?" was the first question eagerly asked.

"Your Highnesses may rest easy in mind. His Majesty is safe and well, and sends you greeting."

"Allah be praised for that," cried both together.

"Where is His Majesty?" asked the Vizir.

"My commands are that for the present His Majesty desires his whereabouts to remain unknown." The looks of both were naturally enough full of astonishment, and the Grand Vizir was obviously very suspicious of my good faith.

"Why is this?" he asked sharply.

"It was not for me to question His Majesty's intentions, but merely to do his august bidding. I have come straight from him, and he gave me credentials to your Highnesses to prove my words." I drew out then the packets for each of them, and placing them first reverentially to my forehead—for was I not a Pasha?—I handed them over.

They took them eagerly, and the difference in their method of reception was worth noting. The Vizir just touched his forehead, as a sort of formality, and

broke open the fastening, but the old Sheikh-ul-Islam received it almost as reverentially as though it were a message from the Prophet himself; and holding it before him inclined his head until it touched the packet. But for all the ceremonial he was to the full as curious as his colleague to know the contents.

What was written there I do not know; but both these great men were completely satisfied now alike of my good faith and of my importance as the confidential messenger from their master. The assurance that the Sultan was alive and well seemed to make new men of them.

"Does your Excellency know what is written here?" asked the Vizir, much the quicker man of the two.

"I do not. I was commanded by our August Master to charge you to take no steps except such as may be necessary to uphold the authority of the Government and preserve order in the capital and I am to proceed to the Yildiz Kiosk to deliver other charges there."

"Will our August Master return to the Palace?" asked the Vizir.

"I have fulfilled all his Majesty's commands?" was my reply.

"The city is almost in a state of revolt, and the news has been spread that our August Master is dead."

"The greater reason for prompt measures to restore order," I said. "His Majesty will doubtless count upon your Highness's urgency."

"Do your Excellency's commands include instructions to me in my duties?" he retorted angrily; but

I wasn't going to be snubbed even by his Highness the Grand Vizir.

"My commands include one to make a prompt and full report of the results of my mission, your Highness," I answered, drily, and he let the matter pass without comment. Drawing his colleague aside he held a whispered conference with him for a couple of minutes and then went away, while the older man turned again to me.

"I am now going to the Palace, your Highness, and I may have some difficulty in gaining admittance, considering the unsettled condition of matters there; I beg to ask that you will do me the favouring honour of accompanying me." I spoke in as conciliatory a tone as I could, but the proposal was not at all to his liking.

"I have many calls upon me here at such a time, and I fear I must ask your Excellency to excuse me."

"It is our August Master's business that calls us there."

"Your commands take your Excellency there."

"But the utmost despatch in executing my commands is essential in his Majesty's interest."

"I have no desire to detain your Excellency," said the old man, blandly, with a spreading of the hands.

"The need for despatch and the possibility of delay if I go alone, compel me to repeat my request that your Highness should accompany me."

"As it is not in your Excellency's commands, and as my many matters here are urgent, I regret I cannot consent."

"Then painful as I find it to constrain your Highness, I must put my request in his Majesty's name,"



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said I, a little more authoritatively, seeing more and more clearly that his presence would greatly facilitate my task.

"Has your Excellency any authority for that in my August Master's commands?"

"Otherwise I should not dream of attempting to influence the movements of so exalted, illustrious, and trusted a servant of his Majesty as yourself," I answered, with a deep bow, as I produced the wide authority which the Sultan had given me.

I was not a little curious to see the effect of this upon one who stood second only to the Sultan in power; and it was all I could have wished. After pondering it thoughtfully and with a deep frown, he looked up, returned me the paper, and gave in.

"I feel I have no option but to accompany your Excellency, if you persist, but I do so under pressure and protest."

"I am influenced solely by the urgency," I answered; "and in view of the possible position of matters at the Palace I would suggest that your Highness's escort should be as large as practicable—and that we should start at once."

Possibly through chagrin at my insistence he did not ride with me, and as we were entering our respective carriages he asked:

"What is it precisely that your Excellency wishes me to do at the Palace?"

"In the first place merely to vouch for me to the officials and gain my instant admittance;" and with a formal bow he got into his brougham.

With our combined retinue we made now a considerable party, and his servants being recognised by the

crowd, which was thronging the whole road to the Palace gates, his appearance with such force at that hour of the night gave a spur to the general excitement, and hundreds of people set off running after us in obvious expectation that something sensational was about to happen.

I suppose we are all more or less liable to be slightly intoxicated by the possession of unaccustomed power; and despite the anxiety that was weighing heavily at my heart, I could not restrain a feeling of elation as we swept along the crowded highways and saw the thousands of people draw aside in wondering recognition of the authority we represented.

I was at best but a small fly on a very big wheel; but having just succeeded in reducing the mightiest subject in the Empire to a condition of obedience to my wishes, it was difficult for the moment to think I was no more than a fly. If I had to tempt men, the means I would use would be the promise of power with a temporary taste of its rather bewildering sweetness.

During that ride I was very much of a Pasha.

What the position of things would be at the Palace, of course I could not gauge. If what Maraboukh had told me was true, in all probability the place would be in the condition of a house divided against itself; one-half in sore distraction at the absence or death of the Sultan, and the other with a very clear policy and line of action.

The Pasha had told me that even the Household troops were ready to side with his party; and if this proved to be the case, the trouble would unquestionably be very serious, and might be desperate. They

were supposed to be loyal to a man ; their pay was not much in arrears—not much for Turkey, that is—and as they were the best drilled, best clothed, and best fed troops in the Empire, they had the least cause of any to be disaffected. But on the other hand, everything in that land of happy-go-lucky autocracy is almost always just the opposite of what it appears, what it is expected to be, and what it ought to be.

When we reached the gate, the Kultuk Kapu, which is the official entrance and stands always open in the daytime for officials, we found it closed and strongly guarded by troops who were quite unwilling to admit us until the high rank of the Sheikh-ul-Islam was ascertained ; and I was thus convinced that despite my strong credentials, I should never have got through. As it was, there was considerable demur to admitting me ; and only the strongest insistence of my companion, accompanied with threats which it was well-known he could make good, prevailed with the officer in charge of the troops.

We drove to the Selamlik ; that building not having been touched by the fire which had broken out in the Sultan's own private apartment and had spread to the buildings immediately around it.

Once inside this, the rest was comparatively easy. I sent at once for the officer whom the Sultan had named to me, himself a Pasha ; and we "Excel-lencyed" one another profusely while he answered my eager inquiries as to the position, and I gave him the commands with which I had been charged.

Two things were clear from what he told me. One was that he had had suspicions of foul play for some time past, and that a large number of both officers and

men had been tampered with ; and the other, that it would have been decidedly hazardous for his Majesty to have returned to Yildiz at once before the extent of the mischief had been fully proved, and the disorder affected among the troops and civilians alike had been weeded out.

At the time of the outbreak of the fire and during the first hours of its raging, it had been very much like hell broken loose. A panic had seized upon all, military and officials alike ; discipline had entirely broken down ; the wildest rumours had prevailed and had been greedily believed and exaggerated as they passed from lip to lip ; the terror of the fire and of the extraordinary causes to which it was attributed, had disorganized everything and everybody ; and that a kind of general massacre had not taken place was due solely to the fact that my informant had kept his head. That at least was the impression he was so obviously trying to produce on me.

One shrewd thing he had certainly done. Having a fairly clear knowledge of who among the troops were unreliable, he had taken the responsibility of disarming the whole of these, some five hundred in number, and had shut them up in the prison in the grounds of Yildiz under a sufficient guard. As among these were several of his superior officers, the boldness of the step had rather taken his own breath away ; and when the fact of the Sultan's disappearance was discovered, he had been so overwhelmed by the sense of the responsibility incurred, that he had seriously considered the advisability of taking his own life to escape the penalties certain to be his reward should the Sultan really have perished at the hands of his enemies.

With the royal troops he had managed to restore some semblance of order out of chaos; but as he felt that without the Sultan's authority he would be powerless in the morning, the hours that had followed had positively racked him with anxiety; and he was in this distracted mood when my message reached him.

The relief caused by my news, and the knowledge that it meant the Imperial confirmation of the daring and drastic step he had taken, and that it was for him indeed all the difference between a disgraceful and probably torturing death and the certainty of the highest reward and honour, almost unmanned him; but he very speedily recovered and it was not without some amusement that I noticed the swelling air of importance which he immediately began to assume. Very human, no doubt, and certainly very Turkish.

That was, however, no concern of mine. He declared himself quite able now to vouch for the prompt restoration of order at the Palace if the capital could be kept in control by the Government; but he asserted, most emphatically, that one step was essential—the people at the Palace must be told that the Sultan was safe and would return to Yildiz on the following day. He urged also that a strong military force, composed of regiments he named as unquestionably loyal, should be brought into the near neighbourhood of the Palace.

I told him the Sultan's commands were that he was to do anything and everything he deemed necessary to restore order, and the Sheikh-ul-Islam joining in the conference, they made their plans together.

On the very vital matter of Rechad Effendi's safety he was also able to give me assurances. Almost the

first step he had taken was to change the guards of all the Sultan's brothers, taking care to select men whose fidelity was beyond question.

I had now completed my task as the Sultan's envoy. I asked the Pasha to give me fifty picked mounted men in the charge of an absolutely reliable captain, and after very little demur on the ground of his unwillingness to spare so many, he went out to select them.

He wished me to accompany him, being anxious, I think, that I should see for myself the admirable arrangements he made, so that I could report at first hand to the Sultan; but I excused myself on the ground that as I was not an official of the Palace it was not for me to "enter places which our August Master had not empowered me to see."

The little troop was soon ready, and the captain, Hassim Bey, having been brought in by the Pasha to be introduced personally to me, I started with his strong escort to try conclusions once more, but under very different circumstances, with my old enemy—Maraboukh Pasha.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE END OF A TRAITOR

EVENTS had crowded so rapidly one upon the other in the few hours which had intervened since Enid's disappearance had become known that I had had no time to think of any set plan for finding her.

Maraboukh Pasha had said enough to convince me that whatever had chanced to her he was sure to know of it, and my first thought was thus to go and try to wring the truth from him by force.

But as I was on my way to his house, other possibilities suggested themselves to plague me with very anxious doubts. It was consistent with what I knew of Count Stephani that I should find his treacherous hand in this. He had ample audacity to plan her abduction and to carry it out ; he could lay hands on many men reckless enough to help him in any such scheme, because he would calculate upon our paying a rich ransom for her ; and it was just such a stroke as he would delight in dealing.

He had had the insolence to ask her to marry him ; and it had been a part of the conspiracy plot that his help should be purchased by the promise of Enid for his wife. Maraboukh, it was true, had laughed that promise to scorn, and had spoken of Stephani as "carrion ;" but that did not prove either that the wily Pasha did not intend to give her to him, or that if he

did not, Stephani might not have got wind of the intended treachery and have carried her off in spite of the Pasha.

Stephani had indeed a rare knack of finding out secrets, and many a time he had surprised me by his inner knowledge of affairs; and if he had found out the Pasha's deceit, the prospect of thwarting him would give greater zest to the project of abducting Enid.

These considerations made me profoundly uneasy, while they so hardened me against both men that I vowed they should pay with their lives for any treachery. I was satisfied that it was to one or other of them I must look for news of Enid; but if Stephani was at the bottom of the trouble, I was sure he would lose no second in putting as great a distance as possible between himself and his enemies in the capital. Thus the worst might happen before I could find him; whereas with Maraboukh I might be able to deal at once.

I was so engaged with these thoughts that I paid little heed to the matters passing around me; but I saw that very vigorous measures were already on foot to clear the streets. The Zaptiehs were out in great force, driving the people to their houses; and in the main thoroughfares we passed more than one body of troops, some drawn up on guard, others marching and counter-marching: a great shew of force proving that the Vizir had made vigorous use of the short time since my interview with him to assert the strength of the Government and suppress the threatened tumult.

When we neared Maraboukh's house I called the captain of my escort to me and told him my wishes.

He was to surround the house, stopping every means of egress, and with a dozen men was himself to enter with me ; and if there was any resistance, which I did not anticipate, he was to use any necessary force. No one was to leave the house, and everyone entering was to be detained. Everything was to be done quietly ; and no one was to be allowed to leave the hall and so carry news of our arrival to the Pasha.

The measures were very quickly taken, and no difficulty was encountered in gaining admittance. The door stood open, indeed, and our men dashed in and, levelling their carbines at the heads of the affrighted servants, ordered silence on pain of death. They were then made to stand in a body together under the guard of a file of the troops ; and taking four men with me up the broad staircase, I left them within call and went on alone into Maraboukh's private room.

I could form a pretty shrewd guess as to how matters stood with him. He was in all probability waiting for the news that the Sultan was in safe keeping ; and having done his best and worst in sowing the seeds of the plot, he was now expecting the call to action which would be the signal for gathering the harvest of power for himself and allies.

I could thus interpret the look of expectation which changed quickly to surprise and anger when I thrust open the great door and pushed my way in uncere- moniously. He started from his chair, stared at me a moment, and then smiled sardonically ; and his first exclamation shewed that no one had yet ventured to tell him of my escape.

"You have missed your way, Mr. Ormesby. This is not your room," he said, with cold sarcasm.

"You are mistaken, Pasha. I ceased to be your guest some hours since, and many things have happened in the interval." Doubt, anger, suspicion, fear and hate of me all shewed in the rapid nervous lifting of his eyes; but he forced them under with a smile and an impatient wave of the hand as he sat down again to his table.

"I am too occupied with weighty affairs to allow me to spare time to entertain even so distinguished a guest as yourself."

"You persist in that mistake, I am no longer a prisoner." I could not forego the satisfaction of tantalising him.

"Shall I order my servants to you again?" he said, impatiently.

"You will do better to hear my news—for it is the news you are expecting."

"What do you mean?" he asked with a sneer.

"News—from the Golden Horn, Pasha," I said very deliberately, watching closely the effect. But he merely shrugged his shoulders, half contemptuously.

"You are pleased to be mysterious, sir."

"You will be good enough to address me by my title."

"Your title?" and he laughed disdainfully. "And what is that, pray?"

"I am Ormesby Pasha; his Majesty the Sultan, Abdul Hamid, has done me the honour to confer that dignity upon me for having helped to save his life to-night on the Golden Horn."

He fought hard, but in vain, to let no sign of his feelings escape, and to keep up the masking, mocking smile. But the effort was beyond even his strength

of will. His eyes fell, and he sat staring down at his desk, his hands clenching tightly the arms of his chair: gradually the colour of his face changed from sallow swarth to pallor, from pallor to ashy greyness, and his breath came labouring through his broad, dilated nostrils. He made two or three motions of swallowing, his lips dry and parched and livid. A fearsome change in such a master of self-restraint—a change which shewed he recognised my words, if true, to carry a sentence of death, and worse than death—disgrace, discovery and ruin.

When, at length, he forced himself to look up his face was drawn and haggard, as though in that brief minute he had lived ten years of agony; and, when he spoke, his tone was deep, and his voice thick with the husk of mental suffering.

“Why do you come to tell me this?”

“Out of no feeling of friendliness, as you will understand; but because you are now in my power instead of my being in yours. Your house is surrounded by the men of his Majesty’s Household Troops; your servants are in their custody, and in the corridor there, within call, are stationed men who, at a word from me, will carry you to prison to await that punishment which you and I know is well merited.”

“This is not true,” he said, with an effort to rally.

“Test it. Try to summon your servants; nay, go and see for yourself.”

He took me at my word, and sounded the bell on his table loudly, and we waited in silence for the result. When no one came, he rang again, more vigourously; and, at that, the four soldiers I had

stationed outside came hurrying in, thinking it was my summons.

"Did your Excellency call us?" one asked me.

"No; remain at your posts," I answered, and they withdrew.

"You are satisfied now, perhaps?" I said, and the expression of his face was ample answer, without his mumbled, scarcely audible, words of assent.

Then a long silence followed, lasting some minutes, during which he sat as still as a statue, reviewing, as I judged, all the shattered threads of the web he had woven so patiently and labouriously, trying to see if any one of them had yet strength left in it to help him; and face to face with the result to him of all that grim, tangled wreckage of failure. Presently, a thought seemed stirring, and he looked up and asked;

"Why do you not give that order you spoke of—for my arrest?" And I seemed to detect a faint gleam of hope in his tone.

