



Gabrielle

Transgressor

By

Harris Dickson

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GABRIELLE

TRANSGRESSOR

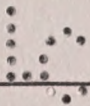
By

HARRIS DICKSON

AUTHOR OF "THE RAVANELS"

WITH FRONTISPIECE BY

WALTER H. EVERETT



PHILADELPHIA AND LONDON
J. B. LIPPINCOTT COMPANY

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CHAPTER I

THE DUMB HOUSE

“WHAT! Dumb House? For the troops?”

Amador, the voyageur, who had turned carpenter in his old age, shivered and glanced apprehensively at the long brick wall which surrounded Dumb House garden. It was a sturdy, massive wall, without break or gate or crevice, rising many feet higher than the roof of Amador's flimsy cypress hut. Amador clenched his huge hands nervously; muscles gathered in knots along his brawny arms; his veins swelled and crawled beneath his hairy skin as dark blue bayous go pulsing through the reeds.

“Eh bien! And why not?” Burly Pierre maintained. “’Twould shelter a regiment.”

“Why not?” snapped Amador. “No man durst enter it these twenty years; ’twould be a brave fool that stepped foot within that garden where Paul-Marie's ghost tends his flowers. Ugh! By the Virgin, I feared him in his life time. Mon Dieu! I lay up much religion against that day when I see Paul-Marie.”

Amador furtively scanned that ominous barrier which shut out the garden of fear, and glanced at the three tall pines which lifted their heads above it; he peeped askance at the unblinking windows of Dumb House itself—deep sunken windows,

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shut as the eyes of men long dead. Then Amador turned away, relieved that he had seen naught of Paul-Marie. His hair-grown chest billowed up like a goatskin bag and slowly collapsed.

“Dumb House!” he grunted; “it is always still—like that. Ugh! it wears on a man’s courage—no sound, no life, nothing. Except on Friday, when the jay-birds, instead of going to hell, flock into that garden. Such a chatter! Such a noise! ’Tis said the devil sits cross-legged on Paul-Marie’s grave and talks with them—just beneath that midmost pine. Sometimes one may see a ball of blue fire hanging like a ship’s lantern against the fork. If one looks again it is gone.” Amador drew deeply from his pipe, releasing a cloud of smoke vast enough to create a dozen geni.

Then he shifted his position and looked away from Dumb House, straight across the yellow Mississippi. Around him were a few scattered huts, and squatty white-washed buildings which crouched between a river and a forest—the tiny settlement of New Orleans. Amador puffed his pipe. Again and again his fascinated gaze swung back to Dumb House. Once for many moments he looked down at Burly Pierre, the bronze-bearded giant of the North, who sprawled on the grass like a clumsy bear stretching himself in play.

Pierre lay flat of his back, his coarse lips parted, staring at the sky. Two braids of thick red hair rambled away from his temples in front of his ears, and two golden ear-rings dangled as the red bear shook himself. A leathern coat, fringed and beaded—the work of many an Indian woman concerning whom

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Pierre practised neither conscience nor concealment—was tossed carelessly across a stump. Pierre's unbuttoned shirt exposed a magnificent breadth of chest. Pierre's creed was simple: A stout paddle, a long rifle, a sharp fight, with kiss of jug and woman at the end of every trail. In this, and this only, did Pierre believe.

Dull, unimaginative, matter-of-fact Pierre stared upward at nothing, striving to comprehend this new idea of fear which Amador thrust at him. The brilliance of a summer afternoon glittered on the river. A drowsy idleness, sensuous, intangible, irresistible, floated downward from the vacant heavens to lie languid on the earth.

The voyageur's boat which had brought Pierre from Frontenac, some thousand leagues away, swung lazily at its mooring. His thick lips smiled; he stretched himself luxuriously. "Eh! How good it is to live. There's something in this air of yours to make a man lie flat of his back and watch the lazy eagles that go to sleep against the sky. Shake myself out of that? Yes, yes——"

To shake himself out of his indolence he raised suddenly on his elbows and looked aggressively at Dumb House wall running straight back from the river through the palmettoes and the reeds. "Ugh!" he grunted, nodding at the jagged glass and spikes of steel along its summit. "Monsieur Paul-Marie invites one to keep out."

A pathway which colonial courtesy spoke of as "the street" twisted along in front of Dumb House, between it and the river. Beyond, following the curve of the river, some straggling huts had taken root along

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this path, hap-hazard and aimlessly as wind-blown seed. Farther still amongst a thicker cluster of shacks and shanties was the Government House, the seat of French dominion in the south.

“I have looked upon much houses of the great—Montreal—Quebec—Frontenac. I make bold to look at this.” Pierre rose and swaggered down the street the full length of Dumb House, then back again to the door whose inhospitable jaws clenched most determinedly.

The house itself was of brick, two stories high, faced with gray stone; a red-tiled roof projected all around like the brim of a mandarin's hat. The four windows below were mere slits in the wall, defended by iron bars ingeniously interlaced. In vain did Pierre seek chink or crack in the solid boards through which to pry.

With sudden access of courage he stepped into the doorway, a space scarce wide enough for him to stand, closed and guarded with weather-beaten oak, studded by heavy-headed nails. Neither knocker nor bell suggested that he enter, yet Pierre raised his fist and struck the door. Then he trembled at his own temerity.

Somewhere, from within the silence that he had profaned, there came an odd murmuring which disconcerted the voyageur; it sounded like whispers and voices—whispers without tongues, and voices without bodies. Pierre suddenly remembered something else that he believed in. His courage played like frozen lightning up and down his back, as one might polish the barrel of a rifle.

Pierre stopped pounding the door. It required all

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his fortitude to stand a moment and listen to the echoes which went rumbling through those empty rooms. Amador shivered and crossed himself. Pierre held his backbone rigidly straight and set his teeth tight together so Amador might not hear them chattering. Then he glanced over his shoulder at Amador, and strolled back to his seat beside the carpenter.

“’Tis a stout house,” he said, for he must say something. After that he fell to looking at the wall and thinking—a process about which Burly Pierre rarely troubled himself.

This wall enclosed a square garden of perchance two hundred paces across. Above the wall Pierre could see the crests of three towering pines, a cottonwood tree, some dark green magnolias, and the topmost leaves of a banana clump waving in the wind. More than this he could only guess. Even as he looked, two wary old crows flapped out of the forest; they barely skimmed the top of the wall and settled down within. The woodsman shrugged his shoulders; it needed nothing more to convince him the garden was deserted.

He turned to Amador, then nodded scornfully towards the slender line of stakes driven into the ground which protected the settlement.

“Bah!” he laughed, puckering his lips as if he meant to blow them over. “Bah! ’tis a fence for children. Such baby barricades may do well enough for your lazy Houmas and womanish Bayou-Goulas, but ’twould make a man’s heart strangle his gullet to hear the Five Nations whooping in yonder forest and know that these play-time pickets were all that stood between.”

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Amador turned in his seat and compared the colony's inefficient defences with that mighty wall, as he had done a thousand times before. A man must think much and ponder many things when he sits alone evening after evening smoking and nodding at that solemn river.

"The governor ought to take it for the troops ;" Pierre returned to his original assertion.

"Aye, 'twould make a noble fortress," Amador admitted.

"Then why not use it?"

Amador merely shrugged his shoulders.

"It is too far from the water," Pierre objected, measuring with his eye the hundred yards of space between Dumb House and the river.

"Water !" Amador scarcely stopped puffing his pipe. "Water ! See you not those tanks ? One—two—three—four tanks : water enough for an army. Paul-Marie had his fountains and his fish-ponds. The tanks supplied them."

"Fountains ?—and fish-ponds ?" Pierre repeated vaguely. What was a fountain ? Why should a man want fish-ponds ? Pierre could not conceive. Neither would he reveal his ignorance, and inquire.

"Aye ; heard you never of fountains or fish-ponds ?" Amador questioned stolidly.

Pierre rolled over on his elbows. "Many of them, in Quebec, along La Chine."

Amador saw that Pierre would speak no more, so he volunteered the story that itched his tongue.

"There were two brothers of them," he began ; and though Pierre betrayed no curiosity he composed his stalwart limbs to listen. "Paul-Marie was the older,

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and Jean the younger. Jean was tall, with the stride of a moose and the quickness of a panther. We called him Grosjean because he was so big. They were great lords in France, no doubt of it; princes, maybe; no doubt of it. People used to whisper a tale of some fine lady—that the king himself sent those brothers away, a kingdom being too small for Paul-Marie and the king. Wealth they had in plenty; else whence came the ship-loads of brick and the slaves to build a house like that? A house like that for two men! Think of it! And no women; never a woman has stepped her foot across that threshold.”

Pierre rolled over on his elbows again, and looked up: “Eh! Too much woman on the mind; too little in the heart.” He lay back disgustedly, and lost interest.

“One day,” Amador went on in the same voice, for he could recite this story to its uttermost syllable—“One day a gentleman came with a ship of his own, and brought his daughter; she was Jean’s wife. Paul-Marie raved and stormed and swore—no woman should come beneath his roof. Had they not had enough of women? Were they forever to be fools about a petticoat?”

“Jean never swore; ’tis not his way to swear. But when the ship sailed back to France it left the lady. Jean placed her in the convent until he could build a house of his own. Right speedily he built his house—that small one yonder adjoining his brother’s wall.”

Pierre stiffened his ears. With the entry of a woman the little house gained somewhat of interest.

“Paul-Marie never spoke to Jean again, though

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'twere hard to understand how man could bear grudge against so sweet a lady. Two years afterward she died, and Jean bore his babe on a pillow to the convent. That same night Paul-Marie died—died standing bolt upright beneath the limb of yonder pine where the crow perches.”

Amador's voice lowered to a whisper of dread: “'Tis said he stiffened like a post there in the garden. Paul-Marie bent to no man; and when dead he bent not to God Almighty. Folk say that Grosjean found him standing there, and buried him—buried him in damnation, for certain it is that no priest was called and no prayers were said. That's why Paul-Marie gains no rest in the grave, and one may hear him mumbling to himself if one but listens at the keyhole.”

Pierre nodded. It was this mumbling which had frightened him when he rapped on Dumb House door. Verily he'd have a brave tale to tell beside the fires on those long journeys through the northwood. He listened with keen attention now, for he meant to adopt Amador's story.

“The child grew up in the convent, brown as an Indian and more restless than Grosjean when there is war amongst the tribes. She out-climbed the squirrels and out-ran the deer. If the sisters punished her she'd scale the convent fence and scurry home to old Margot like a wild creature of the forest. It gave me the chills to see her fly past at dusk, the tiny imp with thin legs and great blue eyes. Folk shook their heads and said Paul-Marie's spirit had entered the child—she being born on the very night he died. I do not believe that, do you? Paul-Marie's spirit is

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in the garden ; one may often hear him talking with the devil and the jays. A man cannot have two spirits ; that is sure." Burly Pierre said nothing.

"Dumb House fell to Grosjean. He shut the cursed door as you see, and went to the Indian wars."

"Grosjean ! Grosjean !" The voyageur sprang up in great excitement. "Mother of God, and all the Saints ! I knew him well. Tall, seasoned like a hickory—arm which would dent the edge of a knife ? eyes that snap and sparkle in the night ? hair gray—but gray as a man still young ? Eh ? Eh ?" Burly Pierre questioned eagerly, and Amador assented to each item of the catalogue.

Pierre grasped Amador's arm, and his eyes lighted with enthusiasm : "But one must see Grosjean to understand ; must see him in fight, when he laughs and begs that you pardon him if he but jostle you. It matters not how tall or broad Grosjean may be, 'tis something else—something I cannot understand, which makes one remember him. He always came when there was fighting, and went away when there was none. I knew him well—as well as any man knows Grosjean," Pierre added presently.

For a long while both Pierre and Amador were silent.

"And who lives there now ?" asked Pierre.

"Paul-Marie, none other ; earth cannot cover him ; Paul-Marie's ghost, the crows, the rabbits, the owls, the bats, they live there—God himself knows what else."

Amador chuckled to himself : "And there's Mother Margot lives next door, housekeeper to Grosjean ; she's stone blind, yet she walks down this path every

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day to the convent and back again. She steps on the same blade of grass and the same clod each time she passes—and she blinder than a bat. When she gets right there, abreast this log—she always says, ‘Good day, Amador,’ ‘Good day, Madame,’ ‘May the saints grant you peace, good Amador,’ ‘Merci, Madame.’ Always the same, no change; and she passes on. Should the sun forget the hour, one might set him right by Margot’s marching down the path. Once the girl—but no matter.”

Pierre’s practical mind revolted at the idea of such a stronghold going to waste. “The governor should order——” he began.

“Order who? Not Grosjean? The governor gives no orders to Grosjean; nay, not even the king. And the good God himself gave none to Paul-Marie. More than that, I warrant you if Paul-Marie were alive not even yon banana tree would be flapping its wings against his wall, prying into his secrets. Look! There he is.”

Pierre wheeled like a weather-cock; a sickly pallor rushed across his face. He shook with palsy, and the scared eyes of him turned towards the garden.

“Here! Here, on the levee!” Amador plucked his sleeve and pointed: “That’s Grosjean.”

Pierre gasped and smiled, smiled again, then laughed outright, looking behind him at the banana leaf that waved from the top of Paul-Marie’s wall.

“There! That’s Grosjean,” Amador repeated. Neither of them had observed Grosjean when he stepped out of his door immediately beyond the Dumb House. When they first noticed him he was standing on the levee beside the river—square-shouldered as an

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oaken block hewn out by Pierre's broad-axe. He stood at the water's edge, his hands clasped behind his back, in silent contemplation.

Grosjean turned his head very slowly, following the curve and sweep of the river until his gaze rested on the Government House, then wandered far beyond as if he sought to peer around the distant bend which barred the road to France. For some moments he watched this barrier of trees round which the curving river swept. Then he sighed his relief because no ship appeared upon the shimmering pathway.

The giant of the North started forward. "Grosjean!" he ejaculated; "Grosjean! I should have known there could be only one."

Pierre had already taken two quick strides towards the levee when Amador sprang up and grasped his arm. "What mean you? Fool!"

"I know him well; we are friends."

Pierre struggled to loose himself, but Amador clung to the big fellow's arm.

"Let Grosjean be," he admonished. "No man speaks first to Grosjean, not even the governor."

"The more fools they!" retorted Pierre; "he's the prince of boon companions——"

With another glance towards the motionless figure on the river's brink Pierre hesitated; then he sat down. A better thought deterred him from intruding upon that silent man.

"But I know him well; I know every scar on his face," Pierre grumbled.

"Aye," responded Amador; "'tis said the history of Louisiana is writ in those scars—one for each battle."

Pierre laughed aloud: "Then I warrant you the

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whole map of North America is traced on his breast and legs—never saw I man so criss-crossed.”

Presently Grosjean came down from the levee and walked quickly back to his door. His was a smaller and a cheerier abode than Dumb House, but every whit as strong, with the same narrow doors and iron-guarded windows. Standing shoulder to shoulder with the big house, it turned no eye towards its fellow, and opened no window upon the other's spacious garden. The houses leaned against each other with eyes averted, as two good friends who had quarreled in the wilderness but who stood ready to help against a common foe. Grosjean stepped within the door and called: “Margot, place the honeysuckle on her table, and the magnolias. Have all ready, for it is near the time.”

Grosjean's voice rang out impatiently, and Margot answered him from the upper floor. He heard the woman's swift movement from room to room and knew the loving exactitude with which she made everything ready for Gabrielle.

Grosjean smiled and stepped into the hall. Upon the marble top of a richly carven table there rested a vase. Grosjean stopped before it and smiled at the painted shepherd who lay stretched at the feet of his mistress, singing the same old song. The flowers in the vase he had gathered himself and arranged with peculiar stiffness. He took them out, spread them on the table, then tried to put them back again more gracefully—for these would be the first things to catch Gabrielle's eye when she entered the door.

“That's worse,” he said; “stiffer than a file of wooden men. But she'll know I plucked them.”

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Grosjean strode out of the door, glancing back and smiling at the vase.

As he passed beyond the shadow of his house Grosjean stopped and measured the height of the sun. "Full early," he grumbled, and checked his steps when he reached the governor's new-made levee. Pierre and Amador watched him swinging along towards the convent. Pierre nodded wisely, and whispered, "I've seen him keep that hell-to-split gait for days and days together, as if his legs hungered to devour all the trail at a gulp."

Grosjean was unchanged: Tall, broad-shouldered, gaunt; a man of the forest, made of bone, muscle, sinews and determination. Two exceedingly black eyes looked out from either side of a high straight nose—looked defiantly at a hostile world. His garments were of the woods, tough in texture and void of decoration. There was no feather in his cap, nor bead-work of women on his coat. The lips were thin, perhaps a trifle harsh and cruel until he smiled. Grosjean was smiling now.

He passed on, his eyes fixed upon the white-washed fence around the convent. He was yet too early, and must consume time upon the way. To his right lay the river, bank-full and yellow, which like the circling rim of a cup pressed the colony back against the forest. To his left were a few log-houses thatched with cypress bark. Many ditches crossed each other at right angles and marked untrodden streets. Instead of draining the marshes these only collected water for frogs to croak in.

To the few strollers along the levee—officers, artisans, African slaves, and voyageurs—Grosjean said

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nothing. They took no offence because he did not even nod as he passed. He had come to a path which turned down the slope of the levee towards the convent, when he observed a small fleet of pirogues and a wide, flat-bottomed barge, moored against the levee. Half a dozen voyageurs were stowing away baggage for a long expedition, while a line of negroes brought yet other packages from the convent. Grosjean looked at the sun. He must wait. So he walked on to where the men were working. His experienced eye took in every detail of their preparations—seven pirogues and a barge, thirty men or more—jerked beef, sagamite, beans, rice, powder, lead, cloth, beads, knives, hatchets—everything. He nodded approvingly. But there were other bundles and baskets which had never before been seen going into the wilderness.

“Raoul,” he said to one of the men, pointing with his finger to an awkward-looking package; “Raoul, you go upon a journey?”

“Aye, Grosjean,” answered the man with great deference; “we convey two sisters to the mission above the Falls of St. Anthony.”

“Two women?”

The voyageur merely shrugged his shoulders in that helpless fashion which means, “I did all I could to prevent.”

“Yes, yes,” said Grosjean to himself; “I know the place. St. Esprit, Lake Superior, between the Ojibways and the Sioux.”

Silent Raoul had said his say. He then went on balancing the boxes and packages carefully in each boat.

Grosjean turned his eyes thoughtfully to the river,

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pondering those dim magnificent stretches of waste between the gulf and the lakes.

“ Ah ! these sisters ! these sisters ! They go beyond the boundaries of the earth. 'Twould be reasonably safe for men, but—Ah ! well.”

He came slowly back along the path and pursued his way to the convent.

CHAPTER II

OUT OF THE CONVENT

THE convent gate stood broadly open. A file of negroes passed out carrying boxes and bales of various shapes to be laden in the boats that lay moored against the levee. They laughed and sang as they worked, with gleaming teeth and happy voices, bearing lightly their burdens of the body, for they bore no burdens of the mind.

Grosjean reached the clumsy green gate. Before he had lifted the knocker the small grille was opened ; he saw the kindly but regretful eyes of Sister Conflans peering through.

“ Ah ! It is you,” she said ; and the crippled sister opened the gate.

“ This way,” she beckoned, leading him along a sandy path beneath the white-washed trellis, and into the main building. “ May you be pleased to wait.” Sister Conflans pointed to the door of a prim little parlor, and motioned deferentially for Grosjean to enter.

Grosjean did not seat himself ; neither did he glance at the wonders of painting and embroidery which the good nuns displayed as their pupils’ handiwork.

Presently Mother Louise came in as noiselessly as a soft gray shadow, with the other woman at her back. She found Grosjean standing at a window contemplating their well-ordered garden, and the patch of bright

OUT OF THE CONVENT

green sugar-cane to the left. Hearing the rustle of their garments, he turned.

“Greeting, good mother,” he said, and bent his head in stately courtesy.

“Peace be with you, my lord——”

“Grosjean,” he corrected decisively.

Sister Conflans looked wonderingly from this rough-clad man of the woods whom she had known only as Gabrielle’s father, to the Mother Superior who addressed him with the respect due exalted rank.

“Grosjean,” the mother went on, accepting his correction, though she hesitated at the word ; “Grosjean, I am glad to see you, yet my heart is heavy that you have come for Gabrielle. Such a flower should have bloomed for our Blessed Church.”

Grosjean smiled and refrained from debating a matter which had long been settled.

“Yes, mother, I am come for Gabrielle. The house is ready. Her husband is expected on Le Duc d’Anjou within the week. A week—’tis brief space for a father who scarcely knows his own child.”

Mother Louise nodded to Sister Conflans, who hobbled up the stair with trembling speed. Almost immediately an upper door opened ; light steps came running through the hall, and a radiant girl bounded down the stair.

“Jean ! Jean !” she cried joyfully, and sprang into her father’s arms.

Even the austere face of Mother Louise relaxed, schooled as she was against betraying the slightest emotion.

Grosjean, the exile, hardened by tempests and scarred by wars, folded his daughter to his heart as

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tightly and as lightly as the husk enfolds the tender corn. The convent and its people faded from his thought. He brushed back the hair from Gabrielle's forehead and gazed into her eyes. Tears came, and dimness, and silence.

At the head of the stair three other pale-faced women leaned over the rail, striving to peer into the parlor. Grosjean saw nothing of them ; he only saw his daughter, and deep in her eyes he saw again that other Gabrielle who had blest his banishment—she who had died in giving him this precious token of her love.

Slender as the nodding lilies in the convent garden, flushed with the glorious color of a rich Provençal rose, Gabrielle pressed her cheek against the tanned one of her father. The suns and storms and the rains which had beat upon Grosjean's cheeks were all forgotten. Her eyes looked up to his like twin blue flowers of paradise.

Gabrielle was dressed in gray, the simple convent garb, with bands of white at throat and wrists and waist. Her home-knit stockings did not wholly destroy the trimness of her ankles, nor did her sturdy little shoes seem made for peasant's wear. The sisters, looking down from above, marvelled that so rough a woodsman should have so fair a child.

“Gabrielle,” he whispered, “is all prepared?”

She cuddled her head upon his bosom, but could not speak.

“Come then,” he said ; “let us be gone.”

Grosjean passed his arm about her waist, and in his eye there was a challenge to any who might dare detain them. This daughter was his sole possession, and Grosjean meant to claim it.

OUT OF THE CONVENT

Mother Louise made a sign to Sister Conflans, who opened an inner door and brought out a basket—the belongings of a young girl. Carefully tucked on top was a dress of coarse gray cloth similar to the one she wore. Gabrielle glanced from her father to the basket and her eyes grew dim again.

“What are these, good mother?” Grosjean asked.

“Her clothing——”

“She has no need of them. Keep them for the poor.” Grosjean dropped a heavy purse into the basket.

“But Jean!” Gabrielle protested; “I shall be lonely. I have some trinkets, and——”

“Very well,” he answered with a smile, lifting the basket and leaving the purse with Mother Louise.

“Come.”

They were moving slowly through the hallway when a sob came from the top of the stair. Gabrielle saw Sister Therese bending over the rail.

“Oh Jean,” she said; “they are going away tomorrow; I shall never see them again. I must——” She broke from her father and ran up the stair. Grosjean let the girl have her wish, and waited.

“Good mother,” he inquired, nodding towards the group above; “they go to the Sioux Mission?”

“Yes, two; Sisters Therese and Claire.”

“They are very brave.”

“Daughters of the Church need have no fears,” Mother Louise answered proudly.

Presently Gabrielle came down again very slowly and kissed Mother Louise. “Good-by, mother; may I come back to see you every single day?”

“Certainly, my child, this shall always be your

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home. God grant you may seek it in gladness, and never be driven hither by distress.”

Father and daughter turned from the foot of the stair. The front door stood open ; the outer gate was ajar. Beyond that lay the world, the only world of which Gabrielle had knowledge—a world of swamp and sedge, of pools where frogs croaked and reptiles lurked. That world was bounded by a wall of moss-hung trees and by a glittering river. Through the gate she saw the crouching huts, the palmettoes spreading their fan-like leaves from the ground, thickets of cane and bramble, ditches of stagnant water where hideous serpents made their home. She saw the negroes carrying packages to the boats. And the great river held them all in its hollow.

Her eyes sped along the sandy walk, beneath the trellis, through the open gate, across the bayous and the marsh to the grim mysterious woods beyond. She shrank and glanced backwards.

Behind her was a cool and quiet hall, the mother with her brow of peace, the door that opened on a garden where soft sweet shadows fell. Like a gray bird fluttering from the fowler she darted through the hall, out of the door, into the garden.

Grosjean followed her, stopping in the door. He saw Gabrielle kneeling beside her bench beneath the green magnolia tree. Presently she rose, plucked a spray of sweet olive and thrust it into her bosom. When she came back to him, with shining eyes, she laid a steady hand upon his arm : “Now I am ready to go.”

They passed through the hall, down the sandy walk, out of the gate, into the world. Thence they

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followed a well-marked path which led to the crest of the levee.

The flotilla of boats caught Gabrielle's eye ; she knew they waited to take her beloved sisters to their field of labor.

Gabrielle paused : "The Sioux Mission," she asked ; "is it so very far?"

"Almost beyond the boundaries of the earth," Grosjean answered reverently, for he respected the courage of these devoted women.

"They will never see the convent again, never see their friends ; they may never—come back." Gabrielle's eyes were very full of tears, and her voice trembled. Grosjean bowed his head in assent, for he well knew the uncertainties of the forest.

"Come." He spoke gayly as he might, for the thought had saddened Gabrielle. "Come, let us go home ; we have many beautiful things awaiting us."

They walked along the levee's crest, Gabrielle clinging to her father's arm and looking out upon the river which came brimming to their feet.

The sultriness of midday had given place to a cool breeze from the southern sea. Many people were abroad. Grosjean spoke to none ; but every stroller, especially the younger officers, turned to gaze after the girl. Some of them smiled at the basket which Grosjean carried. Others would have smiled at Gabrielle had they dared.

Gabrielle kept her eyes upon the ground and upon the river. Her breast fluttered excitedly, but Jean was here, and Jean was very strong. Once only she lifted her eyes and paused involuntarily. She felt the stare that seemed to fasten itself upon her—a bold

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covetous stare that brought the swift blood to her cheeks.

This young man, Vimont, had approached unnoticed, drawing nearer step by step along a path which intersected the levee some few paces ahead of them. There he stopped, and as Grosjean looked the other way Vimont raised his hand audaciously in the act of making Gabrielle a bow.

She thought it must be some friend of her father's and had almost nodded, but Jean passed the man without seeing him.

Something glittered in Vimont's eyes—a something which Gabrielle had never seen before, something she did not understand. She felt queerly; it frightened her. She clutched her father's arm and hurried by.

Vimont stood like a stag at gaze until his friend Grimaud caught him by the shoulder.

“By the nine gods!” laughed Vimont; “yonder girl and her burly guardian make a man of two minds—whether to follow her or no.”

“Come away,” whispered Grimaud, tugging at his elbow; “you've had a fool's luck already that Grosjean did not see you. He'd make you of one mind, and that right joyfully.”

Vimont glanced at Grimaud and instantly back again, grudging the space it took his eyes from Gabrielle.

“Correction girl or casket girl?” he inquired. “Correction, I wager. 'Twould be a God's pity for women like her to bother their pretty heads with paters and penitential psalms.”

“Shut your mouth. Are you weary of the earth?” Grimaud drew him forcibly away, down the levee's

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side. "That's her father, Grosjean—*Grosjean*, I tell you. Don't stand here gaping; she's been married these fifteen years."

"Married? Fifteen years? Imp of Ananias, fifteen years ago that pretty babe was in her cradle."

"True enough," Grimaud answered stolidly; "in her cradle she might have been, but married she surely was to the Chevalier de Tonnay."

"Where is he now?"

"In France, making his fortune. He has never returned."

Vimont's lip curled. "What's wrong with him? Crazy?" He tapped his forehead incredulously, and watched the distant fluttering of Gabrielle's skirt. "What other fortune could he want? Had I such fortune as that I'd swim the seas. Gad! saw you ever such a figure, and such coloring?"

Vimont stood with arms akimbo comparing the bulky form of Grosjean with the daintiness of the girl beside him. "Yes," he assented, weighing the good and evil of the sight; "the watch-dog is a matter to be considered. When did that bit of Sevres come to this camp of tin-pails and soup-kettles?"

"Born here," Grimaud answered with more assurance, for Grosjean was far beyond hearing. Vimont shrugged his shoulders.

"Queer I have not seen her—and I here one week this day. Vimont a sluggard! Ugh! But this sun does sap one's energy. Where has she been?"

Grimaud pointed to the convent. Vimont laughed: "That accounts for it. I shall begin my novitiate to-morrow. That fence is not over-high."

Gabrielle hastened on, her gaze bent upon the path.

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The first tremor of woman-consciousness flooded into her cheeks, but she speedily forgot it.

When father and daughter passed in front of Dumb House Gabrielle scarcely gave it a glance ; of course it was closed, of course it was silent and deserted. She looked beyond it to the smaller house next door where a curtain flapped from a window as if some welcoming hand were reaching out to beckon her.

“ Oh Jean ! ” she whispered ; “ I ’ m so glad . ”

She ran ahead to the door and stepped inside. “ Margot ! Margot ! ” her joyous shouts rang through the house ; “ I am come home . ”

“ Here, my lady, ” a quavering voice replied from the upper story, and Gabrielle climbed the stair.

Old Margot took Gabrielle into her arms and passed her fingers—those sensitive eyes of the blind—across the girl’s face, lingering over each feature to fix it indelibly in her mind.

“ I want to see how you look—at home, ” the blind woman explained.

“ As if you did not see me yesterday, and the day before, and every day since I was born . ”

“ Nay, I missed one, ” Margot objected. “ You have your mother’s brow and hair, your mother’s lips and throat. But this nose, so straight and high, that is your father’s. And your eyes—they are blue, are they not, my darling ? ”

“ Yes, blue . ”

“ Aye, they should be bluer than the skies of Gascony and deeper than the sea. Your hair ? ”

“ Brown, Margot; my hair is brown as you know very well. What a precious old goose you are anyway . ”

“ Your color ? ”

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For answer Gabrielle dented a finger into her cheek, flushed with excitement, and a white dimple remained to mark the spot.

“I fear my color is very violent when I run in the wind.” Gabrielle laughed merrily, it seemed so comical to be describing oneself.

“Your mother’s laugh,” said Margot. “You should be proud to be like your mother.”

Grosjean passed them at the head of the stair, where he set down the basket. Then he entered the room which had been his wife’s. Presently he returned to the door and waited like a restless child. “Hurry Gabrielle, here’s a surprise for you.”

Gabrielle disengaged herself from Margot and followed her father into the quaintly furnished room where all things remained precisely as she remembered them at the dawn of memory. There was the high bed with the stiff curtains, the crook-legged divans, and the chairs whereon brocaded shepherdesses forever simpered at love-lorn shepherds.

Gabrielle’s conception of houses and furnishings was necessarily meagre, as she had never entered but two houses in her life—the convent and this. Therefore these rich hangings did not seem grotesque at such narrow slits of windows; to Gabrielle the Gobelin tapestries did not look odd upon these prison walls; nor did the vases and ornaments contrast strangely with that cumbrous mantel.

She came tripping across the threshold. There she stopped; many strange things were in the room, and she grew bewildered.

Bed and chairs and divans were piled with costly gowns, with velvets and silks and furs, with laces and

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feathers and ribbons—those thousand nameless fripperies that women love. Gabrielle stared, for they were things which she had never seen, even in her dreams. She gave a little gasp of astonishment and gazed as Aladdin gazed upon his castle which the lamp-slave had builded in a night.

Grosjean stood silent at the door with folded arms, enjoying her amazement. She went forward step by step most cautiously towards the bed and paused, afraid to touch these filmy treasures lest they vanish. When she turned she asked vaguely, "These are—for me?" "Yes, for you," Grosjean nodded.

For a long, long while Gabrielle stood beside the bed taking up the delicate fabrics one by one. "For me," she kept repeating.

There were shoes exquisitely shapen, and slippers softer than the skin of a mole; there were gloves of every color, suited to each. There were fans, and hats with plumes, many queer articles of which she knew neither the names nor the uses.

"For me," she murmured over and over again as if seeking a reason why these bounties of fortune had fallen in her lap.

Had there been a simple leather suit with short skirt and fringed leggings wherein she might follow her father through the forest, Gabrielle would have understood. Had there been a pair of beaded moccasins, such as Indian women wear, Gabrielle would have been delighted with the sign that Grosjean meant to take her upon a journey. But these—these—of what use could such trappings be? Why should she require them?

Gabrielle stopped in the midst of all her riches and

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a sudden comprehension flashed into her eyes. She dropped the cloak—it scorched her. She faced her father with quivering lips. “These are not—it is not—because——”

“Yes, your husband is coming on Le Duc d’Anjou.”

“Then these are——”

“Your bridal garments. My daughter must go to France as becomes her own rank—and her husband’s.”

Gabrielle stood perfectly rigid, staring through the window at the great river and the wilderness beyond. This husband of hers was coming—this impersonal being was coming—this myth less real than were the sculptural saints before whom her prayers were said.

There were times when Gabrielle dimly recollected this marriage of hers—recollected the cold night when her father carried her in his arms through a driving rain—recollected the little boy who stood beside her in front of an altar where there were many, many candles; she recollected an old man who told the boy not to be frightened. Gabrielle at times remembered this as confusedly as she might have recalled a word or two of some Latin prayer without the vaguest notion of what it meant.

Once or twice as a child she had heard the sisters talking of it, and with a child’s shrewdness had pretended not to hear. But as she grew older the sisters ceased to talk, and she ceased to think.

But now this phantom was coming; her fingers touched the cloak, it was tangible and real. These were her bridal garments, garments of gauze and lace and ribbons in which—— Gabrielle shivered and flung herself sobbing into Grosjean’s arms. “Oh Jean! Not yet!”

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“But, my Gabrielle, are you not pleased?”
Grosjean was disappointed, yet gratified.

She did not answer; she only cowered in his arms like a frightened child.

“Your husband is a gallant gentleman who has won much renown in the wars——” Grosjean ventured, thinking to arouse her interest.

Gabrielle did not heed him. She only cried “Jean! Jean!” and clung to him; “I do not want to go away. I want to be with you. Only you.”

“Do you not want these?”

“No, take them away. I hate them.”

Grosjean led her from the room, and as he went he whispered to Margot, “Put them all back in the chest.”

Margot began folding the bridal gowns, the cloaks and robes, packing them away in the cedar chest as they had come from France.

“Her mother was younger when she married,” the old nurse said; “but her mother loved.”

When Gabrielle came to the head of the stair she caught sight of the basket with her gray skirt tucked on top. She laughed nervously, grasped the handle and sat beside it on the step.

“I’d rather have these,” she said.

CHAPTER III

INTO THE GARDEN OF FEAR

EARLY as Gabrielle arose upon the morrow her father was before her, for they who live by trap and trail must wake betimes and stir themselves. Grosjean's day had already marched two good hours on its road when Gabrielle, disappointed at not surprising him in his room, came bounding down the stair.

“What! my Gabrielle, still in the gray garb of the convent? Found you naught more to your liking?” Grosjean chided his daughter lovingly, yet with a tinge of genuine regret.

“There! There, Jean.” She paused upon the bottom step like a bird hovering upon a limb, and kissed him. “Do not be angry. See the scarlet oleander in my hair; that is for you. I never wore a flower before in my life, and this one makes me feel very conscious. Mother Louise says we must deck our souls and not our bodies. The convent ways are hard to leave aside. Never mind, some day I shall put on a fine dress, such as a lady wore who came once to the convent. Hurry now, you great lazy; here's Margot calling us to breakfast.”

Gabrielle moved down the hall; Grosjean's eyes followed her with the double love of father and of mother. It startled him that this young woman could be his daughter, his little Gabrielle, the babe of yesterday.

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Her regular life with the nuns had developed every physical perfection, as round and firm as a magnolia bud before its petals fling themselves apart in the fulness of maturity. She had grown tall, as slender and vigorous as a lithe young panther whose footfalls make no sound upon the sward. Grosjean smiled at the ease of each unconscious motion, for never savage chieftain strode down the trail with shoulders more erect and head more proudly poised. The strength of her hips held Gabrielle's body straight; her slight and supple waist was as the God of nature formed it, and owed nothing to the craft of staymakers.

Grosjean shook his head and sighed. "In a fortnight she will be gone; I cannot keep her here." Then he thought of the mighty seas that would roll between him and all who bore his name.

Slowly he followed Gabrielle to the dining-room. At the door she turned and from the smile that played about her lips, from the light that danced in her eyes, Grosjean knew he had lost no child—for as yet no woman had been born in the heart of Gabrielle. He caught her to him, kissed her and set her down again. And Gabrielle did not suspect why he strained her so tightly to his breast.

It had come to the hour of noon. Grosjean was absent at the landing-place, where his voyageurs were loading a barge for the Natchez settlement.

During the morning Gabrielle amused herself in wandering from room to room, smiling and happy. All the inanimate friends of her babyhood were around her, and all unchanged. There was the dark old table with the grotesque lion's head at each corner, and the

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spreading claws inlaid with brass. It gave her the same chilly sensation, half of dread, half of desire to be friendly with it.

The same mail-clad knight scowled down from the same piece of tapestry, but she feared him not; he was her comrade now. She remembered his brave deeds as Jean had related them to her long, long ago.

From door to door she went; and then there was another door, the door to a very little room. When she came to that Gabrielle closed her eyes. She was quite sure she would know everything in this room, the cradle, toys, bits of broken pottery and scraps of rubbish which a lonely child gathers in its play. She could find them blindfold. Gabrielle shoved the door, opened her eyes, and laughed aloud. But the sound of her own voice silenced her, as a jest dies in the stillness of a sanctuary. Her playthings were tossed about as she had left them, covered with fine dust as with the veil of illusion. It was the sanctuary of Gabrielle's vanished babyhood.

She stepped reverently across the threshold, being careful not to tread upon the scattered relics. She paused before the tiny cradle which she had never occupied. Thoughts came that were far too serious to unfold themselves in the sunshine. She turned and stole away, closing the door very softly.

Down the stair she went, through the hall, paused at the kitchen to speak with Margot, then ran into their little garden at the rear.

The garden was just as she remembered it, only the walls did not seem so incalculably high. As a child she used to crane her neck and wonder if the clouds did not brush against the top of those walls—and if

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the jagged glass would cut the clouds—and many other important things.

This garden of perhaps fifty paces width was divided into little yards for Margot's fowls, her flowers and vegetables; behind all these was the orchard.

For a while Gabrielle interested herself with a brood of chicks, fluffy little balls that rolled like wads of cotton before the wind.

Violets grew along the southern wall in the shade, where stiff white hollyhocks ranged themselves most decorously. Gabrielle nodded at them, then stopped to train a rose-spray to its support. Some of the roses had grown out of recollection; some had died and others been replaced. Gabrielle recognized the interlopers, and resented their presence.

Luxuriant bananas gathered in the middle of the garden, where they caught the full heat of the sun; they had increased from single stalks to great clusters higher than the wall. One she pulled down and examined the green fruit, no bigger than her fingers, which was forming at the top.

Gabrielle remembered the day when Jean had set out the fig-trees. It had been great delight to help him work in the garden. Now their branches interlaced and hid the wall; busy jay-birds chattered amongst them, anticipating a feast.

The scuppernong vines against the north wall had overrun their arbor, and hung like a trailing cascade from every side.

Gabrielle felt that she must have been absent a long while for all of these things to happen. Yet she felt no older. Mother Nature, busy with the increasing process of multiplication and reproduction, had taught

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Gabrielle no lesson. She walked slowly to the scuppernong arbor and passed beneath its impenetrable roof.

While she stood half dreaming, hidden by the arbor from the house, her eye lighted upon a denser growth of vines which hung against the base of the wall. Instantly she remembered something ; she stepped backward and glanced at every window of the house to make sure that no one watched her. "There's nobody at home but Margot," she laughed to herself.

Down on her hands and knees she went, crawled underneath the vines, pushed aside their matted growth and forced her way along beside the wall.

"Yes, yes, here it is," she laughed excitedly ; "I knew it was here." There was a hole in the wall, hid by the vines where no one would suspect it.

Gabrielle remembered vividly that thrilling day when she had discovered this hole. With a wildly beating heart she had peered into that forbidden garden which lay beyond the wall. It was the Dumb House garden, deserted by men and peopled by whispering phantoms. How frightened she had been, how cold were her hands, how the twigs fell into her eyes, and how the dust choked her. The noise of a scurrying rabbit had stricken her with fear, but she could not turn and run.

Gabrielle was nineteen now and she had the right to be called "Madame," yet, looking once more through that breach in the wall, she scarcely felt an hour older. There was something in the very smell of that garden which released her from the shackles of convent discipline. She was mastered again by the same adventurous spirit which had borne her onward in that childish

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exploration. Gabrielle shut her eyes and pushed blindly through the breach. It was wide enough for a child, but exceeding narrow for a woman. It was very hot in there, stuffy and dusty, and the dry leaves rustled. With her father's dogged determination she forced her way through the wall and came out in a thicker tangle of vines beyond. She hid there and raised herself erect. Cautiously she parted the vines and peered into the garden of mystery.

Gabrielle's first pang of surprise was to find the place so small. To her childish eyes it had seemed a full day's journey from one vague boundary to the other. It was a journey full of lurking dangers; Indians might be there, or savage beasts, and the little girl with Grosjean's stout heart for an inheritance had dared them all. She had made many a foray into that wilderness, snatched a rose, stolen a bunch of grapes or plundered the fig-trees. Then she would dart back in triumph to the hole. Increasing familiarity had bred contempt, and the lonely garden became a playground for the lonely child.

Oftentimes while Grosjean was absent in some far part of the Province, little Gabrielle would steal away from the convent and slip into this garden unknown to any one. Here she fought out her own campaigns, none the less boldly than did her father, and had her own adventures within the secrecy of these walls.

The thoughts of the garden were never the thoughts of the convent. The good sisters would have never allowed Gabrielle of the Convent to play with that wild-hearted brigand Gabrielle of the Garden.

Gabrielle, grown to be a woman, pushed aside the vines. The same untrammelled imaginings swept

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over her, with all the sweetness and all the fears. She felt the same delicious thrills, the same exciting make-believes, the same sense of perfect seclusion. She felt the same freedom to do as she pleased in a world which was all her own.

First she glanced towards the rear of the grim house whose gallery had formerly frowned upon the flowers. A wildering wistaria had covered the gallery and hid it from view. Against the green mass she saw here and there a belated spray of royal purple. The windows were tight shut, vines grew across them, and pigeons built their nests upon the ledges. Below this was a door leading into the garden; this door had always made the child think of a surly old nun who never opened her lips, nor ever smiled. It was closed now. Beside the walk which ran uselessly to the door, on a sundial a gray hare blinked in the sun. Gabrielle glanced at the hare, and smiled and turned her eyes. Near the center of the garden, on the limb of a dead tree, sat a wise black crow—cunningest of all children of the sky—he looked down from his perch in solemn security. Seeing the hare and seeing the crow, Gabrielle stepped forth from her concealment, for neither man nor danger was abroad.

Gabrielle pushed out of the vines into the sunlight, brushing the twigs and leaves from her hair. With a caw of surprise the crow flapped heavily away; the gray hare tumbled from the dial and scuttled into the underbrush. Gabrielle was alone.

The sun blazed down upon a wilderness—a wilderness complete. The garden rioted in utter savagery. There were box hedges running parallel everywhere, sometimes in stiff geometrical lines—sometimes in

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sweeping ovals and graceful curves as men had planted them. But the hand of man had been withdrawn, and they grew as they listed, long innocent of the trimmer's knife. Weeds gathered defiantly in the paths, as a rabble that delights to show its contempt for law.

Summer, voluptuous and languid, ruled the sky, where a solitary cloud no bigger than a puff of smoke hung motionless. Summer breathed upon a cluster of bananas and they waved their leaves above an odorous cape jessamine, as slave girls wave their fans above some drowsy-lidded favorite of the sultan.

Rosebuds swelled and burst; rabbits bred in their burrows; oranges hung heavy on their stems; a mocking bird sang her sweet maternal song and fed her nestlings in the pomegranate tree. The air vibrated with listless perfumes. All the world throbbed with the glowing blood of youth. The breath of Provençal roses suggested tilt and troubadour, and the languorous love songs of the south. The fathomless sky held neither veil nor threat, for Summer, the mother of the year, flung down upon the garden the shimmering mantle of her protection.

Gabrielle threw back her head in the sheer joy of living and drew a long, deep breath, sipping at the cup of Nature's natal mysteries. There was a soul in the garden different from the soul of the convent. Gabrielle drank deep and wondered at the thrill it gave her.

Much of the shrubbery had grown up like long-legged and spindling children. These she did not recognize, but the three tall pines were waiting to welcome her. By main strength she tore through the

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nearest hedge and stood in the overgrown path, where the weeds grew higher than her knee.

Something fluttered out of a bush and fell at her feet, a brown thrush with broken wing. The helpless creature beat against the ground in front of Gabrielle, worming its way between the stalks. She took a step or two, thinking to pick it up, then laughed. "Ah, you sly old thrush, playing your same trick. Trying to lead me from your babies? Let me have just one peep."

Gabrielle turned and peered into the bush out of which the bird had flown. She pressed aside the outer branches and, knowing exactly what to look for, she spied the nest. There it was, strong without and soft inside, with gaping yellow mouths spread open clamoring for food. The mother thrush fluttered frantically. "Yes," Gabrielle said, rising to her feet; "I'll humor you just to prove what a deceitful old creature you are."

She followed the bird which, by dint of painful effort, seemed barely able to keep beyond her reach. But having once gained a safe distance from her nest, the brown hypocrite took wing and flew away. Gabrielle laughed; it was the same old stratagem of the thrush, but she did not let the bird suspect she knew it.

Passing through the weeds she roused a hare from his burrow beneath the hedge. He sprang up, and darted off like a flash, then turned and stared at this gray-garbed intruder. Gabrielle watched the nervous twitching of his nose, and the undecided wonderment with which he regarded her. She lifted no hand to frighten him, so he hopped away and eyed her from

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a clump of fan palmetto. Gabrielle knew full well that there is no making friends with a gray hare, so she let him be, and sought not to wean him from his wildness.

Instead she looked about to see if there were any white rabbits in the garden. Paul-Marie was very fond of them, and the gentle creatures had been the little child's most sociable companions.

None came to greet her, and she turned her eyes towards the rear of Dumb House, a thing whereat she had always looked in fear.

It stared back at her, flinty and unsympathetic as the face of a cliff. The two small windows above the door were blinded by a screen of wistaria, and Gabrielle felt easier because those deep-set eyes were shut. But she knew that the eye-sockets were behind the vines.

The dumpy columns stood in the same exact row, supporting the gallery; the big water-tanks held their accustomed positions at the corners. She saw no change, and expected none.

The sun had passed meridian height and slanted across the rear of the house, but Gabrielle knew that neither chink nor ray of light beat into that deserted mansion. "Ugh!" she shivered and turned away.

Gabrielle turned, turned her face gladly towards the pines and pressed forward to get free of the weeds. Nothing ever grows beneath the pines; nature spreads her carpet there, allowing neither bush nor shrub to mar it.

"Oh!" she thought suddenly, and quickened her pace, for here was the most interesting spot in the garden—the fountain—and she had forgot it.

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Gabrielle's face was radiant when she emerged from the weeds and felt the brown cushion of needles which yielded its odors to her tread. Beneath the biggest pine Gabrielle stopped and shivered—there were many things to remember in this garden—for Margot had once pointed out the top of this tree and told her it was accursed, that Paul-Marie was buried beneath it. This was one thing that Gabrielle preferred to forget, as she loved to play beside this fountain.

She seated herself upon a bench which rested where the magnolia and the pine took turns at shading it.

“Oh dear!” she sighed disappointedly. The boy on top of the fountain, who held the cornucopia and poured out the water—the boy was so very small. They had once been famous friends, but now—why the boy was still a baby, and Gabrielle had grown.

Gabrielle threw aside her bonnet and sat down on the cemented coping. In the center of an oval basin there lay an oval island plumed and crested with a bewildering growth of pampas grasses. At one end of the basin a group of willows had stepped in daintily, shading the pool and dabbling their slender limbs in the water.

Gabrielle bent over and gazed upon the placid surface. She gasped; a woman gazed back at her—a woman with sunny hair and blue eyes—a woman where she had thought to see a child. Gabrielle turned away. Much as she resented changes in her garden, she resented more the change that had come upon herself. She shook her head and laughed, but the tone was soberer and the face was grave.

“We must all grow old—and some must die,” she

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added, looking mournfully at a pecan-tree which had been throttled to death by a rattan.

Gabrielle turned again to that mysterious fountain. The pitiless sun had stripped it of illusion. The willows had taken root, cracked the coping, and water wasted out. Other willows sprang up along the rivulet which trickled through the crevice and wound away to the remotest depths of the wilderness. Gabrielle shut her eyes to these unwelcome facts and let her fancy transform it once again into a magic lake where fleets of adventurous magnolia leaves set sail for fairy shores.

Though the basin was shaded in part by the magnolia and by the willows, the water felt warm as milk to her touch. Gabrielle bent over and trailed her fingers through it. Tulip-shaped flowers of yellow and white and pink lifted their purity up to hers. Gold-fish, like flashing fire-flies, darted to the shelter of their lily-pads. In a wide space where there was neither lilies nor willows Gabrielle could see the white bottom of powdered shells. It seemed scarce the depth of her arm. She rolled her sleeve up to the elbow and reached down into the water; then she remembered that when the basin was at its present height it would come just to her chin if she stood up very straight. But that was to the chin of a very little girl.

Across the pool from the coping to the island there rested a broken oar, untouched in all the years since Gabrielle left it there. A column of marching ants were using it for a bridge. It was Gabrielle's yard-stick with which she used to sound the water's depth. Now she took it up again and thrust it to the shining bottom of the pool. She leaned over, measuring the

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depth, and caught sight of her own face again. It was smudged with dust shaken down upon herself in crawling through the vines, and sadly needed washing.

“Gabrielle, you need a scrubbing,” she said solemnly; after a moment she added, “Why not? Why not?”

Standing erect she held the oar beside her slim young figure, and the water mark came nearly to her shoulders. If she were yet a child the pool would have been too deep.

“Why not?” she thought.

The sun shone down with steady heat; warm puffs of wind stirred amongst the shiny banana leaves; the water rippled enticingly.

“Why not?” thought Gabrielle.

Instinctively she glanced at the walls—all the way around and back again—twenty feet high, shutting out the world and letting in a patch of intensely blue sky with the dazzling sun in its center. Though walls have ears, these walls of Dumb House garden had no eyes.

She threw a questioning look at the house; it stood silent, deserted, stolid, unblinking in the glare. The cannas shielded the pool and the willows held a screen before it.

“Why not?” thought Gabrielle.

Controlless nature rose in Gabrielle. Summer beat down upon her from the skies, and summer throbbed within her breast. The warm clear water caressed her fingers; the wind stirred in the pines and whispered its temptations. The convent was behind her; its shackles were broken; she was in the garden; she

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was free. Droning bees in the honeysuckle buzzed the songs of solitude, and a mocking-bird sang from the magnolia's lower branch. A full-cupped blossom fell to pieces and dropped its petals into the pool. Earth and air and sky were deserted; the languid sun looked in lazily and did not care. There was a soul in the garden different from the convent, a soul which laughed at discipline.

With a circling glance at walls and house, at trees and shrubbery, Gabrielle flung the gray gown from her; other garments fell aside as outer leaves unfold from the milk-white heart of the magnolia.

