

Halil the Pedlar eBook

Halil the Pedlar by Mór Jókai

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INTRODUCTION.

On September 28th, 1730, a rebellion burst forth in Stambul against Sultan Achmed III., whose cowardly hesitation to take the field against the advancing hosts of the victorious Persians had revolted both the army and the people. The rebellion began in the camp of the Janissaries, and the ringleader was one Halil Patrona, a poor Albanian sailor-man, who after plying for a time the trade of a petty huckster had been compelled, by crime or accident, to seek a refuge among the mercenary soldiery of the Empire. The rebellion was unexpectedly, amazingly successful. The Sultan, after vainly sacrificing his chief councillors to the fury of the mob, was himself dethroned by Halil, and Mahmud I. appointed Sultan in his stead. For the next six weeks the ex-costermonger held the destiny of the Ottoman Empire in his hands till, on November 25th, he and his chief associates were treacherously assassinated in full Divan by the secret command, and actually in the presence of, the very monarch whom he had drawn from obscurity to set upon the throne.

This dramatic event is the historical basis of Jokai's famous story, "A Feher Rozsa," now translated into English for the first time. No doubt the genial Hungarian romancer has idealised the rough, outspoken, masterful rebel-chief, Halil Patrona, into a great patriot-statesman, a martyr for justice and honour; yet, on the other hand, he has certainly preserved the salient features of Halil's character and, so far as I am competent to verify his authorities, has not been untrue to history though, as I opine, depending too much on the now somewhat obsolete narrative of Hammer-Purgstall ("Geschichte des osmanischen Reichs"). Almost incredible as they seem to us sober Westerns, such incidents as the tame surrender of Achmed III., the elevation of the lowliest demagogues to the highest positions in the realm, and the curious and characteristically oriental episode of the tulip-pots, are absolute facts. Naturally Jokai's splendid fancy has gorgeously embellished the plain narrative of the Turkish chroniclers. Such a subject as Halil's strange career must irresistibly have appealed to an author who is nothing if not vivid and romantic, and ever delights in startling contrasts. On the other hand, the unique episode of Guel-Bejaze, "The White Rose," and her terrible experiences in the Seraglio are largely, if not entirely, of Jokai's own invention, and worthy, as told by him, of a place in *The Thousand and One Nights*.

Finally—a bibliographical note.

Originally "A Feher Rozsa," under the title of "Halil Patrona," formed the first part of "A Janicsarok vegnapjai," a novel first published at Pest in three volumes in 1854. The two tales are, however, quite distinct, and have, since then, as a matter of fact, frequently been published separately. The second part of "A Janicsarok vegnapjai" was translated by me from the Hungarian original, some years ago, under the title of "The Lion of Janina," and published by Messrs. Jarrold and Sons as one of their "Jokai" Series in 1898. The striking favour with which that story was then received justifies my hope that

its counterpart, which I have re-named “Halil the Pedlar,” from its chief character, may be equally fortunate.

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R. Nisbet Bain.

September, 1901.

HALIL THE PEDLAR.

CHAPTER I.

The pedlar.

Time out of mind, for hundreds and hundreds of years, the struggle between the Shiites and the Sunnites has divided the Moslem World.

Persia and India are the lands of the Shiites; Turkey, Arabia, Egypt, and the realm of Barbary follow the tenets of the Sunna.

Much blood, much money, many anathemas, and many apostasies have marked the progress of this quarrel, and still it has not even yet been made quite clear whether the Shiites or the Sunnites are the true believers. The question to be decided is this: which of the four successors of the Prophet, Ali, Abu Bekr, Osmar, and Osman, was the true Caliph. The Shiites maintain that Ali alone was the true Caliph. The Sunnites, on the other hand, affirm that all four were true Caliphs and equally holy. And certainly the Shiites must be great blockheads to allow themselves to be cut into mince-meat by thousands, rather than admit that God would enrich the calendar with three saints distasteful to them personally.

The head Mufti had already hurled three fetvas at the head of Shah Mahmud, and just as many armies of valiant Sunnites had invaded the territories of the Shiites. The redoubtable Grand Vizier, Damad Ibrahim, had already wrested from them Tauris, Erivan, Kermendzasahan, and Hamadan, and the good folks of Stambul could talk of nothing else but these victories—victories which they had extra good reason to remember, inasmuch as the Janissaries, at every fresh announcement of these triumphs, all the more vigorously exercised their martial prowess on the peaceful inhabitants they were supposed to protect, and not only upon them, but likewise upon the still more peaceful Sultan who, it must be admitted, troubled himself very little either about the Sunnites, or the victories of his Grand Vizier, being quite content with the contemplation of his perpetually blooming tulips and of the damsels of the Seraglio, who were even fairer to view than the tulips whose blooms they themselves far outshone.

* * * * *

The last rays of sunset were about to depart from the minarets of Stambul. The imposing shape of the City of the Seven Hills loomed forth like a majestic picture in the

evening light. Below, all aflame from the reflection of the burning sky, lies the Bosphorus, wherein the Seraglio and the suburbs of Pera and Galata, with their tiers upon tiers of houses and variegated fairy palaces, mirror themselves tranquilly. The long, winding, narrow streets climb from one hill to another, and every single hill is as green as if mother Nature had claimed her due portion of each from the inhabitants, so different from our western cities, all paved and swept clean, and nothing but hard stone

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from end to end. Here, on the contrary, nothing but green meets the eye. The bastions are planted with vines and olive-trees, pomegranate and cypress trees stand before the houses of the rich. The poorer folks who have no gardens plant flowers on their house-tops, or at any rate grow vines round their windows which in time run up the whole house, and from out of the midst of this perennial verdure arise the shining cupolas of eighty mosques. At the end of every thoroughfare, overgrown with luxuriant grass and thick-foliaged cypresses, only the turbaned tombstones show that here is the place of sad repose. And the effect of the picture is heightened by the mighty cupola of the all-dominating Aja Sofia mosque, which looks right over all these palaces into the golden mirror of the Bosphorus. Soon this golden mirror changes into a mirror of bronze, the sun disappears, and the tranquil oval of the sea borrows a metallic shimmer from the dark-blue sky. The kiosks fade into darkness; the vast outlines of the Rumili Hisar and the Anatoli Hisar stand out against the starry heaven; and excepting the lamps lit here and there in the khans of the foreign merchants and a few minarets, the whole of the gigantic city is wrapped in gloom.

The muezzin intone the evening *noomat* from the slender turrets of the mosques; everyone hastens to get home before night has completely set in; the mule-drivers urge on their beasts laden on both sides with leather bottles, and their tinkling bells resound in the narrow streets; the shouting water-carriers and porters, whose long shoulder-poles block up the whole street, scare out of their way all whom they meet; whole troops of dogs come forth from the cemeteries to fight over the offal of the piazzas. Every true believer endeavours as soon as possible to get well behind bolts and bars, and would regard it as a sheer tempting of Providence to quit his threshold under any pretext whatsoever before the morning invocation of the muezzin. He especially who at such a time should venture to cross the piazza of the Etmeidan would have been judged very temerarious or very ill-informed, inasmuch as three of the gates of the barracks of the Janissaries open upon this piazza; and the Janissaries, even when they are in a good humour, are not over particular as to the sort of jokes they choose to play, for their own private amusement, upon those who may chance to fall into their hands. Every faithful Mussulman, therefore, guards his footsteps from any intrusion into the Etmeidan, as being in duty bound to know and observe that text of the Koran which says, "A fool is he who plunges into peril that he might avoid."

The tattoo had already been beaten with wooden sticks on a wooden board, when two men encountered each other in one of the streets leading into the Etmeidan.

One of them was a stranger, dressed in a Wallachian *gunya*, long shoes, and with a broad reticule dangling at his side. He looked forty years old and, so far as it was possible to distinguish his figure and features in the twilight, seemed to be a strong, well-built man, with a tolerably plump face, on which at that moment no small traces of

fear could be detected and something of that uncomfortable hesitation which is apt to overtake a man in a large foreign city which he visits for the very first time.

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The other was an honest Mussulman about thirty years old, with a thick, coal-black beard and passionate, irritable features, whose true character was very fairly reflected in his pair of flashing black eyes. His turban was drawn deep down over his temples, obliterating his eyebrows completely, which made him look more truculent than ever.

The stranger seemed to be going towards the Etmeidan, the other man to be coming from it. The former let the latter pass, by squeezing himself against the wall, and only ventured to address him when he perceived that he had no evil intentions towards him.

"I prythee, pitiful Mussulman, be not wrath with me, but tell me where the Etmeidan piazza is."

The person so accosted instantly stopped short, and fixing the interrogator with a stony look, replied angrily:

"Go straight on and you'll be there immediately."

At these words the knees of the questioner smote together.

"Woe is me! worthy Mussulman, I prythee be not wrath, I did not ask thee where the Etmeidan was because I wanted to go there, but to avoid straying into it. I am a stranger in this city, and in my terror I have been drawing near to the very place I want to avoid. I prythee leave me not here all by myself. Every house is fast closed. Not one of the khans will let me in at this hour. Take me home with you, I will not be a burden upon you, I can sleep in your courtyard, or in your cellar, if only I may escape stopping in the streets all night, for I am greatly afraid."

The Turk so addressed was carrying in one hand a knapsack woven out of rushes. This he now opened and cast a glance into it, as if he were taking counsel with himself whether the fish and onions he had just bought in the market-place for his supper would be sufficient for two people. Finally he nodded his head as if he had made up his mind at last.

"Very well, come along!" said he, "and follow me!"

The stranger would have kissed his hand, he could not thank his new friend sufficiently.

"You had better wait to see what you are going to get before you thank me," said the Turk; "you will find but scanty cheer with me, for I am only a poor man."

"Oh, as for that, I also am poor, very poor indeed," the new-comer hastened to reply with the crafty obsequiousness peculiar to the Greek race. "My name is Janaki, and I am a butcher at Jassy. The kavasses have laid their hands upon my apprentice and all my live-stock at the same time, and that is why I have come to Stambul. I shall be utterly beggared if I don't get them back."

“Well, Allah aid thee. Let us make haste, for it is already dark.”

And then, going on in front to show the way, he led the stranger through the narrow winding labyrinth of baffling lanes and alleys which lead to the Hebdomon Palace, formerly the splendid residence of the Greek Emperors, but now the quarter where the poorest and most sordid classes of the populace herd together. The streets here are so narrow that the tendrils of the vines and gourds growing on the roofs of the opposite houses meet together, and form a natural baldachino for the benefit of the foot-passenger below.

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Suddenly, on reaching the entrance of a peculiarly long and narrow lane, the loud-sounding note of a song, bawled by someone coming straight towards them, struck upon their ears. It was some drunken man evidently, but whoever the individual might be, he was certainly the possessor of a tremendous pair of lungs, for he could roar like a buffalo, and not content with roaring, he kept thundering at the doors of all the houses he passed with his fists.

“Alas! worthy Mussulman, I suppose this is some good-humoured Janissary, eh?” stammered the new-comer with a terrified voice.

“Not a doubt of it. A peace-loving man would not think of making such a bellowing as that.”

“Would it not be as well to turn back?”

“We might meet a pair of them if we went another way. Take this lesson from me: Never turn back from the path you have once taken, as otherwise you will only plunge into still greater misfortunes.”

Meanwhile they were drawing nearer and nearer to the bellowing gentleman, and before long his figure came full into view.

And certainly his figure was in every respect worthy of his voice. He was an enormous, six-foot high, herculean fellow, with his shirt-sleeves rolled up to his shoulders, and the disorderly appearance of his dolman and the crooked cock of his turban more than justified the suspicion that he had already taken far more than was good for him of that fluid which the Prophet has forbidden to all true believers.

“Gel, gel! Ne miktar dir, gel!” (“Come along the whole lot of you!”) roared the Janissary with all his might, staggering from one side of the lane to the other, and flourishing his naked rapier in the air.

“Woe is me, my brave Mussulman!” faltered the Wallachian butcher in a terrified whisper, “wouldn’t it be as well if you were to take my stick, for he might observe that I had it, and fancy I want to fight him with it.”

The Turk took over the stick of the butcher as the latter seemed to be frightened of it.

“H’m! this stick of yours is not a bad one. I see that the head of it is well-studded with knobs, and that it is weighted with lead besides. What a pity you don’t know how to make use of it!”

“I am only too glad if people will let me live in peace.”

“Very well, hide behind me, and come along boldly, and when you pass him don’t so much as look at him.”

The Wallachian desired nothing better, but the Janissary had already caught sight of him from afar, and as, clinging fast to his guide’s mantle, he was about to slip past the man of war, the Janissary suddenly barred the way, seized him by the collar with his horrible fist, and dragged the wretched creature towards him.

“Khair evetlesszin domusz!” (“Not so fast, thou swine!”) “a word in thine ear! I have just bought me a yataghan. Stretch forth thy neck! I would test my weapon upon thee and see whether it is sharp.”

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The poor fellow was already half-dead with terror. With the utmost obsequiousness he at once began unfastening his neck-cloth, whimpering at the same time something about his four little children: what would become of them when they had nobody to care for them.

But his conductor intervened defiantly.

"Take yourself off, you drunken lout, you! How dare you lay a hand upon my guest. Know you not that he who harms the guest of a true believer is accursed?"

"Na, na, na!" laughed the Janissary mockingly, "are you mad, my worthy Balukji, that you bandy words with the flowers of the Prophet's garden, with Begtash's sons, the valiant Janissaries? Get out of my way while you are still able to go away whole, for if you remain here much longer, I'll teach you to be a little more obedient."

"Let my guest go in peace, I say, and then go thine own way also!"

"Why, what ails you, worthy Mussulman? Has anyone offended thee? Mashallah! what business is it of thine if I choose to strike off the head of a dog? You can pick up ten more like him in the street any time you like."

The Turk, perceiving that it would be difficult to convince a drunken man by mere words, drew nearer to him, and grasped the hand that held the yataghan.

"What do you want?" cried the Janissary, fairly infuriated at this act of temerity.

"Come! Go thy way!"

"Do you know whose hand thou art grasping? My name is Halil."

"Mine also is Halil."

"Mine is Halil Pelivan—Halil the Wrestler!"

"Mine is Halil Patrona."

By this time the Janissary was beside himself with rage at so much opposition.

"Thou worm! thou crossed-leg, crouching huckster, thou pack-thread pedlar! if thou dost not let me go immediately, I will cut off thy hands, thy feet, thine ears, and thy nose, and then hang thee up."

"And if thou leave not go of my guest, I will fell thee to the earth with this stick of mine."

“What, *thou* wilt fell *me*? Me? A fellow like thou threaten to strike Halil Pelivan with a stick? Strike away then, thou dog, thou dishonourable brute-beast, thou dregs of a Mussulman! strike away then, strike here, if thou have the courage!”

And with that he pointed at his own head, which he flung back defiantly as if daring his opponent to strike at it.

But Halil Patrona’s courage was quite equal even to such an invitation as that, and he brought down the leaded stick in his hand so heavily on the Janissary’s head that the fellow’s face was soon streaming with blood.

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Pelivan roared aloud at the blow, and, shaking his bloody forehead, rushed upon Patrona like a wounded bear, and disregarding a couple of fresh blows on the arms and shoulders which had the effect, however, of making him drop his yataghan, he grasped his adversary with his gigantic hands, lifted him up, and then hugged him with the embrace of a boa-constrictor. But now it appeared that Patrona also was by no means a novice in the art of self-defence, for clutching with both hands the giant's throat, he squeezed it so tightly that in a few seconds the Janissary began to stagger to and fro, finally falling backwards to the ground, whereupon Patrona knelt upon his breast and plucked from his beard a sufficient number of hairs to serve him as a souvenir. Pelivan, overpowered by drink and the concussion of his fall, slumbered off where he lay, while Patrona with his guest, who was already half-dead with fright, hastened to reach his dwelling.

After traversing a labyrinth of narrow, meandering lanes, and zig-zagging backwards and forwards through all kinds of gardens and rookeries, Halil Patrona arrived at last at his own house.

Were we to speak of "his own street door," we should be betraying a gross ignorance of locality, for in the place where Patrona lived the mere idea of a street never presented itself to anybody's imagination. There was indeed no such thing there. The spot was covered by half a thousand or so of wooden houses, mixed together, higgledy-piggledy, so inextricably, that the shortest way to everybody's house was through his neighbour's passage, hall, or courtyard, and inasmuch as the inmates of whole rows of these houses were in the habit of living together in the closest and most mysterious harmony, every house was so arranged that the inhabitants thereof could slip into the neighbouring dwelling at a moment's notice. In some cases, for instance, the roofs were continuous; in others the cellars communicated, so that if ever anyone of the inhabitants were suddenly pursued, he could, with the assistance of the roofs, passages, and cellars, vanish without leaving a trace behind him.

Halil Patrona's house was of wood like the rest. It consisted of a single room, yet this was a room which could be made to hold a good deal. It had a fire-place also, and if perhaps a chance guest were a little fastidious, he could at any rate always make sure of a good bed on the roof, which was embowered in vine leaves. There was certainly no extravagant display of furniture inside. A rush-mat in the middle of the room, a bench covered with a carpet in the corner, a few wooden plates and dishes, a jug on a wooden shelf, and a couple of very simple cooking-utensils in the fire-place—that was all. From the roof of the chamber hung an earthenware lamp, which Patrona kindled with an old-fashioned flint and steel. Then he brought water in a round-bellied trough for his guest to wash his hands, fetched drinking-water from the well in a long jug, whereupon he drew forward his rush-woven market-basket, emptied its contents on to the rush-mat, sat him down opposite honest Janaki, and forthwith invited his guest to fall to.

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There was nothing indeed but a few small fish and a few beautiful rosy-red onions, but Halil had so much to say in praise of the repast, telling his guest where and how these fish were caught, and in what manner they ought to be fried so as to bring out the taste; how you could find out which of them had hard roes and which soft; what different sorts of flavours there are in the onion tribe, far more, indeed, than in the pine-apple; and then the pure fresh water too—why the Koran from end to end is full of the praises of fresh pure water, and Halil knew all these passages by heart, and had no need to look in the holy book for them. And then, too, he had so many interesting tales to tell of travellers who had lost their way in the desert and were dying for a drop of water, and how Allah had had compassion upon them and guided them to the springs of the oasis—so that the guest was actually entrapped into imagining that he had just been partaking of the most magnificent banquet, and he enjoyed his meat and drink, and arose from his rush-carpet well satisfied with himself and with his host.

I'll wager that Sultan Achmed, poor fellow! felt far less contented when he rose from his gorgeous and luxurious sofa, though the tables beside it were piled high with fruits and sweetmeats, and two hundred odalisks danced and sang around it.

“And now let us go to sleep!” said Halil Patrona to his guest. “I know that slumber is the greatest of all the joys which Allah has bestowed upon mankind. In our waking hours we belong to others, but the land of dreams is all our own. If your dreams be good dreams, you rejoice that they are good, and if they be evil dreams, you rejoice that they are but dreams. The night is nice and warm, you can sleep on the house-top, and if you pull your rope-ladder up after you, you need not fear that anybody will molest you.”

Janaki said “thank you!” to everything, and very readily clambered to the top of the roof. There he found already prepared for him the carpet and the fur cushion on which he was to sleep. Plainly these were the only cushion and carpet obtainable in the house, and the guest observing that these were the very things he had noticed in the room below, exclaimed to Halil Patrona:

“Oh, humane Chorbashi, you have given me your own carpet and pillow; on what will you sleep, pray?”

“Do not trouble your head about me, muzafir! I will bring forth my second carpet and my second cushion and sleep on them.”

Janaki peeped through a chink in the roof, and observed how vigorously Halil Patrona performed his ablutions, and how next he went through his devotions with even greater conscientiousness than his ablutions, whereupon he produced a round trough, turned it upside down, laid it upon the rush-mat, placed his head upon the trough, and folding his arms across his breast, peacefully went to sleep in the Prophet.

The next morning, when Janaki awoke and descended to Halil, he gave him a piece of money which they call a golden denarius.

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“Take this piece of money, worthy Chorbadschi,” said he, “and if you will permit me to remain beneath your roof this day also, prepare therewith a mid-day meal for us both.”

Halil hastened with the money to the piazza, bargained and chaffered for all sorts of eatables, and made it a matter of conscience to keep only a single copper asper of the money entrusted to him. Then he prepared for his guest pilaf, the celebrated Turkish dish consisting of rice cooked with sheep’s flesh, and brought him from the booths of the master-cooks and master-sugar-bakers, honey-cakes, dulchas, pistachios, sweet pepper-cakes filled with nuts and stewed in honey, and all manner of other delicacies, at the sight and smell of which Janaki began to shout that Sultan Achmed could not be better off. Halil, however, requested him not to mention the name of the Sultan quite so frequently and not to bellow so loudly.

That night, also, he made his guest mount to the top of the roof, and having noticed during the preceding night that the Greek had been perpetually shifting his position, and consequently suspecting that he was little used to so hard a couch, Halil took the precaution of stripping off his own kaftan beforehand and placing it beneath the carpet he had already surrendered to his guest.

Early next morning Janaki gave another golden denarius to Halil.

“Fetch me writing materials!” said he, “for I want to write a letter to someone, and then with God’s help I will quit your house and pursue my way further.”

Halil departed, went a-bargaining in the bazaar, and returned with what he had been sent for. He calculated his outlay to a penny in the presence of his guest. The *kalem* (pen) was so much, so much again the *muerekob* (ink), and the *muehuer* (seal) came to this and that. The balance he returned to Janaki.

As for Janaki he went up on to the roof again, there wrote and sealed his letter, and thrust it beneath the carpet, and then laying hold of his stick again, entreated Halil, with many thanks for his hospitality, to direct him to the Pera road whence, he said, he could find his way along by himself.

Halil willingly complied with the petition of his guest, and accompanied him all the way to the nearest thoroughfare. When now Janaki beheld the Bosphorus, and perceived that the road from this point was familiar to him, so that he needed no further assistance, he suddenly exclaimed:

“Look now, my friend! an idea has occurred to me. The letter I have just written on your roof has escaped my memory entirely. I placed it beneath the carpet, and beside it lies a purse of money which I meant to have sent along with the letter. Now, however, I cannot turn back for it. I pray you, therefore, go back to your house, take this letter

together with the purse, and hand them both over to the person to whom they are addressed—and God bless you for it!”

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Halil at once turned round to obey this fresh request as quickly as possible.

“Give also the money to him to whom it belongs!” said the Greek.

“You may be as certain that it will reach him as if you gave it to him yourself.”

“And promise me that you will compel him to whom the letter is addressed to accept the money.”

“I will not leave his house till he has given me a voucher in writing for it, and whenever you come back again to me here you will find it in my possession.”

“God be with you then, honest Mussulman!”

“Salem alek!”

Halil straightway ran home, clambered up to the roof by means of the rope-ladder, found both the letter and the money under the carpet, rejoiced greatly that they had not been stolen during his absence, and thrusting them both into his satchel of reeds without even taking the trouble to look at them, hastened off to the bazaar with them, where there was an acquaintance of his, a certain money-changer, who knew all about every man in Stambul, in order that he might find out from him where dwelt the man to whom the letter entrusted to him by the stranger was addressed.

Accordingly he handed the letter to the money-changer in order that he might give him full directions without so much as casting an eye upon the address himself.

The money-changer examined the address of the letter, and forthwith was filled with amazement.

“Halil Patrona!” cried he, “have you been taking part in the Carnival of the Giaours that you have allowed yourself to be so befooled? Or can’t you read?”

“Read! of course I can. But I don’t fancy I can know the man to whom this letter is directed.”

“Well, all I can say is that you knew him very well indeed this time yesterday, for the man is yourself—none other.”

Halil, full of astonishment, took the letter, which hitherto he had not regarded—sure enough it was addressed to himself.

“Then he who gave me this letter must needs be a madman, and there is a purse which I have to hand over along with it.”

“Yes, I see that your name is written on that also.”

“But I have nothing to do with either the purse or the letter. Of a truth the man who confided them to me must have been a lunatic.”

“It will be best if you break open the letter and read it, then you will *know* what you have got to do with it.”

This was true enough. The best way for a man to find out what he has to do with a letter addressed to him is, certainly, to open and read it.

And this is what was written in the letter.

“Worthy Halil Patrona!

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"I told you that I was a poor man, but that was not true; on the contrary, I am pretty well to do, thank God! Nor do I wander up and down on the face of the earth in search of herds of cattle stolen from me, but for the sake of my only daughter, who is dearer to me than all my treasures, and now also I am in pursuit of her, following clue after clue, in order that I may discover her whereabouts and, if possible, ransom her. You have been my benefactor. You fought the drunken Janissary for my sake, you shared your dwelling with me, you made me lie on your own bed while you slept on the bare ground, you even took off your kaftan to make my couch the softer. Accept, therefore, as a token of my gratitude, the slender purse accompanying this letter. It contains five thousand piastres, so that if ever I visit you again I may find you in better circumstances. God help you in all things!

"Your grateful servant,

"Janaki."

"Now, didn't I say he was mad?" exclaimed Halil, after reading through the letter. "Who else, I should like to know, would have given me five thousand piastres for three red onions?"

Meanwhile, attracted by the noise of the conversation, a crowd of the acquaintances of Halil Patrona and the money-changer had gathered around them, and they laid their heads together and discussed among themselves for a long time the question which was the greater fool of the two—Janaki, who had given five thousand piastres for three onions, or Halil who did not want to accept the money.

Yet Halil it was who turned out to be the biggest fool, for he immediately set out in search of the man who had given him this sum of money. But search and search as he might he could find no trace of him. If he had gone in search of someone who had stolen a like amount, he would have been able to find him very much sooner.

In the course of his wanderings, he suddenly came upon the place where three days previously he had had his tussle with Halil Pelivan. He recognised the spot at once. A small dab of blood, the remains of what had flowed from the giant's head, was still there in the middle of the lane, and on the wall of the house opposite both their names were written. In all probability the Janissary, when he picked himself up again, had dipped his finger in his own blood, and then scrawled the names upon the wall in order to perpetuate the memory of the incident. He had also taken good care to put Halil Pelivan uppermost and Halil Patrona undermost.

"Nay, but that is not right," said Halil to himself; "it was you who were undermost," and snatching up the fragment of a red tile he wrote his name above that of Halil Pelivan.

He hurried and scurried about till late in the evening without discovering a single trace of Janaki, and by that time his head was so confused by all manner of cogitations that when, towards nightfall, he began chaffering for fish in the Etmeidan market, he would not have been a bit surprised if he had been told that every single carp cost a thousand piastres.

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He began to perceive, however, that he would have to keep the money after all, and the very thought of it kept him awake all night long.

Next day he again strolled about the bazaars, and then directed his steps once more towards that house where he had chalked up his name the day before. And lo! the name of Pelivan was again stuck at the top of his own.

"This must be put a stop to once for all," murmured Halil, and beckoning to a load-carrier he mounted on to his shoulders and wrote his name high up, just beneath the eaves of the house on a spot where Pelivan's name could not top his own again, from whence it is manifest that there was a certain secret instinct in Halil Patrona which would not permit him to take the lower place or suffer him to recognise anybody as standing higher than himself. And as he, pursuing his way home, passed by the Tsiragan Palace, and there encountered riding past him the Padishah, Sultan Achmed III., accompanied by the Grand Vizier, Ibrahim Damad, the Kiaja Beg, the Kapudan Pasha, and the chief Imam, Ispirizade; and as he humbly bowed his head in the dust before them, it seemed to him as if something at the bottom of his heart whispered to him: "The time will come when the whole lot of you will bow your heads before me in the dust just as I, Halil Patrona, the pedlar, do obeisance to you now, ye lords of the Empire and the Universe!"

Fortunately for Halil Patrona, however, he did not raise his face while the suite of the Lords of the Universe swept past him, for otherwise it might have happened that Halil Pelivan, who went before the Sultan with a drawn broadsword, might have recognised him, and certainly nobody would have taken particular trouble to inquire why the Janissary had split in two the head of this or that pedlar who happened to come in his way.

CHAPTER II.

Guel-Bejaze—the white rose.

The booth of Halil Patrona, the pedlar, stood in the bazaar. He sold tobacco, chibooks, and pipe-stems, but his business was not particularly lucrative. He did not keep opium, although that was beginning to be one of the principal articles of luxury in the Turkish Empire. From the very look of him one could see that he did not sell the drug. For Halil had determined that he would never have any of this soul-benumbing stuff in his shop, and whenever Halil made any resolution he generally kept it. Oftentimes, sitting in the circle of his neighbours, he would fall to discoursing on the subject, and would tell them that it was Satan who had sent this opium stuff to play havoc among the true believers. It was, he would insist, the offscouring of the *Jinns*, and yet Mussulmans did not scruple to put the filth into their mouths and chew and inhale it! Hence the ruin that was coming

upon them and their posterity and the whole Moslem race. His neighbours let him talk on without contradiction, but they took good

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care to sell as much opium themselves as possible, because it brought in by far the largest profits. Surely, they argued among themselves, because an individual cuts his throat with a knife now and then, that is no reason why knives in general should not be kept for sale in shops? It was plain to them that Halil was no born trader. Yet he was perfectly satisfied with the little profit he made, and it never occurred to him to wish for anything he had not got.

Consequently when he now found himself the possessor of five thousand piastres, he was very much puzzled as to what he should do with such a large amount. The things he really desired were far, far away, quite out of his reach in fact. He would have liked to lead fleets upon the sea and armies marshalled in battle array. He would have liked to have built cities and fortresses. He would have liked to have raised up and cast down pashas, dispensed commands, and domineered generally. But a beggarly five thousand piastres would not go very far in that direction. It was too much from one point of view and too little from another, so that he really was at a loss what to do with it.

His booth looked out upon that portion of the bazaar where there was a vacant space separated from the trading booths by lofty iron railings. This vacant space was a slave-market. Here the lowest class of slaves were freely offered for sale. Every day Halil saw some ten to twenty of these human chattels exhibited in front of his booth. It was no new sight to him.

In this slave-market there were none of those pathetic scenes which poets and romance writers are so fond of describing when, for instance, the rich traders of Dirbend offer to the highest bidder miracles of loveliness, to be the sport of lust and luxury, beautiful Circassian and Georgian maidens, whose cheeks burn with shame at the bold rude gaze of the men, and whose eyes overflow with tears when their new masters address them. There was nothing of the sort in this place. This was but the depository of used up, chucked aside wares, of useless Jessir, such as dry and wrinkled old negresses, worn-out, venomous nurses, human refuse, so to speak, to whom it was a matter of the most profound indifference what master they were called upon to serve, who listened to the slang of the auctioneer with absolute nonchalance as he circumstantially totted up their years and described their qualities, and allowed their would-be purchasers to examine their teeth and manipulate their arms and legs as if they were the very last persons concerned in the business on hand.

On the occasion of the first general auction that had come round after the departure of Janaki from Halil, the pedlar was sitting as usual before his booth in the bazaar when the public crier appeared in the slave-market, leading by the hand a veiled female slave, and made the following announcement in a loud voice:

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“Merciful Mussulmans! Lo! I bring hither from the harem of his Majesty the Sultan, an odalisk, who is to be put up to public auction by command of the Padishah. The name of this odalisk is Guel-Bejaze; her age is seventeen years, she has all her teeth, her breath is pure, her skin is clean, her hair is thick, she can dance and sing, and do all manner of woman’s handiwork. His shall she be who makes the highest bid, and the sum obtained is to be divided among the dervishes. Two thousand piastres have already been promised for her; come hither and examine her—whoever gives the most shall have her.”

“Allah preserve us from the thought of purchasing this girl,” observed the wiser of the merchants, “why that would be the same thing as purchasing the wrath of the Padishah for hard cash,” and they wisely withdrew into the interiors of their booths. They knew well enough what was likely to happen to the man who presumed to buy an odalisk who had been expelled from the harem of the Sultan. Anyone daring to do such a thing might just as well chalk up the names of the four avenging angels on the walls of his house, or trample on his talisman with his slippers straight away. It was not the act of a wise man to pick up a flower which the Sultan had thrown away in order to inhale its fragrance.

The public crier remained in the middle of the bazaar alone with the slave-girl; the chapmen had not only retired into their shops but barred the doors behind them. “Much obliged to you; but we would not accept such a piece of good luck even as a gift,” they seemed to say.

Only one man still remained in front of his shop, and that was Halil Patrona. He alone had the courage to scrutinise the slave-girl carefully.

Perchance he felt compassion for this slave. He could not but perceive how the poor thing was trembling beneath the veil which covered her to the very heels. Nothing could be seen of her but her eyes, and in those eyes a tear was visible.

“Come! bring her into my shop!” said Halil to the public crier; “don’t leave her out in the public square there for everybody to stare at her.”

“Impossible!” replied the public crier. “As I value my head I must obey my orders, and my orders are to take her veil from off her head in the auction-yard, where the ordinary slaves are wont to be offered for sale, and there announce the price set upon her in the sight and hearing of all men.”

“What crime has this slave-girl committed that she should be treated so scurvily?”

“Halil Patrona!” answered the public crier, “it will be all the better for my tongue and your ears if I do not answer that question. I simply do what I have been told to do. I unveil this odalisk, I proclaim what she can do, to what use she can be put. I neither belittle

her nor do I exalt her. I advise nobody to buy her and I advise nobody not to buy her. Allah is free to do what He will with us all, and that which has been decreed concerning each of us ages ago must needs befall.” And with these words he whisked away the veil from the head of the odalisk.