"I am here on my personal affairs, more than as his Majesty's representative. To him you will have to answer for your crimes against him; to me for the wrongs you have done me."

He listened intently, as though testing every syllable in the crucible of hope. He was now shaking off fast the effect of my former words; or it may be that, with the ready fatalism of the East, he had already resigned himself to the inevitable. Whatever the cause, he began to speak with more of his customary phlegm, and to think with his subtle cunning. And, certainly, I did not make even a good guess at his intention.

"Do you think you are treating me fairly?" he asked. "Your life was in my hands only a few hours back; did I take it?"

"What you meant to do, I don't pretend to know."

"Is that a fair answer? I could have taken your life, and not a soul in all Turkey would have known: but I did not. On the contrary, when my servants merely molested you, I punished them severely. I left you all but free, believing and hoping you would take the high position I offered you; and, now, because I shewed myself a weak and generous enemy, you do this. Well, you have won and I have lost—do as you will."

"Your weakness and generosity consisted in an attempt to bribe me to betray my friend, Grant, and when I refused, you imprisoned me while you hurried your schemes on and stole that friend's sister." He started and shot a glance as I said this, as cunning as a ferret's.

"So that is your personal wrong," he said, slowly. "That is the scent that draws you first to me. She will make a good wife—whoever her husband, if husband at all there be."

I bit my lip and drew my breath quickly in my rage, and he seemed to revel in the pain he knew he had caused me.

"I have come to you for news of her," I said bluntly.

"Of course, I might have known that." He leant back in his chair and looked at me as if in curious speculation, pursing up his lips, and drawing down his heavy brows. "When I look at your Excellency," he said, still slowly, with sardonic, insolent contempt

in tone, look and manner, "and listen to your Excellency's words, and perceive the depth, breadth and vastness of your Excellency's mind, I am ashamed and humiliated. To think that I should have suffered the torturing degradation of being outwitted by a thing like you."

I only laughed, however. His opinion of me was a matter of supreme indifference.

"I daresay you do feel it," I said, lightly. My laugh and tone irritated him, and he thrust his knife in again, and turned it in the former wound.

"And so you love this American girl, and do not like to think of her in the arms of another man? Yet, she may grow to love him, for women are women, and he is at least a man!"

"You intend, then, to say nothing?" I answered, sternly. "You know where Miss Grant is."

"I know where the lady is who was Miss Grant." Certainly he knew how to wound.

"And refuse to say? Come, answer; I have no time to waste. I warn you that you refuse at your peril."

"Peril of what?" He looked up from under his brows, and again I noticed the expression, as of hope, which had puzzled me before.

"Of instant arrest."

"And if I do not refuse?"

"If you give me the information which leads me to find Miss Grant, and if no harm has come to her; and if, further, you put into my hands the Greek, Haidée Patras, then, so far as I am concerned, you can go your way."

"Haidée Patras! So, then, your Excellency is not a Pasha for nothing."

"You can cease these gibes ; they only exhaust my patience."

"So far as you are concerned," he said, echoing my words, meditatively. "What does that mean?"

"It means that if they are both here, as I believe, and you replace them in my care, I will withdraw the troops from your house, and the road will be open to you to fly." Again he listened with acutely strained intentness, and I thought a shade of disappointment crossed his face.

"But if they are not here?"

"Is either here?" I could not keep my anxiety out of my voice, and, seeing it, he dallied with the question.

"But if they are not here?" he repeated.

"If you tell me they are not, I will have your harem searched for them."

"Dog of an infidel, you dare not!" he cried, his rage bursting suddenly, like a thunderbolt. "You dare not, and you know it. You know the law, that no man, not even the truest son of Islam, dare cross the threshold of the harem, save only the master of it. Seek to break that law, if you dare, and the very soldiers who give you the power to insult me in this threat to defy our Prophet's law, would be the first to strike you down."

"Then it is as I thought ; they are here."

"You lie, dog of a Giaour," he exclaimed, with passionate and uncontrollable vehemence, and glared at me, shaken by the torrent of his rage.

The insult stung like a whip lash across the face, but I thrust back the impulse of passion to end the interview there and then by handing him over to the soldiers,

"We will see," I answered, as calmly as I could force myself to speak. "I did not say I should disregard the law I know well enough; but that I will have the harem searched, if necessary. I will have the truth."

He was quick to see the mistake of his outburst.

"I spoke in haste, your Excellency, and I recall the words," he said.

Paying no heed, I opened the door and told one of the soldiers to call the Captain to me.

"You will repent giving me to them," he said, quickly and anxiously.

"I have not done with you yet," I replied; and when Hassim Bey came, I told him that I believed Enid and Haidée were concealed in the harem, and that I must know for certain whether this was so. He objected that no man might enter, and then, reading to him the terms of the Sultan's authority, which made the deepest impression on him, I ordered him to find either the chief Enoch, or any important servant of the harem, and elicit the truth by any means—the torture, if necessary, but to get the truth at any cost.

I said this intentionally in the Pasha's hearing, and the Captain was leaving the room to execute the order, when Maraboukh himself interposed, as I had hoped he would.

"I must be spared this indignity," he said. "The Greek is there, but not the American."

"Send for her," I said, curtly, and stopped the Captain, by whom he had sent the necessary instructions to a servant he named.

I was glad to have wrung something from him, and

was only afraid that he had spoken no more than the truth, and I waited impatiently for Haidée's coming.

"If the American were here, I would restore her to you," said Maraobukh. "But she is not here, I swear that by the tombs of my fathers."

I made no reply, but as soon as Haidée was brought in—looking ill, haggard and broken, and so troubled—I drew her aside and asked her in English for news of Enid.

"I know nothing of her, Mr. Ormesby, except that she is not here. Of that I am certain. Have you come to take me away? For God's sake, do so. My anxiety is killing me."

"Yes, you can leave here with me;" and giving her into the care of Hassim Bey, I sent her down to the carriage, and turned again to Maraboukh.

"Now do you still refuse to tell me anything? I shall not ask again," I added threateningly.

"If I tell you all I know?"

"You shall be set free when she is safe again in our hands."

"And until then?"

"You will remain here and your house will be guarded."

"How will that be better than instant arrest?"

"That is your concern."

For a moment he thought, with concentrated intentness, and then appeared to take his decision.

"I will tell you," he said, his eyes on mine and a diabolical look of malice in them. "She is the wife, or the mistress, of the carrion spy, Stephani. He has taken her to his hills, and by this time——"

"Stop," I cried.

"He loves her, and she is in his arms, now, at this very moment, may be."

"It is false, and you know it," I cried hotly, my blood on fire.

"It is true ; I have the proofs here. She loves him, too ; that is the thought for you. She went willingly, eagerly, joyously to be his."

"Do you hear me ? Stop," I said, mad with rage at his words.

"His, for she loves him." He laughed, sneeringly. "She loves him ; that is the sweet thought for you. Enjoy it, for, by Allah, it is your last thought on earth," and, before I divined his purpose, he drew a revolver from the drawer which he had opened to get the "proofs," and fired point-blank at me.

Only his mad rage saved my life. His hand trembled so violently, in his paroxysm of passion, that, by the mercy of Providence, the bullet whistled harmlessly past my head, and, at the report, the soldiers came rushing in.

"She loves him !" he cried, with a last smile of vindictive rage, and, as the men rushed to seize him, he put the muzzle of the pistol to his own head and, with his eyes on me and the evil smile still on his sallow face, he pulled the trigger and fell back in his chair dead.

He had failed, almost by a miracle, in taking my life ; but he had beaten me, none the less, for he had cheated me of the knowledge which was as much to me as life itself, and had carried his secret with him across the grim frontier of the land of eternal silence.

CHAPTER XXIV

HAIDÉE'S STORY

THAT Maraboukh Pasha should have taken his life rather than face the consequences of the failure of his conspiracy was consistent with the Ottoman character in all respects save in the manner of taking it; while the attempt to kill me at the same moment was just the blazing up of a fierce desire for revenge upon the man whom he regarded as the chief agent in his defeat. When I thought over the strange interview, it appeared probable that he had been testing me in search of a chance of escape. All the time he must have had the thought of self-destruction in his mind; but had not finally resolved upon it until he had seen that the chance of flight was hopelessly barred.

I recalled the eagerness with which he had put his question as to what would be his position if he could not place Enid in my hands at once; and my reply that he would have to remain under guard until she was safe, had shot the last bolt on the gate of his hope.

I had not meant it. Enid's welfare was infinitely more to me than Maraboukh's punishment; and had I at the time realized the full significance to him of my words, I would have answered differently. I would gladly enough have taken steps to keep him safe so long as he could be of help in my search. But the

passion into which his words and taunts had goaded me had clouded my judgment with this fatal result.

However, the thing was done ; and it remained for me to consider what steps to take next. I dispatched messengers at once for a doctor and for the chief Zap-tieh of the district ; and while they were coming, I made a quick examination of such of the Pasha's private papers as I could lay hands on in the hope of finding some clue to Enid's place of concealment. But I found nothing ; and when I had explained matters to the police and had ordered them in the name of the Sultan to seal up everything and take charge of the house, I went down to the carriage and drove with Haidée to the White House.

I was bitterly disappointed and sore depressed. I had built such hopes upon dragging the truth out of Maraboukh that the failure had correspondingly disheartened me ; and when I began to realize that the failure was in fact due largely to my own short-sightedness, in not promising him safety, my self-reproach added poisoned barbs to my unavailing grief.

There was, of course, the still more disturbing possibility to be faced that he had told me the truth : that Enid had indeed been carried away by Stephani ; and the dead man's words recurred to me to rack me with enough pain to have satisfied even his vicious malignity.

But from this purgatory Haidée was able to release me. Beyond telling her that Maraboukh had shot himself and was dead, I did not speak to her during the drive to the White House. When we arrived there I gave orders for food to be prepared at once for the soldiers, and distributed among them a sum of money

equivalent to a full days pay. The Captain I took into the house, and after giving him also a liberal present, I said I would tell him later on my wishes in regard to the troops; and that in the meanwhile they were to remain at the White House.

Haidée had in the meantime changed her dress and came to me at my request in my own room.

"What are your orders for me?" she asked. "I have no orders for you mademoseille; I am not your gaoler. You are free to go where you will," I answered.

"Where is Mr. Grant?"

"Dying, at the Home. Your desertion has helped to kill him." I spoke sternly, harshly even, but I regretted the words when I saw their effect. She closed her eyes as if in agony, and reeling, fell into a chair.

"Mother of God, what a punishment is mine!" she moaned; and after a long pause she looked up and asked pleadingly: "And would you still keep me from him?"

"On the contrary, one of my chief objects is that you should go to him."

"Come, then," she cried, jumping to her feet instantly. "Let us start. I forgive all your former harshness for those sweet words. Let us go—let us go," she said, impetuously; and when I did not rise at once, she added, "God, are you a man of stone, that you cannot see my heart is burning to be with him?"

"I have still another object—to find Miss Grant."

"Let us go, Mr. Ormesby, and I will tell all I know."

As it was desirable for several reasons that I should go to the Home with her, and as it would not occupy much more time to do that, than to listen to what she might have to say and to write in Turkish a long report

to the Sultan of all my doings, I resolved to cross at once and take her.

"You will hate me more than ever, Mr. Ormesby, when you know all," she said; "but I will tell you. It was I who helped to put Miss Grant in the Pasha's hands." She paused as if expecting some outburst from me, but I made no reply. I would not trust myself to speak.

"It was your fault and hers," she continued. "She made me hate her: she and you were enemies; she maddened me with her accusation of poison; together you humiliated and shamed me: and when my chance came, I took it, as any woman would have taken it who loved as I loved and hated as I had been made to hate."

"Your motives are nothing to me," I said bluntly, when she paused again; "tell me what happened."

"You had kept me from the man I loved, and I vowed I would not endure it. I could not; it was killing me. Then I heard you had left the house, and that Miss Grant had taken her brother away also. I was alone and helpless, and then I saw my way to get to him again, as I thought; oh, holy God, as I thought," she cried distractedly. "I sent word to Maraboukh, and with a lying message I lured Miss Grant back from the island, and, together with that devil incarnate, for he was a devil, we laid a trap for her."

"Be as brief as you can."

"You had taken Mr. Grant from the house and I was desperate. What was I to do? You had baffled me, cheated me, scorned me, and lied about me treacherously; what was I to do? What could I do

but separate the sister from the brother, if I was ever to return to him? And so I did it. It was easy enough. I myself wrote to Miss Grant, and reading her by my own suffering heart, I knew what to write. I told her that you had been brought back to the White House sorely wounded and at the point of death and that you had asked for her; and that, if she came at once, she might find you still alive. I sent the message in one of the boats; and knowing she would come in hot haste, we had a carriage at the landing stage in the dusk waiting for her, and I was there. Without a thought of the truth she entered it, and we drove at once—where you found me—to the Pasha's."

"Then she is there?"

"No. She was taken away the same night; where, I know not."

"And you remained there?"

"Yes, caught in another mesh of that devil-spider's web. I was trapped, even in trapping her; and no threats nor curses nor tears nor prayers could move him to set me free. I had done his work, he said and was safe only in his care. He lied to me—when was he not ever ready with a lie?—that my part in the conspiracy was known, that the Palace spies were searching for me, that my life was in danger, and that I must stay. Oh, God! if you knew the torturing anguish of those following hours to me, you would see what punishment has been mine."

My hate of her was turned to loathing as I heard the story of her treachery, and save that the dying man to whom I was taking her lay filling the lingering remnant of his hours with longing for a sight of

her, I could almost have found it in me to throw her with my own hands into the dark waters through which we raced.

"And what of that scoundrel, Stephani? What was his part in this?" I asked after some minutes of silence.

"Stephani? What of him?"

"The Pasha told me he had taken Miss Grant away."

"A lie, of course—what else should it be from Maraboukh? Stephani is rotting in gaol. He found out he was to be fooled; and when he stormed and threatened things, he was dealt with. Like the rest of us, he was but Maraboukh's tool; and when the edge of his use was blunted, again, like the rest of us, he was thrown aside."

"Where, then, is Miss Grant?"

"I know little more than yourself. Stephani may know; it is probable; for it would be like Maraboukh to refine his torture by telling him at the very moment when hurling him into prison."

"Do you know that she was promised to Stephani?"

"I know—to him amongst others? It cost Maraboukh nothing to promise what he knew could never be performed."

"You mean he knew it would never be in his power to do as he said?"

"That he would never have been mad enough, had his plot not miscarried, and his Government been ever so strong, to risk a quarrel with another Power for such a cause."

"Then where is she?"

"I repeat I have no more knowledge than you can have. If he had not lost his reason, or if he had not been driven to risk such a hazard by some desperate pass—when he would do anything—you will find her safely guarded somewhere."

"Then why was he a party to getting her away from us?"

"Because I insisted, and probably because he wished to make it appear to others he was in a position to pay the promised price for their help. Remember that your visit to him and the knowledge you got from him caused him to hurry forward his plans before they were fully matured."

"To whom else was she promised?" I asked, after a pause of thought, rendered a shade less hopeless by her words.

"I know of one only, Abdullah Bey—a desperate and influential man on whose help much reliance was placed."

I questioned her closely concerning this man, and determined that when we reached the island I would despatch Stuart at once with peremptory instructions to the troop captain, Hassim Bey, to take soldiers and arrest him and search his house.

I was so enraged against the Greek for the part she had taken in the infamous project of getting Enid away from us that, save for the purpose of getting from her any information she might have about the matter, I could not bring myself to speak to her. Even to stay in her presence seemed an insult to the woman I loved and had lost through her wily treachery; and so soon as I had finished my questions I went forward to smoke and think.

She had put a fresh view of Maraboukh's actions, and a very probable one. He knew too well the trouble and hubbub which would be caused by kidnapping an American citizen, to make a serious attempt of the kind. That she-devil of a Greek had probably forced him to appear to do it: she had owned to having "insisted": and I had little doubt that the pressure she had used had been some kind of threat to disclose his plans. He had seemed to yield, in order to quiet her, and had promptly retaliated by shutting her up in his own house.

It was by no means unlikely, too, that the Greek might be right in her further surmise that, as he had promised to give Enid to Stephani and others—a promise impossible of actual performance—he had wished to carry the plan far enough to convince them that he could make his promise good when the time came.