For a single instant she stood like a stripped willow wand, lithe and graceful, bending above the water, and marvelled at the reflection she saw—marvelled and flushed, for 'twas not the figure of a child. The pulsing surface of the pool gave her back a faithful duplicate—a wavering and trembling duplicate, rosy with life. Then with scarcely a splash she disappeared into the pool.

At first she gasped and cried out, "Ugh! It's cold." But she quickly hushed, for one must be very quiet in the garden.

"Must get used to it," she said, and reaching down she dashed handfuls of diamonds into the air, bending to catch the sparkling shower as it fell.

"Mustn't get my hair wet—takes too long to dry." Gabrielle stood up and bound it tightly in a coil. Then she laughed to remember how she used to persuade Margot to cut this hair hideously short, so it might tell no tales.

Gabrielle splashed about, delighted that there were no rules in the garden, no bells and no Mother Superior.

INTO THE GARDEN OF FEAR

When she emerged like a renascent Psyche, dripping and glistening, Gabrielle sat upon the coping to dry. A fervid sun poured its heat into the garden's overflowing lap, and encircled her as with a robe. Luxurious odors of honeysuckle, jasmine and tuberose came like chaste handmaidens to anoint their mistress. The lips of the wind kissed her ever so softly and the sparkling drops melted from her shoulders as dew melts from the whiteness of a lily.

Something stirred in the brush. Gabrielle sprang up startled, then laughed merrily at the pair of eyes that were gravely regarding her. "Oh! it's you, you old rascal? Did'st never see a girl before?" She held out her hand to an awkward-looking rabbit who came hopping from beneath a palmetto. The rabbit stopped, his pink eyes fixed upon her, his long ears thrown forward half in fear, half in fascinated curiosity.

"There now, you need not be so bashful. I'll bring a cabbage leaf to-morrow and that will make us friends quickly enough, I warrant." Then she moved her foot suddenly, and laughed as the rabbit scuttled back to his hiding-place.

It takes a long while for one to dry in the sun, especially if the air be dull and languorous, if the flowers be fragrant, and if one be very dreamy. Gabrielle reached up idly to the branch above her head and broke off a magnolia blossom. One of the immaculate petals she spread upon her knee—insensate petal that felt no thrill. As she stroked and smoothed the white petal upon her whiter knee, it turned slowly yellow, jealous to find itself less fair.

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She crumpled it and creased it hard until she made a dimpling scar in the firm white flesh beneath it.

Then she thought of her husband and wondered, as a girl must needs wonder who has so mythical a possession. It was very curious: girls had husbands, but the sisters had none. It was very puzzling. But pshaw! why should she bother? Jean could explain it all.

The mocking-bird ceased her chatter; the rabbit stretched himself lazily in the shade; the wind hushed amidst the pines. Nature dozed through the hour of her siesta. And Gabrielle dreamily creased the magnolia petal against her knee. In the drowsy silence she forgot where she was and what she did.

Once she lifted her eyes and glanced along the line of the northern wall, following the jagged line of sky. Beyond that fathomless sky there lay a forest as unmeasured and as mysterious.

Suddenly something appeared on the crest of the wall crossing the sky-line. Gabrielle imagined it was a man's head thrust up and instantly withdrawn. She could not move or think or feel; terror bound her fast. A red deluge of consciousness swept over her; shame went tingling through her veins. She sprang upright and stood erect, dazed and frightened. She thought of the man on the levee who had stared at her so hard.

"There! There he is again!" Gabrielle gasped, snatched a skirt and drew it around her. Then she laughed.

"Oh! It's a banana leaf flapping in the wind. Foolish thing! How you frightened me."

But she had had her warning.

INTO THE GARDEN OF FEAR

By the magic of a word, a deft touch here and there—behold, a gray-robed figure, fully dressed, stood beside the fountain. The rabbit came back, blinking and wondering at the change.

“You couldn’t get a new coat that quickly, could you, old fellow?” She laughed again, and her cheeks were very pink with the excitement.

Then she stopped and listened, turning her head like a doe in the forest. She heard a shout beyond the wall, running feet and eager voices. She heard the chatter of women, and wondered what it meant.

Although she knew there was no one in the garden Gabrielle departed more hurriedly than she had come, and with many a glance behind her.

CHAPTER IV

THE COMING OF THE SHIP

BEYOND the wall, beyond the uttermost boundaries of the world, as Gabrielle imagined it, Burly Pierre and Amador sat in front of their door and smoked—what else was there for men to do? The wind came in erratic gusts from the south, off the scented Gulf.

They saw Grosjean standing alone upon the levee. The river behind him burned like a molten caldron, the color of a copper moon. The man's figure silhouetted itself against this background. His arms were folded, his lips tight-set, his eyes fixed. His coat flapped impatiently in the wind as if it ill understood how such a restless soul could stand there dreaming.

Amador nudged Pierre and pointed: "'Tis said he sees visions." Pierre shook him off. He liked not the idea of other men seeing what was hid from him.

"Look at him," Amador persisted. "Look at him; he sees something now."

Involuntarily the men's eyes followed Grosjean's.

"Eh bien!" Pierre exclaimed; "of course he sees something—can't you see?" Then up sprang Amador, put his hands to his mouth and bellowed across the ditches, "A ship! A ship!" His voice shook the frail huts and went clamoring back against the forest.

Without pausing to see the tumult he had raised,

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Amador rushed down to the levee, climbed to the top and ran along it, being careful not to jostle Grosjean.

His shout had roused the settlement as though a stick were poked into an ant-heap. Heads were stuck out of huts, and bodies followed, and the chatter of women. Men hurried towards the river, coatless and hatless, with their weapons or their tools. Excited women burst out, tying their aprons round them as they ran. By different paths they came, joining at the levee, as rivulets that merge and flow onward to the sea. All the humanity of New Orleans swarmed towards the landing-place with eyes fixed upon the coming ship.

Whilst Gabrielle had sat and dreamed upon the cemented coping of the fountain, she had heard the shouts which caused her to flee breathless from the garden. But for these shouts she might still have sat dreaming beside the fountain, smoothing out a magnolia leaf upon her knee. She squeezed through the breach and hurried to her own front door.

As Grosjean had charged her to be wary about opening this door, Gabrielle went down upon her knees and peeped cautiously through the shutters.

“Oh! There’s Jean,” she said to herself; for she saw her father standing on the levee. People ran past him, turning this way and that upon the narrow footway. He stood like a huge boulder parting the torrent.

“Something has happened! Something has happened!” Gabrielle opened the door excitedly. Grosjean did not turn his eyes towards her, but others did—many others—every one who passed. She stood

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erect in the doorway, flushed and fluttering from the scare that she had had. The crimson burned in her cheeks; her eyes danced and scintillated like the ripples on the river. She laughed and showed her teeth—it was so very comical, that senseless terror of a banana leaf.

Many people, seeing Gabrielle at the door, made bold to run past the house, and turned their heads to stare. A woman halted so abruptly, with such mute questioning, that Gabrielle smiled and held out her hand. The woman shook it limply. "I could not help stopping," she apologized; then she wiped her hand on her apron and ran on again. Gabrielle laughed.

Now, out of the medley of voices, she began to distinguish a word, even sentences. "A ship;" "Le Duc d'Anjou;" "The soldiers are coming;" "The girls!" Gabrielle comprehended what they were saying.

Gabrielle turned her eyes in the direction these shouting people ran. The fair white sails of a ship came steadily around the last curve of the river. The sun shone gloriously upon her upper canvas, crowning the topmost spars with a halo of golden light.

At first the girl's eyes brightened, 'twas so animated a scene: these swarming folk seemed so full of life, so eagerly expectant. She caught the contagious enthusiasm, clapped her hands joyfully, and stepped out of the door to the stone threshold below.

There Gabrielle stopped, stopped with hand uplifted and lips apart, for a sudden thought came to her. The ship was almost here. It was bringing something to each of these people—a new dress—a case of

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wine—orders from the king—a wife—something to each after his own needs. What would it bring to Gabrielle?

She gasped and caught the door-facing for support. This ship, *Le Duc d'Anjou*, would bring to her a husband, a shadow that walked, a phantom that would claim her, and take her away. Her knees grew weak; she leaned against the door-post; thick mists blurred her eyes. Gabrielle threw a swift glance of appeal towards that white-washed fence around the convent. Now she was outside of it, beyond its protection; and the gate was closed. Would it open for her? Yes, yes; Mother Louise had promised. Then she saw her father on the levee beckoning her to join him.

Gabrielle darted from the doorstep and ran to Grosjean. She laid her hand upon his shoulder and sheltered herself beneath his arm. It was good for a girl to have such a powerful arm to creep beneath. Gabrielle felt the grasp which circled her waist. She quivered and smiled. In this wise they walked without a word towards the landing-place.

There had never been a perfect confidence between this father and daughter for lack of association. Indeed Gabrielle had but few desires to confide. And Jean was so very busy that she hesitated to talk with him of childish thoughts.

Gabrielle remained a child, though a tropic sun and glowing climate had brought her unawares to womanhood. The fulness of her bosom, the curve of her limbs, the carmine of her lips, bespoke maturity. Yet Gabrielle's eyes—round and blue and deep—were the eyes of a babe opening upon a new world.

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Gabrielle walked on beside her father and watched the coming vessel, drawing back at times and glancing towards the convent. Then she clung closer to her father, smiled up into his face and followed the pressure of his arm.

Briskly the vessel forged ahead, her canvas tugging at her spars. Irregular puffs of wind bellied her sails and brought her fully into view. Gabrielle felt a thrill of patriotism when she saw the white pennon of France floating from its yards.

Grosjean removed his cap in deference to the lilies, then halted abruptly and looked at the ship again. "She's not *Le Duc d'Anjou*," he said; "she's a double-decked frigate, and not over forty-two." Gabrielle drew a quick breath and searched her father's face.

"Then it's not the ship that's to bring—bring him?" she asked.

"No. And she's not the *Lorraine* of fifty-six; nor the *Anne* of Austria. The *Marly* is full-rigged——" Father and daughter walked on, then stopped decisively. This unknown vessel, little more than a mile away, turned straight towards them and bowled along merrily. "She's shortening sail," said Grosjean.

Almost before the words were uttered square after square of canvas fell until scarcely enough remained to steady her. With perfect discipline the vessel stripped herself, dropped anchor, and a small boat shot out from underneath her bows.

Grosjean and Gabrielle pressed nearer to the landing-place, where a gabbling crowd had gathered. But the ship's boat, instead of making to the landing,

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headed directly for the nearest point of land. A man in captain's uniform stood upright in the prow ; another officer indicated the Government House with outstretched finger. The man in the prow nodded.

The captain sprang ashore before his boat had touched, thus outwitting the crowd which came running from all directions. He glanced about him, then struck the path which led to the Government House. A bronzed-faced lieutenant kept his position in the boat, and the sailors rested on their oars. It was a very business-like proceeding, without word or greeting for any man.

Before this the arrival of a ship had been occasion for general jubilee. The people were surprised. A Jesuit priest, lean and tanned, who had lost both ears at the Chicasa torture-post, drew away from the crowd and accosted the captain. The captain inclined his head courteously, but did not pause. "My affair is urgent, good father," he replied ; "I pray you give me way." The priest yielded the path and the captain hurried on.

Then Father Jerome walked to the water's edge and called to those in the boat : "May God be with you, my children. What tidings?" he immediately inquired of the lieutenant.

"None that men may tell," the lieutenant answered. "Bear away there!" he ordered the colonists who had begun talking to his sailors. These sailors did not turn their heads and answered none of the thousand questions volleyed at them.

"May I ask who is your captain?" the priest ventured again.

"Captain Hector Plumeau, Frigate Vercingetorix."

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After that the lieutenant shut his lips. He had said all. When the people gathered, clamorous for news, he ordered his men to cast off. In mid-stream, beyond the reach of tongue or hand, they waited the reappearance of their captain.

“What vessel, Father Jerome?” inquired Grosjean, coming up to the Jesuit, who had drawn back from the crowd.

“The Vercingetorix, a new vessel to these waters. The governor has no advices of her arrival. It must be an affair of importance. See how the sailors are prevented from speaking with the people.”

The Jesuits have no love for secrets, and Father Jerome resented this. All of it mattered naught to Grosjean. He bent down and whispered to Gabrielle. “I’m so glad,” she said, and clutched his arm the tighter.

Father Jerome’s face beamed with kindness, despite his scars and disfigurement. “My little Gabrielle,” he said; “how blooms our convent flower transplanted to the world?”

“The world!” thought Grosjean, and his lip curled cynically. But Gabrielle smiled and answered, “I might be homesick if it were not for Jean.”

“Ah well, my dear, when *he* comes it will be different.” The old priest chuckled and pointed down the river, the direction from which all good things came to Louisiana—yea, even a husband for Gabrielle.

Gabrielle looked at him blankly, then glanced at her father. The Jesuit strolled away amongst the people, listening to their murmurs.

Amador grumbled aloud, his eyes fixed upon the

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silent officer in the boat. "I warrant if I were a wench and asked for news, his tongue would wag and snap like a flag in the wind."

"Be of good patience, Amador," counselled the priest; "mayhap they come on the king's affairs, and we shall know all in good time."

"Yes," spoke up B'tiste from the Mill; "the captain has but now gone to see the governor."

Thereupon the group separated, straggling like a herd of home-bound cattle towards the Government House, hoping to hear the siftings of gossip from the great which slip through the most carefully guarded doors.

"Come, Gabrielle," whispered Grosjean tenderly, as to a sweetheart; "let us go home. We shall have our supper to ourselves, thank God." Gabrielle's thankfulness lay deeper than the lips. She said nothing.

CHAPTER V

WHAT THE SHIP BROUGHT

NIGHT settled thickly down, and the fog came. A dense cloud, too heavy to hang suspended in the skies, fell like molten lead upon the earth. Men groped their way along the river front, and the sluggish mist would scarcely part to let them through. A few lights, feeble and smouldering, gasped from unglazed windows. The house where officers gambled was brilliantly illuminated, yet even there the gloom hung like a pall above their games.

A steady gleam came from the governor's study and flickered on the river. His door he kept locked, and not even his closest counsellor knew what was being discussed within. Of a truth the new-arrived captain of the *Vercingetorix* had much to talk about. Two lanterns swung fore and aft in the ship's rigging, and a confused blur of yellow came wavering across the water from her cabin lights.

In Grosjean's house there was neither gloom nor gayety. One lamp burned on his kitchen mantel, another on the table in his hall, and the front door stood open to the street. It was very unusual for this shining swath to pour out of Grosjean's door. The master was much away, and old Margot needed no light to guide her sightless eyes.

Grosjean sat on the back porch, leaning his elbow in at the kitchen window, smoking and watching

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Gabrielle. The girl played at housewife, helping Margot prepare their evening meal.

She talked little, but ever in turning from the fire to the table, from mantel to cupboard and back again, she caught her father's eye, and smiled. For Gabrielle was very happy.

Grosjean made pretence of gazing out upon the garden. Through the night and the fog he could see the trees, see the ghost-like clump of cape jessamines, the bananas, and the vines which another Gabrielle had planted.

Grosjean closed his eyes and listened to the quick step of his daughter in the room, the baby who was now a woman but did not guess it. He listened to the chirping of a cricket in the hedge. Then there rose the cry of a screech-owl from the deserted garden beyond the wall. Of all cries of wood or field there's none so distressful as the voice of this creature—tremulous as a shiver of dread transformed into a sound. Grosjean's mind went speeding backward. Twenty vacant years fell from him, and once again he heard the voice of his young wife, who left the splendor of a court to take her place beside him in the wilderness. Through half-closed lids he watched his daughter.

Gabrielle at her father's insistence had discarded the gray gown and wore one of the dresses that had come from France. She chose the simplest, one of girlish white, with a bit of lavender ribbon to give it color. She had twined a passion-flower in her hair, wearing it with the innate coquetry of woman—whether convent bred or not.

Grosjean noted this, and it put him in a smiling

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humor ; everything amused him. He smiled at the apron which Gabrielle had tied about her waist, smiled as she bent over his coffee, and smiled as he saw her lift the oven lid to make sure that his bread was done. It was all so very like the other Gabrielle. Grosjean dozed off into a delicious state of semi-consciousness, half dreaming, half awake.

“Jean ! Jean !” she called through the window ; “I vow, Margot, he’s gone to sleep. Get up, lazy ; supper is ready.”

Jean roused himself, came stumbling round through the door and took his seat at the table.

Gabrielle’s tongue loosened, and it babbled on, keeping pace with her hands. The blue Dutch plates fell into their places, one—two—three ; cups and saucers, one—two—three. “One for Margot,” and whether or no she made the nurse sit at the table with them.

Grosjean had scarcely taken his seat when there came a knock on the front door, a hesitant, uncertain rap. Gabrielle sprang up delightedly : “Oh, let me go, let me go ; it’s a visitor ! We shall have company. Do you know, Jean,” she said quite seriously, “I have never had a visitor in all my life.”

“No, dear, it is not a visitor ;” Grosjean caught her by the hand as she ran into the hall ; “I have no friend to come and break bread with me. You must never go to the door at night.”

His tread rang sharply on the solid oaken floor, echoing through the lower rooms, which were bare of hangings and sparse of furniture. Gabrielle followed step by step ; when the convent bell used to ring it always summoned every eye to every crevice.

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Gabrielle felt very independent, now that she could go and look at their visitor without concealment.

Grosjean opened the door and peered into the darkness. A man stood there, very erect and stiff—a man in uniform—the governor's orderly. The orderly saluted and handed him a letter.

Grosjean came back to the kitchen table and spread it under the lamp. The letter was very brief; Gabrielle read it over his shoulder :

“Will Grosjean favor me by coming to my house at once? The business is urgent, or I should not disturb him.”

Gabrielle could not decipher the signature, so she asked, “Who is it from?”

“The governor.”

“Mother Louise used to rap me over the knuckles for bad penmanship, and *I* wrote a great deal better than that.” Gabrielle laughed, yet she looked anxiously into her father's face. “Urgent business” in the colony was generally but another name for impending peril. Grosjean stroked her hair a moment; then they walked back together through the hall to the man in the mist.

“You will say to His Excellency that I am engaged.” Grosjean spoke tersely. The orderly saluted, turned on his heel, and left.

“Oh Jean! You ought not to treat the governor so ill.”

“There's no need for me,” he explained; “the tribes are quiet as far up as the Yazoo country. Beside I thought you wanted me at home with you to-night.”

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“So I did ; so I do. But it was such a polite note.”

“Yes,” he reflected ; “you are right. I should have returned a more courteous reply.”

The orderly had disappeared, but a whistle from Grosjean recalled him. “I have thought better of it. Say to His Excellency that I shall be with him in an hour.”

The hour with Gabrielle put Grosjean in kindlier mood. He left home and strode towards Government House, bidding Gabrielle close the door. The bar fell into place, and Grosjean knew that nothing short of a battering-ram could force an entrance.

Grosjean went cheerfully enough to the governor's quarters, a low strong-built house of hewn logs, half a mile farther down the river.

The sentry at the door stood aside and Grosjean entered without so much as a nod. An orderly in the hall opened an inner door, showing Grosjean to a room where sat the governor, and a man wearing the uniform of a captain in the royal navy. It was the same man whom he had seen spring from the boat that afternoon.

The governor hurried to welcome him. “Pardon my disturbing you, but I have great need of your assistance.”

“I thought as much,” Grosjean answered sententiously, in the tone of a man who believes that the world never seeks him except to ask a service.

Captain Plumeau rose courteously ; yet was visibly annoyed at the delay. When he saw the man who had caused this delay, an ordinary courier, Captain Plumeau took no pains to conceal his irritation.

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Grosjean met his frown as calmly as he might have regarded the petulance of a child. Then Plumeau looked at him again.

The governor greeted the newcomer with double deference,—with the consideration accorded to rank, and the respect of one brave man for another. At first the governor felt uncertain whether he should extend his hand, Grosjean being so peculiar. But Grosjean smiled, thinking of Gabrielle and the warm kitchen at home.

The governor grasped his hand cordially. “I am glad you are at home, else I should not have known what to do. Captain Plumeau, let me present you to——”

“Grosjean.” His thin lips gave the word with emphasis.

“Grosjean.”

The governor repeated the word mechanically. His deference had not been lost upon Captain Plumeau, who was disposed at first to think it an excellent bit of diplomacy. But when he looked this forester straight in the eye, he extended his own hand with the consciousness that he received an honor rather than conferred one. “I am honored, m’sieu,” he said.

The governor stepped quickly to the door, and locked it. Then he drew three chairs close together at the table. “I beg you be seated;” he bowed to Grosjean, then took his place between the two.

“Grosjean,” he began; “I need not say that I never should have disturbed you except upon a matter of importance. Neither need I caution you to secrecy.”

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Grosjean's weather-beaten face betrayed neither surprise nor curiosity.

"Captain Plumeau," the governor explained, "has just arrived from France in the *Vercingetorix*. He informs me that I am to be the host of a noble guest sent hither by the king."

The governor trod upon ground most delicate; he watched the perfectly impassive face before him and could not hazard a guess as to what this man was thinking.

"My orders," he continued, "are to conceal this guest in the colony, to show him distinguished honor, but to let him see no one. Above all, I am to let no one see him. Am I right, captain?"

Plumeau nodded.

"As you can well imagine," the governor went on, somewhat chilled by Grosjean's apathy, "he is a guest for whom I am at a loss to provide fitting quarters. The Dumb House being unoccupied I thought—I thought perhaps—" The governor stopped.

Grosjean sat drumming on the table, drumming the long rattle of the call to quarters. He stared straight ahead. Captain Plumeau mistook his silence and suggested, "He will pay royally."

Grosjean hurled a glance at the man which smote him full in the face and silenced him. The eager captain realized that he had made a mistake.

The governor made all speed to relieve this tension: "It is a guest of the king; I thought perhaps——"

Grosjean rose abruptly and struck the table with his clenched fist. He struggled to control himself. "Your Excellency—Your Excellency forgets the

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terms upon which I came to this colony. Let the king provide for his own guest ; let him hide his outcasts where he pleases—but not in my house. I owe naught of love or service to the King of France. Let him conceal his midnight orgies, and shelter the low-lived ministers of his pleasures beneath the roofs of other men. My house is vacant, yes, but I'd tear it down brick by brick before any companion of that debauched king should sleep within it." Grosjean's black eyes sparkled ; he checked himself, and curbed his volcanic passions.

Plumeau sprang to his feet with flaming face. The governor arose and laid a hand upon the captain's arm. Grosjean fronted them both. "Monsieur le Governor," he said, "and you, Captain Plumeau, I mean not to be curt. Your pardon, gentlemen. We speak plainly in these woods. I owe the king no love, and shall render him no service. I am a Frenchman, loyal in all things except to the person of the—the king. Out of consideration for you gentlemen, I shall call him simply 'the king.'"

There was somewhat in Grosjean's face of suffering and sorrow which changed the thought of Plumeau. And there was something else in Grosjean's face which would have made the most reckless man consider twice before attacking him.

"M'sieu," Plumeau spoke in conciliatory phrase, "I fear our good governor has not made you understand. The man who is on my ship is no common refugee. Neither does he run away from the scandal of a low intrigue. It would be no personal service to the king to shelter him, but a service to all humanity. He is an oppressed and banished man——"

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Plumeau glanced at the governor ; the governor read his inquiry and nodded—yes, he could trust Grosjean.

“This man,” Plumeau continued earnestly, “is Prince Murad of Turkey, brother to the sultan. He was cast into prison by the tyrant and condemned to death, but escaped to France. The sultan demanded his surrender of our government. The king desired not to offend his ally, yet was unwilling for the prince to be murdered. So he replied that Prince Murad had fled to Louisiana, beyond the limits of the world. And straightway I was commissioned to convey him hither with all speed.”

Grosjean wavered ; Plumeau pressed his point with blunt eloquence : “Since the knightly Saladin there has been no prince of the East before whom the people bow with such reverence. This youth has astounded gray-haired generals by the wisdom of his counsels, and fired the enthusiasm of thousands by the headlong daring of his personal exploits. Formerly he outrivalled Cleopatra in his pleasures ; then of a sudden he turned from licentiousness, closed his gardens, and freed his dancing-girls. He gathered authors, poets and philosophers about him and debated with them of their learning. For years he has travelled in far countries. I warrant he speaks French more purely than you or I—and other tongues as well. ’Twas public jest in Paris the manner in which grand ladies besieged him. But he let them all alone, and men considered him a great fool. Think of it—he is not yet thirty.”

Plumeau spoke with the rush of him whose heart is in his words. Grosjean halted midway between the table and the door.

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Plumeau struck again, straight and truly : “ M’sieu — M’sieu Grosjean, I love this boy,” he said ; “ and I beseech you to give him asylum. If you could but see him—fairer than a woman, and gentler—marked for murder——”

Grosjean turned and held out his hand : “ Captain, you are a brave man and an unselfish friend. I thank you for teaching me my duty. My house and myself are at your service. But——” his voice rose ; “ but, Captain Plumeau, you may tell your King Louis for me—say Grosjean, and he will know—tell your King Louis that I had liefer shelter the brother who could hurl him from his throne. When shall I receive your friend ? ”

“ To-night, at once,” Plumeau answered.

“ The house shall be ready,” said Grosjean.

CHAPTER VI

THE HOUSING OF MURAD

IT had come to the darkest hour of the night. The stars grew weary of their efforts to shine upon the earth. One by one these patient watchers of the sky had been stifled by a triumphant fog. The ship's lanterns had long since ceased to send their struggling rays towards the shore.

The governor had arranged that Prince Murad should be brought ashore during the dead hour of the morning. With great care he selected a sentry who would not babble, and Captain Plumeau adopted like precaution with his crew. None of them were given shore leave, no colonials were allowed to board the vessel, and not the slightest gossip was permitted between townfolk and sailors. Precisely at three of the clock the governor, Grosjean, and two trusted officers gained a projecting point opposite Dumb House where willows grew at the water's edge. This had been agreed upon with Captain Plumeau as a convenient spot for landing. He could not mistake the place, for the mountainous bulk of the house loomed up behind it.

“Here!” said Grosjean. The outlines of four men slunk into the clump of willows that came close to the water. None spoke. They knew what they had to do and there was no need for speech. Grosjean's ears were keenest. Presently he lifted a warning hand;

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yes, it was a boat, muffled and cautious, but the lap-lap-lap-lap of the waves against her sides could be detected by the acute senses of a woodsman. The boats—there were six of them—showed no light. The waiting party carried none, and not a glimmer came from that sepulchral pile to which the stranger would be taken. Grosjean stood in utter silence, waiting ; his head was bent forward, his ears and eyes intent upon what should be belched up by the fog. Before any of the others saw or heard, Grosjean made a little movement of satisfaction. They were coming, a boat—two boats—four—five—six boats. Grosjean reached out and caught the foremost prow, and held it fast to the beach as Captain Plumeau sprang ashore. The other boats came to rest, and skilful hands prevented any scraping or bumping that would make a noise.

“Six boats were necessary,” the captain explained in a whisper ; “he carries much baggage and I thought it wise to land everything at once.”

Grosjean glanced at the heavy-laden boats. “For two men,” he thought. He would have carried on a year’s campaign with a hundred men on far less equipment. He said nothing.

Plumeau turned to his boat and drew another man to shore, a man of whom Grosjean could only see that he wore flowing garments, a turban, was slightly built, and moved with the elasticity of unconquerable youth. As this man stepped from the boat Captain Plumeau took Grosjean’s hand and passed it through the stranger’s arm. “Your host,” he said to the newcomer ; “and this is Prince Murad,” he whispered further. Grosjean felt the young man smile ; he saw the gleam of his teeth in the darkness—but the smile

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he felt. "Here is our good governor," spoke the captain. Murad extended his hand to each in turn.

"God's peace be on you, gentlemen," he said most gravely; "I am a stranger."

There was something marvellously magnetic in the young man's voice, but the governor gave no time for useless courtesies. "Let us get him into the house at once," he suggested in a whisper to Grosjean.

Plumeau pressed the unloading with all haste. Four sailors in the second boat dumped their cargo ashore without an order or a comment. There were two chests in that boat. The captain assigned two men to each and pointed them to Dumb House.

From the other boats a great assortment of queer packages was heaped upon the river-bank—chests large and small, heavy and light—bales of most unwieldy shape, ingeniously bound with rope—boxes—a multitude of parcels. In the briefest space the boats were emptied and the levee was strewn with curious equipage. No wonder Grosjean shrugged his shoulders and glanced at the two men whose needs demanded such impedimenta. But here it was; it needed no argument. It must be housed, and promptly.

The governor touched one of his officers on the arm: "Come, catch hold," he said, and himself set the example of laying his own hands to the work. The two gentlemen, unused to such labor, staggered beneath their burden, which was a chest weighted out of all proportion to its bulk.

Imitating their governor, the others seized bales, boxes, chests, whatever lay nearest, and bore them noiselessly towards that huge shadow in which they

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were to be entombed. One man alone walked unbent and unencumbered—the man whose arm Grosjean had taken.

As Grosjean turned from the river with his guest he reached to the ground, picked up a bale of stuff and swung it to his shoulder as if it were a bundle of straw. Then he guided the prince's steps towards that forbidding mansion—evil-omened and repellant—which was to be his hiding-place.

At his master's heels, dumb as a dog, trudged another man in foreign garb, bending double beneath the weight of a square box, although it was much smaller than any of the other boxes. This man had searched every boat more swiftly than a terrier, and looked about the landing-place with eyes close to the ground, assuring himself that nothing had been forgotten. He was last of all to leave, retaining jealous possession of this box.

There were near thirty men in all, and they moved like a spectral pack-train across the hundred paces of open ground, then halted in denser gloom beneath the eaves of Dumb House. Grosjean led them straight to the door unerringly as the bat strikes the mouth of its cave at night. He laid his hand upon the oaken barrier. It swung open; a gust of chill air rushed out. Grosjean deposited his bale, then drew the foreigners within the door, and led them to the rear of what seemed to be a wide hall. The governor, panting from his unusual exertion, put down his burden beside the door.

Grosjean returned to the front and beckoned Captain Plumeau: "Here, inside." That silent hallway echoed with the tread of feet, the dragging of chests,

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the clattering of boxes, and the dull fall of bales upon the floor.

“Put everything down. There, is that all? I had best stow them away myself.” Grosjean spoke briefly. When this was done he had but one other word for sailors, officers, and governor—“Go.”

Three men vanished in the direction of Government House—the governor and two officers. “Ugh!” shuddered De Luc; “I’m glad that’s done. Ghastly business. It’s like shoving a man into the catacombs and walling him up. I do not know what he has run away from, but it cannot be worse than what he’s come to. Did you feel the cold?”

Vimont’s teeth chattered to recollect it. The governor said nothing.

As the sailors in each boat returned to the levee they departed for their ship with muffled oars. Their orders were most explicit. One crew remained—the captain’s. “Wait me there,” he pointed, and they melted into the fog beneath the willows.

Farewells had been said aboard the ship, yet Prince Murad detained the captain by catching his arm. He took a signet-ring from his finger and slipped it on the other man’s. “Take this, my friend,” he whispered. The sea-fighter bent his knee and kissed the prince’s hand.

Murad produced a heavy bag from beneath his robe and extended it to Plumeau. In the darkness it fell to the threshold, and the jingle was unmistakably that of gold. Plumeau drew back. Murad bent over and picked it up. Dark as it was, Plumeau saw the gentle smile with which the prince offered it again. “For your brave fellows,” he insisted, inclining his head

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towards the men at the boat. "My friend shall only have my gratitude, and my ring; both of little worth."

Plumeau bowed low again, took the bag and vanished, his figure being gulped up in the fog before he reached the boat. There was the rasp of an oar hurriedly fitted to its lock—a splash. They were gone. A darker blot on the gloom passed away like a phantom, lost in the nothingness whence it came.

Grosjean touched the princely stranger on the arm, drew him across the threshold, and closed that ponderous door. The Dumb House, the shadow of the willows, the river-bank, all were very still again. The housing of Murad had been accomplished.

In the thick darkness of Dumb House hall the eastern strangers stood, robed and draped and turbaned, their arms folded—immobile as monuments. They heard Grosjean feeling his way along the wall; he opened an inner cavity and shut it. A chill blast rushed out; a bat flapped through and beat against the ceiling. Presently the strangers saw a tiny chink of light come creeping beneath the door. The chink broadened; a pallor overspread the floor that durst not come as far as their feet. The door opened wide and Grosjean reappeared, shading a candle with his hand. He beckoned them—"Come."

The candle's flame bent this way and that to dodge the insidious draughts which slunk like spectres through those long-unopened rooms.

Prince Murad held himself erect, and a pace behind him stood his slave brother, Selim, no less composed than he. Selim was of his brother's build and height, but somewhat darker, being the son of a desert-woman. With steady eyes they glanced around them.

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They stood in a vaulted hallway uncomfortably like that prison-corridor from which Murad had escaped. The walls were of brick, roughly cemented, and embroidered with a myriad spider-webs. Four chairs backed manfully against the wall, and the candle set their sturdy legs in a grave dance upon the floor. The black shadow of Grosjean's hand hung down from the ceiling, threatening them like a malicious genius.

On one of the chairs lay a man's hat—Paul-Marie's—where it had been flung by its careless owner. It was covered with the dust of years. Stout wooden pegs driven in the walls sustained their weight of muskets, powder-horns, and rifles. But no man touched them. They were rusted red and the spider made his lair amongst the locks.

A long gray cloak swung above the hat and rustled when the gust caught it. It seemed to writhe as its master might have writhed in his unhallowed grave. With the candle-light behind it, Prince Murad could see the cloak dangling in tatters, riddled by moths, and mottled with mould.

It was the house of accursed death, shut to the chatter of children, forbid to the smiles of women, barred to the sunshine of God. Prince Murad looked straight at Grosjean, the man who was master of such a place in such a land.

The yellow glare fell on Grosjean's face in patches, lighting his breadth of brow, tipping his thin nose, and sparkling in his beard. His other cheek lay hid beneath a mountain of shadow. Back of him yawned a region of pitchy darkness, vague, indeterminate, unknown. It might have been a lady's chamber, or a

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charnel-house, or a limitless abyss. Grosjean stood in the midst of a murky glow and motioned them to come.

Murad hesitated, and in that moment the East and the West came face to face. The Oriental devotee confronted the Pioneer.

Grosjean saw a smooth-faced youth, a mere strippling, lithe and upright as a young reed. He saw the whitest of foreheads, a skin surprisingly fair for one of the Orient—the heritage of Murad's Venetian mother. Murad's twisted turban bore no ornament, except a plume of white heron's feather—the badge of the ancient chiefs of Usbek Tartary. His garments were simple, yet of exceeding fineness, and suggested the muscular symmetry of his limbs. The chin was tender as a girl's, yet strong, and his lips revealed the dazzling whiteness of his teeth.

One foot he had advanced a little way; it showed beneath his robe and marked his calm possession of the ground he occupied.

The candle's tortured flame grew steadier, and lengthened into the form of a graceful woman. Then, as if obeying some secret impulse, it bent towards Murad as a worshipper bends who kisses the earth before its king. Every ray of its light, every spark of its adoration went forth to center in a wondrous star which glittered on Murad's breast.

Never had Grosjean beheld such a jewel, wider than his palm. Like a handful of living planets it seemed, crushed into a mass of writhing flames. All of this Grosjean saw at a glance and connected it with Plumeau's history of the exile.

Grosjean's wavering gaze came back and rested upon the other's eyes. Instantly Grosjean forgot the dress,

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the fold of his garment, forgot the star—forgot everything except the compelling power of the man's eyes. They were the eyes of the East, the mystic, the esoteric, the unfathomable East. Grosjean felt their peculiar spell—as something he could feel, but could not understand.

Murad's eyes were full of dreams, full of purpose, full of thoughts beyond his youth; they held the winnowed wisdom of uncounted centuries. The fatalism of the East was there, the prophetic vision of earth's most ancient people.

For that single instant the men stood face to face. "Come," said Grosjean, and his voice borrowed a reverence from his thought.

Prince Murad obeyed with simple dignity. Selim the silent slipped along at his heels.

The room through which Grosjean led them had been intended for a soldier's ward-room in times of danger. Grosjean halted in the corner and held the candle high, lighting his guests through a narrow door and up a winding stair.

The room above was measurably clean. Grosjean had swept it with his own hand. He set the candle down upon a ponderous table, and with a nod indicated two cots. "They must serve for the night."

Murad smiled, a smile so sweet and gentle that Grosjean looked in wonderment. It was the smile of youth, the cheery nod of a boy—he was nothing but a boy, after all.

Grosjean laughed and felt at ease. "You shall camp here for the night," he said, and was minded to put his arm about the homeless lad, driven hither as he himself had been.

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Murad, who read the other's thought, held out his hand. "I thank you for your shelter and your courtesy, M'sieu—M'sieu——"

"Grosjean." Grosjean supplied the name stammeringly, as a school-boy answers to his lesson.

"Grosjean," Murad repeated the word; "Gros, great, huge, large, big Jean; Big Jean. And you, you are called only Big Jean?"

Grosjean felt guilty, sure that this slip of a lad had detected his pretence. Murad shrugged his shoulders in comical imitation of the French.

Grosjean turned to the rear window and unbarred a shutter. "This window looks out upon a garden. It was once a very beautiful place." He spoke jerkily, tugging the while at those rusted fastenings and spending his strength upon shutters which had long forgot that they were formed to open. A rank growth of wistaria outside held them fast, and creeping tentacles entered at every crevice. By main force he wrenched loose the vines, and the garden lay before them, heavy with mist, as though it were a rug of clouds spread over mountain peaks.

"It is much neglected; no one enters it. You may take exercise without fear. One needs a garden in hot climates——"

Murad noted a star which was for a moment visible; it told him the night was far advanced. The fore-dawn hour approached.

Selim knew his meaning and disappeared down the stair. Speedily he returned with a bale of goods, knelt, undid the fastenings, and the stiff rugs unrolled themselves across the floor.

One of these rugs Selim unrolled most reverently,

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taking the utmost precaution lest he tread upon it. He turned in doubt to Murad. The prince took deliberate observation of the star, then directed Selim to spread the rug in such wise that a worshipper standing upon it would face the sacred shrine of Mecca. Grosjean bowed himself from the room, leaving the Moslems to their devotions.

Once outside the door, Grosjean found himself standing in the shadow of the Dumb House, gazing at the river, thinking of what had happened. Slowly he walked to his own house.

“Jean! Oh Jean!” Gabrielle called to him from the head of the stair; “I missed you from your room. I was afraid. Where did you go?”

“I went out—to see the governor; we were engaged for a long time.”

“It is very late.” She came half-way down the stair to meet him, slim and white and frightened.

“Yes, it is late; you must get yourself to bed again. There! There!”

Two kisses, and another, then Grosjean took the white-robed figure in his arms and carried her up the stair, leaving her go at the door to her own room.

CHAPTER VII

THE SON OF THE STAR

ON the slopes of far Japan a brilliant sun arose, and round the middle of the earth he cast a strip of glittering carpet for the Sultan of the Skies to tread upon. Whirling above the plains of China's Yellow River, he reddened the mountains of India, rent the mists that shelter Cashmere's peaceful vale, poured upon the Kurd and his flocks, and tipped the Caliph's turrets in the fabled city of Bagdad.

Westward he rushed, girdling the earth's hot loins with a clout of fire. With a dazzling lance of light he struck a castled prison which clung to a cliff above the Tigris, darted across Mesopotamia, and blinding day burst into Stamboul—city of Myth and Mosque and Murder.

Having looked upon the dungeon and the capital of Murad, Prince of Turkey, the sun sent a timid messenger to creep through the grated window of Dumb House and nestle at Murad's feet.

The room was bare and void, without curtain or carpet, without garment of any kind to hide its nakedness—nothing to soften the harsh right-angles of fireplace and casement. Against the western wall there stood a cot which Selim had converted into a couch for his royal brother.

Beside this couch Selim had spread his richest rug,

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a marvel of weaving, adorned with threads of gold wherein the glory of the sun did blend with milder shimmer of the moon. And perchance a star—one, two or three—shone fair upon the bosom of an azure sky. The rug was from a mystic loom, fashioned by wonder-workers of the East. The ceiling frowned grimly upon that pulsing ray, yet it nestled there and lighted the rug with beauty.

Filmy stuffs from Persia draped the prince's bed, and Selim had raised a canopy above him.

The unwearied slave crouched upon the floor and with gentle palms kneaded his master's feet softly and soothingly, a custom amongst his desert tribesmen which woos the sweetest sleep. To him the hours had been long ; but Murad slept.

The spot of light upon the rug grew broader. It was the foredawn hour. With a pressure of his hand Selim waked the sleeper. "Son of the Star, awake!" Selim stood before him with uplifted arms. Murad opened his eyes, and rose. Selim cast a robe of coarse dark cloth about the other's shoulders. It was the hour for prayer, and he covered his prince with the garment of abasement in which the devotee approaches God.

Though the sun had not arisen, a stronger light came through the window and fell athwart the rug. Murad stepped upon it reverently. "In this latitude," he said, "'tis slightly south of the sun." He turned his face unerringly to Mecca, and composed his heart to adoration. First he looked to Selim for water wherewith to purify himself. Selim answered by holding out his empty hands.

Murad well knew the law. He bent low and

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touched the floor with his finger tips, taking up somewhat of fine sand, which in emergency would serve in place of water. With a few swift movements about his face and hands he made the ablutions of his religion, and stood cleansed of contamination according to the Koran.

“Praise be to God,” he murmured; “the Lord of all creatures; the Most Merciful, the King of the Day of Judgment——”

Hearing those familiar words, the first chapter of the Koran, Selim turned aside until Murad had completed his foredawn devotions.

The morning morrowed. Their simple prayers were done, the confession of their faith devoutly made. Selim began robing his brother for the day in a tunic of purest white wool, with vestments of silk and a cord of braided gold about his middle.

Then he took from the head of the couch, where it had reposed in a casket of gold, the star which was Murad's personal insignia, the oriflamme which always blazed upon his turban in the forefront of the battle. This Selim kissed most reverently, kneeling the while. Then he hung it round his brother's neck.

Murad laughed and talked, making jest of their evil case, quoting from the royal poet :

“ ‘Cup-bearer, bring here again my yestreen's wine,
My harp and rebec bring'——

“Eh, Selim, the Sultan Murad had a brave heart in him, even if he did falter at Stamboul. Let us see into what manner of cage destiny hath flung us.”

So saying he walked to the window which Grosjean

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had opened, and looked out upon the shrouded mystery of the garden.

The mist slept drunkenly on ground and tree and bush, stirring as the breath of morning touched it. Grotesque and formless creatures rolled upon the earth and climbed each other's shoulders, as though they were phantoms of Al Araf grasping at the sky. One gigantic spectre, a fettered Afrit, stood defiantly erect, proud of God's curse, while humbler ones grovelled at his feet. A slowly increasing glow invaded the recesses of that garden. The shackled Afrit became a tall dark pine, catching on its plummy head the glory of the skies. Beyond it stood a bay-tree whose blossoms shone like fragments of a shattered moon.

The garden stirred to sensuous life, thrilled by the warming of the sun. Jasmines rustled and sent their intoxicating odors upward to Murad at the window. Chaste magnolias, full-bosomed and white as milk, quivered beneath their necklaces of dew. A banana clump met the wind's caress and waved its languid leaves as summer sleepers move their limbs.

Dawn breathed upon the garden. Wild hares hopped about in the thickets; a cock-partridge flew upon the sun-dial and whistled; jays began to chatter amongst the figs. A white rabbit came awkwardly out of the hedge with her spotless youngsters. A mocking-bird sang to his mate upon the nest; the brown thrush began to feed her clamoring brood.

Murad smiled to himself and murmured his favorite passage from the Koran: "Verily God will introduce those who believe and do good works unto gardens beneath which rivers run."

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The man at the window gazed upon those unvarying processes of nature, the mating of kind with kind, the sequence of birth, life, death, in immutable rotation. Naught was new and naught was old. It was the same unbroken circle, without beginning and without end.

Spread out before him lay that garden, once so stiff and precise under the restraints of man, but now bridleless and running mad. Its luxuriant beauty revelled in the kisses of a passionate sun, showered upon a no less ardent and fecund earth.

Around it ran that wall which shut out every prying eye. Here a soul might commune with its Creator, surrounded by His works. Murad turned backward with a smile and met the eyes of Selim.

Selim this morning was far graver than his brother. A mighty problem had lain like lead upon him since they began their flight to barbarous lands. He made shift to draw Murad into serious converse, but Murad parried every effort, for morn came bright and the world was exceeding glad.

“Heed me, Murad!” Selim confronted the other boldly. “What is the omen of the stars? Will the sultan’s decree of death reach you here upon the day appointed?” There was that of love and anxiety in Selim’s eyes which forbade a jesting answer.

“The sultan’s arm is long,” Murad replied soberly yet with naught of fear or apprehension.

“But,” insisted Selim, “we have fled beyond the ends of the earth—beyond the Mountain of Caf—and eluded him?”

“Nay; thus saith the prophet: ‘The fate of every man have we bound around his neck like a collar which he cannot by any means get off.’”

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Selim dropped his arms ; he could withstand the false sultan, and that right joyously, but not the prophet.

“And the days are forty-seven,” he muttered ; “forty-seven.”

“Aye,” assented Murad ; “’tis forty-seven days to the first of the Moon of Safar.”

Neither spoke, for both knew the dread decree which hung upon the rising of the Moon of Safar. The month of Safar followed the sacred month of Moharrem, during which the prophet had ordained that blood might not lawfully be shed.

“The Moon of Safar will rise whether we wish it so or not,” said Murad with a smile most reassuring. “We mend nothing by worry. What is not decreed shall never trouble thee. Let us abide here these forty-seven days in patience.”

Thereupon Selim began to unpack the bales and chests, to lay out their rugs and to clutter the floor with scientific instruments. Murad’s mood craved the sweetness of the morning. He made his way out of the room and down the winding stair.

As he supposed, there was a door immediately below the window from which he had been gazing. He had observed the brick walk leading from what should have been a door. The door was barred. An oaken beam rested across it in iron sockets and required all his strength to move. This he dislodged, removed from the sockets and stood on end in the corner. Then he caught the hasp and pulled open the door. It creaked loudly, swung inward and sucked after it all the odors of the garden as if the long-starved house were drinking them. The rank

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honeysuckle, the powerful tuberose, the succulent mignonette, the jasmine—all came trooping in upon him.

Dewdrops glistened on the grasses that choked the walk ; diamonds trickled through the valleys of a rose above his head ; the web of a spider seemed woven of silver threads and strung with gems.

The rabbit he had seen from his window hopped away most leisurely and turned to look. Two jays put their impertinent heads together and discussed him freely. A crow winged hasty flight to the pinnacle of the pine. Murad stepped back, feeling himself the stone of discord flung into a quiet pool.

“Where man comes there is no peace,” he murmured ; then he waited for the startled creatures to be pacified.

The morn grew. The warm smile of the sky came closer. The lure of the garden drew him to it—this man who was but a boy and weary of shipboard imprisonment.

He picked his way along the path with an air of conciliation, with a promise to bird and beast and insect—with a pledge to every winged and hairy and stinging thing, a guarantee that he would not harm them. He assured them all of his desire to become their friend and to live in their sequestered solitude.

Murad trod what once had been a broad white walk, covered by broken shells. The boxwood hedges on either side disported themselves and sprawled about in most unseemly attitudes of abandonment. Everything did as it pleased in this garden, and therein lay the charm.

Murad passed on, forgetting the jays that scolded,

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the cawing crow, the scurrying rabbits. With measured pace and impassive features he moved along as a man whose mind is elsewhere, seeing nothing—thinking, dreaming and planning. Presently he came to where the path divided. Chance led him to the right. He fared on at hazard and halted beside the fountain. He stood very still, studying those crystal depths. Not a breeze of the morn came tugging at his robe ; not a muscle changed in his face. The fish flashed from pad to pad, then swam boldly out and returned the stare he gave them.

But Murad heeded neither the fish nor the fountain ; to him the pool was but a reflection of infinite spaces above, and upon these his mind was fixed. He was not conscious of the moment when the sun first peered above that jagged wall, curious to inquire why one of its children should be in this land of strangerhood staring so earnestly into a fountain's shallow pool.

Slowly the turban lifted. Murad turned his face towards the sun, towards Mecca, towards the ancient capital of the Caliphs. Cords of determination drew tense about his lips ; his teeth set firmly, unquenchable fire smouldered in his eyes. Far away, down the shining path of the sun, he could see the gilded domes, the minarets, the kiosk and the mosque—could see the shadow caravans of the faithful, his birthright and his heritage.

“Allah is mighty,” he said. “He who vaulted the heavens and spread out the earth like a carpet, has given me this garden for a world—until the first of the Moon of Safar. And yon wall, like the Mountain of Caf, shall encompass it about.” He glanced about

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him and smiled at the narrow boundaries of his world—he who had so nearly grasped the Empire of Mahomet, the Vice-Gerency of God on Earth. Yet 'twas a pleasant spot, grown suddenly brilliant and laughing beneath the sun, like an over-happy woman at her lover's caresses. The hot kisses of the sun fell upon the garden, passionate, glowing, uncounted.

Gabrielle's broken oar lay across the coping of the fountain. Like a meddlesome boy Murad lifted it and sounded the water's depth. With useless exactitude he replaced the oar precisely as he had found it. Then the bench beneath the pine attracted him and thitherward he walked.

Murad stopped and looked fixedly at the foot of the pine as if he saw something quite familiar. Bewilderment gathered on his face, doubt which did not clear. From the pine his gaze wandered uneasily about the garden.

“Surely,” he said, “I have seen this tree before, and that clear spot where the sunlight falls. But no, never have I set foot within this garden.” He took a seat upon the bench and tried to reason out the odd vagary of his mind which led him to imagine he had seen this spot before. Upon his mind was the firm impression that he had seen his own gravestone here, the plate of brass in that open space where the sunshine fell. He did see it, and he saw it plainly.

“I must have dreamed of such a place and forgotten it.” Murad was dissatisfied; every time he looked at this open place the same puzzled expression clouded his brow. Finally the persistent folly of his thought irritated him; he rose and retraced his slow steps towards the house.

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The branch of a pomegranate reached out across his path. He brushed against it and a queerly tinted flower fell at his feet. He stooped, picked up the blossom, and his face lighted as one who meets an unexpected friend amongst the hurly-burly of strangers. Murad laid his hand upon the tree as affectionately as he might have laid it upon the shoulder of his friend.

“And fortune hath aimed at thee also the shafts of severance?” he asked most gravely. “Tell me of thy case, my friend. How hast thou thriven? Art lonely here, so far from the tents of Islam?”

He paused, bowed his head, and went his way within the house.

When Murad reached the upper room again his melancholy fell from him. Selim stood like a statue at the end of a long table whereon he had set his master's breakfast—dried figs from Smyrna, dates from the Meccan desert, ship's biscuit and delicacies supplied by Captain Plumeau. The faint aroma of coffee floated over it all.

Murad rubbed his hands gayly, for youth and health, and the virile air of morning, will have their way at last.

CHAPTER VIII

THE MARVEL OF THE GLOBE

BREAKFAST being done, Selim poured water on Murad's hands and wiped them with a napkin which he loosened from his waist. Then he sprinkled rose-water from a casting-bottle.

Murad strolled about examining the room wherein he had spent the night. It was a rectangular apartment, twice the length of its breadth, being seven paces across and fourteen paces long. Murad had already measured this distance back and forth, carefully counting his steps—a habit acquired during his confinement in the Caucasus. When he detected himself engaged in this same old occupation he laughed guiltily, and went to the front shutter. This he opened a bit, despite Grosjean's caution, and peered through the crack. It was as he thought; the river ran directly past the house some thirty paces away, and such a river as the prophet durst not promise the faithful they should find in paradise. There was his landing-place of the night before, the projecting point, the willows. So much for the front.