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“By the Prophet! a beauteous maid indeed! What eyes! A man might fancy they could speak, and if one gazed at them long enough one could find more to learn there than in all that is written in the Koran! What lips too! I would gladly remain outside Paradise if by so doing I might gaze upon those lips for ever. And what a pale face! Well does she deserve the name of Guel-Bejaze! Her cheeks do indeed resemble white roses! And one can see dewdrops upon them, as is the way with roses!—the dewdrops from her eyes! And what must such eyes be like when they laugh? What must that face be like when it blushes? What must that mouth be like when it speaks, when it sighs, when it trembles with sweet desire?”

Halil Patrona was quite carried away by his enthusiasm.

“Carry her not any further,” he said to the public crier, “and show her to nobody else, for nobody else would dare to buy her. Besides, I’ll give you for her a sum which nobody else would think of offering, I will give five thousand piastres.”

“Be it so!” said the crier, veiling the maid anew; “you have seen her, anyhow, bring your money and take the girl!”

Halil went in for his purse, handed it over to the crier (it held the exact amount to a penny), and took the odalisk by the hand—there she stood alone with him.

Halil Patrona now lost not a moment in locking up his shop, and taking the odalisk by the hand led her away with him to his poor lonely dwelling-place.

All the way thither the girl never uttered a word.

On reaching the house Halil made the girl sit down by the hearth, and then addressed her in a tender, kindly voice.

“Here is my house, whatever you see in it is mine and yours. The whole lot is not very much it is true, but it is all our own. You will find no ornaments or frankincense in my house, but you can go in and out of it as you please without asking anybody’s leave. Here are two piastres, provide therewith a dinner for us both.”

The worthy Mussulman then returned to the bazaar, leaving the girl alone in the house. He did not return home till the evening.

Meanwhile Guel-Bejaze had made the two piastres go as far as they could, and had supper all ready for him. She placed Halil’s dish on the reed-mat close beside him, but she herself sat down on the threshold.

“Not there, but come and sit down by my side,” said Halil, and seizing the trembling hand of the odalisk, he made her sit down beside him on the cushion, piled up the pilaf before her, and invited her with kind and encouraging words to fall to. The odalisk

obeyed him. Not a word had she yet spoken, but when she had finished eating, she turned towards Halil and murmured in a scarce audible voice,

“For six days I have eaten nought.”

“What!” exclaimed Halil in amazement, “six days! Horrible! And who was it, pray, that compelled you to endure such torture?”

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"It was my own doing, for I wanted to die."

Halil shook his head gravely.

"So young, and yet to desire death! And do you still want to die, eh?"

"Your own eyes can tell you that I do not."

Halil had taken a great fancy to the girl. He had never before known what it was to love any human being; but now as he sat there face to face with the girl, whose dark eyelashes cast shadows upon her pale cheeks, and regarded her melancholy, irresponsive features, he fancied he saw a peri before him, and felt a new man awakening within him beneath this strange charm.

Halil could never remember the time when his heart had actually throbbed for joy, but now that he was sitting down by the side of this beautiful maid it really began to beat furiously. Ah! how truly sang the poet when he said: "Two worlds there are, one beneath the sun and the other in the heart of a maid."

For a long time he gazed rapturously on the beauteous slave, admiring in turn her fair countenance, her voluptuous bosom, and her houri-like figure. How lovely, how divinely lovely it all was! And then he bethought him that all this loveliness was his own; that he was the master, the possessor of this girl, at whose command she would fall upon his bosom, envelop him with the pavilion, dark as night, of her flowing tresses, and embrace him with arms of soft velvet. Ah! and those lips were not only red but sweet; and that breast was not only snow-white but throbbing and ardent—and at the thought his brain began to swim for joy and rapture.

And yet he did not even know what to call her! He had never had a slave-girl before, and hardly knew how to address her. His own tongue was not wont to employ tender, caressing words; he knew not what to say to a woman to make her love him.

"Guel-Bejaze!" he murmured hoarsely.

"I await your commands, my master!"

"My name is Halil—call me so!"

"Halil, I await your commands!"

"Say nothing about commanding. Sit down beside me here! Come, sit closer, I say!"

The girl sat down beside him. She was quite close to him now.

But the worst of it was that, even now, Halil had not the remotest idea what to say to her.

The maid was sad and apathetic, she did not weep as slave-girls are wont to do. Halil would so much have liked the girl to talk and tell him her history, and the cause of her melancholy, then perhaps it would have been easier for him to talk too. He would then have been able to have consoled her, and after consolation would have come love.

“Tell me, Guel-Bejaze!” said he, “how was it that the Sultan had you offered for sale in the bazaar.”

The girl looked at Halil with those large black eyes of hers. When she raised her long black lashes it was as though he gazed into a night lit up by two black suns, and thus she continued gazing at him for a long time fixedly and sadly.

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"That also you will learn to know, Halil," she murmured.

And Halil felt his heart grow hotter and hotter the nearer he drew to this burning, kindling flame; his eyes flashed sparks at the sight of so much beauty, he seized the girl's hand and pressed it to his lips. How cold that hand was! All the more reason for warming it on his lips and on his bosom; but, for all his caressing, the little hand remained cold, as cold as the hand of a corpse.

Surely that throbbing breast, those provocative lips, are not as cold?

Halil, intoxicated with passion, embraced the girl, and as he drew her to his breast, as he pressed her to him, the girl murmured to herself—it sounded like a gentle long-drawn-out sigh:

"Blessed Mary!"

And then the girl's long black hair streamed over her face, and when Halil smoothed it aside from the fair countenance to see if it had not grown redder beneath his embrace—behold! it was whiter than ever. All trace of life had fled from it, the eyes were cast down, the lips closed and bluish. Dead, dead—a corpse lay before him!

But Halil would not believe it. He fancied that the girl was only pretending. He put his hand on her fair bosom—but he could not hear the beating of the heart. The girl had lost all sense of feeling. He could have done with her what he would. A dead body lay in his bosom.

An ice-cold feeling of horror penetrated Halil's heart, altogether extinguishing the burning flame of passion. All tremulously he released the girl and laid her down. Then he whispered full of fear:

"Awake! I will not hurt you, I will not hurt you."

Her light kaftan had glided down from her bosom; he restored it to its place and, awestruck, he continued gazing at the features of the lovely corpse.

After a few moments the girl opened her lips and sighed heavily, and presently her large black eyes also opened once more, her lips resumed their former deep red hue, her eyes their enchanting radiance, her face the delicate freshness of a white rose, once more her bosom began to rise and fall.

She arose from the carpet on which Halil had laid her, and set to work removing and rearranging the scattered dishes and platters. Only after a few moments had elapsed did she whisper to Halil, who could not restrain his astonishment:



“And now you know why the Padishah ordered me to be sold like a common slave in the bazaar. The instant a man embraces me I become as dead, and remain so until he lets me go again, and his lips grow cold upon mine and his heart abhors me. My name is not Guel-Bejaze, the White Rose, but Guel-Olue, the Dead Rose.”

CHAPTER III.

Sultan Achmed.

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The sun is shining through the windows of the Seraglio, the two Ulemas who are wont to come and pray with the Sultan have withdrawn, and the Kapu-Agasi, or chief doorkeeper, and the Anakhtar Oglan, or chief key-keeper, hasten to open the doors through which the Padishah generally goes to his dressing-room, where already await him the most eminent personages of the Court, to wit, the Khas-Oda-Bashi, or Master of the Robes, the Chobodar who hands the Sultan his first garment, the Duelbendar who ties the shawl round his body, the Berber-Bashi who shaves his head, the Ibrikdar Aga who washes his hands, the Peshkiriji Bashi who dries them again, the Serbedji-Bashi who has a pleasant potion ready for him, and the Ternakdji who carefully pares his nails. All these grandees do obeisance to the very earth as they catch sight of the face of the Padishah making his way through innumerable richly carved doors on his way to his dressing-chamber.

This robing-room is a simple, hexagonal room, with lofty, gold-entrellised window; its whole beauty consists in this, that the walls are inlaid with amethysts, from whose jacinth-hued background shine forth the more lustrous raised arabesques formed by topazes and dalmatines. Precious stones are the delight of the Padishah. Every inch of his garments is resplendent with diamonds, rubies, and pearls, his very fingers are hidden by the rings which sparkle upon them. Pomp is the very breath of his life. And his countenance well becomes this splendour. It is a mild, gentle, radiant face, like the face of a father when he moves softly among his loving children. His large, melancholy eyes rest kindly on the face of everyone he beholds; his smooth, delicate forehead is quite free from wrinkles. It would seem as if it could never form into folds, as if its possessor could never be angry; there is not a single grey hair in his well-kept, long black beard; it would seem as if he knew not the name of grief, as if he were the very Son of Happiness.

And so indeed he was. For seven-and-twenty years he had sat upon the throne. It is possible that during these seven-and-twenty years many changes may have taken place in the realm which could by no means call for rejoicing, but Allah had blessed him with such a happy disposition as to make him quite indifferent to these unfortunate events, in fact, he did not trouble his head about them at all. Like the true philosopher he was, he continued to rejoice in whatsoever was joyous. He loved beautiful flowers and beautiful women—and he had enough of both and to spare. His gardens were more splendid than the gardens of Soliman the Magnificent, and that his Seraglio was no joyless abode was demonstrated by the fact that so far he was the happy father of one-and-thirty children.

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He must have had exceptionally pleasant dreams last night, or his favourite Sultana, the incomparably lovely Adsalis, must have entertained him with unusually pleasant stories, or perchance a new tulip must have blossomed during the night, for he extended his hand to everyone to kiss, and when the Berber-Bashi proceeded comfortably to adjust the cushions beneath him, the Sultan jocosely tapped the red swelling cheeks of his faithful servant—cheeks which the worthy Bashi had taken good care of even in the days when he was only a barber's apprentice in the town of Zara, but which had swelled to a size worthy even of the rank of a Berber-Bashi, since his lot had fallen in pleasant places.

"Allah watch over thee, and grant that thy mouth may never complain against thy hand, worthy Berber-Bashi. What is the latest news from the town?"

It would appear from this that the barbers in Stambul also, even when they rise to the dignity of Berber-Bashis, are expected to follow the course of public events with the utmost attention, in order to communicate the most interesting details thereof to others, and thus relieve the tedium invariably attendant upon shaving.

"Most mighty and most gracious One, if thou deignest to listen to the worthless words which drop from the mouth of thine unprofitable servant with those ears of thine created but to receive messages from Heaven, I will relate to thee what has happened most recently in Stambul."

The Sultan continued to play with his ring, which he had taken off one finger to slip on to another.

"Thou hast laid the command upon me, most puissant and most gracious Padishah," continued the Berber-Bashi, unwinding the pearl-embroidered *kauk* from the head of the Sultan—"thou hast laid the command upon me to discover and acquaint thee with what further befell Guel-Bejaze after she had been cast forth from thy harem. From morn to eve, and again from eve to morning, I have been searching from house to house, making inquiries, listening with all my ears, mingling among the chapmen of the bazaars disguised as one of themselves, inducing them to speak, and ferreting about generally, till, at last, I have got to the bottom of the matter. For a long time nobody dared to buy the girl; it is indeed but meet that none should dare to pick up what the mightiest monarch of the earth has thrown away; it is but meet that the spot where he has cast out the ashes from his pipe should be avoided by all men, and that nobody should venture to put the sole of his foot there. Yet, nevertheless, in the bazaar, one madly presumptuous man was found who was lured to his destruction at the sight of the girl's beauty, and received her for five thousand piastres from the hand of the public crier. These five thousand piastres were all the money he had, and he got them, in most wondrous wise, from a foreign butcher whom he had welcomed to his house as a guest."

“What is the name of this man?”?

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“Halil Patrona.”

“And what happened after that?”

“The man took the girl home, whose beauty, of a truth, was likely to turn the head of anybody. He knew not what had happened to her at the Seraglio, in the kiosks of the Kiaja Beg and the Grand Vizier, Ibrahim Damad and in the harem of the White Prince. For, verily, it is a joy to even behold the maiden, and it would be an easy matter to lose one’s wits because of her, especially if one did not know that this fair blossom may be gazed at but not plucked, that this beautiful form which puts even the houris of Paradise to shame, suddenly becomes stiff and dead at the contact of a man’s hand, and that neither the warmth of the sun-like face of the Padishah, nor the fury of the Grand Vizier, nor the thongs of the scourge of the Sultana Asseki, nor the supplications of the White Prince, can awaken her from her death-like swoon.”

“And didst thou discover what happened to the girl after that?”

“Blessed be every word concerning me which issues from thy lips oh, mighty Padishah! Yes, I went after the girl. The worthy shopkeeper took the maiden home with him. It rejoiced him that he could give to her everything that was there. He made her sit down beside him. He supped in her company. Then he would have embraced her. So he drew her to his bosom, and immediately the girl collapsed in his arms like a dead thing, as she is always wont to do whenever a man touches her, at the same time uttering certain magical talismanic words of evil portent, from which may the Prophet guard every true believer! For she spoke the name of that holy woman whose counterfeit presentment the Giaours carry upon their banners, and whose name they pronounce when they go forth to war against the true believers.”

“Was he who took her away wrath thereat?”

“Nay, on the contrary, he seemed well satisfied that it should be so, and ever since then he has left the girl in peace. He regards her as a peri, as one who is not in her right mind, and therefore should be dealt gently with. She is free to go about the house as she likes. Halil will never permit her to do any rough work, nay, rather, will he do everything himself, with his own hands, so that all his acquaintances already begin to speak of him as a portent, and his patience has become a proverb in their mouths. Halil they say took unto himself a slave-woman, and lo! he has himself become that slave-woman’s slave.”

“Of a truth it is a remarkable case,” observed the Padishah; “try and find out what turn the affair takes next. And the Teskeredji Bashi shall record everything that thou sayest for an eternal remembrance.”



During this speech the Berber-Bashi had artistically completed the official dressing of the Padishah's head, whereupon the Ibrikdar Aga came forward to wash his hands, the Peshkiriji Bashi carefully dried them with a towel, the Ternakdji Bashi pared his nails, the Duelbendar placed the pearl-embroidered *kauk* on the top of his head, and adjusted the long eastern shawl round his waist, the Chobodar handed him his upper jacket, the *binis* heavy with turquoise, the Silihdar buckled on his tasselled sword, and then everyone, after performing the usual salaams withdrew, except the Khas-Oda-Bashi and the Kapu-Agasi, who remained alone with their master.

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The Khas-Oda-Bashi announced that the two humblest of the Sultan's servants, Abdullah, the Chief Mufti, and Damad Ibrahim, the Grand Vizier, were waiting on their knees for an audience in the vestibule of the Seraglio. They desired, he said, to communicate important news touching the safety and honour of the Empire.

The Sultan had not yet given an answer when, through the door leading from the harem, popped the Kizlar-Aga, the chief eunuch, a respectable, black-visaged gentleman with split lips, who had the melancholy privilege of passing in and out of the Sultan's harem at all hours of the day and night, and finding no pleasure therein.

"Kizlar-Aga, my faithful servant! what dost thou want?" inquired Achmed going to meet him, and raising him from the ground whereon he had thrown himself.

"Most gracious Padishah!" cried the Kizlar-Aga, "the flower cannot go on living without the sun, and the most lovely of flowers, that most fragrant blossom, the Sultana Asseki, longs to bask in the light of thy countenance."

At these words the features of Achmed grew still more gentle, still more radiant with smiles. He signified to the Khas-Oda-Bashi and the Kapu-Agasi that they should withdraw into another room, while he dispatched the Kizlar-Aga to bring in the Sultana Asseki.

Adsalis, for so they called her, was a splendid damsel of Damascus. She had been lavishly endowed with every natural charm. Her skin was whiter than ivory and smoother than velvet. Compared with her dark locks the blackest night was but a pale shadow, and the hue of her full smiling face put to shame the breaking dawn and the budding rose. When she gazed upon Achmed with those eyes of hers in which a whole rapturous world of paradisaical joys glowed and burned, the Padishah felt his whole heart smitten with sweet lightnings, and when her voluptuously enchanting lips expressed a wish, who was there in the wide world who would have the courage to gainsay them? Certainly not Achmed! Ah, no! "Ask of me the half of my realm!"—that was the tiniest of the flattering assurances which he was wont to heap upon her. If he were but able to embrace her, if he were but able to look into her burning eyes, if he were but able to see her smile again and again, then he utterly forgot Stambul, his capital, the host, the war, and the foreign ambassadors—and praised the Prophet for such blessedness.

The favourite Sultana approached Achmed with that enchanting smile which was eternally irresistible so far as he was concerned, and never permitted an answer approaching a refusal to even appear on the lips of the Sultan.

What pressing request could it be? Why it was only at dawn of this very day that the Padishah had quitted her! What vision of rapture could she have seen since then whose realisation she had set her heart upon obtaining?



The Sultan, taking her by the hand, conducted her to his purple ottoman, and permitted her to sit down at his feet; the Sultana folded her hands on the knees of the Padishah, and raising her eyes to his face thus addressed him:

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"I come from thy daughter, little Eminah, she has sent me to thee that I may kiss thy feet instead of her. As often as I see thee, majestic Khan, it is as though I see her face, and as often as I behold her it is thy face that stands before me. She resembles thee as a twinkling star resembles a radiant sun. Three years of her life has she accomplished, she has now entered upon her fourth summer, and still no husband has been destined for her. This very morning when thou hadst turned thy face away from me I saw a vision. And this was the vision I saw. Thy three children, Aisha, Hadishra, and Eminah, were sitting in the open piazza, beneath splendid, sparkling pavilions. There were three pavilions standing side by side: the first was white, the second violet, and the third of a vivid green. In these three pavilions, I say, the princesses, thy daughters, were sitting, clothed in *kapanijaks* of cloth of silver, with round *selmiks* on their heads, and embellished with the seven lucky circles which bring the blessings of prosperity to womenkind. Thou knowest what these circles are, oh Padishah! They are the ishtifan or diadem, the necklace, the ear-ring, the finger-ring, the girdle, the bracelet, and the mantle-ring-clasp—the seven gifts of felicity, oh Padishah, that the bridegroom giveth to the bride. Beside these pavilions, moreover, were a countless multitude of other tents—of three different hues of blue and three different hues of green—and in these tents abode a great multitude of Emir Defterdars, Reis-Effendis, Muderises, and Sheiks. And in front of the Seraglio were set up three lofty palm-trees, which elephants drew about on great wheeled cars, and there were three gardens there, the flowers whereof were made of sugar, and then the chiefs of the viziers arose and the celebration of the festival began. After the usual kissing of hands, the nuptials were proceeded with, the Kiaja representing the bridegroom and the Kizlar-Aga the bride, and everyone received a present. Then came the bridal retinue with the bridal gifts, a hundred camels laden with flowers and fruits, and an elephant bearing gold and precious stones and veils meet for the land of the peris. Two eunuchs brought mirrors inlaid with emeralds, and the *miri achorok* held the reins of splendidly caparisoned chargers. After them came the attendants of the Grand Vizier, and delighted the astonished eyes of the spectators with a display of slinging. Then came the wine-carriers with their wine-skins, and in a pavilion set up for the purpose wooden men sported with a living centaur. There also were the Egyptian sword and hoop dancers, the Indian jugglers and serpent charmers, after whom came the Chief Mufti, who read aloud a verse from the Koran in the light of thy countenance, and gave also the interpretation thereof in words fair to listen to. Then followed fit and capable men from the arsenal, dragging along on rollers huge galleys in full sail, and after them the topijis, dragging after

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them, likewise on rollers, a fortress crammed full of cannons, which also they fired again and again to the astonishment of the multitude. Thereupon began the dancing of the Egyptian opium-eaters, which was indeed most marvellous, and after them there was a show of bears and apes, which sported right merrily together. Close upon these came the procession of the Guilds and the junketing of the Janissaries, and last of all the Feast of Palms, which palms were carried to the very gates of the Seraglio, along with the sugar gardens I have already spoken of. Then there was the Feast of Lamps, in which ten thousand shining lamps gleamed among twenty thousand blossoming tulips, so that one might well have believed that the lamps were blossoming and the tulips were shining. And all the while the cannons of the Anatoli Hisar and the Rumili Hisar were thundering, and the Bosphorus seemed to be turned into a sea of fire by reason of the illuminated ships and the sparkling fireworks. Such then was the dream of the humblest of thy slaves at dawn of the 12th day of the month Dzhemakir, which day is a day of good omen to the sons of Osman.”

It might have been thought a tiresome matter to listen to such long, drawn-out visions as this to the very end, but Achmed was a good listener, and, besides, he delighted in such things. Nothing made him so happy as great festivals, and the surest way of gaining his good graces was by devising some new pageant of splendour, excellence, and originality unknown to his predecessors. Adsalis had won his favour by inventing the Feast of Lamps and Tulips, which was renewed every year. This Feast of Palms, moreover, was another new idea, and so also was the idea of the sugar garden. So Achmed, in a transport of enthusiasm, pressed the favourite Sultana to his bosom, and swore solemnly that her dream should be fulfilled, and then sent her back into the harem.

And now the Kizlar-Aga admitted the two dignitaries who had been waiting outside. The Chief Mufti entered first, and after him came the Grand Vizier, Damad Ibrahim. Both of them had long, flowing, snow-white beards and grave venerable faces.

They bowed low before the Sultan, kissed the hem of his garment, and lay prostrate before him till he raised them up again.

“What brings you to the Seraglio, my worthy counsellors?” inquired the Sultan.

As was meet and right, the Chief Mufti was the first to speak.

“Most gracious, most puissant master! Be merciful towards us if with our words we disturb the tranquil joys of thy existence! For though slumber is a blessing, wary wakefulness is better than slumber, and he who will not recognise the coming of danger is like unto him who would rob his own house. It will be known unto thee, most glorious

Padishah, that a few years ago it pleased Allah, in his inscrutable wisdom, to permit the Persian rebel, Esref, to drive his lawful sovereign, Tamasip, from his capital.

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The prince became a fugitive, and the mother of the prince, dressed in rags, was reduced to the wretched expedient of doing menial service in the streets of Ispahan for a livelihood. The glory of the Ottoman arms could not permit that a usurper should sit at his ease on the stolen throne, and thy triumphant host, led by the Vizier Ibrahim and the virtuous Kueprili, the descendant of the illustrious Nuuman Kueprili, wrested Kermendzasahan from Persia and incorporated it with thy dominions. And then it pleased the Prophet to permit marvellous things to happen. Suddenly Shah Tamasip, whom all men believed to be ruined—suddenly, I say, Shah Tamasip reappeared at the head of a handful of heroes and utterly routed the bloody Esref Khan in three pitched battles at Damaghan, Derechar, and Ispahan, put him to flight, and the hoofs of the horses of the victor trod the rebel underfoot. And now the restored sovereign demands back from the Ottoman Empire the domains which had been occupied. His Grand Vizier, Safikuli Khan, is advancing with a large army against the son of Kueprili, and the darkness of defeat threatens to obscure the sun-like radiance of the Ottoman arms. Most puissant Padishah! suffer not the tooth of disaster to gnaw away at thy glory! The Grand Vizier and I have already gathered together thy host on the shores of the Bosphorus. They are ready, at a moment's notice, to embark in the ships prepared for them. Money and provisions in abundance have been sent to the frontier for the gallant Nuuman Kueprili on the backs of fifteen hundred camels. It needs but a word from thee and thine empire will become an armed hand, one buffet whereof will overthrow another empire. It needs but a wink of thine eye and a host of warriors will spring from the earth, just as if all the Ottoman heroes, who died for their country four centuries ago, were to rise from their graves to defend the banner of the Prophet. But that same banner thou shouldst seize and bear in thine own hand, most glorious Padishah! for only thy presence can give victory to our arms. Arise, then, and gird upon thy thigh the sword of thy illustrious ancestor Muhammad! Descend in the midst of thy host which yearns for the light of thy countenance, as the eyes of the sleepless yearn for the sun to rise, and put an end to the long night of waiting."

Achmed's gentle gaze rested upon the speaker abstractedly. It seemed as if, while the Chief Mufti was speaking, he had not heard a single word of the passionate discourse that had been addressed to him.

"My faithful servants!" said he, smiling pleasantly, "this day is to me a day of felicity. The Sultana Asseki at dawn to-day saw a vision worthy of being realised. A dazzling festival was being celebrated in the streets of Stambul, and the whole city shone in the illumination thereof. The gardens of the puspang-trees and the courtyards of the kiosks around the Sweet Waters were bright with the radiance of lamps and tulips. Waving palm-trees and gardens full of sugar-flowers traversed the streets, and galleys and fortresses perambulated the piazzas on wheels. That dream was too lovely to remain a dream. It must be made a reality."

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The Chief Mufti folded his hands across his breast and bent low before the Padishah.

“Allah Akbar! Allah Kerim! God is mighty. Be it even as thou dost command! May the sun rise in the west if it be thy will, oh Padishah!” And the Chief Mufti drew aside and was silent.

But the aged Grand Vizier, Damad Ibrahim, came forward, and drying his tearful eyes with the corner of his kaftan, stood sorrowfully in front of the Padishah. And these were his words:

“Oh! my master! Allah hath appointed certain days for rejoicing, and certain other days for mourning, and 'tis not well to confuse the one with the other. Just now there is no occasion for rejoicing, but all the more occasion for mourning. Woeful tidings, like dark clouds presaging a storm, are coming in from every corner of the Empire—conflagrations, pestilences, earthquakes, inundations, hurricanes—alarm and agitate the people. Only this very week the fairest part of Stambul, close to the Chojabasha, was burnt to the ground; and only a few weeks ago the same fate befell the suburb of Ejub along the whole length of the sea-front, and that, too, at the very time when the other part of the city was illuminated in honour of the birthday of Prince Murad. In Gallipoli a thunder-bolt struck the powder-magazine, and five hundred workmen were blown into the air. The Kiagadehane brook, in a single night, swelled to such an extent as to inundate the whole valley of Sweet Waters, and a whole park of artillery was swept away by the flood. And know also, oh Padishah, that, but the other day, a new island rose up from the sea beside the island of Santorin, and this new island has grown larger and larger during three successive months, and all the time it was growing, the ground beneath Stambul quaked and trembled. These are no good omens, oh, my master! and if thou wilt lend thine ears to the counsel of thy faithful servant, thou wilt proclaim a day of penance and fasting instead of a feast-day, for evil days are coming upon Stambul. The voice of the enemy can be heard on all our borders, from the banks of the Danube as well as from beside the waters of the Pruth, from among the mountains of Erivan as well as from beyond the islands of the Archipelago; and if every Mussulman had ten hands and every one of the ten held a sword, we should still have enough to do to defend thy Empire. Bear, oh Padishah! with my grey hairs, and pardon my temerity. I see Stambul in the midst of flames every time it is illuminated for a festival, and full of consternation, I cry to thee and to the Prophet, ‘Send us help and that right soon.’”

Sultan Achmed continued all the time to smile most graciously.



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"Worthy Ibrahim!" said he at last, "thou hast a son, hast thou not, whose name is Osman, and who has now attained his fourth year. Now I have a daughter, Eminah, who has just reached her third year. Lo now! as my soul liveth, I will not gird on the Sword of the Prophet, I will not take in my hand the Banner of Danger until I have given these young people to each other in marriage. Long ago they were destined for each other, and the multiplication of thy merits demands the speedy consummation of these espousals. I have sworn to the Sultana Asseki that so it shall be, and I cannot go back from my oath as though I were but an unbelieving fire-worshipper, for the fire-worshippers do not regard the sanctity of an oath, and when they take an oath or make a promise they recite the words thereof backwards, and believe they are thereby free of their obligations. It beseemeth not the true believers to do likewise. I have promised that this festival shall be celebrated, and it is my desire that it should be splendid."

Ibrahim sighed deeply, and it was with a sad countenance that he thanked the Padishah for this fresh mark of favour. Yet the betrothal might so easily have been postponed, for the bridegroom was only four years old and the bride was but three.

"Allah Kerim! God grant that thy shadow may never grow less, most mighty Padishah!" said Damad Ibrahim, and with that he kissed the hand of the Grand Seignior, and both he and the Chief Mufti withdrew.

At the gate of the Seraglio the Chief Mufti said to the Grand Vizier sorrowfully:

"It had been better for us both had we never grown grey!"

But Sultan Achmed, accompanied by the Bostanjik, hastened to the gardens of the grove of puspang-trees to look at his tulips.

CHAPTER IV.

THE SLAVE OF THE SLAVE-GIRL.

Worthy Halil Patrona had become quite a by-word with his fellows. The name he now went by in the bazaars was: The Slave of the Slave-Girl. This did not hurt him in the least; on the contrary, the result was, that more people came to smoke their chibooks and buy tobacco at his shop than ever. Everybody was desirous of making the acquaintance of the Mussulman who would not so much as lay a hand upon a slave-girl whom he had bought with his own money, nay more, who did all the work of the house instead of her, just as if she had bought him instead of his buying her.

In the neighbourhood of Patrona dwelt Musli, a veteran Janissary, who filled up his spare time by devoting himself to the art of slipper-stitching. This man often beheld Halil prowling about on the house-top in the moonlit nights where Guel-Bejaze was sleeping, and after sitting down within a couple of paces of her, remain there in a brown



study for hours at a time, often till midnight, nay, sometimes till daybreak. With his chin resting in the palm of his hand there he would stay, gazing intently at her charming figure and her pale but beautiful face. Frequently he would creep closer to her, creep so near that his lips would almost touch her face; but then he would throw back his head again, and if at such times the slave-girl half awoke from her slumbers, he would beckon to her to go to sleep again—nobody should disturb her.

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Halil did not trouble his head in the least about all this gossip. It was noticed, indeed, that his face was somewhat paler than it used to be, but if anyone ventured to jest with him on the subject, face to face, he was very speedily convinced that Halil's arms, at any rate, were no weaker than of yore.

One day he was sitting, as usual, at the door of his booth, paying little attention to the people coming and going around him, and staring abstractedly with wide and wandering eyes into space, as if his gaze was fixed upon something above his head, when somebody who had approached him so softly as to take him quite unawares, very affectionately greeted him with the words:

"Well, my dear Chorbashi, how are you?"

Patrona looked in the direction of the voice, and saw in front of him his mysterious guest of the other day—the Greek Janaki.

"Ah, 'tis thou, musafir! I searched for you everywhere for two whole days after you left me, for I wanted to give you back the five thousand piastres which you were fool enough to make me a present of. It was just as well, however, that I did not find you, and I have long ceased looking for you, for I have now spent all the money."

"I am glad to hear it, Halil, and I hope the money has done you a good turn. Are you willing to receive me into your house as a guest once more?"

"With pleasure! But you must first of all promise me two things. The first is, that you will not contrive by some crafty device to pay me something for what I give you gratis; and the second is, that you will not expect to stay the night with me, but will wander across the street and pitch your tent at the house of my worthy neighbour Musli, who is also a bachelor, and mends slippers, and is therefore a very worthy and respectable man."

"And why may I not sleep at your house?"

"Because you must know that there are now two of us in the house—I and my slave-girl."

"That will not matter a bit, Halil. I will sleep on the roof, and you take the slave-girl down with you into the house."

"It cannot be so, Janaki! it cannot be."

"Why can it not be?"

"Because I would rather sleep in a pit into which a tiger has fallen, I would rather sleep in the lair of a hippopotamus, I would rather sleep in a canoe guarded by alligators and crocodiles, I would rather spend a night in a cellar full of scorpions and scolopendras, or

in the Tower of Surem, which is haunted by the accursed Jinns, than pass a single night in the same room with this slave-girl."

"Why; what's this, Halil? you fill me with amazement. Surely, it cannot be that you are that Mussulman of whom all Pera is talking?—the man I mean who purchased a slave-girl in order to be her slave?"

"It is as you say. But 'twere better not to talk of that matter at all. Those five thousand piastres of yours are the cause of it; they have ruined me out and out. My mind is going backwards I think. When people come to my shop to buy wares of me, I give them such answers to their questions that they laugh at me. Let us change the subject, let us rather talk of your affairs. Have you found your daughter yet?"

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It was now Janaki's turn to sigh.

"I have sought her everywhere, and nowhere can I find her."

"How did you lose her?"

"One Saturday she went with some companions on a pleasure excursion in the Sea of Marmora in a sailing-boat. Their music and dancing attracted a Turkish pirate to the spot, and in the midst of a peaceful empire he stole all the girls, and contrived to dispose of them so secretly that I have never been able to find any trace of them. I am now disposed to believe that she was taken to the Sultan's Seraglio."

"You will never get her out of there then."

Janaki sighed deeply.

"You think, then, that I shall never get at her if she is there?" and he shook his head sadly.

"Not unless the Janissaries, or the Debejis, or the Bostanjis lay their heads together and agree to depose the Sultan."

"Who would even dare to think of such a thing, Halil?"

"I would if *my* daughter were detained in the harem against her will and against mine also. But that is not at all in your line, Janaki. You have never shed any blood but the blood of sheep and oxen, but let me tell you this, Janaki: if I were as rich a man as you are, trust me for finding a way of getting my girl out of the very Seraglio itself. Wealth is a mightier force than valour."

"I pray you, speak not so loudly. One of your neighbours might hear you, and would think nothing of felling me to the earth to get my money. For I carry a great deal of money about with me, and am always afraid of being robbed of it. In front of the bazaar a slave is awaiting me with a mule. On the back of that mule are strung two jars seemingly filled with dried dates. Let me tell you that those jars are really half-filled with gold pieces, the dates are only at the top. I should like to deposit them at your house. I suppose your slave-girl will not pry too closely?"

"You can safely leave them with me. If you tell her not to look at them she will close her eyes every time she passes the jars."

Meanwhile Patrona had closed his booth and invited his guest to accompany him homewards. On the way thither he looked in at the house of his neighbour, the well-mannered Janissary, who mended slippers. Musli willingly offered Halil's guest a night's lodging. In return Patrona invited him to share with him a small dish of well-seasoned

pilaf and a few cups of a certain forbidden fluid, which invitation the worthy Janissary accepted with alacrity.