But there remained the disquieting probability that when the crisis of the plot had had to be hurried forward, his hand might have been forced, and that what he had intended to play at doing, he might have been compelled to do in earnest. At that moment of crisis he was desperate enough to dare anything. In such a case, there could be no doubt that Enid, wherever she might be, must be in grievous peril, and the thought was maddening.

The more I pondered the problem, the clearer became the necessity to find Stephani and ascertain what he knew; and I resolved to return on this errand the instant I had done what had to be done at The Home.

My first question on landing was for news of Grant,

and I learnt that there was little or no change in his condition. I took the Greek into the house, and was hurrying off to prepare my dear friend for her visit when she stopped me.

"Mr. Ormesby, I know you despise and detest me for what I have done, but I wish you to know I am bitterly sorry."

"You have abundant cause for it, mademoiselle," I said, coldly.

"Wait, please. I must ask you a question. Shall you tell Mr. Grant what I have done?"

"If I do not, it will be out of no consideration for you. My poor friend has not many days to live, perhaps not many hours, and it may save him much pain to keep his faith in you unbroken."

"Oh, how hard and cruel you are," she cried, wringing her hands.

"You will have to be prepared with some story of the reasons for your absence. At present he believes that your absence is due largely to me, and that I drove you, through despair, to leave him."

"I will undeceive him, I will indeed. I will say anything you wish, anything."

"I have no wishes in regard to you."

"But what shall I say to him?"

"Just what you please. You have shown no lack of ingenuity hitherto. You have now to think of only one thing—that my dear friend is dying, and that his last hours shall be made as peaceful as can be."

With that I hurried away to Grant's bedside.

He was lying so still that they thought he was asleep; but the moment I approached the bed, he opened his eyes, and seeing me, smiled and made a

faint movement of the hand, as if to greet me. I pressed it warmly.

"You have been a long time, Mervyn; have you brought any news?" and his large eyes brightened with a gleam of expectation.

"Yes," I answered, nodding my head. "And better than news, Mademoiselle Patras is here."

"Thank God for that," he answered, much less feebly, while a touch of colour crept into his almost wax-white cheeks. "And thank you, Mervyn." And he began to look about, as if in search for her.

"She will be here in a moment or two," I said, in answer to the look.

"And Enid? What of her?"

"She will be here later," I replied equivocally; and his thoughts being engrossed by the prospect of seeing Haidée again, the answer appeared to satisfy him.

I could do or say no more. His very soul was hungry for the presence of the woman he loved.

"I will fetch her, Cyrus, and then I am going back to—to Enid."

"Best so, Mervyn. You two will be happy in your love. It is the best thing life has to offer."

I crept away from the bedside, intensely saddened by his death-like looks, and marvelling at his words. Here was a man, strong far above his fellows in all that makes men men, who all his life, until the last few weeks, had never looked on a woman with the eye of favour, so changed by his love, that of all the great possessions he had won, that love was the one thought of his dying hour.

I took the Greek upstairs, telling her only that I had said nothing to lead Grant to believe that Enid

was in any danger, and being all unwilling to witness their meeting, I called Dr. Arbuthnot from the room and let her enter alone.

"Is there any hope at all, doctor?" I said, when we were alone.

"None whatever now, Mr. Ormesby."

"Yet he lingers."

"And may for some days, or die at any moment."

"And what is the cause?"

"Poison; and yet not poison as you and I understand it. You have heard of the Turk's fatal cup of coffee?"

"Poisoned, yes."

"It is more devilish than poison. These Easterns can be devils at need. The cup of coffee that I mean is that which is prepared with real Eastern refinement, and the cup is partly filled with either crushed glass or finely chopped hair. It was glass in this case, and we have found traces of it."

"How damnable!" I exclaimed.

"The object is to kill, and yet leave no trace of the poison. You can see what must happen. The organs are inflamed, and ultimately perforated. Dr. Eberhardt discovered it; and it explains what before seemed inexplicable. It was administered sometime before he took that dose of poison; and although that was thrown off by the prompt measures we were able to take, a relapse was all but inevitable. In so strong a man there was just the chance that complete rest and treatment might save life; but that chance he destroyed utterly when he insisted upon getting up and going for that night expedition. The exertion and exposure sealed his fate."

"Does he know there is no hope?"

"He knew it before he went out. We told him, not that there was a risk of death in going, but a certainty."

"By Heaven, what a man! And what devilment!"
I cried, aghast at this revelation of subtle infamy.

CHAPTER XXV

A TURKISH HELL

HIS Majesty the Sultan, to whom I hurried on leaving the doctor, expressed the warmest satisfaction at the report which I was able to make to him, and, naturally enough, was especially interested at the news of Maraboukh Pasha's death. But I think he was disappointed that the Pasha had anticipated punishment at the hands of the State.

He questioned me with much ingenuity as to what I knew of the plot and the men in it ; but having no liking for the part of public informer I gave him to understand that my knowledge was limited to what I had heard from Maraboukh's own lips, and I professed complete ignorance of all names ; adding that as Maraboukh's house was in the hands of the Zaptiehs, they no doubt would make use of their opportunities.

He was profoundly moved by the news of Grant's condition and that he had knowingly gone to his death in order to save His Majesty's life. The drift of his questions showed me that he looked upon the act as a signal proof of Grant's devotion to him personally ; and I did not think it necessary to undeceive him.

"He has served me more faithfully than those sons of my own faith whom I have loaded with favours. It is wonderful," he exclaimed. "His death will be a personal disaster for me ; his enemies are my enemies,

and shall feel the weight of my anger. If I cannot save, I can at least avenge him. You will tell him this."

"It would be no comfort to him, Your Majesty. His mind is too great to harbour thoughts of any violence or love of revenge."

"He is a great man for a Christian," said the Sultan, with a characteristic reservation.

"Could he but have lived, Your Majesty's country and subjects would have had no greater benefactor."

He paused a second to think, and then shook his head slowly.

"It was not to be. We are the children of Allah! His ways are ways of inscrutable mystery and we can but walk them blindfold, and work out our fate in faith. Allah alone is great and knows. This was not to be." His tone was one of intense reverence and solemnity. And in that mood of reverent fatalism and acquiescent submission to the will of the Supreme Power which Easterns can always show in the misfortunes of others, and sometimes of themselves, I bowed myself out of the august presence.

At the White House I found the leader of the troops, waiting with a report of his search for Abdullah Bey; and the news was barren. He had not found the man himself nor any trace that Enid had been in his house. I had not permitted myself to hope much from the search, but I was nevertheless keenly disappointed.

There now seemed but one thing to do—to find Stephani and ascertain what he knew and how far it would help me. I had no knowledge whatever on which to work; I could not hazard a guess where to look for her with any prospect of success; and precious

hours were slipping away, every one of which might be fraught with peril to her.

Even the search for Stephani must occupy many hours, and might take days, as anyone will understand who has any knowledge of the system of prison management in Turkey. Some day the terrible truth about those hells of darkness and cruelty will be told in full, and the infamies practised in them will make the world stand aghast in horror.

I did not know where to look for Stephani, nor by what process he had been imprisoned, nor by whose order, nor even under what name. I knew it was no uncommon thing when a man of influence and power, such as Maraboukh, wished to be rid of some poor wretch who had given offence, to consign him to the governor of one of the prisons, some friend, dependent, or tool of the great man, without a shadow of legal formality; and when once the gates had closed on such a prisoner they never opened again for him. The "discipline" of the prison was slower in operation than an executioner under a capital sentence, but not one whit less sure.

It was probable enough that Maraboukh would have had more than one pliant gaoler in his power or pay, probably thick in the plot, and ready to receive without question any prisoners whom the powerful Pasha might despatch to him.

Feeling that I had better apply in the first instance to the official centre, I drove to the Ministry of Police in Stambul, and producing the Sultan's authority, described Stephani and asked to which prison he had been sent. The official whom I saw was polite, courteous, greatly impressed by the sight of Abdul Hamid's

signature and seal, and listened to me with Oriental patience. But he was, or appeared, utterly sceptical of my statement.

"Your Excellency has been entirely misled. No man is ever imprisoned in our country except under due legal forms. Count Stephani is well-known to us, and if he were under restraint anywhere in the Empire we should certainly know the facts. It could not be done otherwise."

"But I am certain he is in one of the prisons," I insisted.

"I assure your Excellency that is an impossibility. But whatever you wish us to do, we will do at once; although I must warn you to prepare for a disappointment. Our system is the most thorough in all the world. The Count Stephani may have disappeared from the capital; but he has probably deemed it discreet to leave, in view of the trouble that is impending for many. I am convinced, however, you will not find him in any Turkish prison."

"Have you never heard of any men being consigned to some of the governors of the gaols without legal formality?"

"Twenty years ago that was possible: indeed, there were one or two apparent cases. But our August Master has now made that impossible. It could not happen, you will perceive at once, because of our perfect system. We cause reports to be made to the Ministry regularly from all prisons, showing all prisoners then under restraint. Permit me to show you;" and he laid before me a number of such reports, smiling the while with an air of polite tolerance for my ignorance.

"But there may be any number of cases omitted from here," I objected.

"What does your Excellency wish us to do?" he asked, as though it were useless to argue further with anyone who could even suggest such an impossibility. I agreed as to the uselessness of further discussion, and told him my wishes.

"I desire to have a list of all the prisons, and the names of the Governors of each."

"It shall be prepared and forwarded to your Excellency."

"Pardon me, I require it at once, and will wait for it now;" and he gave the necessary instructions in my hearing. "Next I wish you to communicate to all these Governors, by telegraph where possible, giving name and full description of Count Stephani, and saying that His Majesty demands to know instantly whether he is in the prison."

As I had made him understand that I was in a hurry and meant him to be, he drafted a message there and then and submitted it to me for approval; his air being all the time that of one who is indulging the useless whim of a person in authority with a fad.

"Lastly, I wish to have the services of one of your oldest and most skilled agents in the work of secret investigation." I meant his best spy of course; but the use of the word would only have provoked more purposeless disavowels and discussions.

When the spy, whose name was Kultuk Said (Little Said), had been brought in, and the list of the prison Governors handed to me, I asked that all replies from the prisons should be sent to the White House, and left.

There is, of course, only one rapid and effective appeal to a Turk of the lower official order, and that is through his pocket and his interests. I lost no time, therefore, in dealing so with Little Said.

"I want you best wits in this business, Said," I began; "and if you serve me well I will pay you handsomely, and recommend you to His Majesty for promotion. I spoke as impressively as I could. "I am engaged on a secret enquiry for His Majesty himself, and he takes a close personal interest in my being successful. It is a matter of the greatest urgency to him."

"Your Excellency can depend upon his servant," he replied, his little ferretty eyes gleaming with anticipation of good things. They did not gleam in vain, for I gave him at once a handsome backsheesh, and as he put the gold coins in his pocket, he gave me to understand that his heart was already in the work. I could see that his greed was, and I took the rest for granted.

"A much heavier reward in money will be yours if we are successful, and as I told you, certain promotion." I gave him then the list of the prison Governors, and added: "The question you have first to answer is, which of these men was a friend of Maraboukh Pasha, and to which of them would he be most likely to send a man who had to be kept in safe concealment?"

He looked up from the paper which he had already begun to read, and shot a sharp questioning suspicious glance at me.

"I assure your Excellency—" he began, when I cut him short.

"Stop a moment, Said. If you are only going to repeat the official story I have already heard at the Ministry, give me back that money, drop your hopes of promotion now and for all time, and I'll get another man to do this secret work for His Majesty. I shall, moreover, report to the Sultan my opinion of your official staunchness and—your actual uselessness for this work. You can take your choice;" and I checked the carriage as if to return to the Ministry of Police.

He sat hunched up in thought for a minute; and his hand stole into his pocket where he fingered the gold lovingly.

"Whatever you do and all that you tell me will be for my ear alone, Said," I added, guessing he might think his fidelity to the official version was being tested. "But if you won't tell me the truth you are no use to me."

Still he hesitated, and I saw the hand which held the gold come slowly out of his pocket, as if he had been drawing drops of blood from his veins.

"Read this," I said, and showed him the Sultan's authority.

He read it with wide eyes, and then gave a deep, deep sigh of relief as he thrust the gold back again. He was mine.

"Your Excellency's words are as the words of the Koran to Said."

"Good," I exclaimed. "Now read that list for the purpose which I see you understand. I perceive you are a faithful servant, of our August Master, Said," and I gave him a couple more gold liras to whet his zeal. To my surprise he marked off no less than six

names on the list, with a double mark against three of them.

These three, he told me, had been officers under Maraboukh when the late Pasha was in command of his province, and they owed their present appointments to his influence. One of the prisons lay far away in the north of Macedonia; and this, from its remoteness, was in the spy's view the most likely place in which to find what we sought.

"But it would take half a week to reach the place," said I, somewhat disconcerted; "and the prisoner cannot have been even arrested more than three days ago."

"Your Excellency's words are words of wisdom. Then it is to the prison of Megridjeh, under Reshid Bey, that we should lead our feet." This was the more likely place, he gave me to understand, because it lay in the hills many miles from a railway, and being thus out of the way frequently escaped even the farce of inspection from the Ministry of Police. There was a forty mile railway journey to face, and a long ride to follow, it seemed; but there was no help for it, and accordingly we turned back and drove to the railway station.

There was no train to Muradly, the nearest station for Megridjeh, for four hours, I was told; but the authority of the Padishah, supplemented by gold and backsheesh, and a little determination can make even the Turkish railway authorities move; and thus a special train was made up and ready before I had completed my preparations. I resolved to make my visit in some force, and I sent up to the White House for Hassim Bey and a dozen of the soldiers to accompany

me. Some little time was occupied in entraining the men and horses; but we were soon off on the first stage of our journey, and the telegraph flashed forward the news to our destination that a special officer of the Sultan, armed with plenary authority and carrying plenty of money was on the way, and might need some assistance as well as three or four good horses on arrival.

They were ready for me, and having given orders that the train should remain to take the party back to the capital, I led the little cavalcade through the town, to the wonderment of the whole population, and having Said with me to act as guide, rattled on as fast as our animals could carry us.

During the ride, I questioned the spy as to the best method of proceeding, and his answer was characteristic.

"If Count Stephani is anywhere in the prison, your Excellency may rely upon Said's finding him. I know every cell, including the secret ones. But first my lord should act officially and appear to trust the commander of the prison, Reshid Bey." The little man was earning his money well.

Our arrival at the gloomy looking place created a considerable amount of excitement, and a guard of soldiers and warders was drawn up near the great gates as I rode up and asked for the commander.

The men appeared at first disinclined to admit my followers; but I let them see I could play my part with authority, and in the sternest tone I could assume, I ordered them in the name of the Sultan to throw the gate open instantly.

It is probable that the uniform of the Household

Troops had much more effect than my command ; but the order was obeyed, and riding in, I dismounted and demanded to see the Governor, Reshid Bey, instantly.

I was taken to his private apartments, and he came to me promptly, looking, I thought, not a little uneasy.

"I am Ormesby Pasha, here on my August Master's business, Bey Effendi, and I should like to know by whose authority those dogs at the gate there dared to question the right of His Majesty's envoy to enter?" I showed him as I spoke the Sultan's authority.

"I will see that they are punished, your Excellency, and I beg you meanwhile to accept my humblest apologies. We had not been advised of your Excellency's visit, and they were, doubtless, ignorant of your Excellency's high rank and business.

"The uniform of my soldiers should have been a sufficient passport, Bey Effendi. I fear I shall have to report to my August Master that your men are so badly trained that they think they can insult even His Majesty's Household troops with impunity."

He looked a veritable bully among bullies: a coarse-featured, low-browed, heavy-jawed brute of a man: and now, like a bully when cowed, he fawned and cringed and writhed with a multitude of abject apologies. A loathsome beast, but reduced to the condition of subservience that I desired.

"I have come in search of one of your prisoners. There have been evil deeds in the capital, and some impious villains have dared to conspire against the very life of our august and beloved Padishah, whom may the Prophet ever bless. One of the traitors has

been sent here, and I require you to deliver him up to me. His name is Stephani—Count Stephani of Pristina."

"Your Excellency has surely been misinformed. I have no prisoner here of that name."

"What prisoners have you received during the last three days?" I was watching him and saw him start as I asked this.