As the rear window overlooked the garden, he knew the room ran the full depth of the house. Such an utterly destitute apartment was hard for the oriental mind to comprehend. There were two cots, the heavy table, and several rough-made

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chairs. That was all. These had filled every need of Paul-Marie.

Of the three doors to the apartment only one was open, that through which he had entered the night before. Murad was anxious to explore, but as his host had left the other doors shut, he did not feel free to go spying about the house.

The broad-topped table in the room attracted him. He had never possessed a table large enough to hold his scientific instruments and his books. Here at least was a crumb of comfort, and he hastened to seize it.

“Come, Selim,” he said, and laid hold of the table. Together they dragged the cumbrous thing to the rear window where the light fell across its middle. But there were dim and misty regions at either end.

“Now, Selim,” he said, “open the brass chest. I shall help.”

They hurried down the stair and opened a chest which rested where Grosjean had placed it in the hall. Inside, stowed away most carefully, were delicate crucibles, pipes of brass curiously inter-twisted, blackened furnaces, heavy-wicked lamps, with other articles weird and odd. Murad handled them all with careless familiarity; some of them the cautious Selim declined to touch. One by one, making many trips, Murad carried everything up the stair and marshalled his treasures on the table. Another chest made of odorous cedar-wood contained his favorite books. These consumed much time in their unpacking, for Murad must needs open many of them, read a bit and smile, as though they were

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friends whom he but stopped upon the way and questioned of their affairs. Betimes his lips moved as he read half aloud :

“The man who has no sense to rule his steps
Slips, though the ground he treads be wet or dry.”

At this he nodded ; the words of his friend were exceeding wise. Meanwhile Selim had unpacked two excellent lamps whose shades shone with prisms of a hundred colors. These lamps he filled from a jug which Captain Plumeau had given, and placed them on the table. Murad looked on, greatly pleased. “Ah,” he said ; “we shall make much comfort and peace. If a man but fill his mind, his body shall not suffer.”

Then he bethought himself, and took a key from his bosom. He went again to the lower hall and searched amongst the boxes and the chests, finally selecting a small but exceedingly strong box, bound with hammered metal and securely locked. This he opened and from within took out a smaller box, of the bigness of a man’s hand. Most carefully he bore this up the stair and placed it in the open space on his table. Selim saw what his brother was about and left the room. Murad brooked no other presence when this engrossing idea got hold upon his mind.

Murad bent over the tiny box with a tinier key, and opened it. He took therefrom a package wrapped in many cloths. These he unrolled inch by inch until he came to a crystal globe of the roundness of an orange. It seemed no rarity of rarities, yet had he broken it the world could not produce again its like.

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The pedestal of wrought iron filagree he wiped discreetly and set upon the table with no great ado. After patiently examining the globe to be sure it had suffered nothing of despite on its journey, he affixed it to the pedestal. It was filled with a colorless liquid, clearer than water could be imagined. Murad held it between himself and the light. There was neither speck nor mote to mar its perfect beauty. Then he took it in both his hands, pressing it close so that the flowing of his blood might warm it.

Murad sat with the crystal globe in his hands for a silent space which might not be measured. Time did not pass ; it endured like a fragment of eternity. In that void room there rose no sound ; there was no stirring of a lash, no tremor of a breath. Murad's turban, with its plume of heron's feather, held itself immovable as the head of a carven god.

His eyes were fixed upon the clear depths of the globe with every faculty of soul and body absorbed in contemplation. Murad focused every power of his will upon the globe, as a burning-glass which gathers heat from every sky to center it all in a single spark of fire most intense.

The globe grew warm ; the liquid began to move restlessly as though some living thought had animated it. Murad observed with grim-lipped satisfaction that his power had not waned for lack of use. When once his eyes had burned the seed of life into the globe he placed it on its pedestal, leaned close and watched.

The spirit of Murad was in the East ; the essence of the globe was in the East, transported thither by the power of his dominating will. The bubbling of the imprisoned liquid told Murad many things.

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Years before, when a wise man gave this ball of glass and water unto him, Murad turned it wonderingly in his hand—for 'twas said the globe possessed a marvel beyond the grasp of mortal mind.

The wise man smiled, then instructed him. He laid bare a mystery of nature so simple that Murad wondered all the more why any wood-chopper could fail to see a truth so palpable. Then Murad met the wise man smile for smile; he smiled when the blindness fell from his own eyes, and smiled at the sightless eyes of others.

Thereafter Murad found a pretext to place this globe in the blood-stained hand of his brother, the sultan, where it became inoculated with the heat of the sultan's passions, and impregnated with the blackness of the sultan's desires. Such was the globe, and such was the simplicity of its marvel.

Murad fixed his gaze upon the globe and fastened every thought upon his brother, clinging to one idea. So did he read the heart of his brother who by right of murder stood in the shoes of great Mahomet. Sitting there intensely silent, intensely occupied, Murad seemed not a man bound by fetters of the body, but a soul incarnate and omniscient.

Beneath the fire of his eyes the liquid began to bubble and to boil. Dark streaks appeared like cirrus clouds; flashes of red darted across as forked lightning writhes across the sky. The globe grew black. It seethed and raged with an imprisoned tempest. Murad's lips contorted into a smile, queer and sullen, for he probed the depths of his crowned brother's soul. Not even yet had he seen enough, for the light shone dim upon his table. His body

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moved without volition; he took up the frail globe and laid it on the window-ledge. There the light searched it through and through, while Murad leaned on his elbows watching it.

Murad knew his brother had not changed, that the black heart of him was consumed by doubts and harried by a coward's fear.

"Impotent as Nimrod in his agony—friendless as though he were already fallen," Murad whispered to himself. The liquid seemed to hear him; it shivered, grew pale, then the blackness and the defiance boiled up again.

Although the mind and the soul of Murad were in the East meditating upon his brother, the eyes of his body were open, and the traitorous sunshine seduced him with a picture most alluring.

Beyond the globe and beyond the passion there lay a garden—peaceful, yet a glowing anarchy of color—quiet, yet smouldering with insurgent perfumes which besieged his window. The breath of summer panted through the pines, murmured amongst the water-lilies, and whispered sweetness unto the mignonette.

Beyond the globe and above the wall Murad's thoughts went wandering in a vast desert of blue, without palm or path or caravan upon it. In the heart of this desert he might dream his dream.

Yet all the while his eyes were conscious that they saw a fountain with placid waters at its base, that they saw a broken oar which rested on the coping. It was a fountain where lilies bloomed and gold-fish played. It was the fountain beside which he had stood and pondered at the morning hour.

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Murad was dimly conscious of a splashing in the basin—conscious of something, gleaming white, between the broad-leaved cannas.

But Murad's thoughts were in the measureless heavens seeking the prophet's paradise. He gave no heed to the houri who disported herself in the fountain of earth. She might toss the gleaming drops into the air and gasp as they fell back upon her, yet he either did not see or he did not care. Gaudy-hued butterflies floated on the heavy air; seemingly they swam upon the perfume waves that rose and fell like billows of some wonder sea.

A nymph came out and sat beside the fountain twining up her hair—a nymph veiled by crisp green leaves, and guarded by stalwart brown friars who stood knee-deep in the water. The mocking-bird sang to her, and the pink-eyed rabbit threw his long ears forward.

Murad saw naught of this. Yet his mind did treasure it, as a sleep-walker pockets a jewel in a dream.

“God wrote patience on the sleeping world,” said Murad. With the touch of his finger he stilled the tumult in the globe, returned to the table and put it in the case. Then he took his seat.

Murad was weary now and his eyes were dull; the long strain had consumed his vital force. He rested idly on his elbow, thinking of nothing, letting his mind run tetherless as a colt at play. Presently he closed his eyes. There came a noise at the door. “Come, Selim,” he called; and Selim entered bearing a tray with coffee.

As Murad sipped it the brothers talked of trifles

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in the aimless way of men to whom neither good nor evil hap has befallen. Even as they talked Murad sprang up and walked to the window. A buried thought had come to resurrection. The sleep-walker had found a jewel in his pocket.

Murad leaned on the casement looking out into the sunlit spaces beyond. He gazed long and earnestly, striving hard to remember. Wrinkles gathered about his eyes; an expression of alertness came as if he were on the verge of capturing an elusive phantom.

There was the fountain; he could see that through the cannas, and the willows shielded it in part. There were the tangled paths, the pomegranate bush, the overthrown tree with the grapevine coiled about it. There were the lazy rabbits, the swaying bananas and the vistas of the pines. All of these were familiar, but it lacked something that he had seen. Overflowing as it was with life, the garden seemed dead and disappointing.

CHAPTER IX

THE GUEST OF DUMB HOUSE

DURING the remainder of the day Murad sat at his table skimming over many a richly-bound volume, running his fingers through the leaves, glancing at a picture—and laying them aside. Even the Koran failed him and was replaced in its gorgeous bag of satin. For half an hour he read a romance of Nizami, found it stupid, sighed and put it down.

Selim glided in and out like a phantom, bringing up from the boxes and chests below such articles as were most needful. Murad gave him no heed. His thoughts went all a-wandering. Once in a while he rose and walked quickly to the window as if to take a quarry by surprise. Then he leaned on his elbow and stared into the garden—stared and tried to think. At these moments Murad smiled most queerly and uncertainly, striving to revive a dormant memory which eluded him. The memory was in his mind, hid amongst its secret archives—one of those fancies which come to men in dreams. He leaned from the window and listened, for the thought was garden-born and something from the garden must recall it presently.

Murad heard the drowsy hum of the bees, the chatter of the jay; he saw the tall pine, the waving cannas, all linked to another idea without which they were meaningless and vacant. His brow contracted, he

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shook his head and looked puzzled. Then he shrugged his shoulders, turned and made some trivial alteration in the arrangement of his table.

Selim ran up and down the stair like a shuttle, bringing each time two heavy bags of coin, tied and sealed. He stacked them on the floor against the wall. At last he came with a brass-bound chest upon his shoulder wherein he stored the gold, leaving but one sack open for their present uses.

“It is safer here ; I shall bring up the others in good time,” he explained to Murad, who nodded without hearing what his brother said.

When he had wearied of Selim, wearied of his studies, and most of all had wearied of the roof above his head, Murad selected a quaint old manuscript with which he went into the slumbering garden.

Into the garden’s heart he went, to the bench beneath the pine, where the earth was cool and brown and carpeted with fallen needles. The magnolia threw its shadow heavy on the bench, and scattered petals in his path.

Like a child that thrusts aside its task Murad laid down his manuscript and stretched himself upon the ground full length, upon the bosom of his mother. He lay face upward, his hands clasped beneath his head, with the fulness of the sky above him and the wideness of the world on either side. Here he might meditate in peace.

He recalled the glories of the Ottoman Empire under Suleyman—recalled the Sultan Murad’s thrilling victory at Narva and the splendid achievements of that other Murad at the capture of Bagdad. He pictured to himself a turbaned sultan storming the

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capital of Eastern Rome and planting his victorious standards on its ramparts. And the visionary wondered what exploits would be his, what victories or what disasters would befall when he came to reign as sultan in Stamboul.

“When I play the chess of Empire on the board of Sov'reignty.”

The words of the sultan-poet burst from him and made his heart beat faster. Murad closed his eyes and dreamed out his dream.

But the skies were very blue in the garden, the birds were very gentle, the air so languorous and sweet 'twas difficult to brood forever upon the sound of distant war-drums. Presently Murad's lips opened again, and without thought he repeated a well-remembered verse :

“Though I opened my eyes and closed them still the form was ever there ; Thus I fancied to myself——”

His own words surprised him, they were so exceeding apt.

“Yes! Yes!” he exclaimed, and sprang erect. “That was it! Right there—at the fountain!” Murad hurried to the fountain and stood beside it gazing down. Whatever treasure the pool might have once possessed there was not even a memory of it now.

“Spendthrift!” he murmured ; “can'st thou hoard nothing of thy riches?”

He observed a fleet of crimson petals sailing on the pool ; he bent over and picked up two or three. They were rose petals. Murad lifted his head and looked

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about him. "No; they could not have fallen there of themselves; perhaps the wind——"

He explored the garden and found but one rose-bush like unto these petals, and it grew some thirty paces from the fountain. "They could not blow so far," he decided. But there was no other solution, and the day was far too warm to study out a puzzle.

Murad walked slowly back to the fountain and sat upon the coping. He looked around him at the garden walls, the tangled solitude, and laughed at his folly. "I am become a mere dreamer of dreams, and nothing more."

But the oar, which at the early morning hour he had laid as a bridge across the pool, now stood on end against the pine tree. The oar could not have gone there of itself. It was very queer and Murad sat down upon the bench to think about it.

The sun passed on; the shadow of the pine moved slowly across the garden until it piled itself black and heavy against the wall of Dumb House. Murad rose and went the way of the shadows, towards the east, bowed his head and entered the darkened door.

When night fell Murad heard the street door open. A gust of wind came up. Grosjean clambered the stair.

"Well! Well!" he began heartily; "how have you fared? 'Tis a dismal old tomb, but——"

"'Tis a kindlier tomb than some others," Murad answered smilingly; "not so greedy—there's space to stretch one's legs and doors to get out of—perhaps."

The word "perhaps" startled Grosjean, as did the

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glance which Selim cast towards his brother. The Frenchman wondered ; it gave him a creepy feeling as of something that impended which he could neither comprehend nor prevent. Murad employed that "perhaps" so deliberately, with such distinct suggestion of a matter already decided, that he might as well have said, "It may rain to-morrow—perhaps." The outcome might not be as Murad wished, but as another Power had already willed it.

Grosjean looked straight at Murad, who smiled and held out his hand. "You see we have made ourselves quite at home."

The litter of scientific instruments on the table caught Grosjean's eye. A compass he knew something of, the barometer, even the astrolabe and sextant. But there were queer retorts, crucibles of clay, complicated tubes of brass like writhing serpents—Grosjean saw them all but could venture no guess as to the alchemy which found work for such uncanny servants.

Murad with a diffident and apologetic expression took up a pair of delicately adjusted scales, which trembled as he held them. He watched the balance shift back and forth.

"I am taking possession. These are my friends. They shall fill my hours ; they shall keep my hands from idleness, my brain from brooding. Where one has his mind employed it matters little what restraints are placed upon the body. Therein lies a kingdom of itself, without boundaries and without tyrants. 'My Mind to me a kingdom is.' I believe it is one of the English poets who said it—do you know the English tongue?"

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Grosjean shook his head ; it had been long, very long, since man had spoken to him of poetry in this stern wilderness. Murad seemed puzzled.

“It sounds not so well in French—the rhyme is more—more rough ;” he hesitated, then continued with the air of one who has started badly and who endeavors to avoid an awkward ending :

“The poet says :

“ ‘ Walls of stone do not in themselves a cage consist ;
And bars of iron are not alone a cage.
If the soul of the captive be free, no shackle
Can bind him prisoner.’

“Ah, my friend, you see I make a poor translator by the mouth.” Murad seemed really discomfited at his failure. Grosjean stood silent, with a dim comprehension of the man’s loneliness—a loneliness beyond the reach of sympathy. Murad’s eyes of the East fretted, and the star upon his breast flamed viciously.

“But these”—with a quick gesture Murad indicated the walls, the narrow windows and the bars which confined him—“these would make a dungeon for a slave, for the body. Ah ! this body, what is it ? It is dirt ! It is food for the worms, for the vultures and the dogs. This tiny knife may utterly destroy it. Or a drop from this.” He picked up a vial from the table. “One drop from this vial and your strong arm withers—you join the caravan of a thousand years ago. Put the body in the ground and corruption comes—roses bloom and briars grow—what matters it ? But the soul ! Ah, my friend, what are these walls, these shackles ? There is its home amongst the

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stars. There it is free to wander as it will. Allah makes no prisoner of the soul."

Murad leaned his head against the window casement and looked upward into the infinite spaces of the night. Presently he turned and spoke quietly: "I pray you make no apology for the shelter you have given me."

Grosjean looked at him, fascinated by the fervor of this youth who proclaimed a gospel of universal liberty, the first murmurs of which were burning upon the tongues of men in many lands.

Suddenly Murad's manner changed to the light and whimsical: "But I talk too much—our brains catch a disease from the tongue. We babble of senseless things. Come, Selim—coffee. Let us sit down and talk together, you and I, my friend."

"I came," suggested Grosjean, "to show you better apartments in this house. You may find others more to your liking."

Selim bore the lamp which from its shining crystals of purple, yellow and red sent fantastic flickerings amongst the shadows. Grosjean opened one of the doors which pierced the southern wall. It led into a hallway like the hall below, but somewhat shorter, the rear having been cut off to make a sort of balcony overlooking the garden.

"We shall have those vines cut," said Grosjean, pointing to the thick wistaria and honeysuckle. "'Twill give you more light." Murad shook his head: "No; they shall remain as God made them."

As they passed through the hall Grosjean observed Selim looking at a ladder which led to a square hole in the ceiling. "To the garret and the roof," he

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explained. "You may need to mend the water tanks!"

Beyond the hall were four large rooms furnished in French style, chairs with curving legs, broad divans and tables, all gracefully carved. The brocades were eaten away by moths, and the tapestries of the beds looked like ill-used battle-flags.

"You might occupy these rooms if you like." Grosjean had not seen them for many years, and their decay surprised him. "But I have no present means of repairing them. It would cause much gossip if I were to send artisans into this house."

Murad waved aside his apologies with the frank delight of a boy: "'Twas in such a room," he laughed, "that I spent my first years in France. They were happy years. Raymond and I were both young, and lived only for pleasure. Pleasures grow very stupid, do they not, my friend? Fear not; Selim is a famous—how do you speak it?—upholsterer; yes, yes, upholsterer, and we shall make much comfort in these quarters."

Grosjean pointed to a large metal tub which stood in a corner—the sole luxury which Paul-Marie permitted. The pipes were rusted and the faucets refused to turn.

"Here is the bath," he said; "a poor affair, but 'twill serve at a pinch. The tanks are on the roof; the water is very good."

Selim pried into the fittings and into the pipes. His face brightened. "We can make it good again. Some grease—it is very strong."

"I shall choose this room," Murad decided.

When they had finished their round of the upper

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rooms Grosjean showed them through the lower floor—seven large apartments, and a hall, all carpeted with dust that for twenty years had not been disturbed by human foot.

“You can be quiet here,” remarked Grosjean, a poor attempt at jest.

“There is no one in the house?” asked Murad.

“None.”

“Nor in the garden?”

“Only the rabbits and the crows. I have not seen the garden for many years.”

“No one ever goes into the garden, man or—woman?” Murad persisted.

“It is quite deserted. You may be as secluded as any hermit might wish.”

Presently they mounted the stair again to where the green lamps burned on the table. Murad gravely motioned the other to take a chair.

“Coffee, Selim,” he said. Their relations had changed; the host had become the guest. For some minutes both men sat silent, the only sound in the room being the swish of Selim’s garments as he moved about preparing their refreshment.

It was long since Grosjean had seen such golden vessels and silver salvers as Selim placed before him—so marvellously rich as to make mockery of the figs, the dates and the ship’s biscuit.

From Selim’s corner there rose an odor of coffee, filling the room with mellow cheer. Selim set two tiny cups of gold before them, two pipes, and an exquisitely carven box fragrant with the Turkish weed.

“Be at your peace, my friend; we shall break our

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bread together ;” Murad inclined his head, and bent to sip his coffee. He snapped a biscuit between his fingers ; the meal began.

The young man’s manner was simplicity itself, yet there lay a kingliness and royal grace beneath it. His garb of white wool from the finest looms of Persia fell apart at throat and waist, revealing the broided girdle and the cords of gold that laced his shirt. The soft white turban cast no shadows on his whiter brow ; the lamplight flickered across his crisp black hair, and the star shone upon his breast.

Grosjean wondered at the whim of destiny which had cast this man into Dumb House. He could not realize that a Prince Imperial of the Ottomans sat within ear-shot of the panther—a neighbor to the painted Chicasa, within whoop of the warlike Natchez. And Gabrielle was scarcely twenty paces away. Verily the ends of the earth had come together.

Then for a long while they talked, these two men of different bloods and different worlds. The woodsman’s soul warmed to the lad, and in his grasp at parting there was a friendship which might otherwise have been many years in growing.

It was late when Grosjean rose to go. Murad himself lighted their way down the stair and followed through the lower room.

“Be careful with the lamp,” suggested Grosjean ; “it must not be seen from the street. ’Twould give these folk a famous fright to see a green lamp moving about in Dumb House. But—I meant to tell you—” he halted with his hand upon the door—“I shall myself bring all necessary provision at nights. There is no other way.”

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Murad thought a moment, then stooped and raised the lid of a chest which Selim had not emptied. One bag had burst. Some of the gold and many loose jewels lay scattered on the bottom. Murad touched Grosjean's arm and directed his eyes to the chest.

"My friend," he said gently, "let us understand each other. I use your house freely, paying only with my gratitude. I lean upon your love—for that I pay nothing. But for other things I must pay in gold. Selim will take this chest up stairs. But there—" he lifted a bag and dropped it in the corner next the door; "I pray you use this money and pay your people for their wares."

"Yes," answered Grosjean after a period of silence; "you are right. I shall be your steward."

Before he opened the door Grosjean motioned Murad to withdraw the lamp. Then he passed through the dark hall, out into the night.

"Jean! Jean!" scolded Gabrielle, "supper is cold."

"I could not help it; I had affairs."

His daughter stepped back quickly and evaded him. "No, you shall do a penance—ten aves, seven penitential psalms." She sprang forward and kissed him. "Now you are absolved."

Jean took his seat at table. He smiled at the unsuspecting Gabrielle. How wide her eyes would open could she but guess the romance that was concealed in Dumb House.

CHAPTER X

THE INTRUDER

WHILST the sun climbed laboriously from the horizon to the zenith, Murad bent over his table without weariness or flagging. The morning hours passed, yet never once had the garden claimed his glance or thought. Many books lay open and ready to his hand, but not the poets which generally gave him such delight. The witty Saadi had lost his charms ; the lyrics of Hafiz, and Hairi's verse—even the patriotic lines of Kemal Bey failed to thrill or interest him. Instead of these he consulted the ponderous tomes of astrologers, compared the precise mathematicians, and followed astronomers through their starry labyrinths. Swiftly he turned from one to the other, making his calculations.

Murad covered the paper before him with queer symbols of the zodiac and a wilderness of figures. Yet the engrossing problem of the stars was not solved. There was some secret influence which he could not fathom, as if some undiscovered planet had intervened and upset the harmony of his constellations.

The bulky volume on astrology contained the winnowed wisdom of many ancient peoples. Yet it was dumb as to the point which puzzled him. Verily there was a new conjunction. Murad stopped

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and meditated with finger between the yellowed leaves.

Selim, thinking that Murad had reached a conclusion, came forward and stood beside the table. The brain-weary man glanced up.

“Forty-six days,” he said; “full time that we should know. Yet the stars tell a halting story. They speak of courage, love, sacrifice and death.”

“Death?” repeated Selim.

“Yes, and ’tis a star of the first magnitude that falls.”

Selim turned aside, shivering, whilst Murad went on: “The Moon of Safar will rise in Scorpio, with red-eyed Antares glaring down. It seemeth a paradox that I, who was born under Jupiter Fortunatus, should die beneath the Moon in Scorpio. Yet——” Murad shrugged his shoulders; the matter was quite beyond his control. Why should he fight against the stars?

He pushed aside his books, rose from the table and moved at hazard about the room. ’Twas a complicated study, fraught with much portent for good or evil, this conjunction of Mars in Sagittarius. What could it mean, a foregathering of the God of War with the Archer of the Skies? Murad revolved it long.

A faint suggestion of honeysuckle and tuberoses came pulsing through the window. Insensibly Murad approached it, step by step. A wave of warm sweet perfumes greeted him. He leaned against the casement and suffered his eyes to wander whithersoever they would. It was very restful. Murad flung his eyes downward upon the garden—

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the drowsy, dreamful, silent garden—much as a man might fling his weary limbs upon a couch.

He fell to watching the long tendrils of a grape which waved from the myrtle-tree. It rustled with a most delicious languor. Murad's lashes drooped and he reeled in spirit as one who is drunken without wine. There was a soul in that garden and Murad felt its call. "Come unto me," the garden said, "and I will give you peace." Vaguely his eyes followed the path. Two cape jessamine bushes, grown so voluptuous that they melted into each other's arms across it, stood on either side. Rounded and milky white with blossoms, they trembled beneath the touch of perfumed winds like a sleeping woman's breasts. Murad's glance passed on, seeking the tall pine which by accident or design stood equidistant from every wall. He recalled Yazigi's verses :

"In the courtyard's riven centre planted He the
tuba tree."

"Allah hath purpose in all things," thought Murad. "For centuries perchance that pine hath grown in order that I, the least of His creatures, might sit upon the bench beneath it and learn some lesson."

For a space, how long he knew not, Murad stood at the casement listening to the under-noises of the day—hearing the whispered songs of unconsidered creatures. His soul rejoiced that no other eye pried into the garden, that here the blood-stained march of Empire should never come.

Suddenly there came a sound, a clear and tinkling

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sound, vague as a half-detected echo of a crystal bell. He heard the splash of waters, and heard a laugh—a laugh so low and musical as to shame the houris that haunt the purling brooks of paradise.

It roused a memory within him, and Murad bent his ear to catch the re-awakened chord. Again it came, one pure note vibrating as from the heart of a kitar which hath a solitary string.

Murad's mind flashed back to the puzzle of the day before, and his eyes sought the fountain. The marble boy upon its summit held out his empty cornucopia. Murad saw him quite plainly, even at his distance of an hundred paces. But the pool itself lay hid behind a row of kannas and willows. The jealous wind died sullenly and refused to part their screen. Murad saw a handful of water mount into the air, and heard a gasping laugh. Try as he might, he could see nothing more. He craned his neck to right and left. No water rose, the laugh came no more, and Murad began to wonder whether his fancy had not again misled him.

“Perhaps I can see better from the hall,” he thought. He left his window, not so abruptly as to rouse Selim, but lost no time. He hurried through the hall and came out upon the rear balcony. The vines hung thick and he feared to part them noisily. Moving from place to place his view opened and closed in most tantalizing fashion. He was about to leave in disgust when through a crevice of the vines he saw something stir beside the fountain. A head appeared above the kannas, the gleam of a shoulder white as alabaster behind a barrier of green. For one instant he saw a rounded arm

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upraised, twining at a coil of hair. Then he saw the cannas again, saw the roses winking at him, saw the lazy sunshine, the vacant garden—and saw nothing more. He waited and waited. Still the vacant garden, still the lazy sunshine—and nothing more. Then he came back to his table and mused upon what he had seen.

The devotee's first thought was one of resentment at this intrusion upon his privacy—this desecration of his solitude wherein a soul might come face to face with God.

Murad pondered upon the long path by which he had travelled from the desires of the body to the peaceful meditation of the soul. No caravans pursued that path; the solitary pilgrim walked alone. Long ago, as taught by his prophets, Murad had left behind him that State of the Commanding Flesh when carnal desires dominate the soul. Within a lesser time had he passed the State of the Upbraiding Soul, wherein the soul makes war upon the body. Putting both behind him, Murad had struggled upward to the State of the Peaceful Soul, with passions all subdued.

None knew better than he the temptations which beset a man on such a path, more strongly if the traveller be of such exalted rank as lifted him above responsibility. Dazzling oases lured on every side. Mellow fruits hung from every branch. Having passed them safely and entered the Great Knowledge, none would dare turn back and dally on the way. Yet Murad was lonely, and Murad was very young.

Presently he rose from his table and moved again to the window. The garden lay spread beneath him,

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deserted and smiling in the sun. But it was his own garden no longer, his vision of solitude had vanished, broken beyond the mending, for dreams once shattered can be patched no more.

Without warning that woman's laugh rang out again from some far nook in the wood, intangible as the perfumes. A smile gathered at Murad's lips—and died. As one who in some enchanted palace watches alertly for whatever hap may come, so Murad turned his face in the direction of the laugh.

From behind a clump of swamp palmettoes crept a girl—a girl in gray and white, intent upon her play. She moved forward on her knees, holding out her hands to a bird most brilliantly red. The bird bore his head jauntily to one side, hopping out of reach as she advanced.

“Come, my pretty cardinal,” she reassured him, dropping crumbs upon the ground; “let us be friends; you need not fear a little nun in gray.”

The little red cardinal paused to consider. She drew back and waited. The bird, wary of placing confidence in strangers, picked up the crumbs, yet never took those keen black eyes from Gabrielle.

He took her bait, but when she stretched her hand to him he flew into a fig-tree. There he balanced himself on a branch and regarded her with half-allayed suspicion.

“Never mind, little red father, never mind,” she said, rising and brushing the sand from her knees. “We shall get acquainted by-and-by. See, I leave your dinner here, and bring you more to-morrow.”

Gently, ever so gently, so as not to alarm her

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friend, she scattered bits of bread upon a clear space in the path, then backed away.

The bird flew down to eat them, and friends came to join him at his meal. Gabrielle stood by, smiling at the quickness of their movements.

“What ugly manners you have—you greedy blue fellow; stop pecking that tiny wren. Aren’t you ashamed? You!” She clapped her hands and the birds rose in a whirring cloud.

Intently as Gabrielle kept her eyes upon the birds and motionless as she stood, she was no stiller than Murad at his window. Perchance if he made a noise, she too would flutter away.

The girl had come now within thirty paces of his window and stood there utterly unconscious of being observed. Murad had never seen a woman garbed so simply. A skirt of gray, severely plain, fell nearly to her ankles. She wore a simple white bodice, with sleeves rolled up, and turned in at the throat for comfort. Brown kisses of the sun lay upon her cheeks, yet failed to hide the rich coloring beneath them. Her arms and throat gleamed whiter than the swan’s unsullied breast.

But it was the unbound hair of the girl, flowing to her waist, that fascinated Murad. It glistened dully in the sun like the darker gold of Tyre. She kept lifting its heavy masses and running her fingers through it. “Quite dry,” she finally decided, glancing up at the sun. Murad shrank behind his shutter.

“I must be careful not to get it wet again; Margot will be suspecting.” Gabrielle smiled, and picked up her bonnet, which she had been dragging behind her by a string. With a few deft movements she

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twisted her hair into a rope, bound it round her head and put on her bonnet.

“Oh dear! A briar!” She stooped, lifted her skirt and pulled a branch of thorns from its hem.

Murad backed noiselessly from the window, and ran down the stair.

The door baffled him; it would creak violently if opened. Little by little he pried it from its fastenings, and after a prudent reconnoissance, stepped across the threshold.

Murad paused outside. His eyes peered above the hedges, swept the garden, searched among the tall and slender hollyhocks. Nothing stirred.

Faring on at random he stopped beside the pile of crumbs whence the birds had flown. He hurried on, looking behind every bush and tree. The bower of scarlet roses sheltered nothing but a hare. Gabrielle had vanished. The pampas grasses nodded and shook their heads as if they knew not whither she had gone. Behind the cannas lay the fountain, empty and unruffled like the vacant sky. The cat-tails dabbled their feet in its waters and whispered to each other, but kept their secret. The boy with the cornucopia held his lips tight-shut.

Murad began a systematic search, thrashing the damp haunts of fern and periwinkle where sunlight never shone. In the darkest corner a grapevine had throttled an oak, breaking its rotten heart and falling with it to the ground. Murad stooped, peered into the shadows, and scared out a partridge.

Having crossed the garden many times from wall to wall he came back to the pine. There was a fresh rose lying on the bench; he took it up and wondered.

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“I see no gate in the wall and no place to hide.” He shrugged his shoulders, then rose abruptly and walked towards the house.

A group of birds wrangled over the bread that Gabrielle had scattered. Here was undeniable evidence. Murad stopped beside it; there it was, but that was all.

Re-entering the house he passed from room to room on the lower floor. Beyond all dispute the place was empty. When he went up the stair he stood again at his window, irritated at being so mystified.

“To-morrow she brings the red-bird’s dinner. I shall keep watch.”

Presently he called Selim. “Selim,” he said, “the garden is mine—*mine alone*. Let no other eye profane it.”

“Hearkening and obedience,” answered Selim.

Thenceforth the garden was consecrated unto Murad, his sanctuary of loneliness and meditation.

CHAPTER XI

I AM CALLED GABRIELLE

THE piebald horse of Night and Day had struggled through the dusk, galloped across the shining seas, and now the sun rode gloriously upon the fleckless desert of the heavens. The Sultan of the Skies viewed the earth from high in air, as though it were a platter midmost the water.

The rich glow of day mellowed Murad's table. He leaned forward on his elbow and drew the globe closer to him, shivering beneath his glance. Through and through the acutely sensitive thing he peered. The liquid woke to life. Streaks of red shot across it; clouds gathered, and tempests raged. The fragile shell strained itself to bursting. "'Twill destroy him," he muttered; "such fires burn out the crucible at last."

With the globe still in his hand Murad turned. The light fell across his face and shimmered on his pale blue robe. So thin it was, so surpassingly fine, it seemed the filament of a bubble.

His eyes wandered through the window and rested on the pine. High above it a bird floated with unmoving wing. Murad's thoughts were not upon the pine, nor yet upon the bird. Despising the trammels of space he stood in the palace of his fathers, a crowned sultan, Commander of the Faithful. "And

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if it so happen by the will of God the Most High, perchance my soul may become like unto this. What matters it? Our mouths shall be stopt with dust—dust, the skulls of kings and the feet of beggars.”

He laid his head upon the table, then lifted it suddenly and sprang up: “The red-bird’s dinner. To-morrow is come.”

His thoughts fluttered from him restless as the sacred doves of Mecca, circling round their cotes then settling back again. Murad laughed. “Here I sit speculating upon an unknown woman as though she were a piece of the moon—verily the mind pursueth fancies most vaguely odd.”

He turned to the globe again; it had quieted into stolid water, for Murad could not fix his mind upon it. He replaced it in its case, turned the key, and took his position at the window.

“Yes, yes, the lines are from Sheykh,” he murmured presently; “I remember them well:

“‘She’s made the pool a casket for her frame fair,
And all about that casket spreads her dark hair;
He saw the water round about her ear play;
In rings upon her shoulders her dark locks lay.’”

A delicious irresponsibility took possession of him, bringing him fancies sweeter than opium-born imaginings from the black poppy of Thebais. The dreamer dreamed, and the garden slept.

Perfumes rose as though from censers swung along the path of some indolent odalisque. A twig snapped; the green vines parted. Gabrielle ran into the open space and lifted her arms towards the sky. With famished lips she drank of freedom. There was a soul

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in the garden different from that of the convent, and she suckled at the breast of new desires.

Gabrielle stood perfectly still. Her narrow cell had bred a narrow soul, knowing naught beyond its four contracted walls. But the thoughts that came in the garden never came in the cell. Nameless desires thrilled her. Her heart surged upward as though it were some bold-winged creature beating its pinions against a star.

If an eagle flew across the skies her unleashed spirit kept pace beside him ; if a lark rose like a rocket and sang unto the sun, she joined her jubilant voice to his. A rabbit stretched himself at the mouth of his burrow—Gabrielle felt a childish desire to lie basking in the sun. She drew a long deep breath and dropped her eyes, frightened at these new delicious thoughts. She turned her back upon the house and went slowly towards the fountain.

Murad watched her from his window until she had passed the pomegranate and the orange, then vanished amidst the swamp palmettoes which grew beyond the pine. The garden was empty as Eden before woman and temptation came.

Murad disappeared from the window. His draperies floated through the room, lost themselves in darkness on the stair, then lighted brilliantly as he stepped into the outer sunshine. The blue robe moved rapidly and halted at the orange-tree.

He saw Gabrielle standing beside the fountain scattering rose petals on the water and smiling at the frightened fish. Murad smiled too. She sat down on the coping and began dabbling her hands in the water. He moved a pace to see her clearer. She rolled back

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her sleeve and reached deep to pluck a lily. He saw her lift the lily to her lips and drop it carelessly into the pool. Then she leaned forward and began to unlace her shoe—one shoe was already in her hand.

Murad hesitated and felt guilty in his hiding-place. He stepped into the path, paused, drew back again. The girl called out clearly, "What are you looking at—you silly thing?" Gabrielle laughed and spoke most brazenly: "Come out, you old peeper."

Murad hid himself deeper in the banana clump, and felt the hot blood rush into his temples. He did not guess that Gabrielle was speaking to a rabbit whose pink eyes stared at her from underneath a hedge. While he stood undecided whether to go forward or slip back into the house, Gabrielle sprang up and dashed along the path towards him. She ran on, trying with eager hands to catch a butterfly. On, on she came, and almost rushed into his arms.

Gabrielle halted, dazed and bewildered. A blue vision confronted her—a figure such as she knew not existed in the world. She stopped with the very breath of motion in her garments as though she were a bird which had been frozen in its flight. Her knees trembled and refused to turn. This then was the Spirit of the Garden. Her eyes dilated; she pressed her hand upon her bosom as startled women do. The two gazed dumbly at each other, Gabrielle's eyes being fascinated by that glittering star upon his breast. Like a basilisk it held her senses bound, without power to cry out or to move.

And then, from afar off as it seemed to Gabrielle, there came a voice so full of mellow sweetness that all her fears were stilled, though her heart beat very fast.

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“Peace be with you, my child,” said he of the lifted hand. The jewel winked and blinked in the sun with a thousand sleepy eyes.

Murad’s greeting came quietly, but Gabrielle’s glance did not waver from that wondrous jewel. It glowed like a living thing, and gave back stare for stare.

In some way, she scarce knew how, Gabrielle saw his shimmering robe of blue—saw his white turban with the heron’s plume—saw his girdle of curious flagree, and saw the golden cords which laced his shirt. More than this she realized that his eyes were deep and kind, that he was young, with broad white brow and blackest hair. Gabrielle was conscious of these things though she did not take her eyes from the star.

The figure in blue commenced advancing upon her, and Gabrielle went backward pace by pace.

“I did not know,” she stammered; “I did not know that you were here. I did not know that anybody was here——”

“No,” Murad reassured her with a smile. Grosjean’s daughter, like Grosjean’s self, felt its winsome gravity. “No. I have but just taken my abode within that house. I am come from a distant land. What is your name, my child?”

“I am called Gabrielle,” she raised her trustful eyes and answered simply.

“Do you live here—in the garden?”

“Oh dear, no!” she made brave to smile; “no one lives in gardens. I come into this one every day.”

“Yes, you were——” Murad checked himself, and asked instead: “Where do you live?”

GABRIELLE

“My father lives there.” She pointed to a roof-top above the wall.

Murad glanced along the unbroken summit of the wall, at the spikes of steel and bits of jagged glass. “The gate?”

Gabrielle laughed, she could not help it—Mother Louise often said she would laugh at mass or anywhere else if a comical idea entered that rattle-pate of hers. “There is no gate; I slipped through a hole—a very tiny hole.”

So the riddle was read.

“Do you come every day?” Murad inquired, determined to learn somewhat of her.

“Every day since Jean brought me from the convent. My father is Grosjean. This is his garden, but he has not entered it since I was born.”

“Which has not been so very long?”

“Indeed it has, a very long time, nineteen years.”

Gabrielle backed away, keeping pace step by step with his advance, not from any fear, but she had commenced retreating and did not know how to stop.

Murad bethought himself of yesterday when this airy girl wasted her blandishments upon the cardinal—how the wary bird hopped away before her, then suddenly flirted himself into a fig-tree. It would scarcely have surprised Murad had Gabrielle flown to the top of the pine. He chuckled at the queer conceit, then laughed aloud, and the laugh bound Gabrielle to him—it was so very hearty and boyish.

Yet Gabrielle kept backing and backing, silly as she felt. They came now, he and she together in this wise, within the dense magnolia’s shade and near the fountain. That startled pool beheld a man and woman

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side by side. Of a verity there be new things sometimes underneath the sun.

Each looked down at the fountain, for neither could look directly at the other, and each had curiosity. Both were mirrored in the fountain, and both looked down.

“Oh!” exclaimed Gabrielle, for there lay a shoe, and she remembered that she had on but one. She brushed the sand from her foot, and bent over, hiding her face until both were tied.

“This is a very beautiful place,” Murad ventured.

“I love it,” she answered with terse simplicity.

“And I,” he added.

“You?” It was then that Gabrielle looked up, and resentfully. Why should he love her garden? What right——?

“It is The Peace, as God made it,” Murad said.

“He meant not that all places should be filled with babble. I have journeyed far to find such a retreat. No one comes, no one intrudes——”

“Do you mean that I—that I have intruded?” Gabrielle asked, staggered by the fear that he might claim her garden and thrust her out. She drew back and glanced towards the breach in the wall.

“No,” he promptly set the girl at ease; “it is not that—you are a part of the garden.”

This sounded absurd to Gabrielle; he spoke of her quite impersonally, as if she were the boy on top of the fountain, or the big pine-tree. But Gabrielle did not laugh outright; necessity in the convent had obliged her to gulp down many a burst of merriment.

“Yes,” she assented; “I do feel that I am part of the garden—or the garden is part of me.”

GABRIELLE

“Will you be seated?” he asked, indicating the bench with a gesture midway between the gallantry of France and the gravity of the East.

Gabrielle did not quite comprehend whether this was a polite suggestion that she be seated in *her* garden, or a command delivered in *his* garden. But the authority of his eyes made it impossible to disobey—besides she did not want to disobey. She seated herself on the farthest corner of the bench. And she sat there so very still that she recalled the times when Mother Louise came into the class-room and clapped her hands: every girl ran instantly to her stall, and one might have heard a fly. So it was now in the garden. Murad stood with folded arms before her, calm, self-contained and deferential.

Gabrielle huddled herself together in the corner of her bench. Those great black eyes looked her through and through, yet gave the uncomfortable impression of not seeing her at all. She felt transparent; it's not very nice for a person to be looking at something else and staring directly through another person. He did not seem to be even thinking of her.

With wide blue eyes fixed full upon him she held her breath and waited for him to speak.

CHAPTER XII

WHO ARE YOU

It was very puzzling. Gabrielle could recall no instruction of the convent which taught a girl what to do in such emergency. There must be a rule—Mother Louise had a rule for everything. How she wished she'd been more studious and learned *all* the rules. The man stood before her with his arms folded, saying nothing for ever and ever so long.

Perhaps the sisters themselves did not know, unless it were Sister Therese, who had been in the world before taking vows; but from what Sister Therese said Gabrielle never should have imagined that men behaved this way. Why did he not say something—anything?

How straight he looked at her, through her. Gabrielle snatched up her bonnet from the bench where she had tossed it when she went to chase the butterfly. She drew it across her bosom. Thus protected she tried to think of something to say; she did think of it and when 'twas said she wished she'd held her tongue.

The man had asked her name, so, bristling like a kitten, Gabrielle demanded, "And who are you?"

"My name is Murad," he replied. There was nothing in the voice to cause alarm.

Gabrielle wondered whether it were anger or amusement that kept twitching at the corners of his mouth.

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She hated to be made sport of. It must have been amusement, she decided, for the other words he said were very comical, though he did not even smile, and seemed to remember them quite perfectly.

“Amurath Abderahman Mahomet Muza ben Mustapha. In France they call me Murad.”

Gabrielle dared not laugh until the blue man had laughed and held out his hand. It was a great relief to hear him speak and laugh.

“Let us be friends,” he urged, still stretching forth his hand. “You are Grosjean’s daughter; I am his guest. Mayhap he has told you I am here.”

Gabrielle said, “No,” and shook her head. Then she sprang up in confusion. “Oh dear, no! I do not mean it that way—that we shall not be friends. I meant that my father has told me nothing. I was quite ignorant until I saw you standing there, and you startled me very much. You had no right to startle me. I have never talked with a man before. — I fear you do not understand. Yes, I shall gladly be your friend. That is what I meant. Will you not sit on the bench? It is a very long bench.” She laughed nervously and hoped he was not offended. She had certainly done all possible to mend a bad speech and keep him from feeling hurt.

“There’s a bird’s nest in that bush, with four little ones. Shall I show it to you?” This was the most alluring idea which occurred to Gabrielle on the moment.

“I shall be greatly honored.” Murad’s eyes twinkled.

Gabrielle led him a little space to an arbor-vitæ bush and parted the thick foliage.

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“See. There it is. No—in the forks. Peep at them and make no noise. Just think how young they are, they were hatched last week. Is it not absurd to be so young?” She pressed a branch aside and directed his eyes to a nest where four little heads were raised, and four yellow caverns opened.

“Hold the branch,” she ordered; “they are very hungry, poor things.”

Gabrielle darted off and began breaking pieces from a rotten stump. Presently she returned with some white larvæ in her palm.

“Now watch them, the greedy little dears.”

With utmost gravity Murad stood aside whilst Gabrielle parcelled out the dinner, dropping a morsel into each uplifted mouth.

“Oh dear! they’re never satisfied. They’d keep me working all day long. But if I were to give them any more it would make them ill.”

Murad let the branch swing into place and turned towards the bench. Gabrielle walked in advance until they approached a bramble thicket. Murad stepped quickly ahead and caught an outreaching spray of briars. He bent it back and stood waiting for her to pass in safety. Gabrielle felt exceedingly awkward; he being a stranger it was her duty to clear the path for him—was it not her father’s garden, and was he not their guest? Of mere gallantries she had no conception, nor of the thousand useless services which men render to women. She only felt rebuked, and obliged to say something. “I love birds,” she ventured, seating herself as composedly as might be upon the bench.

“And so do I—now,” he answered.

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Gabrielle laughed somewhat nervously. "You do not know how you frightened me a while ago ; but we are getting acquainted now, aren't we?" Gabrielle would not have been a woman had she sent no stealthy glances at the man's tunic as he suffered it to fall carelessly across the bench. Never had she seen a silken stuff so fine, nor colors that were so heavenly. Her fingers itched to touch it and feel if it were soft as it appeared. His shirt seemed thinner than the film of a bubble, translucent, opalesque, alive with changeful hues.

He certainly dressed queerly,—not like her father, the couriers, nor like an officer who once came to the convent. He did not in the least resemble the pictures in a book which Sister Therese smuggled from France, and the novices read so eagerly. She feared to look her fill upon him : he might be offended. She tried to listen to what he was saying, but the star distracted her.

"You entered the garden through a breach in the wall?" Murad asked, returning to the puzzle which had interested him so deeply.

"Yes," Gabrielle nodded, trying to tear her eyes away from the star.

"From there?" Murad persisted, inclining his head towards the red-tiled roof beyond the wall.

"Yes, that is our garden on the other side ; it is not so big as this—nor so beautiful."

"Does any one else come here, except yourself?" he questioned.

"No one knows the hole is there ;" Gabrielle spoke with childish triumph. "It's a famous secret. I found it all by myself, ever so many years ago. It

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happened this way : ”—Gabrielle’s eyes sparkled ; she had pitched upon something to talk about, and went on gayly to tell him the one white secret of her life. “ You see this was Uncle Paul-Marie’s house in here. He and Jean—Jean is my father, you know—they quarrelled. When uncle died his house and garden fell to father. Jean never allowed anyone to live here. He would not even talk about it. Once when I was a tiny wee girl I was playing in our garden under a vine that grows against the wall, right there. I found some loose bricks and picked them out until I made a hole large enough to squeeze through.

“ At first I was afeard of the garden, it was so big and lonely and silent—bigger than the whole world ; and it must be full of dreadful things, I thought. But nothing ever harmed me, and no one ever came. The birds and the rabbits were quite gentle. We were good friends then, but now they do not know me. And the fountain, it was very nice to—to—to play in.

“ For the longest while I never dared go near the house ; grown-up people were afraid of that ; even men would not pass it at night. They said evil spirits bide in there, but that’s foolish, isn’t it ? ”

Murad felt a new interest kindling in his heart at the earnestness of this woman with the serious eyes of a child.

“ Really and truly there are no such things as evil spirits, are there ? ” Gabrielle insisted upon an answer. Murad bowed his turbaned head, gravely agreeing that ’twas folly to believe in ghosts.

“ I’m so glad. Sometimes it seemed most scary in there. One day when it was very bright I went

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up close to that big door and listened. The cotton-wood leaves rustled and made a noise like barefoot children pattering around. My heart beat so loudly I could not hear anything else. I peeped in at the window ; something moved, and I—I ran away.”

“Then you are afraid of ghosts?” he asked.

“No, not exactly afraid ; I did not believe in them, but I might have been mistaken. Mother Louise says the wisest person is apt to be wrong sometimes. And I was more apt to be mistaken than grown-up people—do you understand?”

“It is very clear,” he admitted.

Gabrielle looked at him and laughed : “I thought you were a spirit at first.”

“And I thought you were one when I——” He stopped himself again. And they both laughed.

“I never did tell anybody about the hole in the wall. I found it all by myself and kept it all to myself. At the convent one is supposed to confess every little thing one does—but I always managed to forget about the garden. A girl should keep something to herself. She ought to have something for her very own—do you not agree?” Gabrielle fixed her blue eyes upon him so earnestly that Murad comprehended the vital importance of his decision. He made no haste ; he pondered.

“Yes,” he finally decided most judicially ; “’twas proper. You are entitled to meditate upon it alone.”

“Any way, I never told.” Right or wrong, she had done it, and there was a defiant note of impenitence in her voice.

“I rejoice that you have kept the garden sacred.” Murad spoke most seriously, feeling that she would

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understand him. "You have never found anything else in here?"

"Nothing, except the trees, the flowers, the fountain—these wild creatures—and you."

"What do you count me—a tree, a flower, a wild creature, or what?"

"At first I thought you a ghost—now I do not know," she answered frankly. "I have been trying to think. You said *I* was a part of the garden, why not *you*?"

"Why not? So be it." Murad did not smile; his face was very sober. Gabrielle began to wonder what else she might say, when Murad looked up and asked:

"Did you bring the red-bird's dinner?"

"The red-bird's dinner?" she gasped.

"Yes; you promised him on yesterday; you should keep your promises, even to a bird."

"Where were you?"

"At my window, there."

Gabrielle glanced hastily at the house, and for the first time observed that a window was open, although the vines clung close about it.

"You were in that window watching me?"

Murad inclined his head. Her swift eyes swept his face. She might as well have searched the unblinking face of the desert. She looked again at the window, then at the fountain—her eyes bounded back and forth like a tennis ball from one to the other. "Could he have seen?" she thought, and her very finger-tips grew cold.

There were the cannas, they were tall and thick—and the willows. But there were gaps between the cannas, wide gaps, frightfully wide. Gabrielle's

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courage wavered ; blood rushed to her cheeks, deepening into the unrivalled scarlet of the bird.

Her thoughts were an open book to Murad, clearer than the crystal globe upon his table. Yet he did not smile. He reassured her by a blank uncomprehending face and began speaking of the sea, a matter which always catches the interest of a child.

“ ’Tis good,” he said quietly, “to set foot upon the ground again after so many weeks on board a ship. ’Tis a goodly sun you have, like unto my own. Here are pomegranates and oranges, the cypress yonder, the palms and the Syrian roses. Truly I shall not feel that I sojourn in the land of strangerhood.” He talked on in a low tone so that Gabrielle might recover her composure.

Gabrielle leaned over, her cheek upon her hand, and looked down to keep her eyes from meeting his. Her cheek was very red. When she took her knuckles away Murad saw the bars of pink and white that ran across her cheek. He watched the delicious color creep in and fill the pallid spaces. When the color had spread itself evenly, Gabrielle glanced up and ventured, “You come from a far land ?”

“Very far,” he answered. “A land that lieth in the throbbing heart of the sun. Many oceans roll between, and mountains, and deserts, and fierce tribes.”

