









A WIFE OUT OF EGYPT



# A WIFE OUT OF EGYPT

BY  
*Octavia*  
NORMA LORIMER

AUTHOR OF

“BY THE WATERS OF GERMANY,” “BY THE WATERS OF SICILY,”  
“THE SECOND WOMAN,” ETC. ETC.

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## PREFACE

EGYPT, like Tunis, is still inhabited by a race, neither numerous nor powerful now, which has seen all the dynasties of history come and go. The Copts—an Arab way of saying Egyptians: Egypt is the land of Gypts or Copts—are the descendants of the men who hewed wood and drew water for the Pharaohs, for conquerors like Darius the Persian, the Macedonian Ptolemies, the Romans, and the Arabs, and are the intellectual hewers and drawers of modern Egypt. Like the Berbers of Tunis, they were mightily oppressed by Roman and Byzantine masters for not coming into the orthodox religion; like the Berbers, they thought that their lot could not be worse under the Arab conqueror, and stood by sullenly while their masters were conquered, though their help would have made the Arab conquest impossible.

The Arabs persecuted them in their turn, to make them abandon the feeble and impure stream of Christianity which had trickled down to them direct from St. Mark the Evangelist. But by living like rats in holes, the Copts have defeated their purpose, and remain the professors of the most ancient and debased form of Christianity, but the spiritual descendants, in their own eyes, of the Church of Egypt, immortal as the offspring of St. Mark, and the mother of Athanasius and Cyril and Origen.

Until the Nationalist movement began in the revolt of Arabi Pasha, the Copts or Egyptians and the Arabs kept distinct, but they now all call themselves Egyptians, to

prosecute the claim for Egyptian Independence, which is in reality a Pan-Islamic movement into which the Copts have been betrayed. Girgis Boutros, who is one of the chief characters in the story, a very wealthy leader of the Copts, has been entrapped in this way, owing to his hatred of the English.

Side by side with the Copts there is another Arab-speaking Christian community in Egypt, a much fairer and handsomer race, who might often be taken for Europeans—the Syrians. Unlike the Copts, who rarely rise above the position of clerks and book-keepers, they are important in the mercantile community and many of them are very wealthy; and unlike the Copts, they are firm supporters of the British rule, though they are galled by the unwillingness of the English to receive them on terms of social equality.

Hadassah Lekejian, the heroine, and her father and brother are typical Syrians of Egypt.

The plot of this book deals with a subject which previous writers of novels about Egypt have left in the background—the struggle between love and snobbery in the breast of a British officer, who has fallen in love with the beautiful Syrian when he met her, without realizing what her nationality meant in England, and, as he meets her again in Cairo in the position of her fiancé, discovers that she is a member of the ostracized race.

This ostracism is described by Miss Lorimer most convincingly and pitifully. While the reader's feelings are stirred by the beautiful Hadassah's struggle between love of her people and her love for the proud Englishman who insists that she shall give her people up, his interest is riveted on the forces which are working in Egypt—the revengeful Copt's hereditary tendency to betray his fellow-Christians to Islam, and the heartburnings of the Arab-speaking loyalists of Egypt at their social exclusion by the rulers they serve so faithfully.

Miss Lorimer has long been a student of both Coptic and Mohammedan questions. Her knowledge and intuition with regard to the latter was amply shown in her masterly book "By the Waters of Carthage."

I have no hesitation in pronouncing this a far finer book, immeasurably more interesting as a love story, and full of the psychology which Miss Lorimer has taught us to expect in her books.

In "A Wife out of Egypt," Miss Lorimer has introduced to fiction a singularly beautiful and gifted nation, the Syrians, brought up as Europeans, who are white people in everything but race.

DOUGLAS SLADEN.



# A WIFE OUT OF EGYPT

## CHAPTER I

A TAXI-CAB drew up sharply at No. 123, Princes Avenue, South Kensington. It had come down the long, straight road at a speed which certainly did not come within the city limit of twelve miles an hour. Out of it jumped a slim girl in rich furs and a young man in faultless afternoon dress.

They were a good-looking couple, with the pride of life so strong in them that more than one pair of eyes looked enviously at them as they passed.

The girl held out her hand to say good-bye: it was perfectly gloved in pale yellow suède. The perfection of her feet was noticeable, too, for they were encased in patent-leather walking-slippers, whose costly buckles flashed in the electric light. These two points, her light hands and shining feet, stood out in the half-lit street. All the rest of her was lost in the rich darkness of her furs. It was only when she lifted her head that you could see the clear pallor of her skin and the youthful freshness of her scarlet lips, for her closely fitting hat almost hid her face.

"I must *really* go, dear," she said; "and don't wait for me . . . no, *please* don't."

"Why mayn't I?" he said pleadingly.

"Because I should feel I had to hurry."

"Can't you?" His eyes besought her.

The girl blushed happily. "No, it's Miss MacNaughtan, and I haven't seen her for almost two years. Every minute she can give me I'll want to be with her."

"And what about me? . . . In a week's time I won't see you for almost a year."

"But, dear, I've been with you for hours and hours every day for the last month."

"I know," he said; "you've been awfully good, but I'm jealous of every one you want to see very much. . . ." He laughed. "I am a duffer, I know: you'll soon grow tired of me."

"You're the nicest thing in the world," she said, "and I love you for being jealous."

"I'm jealous of that fur," he said, "the little beast's mouth's quite close to your ear." He was looking at the tiny head of the sable which decorated her necklet of fur. "I wish I had taken just one more before we left the taxi, you look so soft and adorable in that coat."

The girl's proud laugh showed her gleaming teeth: their beauty made her lover wish to kiss her all the more.

He had been holding her hand caressingly in his. Suddenly he felt for the ring on her third finger. "I like to feel it," he said, "and think about it, and remember that it's there, as a sign and a token that you are mine; when any other Johnny looks at your hand he knows it's 'no use,' he knows he's too late. I feel quite sorry for them, poor beggars! I guess they'll hover about you, but you're *mine*," he said quickly. "Sometimes I keep saying to myself, 'Stella's mine,' 'Stella's mine,' 'Stella's mine,' until I burst out laughing at my own silliness."

"And Stella's not yours *yet*," she said tauntingly, but with so much love in her voice that he did not mind.

Yet it made him say: "Why can't we get married before you go back to Egypt, Stella? You could return with your parents, and I would follow later on: no one need know but ourselves."

"What would be the good of that, dear?"

"To make sure of you."

"Don't you trust me?"

"Yes, darling, and yet not *quite*, for I'm always afraid you'll find out what a brainless chap I am compared to yourself. You'll discover how horribly few ideas I've got, and how ordinary I am. You may meet the sort you imagine I am."

"And throw you over?"

She drew her hand out of his, determining at last to ring the bell.

“I didn't say you would do that.”

“I wonder which of us will be the most changed when we meet.” Her finger was on the electric bell as she said the challenging words, “Which of us will be the truest?”

“I won't change,” he said, “no jolly fear. Good-bye. Remember I'm coming for you the very first thing in the morning: you've got to take me with you wherever you go, shopping or no shopping.”

She blew a kiss to him as the door closed.

## CHAPTER II

MISS MACNAUGHTAN was sitting in an indulgently comfortable chair in her long drawing-room awaiting the arrival of her ex-pupil Esther Lekejian, or Stella Adair, as she was more familiarly called.

Miss MacNaughtan, who was American by birth, Scotch by ancestry, and English by adoption, kept a boarding-school for girls in one of the most central districts of residential South Kensington. Her school was modern in theory and luxurious in its appointments. Any girl who lived under her guardianship for even a couple of years could not go away ignorant of the duties which would be expected of her both socially and intellectually as a woman of the world.

Her school was expensive—you had only to take into consideration its charming situation (close to Kensington Gardens, and within a quarter of an hour's walk of one of the most fashionable London churches), and the air of luxury which pervaded the establishment, to gauge that the cost of a single pupil seldom came out at less than three hundred a year. But these hundreds did not matter—and Miss MacNaughtan was aware of it—to the class for whom she ran the school: money was of little consideration. Wealthy Canadians and wealthier Americans were willing to pay twice the sum she demanded to have their daughters in her establishment. Miss MacNaughtan knew quite well that if a man could afford to give his daughter £300 worth of furs for a Christmas present, which often happened, it was not likely he would object to paying almost the same amount for her year's education.

Yet in spite of the luxury, and freedom, and extreme modernity of the school, the girls were not spoiled. If a girl was nice when she came to Miss MacNaughtan, she

was much nicer when she left her ; if she was horrid when she arrived she was far less horrid when she went away.

There was a saying that Miss MacNaughtan never took ugly girls ; that, as she could pick and choose, she always chose in favour of good looks. This was not the case ; but as she had a genius for discovering the good points in even her worst pupils, she had also a genius for teaching them how to make the best of their looks. She could not bear stupidity ; she declared that no woman who used her wits need ever look plain. No woman can make herself beautiful, but every woman can make herself attractive.

Miss MacNaughtan surrounded her girls with beauty, and she demanded of them their utmost to add to it. If she charged their parents highly, she never grudged her pupils anything which appealed to her imaginative nature as likely to produce the best results in their talents.

Her school was "a very garden of girls," a garden full of healthy, beautiful flowers. It was her hobby. She loved watching their mental development and increasing physical beauty, as a gardener loves watching the results of his lavish toil.

When the drawing-room door opened, and the old butler announced "Miss Lekejian," Miss MacNaughtan rose from her deep-seated chair with the alacrity of a girl in her teens. She held out her arms, and Stella flew into them. For a moment neither of them spoke, for the girl was in tears—tears of sheer joy at finding herself once more in the dear old room, surrounded by the dear familiar objects, and in the arms of her darling "Naughtie."

With tears very near her own eyes Miss MacNaughtan loosened her embrace and held the girl back from her. She looked at her carefully, and then pulled her face towards her own again and kissed it. "Just what I expected, dear."

The girl gave a slight start. Had she guessed her secret, did she know that she had dared to love some one whom "Naughtie" had never seen, after the thousands of times she had said that she must find her a lover, because she always discovered the best and nicest sort of people in the world ? A little nervously she said : "What did you expect ? Am I not a credit to you ?"

Miss MacNaughtan laughed at her rather anxious face. "I expected beauty and tenderness and passion, and I have found it." She led the girl to a sofa whose cushioned seat was so deep and ample that they sank into it as though it were a feather mattress.

With a motherly laugh Miss MacNaughtan wiped the tears from her ex-pupil's face.

"Oh! Naughtie, I knew I'd do nothing but cry when I saw you, and now that everything is just the same—this heavenly sofa, the bowls of red roses, and the beloved pictures, and the cool walls, and oh! just everything, I want to go on crying more than ever."

"But, Stella, you've had a lovely time, you've been presented to four queens and seen almost all the world, and . . ."

She stopped, for the girl said: "Nearly all the world, but not my own country; I wouldn't go there. I wouldn't go to it as a globe-trotter or as a tourist—I've kept it."

Miss MacNaughtan dropped her eyes as the girl went on.

"And, after all, you've been there without me. It was too bad: you promised to keep Egypt until I could receive you there in my own home, until I could teach you all that I knew."

Miss MacNaughtan stroked the absurdly slender hand in the yellow suède glove and said: "The opportunity came, and I took it—you know *I'm* very extravagant, I put little away, and a trip up the Nile costs money."

The girl smiled. "It certainly does as you would do it."

Miss MacNaughtan laughed. "Has my very extravagant pupil come back to teach me economy?" As she spoke, she let her eyes fall on the soft little muff, a mere handful of sables which an experienced eye could tell represented a very large sum of money, and at the exquisite gown of subtle colouring and delicate handicraft.

The girl stopped her. "You're not really extravagant, but you do love beauty and comfort. I've been in places and eaten food that you would shudder to think of. To-day I put on all my newest rags for your benefit. Isn't this a ridiculous muff?" She held out her hand, and over it hung at least a dozen sables. "They make quite a good mat if you lay them out flat: the real muff's here."

She turned it over: a little pouch just large enough for her two hands was under the sables.

“One of the parents paid for everything. I took his two daughters up the Nile as far as Abu Simbel.”

The girl's eyes shone. “Was it glorious? I've seen Abu Simbel in my dreams a thousand times; did you love it? Did you enjoy Cairo? I'm burning to go there.” Her face flushed, for her mind flew to the fact that her secret was still unconfessed, and that *he* was to be quartered in Cairo next winter. “Did you meet any of my people—my cousin Girgis? His mother has a *big* house in Cairo; I can just remember its lovely Arab hall.”

She was looking at her old schoolmistress eagerly, and as she looked a little note of anxiety crept into her voice. “Why do you look like that, Naughtie? Were you not happy in Egypt? Did it overpower you?—you always said it would. Were you disappointed?”

Miss MacNaughtan laughed as though it was a relief to find something that would relax the expression of her face which the girl had noticed. “No, dear, I was *not* disappointed. . . . I can't imagine the mind that could be disappointed with the Nile, and the Nile means Egypt. You can as well imagine the mind that would be disappointed with God. Egypt is omnipotent, Egypt is the beginning and the end of all things.”

“Then *why* do you evade my eyes?” The girl pulled her teacher's face towards her. Their eyes met.

“Did I, dear? Then I'll look into yours and tell you what I find in them.”

“No, no,” she said, “not yet . . . not yet. . . . Tell me first why you *didn't* like Egypt.”

“But I did like Egypt.”

“Then tell me what you wish to hide about Egypt?”

Miss MacNaughtan laughed her kind, warm, natural laugh. “How my pupil has learned to dictate!” she said . . . “I have nothing to hide, only I think you are expecting too much . . . too much, I mean, of Cairo. You can't expect too much of the Nile, but remember *your* home is in Cairo, which is a very different thing.”

The girl's radiant face clouded. “But wasn't it wonderful in a different way? Are all the books untrue? *Why* am I expecting too much? Isn't it what Lane says—the

most mediæval city in the world? I have quite forgotten it, and I don't suppose I was ever allowed to go into the native parts, but I have read and read about it until I could draw a map of the city. And then the things one doesn't read about—the gaiety and the pleasure-loving life which the people lead . . .” she gave a little sigh . . . “I love dancing; I've become awfully frivolous, Naughtie.”

“I'm so glad, Baby”: the old name slipped out from habit, for Stella had been given over to Miss MacNaughtan's care when she was only seven years old. Miss MacNaughtan had been urged and persuaded to take the child by a tie of friendship which went very deep. As a rule her youngest pupils were thirteen, and so, when the little star-eyed Stella came, she was called “Baby,” and from that day onwards she had been the pet and the pride of the school.

Her father was a wealthy Syrian living in Cairo. Her mother, who was Irish by birth, determined that her child should be educated in Europe, and so, through the influence of an old friend who had helped Miss MacNaughtan in her younger days, Stella was received into Miss MacNaughtan's school. Every summer her father and mother had come to England and had taken their only daughter for her holidays either to Scotland, or to the high hill-towns of Italy, or to France—it was generally to whatever spot in the Western world the girl had set her heart upon seeing. The rest of her holidays she had spent with Miss MacNaughtan, or with some friend of Miss MacNaughtan's if Miss MacNaughtan could not have her, and, when she was old enough, with chosen school-friends. The girl who was lucky enough to carry off Stella Adair as holiday visitor wore a sort of halo in the school for the next term. And it was indeed a distinction to secure Stella, for in her later years at school she could always have remained with Miss MacNaughtan, whom one and all of the school adored. The lucky recipient of Stella's favour felt that to have enjoyed her society for six long weeks when she could have been alone with their adored “Naughtie” was placing her own merits on a very high level.

Stella was all that a school demands of its leader. She was beautiful, or so they thought; she was high-spirited, she was clever and imaginative. But it was her extra-

ordinary gift of languages (a gift which they did not know belonged to her as a birthright from her race) which placed her on the altar of genius. While the most ambitious girls worked and toiled and took every opportunity of conversing with the various governesses in French, German, and Italian, in all of which languages Miss MacNaughtan endeavoured to make her pupils perfectly at home before they left her establishment, Stella spoke them as if by instinct. Her parents talked Italian to her during her holidays in Italy, though they spoke Arabic in their home life, and she had spent long summers with them in Germany. At school her nurse was French. Her weekly letters from home were always in Arabic. During her tour round the world, which she had just accomplished with her parents, she had insisted upon speaking Arabic, for she was distressed to find that she had become almost a stranger to the spoken language. The classic language which is used in writing is scarcely understood by the uneducated classes or by any class who have only heard the spoken language. Of Syria she rarely thought. Egypt had been the land of her people for many generations, yet of modern and social Egypt she knew nothing. She could study its mysteries and its cults in museums or in books. She was no mean archæologist. For years she had attended classes at the London College, and she had paid generous fees to the best lady guides who conduct strangers round the Egyptian portion of the British Museum.

Miss MacNaughtan knew nothing or very little about ancient Egypt. In her brief tour up the Nile she had felt its spell and revered its omnipotence, but her fortnight's residence in Cairo had taught her many things which hurt her big nature when she thought of her charming pupil and how bitterly her years of waiting for the land of her adoption were to be repaid—things which now seemed to her the most evil sarcasm when she looked at the beautiful woman by her side.

She had learned that in Cairo, Stella, the pride of her school, the baby of her motherless heart, the child whom she had reared to such splendid womanhood, would be to all intents and purposes a social outcast. She had learned that a horrible deception had been practised on the girl who had been reared in the belief that for her life

would be a splendid thing, that the lavish expenditure of money, affection, and social training which had been bestowed upon her was to fit her for a life which would make great demands upon her intellectually as well as socially. During her life at school she had grown accustomed to a well-merited adoration. All this now struck the woman who had mothered her and guarded her as an act of cruelty; she had been educated and cultivated for no reason on earth than to cause her suffering.

Miss MacNaughtan said nothing of all that was passing in her own mind. The girl but repeated the words "Half of my nature's awfully frivolous."

"I am so glad, dear; it's a great gift. A frivolous woman with an intellectual mind is a delightful thing. When girls can't be frivolous I'm always afraid; they generally do foolish things. They become cranks or marry undesirables."

"Naughtie, how like you! What principles you teach!"

They both laughed.

"All I know is, dear," the older woman said, "that amongst all my pupils it's not the very serious ones who have turned out best, or made the happiest wives and mothers. I always think twice before I allow a serious girl any liberty, or let her drive home from a party alone with a man in a taxi."

"Had you ever any trouble with me?"

"Not in *that* way, dear," Miss MacNaughtan laughed. "I'd be sorry for the man who tried."

The girl hugged her lovingly. "It was because you trusted me so completely: you can't think how awful it was to feel what cads we were when we did deceive you."

The girl rose from her deep-bedded seat on the sofa. "I love your black cushions. They're new, aren't they? And the black carpet—how clever you are about colour! This room's like a cool garden with roses and green lawns." She pulled Miss MacNaughtan out of her seat. "You're so modernly-ancient, with all the old furniture and the classic statues and these touches of modern purples and blacks!"

The girl gazed round the room. "It's delightful, but . . ." she sighed, "I hate to see anything new in it

since I was here. These purple cushions are divine—they're like petunias, but . . . but . . ." she paused, "it shows how long I've been away. It was all *rose du Barri* and grey when I left . . . the scheme of colour I mean . . . these, of course, never change. . . ." She swept her hand towards the water-colours, and photographs and prints of the best-known ancient masters. "What a dear room for girls to live in, Naughtie; and I took it all for granted . . . but now that I've stayed for weeks and weeks in vulgar hotels and poor inns and pensions, I can realize all that you gave us. But do come and let me go over every inch of the house. . . . I must pay a visit to the kitchens. Are they all here still? I spoke to 'Clarkie'" (Clarkson was the name the butler had been compelled to adopt because he wore a wig: Stella had labelled him "Clarkson," and Clarkson he had had to remain). "And Bridget and Mina?"

"Yes, they're all here, and all *very* excited about your return. My servants never seem to want a change, they stay on and on."

The girl laughed. "I shouldn't think they did want a change: you over-feed them, and over-pay them, and over-consider them."

"But they do their work."

"They would be fools if they didn't, they have so little to do; and they know that even though you spoil people, Naughtie, you mean them to do their duties."

"Have I spoilt you? Are my girls spoilt?"

The girl turned swiftly round and impulsively hugged her. "No, they're not; and I *hope* I'm not. But oh, Naughtie, how I've wanted to meet some one as vital and alive and keen as you are! Mother's a darling, but," the girl sighed, "you've spoilt all other women for me."

Miss MacNaughtan laughed. "But not other men; and after all, I've some claim to the biggest portion of the affection you've got in your nature for women."

Over the girl's face a warmer tint dyed the pale, pure skin. "Come and let's look at my bedroom," she said, "and the blue drawing-room—is it still blue?" Miss MacNaughtan nodded in the affirmative—"and the concert-hall! Oh, how lovely!" she said, as she followed Miss MacNaughtan into the blue drawing-room. It was

still blue certainly, but glorious touches of colour had been added to it since Stella's day, and a frieze of old Japanese prints, whose predominating note was orange, ran all round the room at a level with the girl's eyes.

With a look of almost reproach she turned to her former instructress, who felt compelled to excuse herself.

"My dear," she said, "they didn't cost nearly as much as you are supposing. I took a collection from some one who owed me a bad debt. I should never have got the money, so I thought I might as well have the prints. We have had such a delightful series of lectures on Japanese art and literature, both this winter and last. I became acquainted with a Japanese professor, who is just ekeing out enough money to keep himself in London while he is making a special study of a particular period in English history. I pay him a ridiculously small fee for lecturing to my girls once a week . . . he says it helps him, and I've set the fashion, for he's given several lectures in private drawing-rooms."

The girl put her arm again through Miss MacNaughtan's. "Naughtie, why did I ever grow up? I do so want to come back. . . . I want the wonderful mixture of intellectual food and humanity that you put into life. I shall hate the girls who are getting all these things I've passed away from."

"But, dear, you're coming into so much, you can do and see anything you care about."

"But it's your mind and vitality that suggests and invests these things with such interest. Other people let things slip past, other people live in grooves; I know I'll do the same."

Miss MacNaughtan looked at her. "I don't think you will, honey; but if you do, remember grooves are very comfortable things. I *have* to think out these things. I have to keep very wide awake, that's to say, if I don't want to become a typical 'school maarm,' whom every one fears and shuns. I like living luxuriously, and so I made up my mind, when I had to keep a school, to keep a luxurious and modern one, to keep one which would always be a beautiful landmark in my girls' lives. They pay a lot, dear; I can afford to give a lot! And I never find that they abuse it: with the gymnasium to let off steam in,

they can very well afford to behave decently in the rooms I make pretty for their benefit."

When they had wandered over the house, even into the kitchen, where Bridget and Mina, her niece, now the second housemaid, received Stella with as much awe and admiration as though she were a royal princess, they returned to the drawing-room, where an inviting tea of various sorts of hot cakes and extravagant sandwiches awaited them.

"Do the girls come back to-morrow?" (it was the close of the Christmas holidays) Stella asked, as they sank again into the big sofa nearest the log fire.

"Yes, one or two to-night." Miss MacNaughtan handed the girl a dish of sandwiches as she spoke. . . . "My pet sandwiches, Naughtie, and you remembered. . . ."

Their eyes met laughingly.

"Say you *don't* remember *all* your ex-pupils' pet sandwiches and tea-cakes!" Her lovely eyes took in with a quick glance the American buckwheat cakes and the home-made stoned-raisin cake she adored. "If it's only a part of your marvellous memory and talent for remembering the idiosyncrasies and appetities of your pupils, they won't taste half as nice."

Miss MacNaughtan laughed. "Oh! my dear, my dear, you do want all or nothing, don't you? . . . It wasn't likely that I was going to forget my baby's 'wicked tastes,'" she laughed again. "Even at nine years old it cried for stuffed olives in its sandwiches, and the backs of pheasants for breakfast, and *pâtés de fois gras* for its Sunday supper . . . what a baby it was! . . . and now!" She looked tenderly at the girl's laughing face: her small, white teeth, as beautiful and even as a row of perfectly matched pearls, were pressing their way with a nice exactitude into a sandwich of brown bread and butter and olives stuffed with chillies.

"They are frightfully good, Naughtie," she said. "I was so afraid they would be like some of the books which you thought were exquisitely naughty in your youth, but these are as good as ever and just as wicked."

Miss MacNaughtan smiled indulgently.

"In her youth, indeed!" Hadn't she brought her up from babyhood to her present superb and youthful dignity

of womanhood? . . . To hear her talk of her past youth while she herself felt not one day older than she had done when she was only the girl's age!

"I suppose I *am* a very old woman at your rate of disposing of youth," she said, "but I don't feel it."

The girl looked at her. "Do you know, Naughtie, I have no more idea of your age than I have of some of the things in the Egyptian Museum that look as though they had been made yesterday. . . . You *look* about thirty-five, but you can't be only that, for I'm twenty-one, and I was fourteen years with you. You must have been more than twenty when I came to you."

"A long way, dear."

The girl pulled off her left glove very slowly. "You used to make me think that I would never want to marry. I used to say that I would live just like you, enjoying men's society freely and liking them just enough and no more than to make life agreeable; but lately I began to realize that to live like you one must *be* like you, and God has only made *one* 'Naughtie.' All other women are so dependent, such 'half things;' you're a 'whole thing.'"

She had pulled off her glove, her hand was thrust suddenly before Miss MacNaughtan's eyes, a sob broke her voice: "Naughtie, I do hope you'll like him. If you don't, I won't marry him."

"My dear," the older woman said, while her arms clasped the girl eagerly to her. "Has my baby found her other half? . . . Is she going to complete her womanhood very soon? Is she going to leave her old teacher far behind her?" she strained the girl to her hungrily. "Do you love him, dearie? *Is* he the other half God made for my baby—are you sure?"

"I don't know," the girl said. "I don't really know, but I'm sure I love him!"

"But why don't you know, dear? Don't you feel that the half fits into all the waiting parts of your nature, the places that have felt lonely?"

"I don't know, I can't tell; I don't even know if I understand him: but he adores me, and I love to be adored!" She smiled. "I never loved very easily, did I?"

"That you never did. *What* times I used to have trying

to make you even civil to people who raved about you! But who is he?"

"He's the brother of Nancy Thorpe. I've been staying with her people: he was there."

Miss MacNaughtan's eyes looked troubled.

Nancy Thorpe had been at her school for four years. She belonged to one of the oldest of Norfolk families. As a race the Thorpes were arrogant and family-proud. The men were good-looking and selfish, the women lovely and reckless. Nancy Thorpe had worshipped at the shrine of Stella from the day she put her face, so like a wild rose, into Miss MacNaughtan's school until the day she was almost dragged from it, weeping her heart out.

"You needn't tell me he adores you, dear."

She looked at the girl curiously. It was the first time she had ever remembered that her pupil's nature was not English. In the girl's words, "I love to be adored," there was just a touch of the slave-like adoration of the women of the East who never expect to understand the lords who become their masters.

The girl's face had become illuminated as from some lamp within her soul . . . it was beautiful . . . so beautiful that a lump came into her guardian's throat. "Do you know what he said when I promised to marry him? He said that he had certainly never been conceited before, but that now he would never be un-conceited again. . . . He worships me, Naughtie, in the silliest and foolish way. Thinks I'm cleverer than any other girl, and lovelier and more wonderful; he never believes I can be in earnest about my love for him because, he says, he's such an ordinary sort of a duffer."

"Is he ordinary? . . . Try to think dispassionately: ordinary from your intellectual standpoint?"

The girl paused. "He's frightfully good-looking, at least I think so—just as fair and pink as I'm dark and pale. And about his own job he knows far more than I do."

Miss MacNaughtan laughed. "Well, let us hope so. What is his own job?"

"He's a soldier."

"And about the things you care for that are *not* his own job . . . have you much in common?"

The girl's eyes dropped. "I don't know," she said,

with a sincerity that amazed even the woman who knew her so well. "I really *don't* know, for we were in love with each other too soon to find out, and when we're together, that's just enough! . . . It was only when I was coming to you to-day that I kept wondering what I should tell you about him; it made me ask myself what I did know about him except the fact that I love him." The girl's voice broke. "And you led me to think that . . ." she paused, "that . . . a woman loved a man and wished to give herself to him because he responded to all the *intellectual* interests in her nature as well as the other feelings, because he awakened new qualities in her, because she admired him—oh! I don't know how to express all you taught me to expect, and now it isn't like that . . . not a bit like that."

"What is it like?"

"It's like something you don't understand, something that has no reason in it: you just love because you can't help yourself . . . it takes possession of you."

Miss MacNaughtan turned the curious plain gold ring round and round on the girl's long finger. No woman is ever old enough to have forgotten her own feelings when love's first passion possessed her. She was moved by the girl's appeal to emotions she had hoped were extinct in her own being. Her fascinating voice, which had what Stella had termed the "Terry quality" in it, faltered a little as she said: "I think it's the real thing, dearie. Don't trouble your head about what an old maid said, I can teach my bairns lots of things, but no one, much less an old maid like myself, can teach them what only God knows—which halves fit into which."

The girl's eyes were full of gratitude. "I *think* he was meant for me, Naughtie, for we loved each other right away, and I feel quite unworthy of *him*, and *he* feels himself horribly unworthy of me, so it sounds all right. I ought to be grateful to you for having made me what I am . . . the kind of 'me,' at any rate, that he approves of . . . the kind of me that he thinks so wonderful."

"Dear child, I had splendid ground to cultivate; anything I planted grew in it . . . I can take very little credit to myself. . . . But I should like to see your 'man.'"

“So you will. May I bring him here on Sunday night? Are you still at home to ‘intimates only,’ on Sundays?”

“Yes, dear, bring him. When are you to be married?”

“Oh!” the girl cried. “I don’t know . . . give me breathing time . . . I’ve so much to do and think about. I’m going to Cairo next week—I want to know something about my home before he comes out: his regiment’s going there next winter . . . it will be about nine months until we meet. I want to be just a girl in my home for all that time, *he* wants me to marry him immediately, before we leave London.”

“Has he met your mother? Does he know your people?” Miss MacNaughtan tried to hide the anxious note in her voice.

“Oh, yes, he adores mother; often I feel quite jealous of her . . . she looks so young and pretty, all men admire her; she often finds things out about Vernon that I don’t know.”

Miss MacNaughtan pulled the girl’s ear. “You haven’t time!”

A happy laugh set the girl’s mouth into beautiful curves, and the memory of what Miss MacNaughtan’s words conveyed stirred in her being a beautiful flame of passion.

At that moment the door opened and Clarkson appeared.

“Well, Clarkson?”

“Please, m’m, have you forgotten there is a committee meeting at 6.30?”

“Oh, Clarkson!” Miss MacNaughtan gave one of her youthful laughs. “Have they been waiting long?”

“Only five minutes, m’m, but I thought I’d better tell you.”

“Tell them I’ll be down in two minutes.”

She crossed the room hurriedly and, opening the drawer of a Queen Anne bureau, took out a small note-book. “Thursday . . . Thursday . . . Thursday the 18th, yes, here it is—committee meeting 6.30. Dumb Friends’ League. Good-bye, dear. Sunday night—mind you bring him . . . let yourself out, won’t you? . . . my notes are downstairs.”

As Miss MacNaughtan disappeared the girl laughed to herself. “Just the same as ever,” she said, “the darling!”

Always doing ten times more than any other woman, and always with spare time to see her tiresome, adoring pupils, who 'use her up.'" She flung herself down on the sofa they had sat upon together, and put her hands up before her face.

"The dear, dear old place!" she said, and "dear, dear Naughtie! . . . I wonder if any one will ever take her place in my life, if any one will ever give me the happiness she has? . . ." For a moment she tried to think of herself as back in her old life in the school, as back in the peace of the old days, the peace of a life which, with all its gaieties and interests, had held none of the new passion which had awakened in her. But it was useless to think of her life now as apart from the new force which was moving it, the force which left her disinclined for intellectual pursuits.

In a few moments Clarkson opened the drawing-room door again. When he saw the girl's attitude he withdrew.

Stella called after him, "Clarkie, come back! I'm not unhappy, I'm only frightened because I am so happy. Clarkson, I'm going to be married."

"No, miss!"

"Yes, Clarkson; why not?"

"H'excuse me, miss, I forgot; you see it was h'only yesterday that you was a baby, miss."

The girl laughed. . . . "How's your wife, Clarkson?"

"That's what I came about, please, miss; you see she can't walk, and she'll not be contented with all that I can tell her—she'll want to know h'everything."

"About what, Clarkson?"

"About *you*, miss—h'every single thing. . . ." He paused.

"Do you want me to go and see her?"

"Oh! no, miss, I wasn't thinking of h'asking h'any such thing. . . ." He twisted his hands nervously: standing before the beautiful woman in her rich sables and perfectly chosen gown, he had for the moment forgotten how many times he had carried her up the long stairs to bed, kicking and screaming because the French *bonne* had insisted upon her going to bed before Miss MacNaughtan returned to say good night to her.

"Of course I'll go, Clarkie. . . . Does she live in the same place . . . ?"

"Yes, miss, number h'eight, 'arrington Mews, but I

couldn't have you go round there alone, miss: I had only come h'up to h'ask you please, miss, if you had such a thing as a picture of yourself you could let me show my missus. I'd take h'every care of it, miss."

"Why, Clarkie, I'll go round to see her, and I'll take her my photograph for herself. Tell her I'll come on Sunday afternoon, and I'll bring the gentleman I'm going to marry."

"Ho, miss"—something very like tears rolled down the old man's face—"you are not h'altered, miss, not one h'atom. Thank you, miss; I'll tell her that, miss; shall I call a taxi, miss?"

Stella was putting on her gloves. "Look, Clarkson, there's my ring."

The old man stepped politely forward to look at the odd-looking ring: it was one made after Stella's own fancy. "Very nice, miss, h'I'm sure, but you h'always had beautiful rings."

"Yes, Clarkson, but this one is a special ring, and so to me it is specially beautiful. I suppose my young man is just a fine young man like so many other fine young men . . . to me he is quite different."

"That's right, miss, that's 'ow I knew it would be some day, though it does seem strange to a man as 'ow as beautiful a young lady as you, miss, and as clever a young lady, should ever come to look upon an h'ordinary young chap like that."

The girl laughed delightedly, a laugh which lit her face to the highest beauty. "That's your veneration for our sex, Clarkson. Vernon's so good-looking that lots of women will wonder how it was that he ever came to look upon an ordinary girl like myself."

"Ho no, miss!" His voice was full of reproach and contradiction of her words: the girl had no right to say it of herself—she had been Miss MacNaughtan's most admired pupil, she was now a creature of such refined and unusual beauty, that she had no right to speak of herself as an "h'ordinary" girl.

### CHAPTER III

It was two days later when Clarkson showed Stella and her lover into Miss MacNaughtan's drawing-room. As he closed the door behind them and walked slowly down the wide stair-way, he said to himself: "Good-looking young chap enough, but Gawd, 'ow h'ordinary!"

And that was just what Miss MacNaughtan thought of him.

"Physically delightful, one of England's finest specimens, but mentally—Gawd, 'ow h'ordinary!"

Yet when her pupil followed her into her little ante-room on some feeble pretext to ask her: "Naughtie, what do you think of him?" she answered, "Delightful, quite a prince charming," and he certainly was both of these two things, with his fair colouring and frank English eyes and faultless figure. She could well say he was charming, for he had the distinction of the Thorpe breeding, and she had no reason for thinking him stupid, for as she touched upon scores of subjects he made keen and apt observations. Yet in her heart she had labelled him, as Clarkson had, "h'ordinary" and totally void of imagination.

But after all, she asked herself when the girl had left her, happy in the belief that she thoroughly approved of her choice, might it not be that she had expected that her favourite pupil would select some being such as never existed, some impossible creature with the mentality of a genius and the manners and physique of a man of the world and sportsman, some creature whose good looks were less conventional and more interesting than Vernon Thorpe's. She had tested him under the too powerful lens of her devotion.

During the interview Egypt, and more especially Cairo, had become the topic of conversation. The girl had

laughingly told her lover that Miss MacNaughtan did not care for Cairo. "She thinks the English in Cairo either bores or snobs."

"In what way?" Vernon asked. He turned to Miss MacNaughtan . . . he hoped she didn't think they ought to hob-nob with the natives . . . (he hadn't the slightest idea of what he really meant by the word natives, whether Mohammedans, Copts, Greeks, or Persians; he was totally ignorant of the wonderfully heterogeneous mixture of races which make up the human scum of Cairo). By heredity he had the strongest feelings (which had as yet been untouched) as to who were fit for Englishmen to associate with in foreign countries.

He had failed to remember, after his first introduction to Stella, that she was Syrian by birth. He admired her mother, who was Irish. He had forgotten the fact that her father was a Syrian so completely that Miss MacNaughtan's words did not suggest anything that was uncomfortable. Stella had certainly nothing in the world to do with his preconceived idea of "natives." Natives were, to his very Saxon mind, beings absolutely beneath him—to say he didn't think so would have been to tell a lie—while Stella, he had the *grace* to feel, was far above him! He thought of her with pride, he thought of her with self-satisfaction. It gave him a new belief in himself—the knowledge that she loved him.

For Vernon was not in the least conceited, and in his own country he was certainly not a snob. He was one of the unimaginative Englishmen whose good looks are accentuated by Saxon colouring and an almost Hellenic devotion to physical training. . . . Clever women in all countries become slaves to the Anglo-Saxon brutes. And Vernon was no brute. What he had really thought out for himself and believed, and what was merely the result of caste, it is hard to say. Like most Englishmen he expressed himself as seldom and as badly as possible on any subject that mattered—if it was not his own hobby. His mind had never wandered into abstract paths, or disturbed its fine calm by useless theorizing. But he had the desired characteristics of an Englishman, which should never be changed—grit enough to endure hardships without grousing, courage enough to know fear and face it,

for there is no courage in being fearless. To be fearless is to be lacking in one of the senses which protects us from danger. And Vernon's senses were acutely alive, although they were limited. He had not the highly-developed sensibilities of the Latin races, or even of the less typically Saxon of his brother Englishmen, but his sense for "honour" and for all that comes within an Englishman's understanding of that virtue, was very much alive.

He had been taught, as all English boys are taught, that the telling of a lie is a crime; he had not been taught its equivalent in the Latin mind—the sin of hurting another's feelings.

And so he belonged to the countless class of Englishmen who show all human beings who are not of the Western world that he scorns them, and who would rather make his friends uncomfortable than tell a lie.

But to return to Miss MacNaughtan's answer—it was equivocating and unprovocative of further comment.

She accused herself of being rash in her judgment, of having summed up the English "as a class" from the behaviour of one or two unfortunate specimens whom she had met with in her hotel.

She was glad to change the subject, for her wide experience of human character told her that this typical Anglo-Saxon, who had fallen in love with her highly-gifted pupil, was as full of inherited prejudices as an Oriental is full of superstitions.

"He ought to marry a fair English woman who would keep alive his pink complexion and race, and not one who would taint it with the passion and pain of the pale children of the East, whose forefathers knew and followed 'the man of sorrows who was acquainted with grief.'"

## CHAPTER IV

STELLA had been in Egypt for almost a year; in another week her lover would arrive.

She was sitting in the garden of her beautiful home, thinking over all that had happened since her arrival in Cairo, thinking of all the scales that had fallen from her eyes!

She felt a hundred years older and a thousand times less in love with humanity generally. The time had passed very quickly, because everything had been new to her, and her home-life was delightful. If there was nothing else to please her in Egypt, surely this garden with its exquisite pergolas and Eastern kiosks of old grey wood, and its mysterious devices for the introducing of water-courses and artificial lakes, its odorous orchards of rare fruits and scented shrubs, was sufficient. It was lovely and mysterious enough to gratify any Eastern princess. But in it Stella still felt herself strangely Western, things had not grown familiar to her with the familiarity of a native land. Things which she must have known and been accustomed to in her infancy now made her seem a stranger in a strange land. The very servants in her mother's house appeared to her impossible as servants, they were the adjuncts of an Eastern tableau.

But it was not the strangeness of things which had produced the feeling of age and bitterness in her heart; it was not the mystery of Egypt, with its power of the Unseen and its terrorising sense of Age—it was something wholly modern and unexpected.

It was the finding of herself little better than a social outcast amongst the people who were the Power for Good in Egypt, amongst the people of a nation who had spoiled her and courted her and reared her in their bosom. As yet she had not mentioned a word of her feelings upon the

subject to her people. She loved them too much, and her devotion to England forbade it.

“There must be some reason,” she had often said, “there must be something more than I know!”

And there was a great deal more than she knew, only she had imagined that the fault lay with her own family, that there was some hidden skeleton which every one knew but herself.

Her brother was the only person she could speak to upon the subject, but there was something about his personality and expression which told her that he had lived his suffering down, that he had made a world for himself above the petty snobbery of race prejudice. And he did not wish to re-open the old wound. He was so lovable and sensitive for her in all that happened that she could not bring herself to touch upon a subject that must necessarily give him pain.

She was sitting in the coolest spot in the garden, for the November sun was warmer than any sun she had known in Europe, in her white frock she looked a delightful picture of luxurious girlhood. To-day there was a subject she had to think out and settle quite definitely.

“Salome” was to be performed at the Opera that evening. It was the opening night of the season; she longed to go. So far she had only been at one or two social functions in Cairo—they did not bear thinking about! . . . Would the opera be a repetition?

Another subject which had to be considered was Vernon! he would be in Cairo in a week, did he know? Did he understand? Would he have courage? The “something” in her heart which made her fear, instead of rejoice, at the nearness of his coming made her hunger all the more for an instant proof of his devotion, for an instant proof of his *disregard* for the prejudices of his race.

She did not allow herself to frame any definite fear in connection with his arrival. His letters were everything that her “all or nothing” nature, as “Naughtie” had defined it, could desire; they surely ought to have drowned the whispering voice of fear. Yet the whispering voice told her that as Hadassah Lekejian in Cairo she was a very different person from the Stella he had known. She had been christened Esther, but her father liked to call

her Hadassah, the old Persian rendering of the Biblical Esther. In England she had been known as Stella Adair. Would he feel as proud to say "Hadassah is mine! Hadassah is mine!" as he had been to repeat to himself "Stella is mine! Stella is mine?" Then she remembered how something unknown in her had said, "I am not yours yet! I wonder which of us will have changed the most when we meet."

Nicolas, her brother, was coming towards her; his good looks thrilled her with pride; he was a delightful person to own for a brother. She had seen so little of him during her years at school that she was quite unprepared, on her arrival in Cairo, for the pleasure his personality afforded her. Since she had left Miss MacNaughtan's school, in her travels round the world, or during her visits to her many friends, she had met no one who was her brother's equal for intellectual refinement or good looks. With all the warmth of her ungrudging nature she already adored him. He was equally proud of his sister.

Nicolas sat himself down beside her, and as he did so he laid a small roll of music (in manuscript) and a spray of tuberose on her lap. She lifted the white flower to her nostrils, and softly and sensuously drew in its luscious fragrance.

"Is it finished?" she said: her eyes fell on the MS.

"Not quite, but I've *got* it . . . it's there"—he touched the roll with his sensitive fingers—"it's there; I can't lose it now. I've only to elaborate on the theme."

"How splendid!" she said. "Shall I play it for you?"

"Not yet, it's too rough." He sighed heavily.

"You're tired," she said; "have a rest."

"A little," he answered, "but I'm going for a ride; now that's off my mind I feel free."

He rose to go. She knew the words he had come to say were still unspoken. With his back turned to her he said: "What about to-night, Stella?"

"Are we going?" she said.

"Do you want to?"

"I want to hear 'Salome.'"

He suddenly swung round. "Go," he said; "for the little mother's sake go, and you will soon grow to feel as I do."

“ Oh, Nicolas ! ”

“ I lived in Germany and France for seven years ; I understand. I was so well off that I was a little king there. I forgot all about Cairo.”

She caught his hand. “ You are a king anywhere, dear.” She stood up beside him . . . he put his arm tenderly round her waist, and looked at her with almost a lover’s devotion. “ We’re rather a nice-looking couple,” she said laughingly . . . her voice faltered . . . “ yet we might be lepers.”

“ Hush ! ” he said. “ Don’t. She’s borne it all her life without *one* word.”

“ How she must have loved him ! ”

“ He’s been worth it . . . ! ” the words were spoken with asperity.

Stella dropped her eyes. She had not learnt yet the true worth of her father’s nature—his incorruptibleness in a corrupt land ; his sense of justice, which had never been blinded by the injustices perpetrated against him ; and, best of all, his sincerity as a Christian. Nicolas understood all these things, and often wondered in his heart at his father’s gentleness of speech and at his generosity of purpose. He had allowed no bitterness to corrupt his sense of right and wrong. Personal slights he could not pay back by meannesses, it was not in his nature.

“ Here comes mother,” he said. He looked at the girl with eyes which asked for thoughtfulness for the creature he adored.

Stella rose to meet her mother, her brother sauntered off with his music in his hand. In the distance there was the tum-tumming of the Nile-man’s drum and the clearer note of the bottle-and-key. Overhead, in the unbroken blue of the November sky, birds like falcons were swirling and turning in the sunlight. Mother and daughter met under the ancient wood-work of the long pergola, which had turned to the colour of grey sandstone under the fierce sun of Egypt.

“ I came to ask you, dear, if you would like to go to ‘ Salome ’ to-night . . . your father will ‘ phone for seats. Girgis is coming to dinner—he could go with us.”

There was silence for a moment . . . the girl was thinking. She had never met Girgis Boutros, her full cousin, a wealthy young Syrian cotton-farmer of the Fayyum. He had been

visiting some freshly-acquired property in Upper Egypt, so she had not made his acquaintance.

"Of course, dearest, I'd like to go." The girl spoke hurriedly and with emphasis. Her mother might have thought that her delay in answering was due to her desire to refuse. "I was just wondering how I shall like Girgis, what I shall think of my rich cousin."

"He is remarkably handsome."

"Is he at all like Nicolas?"

"Oh, no!"

The girl looked at her mother. "We are first cousins?"

"Girgis takes after his father's people."

"Is he like father at all?"

Stella's father was in no way an ordinary Syrian; he was of average height and build, with almost a patriarchal type of feature. His eyes and the shape of his fine head gave him his personality and stamped him as a man of individuality and influence.

"No; *in looks* he is not the least like your father . . . . yet . . . he has his ability."

"What is he like?" the girl asked. In her mind she was wondering how he would look at the opera, how he would be dressed, and how he would behave.

"He's like one of the beautiful portraits cut in relief on the limestone walls at Abydos."

"They are portraits of Egyptians; he's a Syrian."

"Only on his mother's side; you forget, his father was a Copt, one of the purest of all the Egyptian types."

"Oh!" Stella said, but her acclamation was expressive of much which her mother understood.

"Is he very Eastern?"

"Yes, very . . . of the finest type."

"You see, mum dear, I know so little about my own people. I've been almost a year in Egypt and I have only met a few."

"Scarcely any, dear." She took her daughter's slender hand in hers and caressed it. "Sometimes I wonder if I have acted unwisely, Stella."

For a moment the girl thought her mother referred to her own marriage with her father, but it was only for a moment; the next she realized that she was alluding to her own education in Europe, to the wisdom of having

cut her off from her father's people. Stella knew that her mother had cut herself off from her *own* people when she married Nicolas Lekejian, but she had thought, until her own arrival in Cairo, that it was on account of her mother's refusal to marry a cousin who was heir to the entailed property which she as a girl could not inherit. The cousin was stupid enough to be considered by many wanting in intellect. As Helen Adair, she had abhorred him, as she had learnt to abhor her people for wishing to marry her to him, and for ignoring the husband whom she loved. And so their name was never mentioned by her, although her daughter had used her mother's maiden name during her upbringing in England, because it was more easily pronounced and saved trouble.

"I'll soon get to know and love them all," the girl said, "though I must admit that I still feel a stranger in a strange land . . . but the land is so wonderful that it doesn't matter."

The eyes of Irish blue, which were still as bright as Stella's dark ones, smiled eloquently. "Girgis is a splendid fellow," she said. "We'll go and visit his home in the Fayyum one day quite soon. I'd like you to see how modern he is in his ideas, and how devoted he is to his work. I've a great admiration for Girgis."

"I'd love to go: the Fayyum is one of the most beautiful of the ancient oases, isn't it? And Crocodilopolis lies close to it?"

"Yes, and Lake Moeris."

"Oh," Stella said, "what a lot there is to see! . . . How thankful we ought to be that we're not tourists who have to 'do it' all in a certain length of time."

The words built up a silence between them again, for the word "tourist" brought to the girl's mind the memory of all the visitors to Egypt she had seen and met at the two social functions to which she had so eagerly gone the winter before on her arrival in Egypt—the functions at which she had been left standing by her mother's side as though she was not fit to be introduced to the moneyed Americans and brainless English women who fly to Egypt every winter merely to enjoy the balls and gaieties which are given by hotel-keepers. The invitations to these balls are sent by the hotel managers to the visitors who

can afford to stay at the most expensive hotels. All the hotels in Cairo give one ball a week during the season. Visitors residing in any of the first-class hotels receive cards of invitation, unless there is some reason why they should not do so. Stella's mother's mind was working in the same direction. She was recalling the look of wonder and indignation in her daughter's eyes when the truth of the situation had slowly dawned upon her—that they were not “in society” in Cairo, that the “right people” did not know them—that she, Stella Adair, the spoilt darling of Miss MacNaughtan's school, that she, Hadassah Lekejian, as her father loved to call her, was not received by the relatives of the very girls to whom she had been the adored “Head” at school. In Cairo the same families who had thought it an honour to entertain her as their daughters' schoolfellow would shrink from her in her own home.

The mother recalled their drive together after the reception through the crowded streets of Cairo, ringing with Oriental yells and swarming with Oriental loungers, and across the Nile bridge with its awful multitudes of Eastern races of widely different types, and on to the quieter banks of the river, where the tall masts of the native boats looked like thickets of slender trees against the burning glory of the setting sun. She recalled the silence of the girl and how her star-like eyes had looked neither to the right nor to the left as they drove through the yelling crowds, but had stared, as though transfixed, into the wild flames which branched through the heavens from the sinking sun.

Not one word had been spoken by mother or daughter during that drive, not one word had been said since in reference to that afternoon. But it was the last social function Stella had consented to attend.

And now Mrs. Lekejian was going to take her to the opera, she was going to crucify her again. But surely it had to be done: the girl must know everything before her lover arrived.

Stella saw her father coming towards them. She never got accustomed to his habitual wearing of the scarlet tarbush which every one employed in the Khedivial service in Egypt is compelled to wear; but Nicolas Lekejian

wore his at all times and in all places, as Syrians and Egyptians always do. Only Eastern eyes could have borne unflinchingly the powerful Egyptian sun, and a tarbush affords no more shade than an inverted flower-pot. Nicolas, his son, always wore a European hat. As he approached his wife and daughter he said, "I can't wait, dear, I must know about the opera, to 'phone. Am I to order seats?"

"Oh, yes!"—it was Stella who answered—"we want to go so much."

"That's all I wanted to know," he said. "I've no time for talk." He unwound his daughter's fingers from his left wrist. They were speaking Arabic: it was their custom to do so when Nicolas the elder was present—Stella said it was the effect of the tarbush.

"Let go, temptress," he said, "and allow your father to get back to his work."

His eyes were bright with the pride he felt . . . like the Esther of old she must surely "obtain favour in the sight of all the world."

"But I want you to stay: do stay and tell me about things; almost everything I see needs explaining . . . even yet."

Her father was pleased that she should desire his company, but remained firm. "I must go, Hadassah; there are a thousand and one things which have to be done before lunch."

She lifted her retaining fingers from his wrist. "Then may I go and wander about alone?" she said . . . "can I go later on to the Market of the Afternoon?"

"Take Yehla."

The girl frowned. "Can't I go *alone*, father? Can't I be free? . . . It isn't like the bazaars: the market's quite open, it's right under the Citadel."

"Yehla won't interfere?"

"He chatters . . . he's there . . . I am guarded . . . Oh, dad!"—she broke into English—"you must let me go out alone. I've always done it . . . even at school."

"You can't in this country."

"Why not?"

"Mohammedans don't understand any freedom for women."

“They must be taught.”

“Not by my daughter.”

“Is it only the Mohammedans?” Her eyes searched his for the truth. “Are the Christians clean-mouthed, clean-minded?”

He remembered that she could understand almost all the languages spoken in Cairo except Greek and Persian. She had already had her young ears polluted with the remarks she had heard about her personal appearance in passing the street cafés and through the bazaars.

“No, unfortunately not.”

“Are all Orientals the same?”

“Generally speaking, yes.” He saw that her face had changed, her soft smiles had turned to bitterness. She remained silent.

“I’m sorry, Hadassah, that you miss your freedom, but I couldn’t allow it . . . you will understand better later on; take Yehla with you when your mother can’t go.”

“Yes,” she said, “I will take Yehla, and I shall understand later on . . . I am learning very quickly.”

At the end of the grey pergola she left her parents abruptly. Her mother returned to the house with her father. When they were out of sight, in a sudden fit of remorse for the coldness in her voice and bearing, Stella flung herself down on a garden seat of arabesqued white marble, and put her hands up before her eyes.

She had to shut out the glory of the East from her sight, the profusion of flowers in the garden, the soaring minarets in the distance where the city lay bathed in light, the turquoise-blue of the fellahin’s jebbas, the whiteness of their turbaned heads; she put her thumbs on her ears and deadened the sound of the ancient call to prayer which was floating over the land like a message from heaven. The cadence of the cry was so divine that the spirit of holiness seemed to rest in the air. As the praying figures rose from their knees and the Mohammedans resumed their toil of drawing water from the sighing sakiyas or hoeing the flooded land for the crops, Stella said:

“Is it all sham? Is this spirit of holiness quite hollow? Is the East really polluted? Is that why the English reject us?” She thought of Italy, of Spain, of the Latin countries generally, where almost the same restrictions

for women prevail. Even in these countries she had found it difficult to walk about alone, yet they were different! There was something in the East which was grosser, something which was *unelevated* by romance, and that the grossness was not restricted to the Moslems, who have retained the ancient opinion of the chief object of women—for Mohammed left untouched the Eastern degradation of women in his elevation of the one God!—hurt her unspeakably.

And into her mind there came the deeper bitterness, the knowledge which had come to her during these nine strange months, that if she had been the daughter of a Moslem, if her father had been a follower of Mohammed's teachings instead of Christ's, he would have been more respected. She had quickly learnt that the Christian-English in Egypt despise the Eastern-Christians, and whether they had not a right to despise them was a question she was afraid to ask herself. In her own home her father would have none but Christian servants, Copts and Syrians and Italians, although it was acknowledged that her father in his business, and her mother in her domestic rule, suffered severely from the fact. "If we do not employ Christian servants," Nicolas Lekejian had often said to his wife, "who will? And until they are employed as universally as the Mohammedans, and have been *trusted* for as many generations as they have been *doubted*, they will continue to live up to the bad name they have been given. They have been treated like criminals for centuries, they have been despised and rejected of men; what can you expect?" He likened their insensibility to honour in business matters, and their servile acceptance of their inferiority, to those of the merchants of Japan, who have scarcely yet got their eyes open to the fact that a man can be both an honourable citizen and a tradesman. Until the era of English rule in Egypt, Christians were compelled to wear a distinguishing mark, like the Japanese tradesmen of old, a mark which set them apart from other people, and precluded them from enjoying the privileges of ordinary citizens or engaging in the commerce open to the Moslems. They suffered humiliation and degradation, which eventually corrupted their natures and killed the true spirit of the religion to

which they have so tenaciously clung for nineteen centuries. The *beauty* of the faith they have clung to, the faith for which they have suffered inglorious martyrdoms, is wholly unknown to the generality of them. The spiritual meaning of its doctrines has not survived the centuries of bitter wrongs which have been nursed in their bosoms. How could it? Yet an absolute faith in the "sacraments" of the early Christian Church in the East has survived because *they* have been taught and performed with the fanatical zeal which always attends religious persecutions.

Stella knew that, in the true sense of the word, the Copts in Egypt are *not* Christians, that they know scarcely anything about Christ or His teachings; but she knew that they had clung with a blind adherence to the dogmas of the Church which had been developed out of Christ's teachings by His disciples in the first centuries after His death. She knew that, speaking broadly, Coptic customs and Coptic ideas, apart from religious matters, are identical with those of the Mohammedans; that Copts as individuals are almost indistinguishable from Moslems. It seemed pitiable that it was owing to their religious zeal that their moral characters had deteriorated. She realized that it was *not*, of course, because they were Christians that they were less honourable in their natures and more cringing in their attitude; it was because of the suffering and oppression they had endured for the sake of Christianity, a depraved Christianity, which taught them less about Christ than Mohammed had taught his followers of Christ. To a Moslem Christ is a seventh Prophet.

It seemed a sad mockery, a bitter sarcasm, that these very people, who had since the days of St. Mark kept alive the Church of Christ in the East, were to-day entirely devoid of the true spirit of Christ's teachings. Christ taught humility, *not* servility—servility is the child of oppression—and Christ was a Socialist.

It had been gall and wormwood to Stella's soul to discover that her father's people belonged to a servile race, a mixed race, a Semitic race, a race which had known oppressive rulers ever since the Biblical days of Assyrian and Babylonian invasions.

Precisely speaking, she realized that she had no race and no country, for the history of Syria leaves not so much

pure blood in its people as the history of Egypt, where the Copts at least are almost the undiluted descendants of the ancient Egyptians. Up till now she had looked upon Egypt as her country, for her people had lived there for many generations, and in ancient history Syria was dependent upon Egypt for a very long period.

The manner in which the English rulers of the land looked upon the Syrians came as a shock to her. They were aliens and undesirable invaders; they were called Levantines!

Her thoughts quickly travelled over the ancient history of her own land to the time when the Greeks of Antioch had introduced into it their art and culture, for the Syrians, like the Japanese, were for ever receiving and imbibing the gifts and qualities of other nations. With their usual adaptability they imbibed the higher beauty of Greek art, which in its turn was reinforced by Roman influence, until Christian Syria was at one time the seat of advanced culture.

“In those days,” Stella said to herself, “Vernon’s people were mere undiscovered barbarians. In the days when Damascus and Antioch, the leading cities of the East, were famous as the trading centres of the whole world, the Romans were thrusting their yoke upon the half-savage Britons.” Yet these very people amongst whom she had been reared, and whom she had learnt to love, were opening her eyes to the fact that the ancient races of the world—the races who had given it its first civilization and culture—were unclean.

She knew that in her own nature there was, mixed up with the Eastern blood of her father, the Celtic blood of her mother. The independence of the Irish race was very strong in her; its revolutionary spirit had more dominating qualities than the servile nature of her oft-conquered forefathers.

To-night she would meet her cousin Girgis Boutros for the first time; to-night she would realize how wholly apart from the British she was in Cairo, how closely linked to the native life of Egypt—for Girgis Boutros was entirely uninfluenced by Western thought. Apart from his knowledge of the English language, which he had learnt for commercial purposes at the Coptic school in the Fayyum, and his faultlessly cut clothes, he was free from the affectations of the wealthy Copts, who would gladly be mistaken for English.

## CHAPTER V

STELLA was waiting in the drawing-room of her mother's house for the arrival of her cousin Girgis Boutros. Her brother was with her. She was playing over the very difficult composition which he had shown her in the garden that same morning ; he was standing behind her, looking over her shoulder.

"It's *awfully* difficult ; you must have patience."

"I know it is, and you make me realize it ; for if difficult to you, I'm afraid it's hopeless for ordinary people."

She had turned round to speak to him, and had seen his look, expressive of admiration. "Play it over to me," she said, "just anyhow, so as to give me the 'feeling' of it."

Nicolas sat down on the piano-stool which she had vacated.

He played over his composition with exquisite expression and charm, but with little execution.

"It's delightful," Stella said—"perfectly delightful. What a pity you're so nervous, for no one will ever do it so much justice in expression ! It's full of the East. How did you get it ?"

"I can play to you," he said, "and to people I'm in sympathy with ; but I'm no pianist, I'm no musician : when I sit down in front of business men or critics I can't play a note. I have to endure hearing my compositions being murdered by people I pay to play them, when publishers ask to hear them, because I know that I couldn't play a note if I made them get up."

"Now that you've me," she said affectionately, "we must try ; let me play it again."

Before she sat down he took her two hands in his and made her face him. "Let me look at you, Stella . . . that dress is charming ; *you* are charming to-night."

"Do you like it ?" she said. "I'm so glad—it's very simple."

Nicolas laughed. "I know that kind of simplicity—it belongs to the Rue de la Paix. I mean it's certainly *not* Levantine!"

Her soft mouth hardened. "I hope so. *Do* I look Levantine?"

"Don't . . . ." He put his arm round her. "You mustn't get bitter, Stella—it isn't worth it."

"What isn't?"

"The opinion of the British!"

"Vernon is British."

Nicolas did not answer.

"*You* like them? You *admire* them in spite of their treatment of us?"

"Not wholesale . . . not their prejudices."

"What, then?"

"Their honour . . . their justice, their clean-mindedness, their dislike of intrigue."

The door opened.

Girgis Boutros was shown in. He was in exquisitely cut evening dress; every detail was perfect; he was "turned out" like a well-bred Englishman who can afford to dress extravagantly but dislikes show. His tarbush of bright scarlet set off the brilliance of his splendid eyes; its straight line increased the statuesqueness of his strong and clearly moulded features; its colour threw up the glitter of his perfect teeth and curly black hair, which he wore very short. It was dry, stubborn hair, which expressed an active temperament.

Stella thought she had never seen any living creature quite so beautiful, or so nearly perfect in figure and feature. His love of exercise was evident by the nut-brown of his complexion, and the alertness of his bearing was suggestive of virile manhood. Beside him Nicolas looked strangely French and delicate.

Mrs. Lekejian had followed her nephew into the room. She was anxious to see the effect his appearance would have upon her daughter.

The introduction took place in Arabic.

Girgis said, "How do you do?" in stilted English to Stella.

The girl laughed. "Why do you speak to me in English?"

"Because," he said, "you are to me so very English, if you please."

Stella thought to herself, "And you are to me so very Eastern, so strangely Eastern, if you please."

In spite of the fact that he was dressed in European clothes as "up to date" as could be bought, he was like one of the portraits of Seti I. come to life again from the white walls of his temple at Abydos.

"Well," she said, "if I find that I can speak Arabic better than you can speak English, I shall be generous, and let you practise your English when you speak to me."

"Thank you very much," he said deferentially, "but I would like to speak in my own language, if you please."

"Why?" Stella said.

"Because it is more beautiful for expressing my feelings."

"You are perfectly right," she said. "Even I feel the want in English of the hundred inflections we have in Arabic for one word. In Arabic you can express any degree of feeling you wish by the different use of the one word; in English we have to qualify it with adjectives."

"That is why," he said, "I think you have no poetry in English . . . no poetry, at least, that I have read," he added the last words apologetically.

Nicolas chimed in. "You're quite right," he said, "it's the same thing in music. I used to think the ancient Arab music was grotesque. I remember the first time I heard the famous Arab tenor I had just returned from Paris. I couldn't hide my laughter . . . now I know that it was my own ignorance; he's wonderful!"

"Oh!" Stella said impulsively, "I do want to hear some *good* Arab singer. I want to go to the Arab theatre. May I?"

"Certainly you will go"—it was Girgis who spoke—"if you please."

"And I want to have an Arab dinner."

"Certainly you must have it," he repeated the formula, "if you please."

Girgis's English only required a little practice to make him quite at home in it. It was almost impossible for him to realize that for speaking it contained no polite metaphors, no elaboration of honorifics.

As they spoke it gave her pleasure to watch his eyes, which flashed like black agate, his dazzling teeth, the exquisite contour of his pillar-like throat. And yet,

with all his Eastern glow of colour, she felt the strange immobility of his countenance, which was characteristic of his Oriental blood.

In watching him she became absent-minded, for she was saying to herself, "He is my full cousin, my father's sister's child, yet I feel that he should have a label stuck on him, and be standing on a pedestal in the Cairo Museum." Girgis was nevertheless very much a living thing, very much a piece of youthful manhood, a manhood of mysterious passions and powers. Vernon, her lover, to whom her thoughts at once flew, belonged to the race of people who despised Orientals like Girgis.

At dinner Girgis sat next to her, but he spoke very little. Silence suited his strong features and dignified bearing.

Towards the end of the meal, however, she was surprised by the unexpected intuition he showed; for he suddenly came out of his stone-like reserve to say: "I prefer to remain silent than to distress you."

"But why should you distress me?" Stella said, surprised at his remark.

"By talking to you of less interesting things than your thoughts afford you."

"You are too modest; all that you have told me is very interesting. I wish you would tell me more about your work."

"It is not so interesting as your thoughts. I see that your mind is saying very much, your eyes speak . . . everything yet is strange to you."

"You are perfectly right," she said, "everything is very strange; I think things go on getting stranger and stranger."

"I am one of the many strange things." Only his eyes smiled: his skin, which was tanned to an indescribable hue by desert suns, became a little warmer. "But do not forget, if you please, that you are also strange."

"To you?"

"Yes, to me. When I look at you I have to say to myself, She is my cousin, Hadassah Lekejian."

"I am called Stella in England."

"Stella!" he said—"it is pretty. What is Stella, if you please?"

"Stella means a star; Esther means the planet Venus, I think."

"That is beautiful," he said; he looked at her as much as to say, "Everything about you is beautiful." "In the East we study the stars . . . they guide us."

"Have you ever heard of Swift?" Stella asked.

"Swift? No." He looked puzzled. "Swift means very fast, does it not? Please explain to me."

"Yes, quite right . . . but Swift was the name of a great English writer who loved a girl called Esther Van-homrigh; he called her Stella."

"The man who will marry you will call you Stella?"

"He does."

The strong face betrayed no sign of surprise, yet the girl's words were wholly unexpected. Girgis Boutros had not heard of his cousin's engagement, and he was over head and ears in love with her at first sight, and prepared to ask his uncle's permission to marry her as soon as dinner was over.

"You are affianced?"

"Yes—engaged, as we call it."

"And you will be married soon?"

"No, not yet; not for a year, perhaps more."

"But how can he wait? He has seen you?" (The strict Copts do not see their affianced brides.)

Stella smiled. "Yes, he has seen me; in England we do not marry men whom we have never seen—engagements often last more than a year. Englishmen are taught patience: they can wait."

"He is English?" He pronounced it *Eenglesh*. There was surprise in his voice, surprise expressive of annoyance.

"Yes, he is an English soldier."

"And he loves you?"

The girl laughed. "I hope so: why do you ask?"

"The English are strange," he said, then lapsed into silence.

"I don't find them so," she said. "Couldn't you wait *one* year for some one whom you loved very much?"

"Could I wait?" he said quietly. "Yes, I could wait seven years, like Jacob, but I would follow her, I would follow my star." His eyes flashed with quickly kindled passion, but his features remained immobile.

"Englishmen trust their women, they need not follow

them; we prefer to know each other intimately before we marry."

"They are not very wise," he said. "I see much unhappiness in the papers. I read the divorces. The English are *brave*, but not *wise*; they learnt much civilization from the East, but not wisdom; they have never learnt wisdom or philosophy!"

Stella laughed again: there was something so old and full of wisdom about this strange youth at her side that she could not resist drawing him out. While they spoke she watched his manners at table . . . they were perfect, and his hands were so beautiful that it gave her pleasure to let him prepare her fruit for her. "Why do you read the English divorces?" she said.

"I wish to practise my English," he said, "and they interest me very much. If you do not read something amusing, something which you wish to follow to the end, you do not read at all; then you forget."

"And the divorces, are they more interesting than novels—you like them better?"

"Novels?" he said, "I do not know; if you please, what are they?"

"Romances, love stories I mean."

He laughed outright for the first time; it was not the frank laugh of an Englishman, but the cynical amusement of a philosopher. "Love stories!" he said. "They are only fairy tales written for children or for nuns; the English do not believe in them themselves; they are not for men. When I wish to learn something about home life in England I read the divorces."

"Oh, you are funny!" Stella said. "Divorces break up home life, they do not make it."

"It seems strange to you . . . who have been brought up in England. . . . Out here we know what the English are; we hear from the divorce courts what they are in their own country."

Stella's back went up . . . "Yes," she said, "you ought to know what they are, considering what they have done for us."

"What they have done for us, if you please?"

"What they have done? what have they not done for all Egypt, Christian and Moslem?"

"I do not wish to offend, if you please . . . for you are

affianced to an Englishman. I do not discuss the politics with women."

He was a stone image once more.

"You have not offended," Stella said, "but I hate ingratitude, and in England women discuss politics . . . they will soon become active politicians."

"But *we* will not discuss it, if you please; you have only been a short time in this country." He spoke with an air of authority, with the air of a man who expected to be obeyed.

"It would not matter how long I lived here," she said—her temper was rising—"it could not alter facts. The English have given us everything. Have all the Christians as well as the Moslem fellahin forgotten the abuses they suffered, the injustices they endured, the unspeakable wrongs that were thrust upon them?"

She looked at him for an answer.

He raised his eyes slowly; his thick lashes brushed his cheeks in a way Stella had never seen eye-lashes do before; in his glance there was scorn and hate. "They gave to us every good thing," he said, "but the best thing of all, that they will never give."

"What have they not given us? We are not Egyptians, that we should wish to rule; this is not our country."

"Love," he said; "they have not given us love."

Stella was silent.

He was still burning her with his eyes. "I once went to the English church," he said. "The priest spoke all of 'love.' He said, 'God is Love . . .' he said, 'Love ye one another. . . .'" Out of church I have not seen that love from any English: if they had any for us they would understand us."

"You think if the English loved us they would understand us?"

"Yes," he said; "but the English *do not* try."

"Hadassah!"

It was Stella's father who spoke. "You must not linger if you wish to be in the house when the curtain goes up."

"I don't want to miss a moment of it," she said, as she instantly rose from her chair. With a smile to her cousin she left the room with her mother. Girgis Boutros suddenly felt that the door had closed between light and darkness.

## CHAPTER VI

THE opera-house was full when Hadassah Lekejian entered it with her mother and cousin. Her father and brother were already in their box.

As she took her place many heads were turned to look at her, for the overture was almost finished, and from the stalls the English officers and men had inspected, with their glasses, the occupants of the various boxes; they were glad of a fresh arrival.

The residents they knew by sight, and many of the visitors, for they had attended some, if not all, of the various hotel dances which had just commenced in Cairo.

A man, himself a visitor, asked his companion, an engineer on the State railways, who the beautiful girl was.

The engineer looked at her through his glasses. "Don't know," he said; "yes I do, though—wait a minute—that's young Boutros; he's a Copt, a cotton magnate, and that's his uncle, Nicolas Lekejian, and his wife; she's an Irish woman. They're among the best Syrians in Cairo; the old chap's an awfully decent sort . . . and that girl must be his daughter; I heard she had come home."

The stranger was silent; then he asked, after looking at Stella again, "Do you know them?"

"Yes, slightly . . . in business only."

"You don't know the family?"

"No, I once met the son, an awfully cultivated chap."

"Won't that girl know any one in Cairo?"

"If by that you mean the English or best French . . . no."

The stranger was silent, but his glasses did not leave the girl's face . . . he knew that she could not see him. After watching her expression very carefully he turned his glasses upon the occupants of the other boxes and then inspected the stalls. There were certainly one or two very pretty

girls in the house, especially amongst the Americans, but there was not another woman with Hadassah Lekejian's elegance or distinction. He thought he had never seen such clear eyes or such a transparent skin. She had taken her place by her mother, her cousin was seated on the other side of her, Nicolas and his father were standing behind them. He noticed that during the performance the occupants of Stella's box had ears and eyes for nothing but the opera itself. Even the cotton magnate, who looked a hundred times more Eastern than his cousin, never took his eyes off the artistes. But in the interval (he was watching the girl very closely) he could see her rapid survey of the house, he could almost feel the sense of aloofness she felt from her fellow women. He leaned forward, and for a moment their eyes met! . . . All her life Hadassah was to remember that look.

Girgis Boutros was enjoying himself amazingly. He had never before been in such near contact or talked so freely to a young girl. He was an only son and all his relations on his father's side were old-fashioned Copts, who kept their women-kind as carefully secluded and as veiled as Moslems. He had therefore only spoken to his mother and aunt. To sit by Hadassah's side, to be the recipient of her smiles and intelligent conversation, was almost more than his easily excited nature could stand. To Hadassah he looked like a statue carved in granite, with the glass eyes which the early sculptors gave to their heads . . . to himself he felt like a thing of flaming fire. He longed to burst into poetry, to recite to her verses from Persian songs which expressed his admiration of her looks.

In a box opposite to their own there was his mother, a beautiful woman, of a very classic type, dressed in an expensive Parisian model gown. She was Hadassah's father's sister, but she had not Nicolas Lekejian's intelligent and very noble cast of features. Her face, for all its classic contour, was touched with the indolence and sensuality of the East. During the second interval Stella noticed that her aunt's box became full of visitors from all parts of the house, Greeks, Italians, and Syrians.

"*Levantine*," the engineer in the stalls styled them all. It was then that he pointed out to his companion the impossibility of knowing people like the Lekejians in-

timately. "You let yourself in for knowing 'Levantines' like these," he said, "and they're impossible."

And his words expressed Hadassah's feelings. Girgis, her cousin, was very charming, he amused and interested her with his un-English ways of looking at things, and his very English way of wearing his clothes . . . but her aunt's friends *were* impossible. Were they the people she ought to know? Were they the only people who would accept her in this cruel land? Their elaborate dresses of gorgeous brocades, their crude jewellery, their too ample figures, and, worst of all, the expression of their eyes and mouths, disgusted her. Stella thought of her own mouth: she would rather it went hard and sour with the bitterness of the cup that was now almost always between her lips than that it should become loose and coarse like those of the over-dressed, over-fed women in her aunt's box. Her aunt looked a refined lady beside them—still, they were her friends. Then Stella asked herself, if her aunt had refused to have these people for her friends whom else would she have had . . . what friends had her mother?

Not one soul in this crowded house, in this opera-house, where she had rented a box ever since she had come as a bride to Cairo with Nicolas Lekejian, knew her well enough to pay her a friendly visit between the acts. She had not one drop of Eastern blood in her veins, and she looked beautiful and youthful in her white lace gown and brilliantly hued Persian scarf—but she was an outcast!

Hadassah could have screamed with shame, and yet she saw the impossibility of it all, she realized the distance by which her father's people were removed from the people of the Western world.

Girgis Boutros said, "Do you know my mother?"

"No," Stella said. "When I was a little girl I may have met her, but I don't remember her."

"Will you let me introduce you to her, if you please?"

Stella hesitated and looked at her own mother. Girgis thought she meant to imply that she could not go alone with him to his mother's box. "I will ask your mother; she will come too, if you please."

"No, don't ask her," Stella said: "I will meet your mother another time . . . not to-night, I like talking to you best."

He noted the anxiety in her voice, but he did not betray his understanding of it. Girgis never betrayed anything he did not wish to show. "If you please," he said; "but my mother would be very happy to see her brother's child and introduce you to her friends."