"Your Excellency shall see the prison register;" and, summoning an assistant, he sent for it.

Stephani's name was not on it.

"You have had none but these?"

"None, certainly none. Why does your Excellency ask that?"

"I am not here, Bey Effendi, to tell you His Majesty's motives," I answered, indignantly. "I will go through the prison. I have with me a man who can identify the prisoner."

"Your Excellency will honour me by taking coffee?" he asked, for without the inevitable coffee and cigarettes no business, official, commercial, or friendly, is ever transacted in Turkey.

"My time is very short," I answered, and taking the proffered coffee, I sipped it, and then at once rose.

I had heard much of Turkish prisons, and had even visited one once, and I was thus prepared for some distressing sights; but no reading, and indeed, no imagination could have prepared me for the sights of that day.

The prison had, like others, three floors: one level with the ground, one above it, and one below it. There were in all just over a hundred cells, and in

them were crowded some twelve hundred hapless, hopeless prisoners. The cells were square, and nearly all of the same size, not one being more than eight or nine feet from wall to wall and floor to ceiling. Even to those on the upper floor scarcely any light was admitted; and in many of these dens from fifteen to twenty miserable, starving creatures were thrust.

We went first to the upper floor, and our way was by a staircase absolutely indescribable for its accumulations of disgusting filth. The air was thick with the foulest stench that ever bred a pestilence, and the odour was so horridly fetid that it almost overpowered me with its abomination. I was faint and sick with it, and should have succumbed, I believe, had not the far greater horrors of the sight of the prisoners themselves deadened my senses even to that nightmare of stench.

Gaunt, hollow-cheeked, emaciated, pale with the pallor of sickness, suffering and coming death they were, one and all. Their eyes protruding half out of the blue sockets, they lay in hundreds on the fouled floors of the cells, panting for air, starving, parched with never sated thirst; enduring the brutalities of gaolers with whom brutality was a science, they suffered the tortures of the damned until the fervently prayed-for relief of death should come to give the only release ever likely to be theirs.

Absolutely no food save bad bread and worse water was ever given them I learnt; and that only in quantities which but sufficed to excite their hunger and goad their thirst. For one short half hour a day they took such air as the small, filth-bestrewn courtyard afforded, and the rest of the time they were left

herded in those awful cells ; too many in numbers to lie down all at one time, the space being too small, and the crush too great to admit of any movement. The stronger stamping down the weak ; many of them naked from head to foot, save for the iron manacles and anklets ; starving for food, tortured with the thirst of hell, gasping for air, poisoned by the reek of pestilence which broods everywhere, there they lay, struggling and writhing in an inferno contrived by man's brutal inhumanity, under an inspiration worthy of hell itself.

The cells on the floor beneath had all the same horrible features, save only that the condition of the sufferers was worse. They had less light, and even fouler air. They had been longer in the putrid stew of misery and wretchedness, for their sentences were longer. The weaker ones were mercifully dead ; for the weaklings die quickly, and the strongest cannot exist more than four or five years ; and that gaoler does his work the best whose prisoners die most rapidly.

But there was a deeper depth yet of misery and awfulness ; and those in the underground cells had plumbed it. There not a ray of light ever penetrated ; the prisoners were chained each to one spot, and lay scarcely able even to change position on the filthy floor, a positively diabolical ingenuity being shown in the moulding of the fetters. In one spot was a poor devil with hands and feet fastened together till his form was drawn to the shape of a bent bow, with the chain as a short string ; there a wretch bent sideways, right hand and right foot fastened in a torturing embrace ; another with ankles fast to a bolt in the wall,

and his left hand chained high up to another bolt, standing like a man half crucified; yet another with his feet fastened too wide apart to support the body, which bent and fell forward, listless, all but lifeless, and all the senses dead but those of intolerable, never-ending suffering.

These were, God help them whatever their crimes, the worse criminals; and the one refined touch of merciless mercy in their treatment was that they were released for one or two or three hours a day, according as the sufferings were like to snap the tender cord of life, and they were left unfettered while the sap of strength renewed, that they might still retain senses to be further tortured.

My senses reeled in the presence of these frightful scenes, and yet I had to play my part, and assume the stolid indifference of an Ottoman to suffering, and prosecute my search for Stephani among the writhing victims of this fearsome, horror-bound place.

CHAPTER XXVI

STEPHANI

THERE was one slight benefit I could confer upon the ill-fated prisoners—I could procure them an extra breath of fresh air, and I directed the Bey to parade them in the courtyard for my inspection. But even this boon was like to have been turned to a curse by the brutality of the gaolers, who, entering the cells, began to turn the inmates out with violent blows and heavy kicks for those who from sickness and want were so spent they could not rise immediately. Cries and groans rent the air on all sides, and filled the measure of my endurance to overflowing. I lost my temper, and ordering the Bey to stop this dastardly brutality, I seized one of the brutes near me whom I had seen kick a poor wretch in the face, and cursing him, I struck him a violent blow with my heavy riding-whip, and flung him head over heels down the stone staircase.

“His Majesty shall know of this,” I cried furiously; “and the next gaoler I see ill-using a prisoner shall be taken out instantly and shot in the courtyard by my soldiers.”

The effect was pretty much as though a shell had burst suddenly in the midst of us. Every man stayed his hands; and all turned to look on me in blank amazement and terror.

"You cannot govern a place like this without force, your Excellency," said the Bey, protesting.

"Nor by the Prophet, shall you torture even dogs, like these, and call it force, Bey Effendi. His Majesty shall know of this from my own lips; and you may look to yourself," I answered hotly.

"I protest against your Excellency's interference," he said sullenly.

"And you may rest assured your protest shall reach His Majesty's ears, for I will carry it myself, and describe what a zealous champion you are of torture and violence and infamous brutality. Now be good enough to get the prisoners paraded with no loss of time, and without this accursed cruelty."

This was done. They were brought out in batches of fifty, and such a hapless sight as they presented may my eyes never see again! Every form of wasting disease had its type among their gaunt, feeble, shrivelled, helpless faces and forms. Had it been a battalion of skeletons marshalled by Death from the tombs for the journey across the Styx, they could have presented no more piteous and pitiable a phalanx as they hobbled and shuffled, and tottered and huddled into position.

Sickening and depressing as was the task of examining them, yet I lingered over it an unnecessary time, that they might have an extra breath of the air for which they were pining and dying.

But Stephani was not among them, and when the last of the decrepit victims from the lower dungeon cells, the barely living dead, had been brought out and led back—in silence now, and without a sign of violence, for the fear of the Sultan's wrath held every

gaoler fast to its clutches—I turned to the Bey and asked if those were all.

"All, your Excellency," he answered, in his sullen dogged tone.

"Now Said. Are these all?" I asked the spy.

"There are the torture cells, Excellency," he whispered.

"By Allah, can there yet be anything worse than we have seen? Lead me to them."

"I have complied with your Excellency's commands," exclaimed the Bey, putting himself before me as I was re-entering the door leading to the lower cells, "I have shown you all the prisoners."

"I am not satisfied, and I am going to search further for myself."

"The prison is in my charge, your Excellency. I must ask you to retire."

"Do you resist His Majesty's commands?"

"I have complied with them. I cannot have the prisoners disturbed further."

I called up the captain of the troops.

"By the Sultan's orders, I am going to search the prison for a man I believe to be concealed here," I said to him. "The commander, Reshid Bey, refuses to allow me to enter. You will clear the way for me; and will shoot down any man, commander or gaoler, who dares to offer opposition. Do your duty."

It was a moment of crisis. The commander had called half a dozen of his men to his side, and things looked ugly. But my captain was a soldier to the finger tips; he had seen me at the Yıldız Kiosk, apparently in supreme authority; and without an instant's delay, he formed up his men.

"Make ready," he cried, with the sharpness of a Prussian officer. "I can only obey orders, Bey Effendi. Is this to go any further? I shall give the word to fire if the way is not instantly cleared."

For a moment I feared the Bey would defy us, and force a conflict and bloodshed, the consequences of which might well have been gravely compromising for me. He himself would have done so; but his men were of another mind. It was one thing to kick and main helpless prisoners and another to face the guns of His Majesty's Household Troops; and they slunk away frightened. The captain then laid his hand on the Bey's shoulder, and the crisis was over and the way clear for me to enter.

Said led me down the stairs into the atmosphere of pestilence, and stopped before the last cell, which I had already visited once.

"I have been in there, Said," I told him.

"But not to the lower dungeons, Excellency. They are beneath the floor of this cell here." There were three prisoners in the cell, clamped to the wall at the left side as we entered, and Said went to the right. "They are here," he said.

I called for lights, and the keys to be brought; and as the scene with the soldiers had finally quenched every spark of resistance, they were promptly brought. A heavy stone in the floor was lifted, and a flight of steps revealed. I descended through the hot, humid air, even viler and more suffocating than any I had yet encountered, and found three dungeons.

One was empty. In the second was a poor devil hands and feet extended, chained to the floor on which he writhed, groaning, praying, cursing, and weeping in

an agony of torture, and yelling between his paroxysms that he would confess.

"Beware how your Excellency touches him," said my guide, warning me. "He will probably be covered with ants." These were the torturers. Said told me that boxes of these terrible insects were always kept ready; and when a prisoner had to be tortured, he was stripped naked, chained hand and foot, and some half hundred of these pests were loosed upon him. The method seldom failed, he assured me, for whether guilty or innocent, men would confess anything to escape the torment.

A glance told me it was Stephani. For the moment he did not recognize me, and I gave orders for him to be released instantly, taken up to the air, clothed, and his sores tended. Then I went on to the last cell. Here were two prisoners, one clamped in an iron frame-not unlike that mediæval engine of horror to be seen in the Tower of London, and known as the Scavenger's Daughter; the other huddled up in a recess, too low for him to assume anything but a crouching position, too short for him to lie down, and too shallow for him to sit, except with his legs bunched up, while his hands were clamped in an iron pillory. Both were unconscious, and probably dying. Ordering them to be released, I left the place, hurriedly, sick with the stench of it, appalled by its awful horror, with every sense in revolt against the Government which sanctioned such practices, and the human fiends who worsened them in execution, and thanking God with all my heart I had not been born a Turk.

I found the commander of the prison waiting for me in a state of great uneasiness. He knew that he had

committed himself gravely in regard to the three secret prisoners; and I did my utmost by word, look, and manner, to frighten him thoroughly.

As a matter of fact, in regard to two of the men I felt considerable embarrassment. To take them with me was impossible, while to leave them behind was only likely to expose them to further torture; the Bey venting on them the rage he felt against me.

Speaking in the short, peremptory tone of authority, I called him up to me, in the presence of gaolers and soldiers alike.

"You have spoken falsely, Bey Effendi; I have found your three victims. Produce the documents committing them to your charge."

"There is some mistake——"

"Silence," I cried, cutting short his attempted explanation. "In the name of His Majesty the Sultan, whose direct and special representative I am, I order you to produce those documents."

A dead silence followed, in which he stood with lowered head and shifting uneasy movement.

"I have no documents, your Excellency," he stammered.

"Then you have dared to abuse your position, to be false to your oath to your August Master, and to betray your trust by using His Majesty's prison to torture your own personal enemies?"

"No," he said, quickly, glancing up; but dropping his eyes instantly, he added in a low tone: "Can I not speak to your Excellency in private and explain?" I knew what he meant—an attempt to bribe me to silence.

"No, I await your explanation here and now in the presence of all."

"They were sent here," he muttered.

"By whom?"

He might well hesitate, for he was between the devil and the deep sea. If he gave me Maraboukh's name he would be offending the man he was expecting to be Grand Vizir—for the fact of the Pasha's death was not known; while if he said nothing, he was confessing the crime against the Sultan with which I had charged him.

"I do not know," he whined in shuffling desperation.

"I can freshen your memory," I returned, sternly. "With regard to one of the men I know the facts clearly; with regard to the others I will give you three minutes to recollect; and if you do not say, I swear by the tomb of the Prophet you shall be carried down to the cell from which I have brought these men and tortured as you tortured them." And I pulled out my watch and began to count off the time.

I have never seen more abject terror than his. The sweat stood thick on his brow; his usually truculent face took that sickly hue of sallow grey which tawny skins turn; his lips were livid and trembling so that his teeth chattered like one in an ague; his features twitched convulsively, and his staring eyes shot furtive glances in all directions, now at me, now on the ground, then around him, as if searching for help or a chance of flight; and his limbs shook and shivered under the frost of fear till his shaking legs could scarce uphold the weight of his body.

"His Excellency Maraboukh Pasha," he faltered at last.

"Did he send you all three of them?" I demanded, and so desperate was his fright that at my loud tone he started and shivered.

"Yes, your Excellency."

"So," I thundered in an indignant tone; "you have been by your own confession in league with the man who has dared to raise his hand against the August One, the Padishah. You were in that vile conspiracy, ungrateful dog that you are. He has paid with his life for his treachery. By the mercy of Allah, his plot has been thwarted and his vile companions even now await their doom. Your's will come too. I hereby dismiss you, in the name of the Sultan, from your command of the prison; I shall report all I have discovered to my August Master; to-morrow his commands in regard to you will arrive here; and until then you will not leave the precincts of the prison. Out of my sight, lest I forget myself and slay you where you stand."

I flatter myself I had played my part of the high-handed Pasha well enough to impose upon every one there, and indeed almost on myself, so bitter was my indignation at what I had seen. I had of course entirely exceeded any powers the Sultan had given me; but for that I blamed not my own presumption, but the circumstances which had seemed to force me forward. I had no alternative now but to appoint the assistant Commander to take charge of the gaol, with peremptory orders to put an end to the savage brutality to the prisoners, and with special instructions as to the treatment of the two unfortunate men who had been imprisoned without process.

Reshid Bey killed himself that night, I learnt after-

wards. News reached the prison confirming what I had said of the failure of the plot, and as he was deeply compromised he chose that method of escaping a worse fate. His death therefore did not lie at my door; although I should have felt the responsibility lightly enough after the horrible evidences I had had of his savage cruelty.

During the interview with the Bey, Stephani had been restored to some semblance of his former self. His hurts had been dressed, he had been fed and clothed, and by my orders had been taken to a room where I could speak with him privately. He had been but two days in the place, but he was so fearfully broken that when I entered the room and he recognised me, he stared at me in sheer amazement and then thinking that I had but taken him from the torture to question him and send him back, he collapsed entirely and burst into a passion of hysterical sobbing.

I let him weep for a time and then, placing a hand on his shoulder, all my old animosity killed at the sight of his hopeless, heartbroken terror, I said :

"Courage, Stephani, courage; I have come to set you free."

He looked up instantly, his open lips quivering, his leaden-hued face beginning to live, and his tear-stained eyes wide with the joy which the words caused.

"Free?" he said in a hushed, trembling whisper, as though doubting that his ears had heard correctly.

"Yes, certainly, free. You will go back with me. Come, man, courage."

"Free," he said again, in a louder tone this time, and turning suddenly he seized my hand which still

lay on his shoulder and pressed it to his burning lips and laid his cheek upon it, all wet with his tears.

"Come, Stephani, you must play the man," I said, intensely touched by this unconscious abandonment of all restraint and manliness. It showed what a depth of misery the wretch had sounded in the short time of his imprisonment. What a hell of torture must it have been to change to this shattered, shuddering wreck of humanity such a bold, confident, reckless, daredevil as Stephani.

He was a long time before he could speak, and then he asked :

"How long have I been here?"

"Two days."

"By the Prophet of God, it was like eternity!" he exclaimed.

"Well, days or years, it's over now, Stephani," and I continued to cheer and encourage him in this way until the worst of his abject fear had left him.

"Let us get away, Mr. Ormesby," he cried then with hungry eagerness, as he glanced about him like a fear-stricken child. "This place kills me. There's something in the air of it. God of all Gods, that I should be a child like this!"

"Before we start I wish to ask you a question."

At this the light of terror flamed up again in his eyes.

"Does my leaving depend on my answer?" he cried.

"No, no, not a bit of it. But you can help me, if you will. You will do so?"

"Help you? I, a poor shrinking wretch broken on the wheel of torture, help you—you, strong enough even to open the doors of this hell. How have you done it?" he broke off, in a tone of wondering speculation.

"No matter how. It is enough that I have freed you. Will you help me?"