“Do the people wear dresses like yours ? Oh ! I know ! I know ! I have been trying ever so hard to think. You look just like the pictures of the wise men who followed the star and found the Saviour. They took Him gold and frankincense and myrrh—you have heard of that ? There is a picture of it at the convent.”

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Murad's eyes changed not, nor sparkled. "Seventeen centuries are as nothing in the East," he answered; "a ripple on the ocean of Eternity. Men dress much the same."

"And do you really live there? There's where the Garden of Eden is, and Nazareth, and Egypt—and everything. Tell me of it?" Gabrielle clasped her hands about her knees and drew closer to him, with the thirst of a child who begs for a fairy story.

"And do you know real people like that? People who ride on camels, and wear funny dresses—and—and—and—— I thought they were just pictures." Gabrielle laughed; she had the dimmest idea as to what these indefinite "ands" of hers might signify.

Murad replied in quite as serious a tone: "There are many camels at my home; and many people who dress like the magi who sought the prophet of your religion."

Gabrielle's lips parted in wonderment. These marvels had been related to her, and she believed them—one must not question in matters of faith. But she had never connected the idea of real people with those sweet myths of her church. The people in these pictures were every whit as bodiless as perfumes from the censers. Here was a man who knew these far countries, one who lived amongst these strange peoples. He was sitting beside her in the flesh. She longed to run and tell Mother Louise. "Now tell me all about it?" She closed her lips and opened her ears.

"Tell you about what?"

"Everything."

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“It would take a long, long while; there is much in the East.”

“Tell me some of it, then. If you do not finish to-day I shall come again to-morrow and hear the rest.” Gabrielle moved closer to him, as she used to move closer when Sister Therese began narrating her wonderful stories. Murad was sorely at a loss. Never before had he been called upon for a story, and given so wide a range.

Suddenly the little cracked bell of the convent began to jangle. Gabrielle sprang to her feet. “Oh dear! I must run. Margot is already at the door. She is never late. Isn't it provoking? But you'll tell me of it to-morrow. Yes, I shall be sure to come.”

She had already taken the first unwilling steps down the path when Murad rose and followed.

“Wait,” he said. “You will come to-morrow?”

“Yes,” she answered.

“You will speak to no one of me? Do you promise?”

“Yes.” She gave her word and Murad knew from those clear blue eyes that she would keep it. They walked on in silence to the leafy curtain through which she always disappeared.

“This is the place?” he asked, beginning to part the vine.

“Yes,” Gabrielle replied awkwardly; “but you must come no farther. The breach is so very small that—that—you must go away.”

Murad went away. He did not look back. He did not smile until she had gone. Then he went back to the bench and smiled many times.

CHAPTER XIII

I SHALL COME

GABRIELLE spent a troubled night, waking and sleeping by feverish turns, a night of mysteries and delicious wonderment. Once when a tiny girl she had come almost face to face with Santa Claus, and now she felt the same creepy sensation—half hanging back, half unconquerable desire to push ahead. The night passed on and left her with a jumble of ideas, nothing vivid except a dream.

Gabrielle dreamed that a door had suddenly appeared in the wall of her convent cell. She stretched out her hand to open it, possessed by some inexplicable madness. Mother Louise stood beside her, speaking as God spoke to those in Eden: "Touch it not; it is the Door of Knowledge." But Gabrielle threw open the door, and behold! a blood-red heaven overhung the earth, blazing with the fire of uncounted sunsets. In the center, seated upon a cloud, Murad beckoned her. The wondrous power of his eyes lifted Gabrielle to a place beside him—which seemed most natural and proper in a dream.

Beneath her lay the outspread world, the seas and the cities; all their wisdom opened to Gabrielle as in a book. All the fire and all the light which filled the universe came from that glittering star on Murad's breast. She watched it, transfixed. Slowly, ray by

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ray, every trail of light returned from the uttermost heavens to hide again in its creator. The star glowed intensely, beyond the strength of eye to gaze upon it. The glory of the sunset faded, and night fell—darkness intense.

Then Murad did a singular thing, and Gabrielle saw him do it. He began picking flakes of light from the star on his breast and pinning them one by one against the heavens, as one might pin bits of tinsel against a curtain. She watched him until he had wrought a fine mosaic in the dome above his head. He formed the flecks of light into one harmonious design which had a meaning that she could read and understand. Nothing was left to chance, nothing happened by accident ; all had their places according to forewritten destiny.

Then, beneath the glimmer of a million new-born worlds, Gabrielle gazed at Murad. She grew dizzy and blinded, for straightway all of wisdom became hers. The secret springs of life lay bare, and never had woman looked upon them.

Gabrielle trembled in her sleep, and when she waked the sun streamed across her pillow. She closed her eyes again, but the dream was gone. Throughout the morning she brooded over what she had seen in the garden, and what she had dreamed, mingling the fact and the fancy until both were merged in a common mistiness.

At the noon hour Gabrielle hesitated to pass the breach in the wall, feeling uncertain about what she would find on the other side. In the make-believes of childhood she had often paused at this breach, thrilling with the delight of anticipated danger. A

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bear might spring from behind a hedge—a fairy might step out of a magnolia blossom—anything might happen in that garden. With her heart beating very fast Gabrielle crept through the wall and parted the vines on the other side.

“Oh!” she gasped, and drew back.

Murad stood before her, motionless, with folded arms and raiment whiter than the sunshine which surrounded him. Turban and tunic and heron feather, all were white; shirt and sandals and cord about his waist—all were white. Not even in her dream had his eyes seemed blacker; not even in her dream had the star shone so bright.

“Oh!” she exclaimed, then caught her breath and smiled.

“I awaited you,” he said, as if that were all. Before he could unfold his arms Gabrielle stepped out and moved towards him, still obeying the blind impulse of her dream.

“Greeting, my child.” He bowed gravely, then his eyes twinkled. “Did you bring the cardinal his dinner?”

“Cardinal?”

“Yes, on the day before yesterday you named him so; a pretty fancy.”

Again the red flush of discomfort trickled across Gabrielle’s cheeks. Again she glanced uneasily from the fountain to the window. “No,” she stammered.

“Then he shall dine with me—with us.” Murad produced a ship’s biscuit which he broke in halves, scattering a portion on the ground.

“The truth is,” Gabrielle acknowledged, “you

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promised to tell me of those strange lands beyond the sea. I forgot the little red father.”

They passed on together side by side toward the bench which rested in the cool sweet shadow of the pine. The shadows were dim and brown and restful. Gabrielle loved the spot most dearly. A glint of unusual color beneath the tree fascinated Gabrielle’s eye and drew her on, as a handkerchief on a stick attracts the antelope. She darted forward, delighted at the rug of varied hues which Murad had spread beside the bench. A dozen colored cushions of rich design were piled there for her comfort.

“The bench is very rough,” Murad explained.

“I shall feel very grand—like a Lady Abbess seated on her throne.”

Gabrielle walked cautiously around the edges of the rug, afraid to step upon it. Then she dropped on her knees and examined the quaint weave of its golden threads, the massing of scarlets and vivid blues and greens in bewildering profusion.

“Sister Veronique would be delighted!” she exclaimed. “She works in the community room from morning until night making tapestry—which she never finishes, poor grumpy old soul. And she’s forever planning some novel design which turns out exactly like the others.”

Murad strode indifferently across the rug; Gabrielle trod upon it gingerly until she reached the bench. There she took up each cushion in its turn.

Into Gabrielle’s imaginings cushions like these had never come, cushions so glowing in color, so soft in texture, redolent with unknown perfumes from mysterious lands. Murad watched the shifting lights

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upon her face, her gestures of rapture at the intricate handiwork.

“This rug,” Gabrielle ventured; “it must have taken a whole year to weave.” She bent down, marvelling at the tireless ingenuity of the toiler.

Murad had a gentle way about him; he set her right without making her feel that she was very ignorant, or he very wise.

“Time is nothing in the East, and people labor slowly. That rug is a family’s work for a lifetime—father, mother, sons and daughters. Their birth, death, marriage is woven into the rug. Can you not hear the tremor of their sighs and feel the dripping of their tears. Those bright reds show the ruby of maidens’ lips; the greens are waving palms; the blues are cloudless skies. And those rich gold threads are happiness. It is scattered everywhere, even in the darkest corners.”

Gabrielle flinched as if she had unwittingly trod upon the heart of a living creature. “A family! A lifetime! Poor patient hands, how weary they must have got. No, I shall not step upon and destroy it.”

Murad corrected her: “If the rich do not consume and destroy the product of the poor, then the poor make no gains from their labor—they cannot eat and live.”

“Why do you not give—you who have plenty?”

Murad shook his head. “’Tis not wise to give. Let him eat who earns. It is decreed that all must work—a wise provision to keep us out of mischief. A prudent sovereign supplies his poor with employment whereby they may earn. He feeds not the idle and the vicious, who are dangers to humankind. Nay, nay,

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child, look not at the rug and brim your eyes with tears. This rug has given food and drink, raiment, occupation and happiness to many of God's creatures. Come, take your place on the bench, and let us talk."

Gabrielle glanced at him. The shadows vanished as though she had lifted her face to the sun. Obeying and trusting she moved across the rug and reseated herself upon the bench.

"And what is this?" she asked, taking up a cluster of brilliant-colored plumes, larger than ever woman had seen before.

"A fan," he answered; "the day grows sultry."

"A fan? And are these feathers?—how strange."

"Yes, of the ostrich."

"I saw one such feather once; a young officer had it in his cap. He came to visit his sister and I peeped at him through the lattice. But that feather was not long and graceful like these. What a beautiful bird he must be!"

"No, he's quite an ill-looking fellow—especially when his feathers are stripped from him."

"I should think so," Gabrielle remarked placidly.

She settled back on the bench, piling the pillows around her and resting her sturdy shoes upon a gorgeous hassock of green and gold. Then she amused herself waving the fan slowly with the air of a grande marquise.

"There are our fans." Gabrielle pointed to a clump of palmettoes. "All we need do is to cut them, trim them round the edges and let them dry. Isn't it comical: your fans grow on a bird and ours grow on a bush." She threw back her head and laughed merrily.

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“I like yours ever so much better, it feels so soft and caressing when it brushes my cheek.”

“Yes,” Murad laughed, and his teeth gleamed; “I see that my fan is already stealing peaches in your orchard.”

“What do you mean by that?”

“So says the poet in the East when pink kisses be stolen unawares.”

“What a pretty idea,” assented Gabrielle.

She glanced down at her plain dress amongst those magnificent cushions; her sturdy little shoes were digging their heels into cloth of gold and wondrous flagree. Gabrielle thought of her house-knit stockings and wondered if they showed. The slow-waving fan kept passing to and fro before her eyes.

For a moment she felt uneasy, considering the roughness of her raiment beside that of Murad. But upon so bright a face as Gabrielle's there could rest no shadow.

Her old friend, the rabbit, hopped out of the bush, threw his long ears forward and fixed his eyes upon her. “Well!” she laughed; “why do you stare? Strange things happen in this garden. Oh, dear! what a shame it is the sisters cannot see me now! How their eyes would open!” Gabrielle swung the fan outward; the rabbit vanished.

“Let's pretend—it's such fun to pretend in the garden—let's make-believe I'm sitting in the sacristy, where everybody gathers from the four corners of the convent. Here is Sister Conflans, bristling with Greek and Latin—we made mirth of her because she never could understand a jest. She'd stalk past as if her knees were made of glass and would break if she bent

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them. How drolly she'd look at me ; and I'd be unconscious as a princess who had been used to fans like this all her life.

“And Sister Gertrude—she's a regular madcap, with the fairest hair and overflowing with wit—Sister Gertrude would laugh at my grand airs, and show her teeth—the most beautiful teeth in the world. I'd nod to her—like this.” Gabrielle bowed her head in absurd condescension.

“I can imagine how tremendously they would chatter. Old Veronique would drop the chasuble she's always mending—and can never find again without her glasses. Sister Agatha would limp in on her stick—one leg is too short ; but she's subject to spasms and rather crazy, so I won't laugh at her. Oh, dear ! what a rare frolic it would be !”

Murad veiled his amusement behind the steadiest of faces. “I thought the convent rules were more severe,” he suggested.

“They are ; but we play all kinds of pranks, such as blowing out lamps, knocking at doors, talking with the novices at night and eating their preserves. If Mother Louise caught us we paid dearly.” Gabrielle straightened up and laid aside the fan and almost whispered : “Once we did a dreadfully wicked thing. We poured ink into the holy water at the door of the choir. The nuns go to matins two hours after midnight and as they know them by heart there is no light except a lamp which throws a faint glimmer over the holy-water vessel. They therefore used the holy water without perceiving the state in which they put themselves. When matins were finished and they saw each other so drolly streaked with ink they laughed aloud

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and interrupted the service. The affair made a great noise. Sister Conflans rated the class roundly and left us all trembling. Thereafter she put herself to great pains running down the culprits, discovering only me. As I kept my tongue and told on no others I was ordered to kneel in my nightcap the following Sunday in the middle of the choir during High Mass as an apology to the sisters for having diverted myself at their expense. Then, as I was also answerable to God for the prayers which had not been said that day—matins having been curtailed—I was forced to stand during recreation and recite aloud the seven penitential psalms.

“Sister Conflans and Mother Louise had great argument concerning the affair. Sister Conflans maintained it was an act of awful impiety, tampering with the holy-water vessel, and was for sending me away altogether. But good Mother Louise answered that the deed was dark enough, as it savored of ink, yet ’twas only a childish freak after all—which made me feel at ease. Was it not wicked?”

“Exceedingly wicked,” Murad answered. “And no bolt came from heaven?”

Gabrielle glanced at him uncertainly; she could not be sure that he made sport of her.

“How long were you in the convent?” Murad inquired, just to keep the girl talking. When her tongue ran slow, he started it again.

“I was in the convent nineteen years—all of my life.”

“And you have never lived among other people? Never had friends, neighbors—never been to balls or seen the theatre?”

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“No, but Sister Therese has told me of them. I know all about them. Sister Therese once spent a month in nursing Madame la Duchesse de St. Aignan in Rue de Grenelle, Faubourg St. Germain. That is a very grand place—about the grandest in the world, I suppose.”

Murad nodded amiably. He knew the Hôtel St. Aignan indifferently well, as the sister of this same grand lady made open overtures to gain his attention.

“So you observe,” Gabrielle remarked complacently; “I am not as ignorant as you might suppose.”

Murad said nothing. He wondered what Gabrielle would think could she guess a tithe of what went on in that stately mansion.

“Should you not like to see the world?” he asked.

“I shall see it all some day—every bit of it.”

Gabrielle was mightily occupied with the sweep and flutter of her fan, delighted at its curling tendrils of blue and pink. “But I’d liefer be sitting right here and see all those novices in the convent catch a glimpse of you. No! No!” she exclaimed, and sprang up eagerly. “You must not be sitting here; you must be hid behind that tree. If they saw you they’d drop their eyes and go trooping past—so—” she imitated them with a gesture comically demure. “But they’d be dying to look at you all the time; and they’d look, too, when your back was turned.”

“Do no men ever come to the convent?”

“O dear, no; not one. I saw an officer once, only once; that’s what they have the convent for—to keep people away.”

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“It must be as secluded as a harem,” Murad observed thoughtlessly.

“What is a harem?”

This question had been asked of Murad many times in Paris by demoiselles more curious than modest. These he had no difficulty in answering.

Gabrielle inquired and went on waving her fan. Had he replied that a harem was a species of elephant she could never have doubted.

“It is a place where ladies live in the East.”

“Then it’s like a convent. Tell me all about it.” The motion of Gabrielle’s fan furnished an indolent accompaniment to her voice. Her direct gaze disconcerted Murad. Twice or thrice he opened his lips, but his tongue did not run very glib.

“Tell me all about the rules?” she questioned.

“Convents are very different—the Ursulines, the Cistercians—and a lot of them. Some are stricter than others; it all depends on what class you are in, the red, blue or white class. Of course the white-class young ladies must be very pious—they are so busy preparing for their first communion. Do they have tedious prayers all day long in a harem? Do they ring bells and make one do a great number of things that one never wants to do? Do they have some stupid rule for every hour of the day?” The pink-and-blue fan waved nonchalantly in the silence; it was embarrassingly still in the garden.

Murad glanced helplessly at the girl, then replied: “No, I do not believe they have such rules; it is quite unlike a convent.”

“What is it like, then? Are you a patron?”

Murad stared: “A patron?”

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“Monsieur le Duc de St. Aignan is patron of four convents ; so Sister Therese says. I thought maybe ——” Gabrielle caught sight of Murad’s face, so utterly blank that she burst into the merriest of laughs : “Of course you do not know. How absurd to be asking a man about convents and religion. Mother Louise says that men have no religion. Of course you know nothing about it.”

“But I know a story,” he suggested as a means to cause diversion, “of a woman who asked too many questions.”

“Oh, tell it me ; I was elected story-teller for our class. I invented all the incidents and they were most curious.”

“Destiny so willed it that when the Moon of Ramazan was at its full I fared upon a journey and crossed the river Euphrates, a very holy river in your religion, for it flows through the Garden of Eden——”

Gabrielle opened her eyes very wide.

“And have you really been there?” she interrupted. “I shall tell Mother Louise at once. She must come and listen.”

Murad arose ; a shadow clouded his face, and both forgot his story. He bent forward and looked steadily into Gabrielle’s eyes. “My child, you promised me yesterday to tell no one—have you forgot?”

“No !” She shook her head.

“I have been most anxious.” He spoke earnestly. “I should have allowed no one to learn that I am in this garden. My life hangs on the snapping thread of silence ; a word may break it. You must

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tell no one, except your father ; he knows it already. Can you keep my secret ? I have trusted you ; I am your friend ?” He held out his hand and Gabrielle clasped it frankly.

“ Are you in danger ?” She touched his robe with her free hand and looked him in the face.

“ I know not what Fate hath decreed concerning me.”

Her white face, upturned to him, betrayed unwonted weight of trouble.

“ Can I do aught ?” she asked.

For answer he placed his finger lightly on her lips and smiled.

“ Is that all ?” She seemed disappointed. “ I shall do that. I have already kept one secret—the garden.”

“ Then keep this. It shall be your second secret—yours and mine together—*our* secret.”

Gabrielle sat there wondering how any evil thing could threaten such a man. She ached to ask him questions, but there was something in his face which forbade a meddling with his affairs. So she only said : “ Last night when I sat talking with my father I wished I might tell him of you—but did not. He has no suspicion that I have ever seen the inside of this garden in my whole life. Is it not singular how we may sit side by side with people and know nothing of what they think ? That is why I wanted the garden. I wanted something all to myself.”

“ Then you must come every day,” he told her. “ The garden is your playground. You shall be quite alone.”

“ But I like to talk with you,” Gabrielle objected. She had risen and moved over beside the fountain ;

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her quick eyes glanced from the window to the cannas, and back again. The cannas were very thick and very tall. She wondered if they were thick *enough* and tall *enough*. But the cannas told her nothing. Murad's impassive features told her nothing. She could not ask. "Oh, dear!" she sighed; "I must go; see, that is my clock." Gabrielle pointed to the shadow of the pine which was beginning to fall across the fountain. "I must always run when the shadow reaches the edge of this coping. That allows me time to open our front door for Margot. Yesterday she was cross because I kept her waiting."

"You will come again to-morrow?" he asked, catching her by the sleeve until she had promised. "I shall tell you stories. I have some trinkets in my chests. And I am—very lonely."

She stood fingering her bonnet-strings. "Yes, yes; I shall come." The answer faltered somewhat as a tiny bell of warning tinkled in her soul. His smile reassured her. She nodded her head positively. "I shall come."

CHAPTER XIV

THE FOLIO

No less prompt than the sun, at noon Murad came to wait beside the vines.

“Off had the Royal Hawk, the Sun,
Flown from the Orient’s hand
And lighted in the West.”

He glanced upward at the mid-day sun of Louisiana and repeated the first lines of Nejati’s stirring song. But his thoughts were not of the chase. He remembered not the days when he had led the circling horsemen, his falcon on his wrist. His blood thrilled not with the ride, the neighing of steeds, the casting-off of hooded hawks. Neither did his pulse beat quick as, when rising in his stirrups, he watched his noble bird sweep down upon her quarry. These thoughts were of the past, buried in his reckless boyhood, and in this garden Murad could not think of what was past. The very ground he trod palpitated with life. A virile sun beat down upon the fecund earth, throbbing with motherhood. Nature filled the air with natal perfumes, with bursting buds and the murmur of new-born creatures. Not of yesterday did the garden whisper to Murad, but of to-day, to-day, and with seductive promises of to-morrow.

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Grosjean had departed with his boats at sunrise. Gabrielle trifled at every occupation that idleness could invent, and finished nothing.

“I do not know what to do,” she sighed. “Oh yes, I shall go out and play with the chicks.”

The old nurse laughed: “You think the days are very long and cannot wait the week until he comes. But once you’ve packed yourself off to France you’ll cry your eyes out when the vesper bells are ringing, because you will be homesick for us all.”

Gabrielle tossed her head, then stopped short: “A week! A week!” she thought. “A week, and—what then? Some one would come and take her away—from all she loved—from——” She leaned against a post and gazed upon their tiny garden.

“Wait the week—the week—the week,” she kept repeating to herself. Presently she went walking up and down the paths, swinging her hands.

Gabrielle was young. A humming-bird hovered at the honeysuckle; a butterfly passed; a chick fell into the drinking-trough. Many interesting things happened. Idleness, the mischief-breeder, began suggesting a thousand ways in which she might beguile the time.

She glanced towards the breach in the wall, took a step or two, and shook her head. “Now if *he* were not there; but he might be minded to peep from his window.”

Gabrielle longed for the cool waters of the fountain, for the magnolia leaves that floated on it. How delicious and drowsy it was. But she durst not venture. If the cannas were only thicker, or the willows taller, or that horrid old window were only shut. She

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stamped her foot : “ He has no *right* to be there. It is *my* garden.”

With an aggrieved toss of the head she started towards the house and stopped—Gabrielle was always starting and stopping. Her face lighted, the idea was most brilliant. “ Oh ! I know what I shall do ! ” She rushed through the door with such energy that Margot looked up from her mending.

“ What a fidget you are ; never still for two moments together.”

Gabrielle made a wicked grimace which could not harm a blind woman, and went clattering up the stair.

In one of the upper rooms there rested an old book-case which 'twere shame to leave unexplored. Amongst those musty books she spent the morning. They were much nicer than the books permitted to pupils at the convent. And there were pictures. What delightful pictures, and how puzzling ! Many times Gabrielle paused with her chin in her hands, wondering what the people in the pictures could possibly be doing. Often she gasped and looked behind her to be sure that nobody was spying. Gabrielle did not flush nor feel embarrassed ; she simply wondered why people, especially young girls, should dress in garlands—and little else. There was no fountain that Gabrielle could see. Had there been a fountain she might have understood. Many times in the garden when the wistaria hung down in drooping clusters Gabrielle had—but that was long ago, before *he* came into the garden and spoiled it.

It seemed a very interesting game these girls were playing in the picture, with wreaths of flowers hung about them.

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What a queer-looking sheep it was in the middle of the ring, with the head like an old man, blowing on a long pipe. And such wicked eyes—they made Gabrielle shiver.

Suddenly she laughed: “Maybe it’s a—what *did* he call it?—a harem.” Gabrielle laughed again at her own folly, there being naught else to laugh at, and a young girl needs to laugh as she needs to breathe. The pictures grew stupid. She laid them aside and went slowly into her own room.

The house was exceedingly still. Gabrielle had much time to brood, and many things to ponder on. Most of all she looked at the sun and listened for Margot’s departure.

As one grows used to a sorrow if it be present always, Gabrielle gradually became reconciled to the beautiful garments which had been sent out from France. She even accustomed herself to handling one or two of the least formidable dresses, and wondered how they would suit her. She spread three of them on the bed and admired, whilst the sun climbed steadily to noon.

“I shall put on the white one,” she decided; “I think I can manage that. His silks make me ashamed of this gray gown.”

She put on a simple dress of white, the gift of Sister Therese, which became her uncommonly well. When she had girded a lavender belt about her waist, and fastened a passion-flower in her hair, Gabrielle felt extremely conscious of her flashy attire. Never before had she worn aught but gray.

“I shall wear it,” she said, vaguely uneasy lest it be not right. Having once decided, she passed

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down the stair and went into the garden. It was noon.

It happened in this wise that Gabrielle waited on one side the wall whilst Murad paced back and forth upon the other, each watching the sun.

Gabrielle came to him with a smile, a dimple in the cheek and a delicious air of uncertainty. For Gabrielle was not so very sure about her dress. It *was* a trifle long, and *did* catch in the weeds.

When she first met his eye Gabrielle felt like shrinking back, becoming suddenly conscious that her dress was much thinner about the arms, the throat and bosom than any she had ever worn. She did not realize this until it was too late. But the dress must be right, or Sister Therese would not have made it so.

She began talking rapidly to keep him from noticing the flower in her hair and—the other things. Yet all the while she wondered if he thought the dress suited her, and why he said nothing about it.

“I was so foolish yesterday; I talked so much I never gave you a chance to tell me of your country. To-day I shall sit as still as a white-class girl preparing for communion.”

Murad contrived to lure her on by another path so the thick foliage of a fig-tree concealed the surprise he had prepared. He was talking with studied lack of care when they passed the fig-tree and the vista of the pines spread out before them.

Gabrielle halted and stared. There in the bare brown spaces underneath the pine a marvel had transpired—a miracle appeared. She clasped her hands across her bosom and gazed upon a dazzling

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pavilion of striped silk. It was round, with a hundred impertinent peaks and pinnacles. Stripes of red ran parallel up the sides, drawing to a center at the top, like so many ribbons dangling from a May-pole. At every little peak there perched a flag, with symbols woven in gorgeous silk. The still air set no flag a-flutter. The pavilion rose before her, perfect in every detail, yet motionless as a mirage tent painted against the skies. A beautiful dead thing it seemed until the shimmering sides went pulsing in and out, drawing its breath of life from the drowsy garden perfumes. The pavilion lay panting in the sun like one of those gaudy lizards which flaunt their poisoned colors amidst the ruins of Baalbec.

“Oh!” Gabrielle exclaimed and turned to Murad, doubting whether he too had seen the vision. She stood bewildered, for this wonder was in the garden, in the glade beneath the pine; this change of changes had come into the garden, where changes never came.

Beyond the widely open door there were couches for indolence, and rugs to fend away the earth. There were urns of scented waters, and a brazier wherein burned the sweet-smelling aloewood. A column of smoke rose into the air, swaying like the body of a dancing odalisque, and hiding its head in the branches of the pine.

She saw musical instruments oddly shaped, some scattered books, and scarves that seemed cut from jagged rainbows.

Gabrielle moved forward step by step and peered at these wonders. Mutely she turned and questioned Murad with her eyes.

“Yes,” he answered, bending his head and smiling;

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“I have imitated King Jan ben Jan. One becomes lonely with naught to do.” Murad nodded towards the shining tent, the wondrous censers and the richly graven urns, as if it were quite a matter of course to bring such toys into the wilderness.

“Who is King Jan—what did you say?” Gabrielle asked, with roving eyes that wandered into every nook and recess of the tent.

“King of the Genii; he governed the world before Adam came. ’Twas he that built the glorious Chilminar in a night.”

“You must tell me about him—but not now—not now.”

Gabrielle kept her eyes upon the pavilion, more than half expecting it to vanish into the pine-tree like the aloe smoke.

“What a simpleton I am,” she said; “but I have never seen anything in my whole life—really I have not. May I look at this?”

“It is yours,” he answered, standing to one side that she might enter into her own.

Gabrielle spent her wonderment in a thousand exclamations—the silks were so passing fine—the ropes were so intricately woven—the smoke smelled so sweet—the urn bore such rare device in golden marquetry.

She marvelled at the couch, which was all built up of cushions. Then she made bold to push aside a filmy curtain which seemed to hang as a confidante to beauty’s sighs—to brush the soft brown cheeks of Eastern women.

“What an odd bed! It looks cosey enough, but those queer animals in the tapestry would frighten me out of my wits should I waken in the night.”

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A lamp of filagree sparkled like a star above the couch's canopy, its perfumed light sifting downward like the intangible mists which cling to the breasts of Jordan.

Gabrielle's idea of luxury was measured by the room of the Lady Abbess. She regarded this couch as something beyond the possibilities of human use.

"It looks grand enough to be the bed of a king," she suggested. Gabrielle's notions of a king were also vague.

"It was the couch of a sultana ;" Murad corrected himself instantly, "or so 'twas said by the rascally trader from whom I purchased it." Murad put himself to needless trouble, Gabrielle being so occupied by a quaint brazier that she had not heard him.

There were the books, wonderful books, books that she touched reverently with the tips of her fingers.

"I have read the Lives of the Saints," she volunteered. "May I look at this?" She began untying the silken cords which bound a large folio. She tried to open it across her knee, but the book was too heavy and awkward.

"I shall take it out on the bench where the light is better."

Murad let her struggle out with the huge folio under her arm, and watched her settle down for a comfortable exploration of the mysteries it must contain.

"Where is my fan?"

Almost before she had spoken, and quite before she could stop him, Murad hurried off toward the house.

"Come back," she called; "I do not want it. I am quite cool."

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Murad did not turn ; he had passed the pomegranate tree and was almost to the dial.

“How hard-headed he is,” she grumbled, doubling her foot underneath her—at which Mother Louise always scolded.

“Bravo ! Bravo !” she exclaimed. “It’s *all* pictures.”

The folio contained numerous pictures, uniform in size and mounting, representing scenes in various Eastern capitals. Luckily the inscriptions were in French. “Mecca” she read the first one, and “Medina” the second. Then she took up the third.

She noticed instantly that this picture differed from the others although it was near the same size. It was in fact an oil painting which by some accident had got into the folio. She looked to the inscription but could not read such outlandish characters.

“Whew !” she exclaimed, puckering up her lip ; “I wonder if anybody can really pronounce that.”

Ignorant as Gabrielle was of art she could see that this was a masterpiece, so smooth that her fingers detected no roughness in the surface, and perfect to the minutest detail.

It represented a throne-room or audience chamber in some palace. The vaulted roof was supported by countless columns, all of gold inlaid with jewels. Upon a dais sat a man of most majestic bearing, clad in glittering garments, with a crown about his brows. He looked directly at Gabrielle. His face was wonderfully distinct—and familiar. It gave her the unaccountable sensation of having seen the man before.

His people—the chamber was crowded with them—knelt in reverence as before a god, touching their

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foreheads to the tessellated floor. None of their faces were visible, none were clearly drawn—they were a mere herd of humanity who counted for nothing in presence of their sovereign.

There was another figure in the picture, a youth who stood beside the king. His softly rounded chin belied the military sternness with which he looked upon this multitude of soldiers.

Gabrielle's blood coursed swifter at the sight of these grizzled warriors proud to bend their knees before a youthful hero. All the martial instincts of a fighting race leapt into her cheeks and glittered from her eyes.

She looked at him closer—closer. Her heart gave a great bound of excitement. His eyes! His face! His attitude! The same grave smile—"It is Murad!" she exclaimed.

Yes, yes, there was the star upon his breast, line for line and gem for gem. It threw a myriad of sparkling rays above that throng, just as it had lighted the heavens in her dream.

The folio slipped from her knees and fell upon the rug, scattering its unconsidered treasures. She held the tell-tale picture before her eyes—eyes which no longer saw it. In some dim way Gabrielle was conscious that a great sorrow had befallen her.

What could it mean, the secrecy of his coming? His presence in this garden where none guessed it? His air of command? Gabrielle could not answer.

She was still pondering the problem when Murad's voice startled her, it was so close, right at her elbow.

"Look, Gabrielle, look!" he said.

She turned. In the glare of the sunlight he waved

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the most astonishing fan that mortal eyes had ever beheld. "Here!" he laughed; "be done with your stupid pictures. This is the Fan of the Thousand Eyes, made from the golden peacock, whose home is Paradise."

He moved the fan back and forth to show the splendor of its iridescent colors.

"Oh!" Gabrielle caught her breath sharply. It was at him that she stared, not at the fan. Despite her utmost determination she dropped her eyes to the picture, and raised them again to Murad's face. She compared them, and the star; she grew very sure.

Murad saw that her thoughts were not upon the scintillating present he had fetched. He stood a moment disappointedly.

"Do you not like the fan?" he asked.

"Yes, oh yes, it is quite pretty," she answered.

Murad saw the folio lying open on the rug; he saw the picture clutched in her hand, which she made half an attempt to hide. He understood.

There was no anger in his face, no reproach; but there was something—something very singular, and Gabrielle could not comprehend.

Murad came forward gently, as a young king should. When he drew quite near to Gabrielle she involuntarily rose and made a gesture half of sorrow, half of reverence. She almost felt that she should prostrate herself like those people in the picture.

Murad lifted his hand, as he had done at their first meeting. But this time he said never a word. Gabrielle stood before him guiltily, her eyes downcast. With the tip of that gorgeous fan Murad touched the

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picture and asked : “ You found it there ? In that folio ? ”

“ Yes. ”

“ You have seen ? You know ? ”

“ Yes. ”

Murad stood silent, his arms folded, his head bent. The Fan of the Thousand Eyes glistened in the sun. The jewels flamed sleepily on his breast. Gabrielle tried to speak :

“ I pray you believe me ; I meant not to pry into your secrets. ” Murad, by a touch upon the arm, ever so light, reassured the girl.

“ I did not mean to be inquisitive, ” she went on hurriedly ; “ I should have known there was something unusual about you—but queer things happen in this garden. A girl never stops to think. Now I understand. Father conceals you here and tells me nothing of it because he thought I’d tell it at once. I should have known. ”

Gabrielle had dropped back to her seat upon the bench. Murad stood before her, his face very grave.

“ It is the will of God, ” he said, “ that you should know. Fools say accident. There is no accident. Nothing haps without Design. Gabrielle, that is my father seated on the throne, the other—you have guessed. I am Amurath, by the will of Allah, Sultan, Commander of the Faithful, Vicar of God of the two worlds. ”

Gabrielle’s upturned face became intensely pale. Each of these formidable names struck her dully on the heart.

“ Gabrielle, ” he continued, “ that is all. It is very little. It is very much. Perhaps the future of a

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nation, perhaps nothing. 'Tis well for you to know that a price is on my head and thousands seek my blood. To whomsoever betrays me, False Mahomet will pour out gold beyond his dreams."

Gabrielle lifted her steady eyes. There was no promise on her lips, no pledge of loyalty came tripping from her tongue. She was silent, utterly silent in heart and soul and lips. Slowly she picked the golden threads from out a cushion, and thought, and thought—more than any convent girl had ever thought before.

"Murad," she said presently, "ever since I was a tiny girl I have kept the secret of this garden. And now that you are come to be a part of this dear place it shall be more sacred."

Murad bent down and whispered something to her. Then he turned and paced along the walk, his head bent in meditation. Gabrielle watched him. There were tears within her eyes, that seemed bluer now and immeasurably deeper, for they guarded a trust.

Her gaze clung to his shining garments as they moved along those dear familiar paths, as they glinted in the sunlight beside the fig, as they softened in the shades beyond the grape. Through alternate shine and shadow they went into those far recesses where periwinkles grew. There she lost him. Where the magnolia leaves piled thick for many winters she heard the rustle of his tread again. Into all these places did the loyal thoughts of Gabrielle follow and abide with him, for he was troubled, and the fault was hers.

She saw him turn in the most secluded sanctuary of the wood, where long gray moss hung down like the

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beards of old, old men. Thence he came straight back towards her.

His eyes were calm, and blacker than any night which lays its curfew on the stars. Yet they glowed withal, from the very beauty of the faith that there was in him.

“It is so written,” he said when he came up. “Mayhap Destiny hath sent you to walk beside me a trifling way so that I may see the roses—otherwise I might have only felt the thorns. Mayhap you walk with me to the end. My affair is not that of common men.”

Gabrielle could not speak; she did not know what he meant. She felt that Murad was not speaking to her—she being an ignorant and useless girl from the convent—but he was addressing a Power that controlled his fortunes. Murad spoke and acted with such certainty of the future that it made Gabrielle feel very queer.

His brow had become smooth and white again; smiles came fluttering back like returning pigeons to circle round his lips.

“We are friends, you and I,” he said; “friends should be frank. Sit down; I shall tell you.”

CHAPTER XV

THE TABLET OF BRASS

MURAD brushed aside the cushions, clearing a space upon the bench for Gabrielle. Then he deftly piled the pillows round her and placed a hassock beneath her feet. He gave not over doing this until he had made her most comfortable, opening her fingers at the last and closing them upon the handle of the Fan of the Thousand Eyes. Gabrielle neither smiled nor frowned ; nor did she think. Passive as a child being robed for a feast, she permitted him to do with her as he chose.

“Now,” he said at the very end of it all, stepping back a pace and seeing that there was naught more to be done, “now, you rest at ease. Listen.”

With soul and body and eyes Gabrielle listened. Her breath came softer than the zephyr which idled amongst the roses ; yet she strove to moderate it, lest even that should jar upon the silence. Murad stood before her in the familiar attitude of her dreams. She almost feared him. She saw the smothered fire of his eyes. His chest billowed up as with a storm from the under seas. His voice came very low, with the mystic suggestions and imagery of the East. Gabrielle leaned forward upon the very edge of the bench.

“Yes, I shall tell you,” he said. “We shall not

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be friends in truth until we have that between us which none others know. You and I shall be strung together as beads upon the thread of this, my story. That was my father whom you saw in the picture, the Sultan Mustapha, drawn by the servile hand which flatters princes. My mother bore him two children, Hassan and myself; I was the older. She came of the Venetians, a Christian like yourself.

“Achmet, the sultan’s oldest son, was of evil life, given to debaucheries. The sultan determined to set him aside and make me his heir. Therefore he sent me to travel in many lands and gather instruction in the craft of kingship. ‘My son,’ said he, ‘follow the precept of wise men, and not the evil example of your father.’ Thus you see me standing beside him in the picture; the painter thought to gain both credit and gold by picturing these kneeling thousands and bursting heavens. ’Tis well enough for such follies to awe the rabble; kings should be of a mind above them.”

Gabrielle listened, with fingers that clutched the fan so tightly it stirred not, neither did it tremble.

“Four years I sojourned in Frankestan, or as you call it, France. There my brother Hassan joined me, son of the same mother, gentle, beautiful and brave. God ordained it that at this time my father died, whether by the knife or the poison cup, I know not. Foul rumors reached me even at so great a distance. Achmet seized the throne and became sultan. He summoned me at once to Stamboul, writing a brotherly letter in which he voiced his desire to profit by my learning. My brother Hassan and myself fared upon the homeward way, doubting not

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that the nation would choose me instead of Achmet to be their sultan. In my heart I meant to treat him generously, according him the government of a province with fitting revenue.

“Though we travelled privily, no sooner had Hassan and myself set foot in Stamboul than we were seized and hurried by devious ways beyond the city gates. Within an ancient caravanserai we found many horsemen armed and waiting. Under strict guard we set out, none speaking, yet all riding hard. Day and night, without ceasing we fared on, the sun rising always in our faces.”

Gabrielle listened—thirsty as the deserts for the rain she listened.

“Amongst that escort there was one whom for days I had noted. It was Selim, my half-brother, son of a slave woman. My heart made itself at ease for that he was there. One night when it came his turn to stand guard at my tent he told me much. He said that those evil counsellors who surrounded Achmet feared me greatly, lest I should come into power and dismiss them. Achmet hated me with a fierce hatred, like unto that his mother bore to mine, because the sultan loved my mother and honored her above all his wives.

“Achmet’s viziers dared not counsel putting me to death, because of murmurings amongst the people. They took argument of each other and sent me to a distant prison, whence if it became expedient I could surely be despatched to the Mart of the Hereafter.

“All of this did Selim tell unto me—he, the son of a slave with the soul of a king, who now serves me in yonder house.”

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Gabrielle's eyes followed Murad's to the window of Dumb House, half expecting that Selim would be watching them through the casement. Murad divined her thought and smiled :

“Nay, he looks not out upon the garden. The garden is mine—and yours.”

Gabrielle listened ; stiller than the pulseless leaves above her head she listened.

“We fared on unceasing for many days and nights. Even Selim knew not whither we journeyed. Then we came to the uttermost confines of Persia, and found our appointed prison-house in the Jeb el Hamrin Mountains. It was a castle of yellow stone, hanging to the side of a cliff, above the River Tigris, near the ruins of Nineveh. For the first month Hassan and I occupied one room.

“Selim brought us the ill tidings that our fate had been decided during a debauch of the sultan. His most depraved viziers filled him with false courage of the vine. We were to die.

“That same night the governor of the castle and a score of mutes entered our room where Hassan and I were at chess. ‘Arise and follow,’ said the governor. We obeyed, knowing not the why of it all.

“Without other word they led us down the long corridor and opened an iron door near the end. ‘In here,’ said the governor, standing outside that we might pass through. It was a small cell, six paces across, with a window scarce bigger than my hand.

“There was a bench, a pallet, a Koran and a bowl. These I saw, then looked at them no more. For in the floor, the center of the cell, there was a brass

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plate, a gravestone. 'Hassan!' I exclaimed, and looked at him. His name was engraved upon the plate.

“‘NOUREDDIN HASSAN MUZA BEN MUSTAPHA.’

“So read the inscription, with the date of his birth and the date of his death: ‘Died the first day of the Moon of Rajeb, at the hour of evening prayer.’

“The fourth moon of the year being then upon the wane, my brother had sixty-three days in which to live. Such was the cunning of the viziers who would torture me through my love for Hassan. Hassan turned to me, stretched out his arms, and we embraced.

“‘Come,’ said the governor; his mutes would have forced me from the room, but I went without suffering them to put hands upon me. I turned at the door. Hassan—poor slight boy that he was—stood calmly on the brazen tablet contemplating his gravestone with a smile of peace. The iron door closed.

“Down the corridor the mutes led me, and we came to another door standing open. The iron work was new and extraordinarily strong. The governor pointed, and I entered. My cell differed little from Hassan’s except the window seemed more securely barred, and the door was sheathed with iron. There was a stool and a cot, a table holding a candle and a Koran; there was naught else save a shining plate of brass which was let into the stones.”

Gabrielle clutched the end of her bench, but made no outcry or interruption.

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“‘This is my apartment?’ said I to the governor, glancing at the gravestone, and turning toward him with the best smile I could muster. The governor bowed; he did not answer otherwise. He stood and waited until I had examined the inscription on my tomb so that he might report me as a weakling, stricken with terror. But I gave him no pleasure in this behalf. I talked with him lightly, as though I had no curiosity to know what might be engraven upon the brass.

“When His Excellency had grown weary of standing, he wished me a very good night. The door swung to; the candle flickered. I was alone. Well did I know that spy-holes were provided whereby I might be watched, so I betrayed no uneasiness, but seated myself at the table and opened the Koran. After a time spent in reading and composing my mind to meet the decree of God, I took up the candle and examined my cell. Nothing mattered except that gravestone. It was like unto Hassan’s in all things, save the dates of birth and death. Thereon it was written that I had died on the first of the Moon of Safar. Hassan had been granted sixty-three days of life, whilst I was vouchsafed more than nine months.

“I stood there over-long pondering the date of my death and the place of my sepulchre. There is much in eternity upon which a man may think.

“When daylight came, as I could tell by a faintness outside my window, I cut a nick upon the wall so I might not lose count of the days. There followed two moons and six days of vacancy. I slept when I liked, paced the floor as I chose, ate bread as I was given it. I committed to memory those por-

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tions of the Koran whereon my memory had grown dim. This employed me. Once each day I made a mark upon the wall. Such was my life.

“On the sixty-third day, at the hour of the call to evening prayer, I sat quite still, fearing I might hear somewhat of Hassan. Folly! I could not even hear the tread of the mutes who came each day at the middle hour to bring my bread and refill my pitcher. I could hear no sound until the key grated in the lock. Yet I did listen.

“It had passed the call to evening prayer, as best I might count the time, when the key clicked and the bolts were drawn. There stood the governor with his mutes behind him. He beckoned me to follow him along those corridors on which the curse of silence lay, as on the mutes. At the door to Hassan’s cell the governor stopped and motioned me to look. My father had raised this governor from the dust to high estate; he dared not meet my eye; he cringed like a slave in his robes of office.

“I looked within. The tablet had been taken up, exposing a vault. Beside this lay Hassan, his brow beautiful and white, but his lips were purple, and a red welt ran across his throat. An executioner stood on either side, with Yazan, the sultan’s chamberlain. Yazan had strangled my brother with the bowstring, and tied his hands across his chest. I gave no sign of misery, and made no cry which would find its echo in Stamboul.

“Yazan, the chamberlain, lifted his hand, and said solemnly: ‘This is the first day of the Moon of Rajeb. The sultan has been obeyed. The sultan shall always be obeyed.’”

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Gabrielle shivered and dropped back upon the bench, yet took not her eyes from Murad.

“I shook off the mutes who would have seized my arms, and walked straightway back to my own door, entered and closed it behind me. There was no light to read the inscription at my feet; I could have shut my eyes and traced it against the wall.”

Murad closed his eyes a moment, then opened them and pointed directly at the foot of the pine. His finger singled out the spot where a patch of sunlight fell. His expression frightened Gabrielle, it was so tense with certainty.

“See! There it is! Mark how the sunshine glitters on the brass!”

His finger moved slowly as if he traced the lettering upon the brass: “Amurath——”

For ages and ages, as it seemed to her, Gabrielle had not spoken. “No! No!” she cried, sprang erect and grasped his arm. “No! You shall not; I can see it all too plainly. Folk say the tree is accursed—that an enemy of God lies buried there. I thought—I thought they meant my uncle——”

Murad’s eyes turned to the girl. He let fall his hand and smiled most queerly. They stood, and were silent.

“It is very odd,” Murad said in a voice strangely subdued; “it is very odd, these fancies that we have. Dreams are but dreams, and yet when first I came into the garden I felt most sure I had seen this spot before. ’Twas but a fancy, a dream of the sunshine that comes to men of the desert—yet it haunted me.”

They moved apart, Gabrielle with fluttering bosom,

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and the devouring blue of her eyes resting upon his face.

“I interrupted you,” she said; “it was so real. I have always feared the pine because—because——” She shivered with controlless dread and glanced about her at the stillness in the dim recesses of the garden. There were a thousand shadowy places which her childish imagination had peopled with a thousand terrors.

But there was the pavilion flaunting its stripes of red and white. It seemed to breathe and live, its sides heaving with the warm sweet breath of the garden. It did live, it was glad of the sunshine. Its tiny pennons laughed at follies of the dark. She sat again upon the bench and smiled: “I was so foolish, *so* foolish!”

The shadow of the pine had already crossed the fountain and began creeping towards the house. Gabrielle sprang up. “Oh dear, I did not dream it was so late. What if Jean has come, or Margot misses me.” She turned to run; then came back.

Gabrielle was brave; she came of a fearless race. Looking him squarely in the face she asked, “When? When? You did not tell me!”

Murad took both her hands and held them as he answered: “On the first of the Moon of Safar. I have yet forty-three days to live.”

“And do you think that anything could happen to you here, so far away?” Gabrielle glanced about her garden, the abode of unbroken peace.

“The sultan’s arms are long,” he replied to her as he had replied to Selim. “A decree of God knows naught of time nor space.”

“Do you fear?” she asked again.

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Murad shook his head. "Why should I fear? That which is decreed will surely come to pass; we can by no means avoid it. That which is not decreed need never worry me."

"Forty-three days;" she repeated the words over and over to herself.

"To-morrow when you come I shall tell you more," he promised, and Gabrielle went her way repeating, "Forty-three days." Murad did not move for many minutes after the whiteness of her skirt had vanished.

He turned and glanced at the bench. The scattered books lay as she left them on the rug; the cushions yet bore the imprint of her arms. Murad smiled, the loneliness passed away. Gabrielle had not gone; she could not go. For Gabrielle was the garden, and the garden was Gabrielle.

CHAPTER XVI

WHY NEED I FEAR

SUMMER poured her midday lassitude into the garden where Murad dreamed upon the bench, waiting for the hour which would bring him Gabrielle.

The scarlet trumpet-flower upheld its poisoned cup. A Persian rose, yellow and sweet, nodded to him in friendly fashion. The magnolia unveiled her daughter—her youngest and last—a daughter whose heart was all untouched, and whose breast was marble-white. Bananas parted their leaves and thrust up their growing fruit. Pomegranates changed the buds of promise for swelling globes of fulfilment. The rabbit nursed her young; the thrush fed her fledglings. The mocker sang to his mate upon the nest.

Murad meditated. "Go thou and replenish the earth" had been commanded of all living things. Deeper than the Wonder, he knew the Wonder's cause.

Cat-tails nodded in the fountain; listless dragonflies settled down upon the lotus. But there were no sparkling diamonds flung into the air and no laugh to greet them as they fell. The cannas opened and the willows swung apart, for they had nothing to conceal.

"Within that fountain through dismay and shamed fright
She trembled as on water doth moonlight."

Murad repeated the words of Yazigi, his favorite poet when in the mood of lutes and songs. He

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glanced from the fountain to his window. It was very far. Too far.

The perfumes came in jubilant billows of rose and jasmine. The black earth panted in the pride of motherhood—proud of all these birds that wooed, these beasts and fishes which owned her as their mother.

Murad looked to the pavilion—a bit of transplanted Islam standing like a conqueror upon a foreign soil. He thought of himself resting at ease in a land of strangerhood. There were many things that he might have thought, but he forgot them all, for Gabrielle came.

Gabrielle came with brow whiter than the magnolia, with lips redder than the pomegranate, with cheeks pinker than the rose which she had twined into her hair. Gabrielle came, the spirit incarnate of the garden.

“I am early,” she laughed; “Jean was away, Margot has gone to the convent. What a glorious day. One is glad to be alive.” She took her seat upon the coping of the fountain where the sunlight glorified her.

“Now tell me the rest of it. You were still in the prison, but I know you must have got out else you would not be here.” Gabrielle’s mind reverted to the very syllable where he had left off. “I was frightened yesterday and scarcely understood. The garden has its moods. To-day it is sunshine.”

“But I had best sit in the shade,” Gabrielle remarked presently, changing to the bench amongst the cushions. She settled back unto the position of yesterday, and it was as if she had never stirred.

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“One night,” Murad began, his tone mingling with the under voices of the garden, “one night, the seventy-second night, my prison doors were burst. ‘Who is there?’ I called, for the hour was unusual. ‘The meanest of your slaves,’ a man answered who came rushing in and knelt at my feet. Even in the dark I knew ’twas Selim.

“‘How came you here?’ I demanded. ‘Your slaves have taken your castle,’ he replied.

“A file of men thronged in bearing their flambeaux. The brilliance dazzled me, my eyes being long accustomed to the dark. I recognized several of my old servants and spoke to them by name.

“‘Who commands?’ I asked, and for answer they prostrated themselves before me. ‘In what force are you?’ ‘Two score and seven.’ ‘The garrison? The governor?’ Selim bounded up, his eyes flashing: ‘As they did unto Hassan so did we unto them. Not one lives.’ ‘’Tis better,’ said an old warrior, ‘that none should bear tales.’ I looked at the man and his missing eye brought him back to memory. ‘El Tuerto,’ I called him by his name, which means, ‘the one-eyed.’ Whereat he was pleased, for he had lost his eye in gallant fight. The man knelt and held out a scimitar. It was my own. The hilt fitted gratefully to my hand. I arose, surrounded by that troop of faithful friends.

“‘Come,’ urged Selim; ‘let us be gone. You have horses and camels. Your ship awaits in the Gulf of Aiden.’