And now they crossed Halil's threshold.

Guel-Bejaze was standing by the fire-place getting ready Halil's supper when the guests entered, and hearing footsteps turned round to see who it might be.

The same instant the Greek wayfarer uttered a loud cry, and pitching his long hat into the air, rushed towards the slave-girl, and flinging himself down on his knees before her fell a-kissing, again and again, her hands and arms, and at last her pale face also, while the girl flung herself upon his shoulder and embraced the fellow's neck; and then the pair of them began to weep, and the words, "My daughter!" "My father!" could be heard from time to time amidst their sobs.

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Halil could only gaze at them open-mouthed.

But Janaki, still remaining on his knees, raised his hands to Heaven, and gave thanks to God for guiding his footsteps to this spot.

“Allah Akbar! The Lord be praised!” said Patrona in his turn, and he drew nearer to them. “So her whom you have so long sought after you find in my house, eh? Allah preordained it. And you may thank God for it, for you receive her back from me unharmed by me. Take her away therefore!”

“You say not well, Halil,” cried the father, his face radiant with joy. “So far from giving her back to me you shall keep her; yes, she shall remain yours for ever. For if I were thrice to traverse the whole earth and go in a different direction each time, I certainly should not come across another man like you. Tell me, therefore, what price you put upon her that I may buy her back, and give her to you to wife as a free woman?”

Halil did not consider very long what price he should ask, so far as he was concerned the business was settled already. He cast but a single look on Guel-Bejaze’s smiling lips, and asked for a kiss from them—that was the only price he demanded.

Janaki seized his daughter’s hand and placed it in the hand of Halil.

And now Halil held the warm, smooth little hand in his own big paw, he felt its reassuring pressure, he saw the girl smile, he saw her lips open to return his kiss, and still he did not believe his eyes—still he shuddered at the reflection that when his lips should touch hers, the girl would suddenly die away, become pale and cold. Only when his lips at last came into contact with her burning lips and her bosom throbbed against his bosom, and he felt his kiss returned and the warm pulsation of her heart, then only did he really believe in his own happiness, and held her for a long—oh, so long!—time to his own breast, and pressed his lips to her lips over and over again, and was happier—happier by far—than the dwellers in Paradise.

And after that they made the girl sit down between them, with her father on one side and her husband on the other, and they took her hands and caressed and fondled her to her heart’s content. The poor maid was quite beside herself with delight. She kept receiving kisses and caresses, first on the right hand and then on the left, and her face was pale no longer, but of a burning red like the transfigured rose whereon a drop of the blood of great Aphrodite fell. And she promised her father and her husband that she would tell them such a lot of things—things wondrous, unheard of, of which they had not and never could have the remotest idea.

And through the thin iron shutters which covered the window the Berber-Bashi curiously observed the touching scene!

They were still in the midst of their intoxication of delight when the frequently before-mentioned neighbour of Halil, worthy Musli, thrust his head inside the door, and witnessing the scene would discreetly have withdrawn his perplexed countenance. But Halil, who had already caught sight of him, bawled him a vociferous welcome.

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“Nay, come along! come along! my worthy neighbour, don’t stand on any ceremony with us, you can see for yourself how merry we are!”

The worthy neighbour thereupon gingerly entered, on the tips of his toes, with his hands fumbling nervously about in the breast of his kaftan; for the poor fellow’s hands were resinous to a degree. Wash and scrub them as he might, the resin would persist in cleaving to them. His awl, too, was still sticking in the folds of his turban—sticking forth aloft right gallantly like some heron’s plume. Naturally he whose business it was to mend other men’s shoes went about in slippers that were mere bundles of rags—that is always the way with cobblers!

When he saw Guel-Bejaze on Halil’s lap, and Halil’s face beaming all over with joy, he smote his hands together and fell a-wondering.

“There must be some great changes going on here!” thought he.

But Halil compelled him to sit down beside them, and after kissing Guel-Bejaze again—apparently he could not kiss the girl enough—he cried:

“Look! my dear neighbour! she is now my wife, and henceforth she will love me as her husband, and I shall no longer be the slave of my slave. And this worthy man here is my wife’s father. Greet them, therefore, and then be content to eat and drink with us!”

Then Musli approached Janaki and saluted him on the shoulder, then, turning towards Guel-Bejaze, he touched with his hand first the earth and next his forehead, sat down beside Janaki on the cushions that had been drawn into the middle of the room, and made merry with them.

And now Janaki sent the slave he had brought with him to the pastry-cook’s while Musli skipped homewards and brought with him a tambourine of chased silver, which he could beat right cunningly and also accompany it with a voice not without feeling; and thus Halil’s bridal evening flowed pleasantly away with an accompaniment of wine and music and kisses.

And all this time the worthy Berber-Bashi was looking on at this junketing through the trellised window, and could scarce restrain himself from giving expression to his astonishment when he perceived that Guel-Bejaze no longer collapsed like a dead thing at the contact of a kiss, or even at the pressure of an embrace, as she was wont to do in the harem, indeed her face had now grown rosier than the dawn.

At last his curiosity completely overcame him, and turning the handle of the door he appeared in the midst of the revellers.

He wore the garb of a common woodcutter, and his simple, foolish face corresponded excellently to the disguise. Nobody in the world could have taken him for anything but

what he now professed to be, and it was with a very humble obeisance that he introduced himself.

“Allah Kerim! Salaam aleikum! God’s blessing go with your mirth. Why, you were so merry that I heard you at the cemetery yonder as I was passing. If it will not put you out I should be delighted to remain here, as long as you will let me, that I may listen to the music this worthy Mussulman here understands so well, and to the pretty stories which flow from the harmonious lips of this houri who has, I am persuaded, come down from Paradise for the delight of men.”

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Now Musli was drunk with wine, Guel-Bejaze and Halil Patrona were drunk with love, so that not one of them had any exception to take to the stranger's words. Janaki was the only sober man among them, neither wine nor love had any attraction for him, and therefore he whispered in the ear of Halil:

"For all you know this stranger may be a spy or a thief!"

"What an idea!" Halil whispered back, "why you can see for yourself that he is only an honest baltaji.[1] Sit down, oh, worthy Mussulman," he continued, turning to the stranger, "and make one of our little party."

The Berber-Bashi took him at his word. He ate and drank like one who has gone hungry for three whole days, he was enchanted with the tambourine of Musli, listened with open mouth to his story of the miserly slippers, and laughed as heartily as if he had never heard it at least a hundred times before.

"And now you tell us some tale, most beautiful of women!" said he, wiping the tears from his eyes as he turned towards the damsel, and then Guel-Bejaze, after first kissing her husband and sipping from the beaker extended to her just enough to moisten her lips, thus began:

"Once upon a time there was a rich merchant. Where he lived I know not. It might have been Pera, or Galata, or Damascus. Nor can I tell you his name, but that has nothing to do with the story. This merchant had an only daughter whom he loved most dearly. She had ne'er a wish that was not instantly gratified, and he guarded her as the very apple of his eye. Not even the breath of Heaven was allowed to blow upon her."

"And know you not what the name of the maiden was?" inquired the Berber-Bashi.

"Certainly, they called her Irene, for she was a Greek girl."

Janaki trembled at the word. No doubt the girl was about to relate her own story, for Irene was the very name she had received at her baptism. It was very thoughtless of her to betray herself in the presence of a stranger.

"One day," continued the maiden, "Irene went a-rowing on the sea with some girl friends. The weather was fine, the sea smooth, and they sang their songs and made merry, to their hearts' content. Suddenly the sail of a corsair appeared on the smooth mirror of the ocean, pounced straight down upon the maidens in their boat, and before they could reach the nearest shore, they were all seized and carried away captive.

"Poor Irene! she was not even able to bid her dear father God speed! Her thoughts were with him as the pirate-ship sped swiftly away with her, and she saw the city where he dwelt recede further and further away in the dim distance. Alas! he was waiting for her now—and would wait in vain! Her father, she knew it, was standing outside his door

and asking every passer-by if he had not seen his little daughter coming. A banquet had been prepared for her at home, and all the invited guests were already there, but still no sign of her! And now she could see him coming down to the sea-shore, and sweep the smooth shining watery mirror with his eyes in every direction, and ask the sailor-men: 'Where is my daughter? Do you know anything about her?'"

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Here the eyes of the father and the husband involuntarily filled with tears.

“Wherefore do you weep? How silly of you! Why, you know, of course, it is only a tale. Listen now to how it goes on! The robber carried the maiden he had stolen to Stambul. He took her straight to the Kizlar-Aga whose office it is to purchase slave-girls for the harem of the Padishah. The bargaining did not take long. The Kizlar-Aga paid down at once the price which the slave-merchant demanded, and forthwith handed Irene over to the slave-women of the Seraglio, who immediately conducted her to a bath fragrant with perfumes. Her face, her figure, her charms, amazed them exceedingly, and they lifted up their voices and praised her loudly. But when Irene heard their praises she shuddered, and her heart died away within her. Surely God never gave her beauty in order that she might be sacrificed to it? At that moment she would have much preferred to have been born humpbacked, squinting, swarthy; she would have liked her face to be all seamed and scarred like half-frozen water, and her body all diseased so that everyone who saw her would shrink from her with disgust—better that than the feeling which now made her shrink from the contemplation of herself.”

Then they put upon her a splendid robe, hung diamond ear-rings in her ears, tied a beautiful shawl round her loins, encircled her arms and feet with rings of gold, and so led her into the secret apartment where the damsels of the Padishah were all gathered together. This, of course, was long, long ago. Who can tell what Sultan was reigning then? Why, even our fathers did not know his name.

“Pomp and splendour, flowers and curtains adorned the immense saloon, the ceiling whereof was inlaid with precious stones, while the floor was fashioned entirely of mother-o’-pearl—he who set his foot thereon might fancy he was walking on rainbows. Moreover, cunning artificers had wrought upon this mother-o’-pearl floor flowers and birds and other most wondrous fantastical figures, so that it was a joy to look thereon, for no carpet, however precious, was suffered to cover all this splendour. Yet lest the cold surface of the pavement should chill the feet of the damsels, rows of tiny sandals stood ready there that they might bind them upon their feet and so walk from one end of the room to the other at their ease. And these sandals they called *kobkobs*.”

“Aye, aye!” cried the anxious Janaki, “you describe the interior of the Seraglio so vividly that I almost feel frightened. If a man listened long enough to such a tale he might easily get to feel as guilty as if he had actually cast an eye into the Sultan’s harem, and ’twere best for him to die rather than do that.”

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“Is it not a tale that I am telling you? is not the room I have just described to you but a creature of the imagination?—In the centre of this saloon, then, was a large fountain, whence fragrant rose-water ascended into the air sporting with the golden balls. Along the whole length of the walls were immense Venetian mirrors, in which splendid odalisks admired their own shapely limbs. Hundreds and hundreds of lamps shone upon the pillars which supported the room—lamps of manifold colours—which gave to the vast chamber the magic hues of a fairy palace, and in the midst thereof seemed to float a transparent blue cloud—it was the light smoke of ambergris and spices which the damsels blew forth from their long narghilis. But what impressed Irene far more than all this magnificence, was the figure of the Sultana Asseki, to whom she was now conducted. A tall, muscular lady was sitting at the end of the room on a raised divan. Her figure was slender round the waist but broad and round about the shoulders. Her snow-white arms and neck were encircled by rows of real pearls with diamond clasps. A lofty heron’s plume nodded on her bejewelled turban, and lent a still haughtier aspect to that majestic form. With her large black eyes she seemed to be in the habit of ruling the whole world.”

“Yes, yes!” exclaimed Janaki, “you describe it all so vividly, that I am half afraid of sitting down here and listening to you. You might at least have let a little bit of a veil hang in front of her face.”

“But this happened long, long ago, remember! Who can even say under what Sultan it took place?... So they led the slave-girl into the presence of the Sultana, who was surrounded by two hundred other slave-girls, and was playing with a tiny dwarf. They were singing and dancing all around her and swinging censers. Above her head was a large fruit-tree made entirely of sugar, and covered with sugar-fruit of every shape and hue, and from time to time the Sultana would pluck off one of these fruits and taste a little bit of it and give the remainder to the tiny dwarf, who ate up everything greedily. Here Irene was seized by a black eunuch—a horrid, pockmarked man, whose upper lip was split right down so that all his teeth could be seen.”

“Just like the present Kizlar-Aga!” cried Musli laughing, “I fancy I can see him standing before me now!”

“The Moor commanded Irene to fall on her face before the Sultana. Irene fell on her face accordingly, and while her forehead beat the ground before the Sultana she muttered to herself the words: ‘Holy Mother of God! protectress of virgins, thou seest me in this place, when I call upon thee, deliver me!’ The Sultana, meanwhile, had commanded her handmaidens to let down Irene’s tresses, and as she stood before her there covered by her own hair from head to heel, she bade them paint her face red because it was so pale, and her eyelashes brown. She commanded them also to salve her hair with fragrant unguents,

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and to hang chains of real pearls about her arms and neck. Irene knew not the meaning of these things. She knew not what they meant to do with her till the Kizlar-Aga approached her, and said these words to her in a reassuring tone: 'Rejoice, fortunate damsel! for a great felicity awaits thee. In a week's time it will be the Feast of Bairam, and the favourite Sultana has chosen thee from among the other odalisks as a gift for the Padishah. Rejoice, therefore, I say.' But Irene at these words would fain have died. And in the meantime the Sultana had placed a large fan in her hand made entirely of pea-cocks' feathers, and permitted her to sit down by her side and hold the little dwarf in her lap. At a later day Irene discovered that this was a mark of supreme condescension. During the next six days the damsel lived amidst mortal terrors. Her companions envied her. The damsels of the harem do not love each other, they can only hate. Every day she beheld the Sultan, whose gentle face inspired involuntary respect, but the very idea of loving him filled her soul with horror. The Sultan spent the greater part of his time with his favourite wife, but it happened sometimes that he cast a handkerchief towards this or that odalisk, which was a great piece of good fortune for her, or the reverse—it all depends upon the point of view. The damsel whom the Grand Seignior seemed to favour the most was a beautiful blonde Italian girl; on one occasion this beautiful blonde damsel neglected to cast her eyes down as they chanced to encounter the eyes of the Sultana. The following day Irene could not see this damsel anywhere, and on inquiring after her was told by her bedfellow in a whisper that she had been strangled during the night. And oftentimes at dead of night the silence would be broken by a shriek from the secret dungeon of the Seraglio, followed by the sound of something splashing into the water, and regularly, on the day following every such occurrence, a familiar face would be missing from the Seraglio. All these victims were self-confident slave-girls, who had been unable to conceal their joy at the Sultan's favours, and therefore had been cast into the water. Nobody ever inquired about them any more."

Janaki shivered all over.

"It is well that this is all a tale," he observed.

But Guel-Bejaze only continued her story.

"At last the Feast of Bairam arrived, and throughout the day all the cannons on the Bosphorus sent forth their thunders. In the evening the Sultan came to the Seraglio weary and inclined to relaxation, and then the Sultana Asseki took Irene by the hand and conducted her to the Padishah, and presented her to him, together with gold-embroidered garments, preserved fruits, and other gifts intended for his delectation. The Grand Seignior regarded the girl tenderly, while she, like a kid of the flocks offered to a lion in a cage, stood trembling before him. But when the Sultan seized her hand to draw her towards him

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she sighed: 'Blessed Virgin!'—and lo! at these words her face grew pale, her eyes closed, and she fell to the ground as one dead. This was not the first time that such a spectacle had been seen in the harem. Everyone of the damsels brought thither generally commenced with a fainting-fit. The slave-girls immediately came running up to her, rubbed her body with fragrant unguents, applied penetrating essences to her face, let icy-cold water trickle down upon her bosom—and all was useless! The damsel did not awaken, and lay there like a corpse till the following morning—in fact, she never stirred from the spot where they laid her down. Next day the Padishah again summoned her to his presence. He spoke to her in the most tender manner. He gave her all manner of beautiful gifts, glittering raiment, necklaces, bracelets, and diamond aigrettes. The slave-girls, too, censed her all around with stupefying perfumes, bathed her in warm baths fragrant with ambergris and spikenard, and gave her fiery potions to drink. But it was all in vain. At the name of the Blessed Virgin, the blood ceased to flow to her heart, she fell down, died away, and every resource of ingenuity failed to arouse her. The same thing happened on the third day likewise. Then the Sultana Asseki's wrath was kindled greatly against her. She declared that this was no doing of Allah's as they might suppose. No, it was the damsel's own evil temper which made her pretend to be dead, and she immediately commanded that the damsel should be tortured. First of all they extended her stark naked on the icy-cold marble pavement—not a sign of life, not a shiver did she give. Then they held her over a slow fire on a gridiron—she never moved a muscle. Then they sent and sought for red ants in the garden among the puspang-trees and scattered them all over her body. Yet the girl never once quaked beneath the stings of the poisonous insects. Finally they thrust sharp needles down to the very quicks of her nails, and still the damsel did not stir. Then the Sultana Asseki, full of fury, seized a whip, and lashed away at the damsel's body till she could lash no more, yet she could not thrash a soul into the lifeless body."

"By Allah!" cried Halil, smiting the table with his heavy fist at this point of the narration, "that Sultana deserves to be sewn up in a leather sack and cast into the Bosphorus."

"Why, 'tis only a tale, you know," said Guel-Bejaze, stroking mockingly the chin of worthy Halil Patrona, and then she resumed her story. "The Sultan commanded that Irene should be expelled from the harem, for he had no desire to see this living corpse anywhere near him, and the Sultana gave her as a present to the Padishah's nephew, the son of his own brother."

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"The prince was a pale, handsome youth, as those whom women love much are generally wont to be. He was kept in a remote part of the Seraglio, for although every joy of life was his, and he was surrounded by wealth, pomp, and slave-girls, he was never permitted to quit the Seraglio. The Sultana herself led Irene to him, thinking that the fine eyes of the handsome youth would be the best talisman against the enchantment obsessing the charms of the strange damsel. The pale prince was charmed with the looks of the girl. He coaxed and flattered. He begged and implored her not to die away beneath his kisses and embraces. In vain. The girl swooned at the very first touch, and he who touched her lips might just as well have touched the lips of a corpse. The prince knelt down beside her, and implored her with tears to come to herself again. She heard not and she answered not. At last the fair Sultana Asseki herself had compassion on his tears and lamentations which produced no impression on the dead. Her heart bled for him. She bent over the pale prince, embraced him tenderly, and comforted him with her caresses. And the prince allowed himself to be comforted, and they rejoiced greatly together; for of course there was nobody present to see them, for the senseless damsel on the floor might have been a corpse so far as they were concerned."

"Hum!" murmured the Berber-Bashi to himself, "this is a thing well worth remembering."

"On the following day the pale prince made a present of Irene to the Grand Vizier. The Grand Vizier also rejoiced greatly at the sight of the damsel; took her into his cellar, showed her there three great vats full of gold and precious stones, and told her that all these things should be hers if only she would love him. Then he took and showed her the multitude of precious ornaments that he had concealed beneath the flooring of his palace, and promised these to her also. For every kiss she should give him, he offered her one of his palaces on the shores of the Sweet Waters, yes, for every kiss a palace."

"I would burn all these palaces to the ground!" cried Halil impetuously.

"Nay, nay, my son, be sensible!" said Janaki. He himself now began to feel that there was something more than a mere tale in all this.

But the Berber-Bashi pricked up his ears and grew terribly attentive when mention was made of the hidden treasures of the Grand Vizier.

"The sight of the treasures," resumed the girl, "had no effect upon Irene. She never failed to invoke the name of the Blessed Virgin whenever the face of a man drew near to her face, and the Blessed Virgin always wrought a miracle in her behalf."

"'Tis my belief," said Halil, "that there were no miracles at all in the matter; but that the girl had so strong a will that by an effort she made herself dead to all tortures."

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“At last they came to a definite decision concerning this slave-girl, it was resolved to sell her by public auction in the bazaars—to sell her as a common slave to the highest bidder. And so Irene fell to a poor hawker who gave his all for her. For a whole month this man left his slave-girl untouched, and the girl who could not be subdued by torture, nor the blandishments of great men, nor by treasures, nor by ardent desire, became very fond of the poor costermonger, and no longer became as one dead when *his* burning lips were impressed upon her face.”

And with that Guel-Bejaze embraced her husband and kissed him again and again, and smiled upon him with her large radiant eyes.

“A very pretty story truly!” observed Musli, smacking his lips; “what a pity there is not more of it!”

“Oh, no regrets, worthy Mussulman, there *is* more of it!” cried the Berber-Bashi, rising from his place; “just listen to the sequel of it! Having had the girl sold by auction in the bazaar, the Padishah bade Ali Kermesh, his trusty Berber-Bashi, make inquiries and see what happened to the damsel *after* the sale. Now the Berber-Bashi knew that the girl had only pretended to faint, and the Berber-Bashi brought the girl back to the Seraglio before she had spent a single night alone with her husband. For I am the Berber-Bashi and thou art Guel-Bejaze, that same slave-girl going by the name of Irene who feigned to be dead.”

Everyone present leaped in terror to his feet except Janaki, who fell down on his knees before the Berber-Bashi, embraced his knees, and implored him to treat all that the girl had said as if he had not heard it.

“We are lost!” whispered the bloodless Guel-Bejaze. The intoxication of joy and wine had suddenly left her and she was sober once more.

Janaki implored, Musli cursed and swore, but Halil spake never a word. He held his wife tightly embraced in his arms and he thought within himself, I would rather allow my hand to be chopped off than let her go.

Janaki promised money and loads of treasure to Ali Kermesh if only he would hold his tongue, say nothing of what had happened, and let the girl remain with her husband.

But the Berber-Bashi was inexorable.

“No,” said he, “I will take away the girl, and your treasures also shall be mine. Ye are the children of Death; yea, all of you who are now drawing the breath of life in this house, for to have heard the secret that this slave-girl has blabbed out is sufficient to kill anyone thrice over. I command you, Irene, to take up your veil and follow me, and you others must remain here till the Debedzik with the cord comes to fetch you also.”



With these words he cast Janaki from him, approached the damsel and seized her hand. Halil never once relaxed his embrace.

“Come with me!”

“Blessed Mary! Blessed Mary!” moaned the girl.

“Your guardian saints are powerless to help you now, for your husband’s lips have touched you; come with me!”

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Then only did Halil speak. His voice was so deep, gruff, and stern, that those who heard it scarce recognised it for his:

“Leave go of my wife, Ali Kermesh!” cried he.

“Silence thou dog! in another hour thou wilt be hanging up before thine own gate.”

“Once more I ask you—leave go of my wife, Ali Kermesh!”

Instead of answering, the Berber-Bashi would, with one hand, have torn the wife from her husband’s bosom while he clutched hold of Halil with the other, whereupon Halil brought down his fist so heavily on the skull of the Berber-Bashi that he instantly collapsed without uttering a single word.

“What have you done?” cried Janaki in terror. “You have killed the chief barber of the Sultan!”

“Yes, I rather fancy I have,” replied Halil coolly.

Musli rushed towards the prostrate form of Ali Kermesh, felt him all over very carefully, and then turned towards the hearth where the others were sitting.

“Dead he is, there is no doubt about it. He’s as dead as a door-nail. Well, Halil, that was a fine blow of yours I must say. By the Prophet! one does not see a blow like that every day. With your bare hand too! To kill a man with nothing but your empty fist! If a cannon-ball had knocked him over he could not be deader than he is.”

“But what shall we do now?” cried Janaki, looking around him with tremulous terror. “The Sultan is sure to send and make inquiries about his lost Berber-Bashi. It is known that he came here in disguise. The affair cannot long remain hidden.”

“There is no occasion to fear anything,” said Musli reassuringly. “Good counsel is cheap. We can easily find a way out of it. Before the business comes to light, we will go to the Etmeidan and join the Janissaries. There let them send and fetch us if they dare, for we shall be in a perfectly safe place anyhow. Why, don’t you remember that only last year the rebel, Esref Khan, whom the Padishah had been pursuing to the death, even in foreign lands, hit, at last, upon the idea of resorting to the Janissaries, and was safer against the fatal silken cord here, in the very midst of Stambul, than if he had fled all the way to the Isle of Rhodes for refuge. Let us all become Janissaries, I and you and Janaki also.”

But Janaki kicked vigorously against the proposition.

“You two may go over to the Janissaries if you like, but in the meantime my daughter and I will make our escape to the Isle of Tenedos and there await tidings of you. One



jar of dates I will take with me, the other you may divide among the Janissaries; it will put them in a good humour and make them receive you more amicably.”

Halil embraced his wife, kissed her, and wept over her. There was not much time for leave-taking. The Debedjis who had accompanied the Berber-Bashi were beginning to grow impatient at the prolonged absence of their master; they could be heard stamping about around the door.

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“Hasten, hasten! we can have too much of this hugging and kissing,” whispered Musli, lifting one of the jars on to his shoulders.

Yet Halil pressed one more long, long kiss on Guel-Bejaze’s trembling cheek.

“By Allah!” said he, “it shall not be long before we see each other again.”

And thus their ways parted right and left.

Musli conducted Janaki away in one direction, through a subterranean cellar, whilst Halil fled away across the house-tops, and within a quarter of an hour the pair of them arrived at the Etmeidan.

FOOTNOTE:

[1] Woodcutter.

CHAPTER V.

THE CAMP.

What a noise, what a commotion in the streets of Stambul! The multitude pours like a stream towards the harbour of the Golden Horn. Young and old stimulate each other with looks of excitement and enthusiasm. They stand together at the corners of the streets in tens and twenties, and tell each other of the great event that has happened. On the Etmeidan, in front of the Seraglio, in the doors of the mosques, the people are swarming, and from street to street they accompany the banner-bearing Duelbendar, who proclaims to the faithful amidst the flourish of trumpets that Sultan Achmed III. has declared war against Tamasip, Shah of Persia.

Everywhere faces radiant with enthusiasm, everywhere shouts of martial fervour.

From time to time a regiment of Janissaries or a band of Albanian horsemen passes across the street, or escorts the buffaloes that drag after them the long heavy guns on wheeled carriages. The mob in its thousands follows them along the road leading to Scutari, where the camp has already been pitched. For at last, at any rate, the Padishah is surfeited with so many feasts and illuminations, and after having postponed the raising of the banner of the Prophet, under all sorts of frivolous excuses, from the 18th day of Safer (2nd of September) to the 1st day of Rebusler, and from that day again to the Prophet’s birthday ten days later still, the expected, the appointed day is at length drawing near, and the whole host is assembling beneath the walls of Scutari, only awaiting the arrival of the Sultan to take ship at once—the transports are all ready—and hasten to the assistance of the heroic Kueprilizade on the battlefield.



The whole Bosphorus was a living forest planted with a maze of huge masts and spreading sails, and a thousand variegated flags flew and flapped in the morning breeze. The huge line of battle-ships, with their triple decks and their long rows of oars, looked like hundred-eyed sea-monsters swimming with hundreds of legs on the surface of the water, and the booming reverberation of the thunder of their guns was re-echoed from the broad foreheads of the palaces looking into the Bosphorus.

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Everywhere along the sea-front was to be seen an armed multitude; sparkling swords and lances in thousands flash back the rays of the sun. The whole of the grass plain round about was planted with tents of every hue; white tents for the chief muftis, bright green tents for the viziers, scarlet tents for the kiayaks, dark blue tents for the great officers of state, the Emirs, the Mecca, Medina, and Stambul justiciaries, the Defterdars, and the Nishandji; lilac-coloured tents for the Ulemas, bright blue tents for the Muederesseks, azure-blue tents for the Ciaus-Agas, and dark green designates the tent of the Emir Alem, the bearer of the sacred standard. And high above them all on a hillock towers the orange-coloured pavilion of the Padishah, with gold and purple hangings, and two and three fold horse-tails planted in front of the entrance.

At sunset yesterday there was not a trace of this vast camp, all night long this city of tents was a-building, and at dawn of day there it stands all ready like the creation of a magician's wand!

The plain is occupied by the Spahis, the finest, smartest horsemen of the whole host; along the sea-front are ranged the topidjis, with their rows and rows of cannons. Other detachments of these gunners are distributed among the various hillocks. On the wings of the host are placed the Albanian cavalry, the Tartars, and the Druses of Horan. The centre of the host belongs of right to the flower, the kernel of the imperial army—the haughty Janissaries.

And certainly they seemed to be very well aware that they were the cream of the host, and that therefore it was not lawful for any other division of the army to draw near them, much less mingle with them, unless it were a few *delis*, whom they permitted to roam up and down their ranks full of crazy exaltation.

The whole host is full of the joy of battle, and if, from time to time, fierce shouts and thunderous murmurings arise from this or that battalion, that only means that they are rejoicing at the tidings of the declaration of war: the war-ships express their satisfaction by loud salvoes.

Sultan Achmed, meanwhile, is engaged in his morning devotions, day by day he punctually observes this pious practice.

The previous night he did not spend in the harem, but shut himself up with his viziers and counsellors in that secret chamber of the Divan, which is roofed over with a golden cupola. Grave were their deliberations, but nobody, except the viziers, knows the result thereof; yet when he issues forth from his prayer-chamber the Kizlar-Aga is already awaiting him there and hands the Sultan a signet-ring.

“Most glorious of Padishahs! the most delicious of women sends thee this ring. Well dost thou know what was beneath this ring. Deadly venom was beneath it. That venom is no longer there. The Sultana Asseki sends thee her greeting, and wishes thee good

luck in this war of thine. 'Hail to thee!' she says, 'may thy guardian angels watch over all thy steps!' The Sultana meanwhile has locked herself up in her private apartments, and in the very hour in which thou quittest the Seraglio she will take this poison, which she has dissolved in a goblet of water, and will die."

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The Sultan had all at once become very grave.

“Why didst thou trouble me with these words!” he exclaimed.

“I do but repeat the words of the Sultana, greatest of Padishahs. She says thou art off to the wars, that thou wilt return no more, and that she will not be the slave-girl of the monarch who shall come after thee and sit upon thy throne.”

“Wherefore dost thou trouble me with these words?” repeated the Sultan.

“May my tongue curse my lips, may my teeth bite out my tongue because of the words I have spoken. ’Twas the Sultana that bade me speak.”

“Go back to her and tell her to come hither!”

“Such a message, oh, my master, will be her death. She will not leave her chamber alive.”

For a moment the Sultan reflected, then he asked in a mournful voice:

“What thinkest thou?—if thy house was on fire and thy beloved was inside, wouldst thou put out the flames, or wouldst thou not rather think first of rescuing thy beloved?”

“Of a truth the extinguishing of the flames is not so pressing, and the beloved should be rescued.”

“Thou hast said it. What meaneth the firing of cannons that strikes upon my ears?”

“Salvoes from the host.”

“Can they be heard in the Seraglio?”

“Yea, and the songs of the singing-girls grow dumb before it.”

“Conduct me to Adsalis! She must not die. What is the sky to thee if there be no sun in it? What is the whole world to thee if thou dost lose thy beloved? Go on before and tell her that I am coming!”

The Kizlar-Aga withdrew. Achmed muttered to himself:

“But another second, but another moment, but another instant long enough for a parting kiss, but another hour, but another night—a night full of blissful dreams—and it will be quite time enough to hasten to the cold and icy battlefield.” And with that he hastened towards the harem.



There sat the Sultana with dishevelled tresses and garments rent asunder, without ornaments, without fine raiment, in sober cinder-coloured mourning weeds. Before her, on a table, stood a small goblet filled with a bluish transparent fluid. That fluid was poison—not a doubt of it. Her slave-girls lay scattered about on the floor around her, weeping and wailing and tearing their faces and their snowy bosoms with their long nails.

The Padishah approached her and tenderly enfolded her in his arms.

“Wherefore wouldst thou die out of my life, oh, thou light of my days?”

The Sultana covered her face with her hands.

“Can the rose blossom in winter-time? Do not its leaves fall when the blasts of autumn blow upon it?”

“But the winter that must wither thee is still far distant.”

“Oh, Achmed! when anyone’s star falls from Heaven, does the world ever ask, wert thou young? wert thou beautiful? didst thou enjoy life? Mashallah! such a one is dead already. My star shone upon thy face, and if thou dost turn thy face from me, then must I droop and wither.”

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“And who told thee that I had turned my face from thee?”

“Oh, Achmed! the Wind does not say, I am cold, and yet we feel it. Thy heart is far, far away from me even when thou art nigh. But my heart is with thee even when thou art far away from me, even then I am near to thee; but thou art far away even when thou art sitting close beside me. It is not Achmed who is talking to me. It is only Achmed's body. Achmed's soul is wandering elsewhere; it is wandering on the bloody field of battle amidst the clash of cold steel. He imagines that those banners, those weapons, those cannons love him more than his poor abandoned, forgotten Adsalis.”

The salvo of a whole row of cannons was heard in front of the Seraglio.

“Hearken how they call to thee! Their words are more potent than the words of Adsalis. Go then! follow their invitation! Go the way they point out to thee! The voice of Adsalis will not venture to compete with them. What indeed is my voice?—what but a gentle, feeble sound! Go! there also I will be with thee. And when the long manes of thy horse-tail standards flutter before thee on the field of battle, fancy that thou dost see before thee the waving tresses of thy Adsalis who has freed her soul from the incubus of her body in order that it might be able to follow thee.”

“Oh, say not so, say not so!” stammered the tender-hearted Sultan, pressing his gentle darling to his bosom and closing her lips with his own as if, by the very act, he would have prevented her soul from escaping and flying away.