"Help you? By the Tomb of the Prophet, aye, on your Holy Crucifix I'll swear it. By any oath you will. I am your servant, your man, your dog, from this hour, Mr. Ormesby. Try me. Set me a task and let me prove my words. Save me from here, and if you want my blood, drain my veins; my tongue, tear it out; my heart, pluck it from my breast; my life, it is yours; and my last act shall be a smile of a dog's gratitude for this."

"Well, I don't want anything of that sort, Stephani," I said, thinking a light tone best to answer his hysterics. "I merely wish to know something that I think you can tell me."

"Wait," he cried, as if just remembering something. "Maraboukh, what of him?"

"He is dead and the whole plot has failed."

"Ten thousand hells," he growled with a bitter oath in his disappointment. "Then I can have no revenge."

"I wish you'd think of what I say. Now, try. Where am I to look for Enid Grant?"

"That hell-fiend taunted me with the loss of her. She was claimed by Abdullah Bey; part of the price of his help."

My spirits fell at this. I had sought for the man and had failed to find him.

"What help was he to give? Try to think, Stephani, as you wish to help me."

"There is no need to think. It was to his house that the Sultan was to be taken; he was the man chosen to carry His Majesty from Yildiz."

"By Heavens!" I exclaimed, as the scales fell from my eyes at the words, and I saw the truth.

He was one of the very men we had seized in the caique on the Golden Horn, and he lay at that moment a prisoner in our charge at the Home.

I had been searching high and low for a man whom all the time I held safe in the hollow of my hand.

"That's the best news you could have given me, Stephani," I cried joyously, jumping up. "You've earned your freedom indeed. Come, we'll be off for you to enjoy it."

CHAPTER XXVII

THE CLUE

I LOST no time in leaving the prison when Stephani had once given me this all valuable clue. He was of course far too weak to attempt to ride the distance to the railway, so I requisitioned a light cart and a couple of horses belonging to the Bey, and in this way he made as comfortable a journey as his aching bones and irritated skin would permit. But had the distance been twice as long and had he been dragged the whole way on the ladder of a hay cart, the knowledge that he was free, that he had left the foul prison, and that his tortures were over, would have made the journey sweet and pleasant beyond the conceit of those who have never suffered an ordeal of the kind.

I myself had never before appreciated the blessings of breathing fresh pure air as in the minutes when I turned my back on that loathsome den of cruelty, abomination, and oppression.

I was eager to make all haste back to the Home, and when we had covered some two thirds of the distance and the hills were behind us, I took Stuart and a couple of the best mounted troopers and galloped on to have all in readiness at the railway.

It turned out to be a lucky precaution. When I reached the station I found that although the train which had brought us was standing on a siding, there

was no engine. The shortness of rolling stock on the Turkish railways is of course well-known, as is also the aggravating literalness with which on occasion certain kinds of stolid Turkish officials will interpret the orders given to them.

I asked for the station-master and he came, bowing most profusely and smiling as though assured in advance of my best thanks for his services.

"Where is the train I ordered you to keep here?"

"Your Excellency, all is in perfect readiness," he said blandly, as he spread out his hands and broadened his smile.

"But where is it?"

"Behold, it awaits your Excellency there," waving toward the siding.

"And the engine?"

"Did your Excellency say engine?" he asked, as if in profound surprise.

"Yes, where is the engine?"

"Alas, then, I fear some blockhead has misunderstood your Excellency. There is no engine."

"But the engine that brought the train here. Where is that?"

"Oh, that; why of course your Excellency will understand that it has returned to Stambul. My instructions are so precise, so definite, so imperative. When an engine is not wanted, my orders are that it shall return at once to whence it came. But your Excellency said nothing about an engine;" and there was quite an accent of reproach in his tone.

"Woodenhead, what good is the train without an engine? Did you think I wanted to live in that siding?"

"I wondered myself when your Excellency gave his noble commands."

"What did you wonder?"

"Why your Excellency made no mention of an engine." His air of innocence was exasperating.

"Did you think I wanted the carriages to push them back to Stambul?"

"Your Excellency will see it was not for me to think; but only to obey." I was so angry that I could have kicked him for a fool.

"You knew that I was travelling on His Majesty's business and yet you dared to send that engine back. You will hear of this again," I said angrily.

"Is your Excellency angry because I have obeyed your instructions? I did not send the train away; and your Excellency, the personification of justice, will allow me to show you the written orders which you left with me. I am bowed down with grief; and hurrying away he came back with the order I had signed in which the number of carriages and horse-boxes was given, and no mention made of any engine.

Whether he was more knave than fool I was not then sure; but I had my suspicions. I knew too that even a Palace official is liable to be black-mailed if a safe chance offers. I smothered my temper, therefore, and replied with a smile.

"Take me to your private office." With another of his smirking bows he led the way there; and once inside with the door closed, I took out my purse. "It is very important that I leave at once," I said.

"Your Excellency will see the fault is not with me. I will do all in my power," he answered, with an eye on the purse.

I laid five liras on his desk.

"How soon can an engine be brought from Stambul—or elsewhere?"

"It will take two or three hours, I am afraid," he said regretfully, shaking his head.

Five liras were not enough, so I put five more beside them.

"Can one be got from anywhere else?"

He hesitated, speculating probably, whether I would bid higher. Then he shook his head again, quite mournfully this time; and sighed.

"I am profoundly anxious to help Your Excellency, but——" and he threw out his hands as if it were impossible.

"Just look in your papers there and see if you can't trace an engine somewhere:" which meant—"Think it over, I'm not going to give more."

He adopted the suggestion, appealing to consult a number of papers in his desk and looking now and then at me and at the money.

"I am prostrate with sorrow, your Excellency, but there is no trace of one." I added two liras to the ten.

"It is not wise to incur the anger of my August Master," I said, significantly, and I saw him waver.

"I will look again," he replied, and pretended to do so. "No, my grief is far beyond words, but it is impossible."

But I was not going higher.

"Very well, then I must wait and His Majesty will know why, and you shall go with me to the capital;" and I began to pick up the liras one by one, slowly. This was more than he could stand, and he exclaimed as if a brilliant idea had just occurred to him——

"Stay, your Excellency, my mind is bright with the sudden hope of helping you. I was too overladen with sorrow to think of it before. There will be a goods train passing in less than an hour, and for His Majesty's service I could detach the engine for your Excellency."

"That will do," I said, and I laid the liras down again, and went out of the office. Five minutes afterwards he came out hurrying after me, his face abeam with one vast smile.

"Your Excellency, your Excellency, a most strange and fortunate thing has occurred. I have just had a signal that an engine returning alone to Stambul will pass through here in a few minutes. It is just what we wanted."

It was just what I wanted, although it had cost me twelve liras to get it; and I was not surprised when the engine steamed in to recognize the men in charge of it as those who had brought us from Stambul.

"It is quite a coincidence," I said drily to the little fat station-master.

"The ways of Allah are ever mysterious, your Excellency," he replied piously.

"Well, hit on some other way next time; or you may find yourself discharged from your office for too much reliance on Allah and too little practice of the truth."

But he was all unabashed and stood smiling as unctuously as ever when we steamed out of the station soon afterwards.

On the way to Stambul Stephani was very curious as to the source of the great official power he had seen me exercise, and I think he was under the

impression that I had acted upon his suggestion and "played for my own hand" by betraying the whole plot to the Sultan. It was not my intention to tell him anything—least of all that I held no official position whatever, and had in fact dangerously exceeded the powers with which His Majesty had armed me.

I preferred to question him as to the circumstances of his arrest and imprisonment by Maraboukh. It had all been simple enough. Straight from leaving me after the stormy interview at the White House he had gone to Maraboukh and while waiting in an ante-room there had been joined by Abdullah Bey. By chance Enid's name was mentioned and then the fact that the wily Pasha had promised her to both of them came out. Both being fiery-tempered, reckless men, they had gone straight to Maraboukh himself for an explanation.

The explanation was given very promptly. Stephani being no longer of use, while the Bey was to be one of the pivots of the scheme, was assailed by the Pasha as an impudent pretender and liar, seized there and then and incontinently bundled off to the care of the accomplice Reshid Bey to be "dealt with" in the prison; while the other man was appeased by renewed promises.

"Why were they torturing you, Stephani?"

"Why, but to wring out of me a confession of a crime I had never committed—an attempt to murder Maraboukh."

"What infamy!" I exclaimed. "But did you believe that Maraboukh would ever think seriously of attempting to kidnap a rich American girl and so

risk the violent hostility of the United States, and probably of every European Embassy?" I asked him.

"Am I to speak the truth?" he replied, with a gleam of his old effrontery.

"You mean, can you do it without risk? Yes."

"Well, then, I did not. I am sure he never meant to do anything of the kind; but *I* meant to do it. He knew the risks and so did I—for him; but I meant him to look after himself. It was arranged with him that we should say she had been carried away by the brigands; but while he was only acting the part, I was in earnest. I have friends in the hills, you know," he said, with a sidelong glance at me; "and their help was easy when I could tell them that she was a very rich prize and that a big ransom, many thousands of pounds, would be gladly paid by her friends—and no questions be asked."

With any other man I should have laughed at such a scheme as a glaring absurdity; but I knew that not only was he quite capable of planning such a venture, but also that the prevalence of brigandage in Turkey would have rendered it quite feasible.

"How do you read her abduction now, then?" I asked after I had swallowed my indignation.

"I think it's easy to understand. This Abdullah Bey is a very dangerous man to play with; and as reckless as a man can be. He was the one man in the plot to be relied on to carry out coolly the perilous job of getting Abdul away from Yildiz. One of two men I should say perhaps, for it was to have been my work until he came into the thing. His Majesty was betrayed by some of those in closest

attendance upon him, and when the Palace had been fired, they were to seize him and put him into the Bey's hands. In all probability, therefore, after the talk with me he suspected Maraboukh and gave him there and then the choice of either handing over Miss Grant to him before the fire or of having the whole scheme wrecked and betrayed. He had too many friends for it to be safe to tamper with him; and thus Maraboukh had his hands forced and was compelled to take the risk of doing what I am sure he never intended."

"Where do you think he would take her?"

"Most likely to the place where he was to take the Sultan—his own house in the hills."

"Do you think he would dare attempt to force her to become his wife?"

"He would dare anything on earth, Mr. Ormesby. When inquiries were made he would probably adopt the brigandage story, and with me safe in Reshid Bey's hands, or dead"—and he shuddered—"he would join in putting the blame on me."

Fervently I thanked Providence that we had been out on the Golden Horn that night.

"Of course you will know this Abdullah Bey when you see him?"

"Does an Eastern forget an enemy?" he growled, and no more was said.

During the remainder of the journey I sat pondering what he had told me. Comparing it with what Haidée had said as to the trick by which Enid had been lured from the Home, I saw, with what torturing anxiety may be conceived, that she must have been in this daredevil's power from the evening before

that of the fire at the Palace until such time as he had had to leave his house in the hills to play his part in the plot.

Knowing her as I did, a great fear seized me that she might be dead. She would kill herself sooner than yield to him. Of that there was no doubt; and the thoughts of what her sufferings might have been were like red-hot brands thrust into my flesh.

The agony of the time of suspense until I could get to her was scarcely to be endured; and I paced to and fro in the saloon, thrusting out my head from the window every few seconds eager for a sight of the minarets of the capital and to know that the journey was at an end.

"At last, thank God," I cried fervently as I saw them, and began counting the seconds till we ran into the station.

A minute or two sufficed for me to give Stuart the necessary instructions. He was to take the troops to the White House and see that they were fed and was to return with a carriage and two or three horses in about three hours and meet me at the Stambul landing stage. I requested the captain of the troops to meet me there also with fresh men and horses.

Then I hurried Stephani into a carriage and drove with all practicable speed to where our launches were lying at the Pera landing stage, and we were soon flying through the waters of the Bosphorus at a pace which set the caiques and men in the vessels we passed staring after us in wondering admiration.

But fast as we steamed, the speed was too slow for the impatience that consumed me; and I paced the

deck calling constantly to the men to get ahead faster, ever faster. I was on fire until I could be face to face with the man who knew what I was burning to know, and from whom I vowed I would drag the truth, if I had to tear his heart out and read it there.

I was indeed like one demented. I could think of nothing but the one object. For Grant, dying though he was, I had not a thought. The wreck of our great scheme was to me less than nothing.

Of the acts I had done and of which I had to render some account to the Sultan, I cared not a whit. I had not touched food for many hours; but the demands of nature were lost in the one over-powering thought, so fearsomely brought to my mind by Stephani's words. It was Enid; Enid in danger; Enid in the throes of suffering, anguish, and suspense; Enid perhaps mercifully dead. It was all Enid, Enid, Enid, to me then.

We must have passed through the squadron of Turkish war vessels for, as in a dream, I heard some one, I think it was Stephani, speak of them. But I heeded nothing, saw nothing, felt nothing, and knew nothing except that Enid was to be rescued or avenged; and that I was flying across the water to get face to face with the man who had wronged her and to drag the truth from his insolent lips.

At last, after a time which seemed an age, although it was barely an hour so fast had we travelled, we reached the island, and telling two of the men to help Stephani and follow me, I leapt ashore before the boat was made fast, and hurried away upon my errand.

CHAPTER XXVIII

A DAREDEVIL TURK

I HAD had the two prisoners confined in separate rooms and very strongly guarded, and from the story which my men now told me, I could make a pretty good guess which was the reckless daredevil of Stephani's description. He had made a desperate and nearly successful attempt to escape.

The men had at first been left with their hands bound only, and one of them had succeeded in freeing himself. When the servant in charge of him had paid his periodical visit in compliance with my orders, he had been attacked with sudden violence by the prisoner, and stunned by a blow on the head before he could utter a cry. The prisoner then crept out of the room, opened a window in the passage near, got out of the house, stole down to the landing stage, and was in the very act of casting off one of the dingies when he was accidentally discovered. A big struggle ensued, in which the man, armed now with a heavy iron boat-hook, fought with the fierceness and desperation of a beast at bay. He laid open the heads of a couple of the sailors who went at him first, inflicting ugly wounds, and then, when more came rushing up, he dived into the water, either to drown himself or more probably to attempt the forlorn chance of swimming to the mainland.

It was a vain effort, however. The seamen followed

in a boat, and from the way the story was told, I gathered that they had given him a very rough and tumble quarter of an hour. They let him swim some distance and then, grappling him with a boat-hook, towed him back and landed him half drowned and thoroughly exhausted.

"You see, sir, they dursen't haul him into the cockleshell for fear as he'd upset it," said the man to me, "and they dursen't let him go neither; so there was nothing else for it. And he'd made it hot for three of 'em already. He carried on like a rampaging wild beast, and afterwards we thought it best to keep a couple of men in his room to guard him."

Thus, when I entered the room, I found two of our men with loaded revolvers sitting by the door watching the prisoner, who was lounging on a sofa in an attitude of apparently listless indifference to their presence. He had made his effort and it had failed, and he had therefore resigned himself, like a true son of Islam, to face the inevitable. He did not even look up at my entrance.

"You can leave the room," I said to the men.

"He's a dangerous customer, sir," one of them ventured.

"Then give me your revolver and remain close at hand," I replied, as I crossed the room and stood by the couch. "You are Abdullah Bey?" I asked him. He feigned not to hear me. "You will find it better to answer," I added, curtly.

Answer me he did then in an unexpected fashion which, had I been less on my guard, would have had sorry consequences for me. With a sudden, single effort, he sprang at me and all but succeeded in seizing

the hand which held the revolver. Only a quick jump backwards saved me, and, in an instant, I had him covered.

"Your blood will be on your own head," I said quietly, and with a shrug of the shoulders and no word but an oath, he went back to his place and resumed his former pose of indifference. "You are Abdullah Bey?" I asked again, and again he refused to answer. "I shall find means to make you speak," I said threateningly.

I had Stephani brought in then and confronted the two.

"Do you know this man?"

"It is Abdullah Bey," said Stephani, and, satisfied on that point, I sent him away again.

"Now, I have something to say to you. I know of your part in the plot of Maraboukh Pasha to depose His Majesty; last night you were caught in the act of carrying His Majesty to your house in the hill, and you know the kind of punishment which awaits a man taken red-handed in the commission of such an act in this merciless country of yours. I have come to offer you a chance of saving yourself from torture and death."