“I shook my head. Wrath mounted to my cheek; strength tingled in my arm, and the lust of battle raged in my heart. ‘I shall not fly!’

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“ ‘We beseech you, master,’ spoke up the blunt Tuerto ; ‘we beseech you save yourself, and us. The hour is not ripe. The tyrant has not yet sickened all the people. Keep yourself from peril, and when deliverance comes you need only march in triumph to your capital. But if *you* perish there is none other round whom the nation may rally.’ There was wisdom in this speech, and I considered it.

“It profits nothing to repeat their arguments, but I agreed to bide the time.

“My friends had acted with prudence, providing swift horses and camels. Westward we swept by night through the province of Zor, and crossing the Euphrates were speedily lost in the Syrian desert which lieth between that country and Damascus.”

Gabrielle listened with sparkling eyes and glowing cheeks. The countries he mentioned were but names to her ; she knew nothing of them, nor did she care. She only knew that Murad had escaped the dangers which beset him, and her heart beat lighter to follow him.

Murad’s enthusiasm kindled with the girl’s as he described their garments fluttering on the winds of many lands.

“A week we coursed southwestward, flying like the dust before the storm. We passed the desert, crossed the mountains, and came at morn upon the Gulf of Akabah. A vessel lay at anchor, swaying on the waves as though it were a camel. Her captain had descried us from afar ; he and his boats came immediately ashore.

“ ‘All, everything ;’ Selim’s comprehensive gesture swept our little caravan and included everything,

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men and horses, camels and baggage. More quickly than I deemed it possible we were all aboard the vessel.

“We threaded the Straits of Tiran, rounded the point of Ras Mahomet, and ran on the Egyptian coast beneath the peaks of Jeb Munfieh. Stepping from the deck into the saddle we sped across Egypt, avoiding the caravan routes, and cleaving the Libyan desert straight as the arrow flies.

“Ah! what a land is that of Africa! The moist plowlands—the groves of eucalyptus—titanic ramparts of the rocks—the red desert rolling away from little brown hills. Ah! the mystery of space—the level, level space, which, like eternity, has no beginning and no end. Ah! what a land of flying white dust, of camels, and of savage men, who cry continually, ‘Oosh! Oosh!’ to their beasts. How the camels swayed and rocked, and their velvet feet crunched upon the sand. The sunlight glittered on our steel, the wind blew in our faces—fierce bands of desert-robbers drew aside to let us pass. Through the night we rushed past the shadow of a solitary palm where a brown man stood, naked, lone and silent, in a naked, lone and silent land. Ah! what a land is that of Africa!”

Gabrielle followed him with a heart that had forgot to beat.

“Then we rested in the tiny port of Beshir, in the Gulf of Sidra, which borders the Mediterranean.”

This meant safety to Murad, and Gabrielle smiled.

“There I parted with my troop, all save Selim; and I shamed me not for my tears. We put to sea, he and I, crossing with many misgivings to Marseilles.

“On those clear, blue days, whilst the heavens and

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the seas were at peace, I could not but remember the fate of gallant Prince Jem, two centuries ago. He, like myself, fled the wrath of his brother and sought refuge with the Christian knights of Rhodes. They made him their prisoner, he who should have been their guest—those Christian knights. They wrung money from the sultan for his keep—those Christian knights. They hurried him from castle to castle in France—those Christian knights—wrangling like dogs over the gold that followed. During all those weary years he had but one solace, the love of Lady Hellene, the Christian lady.

“Finally, he fell into the hands of Pope Alexander Borgia, who poisoned him at his own table, and sold his body to the sultan.

“ ’Twas Prince Jem that wrote :

“ ‘Come, oh Jem, thy Jemshid cup drain, ’tis the land of Frankestan ;
Aye ’tis fate ; and what is written on his brow must hap to man.’

“So did I consider the evil case of Prince Jem, wondering betimes what was written upon my own brow.”

“Then what happened ?” Gabrielle’s eager interest would not suffer him to rest until he had told her all.

“The king of France received me with all comfort and honor. I had powerful friends near the throne. Yet a horse may travel from Stamboul to Paris.

“My friends besought me to hide beyond all search until the first of the Moon of Safar had passed. Much noise had gone abroad concerning this day of my death—for Mussulmans believe that whatever is ordered by the sultan will surely come to pass.

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“One night in Paris, whilst I halted between two minds, there came a knock upon my door, and an officer of the king appeared. ‘Your brother,’ he said, ‘demands you of our government. A powerful embassy is on its way hither to urge the friendship of kings, and the comity of nations.’ ‘I am ready,’ said I, rising, for I desired to bring no evil war upon my hosts. ‘Nay,’ the officer assured me; ‘our king will not deliver you to death. Neither is it wise for him to refuse his ally, the sultan. Go this night; a ship has been provided which will take you to Louisiana.’ ‘And where,’ asked I, ‘is Louisiana?’ ‘’Tis an island in the far seas,’ said he. ‘Then I shall go,’ I answered, ‘first giving thanks unto the king.’ ‘Nay,’ he said; ‘there is no time; there be spies of your nation in Paris, such as are called Assassins.’

“That night I left Paris privily with Selim. But fate sent me good friends along the way, and Allah guided my steps into this garden.”

Gabrielle plucked at the feathers of her fan, smoothed them out, and watched the iridescent colors shimmer in the sun. Presently she lifted her insatiate eyes so full of questions that one slipped from her tongue: “And will they find you here?”

“If it be written that I die in accordance with the command of the sultan, it availeth me nothing that I fly from Stamboul to Louisiana, beyond the edges of the earth. Heard you never the story of Agib, and how God’s will shall surely come to pass? It runneth in this wise:

“There was once a king in the East called Agib, son of Khesib, and he ruled a kingdom near the sea. Being seized with a monarch’s whim for adventure he

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set out upon a cruise in search of strange cities. Far-
ing on at hazard they passed many pleasant seas and
set foot upon many beauteous islands. But a storm
arose and drove them out of their course, as men
would call it, accidentally.

“After days of violent wind and raging water the
captain lost his reckoning and climbed to the top of
the mast to look out. He came down and prostrated
himself before the king, cast his turban on the deck,
buffeted his face, and said, ‘Oh king! we are dead
men. To-morrow by the end of day we shall come to
a mountain of loadstone, which will draw the nails
out of the ship and the ship will go to pieces.’ It
happened as the captain said. The ship went to
pieces on that fatal mountain, and the sailors were all
drowned. The king was saved in order that destiny
concerning him might be fulfilled. He clung to a
plank and was tossed ashore by a monstrous wave,
which left him lying at the foot of a tree. There he
saw in a dream one who spoke unto him saying, ‘Rise,
son of Khesib, dig where thou liest and thou shalt
find a bow and arrows. Shoot an arrow at the horse-
man on top of yonder dome.’ Agib awoke, and behold
there was a dome of brass supported by ten columns.
On the top thereof stood a horse and rider of solid
brass. Agib, hearkening unto his dream, dug and
found the arrows, and shot the horseman off the dome.
The horseman fell with a great splash into the sea. A
storm arose, the sea swelled until it was like to cover
the island. Out of it came a man in a boat of brass
and beckoned Agib.

“Agib entered therein and for ten days rowed on
until they came in sight of an island. Agib was so

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overjoyed that he uttered the name of God—a thing forbidden, for the man of brass was a creature of enchantment. When the name of the Most High was uttered the man vanished, the boat sank, and left Agib struggling in the water. A tremendous wave cast him upon yet another island, so small that none might live upon it. There he climbed into the branches of a tree, and was bemoaning the evil plight into which he had fallen, when he saw approaching a ship, which dropped her anchor. Black slaves came ashore bringing a great quantity of meats and fruits and dates and carpets, and panniers of dried fish, which they transported to the middle of the island. There they dug with spades, uncovering a trap door and disappearing into the bowels of the earth.

“When all of this had been done there came ashore a very aged man leading a youth by the hand. The twain went together underneath the ground. After which the old man came forth alone and his slaves covered the trap door with earth. Then the ship carried them all away. Agib, devoured by curiosity concerning that which he had witnessed, climbed down out of the tree, dug up the trap door and discovered a winding stair of stone. Speedily he came to a luxurious apartment, hung with all manner of rich stuffs, and bright with divers colored lamps. Therein sat the youth. ‘Oh, my brother!’ spoke Agib, ‘be pacified of thy fears. I am a believer like thyself, cast here by destiny. I pray thee vouch me of thy case.’

“‘With all my heart,’ replied the youth. ‘Know thou that when I was born my father assembled the astrologers and had them draw my horoscope.

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“Destiny hath decreed,” said they, “life unto thy son until the age of fifteen. After which, if no evil hap betide him, his years shall be many. But a peril threatens from the Sea of Peril, where standeth the dread horseman of brass. This horseman shall fall, and thy son shall fall half a hundred days after, and by the same hand—the hand of Agib, son of Khesib.” Two weeks ago tidings came to my father that the horse of brass had fallen, overthrown by Agib, son of Khesib, whereat he was as one distraught. At once he built this cavern and brought me hither, where as you see, I am quite safe from Agib ben Khesib.’

“Agib marvelled at the youth’s story, and at the queer hazard which had flung them together in one place. ‘The astrologers lied,’ said he to himself; ‘by Allah, I will not harm the youth.’ And there they bided together, these two, eating and sleeping and drinking together like brothers, until the fiftieth day came, when the youth arose, performed his ablutions, and made the morning prayers. ‘Praised be God, who hath preserved me to my father, for he cometh this day to fetch me. Oh, my brother! cut me a melon.’ Agib made haste to get the melon and asked for that wherewith he might cut it. The youth pointed to a knife which rested on a shelf above his head. Agib climbed to the shelf and seized the knife; but coming down again he caught his foot in the couch and fell. By dire mischance in falling he drove the knife into the youth’s heart, and he died forthright—thus fulfilling that which had been written when the stars were made.”

During the whole of this story Gabrielle did not once take her eyes from Murad’s face—a face as calm

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and grave as if the tale of Agib concerned him not. When he had done Gabrielle settled back upon the bench, heaving a sigh of wonderment.

“So you will understand,” Murad spoke again in a tone of quiet certainty, “that like the stars we move according to the impulse given by the Hand which hurls us into space. The stars fear not, neither do they strive to disobey. Why should we fear or disobey?”

Gabrielle had no answer for him, she deeming herself very simple and Murad very wise.

Murad took his seat upon the coping of the fountain a little way apart from her. Gabrielle watched him through her lashes.

“No! No!” she laughed—the laugh that tinkles as though a tear had fallen on it—“No, I will not have it that way. Sister Therese tells prettier stories than you. In *her* stories the fairy prince always comes to his own, and they live happily ever after.”

Murad glanced up gravely, his mood beyond the influence of laughter or of fears.

“I have offended against mine own judgment. Azizi was very wise. He saith :

“‘As long as thou can’st communicate not thy secret to thy friend,
That friend hath another : Beware then of thy friend’s friend.’”

Gabrielle sprang up, ran to the fountain and sat beside him. She took the hand that lay on the fold of his robe and rebuked him, sweetly as a woman might : “No, you are not sorry that you told me ; you shall not be sorry. Beside, I have no friend, none but you.”

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Then she rose with the merriest laugh—a laugh of make-believe. “You shall be the Fairy Prince, you shall come into your own, and I shall visit you as the Queen of Sheba visited Solomon. That will be glorious. Oh, dear! There’s Margot——”

Gabrielle turned like a fawn to dash away. A mischievous branch reached down from the magnolia tree, plucked the rose deftly from her hair and cast it at Murad’s feet. Together they stooped to pick it up, but Murad was the quicker.

“Give it me,” she said.

“Nay,” he answered her; “in my country whatsoever falleth from a rich man’s tree upon the ground, whether it be olive or date, or other blessing, that is called a ‘windfall’ and is gathered by the poor. I shall keep the rose.”

“Why did you not say you wanted it?” She turned and sped down the path, while Murad sat in the lonely garden and meditated upon his rose.

For sake of the rose he had a smile for every flower in the garden, for every bird that fluttered and every bee that buzzed, for every dash of light and blot of shadow in his path. Bearing the smile upon his lips Murad passed slowly along the walks and disappeared within the house.

CHAPTER XVII

THE DREAD OF THE PINE

FOR nearly four and twenty hours Gabrielle had wondered over Murad's strange adventures. Oftentimes whilst with Margot or her father, or standing alone at the window, she'd gasp to remember something else. She thought of the tablet foretelling Murad's death, and hoped that he would hide in the woods until the time was passed. But there was that dreadful story of Agib. Then Gabrielle forgot all of these and smiled to think how Murad had snatched up the rose which fell from her hair.

Margot had gone to the convent; Grosjean hesitated on the doorstep. "Never fear, Jean, I shall come to no harm. I shall close the door, and the bar is strong. I do not mind in the least; I love to be alone." She pushed him from the step, closed the door, then started running back through the hall.

"I told Jean a lie," she accused herself. "No, 'twas not a lie. I did not tell him I would *be* alone; I only said I did not mind being alone. Anyway, I cannot mend it now." She ran across Margot's poultry yard and pressed through the vines into the wider garden. Murad waited for her.

She met him with a smile as grave as his own, a smile of comprehension and kinship. They had a

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secret in common, something that they alone knew—something that itched the end of Gabrielle's tongue, and made her feel tremendously important. She nodded to him, a sunny little nod of understanding, which plainly said, "You and I know all about it, do we not?"

Murad, princely and courteous, inclined his head in assent.

Gabrielle had no thought for trifling matters. She scarcely glanced at her little brown friend, the thrush. The jay irritated her, he was so fussy and frivolous.

"Come with me," she said to Murad. The two marched on together like military leaders going to a council of war.

She hurried to their accustomed place at the bench. Such things as velvet rugs and parti-colored cushions, even the Fan with the Thousand Eyes, were not for Gabrielle to-day. Even the pavilion, glittering in the sunshine, did not attract a glance.

She pushed the hassocks and the cushions to one side, and sat down. She leaned forward, resting her elbows on her knees, her chin in her hands. Being thus in the attitude for thinking, Gabrielle thought profoundly. Presently she lifted two very serious eyes and stated:

"You are *not* an infidel."

"No," he answered promptly. Then his eyes twinkled: "Why do you say that?"

"We were talking, Margot and I, this morning. She's dreadfully afraid of infidels. She says if one happens to be standing beside an infidel one might get struck by lightning—except for a piece of the

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true cross, or something like that. Mother Louise told me all about them once. She hates infidels, too.”

“What do you mean by an infidel?”

“I do not know exactly, but it’s something very bad. They’re awful. They cannot go to heaven at all.”

“Why?”

“Mother Louise says so; I did not ask her why.”

“What would you say if Mother Louise should call *me* an infidel?”

“Oh, no; everybody is afraid of infidels, and hates them; I’m not afraid of you a tiny bit, and, of course—I do not hate *you*.”

“Suppose I were to tell you that many people look upon me as the head of the Mahometan religion?”

“The what?”

“The Mahometan religion.”

“What is that?”

“The religion of the Prophet believed by millions in the East.”

“Are they not Christians?”

“No.”

“Are they infidels?”

“If one be an infidel who does not believe as you believe.”

“But people must not believe in anything except God and the saints, and the Holy Virgin, and the—oh, well, there are a great many things to believe in; you must believe in all of them and not believe anything else. It is very simple.”

Murad smiled—inwardly. “My people do believe in God, the only God—the same God.”

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“You must believe in Jesus Christ and the Holy Virgin——”

“We believe in Christ as a prophet of our religion, and we reverence Mary as one of the four women whom God hath ordained with all perfection—Asia the wife of Pharaoh, Mary the daughter of Imran, Khadijah the wife, and Fatima the daughter of the Prophet.”

Gabrielle seemed greatly bewildered. “Mother Louise never told me about *them*. I have read the Lives of the Saints, but of course I could not remember all of them. But you are not an infidel, are you?”

“No,” he answered her again, and felt justified.

“I knew it,” she asserted positively; “though I saw a picture of some infidels, and they were dressed like you.”

“But the wise men who found your Saviour were also in this garb, as you told me.” Murad smiled, and Gabrielle knew full well the matter must be right.

After a period of silence she looked up and remarked, “I’m glad I am not a man.”

“Why?”

“A man must consider so many things, and if I were in your place, I should not know what to do. Do you think he can get you—way over here?”

Murad bowed with a most apologetic expression; it was entirely his fault that he did not understand.

“I mean the king,” she explained. “No, what did you call him?”

“The sultan?”

“Oh yes, the sultan—I’ve been trying all day to think of that word. A sultan is higher than a king,

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isn't he? Do you think there is any danger? It seems dreadful to have one's name already carved on a tombstone—and the date."

Murad shrugged his shoulders, a gesture which always made Gabrielle smile, it was so comically unlike a genuine French shrug. But now her mood was far too serious.

"If it be so decreed," he answered.

"That's what you said on yesterday. What do you mean by that?"

"God governs the world and orders all things. If my death be ordained on the first of Safar's moon, no precaution can possibly prevent it. By running away I should run directly into the danger, as did the merchant who hid his son on the island through fear of Agib ben Khesib. Therefore I shall bide here in peace."

Gabrielle gained reassurance from his untroubled face; yet her smile was exceeding wistful. "And that is why you are not afraid?"

"Yes, the coward dies a thousand deaths of his own imagining; the brave man dies the one which fate decrees."

"It is forty-one days until—until——"

"Forty-one," he assented quietly.

Murad went to an oleander bush and plucked a spray, then drifted slowly back, picking the petals into bits and scattering them like scarlet tears behind him. When he came very near to her again he began to speak:

"You ask if the sultan's vengeance is like to reach me in this far land. I do not know. We of the faith differ much. 'Tis noised amongst the people

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that I shall die at the time ordained by the sultan, whose will is the supreme law of Islam. Should I live beyond that time the people will believe me set apart from mortal men, and beyond the sultan's power. It will gain me many followers. I shall overthrow him."

"Overthrow him?" Gabrielle repeated vaguely.

"Yes, there will be battles and fighting; many will die. Ah! the misery of it—one's own nation, deluded children of the Prophet."

The light of combat flashed up and died away from Murad's face. He spoke with settled melancholy, but as a man who has resolutely determined his course.

"Battles and fighting?" Gabrielle asked. "Were you ever in a battle? You never told me of that."

"I have seen service," he admitted; "but there is no glory in winning victories over one's own kin."

"That's just what I could not understand," she began hurriedly, as though she had waited a chance to ask the question. "The king, or the sultan, in the picture—he was your father?"

"Yes."

"He died and your brother became sultan?"

"Yes."

"And it was your own brother who had your name engraved on that tomb?" Gabrielle could not cast the horror from her mind. "I suppose sultans can not love their brothers?"

Gabrielle was in deadly earnest, yet felt as if she were prying into family secrets. Murad surprised her by breaking into a broad smile, then a laugh.

"No, sultans do *not* love their brothers, and have

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no cause to love them. Indeed the first act of most sultans on coming to the throne is to put all of his brothers to death."

"Put his brothers to death—why?" Gabrielle's eyes opened wide.

"For good reason. Princes of our land are restless and ambitious—nothing short of a throne contents them. They keep up perpetual civil war. One of our greatest sultans—peace to his ashes—slew all his brothers at once. 'By Allah,' said he, 'an execution is less grievous than an insurrection. I'll take a span from their highest parts.' So he chopped off their heads and had peace in the land."

Gabrielle shuddered: "I do not want you to go back there. I don't, I don't. When you get to be sultan you will not kill *your* brothers, will you?"

"No," he promised, and made some movement of the hands which seemed very solemn. "I have no brothers—Achmet hath forestalled me. All save one, for Selim lives—a slave with the soul of a king."

"He is in there?" she asked, looking towards the window.

"Yes."

"Why does he never come into the garden?"

Murad glanced at her queerly, and hesitated: "Because—because I come into the garden every day and I feel freer to think if no one be watching me. Therefore I admonished Selim never to cast his eyes upon the garden."

"That's just it," Gabrielle assented eagerly; "I did not know anybody else felt that way. I was always so free in here where no one could see me—and——"

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She glanced at the pool, the cannas, the window, and flushed violently, for Murad was gazing directly at her. He did not really mean to fret her, but the flow of color into Gabrielle's cheek was so very beautiful that in watching it Murad forgot.

"I am sorry," he said presently; "I am sorry that I have spoiled your garden for you."

"I did not mean that, truly I did not; it is ever so much nicer since you came. You tell me so many things and give me so much to think of. I think of nothing all day long except what you tell me in this hour. I must have thought about *something* before you came, yet I cannot remember a single thing. If you went away I should never come here again."

"Possibly I shall not go away." Murad did not intend it, but Gabrielle detected the morbid tone in his voice, and his involuntary glance towards the pine. She sprang to her feet; her eyes sought the spot at the foot of the pine.

"No, no, not that!"

"Not what?"

"I'm so foolish," she said, and sat down again. "Do you remember on yesterday when you spoke of that awful tablet with your name written upon it? You pointed right at that place over there by the foot of the tree and I imagined I could see the grave. Ugh! I dreamed of it all night; right there."

Murad looked at the girl with amazement. "Gabrielle," he said, "that is most strange. Ever since I saw that tree I have had the same idea. The first day I came into the garden I felt sure of having been here before. I imagined the ground was trampled by many feet. The tablet was there, wet

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with dew and besmeared with mud. I saw it clearly, and have not been able to get it out of my thoughts."

Gabrielle did not look up. "I have always imagined something terrible about that tree," she said, as if it were the most natural thing in the world for her to feel whatever Murad felt.

Murad walked away. Gabrielle kept pulling at the fringe of a cushion. When he turned and came back, Murad laughed carelessly :

"Never mind, we'll not talk of that. To-morrow we shall have some books and pictures. And I shall bring you a plaything."

CHAPTER XVIII

THE COUCH OF THE SULTANA

GABRIELLE had lain awake for hours listening for her father to return. In the earlier part of the night there had come a rap on the door. Grosjean conferred in whispers with the man outside, and departed. Gabrielle saw him striding along the levee and noted the lights still burning in Government House. Her curiosity was aroused, but 'twas not this of itself which made her so wakeful.

Try as she might she could not sleep, and however persistently she closed her eyes she could not help seeing that gorgeous couch which Murad had placed in his pavilion. Since the first moment she saw it Gabrielle had the most intense desire to hide behind its curtains and burrow her head in those wonderful pillows—she must know how a sleeping sultana felt in such a bed. Silly? Yes, she knew very well it was silly. Childish? Senseless? Gabrielle comprehended that. Dangerous? In some dim way she realized there might be a danger. But the pioneer blood of Grosjean coursed through Gabrielle's veins, and to him the spice of danger had always made an expedition more attractive.

“He said he meant to make me a plaything; I wonder what it can be?” There were so many things for Gabrielle to think about it was small wonder she could not sleep.

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She tumbled and tossed and reasoned with herself. The summer winds blew through her windows and rustled the curtains of her bed. They irritated her, making her think of those silken curtains about the couch which swayed back and forth like a film of mist, without a sound.

Presently she sprang out of bed and ran to the window, her white robe shimmering in the starlight. The glory of a cloudless night clothed the river in majesty, and set the seal of every star upon its bosom.

Gabrielle glanced up and down the river. No one was abroad. No lights shone anywhere, save from the governor's room, whither her father must have gone.

"I cannot sleep; it's too hot," she said. Then, "It would not take a minute, and I'd be satisfied." Gabrielle knew if she stopped and considered it, she might be cautious—she did not want to be cautious. She did not stop.

She ran to a closet, snatched up a dark cloak and wrapped it round her. Her bare feet pattered on the steps and she laughed at the distinctness with which she heard them. But old Margot was asleep, and Gabrielle could afford to laugh at the pitter-patter of her own feet. It is better to laugh than to think. One can think afterwards. She darted across their garden, passed the wall, and halted behind the vines on the farther side.

The garden lay before her, still and clear and silent. She glanced at Murad's window. The light burned; he was there, and he was not looking. She stole out, avoided the open spaces and slunk from shadow to shadow, looking ever back at Murad's

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window. She reached the cloistered darkness of the pines.

Safe beside the fountain Gabrielle stooped and lifted her cloak to see what the matter was. She had felt a twinge of pain as she passed a rose-bush ; now she remembered it. An ugly scratch across the whiteness of her ankle, and little red drops stood out like a scarlet rosary. "Ugh!" she said; "one's skin grows tender from the wearing of shoes and stockings."

She sat on the coping of the fountain, taking care to get well behind the cannas and to make no noise. She sat on the coping, dabbling her foot in the water and sighing for the days when briars did not scratch and pebbles did not bruise.

It was very dark inside the pavilion, but Gabrielle knew exactly where the couch stood. She was quite sure of getting about without knocking things down—she had taken careful observations in the daylight.

"Ugh! that feels good," she said, stepping upon the thick rugs—"pebbles and weeds are not near as soft to tread upon."

In the dark she made her way to the couch and sat down upon it just where the curtains came together. The curtains were softer than a breath, touching her cheeks more lightly than an angel's kiss.

Gabrielle suffered her cloak to fall, turned aside the coverlet and cuddled underneath. Presently she sat up, looked about her and wished she dared light those mysterious lamps—but Murad might see their glow. Had she only known how to start the smouldering braziers that smelled so sweet she might

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have ventured. Other perfumes rose in the pavilion ; Gabrielle shut her eyes and opened her soul.

“Dear me !” she thought, “I could go to sleep in a minute. It would be a merry prank. How Jean would open his eyes if he should come here and find me, sleeping like a queen in the bed of a queen.”

Presently she grew restless ; she rose and moved about on the hushing rugs, seeking to discover an odor which suggested the queer idea of some one whispering in her ears.

The stars shone outside. Gabrielle loved the stars ; she had her reasons for loving them. She stood at the entrance of the pavilion looking out at the garden, the fountain, the stars—and Murad’s window. She stood there whiter and stiller than the boy upon the fountain, gazing into the night.

“Oh dear ! I must go ; Jean will be coming soon.” She had already made one backward step to take up her cloak when a twig snapped and a bush rustled. She sprang to the opening again, but could see nothing. The dread of the pine rushed upon her, and all of Margot’s stories concerning it.

“Why did I not think of that—I should not have come.” Within the pavilion she felt safe, hiding behind Murad’s assurance that there was no such thing as spirits walking in the night. “It must have been a rabbit,” she thought ; “or perhaps an owl flapped amongst the trees.”

Gabrielle ran to the opening and buttoned the curtain, leaving only a small space at the bottom through which to look and listen.

There came a crunching sound, as of a tread upon the shells in the path. Something walked abroad,

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something far heavier than a rabbit—Paul-Marie was a giant, so Margot said.

Gabrielle crouched behind the curtain, and shivered though the night was warm. She drew her thin white robe about her and felt its insufficiency. She remembered what Margot had often said about the chickens—that 'twas the white ones which the owls caught at night. Gabrielle dared not run to the couch and get her cloak. Something might happen.

She heard steps, erratic steps that ceased and came on again. Now coming—now going—now she heard nothing.

The steps began again and came nearer—nearer—nearer; Gabrielle heard the muttering of a voice. She ceased to breathe.

A shape swung into view, passed the olive bush, moved 'round the cannas and "Oh!" Gabrielle exclaimed. It was Murad.

She almost cried aloud to him for the sense of safety that he brought. She lay upon the thick warm rugs and peered out, glad it was Murad instead of Paul-Marie. Then she watched him more intently, for he stopped beside the fountain, and Gabrielle felt sure that something was wrong.

Murad swung himself into the open space and stopped; Gabrielle saw him clearly, could even see the expression on his face.

It was that expression which frightened her. Never before had he been aught but composed and dignified, with such a surety of power about his lips. Though he stood stiller than the trunk of the pine, Gabrielle realized that he was wavering.

His lips moved; he spoke, but in his own tongue.

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Gabrielle could not understand the words, but she knew, as a woman knows, that something was wrong. Perhaps it was the poise of his head, less certain and less proud ; perhaps it was the helpless outflinging of his arms, as a man who strives to cast off a shackle. Whatever it might be Gabrielle's impulse was to call out to him. But she durst not. His face was tense and drawn ; his clenched hands warned her to let him be.

He spoke again, such words as she had never heard from mortal lips—terrible and stern as though a tongue of steel had uttered them. He stepped forward and gazed long into the fountain.

When Murad turned again it was to move slowly towards the bench where rested the cushions as Gabrielle had left them. They were undisturbed ; one might have imagined that she had but that instant risen from them. Murad folded his arms and looked down upon these silent witnesses of her presence. He touched one with his fingers, being careful not to smooth out a crease that Gabrielle had made.

Presently his hands fell to his side, and as a man who does what he cannot help, he sat down at the farther end, as he had always sat when talking to Gabrielle. His lips moved again, but the words were soft and low and musical. What a voice he had, and how tenderly the mystic syllables fell. Though she could not understand the words, Gabrielle became greatly interested. She saw him take up the Fan of the Thousand Eyes and brush it against his cheek, touching it to his lips as he laid it down. He sat and stared straight ahead of him, at the flap of the curtain as Gabrielle thought. She shrank away from her

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spy-hole and wished for her cloak ; she even feared she had made a noise. Murad sprang up, took a step or two towards her, then halted and shook his head.

Gabrielle darted back to the couch, took up her cloak and wrapped herself securely as she might. Then hearing nothing more she came back step by step to the flap and peered out. Murad stood a few paces distant, with his head turned from her. He seemed to be listening towards the house. Gabrielle widened the crack with her fingers and followed Murad's eye.

Some one else was in the garden. It angered Gabrielle. "Jean!"—she choked the word before it made a sound.

Grosjean looked bigger than ever beneath the uncertain light of the stars. "He has come for me," she thought.

Grosjean came directly to Murad. Gabrielle saw something white in his hand. "Selim told me you were here," he said. "I came against his wish." So did Grosjean absolve Selim from the blame.

Murad extended his hand in welcome. Gabrielle saw him turn his head and glance towards the bench, at the fan lying as she had left it. "Come," he said, taking Grosjean by the arm ; "let us return to the house. There we may confer at ease."

To Gabrielle, who was watching, the action was so significant that Murad might as well have put his thought in words. "The garden is ours," Gabrielle murmured to herself. Her heart beat riotously. She wished her father would go away.

Grosjean did not go away. He planted one foot on the coping of the fountain, and rested an elbow on his

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knee. "Wait," he said; "let me explain before we go into the house. The governor has advices that your friends have fitted out a ship at St. Malo and manned it with adventurers. This vessel will soon reach Santo Domingo, where a hundred buccaneers will join them."

Murad betrayed little surprise. "I fear they are too impatient," he said; "it is not yet the time." It thrilled Gabrielle to think that she knew what Murad meant, and her father did not.

"Here is a letter," said Grosjean, "which was slipped beneath my door this night. It is addressed, 'To the stranger within thy gates.' I have not discovered the bearer. Does any one beside ourselves suspect that you are here?"

Murad shook his head and reached for the letter.

"You have had communication with no one?" inquired Grosjean.

"None," Murad assured him.

"It is quite a singular thing," Grosjean reflected; "so far as I am aware only the governor and two gentlemen know of your presence. I have used all precaution to prevent gossip."

Gabrielle chuckled to herself; some day she would make merry with her father over this prank, and what she had learned by eavesdropping.

"Come," suggested Murad again, but Grosjean still held back.

"I have become interested in you," he said without heeding Murad's hand upon his arm, "and should be glad to serve you. If this place be not safe, we might go together into the remote forests where no white man has ever dared to venture."

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Gabrielle surmised from this that Murad had been discussing affairs with her father. She resented the thought. Grosjean reached out his arm and put it around Murad's shoulders, so strong and so protecting that Gabrielle was glad, and tears came brimming to her eyes. She listened eagerly for Murad's reply.

"No," he said, "I have considered much in that wise. If this garden be not safe, then for me there is no safety above the ground. Beside, I love this garden. I shall remain here unto the end."

For a space the two stood silent beneath the stars.

"What tent is that?" asked Grosjean. He moved a step as if he meant to enter. Gabrielle did not dare to stir.

"I use it sometimes," answered Murad, taking him by the arm. "Come, let us go to the light, where I may read my letter."

Gabrielle watched them move slowly towards the house in earnest converse. She listened so acutely that she heard their double tread through the hallway.

Then another shadow moved amongst the shadows, and Gabrielle too was gone.

CHAPTER XIX

THE PLAYTHING

IN the first dusk of morning, after the foredawn ablutions and prayers were done, Murad turned his eyes from Mecca and his thoughts to Gabrielle. By the light of his lamps—for day was yet too young to set its radiance in the skies—he gathered around him a jumble of queer-looking bottles, and the oddest of all odd crucibles.

“A plaything,” he smiled to himself; “I promised her a plaything; but is it just that I should pry into her soul? Ah, well! it cannot harm Gabrielle, for never in the world was there another soul and heart as innocent.” Yet he shook his head doubtfully and lighted the retort.

The blue flames burned; the crucible bubbled in wrath. He poured something from a bottle, holding his head to one side lest he inhale the fumes. Then he bent over and watched the vicious tongues of red and yellow and green. When the liquid had boiled down and quieted he added a few drops from another bottle, and from yet another. The colors played and sparkled as though the blood-red tragedy of sunset had fallen upon a peaceful azure sea. For hours Murad watched the turmoil in that tiny vessel, where every evil passion and every noble aim were being blent as they are in humankind.

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“The colors mingle and fade,” he said; “now ’tis the ruby—passion and blood; now black, the hue of death—the wrath of battle and murder’s violence. Now ’tis clouding with lead—the pall, the grave, the silence. Now all white and glittering—pride and ambition!”

Then it turned to amethyst, with shifting blues and reds and purples; now a million opals swam in a shining sea of emerald. Murad followed every change and every mood.

“It is almost ready.” Murad began with exceeding care to open a tiny vial encased in wicker. He loosened the glass stopper and held it ready.

“Now!” He extinguished the fire, and shut his lips tight.

“It grows quieter, as age comes on and passion cools. The fever and the fret are done. It is the moment.” Murad leaned close above the liquid. He suffered a single drop to fall from the vial, and keenly observed the effect. It became perfectly clear; there was not a bubble on its surface, not a mote in its depths.

Murad took up an empty crystal globe, like unto that other. This he held between himself and the lamp to be sure it was clean, and without a flaw. He filled it from the crucible, sealed its neck with heated wax, and fixed it to a base of cedarwood. He covered it then with a piece of fine linen and laid it aside upon the table. This done, he relighted his retort and poured what remained of the liquid, drop by drop, into the fire. The flames shot up gleefully until all was gone.

“Life returns to death again,” he muttered.

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“Death and life together give redness to the rose, and blue to the tossing sea—the pink of woman’s cheeks, the blackness of man’s eyes—all, all in death, and from death all life is born.”

When the last drop had fallen, the last flame had died away, Murad covered his retort and crucible.

Steady day shone down upon the garden. His work was done. The globe lay finished. Murad glanced at the sun.

“Two hours yet,” he said, and wondered how he should employ them. Murad selected amongst a number of beautiful books, setting aside those best fitted to amuse Gabrielle.

Before the noontide hour came he made several journeys back and forth to the bench in the garden, spreading out the books and trinkets in such manner as to please her eye.

He carried also an armful of weapons, scimitars and queer-looking knives. After this there was nothing for him to do but wait.

He sat upon the bench and watched the shadow of the pine until it came midway the oleander bush. It was Gabrielle’s hour, marked by Gabrielle’s clock. Murad walked to the grapevine through which she always came. No sound reached him from the farther side of the wall. Murad grew impatient.

He strode to the bench again, and back and forth until it had passed the hour of noon. He came again to the vine.

Gabrielle thrust her face into the sunlight so suddenly that she startled him. “I’ve been watching you,” she laughed; “I did not guess that you could walk so fast—you are always deliberate and calm.”

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Murad felt an odd sense of awkwardness. "I was waiting," he answered simply.

Gabrielle laughed again: "Mother Louise always said I was too impatient for any use—I could never keep still a minute. But I have been standing here for a long, long time looking at you. I stood ever so still and did not make a bit of noise. It's great fun to watch some person who doesn't know it. Where's the plaything?"

Gabrielle stepped out into the path. Murad looked guilty and answered not; so Gabrielle went on: "It is very curious. I look at you and it is almost as if you were thinking out loud, and I hear every word—I have come to understand you so well."

They were walking towards the bench and Gabrielle chatted without restraint: "You are so different from father. He talks to me as if I were a baby, and you—you tell me things."

Whenever Gabrielle turned her eyes straight upon him, Murad felt as if the pages of a book were being opened before him with every syllable made clear. It was a violation of trust for him to look.

"Come," he said; "I have the plaything." He pointed to the bench.

"Which?" she asked wonderingly. "There are so many."

"This," he said; and Murad laid the globe within her hand.

"What is it?" She turned the globe over and over.

"It is a magic glass, such as sorcerers make in the East."

"What is it good for? It is very pretty."

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“Look at these pictures through it.” Murad opened a book and showed her how to hold the glass so that the pictures would be magnified.

“Oh! Aren't they big? My! He scared me—that man seemed staring back at me.” She put the glass aside to note again their real size. “It is very queer. You certainly do know a lot of things.”

Murad found a keen joy in watching the play of intelligence across her features—an eager but wholly untrained mind in its effort to comprehend.

“Let me have the glass,” he said; “I will show you something.”

Gabrielle resigned it unwillingly.

“Do you remember Prometheus?” he began.

“Who?”

“Prometheus.”

Gabrielle shook her head. “No, I saw no one at the convent except that man I told you of—I peeped at him through the lattice. But I did not know his name——”

Murad preserved his gravity and explained: “Prometheus was the Titan who brought down fire from heaven.”

Gabrielle closed her book and settled herself for a story.

“Prometheus stole fire from heaven, and the gods—pagan gods, of course, Prometheus was an infidel—the gods cursed him by sending him a woman named Pandora who made much trouble——”

“Is this a true story—a really *true* story?”

“It may not be true, but it is a very old legend. If Prometheus had possessed a glass like this he could

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have brought down fire from heaven without being a thief.”

Making a great mystery of it Murad gathered some rotten wood from a stump and placed it in a heap on the coping. “Now watch it,” he said, and held the glass above it. Gabrielle saw the dry stuff smoke and smoulder, then blaze up. Murad took the glass away; putting out her finger she convinced herself that the fire was really true, if the story was not.

“That must be necromancy, or magic,” she declared; “anyway it’s wicked.”

Murad shook his head and pointed upward at the sun.

“No. The heat of the universe is there. It comes to us in the sunshine. Do you not feel it?” Gabrielle knew that this was really true—the sun indeed was hot.

“This glass,” Murad explained, “collects the heat and draws it to one place—that makes the fire.” He showed her again, and finally she understood.

“Let me try it by myself. No, give it me in my own hand.” She experimented with the new toy, upon the wood, the cannas, the leaves, and last upon her own bare arm until she was completely satisfied.

“It is very simple,” she admitted. “Everything must be simple when you understand it.”

“Every leaf of every tree is verily a book—if you study them. But they teach no lessons to a fool. We know what the sun is; we know the earth, the flowers, the stars. All of them are simple. We understand everything except the problem of Thee and Me.”

Gabrielle faced the unsolved problem of Thee and

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Me, and faced it seriously ; but Murad looked so very solemn that she laughed in his face.

“Some day you’ll learn about Thee and Me, then you’ll know everything. You may teach me, and I shall not worry. The world is too beautiful for me to bother about things like that.” There was no reasoning with Gabrielle in this mood, so Murad let her be.

She seated herself upon the cushions and began examining the pictures through the glass.

“What singular ships,” she commented presently ; “they are not like the ships that come to Louisiana.”

“No, those are Turkish vessels ; and some of them are what your people call pirates.”

“Which is the pirate ? This one with the black hull ?”

Breathlessly she bent over the picture—a long low hull, trim and slender as a pirogue, with spars keener than rapiers, and a gaunt strength that made it look like some hungry tiger of the seas.

Gabrielle shivered with a delicious terror.

“Oh, dear ! Oh, dear ! I shall never forget how *that* ship looks.”

Murad’s lip curled into a smile of ugliness. “There are many unfortunates in my country who have cause to know that craft. It is no pirate ; it is the sultan’s own ship. It is his house of carousal, his refuge, his executioner—all in one. It has been the slaughter-pen for many a noble victim.”

Gabrielle drew a quick breath and opened her lips—an invitation for Murad to tell her more.

“Aboard that ship,” he continued, “many prisoners have been sent. Sometimes the sultan goes and

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questions them himself. Not one has ever come ashore again."

"Ugh!" She shuddered at that hideous thing which held her fascinated. "There must be much trouble in the world. I should like to remain forever in this garden where it is peaceful and happy."

Gabrielle sat there musing, holding the globe in both her hands, and looking far away over the top of the wall, across the roof of the great world. Murad walked slowly to a pomegranate tree where a passion-flower clambered. Her eyes followed him. He plucked the purple flower and brought it to her. "Examine this through your glass."

Gabrielle raised the glass and searched the marvel of that flower's coloring, deep into the heart of the blossom.

"It is wonderful," she said; "I never dreamed it. I thought it was just a flower like any other. And are all these flowers in the garden as wonderful as that?"

Murad nodded. "These we can understand—what makes them—what they are—and whither they go when they die."

"Let us not talk of dying," she said. "What are these?"

"Swords and knives and scimitars."

"They look very wicked."

"Yes, if badly used; sometimes they become necessary." Murad saw that she still held the globe clasped in her palms.

"Let me show you how my people use them," he said.

He bared his arm to the shoulder and flashed a

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curving blade from its scabbard. First he swung it in a glittering circle swifter than the eye could follow. Then it seemed to spring high into the air, turn over very slowly and return unto his hand. It passed around his body, under his arms, round his shoulders, above his head—the hilt coming always back to his hand. He toyed with the blade and caressed it in mid-air as though it were a gentle pet. Then he held it quite still and laughed at Gabrielle's breathless excitement.

“Is it—is it—sharp?” she queried anxiously.

For answer Murad took up a cushion, tossed it lightly into the air and—Gabrielle could not see exactly how it all happened, neither Murad nor the blade had seemed to move, but the cushion fell in two parts upon the ground, evenly and cleanly divided.

Murad returned his scimitar to its sheath, laughed and sat down. He breathed faster, the joy of action shone in his eyes. Gabrielle never before realized how beautiful a man might be—especially if the man be very strong and brave.

All the while Gabrielle held the globe tight-clasped in her hands. Now she laid it aside. Murad took it up and found that it was warm.

Gabrielle went to sit upon the coping, rolling up her sleeves and laving her arms in the water. Then she thought of something—another unsolved problem, more engrossing than that of “Thee and Me.” She paused, the water dripping from her fingers. Past the cat-tails and past the cannas she gazed straight at Murad's window. A flush of doubt and shame flitted across her cheek; she bent lower and dared not glance

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at the man, or ask the question that troubled her most of all.

Murad's mind reverted to the East. In those days of his dalliance there had been fountains and music; there had been gardens of eternal summer, languorous with the breath of Blessed Isles. In those gardens there were many beauties, pale and dark, blue-eyed, black-eyed and brown—beauties who lived to please their master.

Here again was summer and a garden, and a fountain, and the miracle-music of many birds. Here were all of these things, and more—for here was Gabrielle.

Murad looked full upon her. His eyes flashed, his bosom heaved and the rebel blood went storming to his temples. The muscles tightened in his arm as when he had wielded that glittering scimitar. When he looked at her, Gabrielle flushed and bent her head, though she knew not why. Presently she raised her eyes, and before the frank blue peace within them Murad's soul grew calm again.

Gabrielle was not a woman as Murad had known women in the madness of his youth. She was not a woman as the East regarded women—but a being immeasurably above the level of fountains and perfumes, above all the promises of the Prophet's paradise.

“Yes, the world is very beautiful,” she said inconsequently; “but I understand nothing of it until I am with you. I merely glance at things, and pass on.”

“A wise man,” observed Murad, “sees more of God's wonders in the petal of a rose, than does a fool who journeys far to Mecca.”

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Gabrielle sprang up laughing, and tossed the drops of water from her hands. "Yes, I know, but I love to be a fool, for I have you to tell me about everything. And you are very, very wise."

Murad colored confusedly: "I did not mean that; I meant——"

"Yes, I understand. But you do know ever so much, and I know nothing. Let me see. I can count upon my fingers the things I know.

"I can cook—Jean vows I cook very well, when Margot helps. I can knit—a little; I can sing—if no one listens; I can recite the seven penitential psalms, and every word in the *privilège du Roi*, which is very tedious if one be continually writing it as a punishment for bad penmanship. And I know some of the prayers off by heart. There! That is all—and I have four fingers left quite empty. Can you not tell me something to put on them, and I shall know a little more?"

Murad could not but join her in a laugh, and fall into the merriment of her mood.

"Very well," he agreed; "sit here, in the shade; take the globe in both your hands—so." Murad's hand touched hers, and she felt the warmth of it.

Gabrielle took her place upon the bench, and Murad sat cross-legged on the rug at her feet, after the fashion of Eastern story-tellers.

"There was once a wise man in Persia," he began, "a man of life so pure he could divine the thoughts of other men. Much of his wisdom has been lost, for those who followed after have found their minds too much occupied by matters of the world to meditate upon the things of heaven. 'Twas he that made a

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globe like unto this and filled it with a fluid so subtle that by holding it in one's hand and warming it with one's blood it drew such virtues to itself as to reflect the soul—as a mirror gives back faithfully the features which pass before it.”

Gabrielle glanced down at the globe, looking apprehensively from it to Murad. “Can this globe do that?” she asked.

“Yes. See how clear and pure the liquid is; it is but a mirror of your thoughts. Now I beg you to think of some evil you have done; think hard and hold it tight.”

Gabrielle tried to do as he bade her; she wrinkled her brow and thought. The liquid stirred vaguely, but did not change its color. Murad watched the globe, and smiled: “See, it stirs and trembles in bewilderment. Of what did you think?”

“I thought of the night in the convent when I held the rope so they could not ring the bell for mass.”

“It could not have been a deadly sin,” Murad assured her. “Think of something else. Think of the time when you were most frightened.”

Gabrielle glanced swiftly at the top of the wall, and thought of her terror when the banana leaf flapped against it. Then she glanced at Murad's window.

“Look!” Murad pointed out a tumult in the globe. “It trembles violently. See the streak of crimson in the centre, like a blush that comes and dies away. Of what were you thinking?”

“I cannot tell you. I will not tell you,” she answered hastily.

“Were you in trouble?”

“Oh no, not that.”

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Murad questioned her no further, for he knew. Gabrielle held the globe in her palm until it grew clear again, except for the doubt which lingered mistily in its depths.

CHAPTER XX

THE SOUL WHICH WAS GABRIELLE

IT came near unto ten of the morning. Murad bent over his table absorbed by what went on within the crystal globe before him—Gabrielle. That other globe—his stormy-hearted brother—Murad did not touch, but devoted himself body and brain to the new study of a new problem.

With intense satisfaction he noted how readily this globe responded to his will. He had but to hold it in his palm and fix his thoughts upon Gabrielle when the subtle fluid began to stir. Ripples passed as smiles wavered across her face; eddies gathered in it like dimples—a thousand moods a minute, variable as the shadows and the shines of April.

“How marvellously sensitive she is,” said Murad half aloud. He searched into the uttermost depths but found no taint of evil thought or deed. There was one cloud, which she hid even from herself. In the deep blue of Gabrielle’s eyes Murad had often seen this same mist, not strong enough to cast a shadow.

Murad laid the globe upon the table and walked to the window. There he stood, allowing eyes and thoughts to roam at will through the boundless beauty of the summer. When he turned from the window back to the globe again, it was pulseless and pallid. He had forgotten it.

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“Dead,” he muttered ; “tinder without a spark, soil without the seed, a body lacking breath. It is dead—but lives ; insensate—yet it feels. How close is man to God—an atom of the Divine Essence, yet he comprehends it not.” Murad knew that he could stir the heart of Gabrielle, fire her soul, and plant whatever seed he chose within her mind. The man bowed before the marvel. He knew that his touch, his will, could wake this senseless clay, even as the Nazarene Prophet had waked the widow’s son.

Selim came slipping in like a shadow and stood silent until his master glanced toward him. “A ship,” he said ; “she seems of the French.” Selim pointed to the window at the front.

With great caution Murad peeped through the shutter and watched the ship move slowly up the river. She dropped her anchor as a weary traveller might lay down his pack. The broad white pennon of France fluttered from her poop, waved above the noblest river in all the world, then hung quite still.

Boats swarmed about her, and the entire population of the colony congregated along the banks. Keenly as Murad was interested he could not tell whence she came or what tidings she brought.

Grosjean stood boldly out, apart from the throng, consorting with none.

“I shall not fret for what I cannot help,” thought Murad ; and he fell to watching the boats that came and went.

The globe which was Gabrielle he still clasped in his hand. Now he saw Gabrielle herself run across the open space, touch her father’s arm, and ask a question. Grosjean nodded, half-doubtfully, and

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pointed to the figure of a young man who leaned over the bulwarks of the ship directing the loading of a boat.

Gabrielle gazed at this man; she trembled; her figure shrank. She turned and fled to the house again.

Murad glanced down at the globe. It was in commotion as if some clear lake were lashed by a sudden wind.

“Something has happened,” Murad said to himself.

When Gabrielle came into the garden that day at noon a suspicion of redness lingered about her eyes. She moved dully and scarcely glanced at Murad. He asked her no questions until she seated herself upon the bench and took up the Fan of the Thousand Eyes, which gave her no joy. With head bent forward she stared at a cypress vine as if counting its stars of red and white. Her lips trembled like the quivering cypress leaves.

Murad approached her step by step, and laid his hand upon her shoulder: “Gabrielle, can you not share your worry with your friend?”

“Oh, it’s nothing,” she answered wearily. “It is nothing. Only I have had such a fright. Jean told me that my husband had arrived on that ship——”

“Your *husband*?” Murad gasped.

“Yes; it is very wicked for me to feel this way—but I cannot help it.”

There was a silence, a long silence. Murad stared at the girl as though he refused to understand.

“Your husband?” he repeated.

“Yes, I am married; had I never told you? I

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forgot." Gabrielle bowed her head; she dared not raise her eyes.

"But you never mentioned it," he murmured; "I did not suspect. I——"

"No, I thought nothing of it. I was very happy." Then she lifted her head defiantly and in the firm lines about her chin Murad recognized Grosjean's daughter. "No, I did not tell. I told no one. I put it aside as long as I could. Why should I not enjoy these last days in my own way. I've done no harm."

Defiant as was her tone, Murad detected the trembling at the corners of her mouth; and her eyes threatened to overflow.

"No, my Gabrielle," he assured her, "you have done no harm." But his voice did not seem the voice of Murad.

She sprang up and clenched her hands: "You do not know; you cannot understand. I want to stay here—with—my father. I won't go to France; I *won't*——"

Murad waited, the storm within him beating against the serenity of his face. He waited, and once he lifted his hand with that gesture which Gabrielle remembered best of all: "Sit down, my Gabrielle, and tell me of it."

"There is nothing to tell. Jean brought me home from the convent two weeks ago. He said my husband would arrive on the next ship. I was such a fool; I thought I should like to see Paris, and——" The sentence floated away unfinished and lost itself amongst the tree tops.

"Your husband? Your husband?" It took Murad a long time to comprehend.

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“Yes, yes,” she began hurriedly; “you do not know?”

“Tell me,” he said very simply. He stood without moving. “Tell me,” was all he said.

“I scarcely remember. His father brought him here on a ship from France. Jean took me from the convent one night. We stood up together, the boy and I—before a priest. After that they told me I was married. I did not know. I thought every one was married. Jean bade the old man and the boy good-bye, and carried me back to the convent. I was very sleepy. It was cold. The priest spilled some water. That is all I remember.”

“But your husband?”