And the cannons may continue thundering on the shores of the Bosphorus, the Imperial Ciauses may summon the host to arms with the blasts of their trumpets, the camp of a whole nation may wait and wait on the plains of Scutari, but Sultan Achmed is far too happy in the embraces of Adsalis to think even for a moment of seizing the banner of the Prophet and leading his bloodthirsty battalions to face the dangers of the battlefield.

The only army that he now has eyes for is the army of the odalisks and slave-girls, who seize their tambourines and mandolines, and weave the light dance around the happy imperial couple, singing sweet songs of enchantment, while outside through the streets of Stambul gun-carriages are rattling along, and the mob, in a frenzy of enthusiasm, clamours for a war of extermination against the invading Shiites.

Meanwhile a fine hubbub is going on around the kettle of the first Janissary regiment. These kettles, by the way, play a leading part in the history of the Turkish Empire. Around them assemble the Janissaries when any question of war or plunder arises, or when they demand the head of a detested pasha, or when they wish to see the banner of the Prophet unfurled; and so terrible were these kettles on all such occasions that the anxious viziers and pashas, when driven into a corner, were compelled to fill these same kettles either with gold pieces or with their own blood.

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An impatient group of Janissaries was standing round their kettle, which was placed on the top of a lofty iron tripod, and amongst them we notice Halil Patrona and Musli. Both were wearing the Janissary dress, with round turbans in which a black heron's plume was fastened (only the officers wore white feathers), with naked calves only half-concealed by the short, bulgy pantaloons which scarce covered the knee. There was very little of the huckster of the day before yesterday in Halil's appearance now. His bold and gallant bearing, his resolute mode of speech, and the bountiful way in which he scattered the piastres which he had received from Janaki, had made him a prime favourite among his new comrades. Musli, on the other hand, was still drunk. With desperate self-forgetfulness he had been drinking the health of his friend all night long, and never ceased bawling out before his old cronies in front of the tent of the Janissary Aga that if the Aga, whose name was Hassan, was indeed as valiant a man as they tried to make out, let him come forth from beneath his tent and not think so much of his soft bearskin bed, or else let him give his white heron plume to Halil Patrona and let him lead them against the enemy.

The Janissary Aga could hear this bellowing quite plainly, but he also could hear the Janissary guard in front of the tent laughing loudly at the fellow and making all he said unintelligible.

Meanwhile a troop of mounted ciauxes was approaching the kettle of the first Janissary regiment in whose leader we recognise Halil Pelivan. Allah had been with him—he was now raised to the rank of a ciaux-officer.

The giant stood among the Janissaries and inquired in a voice of thunder:

“Which of you common Janissary fellows goes by the name of Halil Patrona?”

Patrona stepped forth.

“Methinks, Halil Pelivan,” said he, “it does not require much brain-splitting on your part to recognise me.”

“Where is your comrade Musli?”

“Can you not give me a handle to my name, you dog of a ciaux?” roared Musli. “I am a gentleman I tell you. So long as you were a Janissary, you were a gentleman too. But now you are only a dog of a ciaux. What business have you, I should like to know, in Begta's flower-garden?”

“To root out weeds. The pair of you, bound tightly together, must follow me.”

“Look ye, my friends!” cried Musli, turning to his comrades, “that man is drunk, dead drunk. He can scarce stand upon his feet. How dare you say,” continued he, turning towards Pelivan—“how dare you say that two Janissaries, two of the flowers from



Begta's garden, are to follow you when the banners of warfare are already waving before us?"

"I am commanded by the Kapu-Kiaja to bring you before him."

"Say not so, you mangy dog you! Let him come for us himself if he has anything to say to us! What, my friends! am I not right in saying that the Kapu-Kiaja, if he did his duty, ought to be here with us, in the camp and on the battlefield? and that it is no business of ours to dance attendance upon him? Am I not right? Let him come hither!"

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This sentiment was greeted with an approving howl.

“Let him come hither if he wants to talk to a Janissary!” cried many voices. “Who ever heard of summoning a Janissary away from his camp?”

It was as much as Pelivan could do to restrain his fury.

“You two are murderers,” said he, “you have killed the Sultan’s Berber-Bashi.”

At this there was a general outburst of laughter. Everybody knew that already. Musli had told the story hundreds of times with all sorts of variations. He had described to them how Halil had slain Ali Kermesh with a single blow of his fist, and how the latter’s jaw had suddenly fallen and collapsed into a corner, all of which had seemed very comical indeed to the Janissaries.

So five or six of them, all speaking together, began to heckle and cross-question Pelivan.

“Are there no more barbers in Stambul that you make such a fuss over this particular one?”

“What an infamous thing to demand the lives of a couple of Janissaries for the sake of a single beard-scraper!”

“May you and your Kapu-Kiaja have no other pastime in Paradise than the shaving of innumerable beards!”

At last Patrona stepped forth and begged his comrades to let him have *his* say in the matter.

“Hearken now, Pelivan!” began he, “you and I are adversaries I know very well, nor do I care a straw that it is so. I am not palavering now with you because I want to get out of a difficulty, but simply because I want to send you back to the Kiaja with a sensible answer which I am quite sure you are incapable of hitting upon yourself. Well, I freely admit that I *did* kill Ali Kermesh, killed him single-handed. Nobody helped me to do the deed. And now I have thrown in my lot with the Janissaries, and here I stand where it has pleased Allah to place me, that I may pay with my own life for the life I have taken if it seem good to Him so to ordain. I am quite ready to die and glorify His name thereby. His Will be done! Let the honourable Kiaja therefore gird up his loins, and let all those great lords who repose in the shadow of the Padishah draw their swords and come among us once for all. I and all my comrades, the whole Janissary host in fact, are ready to fall on the field of battle one after another at the bare wave of their hand, but there is not a single Janissary present who would bow his knee before the executioner.”

These words, uttered in a ringing, sonorous voice, were accompanied by thunders of applause from the whole regiment, and during this tumult Musli endeavoured to add a couple of words on his own account to the message already delivered by Patrona.

“And just tell your master, the Kiaja,” said he, “and all your white-headed grand viziers and grey-bearded muftis, that if they do not bring the Sultan and the banner of the Prophet into camp this very day, not a single one of them will need a barber on the morrow, unless they would like their heels well shaved in default of heads.”

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Pelivan meanwhile was looking steadily into Halil's eyes. There was such a malicious scorn in his gaze that Halil involuntarily grasped the hilt of his sword.

"Fear not, Patrona!" cried he jeeringly, "Guel-Bejaze will never again be conducted into the Seraglio. She and your father-in-law have been captured as they were trying to fly, and the unbelieving Greek cattle-dealer has been thrown into the dungeon set apart for evil-doers. As for that woman whom you call your wife, she has been put into the prison assigned to those shameless ones whom the gracious Sultan has driven together from all parts of the realm, and kept in ward lest the virtue of his faithful Mussulmans should be corrupted. There you will find her."

Patrona, like a furious tiger that has burst forth from its cage, at these words rushed from out the ranks of his comrades. His sword flashed in his hand, and if Pelivan had been doubly as big as he was, his mere size could not have saved him. But the leader of the ciauxes straightway put spurs to his horse, and laughing loudly galloped away with his ciauxes, almost brushing the enraged Halil as he passed, and when he had already trotted a safe distance away, he turned round and with a scornful Ha, ha, ha! began hurling insults at the Janissaries, five or six of whom had set out to follow him.

"Ha! he is mocking us!" exclaimed Musli, whereupon the Janissaries who stood nearest perceiving that they should never be able to overtake him on foot, hastened to the nearest battery, wrested a mortar from the topijis by force, and fired it upon the retreating ciauxes. The discharged twelve-pounder whistled about their heads and then fell far away in the midst of a bivouac where a number of worthy Bosniaks were cooking their suppers, scattering the hot ashes into their eyes, ricochetting thence very prettily into the pavilion of the Bostanji Bashi, two of whose windows it knocked out, thence bounding three or four times into the air, terrifying several recumbent groups in its passage, and trundling rapidly away over some level ground, till at last it rolled into the booth of a glass-maker, and there smashed to atoms an incalculable quantity of pottery.

Here Pelivan finally ran it to earth, seized it, hauled it off to the Kiaja, and duly delivered the message of the Janissaries, together with the twelve-pound cannon-ball, at the same time reminding him that it was an old habit of the Janissaries to accompany their messages with similar little *douceurs*.

Pelivan had anticipated that the Kiaja would foam with rage at the news, and would have the offending Janissary regiment decimated at the very least; but the Kiaja, instead of being angry, seemed very much afraid. He saw in this presumptuous message a declaration of rebellion, and hurried off to the Grand Vizier as fast as his legs could carry him, taking the heavy twelve-pounder along with him.

Ibrahim perfectly comprehended what was said to him, and placing the cannon-ball in a box nicely lined with velvet took it to the Seraglio, and when he got there sent for the Kizlar-Aga, placed it in his hands, and commissioned him to deliver it to the Sultan.

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"The Army," said he, "has sent this present to the most glorious Padishah. It is a treasure which is worth nothing so long as it is in our possession; it only becomes precious when we pay our debts with it, but it is downright damaging if we let others pay their debts to us therewith. Say to the most puissant of Sultans that if he finds this one specimen too little, the Army is ready to send him a lot more, and then it will choose neither me nor thee to be the bearer thereof."

The Kizlar-Aga, who did not know what was in the box, took it forthwith into the Hall of Delight, and there delivered it to Achmed together with the message.

The Sultan broke open the box in the presence of the Sultana Asseki, and on perceiving therein the heavy cannon-ball at once understood Ibrahim's message.

He was troubled to the depths of his soul when he understood it. He was so good, so gentle to everyone, he tried so hard to avoid injuring anybody, and yet everybody seemed to combine to make him miserable! It seemed as though they envied him his sweet delights, and were determined that he should find no repose even in the very bosom of his family.

He embraced and kissed the fair Sultana again and again, and stammered with tears in his eyes:

"Die then, my pretty flower! fade away! wither before my very eyes! Die if thou canst that at least my heart may have nothing to long for!"

The Sultana threw herself in despair at his feet, with her dishevelled tresses waving all about her, and encircling Achmed's knees with her white arms she besought him, sobbing loudly, not to go to the camp, at any rate, not *that* day. Let at least the memory of the evil dreams she had dreamed the night before pass away, she said.

But no, he could remain behind no longer. In vain were all weeping and wailing, however desperate. The Sultan had made up his mind that he must go. One single moment only did he hesitate, for one single moment the thought did occur to him: Am I a mere tool in the hands of my army, and why do I wear a sword at all if I do not decapitate therewith those who rise in rebellion against me? But he very soon let that thought escape. He knew he was not capable of translating it into action. Many, very many, must needs die if he acted thus; perhaps it were better, much better, for everybody if he submitted.

"There is nought for thee but to die, my pretty flower," he whispered to the Sultana, who, sobbing and moaning, accompanied him to the very door of the Seraglio, and there he gently removed her arms from his shoulders and hastened to the council-chamber.

Adsalis did *not* die however, but made her way by the secret staircase to the apartments of the White Prince and found consolation with him.

“The Sultan did not yield to my arguments,” she said to the White Prince, who took her at once to his bosom, “he is off to the camp. If only I could hold him back for a single day the rebellion would burst forth—and then his dominion would vanish and his successor would be yourself.”

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“Calm yourself, we may still gain time! Remind him through the Kizlar-Aga that he neglect not the pricking of the Koran.”

“You have spoken a word in season,” replied Adsalis, and she immediately sent the Kizlar-Aga into the council-chamber.

The Grand Vizier, the Kapudan Pasha, the Kiaja, the Chief Mufti, and the Sheik of the Aja Sophia, Ispirizade, were assembled in council with the Sultan who had just ordered the Silihdar to gird him with the sword of Mahomet.

“Most illustrious Padishah!” cried the Kizlar-Aga, throwing himself to the ground and hiding his face in his hands, “the Sultana Asseki would have me remind thee that thou do not neglect to ask counsel from Allah by the pricking of the Koran, before thou hast come to any resolution, as was the custom of thine illustrious ancestors as often as they had to choose between peace and war.”

“Well said!” cried Achmed, and thereupon he ordered the chief mufti to bring him the Alkoran which, in all moments of doubt, the Sultans were wont to appeal to and consult by plunging a needle through its pages, and then turning to the last leaf in which the marks of the needle-point were visible. Whatever words on this last page happened to be pricked were regarded as oracular and worthy of all obedience.

On every table in the council-chamber stood an Alkoran—ten copies in one room. The binding of one of these copies was covered with diamonds. This copy the Chief Mufti brought to the Sultan, and gave into his hands the needle with which the august ceremony was to be accomplished.

Meanwhile Ibrahim glanced impatiently at the three magnificent clocks standing in the room, one beside the other. They all pointed to a quarter to twelve. It was already late, and this ceremony of the pricking of the Koran always took up such a lot of time.

The Sultan opened the book at the last page, pricked through by the needle, and these were the words he read:

“He who fears the sword will find the sword his enemy, and better a rust-eaten sword in the hand than a brightly burnished one in a sheath.”

“La illah il Allah! God is one!” said Achmed bowing his head and kissing the words of the Alkoran. “Make ready my charger, ’tis the will of God.”

The Kizlar-Aga returned with the news to Adsalis and the White Prince.

Even the pricking of the Koran had gone contrary to their plans.

“Go and remind the Sultan,” said Adsalis, “that he cannot go to the wars without the surem of victory;” and for the second time the Kizlar-Aga departed to execute the commands of the Sultana.

The surem, by the way, is a holy supplication which it is usual for the chief Imam to recite in the mosques before the Padishah goes personally to battle, praying that Allah will bless his arms with victory.

Now, because time was pressing, it was necessary to recite this prayer in the chapel of the Seraglio instead of in the mosque of St. Sophia. Ispirizade accordingly began to intone the surem, but he spun it out so long and made such a business of it, that it seemed as if he were bent on wasting time purposely. By the time the devotion was over every clock in the Seraglio had struck twelve.

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Ibrahim hastened to the Sultan to press him to embark as soon as possible in the ship that was waiting ready to convey him and the White Prince to Scutari; but at the foot of the staircase, in the outer court of the Seraglio where stood the Sultan's chargers which were to take him through the garden kiosk to the sea-shore, the way was barred by the Kizlar-Aga, who flung himself to the ground before the Sultan, and grasping his horse's bridle began to cry with all his might:

"Trample me, oh, my master, beneath the hoofs of thy horses, yet listen to my words! The noontide hour has passed, and the hours of the afternoon are unlucky hours for any undertaking. The true Mussulman puts his hand to nothing on which the blessing of Allah can rest when noon has gone. Trample on my dead body if thou wilt, but say not that there was nobody who would have withheld thee from the path of peril!"

The soul of Achmed III. was full of all manner of fantastic sentiments. Faith, hope, and love, which make others strong, had in him degenerated into superstition, frivolity, and voluptuousness—already he was but half a man.

At the words of the Kizlar-Aga he removed his foot from the stirrup in which he had dreamily placed it with the help of the kneeling Rikiabdar, and said in the tone of a man who has at last made up his mind:

"We will go to-morrow."

Ibrahim was in despair at this fresh delay. He whispered a few words in the ear of Izmail Aga, whereupon the latter scarce waiting till the Sultan had remounted the steps, flung himself on his horse and galloped as fast as he could tear towards Scutari.

Meanwhile the Grand Vizier and the Chief Mufti continued to detain the Sultan in the Divan, or council-chamber.

Three-quarters of an hour later Izmail Aga returned and presented himself before the Sultan all covered with dust and sweat.

"Most glorious Padishah!" he cried, "I have just come from the host. Since dawn they have all been on their feet awaiting thy arrival. If by evening thou dost not show thyself in the camp, then so sure as God is one, the host will not remain in Scutari but will come to Stambul."

The host is coming to Stambul!—that was a word of terror.

And Achmed III. well understood what it meant. Well did he remember the message which, three-and-twenty years before, the host had sent to his predecessor, Sultan Mustafa, who would not quit his harem at Adrianople to come to Stambul: "Even if thou wert dead thou couldst come here in a couple of days!" And he also remembered what had followed. The Sultan had been made to abdicate the throne and he (Achmed) had

taken his place. And now just the same sort of tempest which had overthrown his predecessor was shaking the seat of the mighty rock beneath his own feet.

“Mashallah! the will of God be done!” exclaimed Achmed, kissing the sword of Muhammad, and a quarter of an hour later he went on board the ship destined for him with the banner of the Prophet borne before him.

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In the Seraglio all the clocks one after another struck one as four-and-twenty salvoes announced that the Sultan with the banner of the Prophet had arrived in the camp.

And the people of the East believe that the blessing of Allah does not rest on the hour which marks the afternoon.

CHAPTER VI.

THE BURSTING FORTH OF THE STORM.

A contrary wind was blowing across the Bosphorus, so that it was not until towards the evening that the Sultan arrived at Scutari, and disembarked there at his seaside palace with his viziers, his princes, the Chief Mufti, and Ispirizade.

Though everything had quieted down close at hand, all night long could be heard, some distance off, in the direction of the camp, a murmuring and a tumult, the cause of which nobody could explain.

More than once the Grand Vizier sent fleet runners to the Aga of the Janissaries to inquire what was the meaning of all that noise in the camp. Hassan replied that he himself did not understand why they were so unruly after they had heard the arrival of the Sultan and the sacred banner everywhere proclaimed.

Shortly afterwards Ibrahim commanded him to seize all those who would not remain quiet. Hassan accordingly laid his hands on sundry who came conveniently in his way; but, for all that, the rest would pay no heed to him, and the tumult began to extend in the direction of Stambul also.

Towards midnight a ciaus reached the Kiaja with the intelligence that a number of soldiers were coming along from the direction of Tebrif, crying as they came that the army of Kueprilizade had been scattered to the winds by Shah Tamasip, and that they themselves were the sole survivors of the carnage—that was why the army round Stambul was chafing and murmuring.

The Kiaja went at once in search of the Grand Vizier and told him of this terrible rumour.

“Impossible!” exclaimed Ibrahim. “Kueprilizade would not allow himself to be beaten. Only a few days ago I sent him arms and reinforcements which were more than enough to enable him to hold his own until the main army should arrive.

“And even if it were true. If, in consequence of the Sultan’s procrastination, we were to arrive too late and the whole of the provinces of Hamadan and Kermanshan were to be lost—even then we should all be in the hands of Allah. Come, let us go to prayer and then to bed!”

At about the same hour, three softas awoke the Chief Mufti and Ispirizade, and laid before them a letter written on parchment which they had discovered lying in the middle of a mosque. The letter was apparently written with gunpowder and almost illegible.

It turned out to be an exhortation to all true Mussulmans to draw the sword in defence of Muhammad, but they were bidden beware lest, when they went against the foe, they left behind them, at home, the greatest foes of all, who were none other than the Sultan's own Ministers.

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"This letter deserves to be thrown into the fire," said Ispirizade, and into the fire he threw it, there and then, and thereupon lay down to sleep with a good conscience.

The following day was Thursday, the 28th September. On that very day, twelve months before, the Sultan's eleven-year-old son had died. The day was therefore kept as a solemn day of mourning, and a general cessation of martial exercises throughout the host was proclaimed by a flourish of trumpets.

To many of the commanders this day of rest was a season of strict observance. The Aga of the Janissaries withdrew to his kiosk; the Kapudan Pasha had himself rowed through the canal to his country house at Chengelkoei, having just received from a Dutch merchant a very handsome assortment of tulip-bulbs, which he wanted to plant out with his own hands; the Reis-Effendi hastened to his summer residence, beside the Sweet Waters, to take leave of his odalisks for the twentieth time at least; and the Kiaja returned to Stambul. Each of them strictly observed the day—in his own peculiar manner.

But Fate had prepared for the people at large a very different sort of observance.

Early in the morning, at sunrise, seventeen Janissaries were standing in front of the mosque of Bajazid with Halil Patrona at their head.

In the hand of each one of them was a naked sword, and in their midst stood Musli holding aloft the half-moon banner.

The people made way before them, and allowed Patrona to ascend the steps of the mosque, and when the blast of the alarm-horns had subsided, the clear penetrating voice of the ex-pedlar was distinctly audible from end to end of the great kalan square in front of him.

"Mussulmans!" he cried, "you have duties, yes, duties laid upon you by our sacred law. We are being ruined by traitors. Fugitives from the host have brought us the tidings that the army of Kueprilizade has been scattered to the winds; four thousand horses and six hundred camels, laden with provisions, have been captured by the Persians; the general himself has fled to Erivan, and the provinces of Hamadan and Kermanshan are once more in the possession of the enemy. And all this is going on while the Grand Vizier and the Chief Mufti have been arranging Lantern Feasts, Processions of Palms and Illuminations in the streets of Stambul instead of making ready the host to go to the assistance of the valiant Kueprilizade! Our brethren are sent to the shambles, we hear their cries, we see their banners falter and fall into the enemy's hands, and we are not suffered to fly to their assistance, though we stand here with drawn swords in our hands. There is treachery—treachery against Allah and His Prophet! Therefore, let every true believer forsake immediately his handiwork, cast his awl, his hammer, and

his plane aside, and seize his sword instead; let him close his booth and rally beneath our standard!"

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The mob greeted these words with a savage yell, raised Patrona on its shoulders, and carried him away through the arcades of Bezesztan piazza. Everyone hastened away to close his booth, and the whole city seemed to be turned upside down. It was just as if a still standing lake had been stirred violently to its lowest depths, and all the slimy monsters and hideous refuse reposing at the bottom had come to the surface; for the streets were suddenly flooded by the unrecognised riff-raff which vegetates in every great town, though they are out of the ken of the regular and orderly inhabitants, and only appear in the light of day when a sudden concussion drives them to the surface.

Yelling and howling, they accompanied Halil everywhere, only listening to him when his escort raised him aloft on their shoulders in order that he might address the mob.

Just at this moment they stopped in front of the house of the Janissary Aga.

“Hassan!” cried Halil curtly, disdaining to give him his official title, and thundering on the door with his fists, “Hassan, you imprisoned our comrades because they dared to murmur, and now you can hear roars instead of murmurs. Give them up, Hassan! Give them up, I say!”

Hassan, however, was no great lover of such spectacles, so he hastily exchanged his garments for a suit of rags, and bolted through the gate of the back garden to the shores of the Bosphorus, where he huddled into an old tub of a boat which carried him across to the camp. Then only did he feel safe.

Meanwhile the Janissaries battered in the door of his house and released their comrades. Then they put Halil on Hassan’s horse and proceeded in great triumph to the Etmeidan. The next instant the whole square was alive with armed men, and they hauled the Kulkiaja caldron out of the barracks and set it up in the midst of the mob. This was the usual signal for the outburst of the war of fiercely contending passions too long enchained.

“And now open the prisons!” thundered Halil, “and set free all the captives! Put daggers in the hands of the murderers and flaming torches in the hands of the incendiaries, and let us go forth burning and slaying, for to-day is a day of death and lamentation.”

And the mob rushed upon the prisons, tore down the railings, broke through bolts and bars, and whole hordes of murderers and malefactors rushed forth into the piazza and all the adjoining streets, and the last of all to quit the dungeon was Janaki, Halil’s father-in-law. There he remained standing in the doorway as if he were afraid or ashamed, till Musli rushed towards him and tore him away by force.

“Be not cast down, muzafir, but snatch up a sword and stand alongside of me. No harm can come to you here. It is the turn of the Gaolers now.”



In the meantime Halil had made his way to that particular dungeon where the loose women whom the Sultan had been graciously pleased to collect from all the quarters of the town to herd in one place were listening in trembling apprehension.

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The doors were flung wide open, and the mob roared to the prisoners that all to whom liberty was dear might show a clean pair of heels, whereupon a mob of women, like a swarm of shrieking ghosts, fluttered through the doors and made off in every direction. Those women who stroll about the streets with uncovered faces, who paint their eyebrows and lips for the diversion of strangers, who are shut out from the world like mad dogs, that they may not contaminate the people—all these women were now let loose! Some of them had grown old since the prison-gates had been closed upon them, but the flame of evil passion still flickered in their sunken eyes. Alas! what pestilence has been let loose upon the Mussulman population. And thou, Halil! wilt thou be able to ride the storm to which thou has given wings?

There he stands in the gateway! He is waiting till, in the wake of these unspeakably vile women, his pure-souled idol, the beautiful, the innocent Guel-Bejaze shall appear. How long she delays! All the rest have come forth; all the rest have scattered to their various haunts, only one or two belated shapes are now emerging from the dungeon and hastening, after the others—creatures whom the voice of the tumult had surprised *en deshabelle*, and who now with only half-clothed bodies and hair streaming down their backs rush screaming away. Only Guel-Bejaze still delays.

Full of anxiety Halil descends at last into the loathsome hole but dimly lit by a few round windows in the roof.

“Guel-Bejaze! Guel-Bejaze!” he moans with a stifling voice, looking all around the dungeon, and, at the sound of his whispered words, he sees a white mass, huddled in a corner of the far wall, feebly begin to move. He rushes to the spot. Surely it is some beggar-woman who hides her face from him? Gently he removes her hands from her face and in the woman recognises his wife. The poor creature would rather not be set free for very shame sake. She would rather remain here in the dungeon.

Speechless with agony, he raised her in his arms. The woman said not a word, gave him not a look, she only hid her face in her husband’s bosom and sobbed aloud.

“Weep not! weep not!” moaned Halil, “those who have dishonoured thee shall, this very day, lie in the dust before thee, by Allah. I swear it. Thou shalt play with the heads of those who have played with thy heart, and that selfsame puffed-up Sultana who has stretched out her hand against thee shall be glad to kiss thy hand. I, Halil Patrona, have said it, and let me be accursed above all other Mussulmans if ever I have lied.”

Then snatching up his wife in his arms he rushed out among the crowd, and exhibiting that pale and forlorn figure in the sight of all men, he cried:

“Behold, ye Mussulmans! this is my wife whom they ravished from me on my bridal night, and whom I must needs discover in the midst of this sink of vileness and iniquity!

Speak those of you who are husbands, would you be merciful to him who dishonoured your wife after this sort?"

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"Death be upon his head!" roared the furious multitude, and rolling onwards like a flood that has burst its dams it stopped a moment later before a stately palace.

"Whose is this palace?" inquired Halil of the mob.

"Damad Ibrahim's," cried sundry voices from among the crowd.

"Whose is that palace, I say?" inquired Halil once more, angrily shaking his head.

Then many of them understood the force of the question and exclaimed:

"Thine, O Halil Patrona!"

"Thine, thine, Halil!" thundered the obsequious crowd, and with that they rushed upon the palace, burst open the doors, and Patrona, with his wife still clasped in his arms, forced his way in, and seeking out the harem of the Grand Vizier, commanded the odalisks of Ibrahim to bow their faces in the dust before their new mistress, and fulfil all her demands. And before the door he placed a guard of honour.

Outside there was the din of battle, the roll of drums, and the blast of trumpets; and the whole of this tempest was fanned by the faint breathing of a sick and broken woman.

CHAPTER VII.

TULIP-BULBS AND HUMAN HEADS.

It is not every day that one can see budding tulips in the middle of September, yet the Kapudan Pasha had succeeded in hitting upon a dodge which the most famous gardeners in the world had for ages been racking their brains to discover, and all in vain.

The problem was—how to introduce an artificial spring into the very waist and middle of autumn, and then to get the tulip-bulbs to take September for May, and set about flowering there and then.

First of all he set about preparing a special forcing-bed of his own invention, in which he carefully mingled together the most nourishing soil formed among the Mountains of Lebanon from millennial deposits of cedar-tree spines, antelope manure, so heating and stimulating to vegetation, that wherever it falls on the desert, tiny oases, full of flowers and verdure, immediately spring up amidst the burning, drifting sand-hills, and burnt and pulverized black marble which is only to be found in the Dead Mountains. A judicious intermingling of this mixture produces a soft, porous, and exceedingly damp soil, and in this soil the Kapudan Pasha very carefully planted out his tulips with his own hands. He selected the bulbs resulting from last spring's blooms, making a hole for each of them,

one by one, with his index-finger, and banking them up gingerly with earth as soft as fresh bread crumbs.

Then he had snow fetched from the summits of the Caucasus, where it remains even all through the summer—whole ship loads of snow by way of the Black Sea—and kept the tulip-bulbs well covered with it, adding continually layers of fresh snow as the first layers melted, so that the hoodwinked tulips really believed it was now winter; and when towards the end of August the snow was allowed to melt altogether, they fancied spring had come, and poked their gold-green shoots out of their well-warmed, well-moistened bed.

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On the eve of the Prophet's birthday about fifty plants had begun to bloom, all of which had been named after battles in which the Mussulmans had triumphed, or after fortresses which their arms had captured. Then, however, the Kapudan Pasha was obliged to go to sea and command the fleet, in other words, he was constrained to leave his beloved tulips at the most interesting period of their existence.

On the very evening when the Sultan arrived at Scutari, one of the Kapudan Pasha's gardeners came to him with the joyful intelligence that Belgrade, Naples, Morea, and Kermanjasahan would blossom on the morrow.

The Kapudan Pasha was wild with impatience. There they all were, just on the point of blooming, and he would be unable to see it. How he would have liked a contrary wind to have kept back the fleet for a day or two.

But what the wind would not do for him, the Sultan's birthday gave him the opportunity of doing for himself. The day of rest appointed for the morrow permitted the Kapudan Pasha to get himself rowed across to his summer palace at Chengelkoei, where his marvellous tulips were about to bloom at the beginning of autumn.

What a spectacle awaited him! All four of them, yes, all four, were in full bloom!

Belgrade was pale yellow with bright green stripes, those of the stripes which were pale green on the lower were rose-coloured on the upper surface, and those of them which were bright green above died gradually away into a dark lilac colour below.

Naples was a very full tulip, whose confusingly numerous angry-red leaves, with yellow edges, symbolized, perhaps, the fifteen hundred Venetians who had fallen at its name-place beneath the arms of the Ottomans.

Morea was the richest in colour. The base of its cup was of a dark chocolate hue, with green and rose-coloured stripes all round it; moreover, the green stripes passed into red, and the rose ones into liver-colour, and a bright yellow streak of colour ran parallel with every single stripe. On the outside the green hues, inside the red rather predominated.

But the rarest, the most magnificent of the four was Kermanjasahan. This was a treasure filched from the garden of the Dalai Lama. It was snow-white, without the slightest nuance of any other colour, and of such full bloom that the original six petals were obliged to bend downwards.

The Kapudan Pasha was enraptured by all this splendour.

He had made up his mind to present all these tulips to the Sultan, for which he would no doubt receive a rich viceroyalty, perhaps even Egypt, who could tell. He therefore ordered that costly china vases should be brought to him in which he might transplant

the flowers, and he dug with his hands deep down in the soil lest he should injure the bulbs.

Just as he was kneeling down in the midst of the tulips, with his hands all covered with mould, a breathless bostanji came rushing towards him at full speed, quite out of breath, and without waiting to get up to him, exclaimed while still a good distance off:

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“Sir, sir, rise up quickly, for all Stambul is in a commotion.”

“Take care!—don’t tread upon my tulips, you blockhead; don’t you see that you nearly trampled upon one of them!”

“Oh, my master! tulips bloom every year, but if you trample a man to death, Mashallah! he will rise no more. Hasten, for the rioters are already turning the city upside down!”

The Kapudan Pasha very gently, very cautiously, placed the flower, which he had raised with both hands, in the porcelain vase, and pressed the earth down on every side of it so that it might keep steady when carried.

“What dost thou say, my son?” he then condescended to ask.

“The people of Stambul have risen in revolt.”

“The people of Stambul, eh? What sort of people? Do you mean the cobblers, the hucksters, the fishermen, and the bakers?”

“Yes, sir, they have all risen in revolt.”

“Very well, I’ll be there directly and tell them to be quiet.”

“Oh, sir, you speak as if you could extinguish the burning city with this watering-can. The will of Allah be done!”

But the Kapudan Pasha, with a merry heart, kept on watering the transplanted tulips till he had done it thoroughly, and entrusted them to four bostanjis, bidding them carry the flowers through the canal to the Sultan’s palace at Scutari, while he had his horse saddled and without the slightest escort trotted quite alone into Stambul, where at that very moment they were crying loudly for his head.

On the way thither, he came face to face with the Kiaja coming in a wretched, two-wheeled kibitka, with a Russian coachman sitting in front of him to hide him as much as possible from the public view. He bellowed to the Kapudan Pasha not to go to Stambul as death awaited him there. At this the Kapudan Pasha simply shrugged his shoulders. What an idea! To be frightened of an army of bakers and cobblers indeed! It was sheer nonsense, so he tried to persuade the Kiaja to turn back again with him and restore order by showing themselves to the rioters, whereupon the latter vehemently declared that not for all the joys of Paradise would he do so, and begged his Russian coachman to hasten on towards Scutari as rapidly as possible.

The Kapudan Pasha promised that he would not be very long behind him; nay, inasmuch as the Kiaja was making a very considerable detour, while he himself was

taking the direct road straight through Stambul, he insinuated that it was highly probable he might reach Scutari before him.

“We shall meet again shortly,” he cried by way of a parting salute.

“Yes, in Abraham’s bosom, I expect,” murmured the Kiaja to himself as he raced away again, while the Kapudan Pasha ambled jauntily into the city.

Already from afar he beheld the palace of the Reis-Effendi, on whose walls were inscribed in gigantic letters the following announcements:

“Death to the Chief Mufti!

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"Death to the Grand Vizier!

"Death to the Kapudan Pasha!

"Death to the Kiaja Beg!"

"H'm!" said the Kapudan Pasha to himself. "No doubt that was written by some softa or other, for cobblers and tailors cannot write of course. Not a bad hand by any means. I should like to make the fellow my teskeredji."