Still he made no response, as if suspecting a trick to trap him into a confession.

"I know of this, because I was one of those who took the Sultan from your caique, and because, in the second place, I was with Maraboukh Pasha when he died, and all his documents and papers came into the hands of the police. The proof of your crimes is beyond question, but there is one thing that may yet save your life. I offer you the chance of it."

He sat up then and looked at me.

"Who are you?" he asked sharply.

"I am an Englishman ; my name is Ormesby."

"How can you do what you say?"

"No matter. I can and will do it."

"Is it by your orders I have been so foully treated here?"

"You were confined here by my orders, and when you tried to escape, you brought on yourself whatever you have since endured."

"What do you want me to do?"

"To restore to my hands, safe and uninjured, the American girl, Miss Grant, who has been in your custody."

He gave me a look of deep cunning and smiled.

"Ah, so that is the complication. You must have been anxious about her, good Mr. Englishman," he said, insolently.

"I am in no mood for trifling," I answered, curtly.

"No? Well, that's nothing to me. It's the man in the fig tree who gathers the fruit, and the man on the ground must wait till he pleases to give it to him. And I'm in the fig tree, it seems, and you are on the ground. She is a very beautiful woman and very rich too. Now, what is she worth?"

"More than your life, or I should not be here now. Where is she?"

"Not quite so fast, if you please. Figs have a high value at certain seasons of the year;" and he smiled as impudently and lightly as though it were my life and not his that hung in the balance.

"There are other ways of getting figs than buying them," said I, significantly.

"Long, uncertain, sometimes difficult, those ways—and the fruit is apt to be bruised or destroyed in the interval. It is safer and quicker to buy."

"I am here to impose my terms, not to bargain, and my patience is apt to be short."

"For my part, I wouldn't be here at all if I could help it, by the Prophet; but being here and being, curiously enough, in the position of power, I intend to bargain, Mr. Englishman. And in Turkey, as I would remind you, we carry on our negotiations over our coffee and cigarettes."

His cool effrontery was staggering; but I did as he wished and sent for coffee and cigarettes. I thought it might tend to impress the fact on him that I was so far master of the place as to be able to do what I said.

"It was that meddlesome scoundrel who calls himself Count Stephani who recognized me. He has returned then?"

"I myself brought him from the prison to recognise you. He was enduring there what may be part of your lot if you refuse my offer," and I gave him a pretty forcible description of how I had found Stephani. But, if it frightened him, he displayed no sign of the fear, for he turned the thing cunningly to my disadvantage.

"It served him right," he said, with a shrug of the shoulders and a smile. "But that you should take such trouble, Mr. Englishman, shows me that my hostage is even more valuable than I thought. By the Kaba, what abominable coffee," he cried, with a grimace of disgust. Certainly his assumption of indifference was excellent acting. "It is no wonder you Giaours are sour folk when you can drink this. I'd

sooner have the cup His Majesty's agents know how to brew. One would at least be without nausea."

"Come, this foolery must end."

"Then what do you propose?"

"That you tell me where I can find Miss Grant and give me the necessary authority for her to be delivered to my hands. If she is safe and uninjured, you shall have the means of escape. Is she safe?"

"And, meanwhile, what of me?" He ignored my question.

"You will remain here."

"And trust to the word of a Giaour!" he answered, with a scoff. "And what would be the amount of ransom?"

"Your liberty—the value you set on your life."

"True, but then the value you put on that is much less than mine, perhaps; and what we are considering is the value not of my life, but of my hostage's life and safety. That is more to you than my life—and how much more?" And he looked at me shrewdly and insolently.

"You are the most impudent villian I ever met," I cried, angrily.

"I do not know your acquaintances," he retorted, with impudent serenity.

"I will give you five minutes to decide;" and I got up.

"You need not. I have decided. I refuse the offer. I will not trust your word and remain here, and I will not give up my hostage without a ransom of twenty-five thousand liras."

"Twenty-five thousand devils," I exclaimed hotly. "You shall not have a piastre."

"Then you will not have the lady," he replied, with the utmost composure, shrugging his shoulders and smiling. "And you should remember, too, what I said of the danger to fruit that is kept too long. I knew the risk I was running in taking this lady into my care. She is safe and uninjured. I will tell you that, for I see how anxious you are; but if I do not return to the place where she is, and any attempt is made to search for her, I have left orders that she is not to be found. And my servants know how to obey me."

The man was the devil himself for pushing his advantage, and he saw in an instant that, although he had relieved me by the news of Enid's safety, he had also frightened me consumedly with the suggestion of her danger by delay. But I put as bold a face on the thing as I could.

"Then the need for instant measures on my side is urgent," I replied. "I am armed with His Majesty's authority to take any and all measures I may deem necessary in this, and on my oath I tell you that if you don't at once yield to me, I will have my men in and drag the truth out of you by some of your own country's devilish measures of torture."

This threat, or my evident exasperation, touched him. He sat a moment, gazing thoughtfully, yet with seeming nonchalance at his cigarette, and then forced a smile as he replied with the first suggestion of nervousness I had observed:

"You have a nice sense of honour in bargain-driving," he sneered. "To threaten a man with the torture who won't come to your terms is worthy of a Giaour. I am in your power in that thing, however,

as you are in mine in regard to the American, and am willing to recognise the fact. But there are limits on both sides. Maraboukh's plot has evidently failed, and my life was one of the stakes. I was playing for riches as well, and am ruined. I have no money left ; and thus to accept your offer would mean that I should become a fugitive beggar, a sort of wandering fakeer, all rags, religion, and wretchedness ; and, to be plain, I prefer death."

"Put Miss Grant into my hands and I will give you two thousand liras," I replied, keen to end the matter. His complete reassurance returned the moment I named the sum, and he tried, with a persistent pertinacity worthy of an Armenian usurer, to get me to increase it, not yielding until he had driven me to the length of calling in my men and having him stripped for the torture.

The rest was soon done. I agreed to take him with me, but to be sure of him, I had him handcuffed to one of my men, and in this fashion we set out.

I found the soldiers waiting for us at the landing stage, as I had directed, and putting my prisoner and his gaoler into the carriage I followed and rode with him. I never met such a careless calous scoundrel. He smoked all the time, and began to chat as gaily as though he had not a shade of anxiety in the world. I bade him keep silent ; but he merely laughed, and continued to chatter away now to the man handcuffed to him, then to me, and lastly to himself, with a light-hearted recklessness, giving me an account of his life, his experience and his amours, and expressing his opinions upon all sorts of subjects from politics to the Karagheuz.

It was a strange drive and a long one, for he took us some fifteen miles to the north of Stambul, to a large and very lonely house situated halfway up a steep high hill. When we reached it I alighted; but he refused to get out, saying his servants must not see him manacled like a thief; and accordingly we summoned them.

A man dressed in the Oriental costume came out, and with many profound salaams was asking me my business when his master called him to the carriage door, and a short conversation took place between them in low guttural tones that I did not catch. Then the Bey laughed, and said to me aloud in French:

"You may like to fetch the American yourself. She is expecting you, it seems, and is in a fine temper at your tarrying. Follow that old sinner, and he'll take you to her."

For a moment the idea flashed on me that treachery was intended, but I dismissed it as impossible, seeing the force we had; and motioning the man forward I followed him.

My heart beat very fast with anticipation of seeing Enid. Grant's assurance that she loved me rushed across my mind at the moment; and I found myself wondering in a vague, confused, muddled way, what I should say, how she would look, and what her first words would be. The Bey's laughing bantering tone as he declared she was expecting me, mingled itself with my jostling, rambling, jumbled, excited thoughts; and when at last the man paused before a door, turned, and looked at me, I was so nervous for the moment I could neither open the door myself nor tell him to do so.

He opened it and stood aside for me to enter, and I went forward awkwardly only to find the room empty.

"What is the meaning of this?" I asked, anger loosing my tongue. "Where is the lady?"

He salaamed and gazed at me in astonishment.

"Your Excellency wishes her to be brought to you?" he said. Then I understood. It was beyond his understanding, of course, that an Ottoman of the rank of a Pasha—as he believed me to be—should so lose all sense of dignity and etiquette as to condescend to be shewn into the presence of any woman. If he needs her, he sends for her. Even a wife dare not enter the presence of her husband without first seeking his permission; and I had been shown into the empty room so that I should order Enid to be brought to me.

"No, take me to her," I answered, curtly, to his much greater amazement; but venturing no protest beyond his stare, he salaamed afresh and led me to the next room, and throwing open the door, announced in a loud voice:

"His Excellency the Pasha."

It was a most welcome touch of comedy; and with a smile I went in to find Enid standing at the far end of the room looking toward me with an expression of mingled fear and surprise, which changed instantly to relief on seeing that the great man thus pompously announced was only myself.

"Thank God I have found you at last," I said, hurrying forward with outstretched hands.

But to my no small consternation, she drew herself up and the look of relief changed to one of anger.

"Those who hide can generally find, Mr. Ormesby. I think you have treated me abominably to keep me here in this way at such a time."

For an instant her reception and the words hurt me beyond telling, until like a flash of divination I realised all that it might mean. They must have brought and kept her here under the pretence that it was my wish. No harm could have been done to her, not even an insult offered. That laughing devil in the carriage outside had probably not even seen her; and in my joy at the knowledge, I laughed. I could not check myself. I laughed aloud.

"It was very good of you to stay," I said, inanely, scarce knowing indeed what I said. The tense, torturing mental strain of the last few hours was relaxed in that moment: the excitement which had kept me up and rendered me oblivious to the claims of bodily fatigue, hunger and thirst, ended with the knowledge of my success and Enid's safety. All suddenly, my strength was exhausted like water from an overturned glass, and I staggered and fell into a chair, muttering with slipshod incoherence much like that of a drunken man: "I'm sorry I couldn't get here before; I've been rather busy you see."

And so I sat, clinging to the remnant of my strength, and fighting hard against the overpowering sense of faintness that threatened me with complete collapse; and conscious that Enid was staring down at me with surprise, indignant anger, and an inclination to disgust.

Truly, a strange lover's meeting.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE LAND OF LOVE'S DELIGHT

M^Y prostration was so complete that Enid soon took alarm, and bending over me she asked, gently :

"Are you ill, Mr. Ormesby? Can I do nothing for you?"

"I'm a bit tired, that's all," I said, with a feeble sort of smile. "I shall be all right in a minute or two."

She knelt down by me then, and having some scent she poured it in her handkerchief and bathed my forehead and temples, and the palms of my hands, and then chafed them gently. Whether it was the scent that refreshed me, or the gentle touch of her solicitous hands, or the wish to ease the look of alarm in her eyes, I cannot say; but I began to get back some measure of strength, and after a few minutes, I struggled to my feet.

"We will go when you are ready," I said.

She looked at me searchingly.

"Are you sure you are fit to go?" she asked.

"Oh yes. I'm—I'm all right now. I'm afraid you've made your handkerchief in a beast of a mess," I said, catching sight of it: I was begrimed with the dirt of my long quest. "You see, I haven't had a chance of washing my face for a bit."

"As if that mattered!" she exclaimed.

"Then, if you don't mind, I should like to go. I rather want to get back," and I smiled again in the same feeble, fatuous way.

"How peculiar you are. But I'm ready, or shall be in a moment," and she went into an inner room, returning in a minute with her wraps. "Can I help you?" she asked, for I was holding on to the back of a chair.

"I think I can manage it, I'm getting all right again. Oh, wait a moment, I'd forgotten." I took from an inner pocket the money which I had promised the Bey, and placed it ready: Enid watching me with much curiosity.

The old servant was waiting at the door, and led the way, Enid and I following in silence, for all the world as though we had been paying a society call. The tame conventionality of the rescue appealed to me as something almost humorous.

"Will you wait a moment?" I said, as we reached the door. "I have to get someone out of the carriage;" and going on I had the handcuffs unfastened from the Bey's wrists, and when he got out I drew him aside, and pushed the money into his hands. Then I put Enid into the carriage and giving the few necessary directions, I followed her and we started.

"You are very strange," she said. "Who was that man, and what were you giving him?"

"I was paying him. This is his place you know."

"Do you mean you were paying him for the use of it while I have been here? What *do* you mean?"

"Well not exactly that, perhaps. But it's rather

a roundabout story altogether, and I'm a bit out of sorts."

"You have not yet told me why I was taken there : and why you thought it necessary to deceive me with that story about being ill at the White House."

"I'm afraid it had rather a mean look, but really there was no other way. I couldn't help it, you see."

"What *do* you mean? Do you know you are frightening me horribly? Have you really been ill? Is there any danger?"

"No, oh no, not now, thank God. But I can't tell you now. And I must make an awfully humiliating confession," I said in a maundering tone. "I'm so exhausted, I can't keep my eyes open. I'm ashamed of myself, but I can't help it." I could not. Nature insisted upon sleep, now that the excitement was over; and before Enid could make any reply I had to yield and fell fast asleep, and was only roused with great difficulty when we reached Stambul, and had to leave the carriage to go on board the launch.

Even the fresh night air of the Bosphorus could not rouse me for some time, so beaten was I; and for nearly half the run across I wrestled against sleep, dosing, nodding starting up, dosing again, and again rousing myself, and trying to think what kind of a yarn I could spin to give colour to the story which Enid believed, and so spare her the knowledge of the peril through which she had passed.

I joined her then where she sat still and intent, gazing now forward through the dark in the direction

of The Home, and again back to the lights on the Pera hills.

"You ought to be asleep, Mr. Ormesby," she said, gently, as I sat down by her side.

"I'm afraid I deserve the snub, but I really couldn't help it. I am horribly ashamed of myself. But I can't stand things like some men.

"It wasn't a snub. I meant it."

"I'd rather talk to you, if I may."

"Of course you may," she answered, a smile in her tone. "Are you going to tell me why you put me in that house?"

"Yes, that's just it. That's just what I want to do," I said, with a nervous laugh. "I'm afraid I jumbled things up a bit just now, but I was half asleep all the time. And I want to say something else. You will find the Greek, Haidée, you know, at The Home. She's with poor Cyrus."

"Is Cyrus worse?" The question came with a catch of the breath.

"I wish I could tell you he isn't. But it's no good—and, of course, you must face the truth as bravely as you can. It's terrible."

"Is he going to die? He was so much better. Has anything happened while I've been away?" Her fear and love for Cyrus were too deeply stirred to let her think of reproaching me for having divided them at such a time. As of course she thought I had.

"He was better; but he insisted on getting up from his sick bed and going out last night; and Arbuthnot takes a very grave view now."

"You let him go out?" The reproaches were coming now.

"No, I wasn't there; but I couldn't have stopped him if I had been. I found him at the White House, and he did as noble a thing as ever cost a great man his life;" and I told her briefly of the adventure of the previous night on the Golden Horn.

"It was like a Grant. I would not have had my brother do otherwise." Her quiet, proud resignation showed me she understood. She was silent for a minute or more and then added: "I am so glad that you were with him;" and somehow her tone set my pulses tingling with delight.

"When we got back to The Home he was so set on seeing the Greek again, that of course I fetched her."

"Of course. Poor Cyrus. I never dreamed he could have loved a woman so," she replied; meditatively. "Poor Cyrus;" and she sighed deeply.

"And such a woman!" said I, thinking of her act toward Enid.

"It does not make much difference with a love like his," she murmured in the same soft voice. "Did he ask for me?" she added, after a long pause.

"Yes, eagerly."

"And you told him?" and she turned and peered into my face by the dim light shining through the windows of the deck house.

"I told him that I—why, of course, that I would fetch you."

"But you fetched the Greek first."

"Yes, I—I did," I stammered. "She was not so far away, and of course he was so anxious." It was a lame enough reason, but it satisfied her.

"But you have not yet told me why you packed me away to that lonely house?"

"It seemed such a safe place; and really no one could say what was going to happen in Stambul or in Pera, when a plot like that against the Sultan reached its head. There might have been a revolution. Indeed, as it was, it nearly broke out."

"But you had already sent me to The Home because of that very thing."

"Yes, but this other place was so much more remote, and so much safer, therefore. No one could have looked for you there."

"There was the American Embassy—or any of the Embassies for that matter."

"Yes, of course there were; but I—I, well as a matter of fact, I didn't think of them."

"And why did you send that extraordinary story about your having been wounded and wanting me, and why a letter written by Mademoiselle Patras of all people?"