Stella could not gather from his way of speaking whether he meant to annoy her or to be polite to her, and he did not mean that she should! He possessed the gift of thought-reading so common in the East. He knew exactly what was passing in his beautiful cousin's mind about his mother's friends. He himself had no love for them, indeed he knew very few of them. In his opinion they were stupid and vulgar, but he resented what he termed Hadassah's English attitude towards all things which were not British.

Stella did her utmost to be cheerful between the acts, and succeeded so well that even Nicolas thought she was enjoying herself. He knew that his cousin was *much* more Oriental in his opinion of women than he or his father were, and he had been just a little anxious to know how he would conduct himself for the long hours he would spend in Stella's company.

But his mind had soon been set completely at rest by Girgis's attitude of respectful admiration.

In the middle of the longest interval the Khedive and his suite entered the house. The house rose to its feet to greet him, and remained standing until he was seated. The orchestra played the Khedivial anthem. Only one figure in the house remained seated; he was the leader of the advanced Nationalist party. So public an act of disrespect and disloyalty could not be allowed to pass unnoticed, and later on Stella heard that the Minister of Foreign Affairs, who was in the house, had sent for him and upbraided him for his behaviour, and that the Nationalist leader had insolently replied that no law obliged him to rise if he wished to remain seated, and had refused to apologize.

The minister had thereupon ordered him to leave the house, which he did.

Hadassah's father was furious. Girgis was wholly indifferent. . . . Stella was completely puzzled.

"But why should he insult the Khedive?" Stella said. "He's not English!"

“He recognizes English rule in Egypt and uses his influence to help that rule. He is contented to be a puppet in their hands.”

“I see,” she said. “Egypt for the Egyptians extends even to the Khedive.” She was wondering if the Syrians and all other Christians would be ousted from the land *with* the English when the time came, or if the Copts would still be wanted to do the brain-work and the art-work and the dirty work of the country, as she had discovered that they had always done ever since the days when the Arabs invaded the land and brought into it the teachings of the Prophet. For the Arabs brought nothing with them but their war-like qualities and their art-destroying religion.

She turned to her cousin, whose face told her nothing of what he was thinking. “I know more about Home Rule for Ireland,” she said, “than Home Rule for Egypt. I feel I’m not qualified to speak, but the Egyptians do seem to me even less capable of managing their own affairs than the Irish. Why can’t they be contented with the peace and prosperity the English have given them?”

Girgis thought for a moment. “You are affianced to an English soldier, if you please.”

“Yes,” Stella said, “what has that to do with it?”

“Will you ask him this question. If the German nation invaded England and conquered it, and made it many times more prosperous than it is now, if they improved the lives of the working classes, if they taught England all the wonderful things that are done in Germany for education and for the industrial life of the people, would England be so grateful to them that she would like to keep them there for ever, would she delight to sing their national anthems? Would England honour one of her own people if he was contented to be a nominal king under German rule?”

Stella did not answer. Fortunately for her, the curtain went up for the last act.

Shortly after this unpleasant incident the British Agent’s wife entered her box—it was almost opposite the Lekejians. A number of people came with her, officers in full-dress uniforms and civilians wearing ribbons and orders. Evidently there had been a dinner-party at the British Agent’s house. After they had taken their seats Stella suddenly recognized one of the party as a man she had danced with

many times at balls in Norfolk and met several times during her visits to Nancy. She bowed to him and received in return a bow and a warm smile. He seemed delighted to see her, and showed very plainly that he meant to come and speak to her. Presently she saw him whisper to a lady next to him, one of the most stiff-necked of the English residents: the lady turned her eyes to Stella's box while she spoke. Stella knew she was discussing her. From that moment the man never looked at her again during the performance.

But that was not the finish of the evening's entertainment, or the end of Stella's mortification; for Girgis Boutros, knowing that she wished to eat an Arab meal in an Arab restaurant, begged his aunt to allow him to leave the opera before the performance was finished and go to the high-class Arab restaurant which he often frequented and order a special supper, one which Stella would enjoy.

Stella was delighted at the idea, so her mother agreed. Where there were no English to wound her pride Stella felt that she might enjoy a purely native evening in characteristic surroundings.

So Girgis went on ahead, and if Stella could have heard the orders he gave to the cook and the owner of the place, she certainly would have enjoyed herself; they sounded like some passage out of the Koran, so deferentially were they received, and so solemnly.

When the party arrived the servants salaamed to the ground. They scarcely dared raise their eyes, yet they wondered how any one so beautiful could be so impure and so bold as to uncover her face in public; how any one with the eyes of a gazelle could be so familiar with men, other than her father and brother, as to dine with them.

Girgis had chosen the best and most secluded table in the room. He was very nervous, in case Stella would not think the supper nice enough, but it was all that money could procure on so short a notice.

As there were no other guests in the room they had the entire attention of the waiters. They sat at long tables spread with white cloths, but they had no knives and forks or plates. Everything had to be eaten with their fingers, a process which Stella soon discovered was not

nearly so disagreeable as she imagined, for the meat, of whatsoever kind it might be, was cut up into small pieces, and piled lightly on the top of water-cress or parsley. The large dish containing it was placed in the centre of the table. Each person was given a round scone of bread (like a Scotch harvester's bap), which Stella discovered was hollow when the top of it was torn off. These scones serve as pockets for the poor, who purchase their edibles ready cooked in the street. At table they act as plates and knives and forks.

It was Girgis who showed Stella how to help herself to a piece of grilled meat, which was deliciously savoury, from the centre dish, with the assistance of a piece of bread. She had to be careful only to use the third finger and the thumb. When she had successfully carried the morsel from the centre of the table to her own scone she had to dip it in one of the four small dishes of appetizing sauces, which were placed in front of her. The whole thing was great fun, and the food was so fragrant and delicious that Stella ate heartily and forgot her troubles.

Very soon the room filled up.

Arabs came in and greeted each other in the stately Arab way—and the Copts as well as the Moslems washed at the fountain in the court which led off the dining-hall, before sitting down to their meals. It was a pretty sight, the beautiful dresses of the natives lending colour to the scene, a scene in which the lack of knives and forks by no means betokened a lack of etiquette and manners. There was a great deal of etiquette observed even amongst quite young men who had evidently come to enjoy themselves. Stella had been so engrossed with the arrival of a new course that she had not noticed a party of Europeans enter the building. A tall screen hid the table at which they had quietly seated themselves. It was the next one to their own, and near the door.

Presently her ear caught English voices: some one was answering a question.

“Yes, when you get pure Arabs *they're* all right; the unspoilt desert Arabs are hard to beat for honour as well as for bravery.”

“Are there many left?”

“Not in Cairo itself . . . the Gypjie is a very different

creature, but even the Gyppie, when he's a *Moslem*, isn't so bad; it's the Christian-Copts and Christian other things one can't stand."

"What is a Copt?" a girl's voice asked.

"The Gyppie that thinks himself a Christian."

"I didn't know there were any," the girl said. "I thought Egyptians were always Mohammedans."

There was laughter.

"Did you never hear of the Arab invasion? What did you think they were before the year six hundred, before the Arabs came?"

"Pagans," the girl said lightly, "weren't they?"

A third voice said, "They're Pagans still pretty well, aren't they?"

"The Copts are a fine mixture of Pagan, Moslem, and degraded early Christian; for instance, they stick to the old Pagan idea that *Thoth* weighs the soul at death, the same thing we saw so often on the temples up the Nile, only they have substituted the archangel Michael for *Thoth*, and their funerals are far more Pagan than the Moslems'. They are a queer people."

Stella lost the next few sentences.

"It's the beastly Levantines one can't bear in this country."

"What *are* Levantines?" the girl asked.

"Speaking broadly, we English class the Greeks, Syrians, Maltese, and Jews all under the heading of Levantines."

A voice which had not spoken before said, "In fact, anything that is not purely British. . . . Do the French come into that scathing category?"

There was so much sarcasm in the voice that Stella could not refrain from moving her chair just a little, so as to see the speaker. As she did so, her eyes for the second time that evening met the eyes of the stranger who had asked who she was in the opera-house.

Her face suddenly became pale with indignation and shame. Try as she might, she could not conceal her feelings—tears had sprung into her eyes and filled them; but the next moment she was listening to her cousin Girgis's description of a desert dancer he had seen about a week ago at the marriage of a wealthy Copt in the Fayyum.

Her composure returned ; gradually her heart began to beat again at its ordinary pace ; she was able to understand what her cousin was talking about, though all the while in her ears there rang the words : "It's these beastly Levantines that one can't bear in this country." She was, then, a Levantine ; Vernon would have to learn that from such people as she had been listening to.

"You are thinking again," her cousin said : "your name suits you ; I feel that only half of you is here . . . your thoughts are in the stars very much !"

"Oh, no !" Stella said. "I am very interested. Can I see this lovely dancer ? How wonderful she must be !"

"It is not possible," he said.

"But why not ?"

"Sometimes she might come to dance in a very wealthy man's harem . . . but not for strangers."

"We are not strangers ; we live here ?"

"You do not live like the natives. They are proud, these dancers ; they will not dance to Western peoples."

"But why ?"

He raised his eyes in the ancient way. "They can get all the money and jewels and adulation they want from people who can understand their art . . . why should they dance to please the ignorant and curious ?"

"Do they get much money ?"

"I have seen one dancer take away with her £200 in money and many valuable jewels in one evening."

"Could I never see her ?"

"I think not . . . if you please."

"But why not ? You say she dances for Christian Copts ?"

"Your mother does not visit with any Copts who live like Moslems . . . she only knows a very few of the Catholic Christians, the Advanced Copts."

"It is all very confusing. In England I told people that the Christians in Egypt were like the Christians in England . . . I had only known Advanced Catholic Copts, I suppose. Do *your* Copt cousins veil themselves and live apart from their men-kind like Moslems ?"

"Most of them," he said, "and if I marry one I shall never see her until half the marriage ceremony is gone through ; they are very old-fashioned, these cousins."

“And you will marry one?” Stella’s voice was full of amazement.

“I do not wish to *now*, if you please.”

Stella laughed, his meaning was so transparent.

“*You* can laugh,” he said, “because *you* are going to marry the man you love.”

There was a pause in which the laugh died out of Stella’s eyes, for her mind was quickly stormed with all that his words suggested! She was going to marry the man she loved . . . what would that man have said if he had been here to-night? . . . if he had seen her at the opera scorned by his own nation, if he had heard her classed with Levantines!

To Girgis her eyes were in the stars again, so he lapsed into silence, while they continued to be served to many courses which seemed to repeat themselves over and over again — courses which consisted of such things as *taib*, or force-meat made of kidneys, and *kebak*, or very thin slices of grilled beef, served on beds of chopped parsley; these were accompanied with a strange variety of salads served on exquisite enamelled dishes of bright blue (Stella had tasted one of sour-milk and garlic mixed into a sort of cream, and one of turnip with chopped gherkins, and one of tomatoes, onions, and parsley). A street musician had been playing on his long Egyptian flute; its plaintive notes were very Oriental, and extremely monotonous. It is characteristic of Orientals that they never get tired of one short plaint, repeated over and over again. The extreme simplicity of the place amazed Stella: the waiters were all Arabs, dressed in ordinary blue-cotton galabeahs, and countless mangy cats crawled about from table to table, seeking food in a persistent and obnoxious way; a dog would have been turned out of the place as unclean. Yet the building itself was a stately one, surrounded by fine stone columns.

To do justice to the foreigners who had been discussing the Levantines so unflatteringly, it is only fair to admit that none of Stella’s party had been seen by them until they rose to go; it was only when Stella pushed out her chair, beyond their sheltering screen, that she had been seen. After that nothing more had been said. Fortunately, too, no one but Stella and her mother had heard

the remarks, for Girgis Boutros could not catch an English conversation, unless it was addressed directly to him, with intentional distinctness of pronunciation. He could not interpret half-tones. So it was only Stella who noticed the look of consternation and shame on the face of the engineer, who had evidently brought his two guests to supper in the Arab restaurant by way of entertaining them. He had been completely hidden behind the screen, and Stella knew that he imagined the restaurant held nothing but natives. His own party and Stella's were the only people in European dress in the room. Stella was generous enough to be sorry for him, yet the words he had said could never be unsaid; she could never again feel herself anything but a Levantine in the eyes of an Englishman in Cairo.

## CHAPTER VII

VERNON was in Egypt! He had been gazetted to Cairo for December 18th, but had obtained a fortnight's leave because he wished to spend the time with Stella and her people up the Nile before he commenced his duties. The Lekejians' dahabeah was anchored off Luxor. Stella was impatiently waiting for the arrival of the Government mail-boat which was to bring her lover; her mother, who was sitting on the deck drawing-room beside her, saw her agitation. When Stella was agitated or deeply moved, the slate-grey of her eyes deepened to black and her lips trembled. She had never once mentioned to her mother the wounds her pride had received, or said a word to show her natural nervousness about Vernon's arrival, but she had gladly agreed to her parents' tactful suggestion that they should spend the time with Vernon in their charmingly appointed dahabeah on the Nile. Neither mother nor daughter had ever hinted that it would be pleasanter to receive him out of Cairo; it was silently understood.

Dressed in spotless white, Stella looked enchanting. Her horror of Levantine splendour had cut her dressing down to the severest simplicity, which suited her youthful freshness. The only jewel she ever wore now was *el shabka*, as Girgis called her engagement ring.

At last she saw Nicolas, who had gone to meet the mail steamer, with Vernon by his side; her whole being trembled with emotion, for her lover looked a splendid figure of English manhood. When he saw her standing under the deck awning of their house-boat he took off his hat and waved it triumphantly in the air; his well-brushed hair shone in the sunlight like bright gold—how fair and British he looked! In a very few moments he was on the deck beside her; he had scarcely permitted the smart Sudanese boy, in a white jersey and green tarbush, to brush

the sand off his feet and trousers with an ostrich-feather broom . . . he was so impatient to reach Stella. With the lightness of perfect physical training he vaulted or sprang over everything that came in his way.

His greeting was to her mother first, who extinguished herself the next moment behind a tall palm, while Vernon folded Stella in his arms and kissed her.

“Oh! do let me look at you,” Stella said, when breath permitted her to speak; “I can hardly believe it’s true that you are here in the flesh beside me.”

“Let me prove it,” he said delightedly, “though I can hardly believe it myself!” He put his arms round her again and kissed her smiling mouth.

“It is harder for me to believe it, dearest,” she said tenderly.

“Why should it be?” he said. “I kept thinking that the train would break down or the ship go to the bottom, or something else awful would happen to keep me away from you. The journey seemed unending; the nearer I got to Luxor the longer the hours became.”

Stella gave a contented sigh . . . but there was something in the sigh which expressed more than content, it expressed a depth of emotion which the girl had never shown in the old days.

He looked at her anxiously, she felt his desire to understand. “So many things have happened to change my life,” she said, “and my *beliefs*. I was afraid you, too, might have changed?”

“Have you changed about me?” he asked quizzically; “but tell me what has so changed your life. Of course everything out here is awfully different, but what’s that got to do with you and me?”

“Just everything,” she said softly; “but for this week at least you are still my own.” She clung to him as he raised her face to his.

“I’m yours for ever,” he said soothingly; “don’t talk rot, Stella, not even in fun—it’s not kind.”

She laughed. “Then I won’t, dearest—and here come father and mother; they’ve been giving us a few moments to get over our ‘shyness.’”

They both laughed and almost ran hand-in-hand to Mr. and Mrs. Lekejian.

“Father, this is Vernon,” Stella said; “he’s awfully shy about meeting you, but I’ve told him you aren’t a very frightening sort of a person, are you, darling?” She kissed her father from the overflowing happiness in her heart.

Vernon held out his hand: he liked the general appearance of his prospective father-in-law, although it instantly brought the fact to his memory that Stella, on her father’s side, was not English. “I am a bit shy, sir, truly enough as Stella says, for I can’t see any earthly reason *why* you should approve of me as a son-in-law. Stella could have married any one in the world, and I am only a soldier with nothing worth mentioning to offer her but my devotion.”

“That, coupled with an Englishman’s sense of honour and the duty he owes his wife, is enough for me,” Mr. Lekejian said, “that is, of course, if my girl wants you.” He looked laughingly at his daughter. “I have sufficient worldly goods to endow her comfortably for life; but remember,” he said more gravely, “that in giving her to you I am trusting you with my most priceless possession.” He let the young man’s hand drop reluctantly.

Vernon could not answer, for he knew the man’s words were true, and he felt suddenly confronted with the real facts of the case, that he, a total stranger to this man, was going to take from him his most priceless possession, that he was accepting the responsibility of bestowing upon Stella a love and devotion which was to equal the devotion of her parents. It made him feel a conceited coxcomb . . . but as he could not express his deep appreciation of the honour Nicolas Lekejian was paying him, he merely said, “I will try not to forget, sir, indeed I will.”

Mrs. Lekejian, who was very fond of Vernon, said, with just a trace of her Irish brogue, which still showed itself in moments of deep feeling: “Indeed, I’m sure you will, Vernon, but we can’t expect parents’ heads on husbands’ shoulders, can we, Stella? I’m not afraid to trust you to Vernon’s care.”

The smile Stella gave her mother was all love and gratitude.

Enough had been said upon the subject of Vernon’s future attitude as their son-in-law to permit of other topics being introduced.

"I'm glad you came straight to Luxor without staying in Cairo, for this is *Egypt*," Nicolas the younger said. With his walking-stick he indicated the wonderful view of the soft Theban hills bathed in the pink sunlight of Upper Egypt, and the plain where the far-spreading waters of the inundation of the Nile reflected the exquisite blue of the sky. "Thebes lies there," he said, "the world's first great capital, the city of the Pharaohs who oppressed the children of Israel; we can go there to-morrow if you like—it's a lovely ride; to-night I thought we might walk to Karnak. The moon is almost full, and Karnak looks glorious by moonlight. Would you care to?"

"Of course I'd like to go," Vernon said, "but I'm awfully ignorant about Egypt. Please take it for granted that I know absolutely nothing . . . what is Karnak?"

Stella answered. "Why should you know?" she said sympathetically. "Karnak was the 'mother-temple,' so to speak, of all the city temples of Thebes; of all the temples in Egypt it is the grandest, though it's not the most perfect. You'll love it. Nicolas and I went there last night. You'll reverence mere men more after you have seen Karnak."

"I suppose I should have read up Egyptian history before I came out," Vernon said, "but, to tell you the truth, I didn't think much about Egypt; it was you I was coming to see."

Their eyes answered each other understandingly, and Stella said laughingly: "You're just taking Egypt thrown in with your pound of tea."

"I suppose I am, but anyhow, I never saw anything quite so amazing as that." He pointed to the perfect reflection in the water of the temple of Luxor, which stands so close to the river's bank that you can see it as clearly in the water as you can on the land.

Its long row of lotus columns, which were tinted with the same delicate pink as the Theban hills, seemed to rise from the depths of the river like the buds of lilies striving to reach the sun.

"Isn't it exquisite?" Stella said. "That's a part of the great temple at Karnak; it was joined to it in ancient times by a paved avenue, lined on either side with crouching rams—half a mile in length. When we've had some tea and it's a little cooler, we'll go into Luxor temple if you

like ; you ought to just see it before we visit Karnak, whose greater glory overshadows it."

"I'd love to," Vernon said, "though I'm a very poor sight-seer."

"You needn't take it very seriously," Nicolas said, "but you'll enjoy seeing it. In the days when Thebes was the capital of Egypt, Karnak and Luxor were parts of the city—the Nile ran right through it. The modern Arabic name for the eastern portion of the city is El Aksar ; Luxor is merely a corruption of it."

"I see," Vernon said ; "it is hard to imagine that all this was once a city." He pointed towards the irrigated land, green with the first shoots of the coming crops, and the stretches of beautiful water which lay between the river's bank and the desert beyond, where the monuments which tell you of the past glory of Thebes are still standing.

Nicolas soon left the lovers to themselves and, for at least one hour and a half, they talked of things which had little to do with the splendour of Thebes or the wonders of ancient Egypt. They were young, and they were in love, so the hour and a half seemed all too short for the pleasure they had to crowd into it. Vernon had to submit to a fire of questions relating to his personal affairs and to Nancy's ; but for almost each question he answered, with the brevity for which Englishmen are famous, he demanded his reward, though Stella laughingly told him that she was much more generous in her payments than he was in the furnishing of his news. His letters had merely touched upon things she had longed to hear about more exhaustively, yet when she asked him to tell her he merely said, "There's nothing more to tell."

It was so comforting to feel that he was just the same as ever, that he had not changed in one iota, that Stella only laughed when he answered her questions in little more than monosyllables. And if for the first time it dawned upon her that the subjects which interested him were limited, and that even in that first hour many things had sprung to her lips to say which she held back in case they would bore him, she was not in the humour to be conscious of it. The joy she felt in realizing that in his eyes at least—and he was typically English—she was perfect, made her blind to everything else.

At half-past four Stella saw Benhadad, their grave butler, carrying the silver tea-tray laden with the tea-pot, coffee-pot, and cups and saucers. He wore a scarlet tarbush and a beautiful soft grey silk galabeah; behind him walked another servant similarly dressed, bearing a tray with hot cakes, sandwiches, and biscuits. When the tea was arranged, with great solemnity the tall Copt with the features of an ancient Egyptian came up to Stella and said in perfect English, "Tea is served, *sitt*."

Stella asked him something in Arabic.

To which he answered: "*Aiwah sitt*," and pointed to the delicately cut plate of jam sandwiches, and when Stella said something else to him in Arabic he again said with exquisite deference: "*Aiwah sitt*," and clapped his hands. One of the small bare-footed Sudanese boys came running to him. Vernon was charmed with the lad's bright face and with the beauty of his slim, well-polished limbs. When Stella spoke to him he repeated, as his superior had done, "*Aiwah sitt, aiwah sitt*," and bowed his slim body almost double.

The next second he had bounded off with the grace of an antelope to the bows of the boat. The sound of flute-music soon began, and the clear tink-tink-tinking of a "bottle-and-key."

Vernon looked to Stella for an explanation.

"That's our private orchestra," she said laughingly, "I thought you would like the 'real thing' for your first afternoon. That's typical Nile music. The flute-player is quite a musician, the other instrument is nothing more than a glass bottle and key: it's very effective when the earthen drum comes in—you'll hear its deeper tum-tum-tumming soon."

"This is perfect, Stella," Vernon whispered; "heaven couldn't be better."

Stella shivered and took a white woollen shawl from Yehla, her boy, who had silently appeared with it.

Vernon folded it closely round her. "How did he know that you wanted it?" he asked. "Did you make a sign to him? I heard nothing."

Stella smiled. "No, I never did anything but feel the need of it . . . you'll soon find out that you have only to 'think a thing' in Egypt to have some servant hand it to

you—just before sun-down it always gets chilly, a wind springs up.”

“How quickly things happen!” he said; “it was awfully warm and bright about five minutes ago—it’s getting a bit chilly certainly.”

“The air will get warmer after the sun actually drops behind the line. All sorts of strange things happen at this hour in Egypt, especially on the Nile: objects on land look perfectly black during the actual glow of the sunset, and then everything for a time becomes drowned in an orange light. Then the sun drops, and a new mystery begins; a fire springs up, as if it came from the underworld, and sends up awful arms of flames into the darkening heavens: you’ll never forget your first Egyptian sunset.”

As she spoke the sonorous voice of the *muëddin* belonging to the mosque whose white minaret rises up so strangely from the splendid courtyard, which Rameses II. built to his pagan deity in the temple of Luxor, called the faithful to prayer.

It was the *maghrib* or sunset prayer which, according to the Prophet’s teaching, should be said a few moments after sunset, or a few moments before, for he would not allow his followers to commence their prayers exactly at sunrise or sunset, or sun-down, because infidels *worshipped* the sun at such hours.

Vernon listened to the ancient cry wonderingly: it was like a voice from another world; there was a mystery in its beauty which was full of godliness.

The next moment he saw the white-turbaned heads of the Mohammedans on the banks of the river bowing to the earth, and many of the simple fellahin prostrating themselves on the ground until their foreheads touched the sand—not one grain of which would they brush off if it clung to their skin.

Vernon noticed that Benhadad and the other servants on their house-boat did not take any notice of the call to prayer, but continued doing the work they were engaged in. “Why don’t your servants pray?” he asked. He was wondering if Mr. Lekejian had forbidden them to do so.

“Because they are Christians,” she said.

“Do you only employ Christian servants?”

“Yes, my father insists—except the Sudanese ‘crew,’ of course.”

“I thought Mohammedans were always considered honest. Why does he have Christians?”

“Because we ourselves are Christians,” Stella said, ignoring the first part of his remark.

“Well, naturally,” he laughed. “Have the missionaries converted these Johnnies?”

Stella laughed this time. “Their forefathers were converted in about the first century,” she said. “Christian missionaries haven’t been very successful since that time.”

Vernon whistled. “You don’t mean it?”

“Almost all the Copts are Christians,” she said, “and they pray seven times a day if they’re strict, but not in public.”

“The *what* did you call them?”

“Copts,” Stella repeated laughingly, “Copt is the European term, although it is derived from an Arabic word for the Egyptian Christian—the Egyptians who did not embrace Mohammedanism are all Copts. It’s the term now applied to all native Christians in Egypt, although originally the word Copt only meant Egyptian—but don’t look as if I was speaking of the sacred bulls of Apis.”

“I don’t know what sort of bulls the Apis bulls are,” he said simply. “Look here, I do feel an awful duffer.”

“Copts are as nearly as possible the real descendants of the ancient Egyptians, the Egyptians who remained unaffected by the Arab invasion and Mohammedan religion. There are a few *Moslem-Copts*, I think, but not many—native Christians converted in later days to Mohammedanism, but they are mostly in Upper Egypt in very out-lying villages. When the Egyptians, generally speaking, became Mohammedans they intermarried with the Arab invaders and with other Mohammedan races. The Christians only remained pure, except of course for the intermarrying which went on in the early Christian days before the Arab invasion by Amr in 640, and so they were called Copts to distinguish them as being the original Egyptians. Above all other people they represent the race of the ancient Egyptians to-day.”

“How awfully interesting!” he said. “Are they in any way pure in the other senses of the word?—are they a

decent set of people, better than the ordinary 'missionary-made' Christians?"

"That depends on how you look upon the matter," she said . . . "you will think them dreadful." Her tone had suddenly become bitter.

"Why do you say that . . . ?" it was the first time he had ever heard anything but sweetness from her lips.

"Because you are English," she said, "and the English think it is the correct thing to despise their fellow-Christians in Egypt."

"But *are* they fellow-Christians?" he said. "Are you sure they aren't just degraded Mohammedans who have sold their faith for the flesh-pots of the Christians?"

"They are Christians of a strange sort," she said, "Christians who have suffered centuries of wrongs and humiliations and tortures for their beliefs; they have endured such persecutions and injustices that only the letter of their religion is left, not the spirit. They aren't Christians as you and I accept the meaning of the word, but they are Christians insomuch that they have never lost hold of the teachings of the early *Church* of Christ. None of them, poor things, know anything about the beauty or humanity of His doctrines, not even as much as the Mohammedans do."

"How strange," he said, "to have hung on to the 'Church' for all these centuries and have lost Christ! What a tenacious people!"

"Of course there are some Copts who love Christ and love humanity through Him—they do crop up now and again—and there *are* a few saintly names even in *modern* Coptic history, but not many. I'm speaking now of the people; not of the highly educated upper-class Copts."

"What a lot I have to learn, darling! I don't know where to begin."

"Oh, you needn't bother about the *Copts*," Stella said hastily—again bitterness was in her voice—"no Englishman ever does learn the real truth about them or tries to find out any good in them. To the tourist the Copt isn't such an effective asset in the landscape as the Mussulman, who prays devoutly in the desert, or in the crowded street, or in the noisy railway station in the most picturesque fashion; the Copts have far *longer* prayers to

say five times each day, but strangers don't hear them."

"I believe you're awfully keen about these Copts," he said; "what's at the back of it all? Have I annoyed you?"

"I'm not keen about them," she said slowly, "I'm sorry to say I'm rather the reverse; but since I've been in Cairo I've tried to study a little about them, and father has told me lots of things which account for their unpleasant characteristics. I've read their history, and I've come to the conclusion that if they had given up their faith and turned Mohammedans . . ." she sighed, "in fact, if all Christians in the East *were* Mohammedans, it would be better for them; the English, in spite of being Christians themselves, would respect them more if they were."

"That sounds as though Mohammedanism was the better religion of the two, at least for Orientals."

"But don't you think the English ought to admire the Copts for sticking to their beliefs even though they have lost the real beauty of Christ's teachings? It's hardly their own fault that they've become what they are. A despised people becomes servile!"

"I suppose the English *do* admire them?"

"I don't think so."

"Why not?"

"Because they won't have anything to do with them, they treat them as outcasts" . . . her indignation was rising. . . . "But, dearest," she said, "don't let me talk about it so soon, let me forget that there ever were such things as Jacobite-Copts and Uniat-Copts and Levantines."

"Whatever is a Uniat-Copt?" he asked. "I never heard of such a lot of strange peoples?"

"A Catholic Copt . . . which means a Roman Catholic belonging to the Egyptian Christian Church. There aren't very many of them, and they have only existed for about a hundred and fifty years. My father is a Uniat-Copt, although he is a Syrian."

Vernon looked at her in astonishment. "Your father?" he said slowly; "is he a Copt?"

"Not in the original meaning of the word," she said, "because he is a Syrian, but for many generations his

people have lived in Egypt and belonged to the Monophysites party, which meant that they sympathized with the Egyptian Christians and not with the Melchites, who include most non-indigenous Christians in their fold. Speaking broadly, a Copt means a native Christian, and my father is not a native, although he goes to the Coptic Uniat church."

"I see," Vernon said slowly; "I hadn't realized that."

"I knew you hadn't." Stella spoke nervously. "The whole subject of the Christian Church in Egypt is so complicated that I don't know now if I have told you quite correctly about it."

He took her hand in his and pressed it to his lips. Ardently he kissed the tip of each of her pretty fingers. "Dearest," he said, "I don't know why we are talking so much about the Church and all the funny sorts of Christians there are in the world in the first hours we are together; let's talk about nicer things, things that we've wanted to know for all these unending months. Did you *miss* me awfully, dearest? . . . your letters were sweet, I nearly know them all by heart. But you are clever! Did you think mine awful rot?"

The kiss he took from her smiling lips was Stella's only answer to his question, for his devotion had brought back her softest expression; in his light flannels he looked so delightfully fair and athletic that her heart overflowed with pride. In a land of almond-skinned and black haired people, he seemed a creature of almost unnatural colouring. In a totally different way his features were as correct as an Egyptian's, they were straight and short; and his teeth, though they were almost as perfect as Girgis Boutros's, were not the marked features in his face which the beautiful teeth of an Oriental always appear to be.

"If you've had enough tea," she said, drawing away her hand because laughingly she declared that "his kisses had made it sticky," "let's go ashore and look at the temple, it will be too dark if we don't go at once: I'll just tell mother." Stella knew very well why they had been discussing the subject of Christians and Copts, but she did not inform her lover. It was because suggestion was forcing her to speak about the last topic in the world

that she ever wished him to hear. Had she not arranged to meet him at Luxor so as to get away from her fellow-Christians in Cairo? Her conversation had shown her that Vernon had as little idea of the real facts of her social position in Egypt as she had had before her arrival in Cairo, and she could not tell him, for Stella was experiencing what thousands of women have experienced before, a certain shyness and lack of ease with the lover from whom she had been parted for so many months. All the wonderful things she had imagined herself saying to him when they first met again were forgotten; or, if they were not forgotten they could not be said; the old intimacy of their minds seemed as if it had never been; she felt that she would have to see him many, many times before she could get back to the delicious sense of rest which his presence had once afforded her. And so she had suggested going ashore and amusing themselves in a way which might help her to get over the foolish embarrassment she felt in his presence. The idea that she would not exactly know what to say to Vernon when they first met had never entered her head, for her mind had always been full of a thousand things she wanted to say . . . but where were they now?

They had no sooner set foot on shore than they were surrounded by long-legged, dark-eyed donkey boys, in short, white shirts and white skull-caps, made of coarse crochet, who pestered their lives out to engage them for the hour, or the week, or the year. Their wit was as ingenious and their brown limbs were so perfect that Vernon felt inclined to engage at least half a dozen of them, especially since their white donkeys were almost as tall as small ponies, and as exquisitely groomed and as elaborately harnessed as the picture donkeys he had seen in Eastern fairy tales. When the brilliant-eyed rascals became too persistent Stella let them know that she could speak Arabic. Instantly their seemingly modest prices fell to about the quarter of what they had been asking. After that they did not seem so anxious to be engaged for the week or for the year!

There was a good deal of whispering amongst them, for they could not understand why a lady who had never been in Luxor before should speak Arabic like a native,

while her husband with the red face did not know one word: the pink skin of the Anglo-Saxon is always red in an Eastern's eyes. The Egyptian donkey-boy never forgets a face . . . it is part of his business not to; and they were quite right, Stella had never been in Luxor before. Countless curio-dealers in the most flagrant shams implored them to buy their wares, all of which were laid out on the dusty highway which divides the temple of Luxor from the river. Vivid green sphinxes, freshly "mummied" hawks, and images of the god Osiris in every possible form were amongst the most popular. In the whole lot there was not one thing worth buying, but the salesmen's patter of broken English was so droll that Vernon and Stella lingered over this curio-market for a considerable time. The natives always addressed Stella as "My beautiful lady," and spoke of Vernon as "Your genleman."

"Your gen-le-man he buy you this very nice god Osiris; him very lucky, my lady; you buy what price you like!"

"Yes, my lady, him very ancient, two weeks back him dug up in Thebes . . . my word is true, my lady . . . very cheap god."

But the only thing Vernon did buy was a fly-switch, as Stella had forgotten to bring her own ashore, and he rather fancied one with very long white hair and a blue-beaded handle, finished with a tassel of small white cowrie shells.

Of course he had never seen such flies: they were as biblical as the asses, and as the stately figures of the elderly Mohammedans, who one and all looked like descendants of Moses and the prophets. But if he was disgusted with the flies he was delighted with the costumes of the natives and with the strange riot of colour. And Stella was enchanted, for until their journey to Luxor her sight-seeing had been restricted to mediæval Cairo, the Pyramids of Gizeh, and the ruins of Memphis, which lies in the Delta. When they entered the temple they were thrilled with the peculiar thrill which only Egypt can produce. Its vast colonnade, formed of lotus-bud columns, had been glorious as they had seen it from their boat, reflected in the waters of the Nile; in the quiet evening light its columns

of sandstone seemed a part of God's conception of this strange land of sand and stone.

After a little time, when they had wandered through the various parts of the vast ruin and glanced at some of the most striking reliefs and statues, Vernon suggested that they should sit down and "take an easy"—he wanted to have Stella's thoughts centred on himself again. Stella had soon discovered that it was the general grandeur and the magic effect of the colouring which appealed to him; the history and meaning of the various parts of the temple bored him, though he tried not to show it when he saw her joy in looking at certain reliefs and statues which she recognized as relating to the little store of Egyptology she had laid up in her memory. When they came across cartouches and reliefs which had obviously been damaged by vindictive hands, Vernon asked if it was the work of fanatical Mohammedans. He knew they hated graven images and "false gods." When Stella told him that it was either the work of Christians, or it might be of the heretic king Amen-hetep IV., who tried to overthrow the gods of the priests of Amon and teach the children of Egypt, more than one thousand years before Christ's coming, almost the same religious beliefs and morals as the broad-minded and intellectual classes in the world are accepting to-day, he said "by Jove!" and no more. To Stella the character of this great reformer was tremendously interesting, and his life's story strangely pathetic, so much so that she tried to interest her lover in his personality. But Vernon said he could not picture to himself the personality of any real individual who existed so long ago; besides, he thought he must have been a beastly fanatic to have hacked about the reliefs and destroyed the images of the gods of his people, the sort of crank that wouldn't be tolerated by decent people to-day.

"I *hate* fanatics," he said; "I have no use for them."

"But Christianity has only endured through fanaticism," Stella said; "no religion, however great, could have survived the cruel persecution of other sects and the neglect of the apathetic but for its fanatics. This temple has suffered far more damage from the fanaticism of the religious enthusiasts than it has ever done from earthquakes or the mutilation of the ignorant."

They had seated themselves on the drum of a fallen column, and Stella was telling him about the early Christian church that had once been built into a part of the temple, and how the Christians in their mad zeal had smashed the statues, disfigured the reliefs, and desecrated the shrines, not only in the portion they had selected for their church but in the temple generally, when she suddenly stopped and looked round, for she heard a footstep close behind her. As she turned to see who it was her eyes met the eyes of the man who had looked at her with so much interest on the night at the opera. His personality had never faded from her memory; his strong face had appeared to her over and over again at the most unlikely moments. Now, for a reason she was totally unconscious of, she felt the hot blood fly to her face.

He lifted his hat. "I hope you will forgive me," he said—"I have been listening to what you said about the Christian church because I was so much interested, and I was waiting to give you this . . . you dropped it when you rose from where you were sitting near the chapel of Mut. I happened to hear it fall or I should not have seen it."

Stella took the object he handed to her eagerly. "Oh, thank you so much!" she said, "I wouldn't have lost it for worlds. I wonder how it came off." She looked at her gold chain from which the charm had become detached; there were other two charms still left on it. One was a silver hand of Fatma (the daughter of the Prophet), in ancient filigree work; the other was an Italian charm in silver representing St. Joseph and the infant Christ: the face of the bambino had been almost obliterated with kissing long before Stella possessed it. The one which had just been restored was a triangle of dull green stone, with a hole drilled through it large enough to hold a thick string. It almost resembled a heart.

The stranger smiled when he saw the Christian, Pagan, and Mohammedan charms hanging on the same chain. "You are well protected!"

Stella's eyes smiled back . . . "The one you found," she held out the greenish stone, "is pre-Sikelian; it would have been dreadful to have lost it—found in the ruins *here* what confusion it might have caused!"

“May I look at it?” he said. He caressed the smooth surface of the time-worn stone with appreciative fingers. “I don’t know the stone; where did it come from?”

“I got it at Ferento, near Viterbo in Italy; I thought it was Roman, for there is an old Roman theatre there, and lots of Roman remains, but an authority told me it was perhaps pre-Sikelian.” She turned to Vernon: “You’ve not seen it. I like to think it has been worn by an unknown people.”

“I wonder what *unknown* evil it was supposed to avert,” the stranger said, “or what unknown good it was to bring; but if it was worn by a woman it no doubt possessed the same old virtues as all the other charms worn by primitive women possessed; their amulets have never changed.”

“What virtue was that?” Vernon asked; “what did they wear it for?”

The girl’s eyes half met the eyes of the stranger; they both knew! Already she had discovered that there was much this stranger understood which Vernon did not.

“To ensure the birth of sons and keep the love of their husbands.” It was the stranger who spoke.

Vernon laughed. “They had only two ideas, two desires, poor things?”

“They are the first desires of every woman still,” the stranger said; “modern or ancient, the real woman changes very little. One notices that in the carvings on the temples the Egyptians seem to have allowed their women as much freedom as the Greeks: the kings and queens are often represented together. There are some fine women in Egyptian history.”

“Yes, indeed; if Egypt never produced a ‘Sappho,’ it undoubtedly has its Queen Elizabeth, and a very remarkable one too; the women of ancient Egypt appear to have been far less restricted than the modern Mohammedan women are. I wonder when the custom of veiling and all the other restrictions began—far before the Prophet’s time, of course.”

“It’s a curious thing,” the stranger said, “the way women have asserted themselves in history, even in the countries where they apparently play unimportant parts. Japan had a woman for one of its finest poet-philosophers, China has had an Empress whose name will never die out

in the history of her country, Egypt had Queen Hatshepsut, and Assyria Semiramis; the Jews had many famous women, the fair Esther amongst their number."

Vernon remained almost silent while Stella and the stranger let their conversation drift from one topic to another. There was an unconscious chord of sympathy between them which facilitated conversation, and to those who have travelled in strange lands the understanding of so unconventional an incident needs no explanation.

When the stranger left them Vernon said, "How do you know all these things? That chap could have talked on for ever."

"I suppose he's lonely. Did he bore you? *I am* so sorry. I thought he was very interesting: he can read most of the cartouches, and he seems to be as taken as I am with the character of Amen-hetep IV. . . . he appears to have read everything there is to be read about him."

"*Amen* . . . what did you say—who was the chap?"

"The heretic king I spoke to you about who tried to overthrow the power of the political priests of Amon-Ra, and teach his people the religion of Truth and Beauty, and the belief that God is in all things—that in worshipping the beauties of nature you are worshipping God."

Vernon laughed. "Good Lord! Who was Amon-Ra?"

"The god who was the supreme god over all the gods in Egypt for a very long period; the priests of Amon-Ra were as strong a political body as the Popes of Rome, and for a far longer period of history."

Vernon looked at Stella with a growing wonder in his eyes. "You talk of all these Johnnies as if they were quite real; they seem as familiar to you as historical characters like Becket and Wolsey are to English school-boys."

"Indeed, I'm not familiar with them—I wish I were; but they are awfully real to me. All this is awfully real." She pointed to the reliefs carved on the walls. "It's awfully real because Egypt was the beginning of everything; I feel that it was the nursery from which we all sprang. Maspero says that 'Egypt is the mother of most of the ideas that have ruled the world, and the children of that mother are the Copts.'"

"And *I* feel that you're awfully clever," he said, putting his arm tenderly round her. "I'm getting rather alarmed."

Stella turned to him quickly, and looked at him with fear in her eyes. "Don't say that, dearest, it makes me feel I'm a bore . . . men, when they know ever so much about a subject, keep it all to themselves ; women, when they know ever so little, talk about it all the time." She sighed. "You see, I've wanted to see Upper Egypt, and especially Luxor, for as long as I can remember, and now that I'm actually here, well, it seems too wonderful." She linked her arm in his, and lover-like, they again wandered slowly round the great building, looking at things casually and quickly because the girl felt that the man at her side was only interested in the magnificence of the masonry and the gigantic size of the stones and columns ; that he only listened to what she told him about the various courts and sanctuaries to please her ; that without her by his side he would not have looked at them at all.

If there was a twinge of disappointment in Stella's heart she was unaware of it, for Vernon was to her so whole-souledly the thing she loved, that it never entered her head to expect any more from him. What he did not take a great interest in she felt rather ashamed of enjoying so much ; what did arouse his interest, the exact measurements and size, she accepted as too scientific for her to comprehend. In the intervals between his love-making, which was certainly excusable after not having seen her for almost a year, and Stella had never looked more attractive, the girl found her thoughts going back to some of the things the stranger had been talking about ; he had asked her, for instance, if any attempt had ever been made to discover the embalmed body of Jacob in the cave of the field of Machpelah, for it is plainly enough stated in the Bible that Joseph, who was in Egypt at the time of his father's death, had Jacob's body brought to Egypt and most expensively embalmed, and then sent back to the land of Canaan to be buried in the cave which Abraham had bought for a family burying-place from Ephron the Hittite. As Jacob's body took four days to embalm, it must have cost Joseph about £240, for that was the cost of mummifying a body in the first-class manner at the time. More than once Stella wondered who the stranger could be, and if she would ever see him again. How delightful it would be, she thought, to have such a man in their party when they were doing the ancient monuments !

## CHAPTER VIII

WHEN they returned to the dahabeah Nicolas met them at the gangway with the announcement that Girgis Boutros had arrived, and was discussing some important business with their father. Nicolas watched Stella very closely as he spoke; he saw her face turn a shade paler and her upper lip tremble. She turned instantly to Vernon. "Girgis is my cousin," she said; "he is a cotton farmer in the Fayyum; he will interest you, I think." There was no time for more talk at the moment, for one of the silent-moving servants, in his jebba of yellow and black striped silk, suddenly began clashing a dinner gong. It seemed to give this dignified figure of the East infinite pleasure to break the stillness of the Theban evening by banging on an instrument shaped like an iron shield with a drumstick as loudly as he possibly could.

Before the second gong had sounded Stella and her lover were both on deck: it was an ideal lovers' hour, full of the sensuous beauty of the East.

Vernon noticed the exquisite simplicity of Stella's dinner gown; her slim straightness appealed to his athletic eye as she stood outlined against the violet dark of the night sky; the moon had not yet climbed the Theban hills, but the first evening star was glowing in the sky like a ship's light above them on a high mast. While Stella had been dressing curious thoughts had been drifting across her mind, half-formed thoughts which made her angry with herself, for they had arisen from the fact that the things which the stranger had said to her in the temple had opened up a sort of chasm in her mind as regards Vernon. Quite unconsciously she had asked herself the question, "When Vernon is not making love to me what shall we talk about? What have we in common? What did we talk about before we were engaged? Now we only seem to talk about

ourselves. Shall I bore him in the future? Do I even bore him now?" Then the idea that she might be robbed of his love reduced her to a state of almost nervous exhaustion. Now, standing beside him in the terrible "stillness of Africa," under a limitless sky, a sky whose darkness gave shelter to the unseen things of ancient Thebes, things which find cover in the day-time in the tombs of Pharaohs and in the secret places of the sanctuaries, but which draw ever nearer and ever nearer to human souls by night, she was conscious only of the security and delight she felt in his near presence; a sudden re-establishing of her faith in herself came to her. What did it matter if they never talked at all, when their silence was full of such eloquent understanding? Her fear that she had bored him with her more serious enjoyment of the temple was quickly wiped out, for in his eyes she read an increasing passion for herself. The contrast between them was striking: Vernon, with all his boyish fairness, had the muscular activity of the biblical David in his limbs, and his blue eyes held but one expression, his desire for the girl at his side; Stella's dark hair intensified the ivory pallor of her clear skin; her lean body, in its virginal purity, looked like the figure of some dancing girl of ancient Egypt, but unlike her lover's, *her* eyes held not *one*, but many expressions in their mysterious depths. Her love for the man at her side was the surface-light which made the dark waters shine like bottomless lakes.

The feelings Vernon roused in her were feelings she did not understand, and as they stirred her into a state of exaltation she interpreted them as the highest love a woman can feel, her love for the man whom Fate has destined to be her other half. Miss MacNaughtan had taught her favourite pupil many things, as much as the most broad-minded teacher could have taught a highly strung, sensitive girl of twenty; but Stella was left to discover for herself the vital truths of life which no woman can teach another.

"Stella," Vernon suddenly said, "you look so sweet, I shan't eat one bit of dinner; you really haven't any right to look so delicious. I must hold you in my arms for one minute." They were standing in the bows of the boat, which were curtained off on all sides but the front, so as to form a small smoking-room for the evening when it was chilly.

Stella leant gently towards him. She was pliant as a river reed, and so slender that he swore he could scarcely feel her in his arms. As he pressed kisses on her white throat and closed eyes, she was passive in his arms, and unconsciously responsive to his demands. Suddenly they started apart, for Girgis Boutros had silently entered the curtained enclosure.

Vernon looked as though he had seen a ghost, for never before had Girgis looked so curiously Egyptian. His dark eyes shone with anger, his white teeth gleamed under the cruel smile which curled his clearly cut lips—Eastern lips as blood-red as the scarlet of his high tarbush, which gave an added height to his splendid physique. For a moment there was silence, and in that moment Stella knew that the two men would one day hate each other.

Quickly regaining her composure she said, "Vernon, this is my cousin Girgis Boutros. Girgis, this is the Englishman I am going to marry, Vernon Thorpe."

Girgis inclined his head but the quarter of an inch, he did not hold out his hand. Vernon, who had not yet got over the shock of seeing what he called a full-blooded "ancient Egyptian," in evening dress, suddenly drop down from the stars (for he had quite forgotten the fact that Stella had mentioned the coming of her cousin), said to the stone image with flashing eyes, "How do you do?" in a stiff and meaningless English fashion; he didn't in the least care how the fellow was, he only wished one thing, that the image with moving eyes of black glass would jolly well take itself back to wheresoever it had come from, if it was from some Pharaoh's tomb or from the mural decoration of the temple they had just quitted, and leave him alone with Stella.

But Girgis did not go; he stood motionless, rooted to the deck, nor could he speak, for his brain was on fire and his passions were maddened by the thought of what he had seen.

He had seen his cousin Hadassah (his pure, virgin cousin as he had thought), his uncle's cherished daughter, in the arms of this red-faced Englishman, this Englishman who was looking at him now with all the contempt that an Englishman shows in his eyes for a man whose skin is darker than his own. It was impossible for him to believe that Stella had not lost her virginity. She had certainly

told him that English girls knew the men quite intimately whom they meant to marry, but such an outrageous thing as a lover holding a girl in his arms and kissing her before she was his wife was only possible when the girl had been his mistress.

“What has suddenly brought you to Luxor, Girgis?” Stella said. “Is anything wrong?”

“I have told your father,” he said; “we cannot discuss it, if you please.”

Stella smiled and turned to Vernon. “That is how he speaks to me when anything of political importance occurs.” She turned to her cousin: “I read about the disturbances in Asiut, and all about the coming election of a new Mudir. If the Copt is elected there will be no end of trouble, won’t there?”

“He will *not* be elected,” Girgis said, “and yet there will be trouble.”

“What news have you brought, Girgis?” Stella said; “please tell me: I am not a child—I must hear it all eventually.”

“You are a woman. I cannot tell you, if you please. But the English will never allow the election of a Copt as Mudir, even in Asiut.”

“How could they?” Stella said; “you know quite well, Girgis, that the position of a Copt Mudir would be an impossible one.”

“Why?” Vernon asked. “What is a Mudir?”

“A Mudir holds a high executive post,” Stella said, “for which a Copt, with his inability to rule, is totally unsuited. His own life would be in danger, as well as those of the authorities who supported him.”

“Why?” Vernon asked.

“Because Copts may be prosperous,” Stella said, “but they are *not* popular, and my cousin knows it.”

“Boutros Pasha! do not forget him, if you please.”

“Oh! he was an exception.”

“There may be many exceptions if the English would give them the opportunity or look for them.”

Vernon listened to him keenly. So Stella’s cousin was anti-English as well as a full-blooded native! How strange it all was! He felt suddenly as if he were a new creature transported to a new planet.

Stella laughed. "Oh, Girgis, you know quite well the English have tried them in lots of posts, but where a man of action is needed . . . a man who can command ready obedience from his subordinates and the population generally, they were failures—you can't deny it."

"What chance have they to learn to command when they are always treated as subordinates—subordinates to Moslems in a country ruled by Christians? But I tell you it will not always be so: the Copts have the brains of the country, and brains will win in the end."

"If they have no executive qualities they will always have to use their brains for men who can rule; in history that has always been the case, you foolish boy."

"To you I may seem very foolish, but wait and see: the English will not always . . ." he stopped, for at that moment the dinner-gong sounded for the second time. As they walked towards the dining-room, Stella said to Vernon, "Please don't think I have no sympathy for the Copts; I have, but I think they are mistaken, their grievances are exaggerated; and Girgis knows better than most of us how totally unfit a Copt is to hold the position of Mudir even at Asiut, where nearly all the inhabitants are Christians: but we must avoid politics with Girgis; he's awfully wrong-headed; he'll know better when he's older."

"How complicated politics are out here!" he said. "I thought there was only the Pan-Islamic trouble with the English, I had no idea we were so hated all round."

"You aren't hated, and you are hated," Stella said: "the feeling can't be explained, but you will soon understand, and if you're *just*, you'll see how stiff-necked the British are; I sympathize with the Copts a great deal except when I'm with Girgis . . . he goes too far; I feel very English with him, which angers him most awfully."

"In what way are the British stiff-necked?"

Stella flushed. "Oh, in lots of ways!"

"Why is your cousin so bitter?" he said. "Does he want a job?"

Stella laughed. "Want a *job*? Oh! no, it's partly, I think, because his father's people are Copts, and he resents the position the Copts hold in the eyes of the Government: they fill all sorts of posts as clerks (in the administrative section of the service there are far more

Copts than Moslems), but they hold none of the higher posts . . . none of the well-paid positions of authority. Girgis is very wealthy—he has no personal grudge.” Stella could not help smiling to herself at the idea of Girgis, with all his wealth, wanting a job.

While they had been talking, Girgis had become lost to sight.

Vernon took her hand in his. “It’s awfully hard to realize that you’re his first cousin, dear.”

“Girgis is rather a dear,” Stella said (she instantly resented what Vernon’s words conveyed), “and you’ll soon discover that Stella Adair died when she left England nine months ago . . .” she looked at him with passionate eyes . . . “you must try to love Hadassah Lekejian a little, Vernon.”

“You darling!” he said, “I only wish we were married and alone, just you and I, on this Nile boat, with no Copt cousin or gassing strangers to take you away for one minute from me.”

Stella laughed happily. “Were you jealous of the stranger in the temple, dear? I *believe* you were!”

“Of course I was,” he said; “he made me feel how stupid I was, how little I could talk to you about all the things that interest you.” He paused and then said quickly, “You didn’t use to care about all these things.”

She pressed his hand and whispered. “Always be jealous like that, Vernon; always think these things.”

They had entered the dining-room, and Vernon was amazed at the sight the dinner-table presented. In a land where no flowers grow except in the irrigated gardens of the wealthy and in public grounds it was an unexpected pleasure to see exquisite flowers on a dinner-table. The low lights, which were hidden by the mass of white blossoms, gave an air of mystery to the room, whose walls were covered with the strange figures of animal-gods and with long texts from the Koran in Arabic-writing appliqués in gorgeous hues on grey canvas. Egyptians use these decorative texts for the glorifying of their ceremonial tents on festive occasions.

Jackals with sharp noses seemed to peer out of the half-darkness, pointing the direct way across the desert to liberated souls on their fearsome journey; gods in the

form of men with apes' heads leered at Vernon as he seated himself at the daintily appointed table. His place was next to Mrs. Lekejian, who talked to him in English, while Girgis spoke in Arabic to her husband. A Frenchman, attached to the French excavation camp at Assouan, was speaking French to Nicolas: they were old college friends. The major-domo of the dahabeah, who was an Italian, always spoke in his own language to the Lekejians, for precautionary reasons.

Vernon was amazed. He had never heard so many languages spoken by a small party with such complete familiarity before; it brought home to him his own limitations, for each time that any one of the party addressed him, it had to be in English. His French had just been strong enough to allow him to scramble through his army exams. Like many of the other things which had been crammed into him for that occasion, it had long since slipped out, but he looked very well-bred, and he and Mrs. Lekejian found plenty to laugh at and talk about. He asked her if she was as keen about the old Egyptian things as her daughter; she confessed that she was not. "My garden has been my hobby," she said; "you can do anything here with a garden, you know, if you have plenty of water . . . these flowers came from it this morning. Stella takes all her intellectual tastes and talents from her father—Syrians are so clever. I used to feel very stupid amongst them at first: they can learn anything they want to."

"You can't think what a duffer I feel," Vernon said; "I can only speak one language, and I don't understand a single thing about anything I see out here except the size of the buildings."

Mrs. Lekejian laughed her girlish, Irish laugh. "Stella knows enough for both of you, I think, and no one expects an English soldier to be intellectual, so don't feel worried."

"Your nephew can speak French and Italian, and far better English than ever I could speak French." Vernon did not add that in England he had thought a good linguist must be either a diplomat or a waiter—both had to learn languages for their professions.

Mrs. Lekejian saw him look at Girgis long and seriously. Both her nephew and her husband were wearing their

scarlet tarbushes . . . Girgis' gleaming eyes and black head, and her husband's dignified and patriarchal appearance, gave a very Oriental touch to the scene.

"A penny for your thoughts!" Stella suddenly said as she, too, caught Vernon's absorbed expression.

He started. A guilty flush deepened the delightful pink of his fair skin. "I was thinking," he said in an under-tone, "how remarkably good-looking your cousin is, and how serious he is for a chap of his age."

"He is splendid-looking," Stella said; "did you ever see such wonderful colouring? 'Sun-burning' isn't the word for the mixture of brown and brick-red in his cheeks. . . . He leads such a healthy life, you know . . . in the saddle all day long under a desert sun. On his farm they have the oldest and the newest of everything . . . electric ploughs, if there are such things, and camel-ploughs made of old acacia-wood, working side by side—Girgis is very different from the ordinary wealthy Egyptian."

She was anxious to let Vernon see that Girgis was not a benighted Copt of early-Christian prejudices, but her lover's eyes gave her no returning smile, he was looking at her cousin as though he were nothing more human or nearly connected to himself and Stella than the images of the animal-gods in scarlet and blue and orange on the walls behind them. Stella had noticed that Girgis during dinner had given her none of his customary polite bows; in his eyes there was a curious expression which she had never seen before. But it pleased her to notice how admirably her brother and Vernon got on together: they seemed to have plenty to talk about, for Nicolas could tell him all about the various clubs, though Vernon was surprised to find that he did not offer to put him up for any one of them. With great tact Mr. Lekejian had kept Girgis talking to himself. He had at once felt the atmosphere of antagonism with which his nephew regarded his future son-in-law, and had taken care that Girgis should not express during the meal any anti-English sentiments. More than once Stella heard her father telling him to be less prejudiced, to talk as he really felt, not as he thought he would *like* to feel; she could not hear all that passed between them, but she could catch enough to know that Girgis, who had been staying with a cousin

in Asiut, had brought the latest news of the coming election. Mr. Lekejian had a certain amount of sympathy for the Copts, who considered themselves slighted by the Government; he understood their grievances just as he understood the feelings of an Irish Nationalist, but wide experience had taught him that the English did not treat them unjustly, that their inability to hold high posts of authority was as much regretted by the English as by themselves. Neither the Copts nor the Mohammedans were, in his opinion, the least capable of ruling their country for their country's good. Self-interest was too deeply engrained in their natures to permit of anything like proper justice to the fellahin.

When they left the dining-room the moon was high enough in the heavens for Karnak to be illuminated by its light, so Stella begged her lover and Nicolas to hurry over their Arab coffee, which was made to absolute perfection, and start off. Stella did not ask if Girgis would go with them; she took it for granted that he was returning by the last train to Cairo. In a very few minutes they were on their way to see the ruins of the mightiest temple on earth. In an excited and happy humour they engaged three splendid white donkeys, gaily bedizened with turquoise necklaces of blue beads and magnificent silver chains, and three tall Egyptians in clinging white shirts with turbaned heads. As they trotted along the road to Karnak, which looked as white as snow in the moonlight—that country road which is surely one of the most picturesque highways in the world?—Vernon's one feeling was that he had suddenly been transplanted into the book of Genesis. The stately figures they passed were so completely biblical, the things they did were so illustrative of the parables in the Old Testament. He saw Moses, and Aaron, and all the prophets, and Mary, the mother of the prophet Jesus, riding on her gentle-footed ass, followed by her amiable spouse. If a pillar of fire had suddenly risen up in front of them to show them the way to the temple, he would not have been surprised; indeed, if they had met the children of Israel bearing the ark of the covenant of God, it would have seemed quite in keeping with their surroundings. The bare-footed women who glided along, trailing their black garments in the dust

behind them, bearing on their shawled heads huge baskets filled with household utensils, or crates with eggs and live chickens, and even small basins containing boiled food, seemed to him like funeral mourners returning from a burial. Their blackness was blacker than anything he had ever seen before, for even their head-burdens were smothered in black.

The solemnity of the East amazed him !

Only the men bore no burdens : their stately turbaned heads were carried with the pride of an ancient race which has seen centuries come and go, leaving its customs and its peoples unchanged ; men whose women have been burden-bearers ever since the day when Eve was created to bear Adam's son.

And withal there was peace in the domestic scenes of these tillers of the land returning to their homes, desert homes which lay not two miles away from the market of the city. A peace which mingled with the Eastern stillness increased the feeling of complete severance from modernity which had taken possession of Vernon's mind. He did not like the feeling, and he kept wondering to himself how English people could live anywhere but in England from choice.

Their donkeys, after the custom of the East, preferred to go in Indian file, so conversation was not easy, but he heard Stella and Nicolas now and then speaking to the natives who passed them. This again bewildered Vernon's conservative mind. In London Stella had been, in his idea, a beautiful English girl who had little or no connection with the East, beyond the fact that her parents lived in Cairo. He knew that lots of English people lived in Cairo, so the fact had conveyed very little to him ; he had seen her mother, who was a charming Irishwoman. In Luxor, Stella seemed a totally different being. To hear her chatting in Arabic with turbaned Orientals riding on hideous brown buffaloes, or with veiled women carrying ridiculous burdens on their hidden heads, gave him an uneasy feeling which he did not like—it distanced her from him more completely than his feeling earlier in the day of his inability to keep up with her mental adaptability.

As they approached the avenue of stone rams lying like crouching beasts at the foot of dark palms which

soared into the white moonlight, they met a stately Arab in long black robes; his head and shoulders were swathed in white, his hands folded serenely across his breast. He salaamed profoundly without uncrossing his arms. He was not a high priest of Amon, but the night-guardian of the temple: it was his duty to show strangers round it. Nicolas assured him that they did not want a guide . . . that they would not attempt to penetrate into the heart of the ruins anywhere alone. "Monsieur Le Grain him very cross! To all places you wish to go I will go too, my gen-le-man. I will conduct you, but I will not disturb you; I understand very well."

"*Tayib*" (good), Nicolas said; "show us the way: take us first to the grand colonnade and afterwards to some very high point from which we can see the moon shining on the buildings; but remember we wish silence, not information."

"*Tayib*," the sheikh repeated politely; "I know my gen-le-man, him no tourist-man. I take you very nice place; moon him very fine to-night. My lady, you trust me." He bowed profoundly to Stella.

With perfect ease he glided from block to block of the fallen stone amongst the thousands that made an earthquake of ancient marbles, while they followed him with difficulty, picking their way across the ruins, and passing under *pylons* as perfect as the gateways of mediæval castles, and down avenues of leering beasts, while above their heads there soared obelisks and giant columns. Vernon had never imagined such a nightmare of fallen ruins or such grotesque imagery as he saw painted on the walls and columns; he felt like a beetle or a rat skulking among the ruins of a mightier and grander world.

Presently the sheikh forgot his promise of silence and began telling them the names of the various parts of the main temple of Amon-Ra, through which they were passing, but Stella silenced him. "Don't speak," she said to him in Arabic; "no human mind can take in more than a meaningless impression of Karnak . . . at first sight. Its size and wonder is enough for to-night."

"*Tayib sitt*, I forgot you not tourist peoples, you not ask questions."

## CHAPTER IX

WHEN at last they found themselves actually in the "Hall of the Columns," the mightiest of the mighty buildings which the great Rameses completed and set his seal upon—even Vernon gasped, but not a word was spoken. The sheikh took himself off, as silently as a shadow, to a comfortable resting-place on the top of a fallen column which measured thirty-five feet in circumference. As though he had no bones in his stately body, he curled himself up like a cat and began to smoke; soon he was fast asleep, or appeared to be so. Karnak, with its awfulness and its beauty, was nothing to him. If it *was* two thousand years old, he had spent half his nights in it for the last twenty years; custom had killed its age! Stella sat down between Nicolas and Vernon and slipped a hand into an arm of each; she wanted humanity close to her.

For a little time they were afraid to speak lest their words to each other should seem absurd—for what words could even dimly express the thunder of emotion which the first impression of that hall of unearthly vastness calls up? The very silence which surrounded them was Egyptian in its depths. It was a silence suggestive of the distant Sahara, a silence expressive of untrodden sands and the stillness of uncounted centuries: they could feel its calm beyond the debris of the fallen Thebes. It was a stillness which was rendered even more still by the sharp barking now and then of desert dogs.

It was Nicolas who spoke first. "It's curious," he said, "how the Egyptian statues, which look so prim and so *unreal* by day, become so terribly human by moonlight. I thought that row of Osirises with folded arms looked amazingly human as we passed them, didn't you? They were like a guard of living giants protecting the temple."

Stella shivered. "I feel as if a thousand things had come

to life again, things with unfriendly eyes that follow us from point to point, things we can't see, with eyes we only feel." She gave a sigh. "It's quite comforting to look up at the sky and see the friendly stars shining down upon us between the columns—there's nothing sinister about them."

"I like that obelisk over there," Vernon said; "it looks as if it was pointing at the moon."

"That particular obelisk," Stella said, "was put up by a woman more than two thousand years ago; she was the famous Queen Hatshepset, the Queen Elizabeth of Egyptian history I was speaking about to-day; she ordered two obelisks to be hewn out of the best granite quarries at Assouan and brought down to Thebes and set upon the front of the temple of Amon-Ra in seven months' time; their points were covered with silver and gold, so that they would shine in the sun and show from a long distance. They were an offering to 'Father Amon,' so she said, but a good part of the honour was to satisfy her most vain and ambitious majesty."

Both Nicolas and Vernon looked for a few moments at the soaring obelisk of granite, and then Vernon said: "How like a woman to have them done in that wild hurry! What a job it must have been! Women were evidently just the same then as now."

"She was a wonder, anyhow," Stella said; "you'll hear plenty about her at Thebes, won't he, Nicolas?"

"I'm not half as well up in all that sort of thing as you are, Stella" (he made a point of calling her by the name she had borne in England—he hardly knew why—to-night), "but I suppose she was about the most important woman in Egyptian history. She was wild about exploration parties: Punt was the great place in her days, not the North Pole."

"What about Cleopatra?" Vernon asked; "wasn't she more important?"

"Oh, no," Stella said laughingly, "Cleopatra only came in at the tail-end of real Egyptian history; it was her love affairs with Julius Cæsar and Mark Antony that made her name famous to the world, she is of no account in *Egyptian* history proper."

"I didn't know that she had ever met Cæsar," said Vernon.

In a few minutes Nicolas rose and left them; he made

it his excuse that he wanted to measure the circumference of the largest of the fallen drums. He had not been gone more than two minutes before Vernon's arm was slipped round Stella's waist, and he had taken one of her hands in his own.

Stella sat in exquisite content: the magnetic contact of her lover, mingled with the mysteriousness of her surroundings, rendered her incapable of clear and practical thought. The half-lit figures of unknown gods, the clear-cut reliefs of warriors and their captives which caught the light of the moon on tower-like columns and walls, the gaily coloured cartouches of countless Pharaohs, and the wide-spread wings of the beetle god Kepher-Ra, met her dreaming eyes at every point. In the great hall there was scarcely a square foot of masonry, fallen or upstanding, which did not illustrate a tale of ancient glory.

Until to-night she had no idea that there was anything existing in the world that approached the ancient glory of Solomon's temple, the temple of the Jews so extolled in the Bible. Now she was sure that this hall of the ancient Egyptians had been far greater. In Egypt alone man seemed almost to have approached his Maker in the magnificence of his conceptions!

At intervals in the wonderful silence Vernon pressed Stella's hand a little closer, and she, knowing what he meant, leant towards him and raised her lips silently to his. Her thoughts were not always of the man at her side, but his human presence was comforting, and the very practical turn of his imagination helped her.

"What are these dogs making that infernal barking for?" he asked. His thoughts were of the senses, for his cigarette was perfect and Stella was delicious. "This is 'top hole' if they'd only stop."

"To protect the farms which lie far out on the Libyan desert—they are quite close to the hills. Wolves come at night and attack the sheep."

"Do they really? Is it still as wild as that, with Luxor lying so near? By Jove! it's wonderful." With an Englishman's love of sport, his mind was awakened.

"It is very wild over there. Nicolas and I rode out to see a Coptic monastery—such a weird old place, like a collection of bee-hives! But the dogs terrified me: they

were quite as savage as wolves. I thought they would tear the donkey-boys to pieces." She started, and stopped speaking quite nervously, for Girgis Boutros had suddenly appeared in front of them. His eyes were fixed on Vernon, whose lips were stealing a kiss from Stella's throat. "Oh, Girgis," Stella said, "how you startled me! I had no idea you were coming to Karnak. How on earth did you know where to find us?"

"Your donkey-boy is standing at the outer *pylon*—he told me where you were."

"But how did *he* know? The *pylon* is half a mile away!"

Girgis shrugged his shoulders. "I do not know: *how is everything known in Egypt?*"

Stella shivered. "How indeed! I always feel that everything knows—even the buffaloes: they've known everything since prehistoric times."

Stella felt ill at ease; she saw that Vernon resented the intrusion of her cousin, and did not mean to make himself agreeable. As nothing was said between them, and Girgis evidently did not intend to go and leave them to enjoy each other's company alone, she rose to her feet. Though she made no noise, the sleeping guardian instantly uncurled himself from the flat top of the fallen drum of sandstone, and, gliding over the mass of ruins as easily as though he was walking on a polished floor, was at her side.

"My lady, she like to sit up very high and see all the temples of the world under the full moon?"

"Yes," Stella said, "call my brother and tell him we are going."

"Yes, my lady . . . your gen-le-man he wait by you, I go find your brother very soon; him looking at lotus obelisk; him very *nice* gen-le-man."

Stella thought Girgis might have offered to go with the guardian and leave her to enjoy the society of her lover in solitude, but he did not . . . there was something about him to-night which unconsciously angered her. His silence was laden with antagonism, his eyes expressed the same horror at her lover's intimacy as they had done earlier in the evening; she felt nervous and oppressed. It was quite a relief when Nicolas and the guardian re-appeared; even then, without wishing it, she found herself walking with

Girgis some little way behind the others, she was conscious of having obeyed his will.

Suddenly he spoke to her in words which ought to have startled her, but they did not—he had in some curious way forced his thoughts upon her. “You will not marry this Englishman,” he said; “why do you let him kiss you? Why is he like a husband or a master?”

Stella stopped. “Why do *you* speak to me like that, Girgis? You have no right to! I will marry him; he loves me . . .” her voice trembled. “I am *engaged* to him, that is why he may kiss me.”

“I love you too,” he said, “but I would not insult you in that manner. I would give you everything you ask for in the world; you are my star, I will follow you. If you marry this man you will be untrue to your own people, you will be always unhappy.”

“Don’t—you *mustn’t* speak like that, you are my cousin. I am going to marry Vernon—how cruel of you to say such things!” Her words were almost a cry.

“Yes,” he said, “I am your cousin, and *I* would not despise your people . . . for they are my people. I would give you all my moneys to help to raise the ignorant—you can be their saviour! . . .”

“Vernon does not despise them—how dare you say so? If you loved me you would not think it. Oh, Girgis, it’s so cruel of you to speak of such things when I was so happy!”

“He already despises me, and I know it, if you please, and *you* also know it! You are destined, like the Esther of old, to save your people; this man will not let you. If he marries you he will separate you from them for ever, and do his best to make every one think you are English.”

“You don’t know, you don’t understand; if you despise him, why shouldn’t he despise you? . . .”

“No,” he said, interrupting her, “I hate him”; and as he said the words all the sinister meaning of the unseen forms filled the temple with their presence, and all the graven images which looked down at them from the high places seemed to echo his words . . . “I hate him, he despises your people.”

“You hate him,” she said, “because *I* love him, because he has made me happy? It is unkind of you.”

Her fear of his anger made her almost conciliatory in her manner of speaking to him ; her fear was for Vernon.

“ I hate him because he will make you *unhappy*, because already he treats you . . . as his ‘ darling ’ . . . he does not respect you or he would not do it.” (He used the word which Orientals in Cairo use for an Englishman’s mistress.)

“ It is your Oriental mind that makes you think such things.” Her anger was rising. “ What is the matter with you to-night ? You imagine all sorts of evil things : I will not even be your friend if you cannot behave with proper respect to me. What has angered you ? ”

“ I cannot tell you, if you please . . . but it is not *I* who do not treat you with proper respect, for I saw you in his arms ! In England does a man marry the young woman who allows him to hold her in his arms, the woman whom he kisses like a dancing-girl ? Does your brother know and permit him to live ? ”

Stella laughed. Poor Girgis, with his Eastern notions of veiled and unseen brides, how it must have shocked him ! He had evidently never imagined that engaged couples kissed one another—her anger cooled. “ Of course he does, you foolish boy ; I am going to marry him ; he is an Englishman . . . in England lovers are allowed to kiss each other—there is no harm in that.”

“ I am not a boy, if you please, I am a man ; but, as you say, I *do not* understand ! The English are very improper, yet they are proud of the position their women hold. I see no modesty in Englishwomen if that is what they allow ; you should not have been educated there.”

“ You don’t understand : it is because their minds are so modest that they can do these things. I don’t believe any Oriental could ever understand how innocent and pure an English girl’s mind is, or how respectfully her lover thinks of her and kisses her.”

“ Will you explain it to me, if you please ? ”

“ I cannot,” Stella said, “ it is too difficult ; but it is true—you must live amongst English people to understand it.”

“ It is, you say, because an Englishman’s *mind* is so pure that he may kiss and hold in his arms a virgin . . . if it is so pure why does he wish to kiss her, why does he wish to hold her in his arms, why is he not content to behave to her as a brother or father behaves ? ”

“I can't explain, for you contort things so oddly, you see things from such an Eastern point of view. It is more like this.” She thought for a moment. “A man who wishes only to drink a little wine may safely do it, but the man who wishes to drink wine to get drunk must not drink wine at all. Now do you understand?”

“You think an Oriental only wishes to kiss a woman because his thoughts are sensual and carry him further?”

“Yes,” Stella said, interrupting him, “he does not kiss her because he loves her as an Englishman loves her.”

“I have never been in England, but I have seen the behaviour of many Englishmen in Cairo. I think they have not the same *customs* as Orientals, but when they are in Egypt they have the same minds . . . perhaps in their own country they are different . . . I do not know.”

By climbing up a mound of debris which had accumulated against its side walls, they had reached the top of a high *pylon* or temple gateway. Stella gave a little cry of relief and delight. The wonderful scene which had suddenly unfolded itself to them was bathed in the white light of the full moon. The *pylons* of the many temples which surrounded the great mother-building stood up bold and free; the avenues of crouching rams and lions looked mysterious and sinister; the mud villages of the desert, under the gentle moon, lay desolate and Pharaonic. In the far distance the food-giving Nile lay serene and pale like a ribbon of silver stretching across the irrigated land.

The whole world was serene and silent. But for the deep shadow thrown by the high courts at their feet, and the blackness of the palm trees against the clear sky, the hour might have been midday in an English winter, for there was light with a total absence of sun.

They found seats, and their talk drifted to the view before them and of the suitability of the houses and customs of the natives to the ancient buildings which surrounded them. These houses added rather than detracted from the general picturesqueness. “It is the Koran again we have to thank for that,” Nicolas said, “for it forbids all changes: everything ought to remain as it was in the Prophet's time with the true believers, which

means that Eastern customs and Eastern dress are to-day as they were six hundred years after Christ."

"What a jolly good thing they *became* Mohammedans!" Vernon said. "They look ripping; it's like living in the Bible . . . that big temple might be the temple of Solomon and that old Arab guide one of the high priests."

"That is the selfish view the English take of this country," Girgis said; "they do not care for the progress of the people, they only wish the country to remain picturesque for them to visit. It is good for the foreign hotel-keepers."

"Perhaps it is rather a selfish view," Vernon said good-naturedly, "but the people seem quite happy, and perfectly content—I don't see why they need change, do you, Stella? Progress, as you call it, doesn't seem to do them much good, judging from the specimens we get in trade."