As he trotted nearer to the palace, he perceived a great multitude surging around it, and amongst them a mounted trumpeter with one of those large Turkish field-horns which are audible a mile off, and are generally used at Stambul during every popular rising, their very note has a provocative tone.

The trumpeting herald was thus addressing the mob assembled around him:

"Inhabitants of Stambul, true-believing Mussulmans, our commander is Halil Patrona, the chief of the Janissaries, and in the name of the Stambul Cadi, Hassan Sulali, I proclaim: Let every true believing Mussulman shut up his shop, lay aside his handiwork, and assemble in the piazza; those of you, however, who are bakers of bread or sellers of flesh, keep your shops open, for whosoever resists this decree his shop will be treated as common booty. As for the unbelieving giaours at present residing at Stambul, let them remain in peace at home, for those who do not stir abroad will have no harm done to them. And this I announce to you in the names of Halil Patrona and Hassan Sulali."

The Kapudan Pasha listened to the very last word of this proclamation, then he spurred his horse upon the crier, and snatching the horn from his hand hit him a blow with it on the back, which resounded far and wide, and then with a voice of thunder addressed the suddenly pacified crowd:

"Ye worthless vagabonds, ye filthy sneak-thieves, mud-larking crab-catchers, pitchy-fingered slipper-botchers, huddling opium-eaters, swindling knacker-sellers, petty hucksters, ye ragged, filthy, whey-faced tipplers!—I, Abdi, the Kapudan Pasha, say it to you, and I only regret that I have not the tongue of a Giaour of the Hungarian race that I might be able to heap upon you all the curses and reproaches that your conduct deserves, ye dogs! What do you want then? Have you not enough to eat? Do you want war because you are tired of peace? War, indeed, though you would take good care to keep out of it. To remain at home here and wage war against women and girls is much more to your liking; booths not fortresses are what you like to storm. Be off to your homes from whence you have come, I say, for whomsoever I find in the streets an hour hence his head shall dangle in front of the Pavilion of Justice. Mark my words!"

With these words Abdi gave his horse the spur and galloped through the thickest part of the mob, which dispersed in terror before him, and with proud self-satisfaction the Kapudan Pasha saw how the people hid away from him in their houses and vanished, as if by magic, from the streets and house-tops.

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He galloped into the town without opposition. At every street corner he blew a long blast in the captured horn, and addressed some well-chosen remarks to the people assembled there, which scattered them in every direction.

At last he reached the Bezesztan, where every shop was closed.

“Open your shops, ye dogs!” thundered Abdi to the assembled merchants and tradesmen. “I suppose your heels are itching?—or perhaps you are tired of having ears and noses? Open all your shop-doors this instant, I say! for whoever keeps them closed after this command shall be hanged up in front of his own shop-door!”

The shopkeepers, full of terror, began to take down their shutters forthwith.

From thence he galloped off towards the Etmeidan.

The great fishmarket, which he passed on his way, was filled with people from end to end. Not a word could be heard for the fearful din, which completely drowned the voices of a few stump-orators who here and there had climbed up the pillars near the drinking-fountains to address the mob.

Nevertheless the resonant, penetrating voice of the horn blown by the Kapudan Pasha dominated the tumult, and turned every face in his direction.

Rising in his stirrups, Abdi addressed them with a terrible voice:

“Ye fools, whose mad hands rise against your own heads! Do ye want to make the earth quake beneath you that so many of you stand in a heap in one place? What fool among you is it would drag the whole lot of you down to perdition? Would that the heavens might fall upon you!—would that these houses might bury you!—would that ye might turn into four-footed beasts who can do nothing but bark! Lower your heads, ye wretched creatures, and go and hide yourselves behind your mud-walls! And let not a single cry be heard in your streets, for if you dare to come out of your holes, I swear by the shadow of Allah that I’ll make a rubbish-heap of Stambul with my guns, and none shall live in it henceforth but serpents and bats and your accursed souls, ye dogs!”

And nobody durst say him nay. They listened to his revilings in silence, gave way before him, and made a way for his prancing steed. Halil was not there, had he but been there the Kapudan Pasha would not have waited twice for an answer.

So here also Abdi succeeded in trotting through the ranks of the rioters, and so at last directed his way towards the Etmeidan.

By this time not only the caldron of the first but the caldron of the fifth Janissary regiment had been erected in the midst of the camp. They had been taken by force from the army blacksmiths, and a group of Janissaries stood round each of them.

Abdi Pasha appeared among them so unexpectedly that they were only aware of his presence when he suddenly bawled at them:

“Put down your weapons!”

They all regarded the Kapudan Pasha with fear and wonder. How had he got here? Not one of them dared to draw a sword against him, yet not one of them submitted, and everyone of them felt that Patrona was badly wanted here.

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The banner of the insurgents was waving in the midst of the piazza. Abdi Pasha rode straight towards it. The Janissaries remained rooted to the spot, staring after him with astonishment.

Suddenly Musli leaped forth from amongst them, and anticipating the Kapudan, seized the flag himself.

"Give me that banner, my son!" said Abdi with all the phlegm of a true seaman.

Musli had not yet sufficiently recovered to be able to answer articulately, but he shook his head by way of intimating that surrender it he would not.

"Give me that banner, Janissary!" cried Abdi once more, sternly regarding Musli straight between the eyes.

Instead of answering Musli simply proceeded to wind the banner round its pole.

"Give me that banner!" bellowed Abdi for the third time, with a voice of thunder, at the same time drawing his sword.

But now Musli twisted the pole round so that the mud-stained end which had been sticking in the earth rose high in the air, and he said:

"I honour you, Abdi Pasha, and I will not hurt you if you go away. I would rather see you fall in battle fighting against the Giaours, for you deserve to have a glorious name; but don't ask me for this banner any more, for if you come a step nearer I will run you through the body with the dirty end."

And at these words all the other Janissaries leaped to their feet and, drawing their swords, formed a glittering circle round the valiant Musli.

"I am sorry for you, my brave Janissaries," observed the Kapudan Pasha sadly.

"And we are sorry for you, famous Kapudan Pasha!"

Then Abdi quitted the Etmeidan. He perceived how the crowd parted before him everywhere as he advanced; but it also did not escape him that behind his back they immediately closed up again when he had passed.

"These people can only be brought to their senses by force of arms," he said to himself as away he rode through the city, and nobody laid so much as a finger upon him.

* * * * *



Meanwhile, in the camp outside, a great council of war was being held. On the news of the insurrection which had been painted in the most alarming colours by the fugitive Kiaja and the Janissary Aga, the Sultan had called together the generals, the Ulemas, the Grand Vizier, the Chief Mufti, the Sheiks, and the Kodzhagians in the palace by the sea-shore.

An hour before in the same palace he had held a long deliberation with his aunt, the wise Sultana Khadija.

Good counsel was now precious indeed.

The Grand Vizier opined that the army, leaving the Sultan behind at Brusa, should set off at once towards Tebrif to meet the foe. If it were found possible to unite with Abdullah Pasha all was won. Stambul was to be left to itself, and the rebels allowed to do as they liked there. Once let the external enemy be well beaten and then their turn would come too.

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The Chief Mufti did not believe it to be possible to lead the host to battle just then; but he wished it to be withdrawn from Stambul, lest it should be affected by the spirit of rebellion.

The Kiaja advised negotiating with the rebels and pacifying them that way.

At this last proposal the Sultan nodded his head approvingly. The Sultana Khadija was also of the same opinion.

As to the mode of carrying out these negotiations there was some slight difference of detail between the plan of the Kiaja and the plan of the Sultana. In the opinion of the former, while the negotiations were still proceeding, the ringleaders of the rebellion were to be quietly disposed of one after the other, whereas the Sultana insinuated that the Sultan should appease the rebels by handing over to them the detested Kiaja and any of the other great officers of state whose heads the mob might take a fancy to. And that, of course, was a very different thing.

The Sultan thought the counsel of the Kiaja the best.

At that very moment, the Kapudan Pasha, Abdi, entered the council-chamber.

Everybody regarded him with astonishment. According to the account of the Kiaja he had already been cut into a thousand pieces.

He came in with just as much *sangfroid* as he displayed when he had ridden through the rebellious city. He inquired of the doorkeepers as he passed through whether his messengers had arrived yet with the tulips. "No," was the reply. "Then where have they got to, I wonder," he muttered; "since I quitted them I have been from one end of Stambul to the other?"

Then he saluted the Sultan, and in obedience to a gesture from the Padishah, took his place among the viziers, and they regarded him with as much amazement as if it was his ghost that had come among them.

"You have been in Stambul, I understand?" inquired the Grand Vizier at last.

"I have just come from thence within the last hour."

"What do the people want?" asked the Padishah.

"They want to eat and drink."

"It is blood they would drink then," murmured the Chief Mufti in his beard.

“And what do they complain about?”

“They complain that the sword does not wage war of its own accord, and that the earth does not produce bread without being tilled, and that wine and coffee do not trickle from the gutters of the houses.”

“You speak very lightly of the matter, Abdi. How do you propose to pacify this uproar?”

“The thing is quite simple. The cobblers and petty hucksters of Stambul are not worth a volley, and, besides, I would not hurt the poor things if possible. Many of them have wives and children. Those who have stirred them up are in the camp of the Janissaries—there you will find their leaders. It would be a pity, perhaps, to destroy all who have excited the people in Stambul to revolt, but they ought to be led forth regiment by regiment and every tenth man of them shot through the head. That will help to smooth matters.”

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All the viziers were horrified. "Who would dare to do such a thing?" they asked.

"That is what I would do," said Abdi bluntly. After that he held his peace.

It was the Sultan who broke the silence.

"Before you arrived," said he, "we had resolved, by the advice of the Kiaja Beg, to go back to the town with the banner of the Prophet and the princes.

"That also is not bad counsel," said Abdi; "thy glorious presence will and must quell the uproar. Unfurl the banner of the Prophet in front of the Gate of the Seraglio, let the Chief Mufti and Ispirizade open the Aja Sophia and the Mosque of Achmed, and let the imams call the people to prayer. Let Damad Ibrahim remain outside with the host, that in case of need he may hasten to suppress the insurgents. Let the Kiaja Beg collect together the jebedjis, ciauses, and bostanjis, who guard the Seraglio, and let them clear the streets. And if all this be of no avail my guns from the sea will soon teach them obedience."

Sultan Achmed shook his head.

"We have resolved otherwise," said he; "none of you must quit my side. The Grand Vizier, the Chief Mufti, the Kapudan Pasha, and the Kiaja must come along with me."

And while he told their names, one after the other, the Padishah did not so much as look at one of them.

The names of these four men were all written up on the corners of the street. The heads of these four men had been demanded by the people and by Halil Patrona.

What then was their offence in the eyes of the people? They were the men highest in power when misfortune overtook the realm. But how then had they offended Halil Patrona? 'Twas they who had brought suffering upon Guel-Bejaze.

The viziers bowed their heads.

At that same instant Abdi's messengers arrived with the tulips. They were brought to the Padishah, who was enchanted by their beauty, and ordered that they should be conveyed to Stambul, to the Sultana Asseki, with the message that he himself would not be long after them. Moreover, he patted Abdi on the shoulder, and protested with tears in his eyes that there was none in the world whom he loved better.

The Kapudan Pasha kissed the hem of the Sultan's robe, and then remained behind with Ibrahim, Abdullah, and the Kiaja.



“Abdullah, and you, my brave Ibrahim, and you, Kiaja,” said he, addressing them with a friendly smile, “in an hour’s time our four heads will not be worth an earless pitcher,” whereupon Damad Ibrahim sadly bent his head, and whispered with a voice resembling a sob:

“Poor, poor Sultan!”

Then they all four accompanied Achmed to his ship. They were all fully convinced that Achmed would first sacrifice them all and then fall himself.

CHAPTER VIII.

A TOPSY-TURVY WORLD.

Halil Patrona was already the master of Stambul.

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The rebel leaders had assembled together in the central mosque, and from thence distributed their commands.

At the sixth hour (according to Christian calculation ten o'clock in the evening) the ship arrived bearing the Sultan, the princes, the magnates, and the sacred banner, and cast anchor beside the coast kiosk at the Gate of Cannons.

Inside the Seraglio none knew anything of the position of affairs. All through the city a great commotion prevailed with the blowing of horns, in the cemetery bivouac fires had been everywhere lighted.

"Why cannot I send a couple of grenades among them from the sea?" sighed the Kapudan Pasha, "that would quiet them immediately, I warrant."

As the Kizlar-Aga, Elhaj Beshir, came face to face with the newly arrived ministers in the ante-chamber where the Mantle of the Prophet was jealously guarded, he rubbed his hands together with an enigmatical smile which ill became his coarse, brutal countenance and cloven lips, and when the Padishah asked him what the rebels wanted, he replied that he really did not know.

That smile of his, that rubbing of the hands, which had been robbed of their thumbs by the savage cruelty of a former master for some piece of villainy or other—these things were premonitions of evil to all the officials present.

Elhaj Beshir Aga had now held his office for fourteen years, during which time he had elevated and deposed eight Grand Viziers.

And now, how were the demands of the rebels to be discovered?

Damad Ibrahim suggested that the best thing to do was to summon Sulali Hassan, a former cadi of Stambul, whose name he had heard mentioned by the town-crier along with that of Halil Patrona.

They found Sulali in his summer house, and at the first summons he appeared in the Seraglio. He declared that the rebels had been playing fast and loose with his name, and that he knew nothing whatever of their wishes.

"Then take with you the Chaszeki Aga and twenty bostanjis, and go in search of Halil Patrona, and find out what he wants!" commanded the Padishah.

"It is a pity to give worthy men unnecessary trouble, most glorious Sultan," said Abdi Pasha bitterly. "I am able to tell you what the rebels want, for I have seen it all written up on the walls. They demand the delivery of four of the great officers of state—myself, the Chief Mufti, the Grand Vizier, and the Kiaja. Surrender us then, O Sultan! yet surrender us not alive! but slay us first and then their mouths will be stopped. Let them

glut their appetites on us. You know that no wild beast is savage when once it has been well fed.”

The Sultan pretended not to hear these words. He did not even look up when the Kapudan spoke.

“Seek out Halil Patrona!” he said to the Chaszeki Aga, “and greet him in the name of the Padishah!”

What! Greet Halil Patrona in the name of the Padishah! Greet that petty huckster in the name of the master of many empires, in the name of the Prince of Princes, Shahs, Khans, and Deys, the dominator of Great Moguls! Who would have believed in the possibility of such a thing three days ago?

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"Greet Halil Patrona in my name," said the Sultan, "and tell him that I will satisfy all his just demands, if he promises to dismiss his forces immediately afterwards."

The Chaszeki Aga and Sulali Hassan, with the twenty bostanjis, forced their way through the thick crowd which thronged the streets till they reached the central mosque. Only nine of the twenty bostanjis were beaten to death by the mob on the way, the eleven others were fortunate enough to reach the mosque at least alive.

There, on a camel-skin spread upon the ground, sat Halil, the rebel leader, like a second Dzhengis Khan, dictating his orders and nominations to the softas sitting before him, whom he had appointed his teskeredjis.

When the Janissaries on guard informed him that the Sultan's Chaszeki Aga had arrived and wanted to speak to him, he drily replied:

"He can wait. I must attend to worthier men than he first of all."

And who, then, were these worthier men?

Well, first of all there was the old master-cobbler, Suleiman, whom they had dragged by force from his house where he had been hiding under the floor. Halil now ordered a document to be drawn up, whereby he elevated him to the rank of Reis-Effendi.

Halil Patrona, by the way, was still wearing his old Janissary uniform, the blue dolman with the salavari reaching to the knee, leaving the calves bare. The only difference was that he now wore a white heron's feather in his hat instead of a black one, and by his side hung the sword of the Grand Vizier, whose palace in the Galata suburb he had levelled to the ground only an hour before.

It was with the signet in the hilt of this sword that Halil was now sealing all the public documents issued by him.

After Suleiman came Muhammad the saddle-maker. He was a sturdy, muscular fellow, who could have held his own against any two or three ordinary men. Him Halil appointed Aga.

Then came a ciaus called Orli, whom he made chief magistrate. Ibrahim, a whilom schoolmaster, who went by the name of "the Fool," he made chief Cadi of Stambul, and then catching sight of Sulali, he beckoned him forth from among the ciaus and said to him:

"Thou shalt be the Governor-General of Anatolia."

Sulali bowed to the ground by way of acknowledgment of such graciousness.

“I thank thee, Halil! Make of me what thou wilt, but listen, first of all, to the message of the Padishah which he has entrusted to me, for I am in very great doubt whether it be thou or Sultan Achmed who is now Lord of all the Moslems. Tell me, therefore, what thou dost require of the Sultan, and if thy demands be lawful and of good report they shall be granted, provided that thou dost promise to disperse thy following.”

Then Halil Patrona stood up before the Sulali, and with a severe and motionless countenance answered:

“Our demands are few and soon told. We demand the delivery to us of the four arch-traitors who have brought disaster upon the realm. They are the Kul Kiaja, the Kapudan Pasha, the Chief Mufti, and the Grand Vizier.”

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Sulali fell to shaking his head.

“You ask much, Halil!”

“I ask much, you say. To-morrow I shall ask still more. If you agree to my terms, to-morrow there shall be peace. But if you come again to me to-morrow, then there will be peace neither to-morrow nor any other morrow.”

Sulali returned to the Sultan and his ministers who were still all assembled together.

Full of suspense they awaited the message of Halil.

Sulali dared not say it all at once. Only gradually did he let the cat out of the bag.

“I have found out the demands of the insurgents,” said he. “They demand that the Kiaja Beg be handed over to them.”

The Kiaja suddenly grew paler than a wax figure.

“Such a faithful old servant as he has been to me too,” sighed Achmed. “Well, well, hand him over, and now I hope they will be satisfied.”

With tottering footsteps the Kiaja stepped among the bostanjis.

“They demand yet more,” said Sulali.

“What! more?”

“They demand the Kapudan Pasha.”

“Him also. My most valiant seaman!” exclaimed Achmed sorrowfully.

“Mashallah!” cried the Kapudan cheerfully, “I am theirs,” and with a look of determined courage he stepped forth and also joined the bostanjis. “Weep not on my account, oh Padishah! A brave man is always ready to die a heroic death in the place of danger, and shall I not, moreover, be dying in your defence? Hale us away, bostanjis; do not tremble, my sons. Which of you best understands to twist the string? Come, come, fear nothing, I will show you myself how to arrange the silken cord properly. Long live the Sultan!”

And with that he quitted the room, rather leading the bostanjis than being led by them, he did not even lay aside his sword.

“Then, too, they demanded the Grand Vizier and the Chief Mufti,” said Sulali.

The Sultan, full of horror, rose from his place.



“No, no, it cannot be. You must have heard their words amiss. He from whom you required an answer must needs have been mad, he spoke in his wrath. What! I am to slay the Grand Vizier and the Chief Mufti? Slay them, too, for faults which I myself have committed—faults against which they wished to warn me? Why, their blood would cry to Heaven against me. Go back, Sulali, and say to Halil that I beg, I implore him not to insist that these two grey heads shall roll in the dust. Let it suffice him if they are deprived of their offices and banished from the realm, for indeed they are guiltless. Entreat him, also, for the Kiaja and the Kapudan; they shall not be surrendered until you return.”

Again Sulali sought out Halil. He durst not say a word concerning the Kiaja and the Kapudan. He knew that it was the Kapudan who had seized upon Halil's wife when she was attempting to escape by sea, and that it was the Kiaja who had had her shut up in the dungeon set apart for shameless women. He confined himself therefore to pleading for the Grand Vizier and the Chief Mufti.

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Halil reflected. The incidents which had happened in the palace by the Sweet Waters all passed through his mind. He bethought him how Damad Ibrahim had forced his embraces upon Guel-Bejaze, and compelled her to resort to the stratagem of the death-swoon, and he gave no heed to what Sulali said about sparing Ibrahim's grey beard.

"The Grand Vizier must die," he answered. "As for Abdullah, he may remain alive, but he must be banished." After all, Abdullah had done no harm to Guel-Bejaze.

Sulali returned to the Seraglio.

"Halil permits the Chief Mufti to live, but he demands death for the three others," said he.

At these words Achmed sprang from the divan like a lion brought to bay and drew his sword.

"Come hither, then, valiant rebels, as ye are!" cried he. "If you want the heads of my servants, come for them, and take them from me. No, not a drop of their blood will I give you, and if you dare to come for them ye shall see that the sword of Mohammed has still an edge upon it. Unfurl the banner of the Prophet in front of the gate of the Seraglio. Let all true believers cleave to me. Send criers into all the streets to announce that the Seraglio is in danger, and let all to whom the countenance of Allah is dear hasten to the defence of the Banner! I will collect the bostanjis and defend the gates of the Seraglio."

The two grey beards kissed the Sultan's hand. If this manly burst of emotion had only come a little earlier, the page of history would have borne a very different record of Sultan Achmed.

The Banner of Danger was immediately hung out in the central gate of the Seraglio, and there it remained till early the next evening.

At dawn the criers returned and reported that they had not been able to get beyond the mosque of St. Sophia, and that the people had responded to their crying with showers of stones.

The Green Banner waved all by itself in front of the Seraglio. Nobody assembled beneath it, even the wind disdained to flutter it, languidly it drooped upon its staff.

The unfurling of the Green Banner on the gate of the Seraglio is a rare event in history. As a rule it only happens in the time of greatest danger, for it signifies that the time has come for every true Mussulman to quit hearth and home, his shop and his plough, snatch up his weapons, and hasten to the assistance of Allah and his Anointed, and accursed would be reckoned every male Osmanli who should hesitate at such a time to lay down his life and his estate at the feet of the Padishah.



Knowing this to be so, imagine then the extremity of terror into which the dwellers in the Seraglio were plunged when they saw that not a single soul rallied beneath the exposed banner. The criers promised a gratuity of thirty piastres to every soldier who hastened to range himself beneath the banner, and two piastres a day over and above the usual pay. And some five or six fellows followed them, but as many as came in on one side went away again on the other, and in the afternoon not a single soul remained beneath the banner.

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Towards evening the banner was hoisted on to the second gate beneath which were the dormitories of the high officers of state. The generals meanwhile slept in the Hall of Audience, Damadzadi lay sick in the apartment of Prince Murad, and the Mufti and the Ulemas remained in the barracks of the bostanjis. Sultan Achmed did not lie down all night long, but wandered about from room to room, impatiently inquiring after news outside. He asked whether anyone had come from the host to his assistance? whether the people were assembling beneath the Sacred Green Banner? and the cold sweat stood out upon his forehead when, in reply to all his questions, he only received one crushing answer after another. The watchers placed on the roof of the palace signified that the bivouac fires of the insurgents were now much nearer than they had been the night before, and that in the direction of Scutari not a single watch-fire was visible, from which it might be suspected that the army had broken up its camp, returned to Stambul, and made common cause with the insurgents.

Achmed himself ascended to the roof to persuade himself of the truth of these assertions, and wandered in a speechless agony of grief from apartment to apartment, constantly looking to see whether the Kiaja, the Kapudan, and the Grand Vizier were asleep or awake. Only the Kapudan Pasha was able to sleep at all. The Kiaja was all of an ague with apprehension, and the Grand Vizier was praying, not for himself indeed, but for the Sultan. At last even the Kapudan was sorry for the Sultan who was so much distressed on their account.

"Why dost thou keep waking us so often, oh, my master?" said he, "we are still alive as thou seest. Go and sleep in thy harem and trouble not thy soul about us any more, it is only the rebels who have to do with us now. Allah Kerim! Look upon us as already sleeping the sleep of eternity. At the trump of the Angel of the Resurrection we also shall arise like the rest."

And Achmed listened to the words of the Kapudan, and at dawn of day vanished from amongst them. When they sought him in the early morning he had not yet come forth from his harem.

The four dignitaries knew very well what that signified.

Early in the morning, when the dawn was still red, Sulali Effendi and Ispirizade came for the Chief Mufti, and invited him to say the morning prayer with them.

The Ulemas were already all assembled together, and at the sight of them Abdullah burst into tears and sobs, and said to them in the midst of his lamentations:

"Behold, I have brought my grey beard hither, and if it pleases you not that it has grown white in all pure and upright dealing, take it now and wash it in my blood; and if ye think that the few days Allah hath given me to be too many, then take me and put an end to them."

Then all the Ulemas stood up and, raising their hands, exclaimed:

“Allah preserve thee from this evil thing!”

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Then they threw themselves down on their faces to pray, and when they had made an end of praying, they assembled in the kiosk of Erivan in the inner garden where the Grand Vizier already awaited them. Not long afterwards arrived the Kiaja and the Kapudan Pasha also, last of all came the sick Damadzadi and the Cadi of Medina, Mustafa Effendi, and Segban Pasha.

"Ye see a dead man before you," said the Grand Vizier, Damad Ibrahim, to the freshly arrived dignitaries. "I am lost. We are the four victims. The Chief Mufti perhaps may save his life, but we three others shall not see the dawn of another day. It cannot be otherwise. The Sultan must be saved, and saved he only can be at the price of our lives."

"I said that long ago," observed the Kapudan Pasha. "Our corpses ought to have been delivered up to the rebels yesterday, I fear it is already too late, I fear me that the Sultan is lost anyhow. The Banner of Affliction ought never to have been exposed at all, we should have been slain there and then."

"You three withdraw into the Chamber of the Executioners," said the Grand Vizier to his colleagues, "but wait for me till the Kizlar-Aga arrives to demand from me the seals of office, till then I must perform my official duties."

The three ministers then took leave of Damad Ibrahim, embraced each other, and were removed in the custody of the bostanjis.

It was now the duty of the Grand Vizier to elect a new Chief Mufti from among the Ulemas. The Ulemas, first of all, chose Damadzadi, but he declining the dignity on the plea of illness, they chose in his stead the Cadi of Medina, and for want of a white mantle invested him with a green one.

After that they elected from amongst themselves Seid Mohammed and Damadzadi, to receive the secret message of the Sultan from the Kizlar-Aga and deliver it to Halil Patrona.

Damad Ibrahim was well aware of the nature of this secret message, and thanked Allah for setting a term to the life of man.

* * * * *

Meanwhile Sultan Achmed was sitting in the Hall of Delectation with the beautiful Adsalis by his side, and in front of him were the four tulips which Abdi Pasha had presented to him the day before.

The four tulips were now in full bloom.

Adsalis had thrown her arms round the Sultan's neck, and was kissing his forehead as if she would charm away from his soul the thoughts which suffered him not to rest, or rejoice, or to love.

He had an eye for nothing but the tulips before him, which he could not protect or cherish sufficiently. He scarce noticed that Elhaj Beshir, the Kizlar-Aga, was standing before him with a long MS. parchment stretched out in his hand.

"Master," cried the Kizlar-Aga, "deign to read the answer which the Ulemas are sending to Halil Patrona, and if it be according to thy will give it the confirmation of thy signature."

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"What do they require?" asked the Sultan softly, withdrawing, as he spoke, a tiny knife from his girdle, with the point of which he began picking away at the earth all round the tulips in order to make it looser and softer.

"The rebels demand a full assurance that they will not be persecuted in the future for what they have done in the past."

"Be it so!"

"Next they demand that the Kiaja Aga be handed over to them."

The Sultan cut off one of the tulips with his knife and handed it to the Kizlar-Aga.

"There, take it!" said he.

The Aga was astonished, but presently he understood and took the tulip.

"Then they want the Kapudan Pasha."

The Sultan cut off the handsomest of the tulips.

"There you have it," said he.

"They further demand the banishment of the Chief Mufti."

The Sultan tore up the third tulip by the roots and cast it from him.

"There it is."

"And the Grand Vizier they want also."

The last tulip Achmed threw violently to the ground, pot and all, and then he covered his face.

"Ask no more, thou seest I have surrendered everything."

Then he gave him his signet-ring in which his name was engraved, and the Kizlar-Aga stamped the document therewith, and then handed back the signet-ring to the Sultan.

The Grand Vizier, meanwhile, was walking backwards and forwards in the garden of the Seraglio. The Kizlar-Aga came there in search of him, and with him were the envoys of Halil Patrona, Suleiman, whom he had made Reis-Effendi, Orli, and Sulali. Elhaj Beshir approached him in their presence, and kissing the document signed by the Sultan, handed it to him.

Damad Ibrahim pressed the writing to his forehead and his lips, and, after carefully reading it through, handed it back again, and taking from his finger the great seal of the Empire gave it to the Kizlar-Aga.

"May he who comes after me be wiser and happier than I have been," said he. "Greet the Sultan from me once more. And as for you, tell Halil Patrona that you have seen the door of the Hall of the Executioners close behind the back of Damad Ibrahim."

With that the Grand Vizier looked about him in search of someone to escort him thither, when suddenly a kajkji leaped to his side and begged that he might be allowed to lead the Grand Vizier to the Hall of Execution.

This sailor-man had just such a long grey beard as the Grand Vizier himself.

"How dost thou come to know me?" inquired Damad Ibrahim of the old man.

"Why we fought together, sir, beneath Belgrade, when both of us were young fellows together."

"What is thy name?"

"Manoli."

"I remember thee not."

"But I remember thee, for thou didst release me from captivity, and didst cherish me when I was wounded."

"And therefore thou wouldst lead me to the executioner? I thank thee, Manoli!"

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All this was spoken while they were passing through the garden on their way to the fatal chamber into which Manoli disappeared with the Grand Vizier.

The Kizlar-Aga and the messengers of the insurgents waited till Manoli came forth again. He came out, covering his face with his hands, no doubt he was weeping. The Grand Vizier remained inside.

"To-morrow you shall see his dead body," said the Kizlar-Aga to the new Reis-Effendi, and with that he sent him and his comrade back to Halil.

"We would rather have had them alive," said the ex-ciaus, so suddenly become one of the chief dignitaries of the state.

That same evening Halil sent back Sulali with the message that the Chief Mufti might go free.

The old man quitted his comrades about midnight, and day had scarce dawned when he was summoned once more to the presence of the Grand Seignior.

All night long the Kizlar-Aga tormented Achmed with the saying of the Reis-Effendi: "We would rather have them alive!"

"No, no," said the Sultan, "we will not have them delivered up alive. It shall not be in the power of the people to torture and tear them to pieces. Rather let them die in my palace, an easy, instantaneous death, without fear and scarce a pang of pain, wept and mourned for by their friends."

"Then hasten on their deaths, dread sir, lest the morning come and they be demanded while still alive."

"Tarry a while, I say, wait but for the morning. You would not surely kill them at night! At night the gates of Heaven are shut. At night the phantoms of darkness are let loose. You would not slay any living creature at night! Wait till the day dawns."

The first ray of light had scarce appeared on the horizon when the Kizlar-Aga once more stood before the Sultan.

"Master, the day is breaking."

"Call hither the mufti and Sulali!"

Both of them speedily appeared.

"Convey death to those who are already doomed."

Sulali and the mufti fell down on their knees.

"Wherefore this haste, O my master?" cried the aged mufti, bitterly weeping as he kissed the Sultan's feet.

"Because the rebels wish them to be surrendered alive."

"So it is," observed the Kizlar-Aga by way of corroboration, "the whole space in front of the kiosk is filled with the insurgents."

The Sultan almost collapsed with horror.

"Hasten, hasten! lest they fall into their hands alive."

"Oh, sir," implored Sulali, "let me first go down with the Imam of the Aja Sophia to see whether the street really is filled with rebels or not!"

The Sultan signified that they might go.

Sulali, Hassan, and Ispirizade thereupon hastened through the gate of the Seraglio down to the open space before the kiosk, but not a living soul did they find there. Not satisfied with merely looking about them, they wished to persuade themselves that the insurgents were approaching the Seraglio from some other direction by a circuitous way.

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Meanwhile the Sultan was counting the moments and growing impatient at the prolonged absence of his messengers.

“They have had time enough to cover the distance to the kiosk and back twice over,” remarked the Kizlar-Aga. “No doubt they have fallen into the hands of the rebels who are holding them fast so that they may not be able to bring any tidings back.”

The Sultan was in despair.

“Hasten, hasten then!” said he to the Kizlar-Aga, and with that he fled away into his inner apartments.

Ten minutes later Sulali and the Iman returned, and announced that there was not a soul to be seen anywhere and no sign of anyone threatening the Seraglio.

Then the Kizlar-Aga led them down to the gate. A cart drawn by two oxen was standing there, and the top of it was covered with a mat of rushes. He drew aside a corner of this mat, and by the uncertain light of dawn they saw before them three corpses, the Kiaja’s, the Kapudan’s, and the Grand Vizier’s.

* * * * *

Happy Guel-Bejaze sits in Halil’s lap and dreamily allows herself to be cradled in his arms. Through the windows of the splendid palace penetrate the shouts of triumph which hail Halil as Lord, for the moment, of the city of Stambul and the whole Ottoman Empire.

Guel-Bejaze tremulously whispers in Halil’s ear how much she would prefer to dwell in a simple, lonely little hut in Anatolia instead of there in that splendid palace.

Halil smooths away the luxuriant locks from his wife’s forehead, and makes her tell him once more the full tale of all those revolting incidents which befell her in the Seraglio, in the captivity of the Kapudan’s house, and in the dungeon for dishonourable women. Why should he keep on arousing hatred and vengeance?

The woman told him everything with a shudder. At her husband’s feet, right in front of them, stood three baskets full of flowers. Halil had given them to her as a present.

But at the bottom of the baskets were still more precious gifts.

He draws forward the first basket and sweeps away the flowers. A bloody head is at the bottom of the basket.

“Whose is that?”