“I do not remember. I never thought of him. He was a little boy, and I looked all the while at his father, who had a curious mustachio. When Jean left me at the convent Mother Louise came into my room. She clasped me tightly in her arms, called me a poor little dear, and kissed me. I wondered at it then. I never did understand until now. After that no one ever spoke of it, and I forgot.”

“How old were you?” asked Murad; his voice was steady enough, but there had come a change.

Gabrielle noticed nothing; she only answered his question.

“I was five years old.”

“And what was his age?”

“I am not sure. I think Mother Louise said he was ten years older than I.”

Murad tightened his arms to curb the swelling of his breast; he turned away and stared at the top of the wall where that line of broken glass fastened its

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jagged teeth into the sky. Twice or thrice he essayed to speak, but it was long before he put his thought in words.

“Then—then you have not seen him since that night?” He leaned forward with a singular light in his eyes—a jealous, unreasoning light.

“No. He has been in France, I suppose. I have been here.”

Murad straightened. A load fell from his shoulders. He stood erect, his nostrils dilated and his lips shut very tight.

“I thought no more about it,” Gabrielle spoke on hurriedly, half to herself and half to him. “It was never talked of in the convent. Two or three months ago Jean wrote Mother Louise it was near the time for my husband to come; she must make preparations for me to leave the convent. As if there were preparations to make—two dresses in a basket—a handful of linen—four reticules and some embroidery made for me by the sisters. I was soon ready. And then—” Gabrielle’s tears bubbled desperately near the surface—“then I came into the garden. You were here, and I forgot. You do not mind my talking about it, do you? I have no one else to talk with. Margot is old, and Jean—Jean does not understand.”

Murad lifted his hand—the gesture of peace, though there was no peace in him.

Gabrielle continued: “Jean does not discuss it. Sometimes a girl *must* talk to some one. I do not know why, but I feel freer to talk with you than with my father. I do not need to explain; you seem to *know*.”

Gabrielle clasped her hands about her knees and fell to studying the pattern of the rug.

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It was deathly still. A magnolia leaf dropped splashing into the fountain. A thrush settled down upon the coping. The thrush twisted her head to one side and fixed her eyes upon the man who stood staring at this woman who sat perfectly rigid, and without a semblance of life. The thrush could not understand. The thrush became frightened at the stillness. The thrush flew away.

“You say it was not true?” Murad asked.

Gabrielle glanced up, understanding even this vague and half-formed question.

“Yes. At first Jean thought he had come on that ship, and pointed out a man to me. But it was not true; my husband had only sent a letter, saying he would arrive in about two weeks.”

Murad instantly remembered the glimpse he had caught of Gabrielle that morning when she ran out of the house and spoke to Grosjean. He understood now why the girl should have been so stunned and bewildered when her father pointed out a man on the vessel's deck. All of this he had seen in the globe. So he asked Gabrielle no questions. He only said, “In two weeks?”

“Two weeks; two weeks.” Gabrielle's face was very white and vacant. “Why, that is fourteen days, and it will be thirty-nine days before——” she glanced at the foot of the pine.

“Thirty-nine days,” he assented.

Gabrielle rocked to and fro, her hands clasped about her knees. Suddenly she sprang up and fronted him with a face as set and determined as her father's had ever been. “I shall not go. I *will* not go. I must stay here until—until—the end.”

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The blood went plunging through Murad's veins like a hound unleashed. Had Gabrielle been more of a woman she would have seen the haggard lines at Murad's mouth, and would have known the meaning of the light which flashed into his eye. But straight as she looked him in his face she saw neither of these things.

"Oh, Murad! Murad! I cannot go away and leave you here—and not know." She moved forward and laid her hand upon the fulness of his sleeve.

"Nay, my Gabrielle," he answered; "let it not worry you; even the stars must travel as they are sent."

"But I must know; I must know," she insisted. "My husband must not return at once to France. I shall come at the same hour each day."

Murad sought to tell her that she must not venture into the garden after her husband arrived, but she could not understand his explanations. So he held his peace.

"Last night," Gabrielle spoke most quietly, "I sat at my window as the moon came up. I never before realized how bright and glorious is the world. But one feels so very small in the moonlight? Did you ever notice it?" Gabrielle made pathetic effort to divert attention from the one dominant thought.

"Yes, I have felt it," he answered, "gazing upon the inconceivable stars of heaven. Many of them are hundreds of times larger than our world. Amongst the multitude of human souls, living, dead, unborn—think how wretchedly insignificant is one."

"Yes, I believe I have thought of that. Anyway, I always felt small in the moonlight, and now I know

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why. You have taught me much ; you have made me think. Sometimes you say one little word and it keeps me thinking ever so hard for days." Gabrielle's hand dropped from his sleeve and hung at her side ; presently it crept back and touched the sleeve again.

"Yes," she said, determined to be cheerful, "it is as if you had opened for me door after door, each leading to thoughts more interesting than the other. I had only known this little world around me, and supposed it was all. You have made me think many wise things, and do many silly ones." Gabrielle thought of her visit to the pavilion the night before ; she smiled, then laughed aloud. She stood in front of him with finger uplifted, as Sister Conflans always did in the class room : "Now if I tell you something very childish you will not make sport of me, or be angry ? Promise ?"

"I promise," he said most solemnly, and wondered what was coming.

"It was very foolish I assure you. But from the first moment I saw that couch in the pavilion I have been distraught to know how a sultana feels—you said 'sultana' didn't you ? Some day you must tell me what that means. We had tiny pens at the convent to sleep in, and at home there's a huge bed. Neither of them resembles this couch in the least. I wanted to try it.

"Now, do not be angry. Last night I slipped into the garden ever so cautiously. A light burned in your window. I could recognize your shadow on the ceiling. I got into the pavilion all safe enough. I much desired to have those queer lamps burning, and

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that dear little furnace which smells so sweet. But I dared not ; you'd be sure to see the light. Perhaps you'd come out and scold. So I crept into the couch and tried to imagine how a sultana felt who lived that way all the time. Or the people who live in—what did you call it?—not exactly like our convents? You need not stare at me that way, I had on no shoes and did not hurt your precious couch one speck. Go and examine it this moment ; it is not even rumped.

“I was lying there perfectly quiet when I heard a noise which frightened me very much. I thought of course it must be Uncle Paul-Marie's ghost. But it was only you, and I was so relieved. Then father came, and you both went away. I listened——”

Murad looked at her so very straight that Gabrielle felt uneasy.

“And you,” he asked, coming closer, “were in that pavilion all the while?”

She nodded.

“You saw—you heard—me?”

“Yes,” Gabrielle laughed ; “you were talking to yourself. Mother Louise says it is only demented people that talk to themselves. But you spoke in a tongue which I could not comprehend——” Gabrielle stopped suddenly ; she remembered now that she had understood his actions if not his words.

“I saw Jean when he brought you the letter,” she added hastily. “Then both of you went to the house.”

Murad said nothing, absolutely nothing. He only glanced from the girl to the pavilion.

“After a while,” Gabrielle continued, “I grew lonesome. The garden was dreadfully still. I crept home again.”

GABRIELLE

Presently Gabrielle sighed and remarked, "It is strange how one gets lonesome when one is grown up. I used to play in this garden for hours and hours together. But one has more imagination when one is a child—and imagination is much company. Is it not true?"

"Yes, it is true," Murad kept saying to himself long after Gabrielle had gone.

CHAPTER XXI

IN THE HEART OF THE STORM

GOD'S heaven writhed. Murad gazed from the window and felt himself a partner in its turbulence.

A storm swept up from somewhere, more furiously sudden than the onslaught of a charging squadron which dashes out of the forest and spatters a smiling field with murder. The roar of battle boomed out of the scowling west, muttered and grumbled in the overheated south.

Rushing horsemen of the skies galloped across unseen bridges; the thunder of their hoofs echoed in a thousand chasms beneath. Serried ranks of spear-tops glittered as a long line of warriors with golden helmets marched across the far horizon. The spiteful lightning drew them sharp against the skies. Their flaming pennons fluttered and war-drums beat at the head of gleaming hosts.

The man at the window smiled as though he felt his kinship with the tempest. Faint and distant there came the rumble of wheels—at first artillery, then interminable wagon trains. Sullen bombards bellowed. The hoarse shouts of men rose above the rattle of arms. The earth crouched in a mighty fear, bent its back, and breathed not.

Then the rain. A vicious drop or two flattened against the window of Dumb House. Afterwards a

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torrent, volley upon volley, deluge upon deluge. They lashed and dashed against the window where Murad stood, as wet sails flap their tattered ends against the mast. Murad did not stir.

Swirling spouts of water strangled and died outside the window. The rain came not downward, but slantwise in glittering sheets. Murad pressed his face against the pane. The broad banana leaves were stripped as though a comb had lacerated them. Their succulent stems were broken; they fell across the path.

But it was the giant pine whose struggle fascinated Murad. He bent his head this way and that, and thrashed his arms about him, like God's anointed leader contending with a thousand foes.

"On yesterday," Murad murmured, "the garden and all of God's world was at peace. On yesterday *I* was at peace. Why should I be at war to-day? No more than the garden did I call this storm upon myself."

Suddenly a branch snapped from the pine, and hung like a broken arm against the trunk. But the tree stood firm, and gave backward not a foot. Murad's breast swelled; if he but possessed the spirit of this pine he too might stand firm.

"Oh!" he exclaimed, and brushed the mist from the pane. Something moved in the garden—something other than broken branches and flapping banana leaves. "Gabrielle! Gabrielle!" The shout was on his lips before he thought to hush it. Then lest Selim should think strange things of what he did, Murad withdrew into his own apartments and swiftly descended the stairs.

IN THE HEART OF THE STORM

At the door of the lower hall his fingers trembled on the latch. He opened the door. A torrent gushed in, rain and wind and flying leaves. The doors upstairs slammed violently. Selim might think what he chose, it did not matter.

Murad thrust his shoulders into the storm, breasted the wind, and beat his advance against it. His robes fluttered behind him; he pressed his turban tighter and drew a long breath of that madly insurgent air.

The paths ran with water; every lily cup was overflowing. Murad plunged on. Beneath the rending branches of the pine he saw Gabrielle—but not the Gabrielle he knew.

A battle delirium possessed her. The blood of warrior ancestors throbbed at the whiteness of her throat. Murad held back and hid behind the cannas.

Gabrielle heard only the voices of the storm, the screaming of the wind, the beating of her own heart—and the cry from her own prison. The air was full of whistling leaves and whirring branches; frightened creatures cowered in their burrows; the willows bent before the fury of the tempest. Gabrielle and the pine stood erect.

A bird went driving past her, hurled ahead of the storm. She saw it turn suddenly downward and dash against the wall. She ran over and picked up the creature—crushed and dead, but trembling yet, and warm. A drop of blood oozed from its mouth and stained her hand. “Poor bird,” she whispered, “you suffer no more. But you rode upon the wings of a tempest. You were free—*free*. That was something.”

Still stroking the bird in her hand she came back to

GABRIELLE

the pine. "But you lived—you *lived*, if it were only for an hour. You shall rest here in the garden, at peace forever." Gabrielle pressed it to her lips, then knelt and hid the quivering bird beneath a palmetto.

She wore Grosjean's heavy coat which protected her to the knees. Murad noticed the rough garment whose fringe seemed made of the skin of a beast. Her head was bare; the fingers of the wind clutched at her hair, tugging, pulling, straining. She fronted the blast and smiled, such a smile as Murad had never seen upon the face of any woman.

Gabrielle's lips opened eagerly to the storm; her eyes shone and followed the lightning, in joy at the terror of it. Suddenly she unbound her hair, shook her head, and gave the wind a plaything. "There! Take it; take it. Do as you will with it—and with me."

Gabrielle was free—in heart and soul and body she was free. She moved from the pine, disdainful of its mockery of shelter. Murad could not guess what she meant to do until she flung her cloak wide-open and stepped out beneath the crackling heavens. She threw her arms abroad, and drank in the tempest like a starving animal. Her bosom swelled; her eyes sparkled; her figure heightened.

A battering downpour hurled itself against the earth. Gabrielle stood midmost of the storm with the rains pelting at her cheeks, with the winds lashing at her hair, flapping her skirts and snatching her cloak. She stood, a defiant atom, with naught between her uplifted face and the lightning of God the Most High.

Murad understood the ecstasy of this woman's soul,

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the joy of its shattered fetters. He read upon her face the gladness that comes in secret to every woman who defies the law, human and divine—the woman who without shrinking pays the penalty.

He did not move; he watched Gabrielle's heaving breast, he watched her eyes that closed dreamily, the nails that clenched tightly in her palms. With her he felt the warring passions that whirled around her.

She glanced towards Murad's window, glanced at the fountain and laughed aloud. She did not care. Why should she care? She closed her eyes again, and from the cup of tumult Gabrielle drank the draught of peace.

Slowly her eyes unclosed and she smiled—an incomprehensible careless smile, as if she were weary of the struggle. "Take that, too, if you like," she said aloud, unwilling to quarrel with the wind.

Smiling she unloosed the fastening at the throat, letting the cloak fly away, unheeded and unwatched.

Murad caught the floating thing which passed him on the wind as if a tempest demon had entered it. With his face against the rain he brought it to her.

"Your cloak, my Gabrielle," he said; "'tis best to wear it." And he bound it round her shoulders.

Gabrielle wheeled. "You here! Why do you come here in the storm? Storms are for such as I—not for you. Can I never be alone? Never be free?" She faced him and her eyes flamed, her cheeks burned; the whir of the tempest was in her tones.

"And you?" Murad asked quietly. "Why should *you* be abroad in such a storm?"

Her answer came with the unbridled fury of the tempest: "I, why shouldn't I? Always I've been

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bound by rules and bells—rules and bells; rise by rules, study by rules, eat by rules—rules and bells—rules—rules—rules. I hate them. I am a human creature, not a spinning wheel. I am made of flesh and blood, not of wood. You—you are a man; you can go into the world. You can fight and kill; you can sin and suffer. You can live, live, *live*.”

Murad lifted his hand, but heedless even of that Gabrielle's protest burst out again: “Do you not think a woman too must live? Has a woman no right to live—no right to suffer—for it is all a part of life? I have never been happy, never been miserable—never been anything. I have merely breathed and ate and slept—like the pigs in the convent sty. I am no better than they. How I hate it! Hate it!” The very futility of her rage made Gabrielle stamp her foot. Then she stood facing him, with her back to the storm:

“I used to sit at the convent window,” she began again more quietly in one of the lulls that fell, “and watch the men go off to war. I saw their boats go round the last curve in the river and my thoughts followed them. Those men were free—the whole vast continent was theirs. There was not a white-washed fence, not a convent rule, not a bell, no matter where they journeyed.”

Murad, facing the storm upon which she had turned her back, felt her garments fluttering towards him. He felt the long whip-lashes of her hair as they cut his cheek. But the woman's arms and soul were lifted to the skies—to the impotent skies—and not to Murad.

“I used to watch the hunters stride into the forest. They could turn wherever they listed and none to say

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them nay—no fence—no rules—no bells. I'd watch the birds soaring above the clouds and wish that I had wings to fly straight into the face of God. Are you not afraid to stand here in the lightning and listen to that? Are you not afraid a bolt may strike you? I dare it!

“Sometimes I'd see a deer running across the fields—free—unchained—living. Perhaps the hunters slew it, what of that? While it lived the deer was free. Do you understand that? Free!

“Once I saw some children playing up and down the levee in the wind, imitating the birds. I knew how they felt, and pitied them—poor little beasts, they were chained to the earth and longing for the clouds.

“I remember one dark night,” Gabrielle spoke breathlessly as if unconscious of her listener; “there was a blinding rain. I crept out on the roof—but I cannot tell you that. Yes, yes, I can, what a fool am I. I crept out on the roof, threw my clothes aside and let the torrent strike me—the wind and the rain—strike *me*, not my garments. There! I have told you. I wish Mother Louise could hear it! I wish God could hear it!

“It is the wind and the rain and the lightning that make me rebel. But the mood will pass, everything passes with a woman. To-morrow I shall go down on my knees, tell my beads, mumble my paters and do my penance like a good little gray nun. Ugh! how I loathe myself!”

Gabrielle glanced at Murad's face. No storm was there unless it were deep in those inscrutable eyes. No storm was in his face, but there was that sullen calm that comes before the storm.

GABRIELLE

Defiant as was her humor, something warned Gabrielle to desist.

“You think I am very foolish, do you not?”

“No, I can understand; the clouds burst when they are overcharged. Breezes that would scarcely stir a feather break loose and destroy oaks in their freedom. The patient camel slays his driver. Contented nations rise and put their kings to death——”

Gabrielle broke into a peal of laughter, the laughter that is a shield and a subterfuge. “How silly of us to stand here in the rain. I’m wet through and through.”

She turned and fled more swiftly than the deer she had described. The grapevine dashed a shower to the ground as she parted it.

Murad stood as she left him, silent, erect, and heedless of the fast-abating storm.

CHAPTER XXII

THE LULL

THE glorious sun awakened Gabrielle, streaming through her windows, a swarm of dazzling motes winking and blinking at her in its trail. The curtains etched their intricate patterns upon the floor, swaying with the dreamiest of motion.

Gabrielle opened her eyes and lay with both hands underneath her head, thinking, and trying not to think. In the patch of heaven at which she gazed, measureless and blue, there was not the tiniest cloud. There was not a tremor of wind to recall the passion of yesterday. Gabrielle's eyes were not so clear; the tempest had left its trace within them.

On yesterday the wind had spent its spite upon its friends, strewing the earth with broken branches and tattered blossoms, driving the birds to shelter, and lashing its comrade, the river, into a frenzy. It had littered land and sea with wrecks.

To-day was a day of penitence, of sighs and soft caresses. Gabrielle, like the wind, had need for absolution.

“What a fool I was,” she said; then closed her eyes as if she meant to go to sleep again and forget it. Presently she rose and knelt beside the window with her elbow on the sill. The world smiled like a child's bright face from its washing.

GABRIELLE

“He had no right to be in the garden; none whatever. It was my garden before he came. Anyway, I do not care; I——”

The world, encased in shining dreams, lay before her. No leaf stirred, no ripple fretted the river, and no voice came of man or beast. Gabrielle looked upon the glittering water and wondered what would happen should the sun drop down and touch it. Would it sizzle and spit as when a coal of fire falls into a pot?

“Oh dear! Mother Louise was right. I never think twice.”

Nature's tempestuous mood had passed, and so had Gabrielle's. The sky and the winds and the river acknowledged their error; Gabrielle fought hard against admitting hers. She shut her lips and put on the armor of defiance. Then she began putting on other things, slowly and deliberately, pausing over each garment and shaking her head.

“I don't care. I don't care. I shall not go into the garden to-day,” she decided. Having settled this controversy with herself she moved about her room vigorously and viciously.

“Yes, I'll look at those dresses. They are very beautiful. Jean would like me to wear one. It was silly of me not to wear them long ago.” Gabrielle tossed the dresses helter-skelter, holding them upside down and wrong side out. She laughed. “I vow I do not know how to put these on, whether to jump in from the top or crawl in through the bottom. How foolish? I shall get some one to help me dress—like a baby.”

Gabrielle found one dress more simple, a gown of white with flowers that ran hither and thither in sprays

THE LULL

across it. She did not know what flowers they were ; she had never seen the like—none grew in this garden, and surely all the flowers of all the world grew there. Gabrielle spread the dress in the sunshine, and clasped her hands about her knees.

“It’s near the color of wistaria,” she decided ; “and here’s a belt to match. I’ll wear that—if I can get into it.” Gabrielle laughed nervously ; it was very exciting. How curious she would look ; but the color suited her, even Gabrielle could see that.

“Jean will like it.” She regarded herself complacently in the mirror. “But I shall not go into the garden to-day. No, I shall not,” she repeated, walking up and down before the mirror. She stopped : “Now, if I could go in there all by myself as I used to do before he came and spoiled it, what fun ’twould be to see the birds flutter ; they would never know me. And that big-eyed rabbit would stare until his eyes popped out. What a shame that I have no place to myself. But I shall *not* go there to-day.”

Nevertheless, when noon came, Gabrielle crept through the breach in the wall, using exceeding care to avoid soiling her dress. It was unusual for her to think of any dress, yet now she thought of little else. She parted the grapevine cautiously, meaning to take Murad unawares—to deluge him with chatter and avoid uncomfortable references to yesterday. But Murad was not in sight. The garden was strewn with wreckage.

She pouted and turned back. “I shall let him wait. It will do him good to wait.” But it was very hot beneath the vines and she feared to move lest she bring down a shower upon her new dress. “I shall slip out

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and hide in the pavilion." She flashed out of the vines, darted down the path, sprang like a deer over a magnolia limb which had fallen across the path, and stopped in front of the pavilion.

The tent was closed. Gabrielle's fingers unbuttoned it nervously; she entered, and fastened the flap behind her. Inside it was dry and in perfect order—the couch, the taborets, many things which she had never yet had time to examine.

"Dear me! What a wonder the wind did not carry it away. The oak is broken and the bananas——" Gabrielle peered through a crevice to see if Murad was coming.

"I'm glad there's nobody here. I can look at these things all by myself." She peeped out of the tent again to be very sure that Murad was not coming.

"What queer printing there is in these books. I wonder if anybody really reads it. I hope he will not come." She glanced at the couch, smiled and shrugged her shoulders.

"I knew he'd be angry with me about lying down on his couch; but I do not care, it was great fun."

The cushions which belonged upon the bench were piled in a corner. Murad had probably put them there in anticipation of the rain. She looked at them, then glanced out, towards the door of Dumb House.

Gabrielle turned the leaves of book after book, yet kept her eyes upon the crevice of the tent, listening for the rustle of a weed or the scraping of a pebble.

"Wouldn't it be nice to take a nap. I could take a real nap—I have a whole hour." But there was a restless spirit about this pavilion which entered Gabrielle; she remembered the day when all these

THE LULL

censers were burning, remembered the heavy odors and the glitter in Murad's eyes; she remembered the strange stirring within herself which had frightened her. Yet she flung herself across the couch, digging her heels like a vandal into those luxurious coverings.

"Whew! How sweet it smells!" Gabrielle closed her eyes and kept them shut very tight.

"Oh, dear!" she exclaimed presently; "I never could go to sleep in the daytime." She sprang up and smoothed out her dress; Gabrielle must have a care not to rumple her clothes. Then she spread the coverlet of the couch most carefully. "He'll never know!"

After that she peeped from the door. No one was coming. She had the tent and the garden all to herself.

The urns were very odd. The cushions were of exceeding intricate design; and of all queer bottles the two that sat upon the taboret were the queerest. But Gabrielle wearied. She opened the flap of the tent and held it wide. A quick thought came; she glanced at Murad's window. "Yes, now is the time; I shall look for myself." She ran to the fountain.

First she stood close beside the basin and looked towards Murad's window. An expression of doubt settled on her face.

"I cannot be sure. If I had been standing right here—or here—or here; or if I ran around;—or chased that miserable rabbit? Was that the day? Oh dear! I can't remember *what* I did. I don't care; I don't care." She sat down on the coping and scraped her heels back and forth in the damp sand. Then she laughed. "I might as well not care. I'll never know.

GABRIELLE

The window is a long ways off anyhow." Gabrielle comforted herself with that.

She sat beside the fountain. Her body was very still, but her thoughts were restless. "What a strong wind that was. The oak is gone; poor old fellow, we were such good comrades."

Gabrielle walked slowly to the fallen tree and stood beside it, caressing the rough bark with her fingers. Then she sat upon one of its branches and gazed about the garden to see what other damage the storm had done. Once she glanced into her own heart at the uprooted ideals, the storm-strewn beliefs, and the naked branches. The branches were ugly. She shook her head and refused to look at them. Instead she turned her eyes upon the garden; it were safer to think of that.

"I'm glad those hollyhocks are broken and twisted; they stood so prim and proper, like a row of girls in the white class. I've always wanted to run against them and knock them down."

Gabrielle's eyes wandered persistently towards the door of Dumb House. No lamb's-wool robe moved slowly down the path; no dark eyes thrilled her with a desire which she was beginning to understand. No one stood where the shadow fell, with folded arms and low voice, telling her stories. Gabrielle had her wish—she had her garden back again, her garden and her thoughts.

Presently, as no one came from the house to interfere, she went and sat upon the coping of the fountain. Her old playmate, the rabbit, hopped out of his burrow and came up very close. She kicked at him viciously. "Get out of my way, you stupid; I hate you." Gabrielle laughed disagreeably to see him

THE LULL

scurry off without once looking behind. Two gray squirrels disappeared into the fork of a tree; their twinkling eyes looked down and wondered.

“In two weeks my husband will be here.” Her hands clenched nervously. She rose and began to walk along the paths, climbing over fallen branches and pushing aside the broken banana-stems.

“And it is thirty-seven days until the first of the Moon of Safar,” she said over and over again.

There was peace and silence everywhere—stifling, desolate, threatening silence. “No wonder,” she said, “that folk believed my Uncle Paul-Marie had gone mad.”

At every circuit of the garden she drew nearer and nearer to Murad’s vacant window. She came quite close and rested her elbow on the dial. The door stood half open. “I will not,” she said determinedly.

She wheeled with the precision of a grenadier, strode to the grapevine, opened it and disappeared.

Gabrielle came into her own room and stood at the window. “He is ill,” she said; “I know he is ill—the rain and the wetting of yesterday. Sister Veronique was ill when she got a wetting. I want to go to him; why do I not admit it? why am I not truthful to myself? I shall go to him; he may need me.”

She had already started down the stair when the front door opened and she heard Grosjean’s tread.

“Gabrielle!” he called.

“Here, Jean.”

“Come, daughter, hurry; I am going across the river. You shall ride with me in the boat. Hurry now.”

CHAPTER XXIII

ACROSS THE THRESHOLD

ANOTHER day had come, and again Gabrielle stood within the garden.

“Why shouldn't I?” argued Gabrielle to herself. “He must be ill.”

She stood midway the path, watching Murad's empty window. Though it had passed the hour of noon no face looked out upon the garden and no sound came from within. She halted and looked wistfully about her. Gabrielle had none in whom she might confide, and her own counsels ran sadly at loggerheads. Her throat was very pure as she stretched it up towards the window; her eyes shone mistily and eager. Gabrielle had a wise little brain, and serious ideas began marching through it. But when they made too much noise she turned them out again.

The dress that Sister Therese had made enveloped her with somewhat of the convent's protection.

“Why shouldn't I?” she insisted. “It is only thirty-six days now. We have lost one day.”

The dress of the wistaria color moved onward, hesitant step after hesitant step. Through the pulseless garden it moved towards the rear of Dumb House. At every step Gabrielle paused and listened, searching the window with anxious eyes.

ACROSS THE THRESHOLD

“Why shouldn't I?” The woman instinct that there was in Gabrielle warned her with a reason. She leaned against the ancient dial, twenty paces from the door. And her shadow blotted out the hours all at once. The dial had told off many an hour of sunshine for Gabrielle, and it now refused to register the hour of her trial.

She could not explain these misgivings to herself; she did not try. But when she approached the door the same old sense of danger struck her, like a chill draught in the face, and recalled every childish terror.

“I will!” She ceased debating.

Gabrielle at least was brave; at least she would be honest with herself. She hurried on and halted at the threshold. There she turned her eyes backward upon the garden. No one was there, no one could see her. Why should she care? She hung back undecided, though she had been four and twenty hours making up her mind.

Four and twenty hours. It is a very long while for a young girl to spend in thinking. A girl who has never had a serious matter to ponder on might think of many things.

There were four hours spent on the river when a girl might sit in a boat and listen to her father, and watch the black oarsmen dig into the water with their oars; she might watch the grim front of Dumb House and all the while be wondering what was concealed by those tight-shut windows. Dumb House shut its windows just as Mother Louise used to clench her lips, and there was no use in asking questions.

GABRIELLE

A girl's father might tell her tales of the river—how the ships came and went—the pirates of Santo Domingo. And when he said “pirates” she would think of some one who had shown her the picture of a pirate ship. Oh yes, she knew what they were like ; there was one pirate ship that she never could forget.

A girl might try very hard to fix her mind upon these stories her father told, but there was Dumb House, and everything her father said would make her think of it instead.

All the way across the river a girl might keep glancing back, watching the windows of Dumb House grow less and less, until the house itself was nothing save a blur against the forest. Then the girl's father might lay his hand upon her shoulder and say, “Wake up! Tell me your dreams.” This, of course, would make a girl smile and sit ever so still in the boat.

When the boat turned and came back a girl need not talk ; neither need she glance over her shoulder. Dumb House lay straight ahead. The girl's father might clasp her very close to him and whisper, “Has the troll snapped off your tongue?”

Dumb House grew bigger and yet bigger as they returned. Now she could see the door, could even see the smaller windows and the iron bars. She wondered if there was an eye behind them that recognized her. A girl never knows how many things she may think about until she begins once to think.

“Come, Gabrielle!” Her father's voice startled her. “I hope Margot has set us a good supper ; this river air makes a man to hunger.”

ACROSS THE THRESHOLD

A girl's own room may be very lonely, very strange, very chill. The moonlight, the river, the forest are very vast and vague when a girl leans her chin in her hands and stares out upon them. Many times she might repeat to herself, "He is ill, and I was the cause. I kept him out in the rain."

Though she might creep into bed and cover ever so snugly, sleep might be a long time in coming.

Much may happen in four and twenty hours.

"Why shouldn't I?" Gabrielle said for the last time, as she stood at the threshold of Dumb House. "The sick should be visited, and I cannot send for the sisters."

She glanced down at her wistaria-colored dress that suited her own coloring so well. She shook her head. It was too gay for a mission of mercy. Gabrielle wheeled and fled back through the garden and reached her own room.

Breathlessly she put on her gown of gray. Then back she ran, and argued no more. With hands and heart grown bolder she pushed open the door.

The door swung wide. She stepped into the hall with the light of day streaming in behind her. Once, years before, she had dared peep into this forbidding entry, and she never forgot the clammy feeling which came over her. The child had run away; the woman only clenched her lips and said, "What a fool I am to be afraid."

Gabrielle advanced, seeing nothing distinctly after the glare of the garden. She looked around, not knowing where to find a door. "It must be this way." She walked cautiously, her hands outstretched.

GABRIELLE

“Oh !” Gabrielle almost shrieked. She stumbled against something on the floor—something soft and flabby, something that lay very still. Her blood ran cold, but she did not cry aloud. Stiffened with terror she stared down at a dark body lying next the wall, a limp, dead thing that seemed to have fallen there. Her eyes were not yet accustomed to the darkness. She stooped and laid her hands upon the object, feeling rapidly along it each way from its middle.

“Oh, it is the rugs ; he has brought them in from the garden. How they frightened me !” Gabrielle rose and leaned against the wall until she recovered strength. Then she laughed, for she held in her hand the Fan with the Thousand Eyes.

“I—I must have picked it up ;” she clutched it tightly as if it were the hand of a friend, and gathered courage from it.

“The door must be this way,” thought Gabrielle, setting her face towards a draught which blew steadily from within. She followed this as a hound follows the scent, and crossed the vacant ward-room until she came to the foot of the stair. Looking up cautiously she saw the light of a half-open door.

She stopped and listened. No living thing was there, no sound. A ray of sunshine struggled through the shutter and wavered on the floor. Shadows crouched in the corners ; phantoms glided from the table to the walls. Except that these things had no heart to beat and no breath to come in gasps, they were not stiller than Gabrielle.

Pausing and listening, feeling her way step by step, she went up the stair. More softly than the wind she

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pushed the door a trifle wider; in sympathy for a woman's fear the door forgot to creak.

The room was deserted. It was brighter and lighter than the one below. Books and glittering things lay upon the table. There were cushions, and a couch like that in the pavilion. A silken robe, which she recognized as Murad's, lay across a chair. Gabrielle touched this as she passed, and her terror vanished.

But he was not there. Where was he? Where was the brother—Selim? Nothing was disturbed, yet they were not there.

She hurried to a door on the far side of the room. The hall beyond was empty and silent. Directly across the hall was another door, half shut. She crept up to this door and listened.

Gabrielle halted, frightened and uncertain, wondering at herself for having ventured so far. Weakness overcame her; she would have been glad to escape but for those dark rooms and halls through which she must repress to reach the garden and the sunshine.

Gabrielle heard the click of a glass—an accident, for Selim rarely made a noise. Then the homelike aroma of coffee came floating to her. Gabrielle smiled and tapped gently on the door.

A shadow crossed the floor. The door opened and Selim bowed to the ground. "Welcome, my lord Grosjean——" Then he lifted his head and stared. They faced each other.

"Murad," she said, then realized her mistake, though Selim was very like his brother. "You must be Selim. I am Gabrielle."

Selim's face was utterly blank. He did not

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comprehend whence this stranger came, nor why. He had never heard of her or seen her.

Murad raised himself in bed and without the semblance of surprise beckoned to Gabrielle.

Selim stood aside, the Eastern composure returning to his face and mien. He bowed serenely, as if Gabrielle were a long-expected guest. The man's face yielded no more of his thought than the desert's face betrays the secret of the ages.

But when Gabrielle had passed him Selim shot a glance at Murad, who leaned on his elbow and put aside his cup. There was a gladness on Murad's face, and yet a reverence which puzzled Selim. For Selim was of the East, and the East accords no reverence to women. Selim's eyes flashed back and forth from Gabrielle to Murad. He looked, he understood; hate flamed up within him like a torch. The fanatic of Islam folded his arms across his breast. Hatred can be very patient in the East.

"Come, my Gabrielle," called Murad. And she came.

"You are ill," she whispered, bending over him; "I knew it; I felt it."

Murad held out his hand; it was hot with fever but his calm speech stilled the blue anxiety of her eyes.

"No, Gabrielle, I shall not die; it is not the hour. There are thirty-six days yet; after that, He knows." Murad's uplifted finger did not tremble. "Destiny hath decreed it."

Selim stood at the foot of the bed like a thing of bronze, tongueless, sightless, deaf. He comprehended that Murad had confided to her a thing which would rend the Moslem world. Every dweller in a desert

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tent, every Sherif in his palace, every blind muezzin and all who turned their eyes to Mecca held their breath. Yet Murad had told a woman—a Paynim woman—a heretic—an unbeliever. Selim glided across the floor, a dull brown phantom intent upon his coffee. Murad nodded, and Selim placed a high-backed chair beside the bed for Gabrielle.

“I knew you were coming,” Murad whispered.

“So did I,” she laughed excitedly; “I knew all the while I was coming, though I vowed I would not. But you are ill, and you need me? Do you not?”

“Yes, I need you,” he replied.

Murad glanced from Gabrielle to the globe which lay on the table, not clearer nor more transparent than the girl. It quivered and stirred, as Gabrielle’s lips quivered and her breast fluttered. Murad could now account for the disturbance which he had noted on the previous afternoon. Selim had not understood why Murad pondered over that globe so constantly.

“Mother Louise would have come,” Gabrielle continued, giving him the reasons she had given to herself; “any of the sisters would have come. Of course I could not send for them, so I had to come myself.”

Murad nodded his entire approval; her doubts gave place to dimples and to smiles. She was here, and reasons mattered not.

Selim’s fiery glance rested for a moment upon Gabrielle—a glance that would have scorched the girl had she but seen it. He came forward with a tray. Gabrielle sprang up. “Let me give it to him—please. I am a famous nurse.”

She bade Murad sit up and rested the tray in his lap.

“There! Do not move; wait.”

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Selim anticipated her wish and provided the napkin which she tied round Murad's neck. "Is it too tight? Now! Here's a bit of bread. What are these? Dried plums?"

"No, they are dates."

"How queer!" She looked at the strange fruit. Selim stooped to renew the perfumes in a censer. He looked up and glared at Gabrielle with such intensity that she turned as though he had called her by name.

"You did not tell him of me?" Gabrielle whispered, and pointed to Selim. Murad shook his head.

"He seemed startled when I came in. He does not like me."

Selim spread a gold-embroidered cloth before Gabrielle, on which he set a bowl of willow-flower water. From the closet he fetched another tray.

"Some figs, Mademoiselle?" He spoke musically, but with an accent which amused her greatly. "Dates from Smyrna, conserves of pomegranate seed, Meccan raisins, Sultani citrons ——"

Gabrielle laughed; she could not guess of what it was he spoke. At Murad's suggestion she tried them all, one after one.

She laughed again, gayly, buoyantly: "Do you know of what I was thinking—I'm so foolish? Sometimes I bring sweetmeats into the garden for the rabbits and the birds. They nibble and taste of tiny bits before making sure they are pleased. I'm doing just as the rabbit does—only I do not throw my ears forward and seem ready to run away. Oh, dear, no; I'm not going to run. It's too pleasant visiting the sick."

Selim had whisked away Murad's empty cup,

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likewise the tray, and made his brother comfortable by propping the pillows behind him.

Murad sat now and watched Gabrielle, breaking and tasting and trying to make up her mind about these unknown fruits.

“My! but I was frightened when I opened that door downstairs. Old Margot says this house is haunted, and I listened for a noise. Silence is worse than noise—one imagines so many dreadful things. Listen!”

Selim too had heard the step, a firm, heavy and determined step in the hall below—Grosjean.

Gabrielle sprang up: “Oh, dear, let me hide, then jump out at father. He will be so surprised to see me here.”

“He would, indeed,” assented Murad.

Selim, the bronze image, waited. Murad inclined his head towards the door and Selim darted out.

They listened, these two, Gabrielle with a twitch of mischief at her lips, and Murad very anxiously. The tread below stopped abruptly, as Selim intercepted Grosjean in the hall.

“Go, Gabrielle, go quickly,” Murad whispered; “go quickly and say nothing.”

“Why?” she asked, and turned her wondering eyes upon him.

“Go—wait in the hall—a moment—for me.” He spoke so earnestly that Gabrielle ran out into the hall.

“Oh yes,” she said; “I understand; father must not suspect that I know you are here. Of course not.”

When Gabrielle had disappeared into the hall, Murad bounded out of bed, drew a dark robe about

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him, securing the cord around his waist, and followed her.

“Come,” he whispered; “be still; do not speak.” He almost dragged her into that long room where stood the table and the couch. There he drew aside the curtains of the couch and pushed her into hiding. “Wait here,” he admonished her, “until your father has gone into my room. Then go quickly—home.”

“Yes, yes, I understand,” she protested; “he must not suspect that I—isn’t it too comical?”

“Be still.” Murad went to the door at the head of the stair and called, “Why do you not come up?”

The stair creaked beneath the weight of Grosjean; Murad held out his hand. “My friend,” he said, “I greet you. Enter.”

Grosjean regarded him with great surprise. “I thought you ill, and risked this visit in the daylight. You are ill. You should be in bed. These fevers are most deceptive.”

Selim followed the other two through the room, carefully closing both doors behind him. He heard a smothered laugh from Gabrielle.

Much may happen in half an hour, and a girl may find strange things to ponder on when, breathless and with flushed cheeks, she has reached her own room again.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE NORTHMAN'S BANNER

“LOOK, Murad!” Gabrielle exclaimed; “see what I have brought.”

Gabrielle opened Murad's door, knowing well that Selim would have made everything ready to receive her. For sixteen days at this hour she had come, and never once had lost her faith. For sixteen days, even in those moments when Murad's heart had almost ceased to beat, and his breath came like whispers of agony, she had kept her courage firm. “He will *not* die,” she sturdily maintained; “he told me he would not.”

Selim fed his hope upon the strength of the woman that he hated; daily he watched for her coming almost as impatiently as Murad.

During the silent hours when Gabrielle sat stroking his hand, Murad rested peacefully as a child, and the surgeon's sleeping potions were forgotten. No matter how delirious he had been, nor how unmanageable with Selim, Gabrielle's touch would instantly soothe and quiet him. Selim curbed his hate, and whilst Gabrielle ministered to Murad he stood sentinel at the window lest Margot should return, or Grosjean make an unexpected visit. Twice Gabrielle had been obliged to hide from her father, and this danger

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kept Murad exceedingly anxious. So Selim stood his guard.

“Look, Murad!” Gabrielle exclaimed. His eyes lighted; his face had long been turned expectantly towards the door.

Gabrielle had grown slenderer since the momentous noon when she first crossed the threshold, and penetrated the mysteries of Dumb House. She had learned of other mysteries, and the lessons were written in every line of her face. Her cheeks were not so round; her rich color had faded, but she carried her head with surer poise, and a deeper womanliness abided within her eyes. Her pale lips set themselves firmly, for they had kissed the brow of sorrow and feared it no longer.

Her eyes were dancing now, a happy flush flowed into her cheeks. She entered the sick room with the same resolute smile that had never faltered. “See!” she exclaimed and held both hands high above her head, letting fall a banner which unrolled and dragged the floor.

Murad glanced at it. The banner had once been white, now stained with age. It bore for device a black raven with open beak and wings outspread. Murad smiled and allowed his eyes to settle, once for all, on Gabrielle’s face.

Gabrielle flaunted her treasure, and spoke with brave enthusiasm.

“It is a famous banner, Jean says; he took it from an old chest this morning and gave it me. He said I must carry it back to France. It is more than a thousand years old, and is a sure token of victory. That’s why I want *you* to have it.

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“You will soon be strong enough to go to your own country and fight battles. Take this banner and then—then no one can harm you.”

Gabrielle strove to speak lightly, to laugh and cheer up the sick man. But her own words led to the perilous edge. She stopped, and Murad began :

“My Gabrielle, I——”

“No, no ; you must not speak. I want to tell you what Jean says about the banner ; if you begin to talk I'll forget it all.”

Gabrielle drew up her chair and spread her banner across the bed.

Selim withdrew to the front window. His eyes, busy with the river and the paths, guarded Gabrielle's peace of mind, and through her gave quietude to Murad. She bent over and touched Murad's brow, to be sure the deadly fever had left him.

“Now, I'm going to tell you about it ;” Gabrielle was out of breath, she had run to him so fast, fearing she might forget her story. She took his hand and stroked it ; Murad listened more obediently if she but held his hand.

“Jean told me that a thousand years ago his ancestors—I believe that is what he called them—anyway, they lived in a country to the far north, where it is very cold. They were fair-haired people with blue eyes, and very brave. Jean says that's where I get my hair and eyes. A great many of their friends and kin-people had gone to live in England. A wicked king ordered them all to be killed—wasn't that dreadful ! Jean's ancestors heard of it and swore to avenge them. There was a king of—king of—Jean's ancestors I suppose—anyway he lived in the north, and

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had three sisters. These sisters were very beautiful, and they were witches. No, no, do not shake your head—that's exactly what Jean told me—*witches*.

“The king's sisters wove his banner for him, with the black raven; the king put it on his ship and sailed away to England. One of Jean's ancestors carried the banner when they landed in England, and the magic of the witches was so powerful that whoever fought under it was sure to win. They had a terrible battle, and all the English were killed. None of the others were killed—or if they were killed some angels took them straight to heaven——”

“To Valhalla,” Murad suggested.

“Yes, that's the place Jean said they went to,” Gabrielle hurried on. “After they had killed all the English one of them was made King of England, King——”

“It was Sweyn, King of Denmark, who conquered England,” said Murad quietly.

“Oh, dear, you knew it already; I thought I had a *new* story.”

“No, Gabrielle, I knew naught of the banner.”

“After they had conquered England the man who had the banner crossed the seas to France and built the castle where Jean lived when he was a little boy—imagine Jean being little.”

Murad reached out his thin white fingers and felt the ancient cloth, strong and well-preserved through all the centuries.

“Wonderful, wonderful!” he said, “that this banner should have floated above the conquering Norsemen.”

“That's it, that's just what Jean called them!”

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Gabrielle exclaimed; "I could not think of their name. No one ever did whip the Norsemen, did they?"

"They were a valiant people," Murad answered, "and spilled much brave blood in Palestine. Even unto this day Eastern women frighten their children with King Richard. 'Why do you fear?' say they; 'that's not King Richard.' *He* was a Norseman."

"Oh, dear! when I tell a story I always get it wrong and it sounds foolish. You make me feel so ignorant."

"I did not mean it, Gabrielle;" he caught her hand and held it to his lips. She did not resist, though Gabrielle was stronger now than he. Presently she rose and stood beside his bed, her face turned towards the sunshine from the window.

Then she smiled down upon him. The smile faded; she was trying to compose her mind and tell him something else.

"Murad, you are growing strong. In twenty days you will have passed the Moon of Safar, and be in no danger. After that you return to your own land. You have told me that there will be battles and fighting. It is very childish of me, perhaps, but I thought I would give you this banner for—for—good fortune."

Gabrielle loosed her hand gently and walked off from the bed. When she came back again the tears were brushed away and her face was calm.

Without a word she spread the protection of her banner over Murad, covering him full length.

CHAPTER XXV

STEADY, GABRIELLE, STEADY

“STEADY, Gabrielle, steady!”

The laughing girl, blue-eyed and happy, and trim as a dove in her convent gown, went hurrying down the weed-grown walk to Dumb House.

“Steady, Gabrielle, steady!” Gabrielle had no time to look about her or to choose her steps, for hands and eyes were centered on the steaming bowl she bore.

“Ugh! the fire’s in the bowl,” she ejaculated, and set it down on the sun-dial whilst she blew into her hands.

The bowl itself did not seem fitted for feasts of epicures or the companionship of gem-studded filagrees. It was thick and yellow; it was criss-crossed with many a crack; it was mottled with scars and scorches, and not a comely bit of ware to look upon. But it was a sturdy old warrior, and had borne the brunt of many a kitchen battle.

From the capacious heart of the bowl there rose an eddying fragrance so savory that one forgot the ill-favor of its countenance.

When Gabrielle had cooled her hands she shifted her napkin and wrapped it round the bowl. Then she took up her odorous burden and trudged on again.

“My! that smells good. It must get to him piping hot.”

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Her foot slipped and she stumbled: "Steady, Gabrielle, you were too long in the making of this broth to spill it now."

But there were many other ways to make a slip, and something within her constantly whispered, "Steady, Gabrielle, steady!"

Straight before her was the door to Dumb House, no longer opening to nameless terrors. It beckoned her to enter a cool and hospitable dimness. This great hall had seemed to sympathize with the hopes and fears of Gabrielle; it seemed to understand the precious anxieties and the blessed troubles of the girl who had passed through it so many times during Murad's illness.

With her knee she pushed open the door, and sped through the hall, not looking whither she went. Gabrielle had no need for eyes, her feet knew the way so very, very well.

"Careful now," she thought, and climbed the winding stair. Her knee had barely touched the upper door when Selim opened it. Gabrielle entered the room without glancing right or left. Murad in a loose blue robe was pacing the floor. He turned fretfully:

"You are late, I have been waiting."

Gabrielle shook her head: "I am early; it is not yet noon. Sit down; you must not weary yourself."

The reproach in Murad's tone was sweet to Gabrielle; even his petulance and impatience had grown most dear. He dropped into a chair with his eyes fixed upon the bowl; he seemed pitifully weak. Selim came forward to take the bowl from Gabrielle.

"No," she ordered, "I shall carry it myself; I

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have firm hold. Fetch the table, spoons, cloth, everything."

Selim disappeared. Gabrielle rested the bowl on the edge of a chair until he returned. Murad leaned over and smelled of it.

"Hurry, Selim," he said.

Selim placed the small table in front of Murad, with its dazzling cloths and array of silver. Last he set out a priceless bowl of blue, inlaid with gold and studded with gems.

Gabrielle filled the blue bowl from the yellow one. Murad reached out eagerly. She caught his wrist:

"Wait a minute; it is too hot. Selim, fetch the rice. Wait, Murad, *wait*, I tell you; let me tie this napkin——" She stood behind Murad tying the napkin and smiling at his impatience.

"Be careful; it is dreadfully hot; sip it slowly; do not burn your tongue——" Murad obeyed; he had long since learned there was no appeal.

He wore a robe of blue, edged with dull gold, over the whiteness of his shirt. There was a girdle about his waist the quaint workmanship of which caught her eyes—but only for a moment.

She had watched Murad so anxiously that she saw more keenly than the surgeon how the tinge of health was coming back into his cheeks. Now she bent over him and laid her hand upon his brow.

"I knew it," she exclaimed triumphantly. "The fever is quite gone. That Surgeon Rosselin is a wonder; he brought old Vincent back from the grave—and Sister Anastasia——"

The invalid smiled up into her face; they were quite used to being alone together. For many days he had been unable to speak or move, or even to lift

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his head when she came. But to Gabrielle's great comfort he had always seemed to recognize her. His hand crept slowly forward, and one wasted finger toyed with the spoon.

"Let me feel your pulse," she said; "then you shall have your lunch."

He stretched his arm, palm upward, on the table. Gabrielle put her finger on his pulse and tried to appear very wise, as Surgeon Rosselin looked when Sister Anastasia was so ill.

"Almost regular; a trifle fast; you are very well. Indeed I have never seen any one quite as well." She patted his hand reassuringly, and Selim entered with the rice. "Here's your rice; let me stir it in with the broth—good chicken broth—that is what the surgeon said you must have." She put a small portion of rice into his bowl and glanced at Selim for confirmation.

"Good chicken broth, the surgeon said, did he not, Selim?"

"Yes, Mademoiselle, with rice."

"As much as I want," supplemented Murad; "I heard him say that." And he reached out with his spoon.

"No, not as much as you want, only as much as you can eat——"

"At intervals, not all at once," added Selim, repeating the surgeon's instructions with the fidelity of an echo.

"Stop talking and let me eat; I'm starving," Murad broke in.

"Give it to him," Gabrielle ordered, and Murad began the attack.

Gabrielle rested her elbows on the table and, with

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chin in hand, enjoyed Murad's broth as much as he. Selim went to watch at the window. Murad's spoon flew diligently back and forth.

"What!" Gabrielle exclaimed, "at the bottom already?"

"It is a very small bowl," he said peevishly.

"You shall have another. Selim." Gabrielle rose with a smile, and clapped her hands for Selim. Murad followed her with his eyes, as was habitual during the hours of his weakness. When Gabrielle turned and met his gaze she flushed—a flush of purest joy. Murad had become dependent on her, and she knew it.

Suddenly she heard a noise outside the window, at the front—noises of men shouting along the river's bank. The color died away and left her cheeks whiter than before. She listened. "It must be a ship." Gabrielle ran to the window and fell on her knees at the crevice through which she had so often peeped. By reason of many searchings every little inlet and jutting point along the river had become familiar, especially that distant curve around which the ships came from France.

Sick with apprehension she scanned its bosom; the river smiled back and reassured her. "Not yet, not yet," the river said.

She rose and returned to Murad rather consciously, for she felt his eyes had followed her.

"Are you so *very* impatient?" he asked. "It cannot be long until he comes."

"I am anxious," she admitted. The fretful questioner held his peace. Gabrielle busied herself about the table. She did not look at Murad, for her lips were trembling and she could not steady them. It

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was a great relief when Selim came in, bringing the yellow bowl.

She poured another portion of the broth, stirred in the rice, and regained her self-possession.

“The surgeon said he might go into the garden this noon, did he not?” she asked of Selim. Selim nodded.

“Yes, he did; yes, he *did*,” Murad asserted; “and I mean to go.”

“You may get him ready, Selim,” she said, for the bottom of the bowl was clean again.

“I am quite ready; I have been ready these two good hours. Do you not think I should be ready after lying here idle for three weeks?”

“Seventeen days,” Gabrielle corrected.

Seventeen days had made a lifetime to Gabrielle, when every day she had dreaded the coming of her husband. But she did not yet realize what her husband’s coming meant.

She looked around the room and saw her banner—the raven with the wide-spread wings—fixed to a staff. Murad had brought it with him from across the hall.

“It is my talisman,” he said.

Murad scraped the last morsel from his bowl, even to the flakes of rice clinging round the sides. Then he held fast to his spoon and looked at Gabrielle.