Girgis did not let Stella speak. "They are to stand still, and be treated like picturesque children for the English to govern and photograph . . . but I have read of *nothing* that can stand still, if you please. Everything must go back or go forward: if it were not for the Koran Egypt would go forward . . . it will go forward without the Koran. . . ." He spoke meaningly. "That is why you English like the Koran, why the English sympathize with the Mohammedans and ignore the Christians: the advancement of the Christians would mean the advancement of Egypt, but the English do not advance them, they suppress them and give their assistance to the Mohammedan who can never rule his own country, for he cannot progress; but now all countries must progress . . . it is the age of progress."

"Oh, Girgis," Stella said, "you are so rabid on this subject, I will not allow politics to be talked to-night." She spoke laughingly, but she was in earnest, and Girgis knew it.

"Yet only at dinner-time you said, 'Talk politics to me—in England women are interested in the affairs of their country.' You will excuse me, if you please; I did not know you were not speaking the truth; I have much of your customs yet to learn."

He looked so politely apologetic that Nicolas said, "It's all right, old chap, only you must remember that Mr. Thorpe looks at things from an English point of view; he has not

got hold of all the fine points of our complicated scheme of politics.”

He turned to Vernon and tried to make excuse for his cousin's outburst. “You know Girgis is not an idle theorist, he is doing all he can for the progress of his country-people. His farm is quite a model, and he's making it pay, too—what's more. At first the people were amazed at any sort of innovation in their ancient customs, but they got over it, and now they look upon him as a sort of god. Besides improving the land and the agricultural methods of the fellahin, he pays himself for Christian teachers to instruct the Coptic children in the village schools on his estates in Upper Egypt.”

“Does not the Government pay for them?”

“Only when there are a sufficient number of Christian scholars at the school; but the Christian population of the district is allowed to supply a teacher for the school if it wishes to. Girgis is one of the few wealthy Copts who sees that it is done in his district by putting his hand in his pocket.”

“The Christians pay the same taxes as the Mohammedans, but they don't have the teachers,” Girgis said. “I only do a little. . . . I am not married, I am rich, if you please; it is very simple for me.”

“Do be fair, Girgis,” Stella said: “these very schools were originally endowed as Koran schools . . . schools where nothing but the Koran was taught. Many of them were endowed by Mohammedans for that purpose. Now that the Government insists on other subjects being taught . . . it would be unfair to have a Copt master for the very small percentage of Christian scholars who attend them. The Christian children get taught all the other subjects, but the Government does not supply the religious teaching—isn't that nearly it, Nicolas?” she asked.

“Yes,” Nicolas said, “pretty nearly.”

“It is not the Christian religion itself that I so much think about,” Girgis said, “for I am not religious; it is the fact that for the progress of the country a progressive form of religion amongst the governing peoples is necessary . . . the Koran is retrogressive; our boys must not grow to be men without any religion, they are too savage

for that, and so if they go to their schools they will have the Koran or nothing—that is all, if you please.”

“It is very interesting,” Vernon said, “but up till now I never knew that there were any native Christians in Egypt; I never thought about them, anyhow . . . but it seems to me that they have some cause for complaint . . . what do you think?” He turned to Nicolas. . . . “They are rather like our Methodists in their religious discontent.”

“The whole thing is very complex,” Nicolas said; “the English have a difficult time of it, and I think the Copts should have more patience: they certainly possess the brains of the country, as they always did, but it will take them many generations before they can rise above the position of servitude and degradation they have held; you can’t imbibe the special qualities necessary for command, and the power to enforce obedience and respect, as quickly as you can amass facts. . . . The Copts have always used their brains for facts: they are quick to learn new methods, new customs, but for centuries they have been shut off from all positions of dignity and authority, so they have lost the governing instinct.”

“Are all Copts anti-English?” Vernon asked.

“Certainly not,” Nicolas said—“the very opposite: the Christian papers are all *for* the English. *Girgis* is not anti-English really, though you might think so; *he* knows what England has done for the country . . . he knows that not so long ago the *Mohammedans* in Egypt were proud to call themselves *Arabs* in Egypt and *not* Egyptians, *now* they call themselves Egyptians because they wish Egypt for the Moslems! But they need not feel injured, for you have to go back to Heaven knows when to find the epoch in Egyptian history when Egypt was ruled by Egyptians. Egypt has always been ruled by invaders—Persians, Greeks, Romans, Arabs, Bagdad-Circassians, and finally the English.”

“Would the Copts rather have Moslem rule again?”

“Oh no!” said *Girgis* quickly, “we only want justice from the English.”

“Even the Nationalist movement was *anti-Turkish* once,” Nicolas said. “The Pan-Islam feeling was evolved out of it; the uneducated people can only understand the Pan-Islam feeling now. It was a party cry; they were

caught by it, for they could understand the old teaching that it is degrading for a Moslem to be ruled by a Christian; the educated Nationalists knew how to appeal to them."

Vernon lit a cigarette. "It seems to me that people take their religion out here much more seriously than we do at home."

"Yet the Egyptian Mohammedan is *not* a strict one," Nicolas said; "he is nothing like the Tunisian, for instance; he's awfully slack really, and not at all fanatical by nature; and, to prove to you that they appreciate the English codes of justice and honour, it is a well-known fact that the warmest advocate for Egyptian rights pleads for a British rather than an *Egyptian* representative for the administration of water in his *own* province, and one high official, who pleaded for 'more Egyptians' in the Government service, almost in the same breath begged to have his *own* case tried by British judges."

"Then I give it up," Vernon said.

"The Christians only want fair treatment," Girgis repeated; "they wish to share equally with the Moslems the positions which the Government gives to the natives, and to see their country allowed to progress."

"But, Girgis, father says that there are even more Government posts held by Copts than by Moslems."

"That is true," Girgis said, "but even your father cannot be just in what he tells you on that subject, for he is too loyal to the English: they are the poorly paid, humbler posts, posts which carry no pensions, the posts which the Moslems have not the intelligence to fill."

"Then it is a case of £ s. d. after all, rather than religion," Vernon said laughingly, "it generally is—human nature is the same all the world over."

"Of course that is the chief point," Girgis said—"is it not natural?—but they also wish that under Christian rule the Christians in Egypt generally should be treated better socially; it would raise them in the eyes of the Mohammedans, it would restore to them their self-respect."

Stella felt her cheeks grow warm with the blood which mounted to her very hair, her pulses quickened. What would Girgis say next?

“How are they treated?” Vernon asked.

“As outcasts,” Girgis said . . . he turned his onyx eyes on Stella, he saw her lips tremble and the blood leave her face as quickly as it had come into it.

“All Christians, do you mean—the rich as well as the poor?”

Girgis did not speak. Vernon looked towards Nicolas for an answer.

It was Stella who spoke. “Nearly all,” she said very quietly. “I think sometimes the English class even the French in with the ‘natives,’ they are so stiff-necked upon the subject. Perhaps it’s because the French, being more intellectual than the English, sometimes enjoy the society of the cultivated natives, who can teach them many beautiful things, and the English will not receive any one, you know, who mixes with the natives socially.”

“Ah! there you have it,” Vernon said; “it is because they are *natives*, not because they are Christians; the English never mix with the natives of the country they rule—they mustn’t.” He stopped, for, like a flash of lightning, the fact faced him that Stella was what the English would call a native! . . . For a moment his blood ran cold and he felt as though he were paralysed: why had he never thought of it before? What a fool he was—for Girgis, her full cousin, looked as Egyptian as any of the reliefs cut on the monster columns of the temple which lay bathed in the moonlight before them! Tongue-tied, Vernon gazed at him as he stood on the top of the high *pylon*, his exquisite profile and perfect figure silhouetted against the background of the clear night sky; he was like the figure of the youthful king whom the guardian of the temple had pointed out to them as having slain, and strung up, hundreds of Syrians in his victory over them; he had to admit that he was beautiful. His thoughts ran quickly over his short acquaintance with Stella, and his first meeting with her. She had been his sister’s devoted school-friend—was it possible that she had known at that time of the gulf that lay between her people and his? He was sure she had not; he was convinced that she thought of herself always as an Englishwoman, that her mother’s Irish blood was so much stronger in her veins than her father’s Syrian that all that was Eastern in her

nature had been wiped out by her upbringing in England. Then he remembered what she had said to him only a few hours ago, that so much had happened since they had met, that so much had changed in her life, that she had almost expected him to be changed too. Poor Stella! his heart was suddenly full of pity for her; his strong hand sought hers, for Nicolas and Girgis had turned their backs to the lovers.

In silence Stella let her hand rest in his; she wanted his arms round her and his whispered assurance that, native or no native in the eyes of the English, she was Stella Adair to *him*, and that his love for her was unchanged; but she had to remain contented with his sympathetic pressure of her hand. She did not know that he had suddenly realized all that she dreaded his knowing; she was unaware how much of the true meaning of her words he had grasped—words which some power stronger than herself had spoken. Then a tumult of revolt attacked her: she was ashamed of her own shame that here in Egypt she was not Stella Adair but Hadassah Lekejian, the beloved daughter of Nicolas Lekejian, the Syrian. Why was she ashamed of her father's ancient race? Why was she ashamed of her own father, from whom she had inherited any of the talents and intellectual qualities she possessed, talents which had placed her at the head of Miss MacNaughtan's school? Why was she ashamed of being Hadassah Lekejian? Was it just because her lover belonged to the race of prejudiced rulers who despised the East, this virile, *unintellectual* lover of hers, whose mind rarely travelled on the same plane as her own, but whose fine manhood had stirred and aroused new senses in her being. She despised herself for feeling as she did—that now that she was in Egypt, she was her lover's social inferior. And yet was she his inferior except in the eyes of prejudice? If only she could wake up in the morning and find herself Stella Adair once more, the Stella Adair of two years ago, the childish Stella who had been taught by her school-friends to look upon herself as some one above the ordinary, some one who would be bestowing almost a royal favour on the man whom she condescended to marry!

And yet in her conscience she could not say that her present inequality in the eyes of the English was all

prejudice, for before her there rose up a picture of Girgis's mother's friends and relations . . . these dreadful over-fed, over-dressed Levantines. . . . How could Vernon mix with them? . . . what would he say to them? His Saxon fairness and Saxon reserve would make him look almost as much out of place beside their flamboyant types as a white woman would look in a room full of black men. Her mind revolted at the idea of his fairness coming in contact with women whose skins were oily and whose hair was heavy with Egyptian darkness. If only they were not so *fat*, if only they were not so highly scented and richly dressed! She thought of her own slender height, her slender hands and feet: would she, too, one day look Levantine? Would her girlish wrists become fat? would her arms fill her sleeves almost to bursting? would her firm flesh shake when she walked? Would her mouth look greedy? Then suddenly she was comforted by the memory of her mother, whose Irish elegance of figure was still girlishly perfect; then she saw her father rise up before her—in her mind's eye he was not elegant like Nicolas her brother, but there was not one ounce of spare flesh on his bones, and his dignity of bearing gave distinction to his whole being. And her aunt, Girgis's mother, although she was quite Eastern in her soft beauty, was no fatter than the majority of elegantly dressed French-women who wintered in Cairo.

All those visions passed like a mirage before Stella's brain, they lasted no longer than a few seconds, and all the time Vernon had held her hand lovingly in his. But a cloud had fallen upon their night of clear shining, and Nicolas felt that it was time to suggest getting back to Luxor. He captured Girgis, and left Stella to come as slowly as she liked with Vernon—so long as they kept the white turban of the Arab in sight they might walk as slowly as they pleased. When they were alone Vernon was dearer and gentler than Stella had ever known him; his boyish simplicity touched her, and his genuine delight, when she suggested a long donkey-ride the next morning to Thebes or to the "Tombs of the Kings," made her laugh, for he did not conceal from her that what thrilled him in the idea had nothing whatever to do with the wonders of ancient Egypt, but with the actual canter by her side on

swift-footed donkeys across that plain of Arcady which lies between Thebes and the Nile. Vernon had so successfully hidden the horrible shock he had received at his sudden realization of her true position in Cairo that Stella imagined that he had not grasped the importance of her words.

“You won’t let Girgis come, dear, will you?” Vernon said. “Do let us be quite alone for our first whole day together!”

“No, he *shan’t* come—I’ll tell Nicolas not to let him.” She laughed nervously. “Isn’t he funny the way he comes?”

“He doesn’t come, he just drops down in front of us. I never saw such a chap—he’s uncanny.”

“He is odd,” Stella said, “but try not to dislike him, dear, he is so much nicer than most of the young men of his race.”

For the moment Stella spoke as she felt, like an English-woman; she thought of her cousin as an Oriental. “He *thinks* a lot, and has great ideas according to his own lights, and they are ‘lights,’ you know: most young Egyptians have none.”

“He hates me; I can feel it.”

“He’s jealous of you.”

“Of me?” Vernon looked astonished. “What’s he got to be jealous of me for? I’ve only just met the chap!”

“He’s jealous of you because *I* love you”—Stella spoke very softly, the words came shyly from her lips—“and he imagines he loves me.”

“Great Scot! he doesn’t imagine *you* could love him, does he—that damned granite monument with glass eyes? Confound his native cheek!”

Stella shivered . . . “Oh! Vernon, he’s my cousin.”

Vernon noticed that she shivered. “So he is; I forgot . . . Great Scot!” The last words were spoken slowly; then he lapsed into silence. He could not say he was sorry; something hardened in him! . . . the man had no right to be Stella’s cousin! Stella had no right to see anything of him if she was sensitive to his attitude.

Stella stopped and withdrew her hands from his grasp. “He *is* my cousin, and he is in every way my equal. I am very proud of him, although he behaved foolishly to-night.”

Her eyes were fixed on Vernon's as she spoke. "Can you bear it, Vernon?" she said sadly; "will your love for me prove stronger than your inherited prejudices of racial differences?"

Vernon's eyes did not flinch under her earnest gaze, but he answered her question by evasion. "What do you mean, darling—strong enough for what? I love you, that is all I know."

"I mean that Girgis Boutros belongs to my father's people and that I, who felt like an English girl until nine months ago, now know that I belong to my father's people too . . . in Egypt my Irish descent does not count . . . I know by all that has happened in these nine months, by the cruelty of neglect and scorn, that I can never betray my people, that I must always belong to them."

"I wouldn't ask you to forsake them completely."

"You might, Vernon, for I wanted to when I first came out here, when I learnt something about my position, I said to myself, 'It is only for a little time; Vernon will take me to England; I need never see or hear of Copts or Levantines or Moslems again'; but now I know that that could never be . . . I could not forsake them; the man who marries me must accept my people: can you, dearest?"

She looked so beautiful with her pleading, upturned face, lit by the marvellous moonlight, that Vernon, still only understanding the half of what her words really meant, said: "Darling, your people will be my people, and my people your people—why let's bother about the subject? . . . I admit that I don't understand Girgis or take much to him, but I dare say I shall get to like him. I'm sure he's a good sort, if you say so; besides, I like a fellow who loves his job: he's awfully keen about farming, isn't he? I'd rather like to see his estate." Vernon expressed the last wish merely to please Stella.

"We'll go," Stella said; "it would please father if you did—he thinks an awful lot of Girgis. You see, so many rich young men of his class care only for horse-racing, and gambling, and theatres . . . Girgis loves the land, and all that he can make come out of it."

"He's awfully handsome," Vernon said; "I don't think I ever saw a finer figure—he's so strong without being coarse; he looks as if he was cut out of granite."

“In many ways he is cut out of granite,” Stella said: “you’d be surprised how hard and callous he is about individuals: the sufferings of the poor mean nothing to him, although he is doing all this to try and educate them, and develop their ideas in agriculture. I think Egyptians have always been without pity . . . it’s been wanting in them ever since the days of the Pharaohs, who looked upon the people as so many units in the land for labour. When they couldn’t work any longer, the sooner they died the better.”

“Then what is all this talk about raising the standard of the poor?”

“That’s for Egypt, that’s for the progress of the country; Girgis is mad on national progress.”

“I see,” Vernon said, “he’s like a good many of our millionaires, who can’t be induced to help deserving individuals, but who will give away thousands of pounds for public charities.”

“It’s like and it’s different,” Stella said, “for Girgis never advertises his good works, he never cares a rap for self-glorification, but he’s seized with the desire to restore the glory that was Egypt’s . . . to develop her riches, to raise her poor; and he’s quite right about what he says: it’s the Koran that keeps Mohammedan countries from progressing.”

“Curious chap!” Vernon said thoughtfully. “Has he any affection—is he all theories? Does he care about his own relations?”

“I don’t know,” Stella said; “the ordinary Egyptian who inherits many of the old characteristics of his race, as Girgis does, for he is *far* more Egyptian than Syrian, has affection for his sons but very little for any one else, and not much of the Christian quality of pity, though pity only came into the world, it seems to me, with the teachings of Christ; but most of Christ’s teachings are forgotten by the Copts, poor things! They have sacrificed Christ for His Church.”

“I suppose pity never did exist in the old days, did it?”

“Is there any in the Old Testament?” Stella said. “Isn’t it full of brutality, sensuality, and avarice? There is scarcely one example of pity recorded in it; Christ’s pity comes in like a beautiful and tender song from heaven.”

When you think of what the East was when He began His mission, how extraordinary He must have seemed!—quite what we would consider a fanatic; but I'm sure I should have loved Him, for I believe I'm rather socialistic; at least, I have been lately."

Vernon looked at her to see if she was in earnest. "You are funny," he said; "I never met such a rum girl, you think about such odd things."

"Why?" she said. "Because I love Christ's personality?"

"No," he said, "but the way you look at things."

"Then don't let me," she said eagerly, "for I want to be just ordinary, not extraordinary."

"Why so?"

"Because I want to be quite like an English girl for your sake. I could never forsake my people, but all the same, I want to be *like* the English girl I feel myself to be, that I thought I was before I came out here."

Vernon laughed heartily. "You are cutting," he said; "to be quite English you think you must be very ordinary and entirely wanting in originality—is that it?"

Stella pinched his arm lightly by way of an answer. "Here we are: there's poor Nicolas holding his soul in patience, and Girgis contemplating Egypt." She sighed. "I think every one should have a lover to-night, don't you? That moon's quite wasted on those two."

He stooped and took his last kiss from her youthful lips before her donkey-boy brought "Lord Roberts" for her to mount.

Half an hour later, when they stepped on board the *Isis*, Mrs. Lekejian handed Vernon a telegram: it was his recall to Cairo. His senior officer was ill, and he was wanted to fill his place, so the morning ride to Thebes on the swift-footed "Horace," with Stella at his side on "Lord Roberts," was postponed until his return. Alas! how little did either of them think that it was never to happen at all.

When Stella said good-bye to him in the morning, Vernon saw that her sadness meant more than the mere parting with him for perhaps only a few days. At last he

said, "Dearest, if you are going to be a soldier's wife, you must learn to bear partings better than this—I might never be going to see you again."

"You may never *want* to see me again : you will be mixing in Cairo society, you will see for yourself the way we are looked down upon ; you'll find every one's the same, you'll never stand out against it." Tears filled Stella's eyes and her voice betrayed the depth of her emotion. "I did so want to have just one week of you all to myself before you heard us discussed in Cairo."

"Dearest," he said, "you're exaggerating things. Don't be so foolish : I think you should trust me."

## CHAPTER X

DURING Vernon's absence in Cairo, which eventually extended itself to twelve days, events happened which were to affect Stella's future in a way which she little dreamt of at the time, for in that twelve days Fate took into her head the marshalling of affairs in a way which gave the girl no indication of their importance. Indeed she congratulated herself that it was a period of intellectual and physical health-giving.

She had made up her mind to see as much as she possibly could of Thebes, its historical sites and monuments, before her lover's return, so as not to bore him with hard sight-seeing, and by so doing her mind would be too fully occupied to allow her thoughts to dwell upon the mysteries of "Cairene society" which her lover would be having unfolded to him. Enjoyments that are the least expected are always the most delightful, and that particular twelve days happened to be among the happiest in her life, for in her sight-seeing, which naturally embraced many long donkey-rides, she had the companionship of the tall stranger whom she had met in the temple of Luxor, the man whose sympathy she had read when their eyes met at the supper party in the Arab restaurant.

His name was Michael Ireton, and, with no little ingenuity for a man of his direct and straightforward nature, he had contrived to get into conversation with Nicolas Lekejian in the smoking-room of the Winter Palace Hotel. During the course of their conversation Nicolas had discovered, as Michael Ireton had intended that he should do, that by introductions he had presented on his arrival in Cairo he knew many of the best families in the English society there. He also discovered that he was no mean Egyptologist, which placed him at once above the ordinary tourist, and made him a desirable companion in a place like Luxor. The

very morning after their meeting, Michael Ireton had learnt, with the help of his donkey-boy, that Stella was going over to visit the great Valley of the Tombs of the Kings. A sudden determination to go with her devastated him; he could scarcely remember a single occasion in the course of his whole life when he had wanted to do anything so much. To ride through that hidden valley which he knew lay across the river under the pink sunlight, that valley lined with the secret mortuaries of the eternal Pharaohs, with that girl by his side, was worth striving to do. He was convinced that his meeting with her at last in the temple of Luxor was the result, and nothing else, of his fixed determination not to let her pass out of his life; his will had triumphed—he had found her and spoken to her, which meant that he was now in a position to see more of her. He had been given his chance; it now remained with him to see what he would make of it. Vernon's presence with her in the temple had worried him once or twice. What was the explanation of it?—for had not his friend in the opera-house told him that neither she nor her people mixed in English society in Egypt?

He never dreamt for one moment that Stella was engaged to the man, for the simple reason that Vernon's evident lack of interest in the things which she had seemed so keen about gave him the impression that they had not much in common, although they seemed to be on intimate terms of friendship.

A good donkey-boy must be a good scout! He must do all that he can to make his master enjoy himself, and, intrigue being the breath of life to him, it pleased the handsome Yussef to bring his master all the information he could about the beautiful young lady on board the *Isis*. At all events, he scouted so well that his master was on the ferry-boat which conveyed Stella and Nicolas and their favourite donkeys across the Nile on their journey to Thebes, and he managed to look so perfectly innocent of the fact that he had waited for a good half-hour for their arrival that Nicolas proved quite willing to let him, at his diffident request, join in their day's excursion. In this wise he managed to spend almost the whole day by Stella's side. And if she found him such an interesting companion that she almost forgot to miss Vernon, was it to be wondered at? For she soon found out that he had taken up, for the

last two or three years, Egyptology as his hobby, and, although he had never set foot in Egypt before, he seemed curiously familiar with all the objects of interest they were going to see. He was boyishly delighted at the prospect of visiting one of the great professors of Egyptian archæology in his camp of excavation at Abydos in a week's time.

Michael Ireton was a man whose age and station in life it was hard to guess, for with his rugged cast of features and big physique he must have appeared many years older than he was, when he was a boy, and now, as a man who had retained a great deal of the freshness of youth and the charm of its simplicity, he probably looked much younger than he was. Stella thought of him as somewhere about thirty-three ; Nicolas put him down at forty, which was not so correct as Stella's guess. His very broad shoulders and strikingly powerful physique, added to six feet two inches of height, made him seem splendidly big even in a land of tall men whose height looks greater by the effect of their flowing garments. His profession as mining engineer had placed him since his earliest years of independence in positions of great authority ; in some of his expeditions through Mexico and Brazil he had had as many as a thousand natives under his command, and had controlled vast sums of money. There was, in fact, nothing little about Michael Ireton, for little things had not come into his life : his methods of dealing with difficulties, or of arriving at desired ends, were almost primitive in their directness.

Any other girl but Stella might have found him a man with whom it was difficult to get into sympathetic touch, and perhaps too serious, but intellectually his brain was a mine of humour. His rough sketches were perhaps as illustrative of his real nature as anything else, for some of them were full of the tenderest effects of light and shade : the indescribable light of Egypt seemed to have floated on to his paper rather than have been put there by human hand with paint and water, while his character sketches of the natives, which he dashed off with lightning speed, sent Nicolas and Stella into screams of laughter. They were life-like in their types and gestures, and showed an instinctive conception of their natures.

Their talk had been of many things, while they were

still on the green plain which is every year watered by the inundations of the Nile ; but when at last they passed into "The Great Valley," and had left all traces of human habitation behind them, they instinctively lapsed into silence. As they rode on and on, into a deeper and deeper sense of its unearthly desolation, they felt lost to all other consciousness. Their knowledge that the great dead of Egypt's Great Day lay in vast tombs, as grand as temples, under the pink rocks which rolled on and ever silently on, at either side of their winding road, was forgotten ; it seemed rather as if they had discovered for themselves a valley of glorious light, a valley forgotten to the world since the day when the finger of God had first produced Cosmos out of chaos.

Very soon Stella was to herself a mere particle of that opal light, her material body had no consciousness, and Michael Ireton's presence by her side did not disturb the illusion, for, curiously enough, he seemed to be in complete sympathy with her feelings, his silence was full of spiritual understanding.

Later on in the day, when they were eating their lunch in less intense atmospheric surroundings, on a picnic spot Yussef had cleverly discovered for them, where the shadow of a mighty rock in a dry land was gracious, their conversation flowed again more freely. Nicolas had suggested that they should visit one of the most famous tombs in the valley, one of "the monuments" which all tourists go to see, but Stella begged him not to.

"I only want the valley and the light to-day—they're quite sufficient ; let's leave the tombs until another day."

She turned to Michael Ireton. "You of course must do just as you like ; perhaps you can't spare the time for such abstract things as 'light.' Would you prefer to leave us after lunch and go your own way ?"

"I would much rather not," he said simply, "that is to say, if I *may* stay ? I quite agree with you : I don't feel inclined to leave this light for all the wonders of the underworld."

"I'm glad you feel like that," Stella said contentedly ; "it's so nice doing things like this with kindred spirits."

Michael Ireton felt happiness run through him at her words like a quickening fire. "Kindred spirits are few and

far between," he said. "One would have to be very careful whom one chose to bring into this valley. How an ordinary tourist would jar!"

"And yet we are ordinary tourists, we're '*doing*' the Valley of the Tombs of the Kings for the first time."

"Tourists we *may* be, but not 'ordinary'; I bar that."

Stella laughed. "Every tourist prides himself on that point, I suppose."

"The ordinary English tourist hasn't the slightest idea what this valley meant to the Egyptians," Nicolas said; "we do differ from them in that respect, anyhow. The ordinary English tourist doesn't even want to know; he looks upon the whole thing as an excursion."

"I do think that if the ordinary American tourist is the most vulgar in the world, the ordinary English tourist is the most ignorant. I'm awfully ashamed of my race sometimes, aren't you?" Michael Ireton addressed Stella.

"Ignorance is one of the sins even the English cannot accuse *my* race of," she said. "I often think it's our want of ignorance that so annoys them," her words dropped acidly from her lips.

Michael Ireton looked at her with a well-disguised ignorance of her nationality in his expression, yet Stella felt that he knew she was not English, and that for some reason of his own he was making her speak of her nationality. Nicolas had not told him their name. "Do you mean that you are *not* English?" he said.

"No, I am Syrian; my name is Lekejian." She said the words a little aggressively, as much as to say, "There now!"

"Do you live in Syria? I want to go there so much, to Baalbek and Palmyra: they must be wonderful."

"I have never even visited my own country. I was educated entirely in Europe: I'm almost as much of a 'tourist,'" she smiled at the word, "as *you* are in Luxor, although my father's family have lived in Cairo for many generations. I know shockingly little about Syria."

"You ought to be very proud of the influence your race had upon the civilization of Egypt—wasn't it Thothmes I. who first broke the power of Syria? After each conquest, with the bringing back of Syrian prisoners into Egypt, we can trace fresh influences of the more refined Syrian arts of their higher civilization. Syria, of course,

was equally affected by Egyptian influence, for Thothmes III., when he had completely subdued the country, brought back Syrian princes to be educated in Egypt; he made a stipulation, however, that when their fathers died they might return to their country to fill their places. They probably married Egyptian princesses, as they often lived in Egypt until after middle age."

"At that rate most probably," Nicolas said laughingly, "Egyptian kings married Syrian princesses as well."

"Of course they did." He turned to Stella: "Wasn't the mother of your favourite King Akhnaton, or 'The Living Truth' as he called himself, a Syrian?"

"Yes, I'm always proud of that, for history attributes a great deal to her influence over her son; it was she who first inoculated him with his very modern views on religion . . . how beautiful his beliefs were!"

"I was glad to discover a day or two ago that the only one of all the ancient deities that Akhnaton ever had carved on any of his monuments throughout the country, *after* his conversion, was the image of Truth, and even then '*Maat*' is only represented as a tiny figure held in his hand, which showed that it betokened merely the abstract idea of truth."

From this allusion to her favourite king Stella led him on to tell her more about the influence of Syria over Egyptian art and Egyptian customs; he pointed out to her that before the Syrian conquest the Egyptians had been contented to depict mere incidents in their carving, *after* the Syrian influence *emotion* appeared. "The beautiful movements of the dancing-girls, their exquisite lightness of gesture, their abandonment of pose, all come in with the more imaginative Syrian art—and what is any art, or indeed anything, worth without emotion?" He looked at her for an answer.

"I'm beginning to feel quite proud," Stella said, "of my habitually despised country."

From the effect of Syrian influence on Egyptian art their talk turned to Egyptian architecture. Michael Ireton confessed that it did not give him the same pleasure as Greek architecture did. "Its total lack of grace leaves you cold," he said, "its only emotion comes from its size. Have you ever seen the Greek temples in Sicily?" he asked

suddenly, his eye kindling with artistic pleasure at the thought of them.

"No," Stella said, "I have never been to Sicily; I am keeping that——" She stopped suddenly, for what *was* the use of keeping them for Vernon?

"I should like to *see* you there," he said. "I should like to take you to Segesta when the wild flowers are at their best. I often used to wonder if the Greeks ever saw their temples rising out of an ocean of purple flowers. . . . I'm sorry for them if they didn't: with their adoration of beauty, they must have missed a great deal."

"I should love to go," she said, "for flowers give that endearing charm to scenery which is entirely missing in Egypt; here the magic 'light' has to make up for the flowers . . ." she paused, "and it does cast its spell over you?"

"Rather!" he said enthusiastically, "it only comes upon you now and then that you *are* in a land without flowers: before I came to Egypt I never realized that in Upper Egypt, at any rate, there is absolutely nothing green except what grows with artificial irrigation; there are, now that I think of it, a very few 'wicked'-looking plants that seem to find suction in dry sand, but they're Nature in her most unnatural mood."

"The dearth of flowers and natural vegetation is awful," Stella said, "yet I think flowers and maidenhair ferns beside Egyptian ruins would seem out of keeping, out of proportion; the yellow sand and the blue sky make a more characteristic background. In Italy the wild flowers look exquisite amongst the ruins, and I adore the ferns that always line the little natural spring, which they call a Bath of Venus."

During their conversation Michael Ireton had been conjuring his brains how he was going to manage to see Stella again the next day. A happy chance soon presented itself, for she had lent him her gold pencil-case to write down the names of some books he had advised her to read. A little to her surprise he closed the pencil up after he had written down the names and put it in his pocket; Stella was mounting her donkey at the moment, so she could not hold out her hand to claim it. As he put it in his pocket he said to himself, "I'll be careful *not* to give her a chance of

getting it back to-day, which will necessitate my returning it to her early to-morrow morning."

As they cantered home across the green plain of Arcady they discovered many lighter subjects to discuss than they had done during their intense hours spent in the "Valley of Death." Stella helped him to add to his by no means small store of Arabic words, and gave him hints about their pronunciation.

When they were saying good-bye he handed his card to Nicolas, who expressed a wish that he should accompany them on some future expeditions if he cared to.

"Care to!" he said; "this has been one of the most enjoyable days in my life—it's been most awfully kind of you to let me come with you." He looked at Stella as he spoke. "Finding that little green heart certainly brought me good luck. I attribute it all to that."

"My precious *hegab* (amulet)," she said, putting her hand in his as she used the Arabic word for his benefit, as she also did when she said good-bye—" *A ma as-sallamah*, you have told us so many interesting things."

"It's not good-bye, I hope," he said, "only *auf wieder-sehn*."

## CHAPTER XI

THE next morning there was to be no excursion, for Nicolas was suffering from a little touch of the sun which he had contracted the day before, and Stella expressed herself perfectly contented to prowl about Luxor by herself; her father and mother allowed her to do so because in Luxor the inhabitants are accustomed to seeing tourists strolling about their village, and in Upper Egypt the natives are much more respectful to women than in Cairo. So, armed with a fly-switch and her sketching materials, Stella had just stepped ashore when she met Michael Ireton coming towards their landing-stage.

His height and aloof individuality struck her more forcibly than ever; a slight blush mounted to her face as he strode eagerly forward to meet her—if her thick veil had permitted Michael Ireton to see the sudden mounting of her colour, how pleased he would have been! for it is a certain consolation to a man who is in love with a woman to know that from any cause whatsoever he has the power to move her. Absolute indifference calls up no blushes.

“I foolishly carried off your gold pencil-case last night,” he said; “I was just coming to return it to you.”

“Thank you,” Stella said as she held out her hand for it, “I didn’t know you had taken it”—which was a direct untruth, for while she had been dressing in the morning she had said to herself, “We must see him again, for he is certain to return my pencil,” and the thought had made her sing more light-heartedly, for he certainly added to life’s enjoyment! And to the girl life for the present, at any rate, was very full of enjoyment. Her conversation the day before with Michael Ireton had set a thousand interesting ideas working in her head; his sketches had given her new aspirations; the few hints she had stolen from his style she was going to try and put into execution that very

morning. Yet the lie came to her lips instantly—forced into expression by the very fear that her desire for his companionship might have appeared evident by her blush.

“Are you going any expedition to-day?” He asked the question with a request in his voice.

“No, not to-day; Nicolas doesn’t feel very well, and I thought I would enjoy a quiet prowling about Luxor.”

“But can you prowl about alone?” he said. “Is it safe?”

“Oh, I think so; I will take my donkey-boy to carry my things,” she pointed to her sketching materials, “and he’ll keep the beggars off: set a thief to catch a thief in the East.”

“May I be your donkey-boy?” he said. “I think I could keep off most beggars.”

Stella smiled. “I think you could,” she said, “but it would bore you. Aren’t you going for an excursion?”

“Not if I may stay with you,” he said, “and I promise you I won’t be a nuisance—and I can keep silence when I have to, I’m accustomed to it.” He drew out his sketch-book from his pocket: “I want to sketch too,” he said. “It will be great fun.”

“Oh, do,” she said, “and let me watch you; I can’t really sketch, I only do little daubs to remind me of the things I like best.”

“So do I,” he said; “that’s why I want to sketch this morning.”

“Had you fixed on your subject?”

“Yes,” he said, “I have; let’s go to the garden of the Savoy Hotel—I’m staying there. I want to make a little sketch of the white-columned arbour that hangs over the river; it’s a mass of bougainvillæas just at present, and it looks exquisite against the blue sky, with the yellow sand behind.”

“Oh, but I could never do that; besides, I should be too shy even to try before you—but let’s go.”

“Why should you be shy with me?” he said. “I wish you wouldn’t.” His grey-green eyes expressed the genuineness of his wish so simply that Stella smiled and said:

“But if I can’t help it!”

“I had hoped you weren’t shy with me,” he said, “we have so many interests in common; but it’s always the

same thing, my wandering life has left its mark. I make all women feel ill at ease."

"Oh, I didn't mean that I felt altogether shy with you, but your work is so strong" (she alluded to the sketches), "so unusual that I couldn't do even my poor best if you were watching."

"Then I won't watch," he said, "but if you like I'll take it for granted that you are only a beginner, and after you've finished I'll tell you what I think is wrong. Will you allow me to constitute myself your teacher?"

"Of course I will—how awfully kind of you!—and I'll try my best not to be nervous."

"That's right," he said; "if you only knew how little you need be nervous . . . you would laugh at your folly." He was thinking in his own mind that he had at least gained one step, that if he pleased her as a master she might develop a desire for future lessons.

"Do you mind if I step in here a moment?" she said. "I left a necklace of mummy-beads to be re-strung; I bought it here, and the thread broke, they're . . ." as she spoke they stepped inside a curio shop which was laid out like a bazaar with almost every conceivable Egyptian form of curio: most of them were obvious copies of famous museum pieces, but beautiful copies and genuine works of art in their own way.

The native produced the necklace: it was made of the finest and smallest blue mummy-beads Michael had ever seen; how a hole had been driven through the slender little tube of turquoise-blue faience he could not imagine.

Stella took it from the man and slipped it round her neck against her white muslin dress: it looked fresh and delightful, and Michael Ireton showed his approval of the effect produced.

Before they left the shop they looked round the various things for a little time, and Stella could not help admiring the delicate way in which Michael handled the tiniest objects. His big hands were pleasing both in their form and in the texture of their skin, and were expressive of a far more artistic temperament than his dominating personality suggested.

It was a little thing, yet it gratified the girl to find that nice things about him kept on developing with their quickly

growing intimacy. He was at the moment handling a terra-cotta head of a figurine . . . an exquisite thing and singularly pure in type for its period. It might have been unearthed in Sicily, or even Greece, for any trace that there was in it of Egyptian art.

"How adorable!" Stella said when she saw it. Michael Ireton was holding it lovingly between the first finger and thumb of his left hand while he shaded it from the glaring light with his right so as to see its outline more perfectly.

"Just look at it," he said; "isn't her profile beautiful?" He moved his head and shoulders away for the girl to see more easily.

"And the straight little nose," Stella said, "and the soft, feminine expression. The Greeks knew all there was to know about beauty, didn't they?"

"Almost," Michael Ireton said; "very little would be new to them."

Stella turned to the curio-dealer. "How much is this little head?" The man had watched their expressions of admiration and the look of desire to possess the terra-cotta in the girl's eloquent eyes; he said to himself, "The tall, big man will give it to her whatever price I ask," so he put a value on it that was quite absurd.

Stella laid it down carefully in its box on its bed of cotton wool. "I will give you"—she mentioned about the twentieth part of what he had asked—"and not one piastre more."

"You insult me, madam," he said; "I speak the truth: it is an antique, it is Greek, pure Greek."

"I know it is an antique, but I also know what broken terra-cotta figures of that size are worth . . . I have seen them many times in the sale-rooms in the museum in Cairo. If it were *whole* it would be worth what you ask."

"Not a head like that, madam; they would not *sell* such a beautiful head as that, it would be in the museum itself . . . they would not allow a 'tourist' to buy so rare a thing . . . the gentleman he knows very well that it is Greek, not Egyptian; it is beautiful; you must pay for beauty, madam." He looked at her companion.

Stella repeated her price as she lifted up the head once more. . . . "Will you take it?"

The man quietly took the head from her, "No, madam,

for I would not insult the artist who made it two thousand years ago." As he spoke he laid it back on the cotton wool.

"Very well," Stella said, speaking very rapidly in Arabic, "keep it, but *you* probably paid the Arab who found it about the twentieth part of what I'm offering you for it, and I have been a good customer."

She walked out of the shop with Michael Ireton at her side. "The wretch saw we wanted it," she said, "so up went his price; I hate encouraging that sort of avarice."

"Did you want it?" he said.

"Yes, frightfully," she said laughingly, "I had to do all I could to prevent myself from buying it. . . ."

"Let me go back and get it, *please* do."

"No, you mustn't . . . I couldn't let you; besides, it wasn't the price of it, that *really* didn't matter . . . he thought we were ignorant tourists—did you see his change of expression when I spoke to him in a torrent of Arabic? I never let on I know Arabic to the 'people,' it's a useful card to have up your sleeve."

"But I do wish you'd let me get it," he said; "some horrid vulgarian will buy it, and just think how the poor thing will hate being touched by ignorant hands."

She smiled at his distress for the vandalism to the beautiful head, but could not answer him, for a hand was laid on her arm from behind. She turned quickly round; it was the curio-dealer, who had been hurrying after them.

"Madam," he said, "I could not take your price for it, I have only *one* price; but will you allow me to give it to you? . . . please accept it."

He held out the box in which the terra-cotta head was carefully packed in white cotton wool; there was no lid on the box, and the little face, so classically proud and yet so seductively feminine, looked up at her.

Stella held out her hand to receive it—she could not refuse it. "Thank you very much," she said; "I will indeed accept it: you are very kind."

"The pleasure is mine, madam," he made a profound salaam, "for you will return to my shop."

When the man was out of sight Stella and her companion behaved like two happy children over their treasure; they looked at it from this and that and from every point of view.

"You really found it," she said, "it ought to be yours . . ." her eyes met his; "but I can't give it up. Let's hurry on to the garden or invent stories about her . . . did you ever see anything quite so lovely?" She held out the box impulsively for him to take another look.

"Yes, I have," he said, and as he spoke he thought to himself how far more beautiful the living woman was at the moment, and he longed to tell her so, but wise caution forbade it, so he added:

"But I'm most awfully glad you've got it."

"The man has given it to us," she said, "because he knows it is business to do so—he does not wish to offend good customers: mother bought one or two valuable Arab things from him when I bought these beads."

They had entered the grounds of the Savoy Hotel, and he was guiding her to the arbour which he wanted her to sit in . . . he wanted to see her surrounded by the brilliant masses of hanging flowers, he wanted to see her without her hat on! He wondered how he was going to manage it.

When they reached the spot Stella was in an ecstasy of delight; the sudden greenness and coolness, and the mass of brilliant flowers, made it, as she expressed it, "too good to be true."

"It always strikes me as very Roman," he said, "the atmosphere of this particular spot—this white-pillared pergola-arbour hanging over the water as it does, and the luxury of the vegetation covering the steep banks—we might be sitting in one of the famous villas on the Bay of Naples in classic times: do *you* see what I feel?"

"Yes, I do, it's simply glorious; let's imagine we're Romans. Listen! that's dancing! do you hear that dull drum . . . drumming and that thud . . . thud?" They listened.

"Some Sudanese is dancing on the deck of a Nile boat."

"It's curiously seductive music," he said, "it grows and grows on one; at first it means nothing, or it did to me."

"I know," Stella said; "I often wonder how they contrive to get so much . . ." she paused, "so much passion into it; you only hear a dull thud, thudding, and an occasional tink, tink, tink, and yet it's full of Eastern passion."

"To an extraordinary degree," he added; "it's very strange."

They had seated themselves in the harbour and were preparing to begin their painting. Michael had taken care to place himself where he could get a perfect view of Stella, whose background he had, unknowingly to her, selected. Suddenly to his astonishment she said, "I think I will take off my hat; the breeze here will keep away the flies, and it's such a treat to be in the fresh air without one's hat." She laid her white topee on the seat beside her and passed her fingers through her hair to raise it.

Then for almost an hour they worked diligently. Stella had selected the point of the harbour that was most distant from them—it made a beautiful piece of composition; she had asked his advice before commencing upon it, and it had met with his approval. During that hour their talk was principally about their work and upon the subject of art, but occasionally it drifted into more personal topics. Yet, oddly enough, there was never the right opportunity for Stella to mention Vernon's name, nor was there any reason why she should tell him of her engagement. They had so many subjects in common of abstract interest to engross their sympathies that the more practical facts of life did not enter into their conversation. Michael Ireton felt that, almost a stranger to her as he was, reckoning their intimacy by the number of times they had met, there was nothing any one could tell him about her which would add one iota to his real knowledge of her. Her mind was like a river of clear crystal to him, a river in which he had found all the beautiful things he had been longing to find in human companionship since he was a boy.

When an hour and a half had passed and Stella at last put down her brush with a sigh, Michael closed his sketch-book quickly and rose to his feet. "May I look?" he said, coming to her side.

She handed him her block, and waited for his verdict nervously.

"I'm not going to flatter you," he said, looking down into her quickly-answering gaze, "because we're going to be friends, and your work's too good to spoil by flattery. You don't want that, do you?"

"Flattery? Oh, no!" she said, "thank you for knowing that I don't."

"There's nothing to thank me for," he said. "It's

the truth . . . your work's too good for that sort of thing . . . it's far from being 'school-girlish,' as you called it, and you know it ? ”

“ I don't,” Stella said humbly. “ To me it's awful . . . it's . . . ”

“ It isn't awful,” he said quickly ; “ but it's full of faults, and you've got some tricks that must be corrected ; you can console yourself, however, that they're not the faults of the tyro.”

He sat down beside her. “ Now look here.” He spoke in the most matter-of-fact way, while he spared her no criticisms. With hungry ears Stella took in every word he had to say, and asked him many questions, which proved to him that she was no longer afraid of him, or in the least shy.

When he had finished the lesson and had indicated the good points in her work, she said, “ Now may I see *yours* ? ”

“ I didn't do the pergola after all,” he said a little nervously. “ I only did a bit of the river with these fishing-boats.” He opened his sketch-book and held it out for her. There was so little work in the hurried sketch, that she looked up at him in surprise.

“ I *was* idle, wasn't I ? ” he said ; “ but somehow it wouldn't come off.” As he spoke a leaf of the book, which was the one before the leaf he had used for the sketch of the boats, fell down, for Stella had pulled the book a little farther to her, and it had escaped his thumb. As a perfect likeness of herself met her eyes, she gave a little start and a cry of surprise ; instantly a vivid blush dyed her face, for it was an exquisite likeness, just as she had been sitting in the arbour surrounded by the curious magenta flowers of the bougainvillæa. But it was the charm which he had put into the expression of her eyes and mouth which made her feel embarrassed.

For a moment she looked at it in silence, and suddenly she knew that she must tell him of her engagement to Vernon.

“ Will you forgive me ? ” he said. “ I have wanted to paint you ever since the first time I saw you at the opera in Cairo. An artist is a persistent animal when he has an end to achieve.”

Stella blushed again, for she knew that he had known

that night that she had heard the cruel words of his companions in the Arab restaurant; she suddenly recalled the look of sympathy in his eyes.

He spoke so impersonally, and had so well conveyed to the girl that his sketch of her had only been made from an artist's standpoint, that she felt greatly relieved, yet slightly annoyed. Perhaps to tell him of Vernon was no longer necessary.

"You were perfectly welcome to do it," she said, a little coldly, "but why didn't you ask me? It is extremely good."

"Because you would have been self-conscious . . . and that would have destroyed everything. It was your expression I wanted to catch, the expression I noticed when you were listening to the music that night: you had the same expression while you worked."

Stella looked at it again: a feeling of joy leapt in her to know that she was so lovely, for she realized that the portrait was exactly like her. The sadness and the laughter in her face were there, and all the characteristics she knew about herself so painfully well. "Mother would like so much to see it," she said. "Will you show it to her?"

"If I may," he said, "I'd be delighted to. Am I forgiven?" He asked the words persuasively.

"Yes, quite," she said; "and thank you so much for my lesson." She had risen to her feet. "I must get home now; how the morning has flown!"

"When will the next lesson be?" he asked boldly. "You should try some sunset effects or an early morning light."

"Perhaps we could manage to-morrow evening. If Nicolas is better we were thinking of going to Thebes in the morning."

He did not ask if he might come too, for something warned him that if he did the girl would be troubled to know how to answer him. The sketch he had made of her had suddenly raised up a barrier between them, which by diplomacy must be broken down, so he determined to gain his permission from Nicolas to go with them to Thebes whensoever they went.

When they arrived at the gangway of the *Isis* he handed

his sketch-book to her. "If you care to show it to your mother," he said, "please take it; I will call for it this evening some time; I won't want it until the morning."

The next moment he had left her standing alone with his sketch-book in one hand and the little box containing the head of the Greek Venus in the other. When she crossed the gangway, one of the Sudanese boys commenced brushing the dust off her clothes with the usual long-handled ostrich-feather broom. In doing so he very nearly knocked the box out of Stella's hands.

She turned upon him impatiently. "If you had broken that curio I think I'd have killed you," she said with such vehemence that the next moment she was ashamed of her outburst of temper, and also angered at the sudden realization of the value she placed upon the little Greek head of a nameless woman!

The Sudanese did not understand; he was accustomed to far stronger expressions of wrath at his stupidity, but it was the first time the gentle daughter of the house had ever shown the slightest trace of bad temper.

## CHAPTER XII

MICHAEL IRETON did not see Stella when he called the same evening for his sketch-book, but Nicolas, who had almost recovered from his slight attack of "the sun," greeted him with charming hospitality, and introduced him to his mother. Mr. Lekejian had left Luxor the day before with Girgis Boutros: his presence was needed in Cairo. Mrs. Lekejian had heard her son and daughter speaking of Michael Ireton; they had told her how much his company had added to their enjoyment of the day spent in the Valley of the Tombs of the Kings, and Stella had been perfectly frank about the painting-lesson he had given her in the morning, and so, when he presented himself on board the *Isis*, Mrs. Lekejian gave him one of her genial Irish smiles, as she said: "I have seen your picture of my daughter; we all think it is extremely good, if a little *too* flattering."

"I'm glad you like it," he said; "I will do a larger sketch from it for you, if you would care to have it?"

"Will you really?" Her bright eyes smiled their gratitude. "How very kind of you! Her father will be delighted—you've caught her expression wonderfully." Mrs. Lekejian noticed that the man's eyes were looking round the deck drawing-room, as though they were trying to find the original of the portrait. "My daughter is writing her weekly letter to her old school-mistress in London," she said; "she was a second mother to her for many years, and Stella is devoted to her."

As a matter of fact Stella had intentionally absented herself from the deck drawing-room, because Michael Ireton had told her that he would call in the evening for his sketch-book, and she could not help feeling a little uncertain about their growing intimacy. The "little" voice that can never be silenced had told her all the

afternoon that it would be self-deception on her part to assume an ignorance of the man's very evident admiration for herself—and would Vernon like her to see much more of him? He had been jealous of him during their first conversation in Luxor Temple. Her letter to Miss MacNaughtan was scrappy and distraught, for over and over again her ear caught the sound of Michael Ireton's voice as he talked to her brother and mother on the deck drawing-room. Mrs. Lekejian was evidently finding him good company, for many times Stella heard her infectious laughter ringing out like a girl's. She tried very hard to obliterate the man from her mind, and to tell Miss MacNaughtan about the "sights" she had been doing, but in spite of her determination, she could not help seeing his well-shaped, powerful hands holding the little terra-cotta head of the Tanagra figure between two fingers, or feeling his masterful presence standing over her, as he had stood in the morning while he criticised her sketch. At last, angry with herself and annoyed with the Fates for having taken Vernon away from her so soon after their reunion, she put away her writing things and went to bed. From her bed in the state-room, which was as dainty as money and good taste could make it, she could hear the strange night noises of the East, and see from her window the wonderful stars in the heavens, and she could *not* hear the voices on the deck drawing-room. But she did not sleep until long after Michael Ireton's hearty voice had called out "Good night, then I'll call round in the morning and see what you're going to do. If you don't want to go out until the cool of the day I will give Miss Lekejian another lesson if she likes—she's going to look upon me in the light of her master."

"Thank you," Nicolas said. "We don't care for her wandering about this place alone, and mother's not much of a hand at sight-seeing; it's awfully good of you."

"Not at all; it's most awfully kind of you to take pity on my loneliness."

The tone of his voice was so casual that Stella could not help smiling when she compared it with the look of pleasure she had seen in his eyes when she had permitted him to take the place of her "donkey-boy."

When Michael Ireton was out of hearing, Mrs. Lekejian

slipped her hand through her son's arm : " Let's take a little walk, dear. What a nice fellow, and how interesting ! "

" Chance acquaintances are often the pleasantest. I got into conversation with him in the hotel the other day." He paused, and then added, " He must be all right, though, for we exchanged cards yesterday, and he belongs to two good clubs, and Professor Eritep's going to have him in his camp for a few weeks. He's awfully keen about Egyptology, although he's only taken it up as a hobby."

" He's a mining engineer, isn't he ? "

" Yes, but I fancy he's made a good deal of money in rubber. He's taking a long rest for such a young man. He says he had a bad attack of fever, the first he's ever had, and he was advised to take a year's holiday."

" He's a splendid type—what a physique ! "

" A fine physique, with fine brains at the back of it ; there's something very simple and primitive about him, isn't there ? "

" Yes, that's his charm ; he strikes one as a man who has not much in common with modern society . . . is he married ? "

" I shouldn't think so ; he's not mentioned his wife if he is."

Mrs. Lekejian was silent while they took their last turn forward on the deck. She was thinking that, although he seemed to be a good many years her daughter's senior, he was much more the type of man she had imagined Stella would have chosen to marry than Vernon Thorpe ; at the same time she had to admit to herself that one does not meet a Michael Ireton every day, that he was quite individual. She could think of no one else that she knew quite like him, so of course Stella could have had no such personality as his for her girlish ideal ; still she could not help feeling that Michael Ireton might have been a dangerous rival . . . she gave a long sigh.

" What's that for, mother dear ? " Nicolas said.

" Oh ! I don't quite know, my son," she caressed his hand affectionately. " I was only thinking : and how is it that when one thinks one instinctively sighs ? "

" Thinking about what ? "

" About Stella."

It was Nicolas's turn to remain silent.

“I think Mr. Ireton’s the sort of man who would have understood ‘things’ better! He’s so broad-minded, he has a wider conception of life.”

Nicolas stooped and kissed his mother; it was their parting for the night. “Your children are very perverse, little mother—perverse and foolish?”

She knew what her son alluded to, she pressed his cheek close to her own. “You’ve fought the fight splendidly, dear.”

“I am absolutely fire-proof now, so I’ve something to be thankful for,” he said with a forced gaiety in his voice. “No more burnt fingers for me, no more playing with fire. I’m going to stick to work—there’s nothing like it.”

A little sadness showed through his mother’s smile as she said, “For some years anyhow, dear; and you’ve always got me.”

“For ever,” Nicolas said; “unless I can find a duplicate of you . . . if I could, you’d have a daughter-in-law at once.”

“I don’t think you could find another ‘me,’ dear, for I am now what your father has made me. I was a silly scatterbrained thing when he married me, you can’t imagine *how* scatterbrained.”

“You darling,” he said; “you must have been lovely. Good night.”

## CHAPTER XIII

MICHAEL IRETON rose the next morning with an appetite for life that kept him singing snatches of odd native songs while he dressed, and thinking thoughts that made his big being tingle with an almost boyish delight.

He had never been in love before, and he was now as completely and wholeheartedly under the influence of the malady or Elixir as any youth in his twenties. He had found the woman he had been looking for all his life, and he was going to have her; in his hard struggles in life his strong will had surmounted all difficulties—and so if there were any unforeseen difficulties in the way of winning Stella for his wife he meant to overrule them. Something told him that if he was given a sporting chance he could *make* her love *him*—the very manner in which she drew her eyes away from his sometimes, and the way she avoided his at others, helped him in his belief; at the same time he recognized that, although there were passion and tragedy in her wonderful eyes, she was sensitive and highly strung to an unusual degree, that, in spite of her Eastern ancestry on her father's side, her nature was exquisitely pure and virginal.

Her lasting affection would only be won through the intellect, not by the senses. If he could only make her miss his intellectual companionship when he was not with her! if he could win her intellectual sympathies before she recognized his own love for her! But how hard it would be to see her and be with her in the exuberant life of the East, surrounded by that light and atmosphere which alone sets a man's blood tingling and makes his imagination sail out to shoreless seas, without betraying his feelings for her! As he walked down to the little landing-stage where the *Isis* was moored, he made all

sorts of determinations to treat her with platonic naturalness and so win her friendship.

Stella waved her hand to him as she saw him across the gangway; her action was so friendly and expressed so much girlish pleasure at the anticipation of another of Luxor's glorious days that he felt it was easy to answer her in the same light-hearted way. "Are you coming to sketch," he said, "or going to Thebes?"

She held up her block. "Sketch. Nicolas mustn't go out until it's cooler, but he's better."

When Michael Ireton was beside her he said, "How do you do?" He was not going to lose the opportunity of holding her hand in his if it was only for one moment: he felt like a foolish lad.

"Where would you like to go?" He said the words with perfectly assumed politeness of manner, although a glorious feeling of thankfulness to the gods surged through his being. It was absurd, and he himself owned it, the way in which the slim, almost fragile girl in front of him had the power to affect him. He had to fight as fiercely with his own nature as he had ever fought against rebellious natives in primitive lands, to maintain his self-control; but he did it so magnificently that Stella comforted herself with the assurance that her fears of the day before had been groundless, sheer vanity on her part.

"Do you know what I think would be delightful?" she said. Her being was all delight to-day.

"No! tell me, and if it can be done we'll do it. Isn't life glorious in a land like this?"

"How does it appeal to you," she said in mock seriousness of tone, "to take a boat and idle on the water for an hour or two: we could get some nice effects on the river. If Nicolas had been well enough to go, we might have taken our lunch and ridden through Thebes and right on to a wonderful road which winds up to those rocks on the top of the hills until you reach the heights of the Sahara." She pointed to the Theban hills which lie behind the plain where the great city stood.

"That sounds fascinating," he said. He knew that her words implied that she could not go for so long a time with him unaccompanied by her brother.

"I have a childish longing," Stella said, "to sit quite

alone on the Sahara . . .” She paused. “I want to hear its centuries of ‘silence’ rolling up like a mighty ocean—it must be awful! Isn’t it strange to think that the great African desert lies on the top of these hills?”

“Do you like being alone?” he said, “I’ve lived so much alone that I can’t do without solitude; I never know what loneliness is except in cities.”

“Oh! that’s just what I feel,” she said: “being lonely does not consist in being alone, it’s being with people that bore you, that don’t understand your interests, isn’t it? They make you feel the utterest and most abject loneliness.”

“Yes,” he said, “but that’s because *you’re* intellectually minded: ordinary folk would rather talk to anybody than nobody. I wouldn’t, and you wouldn’t.”

“Is it?” she said, “I don’t know. I only know that the loneliest feelings I have ever endured have been in crowds and at parties.” She sighed.

The little touch of pathos which so feminized her face reminded him of the night he had watched her at the opera.

“I am always ‘bored to tears’ at parties,” he said lightly; “I hate them and avoid them like the plague, while being alone I often find too exciting—do you know what I mean?”

“Absolutely,” she said, “that’s exactly what I feel, only I never actually realized it before. . . .” She smiled; her whole being was expressive of complete mental sympathy. “I suppose mixing with the dull ordinary world keeps us sane: mother says that if all the world were made like me the lunatic asylums would be full; she thinks she’s splendidly matter-of-fact, and so she is in a way.”

They were walking together to the point where they were to take one of the gay little pleasure-boats which flit across the Nile like butterflies of tropical colouring . . . nothing but the present enjoyment of the day was in their minds, and the consciousness that nothing they enjoyed or noticed would be overlooked or unappreciated by either of them. The man was keenly alive to all that their enjoyment signified, the girl was not. Her conscience was undisturbed by any thought of disloyalty to Vernon.

When they were comfortably seated in the boat and

were settling themselves to paint, Stella drew her gloves off her hands and took out her paint-box from its leather bag; she little dreamt the issue that was to result from her action.

“What a curious ring that is!” he said as he watched her movements: “I noticed it yesterday. Has it a history?” Having no precious stones in it, the importance attached to the ring, although it was on the third finger of her left hand, never dawned on him for one moment.

Stella’s heart stood still; she paused for courage, and then she said slowly: “It is my engagement ring!”

In the acute silence that followed the girl knew, though her eyes were fixed on her paint-box, that the man in front of her was struggling for recovery from the blow her words had dealt him. She had not meant to tell him so abruptly, even though she had assured herself that his feelings for her were only platonic; but the situation left no loophole—she had to tell him there and then or deceive him, and she could not allow such disloyalty to Vernon.

With the greatest care she heard him letting the sigh, which, as it came from his lips very slowly, sounded like a sob, escape from his soul: it expressed all she had feared in the woman part of her, which could not be deceived.

“Your *engagement* ring!” he said. “So you are going to be married? you love some one else?”

“Yes,” Stella said, “you met my fiancé that evening in Luxor Temple.” They had travelled so far on the wonderful road of friendship, that secret road which knows no time or limits, that she spoke as though that evening was far, far away; the very Nile itself had rolled under the Bridge of Life since then. She let her eyes meet his—she was compelled to. The look of surprise she saw in them suddenly angered her, for unintentionally they had told her that in his mind now she was either very different from what he had thought her, or that intellectually she could have nothing in common with Vernon, that, from the highest standpoint, she did *not* love him.

“He had to return to Cairo on duty,” she said, a little hotly; “he is a soldier, and his week’s leave, which we had waited for so long and had planned to spend at Luxor, was spoilt by the illness of his commanding officer:

he had to return after he had only been in Luxor one evening."

Stella had spoken quickly and with an uncontrollable nervousness in her voice.

"How very disappointing! What were you thinking of sketching? Yes, that's a good piece of composition. let's do that."

Stella had indicated the little scene she had hurriedly decided to paint. How thankful she was to think that while they worked there could be silence, for the man's casual voice hurt her more than any blame could have done, and yet, if she chose to deny her own conscience, she could justify herself by saying that she had only met him three times; that they were practically strangers; that she had up till now had no opportunity of telling him of her engagement to Vernon. But her womanhood told her that it was a lie. Her real self, the self that the man in front of her understood as few people had ever done, knew perfectly well that, on that evening in the Arab restaurant when their eyes had met for the second time, she had had her warning. For they had told her that if ever they were to meet her womanhood could draw him to her, that her womanhood could rend him in pieces, until all his highness and masterfulness had melted away and he had become like unto a little child again.

After twenty minutes had passed, the longest twenty minutes Stella ever recollected, Michael Ireton broke the silence by saying, in a voice over which he had at last a perfect mastery—he had half a sheet of note-paper in his hand, which he had taken out of his pocket—"I came across this when I was reading last night; I thought it would amuse you, so I copied it out." He held it out to her. "It is a Ptolemaic school-boy's letter, written about two thousand years ago."

Stella read it aloud: "It was good of you to send me presents on the 12th, the day you sailed. Send me a lyre, I implore you. If you don't, I won't eat, I won't drink. There now. I pray for your good health."

"How deliciously human!"

She looked up with laughter-lit eyes: it happened to be one of her most adorable moments, it was her expression—the one he loved best. Such a fierce desire came to Michael

Ireton to take her face in his two hands and kiss it, that he said abruptly, "Let us go home; that's to say, if you don't mind."

He had made no remark upon the letter, and his tone, almost cross in its abruptness, made her hand him back the paper a little nervously. "Certainly, let's go back," she said shyly; "boys haven't changed much, have they?"

"Human nature never changes," he said, "only customs." The true meaning of his words was conveyed by his tone.

In a very few moments the boatman had pulled them to the point from which they had embarked and they were walking silently back to the *Isis*. When they reached the landing-stage Michael Ireton left her with an abrupt "good-bye." A hard anger had suddenly possessed him which would not allow him to behave, as he would like to have done, with a studied indifference to the fact that he now knew that she was engaged; a fierce anger at his own folly, that he should have allowed himself to walk blindfoldedly into a trap—for certainly it was a trap—kept him silent.

Love had set its trap with a callous cruelty which by Michael Ireton was wholly undeserved, for he had never flouted Love nor had he even scorned it; neither had he dishonoured it: he had instead revered it by refusing to put a false god in its place, calling it by the name of Love. And now, when all his reserve forces had been let loose, now when his finest passions were ready to worship and enjoy his realized ideal of womanhood, Love had struck him a deadly blow; it had trapped him only to laugh him to scorn.

## CHAPTER XIV

THE next morning when Stella was dressing her boy Yehla brought a note to her state-room door. She thought it was probably from Nicolas, as he was in the habit of sending her notes in the morning if there had been any development in the arrangements for the day which she had not heard the night before, so she told him to hold it while she finished tying her neck-tie. When she took it in her hand the handwriting made her start: she had only seen it once, in the Ptolemaic school-boy's letter—it was Michael Ireton's. She opened it with a certain nervousness and quickening of her heart-beats. What could it be about? Something with reference to her engagement, she felt sure. Was he going to blame her, had she been to blame? But it was not; it only contained a few lines:

“DEAR MISS LEKEJIAN,

“Will you forgive my apparent rudeness yesterday morning sufficiently to allow me to join your party *this* morning? As an excuse for any future lapses from conventional politeness please remember my long absences from civilization and be charitable to your apologetic savage.

“Yours sincerely,

“MICHAEL IRETON.”

When Stella had finished reading the note and was standing with it, absently wondering what she was to do, her boy said: “Khadim (servant) waits an answer, *sitt*.”

“Oh! does he?” Stella said, while she puzzled her brains to decide what she ought to do. It would certainly be delightful to have his companionship all day at Thebes, and besides, how could she say “No” without arousing Nicolas's suspicions. And after all, what reasons had she for assuming that the man cared for her?—it was sheer

vanity on her part; his letter was an ample proof that she had only herself to consider; and when her thoughts turned to Vernon she said: "He's enjoying himself in Cairo, his letters are all about dances and fun." She took up her letter-block, and hastily scribbled a few words which sent Michael Ireton's weather-glass of happiness flying up when he read them.

"DEAR MR. IRETON,

"Yes, do come, I should be so disappointed if you didn't. I'm afraid I prefer savages to civilized humbugs. At least you know what they want, and don't want.

"Yours sincerely,

"HADASSAH LEKEJIAN."

If Michael Ireton had fallen in love with Stella Lekejian when he was twenty instead of thirty-six he would in all probability have kissed the paper her note was written upon; instead of which he gave a packet of expensive cigarettes to his weary-looking bedroom-boy and made up his mind to enjoy the pleasures the day would bring forth without grousing about things that could not be helped.

And the day proved delightful. More than once Stella congratulated herself upon her wisdom in having allowed him to come with them, for he made himself so amusing, and contrived to set her mind comfortably at rest upon the point that now, since he knew that she was engaged to Vernon Thorpe, he was capable of carrying on their friendship on a purely platonic and intellectual footing. The very fact that he was many years her senior helped her to believe that if he had entertained any other kind of liking for her he was able to brush it aside and start on another basis. For one thing, Nicolas rarely left them alone for many minutes together, and the archæological interest of Thebes was so absorbing that it allowed very little time for talking about personal or abstract matters. But the day was by no means a negative one in the developing of the issues which Fate had in view, for it only bound the man's feet more securely in the trap which merciless Love had set for him. Forced to dwell only upon intellectual matters, he saw more and more convincingly how correct he had been in his estimation of the girl's character.

There was the assurance of complete affinity in their intellectual interests and pleasures. To Stella it proved that very human-and-intellectual elements can be found so perfectly blended in mankind as to make up an almost ideal companion. She was not the least conscious that she had laughed oftener since she had known Michael Ireton than she had done since she was at school in London. His humour, which was always expressed in the most serious and apparently spontaneous manner, appealed keenly to her sense of the ridiculous; and, as he loved to make her laugh, because laughter brought into play the most winning touches in her mobile face, he exerted himself to amuse her in a way she never for one moment suspected.

For the rest of the days of that golden week in Luxor, whose quality of beauty intoxicates men's senses and lulls into forgetfulness their knowledge of life's woes, Michael Ireton contrived to spend many hours of each day, and also of each star-lit night, at Stella's side.

With really superb control he had been able to do so because he never allowed the girl to feel for one moment that in seeing him she was being in any way disloyal to her lover, even to the extent of permitting a man for whom she herself had no feelings other than those of friendship, but who loved her, to be constantly by her side. Each night when he tore himself away from the seat in the bows of the *Isis* where they had talked and thought, and studied the mythology of ancient Egypt—that seat where, with dexterous management, he always contrived to arrange for the next day's meeting, if it was to be a lesson, or an excursion—Michael Ireton knew that he was laying up a store for himself, a mountain of suffering, the climbing of which he dared not contemplate. Yet so absolutely sufficient for the day was the joy thereof, that he was willing to accept the debt he had to pay for his brief cup of happiness, or rather pleasure, for there was infinite sadness in it—yet he drank to the dregs. Even when they parted, he managed to hide from Stella his real feelings; that is to say, while they were actually together, for he spoke lightheartedly of their probable meeting later on in Cairo; he was going in the interval to Professor Eritep's camp at Abydos, where a site of prehistoric interest was being excavated, to throw his whole soul into the work.

On their last evening together they lighted upon a topic of conversation which was to bear fruit in a curious way in Stella's future life. They were referring to a conversation Stella had had with a Coptic girl of about fifteen years of age who had placed herself near them when they were eating their lunch in the ruins of the only building of a domestic nature left standing in Thebes to-day. Stella had asked the girl if she could read and she had answered proudly that she could. Stella then asked her what the little blue cross meant that was tattooed on her wrist; she knew its significance, but she wished to find out if the girl did. She gave a lengthy explanation that it was put there when she was a little child to show that she was a Christian. Thereupon Stella asked her if she knew *why* a cross was a token of Christianity.

The girl shook her head. "No, *sitt*," she said.

"Do you not know anything about the story of the Cross and Who died upon it?"

The girl again said, "No, *sitt*," and shook her head gravely.

Michael Ireton had made a quick sketch of the girl, who was a typical Copt, with tragic eyes and an aquiline nose. It was when they were looking over his sketch-book that the subject of the child's general ignorance and her total indifference to the meaning of the cross which she so glibly said attested her right to be termed a Christian, that Stella said, "Please don't laugh if I tell you that I have been nursing a great ambition, ever since I returned to Egypt, about this very subject, but I'm afraid it's hopeless now."

"May I hear it?"

"You'll think it foolish, perhaps, and unpractical, but it always comes up again and again—the desire to carry it out, I mean."

She was silent for a moment.

"I never give up a thing I want to do, a thing that carries conviction with it, without a big fight. Have you tried . . . ?"

"It's very difficult: I want to work in a practical way . . ." she paused to find a mode of expressing just what she meant. "It sounds so grand to say that I want to work for the elevation of the Coptic women in Egypt, but that's

what I do mean. I don't mean by giving big sums of money—father does that—but by teaching them myself the simplest things about . . . well . . . about . . .” she paused, at a loss for words, “about the self-respect of womanhood and the virtue of cleanliness and . . .” she looked at him for response, and in his eyes she found all that she needed.

“Then why *don't* you do it?” he said, “who could do it better with your . . . with your intimate knowledge of their language, and also with what I should think is extremely necessary—an intimacy with their most sacred superstitions—you would be able to do magnificent work.” He looked pleased with the idea. “Make a fight for it,” he said; “don't let really surmountable difficulties be magnified into insurmountable ones.”

For a few moments both the man's mind and the girl's were lost in thought, but they were travelling on the same road.

“Would your *father* allow you to do it?”

Stella knew by the expression of his eyes and voice that he really meant, “Would your lover?”

“Yes, in time I think he *would*,” she said, “when I am a little older; but it is all out of the question now—I feel that it is quite hopeless.”

“Your marriage?” He forced the words out of himself in a way which made the colour mount to Stella's cheeks; it was the only indication he had shown, since the morning in the boat when she had told him of her engagement, of any personal feeling for her which was not wholly platonic.

“Yes,” she said, “Vernon hates my having the slightest connection with anything which he calls ‘native.’”

There was a deep silence once more, in which Michael Ireton heard the girl's quicker and more nervous breathing.

“Of course as a soldier's wife you would not have much opportunity.” He rose from his seat beside her and leaned over the bows of the boat: something stronger than his own self-control would be required, if he sat by her side any longer, to prevent him from taking her in his arms; the only thing to do was to leave her. Stella still sat on her comfortable seat surrounded by soft cushions, but they seemed made of thorns—she felt that suddenly the air was quickened with a new force, a force which was almost unbearable.

The feeling was purely psychic, for not one word had been said to produce it, and in Michael Ireton's voice anything but tenderness was depicted. At the moment he was a savage, clinging to every civilized quality that primitive man has adopted to help him to hide his strongest passions. He knew that the girl would scorn him for ever if he behaved dishonourably to her trust in him as a chosen friend, and that he would consider himself as a cad if he did; so, in a voice which had completely recovered its habitual friendly tone, he turned from his silent study of the wonderful heavens, dancing with a million stars, and said: "I hate good-byes, so I'm only going to say good-night. I'm off." He held out his hand; Stella put hers limply in his. An awful sense of numbness had come over her with his words.

"Good-bye," she said, "and thank you a thousand times for all my lessons; I shall miss them."

"It's I who have to thank you," he said with measured politeness, "it's been a delightful week." His voice was so coldly conventional that Stella felt her numbness increasing. Then suddenly he raised her hand to his lips and with a tender fierceness pressed a farewell kiss on the beautiful fingers. "Good-bye, dear little girl; good-bye, and God bless you."

The next moment he had walked, with his swinging strides, swiftly away to say good-bye to her mother and Nicolas, and Stella, after pressing her hands to her face for one wild moment of turbulent emotion, dropped them determinedly and set herself down before a copy of "The Sketch." She made a brave attempt to read it and not imagine foolish things about the man who, in spite of his kindness to her, only thought of her as a "little girl."

A quarter of an hour later, as Michael Ireton stepped across the gangway of the *Isis*, she saw him turn and look up at the spot where she was sitting; she rose impulsively from her seat and, leaning over the edge of the boat, she called out to him, "*Mà-as-salâmah*" (good-bye).

"No, *not* 'good-bye,'" he said, "for I shall see you in Cairo; only '*lêltak sà-îdah*'" (good-night).

From the camp about a week later he sent her one of the many letters he had written to her, letters written to satisfy his ever-increasing desire to speak to her, or

hold some sort of communication with her. Each one he wrote, even while he was penning it, he knew he would not send, yet in a measure it helped to relieve his pent-up feelings. The one he eventually sent ran thus :

“ MY DEAR LITTLE FRIEND,

“ I am trying my hardest to think of your happiness and enjoyment from a purely unselfish standpoint, for which, if you only knew it, I deserve some praise. What could be more delightful than your life at present ? Doing things you love with the person you love best in this world, in this wonderful climate and in this wonderful land—you are to be envied ! As for myself, you have given me so much pleasure that it would be ungrateful of me to complain if you have also quite innocently given me much pain.

“ La Vie est vaine,  
Un peu d’amour,  
Un peu de haine,  
Et puis : Bon jour !

“ La Vie est brève.  
Un peu d’espoir,  
Un peu de rêve,  
Et puis : Bon soir ! ”

“ The work here is ‘thrilling.’ I know, with your love for prehistoric and early dynastic things, how you would enjoy it.

“ Always your most sincere friend,  
“ MICHAEL IRETON.

“ PROFESSOR ERITEP’S CAMP, ABYDOS.”

## CHAPTER XV

AFTER a two weeks' absence Vernon was able to rejoin the Lekejians, who had moved their dahabeah to Assouan. As Stella knew only too well that it did not matter to him where he met them, she selected Assouan, for there they would be able to go for long rides in the desert and get better sailing than at Luxor. She was conscious of the fact, without acknowledging it to herself, that she would be happier with her lover at Assouan, playing tennis in the splendid gardens of the Cataract Hotel, and amusing themselves with a sailing-boat on the wide reaches of the river which lie between Assouan and Komombo, than doing the same ancient buildings with him in Thebes and Luxor that she had done with Michael Ireton; in fact, she was glad to leave Luxor.

The monuments of Egypt affected Stella strangely, for while she gloried in them intellectually, they made her profoundly miserable. In all her life she had never been so unhappy as at the great temple of Abu Simbel, which they had visited in the interval between Luxor and Assouan; it was a sort of unhappiness which was new to her, for instead of it being caused by some definite reason, it was the result of the sudden realization that nothing mattered; that she herself, as a personality, did not exist. This feeling that nothing mattered, or ever had mattered in so fleeting a thing as the life-time of a human being, brought with it the sensation that she no longer had any passion for Vernon, that she could never again love him as she had once loved him; yet even this did not seem to matter enough to cause her any pain. It was as though the age and cynicism of Egypt had withered her emotions.