Guel-Bejaze, all shuddering, lisped the name of Abdi Pasha.

He cast away the flowers from the second basket, there also was a bloody head.

“And whose is that?”

“That is the Kiaja Beg’s,” sobbed the terrified girl.

And now Halil brought forward the third basket, and dashing aside from it the fresh flowers, revealed to the eyes of Guel-Bejaze a grey head with a white beard, which lay with closed eyes at the bottom of the basket.

“Whose is that?” inquired Halil.

Guel-Bejaze’s tender frame shivered in the arms of the strong man who held her, as he compelled her to gaze at the bloody heads. And when she regarded the third head she shook her own in amazement.

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"I do not know that one."

"Not know it! Look again and more carefully. Perchance Death has changed the expression of the features. That is Damad Ibrahim the Grand Vizier."

Guel-Bejaze regarded her husband with eyes wide-open with astonishment, and then hastened to reply:

"Truly it *is* Damad Ibrahim. Of course, of course. Death hath disfigured his face so that I scarce knew it."

"Did I not tell thee that thou shouldst make sport with the heads of those who made sport with thy heart? Dost thou want yet more?"

"Oh, no, no, Halil. I am afraid of these also. I am afraid to look upon these dumb heads."

"Then cover them over with flowers, and thou wilt believe thou dost see flower-baskets before thee."

"Let me have them buried, Halil. Do not make me fear thee also. Thou wouldst have me go on loving thee, wouldst thou not? If only thou wouldst come with me to Anatolia, where nobody would know anything about us!"

"What dost thou say? Go away now when the very sun cannot set because of me, and men cannot sleep because of the sound of my name? Dost not thou also feel a desire to bathe in all this glory?"

"Oh, Halil! the rose and the palm grow up together out of the same earth, and yet the palm grows into greatness while the rose remains quite tiny. Suffer me but gently to crouch beside thee, dispense but thy love to me, and keep thy glory to thyself."

Halil tenderly embraced and kissed the woman, and buried the three baskets as she desired in the palace garden beneath three wide-spreading rosemary bushes.

Then he took leave of Guel-Bejaze, for deputies from the people now waited upon their leader, and begged him to accompany them to the mosque of Zuleima, where the Sultan's envoys were already waiting for an answer.

In order to get to the mosque more easily and avoid the labour of forcing his way through the crowd that thronged the streets, Halil hastened to the water side, got into the first skiff he met with, and bade the sailor row him across to the Zuleima Mosque on the other side.

On the way his gaze fell upon the face of the sailor who was sitting opposite to him. It was a grey-bearded old man.

“What is thy name, worthy old man?” inquired Halil.

“My name is Manoli, your Excellency.”

“Call me not Excellency! Dost thou not perceive from my raiment that I am nothing but a common Janissary?”

“Oh! I know thee better than that. Thou art Halil Patrona, whom may Allah long preserve!”

“Thou also dost seem very familiar to me. Thou hast just such a white beard as had Damad Ibrahim who was once Grand Vizier.”

“I have often heard people say so, my master.”

On arriving opposite the Zuleima Mosque, the boatman brought the skiff ashore. Halil pressed a golden denarius into the old man’s palm, the old man kissed his hand for it.

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Then for a long time Halil gazed into the old man's face.

"Manoli!"

"At thy command, my master."

"Thou seest the sun rising up yonder behind the hills?"

"Yes, my master."

"Before the shadows return to the side of yon hills take care to be well behind them, and let not another dawn find thee in this city!"

The boatman bent low with his arms folded across his breast, then he disappeared in his skiff.

But Halil Patrona hastened into the mosque.

The Sultan's ambassadors were awaiting him. Sheik Suleiman came forward.

"Halil!" said he, "the bodies of the three dead men I have given to the people and their heads I have sent to thee."

"Who were they?" asked Halil darkly.

"The first was the corpse of the Kiaja Beg, his body was cast upon the cross-ways through the Etmeidan Gate."

"And the second?"

"The Kapudan Pasha, his body was flung down in front of the fountains of Khir-Kheri."

"And the third?"

"Damad Ibrahim, the Grand Vizier. His body we flung out into the piazza in front of the Seraglio, at the foot of the very fountains which he himself caused to be built."

Halil Patrona cast a searching look at the Sheik's face, and coldly replied:

"Know then, oh, Sheik Suleiman, that thou liest, the third corpse was *not* the body of Damad Ibrahim the Grand Vizier. It was the body of a sailor named Manoli, who greatly resembled him, and sacrificed himself in Damad's behalf. But the Grand Vizier has escaped and none can tell where he is. Go now, and tell that to those who sent thee hither!"

CHAPTER IX.

THE SETTING AND THE RISING SUN.

The dead bodies of the victims were still lying in the streets when Sultan Achmed summoned the Ulemas to the cupolaed chamber. His countenance was dejected and sad.

Before coming to the council-chamber he had kissed all his children, one by one, and when it came to the turn of his little ten-year-old child, Bajazid, he saw that the little fellow's eyes were full of tears and he inquired the reason why. The child replied:

"Father, it is well with those who are thy enemies and grievous for them that love thee. What then will be our fate who love thee best of all? Amongst the wives of our brethren thou wilt find more than one in grey mourning weeds. Look, I prythee, at the face of Ummettulah; look at the eyes of Sabiha, and the appearance of Ezma. They are all of them widows and orphans, and it is thou who hast caused their fathers and husbands to be slain."

"To save thee I have done it," stammered Achmed, pressing the child to his breast.

"Thou wilt see that thou shalt not save us after all," sighed Bajazid.

In the years to come these words were to be as an eternal echo in the ears of Achmed.

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So he sat on his throne and the Ulemas took their places around him on the divans covered with kordofan leather. Opposite to him sat the chief imam, Ispirizade. Sulali sat beside him.

“Lo, the blood of the victims has now been poured forth,” said Achmed in a gloomy, tremulous voice, “I have sacrificed my most faithful servants. Speak! What more do the rebels require? Why do they still blow their field trumpets? Why do they still kindle their bivouac fires? What more do they want?”

And the words of his little son rang constantly in his ears: “It is well with those who are thy enemies and grievous for them that love thee.”

No one replied to the words of the Sultan.

“Answer, I say! What think ye concerning the matter?”

Once more deep silence prevailed. The Ulemas looked at one another. Many of them began to nudge Sulali, who stood up as if to speak, but immediately sat down again without opening his mouth.

“Speak, I pray you! I have not called you hither to look at me and at one another, but to give answers to my questions.”

And still the Ulemas kept silence. Dumbly they sat around as if they were not living men but only embalmed corpses, such as are to be found in the funeral vaults of the Pharaohs grouped around the royal tombs.

“’Tis wondrous indeed!” said Achmed, when the whole Council had remained dumb for more than a quarter of an hour. “Are ye all struck dumb then that ye give me no answer?”

Then at last Ispirizade rose from his place.

“Achmed!” he began—with such discourteous curtness did he address the Sultan!

“Achmed! ’tis the wish of Halil Patrona that thou descend from the throne and give it up to Sultan Mahmud....”

Achmed sat bolt upright in his chair. After the words just uttered every voice in the council-chamber was mute, and in the midst of this dreadful silence the Ulemas were terrified to behold the Padishah stand on the steps of the throne, extend his arm towards the imam, fix his eyes steadily upon him, and open his lips from which never a word proceeded.

Thus for a long time he stood upon the throne with hand outstretched and parted lips, and his stony eyes fixed steadily upon the imam, and those who saw it were convulsed by a feeling of horror, and Ispirizade felt his limbs turn to stone and the light of day grow dim before his eyes in the presence of that dreadful figure which regarded him and pointed at him. It was, as it were, a dumb curse—a dumb, overpowering spell, which left it to God and His destroying angels to give expression to his wishes, and read in his heart and accomplish that which he himself was incapable of pronouncing.

The whole trembling assembly collapsed before the Sultan's throne, crawled to his feet and, moistening them with their tears, exclaimed:

“Pardon, O master! pardon!”

An hour before they had unanimously resolved that Achmed must be made to abdicate, and now they unanimously begged for pardon. But the deed had already been done.

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The hand of the Padishah that had been raised to curse sank slowly down again, his eyes half closed, his lips were pressed tightly together, he thrust his hands into the girdle of his mantle, looked down for a long time upon the Ulemas, and then quietly descended the steps of the throne. On reaching the pavement he remained standing by the side of the throne, and cried in a hollow tremulous voice:

“I have ceased to reign, let a better than I take my place. I demand but one thing, let those who are at this moment the lords of the dominion of Osman swear that they will do no harm to my children. Let them swear it to me on the Alkoran. Take two from amongst you and let them convey my desire to Halil.”

Again a deep silence followed upon Achmed's words. The Ulemas fixed their gaze upon the ground, not one of them moved or made even a show of conveying the message.

“Perhaps, then, ye wish the death of my children also? Or is there not one of you with courage enough to go and speak to them?”

A very aged, tremulous, half paralyzed Ulema was there among them, the dervish Mohammed, and he it was who at length ventured to speak.

“Oh, my master! who is valiant enough to speak with a raging lion, who hath wit enough to come to terms with the burning tempest of the Samum, or who would venture to go on an embassy to the tempest-tost sea and bandy words therewith?”

Achmed gazed darkly, doubtfully upon the Ulema, and his face wore an expression of repressed despair.

Sulali had compassion on the Sultan.

“I will go to them,” he said reassuringly; “remain here, oh, my master, till I return. Of a truth I tell thee that I will not come back till they have sworn to do what thou desirest.”

And now Ispirizade said that he also would go with Sulali. He had not sufficient strength of mind to endure the gaze of the Sultan till Sulali should return. Far rather would he go with him also to the rebels. Besides they already understood each other very well.

The envoys found Halil sitting under his tent in the Etmeidan.

Sulali drew near to him and delivered the message of the Sultan.

But he did not deliver it in the words of Achmed. He neither begged nor implored, nor mingled his request with bitter lamentations as Achmed had done, but he spoke boldly and sternly, without picking his words, as Achmed ought to have done.

“The Padishah would have his own life and the lives of his children guaranteed by oath,” said he to the assembled leaders of the people. “Swear, therefore, on the Alkoran that you will respect them, and swear it in the names of your comrades likewise. The Padishah is resolved that if you refuse to take this oath he will blow up the Seraglio and every living soul within it into the air with gunpowder.”

The rebels were impressed by this message, only Halil Patrona smiled. He knew very well that such a threat as this never arose in the breast of Achmed. His gentle soul was incapable of such a thing. So he folded his arms across his breast and smiled.

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Then the chief imam fell down in the dust before him, and said in a humble voice:

“Listen not, O Halil, to the words of my companion. The Padishah humbly implores you for his life and the lives of his children.”

Halil wrinkled his brow and exclaimed angrily:

“Rise up, Ulema, grovel not before me in the name of the Sultan. Those who would slay him deal not half so badly with them as thou who dost humiliate him. Sulali is right. The Sultan is capable of great deeds. I know that the cellars of the Seraglio are full of gunpowder, and I would not that the blossoms of the Sheik-ul-Islam and the descendants of the Prophet should perish. Behold, I am ready, and my comrades also, to swear on the Alkoran to do no harm either to Sultan Achmed, or his sons, or his daughters, or his daughters’ husbands. Whosoever shall raise his hand against them his head I myself will cut in twain, and make the avenging Angels of Allah split his soul in twain also, so that each half may never again find its fellow. Go back and peace rest upon Achmed.”

Sulali flew back with the message, but Ispirizade hastened to the Aja Sophia mosque to give directions for the enthronement of the new Sultan.

Meanwhile Achmed had assembled his sons around him in the cupolaed chamber, and sitting down on the last step of the throne made them take their places round his feet, and awaited the message which was to bear the issues of life and death.

Sulali entered the room with a radiant countenance, carrying in his hand the copy of the Alkoran, on which Halil and his associates had sworn the oath required of them. He laid it at the Sultan’s feet.

“Live for ever, oh, Sultan!” he cried, “and may thy heart rejoice in the prosperity of thy children!”

Achmed looked up with a face full of gratitude, and thanked Allah, the Giver of all good and perfect gifts.

His children embraced him with tears in their eyes, and Achmed did not forget to extend his hand to Sulali, who first raised it to his forehead and then pressed it to his lips.

Then Achmed sent the Kizlar-Aga for Sultan Mahmud, surnamed “the White Prince,” from the pallor of his face, to summon him to his presence.

Half an hour later, accompanied by Elhaj Beshir, Prince Mahmud arrived. He was the son of Mustapha II., who had renounced the throne in favour of Achmed just as Achmed was now resigning the throne in favour of Mahmud.

The Sultan arose, hastened towards him, embraced him, and kissed him on the forehead.

“The people desire thee to ascend the throne. Be merciful to my children just as I was merciful to thy father’s children.”

Sultan Mahmud did obeisance to his uncle, and seizing his hand, as if it were worthy of all honour, reverently kissed it.

Then Achmed beckoned to his sons, and one by one they approached Mahmud, and kissed his hand. And all the time the Ulemas remained prostrate on the ground around them.

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Then Achmed took the new sovereign by the right hand, and personally conducted him into the chamber of the Mantle of the Prophet. There, standing in front of the throne, he took from his hand the diamond clasp, the symbol of dominion, and with his own hand fastened it to the turban of the new Sultan, and placing his hand upon his head, solemnly blessed him.

"Rule and prosper! May those thou lovest love thee also, and may those that thou hatest fear thee. Be glorious and powerful while thou livest, and may men bless thy name and magnify thy memory when thou art dead!"

Then Achmed and his children thrice did obeisance to Mahmud, whereupon taking his two youngest sons by the hand, with a calm and quiet dignity, he quitted the halls of dominion which he was never to behold again, abandoning, one after another, every single thing which had hitherto been so dear to him.

In the Hall of Audience he gave up the Sword of the Prophet to the Silihdar, who unbuckled it from his body, and when he came to the door leading to the harem he handed over his children to the Kizlar-Aga, telling him to greet the Sultana Asseki in his name, and bid her remember him and teach his little children their father's name.

For henceforth he will see no more his sharp sword, or the fair Adsalis, or the other dear damsels, or his darling children. He must remain for ever far away from them behind the walls of a dungeon. A deposed Sultan has nought whatever to do with swords or wives or children. The same fate befell Mustapha II. six-and-twenty years before. He also had to part with his sword, his wives, and his children in just the same way. And this Achmed had good cause to remember, for then it was that he ascended the throne. And now he, in his turn, descended from the throne, and now that had happened to him for his successor's sake which had happened to his predecessor for his sake.

* * * * *

But the great men of the realm bowed their heads to the ground before Sultan Mahmud and did him homage.

The long procession of those who came to do him obeisance filled all the apartments of the Seraglio and lasted till midnight. The whole Court bent head and knee before the new Sultan, and the chief officers of state, the clergy, and the eunuchs followed suit. Only the captains of the host and Halil Patrona still remained behind.

Hastily written letters were dispatched to all the captains and to all the rebels, informing them that Sultan Achmed had been deposed and Sultan Mahmud was reigning in his stead; let them all come, therefore, at dawn of day next morning and do homage to the new Padishah.

The moon had long been high in the heavens and was shining through the coloured windows of the Seraglio when the magnates withdrew and Mahmud remained alone.

Only the Kizlar-Aga awaited his pleasure—the Kizlar-Aga whose sooty face seemed to cast a black shadow upon itself.

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Mahmud extended his hand to him with a smile that he might kiss it.

And then Elhaj Beshir conducted him to the door of those secret apartments within which bloom the flowers of bliss and rapture, and throwing it open bent low while the new Sultan passed through.

Only three among the peris of loveliness had preferred eternal loveless slavery to the favours of the new Padishah, and among those who smiled upon the young Sultan as he entered the room, the one who had the happiest, the most radiant face, was the fair Adsalis, who still remained the favourite wife, the Sultana Asseki, even after the great revolution which had turned the whole Empire upside down and made the least to be the greatest and the greatest to stand lowest of all.

Among so many smiling faces hers was the one towards which the tremulously happy and enraptured Sultan hastened full of tender infatuation; she it was whom he raised to his breast and in whose arms he soothed himself with dreams of glory, while she stifled his anxieties with her kisses.

Everything was asleep in the Halls of Felicity, only Love was still awake. Mahmud, forgetful alike of himself and his empire, pressed to his bosom his dear enchanting Sultana, the most precious of all the treasures he had won that day; but the fair Sultana shuddered from time to time in the midst of his burning embrace. It seemed to her as if someone was standing behind her back, sobbing and sighing and touching her warm bosom with his cold fingers.

Perchance she could hear the sighing and the sobbing of him who lay sleepless far, far below that bower of rapture, in one of the cold vaults of the Place of Oblivion, thinking of his lost Empire and his lost Eden!

* * * * *

Early next morning the chief captains of the host, the Bashas and the Sheiks, appeared in the Seraglio to greet the new Sultan. It was only the leaders of the rebels who did not come.

Ever since Sulali had frightened the insurgents by telling them that the cellars of the Seraglio were full of gunpowder, they did not so much as venture to draw near it, and when the public criers recited the invitation of Mahmud in front of the mosques, thousands and thousands of voices shouted as if from one throat:

“We will not come!”

Not one of them would listen to the invitation from the Seraglio.

"It is a mere ruse," observed the wise Reis-Effendi. "They only want to entice us into a mouse-trap to crush us all at a blow like flies caught in honey."

"A short cut into Paradise that would be," scornfully observed Orli, who, despite his office of softa, did not hesitate to speak disrespectfully even of Paradise, whither every true believer ought joyfully to hasten.

Last of all "crazy" Ibrahim gave them a piece of advice.

"'Twill be best," said he, "to gather together from among us our least useful members—any murderers there may happen to be, or escaped gaol-birds for instance; call them Halil, Musli, and Suleiman, deck them out in the garments of Agas, Beggas, and Ulemas, and send them to the Seraglio. Then, if we see them return to us safe and sound, we can, of course, go ourselves."

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This crazy counsel instantly met with general applause. Everyone approved of it, of that there could be no doubt.

Halil Patrona regarded them all in contemptuous silence. Only when “crazy” Ibrahim’s proposal had been resolved upon did he stand up and say:

“I myself will go to the Seraglio.”

Some of them regarded him with amazement, others laughed. Musli clapped his hands together in his desperation.

“Halil! dost thou dream or art thou beside thyself? Dost thou imagine thyself to be one of the Princes of the Thousand and One Nights who can hew his way through monsters and spectres, or art thou wearied of beholding the sun from afar and must needs go close up to him?”

“’Tis no concern of thine what I do, and if I am not afraid what need is there for thee to be afraid on my account?”

“But, prythee, bethink thee, Halil! It would be a much more sensible jest on thy part to leap into the den of a lioness suckling her young; and thou wouldst be a much wiser man if thou wert to adventure thyself in the sulphur holes of Balsorah, or cause thyself to be let down, for the sake of a bet, into the coral-beds at the bottom of the Sea of Candia to pick up a bronze asper,[2] instead of going to the Seraglio where there are now none but thine enemies, and where the very atmosphere and the spider crawling down the wall is venomous to thee and thy deadly enemy.”

“They may kill me,” cried Halil, striking his bosom with both hands and boldly stepping forward—“they may kill me it is true, but they shall never be able to say that I was afraid of them. They may tear my limbs to pieces, but when it comes to be recorded in the Chronicles that the rabble of Constantinople were cowards, it shall be recorded at the same time that, nevertheless, there was one man among them who could not only talk about death but could look it fairly between the eyes when it appeared before him.”

“Listen, Halil! I and many more like me are capable of looking into the very throat of loaded cannons. Many is the time, too, that I have seen sharp swords drawn against me, and no lance that ever hath left the smith’s hand can boast that I have so much as winked an eye before its glittering point. But what is the use of valour in a place where you know that the very ground beneath your feet has Hell beneath it, and it only needs a spark no bigger than that which flashes from a man’s eye when he has received a buffet, and we shall all fly into the air. Why, even if both our hands were full of swords and pistols, not one of them could protect us—so who would wish to be brave there?”

“Have I invited thee to come? Did I not say that I would go alone?”

“But we won’t let thee go. What art thou thinking about? If they destroy thee there we shall be without a leader, and we shall fall to pieces and perish like the rush-roof of a cottage when the joists are suddenly pulled from beneath it. And thou thyself wilt be a laughing-stock to the people, like the cock of the fairy tale who spitted and roasted himself.”

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“That will never happen,” said Halil, unbuckling his sword (for no weapon may enter the Seraglio) and handing it to Musli; “take care of it for me till I return, and if I do not return it will be something to remember me by.”

“Then thou art really resolved to go?” inquired Musli. “Well, in that case, I will go too.”

At these words the others also began to bestir themselves, and when they saw that Halil really was not joking, they accompanied him right up to the Seraglio. Into it indeed they did not go; but, anyhow, they surrounded the huge building which forms a whole quarter of the city by itself, and as soon as they saw Halil pass through the Seraglio gates they set up a terrific shout.

Alone, unarmed, and without an escort, the rebel leader passed through the strange, unfamiliar rooms, and at every door armed resplendent sentries made way before him, closing up again, with pikes crossed, before every door when he had passed through them.

On reaching the Hall of Audience, a couple of Kapu-Agasis seized him by the arm, and led him into the Cupola Chamber where Sultan Mahmud received those who came to render homage.

In all the rooms was that extraordinary pomp which is only to be seen on the day when a new Sultan has ascended the throne. The very ante-chamber, “The Mat-Room,” as it is called, because of the variegated straw-mats with which it is usually covered, was now spread over with costly Persian carpets. The floor of the Cupola Chamber looked like a flower-bed. Its rich pile carpets were splendidly embroidered with gold, silver, and silken flowers of a thousand hues, interspersed with wreaths of pearls. At the foot of a sofa placed on an elevated dais glistened a coverlet of pure pearls. On each side of this sofa stood a little round writing-table inlaid with gold. On one of these tables lay an open portfolio encrusted with precious stones and writing materials flashing with rubies and emeralds; on the other lay a copy of the Alkoran, bound in black velvet and studded with rose brilliants. Another copy of the Alkoran lay open on a smaller table, written in the Talik script in letters of gold, cinnabar, and ultramarine; and there were twelve other Korans on just as many other tables, with gold clasps and pearl-embroidered bindings. On both sides of the fire-place, on stands that were masterpieces of carving, were heaped up the gala mantles exhibited on such occasions; and side by side, along the wall, on raised alabaster pedestals were nine clocks embellished with figures, each more ingenious than the other, which moved and played music every time the hour struck. Four large Venetian mirrors multiplied the extravagant splendours of the stately room.

Around the room on divans sat the chief dignitaries of the Empire, the viziers, the secretaries, the presenters of petitions according to rank, in splendid robes, and with round, pyramidal or beehive-shaped turbans according to the nature of their office.

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Yet all this pomp was utterly eclipsed by the splendour which radiated from the new Padishah; he seemed enveloped in a shower of pearls and diamonds. Whichever way he turned the roses embroidered on his dress, the girdle which encircled his loins, the clasp of his turban, and every weapon about him seemed to scatter rainbow sparks, so that those who gazed at him were dazzled into blindness before they could catch a glimpse of his face.

Behind the back of the throne, flashing with carbuncles as large as nuts, stood a whole army of ministering servants with their heads plunged deep in their girdles.

It was into this room that Halil entered.

On the threshold his two conductors released his arm, and Halil advanced alone towards the Padishah.

His face was not a whit the paler than at other times, he stepped forth as boldly and gazed around him as confidently as ever.

His dress, too, was just the same as hitherto—a simple Janissary mantle, a blue dolman with divided sleeves, without any ornament, a short salavari, or jerkin, reaching to the knee, leaving the lower part of the legs bare, and the familiar roundish kuka on his head.

As he passed through the long apartment he cast a glance upon the dignitaries sitting around the throne, and there was not one among them who could withstand the fire of his gaze. With head erect he advanced in front of the Sultan, and placing his muscular, half-naked foot on the footstool before the throne stood there, for a moment, like a figure cast in bronze, a crying contrast to all this tremulous pomp and obsequious splendour. Then he raised his hand to his head, and greeted the Sultan in a strong sonorous voice:

“Aleikum unallah! The grace of God be upon thee!”

Then folding his hands across his breast he flung himself down before the throne, pressing his forehead against its steps.

Mahmud descended towards him, and raised him from the ground with his own hand.

“Speak! what can I do for thee?” he asked with condescension.

“My wishes have already been fulfilled,” said Halil, and every word he then uttered was duly recorded by the chronicler. “It was my wish that the sword of Mahomet should pass into worthy hands; behold it is accomplished, thou dost sit on the throne to which I have raised thee. I know right well what is the usual reward for such services—a shameful death awaits me.”

Mahmud passionately interrupted him.

“And I swear to thee by my ancestors that no harm shall befall thee. Ask thine own reward, and it shall be granted thee before thou hast yet made an end of preferring thy request.”

Halil reflected for a moment, and all the time his gaze rested calmly on the faces of the dignitaries sitting before him. His gaze passed down the whole row of them, and he took them all in one by one. Everyone of them believed that he was seeking a victim whose place he coveted. The rebel leader read this thought plainly in the faces of the dignitaries. Once more he ran his eyes over them, then he spoke.

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“Glorious Padishah! as the merit of thy elevation belongeth not to me but to thy people, let the reward be theirs whose is the merit. A heavy burden oppresses thy slaves, and the name of that burden is Malikane. It is the farming out of the taxes for the lives of the holders thereof which puts money into the pockets of the high officers of state and the pashas, so that the Sublime Porte derives no benefit therefrom. Abolish, O Padishah, this farming out of the revenue, so that the destiny of the people may be in thy hands alone, and not in the hands of these rich usurers!”

And with these words he waved his hand defiantly in the direction of the viziers and the magnates.

Deep silence fell upon them. Through the closed doors resounded the tempestuous roar of the multitudes assembled around the Seraglio. Those within it trembled, and Halil Patrona stood there among them like an enchanter who knows that he is invulnerable, immortal.

But the Sultan immediately commanded the Ciaus Aga to proclaim to the people with a trumpet-blast at the gates of the Seraglio, that at the desire of Halil Patrona the Malikane was from this day forth abolished.

The shout which arose the next moment and made the very walls of the Seraglio tremble was ample evidence of the profound impression which this announcement made.

“And now place thyself at the head of thy host,” said Halil, “accept the invitation of thy people to go to the Ejub mosque, in order that the Silihdars may gird thee with the Sword of the Prophet according to ancient custom.”

The Sultan thereupon caused it to be announced that in an hour’s time he would proceed to the mosque of Ejub, there to be girded with the Sword of the Prophet.

With a shout of joy the people pressed towards the mosque in their thousands, crowding all the streets and all the house-tops between the mosque and the Seraglio. The cannons of the Bosphorus sent thundering messages to the distant mountains of the joy of Stambul, and an hour later, to the sound of martial music, Mahmud held his triumphal progress through the streets of his capital on horseback; and the people waved rich tapestries at him from the house-tops and scattered flowers in his path. Behind him came radiant knightly viziers and nobles, and venerable councillors in splendid apparel on gorgeous full bloods; but in front of him walked two men alone, Halil Patrona and Musli, both in plain, simple garments, with naked calves, on their heads small round turbans, and with drawn swords in their hands as is the wont of the common Janissaries when on the march.

And the people sitting on the house-tops shouted the name of Halil just as often and just as loudly as they shouted the name of Mahmud.

The firing of the last salvo announced that the Sultan had arrived at the Ejub mosque.

Ispirizade, the chief imam of the Aja Sophia mosque, already awaited him. He had asked Halil as a favour that he might bless the new Sultan, and Halil had granted his request. Since he had ventured into the Seraglio everyone had obeyed his words. The people now whispered everywhere that the Sultan was doing everything which Halil Patrona demanded.

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Ispirizade had already mounted the lofty pulpit when Mahmud and his suite took their places on the lofty dais set apart for them.

The chief priest's face was radiant with triumph. He extended his hands above his head and thrice pronounced the name of Allah. And when he had thus thrice called upon the name of God, his lips suddenly grew dumb, and there for a few moments he stood stiffly, with his hands raised towards Heaven and wide open eyes, and then he suddenly fell down dead from the pulpit.

"'Tis the dumb curse of Achmed!" whispered the awe-stricken spectators to one another.

FOOTNOTE:

[2] Farthing.

CHAPTER X.

THE FEAST OF HALWET.

The surgujal—the turban with the triple gold circlet—was on the head of Mahmud, but the sword, the sword of dominion, was in the hand of Halil Patrona. The people whose darling he had become were accustomed to regard him as their go-between in their petty affairs, the host trembled before him, and the magnates fawned upon him for favour.

In the Osman nation there is no hereditary nobility, everyone there has risen to the highest places by his sword or his luck. Every single Grand Vizier and Kapudan Pasha has a nickname which points to his lowly origin; this one was a woodcutter, that one a stone-mason, that other one a fisherman. Therefore a Mohammedan never looks down upon the most abject of his co-religionists, for he knows very well that if he himself happens to be uppermost to-day and the other undermost, by to-morrow the whole world may have turned upside down, and this last may have become the first.

So now also a petty huckster rules the realm, and Sultan Mahmud has nothing to think about but his fair women. Who can tell whether any one of us would not have done likewise? Suppose a man to have been kept in rigorous, joyless servitude for twenty years, and then suddenly to be confronted with the alternative—"reign over hearts or over an empire"—would he not perhaps have chosen the hearts instead of the empire for his portion?

At the desire of the beauteous Sultana Asseki the insurrection of the people had no sooner subsided than the Sultan ordered the Halwet Festival to be celebrated.

The Halwet Festival is the special feast of women, when nobody but womankind is permitted to walk about the streets, and this blissful day may come to pass twice or thrice in the course of the year.

On the evening before, it is announced by the blowing of horns that the morrow will be the Feast of Halwet. On that day no man, of whatever rank, may come forth in the streets, or appear on the roof of a house, or show himself at a window, for death would be the penalty of his curiosity. The black and white eunuchs keeping order in the streets decapitate without mercy every man who does not remain indoors. Notices that this will be done are posted up on all the boundary-posts in the suburbs of the city, that strangers may regulate their conduct accordingly.

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On the day of the feast of Halwet all the damsels discard their veils, without which at all other times they are not permitted to walk about the streets. Then it is that the odalisks of one harem go forth to call upon the odalisks of another. Rows upon rows of brightly variegated tents appear in the midst of the streets and market-places, in which sherbet and other beverages made of violets, cane-sugar, rose-water, pressed raisins, and citron juice, together with sweetmeats, honey-cakes, and such-like delicacies, to which women are so partial, are sold openly, and all the sellers are also women.

Ah! what a spectacle that would be for the eyes of a man! Every street is swarming with thousands and thousands of bewitching shapes. These women, released from their prisons, are like so many gay and thoughtless children. Group after group, singing to the notes of the cithern, saunter along the public ways, decked out in gorgeous butterfly apparel, which flutter around their limbs like gaily coloured wings. The suns and stars of every climate flash and sparkle in those eyes. The whole gigantic city resounds with merry songs and musical chatter, and any man who could have seen them tripping along in whole lines might have exclaimed in despair: "Why have I not a hundred, why have I not a thousand hearts to give away!"

And then when the harem of the Sultan proudly paces forth! Half a thousand odalisks, the lovelinesses of every province in the Empire, for whom the youths of whole districts have raved in vain, in garments radiant with pearls and precious stones, mounted on splendid prancing steeds gaily caparisoned. And in the midst of them all the beautiful Sultana, with the silver heron's plume in her turban, whose stem flashes with sparkling diamonds. Her glorious figure is protected by a garment of fine lace, scarce concealing the snowy shimmer of her well-rounded arms. She sits upon the tiger-skin saddle of her haughty steed like an Amazon. The regard of her flashing eyes seems to proclaim her the tyrant of two Sultans, who has the right to say: "I am indeed my husband's consort!"

In front and on each side of the fairy band march four hundred black eunuchs, with naked broadswords across their shoulders, looking up at the windows of the houses before which they march to see whether, perchance, any inquisitive Peeping-Toms are lurking there.

Dancing and singing, this bevy of peris traverses the principal streets of Stambul. Every now and then, a short sharp wail or scream may be heard round the corner of the street the procession is approaching: the eunuchs marching in front have got hold of some inquisitive man or other. By the time the radiant cortege has reached the spot, only a few bloodstains are visible in the street, and, dancing and singing, the fair company of damsels passes over it and beyond. Scarce anyone would believe that those wails and screams did not form part and parcel of the all-pervading cries of joy.

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Meanwhile in the Etmeidan a much more free-and-easy sort of entertainment is taking place. The women of the lower orders are there diverting themselves in gaily adorned tents, where they can buy as much mead as they can drink, and in the midst of the piazza on round, outspread carpets dance the bayaderes of the streets, whom Sultan Achmed had once collected together and locked up in a dungeon where they had remained till the popular rising set them free again. In their hands they hold their nakaras (timbrels), clashing them together above their heads as they whirl around; on their feet are bronze bangles; and their long tresses and their light bulging garments flutter around them, whilst with wild gesticulations they dance the most audacious of dances, compared with whose voluptuous movements the passion of the fiercest Spanish bailarina is almost tame and spiritless.

Suddenly one of these street dancing-girls scream aloud to her companions in the midst of the mazy dance, bringing them suddenly to a standstill.

"Look, look!" she cried, "there comes Guel-Bejaze! Guel-Bejaze, the wife of Halil Patrona."

"Guel-Bejaze! Guel-Bejaze!" resound suddenly on every side. The bayaderes recognise the woman who had been shut up with them in the same dungeon, surround her, begin to kiss her feet and her garments, raise her up in their arms on to their shoulders, and so exhibit her to all the women assembled together on the piazza.