“No more,” she shook her head; “not a drop.”

“Then come,” he said, wiping his lips; “we shall go into the garden.”

Selim washed Murad’s finger-tips with willow-flower water and dried them with a silken napkin from his girdle. Then he sprinkled him with a sweet-smelling essence from the casting-bottle.

“Now, you are ready,” Selim said, assisting him

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to rise. But it was Gabrielle's shoulder upon which Murad laid his hand.

Gently and slowly they went down the stair. It was a narrow stair and three abreast crowded it overmuch. At the foot Murad loosed his hold of Selim, but clung to Gabrielle, and Gabrielle drank the joy of supporting him in his weakness. Selim followed and turned with them into the lower hall.

Gabrielle stopped beside the roll of rugs which lay against the wall near the door. She bent over and picked up the Fan of the Thousand Eyes. "To shield you from the sun," she whispered.

Before them the wide-open door framed a square green vista of the garden, glittering in the sunlight, with dashes of color and stretches of brown solitude beneath the pines. Murad gazed upon it with hungry eyes. "It is Irem," he murmured; "it is the garden of Shedad." Selim understood the reference to that ancient legend, and Selim was wroth.

This garden was fairer to Murad than those fabled gardens in which a presumptuous monarch had imitated Paradise. Murad wondered if God would strike him dead—as He had stricken Shedad—for daring to enter them.

Murad turned and looked at Selim. In the silence Selim heard again what Murad had said to him many weeks ago: "The garden is mine."

Selim glanced at Gabrielle with a mingling of submission, hatred and gratitude. Then the slave closed his eyes lest he should desecrate a holy place which was set apart for Murad. He groped his way to the inner door and vanished.

"Come," Murad whispered eagerly; "come."

With one hand resting on Gabrielle's shoulder, the

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other outstretching towards the garden, he passed through the door into the dazzling sunlight. She held the fan above his head, sheltering him from heat and glare, and led him slowly to their bench beneath the pine. "Sit here," she said.

She settled him in a corner of the bench, stuffing cushions at his sides and back: "Rest your feet on this; now lean back."

Murad closed his eyes. Gabrielle fetched a hassock from the pavilion, sat at his feet and leaned her elbow on the bench. "You must be very still," Gabrielle cautioned, "or I shall take you back to the house. Do not talk; it wearies you."

Murad sucked in the delicious air as though it were a draught from the wine-cup of the day. Resting easily, he upturned his face to the infinite blue of the sky. Ah! the wonder of that sky—the depth and the breadth and the serene majesty of it! Almost green it seemed—green as the marvellous crysolite which decks the Garden of the Abode, and wider than the charity of Allah. One solitary cloud hung suspended there, silvery white, as were the clouds above the Garden of Delight, in the Fourth Mansion of Paradise.

With half-closed eyes Murad watched a wheeling bird that circled round and round, rising and falling, breasting the breeze, then turning wing and wing before it. There were other birds, fainter and farther off, like sails of distant ships against an azure sea. These listless ships of heaven bore no cargo and sought no port; they mounted and fell, sailing hither and yon without effort or design. Like the birds, Murad abandoned himself to the caprice of whatsoever winds might blow.

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For the first time Gabrielle saw him in the light of day. His cheeks were sunken, his lips exceeding pale; two slender hands lay unmoving in his lap. She leaned forward and covered them with both of hers. He opened his lips to speak.

“I charged you not to talk,” she said gently. “Why should you chatter! Is the garden not enough?”

“Then you must talk to me,” he whispered.

“But I can tell you no stories; I do not know any.”

“Talk to me about yourself—about the convent. I shall be very still and listen.”

“I could talk of nothing else,” Gabrielle laughed; “there’s naught else I know except the sisters, this garden, and my father. I thought that was all—until you came.”

CHAPTER XXVI

UNTIL YOU CAME

“PEACE be upon you,” the winds had whispered to the garden. “Light and mellow warmth,” the sun flung down. “Beauty to gladden the eye,” boasted a bold, red rose. “And sweetest perfume,” the jasmine’s breath outpoured. A mocking-bird swung forward and back upon a vine; and the mocker outdid them all, for he sang a love song to his mate. Forgetful of the wind and heedless of the sun, the feathered troubadour poured out his serenade. Without eyes for the bold, red rose, nor care for jasmine sighs, he thought only of his mate, and sang to her alone. Murad opened his eyes, looked upon the bird, and smiled. “Drunken without wine,” he murmured, “for very stress of joy and love.”

“Yes,” Gabrielle answered in a whisper; “some times I fear he’ll burst his little throat.”

“Or burst his little heart if he let it come not forth.”

“’Sh! His music fills the garden. I come many times to listen.”

“It is the music which fills the world. And you learn nothing from the bird?”

“Yes, indeed, one may learn greatly from a bird. But you could tell me so much more if you would—of the stars—the burning glass— There! There! Lean back again. Remember you are not to talk.”

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Murad dropped back on his pillows, for he was very weak. Gabrielle sat upon the hassock at his feet, leaning against the bench. She stroked Murad's hands to keep him soothed.

"When you are well you shall talk to me again. You have taught me very much. Until you came I thought of nothing beyond these woods and that river. You seemed to tear them all away and pointed out to me what lay on the other side." Gabrielle seemed frightened, as though she had been cast adrift in the empty spaces of the universe. Murad sat up straight. "No, no," she ordered hurriedly; "lean back again."

"Then tell me of yourself, and the convent; begin at the beginning."

Gabrielle laughed: "There never was a beginning—more than there was a beginning to sunrises, and going to bed at night."

"What is the first thing you remember?" Murad asked. It mattered little to him of what she talked.

"The first thing? I cannot remember, it has been so long ago." Gabrielle wrinkled her brow and tried to think.

"Oh yes, I remember when they opened the parlor grating and passed me through. You can imagine how tiny I was. I kicked and screamed most violently and got red in the face. Everybody laughed, even Mother Louise, which made me hate them all. My life was not worth a pin. I was the most unhappy person in the world."

"Next, I remember the night when Sister Therese came with some medicine. It choked me because I had just finished eating a pasty which an older pupil had hid in my bed. The older girl was displeased

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with me for eating her pasty. That was an exciting night."

Murad behaved according to promise and listened quite contentedly. One of the hands which had rested in his lap slipped out and fell on the bench. Gabrielle, like a mother whose child stirred in its sleep, took up the hand.

"It was very comical," she went on; "one day I hurried over here to see how you fared. I did not suspect that stupid old Rosselin would remain. Selim gave me no warning that he meant to stay the night, and the day as well. You were very ill. I ran like everything through the hall and up the stairs. At your door I heard a voice, loud and angry. It was your voice; you were greatly excited. You were shouting as I imagine a commander would shout in battle. The fever-madness had come, as it came to old Vincent. I opened the door and peeped in; you were sitting up in bed waving your arms. Selim tried to hold you. The Surgeon Rosselin came towards me as fast as he could, and I was so paralyzed with terror I could not move. I should have liked to crawl into a mouse-hole, but could only flatten myself against the wall. He hurried by and did not see me.

"When he came back I crouched in the shadow and he passed again. You were still shouting; it sounded dreadful in that old house where there had been nothing but whispers. I lay still and listened: you grew quiet.

"Presently I heard Rosselin and Selim talking. 'Bah! it is nothing,' said the surgeon; 'he is young and strong, and he has not the habit of drink which makes men die.'

"This comforted me, to hear the surgeon rating

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Selim so roundly for his fears. Rosselin swore wickedly, and stamped around with his big feet. It is very reassuring when Rosselin does that. He came towards the door again, and I ran away.

“The next day Rosselin almost spied me in the garden; but I heard him first. He was striding up and down, slashing about him with his cane. My! how angrily he cut the heads off the hollyhocks. He swore beautifully, because he could not leave Dumb House in the daytime. For the two days that I had no chance to see you I comforted myself with Rosselin’s oaths.

“The next day you were better, but weak and pale. Four days you did not know me; you were always sleeping——”

Gabrielle’s voice fell lower and lower, then died away. The skies were blue and vague; a sweet languor uprose from the earth. Silence came, perfect silence—and peace, perfect peace.

“Tell me of the convent,” Murad begged when he missed the music of her voice.

“The convent? There’s nothing to tell about a convent. Things do not happen in a convent. Let me see: It is now the half hour past noon. If I should go into the class-room I should discover Sister Conflans teaching geography and history. There would be seven small girls standing in a row, unless Bathilde had a headache or Colette the influenza—then there would be five. Sister had either brought her spectacles that day, or she had not. That is what marked the day—those spectacles. It is very stupid.

“Oh yes, something did happen once. Madame de la Roque came in a ship from Havana, I remember her distinctly. Tall, well-made, with a proud, grave

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look, she must have been a great lady. She came at recreation time and we peeped through a wicket. She brought her daughter to Mother Louise, a slender dark girl, who kept her eyes on the ground.

“Madame told Mother Louise that reports of her piety and learning had gone abroad, therefore she desired to propose her daughter as a novice. Mother Louise is easily flattered.

“‘And does your daughter earnestly wish to lead a religious life?’ ‘I assure you she does.’ The young lady said nothing; she seemed most timid and nodded her head. Madame offered a large sum in the way of pension and dowry, and her daughter was accepted. Proving amiable she became a favorite at once. Yet she always kept apart from the other pupils.

“One morning I heard two sisters gossiping in the linen department. ‘There’s a fine story somewhere, you may rest assured,’ one of them said. ‘Yes, yes,’ assented the other, who was a great busy-body, but very kind at heart.

“This caused me to watch Mademoiselle de la Roque more curiously. She had manners which the girls aped, as we thought her of a great family. One noon whilst I was aiding Sister Eloi and Madame Caumont in the record office, Mademoiselle de la Roque entered without a word, as was her habit. She stood before the fire with her hands spread out behind her. Several pupils were reading and kept glancing at her over their books.

“It was comical to see those two old nuns, with their spectacles on, buried to their noses in the archive books. They quarrelled the livelong day, and I was near stifled with laughter. Madame Caumont sniffed and nudged Sister Eloi. ‘The grenadier is warming

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herself.' Sister Eloi nodded—they were good friends again, having some one else to pick to pieces. 'Yes, it is sad for a young gentlewoman to have the manners of a guardsman.'

“Presently Madame Caumont laid aside her spectacles and came hobbling around the end of her table, looking very droll. 'How is it,' she said to Mademoiselle de la Roque, 'that you spread your feet apart in such an odd fashion?' All the girls laughed, and Mademoiselle de la Roque became very red. She stammered in great confusion: 'I was reared with my brother, and must have, unfortunately, copied his manners.' She sat down hurriedly and attempted to draw her chair to the fire. In so doing she caught hold of it between her knees. Whereat the girls burst into new peals. Mademoiselle de la Roque sprang up and ran from the room. 'A trooper in petticoats,' snorted Madame Caumont. 'I could never abide the Spaniards.' Madame Caumont had lived in Paris, and we set great store by her opinions. So we ceased to copy the manners of Mademoiselle de la Roque. She was left quite lonely, though she never spoke an ill word to any one. I became sorry and went secretly to talk with her; for which she seemed grateful.

“Then a most unusual thing happened. One night there was a thunder-storm, such as you witnessed in this garden. Little Ronci—a very small girl—became frightened. She ran out of her cell to Mademoiselle de la Roque's. One of the sisters heard her call out, 'Mademoiselle, I am dreadfully alarmed; you must let me bide in your cell until the storm is gone.' Mademoiselle de la Roque dressed completely before coming to the door: 'The holy rules forbid it,' she said and pushed little Ronci away from her door. We

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were quite indignant at this hard-heartedness. Even the strictest nuns admitted that Mademoiselle de la Roque might have admitted little Ronci for that once without harm. We showed our displeasure against her in every way we could.

“Altogether, she remained in the convent three months, doing her novitiate. Then Madame de la Roque came again and informed Mother Louise that her daughter believed herself unfitted for a religious life, and took her away.

“Now the singular part of it was this: The vessel had no sooner sailed than old Vincent brought Mother Louise a note from Madame de la Roque imploring pardon for a deception. Her daughter was not a daughter, but a son. He had had the misfortune to kill his adversary in a duel, and his mother took this means of hiding him until the king’s wrath blew over. You can imagine what a pretty tumult this affair made in the convent until it was hushed. Mother Louise told us to hold our tongues; of course we talked about it under the sheets. That is the only thing that ever did happen in a convent, I suppose.”

Gabrielle finished with a sigh. She was at the end of her stories.

There was a long silence. Twice or thrice Murad seemed on the point of asking another question. Finally, he did inquire, “But your marriage?”

“Oh yes, I forgot; that was another thing that happened. But I was so small it made no impression on me.”

“Tell me of it?”

“It was nothing,” Gabrielle replied; “let us not talk about that.”

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gentlemen of the French Nation—so the letter said—eager to win renown beneath the glorious smile of such a warlike prince.

Tuerto besought Murad to wait their arrival, and pleasure them with the light of his face, which was like unto a rising full moon.

All went well in Stamboul. People sickened of False Mahomet; there was mutiny amongst his sailors and rebellion in his troops. The tread of Murad would shake him like a rotten apple from his stem.

This letter fired Murad with a warrior's enthusiasm, and lighted the lust of battle in his eye. Already he heard the clash of steel; already he heard the clatter of a myriad hoofs; already he heard the acclaim of a liberated nation. Already he rode at the head of a turbaned host through the streets of his ancient capital. Already—but Murad went into the garden and forgot. There was a lover's soul in the garden, paramount to that of a crowned sultan in Stamboul.

Virile and sturdy as Murad stood, breathing of war and spurning the ground like a conqueror, he thought only of Gabrielle. He had reached the end of his self-appointed beat and was on the turn when Gabrielle pushed her frightened face through the vines. Seeing Murad, she came immediately into the path.

Excitement burned her cheeks, though her lips were very pale. Her fingers twitched, and her eyes dilated with terror. Murad saw that somewhat of distress had befallen her.

“Peace, my Gabrielle!” he said, and she felt ashamed. Her tense figure relaxed; her eyes filled, and she caught his hand. “I have witnessed a

CHAPTER XXVII

THE INCIDENT OF MADAME DE LUC

MURAD strode down the garden path, listening for a rustle in the grapevine which would herald the approach of Gabrielle. He marched back and forth with the tread of a sentry pacing his beat, turning sharply at the end.

Five days of rest—and of Gabrielle at the noontide hour—had brought back generously his strength. The friendly sun of Louisiana, like unto that which blazed across the rocks of Arabia Petrea, browned his cheeks again with well-accustomed tan. Then, too, there had come a letter which tautened the muscles of his arm, and sent his hand a-wandering to the hilt of his scimitar.

About the middle hour of the previous night Selim had heard the shuffle of a foot at Dumb House door. He was far too cautious to open it, but stole down and listened. Something scraped beneath the door—a letter.

“Oh! Son of the Star,” the letter began, telling Murad that Tuerto, the meanest and least worthy of his slaves, was even then at Santo Domingo with a warship stronger than any in the sultan’s navy. To her crew were added a hundred desperate freebooters. The letter gave Murad many valiant names aboard the ship, men who prayed that they might die in the joy of his countenance. Also there were adventurous

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fearful thing," she choked out. "Come, let me tell you of it."

She hurried him to their bench beneath the pine, where a girl could be very safe, where she could unbosom all her troubles to the garden and to him.

"This morning we went to mass, Margot and I," she began before they had settled themselves upon the bench. "I was all ready to come home but remained talking with Mother Louise. We were standing near the gate when some one knocked loudly on the wicket. Sister Conflans opened the wicket and shut it immediately. 'It is Madame de Luc,' she said. 'Open,' ordered the mother.

"The gate scarcely swung ajar when a lady was shoved into the yard so violently as to throw her upon her knees. She was a tall, beautiful lady, and wept most piteously. The man behind pushed her ahead of him—a man with a drawn sword in his hand. It startled me greatly. He was exceeding wrathful; the veins swelled in his throat until they seemed like to burst."

Murad listened without interruption, and Gabrielle rushed on breathlessly: "'Madame de Luc!' exclaimed Mother Louise, greatly surprised at the plight in which the lady appeared. 'Yes, Madame de Luc!' shouted the man, planting his foot within the gate so that it might not be closed. The two sisters covered their faces and I was so astonished I could not move. I stared at him—he was in a towering rage. Ah! and such looks of hatred as he hurled at the poor lady.

"'Madame de Luc! My wife!' he exclaimed; 'wife of the Chevalier de Luc, whom she has disgraced.' At this the lady crawled upon the ground

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to Mother Louise, embracing her knees ; but she did not dare look up, or show her face, or answer her husband, who spoke violently : ‘There she is, Holy Mother ; will you receive her, or will I send her forthright to hell?’ Mother Louise confronted him with such pious disapproval that he dropped his sword at once.

“‘I crave your pardon, Holy Mother,’ he said, ‘if my speech be blunt. Vimont lies dead in the thicket, and the blood of De Luc runs hot.’ He drew his blade across his sleeve, leaving a red smear.

“The lady sobbed distressfully. Mother Louise laid a hand upon her head. She is very brave. Then she spoke most quietly to the man, who was beside himself : ‘The mercy of the Church is measureless : it denies itself to none.’

“Mother Louise stroked the lady’s glistening hair, then she spoke again—the far-away voice of a saint such as one hears in holy dreams : ‘Chevalier de Luc, go and make thy peace with God. Thou can’st not cleanse thy soul as easily as thy blade.’

“De Luc stepped backward, abashed and hesitating ; the gate shut upon his wild face and left us gathered round the lady. I started forward, thinking I might do somewhat for her comfort, but Mother Louise waved me off and led her away.

“When Mother Louise had gone a few steps towards the dormitory, she turned and said, ‘Gabrielle, two of the sisters will take you home. Bide a bit ; there may be men abroad, and turbulence.’

“Everything happened so quickly that I was dazed and could not comprehend. I dropped upon a seat at the gate, looking from one sister to the other.

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him then. 'Did you look on at such a scene?' 'Yes, and why not? De Luc behaved most strangely, as if he were a madman.' Jean laid both hands upon my shoulders and studied me as if I were at fault in some manner. Then he seemed puzzled and asked, 'De Luc did not kill her?'

"'No,' I answered, 'he did not kill her; she is with Mother Louise.'

"'Are you sure?' 'Yes,' I said again. That was a very strange question for Jean to ask, was it not?'"

Murad did not reply. Gabrielle repeated her question; she thought he had not heard. Again Murad did not answer.

"I dared not ask my father anything else; he was angered at me. He led me down the side of the levee and by the path which runs to our house. All the men looked at us, but not directly. Jean passed them, gazing straight ahead, turning neither right nor left. You know how the air stifles one sometimes, before a storm? Well, it was like that. I hurried on with my head down and tried not to see them.

"When we reached our door Jean unlocked it and pushed me inside. 'Go to your room,' he said. I ran up the stair. When Jean commands one must obey.

"At the landing I chanced to turn my head towards the back door, and saw De Luc standing there. He startled me dreadfully. He must have seen me as I came in the door, though he gave no sign. He stood quite still, his arms hanging down, staring at the ground. I looked at him and shivered; he was a murderer. I wondered how he felt.

"I ran to my room and from a window heard Jean's voice below. He spoke harshly. The men

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They would tell me nothing, even when my breath returned. They only shook their heads."

When Murad looked up he found Gabrielle searching his face for some expression which might enlighten her. A glance assured him that she did not understand, she did not even suspect. Excitement suffused her cheeks with extraordinary richness, and girlhood's intuition added no tint of shame. The tragedy she had witnessed conveyed no hint of evil. Murad dropped his eyes and studied the ground, whilst Gabrielle hurried on to the end of her story.

"When all had grown quiet Sister Eloi bade Sister Conflans open the gate that we might depart. The two sisters kept me between them and proceeded along the levee, thinking to go home. We saw a group of men some distance ahead. They were looking towards my father's house and talking earnestly. They stood directly in our path but gave no heed as we approached. 'Let us return,' suggested Sister Therese. 'Let us go on,' I urged, for I had much curiosity. Whilst we debated my father came. He moved through the crowd as though he were this pine tree striding about the garden, and he said no word to any man. I hope you may never see my father angered; he speaks in a gentle tone, but his eyes flash and glitter.

"I ran to meet him, bidding good-bye to the sisters, who returned immediately to the convent. 'Oh, Jean, tell me of it—this dreadful thing that has happened?' I was much excited and he caught my arm. 'Hush!' he said, 'not so loud. How knew you of this?' Then we stopped upon the levee whilst I related to him what I had seen.

"'Hush!' he warned me again, and I was afraid of

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had gathered at the doorstep. My father must have been standing on the stone, though I could not see him. 'Gentlemen,' he said, 'the lady has not been killed; that is a false report. She is now in the convent unhurt. Vimont is dead, beyond help or harm. De Luc is beneath my roof. There the matter shall rest until all the truth be known. Go your ways in peace.' He closed the door and slid the bar into its socket. The men outside were dissatisfied, particularly two of them who kept touching their swords. My father strode through the hall; I crept half way down the stair to listen. Jean spoke a few words to De Luc, who said nothing whatever, only nodded his head. He was very white and silent. He must have been remorseful. Jean said only a word or two. The other took his hand. 'I thank you, Grosjean!' That was all. I learned nothing.

"My father turned and I ran, else he might have caught me eavesdropping. He came up the stair and questioned me about every little thing I had seen at the convent. 'It is a terrible affair,' he muttered.

"'What is so terrible? What is it? Tell me, Jean!' I entreated him. He looked at me until I wondered why he should stare so long. Then he shook his head and walked to the window. I followed him and put my arm around his neck. Jean behaved most oddly.

"'Yes,' he said, wheeling around; 'you are a grown woman. I will tell you. The Chevalier de Luc returned this morning from his mission to the Natchez. *His wife did not expect him.*' There Jean stopped. I must have seemed stupid; he waited some moments, then went on again: 'De Luc left his pirogue at the river bank and hurried home along a

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path through the thicket used only by his wife and himself. At a certain point on this path there is an oak in the midst of a canebrake—a secluded spot where De Luc had built a rustic seat. Just before he reached this place he observed something white—a woman's dress. His heart bounded to think of his wife seeking their old trysting-place whilst he was far away. His moccasins made no sound. He crept forward thinking to surprise her. He did surprise her. Vimont was sitting beside his wife. Vimont was killed. A slave ran to Madame's brother with tidings that De Luc had slain his wife. That is what made the commotion.'

"When Jean told me this much he stopped again without ever telling me why the men fought, or why De Luc mistreated his wife so shamefully. 'Was that all?' I asked Jean, and caught his sleeve to keep him from going down the stair. Jean seemed provoked when I pestered him with questions. 'But,' I persisted, 'Jean, you would not kill a fellow-creature for so slight a cause ; you——'

"Then my father did a singular thing. He is very strong. His sudden grasp crushed me to him until I was like to have cried out. He smothered me against his breast, and I could feel his heart beating. 'My poor, poor Gabrielle,' he whispered. Then he held me away from him with his huge hands, and gazed so sternly into my eyes that it stopped my breathing. 'Kill him?' he answered in the gentlest voice—the gentleness that frightens one, it is so deep and fierce—'Kill? Yes, if I must needs journey to France, and though it were the king—I should kill.'"

Gabrielle rose and stood directly in front of Murad. With clenched hands and heaving bosom she repeated

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the words of Grosjean which had impressed her so profoundly. Murad lifted his head. The figure of the girl held him fascinated. She leaned forward, trying to make him understand what her father had said, in order that he might explain it. "What could Jean have meant by that?" she asked. With parted lips, through which she drew a long full breath, Gabrielle waited, and waited in vain, for a reply.

Murad bent down, picked up a twig, and began drawing lines in the sand.

"What could Jean have meant?" she repeated.

"I do not know," he answered her.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE STAIN

GABRIELLE looked straight at the man upon the bench—the silent man who held a twig in his hand and kept drawing zigzag lines across the sand. He seemed to be thinking of something else—he had forgot her. She could not see his face; she could only see the top of his blue turban and the stiff white heron's feather. The star swung loose from Murad's breast, back and forth like a pendulum. All the while his fingers kept drawing those meaningless lines upon the sand.

Gabrielle shrank back and glanced about the garden from which she had always gained sympathy and comfort. It lay dead and dumb, shining in the sun, without a soul, without a rustle or a heart-beat. Her old friends turned away from her. Never had the garden seemed so lonely and insensate. In desperation she appealed again to Murad.

“But I did not tell you all. Jean frightened me. He had such a look in his eyes and his arms trembled so that I asked him no more questions. Indeed I had no time, for there came a knock upon the door. We ran to the window; there were soldiers below with a number of people at their heels.”

Murad broke his twig and ceased drawing those zigzag characters in the sand. Although he did not lift his eyes Gabrielle felt he was listening intently.

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“Jean called down to the officer and asked: ‘What is wanted, Laporte?’ The officer desisted from knocking and removed his cap: ‘The governor has ordered me to arrest the Chevalier de Luc. Is he in your house?’ ‘He is here,’ Jean replied; ‘will you vouch me for his safety?’ ‘I will; he shall be conducted to the governor.’

“Jean buckled on his pistols, descended the stair and talked with M. de Luc. They went to the front door together, and Jean lifted the bar. ‘Fasten the door,’ he called up the stair to me; ‘I shall probably be gone until the night.’

“I saw them step from the threshold into the path. De Luc strode forth pale and defiant. He did not seem penitent in the least. He handed his sword to Laporte: ‘I am your prisoner, sir.’ They walked off, Jean beside De Luc, and the soldiers closed around them.

“It was a sore puzzle to me, but I knew you could explain it. I have now repeated everything word for word. It is strange how well one can remember some things.”

Gabrielle hushed and sat down upon the bench. Murad must take time to think it out; she knew that. Then he would tell her. She could wait. Murad kept his eyes upon the ground, and his thoughts where Gabrielle could not guess them.

For the second time that morning Gabrielle watched a man’s brow grow sombre as she related this incomprehensible tragedy. Two men had listened to her, and both had turned their faces away. Were they displeased with her? Had she done wrong?

She had not been greatly surprised at her father, for Jean could be grum and reticent at times. She had

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no intimacy with him ; they never talked of trifles. Jean could not laugh and jest, and be amused by little things as Murad could. But she thought it queer that Murad should close his lips, set his eyes upon the ground and give her not a word.

Gabrielle slipped back into her corner of the bench. There was no sound in the garden save the murmur of the cottonwood's topmost leaves. A hush came, and stillness settled down upon that walled-in world.

Presently Gabrielle went over to the fountain, sat upon the coping and began to dabble her hands in the water. She felt herself harshly treated. Murad moved his foot ; then he lifted his eyes and began to watch her. She looked at him no more. The excitement had faded from her cheeks and he saw that her lips were quivering. Murad's garments scarcely swished as he passed swiftly to her side.

“Gabrielle ! Look at me, Gabrielle !” He touched the tangles of her hair. He meant to say something, he had it in his mind. “Gabrielle,——” he began.

She looked up, disconcerting him with the clearest eyes in all the world. The fountain below her reflected the azure of the sky, reflected the shadow of passing clouds, but there was no shadow in the eyes of Gabrielle. There was no mist which a breath from Murad might not blow away. Murad gazed into her soul, as clear and vast as the sky. He dropped his hand helplessly.

Then the shadow did come. He was playing with her, she thought ; he was treating her as a child, taking advantage of her ignorance. Gabrielle was daughter to Grosjean, the Hot-headed. She sprang up and confronted him. “What is it you are concealing from me ? Have I done evil ? You must tell me ; you *shall* !”

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Murad turned upon her with a smile infinitely tender. "No, my Gabrielle," he said; and her wrath was gone. "No, Gabrielle, it is because you have never done amiss, or dreamed of evil, neither your father nor I can speak to you of evil things."

"Of evil things?" she repeated, her lips opening slowly as the pink petals of a rose unfold. "But Jean said the Chevalier de Luc *did right*—it was not evil at all. That is what I could not understand."

"Madame de Luc was a married woman," Murad said, forcing the words and looking down into the fountain.

"Of course—she was Madame de Luc. I told you that."

In his own country Murad was reputed to be devoid of fear, and thousands of turbaned warriors bowed their heads at mention of his name.

"Gabrielle," he asked, taking both her hands into his own, "do you not understand?" She shook her head and tried to smile, but the smile would not come: "No; I am very stupid."

"Gabrielle," he said, "there are bad women in the world—women who deceive their husbands. And husbands—heedless of their own faults—are most careful of a wife." He spoke slowly, word by word, watching her face. Still there came no dawning of the truth to Gabrielle.

"Have you not been taught," Murad asked gently, "of her to whom your prophet Christ said, 'Go, and sin no more'?"

Gabrielle's face brightened: "Oh yes, she was the woman that the people were going to stone. I remember that story very well. But I never thought to ask what it was about. Mother Louise always said I

THE STAIN

never paid half attention to anything." Gabrielle laughed at her own ignorance. "You must tell me of it?" She sat again upon the coping, clasped her hands about her knees, and put his wits to flight by that same steady gaze.

Murad nerved himself anew: "I mean the sinful woman who was false to her marriage vows."

Gabrielle started, and tossed her head with the gesture of a doe who scents unexpected danger. "Oh!" she exclaimed.

The simpler mysteries of nature must be vaguely guessed by every woman-child, though told her by no tongue and taught her by no book. Deep in Gabrielle's soul there lay this dormant knowledge. Not even paradise knew purity complete, nor did Gabrielle. The serpent was there, the heritage of Eden.

Murad saw the color fade from Gabrielle's cheeks, then flash across them like a fiery comet. She sprang up as if to run, but something blinded her eyes, shutting out Murad—the garden—the universe. She groped her way from the fountain to the bench and sat bolt upright, staring at nothing. Her heart began to beat again in a tumult. Suddenly she gave way, snatched a cushion and buried her face in her lap. Like the woman of Eden she hid herself.

Murad stood as she left him, with a stifling pity that choked in his throat. Almost without knowing what he did he crossed the open space and sat beside her on the bench.

"My poor, poor child," he whispered; "it matters not. The world is full of evil—one stumbles on it unawares."

Gabrielle did not sob or cry out; she buried her

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face deeper in the cushion. Murad saw the crimson tide of shame that beat at the edges of her hair. He stroked her hair softly and spoke to her low: "They should have taught you," he whispered; "a woman must know where danger lies, else she may not avoid it."

With a quick movement Gabrielle flung aside the pillow. Why should she hide her face? "Yes, yes, I know; but a woman may be innocent. She was so beautiful and wept so piteously. Besides, here I am—in this garden—I am married. I spend hours and hours talking to you. Surely—surely——" She was looking directly at Murad. Something she saw in his face caused her to hesitate, then stop. A new lesson, a new dread, began hammering at her brain, but she steadily refused to let it in.

"Surely—it was—no harm?" Her gaze rested upon him beseechingly. Murad half turned away.

Again the horror came into her eyes—at first a glimmer of distrust and fright, then a widening and a deeper terror. She closed her eyes tightly but could not shut it out.

Gabrielle staggered to her feet and rested heavily on the end of the bench. The two were looking at each other in silence. Her figure straightened and strengthened. "Look at me, Murad," she demanded; "nay, do not shift your eyes and turn away. I must know. You have taught me much already—teach me more." Then her voice fell; the defiance was gone, only the wistfulness remained. "Tell me, Murad, tell me, was it wrong for me to come here? Could there be harm in what has been so sweet a pleasure?"

He met her gaze unflinchingly, and answered, "No."

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Gabrielle sighed; the burden fell from her. "I have been very silly," she said, dropping her arms to her side. "Why did you frighten me? I thought—I feared——" For a space her eyes roamed about the old familiar objects of the garden, pausing one by one to recognize the playmates of her childhood. They were all unchanged; everything in the garden was just as it had always been. Yet why did they speak to her with such a different voice? Why did she feel so differently towards them?

The truth came as a shock to Gabrielle—the garden was at peace, she was in a tumult. The garden had been standing still, but she had grown, she had matured. The garden was innocent yet; she had become a woman ever and ever so wise. Something within her wrenched loose from its fastenings—something that ached and bled.

"I have been very foolish." She spoke most seriously. "When I was a child I thought it great fun to have a secret. I was the only girl in the convent who had a secret. I looked upon this garden as mine, and never spoke of it. Then you came. We shared it, you and I; still I told no one. I did not dream there could be harm or evil or sin in that. I could not betray you, nor run you into danger. This night I shall tell my father. Jean is wise and good."

For a long while Murad did not answer her. Then he rose from the bench and took both her hands in his: "No, Gabrielle, you must not tell your father."

"Why?" she asked. And he had no reason to give.

"Why should I not tell him; he knows you are here, does he not?"

"Yes."

"You trust him?"

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“Absolutely.”

“I have done no harm in coming here?”

“None.”

“Then I shall tell my father!”

Yet Murad gave her no reason. He only reiterated, “You must not.”

Gabrielle felt relieved that she had done no harm. A puzzled expression settled upon her face. She tried to comprehend.

“Oh, I understand it now. Madame de Luc had done no harm, yet her husband killed the poor gentleman—and—Jean sheltered him. Jean said it was right, and—Oh, Murad! Murad! Jean would not harm you? He knows you; he loves you, I am sure he does.” Gabrielle’s arms came dangerously near to twining themselves around his neck, and her lips approached his own most perilously close. “Jean would not harm you?”

“I—do—not—know,” Murad answered. He could not look her in the face.

Gabrielle drew back, thoroughly mystified: “But I should tell Jean how I happened to meet you in the garden—all, from the very first. I should tell him how you brought books and pictures into the garden—how you spread the rugs and built the pavilion for me. I should tell of your illness, and how glad I was to help Selim in nursing you. Surely Jean would have bade me do that—Jean is so kind-hearted. You do not know how often I have longed to talk with Jean about the curious things you have told me.” Gabrielle lifted her face into the brilliance of the sky, fronting the sun himself, the all-seeing eye of God. “I have done no wrong,” she said; “I shall fear nothing.”

THE STAIN

“It is too late now,” said Murad. “Your father would not believe.”

“But I shall explain it to him—never you fear.”

Murad shook his head, and Gabrielle was utterly confounded.

“I cannot understand,” she insisted, “why I should not tell him. If he thought it silly he would chide me and pinch my ears; then he’d kiss me, and laugh, and pick me up in his big strong arms. Jean is not so terrible after all. You do not know how safe it feels to lie on that broad breast of his.” Her pallid smile flickered like a candle in a storm, then snuffed out. She thought of her father in another mood, when his voice was gentle and his eye flashed so angrily. Murad kept silence.

“What are you thinking of, Murad? I *could* explain it to my father.”

“No, my child, I fear not.” He barely spoke the words.

Gabrielle’s voice wavered: “You mean that Jean, that my father *would not believe me?*”

“He might not.”

“My father will believe me; he shall believe me. I never yet told anyone a falsehood. Mother Louise knows that.”

Murad came very close to her now: “Gabrielle, you shall not tell your father. I forbid it.”

“I shall tell him,” she answered simply; “I know what he will think.”

“Then”—Murad seated himself upon the bench as if the discussion were done. He looked at her and smiled queerly—“Then remember what happened to Vimont.”

Gabrielle’s face turned white to the very lips.

GABRIELLE

Every semblance of color died away, leaving her paler than a woman of marble. She said nothing—absolutely nothing, she was not even conscious of thinking. She sat very still.

“Listen to me, Gabrielle; let me be plain. Your father would never understand. De Tonnay would refuse to listen——”

“De Tonnay!” she exclaimed and glanced up with a quick inquiry. “De Tonnay! I never told you his name.”

“No, but your father has told me of him. I asked questions. Your father did not suspect why I asked. Destiny worketh at times with malice inscrutable. Is it not strange—out of millions of men—it should happen to be your husband who was my closest comrade in France? We had the same tutor, slept in the same bed; for three years we were inseparable.”

“Why did you not tell me of it?” she asked dully.

“I learned it three nights ago. Raymond de Tonnay is a most lovable gentleman, but violent when aroused. One could not reason with him if he were angered. He is my friend.”

“Then I might tell him,” Gabrielle suggested eagerly; “’twould make it easy—being your friend.”

“No, that makes it worse. He has lived at court where women are—are—different from my Gabrielle. It has poisoned his mind.”

Gabrielle went rocking back and forth with hands clasped around her knees.

“I understand it now,” she said finally. “I must lie to my father, lie to my husband—lie to everybody as though I had committed some awful crime. Or——” The voice sounded not like Gabrielle’s; it was broken, quavering, and hard.

THE STAIN

For minutes, hours—months, or years—Gabrielle continued rocking back and forth. She felt that Murad was watching her, she realized that he knew exactly what she was thinking, but she no longer cared. Gabrielle had been walking in her sleep, laughing and dallying as she went, and playing with the roses. She waked upon the verge of an abyss, and was minded to toss herself over. Why had she waked? Why had she not gone on dreaming and laughing? Why had she not overstepped the brink and been none the wiser? It is very cruel to be awakened, very cruel to be wise.

She was conscious now that Murad came with decisive tread and laid his hand upon her shoulder: “Gabrielle, to-night there will be a fading moon, the Moon of Moharrem.”

“Yes, yes, I never forget that. There are but seven days. Seven days—seven days.”

“Yes,” he said; “in seven nights the new Moon of Safar will rise. On the first night of Safar whatever fate has decreed for me will surely come to pass.” Murad bent over and whispered in her ear, “Let us forget the earth, and things of the earth.”

Gabrielle listened; not yet had she sounded the depth and the breadth of her transgression.

“See,” whispered Murad; “here are the flowers—the birds—the garden. Here are we; let us——” He checked his ardor, and being fearful of himself, withdrew his arm.

Once more he stood upright before her, and left the woman rocking to and fro, hesitating between the wisdom that she had learned and the innocence which she had not forgotten. The convent bell now clanged out, and Gabrielle sprang up: “Oh dear! I

GABRIELLE

had no thought it was so late. Margot is even now at the door.”

She ran the faster because she had a new fear in her heart—the dread of discovery.

Waning day shone through Murad’s window. Across the floor from west to east crept a blazing patch of light. It crept on and on, climbed the eastern wall of the room, dazzled amongst the curtains, and suddenly went out. The sun had fallen.

Murad sat utterly still, utterly absorbed. In his hand there lay the globe which was Gabrielle.

When first he came to the table and took up the globe the clouds had gathered. From their streaky edges flashes of black ran hither and yon. Gradually the tumult quieted on the surface. The globe grew still as death. All discoloration settled in the centre. Except for this the liquid was clear.

“A stain upon the stainless soul,” Murad murmured; “and I put it there.”

Darkness came. Murad laid the globe aside when he could no longer see it. Then he stared into the night. A comet blazed in the heavens, menacing war and famine. The waning Moon of Moharrem dropped steadily through the topmost branches of the pines. The seven days of life were melting away.

Murad thought not of them. He only mourned the stain.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE STARS

THE evening evened. Long jagged shadows went rippling slantwise across the river. The birds grew silent. The frogs began.

Gabrielle, like a dutiful daughter, sat upon her father's doorstep waiting until Jean came out. And, like a dutiful daughter, whenever an officer of the garrison approached she disappeared inside until he had passed. Not that she refrained from peeping through the shutters, for Gabrielle was a woman.

Four pirogues lay against the levee-side, directly in front of the house. Gabrielle knew that every package and every bale had been stowed away dexterously in their bottoms, so the burdens balanced and the boats ran smooth. Many of these were placed by her own hand. Old Jules always waited gallantly until she had returned to the house before he set them straight. But he allowed Gabrielle to have the joy of helping, which kept her eyes so bright and her cheeks so pink. She hurried back and forth from the boats with a springy step most good for Jules to see.

Grosjean journeyed that night to Biloxi upon an expedition which would consume three days. Now that all preparations were made, Gabrielle waited on the doorstep for him to come down the stair and make his start.

GABRIELLE

Had she but listened to her conscience, Gabrielle would have admitted that it was not her father who filled her thoughts—that it was something else to which she looked forward with such impatience. Gabrielle had learned to know herself, and had also learned to evade her own questions.

Eight voyageurs lounged upon the levee casting expectant eyes towards the house, and smiled at Gabrielle, who perched on the doorstep. Her eyes snapped with excitement; her fingers trembled. So keen were all her senses that she heard her father coming down the stair in his moccasins. “Oh!” she exclaimed; “you surprised me before I knew it. Is that the way you slip up on people in the woods?”

Grosjean, lithe, muscular and six feet two, stood before her equipped for his journey. Gabrielle looked him over, from the top of his leathern cap to the tip of his deerskin toe. “Jean, I’m so proud of you,” she said.

In any garb Grosjean was a man who might be picked from a million. He bent down. Gabrielle threw her arms about his neck: “You’ll be home again on the third day—the afternoon?”

“‘Deo volente,’ as the priest says,” he laughed.

“I shall have two lonely nights,” she pouted and smiled.

“There are the books,” Grosjean suggested; “or you might visit Mother Louise.”

“I shall manage, never fear; but, Jean, there’s to be no fighting?”

“None; the times are distressingly peaceful.”

“Margot says you have a keen scent for fighting.”

“Not this time, my Gabrielle,” he assured her.

“Keep the door barred. Never go out alone. Send

THE STARS

for two sisters if you desire to visit Mother Louise. You can employ yourself without me."

"Indeed I shall do quite well," she replied merrily. "You are not so important as you imagine. Margot and I get along famously."

Gabrielle's hands trembled as she clasped her father round the neck. There was a warmth in her kiss which Grosjean had never felt before. On the long water route to Biloxi he remembered it many times.

"Bar the door," Grosjean warned her finally, and stepped off the threshold. "Watch us from the window. We go down the river and make portage near the English Turn."

The father waited outside his door until the oaken beam slipped into its socket; security slipped into his soul, for he knew that Gabrielle was safe. With a light tread he strode off towards the boats.

Gabrielle from her window watched them move out upon the sluggish river, the boats trailing one behind the other like ducks along a path. When Grosjean turned and waved his hand, her handkerchief answered him. He smiled, set his face to the south, passed beyond the trees, and was gone.

Gabrielle sat at the window in her night-dress watching the pale dim moon, which, like an old man shorn of his strength, settled down stupidly to sleep. The river, the woods, the great world, were all so quiet that they frightened her. "It is the Moon of Moharrem," she whispered to herself, the strange foreign word coming naturally to her tongue. She remembered everything that Murad told her.

When Margot came into her room for the last time

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she had cuddled herself in bed. "Good-night, Margot," she said in the sleepest of voices; "I am tired; I worked overmuch with the boats."

Margot straightened the curtains of her bed, then went out. Gabrielle listened after her. Everything was still.

She bounded out of bed and went to another window. Down, down, down sank the moon, until just a tip remained visible above the dense forests to the west. In a moment that too was gone.

A million stars which had been ashamed to twinkle while the moon was in the sky, peeped out from their hiding-places. They grew bolder and began winking at the earth.

"The Moon of Moharrem," whispered Gabrielle. She rose from the window and stole into the room where Margot slept. The stars shone in. Like a thief she crept to Margot's bedside.

"Margot! Margot!" she called softly. The nurse did not stir. Gabrielle glided back to her room and began feverishly to dress. Once she stopped to question herself, but shook her head and dressed the faster. Taking up her shoes in one hand she crept down the stair.

The doors stood open. The stairs made no sound. She avoided the chairs in the lower hall. It was easy, after all, to get out of the house. Gabrielle drew a long breath of relief when she sat at the edge of the porch to put on her shoes.

The night was wonderfully clear. Each individual planet set its stare upon her. She winced, feeling that every sentinel of the night had eyes alone for her.

But she finished tying her shoes, then rose and

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hurried to the vine which hung against the northern wall. There she made another stand. "It is only four days," she said, as if that were sufficient excuse for what she might do.

The way through the wall had grown so familiar it mattered little whether 'twere night or day.

When she parted the vines on the farther side there stood Murad, motionless as a spectre, and whiter. He startled her. "Oh!" She caught her breath, then smiled dimly, and waited. Gabrielle was frightened, why or at what she knew not.

"I feared you were not coming," he said; "that something had happened to prevent."

"No," she answered, with an odd laugh; "the moon has just set. I waited until Margot went to sleep. Father went away at dusk," she added, talking at random. There was a tension, and Gabrielle felt it.

"I watched from my window," said Murad gravely, "and hated them for keeping you away from me all these days."

"Yes, for three days I could not come; Jean kept me busy at the noon hour. After that I feared he might come back and miss me. He was in and out every minute. I could never be sure." Gabrielle made her confession awkwardly; she realized perfectly the guilty secret she was hiding from her father.

"They were three very long days," said Murad quietly; "I sat alone in the garden. But we shall be very happy now in the little time that is left us."

Gabrielle tried to speak naturally, to be at her ease: "Yes, you are to tell me stories—many of them. We are not to worry or seek trouble."

"Yes, I know," he answered.

GABRIELLE

They walked together beneath the stars, along their old familiar way towards the bench. Gabrielle kept unwonted distance from him—not that she feared, not for any reason. It simply happened so. Murad was quick to observe this. He, like Gabrielle, felt the barrier between them. But he, unlike Gabrielle, understood the cause. Gabrielle only knew that she held to one side of the path while Murad kept the other. And yet, there were only four days remaining until—until—— Gabrielle would never put this dread “until” into words.

“The comet is beautiful to-night,” she ventured, glancing at the monster, to which she gave no thought.

“Yes,” answered Murad; “it is carrying fire to the sun. Otherwise the sun would fade and we should have eternal night. Even the sun needs replenishing. Nothing can feed upon itself, or it dies.”

Murad spoke in a tone which suggested queer things to Gabrielle. She dared not look at him; nor durst she ask a question. They passed on slowly and in silence, guided only by the light of the stars.

A meteor flared across the heavens. Gabrielle shrank.

“Have no fear,” whispered Murad, touching her upon the arm; “the bolt is not for you. It is aimed at the fallen angels who strive to peep into paradise.”

Gabrielle was interested, so Murad continued: “Allah, like earthly kings, must set a watch upon the frontiers of His kingdom. Blessed angels stand upon the lowest battlements of paradise and hurl their bolts at evil ones who seek entrance to that glorious place. Be of peace, my Gabrielle, the bolt is not for you.”

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Gabrielle had stopped, with face upturned to those myriad eyes of the night. Murad gazed only into her own.

“The bolt may well be aimed at me,” he added; “my rebellious heart hath dreamed of climbing into a paradise that is not for me.” She made no answer; she only thrilled, and feared, and was happy.

They reached the fountain, and Gabrielle bent over the pool. Murad stood beside her. “Look,” he said, “at those other heavens, as full of throbbing worlds as the one above us. This shallow pool mirrors the glory of the sky, and reflects the infinite spaces so truly that no eye could detect the difference. ’Tis very like a sage who puffs himself up with wise looks and solemn words, reflecting from his shallow pate all the wisdom of all the ages, and yet remaineth a fool. Mark how his wits can be addled.” Murad dropped the oar into the pool, and Gabrielle laughed.

“But the heavens are the same,” she said, looking upward. “You cannot change them.”

“No, they are the Truth. I only meant to show how the errors of man may be put to flight. But we are not to talk of that. Come, see what I have prepared for you. The pavilion is *en fête*.”

Gabrielle, intent on what Murad was telling her, had not observed the pavilion, which glowed with a light so vague and indefinable it seemed as if one imagined it.

“Look!” he said, stepping to the door and drawing the curtain.

Gabrielle clasped her hands. It was very beautiful, and very strange. In a few moments her eyes became accustomed to the weird suffusion of light which emanated from nowhere, and cast no shadows. She could

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not be sure that there were hidden lamps, subdued and shaded; she only realized that she could see quite distinctly.

Murad bowed gravely before the door, and pointed her within: "You are now a sultana journeying across the desert on your pilgrimage to Mecca."

Gabrielle stepped inside the tent. Murad followed and watched the girl's astonishment. Had his royal mother seen the gewgaws with which he had decked the pavilion she would have smiled. But they interested Gabrielle, so their mission was fulfilled.

No sultana could have found fault with the richness or the comfort of the couch; it was the couch which idolatrous love had provided for Murad's personal use when he fled across Arabia. It was low and broad and richly draped with tapestries of Moorish horsemen, with floating banners, and many other wonderful things. Over all were festoons of shimmering Persian silks whose colors blended rarely and rested the eye. Beside it stood a tiny taboret upon which was a vase of intricate design whence subtle perfumes came.

Gabrielle entered step by step, sinking ankle-deep into the priceless rugs, and stopping to guess at the mingled odors which changed with every puff of wind.

Gabrielle sat down on the edge of the couch. "I slept here once—almost," she said. "But I told you about it, did I not?"

She sat there swinging one foot and occupying herself with gazing at the curious things which filled the pavilion. Then she bent over and picked up a queer-looking musical instrument which lay against the taboret. "What's this?"

"That is a kitar," Murad explained, "called a

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kitar of the heart, because it hath but one string, and heavenly melodies may be played upon it.”

“Oh!” Gabrielle sat silent. The soft glow lighted her features delicately, without glare and without shadow. So deftly was the light contrived that it suggested mystery and piqued imagination.

Murad looked down upon her. By chance she brushed the solitary string of the kitar, and they listened whilst the wailing note died away.

The perfume, the lights, the whispering of that heart-string brought a delicious bewilderment to Gabrielle. Out of the dimness, out of the perfume, out of the murmurings of that strange foreign music she felt two steady eyes fixed upon her. Her breath came quick. She clutched the kitar and it complained again. She dropped it. It hushed upon the rug.

For one intoxicating instant she closed her eyes, then opened them. She sprang up and stood erect beside Murad. She could hear the beating of his heart—he, the placid one—and his heart was beating wildly.

Murad stretched forth his hand, yet Gabrielle passed from him—out of the pavilion—out beneath the stars.

“You promised to tell me stories—remember that,” she murmured. Murad did not answer. He did not hear.

The perfumes came with Gabrielle; the softness of the light came with her. The vibrations of the kitar followed her—the kitar of a solitary string.

All of these came out of the pavilion with Gabrielle.

CHAPTER XXX

THE PERIL

GABRIELLE passed out of the pavilion, beyond the miracle glow of golden lamps, and candles that diffused a scent of musk. She passed beyond the caressing fumes of aloewood that made her giddy with whispers to which she dare not listen. Gabrielle stepped from muffling rugs that deadened every sound, to the soft brown cushion of the pines. She passed into the companionship of the garden, into the peace of the night, beneath the safety of the stars.

Gabrielle passed out of the pavilion, where her restless soul had stirred most strangely; she took one quicker step and one longer breath. At the door she turned, looked back again, and drank a delicious draught of those intoxicating suggestions before she put temptation from her lips. She listened to the whispers before she put the voice behind her.

Murad stood in the center of the pavilion, his arms folded; his flowing garments trailed across the floor and mingled with the coverlet of the couch. He regarded her intently. With the faintest smile Gabrielle stepped backward—backward—backward, until she was gone.

And in that moment Gabrielle thought of what Murad once had said: "A thousand years are as nothing in the East." He waited patiently. Gabrielle felt that whatever he was waiting for would surely

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come to pass. Tireless, motionless, the spirit incarnate of that mystic East, Murad watched Gabrielle—and waited.

But the eyes were not patient. They burned and glittered as the desert sparkles beneath the passion of the sun. On Murad's bosom the star of birthright gleamed, and trembled as he breathed. Every facet of every gem fixed its eyes upon the woman, for they were enemies—the star of birthright and the woman of the garden. For a moment Gabrielle and the star seemed to be watching each other, measuring their weapons as wary swordsmen do. Gabrielle dropped her eyes and laughed nervously: "Come, Murad, let us sit on the bench; it is cooler."

Across the hushing rugs he came and brought with him a retinue of odors which like a conquering inundation overwhelmed the gentler perfumes that abided in the garden.