But it was, above all, the feeling of self-extinction which unnerved and exhausted her physically. In the temples and tombs she was under the dominion of Age, she was

possessed by the Power of the Unseen ; for the time being humanity mattered to her no more than the bats and scorpions and spiders which housed themselves in the subterranean halls of the Pharaohs. Suddenly, too, she seemed to understand why Egyptians are so cruel, for what do pain or suffering matter to things which in themselves do not matter ?

At Abu Simbel she had risen at dawn, with Nicolas, to see the sun enter the vast hall of the temple and move slowly up the Osiris-guarded aisle to the high altar. She saw it enter as the God Harmachis (the rising sun) has entered that indestructible sanctuary, hewn out of the rock-battlement of the Nile, for more than three thousand years. When Nicolas saw the effect the ancient buildings were having upon his sister's nerves he was only too glad to fall in with her plan for returning to Assouan. It was only when she had left the buildings for some time that she enjoyed them without this sense of depression.

After being at Assouan for a few days Stella was surprised to find that she had returned quite unconsciously to her former state of being, that her own existence was once more, to herself at least, a thing of very conscious and vital importance, and that Vernon's letters were still capable of stirring her pulses and making her long for his presence. At Abu Simbel she had seen into the future—into the time when *this* period of the world's history will be as far removed from the generations that are to follow as the people of the age of Rameses are removed from us. At Abu Simbel she had not wanted Vernon, for he would have expected her to be human, and that would have been impossible, for neither herself nor humanity any longer existed, her being was swallowed up in Egypt. He would have wanted her to respond to his presence as a lover, even while the great Harmachis was crossing the threshold of his house. She was relieved that he was not there to feel bored instead of elated by the Majesty and Dominion and Power of this most strangely romantic of all temples on the Nile.

Now at Assouan, with its modern tennis-courts and gay flower-gardens, riding by Vernon's side along the same desert track which led the ancients to the Land of Gold—that camel-path to Ethiopia from whence came ivory

and frankincense and myrrh for the greater glorification of the gods of Thebes, she could think pleasurable thoughts of Abu Simbel; of its flowering acacia trees, which dipped their lower branches into the waters of the Nile, while their upper foliage screened the façade of the building from the curious eyes of the toilers on the river. How refreshing had been the sight of these golden flowers—how wholly unexpected the figures of the giants-in-stone, whose grave faces had looked sternly down upon her as she mounted the steep bank which led from the river's edge to the temple porch! Now, at Assouan, her state of mind was so normal and so healthy that she could tell Vernon all about the great temples and the tombs of the kings which she had seen, without even remembering that they had caused her both fear and depression. She could describe to him how at Abu Simbel the feathery branches of the acacia trees had come almost into her cabin, so close did they grow to the water's edge, and how the powdery balls of the golden blossom had fallen like a fairy carpet on their deck. She told him how the great Rameses had built the temple as a monument to his victory over the Kheta, who were struggling to retain their supremacy over the northern part of her own country, Syria, and how he had dedicated the temple to Horus, the Sun-god, who at the break of day calls himself Harmachis.

It was chiefly to please herself that she told him these details and lingered glowingly over the mystery and romance of the building, for she wished to at least give him the chance of entering into her feelings and æsthetic enjoyments. If she banished these things from her life when she was with him, their sympathies would eventually become wholly one-sided; besides, there was the subtler feeling of guilt which she wished to atone for. In her heart she would have loved to cherish and keep all these intellectual intimacies and sympathies for her absent friend, the friend whom she persisted in thinking of as only intellectually dear to her. It was because she was jealous of sharing her intellectual being with any one but him that she was forced by the dictates of "the little voice" to talk to Vernon about them more than was at all necessary.

She always felt that Vernon was only holding his soul

in patience while she gave vent to her feelings over things in which he honestly could not work up any genuine interest. He admired the various buildings he saw, because their size and age were things amazing enough to make him amazed without any effort. Their grandeur was obvious, their indestructibility awesome, but their history, or the meaning of their decorations, still did not interest him one scrap. When Stella began to talk about them, he would have yawned himself to sleep if he had not been in love with her.

But their ride to the ancient granite quarries at Assouan was a different thing: it really delighted him, and on that occasion no one could have been a better companion. Their way took them very far from civilization, for nothing but desolation lies near to these historical quarries, from which were hewn the soaring obelisks and strange statues which are to-day treasured among the wonders of the world. He liked to see the marks of the chisel fresh upon unfinished statues and gods which had been commissioned by living kings some four thousand years ago, orders which had never been finished because the king had died and his successor had had his own glorification to attend to and was not going to pay for work which described the glory of a dead Pharaoh. The desert round Assouan, with its forsaken cemeteries, where Moslem saints and Arab sheikhs lie buried in white-domed tombs as beautiful in the African sunlight as phantom cities of desert spirits, and the low tent homes of the wild Bishareen, delighted them both. This was the Egypt Vernon loved, and he asked for nothing more intellectual than riding in the desert or sailing on the wide stretches of the Nile in white-winged boats as gaily painted as the arches of a rainbow. He was as happy as a child. And for one whole week Stella, too, was completely and foolishly happy. Girgis Boutros and his warnings were forgotten; he had not dropped from the blue at wholly unexpected moments, and nothing had happened to remind her of the fact that in Cairo she would have to face the ordeal of Vernon seeing with his own eyes the position she held there in society. And to a true woman it is so delightful to be adored and considered beautiful that Stella basked in the warm sunshine of love and devotion.

At Assouan they had dined once and lunched once in the huge hotel, which, from the point of view of good taste, ought never to have been built, so totally unsuited is it to the landscape, but which, on account of its exquisite situation and perfect comfort, is filled to overflowing every year with wealthy tourists who have discovered the health-giving qualities of Assouan air and the charm of its country life. On both occasions Stella had met people whom she had known in England, and they had been delightful to her, delightful because they had not yet been affected by the prejudices of Cairo. They begged her to come and see them in Cairo when they both returned from their trips up the Nile, and they were enthusiastic over the excursions they made with her father and mother on their house-boat.

The Lekejians had taken them to Shellal, to see the great barrage. Mr. Lekejian knew one of the chief engineers, who showed them over the immense concern, and explained its history and workings. The day at the barrage was a day after Vernon's own heart, and it must be acknowledged that it was a day which might well have filled any Englishman's heart with pride, for in constructing the barrage at Assouan the modern scientific builder has at last accomplished a feat which the ancient Egyptians failed to do. These master-builders, whose many secrets have lain buried with them for endless centuries, never built, in all the history of Egypt, a monument to its greatness which benefited their country as this Assouan barrage has done. The temples and the tombs of Egypt were built for the glorification of the Pharaohs, out of the life-blood of the people; the barrage at Assouan has been built to give food to the poor—in Egypt water means food. It is a comforting fact for an Englishman to remember, as he stands on that amazing structure, that once again in Egypt the hand of the builder has raised a monument of almost superhuman conception, a monument which can take its place with the buildings of the Pharaohs; and he can reflect that it is under English rule that the first Monument to Humanity has been raised in a land where the English rule is vilified. It has been left for the English to bestow the unspeakable blessing of water alike upon the poor and the rich in Egypt. The barrage is a very Temple of Justice. Vernon was immensely impressed; he would

have liked to spend some days in inspecting it, but his "leave" passed all too quickly, and he had to rejoin his regiment.

As the Lekejians wished to visit the temples of Denderah and Komombo and Abydos on their way back to Cairo, Vernon got there a fortnight before Stella, and on the very eve of their arrival there he was ordered to go with his regiment to Helouan. They were to be in camp for a fortnight for manœuvres. At Helouan he saw a good deal of society, for there are health-baths at Helouan which attract invalids, and it is needless to say that during these weeks he was initiated still further into some of the mysteries and peculiarities of Cairene society, and he would not have been human if during that initiation he had not shrunk from the knowledge, which was being slowly but surely forced upon him, that Hadassah Lekejian and Stella Adair were two very different people. He grew to wish that the girl who had ridden by his side at Assouan over the desert sands and under the clear skies *was* the Stella Adair he had known in London . . . he would have given ten years of his life to be able to say truthfully to himself that "for the opinion of the English he did not care a damn!" He hated himself for loathing every Levantine, of whatever nationality, who obstructed his path as he hurried along the crowded thoroughfares where popular street cafés gather them together. It was no use his trying to affect anything like a fellow-feeling for even the most Europeanized of Orientals, for he could not, and he sincerely hoped that they, in their turn, felt no such fellow-feeling for him.

He was happily confident, however, that Stella, who, he was sure, had much the same dislike for them as he had (if she would only admit it), would be only too glad to shake the dust of Cairo for ever off her feet when she was married to him, and that once in England no one would ever know that she was not English, and if they did they would not care, for in London are not the doors in the most exclusive society open to Turks and Jews and Syrians, to the peoples of all races, in fact, if they are wealthy enough to entertain lavishly? It is in the East that refined Syrians like Nicolas Lekejian and his family are treated as social outcasts by the English. Yet

in his soul (which was wholly British) he wished that his beloved Stella had not suddenly been changed into Hadassah Lekejian, the beautiful Syrian Hadassah whom the nice Englishmen in Cairo talked about with so much pity. His love for her had not lessened, but he would have given worlds to have changed her back again into Stella Adair, and, above all things, to have been able to say to himself that Girgis Boutros was not her cousin! The idea that she was conferring an honour upon him by marrying him had unconsciously faded away; it had even occurred to him once or twice to wonder if Mrs. Lekejian had not very naturally encouraged Stella in her love for himself, for, of course, Mrs. Lekejian, being an Irishwoman, would naturally like to see her only daughter married to a European, and she was to be forgiven if she had kept Vernon in ignorance of Stella's true position in Cairo.

But, to be quite fair to Stella's lover, his thoughts upon the subject were only natural; they were not snobbish or disloyal. In camp at Helouan he had plenty of time for dwelling upon the situation, and his thoughts always ended in the same solution, that he would take Stella away just as soon as ever he could from Cairo (which he already detested cordially), and that in England she could have her parents to visit her as often as ever she pleased, but that never again would he permit her to live with them in the East.

## CHAPTER XVI

STELLA did not see Vernon after her return to Cairo for almost a week: it was not his fault, because he was still at Helouan. But to-night there was to be a reception at the British Agency, to which the Lekejian family had determined to go, and Stella knew that she would see him there. Her reason for going was on account of the kindness the British Agent's wife had shown her at a café chantant which had been got up for a charity, and at which Stella had been induced to sing.

Lady Minton had been charmed with the girl's voice and personality, and had insisted upon being introduced to her. Instantly realizing Stella's isolated position when she discovered that she was a Syrian, she exercised all her powers of sympathy to make her feel completely at her ease, and make her enjoy herself. In the kindest way she begged Stella and her mother to come and see her, and expressed the hope that they might enjoy many musical afternoons together. As Stella's heart was easily touched, and her nature intensely responsive to true sympathy, she determined to break through her rule of refusing all social functions of a public kind (she was never invited to private ones) and go to Lady Minton's official reception. Lady Minton's kindness to the girl had not, however, altered the residents' attitude towards the Lekejians; they merely said, "It is a great pity if Lady Minton is going to start doing this sort of thing; it has been tried many times and has been found impossible. Leaving it off will hurt the girl's feelings much more than if she had never been noticed at all." So Stella went to the reception, not only to show Lady Minton that she appreciated her kindness, but to get over the ordeal which she knew had to be faced, the ordeal of meeting Vernon amongst English people who liked to pretend that she did not exist.

It was some satisfaction to know that she was exquisitely dressed, and, as she passed one long mirror after another in the crowded rooms at the Agency, she could not help knowing that the vision of herself she saw in them was pleasing. It sustained her self-esteem, for, if she did not acknowledge to herself that she was charming, she at least comforted herself with the thought that she was well turned-out and looking her very best. Excitement had brought a delicate colour to her usually pale cheeks, and her soft eyes seemed larger and more brilliant than ever. Stella was certainly the name best suited to her to-night, and any stranger would have been astonished to learn that she was not English—that her name was Hadassah Lekejian.

After shaking hands with her hostess, who was naturally too occupied to say more than a few words to her, she soon found herself by her mother's side again, watching the entrance of fresh arrivals. She knew that she would probably stay there all through the evening, and that she would scarcely speak half-a-dozen words to any one outside of her own party. She could see nothing of Vernon; he had evidently not come after all. Soon her heart gave a little bound, and she felt the blood leave her cheeks, for he had entered the room with the very people who had told the man who had bowed to her from the British Agent's box at the opera that she was a Levantine or something, which had prevented him making any further attempt to renew their friendship. Vernon had been dining with them, and Stella saw him talking quite intimately to a pretty girl of the fair, conventional English type, the type of woman whom conventional men approve of because they know exactly what to expect of them. The unaccustomed in women may be amusing in a mistress; it is annoying in a wife.

It would be impossible for Vernon to avoid seeing Stella after he had shaken hands with Lady Minton, and as his companion's mother was one of the leaders of Cairene society—who refused to receive "natives" of any kind in her house—Stella was a little excited to know what he would do. As they drew near her eyes met the blue eyes of the girl he was talking to. She was looking at Stella with very obvious admiration, so she may have

said something about Stella, for her mother's diamond-crested lorgnettes went up, and Stella felt the cold scrutiny of two worldly eyes passing over her. It was her scrutiny of Stella which made Vernon suddenly notice her. A deep flush dyed his face, and for a moment he stopped hesitatingly, but it was only for a moment; the next he had passed on with a bow and an embarrassed smile. His hostess was speaking to him, and telling him in a clear voice that "some Levantines are *quite* beautiful when they are young, but that, like all natives, they quickly degenerate."

At that moment Stella did not feel like the Biblical Esther of old, who hid her nationality from her lord in order to save her people; she felt like Lot's wife when she was turned into a pillar of salt. Then suddenly rage seized her, and she could have murdered and torn in pieces every Englishwoman in the room. The hideous cruelty of it, the hideous vulgarity of it, the hideous prejudice of it! She did not blame Vernon, for somehow she felt that she had been through the scene many many times before, she felt as though it was inevitable that things should have happened just as they had happened. The band was playing a popular waltz, and the big room was becoming crowded; faces she knew by sight were passing before her; and all the while she was talking to her brother Nicolas as though she was in a dream. She had no idea how long she had been standing by her mother's side mechanically talking about things that did not matter, about things she could not remember the moment after they were said—it might have been for hours—when Vernon came up to her. He seemed a little nervous, and explained that he had come just as soon as he could get away from his party.

As he spoke to her a flood of devotion suddenly leapt in him: to see her standing by her parents' side, her young face frozen to a dreadful coldness, filled him with anger against his own race; his eyes were so full of passion that hers melted a little as they looked into them, but the hand she held out to him was the hand of a stranger. She could not decide what she had expected him to do—that he should leave his hostess and dash impetuously towards her and claim her as his own—or what? She

did not know ; she only felt that he had not done as *she* would have done if their position had been reversed. *Should* he have said, when the cruel lorgnettes went up, "That is the girl I am engaged to. May I introduce her to you ?" She did not know ; she only knew that that little moment of hesitation, that conventional bow, and that embarrassed smile, had placed worlds and worlds between them. She *hoped* that she would not allow him to kiss her when they were alone, she hoped that she would never again feel that delicious sense of she knew not what when his arms were round her, she hoped that she would never tolerate an Englishman's love again. He asked her to come for a walk through the rooms and go out on the terrace. Her mother smiled to her to go : anything was better than to see her child neglected and overlooked, while every one else in the room was gay and sociable. At such a gathering there was, of course, no introducing, and in Cairo, where the residents knew each other intimately, there was little need of it. Stella's father was the centre of a group of men who were eagerly discussing the Asiut election and politics generally. There was a Turkish Pasha amongst them, and the most influential lawyer in Cairo.

Stella left her brother to look after her mother, and went off with her lover, but not one word came to her lips to say ; she walked the whole length of the room in complete silence. Her heart was too full of bitterness to speak naturally of trivial things ; besides, she could not think of anything to say that did *not* matter. She longed to cry out and tell him that she was miserable, that she was miserable because she still loved him even though he had failed her, that she was sick of the whole world. Vernon waited until they were seated under a flowering sunt tree, whose luscious scent sweetened the soft night air, before he attempted to speak. Bright lanterns, which looked like sumptuous tropical flowers, were gently swaying from the trees in the breeze, and in the distance an Arab lover was pouring out his heart to the moon.

Vernon's arm stole round Stella's waist and his lips were pressed to her white throat. Stella was trembling, and, although she was not responsive, she did not resist ; already her senses were being drugged by the magic of his caresses.

“Dearest,” he said, “do let’s get married and leave this beastly place. I’ll take you back to England, where you will be courted and adored once more. English people are hateful in the East. I can’t think what comes over them.”

She let him kiss her lips, for he had turned her face to his, but she said, “Don’t, Vernon, please don’t.”

“But why?” he said. “No one can see us here. The tree completely hides us.”

“Yes, I am your lover when there is no one who can see us . . . ?”

“Oh! Stella . . .” he stammered confusedly, “you don’t want me to kiss you in *public*, do you?”

She was silent.

“You’re miserable, darling, out here, where everything is wrong. Why don’t you go back to Miss MacNaughtan?—and I’ll change into another regiment and come home and marry you.”

“This *is* my *home*,” she said slowly. She had drawn her face farther from his.

“I never feel that it is.”

“But you must.”

“Why should I? I like to think of you as Stella Adair, the most beautiful and popular girl in a set of decent English people at home . . . all this sort of thing is upside down . . . It’s like a bad dream; it’s hateful!”

“This is how things are,” she said; “the other was a dream.”

“But it needn’t be: your mother would let you go home to-morrow; I know she would . . . she’s a dear; she understands.”

“And you would have me go ‘home,’ as you call it?”

“Why not? It would only be returning to the people who brought you up, to the people who understand you, the people for whom you were educated.”

He kissed her again, and pressed her soft cheek closely to his, but Stella roused herself to resist the seduction of his passion, to throw off the physical lassitude which his near presence always produced in her. In a voice stifled with emotion she said: “You are wrong; they are not my people; that is just the mistake we have both made. . . . My people are here! Girgis Boutros is one of them. I

am what you English call a Levantine, I came here to-night so that you should know it."

Vernon withdrew his caressing hand. "But you don't care for him—why should you care about leaving him? He doesn't count, or any of his people."

"I admire him," she said, "and I should despise myself if I married you and left my people—surely you would despise me if I did it?"

"Dearest, you don't love me! What has changed you?"

Her only answer was to lift his hand to her lips and kiss it very tenderly, even while the ideal of him she had created was suffering rude shocks. She had hoped that her words would bring forth the protest that he would really love her less if she despised her people, or that he would marry her in Cairo to-morrow if she liked, and so show the stiff-necked English that her people were his people, and that his people were hers.

But he had no such thought in his mind . . . he was obsessed with the one idea that if she loved him she could leave her detestable relations for his sake, that she could cut herself off from the prejudiced society of Cairo and live in a country where being a Syrian meant no more to the general public (if the woman was rich and charming) than being a Turk or a Jew or a Greek. So he said, with a self-aggrieved air: "Go back to England and wait for me, dearest; leave this beastly place—you would if you really cared for me."

"Never!" she said passionately. Her heart was beating wildly, for she believed that she was rejecting the one thing that made life sweet to her; but she would be brave.

"Darling, why won't you?"

"Perhaps if I tell you you won't understand; but please try to: it is because I should hate *you* if I went, if I was not strong enough to resist . . ." she pushed away his hands . . . meaning his physical attraction . . . her voice broke, "I should despise you if you did not hate me for going." As she spoke she knew that she was losing a portion of the ideal of him that she had created . . . she was conscious that one day she might lose all.

"No, I don't understand," he said; "you would despise

me if you loved me well enough to do as I ask you to! All this is beyond me. You look at things from such a strange point of view."

"Not very strange, dearest. Can't you understand, can't you see how I should grow to hate you if my love for you made me a traitor to my own people, if I left my father and my mother and Nicolas because you were ashamed to own that you loved a Syrian, if you were afraid to face the music?"

Vernon was amazed at her intensity. "Who said I was afraid? What have I done? This sort of thing has got on your nerves."

"Do you wonder if it has?" she asked passionately; "do you wonder if I hate myself for loving a man who belongs to the race of people who despise my father—my father who is worth a hundred prejudiced Englishmen—a man who scorns me in Cairo because his fellow-countrymen do not think any one who is not British is fit to speak to? . . . It is cruel," she said, "cruel and abominable. I hate myself for loving you, but I can't help it."

"Don't, darling!" he said in a soothing voice.

"Oh! don't touch me," she cried. . . . "When you caress me I have no will-power, no individuality, no self-respect, and . . . I must resist, for to-night I know that you share the feelings of the English in Cairo. Something tells me that if we had never met in England you would never have loved me here . . . you would never have asked me to marry you?"

"Why do you say that? . . . I came to you as soon as I could. I had dined with these people: I had to be civil."

Stella gave a pitiful laugh. "You did not tell the lady you were with that you were engaged to me?"

"There was no occasion to."

"There was the opportunity! She made a remark about me: I heard it. Wouldn't it have been the natural thing to have told her then if you had not been ashamed?"

"Stella, this is awful . . . nothing has been right since I've been in Egypt . . . you blame me for all the wrongs the English have done to your people. Forget about it and be nice, do, dear."

"How can I forget?" she said. "Certainly not until I know my true position with you. . . . Are we to be openly

engaged? Are you going to acknowledge me to your friends? . . . Are you going to accept my relations? . . . Or am I to be kissed behind the sunt trees and ignored in the drawing-rooms?"

"You're awfully cruel: you've changed completely. Are you so anxious for our engagement to be made public?"

"Yes, if you wish me to remain engaged to you in private!"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean," she said, "that if I did what I ought to do I should break off my engagement with you unless you agree to all I wish."

"Why? . . . For what reason? . . . I can scarcely believe it is you talking. . . . Stella, dearest, why on earth should you break with me? What do you wish me to do?"

"It would be fairer to you, and I suppose I ought to marry my cousin Girgis Boutros."

"Good Lord, Stella! . . . What for?"

"Because I could help him in his work for the people. Because he would ask me to stay with my people and not forsake them . . . he would spend his great wealth on educating and raising the position of the Christians in Egypt."

"But why should you be made the sacrifice?"

"Because he loves me, and surely I have been born and educated for some reason . . . for some purpose other than to be an object of pity to the English. It must have been that I was to help him to carry on his work. . . . Heavens!" she said, with a hopeless sigh, "if only I could . . ." she stopped.

"If only you could what?"

"Forget myself. . . . If only I could forget that you exist, if only I had never known your love."

"You'll forget me all right," he said bitterly. "Girgis is very wealthy!"

"How cruel!"

"Well, I think it's you who are being cruel; you're chucking me for a richer man."

"For one who does not despise me; for one who does not ask me to forsake my people; for one who would be proud to tell every one in Cairo to-morrow that I am his promised wife."

“ And who said I wouldn't ? ”

“ Would you ? Will you introduce me to-night as your fiancée ? ”

“ Of course, darling, if you wish it ; but to whom ? ”

“ To any one.”

“ I don't know people intimately here. . . . They are all the merest acquaintances ; they don't even know I'm engaged : it would seem rather odd.”

His arm stole round her because her face had softened, and she had not resisted the caressing shoulder as he leaned against her. As a woman she was so attractive that he could not resist her. It seemed impossible that any community of cultivated people could treat her as a social outcast ; yet he had only to take her back to the drawing-room to realize that such was the case, and Stella insisted upon their going back. She wished to return, because she found herself becoming weaker and weaker under the magic of hands and the passion of lips, and she knew that neither her heart nor her pride were satisfied, and she was determined that her self-respect and pride should master her physical weakness. As she rose to her feet, she held out her hands imploringly. Vernon took them eagerly in his.

“ Dearest,” she said, “ we need never speak of all this again : we need never mind what people think if only you will accept my people as your people . . . if you will never ask me to leave them. . . .” She paused. “ As a soldier's wife, of course, I should naturally go with you to the uttermost ends of the earth. . . . But I will never go anywhere for the sake of getting away from the people I belong to.”

“ And you will not marry Girgis Boutros ? ”

“ I will never marry him . . . unless . . . ”

“ Unless what ? ”

“ Unless you fail me.”

“ In what way ? ”

“ By scorning my people, by doing nothing to help me to make their position less undignified, by keeping your eyes shut to the injustice of the English.”

Steps close at hand prevented Vernon answering her, and the next moment Nicolas and Michael Ireton were standing beside them. Nicolas hesitated and was turning

away when he saw who it was they had interrupted, but Stella begged him to come back. "Nicolas, don't go! May I join you? . . . Vernon has to return to the friends he came with."

The look of pleasure and something deeper which had lit up Michael Ireton's face when he saw Stella was not lost upon Vernon, whose mind was instantly filled with jealousy. He did not want to leave her with this man who, he knew, appealed to the intellectual side of her nature so strongly . . . nor did he particularly wish to take her back to the reception room, where he might have to face the difficulty of meeting his hostess and introducing Stella. He knew perfectly well that Mrs. Bostock would not be nice to the girl, the more so because Stella was much better dressed than her own daughter, whom Vernon imagined, though he was not vain, to have been designedly thrown in his way upon the last two or three occasions upon which they had met. Vernon had only been three weeks in Cairo, and he had already seen the same set of people a good many times at different social functions. He liked the girl with her pink skin and blue eyes; her love of outdoor games and sport appealed to him: but he had no desire to be drawn into a flirtation with her. As Stella had as much as given him his dismissal, he was upon the point of leaving them, when she said to him in a persuasive voice: "Vernon, *will* you come to-morrow morning and see some of the old Coptic churches? Mr. Ireton would like to come with us."

Vernon detested sight-seeing with all his soul, but he was too jealous of the man to let Stella go about alone with him, so he accepted the invitation. "I hope you don't mind vermin," he said to Mr. Ireton. "Some people I met out at dinner last night told me that these old churches are alive with all sorts of insects: one girl had hysterics when she got home and found the worst of all things on her blouse, within an inch of her hair."

"I do mind them very much," Mr. Ireton said: "they spoil a very great deal of the pleasure of sight-seeing in the East, but clothes will burn and I will wash, and these old churches are quite unique, both in point of architecture and real beauty. I *must* see them; it is worse for ladies. What will you do, Miss Lekejian?"

“I’ll put on things that will wash when I get home . . . my maid will examine them first, for washing doesn’t kill the *worst* kind—do you remember what Robbie Burns said about them? I suppose they have not changed since his day; indeed, they often come home with the washing.”

“Ye gods,” Vernon said, “how horrible! Where is one safe?”

“Never, if you go in public conveyances or rub shoulders with the people in the bazaars.”

“But I thought Mohammedans were clean: they wash before praying?”

“Not the women.”

“And the Copts?”

“They are no better . . . for most of their customs are just the same, and you must remember that this climate engenders these things.”

“Thank God for England,” Vernon said; “I’d rather have its rain and grey skies than the filth and sunshine of the East.”

He turned to go.

“Then you’ll call for me at nine o’clock to-morrow morning,” Stella said; “it will be on your way . . . it gets too hot later on.”

As he left them Mr. Ireton said, “Oriental things don’t appeal to him very much, do they? He’s of too British a turn of mind.”

Nicolas wondered if he had any turn of mind at all, but he did not say so . . . he knew that Vernon had brains of the kind which could absorb certain subjects if they interested him, but he doubted very much if he had a mind which “thought” for itself upon any subject whatsoever. It seemed to him to consist of accepted principles and prejudices.

For a little while they walked about the grounds, while Michael Ireton told them what he had been doing since they had parted in Luxor. He was enchanted with Abydos, and told Stella a great deal about the expectations of the excavating party there. Stella had just had time to see the glorious reliefs on the white walls of the temple on her way back from Luxor: the temple of Abydos had excited her imagination more and depressed her less than any other spot in Egypt, for even if the tomb of Osiris should

never be discovered there, it is an historical fact that for endless centuries devout Egyptians believed that his heart was buried at Abydos, and endeavoured by every means in their power to secure a burial site as close to his reputed shrine as possible. Apart from the romance of Osiris's tomb, the great temple of Abydos is unlike any other building in Egypt. Its very name is suggestive of its peculiar charm and delicate beauty.

Stella said that she envied the professor's wife, who lived with her husband in his camp and helped him in his work there. Michael Ireton looked at Nicolas, who understood the remark his eyes conveyed that if she longed to be the wife of a man whose whole existence was given over to archæological research, how could she be satisfied with Vernon, whose real interests in life were polo and golf?

"Would you be contented to live her life?" he said. "You wouldn't need any pretty clothes—you would have to do without all luxuries: camp life at Abydos is very severe."

"I believe that Stella could do without them," Nicolas said, "better than she could do without intellectual interests and intelligent companionship. At the same time, I think her nervous system would not stand the strain. She loves pretty clothes and pretty surroundings, but they don't make up her life. I think half her pretty frocks are worn to please me."

Stella thanked him with her eyes, for he had said what was practically true. "These pretty things help to make my rather stupid life more exciting," she said . . . "but they really mean nothing: if I could go off to-morrow into the desert with Nicolas . . . or with any one who loved it as Nicolas does, I would leave them all behind me gladly."

"I believe you would," Michael Ireton said. "To me all this sort of thing seems awfully vapid after you have been in camp. Our evenings used to be delightful . . . such talks . . . such arguments . . . such theories, all relating to things which had their place in the world thousands of years ago." As he spoke he caught Stella's glowing eyes, her ardent smile.

"And yet I often think," Nicolas said, "that we are just making history, as the ancients made it; that what

we are doing to-day may prove full of interest to the people who are going to live a thousand years after us. We think it is very thrilling to handle a thing of everyday use which was made two thousand years ago or more, but it was only a plate or a teacup to the people then, just as these modern things are to us. Probably the majority of people lived as profitless lives as we do; it was only the poor who starved and the rich who ruled, that dealt with the strenuous things of life."

"The elemental principles never change," Michael Ireton said: "there is the same loving and hating and fighting and striving going on all round us as there was in the days when the first person of the sacred Trinity worshipped by men was Osiris. But I've a proposal to make to you." He had stopped suddenly, and strained his ear to listen. "Aren't you tired of all this?"—he pointed to the brightly lighted house and to the mass of moving figures. "I know a wealthy Arab who is giving a party on board his dahabeah to-night—it's lying just off Roda Island. If your sister had her wraps, we could get into a small boat and drift down the river and hear the music. The illuminations will be worth seeing."

Nicolas hesitated.

"I wouldn't ask you," he said, "if I didn't know it was going to be something very special. He's got a famous tenor on board, and there is to be a whole flotilla of boats, illuminated: he's entertaining a great swell from Persia. He's giving a series of entertainments, intellectual and otherwise, and I had the honour of being his guest last night. I never experienced anything so delightful before. The boat was a perfect fairyland of flowers and priceless embroideries, and there were story-tellers engaged, and poets, who recited their parts in splendid costumes. The whole thing was classical."

Stella's eyes glowed. "I'd love to go," she said, "but I wish we could go on board. . . . How did you get to know him? I've often heard that the wealthy Arabs give exquisite entertainments. They are devoted to poetry and to classical recitations."

"I got to know him through a Frenchman who ignores the prejudices of Cairo and makes friends with all the most cultivated Arabs . . . he says he'd die of ennui

out here if he depended on the society of Europeans ; their parties are deadly affairs."

"Probably the Europeans think he's half a native because he isn't English," Stella said laughingly, "and ignore him."

"Probably," Michael Ireton said, "but who cares ! He took me there last night. I wish you could have been with me"—he addressed Nicolas—"it really was perfect ; and my host had such charming manners."

"I wish I could," he said, "but with my mother and Stella to consider I can't . . . though I often think that that's the only side of life worth anything out here. . . . I tried it . . . when Stella was at school, but I found it difficult when I wanted to return their hospitality : I couldn't ask them to my home."

"I see," Michael Ireton said, and yet he didn't see, for he could not understand why the Lekejians, who did not really know the English people in Cairo, thought it worth while to mind what they thought or said.

But he was reckoning without Stella's father, who would not allow Mussulmans to come to his house as intimates. He himself knew many of them as one man knows another, and he liked them exceedingly for many reasons, but he would not countenance the idea of permitting them to know his wife and daughter in their home life. He knew their minds too well, and their opinion of women who lived in the free manner of Western women, as Stella did. He knew many Copts who lived almost like Mussulmans (apart from the fact that, being nominally Christian, they were by their Church allowed only one wife), yet he considered them many degrees better in their "mental attitude" towards women than Mussulmans.

Stella and her mother visited very formally a few Mohammedan women of high rank, whose husbands were westernized enough to keep only one wife. Mr. Lekejian would not permit them to go to any harem where the husband had more. Stella thought it was rather foolish, as she knew quite well that the real reason for them having only one wife was because they were not wealthy enough to give the wives the dowry they could claim by law if they were divorced because their husbands were tired of them, and their husbands would not care to support them in their harems for no purpose. It

was easier, as they said, to do as the European men did—have only one wife in their homes, but as many mistresses outside as they chose, for they would expect no dowry when their little day was over. Like many other excellent Christians, Mr. Lekejian preferred to live like the ostrich: he tried to believe that the Egyptian Mussulman when he has only one wife is helping to raise the standard of Eastern morality, that he is doing it in the cause of morality, not of necessity, because the good old days of wealth by bribery and corruption have ended, and only a few Egyptians can to-day afford to keep up the old customs of the harem.

And so to Stella and her mother the inner life of the Mohammedan women was almost as much a sealed book as it was to the ordinary English resident.

When Nicolas returned with Stella's cloak he looked a little disturbed. "I think we ought not to go, dear," he said. "Father has gone home—he may have to leave for Asiut to-night—and mother is quite alone waiting for us."

"Why has father gone? . . . Has anything happened?"

"There has been a disturbance at Asiut. Amin Hamdulla (the Mohammedan) has been elected Mudir; some of the English have been badly knocked about by the Copts, who think they ought to have had their support at the election. Father has gone to his office to write a leader on the subject."

Stella looked grave. She was thinking of Girgis—how angry he would be. The Copt was really a first-class man; she was sorry for his defeat; at the same time, she did not herself believe that he could have filled the post of Mudir as well as a good Mohammedan.

She turned to Michael Ireton and said, "We mustn't stay—please take me back to mother. We will go home. Nicolas, will *you* tell Vernon?"

They had almost reached the lighted rooms, and could hear the babble of voices, before either Michael Ireton or Stella spoke. Stella was unaware that she had been silent.

"I wonder if you realize how very interesting all this is," he said.

"All what?" she asked . . . "that . . . do you mean?" She pointed her hand in scorn to the lighted rooms.

“ Good heavens ! no ; I mean your life outside of all this . . . you are not going to *care* about this . . . ” he took her hand, “ you are so much above it, so much too good for it, dear child ; promise me you will realize how little it matters and ignore it.”

“ How can I ? ” she said. Her hand remained in his, the friendship of it helped her.

“ Why can't you ? ” he asked. . . . “ You don't really care about it ; when you analyse it you know it's worthless.”

“ Vernon belongs to this life,” she said ; “ I loved him before I knew anything about it.”

“ I wonder if you know what love means ? ” He looked into her eyes very earnestly.

“ Why do you say that ? I am not a child.”

He smiled. “ What has that to do with it ? ” he said. “ Lots of people have lived to be seventy, and have been married twice, and never known what love meant.”

She looked at him almost sadly. “ How is one to know ? ” she said.

He did not answer—he was not listening ; he was thinking of what he wished to tell her. “ May I confess something about myself,” he asked abruptly, “ something I would like you to know ? ”

She nodded her head.

“ Well, it is just this : when I first saw you I knew that I could love you madly if I might let myself, and I would have let myself if you had not told me that you were engaged to Mr. Thorpe. I would have tried to make you love me madly too, and, do you know, sometimes I have thought that I could have managed it ; but I am teaching myself to look upon you in a perfectly different way—I am taking up our friendship from a purely intellectual standpoint.”

Stella's heart was beating so quickly that she could scarcely speak, yet she managed to whisper, “ Oh, thank you, thank you ; I want your friendship.”

“ As I have accepted the fact that you can never be my wife, let me try to be your dearest friend, a friend who will never fail you.”

“ I don't know what to say,” she said ; “ what can I say ? I never thought . . . ” she paused. “ Oh ! but you could

never have married me ; you think you would, but you wouldn't."

"I would have married you," he said roughly. "God knows I would marry you to-morrow if I might, and worship every inch of you, body and soul." He held her hand more closely in both of his.

"Hush!" she said. "Perhaps I ought not to let you say all this, but . . ." her voice broke, "I want your friendship, I want your . . ." she raised her eyes to his, "your understanding ; but is it right ?" She was thinking of Vernon's jealousy.

"Why not ?" he said. "I know you are engaged, I know I am too late even to try to make you feel for me as I feel for you." He smiled. "How I should have loved to have tried, little girl ! I have often dreamt that I have tried and succeeded : you have loved me in my dreams, Stella"—he spoke softly—"loved me as I know you are capable of loving ; but I am no love-sick boy, I am man enough to act honourably if you will allow me to be your trusted friend."

She looked troubled. Vernon's love for her seemed like a boy's compared to this man's : she was glad they had almost crossed the threshold of the open window, so that she was spared the difficulty of answering him.

"Before we go in let me assure you," he said, "that I will never allude to my feelings for you again—they are purely my own affair, they need never trouble you : that is the difference between a man and a boy," he said ; "we can master our feelings, we can rely upon our self-control. The subject of love is dead between us, it is going to be friendship in the future—and you can trust me ? You never suspected ?"

She evaded a direct denial. "The thought that you care for me is very dear to me ; perhaps it shouldn't be, but I can't help it . . . I felt so despised . . . so rejected . . . such an alien."

"Good God !" he said, but he checked himself : "I am glad you can feel for me like that ; and remember that I am not offering you my friendship for a day or a week or a year, I am offering it for always . . . if the day should ever come when you should need it you have only to send for me . . . Remember that a man loves to serve the woman he adores, if it is only as a friend."

“Now say good-bye,” she said, with smiling tearfulness, for she saw Nicolas coming with her mother towards her.

“Good-bye, Hadassah,” he said. He had used her father’s name for her, to show her that her people would have been his people. “Remember that this is to make no difference.” With her hand in his he waited for her answer. . . . “No difference?” he repeated. “Promise me that.”

“No difference,” she said, and she thought that she spoke the truth; but it was not the truth, for her eyes could no longer look into his—that was the difference.

“I only wanted you to know,” he said.

“And I understand *why* you wanted me to know,” she said; “good-bye, and thank you. *Ma as-salâmah Ikattar Allâh Khêrak,*” she repeated the words in Arabic.

He answered her back in Arabic, “*Lêtak sa'idah es-salâm alêkum* (Good-night—peace be on you!).”

## CHAPTER XVII

ON arriving home there were two things which troubled Stella's peace of mind and served to throw into the background all that Michael Ireton had said to her, although in a curious way what he had asked her to *forget* remained with her as a new solace for all her troubles.

The news that her father had suddenly left Cairo for Asiut caused her an anxiety which she dared not show her mother, for fear of unnecessarily alarming her, for Girgis Boutros had often warned her that her father had many bitter enemies amongst the most discontented faction of the Copts, on account of the very English views he had expressed in his leading articles in the "El Watan"—the important Christian paper, written in Arabic, which supported the British policy in Egypt. Nicolas Lekejian was, to all intents and purposes, the voice of the paper.

Amongst the few Copts who had thrown in their lot with the Moslem party who were the ringleaders of the most advanced anti-English sect, Mr. Lekejian was looked upon as a traitor to the cause of Egypt's liberation and self-government. He was detested equally by the Egyptian Christian and the Moslem fanatic. He had used his power in the press to suppress the seditious literature which filled the native papers and had warned the rebellious Copts that in joining forces with the Moslem leaders of the revolutionary party they were putting the halter round their own necks. He urged them to consider what the inevitable result would be if they assisted in making the English evacuate Egypt—their own ejection would most certainly follow, for to the Mohammedan any means is justified by the end in the matter of religion; a Moslem Government would not hesitate to rend in pieces the less powerful Christians who had assisted them in driving out their fellow-unbelievers from the land.

Girgis had often spoken to Stella of her father's fearless attitude towards the pan-Islamic body and how he had more than once felt anxious for his safety on the occasion of religious festivals in Cairo, when Islamic fanaticism is fanned to hysterical irresponsibility. Upon learning of the disturbances at Asiut her father had hurried off to the scene of action, for, besides owning a great deal of property in the town, which brought him in a heavy rent-roll, he was one of the governing body of the city hospital, and held various honorary posts in charitable institutions in the neighbourhood. Like many other wealthy Syrians, he had invested his money in landed property when it was of little value, before English rule had brought commercial safety and prosperity to Egypt. The land he had purchased in Cairo for almost a song was now of immense value. But it was not for personal reasons that he went to Asiut, but to do what he could to bring reason to the minds of the incensed Christians. The disturbances in Asiut were entirely Christian in character; the Mohammedans were, of course, only too well pleased to have successfully carried out their work in fanning the spirit of discontent among the Copts against the English Government, but on this occasion they themselves naturally had no injustice to complain of, for it was a Mohammedan who had been elected to the post of Mudir.

Stella was more than anxious for her father's safety. The horrible murder of Boutros Pasha was still very fresh in her mind, and, added to her fears for her father, there was another difficulty which had suddenly thrust itself upon her overstrained nerves—the evening post had brought a letter from Nancy Thorpe, offering herself on a visit for a few weeks to the Lekejians. She had never been in Egypt, and as her brother Vernon was there, her aunt, with whom she lived, had consented to let her visit Stella if it was convenient for Mrs. Lekejian to have her. Stella's mind had arrived at a state of *impasse*! What was she to do? She was perfectly well aware of the fact that Vernon would very much prefer that his sister should never know the true position Stella and her relatives held in Cairo, and she had to confess to herself the fact that she also would be glad if little Nancy never knew. It was out of the question to allow her to come to Cairo unless

she understood exactly what she was coming to. Although she would have preferred that Nancy should not come, she also knew that she would be furious if Vernon expressed any objection to her coming. It was unreasoning and illogical, but it was true, nevertheless, and the point remained indisputable, because its root lay buried in her pride and self-respect. If he did object to Nancy's visit her own engagement to him must come to an end. At the very possibility of his objecting her spirit rose in revolt . . . he must not . . . he dare not ! Then suddenly there flashed into her mind the picture of English Nancy, with her rose-leaf face and Saxon fairness, contrasted with Girgis Boutros, with his features cut in granite and his crisp hair as black as the wigs of the Egyptian Pharaohs. Would Vernon allow his sister to be seen with a native ? Would Girgis complicate her difficulties by ceasing to love herself and transferring his devotion to Nancy ?

When Mrs. Lekejian said good-night to her daughter she did not allude to their evening spent at the British Agency ; her husband's abrupt departure for Asiut gave her the opportunity for ignoring it. She had seen Stella open Nancy's letter : the girl's expression puzzled her as she read it . . . she wondered what it contained. As a rule Stella handed over Nancy's letters for her to read ; to-night her daughter folded the letter up and slowly replaced it in its envelope, saying as she did so, " Good-night, mother dearest ; I think I shall go to bed . . . I'm so very tired."

" Good-night, my darling." Mrs. Lekejian kissed her daughter tenderly on both cheeks. She almost opened the subject of the evening's entertainment, but she refrained ; Stella's expression forbade any confession of the sympathy she felt for her. Mrs. Lekejian knew that the party had tried her daughter's nerves almost to breaking-point, even though she had no idea that Michael Ireton had spoken of his love to her. Mrs. Lekejian belonged to the type of women, and they are many, who understand men like Vernon Thorpe better than men like Michael Ireton. If she had lived in England all her life and had never been exposed to the prejudices and narrow-mindedness of men of Vernon's kind, she would have admired him ungrudgingly, she would have found his nature perfectly in sympathy with her own . . . with Michael she would never have had

the same amount of sympathy. The seriousness of his stronger character made her a little shy with him, whereas it was the very seriousness in his nature which gave Stella the feeling of rest in his presence, the feeling of security which she so much needed. She had inherited very little of the youthful simplicity of her mother's character, although she could be as gay and light-hearted as a child when occasion offered. A perpetually gay and unserious nature bored her to distraction, though she did not know it. In many respects she was years older than her mother, whose simplicity of character made her extremely lovable, and gave her an air of charming youthfulness. When Mrs. Lekejian left the room, and Stella at last found herself alone, she opened Nancy's letter and re-read it slowly through :

“ MY DEAREST STELLA,

“ The Littlejohns have invited me to go to Egypt with them at the end of January. May I spend a week with you before we start on our trip up the Nile, that is to say if you can conveniently have me? If you can't, please say so, and I will stay with you, if I may, when we return from Assouan. By the way, when will it get too hot for Assouan? And do tell me what sort of clothes I shall want for the Nile voyage. Oh, I forgot! I shan't have time to get your answer by post, so will you send me a telegram just to say 'yes or no.' I shall quite understand if you can't have me just now. Isn't it ripping for me, and won't it be lovely seeing you so soon! I am bursting with excitement. We have heard very little from Vernon lately—I suppose he thinks he's busy; he *will* be surprised! How useful he'll be at dances! I've got some ducky party frocks. I'm beginning to read up books about Egypt, but I can't make head or tail of the awful gods, and as for the cartouches. . . . I shall like the desert far better than the temples and museums, I'm sure.

“ Now good-bye, dear girl; some one is waiting to post this. I do hope you can have me!

“ Yours in great glee,

“ NANCY.

“ P.S.—It's all been so sudden that I can't believe it's true.”

Tears came into Stella's eyes as she folded up the letter. The gay and light-hearted Nancy who adored her, of what use would her dance-frocks be? She belonged to the very sort of people who, if they had come out to Egypt as strangers, would have classed her, Stella, as "Native," as an "impossible Levantine!" She knew it and almost hated the girl for it, yet she felt sure that if she allowed Nancy to visit her the girl would be loyal and true to her, and that she would refuse to know any of the English residents who had ignored herself and her people. In the morning she would have to tell Vernon what Nancy's letter contained. She wondered what the first thing would be that he would say? . . . how he would look? One thing Stella was determined upon, and that was that she would not put Nancy off with excuses, that she would not fall in with Vernon's idea, the idea she was so sure that he would express, of making some excuse to stop her coming, and getting married before the next Cairo season and going home; in this way Nancy and his people need never know the position Stella held in Cairo. Stella laughed bitterly to herself. "It's a merciful thing that Syrians are not coloured people," she said to herself, "though they might well be, for the social stigma that is flung at them, or I might have a black baby, and that would give the secret away. . . ." But there must be no secret; her people were as good as the Thorpes any day, and intellectually she knew that they were their superiors. It was not until long after the late night-noises had died down, the mysterious noises of an Oriental land, and stillness reigned over the city of a hundred minarets and over the desert tombs of the Caliphs, that Stella went to bed; she had sat by her window lost in a mirage of thought. Scenes forced themselves upon her mind like pictures in a kaleidoscope, pictures which showed her many things which were only known to her subconscious self.

In the mirage of her brain was also the knowledge of Michael Ireton's confession that he loved her; it gave her an indescribable and delicious pleasure, for there is no tender-hearted woman living who does not derive comfort and satisfaction from the reflection that she has made a strong man love her—strong intellectually as well as physically. Across her vision had drifted the wonder of

how she would have felt towards him if he had tried to make her love him madly, as he had said . . . how she would have felt towards him if she had never met Vernon ?

If only the two men could be made into one, what an ideal combination they would make ! Stella allowed her "wonderings" to take no more definite form than this.

The first mueddin had sounded before she fell asleep, and in her dreams it was not Vernon who was her hero of romance, it was not *his* arms that held her ; it was not *his* voice that spoke breathless words of love ; they were not his kisses that made her feel a queen amongst women once more ! She woke with a start, for in her dreams Nancy was in Cairo, and had come into the drawing-room when Michael Ireton's arms were round her and Michael Ireton's lips were pressed against her own. A flame of shame burned in Stella's being, she was revolting to herself, and yet somehow a little regret lay at the back of her mind, a little unconscious regret that things were only as they had been the night before !

When her Coptic maid brought her early cup of tea there was a note on the tray in Michael Ireton's handwriting. She opened it hurriedly. What could he have to say ?

"DEAR HADASSAH,

"I saw your brother late last night, after he had taken you home. I hear that you are anxious for your father's safety in Asiut, so I am going there this morning. I know I can't do much, but I will keep you informed of your father's safety, which may be of some comfort to you.

"We can do the Coptic churches together another time, and I believe Mr. Thorpe will be just as well pleased as I should be, under the same circumstances, if I am not there. God bless you, Hadassah, and don't forget that I am your friend for always.

"MICHAEL IRETON."

Stella felt quite overcome with the news. Michael had gone to Asiut because her father was there . . . here was kindness indeed ! But if there was any real trouble in Asiut, would he be allowed to stay in the city ? and if he was, would *he* not also be in danger ? The feeling would be very strong against all foreigners, for as Asiut is almost completely a Coptic city, the Mohammedan element would

be largely outbalanced. Besides, it would suit the Nationalist party very well to allow the Copts to treat the foreign Christians as insultingly as they pleased.

Stella did not know exactly what her feelings on the subject were: had Michael's going relieved her mind, or had it only added one more anxiety to the many?

She slipped on her bedroom-gown and went to her mother's room. When her mother answered the gentle knock, she was little prepared to see her daughter's large eyes looking at her from a very pale face. "Come in, dearest," she said. "What news has the post brought you?" She saw Michael Ireton's letter in her daughter's hand.

"May I get into bed with you, mum dear, and I'll tell you?"

Mrs. Lekejian opened up the bed-clothes and made a place for her daughter by her side. Since the days when Stella had spent her long holidays with her mother, and had been allowed to get into bed with her in the mornings, she had never lain there. Something of the old feeling came back to them both. Stella felt like a little child; her mother was her comforter and protector once more.

"Mother," she said, after a moment's silence, "Mr. Ireton has gone to Asiut this morning."

Mrs. Lekejian looked at her daughter with inquiring eyes. Stella's remark needed an explanation.

"He thought we might be worrying about father. He went on his account."

"How kind of him!" Something in Stella's eyes embarrassed her mother.

"He is the kindest thing I ever knew; there never was any one so kind . . ." she handed her mother the note she had received from Michael. Mrs. Lekejian read it.

"Stella!"

Their eyes met for one moment, then Stella's dropped. She could not speak to her mother of this man's love for her, for had he not said that she was to forget it, that he had conquered it, that he was from henceforth to be only her friend? His going to Asiut was done out of the spirit of friendship, not of love. . . .

"I have something else to say to you, mother, which will surprise you. Nancy wants to pay us a visit—she is

coming out to Egypt directly. She asks me to wire to her if you can take her. . . .”

There was a pause.

“Of course we can take her, dearest.” Mrs. Lekejian’s voice trembled a little, and there was silence again.

“Mother,” Stella said—she was forcing herself to speak—“if Vernon shouldn’t want her to come?”

Mrs. Lekejian did not speak. She left the next step for her daughter, and in the silence mother and daughter heard the quicker beating of each of their hearts.

“I must tell Vernon that she wants to come, and if he should object. . . .” Stella’s voice died away, she pulled the bed-clothes over her face. . . . “Oh, mother!”

The next moment Mrs. Lekejian’s arms were round her, she was holding her child very closely to her. “My dearest,” she said. “Oh, my dearest! I sometimes wish I had never been born. What have I done? what have I done?”

“Hush, mother, don’t! It’s no one’s fault, it’s something far beyond human blame.” For a little time they held each other very closely. Arms of love were what Stella needed at the moment. She was not crying, she was merely sighing like a weary child.

“We may be mistaken, darling. Perhaps Vernon will be glad that Nancy is coming; we mustn’t blame him before we know.”

“Perhaps not, mum. . . .” Stella roused herself. “He may not. . . . but if he objects, he must remember that between him and my people there is no choice.”

“Oh, Stella!” Mrs. Lekejian’s eyes filled with tears. She did not blame her daughter, for she knew what her feelings must be towards a race of people with whom she had little in common, and she remembered how she herself had renounced her own people for her husband; but she did not know her daughter, and if she did, she had not reckoned with the Irish pride that had descended to her through her own blood; she did not realize her unswerving allegiance to her own flesh and blood.

“I mean, mother, that if my people are not to be Vernon’s. . . . if he objects to Nancy entering Cairene society under your chaperonage from father’s roof, I will never become his wife.”

A cry of pity burst from her mother’s lips. “But you

love him, Stella ! . . . Oh, my child, my child ! ” Bewilderment and dismay filled her.

“ I love him and *hate* him, mother ! ”

“ Has he ever said anything, anything about . . . ? ”

“ He wishes me to go to England and wait there until he comes home . . . *then* he will marry me ! ”

“ But could you not, dearest ? . . . I can't bear to see you suffer. . . . He may be wise, he may be considering your happiness, not his own feelings. ”

A cry was torn from Stella's heart. She had risen to go to her own room, but she flung herself across her mother's bed in a passion of weeping. . . . “ Don't, mother, don't tempt me, don't be like Vernon—I can't bear it: the half of me that he owns can't stand the temptation, but it's the lower half of me ! . . . The other half, which he doesn't know and can never know, and won't even try to understand, won't allow me to be a traitor to my people, to my father, to you, to Nicolas. It won't allow me to humble my head in the dust for the sake of his love. . . . ” She stopped ; her eyes sought her mother's. . . . “ Oh ! pray God, mother, that the other half won't win. ”

Her mother could not speak, for the thoughts that filled her mind must never cross her lips, they must not be spoken even to her own child. She had not lived in Cairo and mixed in the strange society of European-Orientals for twenty years without having learnt something of their true natures, but her love for her husband had never allowed her to utter one word of her real feeling towards them. Even Nicolas and Stella never guessed the quiet self-restraint and power which lay behind their mother's seemingly simple character. They often wondered to themselves how much or how little she had suffered when she first realized her position in Cairo, or how far her love for her husband had outweighed all other matters and made her oblivious of her really friendless condition. They were lovers now just as much as they ever had been, of that there was little doubt in Stella's mind ; she envied her mother.

After her outburst of weeping she became perfectly self-possessed. “ I am making a mountain out of nothing, ” she said ; “ please forget how stupid I've been. Vernon's coming for me at nine o'clock, so I must hurry. ”

“What are you going to do?”

“We *were* going to see some Coptic churches together.”

“Why do you say you *were*? Are you not?”

“Because Mr. Ireton was coming too . . . in fact he and I had planned to do them together, and then I asked Vernon to come with us.”

“He won't enjoy them, will he?”

“But I shall.” Stella smiled. “It's no use allowing him to think that I'm always going to do only the things *he* likes, mother, is it?”

“Not a bit, dear, if you will enjoy it.”

“I should not enjoy *not* doing them, because that would be doing just what I try so hard not to do.”

“What is that, dear?”

“Giving in to him on every point when he is there to urge it . . . and persuading myself that I am going to be so strong-minded when I'm by myself.”

“The old-fashioned woman always did give in, dear. . . . Do you think they were any the unhappier for it?”

“So did the harem woman, mother, because she was neglected if she didn't.”

“Why, dearest!” Tears sprang, like summer rain, into Mrs. Lekejian's eyes.

Stella's arms went round her. “Mum, dear, I didn't mean anything . . . really, I didn't, only I want to stamp right out of my nature all the elements of the Eastern woman's attitude towards men, and I sometimes think that my love for Vernon is primitive and Eastern. . . . It has nothing to do with my intellectual nature . . . there are moments when I should like Vernon to take me away and shut me up in a castle and keep me all to himself, keep me from hearing or knowing anything about all the great and important subjects of the day. . . . I'd enjoy it, mother. . . . Are you ashamed of me?”

Mrs. Lekejian smiled as she thought to herself how every woman has longed to be a slave to some man's passion. But she only said: “It's a natural instinct, it will pass; it's nothing unusual.”

Stella shook her head. . . . “It's more than that, mother. . . . It's stronger than that . . . it's the East and the West horribly muddled up in me.”

## CHAPTER XVIII

STELLA and Vernon were just starting off on their expedition to see the Coptic churches in Babylon, which is the name of the portion of the native city of Cairo where the Coptic churches lie hidden away like the secret meeting-houses of the early Christians in Rome, when their exit was stopped by the appearance of their dignified servant, Joseph, who told Stella that a young dragoman had called and had asked to see her father; on hearing that he was not at home, he had asked if he could see her brother. When he was told that Nicolas also was not in the house he had entreated to be allowed to speak to the daughter of the house . . . his business being most urgent.

Stella turned to Vernon. "I had better see him for a moment. What is his name?" she asked Joseph.

"Mahmud Hamdi."

"That's the name of the young Arab who showed us over the pyramids about a year ago. I wonder what he wants? Do you mind coming into the library with me while I see him?" Vernon followed her into the library, which was also Mr. Lekejian's private office. "I will see him in here," Stella said to Joseph. "Tell him I have only five minutes to spare."

At Joseph's bidding a superb young Arab stepped quietly into the room and salaamed profoundly. Vernon was amazed at the dignity of his bearing, and at the elegance with which he wore his rich native dress. His was not the usual bizarre uniform of a dragoman—the vulgar display of gold lace and coloured trappings was absent; nothing could have been in better taste or more pleasing to the eye than his native outfit.

"You remember me, my lady?" he said in English.

"Yes, I remember you . . . you are Mahmud Hamdi. . . . What do you wish to tell me?"

Stella spoke coldly, and there was impatience in her voice: these fine young dragomen were vain creatures; it did not do to treat them graciously, although their manners suggested the most perfect breeding.

Mahmud smiled softly. His delicate teeth shone like jewels against his clearly-chiselled lips, which were childishly pink and smooth. "My lady, there is much trouble in my *familee*; I come to ask your father's advice."

"Why do you consult my father?" Stella said. "He is a Christian."

"No matter, my lady, him very just man, him write to the papers and tell Lord Minton."

"What has happened?" Stella said. "Please tell me quickly; I am going out; I have very little time."

"Yes, my lady, I will tell you very soon. . . . Your gen-le-man him wait a little, him very kind. . . . My father rich man, him own much land; I show you lady other day all round near the pyramids; him not want for anything."

"Yes, yes," Stella said. "Do go on—I know all about your family."

"Very well, my lady, my big brother him in prison for stealing antiquities. It one big lie, my lady; my brother no need of any money, my father give him plenty, plenty, plenty!" Mahmud waved his hand to suggest the rolling ocean of wealth which his father distributed amongst his sons.

"Then why is he in prison?"

"I will tell you, my lady. . . . Mohammed Hassan very jealous of him, Mohammed him pay the courts £700 to put my brother in prison."

"And what do you want my father to do?"

"My lady, if your father tell Lord Minton, him very just man; him give order to have case tried again in English courts."

"Oh," Stella said, "I see! That's it: your brother was tried in a native court and was sentenced by a native judge, now you wish the case tried in the English courts: you believe in English justice?"

"Yes, my lady, because my brother him innocent; every one knows Mohammed Hassan bribed the jury; him very bad man."

Stella looked at Vernon. . . . "You have heard all this?" she said.

"Yes," Vernon said. . . . He didn't believe a word of what the man had said, because it was not in his nature to believe anything that an Oriental said, unquestioned. . . . Stella knew that the Arab was probably speaking the truth, because his father was a reputedly wealthy man, and his sons bore the character of being honest and trustworthy; but what interested her was the confession from the lips of this same young man who had talked to her so finely upon the subject of "Egypt for the Egyptians," the day he had acted as her guide to the pyramids, that the native courts were corrupt, and that he was now anxious to have his brother's case tried again in the British courts. It was typical of the ethics of the Nationalist party in Cairo.

"How was the theft discovered?" she asked.

"In big antichità shop in Luxor, my lady; very fine pieces of curios have been seen for sale; excavating gentlemen watch very close; my brother takes tourist peoples all over monuments in Egypt; Mohammed Hassan him say that my family steal antichitàs in the monuments and sell to Luxor shops."

"Why does Mohammed Hassan hate your brother?"

"Him very jealous, my lady; my brother very beautiful young man; in Luxor a rich tourist family have lady's maid; she fall in love with my brother, my brother not marry her." The very idea Mahmud scouted with scorn.

Stella smiled.

"Mohammed Hassan him jealous of my brother's good business, him very jealous of my brother's nice face; she very silly woman, she go tell everybody that she loves my big brother, that she is his darling! Mohammed Hassan try all the time to ruin my brother, him succeed now very well."

"And you think the native courts are corrupt?"

"I know it, my lady: if your father tell Lord Minton, him try my brother's case in English courts."

Stella was silent for a moment.

Mohammed turned his attention to Vernon. "Mister . . . you not seen pyramids? I not seen you there. . . . To-night very fine moon: you bring young lady to see

pyramids, I find most splendid camels; you enjoy very good excursion. I very fine dragoman: if you not want camels I take you very nice walk, no tourist peoples, all very quiet and nice for young lady and gen-le-man."

"No, thank you," Vernon said, "you stick to your business about your brother."

Stella smiled, for Vernon was speaking to the magnificently dressed Arab as though he was a street merchant selling fly-switches—whereas he was really the son of a wealthy landed proprietor. This did not prevent Mahmud taking despised "tourist peoples" over the pyramids at the charge of 6s. for the afternoon, and if he could not get 6s. very often he gladly did the job for nothing, if he was attracted to the party, for he knew that he would be offered plenty of cigarettes and that he could practise his English.

"Well, Mahmud," Stella said thoughtfully, "if I ask my father to use his influence on your brother's behalf, will you promise me that in the future, when you are talking about Egypt for the Egyptians, you will remember that you no longer want Egyptian judges in your courts; will you tell all the tourists, when you speak about the injustice of the English people filling the posts in your Government which might be held by natives, that you have changed your mind—that you by personal experience know that Egypt is not yet ready for self-government—tell them that you came to my father, who is a *Christian*, to ask him to help you to have your brother's case tried in the uncorrupt English courts?"

"Oh, yes, my lady, certainly! I will promise everything you wish."

Mahmud was eager to promise anything, for his talk of Egypt for the Egyptians had only been froth, as most of the fine talk of the young Egyptians in Cairo is. "My lady, I tell everybody English peoples the most just in the world . . . I tell everybody if English courts send a man to prison that man him guilty."

"Very well," Stella said, "I'll see what my father can do."

Mahmud salaamed respectfully. "My lady, I thank you." He turned to Vernon: "My gen-le-man, if you come to see pyramids you not forget Mahmud Hamdi. Good morning, my lady; good morning, my gen-le-man."

“Good morning,” Stella said, “and don’t you forget that the native courts are corrupt.”

When the Arab had left Vernon said, “Do you believe a word that beggar said? Do you think this brother did steal the curios?”

“No,” Stella said thoughtfully. “I shouldn’t think he did: they’re very well off, though Mahmud will take a few piastres for a morning’s work if you can’t afford to give him any more or won’t give it him. I should think that his story’s true—the native courts are dreadfully corrupt. . . .” She turned to her lover smilingly: “That’s one thing I think no one will deny—that the English courts are the best and straightest in the world.”

“I’m glad we’ve one virtue in your eyes.” Vernon had not forgotten their quarrel of the evening before.

“I think you’re all virtues and prejudices; the English are singularly free from big vices and the petty sins of corruption—perhaps your prejudice is only the self-righteousness of a naturally *uncorrupt* nation.”

When they arrived at the point at which they were to meet Michael Ireton, Stella said, “Mr. Ireton isn’t coming with us; I had a note from him this morning—he’s gone to Asiut.”

“Whatever for? Isn’t there some disturbance going on there? I read rather a nasty account of it in the paper this morning: I should think English people had better give Asiut a wide berth at present.”

“My father had to go there last night. Mr. Ireton thought that mother and I would be anxious about him, so he went off this morning. Besides, he wanted to see for himself what was going on: he’s awfully interested in this Copt question, and indeed in almost everything connected with Egypt.”

Vernon did not speak.

Stella understood why, although he had a very excellent excuse for not doing so, for they were passing through one of the narrowest and most crowded streets in the native town. . . . Scantily clothed men, carrying goat-skins full of water for sale, were barging into them with fearful yells, and at unexpected corners camels’ heads appeared high above their own, their soft tread giving no warning of their near approach. White donkeys, bearing fat women enveloped in black, trotted along regardless of whether

there was room for the market produce they carried in their wallets to crush its way through the crowd of loafing and hurrying people.

Vernon hated the whole thing : the smells and the flies and the noise. They far outweighed in his mind the exquisite beauty of the mosque domes, which looked as though they were made of delicate lace against the blue of the African sky ; and if there were minarets overhead, from which the call to prayer had sounded five times a day for over five hundred years, he did not see them ; if there was a feast of colour and a banquet of beauty in the old meshrebiya window-screens of the mediæval houses, it was all to him a filthy place, not fit for ladies to pass through. He wished to God that Stella didn't care for old things ; it would have been so jolly out at the Ghezira Sports Club, or motoring by the banks of the Nile, where there was something green and clean to look at. The difficulty of walking and seeing that Stella was not molested occupied all his attention, while at the back of his mind there was the irritating thought that Michael Ireton had gone to Asiut to please Stella. He knew that the man had, in his quiet, unobtrusive way, somehow managed to place himself on a footing of great intimacy with the family ; in fact he seemed more at home with them than Vernon did himself. When at last they reached the particular church Stella had chosen to see, they found that a service was going on. They had to mount a high stair to reach the building, which could not be seen from the outside. Some gorgeously robed priests were intoning in the Heykel or chancel behind a wall of wooden panel-work which completely shut off this portion of the building, where only the Coptic language is permitted ; the ordinary priests, who read and chant explanations in Arabic, and the choir and acolytes, were in an outer compartment, which was separated from the congregation by an elaborately carved screen. A dozen choir-boys were squatting on the floor at the feet of the priests. Their behaviour was so shocking that before Stella and Vernon had been in the church a minute one of the priests, who wore a white garment with a Coptic cross on his back, of bright scarlet, stooped down, and picking up a wooden clog which one of the boys had discarded, threw it angrily at the most unruly member.

There seemed to be nothing unusual in the proceeding, for it caused no sensation : the boys took it as unconcernedly as a party of playing puppies, and the priest went on explaining in Arabic the portion of the Scripture which had been read aloud in Coptic by one of the priests in the sanctuary. In the sanctuary no priest is allowed to sit down while reading the service, and as it takes many hours, the sound of tinkling cymbals, which announces the fact that the priest is weary and must sit down, is often heard. A number of women, who were all very closely veiled and enveloped in black shawls, were sitting on the floor in a sort of pen which was hidden by the finest meshrebiya screens ; they were nuns, and had evidently come in from the convent which formed a part of the extraordinary building. Certainly Vernon had never been in any church the least like it before—it was far more pagan and mysterious than the open and spacious Moham-medan mosques, most of which he admired ungrudgingly. As he stood and listened to the dull service muttered by turbaned priests, and heard the responses shouted by lolling boys, he wondered to himself what comfort or pleasure they found in the bare bones of their strange religion. He could not believe that it was such a service as this that had kept the Copts faithful to the Church for all these centuries of persecution. For two hundred and seventy years before there was a mosque in Cairo, this church had carried on this service. Everything about it was jarring to him—the close atmosphere, the certainty of vermin, the irreverent attitude of the officiating priest. He had no reverence for the exquisite art of builder and artisan which was everywhere around him, in the ancient wood-carving, in the unrivalled delicacy of the inlaid screens, in the exquisite horse-shoe arches, in the *cipollino*-columns, with classical capitals, which set the mind instantly wondering and asking from what pagan temple had the Early Christians stolen them. Stella was intensely interested, but she made a sign to Vernon that they would go ; she saw that he was bored, and she did not wish to force her point. She had had her way and so, after they had walked hurriedly through the convent, where the black-swathed nuns were squatting on their bare kitchen floor, drinking coffee out of very small cups,

she was prepared to let him off any more sight-seeing. The convent was as bare and uninhabited-looking as Pompeii, and just as antiquated. For what reason the nuns lived there Stella could not imagine: they seemed to do no work, and their poverty was abject. One poor creature was quite mad: she was possessed with the idea that she was the favourite wife of the Khedive, and that he was always on the point of coming to see her. Their ignorance was appalling. The only room in the building which had any furniture in it was the reception-room for the archbishop.

And it was terrible in its European hideousness. The narrow cells of the nuns, where even beds were not visible, were infinitely preferable, for they at least looked out upon an eastern courtyard of ancient beauty. But the general atmosphere of the place was horribly depressing: it had no air of æsthetic austerity or divine grace to elevate it. Stella compared it in her mind with the convent at Assisi where St. Clare spent her womanhood. How different it was! This Coptic retreat for women who had determined never to marry was altogether sordid and unemotional. As they descended the staircase a Coptic youth met them at the bottom of it and implored Stella to enter the lower church: it was much more open, and larger, and had been freely restored. . . . Stella knew that it contained many treasures, but she did not wish to inflict any more sight-seeing upon Vernon, who said eagerly, "Surely you've had enough for one morning! I can't stand that awful atmosphere any more: do come along."

The Coptic youth in European clothes implored her again; he saw a chance of improving his imperfect English and of relieving the monotony of the long and wearying service by gloating upon Stella's beauty.

When she refused and turned away, Vernon gave a deep sigh of relief.

Stella smiled. "You're glad that's over."

"Yes, rather. I hate these beastly smelly places. The mosques are lovely; if only there was anywhere to sit down in them, we could go into one and talk . . . but these dark churches hold all the smells and dirt that have ever got into them since the time of St. Mark. I say," he cried eagerly, "do let's go out to the pyramids, and get some of the clear air of the desert into our lungs."

Stella agreed willingly : it was on her mind that Nancy's visit had to be spoken about, and she thought that the desert would be a very good place to introduce the subject.

As soon as they could find an *arabeah* which looked clean enough to drive in, they dashed off at a break-neck pace to the point where the tram starts for the pyramids and the Mena House Hotel. It was not much after eleven o'clock when they found themselves seated in the desert just under the pyramids ; they had walked over the golf-course and round the outskirts of a Bedouin village, and had chosen a resting-place where a plantation of palm trees and a mud village filled the foreground just under the pyramid hill. They had not ascended the high ground above the Mena House Hotel, but had dipped down in the hollow to the left after leaving the tram. The Bedouin village stretches from the end of the golf-course to below the pyramids on this flat ground. From where they sat the palm trees seemed to grow right at the foot of the pyramids ; there was really a good stretch of desert between them.

It was so delightful, and the sweet air of the desert after the close atmosphere of the city was so invigorating, that Vernon was soon in one of his sunniest moods. He had no wish to talk, nor had Stella ; they were absolutely alone, for tourists never wander into this lower portion of the desert ; but now and then little Arcadian scenes would unfold themselves before their eyes with a simplicity and naturalness which was in keeping with the soul of the desert. It might be that the lean brown figure of a small boy in a white cap, perched on the top of a tall camel, would pass across the foreground between them and the village of palms, or it might be the black figure of a woman who would emerge from one of the mud houses and walk with desert grace across the yellow sand : she had come to fill her tin basin with desert soap.

One such figure, when she saw the two strangers seated on the sand, came slowly towards them. She was a creature of soft youth and beauty. Below her veil of thin black, which trailed in the sand behind her, there was a transparent shawl of brilliant silk, in which orange and gold and green caught the sunlight as she walked. It was her only coloured garment, but her brown arms and neck were covered with silver and gold jewellery. Gold

beads as large as pigeons' eggs, and lumps of coral like blocks of sealing-wax, were strung together in rows, and hung from her brown throat. Her thin black garment, which swathed her figure like a mummy, was open a little above the breasts.

Her pretty face was not disfigured, like most desert girls', with blue tattoo marks, and being a Bedouin she was of course unveiled.

Vernon thought her a delightful creature; he liked watching her dimples come and go as she talked to Stella about her simple home life. Like all primitive creatures she was very inquisitive, so Stella had to answer many questions, some of which she was thankful that Vernon could not understand. Next in the procession was a camel laden with green fodder, a pleasant sight in a dry land; it was followed by a man on a small black ass, who was carrying his baby son in front of him. His little daughter was trotting on foot by his side; on her young head was a huge basket full of patty-cakes of manure which she had spent her morning since sunrise in gathering from the road-side by the Mena House. The rich man's horses gave her mother manure to use as fuel for her oven. Next came a flock of black goats, driven by a black-robed woman who was carrying her baby in her arms. A copper pot full of soup was on her head—she was carrying it to the nearest furnace to have it cooked. . . . As her upright figure disappeared in the distance, and only the black pot stood out against the clear sky, like some curious Eastern head-dress, Vernon broke the silence.

"I don't mind these desert people a bit," he said; "*they're* all right. . . . I suppose they are Arabs?"

"Yes, Bedouin Arabs. The people in the villages round the pyramids pride themselves on the pureness of their Arab blood."

There was silence again. Vernon was thinking that he wouldn't mind in the least if all Stella's aunts and cousins were of pure Arab blood, if they were as simple and dignified as these quiet villagers.

Stella was saying to herself, "Now I must tell him about Nancy. I believe he wouldn't mind her visiting us one bit if my father lived in one of these mud huts in that palm village . . . he does not know that the roof is covered

with dung!" She compared the black-robed figure of the young girl in the trailing shawl of rainbow-tints with her Levantine aunt's friends in their over-trimmed Parisian gowns. In her heart she knew that the comparison was odious, for here there was no vulgarity, in the desert homes there was no veneer of Parisian civilization.

"Vernon," she said abruptly, "I had a letter from Nancy this morning."

"Hullo!" he said, "how is she? . . . Nancy would love this . . ." he indicated the desert . . . "wouldn't she? But Lord! how she'd hate those beastly churches. By the way, why did every man who came in carry a crutch?—they couldn't all be lame!"

Stella smiled. "They must not sit during service, and the services often last for hours; they carry crutches to rest upon while praying."

"How odd! They are so strict about some things and so slack about others!" He lapsed into silence again.

"Nancy says she is coming to Egypt; she will be in Cairo next Thursday."

Vernon sprang to a sitting position—he had been lying at full length on the sand. "Good Lord! Stella, do you mean it?"

"Yes, here is her letter." She handed it to him: her heart was beating very quickly. Vernon read it through without comment; for a few moments they remained silent.

"Well?" she said.

"Well?" Vernon said slowly. "I wish it needn't have been, but I suppose it can't be helped."

"You wish *what* needn't have been?"

"Nancy's coming to Cairo."

"Why?"

"You know why, dear; and what's more, you wish it too, you can't deny it."

"I don't wish it," Stella said emphatically, but she knew she was lying as she spoke. "You mean you're ashamed of me and my people?"

"Dearest, how can you say so?"

"Because it's true. . . . I've not wired to Nancy yet, but I must do so when I go back."

"What are you going to say?"

"That depends."

“ Upon what ? ”

“ Your wishes.”

“ Dearest,” he said eagerly, “ how nice of you ! Of course I’d much rather she didn’t come,” he turned to the letter again . . . “ but she’s actually on her way out now, so whether she stays in Cairo or not she’ll be in Egypt. . . .” He paused. . . . “ What’s to be done ? Great Scot ! ”

“ Oh ! it’s quite simple,” Stella said. Her words fell very slowly from her lips ; they were like drops of ice.