"Yonder is the wife of Halil Patrona!" they cry, and Rumour quickly flies with the news all through the city. Everyone of the bayaderes dancing among the people has something to say in praise of her. Some of them she had cared for in sickness, others she had comforted in their distress, to all of them she had been kind and gentle. And then, too, it was she who had restored them their liberty, for was it not on her account that Halil Patrona had set them all free?

Everyone hastened up to her. The poor thing could not escape from the clamorous enthusiasm of the sturdy muscular fish-wives and bathing women who, in their turn also, raised her upon their shoulders and carried her about, finally resolving to carry her all the way home for the honour of the thing. So for Halil Patrona's palace they set off with Guel-Bejaze on their shoulders, she all the time vainly imploring them to put her down that she might hide away among the crowd and disappear, for she feared, she trembled at, the honour they did her. From street to street they carried her, whirling along with them in a torrent of drunken enthusiasm everyone they chanced to fall in with on the way; and before them went the cry that the woman whom the others were carrying on their shoulders was the wife of Halil Patrona, the feted leader of the people, and ever denser and more violent grew the crowd. Any smaller groups they might happen to meet were swept along with them. Now and then they encountered the harems of the greatest dignitaries, such as pashas and beglerbegs. It was all one, the august and

exalted ladies had also to follow in the suite of the wife of Halil Patrona, the most powerful man in the realm, whose wife was the gentlest lady under Heaven.

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Suddenly, just as they were about to turn into the great square in front of the fortress of the Seven Towers, another imposing crowd encountered them coming from the opposite direction. It was the escort of the Sultana. The half a thousand odalisks and the four hundred eunuchs occupied the whole width of the road, but face to face with them were advancing ten thousand intoxicated viragoes led by the frantic bayaderes.

“Make way for the Sultana!” cried the running eunuchs to the approaching crowd, “make way for the Sultana and her suite!”

The execution of this command bordered on the impossible. The whole space of the square was filled with women—a perfect sea of heads—and visible above them all was a quivering, tremulous white figure which they had raised on high.

“Make way for the Sultana!” screamed the Kadun-Kiet-Khuda, who led the procession; a warty old woman she was, who had had charge of the harem for years and grown grey in it.

At this one of the boldest of the bayaderes thrust herself forward.

“Make way thyself, thou bearded old witch,” she cried; “make way, I say, before the wife of Halil Patrona. Why, thou art not worthy to kiss the dust off her feet. Stand aside if thou wilt not come along with us.”

And with these words she banged her tambourine right under the nose of the Kadun-Kiet-Khuda.

And then the bad idea occurred to some of the eunuchs to lift their broadswords against the boisterous viragoes, possibly with a view of cutting a path through them for the Sultana.

Ah! before they had time to whirl their swords above their heads, in the twinkling of an eye, their weapons were torn from their hands, and their backs were well-belaboured with the broad blades. The furious maenads fell upon their assailants, flung them to the ground, and the next instant had seized the bridles of the steeds of the odalisks.

The Kizlar-Aga was fully alive to the danger which threatened the Sultana. The whole square was thronged with angry women who, with faces flushed and sparkling eyes, were rushing upon the odalisks. Any single eunuch they could lay hold of was pretty certain to meet with a martyr’s death in a few seconds. They tore him to pieces, and pelted each other with the bloody fragments before scattering them to the winds. Elhaj Beshir, therefore, earnestly implored the Sultana to turn back and try to regain the Seraglio.

Adsalis cast a contemptuous look on the Aga.

“One can see that thou art neither man nor woman,” cried she, “for if thou wert one or the other, thou wouldst know how to be courageous.”

Then she buried the point of her golden spurs in the flank of her steed, and urged it towards the spot where the most frantic of the maenads stood fighting with the mounted odalisks, tearing some from their horses, rending their clothes, and then by way of mockery remounting them with their faces to the horses’ tails.

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Suddenly the Sultana stood amongst them with a haughty, commanding look, like a demi-goddess.

“Who is the presumptuous wretch who would bar the way before me?” she cried in her clear, penetrating voice.

One of the odalisks planted herself in front of the Sultana and, resting one hand upon her hip, pointed with the other at Guel-Bejaze!

“Look!” she cried, “there is Guel-Bejaze, and she it is who bars thy way and compels thee to make room for her.”

Guel-Bejaze, whom the women had brought to the spot on their shoulders, wrung her hands in her desperation, and begged and prayed the Sultana for forgiveness. She endeavoured to explain by way of pantomime, for speaking was impossible, that she was there against her will, and it was her dearest wish to humble herself before the face of the Sultana. It was all of no use. The yells of the wild Bacchantes drowned every sound, and Adsalis did not even condescend to look at her.

“Ye street-sweepings!” exclaimed Adsalis passionately, “what evil spirit has entered into you that ye would thus compel the Sultana Asseki to give way before a pale doll?”

“This woman comes before thee,” replied the bayadere.

“Comes before me?” said Adsalis, “wherefore, then, does she come before me?”

“Because she is fairer than thou.”

Adsalis’ face turned blood-red with rage at these words, while Guel-Bejaze went as white as a lily, as if the other woman had robbed all her colour from her. There was shame on one side and fury on the other. To tell a haughty dame in the presence of ten, of twenty thousand persons, that another woman is fairer than she!

“And she is more powerful than thou art,” cried the enraged bayadere, accumulating insult on the head of Adsalis, “for she is the wife of Halil Patrona.”

Adsalis, in the fury of despair, raised her clenched hands towards Heaven and could not utter a word. Impotent rage forced the tears from her eyes; and only after these tears could she stammer:

“This is the curse of Achmed!”

When they saw the tears in the eyes of the Sultana, everyone for a moment was silent, and suddenly, amidst the stillness of that dumb moment, from the highest window of the prison-fortress of the Seven Towers, a man’s voice called loudly into the square below:

“Sultana Adsalis! Sultana Adsalis!”

“Ha! a man! a man!” cried the furious mob; and in an instant they all gazed in that direction—and then in a murmur which immediately died away in an awe-struck whisper: “Achmed! Achmed!”

Only Adsalis was incapable of pronouncing that name, only her mouth remained gaping open as she gazed upwards.

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There at the window of the Seven Towers stood Achmed, in whose hands was now a far more terrible power than when they held the wand of dominion, for in his fingers now rests the power of cursing. It is sufficient now for him to point the finger at those he loves not, in order that they may wither away in the bloom of their youth. Whomsoever he now breathes upon, however distant they may be, will collapse and expire, and none can save them; and he has but to pronounce the name of his enemies, and torments will consume their inner parts. The destroying angel of Allah watches over his every look, so that on whomsoever his eye may fall, that soul is instantly accursed. Since the death of Ispirizade the people fear him more than when he sat on the throne.

A deep silence fell upon the mob. Nobody dared to speak.

And Achmed stretched forth his hand towards Adsalis. Those who stood around the Sultana felt a feeling of shivering awe, and began to withdraw from her, and she herself durst not raise her eyes.

“Salute that pure woman!” cried the tremulous voice of Achmed, “do obeisance to the wife of Halil Patrona, and cover thy face before her, for she is the true consort of her husband.”

And having uttered these words, Achmed withdrew from the window whither the noise of the crowd had enticed him, and the multitude clamoured as before; but now they no longer tried to force the suite of the Sultana to make way before Guel-Bejaze, but escorted Halil Patrona’s wife back to the dwelling-place of her husband.

Adsalis, desperate with rage and shame, returned to the Seraglio. Sobbing aloud, she cast herself at the feet of the Sultan, and told him of the disgrace that had befallen her.

Mahmud only smiled as he heard the whole story, but who can tell what was behind that smile.

“Dost thou not love me, then, that thou smilest when I weep? Ought not blood to flow because tears have flowed from my eyes?”

Mahmud gently stroked the head of the Sultana and said, still smiling:

“Oh, Adsalis! who would ever think of plucking fruit before it is *ripe*?”

CHAPTER XI.

GLIMPSES INTO THE FUTURE.

Halil Patrona was sitting on the balcony of the palace which the Sultan and the favour of the people had bestowed upon him. The sun was about to set. It sparkled on the

watery mirror of the Golden Horn, hundreds and hundreds of brightly gleaming flags and sails flapped and fluttered in the evening breeze.

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Guel-Bejaze was lying beside him on an ottoman, her beautiful head, with a feeling of languid bliss, reposed on her husband's bosom, her long eyelashes drooping, whilst with her swan-like arms she encircled his neck. She dozes away now and then, but the warm throb-throb of the strong heart which makes her husband's breast to rise and fall continually arouses her again. Halil Patrona is reading in a big clasped book beautifully written in the ornamental Talik script. Guel-Bejaze does not know this writing; its signs are quite strange to her, but she feasts her delighted eyes on the beautifully painted festoons and lilies and the variegated birds with which the initial letters are embellished, and scarce observes what a black shadow those pretty gaily coloured, butterfly-like letters cast upon Halil's face.

"What is the book thou art reading?" inquired Guel-Bejaze.

"Fairy tales and magic sentences," replied Patrona.

"Is it there that thou readest all those nice stories which thou tellest me every evening?"

"Yes, they are here."

"Tell me, I pray thee, what thou hast just been reading?"

"When thou art quite awake," said Halil, rapturously gazing at the fair face of the girl who was sleeping in his arms—and he continued turning over the leaves of the book.

And what then was in it? What did those brightly coloured letters contain? What was the name of the book?

That book is the "Takimi Vekai."

Ah! ask not a Mussulman what the "Takimi Vekai" is, else wilt thou make him sorrowful; neither mention it before a Mohammedan woman, else the tears will gush from her eyes. The "Takimi Vekai" is "The Book of the Sentences of the Future," which was written a century and a half ago by Said Achmed-ibn Mustafa, and which has since been preserved in the Muhamedije mosque, only those high in authority ever having the opportunity of seeing it face to face.

Those golden letters embellished with splendid flowers contain dark sayings. Let us listen:

"Takimi Vekai"—The Pages of the Future.

"On the eighth-and-twentieth day of the month Rubi-Estani, in the year of the Hegira, 886,[3] I, Said Achmed-ibn Mustafa, Governor of Scutari and scribe of the Palace, having accomplished the Abdestan[4] and recited the Fateha[5] with hands raised

heavenwards, ascended to the tower of Ujuk Kule, from whence I could survey all Stambul, and there I began to meditate.

“And lo! the Prophet appeared before me, and breathed upon my eyes and ears in order that I might see and hear nothing but what he commanded me to hear and see.

“And I wrote down those things which the Prophet said to me.

“The Giaours already see the tents of the foreign hosts pitched on the Tsiragan piazza, already see the half-moon cast down, and the double cross raised on the towers of the mosques, the khanze[6] plundered, and the faithful led forth to execution. In the Fanar quarters[7] they are already assembling the people, and saying to one another: ‘To-morrow! to-morrow!’

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“Yet Allah is the God who defends the Padishah of the Ottomans. Their Odzhakjaiks[8] will scatter terror. Allah Akbar! God is mighty!

“And the captains of the galleys, and the rowers thereof, and the chief of the gunners, and the corsairs of the swift ships will share with one another the treasures and the spoils of the unbelievers.

“And the Padishah shall rule over thirteen nations.

“But lo! a dark cloud arises in the cold and distant North. A foe appears more terrible and persistent than the Magyars, the Venetians, or the Persians. He is still tender like the fledgelings of the hawks of the Balkans, but soon, very soon, he will learn to spread his pinions. Up, up, Silihdar Aga, the Sultan's Sword-bearer! Up, up, Rechenbtar Aga, the Sultan's Stirrup-holder; up, up, and do your duty. And ye viziers, assemble the reserves. Those men who come from the land where the pines and firs raise their virgin branches towards Heaven, they long after the warm climates where the olive, the lestick, the terebinth, and the palm lift their crowns towards Heaven. The fathers point out Stambul to their sons, they point it out as the booty that will give them sustenance; tender women lay their hands upon the sword to use it against the Osmanli, and will fight like heroes. Yet the days of the Sons of the Prophet will not yet come to an end; they will resist the enemy, and stand fast like a Salamander in the midst of the burning embers.

“The years pass over the world, again the Giaours assemble in their myriads and threaten vengeance. But the Divan answers them: 'Olmaz!'—it cannot be. The Anatolian and the Rumelian lighthouses, at the entrance of the Bosphorus, will signal from their watch-towers the approach of the foreign war-ships.

“But this shall be much later, after three-and-twenty Padishahs have ruled over the thirteen nations; then and not till then will the armies of the Unbelievers assemble before Stambul. Woe, woe unto us! Eternally invincible should the Osmanlis remain if they walked, with firm footsteps, according to the commands of the Koran. But a time will come when the old customs will fall into oblivion, when new ways will creep in among Mussulmen like a rattlesnake crawling into a bed of roses. Faith will no longer give strength against those men of ice, and they will enter the nine-and-twenty gates of the seven-hilled city.

“Lo! this did the Prophet reveal to me in the season of El-Ashsoer, beginning at the time of sundown.

“Allah give his blessing to the rulers of this world.”

Thus ran the message of the “Takimi Vekai.”

Halil Patrona had read these lines over and over again until he knew every letter of them by heart. They were continually in his thoughts, in his dreams, and the eternally recurring tumult of these anxious bodings allowed his soul no rest. What if it were possible to falsify this prophecy! What if his strong hand could but stay the flying wheel of Fate in mid career, hold it fast, and turn it in a different direction! so that what was written in the Book of Thora before Sun and Moon were ever yet created might be expunged therefrom, and the guardian angels be compelled to write other things in place thereof!

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But such an idea ill befits a Mussulman; it is not the mental expression of that pious resignation with which the Mohammedan fortifies himself against the future, submissive as he is to the decrees of Fate, with never a thought of striving against the Powers of Omnipotence with a mortal hand. Ambitious, world-disturbing were the thoughts which ran riot in the brain of Halil Patrona—thoughts meet for no mere mortal. Poor indeed are the thoughts of man. He piles world upon world, and sets about building for the ages, and then a light breath of air strikes upon that which he has built and it becomes dust. Wherefore, then, does man take thought for the morrow?

The night slowly descended, the glow of the southern sky grew ever paler on the half-moons of the minarets, till they grew gradually quite dark and the cry of the muezzin resounded from the towers of the mosques.

“Allah Kerim! Allah Akbar! La illah il Allah, Mohammed rasul Allah! God is sublime. God is mighty. There is one God and Mohammed is his Prophet.”

And after a few moments he called again:

“Come, ye people, to the rest of God, to the abode of righteousness; come to the abode of felicity!”

Guel-Bejaze awoke. Halil washed his hands and feet, and turning towards the mehrab[9] began to pray.

But in vain he sent away Guel-Bejaze (for women are not permitted to be present at the prayers of men nor men at the prayers of women); in vain he raised his hands heavenwards; in vain he went down on his knees and lay with his face touching the ground; other thoughts were abroad in his heart—terrifying, disturbing thoughts which suggested to him that the God to Whom he prayed no longer existed, but just as His Kingdom here on earth was falling to pieces so also in Heaven it was on the point of vanishing. Thrice he was obliged to begin his prayer all over again, for thrice it was interrupted by a cough, and it is not lawful to go on with a prayer that has once been interrupted. Once more he cast a glance upon the darkened city, and it grieved him sorely that nowhere could he perceive a half-moon; whereupon he went in again, sought for Guel-Bejaze, and told her lovely fairy tales which, he pretended, he had been reading in the Talik book.

The next day Halil gathered together in his secret chamber all those in whom he had confidence. Among them were Kaplan Giraj, a kinsman of the Khan of the Crimea, Musli, old Vuodi, Mohammed the dervish, and Sulali.

Sulali wrote down what Halil said.

“Mussulmans. Yesterday, before the Abdestan, I was reading the book whose name is the ‘Takimi Vekai.’”

“Mashallah!” exclaimed all the Mohammedans mournfully.

“In that book the overthrow of the Ottoman Empire is predicted. The year, the day is at hand when the name of Allah will no longer be glorified on this earth, when the tinkling of the sheep-bells will be heard on the ruins of the marble fountains, and those other bells so hateful to Allah will resound from the towers of the minarets. In those days the Giaours will play at quoits with the heads of the true believers, and build mansions over their tombs.”

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“Mashallah! the will of God be done!” said old dervish Mohammed with a shaking voice, “by then we shall all of us be in Paradise, up in the seventh Heaven, the soil whereof is of pure starch, ambergris, musk, and saffron. There, too, the very stones are jacinths and the pebbles pure pearls, and the Tuba-tree shields the faithful from the heat of the sun, as they rest beneath it and gaze up at its golden flowers and silver leaves, and refresh themselves with the milk, wine, and honey which flow abundantly from its sweet and glorious stem. There, too, are the dwellings of Mohammed and the Prophets his predecessors, in all their indescribable beauty, and over the roof of every true believer bend the branches of the sacred tree, whose fruits never fail, nor wither, nor rot, and there we shall all live together in the splendour of Paradise where every true believer shall have a palace of his own. And in every palace two-and-seventy lovely houris will smile upon him—young virgins of an immortal loveliness—whose faces will never grow old or wrinkled, and who are a hundred times more affectionate than the women of this world.”

Halil listened with the utmost composure till greybeard Vuodi had delivered his discourse concerning the joys of Paradise.

“All that you say is very pretty and very true no doubt, but let your mind also dwell upon what the Prophet has revealed to us concerning the distribution of rewards and punishments. When the angel Azrael has gently separated our souls from our bodies, and we have been buried with the double tombstone at our heads, on which is written: ‘Dame Allah huti ale Remaeti,’[10] then will come to us the two Angels of Judgment, Monker and Nakir. And they will ask us if we have fulfilled the precepts of the Prophet. What shall our trembling lips reply to them? And when they ask us whether we have defended the true faith, whether we have defended our Fatherland against the Infidels, what shall we then reply to them? Blessed, indeed, will be those who can answer: ‘I have done all which it was commanded me to do,’ their spirits will await the final judgment in the cool abodes of the Well of Ishmael. But as for those who shall answer: ‘I saw the danger which threatened the Osmanli nation, it was in my power to help and I did it not,’ their bodies will be scourged by the angels with iron rods and their souls will be thrust into the abyss of Morhut there to await the judgment-day. And when the trump of the angel Israfil shall sound and the Marvel from the Mountain of Safa doth appear to write ‘Mumen’[11] or ‘Giaour’[12] on the foreheads of mankind; and when Al-Dallaja[13] comes to root out the nation of the Osmanli, and the hosts of Gog and Magog appear to exterminate the Christians, and drink up the waters of the rivers, and at the last all things perish before the Mahdi; then when the mountains are rent asunder and the stars fall from Heaven, when the archangels Michael and Gabriel open the tombs and bring forth

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the trembling, death-pale shapes, one by one, before the face of Allah, and they all stand there as transparent as crystal so that every thought of their hearts is visible—what then will you answer, you in whose power it once stood to uphold the dominion of Mahomet, you to whom it was given to have swords in your hands and ideas in your heads to be used in its defence—what will you answer, I say, when you hear the brazen voice cry: 'Ye who saw destruction coming, did ye try to prevent it?' What will it profit you then, old Vuodi and ye others, to say that ye never neglected the Abdestan, the Guezuel, and the Thueharet ablutions, nor the five prayers of the Namazat, that ye have kept the fast of Ramazan and the feast of Bejram, that ye have richly distributed the Zakato[14] and the Sadakato,[15] that you have made the pilgrimage to the Kaaba at Mecca so many times, or so many times, that you have kissed the sin-remitting black stone, that you have drunk from the well of Zemzem and seven times made the circuit of the mountain of Arafat and flung stones at the Devil in the valley of Dsemre—what will it profit you, I say, if you cannot answer that question? Woe to you, woe to everyone of us who see, who hear, and yet go on dreaming! For when we tread the Bridge of Alshirat, across whose razor-sharp edge every true believer must pass on his way to Paradise, the load of a single sin will drag you down into the abyss, down into Hell, and not even into the first Hell, Gehenna, where the faithful do penance, nor into the Hell of Ladhana, where the souls of the Jews are purified, nor into the Hell of Hotama wherein the Christians perish, nor into the Hell of Sair which is the abode of the Heretics, nor into the Hell of Sakar wherein the fire-worshippers curse the fire, nor yet into the Hell of Jahim which resounds with the yells of the idol-worshippers, but into the seventh hell, the deepest and most accursed hell of all, whose name is Al-Havija, where wallow those who only did God lip-service and never felt the faith in their hearts, for we pray lying prayers when we say that we worship Allah and yet allow His Temple to be defiled."

These words deeply moved the hearts of all present. Every sentence alluded to the most weighty of the Moslem beliefs; the meshes of the net with which Halil had taken their souls captive were composed of the very essentials of their religious and political system, so they could but put their hands to their breasts, bow down before him, and say:

"Command us and we will obey!"

Then Halil, with the inspiration of a seer, addressed the men before him.

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“Woe to us if we believe that the days of threatening are still far off! Woe to us if we believe that the sins which will ruin the nation of Osman have not yet been committed! While our ancestors dwelt in tents of skin, half the world feared our name, but since the nation of Osman has strutted about in silk and velvet it has become a laughing-stock to its enemies. Our great men grow gardens in their palaces; they pass their days in the embraces of women, drinking wine, and listening to music; they loathe the battlefield, and oh, horrible! they blaspheme the name of Allah. If among the Giaours, blasphemers of God are to be found, I marvel not thereat, for their minds are corrupted by the multitude of this world’s knowledge; but how can a Mussulman raise his head against God—a Mussulman who has never learnt anything in his life save to glorify His Name? And what are we to think when on the eve of the Feast of Halwet we hear a Sheik, a descendant of the family of the Prophet, a Sheik before whom the people bow reverently when they meet him in the street—what are we to think, I say, when we hear this Sheik say before the great men of the palace all drunk with wine: ‘There is no Allah, or if there is an Allah he is not almighty; for if he were almighty he would have prevented me from saying, there is no Allah!’”

A cry of horror arose from the assembled Mussulmans which only after a while died away in an angry murmur like a gradually departing gust of wind.

“Who was the accursed one?” exclaimed Mohammed dervish, shaking his clenched fist threateningly.

“It was Uzun Abdi, the Aga of the Janissaries,” replied Halil, “who said that, and the others only laughed.”

“Let them all be accursed!”

“Wealth has ruined the heart of the Osmanli,” continued Halil. “Who are they who now control the fate of the Realm? The creatures of the Sultana, the slaves of the Kizlar-Aga, the Izoglani, whose licentiousness will bring down upon Stambul the judgment of Sodom and Gomorrah. It is from thence we get our rulers and our treasurers, and if now and then Fate causes a hero to plump down among them he also grows black like a drop of water that has fallen upon soot; for the treasures, palaces, and odalisks of the fallen magnates are transferred to the new favourite, and ruin him as quickly and as completely as they ruined his predecessors; and so long as these palaces stand by the Sweet Waters more curses than prayers will be heard within the walls of Stambul, so that if ye want to save Stambul, ye must burn down these palaces, for as sure as God exists these palaces will consume Stambul.”

“We must go to the Sultan about it,” said the dervish Mohammed.

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“Pulled down they must be, for no righteous man dwells therein. The whole of this Empire of Stone must come down, whoever is so much as a head taller than his brethren is a sinner. Let us raise up those who are lowest of all. Down from your perches, ye venal voivodes, khans, and pashas, who buy the Empire piecemeal with money and for money barter it away again! Let men of war, real men though Fame as yet knows them not, step into your places. The very atmosphere in which ye live is pestiferous because of you. For some time now, gold and silver pieces, stamped with the heads of men and beasts, have been circulating in our piazzas, although, as we all know, no figures of living things should appear on the coins of the Mussulman. Neither Russia, nor Sweden, nor yet Poland pay tribute to us; and yet, I say, these picture-coins still circulate among us. Oh! ever since Baltaji suffered White^[16] Mustache, the Emperor of the North, to escape, full well ye know it! gold and silver go further and hit the mark more surely than iron and lead. We must create a new world, none belonging to the old order of things must remain among us. Write down a long, long list, and carry it to the Grand Vizier. If he refuses to accept it, write another in his place on the list, and take it to the Sultan. Woe betide the nation of Osman if it cannot find within it as many just men as its needs require!”

The assembled Mussulmans thereupon drew up in hot haste a long list of names in which they proposed fresh candidates for all the chief offices of the Empire. They put down Choja Dzhanum as the new Kapudan Pasha, Mustafa Beg as the new Minister of the Interior, Musli as the new Janissary Aga; the actual judges and treasurers were banished, the banished judges and treasurers were restored to their places; instead of Maurocordato, who had been educated abroad, they appointed his enemy, Richard Rakovitsa, surnamed Djihan, Voivode of Wallachia; instead of Ghyka they placed the butcher of Pera, Janaki, on the throne of Moldavia; and instead of Mengli Giraj, Khan of the Crimea, Kaplan Giraj, actually present among them, was called to ascend the throne of his ancestors.

Kaplan Giraj pressed Halil’s hand by way of expressing his gratitude for this mark of confidence.

And, oddly enough, as Halil pressed the hand of the Khan, it seemed to him as if his arm felt an electric shock. What could it mean?

But now Musli stood up before him.

“Allow me,” said he, “to go with this writing to the Grand Vizier. You have been in the Seraglio already, let mine be the glory of displaying my valour by going thither likewise! Do not take all the glory to yourself, allow others to have a little of it too! Besides, it does not become you to carry your own messages to the Divan. Why even the Princes of the Giaours do not go there themselves but send their ambassadors.”

Halil Patrona gratefully pressed the Janissary's hand. He knew right well that he spoke from no desire of glorification, he knew that Musli only wanted to go instead of him because it was very possible that the bearer of these demands might be beheaded.

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Once again Musli begged earnestly of Halil that the delivery of these demands might be entrusted to him, and so proudly did he make his petition that it was impossible for Halil Patrona to deny him.

Now Musli was a sly dog. He knew very well that it was a very risky business to present so many demands all at once, but he made up his mind that he would so completely take the Grand Vizier by surprise, that before he could find breath to refuse the demands of the people, he would grant one of them after another, for if he swallowed the first of them that was on the list, he might be hoodwinked into swallowing the rest likewise.

The new Grand Vizier went by the name of Kabakulak, or Blunt-ear, because he was hard of hearing, which suited Musli exactly, as he had, by nature, a bad habit of bawling whenever he spoke.

At first Kabakulak would not listen to anything at all. He seemed to have suddenly gone stone-deaf, and had every single word repeated to him three times over; but when Musli said to him that if he would not listen to what he was saying, he, Musli, would go off at once to the Sultan and tell *him*, Kabakulak opened his ears a little wider, became somewhat more gracious, and asked Musli, quite amicably, what he could do for him.

Musli felt his courage rising many degrees since he began bawling at a Grand Vizier.

"Halil Patrona *commands* it to be done," he bellowed in Kabakulak's ear.

The Vizier threw back his head.

"Come, come, my son!" said he, "don't shout in my ear like that, just as if I were deaf. What did you say it was that Halil Patrona begs of me?"

"Don't twist my words, you old owl!" said Musli, naturally *sotto voce*. Then raising his voice, he added, "Halil Patrona wants Dzhanum Choja appointed Kapudan Pasha."

"Good, good, my son! just the very thing I wanted done myself; that has been resolved upon long ago, so you may go away home."

"Go away indeed! not yet! Then Wallachia wants a new voivode."

"It has got one already, got one already I tell you, my son. His name is Maurocordato. Bear it in mind—Mau-ro-cor-da-to."

"I don't mean to bother my tongue with it at all. As I pronounce it it is—Djihan."

"Djihan? Who is Djihan?"

“Djihan is the Voivode of Wallachia.”

“Very well, you shall have it so. And what do you want for yourself, my son, eh?”

Musli was inscribed in the list as the Aga of the Janissaries, but he was too modest to speak of himself.

“Don’t trouble your head about me, Kabakulak, while there are so many worthier men unprovided for. We want the Khan of the Crimea deposed and the banished Kaplan Giraj appointed in his stead.”

“Very well, we will inform Kaplan Giraj of his promotion presently.”

“Not presently, but instantly. Instantly, I say, without the least delay.”

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Musli accompanied his eloquence with such gesticulations that the Grand Vizier thought it prudent to fall back before him.

"Don't you feel well?" he asked Musli, who had suddenly become silent. In his excitement he had forgotten the other demands.

"Ah! I have it," he said, and sitting down on the floor at his ease, he took the list from his bosom and extending it on the floor, began reciting Halil Patrona's nominations seriatim.

The Grand Vizier approved of the whole thing, he had no objection to make to anything.

Musli left Janaki's elevation last of all: "He you must make Voivode of Moldavia," said he.

Suddenly Kabakulak went quite deaf. He could not hear a word of Musli's last demand.

Musli drew nearer to him, and making a speaking-trumpet out of his hands, bawled in his ear:

"Janaki I am talking about."

"Yes, yes! I hear, I hear. You want him to be allowed to provide the Sultan's kitchen with the flesh of bullocks and sheep. So be it! He shall have the charge."

"Would that the angel Izrafil might blow his trumpet in thine ear!" said Musli to himself *sotto voce*. "I am not talking of his trade as a butcher," added he aloud. "I say that he is to be made Prince of Moldavia."

Kabakulak now thought it just as well to show that he heard what had been asked, and replied very gravely:

"You know not what you are asking. The Padishah, only four days ago, gave this office to Prince Ghyka, who is a wise and distinguished man. The Sultan cannot go back from his word."

"A wise and distinguished man!" cried Musli in amazement. "What am I to understand by that? Is there any difference then between one Giaour and another?"

"The Sultan has so ordered it, and without his knowledge I cannot take upon myself to alter his decrees."

"Very well, go to the Sultan then and get him to undo again what he has done. For the rest you can do what you like for what I care, only beware of one thing, beware lest you lose the favour of Halil Patrona!"

Kabakulak by this time had had nearly enough of Musli, but the latter still continued diligently to consult his list. He recollected that Halil Patrona had charged him to say something else, but what it was he could not for the life of him call to mind.

“Ah, yes! now I have it!” he cried at last. “Halil commands that those nasty palaces which stand by the Sweet Waters shall be burnt to the ground.”

“I suppose, my worthy incendiaries, you will next ask permission to plunder Stambul out and out?”

“It is too bad of you, Kabakulak, to speak like that. Halil does not want the palaces burnt for the love of the thing, but because he does not want the generals to have an asylum where they may hide, plant flowers, and wallow in vile delights just when they ought to be hastening to the camp. If every pasha had not his paradise here on earth and now, many more of them would desire the heavenly Paradise. That is why Halil Patrona would have all those houses of evil luxury burnt to the ground.”

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"May Halil Patrona live long enough to see it come to pass. This also will I report to the Sultan."

"Look sharp about it then! I will wait in your room here till you come back."

"You will wait here?"

"Yes, never mind about me! I have given orders that my dinner is to be sent after me here. I look to you for coffee and tobacco, and if you happen to be delayed till early tomorrow morning, you will find me sleeping here on the carpet."

Kabakulak could now see that he had to do with a man of character who would not stir from the spot till everything had been settled completely to his satisfaction. The most expeditious mode of ending matters would, no doubt, have been to summon a couple of ciauxes and make them lay the rascal's head at his own feet, but the political horizon was not yet sufficiently serene for such acts of daring. The bands of the insurgents were still encamping in the public square outside. First of all they must be hoodwinked and pacified, only after that would it be possible to proceed to extreme measures against them.

All that the Grand Vizier could do, therefore, was frankly to present all Halil Patrona's demands to the Sultan.

Mahmud granted everything on the spot.

In an hour's time the firmans and hattis-scherifs, deposing and elevating the various functionaries, were in Musli's hands as desired.

Only as to the method of destroying the kiosks did the Sultan venture to make a suggestion. They had better not be burnt to the ground, he opined, for thereby the Mussulmans would make themselves the laughing-stock of the whole Christian world; but he undertook to dilapidate the walls and devastate the pleasure-gardens.

And within three days one hundred and twenty splendid kiosks, standing beside the Sweet Waters, had become so many rubbish heaps; and the rare and costly plants of the beautiful flower-gardens were chucked into the water, and the groves of amorous dallying were cut down to the very roots. Only ruins were now to be seen in the place of the fairy palaces wherein all manner of earthly joys had hitherto built their nests, and all this ruin was wrought in three days by Halil Patrona, just because there is but one God, and therefore but one Paradise, and because this Paradise is not on earth but in Heaven, and those who would attain thereto must strive and struggle valiantly for it in this life.

FOOTNOTES:

[3] 1481 A.D.

[4] Ablutions before prayers.

[5] The first section of the Koran.

[6] The Imperial Treasury.

[7] The part of Stambul inhabited by the Greeks.

[8] Companies of horse.

[9] Tablets indicating the direction in which Mecca lies.

[10] "God be for ever gracious to him."

[11] Believer.

[12] Unbeliever.

[13] Anti-Christ.

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[14] The prescribed almsgiving.

[15] Voluntary almsgiving.

[16] Peter the Great. The allusion is to the Peace of the Pruth.

CHAPTER XII.

HUMAN HOPES.

A time will come when the star has risen so high that it can rise no higher, and perchance learns to know that before long it must begin its inevitable descent!...

All Halil Patrona's wildest dreams had been realised. There he stood at the very apex of sovereignty, whence the course of empires, the destiny of worlds can be controlled. Ministers of State were pulled down or lifted up at his bidding, armies were sent against foreign powers as he directed, princes were strengthened on their thrones because Halil Patrona wished it, and the great men of the empire lay in the dust at his feet.