I wished devoutly that she would drop her cross-examination.

"I thought you would know then it came from the White House."

"But you could have sent Stuart?"

"Yes, I could have sent him," I answered, stumbling and blundering worse than ever. "But he wasn't with me. You see, when a man's ill he does odd things."

"But you say you were not ill? What *do* you mean?" The light was very dim, and I could scarcely see her features; but I thought she was smiling.

"Why, I mean, of course, that I had to act as I suppose I should have acted if I had been ill."

"Are you still half-asleep?" It was very strange,

but instead of the indignation I had anticipated, her manner was now half-bantering.

"No, I feel all right now. I only wanted a nap to set me right. I get tired so easily, I think."

"When did you take the Greek to The Home?" she asked next, in a more serious tone, as if a fresh link of questions had occurred to her.

"I am glad to say in the early hours of the morning."

"And did not come for me until to-night?"

"I'm afraid it does look odd; but I really didn't lose any more time than I could help. There were such heaps of things to do at the White House, and—and other places."

"Things which his Excellency, the Pasha, had to attend to, I suppose, before his Excellency could spare time to think of me."

"I'm afraid I must leave it at that," I admitted; for I had no answer unless I told her the truth.

"Do you think I ought to be pleased or angry at that?"

"I suppose you ought to be angry. I see it now," I replied, as though perceiving and regretting an error. And the pause that followed was a very uncomfortable one for me. She broke the silence abruptly with a very disquieting question.

"Where is that Count Stephani?"

"Stephani? Why, what on earth made you think of him?"

"No matter; I have thought of him. Where is he?"

"He's—he's at The Home."

"At The Home?" Then with a note of great surprise. "Why, how came he there?"

"I took him there."

"You? You took Stephani?" she repeated, unable to believe me. "When?"

I bit my lip in confusion.

"I don't think we need talk about him, need we?"

"When did you take him there?"

"I really don't think you need bother about him, or his movements."

"When did you take him there?" she repeated, insistently.

"Late this afternoon, or rather early this evening. I think, if you don't mind, I'd rather talk about these things another time. I find I am growing sleepy again. I think I'm getting confused." She laughed; but whether in anger or raillery I could not tell. It was a very gentle laugh.

"But I wish to talk about them," she persisted. "You are making your actions seem so strange and inconsistent. How did you meet him, and where, and when?"

"He was in one of these prisons here."

"Do I understand you rightly? You say Cyrus was asking for me at the same time he asked for Mademoiselle Patras; you fetched her, as you say, at once; and then, instead of coming, or even sending for me, you went off first to find a man like Stephani, and took him across to The Home, leaving me in that house all the time? Can you really have done this?"

"I'm afraid it looks like it, doesn't it?" I said, feebly.

"But what was your motive?" The question came sharply, and yet with an indescribable suggestion of her former banter.

"Well, in a sort of way I couldn't help myself." I felt the utter inanity of such a reply.

"Do you think to convince me with such a reason as that? I begin to think that I understand your motive," she cried. She was indignant now; and I had made such a mess of my explanation, that I could not be surprised. "But is that all you can plead in excuse. You surely can understand what I should think of neglect of that kind."

"I think you're beginning to make that plain enough," said I, feeling very miserable.

"It would be worse than contemptible in its brutality," she declared, with very energetic warmth.

"I'm very sorry you take it so. I can see it looks black, but it really isn't so black as it looks, if I could only make you understand;" and I shook my head dismally and sighed. It was a bit rough to be so misunderstood; and I sat waiting for her indignation to burst out against me with such resignation as I could muster.

But it did not come. She did not make any reply for a while, except that she laughed again, gently and sweetly; and as I looked up in genuine surprise, she asked in a low tone full of meaning:

"And what if I do understand? What if I know you to have been guilty of all this awful conduct, and what is worse, that you have crowned it with a round-about, rambling, inconsistent story intended to deceive me grossly?"

"I'm sorry you think I would——"

"Please, please," she broke in, putting out a hand as if to stop me. "Now answer me one thing honestly. Do you think I would believe you, even on

your own confession, to be capable of treating me so?"

"I don't see——"

"Answer, please; yes or no?" Was ever a more awkward question put to plague a man by the woman he loved? What could I say? And when I hesitated, she laughed again, softly and musically, as if in sheer enjoyment of the quandary in which she had placed me. "It is an awkward question to answer, I know that. If you say yes, you condemn your opinion of me; if you say no, you condemn your own attempt to deceive me? But you must answer."

"There are some things I can't explain," I said, lamely. But she would not let me off.

"Yes or no, please? Which is it?"

"I hope you would find it difficult," I mumbled.

"Is that yes or no?"

"I suppose it's no," said I. "And yet——"

"And yet you tried to make me." Unmistakably there was reproach in her tone now; but reproach very different in its origin; and my heart leapt with sudden hope. Then came banter again: "I suppose you acknowledge I received the confession of your baseness with great equanimity, and merely questioned you instead of being bitterly angry. Doesn't it occur to you I might have had a good reason?"

"What reason?"

"When we came on the launch, I questioned Stuart. It was an easy guess then that you wished me not to know the danger in which I had been, and from which you saved me. They lured me to that house in the hills to see you, and kept me there with the tale that

you were coming; and I am so ashamed that when you came, after having done what I know you had to do, I received you as I did. You will forgive me?"

"There is nothing to forgive. You couldn't know," I answered.

"And I never gave you even a look or syllable of thanks!"

"There was no need for anything of that sort. When I knew you were *all* right, it was enough for me. It was *all* very easy that I did, although it took time. That was all."

Yet it was not quite all. We sat in a somewhat embarrassed silence until with a sudden impulse, I took my courage in both hands.

"I had a very strong incentive;" and as suddenly I stopped, my voice seeming to be choked in my throat.

She turned quickly, and as quickly looked away; perhaps my voice betrayed me.

"Incentive?" she questioned, in quite a low uncertain tone.

"My love, Enid. I—I have always loved you." Then in the dark our hands found each other, and she let her's stay in mine. She was trembling, and as I drew nearer to her, she sighed, and seemed quite glad to rest against me.

Then I knew. And as I pressed my lips to her hand life was suddenly radiant, the Bosphorus transfigured, and the darkness glorious light; for the magic of ecstasy had cast its witchery over me, and I had crossed the frontiers of the land of Love's Delight.

CHAPTER XXX

PASHA NO LONGER

WHEN we reached The Home our first question was, of course, for news of Crant, and we were relieved to hear that no change for the worse had taken place in his condition. Dr. Arbuthnot would not allow himself to hope for any recovery; but his patient was in no great pain, he said, had taken nourishment during the day, and had slept well. The arrival of Haidée had greatly eased his mind; but he had asked once or twice when Enid was expected. On the whole, however, the day had passed without any set back; and we agreed that Enid should get ready to go to him the moment he woke.

Many things had occurred during my absence. I found the house full of Ottoman officials, and an urgent request was awaiting me that I should go to His Majesty as soon as I arrived. This was a physical impossibility, however. I was utterly done up, and could hold out no longer even at the command of a dozen Sultans; and, as soon as I had had some food, I took the very prosaic but rational step of going to bed.

The sun was up some hours before I awoke, and I found that, at Enid's thoughtful instigation, Dr. Arbuthnot had given strict orders that I was not to be disturbed. The sleep restored me, and after breakfast—over which Enid and I had a long and delight-

fully confidential chat—I felt equal to the task of confessing my offences of the previous day to the Sultan himself.

He received me graciously, but with some reserve. He accepted my apology for not having seen him on my return, listened with patient courtesy to what I told him, and expressed himself pained and shocked beyond words at my description of the scenes at the prison.

"You exceeded your commands," he said, in a tone of quiet, dignified reproof; adding, after a pause, and with a gracious smile: "But under similar circumstances I might have done as you did. I will, at any rate, confirm your acts, and will myself see that those responsible for the misdeeds are punished."

"Your Majesty will do better to see that such abuses are put down with a strong hand," I said, audaciously. "These things are a disgrace to your Majesty's Government."

"You speak frankly."

"I say no more than any honest man would say who had seen what I saw yesterday, your Majesty."

"But you did not see with Ottoman eyes, nor perhaps do you understand the conditions and exigencies of Ottoman rule. The East and the West are widely divided."

"In neither West nor East need a prison be a hell, your Majesty. Torture, disease, filth, and suffering, appalling beyond conception and belief, need be no more the predominant features in an Eastern gaol than in a Western."

He paused a moment, and I thought he was going to rebuke me; but with a slight lifting of the hand, he

said: "Still, the East is the East, and these men are the vilest of the vile."

"That is true—of the gaolers, your Majesty," said I, not without indignation at this implied defence of the scandal. "Many of these poor tortured wretches are no worse than petty thieves; and, even in the East, it should be an anomaly that the man who steals a single piastre should be done to death with horrors, and he who robs a whole province should be honoured and titled."

"Again I say you speak very frankly. If it were ever your lot to rule an empire, you would know more of the limits of power. We can but rule with the means at command." He spoke reflectively, and I thought sadly.

"If I speak frankly, it is only by your Majesty's permission. I do but speak the thoughts in me. That country is surely in a desperate plight where the truth may not be told and the facts must be softened lest they offend the ear of authority."

"That is right, no doubt, but you do not understand. I do not always know the truth; yet I seek it zealously by many agents."

"Whose corrupt lips are moulded to utter only the things palatable to your Majesty's ears."

"Now you speak too boldly."

"Your Majesty has but to express a wish and I can be silent; but in the West we have found less harm is done by freedom of thought and liberty of speech, even when liberty becomes licence, than by the dumb acquiescence in injustice. We cannot ward off ruin by closing the lips of those who would tell us of its causes."

"The future lies in the lap of Allah, the Most High." How insufferably sickening that cant of the East sounded to me after what I had witnessed!

"Most true; but in the West we have a saying that God helps those who help themselves, your Majesty; and it is true of nations as of men."

"If true of either," he retorted; and then said quickly: "And have I not striven? Who has done more than I to educate my people? Who more to develop the country by encouraging the spread of communication by railways? What nation in Europe or in the world is more tolerant towards the faiths of Europe than this? Where do more varying faiths find a safer sanctuary than in my capital? Jews, Armenians, Greeks, Catholics—are not all these allowed to worship freely without interference? What do we ask or require of any of them save that they shall leave the sons of Islam alone? And it is even so in the matters of political government. We do but ask to go our way alone and to work out our own destiny."

"I know and have admired your Majesty's efforts in these directions. But they are not all. I am no Ottoman, as your Majesty knows, but I have travelled far and wide in your empire, and have lived years in your country, and I have seen for myself things as they are, and as you do not and cannot know them to be. If I say no more, it is for fear of offending your Majesty's ears."

"You may speak if you wish," he said; not, however, without a pause of hesitation.

"Your Majesty is surrounded by men whose life-work it is to keep from you the truth. With what result? Your Empire is one of the richest in natural

resources and possibilities on the face of the earth—and they lie undeveloped and neglected, to the bewilderment of the world and the ruin of your Government. Your Majesty's Official Government is a by-word even among your own subjects for incompetence and corruption. Your exchequer, whose coffers should be filled to overflowing in a land so rich, is trembling on the very verge of bankruptcy. The administration of Justice is influenced and determined, not by the law of the Koran, but by the personal leanings and corruptness of your magistrates. Your commerce and industries are stunted and pining because your traders have no security for their possessions and barely any even for their personal safety. The Pashas of your provinces rule them only to drag from them the greatest amount of gain in the shortest space of time. Your traders and farmers and merchants in those provinces are afraid to prosper because prosperity only attracts the oppression of the Pashas, even as the magnet attracts the iron. Your Church, in its wide-spreading lands, possesses the potentiality of wealth beyond the dreams of an Armenian miser, and yet is so poor that it exists only by begging. You have the finest soldiers in the world, and your troops are kept ever on the edge of revolt through lack of pay. Your Navy, powerful in number of ships and on paper, is so enfeebled that your captains dare not venture their vessels on the sea. Your schools, of which in your capital your Majesty is justly proud, are in your provinces mere hovels in which a few handfuls of undisciplined pupils are taught little by incompetent teachers. Your outlying districts are peopled by men who one day are peasants and the

next brigands, according as chance and opportunity offer, until the perils of travellers are such that it is dangerous for a man to whisper to-day the direction which he intends to take on the morrow. Thousands upon thousands of acres of land which should hum with the busy sounds of peaceful industry, lie dead and unproductive under the killing frost of neglect. I speak only of the matters of common knowledge; but the men who know and would tell of them are muzzled by your press laws and silenced by the fear of that official tyranny which is the only thriving and unfettered industry in your Majesty's distracted dominions and the cardinal aim of which is ever to stifle the truth and the right. Shall the Empire thrive in such a case? Can it? Or is it not certain to be rushing upon ruin, riven by such wide upheavals as this foul conspiracy which has just been plotted against your Government and aimed even at your Majesty's throne."

Not once did the Sultan look up at me while I spoke, but sat grasping tightly the arms of his chair, frowning ominously, with lips pursed and face set hard; and in ominous silence he remained a space until his anger passed restraint.

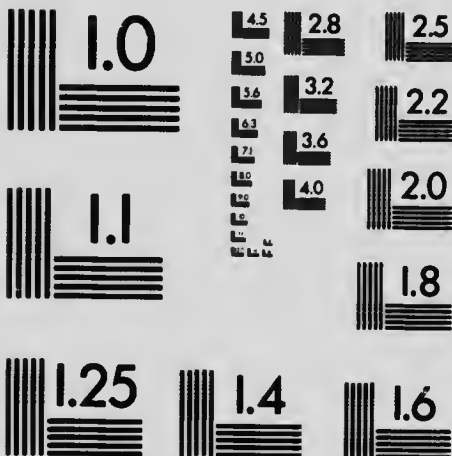
"It is impossible," he cried, hotly. "It is impossible. I have listened to you, but it is impossible. We are misunderstood. And now, it is enough. I will have no more."

He spoke in his sternest tone, and I could see I had given him deep offence by my plain words; but I cared nothing for his anger now, and stood waiting for him to dismiss me or to say why he had summoned me. He did not keep me long in suspense.



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"I have sent for you to say I am returning to Yildiz to-day, and should have asked you to accompany me but for what I have learned in your absence. Where is Abdullah Bey?"

"I do not know, your Majesty," I replied, surprised at the question.

"Was he not one of the villains with whom Mr. Grant found me that night?"

"My poor friend is dying, as the result of rescuing your Majesty, and is too ill to be questioned," I said, with a touch of Eastern evasion.

"I am not asking Mr. Grant, but you, Mr. Ormesby. You can answer if you will."

"By your Majesty's leave I prefer not to do so."

"But I do not give you leave. I require an answer. Is it not the case that he was brought here a prisoner and that you yourself took him away?"

"What I have done, I have done under your Majesty's own written authority," and I produced the paper that had been of such signal service to me.

"Give it to me." He took and tore it up with the impetuous passion of a child. "This was not granted for you to use it to shield the villains who with their own hands sought my life. You have proved unworthy of the trust I placed in you."

"As your Majesty pleases," I answered firmly. "But I would remind you it was granted that I might do anything and everything that was necessary to rescue the sister of the man who gave his life to save yours; and there was no other course save that which I took. But I am in your hands, and it is for you to remember or forget, as you will."

"I am not ungrateful to Mr. Grant for the service

he rendered me: far from it. You will convey my deep thanks to him, and I wish to be kept informed of the progress of his illness. It has distressed me painfully. But you have exceeded your powers and have aided the escape of as desperate a traitor as ever lived; and that I can neither forget nor forgive. I made you one of my Pashas, and that should at least have rendered my enemies yours."

"It is for your Majesty to confirm or cancel the honour you were pleased to confer upon me of your own will."

"I have cancelled it already, sir," he said angrily.

"Then that absolves me from any official and personal obligation to answer your Majesty's questions," I replied, quite as warmly, very glad of the opening.

"I repeat that, in all I did, I had no alternative."

"You did very ill, sir," he declared, sternly.

"Miss Grant's life was in danger."

"That was no reason for you to abet the escape of the dog who dared to lay hands on me. And I meant so well by you."

"I shall always have a lively recollection of Your Majesty's favour—and disfavour;" I returned. And with that I asked permission to retire and bowed myself out, disgusted at his implied readiness to have sacrificed Enid for the mere sake of personal revenge.