“ How is it quite simple ? ”

“ I’ll wire to her that we can’t have her when she arrives, then I’ll write to her and explain *everything*, and then if she chooses to come to us after her trip up the Nile it won’t matter to you.”

The tone of her words made her lover glance anxiously at her face. “ Why won’t it matter to me ? ” he said. “ I don’t wish Nancy to stay in Cairo either before or after her trip up the Nile.”

“ If she stays with me *after* she has heard all about our position in society in Cairo, she will not be coming as my future sister-in-law . . . it need not trouble you.”

“ Stella . . . ” Vernon clasped her hands in his, “ Stella, what do you mean ? ”

“ I mean just what I told you last night—that if my people can’t be yours, yours can’t be mine.”

He held her hands more tightly. “ But you will be mine . . . you promised you would . . . I hold you to it. . . . Let’s be quits : I don’t care if you accept my people or reject them—we love each other, that’s enough.”

She tried to withdraw her hands ; her face was white and tense.

“ You don’t love me any more, you are tired of me . . . you make this an excuse.”

Stella dropped her eyes. A curious revelation had unconsciously come to her at the very moment that he was telling her that he would hold her to his promise—that his touch had ceased to thrill her, that not once during the whole morning while he had been with her had the old intoxicating flame of passion rushed through her veins and drugged her will-power. A terrible numbness came over her, she could not speak. Vernon instinctively felt some lessening of his power . . . the magnetic

current had broken! And as he felt it he hungered to kiss her back to subjection; his vanity was bruised; he looked round to see if any one was in sight before pressing his lips to hers; away in the distance a group of Arab boys in white *jebbas* were playing at a sort of hockey on the sand with sticks and a ball . . . their flying figures looked like white gulls against the bright blue of the sky. Trains of camels, coming from the right and from the left, passed each other in haughty disdain: their burdens were humble enough, for some of them carried boxes and bedding and pots and pans, the entire contents of a Bedouin home, and others cheap green fodder for the black goats which surrounded them; yet their bearing had the dignity of other days. There was no one to see; he bent forward to draw her to him—he must make the flame ignite, he must kindle it to the warmth of passion.

“You are mine,” he said, “do you hear?—mine only, and for ever. Stella, say you love me, say that only our love matters! . . .”

With a composure she hated herself for feeling she allowed him to kiss her lips, to use his lover's privileges; she was eager to feel responsive, for as yet she was scarcely conscious that she was not. She did not dream that his kisses could never do again what they had done only a few days ago.

“Say you love me,” he said; “say it, darling! I must hear it from your lips.” There was a new note of anxiety in his voice—the lack of response in her lips had awakened it; something, he could not tell what, made him feel less sure of her: it made him angry, and doubly keen to subjugate her once more. . . . It is a dangerous moment when a woman finds out for the first time that the man she has blindly adored has no longer the power to intoxicate her senses, that his kisses no longer act as narcotics . . . the feeling may pass, and the old fierce love return for a time, but the malady is like paralysis—the first attack is always followed by a second of a more serious nature, the third invariably proves fatal.

She pushed him gently away. “How ever much I love you, it doesn't matter if you feel as you do about my people; I shouldn't consider my promise binding.”

“I'm awfully fond of your mother and father, and I'll

pretend I love even Girgis and all your cousins, rather than give you up. Will that please you?"

He had caught her hands again, and imprisoned them fiercely.

"What about Nancy coming?"

"Let her come," he said hotly.

"Thank you, dear; I will ask her; I'm so sorry."

"Sorry. What for?"

"That Nancy should have placed you in this awkward position."

He smiled. "There, darling, I knew you didn't want her to come—it was only your pride."

"I only mean that I'm sorry for you because you mind; I don't, I'd rather she knew . . ." she paused. . . . "I think you're doing a very unwise thing."

"In what way?"

"In persisting in continuing our engagement. You'd much better take your liberty: I'm young enough to recover from the shock." She smiled sweetly, to soften the bitterness of her words.

"Then I don't," he said; "and what's more, you've got to promise that you'll never again mention the word liberty or breaking off with me, if I do my utmost to please you in regard to your people. Promise," he said—he held her face in his two hands—"promise . . . say after me, 'I, Stella Adair, promise to marry you, Vernon Thorpe, at the soonest date possible, if you are as nice as you can be to my people.'"

Stella looked laughingly into his eyes—they were very boyish and blue—but as she looked the plain face, with its strongly marked lines, of Michael Ireton rose up before her, a curious coldness numbed her heart, a touch of pity entered into her feeling for Vernon . . . his old mastership was dead. . . . She paused and then said slowly, "I, Hadassah Lekejian—for that is how it must be—am willing to marry you: the old engagement with Stella Adair is a thing of the past; the new compact must be made with Hadassah Lekejian, the Syrian Hadassah Lekejian, the cousin of Girgis Boutros."

"All right," he said, "so be it, insert Hadassah Lekejian in the agreement and give me a kiss to seal it." Something of love's passion stirred Stella's senses as he renewed

the compact ; they were young, and the peace of the African desert enveloped them. For the time being Stella's soul was lulled to rest : the animal content of the Bedouin women, in their trailing black garments, who kept ever coming and going across the yellow sand, seemed very enviable, while the stern outline of the pyramids, silhouetted against the turquoise sky, forced their "terror of age" upon her and showed her the folly of her own unrest.

Here, with the procession of Egypt passing and repassing before her as it had passed in this empty world of heaven and sand ever since the Sphinx had been hewn out of Libyan rock by an unknown genius at the command of an unknown Pharaoh for his unknown God, how could she be a slave to doubts and fears of human passions ? She had imagined that Vernon would be the master of her desires for ever, that her great battle would always be to free herself from the obsession of his love, to act up to her own ideals, and not to blindly obey him in all things ; in the old days the selfish enjoyment of administering to his selfishness had lowered her in her own eyes. Now unconsciously the bonds of love were loosening, another voice had dropped a diviner poison in her ears. A new and awful desire had come to her, a desire known only to her subconscious self, to test her power over the stronger man's heart, to make the man who was "the master of his soul and the captain of his fate" love her madly ! Was she nothing better than a courtesan ? Was the sensual Levantine blood in her veins asserting its true power ? The idea revolted her : she would have given herself at that very moment to her lover, to prove to herself that she was no wanton of wandering passions. All she was aware of was that in Vernon's love for her she now saw a boyishness and selfishness she had never found before ; she was angry with herself for having discovered a flaw in the ideal she had created, the ideal she had enshrined in the outwardly perfect form of Vernon Thorpe. At that very moment he looked an ideal lover, yet, as she confessed to herself, the personality of Michael Ireton rose before her eyes, his heavy, almost colossal figure, his blunt, irregular features, his brilliant and melancholy eyes. She closed her mind upon it in anger ; she had not wished to see it, she had used no effort of memory to visualize it.

For the rest of their morning in the desert Stella was a perfect lover. Her sweetness of disposition at all times made her a delightful companion, and this morning the little voice which could not be hushed urged her to do her utmost to please Vernon, and he was easily pleased, for he asked nothing more than to idle in the golden sunshine by her side while he smoked Egyptian cigarettes and watched the simple doings of the peasant peoples. They talked lazily of many things: of Nancy's coming, of their proposed visit to the Fayyum to see Girgis's farm, and of the possibility of their marriage in the following winter.

## CHAPTER XIX

A WEEK of horrible anxiety for Stella brought forth no dreaded results. If youth could only realize what age knows, through bitter experiences—that few evils in this world are as bad as our anticipations, that our fears are our greatest miseries! Mr. Lekejian had returned to the bosom of his family unhurt, Michael Ireton had left Asiut for Abydos, and Nancy had arrived and taken her place in the Lekejian household as simply and happily as though they had been English people living in Mayfair.

All Stella's dreaded explanations were unnecessary. Nancy simply washed her hands of the English inhabitants of Cairo—she had introductions to many important people, she refused to present any of them; Stella had not the courage to tell her that Vernon had asked her to prevent his sister paying them a visit during the season, and Vernon himself seemed anxious not to mention the fact—he had been led into one private talk with Nancy upon the subject of Stella's relations, in which Nancy had done some very plain speaking. It goes without saying that she knew nothing at all about the extremely difficult subject of mixed races in the East, and that in her loyalty to Stella she under-estimated the enormous advantage it is to the young Egyptians in Cairo to have the example of healthy-minded, sport-loving Englishmen like Vernon Thorpe in their midst—for, with all their faults, and they are many (and unfortunately they are of the nature which makes Englishmen peculiarly offensive to the natives), the presence of the young Englishmen in Egypt is a healthy influence for the nation's moral regeneration. Other races may possess qualities which engender love instead of hatred in the Egyptian breast, but no other nation could give them a better example of the manly characteristics in which they are most lacking themselves. That they respect the

very Englishmen whom they hate is indisputable, in spite of the fact that they are Christians; and after all, to say that they respect them is the highest compliment they can pay them; they certainly neither respect nor trust one another.

Since Nancy's advent in Cairo, Nicolas had become a boy again. Her high spirits and inexhaustible vitality had shaken him out of himself: never had Stella seen him so light-hearted or happy. He had thrown off the gravity and silence which had become habitual to him since his life had been spent in Cairo; he was more like the enthusiastic and gay "old Nick" of his irresponsible student days in Paris. When Nancy saw him lapse into gravity and melancholy, she chaffed him out of it, for she was afraid of no man living, and as she had always been an object of adoration she never doubted her powers to beget affection, and she was not mistaken. Mr. Lekejian adored her: when she was in his presence he beamed on her with tender, approving eyes, and when she laughed he sighed. Alas, how seldom Stella's voice rang through the old house like Nancy's! Her mirth and humour were delicious to his ears, and her childish fairness was indescribably appealing to his affection. He would have rejoiced to have had another daughter, fair, wilful, and provoking like Nancy, a child whom he could spoil and tease and play with as he never now could spoil and tease and play with Stella, who, like her brother Nicolas, very seldom showed any of the high spirits and wilfulness that had characterized her as a child.

When the girls sauntered about the wonderful garden arm in arm, something very warm and gracious flowed through the old man's veins; they were both so lovely, both so dear to him, for Nancy was inexpressibly dear to him because of her loyalty to Stella and her whole-hearted adoption of his despised race. The girl had only been a week in his house, but already he was her staunch friend for life—he would have done anything to give her pleasure and to guard her from trouble, and the odd thing was that he had found, in this little girl who had carried all the way from England the freshness of hedge-roses in her cheeks and an English child's lightness of laughter in her voice, a woman of quick and resourceful intuition in

a moment of need, and splendidly intelligent about the graver matters of life. On his return from Asiut he had discovered her installed in his house as a member of his family, playing with his son in a way which showed him that Nicolas was still very impressionable and delightfully young in spite of his grave manner; and showering affection on both his wife and daughter, who had both been so anxious about her coming.

Towards himself Nancy evinced the warmest tokens of friendship: in three days he had seen more of her society than he had seen of his daughter's in three weeks, for Nancy invaded his office at all hours and monopolized him whenever he returned to his home. The details of the Asiut disturbance he related to her word for word, especially the exciting incidents, which he had to elaborate to satisfy her, while he realized that, without grasping the complicated state of affairs which the situation presented, she seized upon the salient facts with a rapidity and sense that surprised even the quick intelligence of the Syrian. And Nancy was surprised to find what a staunch upholder of the English policy in the East Stella's father was. Nothing that his family had suffered through the narrow-mindedness of social circles in Cairo had budged him one inch from his loyalty to what he considered the right cause, or blinded him to the fact that only since the English had been in Egypt had there been anything resembling prosperity or peace in the country.

"Things are bad enough as they are," he told Nancy, as he had often told his wife and daughter. "The cess-pools of Cairo are still here, but they are like lakes of pure water compared to what they once were. I am old enough to remember 'the other days,' and therefore I can judge. It is all very well for you, little Nancy," he said, "to come out from England and think that things are a disgrace to English rule in Egypt" (Nancy had been reading the death-rate in Cairo, and expressed with youthful indignation her horror of the infant mortality), "but you'd think the city a garden of Eden if you had known it when I was a child. In my young days you could not walk through the native town without stepping into mire and filth which often came up over the ankles."

When he told her that the estimate for the new installa-

tion of modern drainage in Cairo, the most modern in the world, amounted to £3,500,000, and that it was likely to be accepted, she was solemnly impressed; she understood a little better the magnitude of the undertakings which are being done by the present rulers in Egypt. It would have been impossible for any intelligent being to live in the Lekejian household and not have her brain and imagination stimulated, however lethargic she might be—and Nancy was anything but lethargic—for on all subjects they were abreast of the times, and Nancy noticed, with English admiration for those who have “the gift of tongues,” that there were books and periodicals and newspapers, besides scientific works, lying about on the various tables in all the sitting-rooms of the rambling old house, written in at least four European languages. “And these,” she kept saying to herself over and over again—“and these are the people Vernon is ashamed to call his relations.” For that he was ashamed, not of Stella herself, but of her cousins and aunts, Nancy had divined before she had seen him in Cairo one hour. A hundred times a day when she was with the Lekejians she felt her own ignorance and intellectual limitations. Even with Nicolas, in spite of her “chaffing,” she always was aware of his mental superiority.

It was a strange experience for Nancy, suddenly being dropped into the middle of an undreamt-of environment, finding herself a member of a household whose outlook upon many familiar subjects was entirely new to her. Instead of coming as a visitor to Egypt to see the ancient monuments and enjoy the social gaieties provided by the hotel-keepers for pleasure-seeking tourists, she had been thrust into the centre of a life which was palpitating with political unrest, she was seeing Egypt behind the veil . . . she was learning to look upon her own race as not altogether unimpeachable or without blemish.

The case of Mahmud Hamdi and the stolen curios was to be tried again in British courts. Mr. Lekejian, after consenting to look into the case, advised Mahmud Hamdi to employ a celebrated Belgian lawyer and rely entirely on his judgment of the case, with the result that it was to be tried again in the English courts. It was, however, urged by the society of archæologists that such a case ought to be tried fairly and the disgraceful proceedings openly exposed.

If the case went against Mohammed Hassan and his confrères, the Lekejians knew that there would be yet one more enemy added to Nicolas Lekejian senior's account . . . an enemy of the most unscrupulous order, for the case was a very black one. But Nicolas Lekejian paid no more account to his enemies, or their threats, than a man who is scrupulously honest and clean-handed ever does in a country where the dignity of disregard is the strongest weapon.

During the week that Nancy was in Cairo she had many novel and exciting experiences. The second evening after her arrival she went with the Lekejians and her brother to see a Coptic wedding, and the night after to see a Mohammedan one. They were so similar in character that she would never have guessed that they were not both Mohammedan if Stella had not told her. Vernon was with them on both occasions, and Nancy was amazed to see how little real interest he took in the extraordinary ceremonies and festivities. He did not even think them picturesque, though the Mohammedan marriage was exceptionally splendid, for the household was celebrating a double event, the safe return of their elder son from Mecca and the marriage of their younger son to a wealthy carpet-merchant's daughter. The Lekejians were of course mere onlookers, like any other strangers, but through their intimate knowledge of Arabic Nancy was initiated into all that passed. At the Coptic wedding she and Stella were invited to go upstairs to the women's part of the house and be introduced to the bride, a shy, dark-eyed creature, who was sitting by herself in a little room apart from the crowd with her husband's best man. Her bridegroom was downstairs helping to entertain his guests, according to customary etiquette.

Nancy had also seen the return of a Hadji from Mecca . . . a sight she was never likely to forget, for its amazing picturesqueness and mediæval magnificence. To-night they were to go to an Arab theatre; the famous Arab tenor Stella had so often heard discussed by her brother and his musical friends was to sing two solos. Vernon was to make one of the party. When all the family were together on such occasions Nancy could not help noticing that her brother invariably found a place next to Mrs. Lekejian, if he was not with Stella, for Mrs. Lekejian was

extremely fond of him and often fought his battles when Nancy attacked her brother with her hot tongue and ready wit. Nancy, with her all-seeing eyes and inquisitive senses, had divined that Mrs. Lekejian was the only one of the party who understood Vernon or whom Vernon understood; the qualities which Stella had *not* inherited from her mother kept a veil between herself and her lover which could never be lifted. The Stella who had been evolved out of her new surroundings and peculiar circumstances mystified and distanced her lover. During the performance at the Arab theatre Stella was more than usually silent. Nancy was not to discover the reason until long afterwards: Stella had been invited that same afternoon to take an active part on the working committee which was being organized in connection with the new Government schools for the practical education of native girls in domestic subjects. Her mind was running on the main features of the project, and they were keeping her preoccupied.

The outstanding difficulty in the work was, of course, the fact that by far the greater proportion of women in Egypt are Moslems, and in the Moslem population only three women per thousand can read, and added to that there is the difficulty that only women may teach women or lecture to them, so that the number of female teachers is wholly inadequate to supply the girls' schools. The number of Moslem men who can read per thousand is only eighty-five. It was in connection with the movement for the free education for girls upon such subjects as practical housewifery that Stella had been invited to give her services. It was thought that, apart from the new Government school instituted for this purpose in Cairo, to which some of the more advanced Moslem families sent their daughters, some of the European ladies in Cairo might give free lessons to girls and lectures to women, to prepare them for household work and to teach them to be better wives and mothers.

The girls would naturally only attend such lectures with the willing consent of their parents, who would be assured that no religious instruction would be given. Considering the fact that there had been ninety-four applications for the thirty vacancies for the Government posts as instructresses on such subjects—the term of instruction consisted of a two years' course at a college in England—Stella

felt convinced that the lectures would in time be well attended and do much good. She thought that if only she could teach two mothers in one year to keep their tiny babies clean and prove to them how disastrous it was to their health to let flies cover their poor discharging eyes and noses, she would be doing something towards paying off the debt she owed to mankind for living a luxurious and useless life whilst all around her poverty and ignorance and bondage stared her in the face. If she could only teach two girls the great religion of Honour, Cleanliness, and Self-respect, they in their turn might teach their sons the advantage of choosing wives from among the higher types of womanhood which this day of greater enlightenment is undoubtedly bringing forth even in the East.

The Arab play, which was very biblical to Nancy, because of the biblical dress of the actors, who were all men, and their solemn mien, as they sat on chairs arranged in a half-moon far back on the stage and declaimed in dignified tones, was not interesting enough to hold Stella's attention . . . her thoughts were more engrossing, and, as Nancy naturally did not understand a word of what was being said, the proceedings, with their unvaried monotony of tone and gesture, "bored her to tears," as she herself expressed the state of her feeling to Nicolas. Nancy did not know in the least what she had expected, but anyhow it was nothing in the least like what she saw; to her uninitiated mind Arab acting was totally undramatic and sadly lacking in picturesqueness.

Suddenly, however—she did not know why—the drama seemed to be gaining in interest, for there were moans, and groans, and curious *un-human* exclamations of emotion coming from the large audience of men which filled the body of the theatre. All the women were out of sight in a gallery, behind a grille like a nuns' gallery in a Catholic church. The wave of excitement was followed by two veiled women being dragged across the stage by fresh actors. At this juncture even Stella evinced a little interest, and tried to interpret what was happening to Nancy; but the particular event of the evening, the event which people like themselves had come to hear, was the tenor, who came forward at last and was welcomed

with wild and strange tokens of enthusiasm. Nancy and Vernon were the only two Europeans in the house, Mrs. Lekejian excepted.

Just before the tenor commenced singing Nancy noticed a wave of colour flood Stella's pale skin, and a look of surprised pleasure light up her tragic eyes. Nancy did not betray that she had noticed Stella's emotion, but followed her gaze across the house to the level of the stalls, and in so doing met the commanding eyes of Michael Ireton fixed on their box. She wondered who he was, with his air of distinction—distinction not of good looks certainly, but of individuality and strength. His curious attitude of aloofness from his fellows was noticeable even on such an occasion. When the tenor began, Michael Ireton, however, was forgotten, for never before had Nancy heard anything so monstrously funny or so unlike her idea of beautiful singing. To her ignorant ears it was frightfully ridiculous; if the man was singing a love-song, she thought it would have made a cat laugh. Her eyes sought Stella's, and when they met the two girls could scarcely conceal their amusement. Vernon had retired to the back of the box, where he remained literally doubled up with quiet laughter.

But the Arab men in the body of the house were not amused, they were moved and enchanted. The singer had carried them into worlds of exquisite delight. When he quavered and trilled, in the strangest of falsetto voices, on one beat of a note for a longer time than usual, they called out, "God approve thee, God prosper thy voice!" Nancy thought she could not endure it a moment longer without laughing outright, yet the natives groaned or rocked to and fro with delight. In their enjoyment there was something curiously sensual and indelicate, and the grunts of satisfaction they gave hurt the girl's innate sense of decency. She was glad that the Lekejians' box removed them from the level of the crowd, for she felt that she would not like to meet the eyes of any one of the Arabs who were giving such curious vent to their appreciation. Stella was thankful that only her father and Nicolas could understand the words of the song, not that they were very bad—not really as suggestive, she had to admit, as many popular songs in English musical comedies, but they were

just bad enough for Orientals to make much worse in their imaginings. When the song was ended, and the Arabs had grunted and sighed out their tokens of approval and had showered roses and jasmine flowers at the singer, Michael Ireton appeared in their box. From the first moment when he shook hands with Stella and said his formal "How do you do?" to Vernon, Nancy knew that the big, dominating man loved her brother's fiancée, and as a brother is never a very romantic personality to a sister she wondered why Stella preferred Vernon to this rather mysterious being who reminded her of all that she had heard about Cecil Rhodes.

To-night Vernon looked delightfully well bred and physically fit, and almost as fair as Nancy herself. In this land of dark-eyed, almond-skinned peoples, he seemed absurdly clean and blue-eyed. Michael Ireton's eyes were quite unremarkable in size or colour, it was their sincerity and melancholy that made them the pleasant feature of his rather massive face. There was nothing little about Ireton, and curiously enough, one of Nancy's first thoughts about him were what Stella's had often been: "What a rock of defence round any woman his arms would be, what rest for any woman to find herself lost in their strength!" Nancy scarcely spoke to him, and when the party left their box to walk up and down the ugly little corridor outside, which they did during the second and last act, she noticed how anxious he was to speak to Stella alone. For some feminine reason which was wholly unreasonable she helped him to achieve his object.

"You are not looking well," he said to Stella, after her slight embarrassment at meeting him had subsided; "have things been troubling you over much since I saw you last?" He looked at her earnestly and spoke very guardedly: in his bearing towards her there was more emotion than in his words, and Stella felt it.

"No, oh no!" she said quickly, "things have been better. . . . Nancy is such a dear, I love having her."

"I'm so glad, little girl," he said tenderly, "for I'm going away, and it will make things easier for me to know that you have got her with you . . . that . . ." He did not finish, for Stella's cry of "Going away?" startled him: her words merely repeated his own, but there was a world

of meaning in them—to Michael Ireton they sounded like a cry of pleading.

“Yes, going away,” he said, “for I find myself defeated, utterly routed. I can’t be only your friend, Hadassah. . . . I knew it when I saw you to-night; it’s no use pretending.”

A sudden desire to free herself from Vernon overwhelmed her . . . she longed for nothing so much as to tell Michael Ireton to stay—to stay and to pretend no longer. She could scarcely get breath enough to speak . . . Ireton thought he had hurt her.

“I know I promised,” he said, “never to speak of this again: I’m a selfish beast, but . . .” he paused, “well, I only wanted to explain why I am going away for ever without seeing you any more; I was pretending it was for your sake, but it is pure selfishness . . . forgive me!”

Stella held out a trembling hand. “Don’t go, please don’t go . . . I want you to stay . . .” there was something in her voice that made him turn with a sudden directness and look at her . . . he had been avoiding her eyes, not even glancing at her pale face while he spoke.

“I am not to go . . . *you* ask me to stay?” He seemed to tower over her in a way which made her feel very helpless and captured. “You can only mean one thing in saying that . . . *do* you mean it, Hadassah? . . . *can* you mean it?” He seized her hands and crushed them in his until the pain almost made her cry out—they were alone in a part of the passage which was unfrequented. She did not answer, so he repeated, “Is it true? Why do you ask me to stay?”

Suddenly she tried to free herself and said, “Go—oh go, go! You must think I am mad.”

But he held her fast. “You are not mad,” he said, “but the maddest thing you can do is to marry a man you don’t any longer love . . . it is wronging *him* as well as yourself . . . don’t send me away if you care for me! Things will come right.”

The suggestion from his lips that she no longer loved Vernon horrified her: of course she loved him, if she loved any one on earth. She tried to tell him so, but her lame protests were stopped, for suddenly there was a commotion and cries of alarm, Stella heard words which blanched her cheeks and made her fly from Michael Ireton’s side

to the entrance of their box, where a crowd had gathered. When she reached the door, Nicolas sprang to her side, and put his arm round her as though to guard her. "Come with me, Stella," he said tenderly; "Vernon has been wounded: he saved father's life a moment ago down in the *buffet*." It seemed as if Stella herself had been suddenly stabbed, for she almost sank to the ground. Nicolas whispered to her, "Be brave, dear; he is not dangerously hurt."

"And father, is he safe? Where is Vernon? Take me to him." With a splendid effort she straightened herself and said, "I am all right; I really will be perfectly calm."

"Father wasn't touched, and Vernon's not badly hurt."

"Where is he? You must let me go to him."

A wild feeling of shame for her disloyalty to Vernon flooded her being. "Take me to him, Nicolas," she said most pleadingly; "he will be expecting me." She longed to abase herself before Vernon to atone for her guilt.

"You can't see him to-night, dearest; he's gone to the hospital. Fortunately Dr. Mason was in the house, just outside the *buffet*; he carried him off at once in a cab; he'll be all right when the bleeding's stopped."

Stella collapsed in a little heap on the seat nearest the door in their box. Nancy flew to her, pale and trembling but calm; her young arms closed tenderly round the shattered girl. "He'll be all right, darling, in no time . . . it is nothing serious, it really isn't," she appealed touchingly to Nicolas, "the doctor said it wasn't, didn't he?" She looked again to Nicolas to back her words, for Mrs. Lekejian had gone home with her husband. "He's a soldier, remember, and this is only a scratch, though it might have been horribly serious."

Stella made a great effort to regain her self-control. "How did it happen?" she said. "Have they caught the murderer? Oh, these wretches, how merciless they are!"

"Yes, they got him—he's in safe keeping now. To do him justice, he didn't make any attempt to escape; he's one of the Al-Lewa crowd, and considers that the part father has played in exposing the corruption of the native courts has proved conclusively that he is a traitor to Egypt's freedom; it fired a wretched youth, an independent Nation-

alist, to attempt his murder; he considers father's work in the whole affair was 'anti-Egyptian.' Of course he's scarcely to blame, poor youth—he's simply been inflamed to madness by the Al-Lewa party. Probably he's one of the best, for at least he's risked his own neck for the sake of what he considers his country's good. Vernon behaved splendidly: father undoubtedly would have been killed if he hadn't sprung at the wretch and spoilt his aim."

"Oh," Stella said, with a pitiful cry, "the wicked murderers! How I hate them all! How I hate myself! Take me home—let's go home, Nancy." She said the last words insistently. As she saw Michael Ireton's tall figure enter their box, she clung feverishly to Nicolas. "Where is he wounded? Poor Vernon . . . is he conscious? . . . are you keeping anything back? . . . Tell me the truth, I prefer it. . . ."

Nicolas drew her away while he asked Ireton to look after Nancy, to whom the whole thing was bewilderingly incomprehensible and horrifying; truly the lust and passion of the East was being revealed to her hour by hour. She could not but feel very proud of Vernon, and somehow just a little glad that he had been given an opportunity of proving to Stella the sound metal he was made of. She did not believe that he was seriously injured, and, knowing his excellent constitution, she felt confident of his quick recovery . . . in a day or two he would be playing polo again just as he so often had done after accidents which had alarmed all onlookers at the game. Nicolas had described to her how Vernon had seen the man's revolver pointed at his father, and without pausing for one second had thrown his glass of lemon squash in the man's eyes, with the result that the weapon was turned on himself as the man's arm swung round.

Any snobbishness she had accused him of in Cairo was entirely wiped out, he was wholly reinstated in Nancy's good books again.

As Michael Ireton said good night to her in the Arab courtyard of the Lekejians' house, he said: "This is the first time we have met, but there is a great bond of sympathy between us. We are both Stella's devoted friends. I am going away, and I will not see her again for a long time. I am very thankful to know that you are with her

. . . her life is very difficult here, she has told me that you make all the difference in the world."

"I do nothing," Nancy said ardently. "What can any one do? I only love her and . . ." She paused.

He quickly interrupted her. "That is how you help her," he said: "you love her, she needs love—abundant love and understanding. You will not grudge her either?"

As he finished speaking he raised the girl's small hands to his lips. "Good-bye," he said gravely, "and God bless you: I may never see you again."

"Good-bye," Nancy said. With girlish simplicity she added, "I wish you weren't going away; I think in Egypt it would be nice to have a big friend like you."

## CHAPTER XX

VERNON'S recovery was not such an easy and speedy one as Nancy had predicted. The wound healed satisfactorily, but his temperature had a nasty habit of rising and falling, in the way that temperatures do rise and fall in the East, even with the healthiest patients, a fact which kept all concerned for his welfare anxious and restless. One day he would be much better, with an almost normal temperature; the next day it would have risen again, and so on, and with no specific reason for its doing so. The girls were only occasionally permitted to see him, though he was lonely and bored in the hospital, in spite of the excellent care and the kindness he received. When Stella saw him for the first time after the accident he made so little of what he had done that she could have knelt at his bedside in humility, but whenever she attempted to thank him or to praise him for his splendid nerve he would say, "Oh, chuck it, old girl! There isn't the greatest rotter living who wouldn't have done the same thing as I did."

And Stella always *had* to chuck it, for talking about it obviously annoyed him, and her strict injunctions from the nurse were to do nothing to excite or tire him. Until her brother was in a more safely convalescent stage Nancy refused to go up the Nile or leave Cairo, so the Littlejohns had to go without her; after all she didn't care very much, for it would have meant leaving Stella and losing touch with the thrilling life she was living; she felt very little inspiration for seeing ancient tombs and Egyptian temples when she could almost take part, so to speak, in the making of Egyptian history. The very fact that, *unlike* Stella, the East was not her home, made everything that belonged to it absorbingly fascinating. What revolted Stella and made her heart-sick often thrilled Nancy, because it was

all a part of the mystery and spell of the East, even when it was horrible.

When Vernon was well enough to be moved he was ordered off to a sanatorium at Helouan, and it was during his time of convalescence there that Stella begged her mother to take Nancy and herself for a short visit to Medinat-al Fayyum. Instead of staying in the town itself, with Girgis Boutros and his aunt and cousin in their white villa, with its green jalousies, on the bank of the Bahr Yûsuf, they induced Girgis to make arrangements for them to sleep in the sportsman's hotel or rest-house, which is built on piles over the historical Lake Moeris, which lies out in the desert some miles from Medinat-al Fayyum.

It was a roasting hot afternoon when Girgis, attired in the most perfect riding kit of English build, met them at the station. Nancy, who had only seen him once, in correct calling attire in Cairo (his mother had a fine house there and was very particular about her son's social etiquette), was not prepared for his appearance in immaculate brown riding-boots, the latest thing in riding coats and breeches, surmounted with the inevitable scarlet *tarbush* which he always wore. It made an odd combination, but the costume suited him perfectly and he knew how to wear it. He told them that he wished to take them to his aunt's house in the town—he lived with his aunt—to have tea before escorting them to Lake Moeris. Feeling very tired and hot, they gladly consented to do as he had arranged. When his three visitors were seated in a luxuriously appointed, but strangely old-fashioned, landau, Girgis mounted his Arab mare. It was the most beautiful beast that Nancy had ever seen: she couldn't think of anything else, as it almost danced by their side; its curved neck, its long, flowing tail, its delight in its own beauty, kept her in a constant state of acclamation. In the Egyptian sunlight both man and beast were objects to thrill the senses. Girgis, who knew that he set off the Arab's beauty to its greatest advantage, did not betray by even a smile that he was in the seventh heaven of delight. Stella he still worshipped she was his divinity, he hungered to own her, to make her his wife—but this flower-like girl appealed to his imagination like a garden

where exotic flowers wafted their fragrance to him over cool waters. Her fair throat and delicate face, her laughing eyes of lapis-blue, could make him forget that her people and her very brother belonged to the hated race who despised him. From the moment when she placed her soft-palmed hand in his he had succumbed, her fragrant personality had lifted him into realms of Oriental delight.

As they drove from the station and passed from a hideous bareness, mingled with dust and flies and Eastern smells, to the cool river banks, bordered with spreading willows and swaying tamarisks, Nancy's quick eye and intuitive brain taught her more than years of explanation could have done. She already knew that in the East, where strong contrasts are for ever forcing themselves upon you, you need never be surprised at anything: Girgis's *tarbush*, worn with English riding-boots and tweed clothes, were illustrative of the fact. So when they stopped in front of an imposing villa, which seemed to her very French and un-Eastern with its white walls and green jalousies, she was not the least astonished when the door was opened by a small boy of about seven years of age who looked like an unfeathered starling which had not yet digested its early meal of worms.

Girgis hurried them into a sitting-room on the ground floor which had not a trace of anything Eastern about it—it was the most uninteresting, uninviting room Nancy had ever been in. Photographs in silver-wire frames, tied up with bright yellow ribbons, were conspicuous on every article of furniture which could hold a picture frame; heavy albums, bound in plush, lay on oval-shaped maple-wood tables. A set of stiff gold chairs, too uncomfortable to sit upon, were planted in a row round the walls; the cool view of the flowing Bahr Yûsuf was entirely hidden by stiff Nottingham-lace curtains. Girgis knew that the room was hideous, but neither of the girls knew that he did. He also knew that his aunt would appear in a few minutes in an appalling tea-gown of purple flannelette, but he might have thought it a creation of Worth's for all the girls could guess by his expression when she entered the room. He knew that the whole business of afternoon tea would shock Stella unutterably, but he was not ashamed: they were his relations and her near connections; Stella's

neck must be bent ! He knew that the etiquette of serving and offering afternoon tea correctly, and the wearing of charming clothes, was only a matter of opportunity . . . and his aunt had had none ; she had lived in Al Fayyum all her life. He knew that with such limited surroundings Stella would have had no better idea of how to entertain English visitors, or how to keep a European house, than his aunt and cousin ; he also knew that, as his aunt and cousin had lived in the wealthy oasis city of Al Fayyum, they were much more advanced in their views and mode of living than his other cousins who lived almost like Mohammedans in Upper Egypt.

When at last his aunt came awkwardly into the room, followed by her heavy-featured daughter, Stella could scarcely believe that they were people of the same rank in life as Girgis, for Mrs. Ha Boutros did not look the least Eastern in type, she seemed to Stella more like a second-rate Italian inn-keeper's wife than an Egyptian ; but her voice was soft and her clear pronunciation of English was refined. Mrs. Lekejian, who had only seen her once before, many years ago, greeted her with a charming air of family relationship—she had heard many things from Girgis about his aunt which had made her respect and like her very much. But Mrs. Boutros was very shy, and this made conversation extremely difficult. Her daughter, who was literally too shy to speak, sat on the edge of her gilt chair close to Nancy and looked at her with the surprised eyes of a cow. Nancy did not know what to speak to her about . . . if Girgis had not been there she could have got on better, for she would have treated her almost like a child ; but if she did he might think her condescending. Anything like intimacy was hopeless, for the girl simply answered " yes " and " no " to her remarks about Al Fayyum. Topics soon became exhausted. Girgis, realizing Nancy's difficulty, asked if tea was coming ; it arrived just as he spoke.

A huge silver tea-tray was carried round the room to each person by a trembling Coptic maid-servant, whose complexion and features were so beautiful that Nancy could scarcely resist speaking about her ; in these dreadful surroundings she was an amazing contrast and relief. She wore a native dress of clinging black, with her hair modestly

hidden under a bright blue handkerchief. Nancy wondered why her mistress could not see how sweet she looked compared to her own daughter ; Girgis must, she felt sure, for he had perfect taste in his own details of dress. After the maid had handed round the tea, which was cold and weak, Miss Boutros rose from her chair awkwardly and offered her guests some of Huntley and Palmer's mixed biscuits, which were piled up in a little wire basket decorated with the same bright yellow ribbon. Stella and Nancy dared not let their eyes meet. It seemed as if their hostess must have gone to some shop where they only sold objects made of twisted wire, and to another, where they only sold yellow ribbon. In a land where old dishes of exquisite colours and shapes are to be bought for a few pence it seemed a dreadful perversion of taste to be drinking tea out of vile Japanese cups and eating biscuits off twisted-wire baskets.

Mrs. Lekejian had tried various topics of conversation with the mother, who was not quite so shy as her daughter. She knew absolutely nothing about the ancient or modern history of the town she lived in, though, as far as both Stella and her mother could discover, she had never been out of Al Fayyum in her life ; indeed, she seldom went out of the house. Yet she did not give them the impression of being bored or dull. Even the affair of Vernon's illness and Mr. Lekejian's attempted murder did not break the formality of her responses. The details of it were discussed, and the Asiut election disturbances were touched upon—but in each instance it was Mrs. Lekejian who did all the talking and her hostess who only responded with little artificial exclamations of praise of Vernon and horror of the fanatic's deed. It seemed to Stella, as she listened to her mother talking to the oddly dressed woman at her side, that nothing really interested the latter except illustrated papers, for she saw piles and piles of " Je Sais Tout " and " Comic Cuts " on a table near the window.

When the tea, a dreadful concoction made with unboiled water, was drunk, and a few more platitudes had been exchanged, Stella said she thought they ought to be getting on their way, as her mother was very tired. Their hostess, who was obviously relieved that their visit was at an end, did not attempt to detain them. She was delighted that Girgis had brought them, and she felt proud that such a

beautiful girl as Stella was her own nephew's first cousin, but she nevertheless felt relieved that they were going; she was longing to discuss every point of their looks and dress with her daughter, who, poor thing, was not so well satisfied with her best clothes as she had been before their arrival. With a jealous woman's double-sight she had seen that Girgis was in love with Stella and that he was enthralled with Nancy's beauty, though Nancy's fairness was to her too strange to be beautiful. She had heard of fair Western women in romances, but she had never imagined that a living woman could look so unreal as the English girl seemed in her Eastern eyes.

When they were once more comfortably seated in the carriage, Nancy gave a sigh of relief. She did not like to be the first to say anything, because, after all, these people were near connections of Stella's and first cousins of Girgis; but when he was out of hearing, which was very soon, for his Arab mare could not be induced to go at their driving pace, Mrs. Lekejian said to Stella, "What a pity! Why ever can't they be contented to live in the old style? I wonder Girgis doesn't see it."

"I'm sure he does, mother," Stella said; "but he thinks that living in the European style is a step towards progress and regeneration, and you know how keen he is about all that sort of thing. It certainly gives the women something to do, for there's more to look after, with lace curtains and carpets and all those hideous ornaments about." She laughed at the memory of their visit, but it was a kindly laugh.

"How *would* they live if it was in the native way?" Nancy asked. "Not like harem women, doing absolutely nothing?"

"Oh, no, but quite differently," Mrs. Lekejian said. "The old native houses were lovely, and oh, these terrible dresses bought at Greek shops, and these uncomfortable chairs!"

"Had the Copts fine houses like the Arabs?" Nancy asked.

"Well, no, they hadn't"—she paused—"for in the old days (when these splendid houses were built) the Christians were too poor—they were never allowed to have any money; but now why can't they build their grand new houses in

the old way, and live in them in the old style? They would feel at home in them and look much less absurd. That poor girl! . . .” she sighed.

Nancy had seen some of the glorious old Arab houses in Cairo, hidden away in unexpected quarters, but she somehow had indefinitely associated their beauty in her mind with the fact that they were Mohammedan buildings; she did not know that in most respects the Copts in the old days lived like their Moslem neighbours and would have had houses similar to theirs if they had had the money to buy them . . . she did not understand that their wealth was a thing of later growth, that, like all despised races, they had made their money off usury and by diligent hoarding. Persecution begets undesirable qualities of intelligence.

Nancy thought for a moment and then, turning to Stella, she said: “I did think Girgis was sweet to them, didn’t you? He was so well bred, so dignified. I’m sure I should have been a snob and done my best to show visitors that I knew how awful they were.”

Stella looked pleased, and so did her mother. “Girgis is quite extraordinary,” they both said; “one never knows what he feels; with all his revolutionary ideas he’s a true philosopher.”

“Oh,” Nancy said, “I think he is awfully sensitive—I’m sure he is; but they are his people, it was his loyalty to them.”

The Arab mare pranced up to them at that moment. Girgis managed to keep her within speaking distance; he looked very happy. “My aunt was greatly pleased to see you.” He addressed Stella: “She asked me to thank you for honouring her.” (Girgis very seldom now said “If you please,” Stella had chaffed him out of it.) “She thinks you are very beautiful and high-minded.”

“Oh,” Stella said, smiling good-naturedly at his odd expressions, “you mustn’t make me vain! It was your aunt who deserved our thanks.”

“Excuse me, but I could not make you vain.”

Stella laughed again. “Why not?” she said. “I am only human.”

“Because what *I* think and what my cousins think could not make you vain, and you know it; and I thank *you* also for coming,” he bowed to Nancy. “It was not gay for you. I am sorry.”

“ Oh, but I enjoyed my visit,” she said ; “ they’re very kind. I wish we could have stayed longer, so that we could all have got over the shy feeling. Your cousin must know such a lot of things that would interest us. I wanted to make friends and talk with her about all sorts of things.”

“ They have been very curious to see my cousin Hadassah, now they are satisfied. For many days they will talk about your visit.” His un-mirthful Egyptian smile broke the severity of his features. “ My cousin has only seen painted pictures of virgins like you ”—he looked at Nancy ; “ she did not understand that in a country where there is much moisture the women grow up like flowers ; they are as sweet to the nostrils as almond blossom in spring. And so you must excuse her ; I saw her look very much.”

“ You say these things so prettily that even when I know you don’t mean them I enjoy hearing them,” Nancy said gaily, “ but I want to *feel* like almond blossom in the spring.” Her laughter was so infectious and mirthful that it inflamed his quick blood. His mare responded to his mood : her nostrils distended, her tail curved, she danced with the pride of life. . . . “ Englishmen don’t know how to pay compliments ; they never say these poetical things unless they think the woman they are addressing is vain and foolish.”

“ But *I* speak the truth, if you please ”—his eyes met Stella’s as his old habit of speech slipped out—“ it is no compliment ; you carry the sweetness of white night-flowers into the unwatered desert.”

His grave air made Nancy laugh again, but seeing that he was serious, she smiled her thanks.

“ You think, do you not, that my cousin Hadassah is very beautiful ? ” Nancy nodded her head. “ And Hadassah told me that you were like an English rose. Why is it then *not* true if I say you are both beautiful to me ? ”

Mrs. Lekejian and Stella joined in Nancy’s laughter, for Girgis had certainly gained his point. They had left far behind them the precincts of the oasis city, with its dull bazaars full of cheap European goods for *un-European* customers, and its streets with fine European villas, built out of the wealth which has belonged to the people of Al Fayyum ever since the day when Joseph, the controller of Pharaoh’s household, so legend says, bestowed

upon the surrounding country the network of canals and reservoirs which have made the Fayyum famous as an agricultural centre for all Egypt. They had almost forgotten the cool waters of the Bahr Yûsuf, for they were nearing the hideous ruins of Arsinoë, of the famous Crocodilopolis of the Greeks, and Hadassah was trying to induce Nancy to give her attention to the fact. Nancy said she would gladly give her attention to it when any scenery began, but she refused to call a far-extending dust-heap, city rubbish-shoots in fact, "ancient remains." If Stella said that they were the ruins of the once-famous site, she would take her word for it, but look at them she would not while there were really interesting things to see all round her—agricultural methods which in all probability Joseph had introduced into the country, and coats of many colours, which he himself might have worn.

When Stella told her that the sacred crocodiles wore bangles and were fed on marrons glacés and other delicacies, her interest was roused; but as every sign of the lake in which the sacred beasts were kept had disappeared, and in its place an Arab cemetery had also flourished and passed away, she would not waste time over inspecting the un-savoury place. Stella longed to stop the carriage and walk over the ruins, but her mother dissuaded her—it was very hot, and the dust which she would stir up might hurt her eyes and throat, while the fleas would be really awful. Nancy said that the "ash-pit" in Cairo which Stella called the ruins of "Fustat" was bad enough, but that from its heights you could see something beautiful in the surrounding country, and you could, if you took the trouble, pick up pieces of ancient pottery as rich in tone as the jewels which were discovered in the famous tomb of Queen Thi; but here at Crocodilopolis there was absolutely nothing to be seen but the worst kind of hideousness. She asked Girgis if he did not agree with her, which of course he did: the splendour of ancient Egypt meant nothing to him except as a token of the country's future possibilities—if it once had been great it could be great again. And so they left behind them the site of the ancient Arsinoë, which in the reign of Ptolemy II. was the capital of Upper Egypt. In the desert the dazzling heat was moving like a wave over the country; the long, dusty road was black

with market people coming towards them on camels, on donkeys, and on foot; the heavy necklaces and anklets of the women showed the wealth of the country and caught the sunlight as they walked. It was all intensely Eastern, and, as Nancy remarked, the "limit" was reached when a porcupine instead of a rabbit scurried across their path into the dust of the desert.

As the hours passed, however, and there was little to break the monotony of the endless processions of black-robed women, whose trailing garments looked wholly unpractical for agricultural labour, and the long string of camels walking as though they were all one beast, at the same pace, with the same movements, and the same lofty indifference, they were not sorry to arrive at the little hotel which has been built for sportsmen on piles over the lake. They had to climb an outside stair like a ladder to reach the front door. A cry of delight burst from Nancy's lips as she saw the cool interior where they were to dine: the canvas walls were hung with the usual Egyptian decorations, the animal gods of the ancients, and gay texts from the Koran, cut out in brilliant shades of yellows and greens and blues, and stitched on to red cotton. At intervals there were openings in the walls to admit the cool breeze from the lake and show inviting glimpses of softly moving tamarisks and low-flying water-birds. The dinner-table was decorated with crimson roses which Stella knew her cousin Girgis must have ordered the day before from Al Fayyum, and comfortable couches ran all round the room, which was long and narrow, and not unlike the cabin of a ship. The glimpses of the lake which surrounded it on all sides added to the impression and delighted each one of the party as they sank gratefully on to the divans.

Hadassah sat next to her cousin; in a low voice she said to him, "Girgis, dear, you are so kind." She laid her hand lightly on his arm, but she felt him tremble under her touch, and quickly removed it. "We are enjoying ourselves so much, and I understand how much trouble you have taken. All this is perfectly delightful."

"But you are not happy," he said: his eyes read into her very mind. All her attempts to appear gay had not deceived him; nothing ever deceived Girgis.

"I have been anxious about father and Vernon," she said;

“the change here will do me good.” She turned her eyes away, his unnerved her.

“You are unhappy,” he repeated.

Mrs. Lekejian and Nancy had put their heads outside the canvas opening; they could not hear what Stella said. “Why do you say it?” she said; “I wish you wouldn’t”—but she had not denied it.

“I know why you are unhappy—it is not anxiety for your father—but for to-day please try to forget.” His voice was so gentle that the smile she bestowed upon him was appreciative of his kindness. It was never the least good to attempt to lie to Girgis, for he could read her through like an open book.

Quite suddenly he said: “Since I have seen his sister I do not hate him so much.”

“Hush!” Stella said. She looked nervously at him; an unacknowledged fear took definite shape in her mind as she did so.

“No!” he said, “I do not love Miss Nancy. If I had never seen you I would have desired her, but not now. You exhaust my senses: I have none for any other woman. But she is pure and beautiful, and she is his sister. How is such a thing possible?”

“Have you already forgotten what we owe to Vernon? You should love him for it: when I think that but for him we should not have had father, I feel that I could lay my very soul in his hands to do just as he liked with.”

Girgis became excited. “And what did he do, if you please? Only what any man would have done, only what no man could *not* have done. He had the good chance to be the man chosen to do this thing . . . while I, who long to serve you, was only a few yards away. Why has he all the fortune? Now you will feel that whatever he does, or thinks, you must bear with it; you will give him your soul. . . . I would have saved your father and died for him, if only to win tenderness always from your eyes when you thought of me.”

“Girgis, why do you still think of me like that? . . . try not to.”

“When you loved Vernon Thorpe could you have made yourself not love him? Who can do these things? We cannot help love, we cannot help love.”

Stella noticed that he had said "*when*" you loved Vernon, but she ignored the inference. "No, no," she said, "one can't help loving, I know that, but *you* only think you love me, I'm sure you do—you gave yourself no time, you didn't know me; you said you would marry me the first time we met. Do you remember?" she tried to treat the matter more lightly.

"Because you came like lightning into my heart, and, like the full moon, the mystery of your beauty raised my love to worship. You are my divinity."

His romantic manner of expressing his love for her brought the tender smile that he loved to see into her eyes. In spite of the fact that her Western upbringing had imbued her with the feeling that love poetically expressed was seldom, if ever, deeply felt, she was conscious that her cousin had a feeling for her which was far removed from the sensuous passion of most Egyptians. She felt sorry for him, and troubled about how to treat him; at the same time the relief she experienced in the fact that Nancy, with her glowing personality and vitality, had not inspired him with an overwhelming passion, outbalanced her sorrow that he was still romantically attached to herself. He was very attractive this afternoon in his capacity as host, and his good qualities appealed to Stella none the less for Nancy's very obvious approval of him.

They had good appetites for the beautifully cooked dinner, which he had personally supervised. He knew Stella's likes and dislikes, and as she watched him while he attended to their various wants, she could scarcely believe that his home life was spent in the absurd surroundings they had seen that afternoon; yet, in spite of his ease of manner and perfect familiarity with Western methods of entertaining, she could not think of him as her cousin by blood, he was still one of the enigmas of Egypt. That Vernon had saved her father's life was never long absent from Stella's thoughts—she was in return ready to lay down her life for him; but the deed had not brought them really any closer together, for in her gratitude she had placed herself on a new and almost strange footing towards her lover. He implored her to forget her gratitude towards him, to treat him as she had done before the accident—in her tenderness towards him

he missed the old fire of her first passion, he longed for the return of her independence of spirit. If Michael Ireton had not spoken to her, and she had not allowed herself to be false in thought to her lover at the very moment when he was offering up his own life for her father's—she might perhaps have retained her former independence, but not now! Now she must make amends for that moment of sudden surrender to the man who had taught her what his deeper nature knew of a love's devotion for the woman he prized.

After dinner Girgis disappeared, and they did not see him again until they said good night to him: they little imagined that he was supervising the erection of mosquito-curtains on their various beds, and seeing that their bedrooms were as attractive as he could make them. With the awful masterfulness of an ancient Egyptian he had insisted upon mosquito-netting being produced from somewhere. It had been forgotten, but it *was* produced! A native runner had been to the Fayyum and back in an incredibly short space of time. His brown body, naked but for the meagerest loin-cloth, was now steaming like a roast of beef which had just been pulled from the oven, and his tongue was parched to a cinder, but the mosquito-netting for the rich "Seti" had been procured. If Stella had seen the poor wretch panting on a circular prayer-mat made of straw, at the back door of the inn, she would have thought her security from mosquito-bites dearly bought. But Girgis feared that malarious mosquitoes might hover round their lake dwelling, and after all, if the native had died from exhaustion, his place in the world could be filled at dawn by a new man.

It was only nine o'clock when they went to bed, because their day had begun very early; but Nancy and Stella, who shared one queer little room, talked until at least an hour later. When women have spent the whole day together their real confidences only begin when their hair comes down at night: going to bed is like the P.S. of many people's letters. Their mosquito-curtains prevented them sitting on the edge of their beds in their customary fashion, even when their rooms afforded comfortable easy chairs, so they sat on the cool straw-matted floor, with their arms hugging their knees.

Nancy's flood of golden hair, which entirely hid her face, made Stella's by contrast seem very dark, just as her gay and mischievous face proved that Stella's had grown very serious for her years. In Nancy's eyes Stella now resembled Rossetti's "La belle dame sans merci"—especially when her hair was let down for brushing.

Suddenly Nancy put her chin on her knees, and for a moment her gay voice became serious. "Stella," she said, "how does it feel to have three men in love with you at one time?"

Stella, to hide her embarrassment, said, "Don't be an ass, Nancy."

Nancy sighed. "I'd be quite contented with one. What's the use of being pretty if no one loves you?"

"One of the three who, you imagine, are in love with me, do you mean?"

"No." Nancy's eyes dropped. "No," she repeated slowly, "I'm not a Ptolemy, so I couldn't marry my own brother, and Michael Ireton . . ." she paused and looked at Stella, who instantly unclasped her hair and let it fall over her face. Her apparent impatience did not unnerve Nancy, who continued, "Michael Ireton is too monogamous—he'd make *me* unfaithful in a week; while Girgis . . ." she gave a little shiver, "oh! he'd terrify me. He might turn out to be a Bluebeard."

Stella looked at her suspiciously. . . . "Why . . . I thought you admired him?"

"So I do, and I like him most awfully, all we know of him, but neither you nor I really know him, or will ever know him."

Stella nodded her head. "That's what I feel."

Nancy always spoke as though she and Stella belonged to the same race of people. "He knows far more about us than we know about him—I mean the human part of our natures. He may not have met many Englishwomen, but he has the ancients' understanding of human nature. You feel it . . . it rather troubles me sometimes."

Stella said very gravely: "We know only the civilized part of him, which is the lesser part."

"Of course, that's all we ever know about any one," Nancy said; "it's all we allow people to know . . . we hardly know the 'other part' of our own selves, do we?"

"But with Girgis the uncivilized part belongs to a strange people. . . . "Stella paused abruptly in the middle of her speech; her hair still veiled her face.

"Well?" Nancy said, "go on."

"I often try to visualize the Girgis we don't know, the Girgis who has nothing to do with Coptic schools, and electric ploughs, and automatic wells, and brown riding-boots, and afternoon teas; the Girgis who still in his heart worships 'Sebek,' the Crocodile God of Al Fayyum; the Girgis who would have offered up his own sister as a victim to the Nile for the propitiation of its bountiful overflowing."

Nancy shivered.

"He is, with all his love of progress and hunger for modernity and for the regeneration of Egypt, a reincarnation of an ancient Pharaoh—I see it so often in him. He wears his clothes beautifully—and how well he chooses them!—but they don't really hide the inscrutable statue of the Pharaoh he really is, do they?"

"No," Nancy said, "not a bit."

"There is nothing living," Stella said slowly, "that I have seen in all Egypt so Eastern as my own cousin Girgis—isn't it strange? And the more he adopts the fine veneer of European civilization, the more Eastern he appears to me."

"Aren't you very proud of it? I feel so terribly modern when I am with him, so entirely outside the 'Great Classic Belt' that dear Naughtie used to speak about." She was examining Stella's pretty almond nails and slender fingers.

Stella caught her hand tightly in hers: "You're a darling, Nancy; you've been so sweet, we all adore you." Her voice shook.

"Oh, Stella, don't speak like that! It is all of you who have been adorable to me."

"You know everything and understand everything now, you have met my relations on my father's side: are you not just a little ashamed of the connection?"

Nancy took the veil of dark hair in her hands and drew it away from Stella's face so that she could look into her eyes while she answered. "Not in the least," she said slowly; "I hate the beastly stuck-up English people who can't see the difference there is between you, dearest, and all your clever family, and the ordinary common

Levantines and natives whom both you and I abhor. Who *could* be ashamed of Girgis?" She spoke with spirit.

"I'm not," Stella said, "but I know the way in which English people are taught to regard all races who belong to the Eastern hemisphere: they never even try to understand them; they class the good and the bad all together in one lump, when it comes to anything like intimacy. Lots of the English officials speak very highly of many natives who hold Government posts, and even of some of the wealthy landowners; but when they are asked to try to understand them as friends and companions they instantly say, 'They are impossible.' The Bishop of Khartoum was not afraid to speak very strongly on the subject a day or two ago. The English will always be hated if they intend *always* to despise us as intimates, if they continue to say that we are all impossible because of the many who are . . . Vernon didn't want you to visit us: we almost quarrelled over your coming."

"Good heavens! Is that why you wrote that letter and sent the wire which I never got?"

"Yes, it was to please him."

"And I came in spite of everything. How can you love such a snob? . . ." she looked into Stella's eyes searchingly, and said again . . . "Why *do* you love him?"

Stella let her hair screen her face again as she bent her head . . . "Hush, Nancy, don't! You shouldn't speak of him like that—how can you! . . . we never know why we love; but surely, now, he *is* worth loving. . . ."

"I couldn't marry a man who was a snob. You think he was frightfully brave because he saved your father . . . well, if he *hadn't* done it, he'd have been a coward—that's another way of looking upon his act of heroism. . . ." Nancy's anger at her brother's attitude towards Stella's relations had for the moment wiped out all her former pride in his act of cool-headed bravery. "Fancy being ashamed of anything that belonged to you!" she went on hotly. "I thought Girgis's cousins were funny and awfully awkward in their stuffy, ugly European clothes, and so did you! . . . but just think what we should have looked like in their eyes if we had chosen to wear Eastern dresses without knowing how they should be put on! I guess we'd have made an even greater muddle of it than

they did ; besides, isn't it awful to let ourselves care so much about these trivial things. I felt all the time that both the mother and daughter must know about all sorts of interesting things that they were too shy to introduce into conversation. Think of how little chance they have had to feel at ease in strange society."

"It's the trivial things that weigh down the scales of life . . ." Stella said quietly ; "if we could rise above trivial things life would be comparatively easy."

"That's true," Nancy said thoughtfully, "but I can't believe that my own brother didn't want me to visit his future wife's relations. It makes me sick to think of it, and ashamed of him."

"But it's quite true. He urged me to go home and wait for him in England, so that I should not have to mix with my father's people . . . it's all dreadful, Nancy, and I want to do things he'd hate . . . I want to do all I can with money and education to help to raise the women, for if the women were better educated and were treated with greater respect by the men, they could do far more for the advancement of Egypt than all the acts of parliaments and public bodies put together that try to put down vice and dirt and horribleness : for you mustn't be mistaken about things . . . out here they are horrible . . ." she made a face of disgust. . . . "Cairo is horrible ; really the visitors only see the fair side of it, but the truth would horrify you. . . ." She sighed. "When scarcely any of the women can read, and when they have no idea of a moral training for their sons, and are even without the most ignorant sense of decency in the matter of cleanliness, what can you expect ? . . . Vernon never wants you to know that I belong to *that* side of Cairo really—the native side, I mean."

Nancy's temper was up in a flash, her violet eyes were as black as onyx : "Know what ? I should like to know : know that your brother and father have twice the brains that he has, that they are both too well bred to be the snob that he is, that when he's with them he must, if he has any feelings at all, know how ignorant he is compared to them both. Oh ! don't you see that he's a walking monument of Anglo-Saxon vanity and prejudice ? I don't see how you can go on loving him. I saw Nicolas looking at him the other night when he said quite proudly that he had never

even heard of, let alone read a word of 'Omar Khayyám' in his life. Nicolas couldn't believe it . . ." She looked at Stella for a reply.

"Don't you want me to go on loving him, dear?"

Nancy's anger broke down. "Yes, of course I do; I'll be awfully sick if you ever fall *out* of love with him; if you were lost to the family it would be ghastly."

"Then why say things like that?"

"I only say them because I know you always will love him in spite of everything. You're so blind when you care for people: I suppose that's why they say love is blind."

Stella began brushing her hair very diligently. In the days that had passed since the attempted murder of her father she had almost succeeded in banishing Michael's dominating personality from her thoughts, and was living once more in a dream of imaginary love for Vernon . . . he had saved her father's life, and by so doing had unconsciously surrounded himself with an atmosphere of heroic romance. Stella could no longer think of him dispassionately, for there was always the protest of self-accusation, that she had been unworthy of his loyalty to her people, and of his love for herself! A thousand times she had longed to have the words she had said to Michael Ireton unsaid, and yet stronger than her wish she knew was the unformed desire to see him once more . . . if only to explain to him that now and for ever more she was Vernon's, if only to try to unsay the words she had scarcely said. Yet, after all, what had she said except to ask him to stay? Yet she knew that no arguing, no banishing of the astonishment she heard in his voice when she said the few words, "Oh, don't go," would quiet the "still, small voice"—that still, small voice of conscience which has a thousand lives. Would it always go on reminding her of the "world of words" which had been expressed in his voice and in hers! If her soul could have spoken to Nancy it would have said, "The man I once loved bores me: he is your brother; take him away, let everything be finished between us, let me pay for his deed of heroism in another way than by becoming his wife. . . ." But the soul did not speak, and the woman was too eagerly engaged in deceiving herself and clothing her Fallen God with the garments of Love to allow it a chance.

Nancy, little dreaming of the thoughts Stella was hiding behind her veil of dark hair, said: "Tell me, Stella, has Nicolas ever been in love?"

"I think he once cared for a girl, I'm nearly sure he did; mother has said things vaguely about her, but he's never mentioned a word of it to me; he is very reserved, as you can see."

"What happened, I wonder . . . was she an English girl?" If Stella could have seen Nancy's eyes as she asked the question, she would have learned that the asking of that question was the "postscript" of the girl's conversation.

"I think he'd hate me to speak about it." Stella paused . . . "Yes, the girl was English, he knew her when he lived in Paris . . . she allowed him to get fond of her, and do everything for her, all that a devoted friend may do, I mean; when he came to Cairo she got her mother to bring her out to Egypt. . . ." Stella was breathless; her indignation had risen, but she was trying to speak indifferently. Nancy saw her emotion. . . . "In Cairo she . . . well, she dropped him!"

"Little beast!" Nancy hissed. "What's become of her? Does he love her still?"

"She's married the heir to a baronetcy who is drinking himself to death."

"And does Nicolas still care?" Nancy said persistently.

"No, I don't think so; he was heart-hurt rather than heart-broken at the time even, but he was so badly hurt that he never trusts any woman now; with all his gentleness of disposition he is dreadfully cynical. The girl looked so young and sympathetic, mother says, but she was really as hard as nails and as selfish as a man."

Nancy picked up her brush and rose to her feet. . . . "Then if *I* fall in love with Nicolas I shall have to propose to him?"

Stella caught hold of her feet and brought the girl toppling to the ground; she caught her in her arms and held her like a child in them. "Nancy," she cried, looking into the naughty eyes and laughing face . . . "Nancy, you mustn't . . . promise me, Nancy, you won't play with him."

"Oh! don't be alarmed," she said . . . "your Nicolas is *quite* safe, he doesn't think me 'as sweet to the nostrils' as Girgis does . . ." she went into a fit of laughter at the

thought of Girgis's similes. . . . "What fun it all is, Stella! Girgis makes me scream, he's so quaint, and so delightfully poetic; I can't imagine Vernon even thinking the things he says: English love-making is really very stupid, it's so lacking in imagination—don't you find it so?" Nancy looked wickedly at Stella. . . . "I shouldn't think Vernon ever took the trouble to think out poetic speeches, does he?"

Stella blushed guiltily, for in her imagination it was not Vernon's form of English love-making to which her mind had flown, but the few fierce words Michael Ireton had spoken, words which had stirred more fire in her veins, and wakened more songs in her heart, than all the Oriental phraseology of Girgis at his best. She wished Nancy would stop talking and go to bed, for with the sudden opening of her memory to Michael Ireton's devouring eyes and the confession of his love, the woman in her was thundering at her senses, and she was ashamed!

But Nancy loved teasing. "You're blushing! I do believe he's better at it than I thought. I can only imagine him saying, 'I'm beastly fond of you, old girl,' and asking you to sit on his knee. Vernon, he likes even *me* to sit on his knee while he smokes his pipe and talks. . . ." Nancy sighed—"talks and talks everlastingly about cricket and polo and golf—have you learnt to *talk* cricket yet? Do you remember the day at Lord's when you thought the umpire in his white coat was the doctor in attendance?"

They both laughed at the memory of that terrible day when Stella had tried her best to please her lover by being interested in cricket. . . . the love of sport which bestows an understanding of its slang and rules is inborn, it cannot be acquired. "The sense" of games had been omitted in the making of Stella, and yet, like many women who do not care for games or sport, she had often attracted the sport-loving men. Her clean-cut limbs, her well-balanced figure, her proudly carried head appealed to their critical eye. They ought to have known that she was too graceful to be a really good sportswoman, for the really active English girl who is good at all games is seldom graceful, though her supple movements are pleasant to watch.

"It's all so absurd," Nancy said, "you classing yourself with the native life here; you're not Egyptian, you're Syrian, and if you *were*, Egyptians aren't niggers!"

“No, we’re not Egyptians,” Stella said slowly, “we are what you English hate even more, we are Syrians, and Syrians are classed with the Jews and the usurers of the world generally. Our intelligence annoys you rather than pleases you . . .” she stopped abruptly . . . “we belong to the Semitic races !”

Nancy gave a breathless little gasp. . . . “Does . . . does your father *lend* money, Stella ?”

“No, he never did, but Syrians *do*, and so do the Jews, because the Mohammedans can’t, the Koran forbids it . . . but it doesn’t prevent them borrowing.” Stella smiled sarcastically.

“Are Mohammedans great gamblers, then ?”

“Frightful.”

“Does Girgis lend money ?” Nancy spoke timidly.

“No, *rather* not ; he does all he can to prevent young Egyptians from borrowing money . . . they mortgage their cotton-crops year after year . . . the money all goes on the ‘fleshpots of Egypt’ . . . on the very things that the Prophet forbade. The young Egyptians who live in cities care for nothing but dress, horse-racing, and gambling . . . the Jews and Syrians are hated because they are careful and have made big fortunes by lending money at high interest to foolish gamblers . . . the Egyptians would always borrow money somehow and somewhere !”

“But moneylending is horrid . . .” Nancy shivered . . .

“I’m glad Girgis never does it, aren’t you ?”

“Yes, I am glad,” Stella said, “and thank God father abhors it.”

Both girls were silent for a few moments.

“You see what I mean,” Stella said thoughtfully—“that the regeneration of Egypt, if it ever comes to pass, must be effected by elevating the standard of womanhood.” She paused. . . . “Of course they are far happier as they are,” she said wearily, “I know that ; but we must raise them, even if we awaken them to suffering . . . they have slept long enough, poor things.”

“Do you think they are really happier as they are ?” Nancy asked in surprise. “Why ?”

“I think they are, for they at least are unconscious of their unhappiness . . . the enlightened woman is not. They don’t know that they are ignorant, and filthy, and idle,

and not fit to be the mothers of any race of men ; they don't know that Happiness is the carrot that is ever dangled before our noses . . . they imagine that the fortunate individuals who have sufficient wealth to purchase material indulgences actually taste the ' carrot ' and wallow in its goodness."

" Then, dear," Nancy said, " why, oh, why waken them ? Why teach them that the carrot always eludes our teeth ; that we never chew it, however deserving we are ? "

" Why wake them ? " Stella said. " Because every one must suffer for a big cause, and surely the regeneration of their nation is a big enough one . . . the ancient Egyptians never could have been as great a race if their women had been as the women are to-day . . . we know they weren't ; history tells us that they weren't ; the pictures on the walls show us that they weren't . . . the Egyptian mother of to-day is a disgrace to her land . . . why the men are as decent as they are is a marvel."

" The Koran," Nancy said : " the men can read the Koran."

" Oh, the Egyptian youth of to-day pays very little attention to the Koran . . . to escape military service he goes through a course of education at El-Azhar, the Moham-medan University, where he has to study the Koran, but when he is through his course he shakes it off. . . . El-Azhar," Stella said dreamily, " is the most beautiful thing in Cairo. When I first went there I thought the students were the most devout and unworldly people *in* the world . . . I have learnt differently . . . you must go there."

" I'd love to," Nancy said ; " I adore seeing the people in their native element."

" El-Azhar," Stella said, " is like the Vatican : it's a vast, mediæval organization which appeals to the emotions and annoys the intellect. When I walk through its ancient courts full of devout students, apparently lost to the world in their search after Truth, I hate all modern progress, I loathe the idea of changing in any way this beautiful seat of learning which has gone on since . . ." she paused for dates . . . " well, since long before England saw the Normans." Again she paused. " But then, if you were to go through the ' fish market ' at night, as I did disguised as a native woman once, you would want to open the gates of El-Azhar to even the most vulgar inroads of modernity . . . you would

want to let in the fresh air of progress . . . you would want to let in the idea that women, as the mothers of all nations, must hold an even higher position in the land than the men ; that, grafted on to the Prophet's teachings, must come the teachings of the world of to-day. If institutions such as the ' fish market ' are to be done away with, it must be by raising the standard of motherhood in this country. Reform can only be effected by giving men mothers who will teach them to respect their manhood and not vilify it, mothers who will teach their sons that women were not made for the sole purpose of satisfying passions and for the raising of males."

" Stella," Nancy said, " why don't you teach the women these things ? You make things so understandable, you could do a lot of good by public speaking." Nancy had heard of the " fish market," which, it is to be hoped, will sooner or later be a thing of the past in Cairo.

" I want to," Stella said, " but it's so difficult—I want to more than I can tell you."

" I suppose it would be difficult," Nancy said, " but I'd rather enjoy defying conventions, if they hindered a good cause ; I wouldn't care one scrap—not here any way."

" There are so many people to consider : there's father . . ." She was going to say " and Vernon," but refrained . . . " and even mother, I believe she would . . ." she left her sentence unfinished.

" Would your father object ? Really I don't believe it."

" Yes, I think so . . . not that he would think it wrong, but you must always remember that at the back of everything . . ." she hesitated . . . " father is an Eastern, and he knows the vile Oriental mind . . . he knows the sort of things Arabs say and think about women who do anything in public, and he simply can't bear the idea of even the vilest and most ignorant of them *thinking* horrible thoughts about his own wife and child."

" I see," Nancy said ; " it's awfully difficult."

" Father is hated almost as much as if he was an Englishman by all the different sects except perhaps by the ' Independent Egyptian Party,' which is represented by the highest Coptic people, and I think he's respected by many of the influential and wealthy Moslems, whose aim is ' Representative Government in Egypt irrespective of

race or religion,' because they know that he is *not* self-interested, that like them, his first wish is for Egypt."

"Does Girgis belong to that party?"

Stella thought for a moment. "He goes much farther; he has many sympathies with the 'Nationalists.' He used to belong to the Party of the People, as the moderate Nationalists are called . . . but you must remember that Girgis is awfully young; father is old enough to have seen the days of Turkish oppression."

"How old *is* Girgis?"

"Just my age . . . not twenty-three."

Nancy laughed. "Good heavens! Stella, he's only a boy."

"You must remember that most native 'boys' of his age are married men and fathers. Twenty-three in an Egyptian is equivalent to thirty-three and more in an Englishman. Boys have all the independence of men: in Egypt they have often homes of their own at sixteen."

"I'm sorry for Girgis," Nancy said; "you've given him a soul, and with the awakening comes the usual pain; he's bound to suffer."

Stella did not pretend not to understand what she meant, but said sadly: "I don't know how much he feels, I don't begin to understand him; he likes me, I know, but how deeply or how lastingly it is impossible for us to judge. His life is unusual, so his feelings may be different from the ordinary Egyptian's."

"One can't fathom him," Nancy said, "but anyhow, you have given him a new standard of womanhood; he can never fall in love with an ignorant Copt after having loved you, and that's rather sad for him."

"He never would have 'fallen in love,' my dear . . . he would have married in due time and had sons, by Allah!"

"And after all that's man's chief end," Nancy said.

"The Moslem makes no pretence that it is not," Stella said. "Sentiment is a Western idiosyncrasy: the East keeps sentiment for outside the walls of the harem."

"And all his great aspirations, his theories?"

"Oh, about them he's quite in earnest; he is full of 'sentiment and emotion' for Egypt. Besides, cotton and the growing of it interests all native-born Egyptians; it's in their blood, like wool is in Australians. He's deep in the great problem now of how to *mature* Egyptian cotton

earlier in the season, before the boll-worm has time to ruin the crops. American cotton flowers quicker and the boll-worm has less time to harm it before the harvest . . . the boll-worm does its worst in September. The great question which is puzzling Egyptian cotton-experts is, Should Egyptian farmers introduce more American cotton into the country? . . . it produces a heavier head of cotton and is less affected by the boll-worm on account of its early ripening . . . or should they stick to the superior Egyptian plant, which is the only cotton in the market which will mercerize satisfactorily? Egyptian cotton fetches a far higher price in the market . . . at the same time two or three successive years of bad boll-worm produce disastrous results. Girgis is, of course, all for preserving the Egyptian plant, and I think he's right, for it has qualities no other cotton possesses . . . dear boy, he's setting his whole mind to work on the problem of the boll-worm . . . if his heart has other interests . . . and of how to produce by the crossing of the various plants natural hybrids which may in their turn produce a cotton which will retain the valuable characteristics of the Egyptian cotton and mature earlier. He's awfully interested in all the experiments of the agricultural society; he's working with them privately, as well as on his own farm."

"How splendid!" Nancy said. "I wish he would tell me all about these things . . . they are much more interesting than foolish compliments, pretty as they are!"

"Poor fellow, he's only used to the vapid minds of the native women, who never concern themselves about anything that matters; but if you once start him he'll talk cotton and boll-worm until you will know all there is to be known on the subject. You see how well informed I am."

"Good-night, dear," Nancy said; "I suppose we must go to bed . . . but you're so interesting . . . how Naughtie would love to hear all you've been telling me . . . I'll try my hand at boll-worm with Girgis."

"Nancy," Stella said, "you look such a fresh wild rose in this dry land, but everything gets mummified sooner or later, so put some grease on that baby skin of yours, or it will be burnt to a cinder."

"All right," Nancy said; "I don't want to lose my one asset."

## CHAPTER XXI

THEY awoke next morning to find the world hot and sunless; a vapour bath enveloped their small lake-dwelling, and the air was so stifling that Nancy was almost prostrate. It was her first experience of the "damp heat" of a warm country.

On a sunless day Egypt is as ugly as it really is . . . on a day of dazzling sunshine, it is as beautiful as it really is not. So Nancy said as she stood at the door of their canvas room and looked out upon the mist-enveloped lake and along the dusty, breathless road which stretched towards the desert.

Suddenly she called to Stella, who was talking to Girgis in the room behind her. "Oh, both of you come quickly! A horse has bolted and is tearing down the road; a man is holding on to the reins and trying to stop it, but he's being dragged along horribly . . . quick, come and look!"

Stella and Girgis ran to her. As they reached the opening Nancy fled down the outside staircase, which took her to the ground, the other two at her heels. By this time the horse with the lorry had almost reached the iron gate and the two white posts which did duty as an entrance to the domains of the lake-inn. As there were no hedges or dividing lines to mark the enclosure of the property from the surrounding desert, the gate was merely an ornament. As the beast swung round the posts the man lost his footing and was flung on the ground, and one of the horse's fore-feet passed over his right hand. The girls heard a scream of pain from the wounded Arab; the next instant a labourer appeared from somewhere and had got hold of the horse by the bridle—an easy affair now, as it had slackened its pace after the collision with the gate-post. The man who had been thrown to the ground was lying in a huddled-up heap on the path.