For whole days at a time he sat reading the books of the Ottoman chroniclers, the famous Rashid and the wise Chelbizade, and after that he would pore over maps and charts and draw lines of different colours across them in all directions, and dot them with dots which he alone understood the meaning of. And those lines and dots stretched far, far away beyond the borders of the empire, right into the midst of Podolia and the Ukraine. He knew, and he only, what he meant by them.

The projects he was hatching required centuries for their fulfilment—what is the life of a mere man?

In thought he endowed the rejuvenescent Ottoman Empire with the energies of a thousand years. Once more he perceived its conquering sword winning fresh victories, and extending its dominions towards the East and the South, but especially towards the North. He saw the most powerful of nations do it homage; he saw the guardian-angels of Islam close their eyes before the blinding flashes of the triumphant swords of the sons of Osman, and hasten to record in the Book of the Future events very different from those which had been written down before.

Ah, human hopes, human hopes!—the blast blows upon them and they crumble away to nothing.

But Halil's breast beat with a still greater joy, with a still loftier hope, when turning away from the tumult of the world, he opened the door of his private room and entered therein.

What voices are those which it does his soul good to hearken to? Why does he pause and stand listening before the curtain? What is he listening to?

It is the feeble cry of a child, a little baby child. A few days before Guel-Bejaze bore him a son, on the anniversary of the very day when he made her his wife. This child was the purest part of Halil's joy, the loftiest star of his hopes. Whithersoever I may one day rise, he would reflect, this child shall rise with me. Whatever I shall not be able to achieve, he will accomplish. Those happier, more glorious times which I shall never be able to see, he will rejoice in. Through him I shall leave behind me in Ottoman history an eternal fame—a fame like to that of the Kueprili family, which for a whole century and a half gave heroes and saints and sages to the empire.

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Guel-Bejaze wanted the child to be called Ferhad, or Sender, as so many of the children of the poor were wont to be called; but Halil gave him the name of Behram. "He is a man-child," said Halil, "who will one day be called to great things."

Human calculations, human hopes, what are they? To-day the tree stands full of blossoms, to-morrow it lies prone on the ground, cut down to the very roots.

Who shall strive with the Almighty, and from what son of man does the Lord God take counsel?

Halil stole on tip-toe to the bed of his wife who was playing with the child; she did not perceive him till he was quite close to her. How they rejoiced together! The baby wandered from hand to hand; how they embraced and kissed it! Both of them seemed to live their lives over again in the little child.

And now old Janaki also drew nigh. His face was smiling, but whenever he opened his mouth his words were sad and gloomy. All joy vanished from his life the moment he was made a voivode, just as if he felt that only Death could relieve him of that dignity. He had a peculiar joy in perpetually prophesying evil things.

"If only you could bring the child up!" he cried; "but you will not live long enough to do that. Men like you, Halil, never live long, and I don't want to survive you. You will see me die, if see you can; and when you die, your child will be doubly an orphan."

With such words did he trouble them. They were always relieved when, at last, he would creep into a corner and fall asleep from sheer weariness, for his anxiety made him more and more somnolent as he grew older.

But again the door opened, and there entered the Kadun-Kiet-Khuda, the guardian of the ladies of the Seraglio, accompanied by two slave-girls carrying a splendid porcelain pitcher, which they deposited at the sick woman's bed with this humble salutation:

"The Sultana Valide greets thee and sends thee this sherbet!" The Sultana Valide, or Dowager, used only to send special messages to the Sultan's favourite wives when they lay in child-bed; this, therefore, was a great distinction for the wife of Halil Patrona—or a great humiliation for the Sultana.

And a great humiliation it certainly was for the latter.

It was by the command of Sultan Mahmud that the Sultana had sent the sherbet.

"You see," said Halil, "the great ones of the earth kiss the dust off your feet. There are slaves besides those in the bazaars, and the first become the last. Rejoice in the present, my princess, and catch Fortune on the wing."



"Fortune, Halil," said his wife with a mournful smile, "is like the eels of the Bosphorus, it slips from your grasp just as you fancy you hold it fast."

And Halil believed that he held it fast in his grasp.

The highest officers of state were his friends and colleagues, the Sultan himself was under obligations to him, for indeed Halil had fetched him from the dungeon of the Seven Towers to place him on the throne.

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And at that very moment they were digging the snare for him into which he was to fall.

The Sultan who could not endure the thought that he was under a debt of gratitude to a poor oppressed pedlar, the Sultana who could never forget the humiliation she had suffered because of Guel-Bejaze, the Kizlar-Aga who feared the influence of Halil, the Grand Vizier who had been compelled to eat humble pie—all of them had long been waiting for an occasion to ruin him.

* * * * *

One day the Sultan distributed thirty wagon-loads of money among the forty thousand Janissaries and the sixteen thousand Topadshis in the capital because they had proposed to be reconciled with the Seraglio and reassemble beneath the banner of the Prophet. The insurgent mob, moreover, promised to disperse under two conditions: a complete amnesty for past offences, and permission to retain two of their banners that they might be able to assemble together again in case anything was undertaken against them. Their requests were all granted. Halil Patrona, too, was honoured by being made one of the privy councillors of the Divan.

Seven-and-twenty of the popular leaders were invited at the same time to appear in the Divan and assist in its deliberations. Halil Patrona was the life and soul of the lot.

He inspired them with magnanimous, enlightened resolutions, and when in his enthusiastic way he addressed them, the worthy cobblers and fishermen felt themselves turned into heroes, and it seemed as if *they* were the leaders of the nation, while the pashas and grandees sitting beside them were mere fishermen and cobblers.

Everyone of his old friends and his new colleagues looked up to and admired him.

Only one person could not reconcile himself with the thought that he owed his power to a pedlar who had risen from the dust—and this man was Kaplan Giraj, the Khan of the Crimea.

He was to be Halil's betrayer.

He informed the Grand Vizier of the projects of Halil, who wished to persuade the Sultan to declare war against Russia, because Russia was actively assisting Persia. Moldavia and the Crimea were the starting points of the armies that were to clip the wings of the menacing northern foe, and thereby nullify the terrible prophecies of the "Takimi Vekai."

Kaplan Giraj informed Kabakulak of these designs, and they agreed that a man with such temerarious projects in his head ought not to live any longer—he was much too dangerous.

They resolved that he should be killed during the deliberations at the house of the Grand Vizier. For this purpose they chose from among the most daring of the Janissaries those officers who had a grudge against Halil for enforcing discipline against them, and were also jealous of what they called his usurpation of authority. These men they took with them to the council as members of the Divan.

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It was arranged thus. When Halil had brought forward and defended his motion for a war against Russia, then Kaplan Giraj would argue against the project, whereupon Halil was sure to lose his temper. The Khan thereupon was to rush upon him with a drawn sword, and this was to be the signal for the Janissary officers to rise in a body and massacre all Halil's followers.

So it was a well-prepared trap into which Halil and his associates were to fall, and they had not the slightest suspicion of the danger that was hanging over their heads.

* * * * *

The Grand Vizier sat in the centre of the councillors, beside him on his right hand sat Kaplan Giraj, while the place of honour on his left was reserved for Halil Patrona. All around sat the Spahi and Janissary officers with their swords in their hands.

The plot was well contrived, the whole affair was bound to be over in a few minutes.

The popular deputies arrived; there were seven-and-twenty of them, not including Halil Patrona. The Janissary officers were sixty in number.

Kabakulak beckoned to Halil to sit on his left hand, the others were so arranged that each one of them sat between a couple of Janissary officers. As soon as Kaplan Giraj gave the signal by drawing his sword against Halil, the Janissaries were to fall upon their victims and cut them down.

"My dear son," said the Grand Vizier to Halil, when they had all taken their places, "behold, at thy desire, we have summoned the council and the chief officers of the Army; tell them, I pray thee, wherefore thou hast called them together!"

Halil thereupon arose, and turning towards the assembly thus addressed it:

"Mussulmans! faithful followers of the Prophet! If any one of you were to hear that his house was on fire, would he need lengthy explanations before hastening away to extinguish it? If ye were to hear that robbers had broken into your houses and were plundering your goods—if ye were to hear that ruffians were throttling your little children or your aged parents, or threatening the lives of your wives with drawn swords, would you wait for further confirmation or persuasion before doing anything, or would you not rather rush away of your own accord to slay these robbers and murderers? And lo! what is more than our houses, more than our property, more than our children, our parents, or our wives—our Fatherland, our faith is threatened with destruction by our enemy. And this enemy has all the will but not yet the power to accomplish what he threatens; and his design is never abandoned, but is handed down from father to son, for never will he make peace, he will ever slay and destroy till he himself is destroyed and slain—this enemy is the Muscovite. Our fathers heard very little of that name, our

sons will hear more, and our grandsons will weep exceedingly because of it. Our religion bids us to be resigned

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to the decrees of fate, but only cowards will be content to sit with their hands in their laps because the predestined fate of the Ottoman Empire is written in Heaven. If the prophecy says that a time must come when the Ottoman Empire must fall to pieces because of the cowardice of the Ottoman nation, does it not depend upon us and our children whether the prophecy be accomplished, or whether its fulfilment be far removed from us? Of a truth the signification of that prophecy is this: We shall perish if we are cowards; let us *not* be cowards then, and never shall we perish. And if the foe whose sword shall one day deal the nations of Muhammad the most terrible wounds, and whose giant footsteps shall leave on Turkish soil the bloodiest and most shameful imprints—if I say this foe be already pointed out to us, why should we not anticipate him, why should we wait till he has grown big enough to swallow us up when we are now strong enough to destroy him? The opportunity is favourable. The Cossacks demand help from us against the Muscovite dominion. If we give them this help they will be our allies, if we withhold it they will become our adversaries. The Tartars, the Circassians, and Moldavians are the bulwarks of our Empire, let us join to them the Cossacks also, and not wait until they all become the bulwarks of our northern foe instead, and he will lead them all against us. When he built the fortress of Azov he showed us plainly what he meant by it. Let us also now show that we understood his intentions and raze that fortress to the ground.”

With these words Halil resumed his place.

As pre-arranged Kaplan Giraj now stood up in his turn.

Halil fully expected that the Tartar Khan, who was to have played such an important part in his project, inasmuch as his dominions were directly in the way of an invading enemy, and therefore most nearly threatened, would warmly support his proposition. All the greater then was his amazement when Kaplan Giraj turned towards him with a contemptuous smile and replied in these words:

“It is a great calamity for an Empire when its leading counsellors are ignorant. I will not question your good intentions, Halil, but it strikes me as very comical that you should wish us, on the strength of the prophecy of a Turkish recluse, to declare war against one of our neighbours who is actually living at peace with us, is doing us no harm, and harbours no mischievous designs against us. You speak as if Europe was absolutely uninhabited by any but ourselves, as if there was no such thing as powerful nations on every side of us, jealous neighbours all of them who would incontinently fall upon us with their banded might in case of a war unjustly begun by us. All this comes from the simple fact that you do not understand the world, Halil. How could you, a mere petty huckster, be expected to do so? So pray leave in peace Imperial affairs, and whenever you think fit to occupy your time in reading poems and fairy-tales, don't fancy they are actual facts.”

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The representatives of the people regarded the Khan with amazement. Halil, with a bitter look, measured him from head to foot. He knew now that he had been betrayed. And he had been betrayed by the very man to whom he had assigned a hero's part!

With a smiling face he turned towards him. He had no thought now that he had fallen into a trap. He addressed the Khan as if they were both in the room together alone.

"Truly you spoke the truth, Kaplan Giraj, when you reproached me with the shame of ignorance. I never learnt anything but the Koran, I have never had the opportunity of reading those books which mock at the things which are written in the Koran; I only know that when the Prophet proclaimed war against the idolators he never inquired of the neighbouring nations, Shall I do this, or shall I not do it? and so he always triumphed. I know this, too, that since the Divan has taken to debating and negotiating with its enemies, the Ottoman armies have been driven across the three rivers—the Danube, the Dnieper, and the Pruth—and melt away and perish in every direction. I am a rough and ignorant man I know, therefore do not be amazed at me if I would defend the faith of Mohammed with the sword when, perhaps, there may be other means of doing so with which I am unacquainted. I, on the other hand, will not be astonished that you, a scion of the princely Crimean family, should be afraid of war. You were born a ruler and know therefore that your life is precious. You embellish the deeds of your enemy that you may not be obliged to fight against him. You say 'tis a good neighbour, a peaceful neighbour, he does no harm, although you very well know that it was the Muscovite guns which drove our Timariots out of Kermanshan, and that the Persians were allowed to march through Russian territory in order to fall upon our general Abdullah Pasha from behind. But there is nothing hostile about all this in your eyes, you are perfectly contented with your fate. War might deprive you of your Khannish dignity, while in peaceful times you can peaceably retain it. It matters not to you whose servant you may be so long as you hold sway in your own domain, and you call him a blockhead who does not look after himself first of all. Yes, Kaplan Giraj, I am a blockhead no doubt, for I am not afraid to risk losing this wretched life, awaiting my reward in another world. I was not born in silks and purples but in the love of my country and the fear of God, while you are wise enough to be satisfied with the joys of this life. But, by way of reward for betraying your good friend, may Allah cause you, one day, to become the slave of your enemies, so that he who was wont to be called Kaplan[17] may henceforth be named Sichian." [18]

Even had nothing been preconceived, Kaplan Giraj's sword must needs have leaped from its sheath at these mortally insulting words. Furiously he leaped from his seat with his flashing sword in his hand.

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Ah! but now it was the turn of the Grand Vizier and all the other conspirators to be amazed.

The Janissaries who had been placed by the side of the popular leaders never budged from their seats, and not one of them drew his weapon at the given signal.

Such inertia was so inexplicable to the initiated that Kaplan Giraj remained standing in front of Halil paralyzed with astonishment. As for Halil he simply crossed his arms over his breast and gazed upon him contemptuously. The Janissary officers had disregarded the signal.

"I am well aware," said Halil to the Khan with cold sobriety—"I am well aware what sort of respect is due to this place, and therefore I do not draw my sword against yours even in self-defence. For though I am not so well versed in European customs as you are, and know not whether it is usual in the council-chambers of foreign nations to settle matters with the sword, or whether it is the rule in the French or the English cabinet that he who cuts down his opponent in mid-council is in the right and his opinion must needs prevail—but of so much I am certain, that it is not the habit to settle matters with naked weapons in the Ottoman Divan. Now that the council is over, however, perhaps you would like to descend with me into the gardens where we may settle the business out of hand, and free one another from the thought that death is terrible."

Halil's cold collected bearing silenced, disarmed his enemies. The eyes of the Grand Vizier and the Khan surveyed the ranks of the Janissary officers, while Halil's faithful adherents began to assemble round their leader.

"Then there is no answer to the words of Halil Patrona?" inquired Kabakulak at last tentatively.

They were all silent.

"Have you no answer at all then?"

At this all the Janissaries arose, and one of them stepping forward said:

"Halil is right. We agree with all that he has said."

The Grand Vizier did not know whether he was standing on his head or his heels. Kaplan Giraj wrathfully thrust his sword back again into its scabbard. All the Janissary officers evidently were on Halil Patrona's side.

It was impossible not to observe the confusion in the faces of the chief plotters; the well-laid plot could not be carried out.

After a long interval Kabakulak was the first to recover himself, and tried to put a new face on matters till a better opportunity should arise.

“Such important resolutions,” said he, “cannot be carried into effect without the knowledge of the Sultan. To-morrow, therefore, let us all assemble in the Seraglio to lay our desires before the Padishah. You also will be there, Halil, and you also, Kaplan Giraj.”

“Which of us twain will be there Allah only knows,” said Halil.

“There, my son, you spake not well; nay, very ill hast thou spoken. It is a horrible thing when two Mussulmans revile one another. Be reconciled rather, and extend to each other the hand of fellowship! I will not allow you to fight. Both of you spoke with good intentions, and he is a criminal who will not forget personal insults when it is a question of the commonweal. Forgive one another and shake hands, I say.”

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And he seized the reluctant hands of both men and absolutely forced them to shake hands with each other. But he could not prevent their eyes from meeting, and though swords were denied them their glances of mutual hatred were enough to wound to the death.

After the council broke up, Halil's enemies remained behind with the Grand Vizier. Kaplan Giraj gnashed his teeth with rage.

"Didn't I tell you not to let him speak!" he exclaimed, "for when once he opens his mouth he turns every drawn sword against us, and drives wrath from the breasts of men with the glamour of his tongue."

So they had three days wherein to hatch a fresh plot.

* * * * *

The session of the Divan was fixed for three days later. Halil Patrona employed the interval like a man who feels that his last hour is at hand. He would have been very short-sighted not to have perceived that judgment had already been pronounced against him, although his enemies were still doubtful how to carry it into execution.

He resigned himself to his fate as it became a pious Mussulman to do. He had only one anxiety which he would gladly have been rid of—what was to become of his wife and child.

On the evening of the last day he led Guel-Bejaze down to the shore of the Bosphorus as if he would take a walk with her. The woman carried her child in her arms.

Since the woman had had a child she had acquired a much braver aspect. The gentlest animal will be audacious when it has young ones, even the dove becomes savage when it is hatching its fledgelings.

Halil put his wife into a covered boat, which was soon flying along under the impulse of his muscular arms. The child rejoiced aloud at the rocking of the boat, he fancied it was the motion of his cradle. The eyes of the woman were fixed now upon the sky and now upon the unruffled surface of the watery mirror. A star smiled down upon her wheresoever she gazed. The evening was very still.

"Knowest thou whither I am taking thee, Guel-Bejaze?" asked her husband.

"If thou wert to ask me whither thou oughtest to send me, I would say take me to some remote and peaceful valley enclosed all around by lofty mountains. Build me there a little hut by the side of a bubbling spring, and let there be a little garden in front of the little hut. Let me stroll beneath the leaves of the cedar-trees, where I may hear no other sound but the cooing of the wood-pigeon; let me pluck flowers on the banks of the

purling brook, and spy upon the wild deer; let me live there and die there—live in thine arms and die in the flowering field by the side of the purling brook. If thou wert to ask me, whither shall I take thee, so would I answer.”

“Thou hast said it,” replied Halil, shipping the oars, for the rising evening breeze had stiffened out the sail and the little boat was flying along of its own accord; then he sat him down beside his wife and continued, “I am indeed sending thee to a remote and hidden valley, where a little hut stands on the banks of a purling stream. I have prepared it for thee, and there shalt thou dwell with thy child.”

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"And thou thyself?"

"I will guide thee to the opposite shore, there an old family servant of thy father's awaits thee with saddled mules. He loves thee dearly, and will bring thee into that quiet valley and he must never leave thee."

"And thou?"

"This little coffer thou wilt take with thee; it contains money which I got from thy father; no curse, no blood is upon it, it shall be thine and thy children's."

"And thou?" inquired Guel-Bejaze for the third time, and she was very near to bursting into tears.

"I shall have to return to Stambul. But I will come after thee. Perhaps to-morrow, perhaps the day after to-morrow, perhaps later still. It may be very much sooner, it may be much later. But thou wait for me. Every evening spread the table for me, for thou knowest not when I may arrive."

The tears of Guel-Bejaze began to fall upon the child she held to her breast.

"Why weepest thou?" asked Halil. "'Tis foolish of thee. Leave-taking is short, suspense only is long. It will be better with thee than with me, for thou wilt have the child while I shall have nothing left, yet I do not weep because we shall so soon meet again."

Meanwhile they had reached the shore, the old servant was awaiting them with the two mules. Halil helped his wife to descend from the boat.

Guel-Bejaze buried her head in her husband's bosom and tenderly embraced him.

"Go not back, leave me not alone," said she; "do not leave us, come with us. What dost thou seek in that big desolate city when we are no longer there? Come with us, let us all go together, vanish with us. Let them search for thee, and may their search be as vain as the search for a star fallen from Heaven; it is not good for thee to be in high places."

Halil made no reply. His wife spoke the truth, but pride prevented him from escaping like a coward when he knew that his enemies were conspiring against him. Presently he said to Guel-Bejaze with a reassuring voice:

"Do not be anxious on my account, I have a talisman with me. Why dost thou smile? Thou a Christian woman dost not believe in talismans? My talisman is my heart, surely thou believest in it now? It has always helped me hitherto."

And with that Halil kissed his wife and his child and returned to the boat. He seized the oars in his powerful hands and was soon some distance from the shore. And as he rowed further and further away into the gloom of evening he saw his abandoned wife still standing on the shore with her child clasped to her breast, and the further he receded the keener grew his anguish of heart because he durst not turn back to them and kiss and embrace them once more.

* * * * *

Early in the morning the gigantic Halil Pelivan, accompanied by twelve bostanjis, appeared among the Janissaries with three asses laden with five little panniers, containing five thousand ducats which he emptied upon the ground and distributed among the brave fellows.

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"The Grand Vizier sends you this, my worthy comrades," cried he.

This was the only way of talking sense to the Janissaries.

"And now I have to ask something of you."

"Say on!"

"Is there among you any fellow who loves nobody, who would be capable of slaying his own dear father if he were commanded so to do and well paid for it, who is afraid of nothing, has no bowels of compassion, and cannot be made to falter by the words of the wise?"

In response to this challenge, hundreds and hundreds of the Janissaries stepped out of their ranks, declaring that they were just the boys to satisfy Pelivan's demands.

Pelivan selected from amongst them two-and-thirty of the most muscular and truculent, and commanded them to follow him into the Seraglio.

Once there he conducted them into the Porcelain Chamber, made them squat down on the precious carpets, put before them quantities of the most savoury food, which they washed down with the rich wine of Cypress and the heating Muskoveto, a mysterious beverage generally reserved for the Sultan's use, which is supposed to confer courage and virility. When they had well eaten and drunken moreover, Pelivan supplied them with as much opium as they wanted.

Shortly afterwards there came out to them the Grand Vizier, the lame Pasha, Topal Ozman, Patsmajezade, the chief Justiciary of Rumelia, the cobbler's son, and the Tartar Khan, who patted their shoulders, tasted of their food, drank out of their goblets, and after telling them what fine brave fellows they were, discreetly withdrew.

The Divan meanwhile had assembled in the Hall of Lions.

There were gathered together the Ulemas, the Viziers, and the representatives of the people. Halil Patrona was there also; and presently Kabakulak, Topal Ozman, Patsmajezade, and Kaplan Giraj arrived likewise and took their places.

The Grand Vizier turned first of all to Halil, whom he addressed with benign condescension.

"The Padishah assures thee through me of his grace and favour, and of his own good pleasure appoints thee Beglerbeg of Rumelia."

And with that a couple of duelbendars advanced with the costly kaftan of investiture.

Halil Patrona reflected for an instant.

The Sultan indeed had always been gracious towards him. He evidently wanted to favour him with an honourable way of retreat. He was offering him a high dignity whereby he might be able to withdraw from the capital, and yet at the same time gratify his ambition. The Sultan really had a kindly heart then. He rewards the man whom his ministers would punish as a malefactor.

But his hesitation only lasted for a moment. Then he recovered himself and resolutely answered:

“I will not accept that kaftan. For myself I ask nothing. I did not come here to receive high office, I came to hear war proclaimed.”

The Grand Vizier bowed down before him.

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"Thy word is decisive. The Padishah has decided that what thou and thy comrades demand shall be accomplished. The Grand Seignior himself awaits thee in the Porcelain Chamber. There war shall be proclaimed, and the kaftans of remembrance distributed to thee and thy fellows."

And with that the Ulemas and Halil's comrades were led away to the kiosk of Erivan.

"And ye who are the finest fellows of us all," said Kabakulak, turning to Halil and Musli—"ye, Halil and Musli, come first of all to kiss the Sultan's hand."

Halil with a cold smile pressed Musli's hand. Even now poor Musli had no idea what was about to befall them. Only when at "the gate of the cold spring" the Spahis on guard divested them of their weapons, for none may approach the Sultan with a sword by him—only, then, I say, did he have a dim sensation that all was not well.

In the Sofa Chamber, where the Divan is erected, is a niche separated from the rest of the chamber by a high golden trellis-work screen, behind whose curtains it is the traditional custom of the Sultan to listen privately to the deliberations of his counsellors. From behind these curtains a woman's face was now peeping. It was Adsalis, the favourite Sultana, and behind her stood Elhaj Beshir, the Kizlar-Aga. Both of them knew there would be a peculiar spectacle, something well worth seeing in that chamber to-day.

The curtains covering the doors of the Porcelain Chamber bulged out, and immediately afterwards two men entered. They advanced to the steps of the Sultan's throne, knelt down there, and kissed the hem of the Sultan's garment.

Mahmud was sitting on his throne, the same instant Kabakulak clapped his hands and cried:

"Bring in their kaftans!"

At these words out of the adjoining apartment rushed Pelivan and the thirty-two Janissaries with drawn swords.

Mahmud hid his face so as not to see what was about to happen.

"Halil! we are betrayed!" exclaimed Musli, and placing himself in front of his comrade he received on his own body the first blow which Pelivan had aimed at Halil.

"In vain hast thou written thy name above mine, Patrona," roared the giant, waving his huge broadsword above his head.

At these words Halil drew forth from his girdle a dagger which he had secreted there, and hurled it with such force at Pelivan that the sharp point pierced his left shoulder.

But the next moment he was felled to the ground by a mortal blow.

While still on his knees he raised his eyes to Heaven and said:

“It is the will of Allah.”

At another blow he collapsed, and falling prone breathed forth his last sigh:

“I die, but my son is still alive.”

And he died.

Then all his associates were brought into the Sofa Chamber one by one from the Erivan kiosk where they had been robed in splendid kaftans, and as they entered the room were decapitated one after the other. They had not even time to shut their eyes before the fatal stroke descended.

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Six-and-twenty of them perished there and then.

Only three survived the day, Sulali, Mohammed the dervish, and Alir Aalem, the custodian of the sacred banner and justiciary of Stambul. All three were Ulemas, and therefore not even the Sultan was free to slay them.

Accordingly the Grand Vizier appointed them all Sandjak-Begs, or governors of provinces.

As they knew nothing of the death of their comrades they accepted the dignities conferred upon them, renouncing at the same time as usual their office of Ulemas.

The following day they were all put to death.

On the third day after that the people of the city in their walks abroad saw eight-and-thirty severed heads stuck on the ends of spears over the central gate of the Seraglio. All these heads, with their starting eyes and widely parted lips, seemed to be speaking to the amazed multitudes; only Halil Patrona's eyes were closed and his lips sealed.

Suddenly a great cry of woe arose from one end of the city to the other, the people seized their arms and rushed off to the Etmeidan under three banners.

They had no other leader now but Janaki, all the rest had escaped or were dead. So now they brought *him* forward. The tidings of Halil's death wrought no change in him, he had foreseen it long before, and was well aware that Guel-Bejaze had departed from the capital. He had himself prepared for her the little dwelling in the valley lost among the ravines of Mount Taurus, which was scarce known to any save to him and the few dwellers there, and he had brought back with him from thence a pair of carrier-pigeons, so that in case of necessity he might be able to send messages to his daughter without having to depend on human agency.

When the clamorous mob invited him to the Etmeidan he wrote to his daughter on a tiny shred of vellum, and tied the letter beneath the wing of the pigeon.

And this is what he wrote:

"God's grace be with thee! Wait not for Halil, he is dead. The Janissaries have killed him. And I shall not be long after him, take my word for it. But live thou and watch over thy child.—JANAKI."

With that he opened the window and let the dove go, and she, rising swiftly into the air, remained poised on high for a time with fluttering pinions, and then, with the swiftness and directness of a well-aimed dart, she flew straight towards the mountains.

“Poor Irene!” sighed Janaki, buckling on his sword with which he certainly was not very likely to kill anybody—and he accompanied the insurgents to the Etmeidan.

In Stambul things were all topsy-turvy once more. The seventh Janissary regiment, when the two-and-thirty Janissaries returned to them with bloody swords boasting of their deed, rushed upon them and cut them to pieces. The new Janissary Aga was shot dead within his own gates. Kabakulak retired within a mosque. Halil Pelivan, who had been appointed Kulkiaya, hid himself in a drain pipe for three whole days, and never emerged therefrom so long as the uproar lasted.



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Three days later all was quiet again.

A new name came to the front which quelled the risen tempest—the last scion of the famous Kueprili family, every member of which was a hero.

Achmed Kueprilizade collected together the ten thousand shebejis, bostanjis, and baltajis who dwelt round the Seraglio, and when everyone was in despair attacked the rebels in the open streets, routed them in the piazzas, and in three days seven thousand of the people fell beneath his blows—and so the realm had peace once more.

Janaki also fell. They chopped off his head and he offered not the slightest resistance.

As for Pelivan and Kabakulak they were banished for their cowardice.

So Achmed Kueprilizade became Grand Vizier.

As for Achmed III. he lived nine years longer in the Seven Towers, and tradition says he died by poison.

FOOTNOTES:

[17] Tiger.

[18] Mouse.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE EMPTY PLACE.

Everything was now calm and quiet, and the world pursued its ordinary course; but far away among the Blue Mountains dwells a woman who knows nothing of all that is going on around her, and who every evening ascends the highest summit of the hills surrounding her little hut and gazes eagerly, longingly, in the direction of Stambul, following with her eyes the long zig-zag path which vanishes in the dim distance—will he come to-day whom she has so long awaited in vain?

Every evening she returns mournfully to her little dwelling, and whenever she sits down to supper she places opposite to her a platter and a mug—and so she waits for him who comes not. At night she lays Halil's pillow beside her, and puts *their* child between the pillow and herself that he may find it there when he comes.

And so day follows day.

One day there came a tapping at her window. With joy she leaps from her bed to open it.

It is not Halil but a pigeon—a carrier-pigeon bringing a letter.

Guel-Bejaze opens the letter and reads it through—and a second time she reads it through, and then she reads it through a third time, and then she begins to smile and whispers to herself:

“He will be here directly.”

From henceforth a mild insanity takes possession of the woman’s mind—a species of dumb monomania which is only observable when her fixed idea happens to be touched upon.

At eventide she again betakes herself to the road which leads out of the valley. She shows the letter to an old serving-maid, telling her that the letter says that Halil is about to arrive, and a good supper must be made ready for him. The servant cannot read, so she believes her mistress.

An hour later the woman comes back to the house full of joy, her cheeks have quite a colour so quickly has she come.

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"Hast thou not seen him?" she inquires of the servant.

"Whom, my mistress?"

"Halil. He has arrived. He came another way, and must be in the house by now."

The servant fancies that perchance Halil has come secretly and she, also full of joy, follows her mistress into the room where the table has been spread for two persons.

"Well, thou seest that he is here," cries Guel-Bejaze, pointing to the empty place, and rushing to the spot, she embraces an invisible shape, her burning kisses resound through the air, and her eyes intoxicated with delight gaze lovingly—at nothing.

"Look at thy child!" she cries, lifting up her little son; "take him in thine arms. So! Kiss him not so roughly, for he is asleep. Look! thy kisses have awakened him. Thy beard has tickled him, and he has opened his eyes. Rock him in thine arms a little. Thou wert so fond of nursing him once upon a time. So! take him on thy lap. What! art thou tired? Wait and I will fill up thy glass for thee. Isn't the water icy-cold? I have just filled it from the spring myself."

Then she heaps more food on her husband's platter, and rejoices that his appetite is so good.

Then after supper she links her arm in his and, whispering and chatting tenderly, leads him into the garden in the bright moonlit evening. The faithful servant with tears in her eyes watches her as she walks all alone along the garden path, from end to end, beneath the trees, acting as if she were whispering and chatting with someone. She keeps on asking him questions and listening to his replies, or she tells him all manner of tales that he has not heard before. She tells him all that has happened to her since they last separated, and shows him all the little birds and the pretty flowers. After that she bids him step into a little bower, makes him sit down beside her, moves her kaftan a little to one side so that he may not sit upon it, and that she may crouch up close beside him, and then she whispers and talks to him so lovingly and so blissfully, and finally returns to the little hut so full of shamefaced joy, looking behind her every now and then to cast another loving glance—at whom?

And inside the house she prepares his bed for him, and places a soft pillow for his head, lays her own warm soft arm beneath his head, presses him to her bosom and kisses him, and then lays her child between them and goes quietly to sleep after pressing his hand once more—whose hand?

The next day from morn to eve she again waits for him, and at dusk sets out once more along the road, and when she comes back finds him once more in the little hut ... oh, happy delusion!

And thus it goes on from day to day.

From morn to eve the woman accomplishes her usual work, her neighbours and acquaintances perceive no change in her; but as soon as the sun sets she leaves everyone and everything and avoids all society, for now Halil is expecting her in the open bower of the little garden.

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Punctually she appears before him as soon as the sun has set. It has become quite a habit with her already. She so arranges her work that she always has a leisure hour at such times. Sometimes, too, Halil is in a good humour, but at others he is sad and sorrowful. She tells this to the old serving-maid over and over again. Sometimes, too, she whispers in her ear that Halil is cudgelling his brains with all sorts of great ideas, but she is not to speak about it to anyone, as that might easily cost Halil his life.

Poor Halil! Long, long ago his body has crumbled into dust, Death can do him no harm now.

And thus the "White Rose" grows old and grey and gradually fades away. Not a single night does the beloved guest remain away from her. For years and years, long—long years, he comes to her every evening.

And as her son grows up, as he becomes a man with the capacity of judging and understanding, he hears his mother conversing every evening with an invisible shape, and she would have her little son greet this stranger, for she tells him it is his father. And she praises the son to the father, and says what a good, kind-hearted lad he is, and she compares their faces one with the other. He is the very image of his father, she says; only Halil is now getting old, his beard has begun to be white. Yes, Halil is getting aged. Otherwise he would be exactly like his son.

And the son knows very well that his father, Halil Patrona, was slain many, many long years ago by the Janissaries.

THE END.

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