I went then to my dear friend's room and found him looking better than on the previous day. He welcomed me with one of his kindly fascinating smiles as I took his hand. Enid and the Greek were with him, one on either side of the bed.

"You are better, Cyrus," I said, cheerfully.

"I am happier, for we are all here now, and

all friends. I owe you much, Mervyn," he said, quietly.

"And can pay me in full as soon as you are up and about again."

"You are partly paid already, I hear;" and he looked towards Enid, who smiled in her turn. "I pray God you will be happy," he said, earnestly.

"It will be my fault if Enid is not," I answered. "And now we've only one thing to think about—to get you through this."

"I want to speak to Mervyn," he said quietly to the others, who left us alone at once.

"You mustn't worry about things, Cyrus."

"I'm not worrying, Mervyn. But you and I need not pretend. Haidée and Enid think I do not know that the end is near; and I don't wish to distress them. But you and I know." He spoke as quietly and firmly as ever in his strongest health.

"I don't think it's as bad as that by any means."

"Well, we'll hope not. I should like to live, of course. It is hard to leave Haidée—and all. Everything is so unfinished. But I'm going to die none the less." The tone was one of absolute conviction. The calm note of a brave man facing the inevitable.

"The doctor doesn't take that view."

"I think he does, Mervyn, for he knows. But, now, I have made no will, and I want to speak to you about that. I am anxious for Haidée's sake."

"There is no need to speak of this; but if you wish it, I will write you one now and you can sign it."

"Yes, I wish that. When I am gone you will wind things up here as best you can. Do just as you think best about everything. Somewhere in my papers you

will find all the particulars of my money and some notes of what I have always meant to do with some of it. Will you see that that is done?"

"Yes, certainly. You have my word on that."

"They will take the greater part of what I have; and as to the will, divide what is left equally among Haidée, Enid and yourself."

"I'd rather not——" I began.

"It is my wish, Mervyn;" he interposed, with the old dominant note.

"Shall I write it out here and now?"

"No. Write it somewhere else and let Haidée come to me. The air seems cold when she is away. She told me how you found her. Ah, my dear friend, what I owe you for that one thing!" And he pressed my hand again. "Let Haidée come alone now. Enid will be glad to be with you."

I was deeply moved and went at once in search of the Greek, whom I found pacing the corridor alone close to the door of the chamber, her face, eyes and gestures like those of one distraught with unbearable anguish.

"Will you go to him, Mademoiselle? He has asked for you."

"Holy Virgin, it is killing me, Mr. Ormesby," she exclaimed in a quick whispered tone, flinging her arms high, and then pressing her clenched hands to her face. Whether it was remorse for the part she had played in the catastrophe, or poignant regret at the loss of the man she loved, I could not say. But her agony of mind was unmistakable; and she clutched my arm suddenly and bent her hollow, staring eager eyes on me and asked, "Can *nothing* be done?"

"Nothing, I fear. The issue is in higher hands than ours. We can only play our parts and wait and hope."

"Hope!" she echoed, in a voice of utter despair and desolation. "There is no hope in my heart."

"Will you go to him? He is waiting for you," I reminded her, after a pause.

"If I could only give my life for his!" she murmured, leaving me.

"He would not value the life saved at that cost." She turned back quickly, her face radiant with a smile and her eyes dashed with the dew of tears.

"Almost the only kind thought of me you have ever uttered, Mr. Ormesby. You know what we are one to the other. Holy Mother of God, if he could only live!"

"You must not let him see your grief."

"Do I not know that? Have I not worn the mask all through and smiled—smiled, my God, when my heart was swelling in my bosom till I thought and hoped it would break and I could die first."

"He is waiting for you, Mademoiselle," I said again. She turned away and entered the room and I heard her speak to him in her low caressing gentle tone.

Enid was waiting for me below, and I told her what had passed between Grant and myself, and while setting out the papers to write the will at once, I described the scene with Haidée.

"She is suffering acutely," I said.

"What her agony of mind must be!" replied Enid, softly. "I pity her."

"You mean her knowledge that it is through her?"

"Indirectly through her; not directly. I know now

how wrong I was at first, and I am bitterly sorry I ever said what I did. Loving Cyrus as she did, I must have seemed horribly cruel. I know now how cruel. I ought to have known then."

She was standing by my chair and laid her hand on my shoulder as she spoke. I understood that "now", and I captured the hand and kissed it.

"Yes, that's why," she said, smiling down on me.

"Have you spoken to her since you came back?"

"Only once alone—to tell her I was sorry and to ask her to appear to be friends before Cyrus."

"And her answer?"

"That she would never forgive me. She is a creature of passion; as strong in her hate as in her love."

"She is a Greek."

"Would to Heaven she had never crossed Cyrus's path," exclaimed Enid, vehemently.

"In that case, Maraboukh would have found some other way; perhaps more cruel even than this. It is the Pasha we must blame."

"My poor Cyrus. I suppose there is no hope?"

"I wish to God I could think there was."

I began the writing of the will then, and had nearly finished it, when I was interrupted by a loud cry that rang through the house, startling us both.

"It is the Greek's voice," I said; and it rang out again and again as we rushed up the broad stairway to Grant's room.

CHAPTER XXXI

A GREAT MAN'S DEATH.

AS we reached the passage by the sick room door, I saw the Greek fall unconscious, and rushing past her, we entered to find Grant out of bed, clinging to the bedstead, and groaning as if the pains of hell were tearing and racking him. Dr. Arbuthnot, Mrs. Wellings and the nurse had just come to his help, and together we got him back to bed, where he lay writhing in agony.

"Quick, the morphia," said the doctor, urgently, and as soon as it had been administered, Grant drew a couple of long deep breaths and lay still.

"What does it mean, doctor?" I whispered.

"It is the end, Mr. Ormesby. Perforation has taken place."

"How long has he to live?"

"At most two or three hours."

I went out then and sent Stuart in hot haste to Pera for a clergyman. Meanwhile, Haidée had recovered. She had been overwrought and had fainted, and she told us now what had occurred. She had been alone with Grant and he had seemed as peaceful as ever, when, suddenly he gave a great cry and leaped out of bed, half delirious with agony, and she had rushed away to call for help.

We returned to the room all together and found him still more than half unconscious, in which condition

he remained for nearly two hours. Then with returning consciousness came the pain again and Dr. Arbuthnot was about to make a fresh injection of morphia, when Grant stopped him.

"I can bear it now," he whispered, calmly, although the perspiration was pouring from him and his features now and again twitched with his tortures. "Better the pain than unconsciousness, doctor." He murmured Haidée's name, and put out his hand to hold hers. "We will not part until we must," he said with a brave smile.

She stooped and kissed him, and then crouching by the bed, she laid her face close to his.

"Courage, Haidée, courage, my dear one," he murmured.

"I shall be within call, I can do nothing," whispered the doctor, signing to the nurse to leave the bedside.

Grant saw the sign, and withdrawing his hand from the Greek's held it to the nurse.

"You have been so good to me and so patient," he said. "And you, doctor; how can I thank you enough?"

I saw Enid choking back the tears at this as she fell on her knees by the bed, and I moved round to her and stood close to her side.

Grant put his hand back again into Haidée's and whispered fresh words of encouragement to her, and stretched out the other and laid it on Enid's head, his face all the time wearing a smile, broken only by the spasms of pain which even his powerful will could not wholly control.

In truly trying silence the time passed until they came to tell me that Stuart had returned from Pera.

As I re-entered the room Grant saw me and smiled.

"The end is close now, Mervyn," he said faintly, as I reached the bedside.

"It is God's will, Cyrus."

"Yes it is God's will," he answered, calmly.

"The chaplain from the Embassy is here. Will you see him?"

"You are always thoughtful, my friend. Let him come."

I brought in the chaplain then, and when the moving, beautiful prayers had been read and the last solemn rites for the living administered, my dear friend was perceptibly weaker. But he faced death with a calm, resigned composure infinitely beautiful to see.

When the chaplain had left, Grant whispered my name.

"Good bye, old friend. You will remember what I wished?"

"It is all written. Will you sign it?"

"I have no strength. Like so much else, it is unfinished. But you and Enid together will finish it. God give you happiness."

I held his hand a moment, felt the pressure of his fingers and caught his last glance, smiling, brave, trustful as ever.

"I am quite at peace, old friend."

The tears were in my eyes and I turned away to hide them.

He spoke next to Mrs. Wellings and then to Enid and kissed her, telling her he was glad we had come together, and he prayed for God's blessing on her;

and she was too overcome now to do more than sink back on her knees and bury her head as she prayed for him.

Then he turned again to Haidée, drew her face to him, and kissed her for the last time, still smiling and seeking to cheer her; and lay back with a deep, deep sigh as though his last effort had spent the remnant of his strength.

And so he passed: his last look for the Greek, his last smile for her, his last faint movement to press her hand.

I saw the change, and silently beckoned the doctor. He came instantly; and after a brief look or two and a vain touch for the heart's pulse, he drew the sheet over the face of the dead man.

I lifted Enid to her feet and led her from the room, signing to Dr. Arbuthnot to see to the Greek. She was all but unconscious; and when the doctor roused her, she started and stood a moment like one in a trance, staring down in white horror at the sheeted dead.

With a cry she threw herself upon the bier, tore away the white covering from the face, called to her lover by name, showering kisses on the broad pallid forehead and bloodless lips, and appealing to him in her distracted frenzy with a thousand terms of caressing passion to look and speak to her.

She would not believe him dead, and raved with the raving of insanity that we were trying still to take him from her.

Then with a fearsome suddenness the truth seemed to seize upon and convince her. She sprang to her feet, raised her arms on high; every muscle set and

each nerve at highest tension ; dashed her clenched fists against her head and then pressed them against her face now drawn, haggard, wild and dead-white with the strain of her vehemence. She stood thus for some seconds, her eyes wild-staring and fixed in horror on the dead face of her lover. Next a fearsome tremor seized and shook her until with a loud, long, shuddering scream of agony her strength appeared to give out and she fell headlong across the lifeless clay.

It was her death cry : for when they raised her it was only to find that life was extinct.

CHAPTER XXXII

THE END

SOME eighteen months after the death of my friend Grant, the curiosity of the passengers on a British steamer making for Constantinople was acutely aroused by the sight of one of the oddest looking vessels that ever put to sea. She was steaming slowly down the Bosphorus, flying the Ottoman flag, and was clearly a Turkish boat; but what extraordinary kind of cargo she could be carrying baffled us.

Almost the whole of the deck from stern to fore-castle had been boarded in; the bulwarks had been built high up; and as the whole superstructure was of rough unpainted timber, she resembled nothing so closely as a huge floating packing-case. Only a couple of men were to be seen on board; and not a sound came from her save that caused by the churning of the propellers. Almost a weird object.

"What an extraordinary boat, Mervyn," said Enid, as we stood together looking at her. "What can she be?"

"I should have guessed she was carrying a cargo of wild beasts, only there wasn't a sound of any sort on her as she passed, and we were quite close. Besides, they don't come to Turkey for wild beasts."

"Not four-footed, perhaps," answered Enid with a shrug. "I expect there's something horrible behind it. Let's ask the captain."

He came by us at the moment and she asked him.

"I don't know for certain, Mrs. Ormesby," he answered; "and I don't fancy I could guess. Turkish riddles of this sort aren't easy to guess as a rule. But it's pretty sure to be some Turkish devilment or other. Possibly a shipload of poor devils that the Sultan or the Pashas find in the way; Armenians likely, or Jews, or something of the sort, that they don't like to butcher openly and are sending instead to the living death at Yemen."

"Poor wretches," said Enid, pityingly.

"I tell you what it may be. Do you remember there was a fire at Yildiz Kiosk a year or so back?"

We did, and told him so, as we exchanged glances.

"Well, they've have some sort of inquiry going on about that. I heard of it a couple of voyages back. I shouldn't be surprised if yonder odd-looking craft has got the guilty ones aboard: as if it was any sort of a crime to plot against a Turkish Government," and with a shrug of contempt he went on.

"Do you think that can be it, Mervyn?" asked Enid.

"Anything can be it in Turkey. But we shall soon know," said I; and the captain proved to be right.

"See, Enid, there's The Home," I exclaimed a little later, pointing to the island which lay away to our right.

"Poor Cyrus," she murmured with a sigh, after gazing at it thoughtfully and sadly for a while. "You won't stay in this dreadful place an hour longer than necessary, will you? It makes me low-spirited as I think of that dreadful time. I almost wish I hadn't come—but then I couldn't stay away," she added, as she slipped her hand under my arm.

"Two days, or three at most, will fix up everything. There are only the formalities to complete."

These were, of course, the final arrangements in connexion with the old and abandoned scheme.

After her brother's death, nothing would keep Enid in Turkey a minute longer than was imperatively necessary ; and as she would not hear of my remaining without her, I had rushed through so much of the mass of work as I could settle, and had left the adjustment of details in the hands of my then secretary.

Despite his tone in our last interview, the Sultan had made overtures to me to remain and carry out the scheme under Turkish auspices, promising me the full weight of his assistance. But I had no heart for any such venture when Grant was gone. Moreover, I knew that unaided by his energy and brain, and impeded by Turkish lethargy, the thing was sure to be foredoomed to ignominious collapse and failure. Thus, I had declined, and within a week of my dear friend's death, we had left Turkey, my intention being to return and wind up the business affairs so soon as I had seen Enid and Mrs. Wellings safe in New York.

The intention was not carried out, however, Enid pleaded nerves. She had been so sorely tried that she declared she could not bear the thought of my return to Constantinople ; and although she showed no other symptom of nerve breakdown, I remained a very willing convert to her theory. She felt her brother's death intensely ; but youth is youth, and love is love ; and youth and love and time brought consolation, and blunted, as they do all the world over, the edge of our mutual grief. And then we had been married quietly.

Some months in England followed, until at length

the demand for my presence in Constantinople had grown too pressing to be resisted longer, and together we made the journey.

The sight of the old scenes re-opened in a measure the old wounds ; but there were compensations. It was there that Grant had lost his life ; but it was there also that we had found our love ; and the earth does not hold the lover who cannot find a sweet and soothing pleasure in renewing such associations.

I soon hurried my work through. I hunted up those who had helped us—old Ibrahim, the Jew, and his grand-daughter, the man who had helped me to escape from Maraboukh's house, even Stephani : his treachery long since forgiven in remembrance of his help in Enid's rescue : all I could find, in fact ; and left them substantial cause to remember us with gratitude.

When all was done, and even our trunks were packed for our departure, we left ourselves an hour or two for one sad task that remained—a visit to Grant's grave.

Although the edge of Enid's grief had been mercifully blunted by time, the wound of his loss was still fresh enough to bleed ; and she was deeply affected as we stood together by the side of the tomb in the lovely cyprus-shadowed corner of the cemetery.

The spot was marked by a monument, plain and massive, "standing four-square to the winds of heaven," and typical in its silent eloquence of the grandeur, strength, and self-reliance of the man whose death had meant so much to the country wherein it had been so treacherously compressed.

The early shadows of the fast closing day were already settling down upon Stambul ; the minarets

were beginning to grow dim in the twilight, the waters of the Bosphorus and the Golden Horn were rapidly darkening; and a depressing gloom was lowering over the land. "Islam sleeping away her strength." The words flashed into my thoughts, and with them the fatal and ever memorable night when Grant had spoken them; the night when the first coil of the treachery was cast round him to lure him with the gilded sweetness of love to his death.

His ambition had been to lighten with the golden shafts of liberty and prosperity the gloom of misrule and persecution for the toiling, long-suffering people; to lift the grinding heel of the oppressor; to restore something of the due balance between result and effort; and to sweeten the lot of those to whom life meant a round of fruitless toil, and rewardless, struggling, and crushing poverty. Surely a scheme worthy of as great a man as ever dreamed a dream of unattainable, and set out to give it practical reality.

He had failed; and had paid for failure with the forfeit of his life; and all that remained of both the work and the worker was the monument that covered his ashes and those of the woman who, all unconsciously, through the medium of their mutual but fatal love, had been used for his undoing.

A monument with the simple inscription:

Sacred to the memory of
Cyrus Dennison Grant,
A citizen of the United States,
who was treacherously murdered.

Also of
Haidée Patras,
A Greek.