Stella and Nancy hurried towards him; Girgis was quietly returning to their hotel when Stella called to him: "Girgis, the man's hurt—didn't you hear him scream? Send some one to help him, or come and help him yourself." Girgis stood still and let Stella run on. When she reached the man she asked him where he was hurt; he was groaning and moaning as though he were in mortal agony. In answer to her inquiry, he stretched out a crushed hand: it was streaming with blood and the palm was disgustingly bruised. As he rolled over on his side he displayed a nasty cut on his temple . . . in despair, Stella turned to Girgis for advice: he was not there! He was speaking to the Arab who was holding the restive horse . . . she heard him asking "had he brought the chickens he had ordered for lunch, and the fruit?"

Stella was furious. "Girgis!" she cried, "didn't you hear me? Why didn't you come? The poor creature is in agony."

Girgis sauntered towards her unconcernedly. "Leave him," he said; "he's only moaning because you are there. Come away."

Nancy's eyes flashed with anger—she could not trust herself to speak. She was holding the fellah's hard-worked, slender hand in her soft fingers. "Here, Stella," she said, "make a wad of my handkerchief and put it in the palm of his hand, and then tie your own closely round it . . . yes, tightly, that's right. . . ."

Stella did as Nancy told her, and when the wound was bound up as well as it could be with two little pieces of cambric and lace, Stella urged the man to sit up, to try if he could walk. He did so for a moment, but rolled over again, moaning pitifully.

"Let's go to the inn," Nancy said, "and send some one to him. The cut on his head ought to be washed: the flies are getting at it." Nancy had been keeping the pests off the wound with her fly-switch.

Before they left him Stella took four Egyptian shillings out of her purse and gave them to the man. "You can't do any work for a few days," she said; "that will buy you some food. I will send some one from the inn to look after your wounds: turn over on your face again and keep the flies off."

The man did as he was bid.

Girgis was still talking to the Arab who had caught the horse. Stella passed him without a word or a glance, and so did Nancy. He hastened after them. "The boat is ready when you wish to go."

"Thank you," Stella said, very coldly, "I must first see that some one attends to that poor creature's head and hand; it's bleeding horribly."

"It is not at all necessary," Girgis said casually.

"I think it is, and so does Nancy."

"As you wish," he said.

Stella was exasperated at his brutality. If the man had been dying she felt that his attitude would have been exactly the same; he thought no more of him than of a fly.

Girgis turned round to look at the man: he was already walking away, his groaning had ceased; he was evidently not seriously hurt, judging by the manner in which he was holding himself. "Did I not tell you that he was only groaning because you were there?" Girgis looked pleased.

"But he is really hurt," Nancy said; "his hand is crushed and there is a big cut on his head: it is very wonderful of him to walk away like that."

Girgis was not listening—his interest was centred now on an automatic native well which they were passing at the moment, and which he had induced the landlord of the inn to purchase. He left the girls to go and inspect it. Automatic *sakiyas* were a great feature on Girgis's estates. Stella thought they were very ugly, and regretted the innovation: they were all very well in a land where labour had to be saved, but in Egypt she considered them an unnecessary substitute for the old and highly picturesque Nile-wells.

When Girgis was out of hearing Stella turned to Nancy: "What do you think of that?" . . . she said, referring to her cousin's casual treatment of the injured man.

"I think it is the ancient Egyptian in him showing its head, he's too nice otherwise to be utterly devoid of pity; it makes one afraid."

"I'm convinced he thinks that the fellahin can't feel—they're little more than flies to him."

"But of course they do feel, else why should he be working for their progress?" Nancy asked the question—she did not make the assertion—because her eyes were following

the now quickly moving figure of the Arab. Against the pale sand of the desert and the low scrub of pink-tipped tamarisks and dark-leaved castor-oil plants, his cotton jebba looked as blue as the necklace of mummy beads Stella was wearing.

“Of course they feel,” Stella said, “but they are philosophers as well as children, and the worst of it is that the man understands Girgis and his brutality far better than us and our sympathy; he probably respects him more.”

Girgis was so totally unconscious of having disgusted the two girls with his callous behaviour, that he attributed their silence in the boat to the excessive heat. It was a heat Nancy had never dreamt of and had not before experienced in Egypt. No sun was visible, and the air felt thick as well as warm. . . . Everything, even in nature, looked hideous, and she felt hideous, which was far from the truth, for even though the English pink had left her cheeks and the violet tone of her eyes had decidedly paled, she was still a child of delightful fairness. Stella, who also disliked the oppressive atmosphere and bemoaned the absence of any beauty in the landscape, seemed to gain in good looks as the days grew hotter. Her skin had become warmer during the hot weather and her whole being seemed to have expanded like a flower that needs the sun for its fullest development.

They were in a huge boat manned by three brown Arabs who were pushing their way through a narrow channel overhung with a dense scrub of low-branching tamarisks . . . the heat was stifling, for no air got into the channel, and here and there the boat stuck on its muddy bottom. On these occasions the men had to wade waist-deep in the water to push her off. Before they got into the water they had taken off their long galabeahs and dexterously converted their red handkerchiefs into loin-cloths—otherwise they were naked. The rapidity and neatness with which they made red handkerchiefs into modest bathing-drawers amused Nancy, and brought the little god of mischief dancing into her eyes. It reminded her of the very first day that she had arrived in Cairo, when she had laughed herself almost to tears at the sight of a native arranging his European costume for rain. A thunder shower had come on suddenly, and a poor man who had on his best black

coat and trousers, which, being made of the shoddiest German material, would not stand heavy rain, determined to take them off. Without the slightest hesitation he sat down by the wayside, it happened to be on the wide steps of the Hotel Continental, and took them off—his coat, waistcoat, and trousers. After folding them up in a neat bundle he tucked them under his arm and sauntered happily along one of the fashionable streets of the European quarter of the city in his cotton shirt. Scarcely any one noticed that his only garments were an English shirt and a stiff collar, for a native jebba is so like an Englishman's shirt that the difference was scarcely perceptible.

When they at last got out of the channel and into the open lake the men climbed back into the boat, but there was not much more air to boast off, though Girgis had said it would be cooler, and they could scarcely see a hundred yards in front of them. They might just as well have been in a small bathroom full of steam. The two girls and Mrs. Lekejian lapsed into complete silence, and Girgis sat like a carved image in the end of the boat. Long before they got to the other side of the lake, where the ruins lay of the sort of Pompeii which they were to visit, the unanimous wish was to return to their comfortable quarters in the hotel. There was nothing to be done on such a day as this but sit indoors and read, for there at least you would be more or less free from flies, and the moist heat was worse on the water than in the canvas-walled room of the hotel.

Their return journey was made in perfect silence. Unconsciously the little incident of the wounded Arab had raised up a stone wall between Nancy and Girgis: she felt that if she spoke to him, and he paid her one of his flowery compliments in return, that she would be rude to him, and as for talking about anything as intellectual as "cotton," while her brain felt like cotton, it was impossible. Out of the silence she could not start questioning him about "boll-worms" and berseem crops.

When they reached their inn they were amazed to find Nicolas there. To Stella's surprise, he said he had given himself a holiday, as he was feeling rather slack. He had spent the night in the hotel in the Fayyum, which he

declared was *almost* clean and quite respectable. They were all delighted to see him, and Nancy said, "Now I shall have some one to flirt with: Girgis would like to recite Persian poems to Stella all day long if I was not here, but he has too good taste to speak in a language I can't understand, and the only English poems he knows are nursery rhymes. I believe he thinks Tennyson wrote "Little Jack Horner sat in a corner," and I heard him muttering 'Ba, ba, black sheep' most sentimentally a little while ago when he thought I wasn't looking; perhaps he thinks the words have some double meaning which he doesn't understand."

Nicolas laughed more because of the girl's infectious high spirits and love of mischief than at what she said. "But it takes *two* to flirt. Supposing I can't or *won't*?" he said gravely.

"I'll teach you if you can't, and if you won't, what's the use of your coming?"

"What is flirting, in your opinion?"

"Oh, having a ripping time! Two people liking each other well enough to pretend they like each other a lot more, and not really liking each other well enough to have a bad pain if they don't!"

"That's just what I thought," Nicolas said, "and it's a game in which I can't see myself the winner."

"Well, what are we going to do if we don't flirt?" Nancy said in a bewildered way. "I didn't come to Al Fayyum to read books!" She spoke as if reading books was going back to school.

Girgis, who had come into the room at that moment, pulled out a pack of cards from his pocket. "Bridge!" he said, with the solemnity of an oracle. "Will you like to play the game of bridge, Miss Nancy?"

Mrs. Lekejian laughed. "Oh, you moderns!" she said, "you are prepared for all emergencies."

Stella consulted with Nancy. "Shall we play? It seems so rotten to be playing bridge at Lake Moeris, yet what are we to do?"

"When there ain't a-going to be no lake, why not try to forget it?" Nicolas said.

"That's true," Nancy said, "and if Nicolas won't flirt," she rebuked him with soft eyes, "perhaps he'll condescend

to play—to come down to my level and amuse my small mind.”

They all sat down to a game of bridge while Mrs. Lekejian wrote a letter to her husband. Girgis played an excellent game—he was Stella’s partner. Nancy and Nicolas both were much stronger than Stella, who had no natural instinct for games, but was clever enough to learn anything she set her mind to, and Girgis felt frightfully happy at finding himself for once in a position to help her and at the same time show off his own quickness.

Occasionally Mrs. Lekejian looked up from her writing to speak or smile to one of the quartette, and each time she did so Nancy’s fair hair struck her as strangely incongruous beside the scarlet tarbush of her nephew and the dark glossy hair of her son and daughter. Once, as she raised her eyes, she saw Nancy and Nicolas looking for a card some one had dropped—their heads were close together under the table. She could see Nicolas’s hand rest on Nancy’s for just one moment before the girl raised a flushed face to the level of the table. As she did so she said :

“Stella, he’s flirting with me—he’s better than his word.” A burst of laughter came from all four, and Nicolas turned scarlet. “Don’t you call holding hands flirting, Mrs. Lekejian?” . . . Nancy had risen from her seat and flown to Mrs. Lekejian’s side. Flinging herself on her knees she said, “What will you give me if I make your grave son really flirt enough to forget how young he is, and stop being grown up? You know you’d love to see him do it . . . for men who flirt don’t make foolish marriages, it’s the grave men whom gay women capture.”

Mrs. Lekejian pretended to whip the laughing girl, who flew back to Nicolas. “If you are so grave you will die an early death,” she said, “or be put in the museum, or somewhere worse.”

“What do you want me to do?” he said.

“Amuse your guest,” she said, bowing with mock gravity before him.

“How shall I amuse her?”

“Oh! don’t ask her how, just begin; tell her stories—naughty ones if you don’t know any good ones, I don’t mind—only I must be amused or interested.” She sighed

despondently. "Will this awful mist never lift? I don't want amusing on a sunny day, the world's such fun; but on a day like this what do men think they are made for, if it isn't to amuse us women?"

Stella laughed: she knew Nancy's fits of teasing too well to do anything else.

Nicolas sat down beside her. "I'll try," he said, "to tell you a story."

Their voices instinctively fell into lower tones. "What's it about?" she said.

"About a little boy who played with fire."

"Has it a moral?" she said, pouting absurdly.

"Yes . . . all good stories have morals."

"But I don't want a *good* story."

"And I don't know any bad ones."

"Make one up," she said; "or I'll ask Girgis to tell me one—he's sure to know lots."

"Don't you want to hear what became of the bad little boy?"

"Oh! was the boy bad?" her face mimicked excitement.

"Yes, *very* bad."

"Then that will do," she said. "I don't mind the story being good if the boy was very bad. Why was he very bad?"

"Because he had been warned not to play with fire."

"Who had warned him?"

"A lady called 'Experience.'"

"Where did he meet her?"

"When he was idling instead of working."

"What did she say to him?"

"That if he played with fire it would burn him, and it would hurt."

"Go on," Nancy said. "Did the boy play with it?" She assumed great interest.

"At first there wasn't any fire," he said, "only two tiny sticks; but the boy knew that if the two sticks came too close together there would be fire, but he couldn't resist the fun of making just little tiny sparks and flashes . . . tiny ones at first, and then bigger and bigger until they burst into a big bright flame, and then he couldn't stop them burning. They burnt him frightfully and hurt

his hands horribly, and still he couldn't help holding them; the flame fascinated him almost more than the pain hurt . . ." he stopped.

"And then?" Nancy said.

"And then . . . well then . . ." he said, "there was nothing more, nothing at all, except the awful pain and the memory of all that the lady called 'Experience' had told him."

"Do you think that little boy will ever play with fire again?" she said.

"I think not," he said; "he sticks so hard to his work now, and never even looks at matches, so that he isn't likely to do it again."

"Do you know the little boy?" she said gravely.

"Yes, I am his most intimate friend."

"Should I like him?" she said.

"I think not," he said, "he is too grave for you."

"You think, like Girgis, that I am only 'sweet to the nostrils like orange flowers.'"

He laughed. "Did Girgis say that?"

"Yes, and much more; he flirts better than you."

"I don't flirt at all."

"And you will not introduce me to the little boy?"

He shook his head.

"You are afraid he would play with the matches again?"

"Yes, I am afraid." He looked into her half-laughing eyes. "Yes, I am afraid; I think you are so eager for fun that you could not resist tempting the little boy to play with the matches, and I think that you are so clever that you would drop yours before they burnt your fingers."

"You think I am heartless," she said, "because I am not always serious?"

"I don't think," he said; "what you really are does not signify to me so long as . . ."

"Then you are rude."

"It is better to be rude than foolish, in my case at least."

"I don't think so; I want to be friends—we are almost brother and sister."

He laughed. "Oh! very nearly."

"Well, I'm going to be Stella's sister-in-law."

Nicolas frowned. "Poor Stella!"

"Why poor Stella? Because I am to be her sister-in-law?"

"No," he said quickly, "that almost reconciles me to it." His eyes were so tender that Nancy blushed.

"Then why poor Stella?"

"Because I think the whole thing's a mistake."

Stella and Girgis had left the room, and Mrs. Lekejian could not hear them speaking from where she sat when their voices were lowered.

"You do not like Vernon: I felt that the first night I arrived."

"I shouldn't dislike him if he was not going to marry Stella."

"You think he is not good enough for her . . . I agree with you." Their eyes met: Nancy's laughing eyes had become dark and grave. "But who is good enough for Stella? interesting enough, I mean?"

"Vernon could be if he did not think himself too good."

"Oh, you surely don't think he does!" Nancy gave a little cry. "He never could: he's horribly narrow, I know, and has an absurdly narrow outlook upon things he's unaccustomed to, but he couldn't think he was too good for Stella . . . why, he used to tell us at home that he felt ashamed of himself for having asked her to marry him."

"He doesn't think that now, not since he came out here?"

"Nicolas," Nancy said very seriously, "you exaggerate all that sort of thing, you are far too sensitive."

"Don't," he said. "I have learnt my lesson."

"But surely," she said, "it's almost as narrow of you to think that all English people think alike."

"Perhaps it is," he said, "but anyhow, the fact's unalterable."

"The English out here are hateful," Nancy said. Tears had filled her eyes, for Nicolas's voice was lifeless.

"They aren't altogether to be blamed," he said; "some of them have tried to be friends with the best of the natives, but they get disgusted . . . they give it up."

Nancy was silent. Then, as though speaking her thoughts aloud, she said: "The mother of the most intellectual king of all Egyptian history . . . the great reformer

who lived more than two thousand years before his time, was a Syrian, so Stella says . . . you are Syrians."

"A despised race," he said, "because we have the business instincts of the Jews and their ability to outlast persecution."

"You are bitter."

He glanced at her. "Who wouldn't be . . . ?" He paused. "I am never so bitter as when I'm speaking to you."

"Why?" she asked—"why, when you are speaking to me of all people, who sees no barrier between your race and her own—why with me, Nicolas?"

"Because," he said slowly, "because, as Girgis said, you are sweet to my nostrils as a wild rose; that is why."

"Oh, now you flirt!" she said nervously, "but Girgis said 'orange blossom.'" She looked at him mischievously. A deep flush spread over her neck and face when she saw the wound her words had inflicted.

"I was not flirting," he said coldly: "you were annoyed ten minutes ago because I did not take you seriously, and now, because I betrayed a deeper understanding of myself to you, you turn everything into banter."

"I am so sorry," she said, "but I thought you were teasing me. I did not mean to hurt." She laid her soft fingers on his wrist: "Don't be cross, Nicolas."

He drew his hand away and rose from his seat. "Little English rose," he said gently, "don't prick me with your thorns." He turned and left her without another word.

## CHAPTER XXII

THE next morning the glamour of Egypt had returned. Nancy could not believe that she was looking upon the same landscape as the day before, for all that had been barren ugliness was now turned, by the glory of Amon Ra, into a vision of magic beauty. The amazing transformation seemed almost theatrical. Some hand in the heavens was playing with the limelights. The grey sand and colourless rocks were thrown into vivid hues ; the clouds in the sky were reflected on the silent desert-like fields of summer flowers as azure in tone as the gentians which colour the Alps in spring, or the blue Borage (*sugameli*) which grow like a harvest of sown corn round the Greek temples of pagan Sicily. They were intoxicated with the mere joy of living ; the smallest object was a thing of delight. Mrs. Lekejian was happy in seeing her two children almost as gay and light-hearted as Nancy, whose bubbling vitality was so magnetic that it acted like an intoxicant upon the sensitive temperament of her two more seriously minded companions. Nancy's mood struck the keynote of the day ; she raised the pitch from which the others took their tone. To-day it was a very high one : even Nicolas seemed to have forgotten that English hedge-roses have thorns, and Stella had once more found her voice for song. As a child she had always warbled with the liquid note of a mating thrush when she had any congenial task on hand. But of late her song had ceased.

A picnic to see the ruins of the famous labyrinth and the pyramid of Amen-em-hat III., and his daughter Ptahnefert, was to be the order of the day. They lay about five miles out, in the desert, from the town of Medinat-al Fayyum. . . . Girgis was to ride on his Arab mare while the others drove in his comfortable carriage as far as the good roads of the irrigated country would allow them.

After that they were to pick up donkeys and ride across the roadless desert. It was necessary for them first to return to Medinat-al Fayyum, as Girgis had to attend to some business in the town.

Girgis was very excited, and talked very often about a portion of the drive where, he assured Nancy, the scenery was exactly like Scotland, for which country he had a romantic admiration. He had seen pictures of Highland scenery on postcards. He warned them also, in the gravest manner, that the picnic proper, which they would take in his rest-house in the desert, would be a very simple affair; he made profuse apologies for the rough fare they would have to put up with. The party readily agreed that almost any sort of food would be good enough, and all that they would expect or require.

On their way back to the city of Al Fayyum the scenery was exactly the same as it had been two days before, for Egypt, with its infinite variety of light and shade and its extraordinary mixture of human types, is in its essentials always the same: its procession of black-veiled women, like funeral mourners, never draws to an end; its strings of obstinate buffaloes, moving slowly through the desert sand, never alter their grudging pace; its groups of nimble-footed asses carrying stately riders, whose turbaned heads bring to mind the prophet-law-givers of ancient days, never slacken their willing trot; the mud villages, with low houses and high pigeon-towers, never change; the saints' tombs, with white domes and dark palm trees, repeat themselves with the same unfailing regularity.

But the secret of Egypt, which no pen can explain, lies in the enchanting variety of its sameness. Its repetition never wearies, its sameness is never the same, its restrictions are never limited. And so the party, as they drove across the country from the lake-hotel to the city of Al Fayyum, saw fresh beauty and new wonders in every figure they passed, and in every building that lay in desert silence under the bewildering sun.

When Girgis reached his own property he often cantered away from their carriage and across the country on his exquisite mare; after a little while he would be back at their side again and ready to tell them all that he could about the country. Of the ancient things he knew nothing.

Girgis was too wrapped up in things modern to take any interest in the ancient history of his race, but upon things agricultural he was a walking encyclopædia of information.

The third time he bounded off Nancy asked Stella if he was bored by riding so slowly by their carriage?

Stella smiled. "Oh, no, the time is passing far too quickly with him; but Girgis is a very level-headed young man, and, infatuated as he is with our society—for he is having the time of his life, poor lad—he never forgets the main object of an Egyptian."

Nancy looked at her with questioning eyes.

"Cotton," Stella said: "cotton is to the Egyptian farmer what wool is to the Australian. You remember the Piddocks at school—how they knew everything there was to be known about wool?"

Stella nodded her head towards the richly irrigated country as she spoke. "Some fellahin are ploughing with camels and a wooden plough over there . . . can you see their blue galabeahs and the camels' heads? Girgis is paying them a surprise visit . . . he's going to see how many of the men are sleeping instead of working: the last time he left us the sâkiya boy was playing dominoes with one of the ploughmen, and the ox-wheel was standing still at the irrigation well."

Nancy was greatly interested. Her practical mind had a grave respect for any one who could so admirably combine business with pleasure as Girgis did, and who could at the same time be so unfailingly ornamental. When he returned to their side he looked very stern—even Stella could not hold his attention altogether.

"What's the matter, R.G.?" Nancy asked. (R.G. stood for "Rameses the Great," which had been her pet name for him from the first day she met him.) "What's the matter with Egypt? how many slaves have you bastinadoed? how many hands have you cut off?" She raised herself on her seat and looked across his mare's neck. "Have you no heads to show? . . . how very tame! . . ."

"I should very much have enjoyed cutting off two hands," he said, "and I think Lord Minton would have thanked me if I had sent them to him." He muttered something in Arab which Stella recognized as a popular native curse: some one was to have deformed sons and some

one else was to be eaten by flies and his wife was to be barren.

“Do tell us what has happened,” Nancy said, “it will help to entertain us . . . we are your guests.”

“You would not understand,” he said; “it would not interest women.”

Stella laughed. “Remember, Girgis, you are not speaking to native women; you do not know what we understand or understand what interests us.”

“Give our combined intelligences a chance, R.G.; Englishwomen are awfully inquisitive,” Nicolas said.

“It is very simple to *you*”—he addressed Nicolas—“you know how much harm late berseem crops do to the cotton crops, and how much I have done to try to prevent the farmers from cutting berseem after April; I won't allow any berseem to be sown close to my cotton on my own land at any time.”

“I think even Stella knows something about that. Lord Minton is taking very strong measures to stop the short-sightedness of the natives in that respect,” said Nicolas. His eyes addressed Nancy.

“I don't know anything about it,” she said simply, “but tell me, if you please.” She laughed as she used Girgis's old expression.

“During the early stages of the cotton-growing, up to the end of June, the boll-worm can find nothing to live upon in the cotton fields, and so it goes to the berseem crops and puts in time until the cotton is to its taste. . . . The natives foolishly plant their berseem quite close up to the cotton crop, so as not to waste any land. If there was no berseem for their worms to feed upon they would die of starvation and want of moisture.”

“Then *why* do the natives plant it so close? isn't cotton far more valuable than berseem?”

“Yes, much, but berseem grows quicker and so gives a ready return for their money. Two or three berseem crops can be grown in one season, but only one cotton crop.”

Girgis burst in: “I pay nearly all the working expenses of my farm off berseem and other light crops; my cotton is clear profit.”

“Then why doesn't berseem hurt *your* cotton?”

“Because I cut my last crop of berseem before it can hurt

the cotton—the boll-worm does not do its work so early ; and I never keep a berseem crop standing for seed anywhere near my cotton crops, or water it after a certain date.”

“I see,” Nancy said ; “and yet I don’t see why the natives should be such fools . . . they have been growing cotton ever since the Nile ran through Egypt, practically ; they must know how they will lose in the end.”

“The poor things try to squeeze in another crop,” Nicolas said, “because of their awful greed for ready money. You must remember that the greater part of the small growers have gambled away their cotton crops almost as soon as the green shoots have shown above the ground : the money off the berseem is all they can put in their own pockets.”

“Is the Berseem Act one of Lord Minton’s reforms ?” Stella said. “He’s wonderful, isn’t he ? He strikes at the root of evils. . . . Instead of introducing new cottons which are not so valuable as the old ones, how much wiser to make it illegal to cut berseem and sow it after a certain date !”

“He has not got so far as that yet,” Nicolas said, “it is not *illegal* . . . the fellahin wouldn’t stand that all at once.”

Girgis gave his mirthless laugh. “He is much wiser,” he said ; “he has ordered the Mudirs to *persuade* the fellahin not to do it.”

The real interpretation of the word *persuade* was not hard to guess by the tone of Girgis’s voice.

“How do you persuade your men ?” Nancy asked. “Are you a Mudir ?”

“No, I am not a Mudir—I am a Christian.”

They all laughed at his veiled sarcasm except Nancy, who did not understand it.

Mrs. Lekejian shook her head : “Oh, Girgis, Girgis !” she said in a kindly tone, “is that the only reason why you are not a Mudir ?”

“That is why I can never be one,” he said, “while Egypt is governed as she is at present, but who knows ? . . .” his eyes gleamed in his sun-browned face like moving onyx beads . . . “but I am a land-owner, Miss Nancy, and when I let a small piece of land to a tenant farmer last year, it was laid down in the agreement that no berseem was to be sown (within a certain distance from the cotton), after a certain date, and that no crop of berseem was to stand for seed after a certain date.”

“ Well ? ” Nancy said.

“ Well,” Girgis said, “ that contract has been broken.” He looked at his riding-whip significantly . . . “ If I had done what I should have liked to have done I should have sent his two hands to Lord Minton, as you so wisely suggested.”

Nancy laughed. “ As a gentle reminder that you had not forgotten the indignity offered to your ancestors when one of the Pharaohs—I forget which, though—Stella told me about it only yesterday—brought back from Syria seven chiefs and hanged them head-downwards from the bows of his boat on his triumphal return to Thebes. But I quite agree with you that they deserve it.”

“ Exactly . . . and the same king sent one of their heads to Napata as a hint to the revolutionary Nubians that that was how he treated people who disobeyed his orders . . . a few hands hung from the bows of our boat to-day would prevent berseem-sowing and have more effect than all the fines and imprisonments . . . it takes an Egyptian to punish Egyptians and to rule them : the English will learn that lesson one day.”

“ So you think, my dear boy,” Mrs. Lekejian said ; “ but I think it’s a good thing that there is little chance of you ever becoming a Mudir ; the ancient Pharaohs wouldn’t have been in it with you. . . . The wretched fellahin are only children : you speak as though they had our intelligence, as though they understood.”

“ They must be made to understand, and until they can understand through their intelligence they must be made to understand through fear.”

“ If they could have been taught by the cutting off of hands they would surely have learnt long ago,” Stella said.

“ If only the Prophet had laid it down in the Koran,” Nancy said . . . “ it seems to me that the Koran is the only thing they ever will obey ; a new and enlarged edition should be brought out.”

“ You think they obey it,” Stella said, “ but ! ” she shrugged her shoulders . . . “ well, the Prophet forbade the drinking of strong wines, but he did not mention whisky and liqueurs, and even music was forbidden, yet the most devout fellah sings whenever he gets the chance, and almost every wealthy Mohammedan has a music gallery

in his house . . . it's the same thing with dancing—they adore it, and it was most strictly forbidden.”

“On the old caravan roads,” Nicolas said, “you often meet strolling singers who entertain the travellers round the camp fires at night! It's the natural amusement of the people.”

Nancy's eyes sparkled. “How I should love to get into the real desert life! I want dancers, and fortune-tellers, and snake-charmers, and jugglers, and story-tellers, and buffoons in their proper environment. Can't we go?”

Mrs. Lekejian whispered to her: “They generally become so improper, my dear, that if you understand what they are saying no lady can stand it; that is why they were put down in the streets of Cairo—I well remember all that sort of thing. But the people love lewd jests and low fun so much that they won't pay the performers any money until they pass all bounds of decency.”

Girgis had left them again, but this time he was not far off; they saw him riding beside a steam plough which was doing its work in its rapid modern way. When he returned he told Nicolas the time it took to plough an acre of land with the new machine compared to doing it with the camel and wooden plough of classic days. Nancy noticed that all his ploughing was not done in this rapid fashion.

“You have to consider the fellahin,” he said. “What would they do?”

Nancy's eyes softened: for once Girgis had shown that he was human. “I forgot that,” she said. “What would they do? And yet you can't stop the hand of time: it is beginning to move even in Egypt. Is it right to retard progress for the sake of employing human beings who are little better than animals?”

“Socialists would solve that problem in their own way,” Nicolas said, “but fortunately Girgis is still a considerate master rather than a theoretical reformer.”

They had suddenly left the agricultural land of the oasis, with its wide roads and rich green crops, and were descending into a rocky valley, hedged on either side by a beautiful undergrowth of natural wild plants. This was Girgis's Scotland. In Egypt, greenness and luxurious vegetation always means abundant irrigation—the overflowing of the Nile (at Medinat-al Fayyum the Bahr Yûsuf,

a branch of the Nile, distributes its waters in canals and channels over the wealthy oasis). Such vegetation was a delight and surprise to Mrs. Lekejian and Nicolas. Girgis had reason to be proud of it. Nancy, of course, took the wild greenness for granted; this sort of scenery in her eyes was natural—the desert, with its waves of sand and turbulent rocks of strange colours, was uncanny and mysterious. As yet she scarcely understood Girgis's and Nicolas's discussion about the new roads in the Delta which the Government are introducing, for it had never entered her head that there are no roads, as we understand the word road, in Egypt, except in the Delta and in the outskirts of the settled towns. The caravan roads are tracks in the sand, which the natives can follow with the same sense and understanding as mariners follow the tracks in the sea which are their roads of communication with other lands. The road from the city of Medinat-al Fayyum to Lake Moeris was one of the wide roads for agricultural transport which are common in the Fayyum, and so, when they left their carriage at the point where Girgis told them they were to meet their donkeys, a new experience awaited Nancy: they were to ride across the roadless desert to the pyramids of Hawara.

Their donkeys were splendid animals, and the best and quietest of them was given to Nancy. It stood as high as a small pony, and was as white and smooth of skin as her own suède glove. On its breast there were necklaces of blue beads hanging, with silver charms and amulets of every description, cowrie shells, and passages from the Koran rolled up in little red leather cases, and lumps of sacred soil from Mecca. The ass looked like a beast got up for an Eastern fancy bazaar.

Girgis, with Stella and her mother, led the way: how they did it Nancy could not imagine, for in her eyes the desert held as few landmarks as the open sea; but they never seemed to have the slightest doubt about their direction, and the donkeys ambled on as though they were going to market with native women on their backs. But Nancy felt very different from the placid native women who grow fat through indolence of mind and Oriental compliance with the will of Allah, for the air was electric and her senses were intoxicated with the spell of Egypt. Everything

she had ever heard or read about the desert fled from her mind at the actual realization of its wonder, and she was more nearly able to comprehend the infinity of God than she had been before. In the desert God is in the light and in the silence, He is the Lord of the Sweet Wind; so much so that Nancy, with her practical mind and irrepressible modernity, felt the Mystery of the Sublime. That nearness of God which alone the desert can bestow is its secret. In the desert man's place in the world is lost.

Nicolas, whose sensibilities were too keen to allow him to remain outside the mental atmosphere of his company, did not disturb the reverie into which his usually talkative and amusing companion had fallen. He was riding a few steps behind her, partly for the pleasure of watching the natural grace of her seat in the saddle, and partly because the girl's donkey persisted in leading the way. She looked such a childish figure under her long veil of dark blue, which she wore right down to her knees, that Nicolas longed to hold her in his arms as one holds a child that one loves. Nancy's violet eyes could not bear the fierce glare of the pitiless sun as well as Stella's dark ones, which, like her own, had long been accustomed to the half-light of England. Stella wore a green gauze veil only half as thick as Nancy's. Nicolas and Girgis did not even wear blue glasses. To Nancy it seemed incredible that any mortal eyes could bear the terrific glare. Besides, the thick veil saved her fair skin from the hot air, which burnt like the breath of an oven. Wearing it as long as she did, right down to her knees, prevented flies getting under it, and as it flapped about it created a little draught.

After they had been riding for some time in the intimate silence, which tells more than any speaking, little towns appeared on the far horizon of the desert—little towns with white minarets and green palm trees; and evidently there was water, for Nancy could see the white wings of sailing boats, like birds on the edge of the desert.

"I had no idea," she said suddenly to Nicolas, "that there were so many towns in the real desert; I thought only Bedouins and various sorts of tent-dwellers lived on its barren waste away from the Nile . . . but there must be water there . . ." she was nodding towards the far-distant town. . . . "What are we coming to?"

Nicolas smiled. "I'm afraid it would take you a very long time to come to that city," he said; "about as long as it took the boy to reach the end of the rainbow, where he went to find the buried treasure. . . . I doubt if any of the inhabitants of the Medinat-al Fayyum have ever been any nearer to it than we are now."

"Why?" Nancy said. "Is there something sacred about it? Is it a forbidden city? The Moslems have many forbidden cities, haven't they?"

"It's a city forbidden to all mortals, not only Moslems."

"Do explain!" Nancy said impatiently. "What do any but mortal things want with mosques and houses and boats . . . it's growing clearer and clearer—how lovely it is!"

"All I know is that no mortal has ever trodden its streets, no prayer has ever been offered up by human lips from those white mosques, no call to prayer cried from those minarets."

Nancy made her donkey halt until Nicolas was by her side; her questioning eyes met his grave ones, which were now gay with laughter. "Now do you understand, Miss Hedge-rose, do you realize that at last you have seen a 'mirage' . . . a real desert mirage—that that city over there doesn't exist at all."

Nancy's expression changed to one of absolute wonder and incredulity. "Do you really mean it? Am I to believe that, though we both see them, there are no real houses over there, no water with boats on it, no palm trees?"

Nicolas shook his head. "No, none at all."

"Then I suppose you will be saying that there is no me . . . that I don't exist, that I'm only material mind, like the Christian scientists."

"No, I won't," he said, "though I often try to wish there wasn't any you . . . do you know why?" He put his hand on the pommel of her saddle as he spoke. "Of course you know," he said a little bitterly, "though, like all women, you will pretend that you don't."

"Because I 'rag' and waste your time?"

Her eyes were not turned to his, and through her dark veil he could not see that the tint of her cheeks had turned to crimson.

Nicolas lifted his hand from her saddle. "Yes, sweet Nancy, you are dangerously real, as real and living to me every minute of the day as I am myself—even when we are miles apart. You are far more real than that great tomb of Amen-em-hat, which was placed there two thousand years before Christ introduced His strange theories into the East and gave the world a new religion to fight over, a Saviour to die for, and new ideals to live for." He paused . . . "Behind it lie the ruins of the famous Labyrinth."

Nicolas had purposely spoken of these things to detract from the embarrassment his first words might have caused . . . he was angry with himself for having allowed his feelings to unbridle his tongue—but truly the tongue is an unruly member: when we think we have it most under control it pulls the bridle from our hands and is off at a wild canter.

"What is the Labyrinth?" Nancy said. "Stella talked about it last night as though I ought to understand all about it. Stella knows a horrible lot about ancient Egypt, doesn't she?"

Nicolas laughed. "Yes, a horrible lot."

"I can't imagine how she remembers the hatefully long names; but I suppose, after all, you can remember anything if you are interested enough in the subject. . . . I like Girgis's Egypt far best, the Egypt of the boll-worm and the fellahin and the Nationalists, it interests me frightfully; but I *ought* to know about the Labyrinth."

"The Labyrinth is the name given to the huge city which grew up round the pyramid of Hawara, while the king (Amen-em-hat III.) was building it for his own tomb when he was dead . . . these pyramids took so long to build and decorate that cities used to grow up around them during their construction. They died away when the king was buried, and another city grew up round the next pyramid that the new king was having raised for himself: in Egypt it was always a case of 'The King is dead, long live the King!'"

"I see," Nancy said, but she spoke absently, for her eyes were once more on the mirage. "I never imagined mirages were things that *every one* could see at the same time," she said dreamily. "I thought they were optical

delusions which highly sensitive and imaginative people saw . . . but *you* see that town, and *I* see it, and I suppose all the others see it ? ”

Nicolas laughed at her consternation over the unreal. “ And it doesn’t exist after all ! . . . it really doesn’t ; it’s like our happiness,” he said reflectively.

“ Oh, don’t say that ! How horrid of you, when I’m so absolutely happy to-day ! . . . happiness is real when you feel like this—aren’t *you* happy this morning ? ”

“ Yes, just now, too happy,” he said, and his eyes told her the reason why . . . “ but will it last, like the king’s tomb, or will it fade away when the sun goes down like your mirage city ? ” Something in his voice conveyed more than his words.

“ If happiness lasted for ever I suppose we should get awfully sick of it and long for a good fit of the blues.”

“ Perhaps you’re right : unhappiness is like rain, it softens humanity . . . people who have never known it can’t sympathize with others who have, and some people who have never known any real happiness can’t sympathize with a girl like you who can be happy through the mere joy of living—isn’t that so ? ”

“ Yes, sometimes I think so ; but I really believe that for ordinary mortals there is more danger in too much happiness than in too much suffering, although it sounds as though, whatever gods there be, the gods who have arranged all things according to their own pleasures were very cruel ; it’s their way of paying out mankind for daring to have too good a time. Truly Nemesis is a jealous god, and her name is woman ! If mortals dare to have a really glorious time she sees that they pay for it by suffering, and if they are to escape suffering she sees that they are bereft of the most human gift of all, the power of sympathy.”

“ It seems to me that even you must have suffered ! Yet who would have imagined it ? But then you are amazingly sensible too, and you don’t look it. How do you manage it ? ” He laughed affectionately.

“ I don’t know what I *look*, but I feel a walking monument of common, practical, everyday sense. I often wish I didn’t . . . I’m not a bit temperamental. . . . I think that’s the word used nowadays, isn’t it, to express people

like Stella ? I'm so horribly, sanely ordinary beside her ; when I'm old and fat I shall be dreadful."

"In what way, and why should you ever be fat ?" Nicolas made no flattering rejoinder.

"Because the women of our family *grow* fat, the men stay thin . . . we're like the hedge-roses truly enough : when the bloom goes off we turn into round, red, prosaic food for the birds. . . . I shall be absolutely commonplace both in mind and appearance, not one scrap different from all the other little round, red-faced women who knock the bottom out of the most charming illusions by their bump of common sense."

"It was I who knocked the bottom out of your desert city, wasn't it ? Will you forgive me ?"

Nancy laughed as her beast bore her swiftly away from her companion's side ; it was a gentle beast, with nice manners, but it did not like being passed, and Nicolas's donkey had been trying to gain the lead. "You've yet got to prove that your words are true," she called out ; "anyhow, *I'm* not going to let the mirage of my happiness fade away at sunset."

After a good long scamper across the open desert her donkey suddenly halted with extraordinary abruptness in front of a native hut whose small windows were jealously guarded with wooden blinds to keep out the sun. The door also was shut, to exclude the hot air ; but the moment the animal stopped the door was opened and a stately Arab salaamed in front of Nancy with grave respect. Nancy had not been in the least aware of the tremendous temperature they had been riding in—for the dry heat of the desert is curiously deceptive—until she entered the cool hut, whose gracious shade and air of spotless cleanliness made it seem an earthly paradise. The Arab servant, whose beautifully rolled turban and long grey silk robe endowed him with the air and dignity of an Old Testament prophet, helped her to dismount ; he next relieved her of her veil and riding-gloves.

With a sigh of content she looked round her and inspected the building : the one large room, with its mud floor and mud walls, seemed as cool as an ice-house ; pleasant streaks of desert light strayed into it through the wide ribs of the wooden shutters, but the chief delight was the

total absence of flies. Since sunrise the windows had been carefully closed, and so had the door. During the night the cool air had been allowed to flow in, and the flies which had got in at night had been suffocated in the Keating's powder which had been laid for them all round the window-panes. Their corpses had been buried and put out of sight long before the appearance of the master and his guests.

On a tressel table Nancy saw preparations being made for an appetizing lunch . . . it had just been unpacked from a very up-to-date luncheon-basket whose little brass label was marked "Harrods." When she saw the label she could not help smiling: it took her mind back so abruptly to scenes far different from her present surroundings. Instantly she saw all the conventional London women doing their conventional shopping, she saw this very basket lying in its particular department in Harrods' stores. In a moment the whole of her English life flooded her being; a horrible dread of it seized her senses. Would she have to return to it? would she have to take up again all the things that now she felt did not matter? would she have to fill her life afresh with shopping, and games, and society gatherings? The visualizing of it all took less time than the dreaming of a dream which seems to the sleeper to have harrowed his life for days and hours, but in reality has only lasted a few seconds. Stella was in the hut beside her before the smile the label had called up had faded from her lips.

"Look," she said, "at the modernity of R.G. Your Pharaonic cousin has had his lunch-basket sent out from Harrods'. His riding-breeches came from Thomas's, his boots from Hook and Knowles, and here's a thermos flask from . . ."

The Arab handed it to her politely and without a vestige of a smile said: "From Amon-Ra, *sitt*."

Stella laughed at the man's ready answer.

"What does he mean?" Nancy said.

"He means that they are heat-giving, like the great sun-god Amon-Ra . . . you're forgetting all your lessons in Egyptology, Nancy."

"Oh, stop about the ancient gods! Now that I am not going up the Nile, and shan't see their temples, I can't

even fake up a human interest in them ; they all seem to me so impossible. . . . I prefer the gods of the present day, there's plenty of them and other things."

Nicolas held up a jar of *pâté de foie gras*. " Things like this, for instance," he said, " and this . . ." he threw a dessert chocolate across the table for her to catch, " and this," he laid a glass of preserved peaches on the table ; " and what of this ? "—a roast chicken, exquisitely cool in its wrappings of green leaves, was exhibited.

" I didn't know I was so hungry or so greedy—it's all the same thing with over-fed civilizations, isn't it ?—until I saw these delicacies, did you ? Isn't it all ripping ? " She turned to smile upon Girgis, for it was he, of course, who had provided the luxurious feast set before them ; but he was busy outside the hut seeing that the saddles were removed from the donkeys before the beasts took their midday siesta. The saddles had to be taken out of the sun, or they would be too hot to sit upon later on. So Nancy's eyes were turned to Nicolas again : " When I saw this basket I had a terrible wave of depression ; it's passing off now."

" Why depression ? Were you so far removed from material things that the sight of food disgusted you ? "

" Oh, no, all this belongs to Mortal-mind, and I'm awfully mortal ! . . . I'm afraid I don't ever want to be Divine-mind if *pâté de fois gras* is to be excluded ; but that basket and the one word ' Harrods ' " (she pointed to the label) " called up all sorts of boring visions in my mind ; it reminded me that there *is* a London of shops and blouses and gowns and things. After the desert it's awful : the whole thing thundered in my ears and forced on me the truth of the fact that this is *your* life, not mine, that I have to return to all the dullness of things that don't matter, of things that are artificial and untrue . . ." she sighed . . . " I'd love to live in the desert with a praying-mat and a gullah for ever."

" I wonder if you would really be contented to live in Egypt, to make it your home," Stella said. Nicolas appeared not to be listening, but Nancy felt his searching eyes awaiting her answer.

" If I could live in the desert for half the year I should be more than content, and the other half in Cairo as *you*

live, not as the English live—I'd sooner be in London buying blouses at Harrods' and talking rot at tea-parties. . . .” She paused. . . . “At present I can't imagine wanting to live anywhere for *always*—I want to see the whole world; now that I've begun at the beginning of things, I want to go on. I'd love to see the very latest civilizations, but I should like to live for four years in Egypt first—that's to say, if I could live with your people.”

She slipped her hand into Mrs. Lekejian's. “Will you adopt me when Stella's gone?—let me be your little black sheep?”

Mrs. Lekejian patted the girl's absurdly slender hand affectionately. “What a temptress she is!”

“Wouldn't it be fun!” Nancy said—her mind had flown off to other things—“if there could be a ship-load of Western babies wrecked on a desert island . . . if they could grow up there and evolve their own civilization. What would they invent, I wonder? Would their centuries of inherited civilization tell upon their various arts and crafts? would their minds run to electricity? would their utensils be beautiful and pure in shape, like the things of the primitive peoples, or would they be more like ours of to-day?”

There was a general laugh at the idea, and Mrs. Lekejian said: “What are we to do when you are gone, Nancy? You keep us all alive: you seem to be a part of our life already.”

“You darling for saying that, when you know I'm a perfect plague . . . Nicolas will get some work done again, and Mr. Lekejian will grow quite old for want of teasing. But I suppose you will have to leave Cairo soon.” She spoke regretfully.

Mrs. Lekejian looked towards Stella: “So much depends upon her future plans: if Vernon is sent home I suppose she will want to go too”—in speaking of home Mrs. Lekejian always referred to England. “We had thought of going this summer to some watering-place near Alexandria, and Stella had some idea of visiting Syria with Nicolas, of staying on the slopes of Mount Lebanon for the hot summer months; but Vernon may be sent home on sick-leave if his recovery is not satisfactory, then I don't suppose she'd want to go to Syria.”

Nancy said, "I suppose not," though, to her mind, living on the slopes of Mount Lebanon, with Nicolas for a daily companion, sounded so much more interesting than going back to England with Vernon, that her words dropped out in slow wonder. Something kept her from asking why Vernon did not marry Stella whenever he was better and go with her to Syria if he could get sick-leave.

This discussion had taken place during their luncheon, which was a most complete and excellent affair, commencing with hors d'œuvres and ending up with Turkish coffee made in the true native manner on a fire kindled on the desert floor. Nancy watched with delight the two white-turbaned heads bending low over the little brass coffee-pot while the sugar and water and coffee boiled all together in it. At the critical moment one or two drops of cold water were thrown in to clear it. It was all so gravely and seriously done that it might have been a religious rite. It was served on a brass tray, in miniature glass tumblers decorated with beads of blue enamel.

Girgis was inwardly delighted that his picnic was proving such a success and surprise to his guests, who certainly did ample justice to the good things he had ordered. The whole affair was such a striking contrast to the uncomfortable tea provided by his aunt two days before, that Stella and Nancy were amazed that he should have known how to do all these things so well and yet remain contented with his aunt's attempts at Western habits. But what bored Girgis far more than his aunt's feeble attempts at hospitality in the Western mode was the vulgar luxury of his mother's Levantine friends in Cairo. While they were enjoying their cigarettes and coffee and the indulgence of an after-lunch lounge to rest their backs, Nancy saw the two Arabs who had been serving their coffee saying their prayers out in the open desert . . . one of them was washing his feet and rinsing his ears and nose (preparatory to his devotions)—water from an earthen *gullah* served as his *jet d'eau*. The other Arab was standing upright, his rapt eyes gazing towards the East, his slim hands folded devoutly across his chest. On the sand at his feet was his circular praying-mat, made of plaited straw.

In the great stretch of desert, which seemed to Nancy's

untutored eye to constitute the whole world as she looked out upon it from the shade of the cool hut, these figures were the only living things. Beyond them, in the fierce sunlight, lay the imperishable tomb of the Pharaoh whose imperishable work laid the foundations of the wealth of the oasis city of this day. It rose up brown and stern in its primitive grandeur against the blue Egyptian sky. Truly the gods of the ancients did not fail their people in their days of great endeavour.

Nancy nodded to Stella, whose eyes also were looking at the two Arabs; in her heart she was envying them in their complete surrender to their one god.

Nancy asked Girgis why he employed Mohammedans when he was such a jealous Copt.

"I make no difference," he said. "I employ Copt or Moslem according to what I think the man is worth . . . that is how it should be; but I do not give all my best-paid posts to Moslems."

"I think that is perfectly fair," the girl said eagerly; "but I imagined you would only employ Copts, as Mr. Lekejian does."

"My party does not consider a man's religion. If a man is better for the religion he believes in, what does it matter what religion it is? We do not let religion govern our politics, we are striving for the betterment of Egypt . . . that is the great thing. . . . But I am not very pleased when I see *your* Government giving all the pensionable posts, all the posts which uphold the dignity of the people, to the Moslems; I wish to see the Christians given the same chance as Moslems—that is all I ask; and this can never be done until the 'Independent Egyptian Party' is in power."

"What is the Independent Party composed of?" Nancy asked.

"It is representative of the Coptic community and many of the representative and wealthy Moslems. Its aim is Representative Government in Egypt, irrespective of race and religion . . . but I go farther than my party . . . they are too slow."

Girgis said the last words with an unlovely smile curling his scarlet lips and showing his gleaming teeth. Mrs. Lekejian, who knew her nephew's fanatical views upon

political subjects, tried to divert the conversation—the picnic was not to be spoilt by political discussions. On all other topics she knew that Girgis was well balanced and particularly level-headed. She hoped that as years went by he would grow to see the folly of his views upon the Egyptian question of Representative Government.

She was glad when the two Arabs, who had finished their prayers, entered the hut carrying the brass *tisht* and *ibreek* for washing the guests' hands after meals.

The head servant stopped at the side of Nancy and held the basin in front of her—a clean towel was laid across its wide brim. When she put out her hands a second servant trickled some cold water, scented with attar-of-roses, over her fingers from the brass *ibreek*, whose slender spout was as gracefully curved as the neck of a flamingo. The water ran through an exquisitely pierced raised receptacle which acted as a soap-dish, at the same time hiding from view the used water. In this way the next guest did not see the water his neighbour had washed in.

“If this isn't the very essence of refinement and Oriental indulgence!” Nancy said, “and foolish people at home think you rough it in the desert! I'd like them to see us now. I do wish we could live in the desert for a bit—couldn't we?”

“It's almost too hot now,” Mrs. Lekejian said. “I was afraid to let you ride under that awful sun to-day.”

“I loved it,” Nancy said. “I didn't feel the least hot—did you, Stella?—not half as hot as you do in a London 'bus.”

In spite of her protest the two girls almost shrank back from the blast of hot air which fanned their faces as they emerged from the hut—it was like the air of a furnace; and the sun was so blinding that Nancy had to drop her veil instantly. Yet Girgis did not seem to be aware of the difference, his thickly lashed eyes never flinched, and he wore nothing to protect the back of his head.

Mrs. Lekejian made up her mind to wait in the rest-house until the party picked her up on their return journey from the Labyrinth and the tomb of Amen-em-hat, and so Girgis had the bliss of Stella's undivided attention. He helped her to climb the pyramid, while Nicolas assisted Nancy. It was very unlike the gigantic efforts in climbing which have to be made at the pyramids of Gizeh, for here the whole

thing was built of small bricks made of sun-baked mud, which crumbled to pieces under their leather-soled boots, after successfully defying the elements for three or four thousand years. Girgis had been finding it harder and harder to content himself with smiles and tender looks from his cousin; he had broken out once or twice into rhapsodies of love, but as they were generally quotations from Persian or Arabic poems, they were not personal enough to deserve censoring.

If Stella had in the least understood how magnificently he was controlling the tumult of passion which was surging through his veins and threatening to demolish his will-power, she would have admired the strength of the man and appreciated far more fully his respect for her wishes. At last words escaped him which he had meant not to say, words he had been thinking all day long, for he realized that Stella was gayest and happiest now, when Vernon Thorpe was forgotten, when her mind was occupied with other things. Her girlish lightheartedness during her visit to the Fayyum was a surprise to him . . . she was almost as big a romp as Nancy, but in her eyes slept that passion which kindles in men's hearts the exquisite flame!

They were seated on the ground. Stella was letting the hot desert sand trickle through her fingers! Girgis suddenly grasped her wrist with his firm hand, his masterful eyes drew hers to his. "Tell me, because I adore and worship you, because you have brought into my heart a higher love than I ever understood before, a love which could not offend your pure mind if you could read it all—why do you not desire to marry your English lover any more . . . is it because you have learnt to love your own people too much? Have you ceased to respect the English?"

Stella drew her hand from his fierce grasp. "Girgis, why *do* you persist in saying these things? Of course I wish to marry Vernon, I love him more than ever."

"That is what you wish was true, but is not true."

Stella felt her heart beating more rapidly. "You have no right to say such things. What do you know about my feelings?" Her pride had risen to her assistance.

"I know," he said, "because I can read your mind

. . . but not all your mind, for I do not *yet* understand why your passion for him has died . . . if you loved me that would explain . . . but you do not . . . not yet . . .”

“I never shall, Girgis . . . not in the way you wish me to, not in the way a woman should love the man she marries.”

“How is that way, if you please?”

“With her whole heart; she should feel that for her there is only one man whom she could marry, and that man is the man she loves.”

There was silence for a little time and then he said, “Forgive me, but that is not how you love Mr. Thorpe, and yet you are willing to marry him . . . you are marrying him now because you are grateful to him for having saved your father’s life . . . you are marrying him because he is a hero?”

Stella smiled rather sadly, but did not answer.

Girgis waited for a moment or two.

“Would you marry me if I were a hero?”—he paused as though thinking—“if I did something for Egypt . . . very great . . . would you marry me?”

“I am going to marry Vernon.”

“Perhaps not?”

“But I tell you I am, Girgis, so there is no use in your talking so childishly.” She rose to her feet impatiently.

Girgis saw that she was annoyed, and begged her to forgive him. “You are my guest to-day,” he said, “and I did not mean to anger you; I have tried very hard not to speak of my love, but ‘out of the fullness of the heart the mouth speaketh.’ Will you forgive me? I only live for the sweetness of your smiles.”

“Dear Girgis,” she said, “I do care for you very, very much, or I would not forgive you; but you must not say these things again if you wish to always keep my affection—and you don’t want to kill it, do you?”

She held out her hand, he grasped it passionately in his.

“Kill it!” he said, “I will make it grow and grow until it becomes the love you speak of; there is nothing I would not do for you. . . . I would die the worst death, and it would be sweet, for your sake; to do you the smallest service I would become a slave. But as I cannot do these

things, please give me your sympathy—I have found no occasion to earn your gratitude and love.”

Stella laughed affectionately. “Live for me, Girgis—that will be of much more use and far nobler than dying; you can live and help me to work for Egypt. Do everything that lies in your power to teach the people self-respect; teach the men the wisdom of granting liberty to their wives and daughters, the wisdom of educating them so that there may be many companionable girls in Egypt, like Nancy and myself, for men like you to associate with and marry. . . .” She paused. . . . “Do you know why you love me, Girgis? Do you know the real reason? Shall I tell you? It is because I am the first girl you have ever known intimately who is a companionable human being; you think I am very wonderful because you never dreamt that there were such girls as Nancy and myself: but we aren’t a bit wonderful, there are hundreds and thousands like us all over the world.”

“God has only made one Hadassah Lekejian,” he said gravely, “as He has only made it possible for me to love one woman.”

“You will love many, many more yet; you will love one who will be far more suited to bring you happiness than I am. You don’t know what you need; you’re only in the making yet, although you are so very wise over many things. You will remember what I am saying now some day, and know that I am right.”

“I shall always remember to-day,” he said, “for never before have I been so much alone with you; and I shall remember it because I have sworn to you that I will accomplish some work for Egypt. . . . I have determined to be as deserving of your gratitude as Vernon Thorpe.”

Stella looked at him with gratitude already kindling her eyes. “I shall be very proud of you.”

“I hope so.” He said the words so significantly that his cousin questioned him anxiously.

“It will be work done in my own way and according to my own ideas. . . .” he was helping her to mount her donkey, which the Arab had brought to them where they were seated, as a sign that it was time that they began their homeward journey. . . . Girgis held the reins in his hands a moment before giving them to her. “You will always

remember that, whatever sacrifice I may make, whatever work I may do, it has been done for Egypt, and that I have done it for Egypt for *your* sake."

Stella could not look at his burning eyes or take the reins from his trembling hands without realizing the terribleness of the Oriental passion which her own desirability as a woman had roused in her hard-headed modern cousin.

In the African desert he looked magnificently in keeping with his surroundings. His close-fitting khaki riding clothes gave his figure the slim and straight lines of the carvings on the temples, where youthful warriors are depicted displaying the valour and strength they have shown in battle; but never for one moment did he appeal to her senses as a woman, his beauty and virile manhood could not make her tremble like a frightened child as she trembled when Michael Ireton shook hands with her.

With her pulses unmoved she looked into his burning eyes, and as she took the reins into her own hands she said, "I will remember, and I will love you for the work you are going to do, as I love you for the work you have done."

## CHAPTER XXIII

To the Lekejian household the visit to Al Fayyum was already a thing of the past ; they were busy with preparations for going to England. Vernon had been given three months sick-leave ; his slow recovery had been very similar to many other cases in Egypt, where even the healthiest constitutions fail to recuperate after an illness of no great seriousness. As every one knows, when you are well in Egypt, you are very very well, and the thing is to keep well, for getting well again after an illness is always a difficult matter. Since their return to Cairo none of the family had seen anything of Girgis Boutros, who had bidden them farewell at Al Fayyum. In his parting there had been a little more intensity of feeling than Stella thought necessary or at all like her cousin, considering that it was for so short a distance and likely to be for so short a time ; she wondered if he meant to absent himself from their society until his feeling for herself had become more platonic. As she had seen and heard nothing of him since that day, she took it for granted that her surmise was correct, and admired him for the sound sense he was displaying.

Nicolas had also given them less than usual of his companionship. He appeared to be very much engrossed in a light opera (on Oriental lines) which he was writing in collaboration with a Frenchman who had been his greatest chum in Paris. The man was much older than Nicolas, and had already made a considerable name for himself as a composer. His music was lighter and of a much more popular nature than Nicolas's, but as he knew comparatively little about Oriental life, he had been anxious to secure the collaboration of a man who was not only a composer of great charm and originality, but whose knowledge of the East was instinctive. Since their ride across the desert to the tomb of the Great Irrigator, Amen-em-hat,

he had never let one word escape his lips which Nancy could have interpreted as personal, or as meaning more than the most ordinary platonic friendship might allow, while in every way in her power Nancy had tried to find out the true state of his feelings for herself. Sometimes she was convinced that he was putting a great restraint upon himself and that the words he had spoken at Al Fayyum were spoken out of the fullness of his heart; that in the desert, when you are alone with the elements, the elemental man gains the upper hand of the conventional man of the world—in Nicolas's case a man who was obviously determined never to cause himself suffering again at the hand of a woman. At other times she was equally convinced that she had put too much meaning into his Oriental gift of flattery, that he cared no more for her than all men care for an attractive girl who takes the trouble to make herself amusing. Sometimes she was so angry with his apparent indifference and impersonal manner that she felt worn out with her endeavours to upset his self-control, and with her own well-concealed vexation. Upon her own feelings for Nicolas she could not form any decision; indeed, she had never questioned herself on the matter—she was only conscious of the fact that his good or bad opinion of her mattered far too much for her peace of mind, and she was in a constant state of irritation and unhappiness if his last word or attitude towards her was cynical or indifferent. Consciously she worked very hard to unbridle his tongue, to make him say regrettable things; what she was going to answer to these "unbridlings" she never paused to consider, for she did not know the state of her own feelings—few girls do until a man confesses his love for them. The fact that he was a Syrian, and therefore an Oriental, never troubled her mind. Nicolas Lekejian was no more Oriental to her, in the true or objectionable sense of the word, than the Baghdads and other European Orientals, whom she had met in London society, and whom the world generally accepted unquestioningly because of their great wealth.

Their last day of sight-seeing was to be spent in a most delightful manner: they were going to take part in the popular holiday called "Shem-en-Neseem" or "The Smelling of the Zephyr," which the Cairenes celebrate on the Nile and in the semi-tropical gardens of the Delta Barrage

below Cairo. It is the most typical non-religious holiday in the year, and one which Stella had never seen. On that day the populace of Cairo, of all nationalities and creeds, joins together in common fellowship to "smell the air." It is observed on the first day of the Khamáseen, when hot southerly winds are of frequent occurrence. The Khamáseen commences on the day immediately following the Coptic festival of Easter Sunday, and terminates on the Day of Pentecost (or Whit-Sunday), an interval of forty-nine days.

But the Shem-en-Neseem is not in any manner a religious holiday, although it owes its origin, no doubt, to a Coptic superstition that the air on that particular day has a beneficial and wonderful effect. There are many customs of a religious and superstitious nature belonging to the almanack of the Copts which are to-day observed by the Moslems of Egypt.

"The Saturday of Light," for instance, is of Coptic origin, but it is now a common custom (more common in the villages than in Cairo) for both men and women on the Easter Saturday to adorn their eyes with kohl. This is in token of the miraculous light which appears when the festival of that day is celebrated in the Holy Sepulchre at Jerusalem.

On the morning of the festival of the Shem-en-Neseem, the women of the households rise very early, and before doing anything else they take an onion and break it open and smell it. In the course of the day thousands of the citizens of Cairo ride or walk into the country, or, what is still more popular if they can afford it, go by steamer or barge, or indeed by any sort of river craft, to the gardens of the barrage. The sight on the river is exquisite, for every boat is decorated with palms, and flowers, and gay Egyptian bunting. No English water carnival was ever half so picturesque, for the mixture of races which partake in the holiday-making brings together a variety of costumes which no pen-picture can describe. Every sort of musical instrument is heard, from the classic reed-pipe of the Egyptian to the tink-tinking of the Italian mandoline, and the extraordinary tunes played in a manner beyond recognition on European brass instruments by natives on board of chartered excursionist steamers.

This "Smelling of the Air," as the holiday is vulgarly called, shows all strangers, as it showed Nancy, how delightfully simple most nations but our own can be in the matter of enjoyment. Fresh air, flowers, and music were all that was necessary for a perfect holiday in the eyes of that heterogeneous crowd.

The sight had delighted the two girls, for it was amazingly picturesque as well as extraordinary, and, to their astonishment, even the Greek Levantines contributed their share to the beauty of the scene, for on one soft green lawn in the gardens, shaded by flowering tulip trees, they watched a group of Greek girls, with dark uncovered heads, dancing a minuet with so much charm of movement and regard for classic pose that it was impossible not to recognize the endurance of heredity. In these shaded gardens, which the plentiful waters from the barrage have made into an Egyptian Eden, there were family picnics of almost every religion and nationality which Cairo, with its long centuries of civilization, has drawn to its bosom. From under the delicate shade of sweet sun trees, gay with yellow flowers, the *darabûkah* sounded its Oriental beating, to the long-drawn-out chant of some musicians who were singing a modern Arab love-song in the characteristic Oriental manner. Not many yards off, where the magnolia blooms were wafting their sensuous fragrance to the nostrils of a large family of Italians, cards were being played and siestas enjoyed, to wear off the effects of strong *vino rosso* and "*buono appetito*." The children of all races wore gay clothes hung with festal charms to protect them from harm. Arab women, veiled and shapeless in their wrapping of the densest black; Syrians, whose width of turban distinguished their race; Shereefs, in their dignified robes and turbans of green, which set them apart from their less fortunate brethren; the Copt, with his long black coat and spectacles, telling of hours spent at the business desk, all contributed their quota of picturesque interest to the enchanting *mise-en-scène*.

Nicolas was with them, and had entered wholeheartedly into the girls' desire to see all that there was to be seen of the picturesque side of native life on this curious holiday when, unlike most festivals in a Mohammedan country, the Koran had not originated its proceedings. Here and there

in some retired spot in the public gardens a pious Moslem was chanting a passage from the "Excellent Book" to some elderly friends, and once Stella and Nicolas were able to stand by and listen to a song being sung in the old Arab style. It was in praise of a favourite camel: the effect was wonderfully restful. It is a pity that modern Egyptian songs and modern Egyptian music have driven out the classical Arab music, whose tone, being divided into thirds, cannot be produced by native instruments.

The old Arab songs usually extolled the praise of a favourite horse or camel, the glory of war and fighting, the beauty of some maiden of purely legendary renown; modern Egyptian songs are, alas! usually about love, and, as Stella and Nicolas knew only too well, often horribly indecent in character, at least to European ears.

On their journey up the river to the gardens Nicolas had had an experience of this kind. The boat was crowded, and they had been fortunate enough to secure seats in the bows, when they were surrounded by a crowd of holiday-makers, girls, women, and children as well as men, of every grade of the commercial lower classes in Cairo.

The boy at the piston pipe, an Egyptian of almost perfect physique and feature, a really beautiful creature, dressed in the simplest of hot-weather working garments, was shouting down a tube from the top deck his orders for steering to another of the ship's hands on the lower deck. Nancy saw Stella look very uncomfortable and try to move away, but she did not understand the reason of her discomfiture. Presently she saw most of the women and men smiling with good-natured amusement: something was happening which she did not understand, and all the while the boy's orders had been getting louder and louder. As his language grew more and more excited, the people laughed more openly; then suddenly Nicolas, who had been paying for their tickets and getting change from the steward, appeared on the scene, and Nancy thought she had never seen a face so altered with rage . . . she scarcely knew him. For the first time she saw the demoniac expression of hate which only an Oriental can show in his eyes and in the subtilty of his expression. The change in the man startled her; up till now she had only seen him as the gentle, refined dreamer whose perfect manners never failed him. The reason for

his rage she was totally at a loss to discover, even when he put his arm roughly through his sister's and drew her unresistingly through the crowd of holiday-makers to the farthest part of the boat from where the gesticulating boy stood at the speaking-tube. Nancy he left standing in blank amazement close to the boy's elbow. For a moment she felt a little injured that she, his guest, was left there quite alone—as a rule Nicolas guarded her as though she would break in pieces if she were roughly touched, as she often laughingly told him; but the next moment he was back at her side with the *ras* of the ship, who addressed himself to the unsuspecting youth by kicking him as though he were a dog, at the same time expressing to Nicolas the folly of his objecting to the boy's very ordinary language.

As Nicolas drew Nancy away to where his sister was seated, she asked him to tell her what was the matter, but he could not speak, his face was still white with anger. When Nancy reached Stella's side she said: "Do tell me what has happened? Was that boy rude to you? I didn't see him do anything? He's such a lovely creature, surely he wasn't rude? Did you ever see such a perfect mouth or such teeth? What happened?"

"Unfortunately I understood the words that came out of his mouth. . . . So I do not think it so lovely."

"Were they awful?"

Stella shuddered. "I want to forget them. . . . Talk of something else. . . . Poor Nicolas!"

Nancy was silent for a moment, and then she said meditatively, "And all these Greek and Italian girls and these tiny children understood! How little one realizes when one doesn't know the language!"

"Every one of them understood: they're accustomed to it. The tiny children sing revolting songs. . . ." Stella sighed: her nerves were quite unstrung. "That's why father never would allow me to go about alone when I first came out, and I didn't understand. . . . He hated telling me . . . it isn't only the men, it's every one; though probably that boy never imagined we understood a word of what he was saying. He thought we were ordinary tourists, and that's the way he's accustomed to giving orders to any poor creature whom he thinks is one degree below him in his official capacity."

When Nicolas returned to them he was his ordinary gentle self again. He had subdued the Oriental passion which the boy's obscene language had roused in him, but for the rest of the day Nancy understood why he was so careful not to allow Stella or herself to listen to native singers, or watch the amusing antics of buffoons, until he had himself heard the nature of their performances. The effect of the little incident, which in itself was very slight, as far as Nancy was concerned—for she had not understood one word of what the boy was saying—was curiously far-reaching. It had unsealed a door for her in Nicolas's nature which hitherto had been closed. She understood that the awful passion she had seen was as much a part of him as the gentle and refined personality she was accustomed to, and, strangely enough, Oriental though it proved to her that he was, it served rather to increase her respect for him than to disgust her. When any similar thing occurred, Nancy noticed that Nicolas always hedged himself in with a stronger wall of reserve than usual, and became a few degrees more misanthropic in his attitude towards herself, or peculiarly cynical. He seemed to think that this most objectionable feature of the Oriental character reflected upon himself. He felt that his own feet were steeped in mire; that obscenity and sensuality are inseparable, in the Western's idea, from Oriental minds of all classes and countries. It was awful to think that his exquisite sister, who had been brought up with the unpolluted mind of a refined English woman, should be subjected, through her intimate knowledge of her own language, to hearing expressions which are practically unknown to the minds of even the lowest Englishmen. On such occasions he hated the East with a deadly hatred, and on this particular day he felt, in an inexplicable manner, that the boy's language had placed him, as it ought to do, poles apart from the sweet hedge-rose he longed to gather and wear in his bosom. What right had he, whose mind knew the minds of these men, to think of this girl as ever entering into his innermost life? And yet there were occasions when he loved the East as only an Oriental born with a philosophical turn of mind can love it and understand it.

He had a few acquaintances amongst the highly-edu-

cated sheikhs, who enjoy a considerable reputation as poets and philologists, and who welcomed him, in spite of their difference of faith, into their learned circles.

In the evenings when he went to their houses, where often the only hospitality offered to their guests was a cup of black coffee—each man taking his own pipe—and the only form of entertainment considered necessary was the intellectual conversation of the sheikh, he felt proud of the land of his adoption, and it was with pleasure that he recalled the fact that in the early dynasties it was under the influence of Syria that the art and civilization of Egypt developed to their highest forms. Much as he delighted in the refinement of everything around him on these occasions, he did not allow himself to forget that such intellectual banquets in Egypt are reserved for the few who devote their life to literary pursuits. With their intense love of rhetoric and polite literature they took his mind back to the days when Heliopolis was the great seat of rhetoric, to the days when Plato and the other golden youths of his age went to study there and acquire the most necessary of all accomplishments, the gift of classical oratory.

## CHAPTER XXIV

IN a native café of dishonourable repute in a lonely suburb of Cairo, three young men, members of the advanced Nationalist party, were waiting for the arrival of their fourth companion ; they had met together to discuss their last plans for the assassination of the Khedive, Lord Minton, and the Prime Minister.

Their fourth man was Girgis Boutros !

Two of the party, who were the leading spirits of the conspiracy, had given violent vent to their feelings during the last few months by attacking the partiality of France because her Government had intimated that " conferences " such as the Nationalist party had held in Geneva would not only be inexpedient but undesirable in Paris, considering the cordial relations between the two countries and the recognition by France of Britain's position in Egypt. During their residence in Europe as students, these mistaken young Egyptian patriots had become practically non-believers—non-believers, that is to say, in everything except their own ideas as to the proper governing of their country. They felt themselves perfectly capable of filling any one of the posts held by the great personages whom they were conspiring to murder.

Girgis Boutros had only recently become one of their party ; in his ardent desire to see the establishment of Representative Government in Egypt, he had cut himself off from all religious party feeling and thrown himself unreservedly into the projects of the most active of the advanced Nationalist party. Personal matters had greatly helped to make him take this step, a step which naturally pleased the Nationalists, who were delighted to have a man of Girgis's wealth and social standing aiding their cause and schemes.

His natural prejudice against the British had been for months past fanned into a flaming fire by what he chose

to term personal social slights. It is true that since he had known Vernon Thorpe there had been many occasions upon which he had been submitted to petty indignities from the British, for he had been brought into closer touch with the sporting community in Cairo than ever before, and over and over again his feelings had been deeply wounded.

The very man who was going to marry his adored Hadassah, his own first cousin, the girl who always treated him with the affection of a sister—indeed, he would rather she had not, for sisterly affection stabs the heart which is burning with a lover's passion—did not consider him fit to enter his club.

It is impossible to enumerate the petty slights he received or imagined he had received from his future cousin by marriage, and from Vernon's friends, who never thought of him for one moment as anything else but a "native," with whom, of course, they could not associate on terms of equality.

On the fatal day when he had thrown in his lot with the assassins he was in a state of mind which rendered him not wholly responsible for his actions. His passion for Stella had been growing and growing, and steadily gaining hold of his senses. He had been fighting against it as best he knew how, but alas! it was not a very successful fight, for the Oriental youth is not taught to restrain himself in his desires, and all that was best in Girgis, as well as all that belonged to the vigour of his full Oriental manhood, desired and hungered for the sweetness of Stella. As his love grew in intensity, and he found no means to satisfy it, his health began to suffer. In his sleepless nights his hatred for Vernon and for his race, and all that it stood for in Egypt, in his mind, became a monomania.

He loathed Vernon because he knew that Stella considered him superior to himself. He loathed him because chance had given him the opportunity of figuring as a hero in her eyes. He loathed him because he was fair while he himself was dark. He loathed him because he knew that Vernon cared as little for what he, Girgis Boutros, thought of him as if he was a worm.

Since he had learnt that the date of Stella's marriage was practically fixed, he felt that he had nothing left to live for. For what was his great wealth if it could not

give him the thing his being coveted most in the world? His plans for the betterment of Egypt, he imagined, could best be furthered by offering up his life on the altar of Nationalism. By dying a martyr's death he, too, would be a hero in his beloved's eyes, for in the future she would realize the blessings his party had conferred upon her country. She had promised to love him if he worked for Egypt—this was the work Fate had selected for him to do.

With the calm philosophy of an Oriental he faced death fearlessly; for him "the Land which loveth silence" held no dread, and he knew that certain death awaited him if he either succeeded or failed in his attempt to commit the deed that had fallen to his lot.

The thing he had not sufficient courage or self-control to do was to go on living and making the best of what is good in life when it has been robbed of what is sweetest.

On the first occasion when the four conspirators met together, at the tomb of their hero Wardani, who had not long since assassinated the late Prime Minister, they did not know that they had been shadowed by native detectives disguised as peasants.

Although the eavesdroppers could not hear all that was said on that occasion, they were quite certain that this meeting was of vast importance, for solemn oaths were taken, and the two leaders were well known to them by sight as dangerous members of the Nationalist party. So convinced were they of the fact that they never lost sight of these four young men for one moment; everything they did was known to them. A few days later, when one of them went to Alexandria quite suddenly to watch the goings out and comings in of the Premier and his entourage, he was, though he did not suspect it, followed the whole time by a detective in the guise of a donkey-boy seeking a customer.

Their second meeting had been held in a small room in a city café in Cairo. Again the detectives—this time dressed as well-off young Arabs who had gone to the café to indulge in illegal gambling and other vices which appeal to the Oriental mind—had followed them, but owing to the thickness of the walls, for the building was in the heart of mediæval Cairo, they had not been able to hear much of what was being said.

On this third and last evening, when the conspirators were to decide upon the choice of explosives to be used by the assassins for the murder of the Khedive and the Prime Minister, they had contrived to sit next to their prey during the long tram drive which conveyed them from the city to the desert café. When they got out of the tram they waited until they had seen their victims seat themselves in an arbour made of jasmine and oleander trees: it was the most attractive portion of the café, reserved for favoured customers. The detectives, who were again dressed as simple fellahin, took up their position just outside the screen, in a dark corner which went well with their humble appearance. Nothing could have suited them better, for here they could hear and also see, if they put their eyes close to the screen of green foliage, everything that was being said and done, without themselves being seen—for they had no lights except what was afforded by the moon and stars in the clear heavens.

The beauty of the balmy night was lost upon them, as it was lost upon the impatient conspirators, who, as the time went on and Girgis did not appear, grew alarmed and anxious. The detectives noted their growing concern.

In the clear heavens the stars seemed to oscillate until at moments they hung like mosque-lamps over the heads of the listeners, who had ordered cups of black coffee for which they paid one farthing each. When the soft wind moved the jasmine flowers, their sweet, strong scent, so dear to native nostrils, drifted through the air. From the desert came the idle notes of a flute-player who was sitting cross-legged on the sand sending across the desert, at his sweet fancy, bird-like notes from his long reed "*nay*," and, as though to intensify the stillness of the African night, the sharp barking of wolf-dogs, which Bedouin farmers set loose at night to guard their flocks from raiding jackals, came from the far horizon.

Inside the café, on a raised divan near the door, a bearded Turk, well fed, red-fezzed, and yellow-slippered, lay smoking his "hubble-bubble." The long red tube of his pipe reached from the floor to his sensual lips, which sleepily held the amber mouthpiece. The occasional "hubble-bubble" which the water made in the enamelled glass bowl on the floor showed that his sleep was not sound

enough to prevent him enjoying the indulgence in his favourite pastime.

On the outer floor of the building a pipe-cleaner sat plying his pitifully paid trade.

Nothing could have looked more peaceful than the scene, or more typically Oriental. The interior of the building, which stretched a considerable way back into the desert, was full of all-night gamblers and hashish-smokers, customers who had business to transact or pleasures to indulge which did not meet the approval of the city police.

In Cairo the *cola* or midnight call to prayer was being chanted from the royal mosques as Girgis Boutros, on his fleet-footed mule, rode through the city. On his unheeding ears fell the beautiful and familiar words which open the midnight prayer as well as the call at sunrise.

“Prayer is better than sleep, there is no God but God; alone He hath no companion; to Him belongeth the dominion, and to Him belongeth praise. He giveth life and causeth death; and He is living and shall never die. In His hand is blessing; and He is almighty. There is no Deity but God, and we will not worship any beside Him.”

As this call is not an obligatory prayer, there are few in these degenerate days who rise from their beds to perform its supererogatory act of devotion, so it was only here and there that some devout figure prostrated itself to the ground as the chant from the throats of the mueddins floated out to the sleeping city.

In reposeful cafés fat Mussulmans were sleeping on the matted floors, rolled up in white shawls like children; the less satisfied were sitting cross-legged, smoking their *shibouks*. In the background the gay colouring of the painted pipe-racks and mirrors caught the fitful gleam of dying lamps. The absence of the awful noise which fills the native streets in the daytime would have delighted the stranger and tempted him to linger over the beauty of the exquisite effects of light and shade, for, without the usual danger of being jostled and knocked about by the never-ending traffic of camels and donkeys and mules, he could have enjoyed the majesty of the mosques which broke the outline of the narrow streets with their soaring minarets.

In the brilliance of the midday hours, when the crooked streets are packed with dense masses of unsavoury poor, the sight-seer has little chance of realizing the grace of their architecture and the age of their stones.

But Girgis, as his mule bore him swiftly past Byzantine arches and Koran schools, had no eyes for beauty and no ears for prayer: he was oblivious of all things save the one only, the immediate necessity of joining his companions in the desert café as quickly as possible.

In the morning he had seen Nicolas Lekejian, who had told him very briefly and casually that Vernon Thorpe was going back to England in Lord Minton's private suite, and that Stella and her mother were preparing to leave for England. Nicolas, little knowing the importance of his information, wondered to himself why Girgis had suddenly left him instead of going with him, as he had promised, to see his aunt and cousin.

Since the moment that Nicolas told him that Vernon Thorpe was to be in Lord Minton's party on his journey from Cairo to Alexandria, he had thought of nothing else. He was overwhelmed with the knowledge that it was he, Girgis Boutros, who must kill the man his cousin Hadassah was going to marry; that is to say, if he carried out the vow he had made at the tomb of Wardani, to wreck the train which conveyed Lord Minton and his suite to Alexandria.

Though the café lay some miles outside the city, and he was late even for an Oriental's idea of punctuality, he seemed to be drawing near to the spot all too quickly. His mind was still in a state of chaos, his determination how to act all unformed; yet he dared not curb the pace of his beast, and instinctively he had taken the shortest route to the appointed meeting-place. Only a quarter of an hour was left, and not one gleam of light had come to him, not one idea had formed itself in his mind of what he was to say to his compatriots. He seemed to be riding in a horrible nightmare.

As in a mirage he saw the tomb of Wardani, where he and his companions had taken the oath that they would assassinate the enemies of their party; the vision moved before him with extraordinary vividness as his beast carefully picked its way over stony ground and through heavy sand. He wished that it was he himself who was lying in that

tomb, that it was he who had done that great deed for his country, so that he would be saved doing one or other of two deeds which his soul abhorred. He must either revoke his vow or kill the man whom his cousin was going to marry !

It was almost one o'clock before he arrived at the café. On his appearance his companions indulged in lengthy and polite salutations, for even the greatest impatience and extreme anxiety must give way to Oriental politeness. The most perfect regard for the etiquette of friends meeting on an important occasion was indulged in, and after the necessary exchange of formalities, Girgis was offered some refreshment and invited to be seated at the table, which held various Oriental pipes and cups of coffee. But Girgis would not sit down : he remained standing, while he refused all forms of hospitality.

The eldest of the party, noticing his strange aloofness and the very evident nervous strain under which he was labouring, asked him why he was so late. Had anything of importance happened to cause him one whole hour's delay ?

"Yes," Girgis said, "something which is of grave importance to *me* has happened."

The tone of his voice more than his words made his companions look at him anxiously, and caused the eavesdroppers behind the jasmine screen to strain their ears. The fact that Girgis Boutros had thrown in his lot with these desperadoes of the Socialist party had caused them great astonishment ; they had long been aware of his Nationalistic tendencies and his severance from all religious-political parties, but they had not been prepared for him lending himself to such desperate measures. After Girgis's significant remark they had to strain their eyes as well as their ears, for the conversation between the conspirators was conducted in a truly Oriental fashion. Much was expressed that was not said, and much was said that had to be gathered from involved and obscure language. The Eastern saying that the "walls have ears" is accountable perhaps for the fact that Orientals have from time immemorial learnt to speak and give orders without using words. But in this case the walls had eyes as well as ears, eyes that had not only an Oriental's knowledge of a language

without words, but had the double sight acquired by highly trained detectives.

“Will you kindly explain the nature of your information?” The words were spoken with an acidity which showed that Girgis’s words had fallen upon subtle ears, ears quick to note the finest inflection of voice and expression of speech.

“The information which I received this morning, and which detained me to-night, has nothing to do with the subject we have met here to discuss, except as regards *myself*. It is a purely personal matter, but it affects me so gravely that I have come here to-night, not to help you to carry out your plans, but to deliver myself up into your hands.”

The words “traitor,” “cursed Christian,” and hisses passed from lip to lip. Instinctively the three men closed round him.

Girgis felt their instant distrust, and knew the reason: he was a Christian, they were Mussulmans, even if they had renounced their faith politically.

“I wish to say that I cannot carry out the deed I have vowed to perform.”

Obscene curses instantly flew from the lips of his companions, foul insults were hurled at the Christian dog they had always known him to be. “Death to the revoker!” they hissed as they gripped his wrists and held them in their grasp like those of an arrested pickpocket.

But it was only for one moment. With the fighting power of an ancient Pharaoh, Girgis flung them off as easily as though their restraining grasp had been from the hands of delicate girls. “I will allow no man to treat me as a coward,” he said; “I am alone and unarmed, and at your mercy.”

In the most insulting words the leader of the party demanded a full explanation for his so suddenly revoking his vows.

“I must refuse to give my reason,” Girgis said.

“Then let me recall the fact to your memory that ‘death’ is the penalty to be paid by any one of the party who revokes his vow—you agreed to that very necessary clause in our agreement at Wardani’s tomb?”

“I have not forgotten it,” Girgis said solemnly, “I *deserve* death at your hands, and I am prepared to meet my God.”

And he was speaking as he felt : he had no desire to break any of the vows he had made, and death meant so little to him, since the sweetness of life had been denied him, that he accepted the fact of it with quiet approval.

“ You will also recollect that on that same night, at that same sacred spot, you solemnly swore, by the blood of our beloved hero, who gave his life for our cause, that if by any chance whatsoever you were compelled to renounce the part you vowed to undertake in the affair, you would give a truthful explanation of your reason for withdrawing. The sacredness of such a vow may mean nothing to the son of a black camel, but if you persist in refusing to tell us your reason, we will drag it from you as the secrets of your forefathers were dragged from their lips when they renounced their faith for fear of bodily torture, and were received into the bosom of Allah.”

Remembering that such a vow had been taken, Girgis determined to tell them the truth ; but first he cursed them from the bitterness of his heart.

Out of the fullness of his language, which is at its fullest in its curses and oaths, he rent them in pieces, for he realized in that brief moment that it was because he was a Christian that they had instantly denounced him as a traitor and had treated him as a thief. In that moment he had seen more plainly than anything else could have shown him that, in spite of the persuasions the Moslems had offered to the malcontent Copts, they would, as soon as self-government was established in Egypt, drive them out of the land and rid it of even every native Christian. He recognized the hatred of the man who is born a Moslem for the man who is not of his faith. These feelings flooded his brain like an inrolling wave dashing its full force against a harbour wall ; his curses had scarcely left his lips before he said : “ If there had been any need to treat me as a prisoner and a traitor I would not have come here to-night ; but as I swore at the tomb of Wardani to tell you the reason if I revoked my vow, I will do so now. My cousin,” he spoke very slowly, “ is going to marry an Englishman. . . . I have just heard that he is going to be in the train, which I swore to wreck on its journey to Alexandria. I cannot kill him.”

Filthy epithets expressed the scorn of the three National-

ists for his sentimental reason, but the listening detectives felt relieved that their estimate of the young Copt's character had not been at fault.

“And you wish for and seem proud of the fact that this man, who belongs to the cursed race who rule our country, and tax our people, and boast of their inability to understand us, speaking of Orientals as though we were animals and not superior human beings to themselves—this race who, while boasting that they cannot understand us, yet wish to rule us—this race of bribe-receivers and seducers, who despise all Orientals and, above all, all Christian Orientals—this is the race you are pleased and proud to annex yourself to by marriage—for one of this race you are willing to turn renegade to your party and sacrifice your principles.”

“I do not wish my cousin to marry this Englishman,” Girgis said hotly, “but I cannot kill him . . . I have come here to-night to ask you to kill me and find a substitute for my part in your conspiracy.”

“That is a request you will make many times in the course of the next few weeks,” the leader said. “Death will seem very desirable! But you will live long enough to wish, every hour of the day and every moment of the night, that you had not been transferred from the body of your filthy father into that of your corrupt mother, to appear with diabolical soul in human form.”

The actual words used were too immoral to have their equivalent in English. It is impossible to render literally into English any conversation between natives. What had taken place during this eventful half-hour had either been expressed in a form of language which is wholly untranslatable or by signs; but this is what it meant in plain English.

At a sign from the leader a move was made by the party; the meeting for the night was to be abandoned. Instantly the detectives were on the alert: it was their plan to close in upon the men as they left the arbour, which they must do by the narrow opening in the oleander hedge.

Though Girgis protested that it was unnecessary, he quietly submitted to being bound before going with his companions to the place they chose for his concealment. It would naturally be some hole where his unclean tongue could find no chance of betraying their secrets.

Even if he had desired to leave them, which he did not, he knew that the attempt to do so would be useless, for they all carried firearms, while he himself was unarmed, and experience had told him that there are many nameless graves in the desert which secret hands have dug.

As the three men were emerging from the arbour with Girgis in their midst, their exit was blocked by six fellahin !

With the arrogance shown by Egyptians belonging to the better-off classes to the poor who treat them with the slightest sign of disrespect, the Nationalists tried to thrust them out of their way. To their intense surprise the six fellahin covered them with revolvers.

“ You are charged with conspiring to murder the Khedive, the Prime Minister, and Lord Minton. We therefore arrest you in the name of the Khedive.”

In the scuffle that ensued two of them allowed themselves to be handcuffed tamely, but the leader of the party managed to draw his revolver and shoot Girgis Boutros, for it flashed into his mind that the Christian dog had betrayed them, that his coming to deliver himself up into their hands had only been part of his well-laid plot to trap them.

As Girgis sank to the ground, the man who had shot him and was now struggling to free himself from the grasp of the detectives, spat upon his upturned face and kicked his tarbush off his head. It was his last effort : while he was insulting the wounded man he felt his hands caught and his wrists forced into handcuffs. His companions could not assist him : they were already manacled.

The whole affair of their arrest had been so neatly and quickly effected that it was over in less than ten minutes.

The pipe-cleaner was still cleaning his master's pipes for the next day's customers, the flute-player was still piping his liquid tune, when the prisoners were escorted from the café by the detectives and their accomplices who had been lying in wait not far away.

Before the first pale light of dawn had fallen upon the brooding features of the Sphinx, or the stars had vanished from the heavens, the three conspirators were safely lodged in gaol and Girgis Boutros was in the Kasr-el-Hainy, the city hospital of Cairo.

## CHAPTER XXV

ONCE again Stella was seated in her father's garden awaiting the arrival of her lover. He was coming to lunch, and to spend his idle midday hours with her, probably the last before his departure for England. In the dark pergola, where only glints of the fierce African sun could penetrate the thickness of the luxuriant foliage, it was easy to forget the heat and squalor of the native city, with its plague of flies, which make it unbearable in the hot months, and the sun-blazoned side-paths of the Esbekiya square, where natives who have nothing to sell, and wish to beg from the wealthy travellers, lie on the flagstones as though they were there to provide the homeless with beds. The pergola where Stella was seated might have been in some old garden in Italy—where a luxurious climate and ancient stones make “un paradiso” of an earthly garden—but for the occasional cries that reached her ears which were of purely Oriental sound, and for the not infrequent chanting of boatmen, who, to ease the burden of their labour, were singing some familiar Nile song; or, it might be, for the swirling overhead of grey-winged kites, as they flapped and circled in their low flying from tree to tree.

Presently Vernon appeared at the end of the long pergola. At his coming Stella rose eagerly from her seat in the central kiosk, where iced drinks and cool fruits were temptingly displayed on Persian dishes of ancient blue enamel.

But her steps slackened as she saw the expression on her lover's face! He carried an open newspaper crushed in his hand. As he reached her he threw it at her feet, saying, “Read what your beautiful cousin has done, or rather what he tried to do!”

Too taken aback to even feel hurt at his abrupt and unmannerly greeting, Stella took up the paper with shaking hands; it was a copy of the Coptic daily paper, the

“Al Watan,” which, for the benefit of its foreign subscribers, has the English version of its contents printed side by side with the Arabic.

Where Vernon's hand had crushed its print Stella saw in large letters the words, “Attempted assassination of the Khedive, the British Agent, and the Premier. Conspirators captured.”

A little further down she read the names of the four men who had been arrested: Girgis Boutros was amongst the number. No details of the capture were given beyond the fact that the editor expressed deep regret that Girgis Boutros, an influential and highly respected young Copt, had intended to wreck the train which was to convey Lord Minton to Alexandria on his departure from Cairo for England. Nothing was said of his renunciation of his vows, or of the serious condition in which he now lay in the city hospital.

With a cry horrible to hear, so physical it seemed in its agony, Stella covered her face with her hands as though to blind herself to her misery of shame, and, turning her back on her lover, she flew back to her seat at the end of the long pergola. There, in an attitude of hopeless despair, she flung herself down on her knees and buried her head in her arms.

Vernon followed her slowly, his heart not softened one bit by the girl's pitiful weeping—the girl whom, according to his fashion, he loved—for he was conscious of one thing only at that moment—his nature knew no complicated emotions—his intense hatred of her cousin Girgis Boutros and of all things Egyptian. The idea that he was to be connected with such filthy scum of the earth as he now considered Girgis was revolting to his senses; everything that was English in him rose up fiercely against it. As he came closer to Stella he felt for the first time that, beautiful as she looked even in her misery, she belonged to a people that could never be his, that in her desolation she herself was actually one of them. He could not stoop to comfort her. Why was she not filled with rage and anger as he was, rather than with distress? If she felt one particle of sorrow for this wretched cousin of hers, then she well deserved all the humiliation his deed would undoubtedly bring upon her family. She had brought the disgrace

upon herself by having allowed the intimacy of cousinship to exist between them. He had offered to cut her off for ever from these horrible relations when he had first discovered what they were like, and she had emphatically refused to consent to his wishes.

When her weeping, which, in its intensity, was due to the overstrained state of her nerves, had abated, Vernon said coldly, "Perhaps you will at last consent to leave these connections of yours and live in England . . . will you, Stella?"

His last three words were spoken with a little more softness. The beauty of the bowed head and the grace of the girl's supple figure was appealing to his senses; he expected her to raise tear-stained eyes to his, with gratitude gleaming through them like sunshine in rain; but instead, to his utter amazement, she sprang to her feet with all the swiftness of her Eastern inheritance, and faced him with blazing eyes.

"How dare you?" she cried. "Oh! how dare you, Vernon? How can you, at this moment of all others, when I must cling to my people, when I must keep the promise I made to Girgis! He has done this thing because I asked him to . . . oh, you poor boy! . . . you poor, wrong-headed Girgis, what have you done? Was it because you wanted to be a hero in my eyes? Is this your work for Egypt?"

"Good Christ!" Vernon said slowly, "so you are in it?" His face had become ashen white . . . "My God! so this is what you have come to . . . is this how you have loved me?"

"It had nothing to do with my love for you: I would have given my life for you as you offered up yours to save my father." Her eyes flung a new defiance at him.

"For the sake of the love I believed in once," he said, "don't lie to me, if you and your cursed race are capable of speaking the truth!"

The full significance of *his* interpretation of her words had not yet dawned on Stella, but maddened into Oriental passion at his insulting speech, she struggled for breath to speak. Her English upbringing and her father's strength of will, which she had inherited, helped her to address her lover with perfect control over her choice of

words, although her voice was breathless with emotion. "As you are incapable of believing that we can speak the truth, there is no use in my trying to explain to you why my cousin has apparently consented to do this deed. You must think what you choose . . . nothing I can say would alter your opinion. . . . You naturally imagine that it is from the very lowest motive; he is simply a murderer in your eyes."

"His reason is quite plain: you have already explained it. You were to reward him by giving him your love. I was to be in that train, and he knew it! From an Englishman's point of view he is nothing more or less than a murderer, though he may choose to term himself a political assassin."

The girl's shriek of horrified rage rent the air; she fell at his feet! The shame of his thought of her overwhelmed her. "Oh, God, let me die . . ." she moaned, "if you have thought this thing, if you have believed that I could love the man who would willingly have killed the saviour of my father!"

"What else is there to believe?" he said. "Don't play-act, Stella. Girgis has been arrested for conspiring to murder the British Agent on his journey to Alexandria—you and all your family knew that I was going to be in his party, and you yourself have confessed that you promised to love your cousin when the deed was done."

Something very like hatred gleamed in Stella's eyes for the man to whom she had given her girl's first love, as she said very cruelly: "Only because of the gratitude I shall always feel for you, and nothing more, will I allow myself to deny your horrible accusation. . . . I never knew anything about this hideous crime my cousin was going to commit, and I do not believe for one instant that he was aware of the fact that you were going to be in that train . . . how could he have known? . . . I have not seen him. . . . When I told you that he had done this thing for my sake, I meant that it was because he had promised to work for Egypt to please me." She sighed. "I remember now he said it would be work done in his own way; and this is what he meant."

"Leaving personal matters alone," he said coldly, "I am afraid you cannot alter the principal facts of the case,

that he was one of the conspirators who have been arrested for plotting to 'kill the enemies of their country,' as they would describe their brutal murders."

Stella was sitting in a huddled heap on the gravel path, but she did not raise her head. "If you would only try to understand!" she said. "It is because he does most sincerely believe that these men in the service of the English Government are the enemies of his country that he has given his young life for the cause: these patriots, as they unwisely consider themselves to be, have not feared death—you must admit that? I asked him to do work for Egypt, to prove his love for me. I said I would love him if he did—not in any way in which, as your faithful wife, I might not have loved him. And this is what he has done, this thing which you, the man I once unquestioningly loved and promised to obey, cannot understand. You pride yourself on not understanding us, you rejoice in the fact that you never could; I fail to see that it is anything to boast of."

"You are quite right," he said; "I don't, and never will understand. Thank God, treachery is not a characteristic of the English race. We may be stupid . . . I know you think us so, but we are even by your race considered trustworthy. I told you the very first week I arrived in this hateful place that it was best for you to get out of it, to cut yourself free from its influence and from the relations who were nothing to you at that time. I wanted you to remain the Englishwoman I thought you were in every respect except name."

Stella rose to her feet very slowly: there was something very Eastern in her movements, as she looked at him with unlovely scorn in her eyes and said: "You see I am not, and never was an Englishwoman?"

"Well, Irish, if you like," he said impatiently, "what does it matter?"

"Or an Irishwoman," she said, still more bitterly. "I am a Syrian; I belong to a race which taught the Egyptians a higher civilization thousands of years before you and your island barbarians were discovered to the world. I am Hadassah Lekejian, Nicolas Lekejian the Syrian's daughter, and I should be far more ashamed of denying the fact or of leaving my people because the man

I loved scorned them than of having caused poor Girgis to do this mad deed, a deed he attempted to do from a sense of duty to his country!" Her voice softened. "Are you totally incapable, Vernon, of seeing any other person's point of view but your own—are you so characteristically English?"

"With women seeing things from other points of view generally means 'condoning the deed,' I find. I'm afraid I can't." Vernon's eyes were as cold as his manner was unloverlike, but he was more than a little surprised when Stella, upon hearing his answer, said quite firmly:

"Then let this be good-bye; I will never see you again. I have forgotten father too long, I must go to him . . . he must by this time have heard more than the papers tell us." As she spoke she quietly took the ring from her finger, which he had placed there with so much love and tenderness, and held it out to him: "Please take it back," she said, "I need not wear it now."

He looked at the emblem of their engagement vacantly for one moment—their parting had come as an overwhelming shock to his senses—as it lay in the palm of his hand. Its almost childish size struck him even at the moment as pathetic: this tall girl in front of him, whom he had once sworn to cherish, was cast in such delicate lines that his strong manhood suddenly hungered to possess her. The next moment he had sent the ring flying through the air. As it fell it hit the wing of a little Cupid who had been in the act of stringing his bow on the top of an old stone pedestal for many centuries. When he turned and faced her all his belief in the treachery she must have inherited from her people showed itself plainly in his eyes. His hands were dug deep in his pockets: he would not trust himself to hold hers. "Let things be as you wish," he said brutally; "you are right: this had better be good-bye if there is to be nothing more between us . . . you wish it?"

"Yes, I wish it," she said, "for even if I loved you as I once did, I would not allow you to sacrifice yourself by marrying me. I know now all that you think about my people, and as I owe you an unpayable debt for having saved my father, I would not be so ungrateful. . . ." She straightened herself, as though to gain fresh courage. "I must go to him, and not waste time: this will almost kill

him." Her voice shook as she spoke. "I can't say any more, I have no more to say"—she held out her hand. "I only beg of you, go home to England and forget all about me and my people; but when you do think of me, don't be harder than you can help: try to remember that you do not understand or wish to understand the characteristics of the people whose blood is in my veins."

Vernon did not take her outstretched hand. "It is horrible to part like this," he said. "Have you quite forgotten the old days in England, when nothing of all this sort of thing ever entered our heads, when you loved me so truly, or so I imagined, that you would have done anything I asked of you? . . . You would never have let any one come before me then."

"I was a girl then, and girls are very selfish in their love; now I am a woman, and no self-respecting woman should let herself be governed in all things by the man she loves, if she disapproves of the demands he makes upon her—that sort of love is mere slavery, it is no mere animal passion. . . . I couldn't do the things you ask, Vernon, and still love you."

"Yet I asked so little." Vernon spoke in the past tense, for, unconsciously, he was just a little relieved that it was Stella herself who had broken off their engagement. At the same time he could not bear to let her go out of his life with this feeling of bitterness in her heart. Her beauty was as desirable as ever in his eyes—it was maddening to think that he was losing it. It was galling to his pride that she could surrender him so easily—surrender him for the horrible natives to whom she considered that she belonged.

"You asked me to forsake my people for yours, to sink my identity in yours; for you take no interest in my interests, and never tried to—I have always had to throw myself into yours. You wanted me to make the social world to which you belong forget that you had married 'a wife out of Egypt' . . . to forget it where any stigma might be attached to the fact. In places, perhaps, where they do not know the manner in which the English treat us and look down upon us in the East, it might have added a touch of picturesque interest to your household if you had said 'My wife is a Syrian' . . .

but the fact would have to be talked of with discrimination. . . .” She paused. . . . “I’m afraid my woman’s understanding of the respect a wife should have for her husband has not stood the test of your demands in these things.”

“If you don’t love me it is best to say good-bye; it takes a cleverer chap than I am to follow all that you wish your words to imply.” He spoke impatiently.

They walked in silence together along the garden path, where sun-birds of brilliant plumage were darting from shrub to shrub, dipping their long beaks into luscious tree-flowers of Eastern splendour, and roses of every hue.

At the parting of their ways Stella put her hand on Vernon’s arm: there was pleading in her touch. “Everything you have said and done that has hurt me and my people, Vernon, will be forgotten—everything will be forgiven . . . even your” . . . she hesitated, “even your belief in my treachery towards yourself. We will always think of you as the man who saved my father’s life. . . .” Tears filled her eyes. “Sometimes, when I have thought of what you did and of all that it means to me, I could let you treat me as your slave. I could willingly obey your most unlovely commands.”

The next moment she had gone, and Vernon was left wondering!

## CHAPTER XXVI

ON her way to her father's private office, which could only be reached by crossing the inner courtyard of the house, which in the old Mamluk days had been the recreation ground for the women of the harem, Stella met Nancy, who, the moment she saw her, ran to her and caught her by the arm excitedly. "Oh, Stella, what is the matter? You look awful! And Nicolas wouldn't even speak to me just now when I passed him. He was looking for you. Has anything *very* terrible happened?"

Stella pressed the girl's hand convulsively in hers. "Yes, something awful has happened: but let me go to father. . . . I can't speak, dear, don't ask me. . . . Where is Nicolas? Which way did he go?"

"That way," Nancy said, pointing to the passage which led to Mr. Lekejian's office. She did not try to restrain Stella, but stood lost in wonder and filled with a miserable anxiety. The way in which Nicolas had drawn himself away from her, as though he was suffering from some infectious disease which might harm her, had made her think for the moment that some plague had broken out in the city, and that he had been in close contact with the infected. But the awful look of misery, mixed with anger, which his eyes expressed when she implored him to tell her what had happened, contradicted that impression; there was something far more personal and tragic in it.

Unconscious of almost everything but the desire to reach her father's office, Stella fled on, regardless of Nancy's discomfiture. So Nancy sat herself down to think on the gnarled root of the ancient lebbek tree, whose top branches reached right up to the exquisite meshrebiya work which had served as a window-screen for the women's drawing-room in days gone by. The tree bore a legend that was touched with romance, for from its branches a

daring lover had once reached the pierced wood-work of the jealously guarded window, and had sung to his fair Juliet, who could see him without herself being seen. One dark night this same veiled Juliet slipped from the screened window to the top branches of the tree and escaped from her prison in the harem to her lover's arms. But to-day the daughter of the house was a Christian, and this old romance belonged to Moslem days.

As Stella neared her father's door she met her brother coming to it from the opposite direction. Both stopped instantly and looked despairingly at one another.

"Where is Vernon?" Nicolas said. "I thought you were with him, Stella! Does he know?"

"He has gone, we have parted for ever! How is father bearing it? Does mother know?"

Nicolas put his arm tenderly round his sister; she drew herself away.

"Please don't, dear. I want all my courage for father. . . . Vernon doesn't matter—I mean our parting doesn't. . . . If he could think such things of Girgis, how could I marry him?"

Nicolas looked at her in amazement. Was she in ignorance of the depth of their cousin's villainy? "But Stella, don't you know, don't you understand, haven't you realized what Girgis was trying to do?" he shuddered.

"Yes, of course I do. It was a hideous and cruel thing, but according to the poor boy's lights these men they were plotting to kill were all the enemies of his country; that is a very different thing from trying to murder his cousin's lover from jealousy? Vernon imagined that Girgis knew that he was to be in the British Agent's party!"

There was silence for a moment, then Nicolas said very slowly in Arabic: "He did know, Stella. . . . God have mercy on his soul!"

Stella suppressed the cry that sprang to her lips; she caught her brother by his shoulders and made him face her. "That is a lie, Nicolas. Oh, say it is a lie! Some one has dared to tell you that lie! Have you seen Girgis? Did he tell you himself? I won't believe this hideous thing until he himself confesses it: he couldn't do it, I know he couldn't."

Nicolas took her two hands from his shoulder and held them firmly and lovingly in his own. "Be brave, Stella, and face the horrible truth. Girgis did know—I told him myself! I met him early yesterday morning. I told him that we were leaving for England, and that Vernon was going home in Lord Minton's suite."

Stella did not speak. With bowed head she held her brother's hands passionately in hers . . . when words came she said: "And I loathed Vernon for thinking such a thing possible"—she spoke as though she was visualizing the scene which had just passed between her lover and herself—"and it was true, it was what he thought."

She looked at her brother with a face so stricken and withered with shame that half a woman's lifetime, a lifetime of suffering, seemed to have passed over it in the last few minutes.

"Girgis must have been mad," Nicolas said. "He would never have brought this shame upon us in his normal state of mind. . . . He has ruined your happiness . . . and he has . . ."

She stopped him by exclaiming: "We must go to father . . . will you find mother and let me go to him? Mother went out—I think to Cook's."

"I'll find mother," Nicolas said; "she may not know. Poor mother!"

When Stella opened the door of her father's office her eyes met a sight which she would never fail to remember in after years—whatsoever happiness her future might bring forth.

In the ancient Coptic language Nicolas Lekejian was praying aloud on his knees, beside his business desk; his head was buried so despairingly in his arms that only his red fez could be seen. Stella went silently up to him, and, slipping down on her knees by his side, put her arms across his shoulder and joined in his prayers. Her touch made him turn his head and look at her.

"Hadassah!" he cried, "Hadassah!" In a moment his arms were open and his child was in them, with her slim arms encircling his neck, her passionate kisses covering his worn face.

"Hold me closer, father darling, hold me far closer; never let me go; let me stay with you always!"

The tears that fell from his eyes tasted salt to her lips.

“Don’t cry, father; don’t let this make you ill again. Girgis loves you; he must have been mad; you must forgive him.”

“God in His mercy forgive him,” Nicolas Lekejian said, “for the shame he has brought on my household.” As he spoke he rose from his knees, and, seating himself in his business chair, he held out his arm for his daughter to seat herself on his knee. Never since she was a little child had his beautiful Hadassah seemed so near to him. The tender affection he had given her as an infant he bestowed upon her now, the old pet-names came instinctively to his lips; out of the well of anguish that he felt for her, the waters of healing were poured forth abundantly; broken sentences of sympathy, fearful words of inquiry dropped from his lips. “When was she to see Vernon? Would she like her father to see him first and spare her all that he could? His little Hadassah, his pearl among daughters, the precious jewel of his bosom!”

With her two hands Stella raised his face to hers, and looking into his eyes she said: “Father, I will tell you something that will lessen your sorrow for me a little.”

“What is that, my daughter?”

“I have seen Vernon this morning. I have broken off our engagement.” In an agony of sympathy for his child the old man crushed the girl’s hands in his . . . but she went on unheedingly . . . “I would have married him before this happened if he had wished me to . . . because he saved your life. . . .” She bent her lips impulsively to his and kissed him. . . . “Oh, dearest, if we had lost you! . . .” She shut her eyes, and trembled at the misery the idea conveyed. . . . “What should we have done? . . . I would have married him, but I did not love him—it would have been from gratitude. It would have been for want of courage to tell the man who saved you for us that I did not love him.”

“Hadassah!” Her father’s voice evinced absolute consternation. “You did not love Vernon?”

“No, father, not any more; I once did . . .” she sighed, “but that sort of love seems to belong to years and years ago. I’m different now.”

“Does your mother know?” he asked. “She is out

this morning—has she returned? Have you told her this?”

“She doesn’t know that my feelings for Vernon have changed. . . . I didn’t want any one to know. . . . But now that this has happened!” she shuddered.

“Are Vernon’s feelings the same for you?” Nicolas Lekejian groaned. . . . “How did he take this horrible news?”

Stella felt by the manner in which her father spoke that he did not know that her cousin had heard of Vernon’s plans for travelling in the British Agent’s suite. A great wave of hope and longing came to her that he might never know. If only by some miracle it could be kept from him, one drop of misery would be spared her, and the bitterest shame removed from the memory of his nephew’s name in her father’s eyes. She answered him evasively. “Men’s affections are so difficult to understand, father, all except yours.” She caressed his cheeks with her soft lips. “I suppose he cared for me just as much as ever until he heard of this, and until I resented the things he said about my people—then I spoke hatefully to him. Sometimes I used to wonder if he wouldn’t have been glad to be free; I think he would if he had felt quite certain that I shouldn’t have married any one else.”

Nicolas Lekejian smiled: he was too wise a father to question his daughter upon such a subtle point as her own reason for no longer loving Vernon. He knew that it is only the things that don’t matter, the things which do not affect our finest senses which can be explained; that the birth of passion and the death of it are as little understood by mortals as the death of our material bodies.

Just at that moment three telegrams were brought into the room by Mr. Lekejian’s confidential clerk, who laid them gravely in front of his master. There was a note on the top of the telegrams, which were on an ancient Arab tray. “This requires an immediate answer, sir,” the man said in Arabic. “The hospital porter is waiting.” He pointed to the note, and with a respectful salaam withdrew to the outer office.

The note was from the doctor of the city hospital, a very able man, whom Mr. Lekejian knew intimately and liked as a friend.

It ran :

“ If you wish to see your nephew Girgis Boutros alive, please come at once—the worst is feared.”

“ Yours with sympathy,

“ K. B.”

Nicolas Lekejian instantly rose from his seat, pushing Stella gently from him. “ Find your mother, child, and stay with her.” He kissed her tenderly as he pressed an electric bell at his feet. The turbaned servant was at his master’s side again in answer to the summons.

“ Tell the man who brought this that I will follow him ; give Mr. Nicolas these telegrams when he comes in and ask him from me to answer them, and lock up my desk.” The next moment he had left his office and was out in the courtyard.

Nancy, who was still seated below the lebbek tree when he passed it, rose to her feet instantly and flew to him. “ Won’t you tell me what has happened, Mr. Lekejian ? Every one seems steeped in gloom ? Can I help you ? ”

“ Little girl,” he said, “ something very dreadful has happened, something you must try to forgive, for Girgis Boutros is dying.”

“ R.G. dying ! Oh, Mr. Lekejian, it can’t be true ! ” But the girl’s words fell upon the silent courtyard, for Mr. Lekejian had passed into the outer court, where the porter at his coming sprang from his old stone bench near the door and, at his master’s silent order, which was given by the merest sign, darted up the street to find a cab. In less than four minutes he had returned with one and was respectfully helping him into it, while with the exquisite courtesy of his language he uttered the familiar blessings on the out-going of the master of the household.

When Nicolas Lekejian entered the hospital he was at once taken up to the ward in which his nephew was lying. As the nurse who accompanied him opened its door, the doctor hurried down the length of the room to meet him : he felt a sincere sympathy for the man who had given so much of his time and brains for the service of British rule in Egypt, and who had got so little from the British in return, and who was now, by this dastardly attempt of

his nephew, placed in a position of humiliation; but he was quite unprepared for the change that the shock had produced in the man. The Syrian, the only one of his race whom the doctor had ever really respected or greatly admired, was now an old man! In the East there is a very short time granted between the years of middle age and infirmity. With Nicolas Lekejian there had been none. These few hours, since the papers had published the brief notice of his nephew's attempted crime, had eaten them up. The doctor shook him by the hand silently and sympathetically as he walked with him to the patient's bedside, a sign from the nurse beckoning them to come more quickly.

They hurried their steps, but the angel of death went before them; and ere they reached the narrow bed, where since daybreak the life-blood had been flowing from the lungs of the young patriot, it had stopped and gathered in its arms the soul of Girgis Boutros and borne it to that valley of expiation, wheresoever it may be, which must be traversed before the erring are granted peace.

When Nicolas Lekejian stood by his nephew's dead body he said: "And the goat shall bear upon him all their iniquities into a land not inhabited."

## CHAPTER XXVII

WHEN Nicolas Lekejian returned from the hospital to his home, Stella and her brother found it *unnecessary* to deceive him about Girgis's knowledge that Vernon was to be in the train which he had planned to wreck, for the doctor had given him the full details of the capture of the conspirators by the police, and of Girgis's death at the hand of his own confederates. The news lifted the burden of shame from their hearts, and in their thoughts of him lessened the awful horror of his meditated crime. Stella underwent a revolution of feeling, and hated herself for ever having believed the accusation against him. Her old belief in his loyalty to herself and his gratitude to Vernon for having saved her father was re-established. His youthful and unpractical ideas regarding politics she understood from his point of view, bitterly as she, from her own standpoint, condemned them; but the knowledge that he was no murderer allowed her to think of him as a political conspirator who had met his death nobly and fearlessly instead of as a contemptible murderer.

His sudden death came as an overwhelming shock to the entire household; but in the East, where the true meaning of the words "In the midst of life we are in death" is brought daily home to every one with amazing realism, it seemed more *unreal* to Nancy than to any of the others. She could not believe it: she could not realize that any one so alive with the virility of manhood should have suddenly become non-existent; it was incredible.

Nicolas had found her in his mother's morning-room, whither she had flown upon hearing from Mr. Lekejian that Girgis Boutros was dying. Mrs. Lekejian had not yet returned.

The girl's stricken face had torn Nicolas's heart and made him yearn for her all the more deeply: the cheeks of

his pink hedge-rose were as pale as snowdrops. When he saw that his mother was not in her room he turned to go—he could not trust himself alone with the pitiful figure; but as he was about to leave without speaking to her, Nancy cried to him: “Nicolas, what have I done? Girgis is dying, your father says. What has happened? Why can’t I know?”

“Dying!” Nicolas started. The suddenness of the news astounded him, but he felt no pity for the miserable youth.

“It is the only thing he could do,” he said bitterly. He imagined, of course, that his cousin had committed suicide. “He has disgraced himself and brought shame on our household.” He put the girl determinedly from him as she rose to her feet and impulsively held out her hands to detain him. “Don’t touch me,” he said: “this house is no fit home for you . . . you don’t understand . . . Girgis was conspiring to murder your brother!”

Nancy staggered back: his words stunned her, she could scarcely gasp out the question, “Vernon? Is he safe? Where is he?” as she stared at him with terror in her eyes. Nicolas could have killed himself for having so cruelly hurt her, for the girl’s words had come labouringly.

“Vernon is perfectly safe—he was here this morning: the conspirators were caught before the deed was attempted. . . . My cousin . . .” Nicolas emphasized the relationship with a bitter purpose, “was arrested last night along with the three other dastardly villains who were plotting to kill the Khedive, the Prime Minister, and Lord Minton. Girgis was to have wrecked the train which conveyed Lord Minton to Alexandria.”

Nancy’s hands went up before her eyes—the horror of the idea was too near—but Nicolas’s abrupt movement to leave her made her drop them and cry out sharply: “You mustn’t go; stay with me”—she caught him angrily by the arm—“stay with me, I tell you! I can’t bear to be alone: it is cruel of you to go.”

Nicolas stayed by her side and forced himself to speak calmly. “I will do anything I can for you, little Nancy,” he said, “anything in the wide world that will help you. I was a brute to tell you so abruptly, but I was mad—mad with anger; and I thought the sight of any one of us would

naturally be loathsome to you. . . . I was afraid to come near you."

Nancy smiled through her tears, tears which had begun to flow through the sudden shock to her nerves. "When you all shunned me I felt lost, and a stranger amongst you for the first time. And I thought you cared a little for me. . . ." She shivered. "Oh, this land is terrible!"

"You are lost to us, Nancy," he said; "Girgis has cut all our ties . . . you must forget this horrible country and go home."

"What do you mean? Girgis must have gone mad; he was not accountable for his deeds. Love sends some natures mad, when it is hopeless. Vernon will understand . . . now that the poor boy is dying. Oh, poor, poor R.G.! . . ." she paused . . . "affection makes life damnable!" Nancy looked at Nicolas for an answer.

"His form of madness is damnable," he said bitterly; "it has broken the engagement between your brother and Stella: Vernon could not marry into our family after that."

"Oh, Nicolas! Who said so? . . . he could . . . he could if he loved her even as poor Girgis loved her . . . but Vernon does not know how to love . . ."

Nancy's trembling ceased; she was suddenly transformed into the combative, daring girl whose love for her school-friend never wavered, and to whom the evidence of her brother's self-satisfied character was constantly asserting itself unpleasantly. "What proof is there," she said, "that Girgis wished to murder my brother? . . . I can understand and believe that he would do anything, however awful, for political reasons, for I have always considered him quite unbalanced on that subject; but I refuse to believe—and I think you ought to as well, Nicolas—that he would stoop to murder any one for purely personal motives, or that he would knowingly have killed the man who saved his uncle's life. Girgis adores your father. Do you know," she said encouragingly, "he once told me that he considered that the giving of Stella to my brother (whom of course, as an English soldier, he disliked) in a way helped to repay the debt his family owed Vernon for having saved your father? I believe that Girgis would have saved Vernon's life instead of taken it, if it had only been to earn Stella's gratitude! That is not the sort of stuff criminals

are made of—criminals who stoop to murder for personal motives ? ”

Nicolas's eyes were aflame with gratitude for the girl's words, but he made no response.

“ You must prove to me that R.G. knew that Vernon was to be in that train before I allow myself to think the worst of him : what we know is bad enough, but it is outside of that line of villainy.”

Nicolas was on the point of telling her the horrible truth about his cousin, for he wished to spare his family nothing in her eyes, when his father hurriedly entered the room. Nancy flew to him and flung her arms round him : the weight of years and sorrow that had suddenly been added to his life almost made her cry out.

“ Where is your mother, Nicolas ? ” he said as he looked eagerly round the room. He had accepted the girl's proof of affection gladly and was tenderly caressing her hands while he spoke. When he saw that his beloved wife was not there he said in a tired, hollow voice : “ I have just returned from the hospital. Things are best as they are ! Girgis is dead ! ”

The two listeners did not speak.

“ I was too late to hear any confession he might have wished to make. A bullet from a revolver, fired at him by one of his own party, entered his lungs . . . he bled to death.”

“ Why did they shoot him ? ” It was Nancy who spoke, very quietly and fearfully.

“ Because they thought Girgis had betrayed them. They were all arrested only a few moments after he had arrived at a little café in the suburbs, where he had gone to tell his companions that he had revoked, that he could not carry out the horrible crime he had vowed to commit. . . . ” Mr. Lekejian pressed the girl's hand closely in his own and looked into her eyes as he said the last words. “ He had heard in the morning that your brother was to be in Lord Minton's party. . . . He met his compatriots in that café last night to deliver himself up into their hands. He knew he would be tortured to death ! ”

There was silence for a moment, then the old man repeated the familiar Coptic prayer which begins with the words, “ Oh, my Lord, have mercy ! Oh, my Lord, have mercy ! ”

A groan of relief and gratitude came from Nicolas's lips as his eyes sought Nancy's.

"Thank God he died!" she said. "Poor wrong-headed Rameses the Great!"

"God is merciful," Mr. Lekejian said. "His mercy is farther-reaching than we understand. He will judge the boy justly."

"But he is so young to die," Nancy said, "and so beautiful . . ." she paused a moment, as though she was visualizing the figure of the exquisite youth lying white and still in death . . . "I'm so glad, so awfully glad that he met his end like that . . . that he refused to commit the crime. It was just as if God had sent him reason at the very last. . . . Does my brother know?"

"No, my child, I think not." Mr. Lekejian hesitated, and looked at Nicolas.

"Nancy knows—I have told her, father."

"Yes, I know," she said hurriedly, "but when, oh, when Vernon understands that Girgis practically lost his life because he would not be a party to murdering him, that he refused to carry out the awful vows he had undertaken in a fit of madness, they will be the same as they were before . . . Vernon will . . . will . . ."

Mr. Lekejian turned to leave her. He could not tell her that his child had ceased to love her brother. "If it had been you who was going to be my dear daughter instead of Vernon my son, things might have been the same, but alas! that is not the case."

The next moment he had closed the door behind him, and Nancy and Nicolas were left looking foolishly at one another.

A crimson blush dyed Nancy's soft face from her throat to her forehead!

Instantaneously with Mr. Lekejian's words there rang through her ears her own words to Stella that night at Al Fayyum! "If I fall in love with Nicolas I shall have to propose to him . . ." The idea possessed her. Why should she not, by one moment of awful daring, in this awful hour of anguish, when his suffering robbed *her* of all false pride, offer herself to him as his wife? She knew that he loved her and that he would never, unless she tempted him beyond measure, tell her of that love.

She was willing to risk the humiliation of rejection in the hope that her offer would be received with joy.

“Nicolas!” He turned to her: the beautiful blush had not left her face, and the tone of her voice told him more of her tale than she was aware. She held out her hand: he knew that she was offering it to him as his wife, but he did not move. He had only to stretch out his arms and she was his; instead he stood with bowed head and firmly clenched fingers.

Nancy went to him and placed her hand very shyly on his. “Won’t you take me, Nicolas? Don’t you want me?” The next moment her hand was imprisoned in his passionate grasp.

“Oh, my darling! God knows how much I want you, but we’re not fit for you, Nancy . . .” his words came brokenly . . . “this is only pity you feel, it can’t be anything else.”

“I have always tempted you, Nicolas, because I have always loved you . . . you can’t refuse me, dearest, after my having summoned up courage to ask you. . . .” She looked at him with lovely, taunting eyes.

“Little Nancy,” he said wearily, as though bodily exhaustion had overcome him . . . “don’t tempt me to behave like a villain—help me to resist!”

For a moment the man’s abject humility brought tears to her eyes, but there was still a playful lightness in her voice when she said: “I once told Stella that if I fell in love with you I should have to propose if I wanted to marry you; now I must tell her that I *have* proposed and have been refused, that you are shocked at my want of maidenly modesty.”

“Nancy,” he said hoarsely, “you know I love you! You have known it all the time! You knew you were asking me to accept the one thing that could make life sweet—you knew it, or you would not have done it! I will always worship and adore you, more than ever now for having done this thing—though God knows you have tempted me almost more than I can bear.”

“Then don’t bear it,” she held out her hand, “give in and make me your wife.”

“I can’t allow you to ruin your life.”

“Why ruin it, Nicolas, when I’d rather belong to you than any one else in the world?”

“Little girl”—he looked at her with exquisite tenderness shining in his eyes—“little English Nancy, you are only a child in years; you will go home to England and marry a man of your own people . . . you don't understand all that I should be doing if I accepted what you offer to do, you can't understand . . . you don't know what you would have to give up, what you would be subjected to.” He shook her almost roughly out of his way as his mind recalled all the slights his mother and sister had endured. “Let me go, for pity's sake, Nancy. Don't tempt me any longer.”

“First tell me, Nicolas, why it would have been all right for Stella to marry Vernon?”

“Because he would have taken her home to England, she would have borne his name, her race would have been swallowed up in his . . .” he spoke bitterly . . . “you can't blame him.”

“I see,” Nancy said slowly; “Stella would have been changed into an Englishwoman by marrying my brother, while I, an Englishwoman, should have been changed into a Syrian by marrying Nicolas Lekejian junior, and I should have lived in Cairo?”

“Exactly, for while my father lives I will never leave him; I am not much of a business man, but just of late he has learnt to rely upon me in the matter of correspondence . . .” he looked at her hungrily, for love was making its demands . . . “I mustn't let you do it.”

The girl was thoughtful for a moment. “Your mother has been happy, Nicolas?”

“You mean she has never allowed us to see her suffering, she has given up her life to her husband and her children.”

Nancy answered him with the pleading that was in her smile.

“My darling,” he said, “if I loved you less than I do, if I did not treasure you as something far too pure and unspotted to sully with the life out here, I would forget your happiness and think only of my own.” He put his arms round her. “I want to hold you just once, Nancy, as if you belonged to me, may I?”

Nancy yielded her pliant body to his embrace, their cheeks were pressed together. Nicolas dared not trust himself to seek her lips: the sweetness of her breath was on his neck, the fragrance of her being was enflaming his senses.

In that sublime draught of love all sorrow and suffering was forgotten, the ecstasy of the moment obliterated the memory of renunciations.

Then Nicolas, while the best in him still triumphed, unclasped her fingers from his neck and held her from him at arm's length. "God bless you, little hedge-rose," he said; "your sweetness and dearness are not for me, but after this I can fight, I can be strong."

He crushed her hands tightly in his.

"Good-bye," Nancy said softly, but as her words were spoken she thrust her pleading face quickly forward and pressed her lips against her lover's.

One heavenly kiss from her young lips was to be his ere they parted.

When she raised her head, she whispered: "My husband! For in my thoughts and in my heart you will be my husband, Nicolas, and I am your wife." She smiled divinely. "So remember if you marry again you will be committing bigamy."

"Good-bye, little wife," he said, "and God guard you."

The next moment Nancy had left the room, and Nicolas was alone, enjoying over again the brief ecstasy of their first embrace.

## CHAPTER XXVIII

NANCY fled straight to Stella's room. She found her there standing by the window, looking out into the palm-garden with unseeing eyes; she did not move or appear to notice Nancy's entrance until the girl's arm was slipped through hers, then she turned questioning eyes on her to see if the girl knew of Girgis's death.

Nancy understood the meaning of her look. "Yes, I know, darling!" There was silence again, for mere words at such a moment seemed a mockery, a pitiful mockery of the inexpressible sorrow she felt for her friend. Tears instantly filled Stella's eyes—Nancy's sympathy had brought them, and they were a welcome sight to Nancy, for the girl's motionless calm was harder to bear. Vernon's name Nancy could not mention: he seemed to her at the moment despicable and inhuman; her passionate young being longed to transform itself into a man and a lover, so that she might fold the girl in strong arms and show her how she would love if she were a man. To know that this girl, whose loveliness never grew stale in Nancy's eyes, had been thrown over by her brother in this hour of trial and suffering, filled her with wrathful indignation. Words burst from her lips as a protest against his behaviour; as a token that she, his sister, considered the house of Lekejian an honourable one to be allied to.

"Stella," she said, "I have proposed to Nicolas, and he has refused me." She could not have said it if she had not been certain of Nicolas's love; the knowledge of it was in her heart like a song.

"Nancy!" Stella's voice betrayed reproach rather than sympathy—reproach that her friend should have dared to offer such consolation to her brother in their dire humiliation: it seemed to her a form of patronage which was not in good taste.

“Yes, I told you at the Fayyum that I should be driven into doing it . . . and I was.”

“In what way?”

“Because I love him, and he made me understand that he would never ask me to be his wife, he told me that this deed of Girgis’s had placed a gulf between us for ever . . . he could not have said more plainly, ‘I can’t marry you.’”

“And how could he?”

“He could do anything if he loved me . . . love can do anything . . . it is faith . . . it can move mountains!”

“He does love you—you know that?”

“Not in my way, or he’d marry me; he’d have married me long ago.”

“His own way is nobler, Nancy!”

“Oh, fiddlesticks!” she said scornfully. “I don’t want nobility, human devotion is good enough for me!”

“You ask for humility?”

“I don’t!” Nancy spoke emphatically, “I want the happiness of becoming his wife. . . .” She paused, and then added irritably, “For hypersensitive reasons he won’t grant me that happiness, he has refused me; yet I would rather be his mistress than any other man’s wife—so why *should* he spoil my life?”

“Hush!” Stella drew her hand away. “You don’t know anything about these things, Nancy; I wonder if you really know what love is—it’s so deceptive . . .” Stella sighed . . . “so deceptive, Nancy, for many false gods will rise up and call themselves Love . . . Nicolas is unlike the men you have been accustomed to meeting, just as we are unlike the women Girgis knew, and, added to that, you are provoked because you can’t make him say that he loves you. If you knew more men like him!”

Nancy interrupted her: “He’s got brains and ideas, and he makes life interesting. When I’m with him I always think there are so many interesting things to do that the days could never be long enough . . . when I’m alone, and his ideas are forgotten, I don’t know how to pass my time.”

“*Vernon* was a new type to me when I met him . . .” Stella went on as though lost in her own train of thoughts . . . “travelling about the world as I did one didn’t meet that sort of man very much, and at school we hadn’t the chance . . . I thought him very unusual!”

Nancy looked at her: a slow awakening to the true

understanding of things was coming into her eyes and changing her expression.

"I can't describe my feelings for him then, I never stopped to think; I took it for granted that I loved him . . ." she blushed . . . "and I did adore him in a sort of way: his good looks and active manhood roused feelings in me that I mistook for love. It's really awfully difficult to know, Nancy, when you are quite young, and when a very good-looking man makes love to you."

"Stella!" Nancy's voice was filled with amazement. "You had ceased to love him before this happened?"

"Yes, I asked him for my freedom!" Stella's loyalty to the memory of the man whose love she had once so glorified in would not allow her to let even his sister know that she had freed Vernon for his own sake, freed him from a tie which she knew had become undesirable to him on account of her birth.

"And Vernon?" A tone of sisterly loyalty to her brother was evident in Nancy's voice: it betokened a touch of resentment.

"I have not broken his heart, the wounds will mend; we are not really suited to one another; we fell in love with each other's physical attractions, I suppose, and intimacy has proved that in characteristics we are unmateable."

"Did you love any one else, Stella? Was it poor Girgis? I think it is only loving some one else that can show a woman that sort of thing?"

A cry of horror told Nancy how mistaken her idea had been. At the same moment Stella's hands flew up to her face to hide the crimson blush of shame which her question had called up. Did she love some one else? It was weeks now since she had allowed her senses or mind to dwell on the image of Michael Ireton: she had imagined she had driven him out of the citadel of her heart. She had fought the fight over and over again, until the repeated attacks of his strong personality at unguarded moments had almost ceased.

"I'm so sorry, dear; I didn't mean it." Nancy's words were full of humility. "Will you forgive me? It was horrid of me!"

"Poor Girgis! . . ." Stella raised her eyes to Nancy's as she spoke; the horror of his death and of how he had met it swept suddenly over her again with renewed violence.

“He was so young to die, Nancy, and so full of life; and with all his wealth and perfect health, life should have been so sweet—he seemed to have everything a young man could want.”

“Except your love!”

“I know. It is easy to know now, but I never dreamt how much he wanted me really . . . I thought he was only a boy . . . it is so difficult to believe that men can really feel any lasting depth of love for a woman when it begins so suddenly. Girgis would have asked my father for my hand the first night he met me if he had not known that I was engaged to Vernon. I have always heard and read that with all Eastern and Oriental races *real* love comes at first sight: it was certainly so with Girgis.”

“We’re too English to understand that sort of thing, but so much is real and so much is true that we don’t understand.”

“I’m *not* English; I ought to understand, I suppose.”

“You are English: your mother is, and your bringing-up has been English; you’re accustomed to the reserve of English people—Girgis’s flowery expressions didn’t mean anything to you . . . poor Girgis! we only laughed at them . . . I’m sure Vernon never said anything more poetic than ‘I’m beastly fond of you, old girl, and you know it,’ and yet you believed in him implicitly.”

Stella smiled, for the remark was certainly reminiscent of Vernon’s attempt at expressing his feelings for her. With a tender smile still on her lips, she quoted the verse of a song Girgis used to murmur to her in tones of passion. She tried to sing it in the quavering, characteristic native fashion:

“Thou hast made me ill, O my beloved!

And my desire is for nothing but thy medicine.

Perhaps, full moon! thou wilt have mercy upon me,

For verily my heart loveth thee.

O thou in the rose-coloured dress! O thou in the rose-coloured dress,

Beloved of my heart! remain with me.”

“It’s so dreadful to think, Nancy, that I am responsible not only for his death but for the horrible deed he was meditating committing. He promised to work for Egypt to please me: I meant him to work in the way he always

has, educating the farmers, giving money for new schools, and by setting the good example he has always done to other wealthy Egyptian youths of not gambling, and of leading a clean, healthy, open-air, active life. And now he has done this mad act! Allowed himself to trust these horrible Socialists, who are the true enemies of his country—not one of them was fit to shake hands with him! And then to shoot him as though he were a dog! Of course they came to the conclusion that he had betrayed them because he was a Christian—that's typical of all Moslems, their distrust of Christians!"

"But he *couldn't* have thought it would *please* you, Stella—he knows your views?"

"He wished to appear a hero in my eyes, as Vernon did: he knew he must die if he accomplished the deed, for the conspirators who have done these things have always met with death, and, be it to their credit, they have never feared death; but he had not the courage to live if he could not have me for his wife."

"Poor Girgis! How foolish!"

"He asked me if I would love him as a hero if he did some great work for his country."

"And such work! How wrong-headed! He had quite a kink on the subject."

"I said I would, and then he said (I remember his very words now) . . . 'Remember, it will be work done in my own way, but it will be work done for Egypt and for your sake.' And now he's dead, and to-night he will be buried, and to-morrow the world will know him no more! And all this is because I am alive—I, who am utterly worthless! I must go on living and hating myself every hour of the day." Stella flung herself down on the low couch by the window and wept. . . . "Of what earthly use am I? Why take this good life and save a drone—a woman like myself?"

Nancy stood by her, not knowing what to say.

Stella turned round and faced her suddenly. "Isn't it horrible to be me, Nancy? If I could have loved Girgis, this thing need never have been—if I'd never been brought up to believe I was like Western women!"

"It would have made no difference, Stella: if you had married him, Girgis would have gone his own way, in

spite of his adoration for you ; I feel it, and I know it. In politics you could never have influenced him, he'd have come to this sooner or later : he was a born revolutionist."

The truth of her remark made Stella's face less tragic.

"R.G. was the incarnation of an ancient Egyptian : he could only rule by drastic measures, even though his rule was just and honourable. He had ceased to hope for any further good coming out of British rule in Egypt, so he wanted to cut off the heads and hands of the rulers and hang them on the prow of his boat—wrecking the train was the modern equivalent for that sort of thing. You must remember that death meant absolutely nothing in his eyes ; life was sweet when its desires were procurable, but death did not matter—it was one of the things that happen : a man's fate is about his neck !"

"He was my full cousin," Stella said woefully, "and yet I know that all these things you say are true, though it seems incredible that any one so closely allied to me could see things in that light. . . ."

"But will he be buried to-night, Stella ? How awful ! How sudden !"

"Probably, after sun-down : in this weather there is no time between death and burial. That is why we come to look upon death more lightly, the whole thing is over so quickly."

Nancy shuddered. "It's awful, isn't it ? There's something so pitiless about Egypt. It gets down so remorselessly to the bed-rock of cruelty and of passions. In England we have forgotten elemental things."

"You must leave it, Nancy, and forget its mixture of races, its mixture of creeds, its mixture of hates and morals. You don't understand the hundredth part of its race-hatreds : how all the different sects of Christians loathe and detest each other, how all races loathe and despise the Jews, how the Jews in their turn loathe and detest the Moslems, how the English Christians despise and scorn the Eastern Christians, and how the Copts detest the Greeks."

Stella had not finished her list of hates before a knock came to her door and a servant entered and said, with a profound salaam, "The lady of the house has returned ; she desires her daughter's presence in her room."

## CHAPTER XXIX

Two months later Miss MacNaughtan was once again waiting in her green and black drawing-room for the arrival of her favourite pupil, Stella Adair. She was seated in the same deep-bedded sofa as she had been when she had waited for her two years ago, she was again listening for the sudden stopping of a taxi-cab at her door. The sound she was expecting caught her ears, then the opening of the front door, then the tread of feet on the polished staircase and the murmur of voices. It was Stella speaking to the old man-servant. Then the door was opened and her darling flew across the room to her: the next moment the two women were locked in each other's arms; not a word had been spoken; not an exclamation made.

When the long embrace was over the elder woman drew the girl to the sofa; they sank into it together, still in silence. After she had sat motionless for a few moments, Stella let her eyes wander slowly round the room: her ardent gaze took in every familiar object and marked jealously each new feature of decoration, each new ornament. Impetuously she rose to her feet and stood for a moment in front of a large photograph of Watts's "Love and Death."

As a school-girl she had adored this exquisite picture. Miss MacNaughtan watched her with sympathetic eyes: she knew that her pupil had come into a woman's inheritance of suffering, and that suffering must be borne alone. She saw that the school-girl she had nurtured so carefully existed no longer; she was glad that this creature of noble womanhood was there in her stead. Like a bird whose feathers have been bruised and bent with the buffeting of many winds, Stella flew back to her seat on the sofa. As she sank into it she buried her face in her hands.

With a deep breath, which was a relieving sigh, the words

escaped her lips : " Thank God ! " She looked up as she spoke, and dropped her hands in her lap.

" For what, my darling ? "

" For you. . . . Thank God He has left *you* at least unchanged."

" My poor child ! Young people come and go here, but things never really change. With you—things had to change, you were only in the making, you *had* to leave girlhood behind and take your place in the kingdom of womanhood."

" A kingdom of suffering ? "

" Not altogether ; in womanhood the sweetness is so much sweeter if the pain goes deeper."

The girl suddenly changed her tone. " Naughtie, I remember now all that you meant and *knew* when you came back from Egypt and wouldn't explain. Do you remember how I asked you what you were keeping back ? "

" I didn't know nearly *all*, but I was afraid ! "

" Wouldn't it have been better to have told me, to have warned me ? "

" It was hard to know. I thought not, dear. . . . What good could it have done ? "

Stella paused, and then said reflectively, " I wonder ? " Her wonder was whether, if Vernon had known, he would have gone to Cairo, or would have changed into some other regiment and made her marry him without waiting ? She knew that she would have done what he asked then, but even now, as she thought of it, the sigh she had given was one of relief—relief that things were even *as* they were rather than as they *might* have been ! Suddenly she said, " You know that Nancy is in love with Nicolas ? "

" Is he in love with her ? "

" Oh, he adores her ! . . . We all adore her ; she's such a brick ! Dear, loyal little Nancy, *she* has never failed us."

" When are they to be married ? "

Stella shook her head. " Nicolas won't give in."

" What about ? "

" Haven't you heard that the other three conspirators have got five years' penal servitude ? "

The swift flight of the girl's mind told Miss MacNaughtan why she had said, " Nicolas won't give in."

" Yes, I saw it in the papers a few days ago."

“Girgis, my cousin, might have been one of them.” Stella’s face quivered convulsively.

“But Girgis is not Nicolas. . . . I think he is hypersensitive. . . . You know, dear, I would not pretend to approve of Nancy or of you marrying a man like your cousin Girgis; he was brought up in Oriental customs, he was elemental in his passions, he was essentially Eastern: but your brother is to all intents and purposes a European, a highly-cultured man and a perfect gentleman; besides, Syrians are not a dark race. It is not as though coloured blood was to be feared. . . .” she paused. “Poor little Nancy! So she, too, is passing through the fire?”

“Yes, the whole of a woman’s life is pay, pay, pay,” Stella said, “and the ones who feel the most pay the most heavily. It’s pathetic. . . .!” she paused, “and yet the work I’m going to do will only add to the suffering of womankind!”

Miss MacNaughtan looked at her anxiously. “What work is that, dear?”

“I am going to teach the women of Egypt to be clean and to suffer!”

“My dear!” Miss MacNaughtan smiled.

“I am. . . . It’s quite true!”

“But how—in what way?”

“I’ve at last gained father’s consent. I’m going back to Egypt to lecture in the schools for women. I’m going to lecture on all sorts of *domestic* things. . . .” She turned sadly smiling eyes to her companion. “I’m going to teach the humbler classes the virtue of cleanliness, not only of the body but of the *mind*, I hope, and I’m going to teach them how to work and be good housewives, instead of the idle, filthy creatures they are, living solely by animal instincts. . . . I’m going to show the upper classes the wisdom of educating their girls so as to be companions and not slaves to their husbands. . . .” She paused and sighed. . . . “Oh! and generally, Naughtie, inoculate them with the sufferings of a higher civilization. . . .” She paused. . . . “I wonder if it’s a case of the fox that had its tail cut off? It seems woefully like it, doesn’t it?”

“You wouldn’t be different from what you are, would you? You wouldn’t change with one of them?”

“I’m going to do it, Naughtie; the idea has been

growing and growing. . . . My engagement to Vernon stopped it. . . . But now—now that I am free, it seems as though it had all been arranged so that I should do it. Nancy wants to help me ! ”

“ But her people ? ”

“ She inherits her mother’s money at twenty-three ! She’s quite free ; but I don’t want her to. . . . Dissuade her if you can, only I’m afraid that if Nicolas doesn’t marry her, she’ll do something of that sort. . . . Egypt has unsettled her ; she’s lost all taste for conventional English life. . . . ” She paused. “ It was modern Egypt that fascinated her—she took very little interest in the ancient things. She’s like Vernon in that, only he hated *everything* Egyptian. ”

“ But you, dearest—what sort of a life is it for you ? ” Miss MacNaughtan looked troubled.

“ It’s the only one I can see before me . . . and I always see it. I have seen it ever since I began to understand things that are below the surface in Egypt. . . . I want to work for the poor who are totally unenlightened, but it’s very difficult—they are so afraid of Christians trying to proselytize. There was a dreadful letter in one of the native papers the other day, hurling the most foul abuse, and insinuating, and attributing the lowest motives to a dear woman who was lecturing to a crowd of women, trying to teach them some of the first principles of hygiene, the keeping of their babies clean, the folly of charms for curing sore eyes, and all that sort of thing. ”

“ Reformers must suffer persecution ; it’s splendid work. ” While they were discussing the subject, Clarkson brought in the tea and arranged it in front of his mistress.

Stella’s eyes took in at a glance the fact that her favourite sandwiches and cakes had not been forgotten. She laughed as she inspected the dishes. “ Dear Naughtie, I do believe I’m growing younger. The sight of these stuffed olives makes me feel that life still has its moments ! ”

“ I’m so glad, dear, but I want it to have its years. I’ve looked forward to this day for ages and ages, it seems to me ; letters are so unsatisfying, even though you told me all the essentials. ”

“ And now things are so different, and yet the same. . . . When I look at you, Naughtie, I see light ahead ! I

feel more confident of myself. I used to long to live a life like yours, and then love came . . . !” she paused . . . “or I thought it did, and it drove out all my fine ideals; but they’ve come back—they weren’t dead, they were only drugged for a time. . . .” She shook herself as though to throw off even the memory of her servitude. “I’m so glad I’m free from the chains of love. I’m glad I own myself again.”

“Poor dear !”

“I’m not speaking bitterly. My heart isn’t broken . . . not even chipped. . . . It’s all the other things in me that were hurt . . . and oh, so bruised ! . . . pride, belief, loyalty, justice—everything, in fact, except my heart; *it* was only . . .”

“But you loved him ?”

“His good looks and love-making carried me off my feet, that must have been all. I suppose every woman finds a great charm in being loved; perhaps she has to be loved many times before she herself knows what real love means.”

“Then things, after all, are for the best.”

“I suppose so. . . . But was it necessary to undergo all this . . . to find it out? And now Nancy has to carry about a hungry heart !”

“A little waiting won’t do her any harm: it either strengthens affection or kills it.”

“I don’t think Nicolas will ever consent.” Stella laughed at the memory of something that had suddenly flashed across her thoughts. “Do you know, Nancy actually proposed to him—at least she swears she did. I was too sad, at the time she told me, to laugh, but I’ve often done so since !”

“My dear, how like Nancy !”

“It was on the day Girgis died, when everything was terrible. I had just broken off my engagement with Vernon. She was so sweet, Naughtie, I wonder that Nicolas could have been strong enough to resist her. Father worships her, and she plays with him like a kitten . . . and yet she’s such a true woman. After Girgis’s funeral, when father was ill, she nursed him—in that awful heat, too. She sat up watching him, with mother and me, night after night. She was wonderful. Nicolas

and she used to meet during all that time just as friends; she behaved like a brick to him. . . . We were coming home then, you know."

"Yes, I expected you weeks ago."

"Father took ill quite suddenly."

"How is he now?"

Stella sighed. "He's an old man, though he's not sixty yet—an old, old man. Girgis killed his last spark of youth. It was terrible—you can't think how terrible."

"My poor darling, I'm sure it was."

"In the East most men are old at sixty, and yet once they get past that age many of them live on and on until they are any age. You don't know how old a thing can look, until you have lived in the East. The men who live frugal lives, and can't afford the luxuries which usually kill them, live to be as old as Methuselah."

"One of the blessings of poverty!"

"Exactly! Bread and coffee and smoke is all they can afford. The well-off classes get so gross and fat, they never live to see old age. Poor father—he has not grown fat, and although he could have indulged himself in every kind of luxury, he's lived such a temperate life. . . ." She paused. "Father's religion has always meant a great deal to him; he's lived up to it; his has been a beautiful life."

"He's been a true friend to England."

"That's where he is so big," Stella said eagerly. "You can't make him bitter towards the English, in spite of the treatment we have received at their hands. . . . He says these are petty things, that no race is without its faults, and that their shortcomings must be overlooked because of the wonderful work they have done for the country. *He* sees the difference! . . . Poor Girgis was too young! He came into a generation grown used to the benefits conferred on his country by the British, a generation eager to find fault and revolt against the smallest grievances. You don't find many of the old men in Egypt amongst the Socialist party!"

At that moment the telephone-bell sounded, and Miss MacNaughtan rose to answer it. In a few moments she called out, "Stella, can you come with me to-night to a lecture at the Royal Geographical Society? I have had

two tickets offered to me. Penrose, the explorer, is going to lecture on his journey across Central America and down the Amazon."

Stella nodded. "I'd love to, but if I do I must go home at once." She rose from her seat. "Where shall we meet?"

Miss MacNaughtan hung up the receiver. "Come for me here, dear; it's not much out of your way, and we can drive together in a taxi."

The girl looked at the clock. "It's half-past five now. I must be back again at what time?"

"Seven-thirty, if we want good seats. It's sure to be crowded."

They walked together to the top of the stairs.

Stella looked up with happy eyes as she ran down them. "It's like old times, Naughtie, going to lectures together!"

Her old mistress smiled a loving answer. "Good-bye, dear. Do you want a taxi?"

Clarkson was ready to open the door and blow his whistle. While Stella waited for the taxi he said: "H'it's been a rare treat to see you h'again, miss. There's never been h'any one like you in this 'ouse, h'ever since you went away."

"Oh, Clarkie, I'm so glad! I'm so awfully glad nothing ever changes here . . ." she sighed. "I'm *all* changed, only you can't see it; only the shell of me is the same."

"H'i'm too h'old to change, missie; there's only one kind h'of change left for me, now, but h'it seems as h'if H'i wasn't going to meet it quite so soon, 'aving seen you."

As Stella drove up the long, familiar road in the swiftly-moving taxi she felt happier and more at rest than she had done for many months. Life was readjusting itself, and it was not going to be without its interests, its ideals, and even its beauty!

Everything around her at the moment was so typical of London: the grey, soft atmosphere with its veiled effects, the continuous kaleidoscope of the motor-traffic, which had grown to an appalling immensity since her departure, the smartness of the men emerging from their clubs and barracks, the luxury of the women seated in magnificent

motors, and the beauty of the little children who had not yet lost their angel-faces. It was all so essentially London in sound and colour that she felt as though this was the only life she had ever known, that this was the world she belonged to. Cairo, with its mixture of slow-moving camels, its white donkeys and dark-eyed boys, its closed carriages with veiled women, its French cafés, its Levantine idlers, its self-satisfied English soldiers, was a thing so far away from her now that it was scarcely real.

Suddenly her heart gave a bound and the vivid blush of youth dyed her pale skin, for while passing at lightning speed some West End club, whose name she did not know, she saw the figure of Michael Ireton coming down its front steps. The next second he was lost in the great ocean of London humanity, lost as hopelessly as though she had only seen him in a dream.

But that one flash of his living presence not a hundred yards away from her instantly brought back to her her life in Cairo. It was now the real thing; London was the unreal! For the rest of her ride she noted nothing of the almost supernatural movement of the traffic, with its continuous roar, which only a few moments before had so fascinated her, or of the familiar points in the landscape of streets and squares which had brought back vivid memories of her school-girl life. She was in Cairo, visualizing with beating pulses and a breathless state of being—a being which bore no resemblance to that of the quiet woman of a few moments ago, the woman who had hugged to herself the belief that she had passed into the calmer waters of life, the woman who imagined that she was freed from the chains of love—her last meeting with Michael Ireton. The taxi stopped at her door, while in her mental condition she was still standing in the corridor of the Arab theatre, with Michael Ireton's big figure towering over her. His last words were in her ears, and her pleading cry of "Oh, don't go, please don't go!" filling her world of sound.

She paid the man mechanically, almost allowing him to take what coins he chose from her hand; then she paused for a moment before opening the door. She must control her nerves. A sense of hopelessness filled her

at the thought that one passing glance of this man, whom she had never acknowledged to herself that she loved, should have so upset her. Her belief in herself was suddenly blown to the winds. With a strengthening of her will-power which was helped by anger, she put her key into the lock and let herself into the hall.

Not five minutes later she was speaking in quite natural tones to her mother, and telling her of her promise to go to the Geographical Society's lecture with Miss MacNaughtan.

## CHAPTER XXX

THE auditorium of the Royal Geographical Society was almost full when Miss MacNaughtan and Stella entered it. With some little difficulty they found two seats in one of the upper rows of the closely-packed building. They had scarcely settled themselves before the lecturer stepped forward and took his place at a desk on a slightly-raised dais in front of the screen on which the illustrations of his subject were to be projected by magic-lantern slides.

The subject of the lecture was extremely interesting, and the illustrations were delightful, but, like many other explorers, the speaker had not the feeblest idea of how to make his subject humanly interesting. He gave the merest bare-bones of accurate information on incidents which might have been illustrated with vivid touches and magnetic sympathy.

He had, in common with many travellers, the feverish desire to map out new lands; what was characteristic or beautiful in these untravelled regions had not apparently caught his eye or interested him.

With two years' accumulated incidents and information, all of which must have been of unusual interest, he had contrived, through the trammels of conventional English learning, to remain a totally uninteresting personality.

Stella's thoughts strayed from his dull statistics, which conveyed absolutely nothing to the majority of his listeners, to the events of the afternoon, while her eyes wandered round the gathering of oddly-assorted people. From where she sat it was almost impossible to see the occupants of the lowest row of seats in the auditorium—the bench always reserved for "The Fellows of the Society" and their specially invited guests.

Miss MacNaughtan was congratulating herself upon the fact that scarcely any one of her elder pupils would have

made such a poor attempt at interesting their audience, if she had been given the skeleton of the explorer's speech to elaborate into a lecture. Few women could have spoken in a manner so totally devoid of magnetism.

When at last the lecture was over, the majority of the audience left the building and went home or hurried on to finish their evening at some other place of entertainment: it was the minority who found their way to the reception-rooms at the back of the auditorium, where interesting relics of the Society are shown, and the members meet to discuss the lecture and talk to their friends. The great man did not succeed in leaving the auditorium before he was surrounded by admiring friends who had been seated near enough to him during the lecture to capture him the moment his speech was over.

Presently there was a little excitement in the reception-room, for he had at last got away, and was entering it. He was followed by the well-known guests and Fellows who had been seated in the places of honour.

Stella was not talking to any one when they entered—indeed, she scarcely knew any one to talk to—but was examining the contents of a glass case at the far end of the room, and Miss MacNaughtan was surrounded by a number of friends who were regular attendants at the lectures given by the Society.

Stella had not watched the entry of the distinguished members, she had just lifted her head for one moment to satisfy herself as to the cause of the flutter amongst the audience. Suddenly she became aware of a new force in the room, something which, human or inhuman, had acted upon her senses like a magnet. Without knowing why, her pulses uncomfortably quickened, her sensibilities became painfully acute; with such highly-organized natures as hers, this psychic experience is not uncommon. To shake off the thralldom of the magnetic force she moved to the next glass case to examine its contents, but her interest had waned, she felt incapable of intelligent thought. The approach of something whose near presence seemed in a way connected with her increasing nervousness compelled her to turn her head: she could not have resisted if she had tried. At that moment her whole being was expectant! Her actions passed beyond her self-control, the room

contained nothing but herself and this new devastating force. Yet her mind had not connected any individual human being with that power.

So when Michael Ireton's eyes looked into hers as she turned what he imagined to be eyes of welcome to him, the shock made her for a few moments mentally unconscious and physically powerless.

To Stella hours seemed to pass before she could say the conventional "How do you do?" Indeed she never said it, nor did Michael Ireton think it necessary to speak.

The whole bearing of the man was just the same as it had been on the first night when she had seen him, when his dominating personality had drawn her eyes to him across the crowd of faces at the opera.

At last, struggling and bravely fighting for command of her voice, she said, scarcely above a whisper, "I didn't see you during the lecture: were you there?"

He took her nervously offered hand in an eager grasp, which conveyed to the girl the sense of an enfolding embrace. "Yes, I was there, and I knew you were, though I didn't see you."

She withdrew her hand.

He looked at her questioningly. "Are you . . . ?" He hesitated . . . "Are you alone?"

"No, I am not alone!" Stella knew that he meant to say, "Is your husband here?" for the whole expression of the man told her that he thought she was married. There was an air of accepted severance from any attitude of a possible lover, which is unmistakable in a woman's mind. She turned her head towards the talking people who were striving to get as near to the celebrated explorer as possible. "I am with my old school-mistress, Miss MacNaughtan; she is over there—that lady with the beautiful grey hair and dark eyes"—her voice was gaining strength.

"I see," he said, unthinkingly, for his eyes were looking at Stella's hands. The exquisitely-fitting white suède gloves were inexorable; if she wore a wedding-ring he could not see it. . . . There was a pregnant pause again. The burden of their hearts was too heavy for their lips to speak of small things: to ask each other how they were would have been the bitterest sarcasm when they were

horribly conscious that it was just of how they were that they dared not speak. To have answered the question truly would have been to avow the primitive and elemental forces which made up the sum-total of how they were at the actual moment. To have said how they had been since they had last met would have been humanly impossible. How they had been outwardly, and how they were, they could see with their eyes.

The girl saw that the man had hardened, and yet had not become embittered; each line on his rugged face had deepened, each mark of fortitude grown surer. She saw in him a man too big, in the bigness of things that deal with the ungovernable laws of life, to allow himself to be vanquished by the scathing hand of Fate.

And he saw in the girl, physically fragile as she had become, a new womanhood far dearer and more desirable than that which had gone before. He saw in her, as the wife of another, the only woman for whom his manhood had suffered starvation. These impressions were the immediate action of the senses, too swift for words.

"I have had no news of you since we parted," he said at last. "You must have much to tell me . . . may I hear it . . . ?" he looked at her with gentle eyes . . . "I can bear it, dear friend."

Stella's lips quivered. "You haven't heard, you don't know . . ." she paused . . . "of my cousin's death . . . and what caused it; you have heard nothing since . . . since that night?"

"I have been out of Europe; I wanted to cut myself off from all news until . . ." he looked at her searchingly; he saw that she was trembling and deeply moved: evidently there had been some painful tragedy connected with her cousin's death. Stella made an effort to tell him, but he prevented her. "Not just now," he said gently. "Seeing me has suddenly recalled unhappy memories: don't let it distress you; you must tell me everything some other time. . . ." He paused before asking, "May I come and see you . . . or would you prefer that I did not?"

His eyes assured her that if he came it would be in no manner that need embarrass her or cause her husband the slightest annoyance. He waited a moment for her answer.

“You must think me very silly,” she said, struggling to control the trembling of her lips and to regain her self-possession, “but”—she raised star-like eyes to his—“you are quite right: seeing you again so unexpectedly has brought back everything . . . poor Girgis! . . . so much has happened . . . far more than you think!”

“I understand,” he said soothingly, “you needn’t say any more . . . I won’t ask to come . . . some day perhaps, when things are less vivid, you will tell me all.” He turned to go, but the same cry came to Stella’s lips that had escaped them on that awful night . . . the night when Vernon saved her father’s life.

“Don’t go! Oh, don’t go . . . it isn’t that!” But her cry, which would have been so sweet to his ears, was unheard, for in a clear, loud voice some one spoke to him and laid a white-gloved hand on his arm from behind. The speaker was a beautiful American girl, whose quick glance took in with some curiosity of expression Stella’s unusual quality of good looks and her fine individuality of dress: in the peculiar transparency of complexion and the delicacy of figure there was something curiously star-like and ethereal about Stella when she was in evening dress. As the American drew her eyes from her reluctantly she said: “Oh, Mr. Ireton, at last I’ve run you to earth! I so much want to introduce you to my great friend Jewel Gibson: you’ve heard me speak of her many times.”

Stella quickly turned away and made a good pretence of examining the contents of the glass case by which she had been standing when Michael Ireton came up to her. An unconscious flame of jealousy leapt through her veins; it served to steady her excited nerves. She had noticed the expression of pleasure that instantly lit up Michael Ireton’s heavily moulded features when he discovered who the owner of the hand which was put on his arm to arrest his attention was.

The girl was so eager and radiant in the full bloom of her newly developed womanhood, so wide-browed and clear-eyed, a type of the most enchanting of American daughters, that Stella felt herself to be cruelly seared and battered beside her.

It was the first time that the physical effect of sorrow had laid its cold hand on her heart. It was the first time

that she had found herself distanced from unspotted youth. From where she stood she could watch Michael Ireton talking to her if she turned her back to the glass case, and even while it hurt her to see him with the girl when he might have still been talking to herself it gave her a curious pleasure. A little solace came to her when he more than once turned anxiously round, as though he were looking to see where she had disappeared to.

If only she could have said three more words, to tell him that she was not married, he would have understood the real meaning of her emotion. He would have known that he might come and see her. But these were the very words she knew that she could never say unless he deliberately asked her the question, and there was no mistaking the meaning of his voice when he said, "I understand; you need not explain."

He thought that one of the many things that had happened was her marriage with Vernon, instead of it being one of the many things which had not happened, as she had meant her words to imply. While she watched him talking to the two girls her jealous eye imagined that Michael Ireton was fond of the beautiful girl, that he had in all probability, and very wisely, thrown himself into an intimate friendship with her in his desire to forget and conquer his love for herself. And the girl's manner she imagined was a little proprietary; it suggested something very feminine and confiding.

With a war of conflicting emotions tearing at her nerves, Stella sought Miss MacNaughtan.

"My dear child, you are tired to death. What is the matter?" she laid a caressing hand on the girl's arm.

"Yes, I am *dead* tired," Stella said languidly. "Do you mind if I go home . . . no . . . don't let me take you away, I can perfectly well go alone."

Even as she said the words she wondered why she was asking to go when she knew that her desire to stay in the same building as Michael Ireton for as long as she could was greater than anything in the world—to stay, even though there was not the faintest likelihood of her being able to speak to him again that night—to stay and watch him speaking to the beautiful American girl, whose blue

eyes seemed to smile so trustingly at him, even though watching them tore her heart to pieces.

And yet she went on with her request to go home, for there are so many parts in the entirety of one suffering woman that many actions are done, and unaccountable words are spoken, by one part of her that knows not the other. Actions which change the whole currents of our lives are done by mere fragments of us, actions for which the united parts of us have to suffer.

The nervous, overstrung mental part of Stella hungered at the moment for the peace and security of home; the human and elemental part of her hungered for the near presence of her lover. The instinctive desire to be near and touch the object one admires, let it be animate or inanimate, had been overruled in Stella by her nervous mentality.

Less sensitively strung natures are at such moments capable of acting more wisely; if happiness lies within their grasp they are able to seize it and keep it; they gain their desires and bestow blessings on others by the possession of sensibilities not too delicately attuned.

As Miss MacNaughtan hurried Stella off to the cloak-room to get their evening wraps, she wondered if anything very unusual had occurred, or if Stella's present delicate state of health was accountable for this sudden avalanche of physical tiredness which had made the girl look as though a draught of cold air would blow her out. But there was something about the girl's appearance which did not suggest mere physical exhaustion—she looked much more as though her nerves had received a sudden shock. Miss MacNaughtan knew Stella's nature far too well to question her, so nothing was said by either of them in the cloak-room. As they opened the door, to Stella's unutterable astonishment, they came face to face with Michael Ireton! Then Miss MacNaughtan understood. He had evidently been hurrying so as not to miss them. A flush of the clearest crimson instantly dyed Stella's pale face.

"I couldn't let you go without saying good-bye . . . Mrs. Thorpe," he said. "I lost you in the hall. . . . May I see you into your taxi, or have you a motor?"

Stella looked at him gratefully—how comforting it was to feel that he had not let her drift out of his life without

even trying to find her!—yet all she managed to say was, “A taxi if we can get one. May I introduce you to my friend, Miss MacNaughtan?”

“How do you do?” Michael Ireton said cordially, while a smile of genuine pleasure lit up his eyes. “I have very often heard Mrs. Thorpe speak of you in Egypt. I am very glad to have had the chance of meeting you.”

Miss MacNaughtan looked critically at the man as he spoke. Did he mean anything to Stella? Had a chance meeting with him perhaps been the cause of her sudden physical tiredness? She wished she knew. Stella had certainly blushed and was obviously affected by his appearance at the cloak-room door, but whether the girl liked him or not she was unable to surmise. Stella had fallen behind, driven by the contrary forces at work in her into separating herself from Michael as far as possible, though afterwards she would go over in her mind every step she took which brought her nearer and nearer to the parting of their ways. As she walked behind them his words “Mrs. Thorpe” kept ringing in her ears. If one of the impulses that were at work in her could have spoken it would have cried aloud, “I am Hadassah Lekejian, not Mrs. Thorpe. I am free; don’t leave me.”

A storm of doubt was troubling Miss MacNaughtan. At the moment the girl’s happiness was everything to her: and was this one of the crucial moments of her life? Would it add to Stella’s happiness if she were to tell this man that she was still unmarried? And yet, if Stella had desired him to know it, why had she not told him the fact herself? She had talked to him already that evening. There are no words which can adequately express the curious certainty the older woman felt that this chance encounter with this very unusual-looking man meant a great deal to her pupil. He had only spoken to her about the most ordinary matters for a few moments, yet he had made her feel that to know any one who cared for Stella was a pleasure to him, that whether she was Stella Thorpe or Stella Lekejian his mind and heart were full of her.

They had to separate for a moment while Michael Ireton hastily got his coat and hat; still they were too near to him to allow her to ask Stella any questions. When he

rejoined them and Stella had again given up her place at his side to her chaperon, Miss MacNaughtan suddenly said, as though she was driven into doing so as a last resource of her wits, because they were now at the front door and an empty taxi had drawn up for them to get into:

"My old pupil is still Stella Adair, as we used to call her—you have not apparently heard that she did not marry Vernon Thorpe . . . her cousin's tragic death broke off their engagement."

"Not married?" A flash of almost boyish happiness lit up his strong face and opened Miss MacNaughtan's heart to him for ever: it told her all that she wanted to know about the character and personality of this man who, she now knew, loved, with the simplicity and unchangingness of a big man's nature, her darling pupil.

"They were not suited to one another," she said in a lower tone; "everything is better as it is."

"Thank you for telling me," he said: "I have been away so long."

The porter who had been asking Stella if she wished for the taxi, in an impatient voice, had now opened the door. The girl said mechanically, "Naughtie, this is our taxi. Are you ready?"

"Yes, dear, I'm coming."

Michael Ireton was shaking hands with her; Stella heard him say, "Thank you for telling me." She could see by his face that he knew she was free. The next moment Miss MacNaughtan was seated in the taxi, and Michael Ireton was waiting for her to shake hands with him and take her place in the cab.

As she put her foot—that exquisite foot he knew so well, in its shimmering satin slipper—on the step, she held out her hand.

He took it with a clasp which to the girl was deliciously expressive of possession; he meant her to understand that she was his. "*Ma as salamah*" (good-bye), he said tenderly, "*wa atekum essalam wa-barakat Allah*" (and on you be the peace and the blessing of God).

He used the familiar Arabic words of parting intentionally, for not only were they beautiful, but he wished to show her as plainly as possible that her connection with

the East was a pleasant memory to him . . . that on that account she need have no misgivings.

As Stella answered his compelling gaze with eyes which denied him no expression of her love, she said softly : “ *Tkattan Allah* (thank you), Michael, *ma as salamah* ” (good-bye). . . . The words meant literally, “ May God increase your goodness : good-bye. ”

The next moment Stella’s hand was withdrawn and she was seated by Miss MacNaughtan’s side, the taxi door was slammed, and they had moved quickly off into the night.

As Michael Ireton stood alone on the kerbstone watching their disappearance, he suddenly remembered that he had not got her address, that he had let her go without asking her where she lived. Nor had he heard any direction given to the driver, for in his mind’s eye he could see Miss MacNaughtan raise the speaking-tube to her lips while he was saying good-bye to Stella, and give the driver his instructions. He made ready to jump into the next taxi that pulled up to fill the place of the one that had just vanished, but it was impossible to do so, for an elderly lady had hailed it and quickly took possession of it.

Stella was completely lost to him in the millions of souls which live in London.

Defeated in his attempt to follow her, he continued to walk slowly on, his whole being still on fire with the memory of the ungrudging love Hadassah had offered to him in her eyes. Even though she was lost in London, she was his absolutely, and he knew it. Every sense in him at that moment told him that Stella was even now rejoicing in his love for her ; under such circumstances nothing else seemed to matter, nothing was insurmountable. She was free to give herself to him when he found her, and as he had two legs of his own and a tongue in his head, he would find her. He did not know that he had but one day to do it in, for alas ! Stella was leaving London for Lucerne the day after.

As he walked on, not taking the trouble to ask himself where he was going, he thought of every possible means of discovering her whereabouts. Often as he had heard Stella allude to her old school-days in London, he had no recollection of ever having heard her mention where her school was situated. He wondered if Miss

MacNaughtan was a member of the Royal Geographical Society, or if she was using some friend's tickets for the lecture; he must look up the list of members the next morning.

In going over the events of the evening in his mind, he realized that Hadassah had been trying to tell him that she was not married, that she had not meant to tell him not to come, that seeing him so suddenly had upset her—it had brought back to her all the painful events of their last meeting.

Then doubts attacked him. Even now that she was free, would she have allowed him to come and see her—had she only given him that parting look of love because she knew that he would not find her? With her hypersensitive nature she might think it was her duty, considering her social position in Cairo, to prevent him marrying her.

As he thought of the delicacy of her appearance, a fierce desire to hold her closely to him overwhelmed him. Her exquisite fragility appealed to every chord of strength in his muscular body. The hunger to crush her filled him.

It was a beautiful night, almost Italian in the warmth of the air and the violet tone of the sky. Michael Ireton wandered on, not dreaming of where he was going, but following unconsciously the demand in his present mood for the sympathy of beautiful surroundings, he found himself crossing the bridge which spans the artificial lake in St. James's Park. There he stopped instinctively. The outline of the Government buildings at the Westminster end of the water, so curiously Oriental in effect against the purple of the night sky, seemed to be the very atmosphere for the crisis in his life, into which he had been unconsciously drawn. Though Hadassah was lost to him in the great city whose very pulse-beat he could feel where he stood, as totally lost to him as he had seemed to her only a few hours before, he no longer felt alone in London, as he had done that very morning. He felt that to the great pulse of London there was now added another heart-beat whose gentle movement he could feel and hear above all the roar of the distant traffic. As he gazed at the exquisite reflections on the still water of the lake, and let the continuous whirr of the traffic pour in upon

his senses like the dull roar of an incoming sea, a great peace entered his soul. Somewhere in the vast city, seething with the striving and struggling of six million souls, his darling was living and breathing. It seemed as though, out of all the marvellous ocean of humanity, her exquisite virginity stood out in a halo of light. Her gentle heart-beat reached his ardent senses as clearly as though nothing existed in the city but herself and his listening ears, as though space did not matter when love defies all natural laws.

The indescribable loneliness he had experienced since his arrival in London from distant lands had vanished, he had no desire now to leave the next morning. His one idea was to remain—remain until he had found her.

Only a few hours ago he had felt that his loneliness was greater than he could bear, for there is no place in the wide world where a human soul can feel himself so much alone as in London. The loneliness of London is not like the beautiful solitude of the desert. The loneliness of London is unhuman and cruel. In the desert nothing comes between man and his Creator, there they are in constant communion. In London the Creator is very far to seek.

In London, where six million pulses beat, there is a loneliness awaiting the lonely which is very far from God.

By the obliteration of the world around him, and by the intense concentration of his thoughts, it seemed to Michael Ireton that he was able to enter into communion with Stella's soul. The lately-discovered news that he could now indulge himself in the joy of thinking about her seemed to enable him to draw her spiritually into his enfolding arms. He even wondered if she could feel the sense of his embrace: had it soothed her as it comforted him? His fighting back of the sudden vivid attacks of her personality, which he had practised for so long when his great need had been to forget her, had now no longer to be practised. It seemed almost impossible that he might now, with no wrong either to her memory or to his own soul, embrace with unlimited joy every suggestion of her sweetness. In a dream he stood on, letting the late hours of the night go by unheeded, in complete abandon-

ment to the joy and hopes which filled the new world that the night had given him.

For many years Michael Ireton had lived a life almost devoid of the society of women, for his profession had taken him into distant parts of the world, where primitive natives were the only women he saw. He had led too exciting and too busy an existence to miss their companionship, and during the months which he had spent at home he had, until only a few years ago, stayed with a very aged grand-uncle who had brought him up in a desolate village in Wales. The old man had died the year before Ireton first saw Stella, but he had lived long enough to see his nephew—for whom he had stinted and saved during his public-school life and all through the years he had spent in training for his life as a mining engineer—a successful and highly-paid member of his profession. In return, Michael had devoted every day of his sojourns in England to his uncle, guarding, and administering to, his smallest wants with the tenderness and unselfishness of a woman. Every luxury the enfeebled old man could enjoy Michael gloried in procuring for him, and he was able to do so, for he had, as Nicolas imagined, speculated successfully in rubber. He never grudged one of the long hours he spent sitting beside the invalid's chair, telling him about the minutest details of his last expedition.

For some years now he had been in a position to refuse all but the most tempting offers made to him in his profession. He handed over the less remunerative ones to young fellows who had served under him, and who were eager for advancement. Since his uncle's death he had seen more of the world of men and women who mix in fashionable London society than he had done during all the other years of his life. At first he had found himself strangely out of his element, for his former theoretical knowledge of women had made him place them on an almost inhuman pedestal of virtue, with the result that he never really got to know them and very seldom found himself completely at ease with them. They had always been conscious of his opinion of them, with the result that they were afraid to be quite natural, in case they should fall from their pedestals. He had thought of them all his

life as delicate, sensitive creatures, infinitely more refined than men. When he found himself knowing them personally, he felt himself rough and unconventional beside them, and was afraid of boring them with serious conversations. At first he had been entirely devoid of all small talk, and had envied the ease of the men who had been accustomed to mixing freely in women's society all their lives.

But since he had met Stella and loved her, as he had done at first sight, with all the devotion and completeness of his simple nature, his attitude towards women had changed. He had sought their society and had got on with them much better. He enjoyed testing Stella, as it were, against the brains and sympathies and characteristics of other delightful women.

He had, in fact, been trying his best to fall in love. He had been endeavouring to displace Stella in his thoughts, to shatter her image from the altar of his heart.

Some of the women he had singled out had charmed him for a little time, and not a few of them had shown him the fact that his attentions were not distasteful to them ; for Michael was the sort of man to whom delicately-attuned women were naturally attracted. His quiet force and noticeably powerful physique appealed to the contrasting qualities in themselves. To the very feminine the very masculine makes devastating appeals.

But, exquisite as they were to his eye, none of them meant anything to the deeper qualities of his nature, the qualities that hungered for the girl's spiritual as well as physical attractiveness. They became in the end merely interesting and likeable in so far as they were, as women, Stella's sisters. He knew that Stella might be like a thousand and one other women in other men's eyes, but she was absolutely unique in his, as no doubt all the beautiful women he met were in some other men's eyes.

Many of them had answered the sum of the requirements in his nature in certain moods ; Stella responded to all, and besides, she had called into being new wants in his nature, wants which produced a hunger he had never known before. Unconsciously Stella had become an actual part of his life, even though he had fought bravely

to drive her out of it. It was always with a sense of relief that he left gay scenes and large gatherings and got back to his mental companionship with her in his own rooms. Now and then, after he had shaken off the effects of some slight attack which had been made upon his feelings by the pleasant adulation of a new acquaintance, his mind would rush back to Stella with renewed force. It was like going home to all that was dearest and best after a period of difficulty and doubt.

To-night he could not return to his room in his club, for to-night had given Stella back to him, and he did not wish to lose one moment's consciousness of the fact. He felt closer to her and more capable of enjoying the delight of dwelling upon new hopes and the limitless possibilities of love, under the star-lit sky, while his eyes unconsciously took in the Oriental outline of the tall buildings, connected in his mind with the beauty of Cairo, than in his conventional London bedroom.

He never doubted the possibility of finding her: it was merely a matter of time and patience. Now that she was free, and her eyes had lavished their burden of love upon him, nothing really mattered, nothing was insurmountable. If he could not find her in London, he would write to her father's address in Cairo, and tell his clerk to forward his letter to his mistress.

His mind was full of thoughts! Then a fresh anger at his own stupidity disturbed him. Why had he allowed her to go without getting her address? If only he had had his wits about him he could have gone to her in the morning and taken her into his arms. To-morrow he might have felt her first kisses on his lips, her slim arms round his neck. He became so impatient at the thought that he had to walk up and down the length of the bridge to calm his restlessness. As he returned to the place he had been leaning over a woman, wrapped in a tattered black shawl, crept up to him and held out her hand. He dismissed her instantly. It was always a difficult matter for him to exercise the genuine self-control he found necessary in withstanding the appeals of beggars in London, where the contrast of wealth and poverty is so appalling. . . . The woman moved away—her obedience was expressive of absolute hopelessness; Michael Ireton suddenly

called her back. Her tragic eyes were like Stella's, he could not let her go! In his hand were a handful of coins, silver and copper: he held them out to her. The woman looked at him quickly to see if he was drunk, then seized the proffered money with a quick, bird-like claw and fled into the night.

## CHAPTER XXXI

THE next morning Michael began his search for Stella. His only hope of finding her, by direct means, lay in the chance that Miss MacNaughtan was a member of the Royal Geographical Society—if she was, he could easily get her address by applying to the secretary of the society for a list of the members. Her name was not in the Directories because she called her school Prince's College.

Soon after ten o'clock he was in the secretary's office, and after a good half-hour's impatient waiting he had the list of the members in front of him. Never, since the days when he had eagerly looked to see if his own name was amongst the successful competitors in his engineering examinations, had he felt so agitated or nervous in reading through a list of names. Twice his heart seemed to stop beating, when he came across the word MacNaughtan, but it was only a momentary thrill, for in both cases the members were males. With a defeated sigh he threw down the list: there was no Miss MacNaughtan amongst the members, she must have had cards of invitation sent to her through some friend. His next plan of action was to spend the entire morning in inspecting the fashionable shops where he thought wealthy girls like Stella would be likely to go.

He first chose Landwools at Knightsbridge, because the shop was associated in his mind with the most beautiful Englishwomen he saw on his return from savage lands. He took it for granted that almost every woman spent her mornings in London shopping. With the ingenuity born of love, he managed to find some excuse for walking through a greater part of the buildings. Downstairs, charming girls and sumptuously-dressed women were selecting gloves and stockings and laces, and feminine fripperies of all sorts, the cost of which would have

appalled Michael Ireton's simple bachelor soul. Upstairs the same class of luxurious shoppers were sitting on comfortable lounges watching young girls parade up and down the show-rooms in model gowns.

Michael Ireton was too embarrassed to do more than glance at these lovely creatures, whose faces appeared to him too delicate and too unreal to be human. His feelings were shocked at this parade of soulless beauty. It seemed to him indelicate and immoral. Under the pretext that he was looking for a lady who had appointed to meet him, he strode through the various rooms, satisfying himself that Stella was not one of the seated customers who were critically surveying the garments worn by the mincing mannequins.

He was glad of it, for his tenderness for women revolted against the spectacle. Only at Tattersall's had he seen men inspecting horses trotted out for sale as he now saw these women criticizing the girls whose lives are devoted to the cult of their bodies for the displaying of gowns to be worn by the wealthy parasites. Disappointed but not defeated, he went to Harrods. By purchasing some small articles here and there he was at liberty to walk about the various departments of the popular stores which his male mind selected as being most seductive to the female. If any one had asked him why he was looking for Stella in these various haunts of feminine vanity, he could not have answered, but it seemed to him that he had as good a chance of seeing her there as of not seeing her. She must have things to buy, as she did not live in London. But she was not at Harrods, so he betook himself to the Army and Navy Stores in Victoria Street, where his perseverance was instantly rewarded, for who should he meet coming down the steps of the building into the street but Miss MacNaughtan!

Michael Ireton lifted his hat and stopped abruptly in front of her, but she slipped past him and hurried on. A taxi-cab was waiting for her at the foot of the steps.

"Good morning," she said as she passed him; "so sorry I have no time to speak just now—I must get to Victoria Station by twelve o'clock."

As she stepped into her taxi Michael Ireton, who had followed her, said, "Tell me your address: I must see you."

“233, Prince’s Gate, Kensington.” But as she said the words a private motor-car, with a whistle like that of a train, passed. As its whistle rent the air her address was swallowed up in its arrogant roar.

Michael cursed the thing with a gorgeous energy. A taxicab, passing at the same moment, stopped—he had hailed it—and as he jumped in he said to the driver, “Do you see that taxi passing that lorry covered with green tarpaulin? If you can overtake it before we get to Victoria Station, or don’t lose sight of it when it arrives there, I’ll give you a sovereign.”

The next moment they were off, and the race began. Michael Ireton strained his eyes to keep the taxi ahead of them well in sight: it had only had the start of him by about a minute, but one minute goes a long way in a London street if there is nothing to block the traffic, and at the moment the street was singularly clear. But his taxi was gaining ground, they would soon be abreast of Miss MacNaughtan! The next moment something in the inner mechanism of the machine jammed and they came to a dead halt, the driver jumped off his seat and opened the door. “Here you are, sir, get into this one”—another taxi was within a yard of him—“and give my pal the quid: he’ll do it for you.”

“Don’t lose sight of that ’ere taxi—it’s going to Victoria Station; this gent wants to catch it up—he’s good for a quid.”

They were off again, but by this time Miss MacNaughtan’s taxi was lost in the crowd of other cabs and motors which were pressing their way into the station yard: at least it was lost to Michael, who felt convinced that the driver too had failed to keep his eye on it. But he was wrong. To arrive at the station entrance by keeping in the order of the long line of vehicles would have meant missing Miss MacNaughtan when she got out of one of the front taxis, so Michael jumped out of his when it was about the eighth in order from the one which was being unloaded of its luggage by the porters.

He watched the occupants of the five taxis, which, with three private cars, made up the line of eight which was in front of him. Miss MacNaughtan was not in any of them. He returned to his driver, who had agreed to wait until

he had found his friend: "We've lost it; I can't find my friend."

"No, we 'av'n't, sir. I thought I was right: a lady got out of the taxi we was following so quick that I wasn't sure if I was mistaken. She didn't stop to pay the man, but ran as quick as a girl—but she wasn't a girl, sir. Was that who you'd be looking for? Had she on a grey coat, sir?"

Michael Ireton put his hand in his pocket and drew out half a crown: "Take that," he said, "and wait a few moments: I hope I'll have to give you the sovereign."

If Miss MacNaughtan was leaving London by a train that started at twelve o'clock, he had lost her; if she was only going to see some friend off by a train leaving at that hour, there was hope that he might meet her. He would wait to see if she came out, trusting to luck that she would leave the station by the same exit as she entered, which was likely, as she had not paid for her cab.

Wondering what he had better do if he did not meet her, he walked meditatively into the busy station. It was seven minutes past twelve. He stopped under the big clock. As his eyes dropped from looking at its face they suddenly met the laughing and kindly eyes of Miss MacNaughtan staring at him.

He rushed eagerly forward and said, "Ah! I've found you."

"So it seems," she said, still beaming with humour.

"And now that I've found you I'm not going to let you out of my sight until you have told me where you live."

Her kindly smile turned into a good-natured laugh: the man was so ardent that he might have been her lover. "My address!" she said, "why, I called it out to you from the taxi."

"I couldn't hear it. I've been searching for you all the morning—don't laugh, indeed I have; it is the greatest stroke of luck that I have found you now."

"Looking for me?"

"Yes, for you, because *you* can tell me where Miss Lekejian lives: I let you go away last night without getting your address or hers."

"Does Stella wish you to know it?"

“I think so. I made a mistake last night—I thought she was married. When you told me she wasn't . . . I, well, I lost my head, I forgot everything else.”

They had reached the station exit, so Miss MacNaughtan said quickly, “If you have had time to look for me all over London, you must have time to drive with me while we talk . . .” she smiled good-naturedly . . . “we can't speak here, can we?”

At that moment the taxi-driver who had been waiting for Michael Ireton's return came up. “Begging your pardon, sir, is that the lady you wanted?”

Michael Ireton put his hand in his pocket and took out his sovereign purse. Miss MacNaughtan watched him with a fine light of appreciation twinkling in her eyes. When he had taken a pound out of its neatly fitting abode he said: “You're welcome to it: it's the best-spent sovereign I've ever parted with in London.”

“Thank you, sir,” the man said; “good luck to you.” He was wondering in his heart as he spoke why the fine-looking gentleman's queer eyes glowed with happiness because he had met the grey-haired lady who was certainly old enough to be his aunt.

When they were comfortably settled in the taxi, Miss MacNaughtan said, with the air of frankness which was her most characteristic quality and charm, “I'm afraid you'll be terribly disappointed when I tell you that I was *one* minute too late to say good-bye to Stella . . . she has gone to Switzerland.”

“Gone to Switzerland? What ghastly luck! Do you know her address?” His eyes pleaded.

“Yes, but are you certain she would like you to have it? Have I any right to give it? You spoke to her last night—why didn't you ask her for it?”

“I did”

“And she refused . . . then I can't.”

“No, I know now that she didn't refuse, I thought she did . . . she was upset by seeing me.”

Miss MacNaughtan put her hand lightly on his arm. “I think we must be frank with one another. . . . I love Stella—I brought her up; she is almost my own child.”

“And I love her too; I loved her from the first moment

I saw her . . . how can I make you believe that she is the only woman I have ever loved ? ”

Miss MacNaughtan smiled at his direct avowal ; she liked the man for his simplicity of speech and determination. “ I thought as much,” she said : her eyes were smiling contentedly ; this big man pleased her ; she could have wished she was a girl again, with Stella’s appealing charm, for there is no age-limit to a human being’s desire for devotion. “ You behave like a man in love,” she said, “ but I like you none the less for it.” Her eyes laughed indulgently as she spoke. At the same moment the taxi pulled up at her own door, and Michael Ireton’s heart went into his boots. Was she going to send him off without the coveted address ? She was kind, but she was tactfully evasive.

It was one of Miss MacNaughtan’s extravagances to hire taxis from the garage nearest to her house and keep them waiting for her for hours. When her huge account came in at the end of the year she smiled and congratulated herself on the fact that it was not as big as the cost of the upkeep of a motor would be, and there are times when your motor is under repair !

“ Won’t you come in ? ” she said, “ I’m inquisitive. I want to know more of the man who is going to follow my child to Switzerland . . . ” she paused, “ shall I say it ? . . . of the man who had the power to upset her so last night.”

“ May I come in ? . . . Oh, thank you . . . I should like to see the home Hadassah loved so much.”

“ You call her Hadassah ? ”

“ Yes, I prefer the old Eastern form of the name ‘ Esther.’ ”

They were in the hall by this time, and Miss MacNaughtan turned to him with one of her impetuous movements. “ I think I know *why* you prefer to call her Hadassah. . . . I’m glad of it . . . ”

He did not speak ; he was following her upstairs.

“ Clarkson ! ” Miss MacNaughtan called out.

“ Yes, mum.”

“ I want lunch for two in the library. Tell Miss Bateson not to wait for me—let them begin their lunch at once.” She turned to Michael : “ You can stay and have a scrap

of lunch with me in my study. I have a lecture at 2.40, until then we can talk. Are you free?"

Michael Ireton was looking round the room; he was feeling Stella's near presence, he was thinking of the years she had passed in an atmosphere like this, of beauty and refinement. He had never been in her Arab home in Cairo, so he did not know that the girl's whole life had been spent in the midst of beauty. "What charming surroundings for a girl like Hadassah to be brought up in!" he said; "what an ideal school!"—he smiled—"but *is* it a school really?"

"Yes, truly. It is one of my hobbies to instil the love of beauty into girls when they are young. I have an idea that if they really worship beauty they will be disgusted by all that is *unlovely*." Her eyes expressed the fuller meaning of her words.

"I quite agree with you: Hadassah is an excellent illustration of your theory."

"Luncheon is served, mum." It was Clarkson's voice that interrupted them.

When they were eating their admirably cooked soles Michael Ireton said: "It is very kind of you to let me do this."

"Do what? Eat your lunch with me?"

"Yes; I am practically a stranger to you!"

"That's the very reason why I asked you," she said; "I want to know you."

"I see," he said: "all the same it's very kind of you; you might have turned me off—it gives me hope."

"Like a severe school-mistress."

He smiled, the smile which made the woman like him still more.

"I will tell you Stella's address," she said, "if you will explain why you thought she refused it to you last night."

"When I met her last night I thought she was married. . . . I mistook her emotion when I asked her if I might come and see her for refusal. . . . I don't know why she was so upset by seeing me: she said a great many dreadful things had happened since we had met last. Can you tell me?"

"You don't know, perhaps, about her cousin Girgis Boutros's tragic death?—it has changed her whole life."

"Is he dead? . . . that magnificent fellow . . . what

happened? . . . was there some tragedy? . . . he was very unlike the usual native."

While Miss MacNaughtan told him the story of Girgis's death, Michael Ireton remained perfectly silent. When she had finished he said: "You don't think Hadassah ever loved him?" His voice broke slightly as he spoke; the woman's heart was touched for the man's fear.

"No, oh no! He *was* her cousin, but . . . well, how can I explain everything?"

"I know," he said; "I thought not, I hoped not."

There was silence for a moment.

"Had his death anything to do with her engagement with Vernon Thorpe being broken off?"

"Yes, it was the loophole for her escape! She never loved him, but how can I better express it than by saying she had fallen *out* of love with him long before Girgis's death? It was only a girl's infatuation at the best of times. Every woman loves being adored, and in England, at any rate, Vernon adored her. . . . The dullest sort of Englishmen have quite a gift for love-making—that is to say, love-making when things are on the footing of intimate courtship . . . they are tongue-tied at all other times, but excellent at simple 'lip service': and he is very good-looking." They both laughed.

"Your cult of the beautiful bearing fruit—his beauty made her love him."

"Yes, but his mind . . . is it beautiful?"

"I don't know, I know nothing about him . . . but what earthly chance have I compared to him? . . . and yet . . ." he looked across the table eagerly at his companion, "I will be truthful. Before I knew she was engaged I thought I *had* a chance; after she told me, of course I realized that ours was merely an intellectual affinity. . . ." He thought for a moment. "Later on in Cairo, the last time I saw her, I fancied she cared, but it could only have been that she was troubled, that she leaned on me as a friend. . . . You who know her so well, will you be brutally frank and tell me if I've any chance. . . . God knows that I adore her truly; you needn't be afraid to tell me the truth . . . I left her when I thought it was for her happiness, I can leave her again. . . . I hope I love her well enough to think of her happiness first."

"I think you have a *chance*," she said, "because you are persistent and insistent, and because you evidently are more than *negative* to her: your sudden appearance upset her to a very great extent last night. The negative state is the one that is hopeless for a lover."

"It may have been that I reminded her of our last meeting, at which the accident happened to Mr. Thorpe when he saved her father's life." As he spoke he remembered Stella's cry of "Stay, don't go! I want you."

"Don't be down-hearted," Miss MacNaughtan said lightly: "I will be perfectly frank with you. Yesterday afternoon I did *not* think Stella was in love with any one, in fact she was very much out of love with every one; she was delighted that she had escaped from the trammels of love; she was congratulating herself on the fact that she could now carry out her scheme of work in Egypt . . . has she ever mentioned it to you? But she is looking very ill . . . I feel quite anxious about her . . . she has gone through so much."

Michael Ireton's mind was concentrated on the scheme of work Stella had once laid before him. "She has spoken of her desire to work amongst the women."

"Then you are more than a mere ordinary friend: there are things we only tell to people we care for, even if these things are no secrets."

"I want to help her in that work and I want *her* to know that . . . will you tell her?"

"You would live with her *in Cairo*?"

"Certainly—why not? . . . if she knows me at all she knows I would," his face rolled into smiles . . . "where wouldn't I live with her, I should like to know? It would be a strange place."

Miss MacNaughtan laughed. "You are very thorough-going about it," she said; "it is rather refreshing in these unromantic days."

"I fell in love with her at first sight; I would have married her the next day if I could. You may think me mad or anything else you like, but I'm not. I am simply determined to win . . . I have seldom been defeated."

"Love is madness," Miss MacNaughtan said, "a beautiful madness, but still a pronounced form of mania; it has a power of obsession that very little else has." She looked

at her wrist-watch. "But I must go soon—I have a history lecture at 2.40. . . . I wonder if I shall manage to collect my scattered senses." She rose to go.

"One minute," he said, "you didn't finish what you were saying: I interrupted you."

"Saying? What about?"

"You said that in the afternoon you were convinced that Hadassah was heart-whole . . . did you not think so . . . later on . . . not after we met in the evening?"

"After she met you, do you mean?"

"Yes, I mean that . . . you began your sentence as if you were going to say something about a change in your opinions."

Miss MacNaughtan looked at him with serious eyes. "Would it be fair to Stella to say what I thought?" she said. . . . "Go and try your luck . . . they are going to Lucerne if they find it suits her father . . . you know that he is very ill. They are going to stay at the Schweitzerhof Hotel for a month."

The moment he heard the address Michael Ireton had the air of a man ready for instant flight.

Miss MacNaughtan held out her hand. "Now be off with you: I know you mean to catch the night boat from Dover, and I have to interest my girls in the Seventh Crusade."

"Good-bye," he said; "wish me good luck in my first crusade of Love."

"You have my best wishes," she said, "but go gently, for at the present moment your Hadassah is sick of love."

## CHAPTER XXXII

IN the evening of the day following Michael Ireton walked into the Schweitzerhof Hotel at Lucerne. He had travelled without stopping since three o'clock the day before, but he was as spotlessly clean and carefully dressed as though he had been leading an idle and luxurious life in the fashionable Swiss resort for weeks. He had driven from the station to a smaller hotel, where he had engaged a room for one day; there he had deposited his luggage and changed his travel-stained clothes and had had a bath. He was boyishly fastidious about his appearance before presenting himself to the Lekejians.

In the hall of the hotel he asked to see the visitors' book; he examined the list of people staying in the hotel very carefully. The Lekejians' name was not amongst them. His mood of confidence changed to one of doubt.

He went to the large letter-rack which hung on the wall and scanned the addresses of the letters awaiting the arrival of coming travellers; there was nothing in the rack addressed to any one of the Lekejian family. With a feeling of approaching defeat, he went to the booking-office and asked if a family called Lekejian, the friends with whom he had come to stay, were in the hotel.

The clerk looked up. "What name, sir? Did you say Lekejian? No, sir; they were expected this morning, but we had a telegram last night cancelling their rooms . . . they have not left England on account of illness—Mr. Lekejian is very ill. He has stayed here many times, sir; we are extremely sorry."

"Thank you," Michael Ireton said. "Do you know where they are staying in England?"

The man referred to the telegram. "No, sir, there is no address, but they had not left Dover when this was sent off." He handed Michael the telegram.

“ Thank you.”

“ Do you wish a room, sir ? ”

“ Not now, I will return to England. Will you send a telegram for me ? I will dine here and wait for a reply.”

“ Certainly, sir.”

Michael Ireton wrote out the wire : it was to Miss Mac-Naughtan : “ Mr. Lekejian ill, not left Dover. Have you any information ? If you have please send it, also Dover address.”

At 8.30 he got his reply.

“ Leaving Dover for Cairo. Mr. Lekejian wishes to return via Marseilles.”

The telegram fell out of Michael's hand. He was making a pretence of eating something of the very good dinner which the hotel provided for the table d'hôte.

A great pity for Hadassah swept over him ; for the moment it wiped out all personal feeling. His defeat and disappointment were forgotten. If he could only write and tell her how sorry he was for her ! for undoubtedly Mr. Lekejian must be very ill. It seemed to him as though his gentle Hadassah was only to pass out of one affliction to go into another.

The details of her cousin Girgis's death had been in his mind very vividly during the long journey from London. The pathos of it, the youthful folly of it, hurt his strong soul. He knew that the boy had offered up his life for Egypt because he was not strong enough to live without Hadassah's love ; what it meant in the way of courage and fight to live without Hadassah he knew only too well.

He knew that this fragile girl held the sweetness and dearness of life for him in the palm of her little hand ; he knew that if she sent him away, as Girgis had been sent away when he offered himself to her, the world would be, not unendurable, as it had been to Girgis, for with fortitude all things are endurable, but it would be scentless and soulless . . . a mere earth with no flowers for its Eden.

## CHAPTER XXXIII

THERE were sorrow and mourning in the old Mamluk house in Cairo : Nicolas Lekejian was dead, and Hadassah would not be comforted. Unlike the Eastern women of old, who tore their hair and beat their breasts and yelled upon the house-tops when their nearest and dearest were borne with loud manifestations of sorrow to their place among the dead, Stella had remained tearless and unemotional until long days of pent-up feeling and sleepless nights of remorse had ended in a collapse of nerve and body.

Without doubt Nicolas Lekejian had died from the shock his system had received when Girgis Boutros was arrested with his fellow-conspirators, and Stella could not help holding herself in a measure responsible for her cousin's death. If it had not been for her he would never have thrown in his lot with the Nationalists. If she had taken more pains to discover what the work was he meant to do for Egypt she could have prevented him acting as he did ; hence she felt herself to be not only responsible for her cousin's death, but in a measure for her father's also.

It was absurd, of course, but natural in the highly strung state of her nerves and sensibilities. In long hours of sleeplessness she exaggerated every unwise step she had taken and foolish thing she had said. Her own beauty and her quality of attraction became an accursed thing in her eyes.

Her father's love, the love that had been torn from her just when she needed it the most, was the only love her mind could tolerate or dwell upon.

If Michael Ireton had come to her and said, " I love you madly, Hadassah," if he had repeated the very words of her heart's song, the song she had never been able to silence since he had first said the words, she would have turned from him with shrinking and horror. To love Michael now

would seem as dishonourable to her dead father's memory as it had seemed dishonourable to Vernon, when she was his promised wife.

And Michael Ireton did come! He came one day when Mrs. Lekejian was sitting by her daughter, hoping and praying that for a little time the girl would sleep, that for a little time the tragic eyes would close and the restless limbs would rest. His card was handed to her while Stella's face was turned to the wall. She rose quietly and left the room, bidding the servant follow her; Stella cared too little about what was happening to even ask herself why her mother was going without first explaining her reason for leaving her so suddenly.

"Tell him," she said to the servant, "that I cannot see him; explain that we have sorrow in the house, and illness." Mrs. Lekejian spoke quietly.

"I did tell him that our dear master was dead, *sitt*, and he was very sad; I told him, my lady, because he said that he had been looking for you all over Europe—the big, tall man is very much in love! He asked to see Miss Hadassah."

Mrs. Lekejian smiled at the man's sympathy for the impatient lover. In Arabic, this fine arrangement of his sentences had been graced with the flowers of his elegant language. His announcement that the "big tall" man was very much in love because he asked to see her daughter was as amusing as it was true.

Mrs. Lekejian's Irish heart melted: she would go and see the big, tall man for a few minutes.

When her slight figure, in widow's weeds, entered the room where Michael Ireton was nervously waiting, he almost cried out with surprise . . . never before had he thought her the least like Hadassah! Now, with the tragedy of her recent loss deepening the beauty of her violet eyes, he recognized many points of Stella in her Irish mother.

He strode forward and held out his hand. Something better than words of sympathy was in the grasp he gave her and in the expression of tenderness which, like a divine light, transformed his rough face.

They had not seen each other since the night when Vernon had saved her husband's life, and the sudden recollection of

it brought a lump into both their throats which made speaking an impossibility. They remained silent. With a gentle caress Michael Ireton at last let her hand drop; still in silence they stood looking at one another while his eyes seemed to say, "We will not speak of your sorrow, you need not be afraid—the sorrow of death is sacred." Feeling this she grew braver and said gently, "You wanted to see my daughter?"

"Yes," he said; "is it permitted? . . . May I? . . . Will you allow me?"

He looked at her to see if she realized his deeper meaning.

"Stella is ill," she said—"too unnerved to see any one."

"Ill?" he said in alarm.

"A nervous breakdown; she will be all right again with quiet and care."

"Your daughter and I were friends, Mrs. Lekejian . . . do you really think it would do her harm to see me . . . ?" He sighed wearily. . . . "How the Fates have conspired against me!"

"I know you were great friends, but she is really too ill, it would not be wise at present—the doctor would forbid it."

"I can *wait*," he said doggedly, "I can go on waiting . . . I have waited . . . but don't you think she would see me if she knew I was here, if she knew how far I had travelled in the hopes of seeing her, and what difficulty I have had in finding you?"

Mrs. Lekejian smiled: the man was not to be easily dismissed.

His eyes brightened. "If it is only nervous collapse, it might do her good to see an old friend. Will you beg her to see me," he said, "if only for five minutes? Tell her I have never stopped looking for her since the night I saw her at the Royal Geographical Society's lecture."

Without a word Mrs. Lekejian turned and left the room and did what he asked. When she saw that Stella was not sleeping she said quite simply, "Stella, Michael Ireton is waiting in the drawing-room; he has begged me to come and ask you if you will see him, if only for five minutes. Will you, dear?—he is terribly insistent!"

"Michael Ireton!" The cry of the words rang through the room as Stella uttered them: the next moment she had drawn the bed-clothes over her face. "Oh, mother, don't

let him come, he loves me . . . don't let me hear the word Love ever again : it was Love that killed Girgis, it was the Love I thought I had for Vernon—it was Love that brought about all this unhappiness . . . I hate the very name of Love.”

“ Since when has he loved you, dearest ? ”

There was no answer, but a nervous sigh.

“ He seems strong and big and true, poor fellow ! Is he to be sent away because my child happens to be cross and peevish ? ”

“ Oh, mother, I want only you—I want to be left alone. Love has gone out of me, I will never love again.”

“ My dearest, you needn't see him, he *will* leave you alone ; but what about the future ? When you are well again, won't you be sorry ? Are you doing wisely ? ”

“ When I am well again I want to work, not to love.”

“ Will he prevent it ? ”

Stella hesitated. “ Perhaps not . . . but don't you see, mother, Love stopped all my work before, it might stop it again.”

“ Then you think you *might* love him if you saw him ? ”

“ I don't know . . . I'm afraid of myself . . . supposing I never can love : I thought I loved Vernon : perhaps it is only that I love being made love to.”

“ You were too young to know.”

There was a moment's silence.

“ What must I tell him, dear ? . . . I think he has suffered : don't be too callous of his feelings for you.”

“ Tell him I am sorry, mother, that is all.”

Mrs. Lekejian put her hand on her child's forehead and looked into her eyes. “ Dearest, I know very little about this man, but what I have seen of him I like and admire, and something tells me that, if you send him away comfortless, you are sending away your happiness.”

“ Do you want me to leave you, mother ? ”

“ My dear, perverse child, how fractious it is ! Of course I don't.” She smiled tenderly : the girl's peevish tones were so totally unlike her ordinary self that they proved how highly nervous her condition was. “ I will tell him you are sorry . . . is that all ? . . . he has waited, Stella, he *says* he will go on waiting . . . but will you give him no hope ? He has crossed Europe to see you—can you expect his feelings

to remain the same if you think only of your own and nothing of his ? ”

Mrs. Lekejian waited.

“ Tell him I am going to work for Egypt if ever I am well enough to do anything again . . . he approved of the idea . . . tell him that, mother ; tell him that all my life I am going to work . . . it will be my atonement.”

Mrs. Lekejian went out of the room and shut the door, but she did not go down the stairs, she knew her daughter and human nature too well.

When the door was closed, Stella burst into a flood of tears, such relieving tears that much sorrow and striving and fear seemed to pass away with them. . . . She called to her mother to come back. . . . “ Mother, mother, how beastly I’ve been, how hateful ! Mother, *do* come back. . . . You might have known that I didn’t mean it. . . . Oh ! say something kind—*he* is so kind.”

As though she had heard the cry the next moment Mrs. Lekejian was by her side.

“ Mother ! ”

“ You called me, dear ? I came back ! ”

Stella did not answer.

“ What kind thing shall I tell him, dear ? ”

“ I am thinking.”

“ Take your time . . . he can wait.” She smiled. “ He’d wait for seven years like Jacob, I think.”

“ He has been so kind, mother, and I wasn’t fair to him, not fair from the very first . . . I was selfish and cruel.”

“ Yes, dearest,” Mrs. Lekejian said again. This time the old humour, that was hard to kill, lurked in her eyes . . . she was perfectly certain that Stella cared for the tall, big man downstairs.

“ Ask him, mother, if he will go away and let me work out my own salvation . . . ask him to go away for a whole year, tell him not to write to me or to think of me unless he can’t help it . . . ” she smiled deliciously as she said the words, “ and at the end of the year, this very day year, mother, if he likes he can write to me and ask me if he may come and see me . . . only don’t promise *anything*, mother . . . let him be free . . . and let me be absolutely free . . . I must be free, or I shall hate him.”

“Poor fellow!”

“If I saw him now, mother, I shouldn’t even say that; I can only say it through you.”

Stella laid herself down again wearily. “I’m so tired, mother; send him away.”

“I know you are, dear—try and sleep. I will go and comfort him as best I can. I know you are not in a fit state to be troubled, but this may mean your happiness . . . that is why I have tired you.”

When Mrs. Lekejian opened the door Michael Ireton turned swiftly round—he was standing with his back to the door when she entered. “How long you have been!” he said. “Will she see me?”

“She is really not well enough to see you . . . I am so sorry,” she spoke with a kindly little shake of the head . . . “it is wiser not to urge it.”

“Did she not even send me a message? If you only knew how much it means to me!”

“I think I do . . . and she is not unkind; remember her system has had a severe shock. You must make allowances—she is very highly strung, she craves for rest for body and soul.”

“I understand,” he said, “but will *you* let me hope? You have always been so kind, will you accept me if ever Stella does?”

During their conversation not one word had been definitely spoken on the subject of marriage or even love, but Mrs. Lekejian understood the intentions of the man before he had even asked her if he might see her daughter. His whole being had asked the question, “May I marry your daughter if she will have me?”

With a winning gentleness which is the abiding charm of very feminine women, Mrs. Lekejian said: “Yes, I will accept you and I will hope for you, because I believe that my daughter does care for you, and that her future happiness lies in your hands, although just at present all suggestion of any such love as you feel for her is odious to her. Do you understand? . . . I wonder if any man can? . . . it is not *you*, it is the idea of love itself after . . .” she looked at him, pleading his full understanding of her words.

“I know,” he said, “I can wait . . . I can go on waiting . . . I have waited for her all my life.”

"Death has been too near to us," she said softly, "for the child to think of love . . . it hurts her."

"I can wait," he repeated; "her feelings are perfectly natural under the circumstances. Miss MacNaughtan told me about your troubles and sorrows." He expressed no conventional forms of sympathy.

"Stella has sent you a message!"

Michael Ireton looked eagerly at the sensitive face, again so reminiscent of Stella.

"She asks you *not* to write to her or think about her for a year"—she smiled—"that is to say, if you can help it: these are Stella's own words." A light of sympathy shone in her eyes for the man whose face had fallen like a child's.

"At the end of the year . . . this very day year," she said, "if you still care you may write. . . . No! no, go slowly, there is no *promise*, nothing really definite . . . but it is the most hopeful plan, even if it seems hard: but remember you are to be free, absolutely free."

"I'll come," he said, drawing out his watch, "at 6.45 this day year."

Mrs. Lekejian laughed. "You certainly deserve to succeed—and how difficult girls are!—but don't feel too certain: remember Stella only told me to tell you that you may *write* to her at the end of the year if . . . if you have not forgotten her, if you still feel for her as you do now . . . these were her very words."

He sighed—it was the sigh of a man who had been strung to the limit of endurance. "I must be thankful," he said, "for small mercies, and I am; but we are never content: the knowledge that she was free to be won seemed to be enough for my happiness a fortnight ago, now I want . . ."

Mrs. Lekejian put her hand on his. "She is more than half won already, I think, but she doesn't know it; or if she does she is rebelling against it for the time being . . . she is afraid of . . ." her eyes met Michael Ireton's . . . "you know what I mean . . . *afraid* of love—a 'lover's love.' She craves for her father's love, the love that is quickened with affection, not passion."

"I understand: my best chance is to go away—I will take your advice."

"Yes, go away and allow her to miss you!" she smiled,

‘and she *will* miss you, for every woman needs devotion, and Stella has always had it.’

“A year is such a long time,” he said; “supposing some one else offers her that devotion.”

“Would she be worth the winning if any man’s love would do?”

“What’s worth and what isn’t worth doesn’t enter into love: once the malady’s ripe, it’s a terrible thing.”

“You are quite right, it is a terrible thing, a cruel thing. But I must return to Stella. You are strong, so be brave; you are not like poor Girgis, who looked so strong and was so weak.”

“I mean to live for her . . . Girgis died for her . . . that is the difference.”

He raised her hand to his lips. “Pray God you may be my mother some day,” he said earnestly.

Tears were in the eyes that answered him as she said, with the undying Irish in her voice asserting itself, “I’ll pray too.”

## CHAPTER XXXIV

IT was the hour of sunset in Cairo—that magic hour in the East when the most worldly mind is moved by the Infinite Being of God. Stella Lekejian was coming out of the Coptic schoolroom where she had been teaching. Her long day's work was done!

Her pupils, who were all closely veiled women belonging to the lower-middle classes, were hurrying in twos and three to their various homes. Some of them, though wives and mothers, were girls just emerging from childhood. To the casual observer these closely veiled figures looked like ordinary Cairene Moslem women—their shapeless black garments differed not one whit from all the others—but on a closer examination you could see that their dark eyes, whose heavy lids were blackened with kohl, were larger and more elongated, and that they inclined slightly upwards from the nose. Also, if you looked, you could find, among the tattoo marks which decorated their wrists and faces, the distinguishing sign of their sect—a little cross, the emblem of Christ's suffering. It was on each woman, mixed up somewhere with many other strange devices, some of which were pagan and unlovely in their origin. These blue marks do not, even to the Western eye, detract altogether from the comeliness of the women's appearance.

Their attitude towards Stella resembled the devotion of English Sunday-school children to their teachers. Each day they brought her little bunches of odorous jasmine and early sprays of tuberose. During the year she had worked amongst them and held meetings of various kinds, in the beautiful little school-house which her mother had built and endowed as a memorial to her father, Stella had endeared herself to these primitive women.

At first they had only come in twos and threes, and had shrunk from any form of intimacy, but gradually their

numbers had increased until the largest class-room in the building was not big enough to hold them. She had been wise enough to leave religious instruction and discussions severely alone, for although her father had been a strict Uniat-Copt all his life, she herself had been brought up in the Church of England, and in Cairo the English Protestants are almost as much disliked by the various sects of the Copts as the members of the Greek Church. Between the Copts and the Greeks there is an undying feud.

Naturally she had found it quite impossible to do anything with the Moslem women, at least by any direct means; but indirectly she had seen the seeds of her untiring efforts bearing fruit. One young mother had actually come to her and asked her to help her in the curing of her baby's eyes from ophthalmia—this was not, of course, until she had tried every charm and had failed. Having seen the complete recovery of a little Coptic child from the same disease, whom Stella had cured with the simple remedy of cleanliness, she had at last been given permission by her husband to seek Stella's advice. After this, many Moslem women came to her for help, although they were not permitted to attend her classes.

During the year her busy life had left her little time for reflection; but it gave her a satisfaction she had never experienced before—the satisfaction of feeling that she was at last of some practical good in the world, that her reason for existence was justified—and, oddly enough, the trivial things of life, the things she had once envied, were now offered to her ungrudgingly. She would have found a warm welcome in most of the houses of the resident English in Cairo if she had chosen to go there, for suddenly their doors had been opened to her! She never even questioned the reason why this change had taken place in their attitude towards her, for she was now far more than formerly in close touch with the native population. There was only one house that she visited, for the iron of bitterness had entered her soul too deeply, in the days of her impressionable girlhood, ever to allow her to accept even the most sincerely offered tokens of hospitality and friendship. It was only in the house of a celebrated lady doctor, whose kindness to the poor had won Stella's admiration and devotion, that she was perfectly happy,

and it was only there that she used to allow her mind to dwell upon the possible joy that awaited her in the future. It was when she saw the husband and wife working together in the common cause of humanity—for they were both doctors—that she used to dream dreams of what happiness might be hers when her year of probation was over. In the years to come perhaps Michael and she would work together and play together and find life sweet together, as these two friends did.

Why the stiff-necked English had suddenly unbent to her Stella was never to know! Perhaps it was out of sympathy for the splendid work she was doing, perhaps it was as a token of their admiration for her rejection of a British officer, or it may have been because old Nicolas Lekejian, their faithful ally and ungrudging supporter, was dead, or because the head of the house was no longer a Syrian, for Nicolas the younger, now that his music was an assured success, was busy in Paris for a greater part of the year. Be it as it may, the invitations Stella received were refused on the grounds that her work left her no time for society, which was perfectly true.

On this particular evening, as Stella followed the little company of Coptic women from the door of their school-house, whose pleasant courtyard was shaded with an ancient sycamore tree and one tall Victoria palm, her mind was disturbed with personal emotions. Her usual sympathy with her pupils had in a measure been absent, she had felt herself incapable of putting aside her own interests and throwing herself wholeheartedly into her work as she usually did. During the long hours she had been sewing and speaking to the women, and teaching the girls to read and write, a letter she had received from Michael Ireton in the morning had been fluttering in her bosom like the wings of a bird. It was in reality lying securely in its envelope in her pocket, yet she felt it in her bosom like a living thing trying to get free—a thing trying to gain dominion over her struggling senses. It had been the one living, active thing in the room. She had not heard from her lover since she had sent him away with the request that he would not write to her for one year.

And now, on this very evening when the year of probation had expired, Michael Ireton was in Egypt! He must have

received her letter in answer to his, asking her to let him come and see her ; he had asked if she was ready to allow him to help her in the work she was doing.

She had written to tell him that he might come, for his letter had stirred into full being the love that had grown and strengthened while it had silently slept in her bosom. During the year of engrossing work it had unconsciously given beauty and meaning to every law and force in the natural and spiritual world. It was an unconscious development of love, for, with a self-control which had increased her capacity for work and had strengthened her physical being, she had during the year succeeded in forcing into the background of her life all concrete thoughts of love, along with all personal matters—matters at least which related to her feelings for Ireton. She had tried to banish him from her mind for her work's sake, and, as a test of the enduring quality of her love for him during the period she had fixed for their separation, she had determined to work with one sole purpose in view—the regeneration of the Egyptian women. If at the end of a year's time Michael still cared for her and she still cared for him, surely their love would be enduring.

Now, in this supreme hour of Egypt's beauty, when the spell of its light was transforming the world into a kingdom of heavenly glory, Stella unreservedly surrendered herself to the joy of her new happiness. It seemed to her, as she watched the black-robed figures of the Coptic women disappearing into the golden distance, that the whole world was bathed in a flame of Love : she let it envelop her until she was lost in its mystery. Only the golden silence and the limitless space of wondrous light existed.

## CHAPTER XXXV

THE next morning Stella asked her mother if they might have their morning coffee and fruit in the *mandarah*—the large apartment on the ground floor of the house, where, in days gone by, only male visitors were received.

They were sitting on a low seat encircling the wide window which looked out upon the courtyard, in the portion of the room called the *durkaah*. Here the marble floor was sunk about six or seven inches, and in its centre was a beautiful fountain, composed of three shallow basins raised on slender shafts, one on the top of the other. From the highest fitful sprays of clear water sprang into the air and down again, the diamond drops falling into a sunken basin, of Byzantine design, whose marbled lining was jewelled with priceless tiles and pieces of precious stones. The lofty walls and the floor of the stately apartment were marble-lined and showed here and there Oriental designs in antique tiles of lustrous Persian hues.

It was a delightful apartment in the hot weather, for the plash, plash of the falling water was cooling to the senses, and the entire absence of upholstered furniture, or indeed any kind of furniture, kept the atmosphere pure and fresh. Their coffee was placed on a white marble table of classic shape, such as one sees in the best houses in Pompeii. Its legs, which terminated in lions' claws, were securely fixed to the floor. The only seats in the *mandarah* were low benches fitting round the wide oriel window.

The morning post had just arrived, but the appearance of a number of letters had not interrupted the absorbing conversation between mother and daughter. They were discussing the momentous question of Michael Ireton's letter and of his arrival in Cairo the night before.

"Yes, he has waited for a whole year, but I didn't ask him to, mother—he needn't have done it! He was perfectly

free to choose any other girl he met . . . don't look like that." Stella held out her hand imploringly.

"I didn't mean to look like anything, dear," her mother said laughingly, "but to me it seems so strange, so unnecessary, when you might have been together: there are none too many years allotted to any of us for youth and happiness—you'll find that, my darling—why squander one of them?"

"But I've not squandered it, mother, it has been a precious year—it has given me heaps of things, and a kind of happiness I never knew before. I've been doing work I love, work Michael knows I never mean to give up, and at the same time I've tested the endurance of my feelings for him and of his for me." She sighed contentedly. "You can't think how much each day of this year has added to my love for him, and from his letter," her colour deepened as she thought of it, "I don't think he cares for me any the less."

"I'm so thankful, dearest, and I believe he is almost worthy of you; I liked the little I saw of him, and your father admired him."

"Almost!" the girl spoke scornfully of her mother's qualifying adjective—"almost! he's worth a hundred of me."

"To me, darling, naturally no man is quite good enough for you . . . but certainly you could never be happy with a man who had not exceptional brains and a strong individuality: I think he'll manage you!"

Stella knew what her mother's words were intended to imply—that in character and temperament Michael Ireton was suited to her in a way which Vernon Thorpe had never been.

"I understood him and he understood me—at least, we were in perfect sympathy with each other from the very first moment we met . . . and as the days went by in Luxor his companionship showed me how very little I had in common with Vernon Thorpe. I grew painfully conscious of the fact that when we were *not* talking about our feelings for each other, or he was not actually making love, that there was a total dearth of intellectual interests and conversation between us. I used to like him because he was nice and what is termed generally 'a good sort,' but it was Michael who had the gift of making life interesting, of making one forget things that didn't matter."

“And knowing all this, Stella, you have made the poor man wait for a whole year after all he had suffered while you were engaged. Poor fellow! . . .” she smiled as she looked at her daughter lovingly. She was glad for both their sakes that the year was over. She was glad also that it had certainly added to rather than detracted from Stella’s good looks. There was now a permanent glow of good health and an atmosphere of vitality about her which had been only a fluctuating quality in the old days. Her busy life had given her this and much more.

A pause in the conversation followed, while Mrs. Lekejian took up her letters and glanced at the handwritings on the envelopes. “One from Nancy,” she said brightly, “and . . . how strange! one from Nicolas as well.” She started. “Why . . . they are both from the same hotel.” She pointed to the name of the hotel stamped on the envelope: she looked at Stella significantly as she impatiently tore the letter open. When she had only read a few words she cried out, “Stella, they’re married! Listen. . . .”

“MY DARLING MOTHER AND STELLA,

“Nicolas and I were married this morning, and I’m the happiest girl in the world. I will tell you all about everything and how it came to pass, when we meet—it’s quite a romance. We are just off to Italy, where we are going to ‘moon’ for a heavenly fortnight. Then we sail from Naples, and will be with you in about three weeks. Nicolas says we are all to go up the Nile by Cook’s first pleasure boat, so do make plans, and don’t disappoint us.

“Your loving daughter,

“NANCY LEKEJIAN.

“P.S.—This is the first time I’ve signed myself Lekejian except in church in the register.”

Mrs. Lekejian’s whole being was expressive of an almost girlish delight. Her affection for Nancy was very genuine, and she knew how deeply her son had felt his unselfish renunciation of the girl’s love for him. She looked to Stella for the sympathy she knew she would receive.

“I’m so glad, so frightfully glad,” Stella said. “Dear little Nancy, how happy they will be! I suppose they are eating their breakfast together as husband and wife!

What fun! Be quick, darling, and open Nicolas's letter. I do wonder if he will tell us how it happened, I so want to know all about it."

Mrs. Lekejian's voice was breathless with excitement as she read aloud her son's brief announcement of his marriage.

"DARLING MOTHER,

"Nancy is now my wife, and I am the happiest man on God's earth. I can't write, but we shall both see you soon, and I know that you will rejoice at my happiness.

"Your loving son,

"NICOLAS."

"Now that he's a celebrity I suppose he considered himself more worthy of being her husband . . . dear old Nicolas. . . ." Stella spoke tenderly, then suddenly she gave a nervous sigh. "Mother, I'm afraid to-day's going to be too good to be true." As she spoke she looked at the little gold watch, surrounded by diamonds, which she wore on her wrist—her father's last birthday gift. It wanted only twenty minutes until her lover's arrival. "Do you think anything will happen to him before he gets here?" she said anxiously. "Nancy's good news and mine seem really too much." She was trembling at the thought of such overwhelming happiness.

At that very moment a servant came with gliding native movements up the long room to where they sat. With a low salaam at his mistress's knees, he said, "A gentleman has arrived, *sitt*, but he says he will wait if he is too early; it is the 'tall big' gentleman, *sitt*."

Stella's face flushed crimson. "Oh, mother, it's Michael!"

She looked nervously round the room; at that moment she would have escaped if she could, for her curious virginal shrinking from the meeting with her future husband overwhelmed her deeper desire to see him. The joy of expecting him had been too suddenly terminated by his arrival—she would gladly have postponed it; but Mrs. Lekejian, understanding this side of her daughter's complex nature, rose from her seat very quickly and left the room. "I will send him to you, Stella," she said; "don't be

foolish—you are not a child—and do give him the welcome he deserves.” She looked at the moment much more pleased than her shrinking daughter. But her voice had laughter lurking in it, though it was stern enough to bring Stella quickly up against the fact that her future happiness did depend upon her self-control in the next few moments.

When her mother met Michael Ireton she said, “So the year has passed and you have come: you need not explain.” He grasped her hand gratefully. “I give my child to you willingly, for I know that she loves you and you will make her happy. Yusuf will take you to her . . . she is waiting for you.” She held his hand in hers for a moment longer . . . “You will be wise, Michael, I think, to take the bull by the horns . . . Stella is frightfully nervous.” Her merry eyes expressed clearly all that she could not tell him. As she hurried away she said, “Go to her quickly; I will see you later on.”

When Michael Ireton entered the impressively Eastern room he did not hesitate to take Mrs. Lekejian’s advice: in two long strides he seemed to cross its great length and reach the window where Stella was standing, nervously waiting for him. Without one word of greeting he swiftly and masterfully enfolded her in his arms.

“No,” he said, “not yet, don’t try to struggle. . . . You are mine, mine at last and for ever.” He bent his head to her shrinking face and covered it with kisses, kisses which made the girl realize how utterly useless it was to protest. Her moment of surrender had come.

Nor did she wish to protest, for the joy of experiencing the strength of his manhood, of at last feeling the comfort of his strong embrace, was exquisite to her senses. If she had been conscious she would have wished that moment never to end.

With his lips on her lips she felt as though she was floating through a world of space, to some unknown shore, in the strong arms of love.

And when he held her passionately from him, at arm’s length, to look at her with ardent eyes, she said: “Dearest, can you forgive me?”

“Tell me you love me, and I will forgive you everything, all the waiting and the hunger of years.”

"I love you," she said simply, "more than anything in all the world; I have always loved you."

"Then, darling, why did you send me away? why did you waste one year of our life?"

She was crushed to him tenderly again: his hunger for the nearness of her beauty, for the fragrance of her being, was demanding its justification. "How could you have done it?" he said, lifting his lips from hers to gaze into her love-warmed eyes, "how could you?"

"I did it," she said, "because I wanted to know if my love was worthy of you. I was afraid: it was for your sake, for the sake of our love!"

"My darling," he drew her back to him, "you worthy of me!—how could you doubt it? . . . Oh, my darling."

"Did you mind so very much? I had to do it, the Fates made me; I can't explain just why, but they did. It's all over now," she gave a tired sigh, a sigh of perfect content, a sigh of absolute thankfulness for his presence and for the acknowledgment of their love.

"The waiting was worth it," he said eagerly, "if it has done what you wished: I would have waited a thousand years."

"It has done far more! Things could never have been so wonderful if I hadn't learned to know how much I wanted you, how much I missed you, how afraid I grew that you might love some one else."

"Then thank God I waited," Michael Ireton said briefly "but you are not going to send me away again, Hadassah, with any more indefinite promises. I am going to make you my wife whether you will or won't!"

"But I will, dearest—I am ready." With an exquisite shyness she kissed him for the first time without his demanding it. "I will whenever you like; I know now that I'm not afraid."

With a fierce joy which made her serious face break into smiles he caught her to him and hugged her like a delighted boy. "Thank God!" he said, "but I can hardly believe it's true, things have been so hard . . . so hard and cruel, and now everything seems too good to be true."

"I think we certainly must do something to appease the jealousy of the gods," she held up her silver hand of Fatma; "yet we have surely suffered enough, and I have worn this

so constantly, Fatma ought to reward us by averting their envious eyes. I don't wonder they're jealous of us, do you?" Her lips invited a caress.

"And this," Michael said, raising the rough heart of green stone. His eyes reminded her of the day he had found it in the temple of Luxor. A warm blush dyed her face as his eyes insisted upon her answer.

"I hope it will do its work, dearest, for women when they love are the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever."

He pressed his lips to her hand which held the ancient amulet—an ecstasy of passion shone in his eyes as his mind travelled out to meet hers in the days that were to come.

"It is so glorious, Michael, to know that we may love each other, to know that you may do as you once said you could do if you might, and now you may!"

"What was that? What did I say?"

"You once said, 'I could love you madly, Hadassah, if I might.' I have never forgotten it . . . often and often I have driven the words from my ears, often and often I have wanted to feel that 'mad love' . . . it was horrible to know that I had to stamp on it and crush it and kill it, that your dear affection was all wrong."

"And yet, when I found you and you were free, you sent me away. . . . I thought you didn't care for me." Again he said, "How could you?"

"I was ill then, I was sick of the very name of love—love had brought such misery, Michael: poor Girgis loved me; if I had never thought that I loved Vernon, how much sorrow and remorse would have been saved!"

"I know, dearest. I was a selfish brute to come at that time—I should have waited; but that night when Vernon saved your father's life I thought you cared . . . it gave me the courage; I thought you cared when you asked me to stay."

"And so I did care," she said, "I always cared; I cared from the very first time I saw you, I have always cared; I think I must have cared for you in my former incarnation . . . perhaps I was your dog and fed from your hand."

In the years that were to come there would be time to talk and talk, and to explain. Now he could not spare her dear lips from the perfection of love. In his arms, which had wanted her so long, Stella could only speak to him in

broken sentences . . . and, man-like, he was perfectly contented with silence when it was so golden.

It was after midday when Mrs. Lekejian returned to the *mandarah*. She entered it a little nervously, for it is always an unpleasant duty to disturb lately united lovers, but Michael Ireton put her instantly at her ease by saying: "Hadassah has promised to marry me as soon as it can be managed: will you accept me as your son?" He stooped down and kissed her, thinking to himself as he did so how delightful a thing it would be to have this gentle personality, this woman whose blue eyes could never wholly banish their smiles, for his mother-in-law.

She turned swiftly to Stella, while she held out her two hands to Michael: "I'm so glad! I knew she loved you"—her eyes warmed to the man who seemed to tower above her like a giant—"but I knew you would have to capture her by strategy if you wished to marry her. . . ." Her voice trembled. "You will be good to my baby . . . I heard that my son was married yesterday . . . I shall be all alone now."

He held her slender hands in his two big ones more tightly. "Indeed, you won't be alone; there's surely plenty of room for us all here . . ." he looked round the splendid hall. "For at least six months in each year I've promised to help Hadassah with her work—not to hinder it, you know—and for the rest of the year we're going to live wherever our fancy pleases us . . . wherever you and Hadassah think best."

Tears sprang into Mrs. Lekejian's eyes. "Then you won't take her away from me? How kind! I should be quite alone!"

Stella flung her arms round her mother's neck: "Michael is really the nicest thing that ever happened," she said, "the nicest thing in the whole world; he couldn't do a nasty or cruel thing if he tried: he would never take me away from you. He's going to have a mother now to spoil him, as well as a wife." She turned her love-bright eyes to her lover: "Mother's a darling, Michael; she'll not be a bit an 'in-law,' for she's really much younger than I am." She paused. "I grew up the first time I ever saw you, mother has never really grown up yet . . ." Stella scanned her

mother tenderly from head to foot, and then looked at her lover—"but she'll just have to look a little older now, if she's going to have you for an 'in-law' . . . you're such a big thing, dear, I think you ought to be able to take care of us both."

By way of answering her he put a protecting arm round each of the women and drew them to him. "I'll do my best," he said simply; "God knows how I mean to try."

"If only father had known," Stella said, "there would have been nothing left to wish for."

"But he does know, dear, I never doubt that . . . I couldn't live and doubt it."

As Mrs. Lekejian said the words Michael Ireton understood the reason how, in spite of all her suffering, she had kept her child's heart, and why her husband had so adored her. One moment before he had thought his human happiness could not be added to, but the expression in her eyes had suddenly shown him fresh reasons for gratitude; a new chord had awakened in his manhood—the tenderness of a son for his mother. "Little mother," he said, "I will do my utmost to make his child happy and to be a good son to his wife. . . ."



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