"It is cooler here," Gabrielle repeated, half in apology, taking her seat upon the bench and leaning back so that she might better gaze into the heavens. There were the stars, the merry little stars; Gabrielle loved them, for they reminded her of the beginning of her love. Her thoughts strayed back to that first night when she dreamed of Murad plucking these stars from the great one at his breast and pinning them against the sky. She clung to the fancy that they were Murad's stars, and that is why she loved them.

"Murad," she whispered, pointing upward, "Mother Louise told me once that the stars were little holes in the floor of heaven, and their light was God's glory peeping through. Do you believe it?"

"It is a very beautiful thought," he answered her.

GABRIELLE

“One night I stood upon a hill-top and watched my spearmen marching past. It was a wonderful spectacle. So I often think of the heavens as an embattled field, and each star as the tip of a spear.”

“I like mine the best,” Gabrielle insisted.

“And I like yours the best,” he agreed. “I have done with armies, with conquests, and the pride of kings.” An odd ring came into Murad’s voice, so odd that Gabrielle looked quickly at him.

He checked himself, holding leash upon the words that tugged at his lips. Then he pointed upwards and began to speak with that tone which always riveted Gabrielle’s attention: “Do you see that group? Look this way—at the end of my finger—so small that they huddle together with fright? Those are the seven sisters. There is a story.”

Gabrielle clasped her hands in her lap and listened eagerly.

“Many ages ago when the world was ruled by heathen gods, lusty young Orion beheld the seven daughters of Atlas, and love gat hold upon his heart. For they were like unto the rising full moon. He rejoiced greatly, and his breast expanded with happiness. But they would have none of him. Orion was troubled, and his color changed. He pursued. The maidens fled, and besought Jove, who ordained them safety. Jove transformed them into stars and set them in the sky. At first there were seven; now there are only six, for Electra put on mourning garments and faded from her place rather than behold the ruin of a city which was builded by her son.

“Orion wasted not his youth by loving women who were in the sky. He became enamoured of another. This woman’s father put out Orion’s eyes and cast

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him on the sea-shore. The sun-god out of pity restored him to his sight.

“Diana, goddess of the hunt, saw and loved him, for his limbs were cast in the mould of symmetry and beauty. Her brother Apollo devised a stratagem by which to bring Orion into evil case. One day whilst Orion was wading through the seas and only his head appeared above the water, Apollo pointed out the black spot to his sister, challenging her to strike it with a dart. Diana discharged a shaft so skilfully that she slew Orion. The sea waves dashed his body to the shore. At this Diana wept unceasing, extolling his beauteous perfections. She heaped dust upon her head and became as one distraught. She took her dead lover in her arms and set him amongst the stars. There you may see Orion, pursuing the fleeing Pleiads, with Sirius, his faithful dog, at his heels.”

Gabrielle sat stiller than the stars, and her eyes were just as bright. “So the goddess killed the one she loved?”

“Yes, then placed him in the sky where she might see him forever.”

“But he loved other women, you say, and pursues them yet?”

Murad smiled: “It is but a fable. There are many such fables about the stars.”

“I do not like to hear such stories. I——”

“And sometimes,” Murad began reflectively, “when I look at a cloudy sky and see but three or four stars, I think of the Hindoo girl beside the River Ganges. Should her lover die, or go upon a journey, the girl creeps down to the river at night with a candle set in a tiny wicker boat. With many prayers she sets the flickering light afloat, believing it to

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represent the soul of her beloved. If it floats steady the omen is good, and the girl makes glad her heart. But if the boat should overturn she weeps and rends her hair, for it bodes misfortune.

“How beautiful to think that yon stars are each the soul of some departed hero floating proudly down the current of the skies.”

“I like that story better. When you are gone—” Gabrielle forced the words most bravely—“When you are gone I shall set a light floating in the fountain where it will be sure not to overturn.”

Murad smiled at her earnestness. “Nay, let us not go forward to meet evil hap upon the way. We have yet four days. See,” he pointed to the sky again, “if your eyes be keen you can see two twinkling atoms midway between Orion’s belt and the Pleiads. They are very near together, side by side, and hand in hand.”

“Yes, yes, I can see them; two baby twinklers. Are they not brave? And so happy with each other.”

“I often gaze upon them,” Murad continued, “and imagine them to be our souls—yours and mine—wandering through all eternity. They seem welded into one, but there is a space dividing them.”

“Yes,” Gabrielle answered, little guessing the wisdom of her words; “they are very close, yet they are divided, and eternity itself cannot weld them into one.”

Murad glanced at her. It had been merely a thoughtless speech. She had not meant it.

“But the sweetest thought of all,” he went on, “comes near the middle hour of the night when I sit upon this bench in dreamful mood. It is then that I

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imagine those stars are street-lamps in the City of Jewels, which is the capital of the Country of Delight. Then I do fancy that you and I shall wander along the streets of that miracle city, whose paving-stones are blue; we shall wander forever and forever amongst its palaces and its gardens. There shall be a secret garden, like unto this, and a fountain, such as that—else 'twould be no Country of Delight. In India there lives a bird which catches fireflies to light its nest. I shall catch for you the stars of heaven to light our love. Gabrielle! Gabrielle!"

Gabrielle drew a sharp breath. "No! No!" she exclaimed, not knowing what she said, and sprang erect.

"But heed me, Murad," she said; "there is something I would say to you. I have much time to sit alone, and I think of nothing except your safety. Would it not be wise for you to fly into the forest until this dreadful day has passed? Jean knows every path, every trail; the Indians are his friends. They could hide you beyond all pursuit. You would be safe, Murad, safe."

Murad shook his head: "Remember the story of the loadstone mountain, and the merchant's son who was decreed to die by the hand of Agib. Here is an ant-heap in the desert. I stir it. An ant runs out. What doth it profit him to run? If I so desire may I not crush him with my heel? Should the Vengeance of the Sultan reach me in this garden, then no spot on all the earth is secure. I shall remain here—by your side—until the end."

There was a long silence before Gabrielle spoke again.

GABRIELLE

“Yes, the garden is very peaceful. It seems impossible to imagine harm entering here. Was there ever a night so holy? No evil thought could live within this place. Yet I should feel more at ease if you but went into the forest with Jean. Sometimes I feel that I shall scream aloud for stress of waiting.”

“You are anxious, my Gabrielle?”

“Yes.” Gabrielle’s whisper came lower than the rustling of the cottonwood leaves, softer than a sigh which trembled in the heart of the pine.

Murad sprang up and stood before her, his voice quivering: “That will I do, my Gabrielle. I shall go into the forest. Go with you—with you—alone.”

“I?” She cowered into a corner of the bench, her lips apart, her face turned upward to him and to the stars. “With me? I could be no help to you—naught but a hindrance.”

“Yes, you and you alone. Gabrielle! Gabrielle! Do you not comprehend that love for you has taken the place of ambition, of life itself, of religion? For you will I toss this bauble from me.” Murad tore the star from his throat and dashed it to the ground. “What matter these gauds and trinkets? You have taught me my boasted wisdom is a lie.”

Gabrielle recoiled from him like a stricken thing, leaning forward, covering her face and breathing very hard. “Come, my Gabrielle, let us go to the forest—you and I. There in the savagery of primeval man we shall build our shelter, and the shadow of empire will never darken it. Come, the world lies before us. Let us choose. The seas? Would you choose the bounding seas that never knew a shackle? Choose Paris? Vienna? Rome? The capitals of the world

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are open to us. Choose you one of them and it shall be yours. Look up, Gabrielle, look up! The night of terror has passed. The day is breaking. Look up!" Murad touched her on the shoulder, and the thrill ran through her body as he had seen it run through the liquid in the globe. She struggled to her feet. Even in the starlight he saw the deathly pallor of her face.

"Hush, Murad, hush; you forget. You forget my husband, my father, myself. I am a wedded wife."

"Your husband knows nothing of you, nor cares. During all those years in Paris he never spoke your name. Put him aside. Be my wife; I have the best right."

"But my holy Church—one wife—one husband—one God—forever."

"What matters the Church or your religion?"

"Would you give up——?"

"Everything freely. If I take you to wife no son of Islam will follow my standards to battle and wage holy war in my name. What I forsake is nothing; what I gain is all. I am wiser now. I know my duty to you, my duty to your father, whose guest I am. I know my duty to your husband, who is my friend." Murad spoke swiftly, as a man who has thought much, and chosen: "My dream of empire shall wither. I shall blast the hope of thousands who wait to hear my trumpets sounding in the desert. What care I? Gabrielle, will you not make me the Sultan of this Garden Empire, bounded by these walls, with this bench for a throne—and *you!*"

Gabrielle backed away from him, terrorized by the passion which flamed in Murad's eyes. Step by step she went, just as she had done on that memorable day when he first confronted her. Murad followed her.

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In this way she crossed the open spaces where the stars shone down, entered the shadow of the magnolia and stopped with her back against its trunk. Gabrielle could retreat no farther. There was none to whom she might call for help. In all the universe there was only this one man, those far-away stars, and the vacancy of the night.

“Murad,” she pleaded; the tone of her voice halted him more surely than if a warrior of might had smitten him. He stopped, and the passion of his tongue was stilled.

“Murad, I am only a foolish girl; you are very wise and very good. You understand everything much better than I. My heart tells me this is wrong, wrong for you to say, and sinful for me to listen. I feel so strangely here in my breast—it flutters and 'tis like to choke me. I scarce do know how to make you comprehend.”

Murad stretched out both his arms, but did not touch her: “Gabrielle, you speak as if you fear me. I——”

“No, it is not that; I have no fear of you. I feared Mother Louise and loved her. I fear my father and love him. But fear of you has never entered my heart, else I should not have come into the garden. Before this night I never stopped to consider. I wanted to come. I came. That was all. But I learned something a while ago—in that pavilion. I do not know what it was, but I learned it. I felt queer, and shivered. Now I am different—greatly different. Did you observe that I was alarmed and frightened at nothing—only at myself? But you stood there, so strong and good, and my fear was gone. You did startle me, Murad; you were so

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excited. Now you are yourself, and I am not afraid." Gabrielle laid a hand upon his robe, and her confidence made no mistake. The master of a thousand slaves held the lash above his own soul.

"Murad, my husband is coming to-morrow, or the third day at farthest. If he knew the truth he would allow me to visit you here. He is your friend; it would be only for one day, or two, but they mean so much to me." Gabrielle's voice fell low, and her lip quivered; but the hand upon his sleeve held firm.

"I understand it now," she went on, leading him back to the bench.

"Wisdom came all at once, to-night. I know the danger now; I know—many things. But, Murad! Murad! I did not want to understand—I did not want to know. There are but four days more, and then——" Beyond this point Gabrielle's imagination did not run.

Murad rose and took her by the hand. He led her out of the shadow of the pine into the shining spaces of the night. Though she wondered why he did this, she suffered him to have his will.

He laid a hand upon her shoulder and turned her face upward so that the brilliance of the stars might sink into her eyes. He drew her gently to him and kissed her brow—a precious kiss, though brow and lips were cold. A shiver ran through Gabrielle, causeless as the tremor in the leaves above her head.

"I knew," she said most simply, "that I need not fear you. In all the world I'd come to you for sympathy and protection."

Presently Gabrielle drew away from him, stooped and picked up the jewelled star which he had cast upon the ground. "God made you for this," she

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said, and fastened it round his neck. "It is your destiny."

When this was done Gabrielle smiled, lifted the star to her lips and kissed it: "Good-night, Murad."

Back through the starlit night she went. Back through the pale and passionless garden she went.

She hesitated beside a shining bush of jasmine; she wavered at the pomegranate tree; she tottered at the vines, but she went on, and vanished.

The stars looked down upon Murad standing alone—those mocking street-lamps of his shattered city which lieth in the mythical Country of Delight.

CHAPTER XXXI

THE FIRST OF SAFAR

“THE day is coming ; the day is breaking,” Gabrielle murmured over and over to herself, although it was yet dark in her room, and not even the pallor of false morning had crept in to frighten her.

“It is coming ! It is coming !” The thought kept dinning at her brain until it was like to drive her mad. “It is almost here. Almost.”

Gabrielle rose from a pillow which had granted her no rest, glided to the window and crouched on the floor beside it. A shivering huddle of white and wretchedness, she leaned her chin upon the window-ledge. The stars had not begun to fade. Each one seemed to be looking straight at Gabrielle, and each reminded her of something Murad had said. Mother of Mercy ! could she ever forget what those stars had witnessed during her three nights in the garden ? Could she ever forget what those stars knew ?—for stars must know what a woman feels.

She looked up at them—those street-lamps of the City of Jewels, the capital of the Country of Delight. Red-eyed Antares stared down at her, and Gabrielle hid her face. Antares knew.

Then Gabrielle looked up again, and smiled, and was not ashamed. The stars were her friends ; they shared her secret. It is comforting to be partner with the stars.

GABRIELLE

But they were leaving her now ; they were growing dim. That pitiless streak above the tree-tops waxed broader as though the heart of the forest were being consumed. Higher into the sky it climbed. The stars fled. Gabrielle wished that she might bid the sun stand still. Freely would she have halted the universe, and doomed her country to perpetual night.

A tiny beetle, with wings of red and black and gold, went crawling across the window-ledge. A spider's web entangled it. Indifferently Gabrielle watched the struggling thing, for all creatures must have their troubles. Then she began to feel a kinship for the beetle, it was so helpless and so unconsidered.

She wondered if the beetle thought, if the beetle felt and suffered. She wondered if such an atom of life could love. God had made the beetle, and God had set the snare of the spider in its path. By whose fault did the snare and the temptation and the peril come to her? God had not given her strength to overcome them all. A bitter resentment boiled in Gabrielle's soul, surged into her throat and choked her. Why should God sit placidly upon His throne and permit this agony? If God were just and merciful would He do it?

Never before had Gabrielle dared ask such questions of herself, or dared to think. She stood aghast at her own blasphemy. Then she clenched her lips and steeled her heart. It was the truth ; she dared to think, she dared to feel, she dared to resent. She thrust out her hand and rent the spider's web—brushed the meshes from the beetle's wing and flung it free into the air. Thankless beetle ! It flew away. Yet Gabrielle felt a sense of elation that she had

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pitted her will against the Divine, and righted one crime against the helpless.

The beetle was gone. The spider cowered in his lair. No mighty hand reached downward from the sky to rend the web which encompassed Gabrielle. The sky was blank and grim and hopeless.

Petition and prayer she cast into the heavens. No answer came. A deaf God, blind and dumb, ignored alike her blasphemy and her prayers.

Long streaks of crimson shot through the ambient air like spokes of a fiery wheel. A burning hub appeared. The imperial sun emerged, rested an instant on the tree-tops and bounded upward into space. Alone he rode, proud and solitary. "He brooks no brother near the throne;" Gabrielle repeated a remark that Murad once had made when he compared this sun unto the sultan. She smiled to herself—everything reminded her of Murad. The stars reminded her of him—the river and the skies, all the broad universe, were but echoes of what Murad had taught her.

There was the sun—Murad's country lay in the throbbing heart of the sun. There was the river—had he not told her many times of those rivers in paradise more odoriferous than musk and whiter than milk? Had he not told her of Hindoo girls beside the Ganges? Of the Euphrates that watered Eden? How could she help thinking of Murad when she looked upon the river?

"It is the day—the First of Safar," Gabrielle murmured to herself. She rose and stood at the window, a chill wind pressing her garment against her. The day of terror had come; God had deserted her. She dropped her arms.

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Gabrielle watched the sun as if she half expected it to change its course. And the river, too; but that flowed on as usual, heedless whether Murad lived or died. Some crows flew over her head towards the woods crowing discordantly. Their clamor irritated her.

A man strode by whistling, going to his work at the rice mill. Gabrielle hated him for his merry indifference. She forgot to draw the curtain as he glanced at her window. The man turned his head before passing out of view. She stared back at him and wondered why he should smile at her misery.

But the day had come; it was the First of Safar. That was the important thing. Presently she heard Jean moving around his room very quietly so as not to disturb her. She began dressing. Jean would soon be knocking at her door, telling her that the sun was in the skies, and only lazy girls kept their beds. As if she did not know the sun had risen.

Gabrielle took up one dress after another. "Not this: nor that: nor that." She went to the closet, and took out her discarded convent garb. Gabrielle felt safer in that. During all the years she had worn it she had never known a sorrow. Neither had she known happiness—as she knew happiness now.

"It was in this that he first saw me—unless—unless——" She thought of the unsolved riddle of the fountain, flushed happily, and drew the coarse gray folds about her.

When Gabrielle was clad, she opened her door and came face to face with Grosjean. Even so blind a father as Jean could see that all was not well.

"What ails my Gabrielle?" His big voice dropped tenderly, then rose again as he caught her arm and

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began to tease: "Come, take cheer. Surely his ship will arrive within the week."

Man as he was, Grosjean comprehended that his daughter was not fretting for her husband. So he held his peace.

Their breakfast was silent. The helpless hands of Grosjean lay idly on the table. Gabrielle ate nothing. She did not even mislead him by crumbling the food upon her plate.

"I shall go to the governor at once," Grosjean said, and went away. Gabrielle watched him as far as she could see.

Presently Margot, too, departed at this most unaccustomed hour for the convent. Gabrielle asked no questions. She dropped the oaken bar into its socket and came back through the silent house. "Alone," she said to herself again and again; "alone; alone."

She drifted into her own little garden, familiar, cheerless and empty. Feelings came and went, like all others, in the rush of a multitude. There was but one perpetual thought in her mind which neither came nor went—it was always there. Gabrielle glanced at the wall, stopped and shook her head defiantly: "Why shouldn't I? What could happen? It is the last day." She passed through the scuppernong arbor, through the breach in the wall, and stood on the farther side.

Once more the garden of her childhood had become to her a place of fear. She dreaded to part the vines and look beyond; perhaps they were hiding something. But Gabrielle had her father's courage, and she dared.

"My Gabrielle, I have waited long."

Murad's voice greeted her, full and strong, and

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buoyant with life. There was something in his tone, something in that one quick step which he took towards her—something, she knew not what—but it sent the blood tingling to her heart and lips and brain.

Silent she stood, clutching at a girder of the grape. She attempted to speak but could not. She was cold; and she stifled as one who tries to cry out in a dream. She had planned a thousand things to tell him if he lived. Now she could not even speak to him. He had been waiting for her—waiting for her; in the supreme joy of that Gabrielle forgot all else.

“Come,” he said. He took her by the hand and she followed unresistingly to their sacred place upon the bench.

“Sit there.” He spoke, and Gabrielle obeyed him.

The pavilion was gone. The cushions and the couch and the rugs—all were gone, gone like a passing dream. Gabrielle did not miss them; she noted no change in the garden. Murad was here; that was sufficient. He wanted to speak to her; she would listen.

He stood before her in the old familiar attitude, with folded arms and black eyes that glittered more fervidly than the star. The color of his robe she did not note; she only saw that his face was very pale. His voice came low, and she held her breath.

“Gabrielle, this is the First of Safar.”

“Yes, it is the day,” she answered.

“The day of the crucible,” he said; “the day of choice. Listen. You love me, and my soul bows in reverence. These nights in the garden alone with you have made me care naught for the Prophet’s paradise. The Prophet’s paradise could not be happier;

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religion offers me nothing half so pure. The faith of ages promises no reward that is comparable with this."

Murad's figure straightened. Gabrielle looked at him wonderingly, he seemed so tall and strong. He lifted both his arms unto the skies as if addressing some false god whom he had renounced.

"I cast them all aside," he burst out; "I who have been sleeping, I have waked."

Gabrielle did not gasp or stir a lash. With parted lips she held her face upturned to his, as the famished desert to a storm of rain which sinks and leaves no sign. She sat utterly still and listened. He had bade her listen.

"Gabrielle, it is just that you should know of me. My mother was a Venetian, a Christian; my father the mightiest monarch of the East. She was his favorite wife; I his chosen son. You cannot imagine the luxury with which my father surrounded me, the indolence, the voluptuous delights. Were I to tell you of my youth you would hate me—you would not let me kiss the sand you tread. Neither would you understand, for the ways of the West are not the ways of the East. Blood runs slow in the West. The East alone knows how to crowd a lifetime into one delirious night, then to welcome a death most gladly purchased.

"At twenty I was wild, ungoverned, nothing balked my whim. After a night of maddest revel, such as had never been in Bagdad, I forsook my gardens and freed my dancing-girls. I went into the world and studied much. Ill hap befell my country. My father followed evil counsellors and the people groaned. Such as murmured he struck dead. Yet

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he lived in dread of revolt and assassination. So he gave it out that I should be his successor in the stead of Achmet, my older brother. Whereat the people were comforted, and made patience to wait. Achmet did away with our father and seized the throne. All else you know." Murad paused, then went on again, for Gabrielle made no sign.

"But the leaven works. The pile is ready for the torch. My friends will soon be here with their warship. If I but outlive this day, and set my standards to the breeze, I shall be the sultan." Murad's voice sounded dull and spiritless, lacking the enthusiasm of warrior or of prophet.

"But Gabrielle, my Gabrielle! You say I have taught you much. Listen to what you have taught me." The full tones rose in Murad's throat—rose and rang and trembled.

"You have taught me that a sultan may be poor indeed; that I should sit upon a barren throne wielding a bauble above a vacant empire—if I had not you."

Gabrielle did not move; she drew a long, sweet breath as though she sipped the edges of a cup from which she dared not drink.

"These last ten years," he continued, "I have led a life as pure as yours. I have belonged not to myself, but to a Cause, and those who trusted me. If you knew the East you might understand. The devotion of Islam hangs upon their belief in my sanctity. When that faith is gone, all is gone, my power is lost." Murad paused as if he found it hard to speak the words which should bring a bitter truth to Gabrielle.

"Gabrielle, you know not what superstitions lurk in

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the fanatical heart of the East. Were I to take but one wife, and she an unbeliever, my own people would turn like wolves and destroy me in my palace. Nay, nay, child, let not thy lips be pale. This is the day of choice; I must choose between you and the Empire.”

Gabrielle’s bosom heaved, like the sea. Her eyes closed, then opened again, brave and blue and deep.

“Oh, my Gabrielle! these days in the garden, these nights beneath the stars, have made me realize what is worthless, and what is of worth. I shall put Empire in the balance with Gabrielle, and toss the crown aside.”

Gabrielle’s fingers twitched, but she gave no other sign of life. His words sunk into her soul rather than entered at the ears.

Rapidly Murad spoke, like a hot wind that swept across the desert: “What have you done for me? You have made me live, I who was dead to human feeling. You have made me a man, I who was an anchorite. You have made me live, and suffer, and kiss the wounds that bled—thanking Allah, for the dead soul bleeds not.”

Gabrielle sat pale, dizzy, immovable, her fingers grasping the bench and her eyes wide open. Murad came gently to her, took her face in both his hands, and gazed long into that azure sea wherein his soul had found itself.

“Blue,” he whispered; “blue as the innermost heart of heaven. And I see the light. Ah, dear one of my soul! I see the lights which glimmer, then fade away and leave the blue again. And every tiny star, and every glimmer of light within thine eyes I know to be a world—a world infinite.

“Last night you and I did sit upon this bench and

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throb with the beauty of those heavens which are made for us alone. We saw the sparkling worlds which dangled like jewels from the fringes of a cloud ; we saw the panting worlds whose sweet mad breath pulsed downward from a thousand million miles ; we saw the timid worlds which hid their faces when we gazed ; we saw the bolder worlds staring at us in return. We saw the stars which drew veils across their bosoms—stars which stripped their bosoms bare—white stars of purity—and red stars of passion.

“Ah ! Gabrielle, my Gabrielle ! Those worlds are beyond my reach. Many nights they have mocked me when I sat here alone. But all of them, and more, do I possess when I gaze into the twin blue heavens of your eyes. Nay, nay, my star-decked sultana, close not the lattice of thy lashes, which like a dropt portcullis bars my path to paradise. Shall my arms be stretched to you as emptily as I stretch them unto the skies ?”

A sob burst from Gabrielle. She threw herself face downward upon the bench. “No, Murad, no ; do not bend and kiss me. Not yet, not yet——”

“I dare not kiss you—yet,” and his hot breath fanned her cheek. “There’s a flower grows in Trebizond upon which the bees do feed, and the honey thereof driveth men mad. I dare not kiss you—yet.”

Her shoulders quivered at his touch as beneath the branding-iron. He took his hand away, and stood apart. Gabrielle lifted the whiteness of her face. Love had fled from eyes and cheeks to hide in the terror of her heart. Her eyes were bluer for the tears, as skies are bluer for a sanctifying rain. She rose and leaned heavily on the bench. Yet never did she flinch from meeting him gaze to gaze.

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“Murad;” she spoke in a voice of surpassing sweetness, yet with a steady grief that varied not. “Murad, the holy Church forbids me to think of any man save one. I have sinned against the Church, I have sinned against my vows, and sinned against my soul’s peace. I have sinned without repentance. I shall not lie, and say that I am sorry.

“To my husband I am bound forever. To you I can only give what I have given. It is very little; it is all I have. I gave it freely, unconsciously. And now—” she opened her empty arms—“I have given all. I have no more.”

Gabrielle moved from the brownness of the pine-tree’s shade, through the silence of the sunlight, until she stood beside the fountain. The garden had grown desolate. It was dead. The jasmine odors reminded her of that stifling sweetness which uprises round the dead.

Murad made no effort to touch or to detain her. She passed on a step or two. Then Murad spoke harshly, quoting the bitter words of an Eastern poet: “*The raven of parting croaks loud at the door.*”

Gabrielle stopped; she turned upon him a face so pinched with agony that Murad was ashamed. He caught her by the sleeve and begged, “Forgive me, Gabrielle, forgive; I meant not to make your way the harder.”

“There’s naught to forgive,” she answered in a voice which had passed the bounds of suffering. “I have all to thank you for—the joy of these weeks, the joy of the future.”

“The joy—of the future?”

“Yes, of the future; a joy which nothing can take from me.”

GABRIELLE

They stood in this wise, facing each other, when there came a knock on the street door, and the shout, "Gabrielle! Gabrielle!"

Gabrielle roused herself: "It is my father. I barred the door. He cannot get in. I must go. I must——"

CHAPTER XXXII

THE MOON IN SCORPIO

“GABRIELLE! Gabrielle!” Grosjean’s shout came over the wall and reverberated through the garden as harsh as the call of the resurrection angel. To the woman who obeyed, it marked the end of time, the beginning of blank eternity.

In a sort of stupor Gabrielle ran along the path and gained her own side of the wall.

“Gabrielle, where are you?”

She ran through the hall, dragged the oaken bar from its socket and let it fall with a clatter. She opened the door and sprang out upon her father. “Here am I. I wanted to see if you would be angry. You were so cross at me this morning.”

Gabrielle kissed her father and drew him into the hallway. There she dropped her head upon his bosom and sobbed. Before Grosjean had time to wonder, she looked up again and laughed, “Oh, dear! what a fool I am.”

Grosjean, discreet man, asked no questions; women and winds give no reasons. “Come,” he said; “let us go up the stair. We must have a talk.”

“Little woman,” he began when they had taken their seats together in the room which had been her mother’s, “the governor has advices that the Narbonne will arrive within the week. She has sailed from Havana but will touch at Biloxi. There are

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matters which you should know. We are quite alone and can speak without restraint.”

Gabrielle slipped from the divan and seated herself upon a hassock at his feet. She leaned upon his knee and looked up, making brave pretence of attention. It mattered little to her what he said ; she was grateful that she would not be obliged to answer.

“Now that you are in such happy spirits,” Grosjean pinched her cheek till the color came, “I wish to tell you of yourself, and of the duties which will fall to you in France.”

Gabrielle tried honestly to listen ; perhaps she did hear a few of his words. Grosjean, quite as a matter of fact, told her of the proud position she would occupy beyond the seas.

But Gabrielle’s thoughts strayed backward to the garden ; to her there could be no other world. All the joy and all the sorrow of the universe were born in the garden, and would die in the garden. As one who hears a murmur in the distance Gabrielle caught a word or two : “Your Uncle Paul-Marie—Duc d’Amblemont-Courtenay—direct line from King Louis the Saint. Under this king the banner of the raven floated in Palestine——” Gabrielle heard this quite distinctly.

“——Great possessions—when he died I inherited the title—exiled but without humiliation. Count de Tonnay will one day succeed his father as Marquis de Fersan——”

Grosjean talked on and on, stroking her hair and patting her cheek. These were merely names to Gabrielle, and did not interest her. Yet she was glad he kept on talking, for she could think—think—think.

Twice or thrice Grosjean attempted to tell Gabrielle

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the reason why he and his brother lived in Louisiana. But he had dismally failed to make plain the causes of Vimont's death, and he wisely left this task to her husband.

For an hour, perhaps two, Grosjean, Duc d'Amblemont-Courtenay, talked with his daughter, caressing her as a father should.

"Are you not delighted, my Gabrielle, that you shall be a duchess and live in a great palace——?"

Gabrielle turned toward him and the cry burst from her heart before she was aware, "But I do not want to go; I——"

"There! There! Rest your head upon my knee and tell me. Yes, I know how you dread going into the great world. But you will soon grow accustomed to it. The court of France is full of pleasures—and dangers. Yet 'tis safe enough for my Gabrielle, and you will come to love your gallant young soldier—never fear."

Gabrielle buried her face upon that broad breast which was so comforting, and sobbed.

"From all report my Gabrielle is fortunate in having a man of unsullied honor for her husband. I doubt if there be another such as De Tonnay near the throne of France. Much responsibility will be upon you to guard the honor of two such names." Gabrielle burst into a controlless weeping, whereat Grosjean drew her closer in his arms.

When she had quieted and was looking out of the window with tear-dimmed eyes and aching heart, she saw the rising of a storm outside. It came on with a sickening oppression that stifled her. She left her father and walked to the open window.

Grosjean watched the girl as she leaned her head

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against the casing. "My own child," he thought, remembering the months he had spent in the woods where mankind's babble could not worry him. Then he slipped away so quietly that Gabrielle did not miss him.

Midnight passed and Gabrielle crouched beside the window, peering through the panes. The storm roared and screamed, lashed the river and wrote its blazing wrath across the skies.

Once, when the lightning flashed, she saw a ship passing up the river with topsails set. Gabrielle knew enough to be sure it was skilfully handled and would safely turn the point into a place of shelter. It was a large ship of war, and French, perhaps Murad's ship. Joy! Joy! His friends had come. This she saw in the space of a thought. When the lightning flashed again the ship was gone.

After that Gabrielle stared until her eyes grew set. Yet she saw nothing. All the while she kept vigil upon that inner door lest her father should come in to inquire if she feared. Twice Grosjean had come, and twice she had been quick enough to reach her bed and feign sleep.

She saw nothing; she heard nothing. Not a sound uprose from earth or wood or river—only the crash of breaking branches, the dashing of the waves, the incessant artillery of the heavens.

Another hour passed; Gabrielle stared upon the river. She knew there was a river out there somewhere in that monotone of black.

Suddenly, and with less of warning than the bolt that kills, a fiery chasm zigzagged across the skies, while a thunderous convulsion shook the earth.

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Gabrielle shrieked as if she were struck and blinded. But 'twas not that which wrenched the cry from her lips. There—right before her—so close she felt she could have put her hands upon it—there was a ship—a black ship—a tossing, tumbling ship—with every spar and rope and bit of rigging sharp drawn against the forest by that pitiless glare. The lightning seared it upon her eyeballs, and Gabrielle shrieked: “The sultan’s ship!”

It was the sultan’s ship, and Gabrielle had recognized it.

Grosjean burst into the room: “Gabrielle, did you speak? Are you frightened?”

“Yes,” she answered from the window. “I was frightened—at the lightning. Jean! Jean!” She clung to his neck an instant, then cast him from her and ran to the window again. She must watch—watch—watch. Grosjean followed and took her hand. She tore herself away: “But I am all right again, indeed I am. I must have been very sound asleep. Go back to your room. Good-night! Good-night!” Gabrielle pushed him from the room, then crept to her bed and lay down.

“I shall leave the door ajar,” suggested Grosjean.

“No, I beg you; it is no use; please close it—tight.”

Grosjean shut the door.

She immediately bounded to the window again, staring into the darkness through the pelting rain, staring at the blackness of the night. “I must have imagined it,” she said; “I am so weak and nervous.” She stopped in the middle of the floor, and thought: “I wonder if Jean is asleep.”

A daring purpose came to Gabrielle, a persistent desire which would not be dislodged. She would go

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into the garden, despite the storm and the night. Perhaps the lamp was burning in Murad's window. This would reassure her.

But if Jean should wake and miss her—what? It mattered not—nothing mattered. She crept to his door and listened. Then to the door in the hall. The rain made much noise upon the roof, and the thunder.

“I am a fool, a fool,” she kept saying to herself; yet she drew the cloak around her, found a pair of shoes, and ran down the stair.

At the hall door she stopped and feared to open it. 'Twould let in a gust of wind and slam every door in the house. Gabrielle went into the kitchen and closed it carefully. Then she raised a window and climbed out into the night.

In the darkest hour of the morning the back door to Dumb House was cautiously opened. A man's figure, muffled and cloaked, stole into the outer darkness from the denser black within. He stood upon the threshold listening, then whispered to another man who was not visible. The door closed and the lock clicked.

It was Murad. He waited in the doorway until something fell at his feet from the upper window—something heavy wrapped in a piece of white cloth. He stooped, picked up the cloth and took out a key which he placed in his girdle. “Allah keep you, Selim,” he said. The window, like the door, was shut.

After another moment of listening Murad pulled his cloak about him and stepped into the storm. With head bent before the rushing rain, he ran along the path where he knew every bush and shrub. If a rose reached out and caught his robe it was the grasp of a

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friend. If the pomegranate brushed his cheek, it was in sympathy, and the shedded raindrops were its tears.

Murad pushed on, head down, and paused in front of the grapevine, through which Gabrielle always came. Here he halted again; had human beings been abroad the storm would not have permitted him to hear them.

Murad parted the vine and disappeared. It was his first venture into the path which Gabrielle had sanctified.

He groped about until he found the breach. "It is destiny," he said. "Love and safety."

Murad passed through without difficulty. On the farther side there was a pile of bricks lying against the wall. He replaced them in the breach, fitting them as best he could.

When the hole was closed, Murad rested beneath the vines.

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE VENGEANCE

MORN had almost come. Gabrielle crouched once more at her window, with damp hair blown about her face, and a dripping cloak that left its trail along the floor. A dense black vacancy gaped in front of her—a chasm infernal, bottomless and without sides, wherein all sense of space was swallowed up. The demons of the storm had screamed themselves hoarse, and now, whining like whipped curs, they cowered in distant corners of the sky.

The river beat spitefully against the shore, venting its resentment on the grass and on the levee. Gabrielle raised the sash at intervals, inch by inch, so she might look out and see the front of Dumb House. But strain her eyes as she might, she saw nothing.

Earnestly and long she sought to descry some blacker spot, some deeper shadow which she might identify as the ship. Or had she really seen a ship? Yes, surely she had seen the sultan's ship. She could describe every spar and mast and bit of rigging; she could even distinguish the men tugging at ropes, clinging to bulwarks, and striving to stand upon the plunging decks. Yet Gabrielle had dreamed so many dreams and conjured up so many visions, she had come to doubt her own sight. She must wait, wait until morn and certainty would come. God of

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Patience! how long must she wait? Because she was a woman must she wait and wait forever, with clenched hands and lips struck dumb by guilt?

Her shoes were muddy and her hair disordered by the rain outside—what mattered it? She must wait.

Her heart beat on, or stopped as it chose, muffled its own terror with a dull convulsion now and then which sent the sluggish blood into her finger tips. She must wait.

Her head rested on the window-ledge, and no longer ached; it had forgot to throb and burn. She must wait. She no longer listened for her father's waking; she no longer cared.

Dawn must come; night could not cling forever to the world. Sometimes she wished the darkness would never lift; the day might be so brutally frank.

A thin gray streak began to outline the tree-tops beyond the river. The glow began to spill out across the water as though the world on the other side were overflowing with soft gray streaks.

Now she could see the whole bosom of the river. It was vacant. There was no black-hulled vessel riding at anchor, no sign of that other ship which went by hours before. Both those phantoms of the night were gone.

"I must know what has happened," she murmured; "I cannot wait."

Gabrielle slipped from the room without the slightest noise. The gray skirt was wet about her ankles, and her cloak hung heavy from its drenching of the night. She passed out of her room, pale and determined; she tripped softly down the stair, neither foot-beat nor heart-beat giving forth a sound. She

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had no fears about opening the door, for the wind had ceased.

Gabrielle thrust aside the vines on the far side of the wall. The mist hung heavy over all, and nothing stirred. She gained the path unseen and unmolested.

There she hesitated. Dumb House stood dripping in the gloom. The pine-tree reared its crest into the clouds. Which way would she go? Surely towards the house. Instinct guided her; it was the habit of limb and love to turn towards the fountain.

For the first time Gabrielle glanced to the ground, and terror choked her. The path was trampled and torn by the passing of many feet; the hedges were broken; a broad swath ran from the door of Dumb House straight through the garden, as though a squad of men had marched across.

There were other footprints farther down the path—deeper footprints filled with water. The garden had been profaned. Murder had invaded it, and like a violated temple the garden held up its altars for day and God to view.

Gabrielle stumbled on in the direction of the fountain. With a stifled cry she rushed to the turn in the path and snatched up a fragment of stuff which had caught upon a thorn. It hung in moistened tatters, too limp to flutter. She unwound it with fingers desperately strong—a part of Murad's robe.

A few steps beyond she saw the place where his body must have been dragged through the mud. Here it had rested. There was a footprint filled with diluted blood.

Gabrielle lifted her skirt to run when she saw something glitter beneath a clump of violets. She

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stooped, then dropped upon her knees. It was the Star of Murad, trampled into the mud. There it lay, with broken chain and bended points, but glittering and defiant. Gabrielle thrust the cold wet thing into her bosom and ran on again.

She passed the bananas and sped down the last little stretch which led to the fountain. The foot-prints grew thicker and centered in the space beneath the pine. The ground had been upturned and clods of fresh earth were scattered everywhere. Her foot slipped in the mud; she tottered on. Lifting her eyes, she gave a cry, and halted, dead still.

There, beside the pine-tree, were two strangers—old men—kneeling in the mud—two men with white beards and flowing robes. Their rich silks dragged in the water and dabbled in the mud. Their turbans hung limp and flabby. They knelt, facing each other a trifling space apart. They rocked to and fro, mumbling to themselves.

Gabrielle had made a noise and cried aloud; yet neither of them turned. They swayed their bodies back and forth, moaning a chant, and muttering words she could not understand. All of this Gabrielle saw in that twinkle of an eye which changes the living to the dead—the dead to the living.

And then! She saw something more. Holy God! The Vengeance of the Sultan!

Between the two men was the tablet of brass. There it lay, covering a new-made grave. It had traversed the globe to fulfil the sultan's bloody decree. Gabrielle could not read a syllable of its inscription, but she knew it well, for Murad had told her.

She staggered forward, pressing her hands against

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her temples. The two men gave not over their moanings and lamentations, buffeting their faces and tearing their beards. Why were they here? Where did they come from? Gabrielle did not care.

She pressed between them and stared down at the tablet. There were tracks of feet and smudges of fingers across it. Drops of dew clung to it, like sweat to the brow of the dead.

Gabrielle stood erect and tearless. It had happened. She moaned aloud, joining her voice unconsciously to the wailing of those mysterious men. "Oh, Murad! Murad! Had I only gone with you—gone to the forest, or the seas,—anywhere. Why should I have cared? I could have saved you. Now—now——" Her knees gave way; she fell lengthwise adown the tablet, her cheek pressed close against the brass.

The two men did not stir, though she fell directly between them. They swayed back and forth as before, and their turbans touched her, one on either side. The mist eddied upward. The pine dripped its slow residue of rain. The mourners mourned and tore their beards, lamenting after the fashion of the faithful. Then their chanting ceased. Silence and dawn hung above the garden.

Suddenly from out of the gloom betwixt them and Dumb House running steps came spattering through the mud.

When Murad turned the last curve in the path, he, like Gabrielle, halted in amazement to see these swaying figures on the ground. But 'twas not these men he sought.

"She has come; I saw her;" he spoke aloud. Then he saw the gray dress.

Murad bounded forward, thrusting the men aside

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as though they had been clods beneath his feet. He knelt beside Gabrielle and raised her on his knee. Then he turned like a madman to the others: "Dogs of the dust, give aid."

Neither of them heeded him. He spoke again—he shouted. Then the man who had been most violently jostled seemed to hear. He glanced dully into Murad's face—stumbled to his feet with a cry of terror and disbelief. He gave a sharp exclamation in his own tongue.

Murad answered roughly in the same dialect, and called this man by his name, "Younan ben Efitamous."

The other mourner rose in like fashion, but opened not his lips. He only stared at Murad. To the woman neither of them looked.

With one accord they prostrated themselves, beating their foreheads against the ground, and crawling through the mud to Murad's feet.

With his free hand Murad snatched the turban from the head of Younan, and smote him. "Rise, Younan; rise, Taleb," he commanded in that tone which no Moslem dared to disobey.

Instantly they arose, and obedient to Murad's gesture, gave assistance to the girl—for Younan ben Efitamous was reckoned a marvellous physician in the East.

Together he and Murad lifted Gabrielle with all tenderness to the bench. Murad tore the robe from Taleb and folded it beneath her head. She rested with her head in Murad's lap while Younan chafed her hands and composed her limbs. At a nod Taleb fetched water from the fountain, wetting a cloth, wherewith to bathe her temples.

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Murad watched anxiously the expression of that older man whose power could bring the dead to life. Presently the physician smiled. Then he rose from his crouching position beside Gabrielle, and signified that all was well. Murad stroked her forehead and waited for her to revive.

The while he spoke hurriedly with Younan and Taleb, pointing to the house, the garden, and indicating the grave beneath the pine. "Selim," he said.

Younan, with the love of an old man for his prince, asked many questions, and Murad told him briefly the state of his case.

In return Younan by swift words informed his master how he had come in the sultan's ship, Al Borak, hoping to use stratagem and delay until Tuerto might arrive from Santo Domingo. For of this Younan had advices. Verily the hand of Allah hath been made manifest, preserving in His own way him whom He had anointed and ordained to empire.

To all of this Murad gave slight heed, for Gabrielle engrossed his thought.

The other man, who had remained behind with Younan, being of humbler station, durst take no part in talk between his betters. Taleb drew back as befitted his condition. Yet his eyes gave not over staring at the prophet who had appeared out of the grave whilst they were mourning. He, Taleb,—free man of Medina,—he was witness to the miracle.

Gabrielle stirred. Murad owned a skill in surgery and knew she must speedily awake.

He nodded to Younan. It was sufficient. Both men prostrated themselves to the earth, withdrew, and passed into the Dumb House, casting their eyes not backwards upon the privacy of their prince.

CHAPTER XXXIV

THE SIN OF GABRIELLE

THE mist had slowly lifted from the garden and floated over the wall like smoke.

Gabrielle lay with her head in Murad's lap. She stirred and moaned. Her eyelids quivered; breath trembled at her lips. A flush crossed her cheeks and disappeared. Her bosom fluttered, rose gently, and fell.

Murad stroked her temples and chafed her hands; yet he held his face away, fearing to terrify her when she waked.

She opened her eyes dully and saw nothing but the pine-tree's canopy. Then she closed them again, content to rest as she was. "Gabrielle," he whispered; "fruit of my heart; blue flower of paradise——" She smiled faintly, as though it were in sleep; her hand crept into his and clasped it.

"Sherin of my soul,"—he bent above her and spoke exceeding low, jealous of the winds, jealous of the mists—"Sherin of my soul, Ferhad, thy lover, is not dead, but lives, and lives for thee. Listen, he speaks. Allah hath preserved his life and delivered it unto thee. His heart is like a lamp which smouldered in a tomb; now it blazes when air is given it to breathe. Up, my Gabrielle! I say unto thee as God spake to Mahomet, 'Verily, were it not for thee the heavens had not been created'! Up! Up!"

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Gabrielle lay full length upon the bench, and trembled in every limb. Slowly her eyelids unclosed. Murad was bending over her and his lips were dangerously near. She clasped his hand; it was warm and strong and—living. She dared not look; she dared not be sure. She shut her eyes to the daylight, and opened her soul to dreams.

Murad felt the tremor that ran through her body. He saw the color creep into her lips, glow on her cheek, and tint the alabaster of her eyelids. He felt the weight of her head and shoulders lessen in his lap. Suddenly she lifted both her arms, wound them round his neck and drew herself close against his heart.

By the sheer strength of her round young arms, Gabrielle raised herself into Murad's bosom. By the power of her lithe young body she held herself firm, and rested there content. Then, as a weary wanderer who has come home at last, arms and head and body all relaxed in the blessed security she had won.

But Gabrielle still hid her face, burying it amongst the folds of that foreign garb which had become so dear. The sunny tresses of France matted like a veil about her forehead; and the blacker hair of him who had suckled at the breast of the sun dropped down and mingled with them. Murad held her close, very close, and let her have her way of silence.

Gabrielle wondered at herself—that the madness and the thrill of love as she imagined it should be so strangely absent. She marvelled that her heart should beat so quietly, and that she found a more unquestioning peace than that which came to her upon the convent pillow. Mother Louise could not have been more comforting than Murad, whose arms kept her so very safe, and whose lips kissed her brow.

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And sweet were the whispers that she heard—whispers that grew bolder, doubts that became certainty, hopes that were welded into possession.

“Look up, Gabrielle! Rejoice with me! The First of Safar has passed. Allah hath granted me life, and crowned it with thy love. Exult! Exult! Open thy brigand eyes, which have plundered me of my soul.”

His buoyant voice aroused her as a draught of ruddy wine. She sat upright and turned her fearless eyes upon him—dim eyes, glistening eyes, but brilliant and unafraid.

“Murad, I had such a frightful dream. I came into the garden and thought I saw your grave. Two men were sitting beside it. I did not suffer. No. My heart was already dead. I looked down upon it, then everything went dark and I fell—” Gabrielle had not yet glanced towards the foot of the pine—“I fell there,” she pointed. “I fell—there!” Gabrielle sprang up with a scream, for she pointed at the tablet of brass. She shuddered and clung to Murad as if some power might wrest him from her again. Her eyes searched the garden.

“Where are the two men? I saw them—kneeling there—and mumbling! Two ugly old men—with beards?”

“Peace, my Gabrielle;” Murad comforted her as a lover may. “Yes, there were two men. I have sent them away—into the house.”

He nodded towards the door of Dumb House. Gabrielle smiled up into his face, and the peace that was Murad’s shone upon her soul.

“Sit here,” he said, leading her to the bench; “you should know.” Murad stood apart from her,

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alone, his face white with wrath. His slow arm swept about him, indicating the trampled herbage, the scattered dirt, the upturned sod—the tablet.

“The work of my royal brother—the Vengeance of the Sultan. And there lieth Selim—Selim the Sacrifice, who gave himself to die that I and the Cause might live. Earth, the Treasurer, hath laid him away. Shall I tell you what hap befell us in the night?” Gabrielle nodded.

“The night came on. Selim grew restless. I sat at my table and cared not. Selim peered from the windows and listened from the doors. Chance so willed it that we stood together at the eastern window when the lamp of God showed us the murderer’s ship. It was my hour. I could not fly. Destiny would be fulfilled as well in the forests as in the house. The moon was in Scorpio. I could die as a Sherif dies. I came to my table and sat. Yet, thinking of you, my Gabrielle, there rose in my heart a rebellious desire to live, to thwart Destiny by any means. I believed then ’twas written that I should die, else, were life avouched me you would have shared it.”

Gabrielle caught her breath. Yes, she had been to blame. She knew it.

“I clad myself in royal robes, placed the Star of Murad on my breast, and waited. Selim paced the room like a panther, eying me at every turn. He stood before me and grasped my shoulder. ‘Heed me, Murad, thine hour is *not* come; the Cause is *not* lost. Allah hath not decreed a crime so monstrous. Heed me, Murad! Men say I resemble thee; I am of thy height and figure. My skin is pale as thine from biding in this house. Strip those robes—’ he, Selim the slave, commanded like a king, and I, Murad the

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Prince Imperial, obeyed him like a slave—‘Strip those robes; thy turban; thy shoes; now, thy Star. Take these.’ I clad myself in Selim’s garments. Then he bade me go and hide within the garden. ‘I have disobeyed thee, Murad,’ he explained; ‘thy gold and jewels are secreted in the hollow oak. I have placed a letter beneath Grosjean’s door, telling him to bestow them all upon his daughter, in case we both are slain this night.’

“‘Heed me, Murad!’ again he said. ‘This is not all for thee, despite my great love. It is for the Cause. Each man doeth what he can. Should *thy* life be taken, then *our* lives are but as empty vessels from which the wine is spilled.’ We embraced each other. Then I came into the garden and Selim threw me the key that I might return if fate so ordained. Can you guess, my Gabrielle, where it was I hid?”

Gabrielle’s eyes lighted. She guessed it.

“Yes,” he said; “the breach in the wall that you made with your baby hands pointed me to safety. I bided the night within your garden.”

“At what hour did you come?” Gabrielle asked.

“I know not; perhaps the second hour before dawn.”

“And you went through the wall into our garden?”

“Yes,” he answered her. Gabrielle smiled to think how very near they must have come to meeting. But she settled back on the bench and said nothing, her eyes being drawn resistlessly to that tablet of brass.

“And—they murdered Selim—in the night?” she asked.

“Yes, there were perchance as many as five score

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men—I came back through the wall and watched as best I could. It was very dark.”

“And who were the two men that I saw?”

“My friends, Younan and Taleb; they came with the sultan’s ship, hoping to succor me, but remained to lament above my grave.”

“Yes, I remember clearly now; I must have fallen between them.”

“I found you lying there, colder than the brass;” Murad spoke with a tenderness infinite. “I warmed you back to life; I warmed you with my hands, my breath, I held you to my bosom. The very warmth of your body belongs to me; it is mine, for I have made it.”

There was silence in the garden. The skies grew brighter and the day came on. Murad’s lips trembled with the intensity of his thought.

“Gabrielle! Gabrielle!” Words broke from him like maddened horses beyond all control. “Gabrielle, it is destiny that you and I were created for each other. Though we were born at the ends of the earth—though we are enemies in blood, faith and tradition, the cords of destiny have bound us together. For this did I blindly cast off the follies of my youth. For this have I survived the carnage of battle, escaped the assassin, passed intrigue and disaster—riding the seas and outliving this night of murder. The hand of Allah hath stamped our love with the seal of His approbation. And you? You have grown here in this garden, a lone white lily, knowing naught of other men, waiting for me. The Power that set the moon in the heavens hath made the tides of your blood to ebb and flow for me alone; the Power that lighted the sun and bade the comets feed it, hath

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lighted a fire at the altar of thy heart and bade me to keep it living. That Power hath put your hand in mine, hath pressed your bosom unto me, and laid us lip to lip forever. Come, Gabrielle, let us be gone."

The crimson flooded into Gabrielle's cheeks and abided there. With one quick movement she brushed her tangled hair from temples and from brow. Never had she looked so fresh and girlish, so radiant with delicious coloring. Love brought back the beauty of which those sleepless nights had robbed her.

Murad looked down upon her. Then of a sudden he stooped, kissed her forehead and sprang up again. "Destiny hath struck its shackles from me," he cried aloud; "I am free!"

Gabrielle watched him wonderingly, for he ran like a mad creature to the foot of the pine and stood upon the brazen tablet. With one hand he pointed downward, the other he uplifted to the eternal stars. His voice rang clear and shrill in a shout of triumph:

"Hear me, Gabrielle! My riddle is solved, my fetters are burst. In this grave lies buried the Prince Imperial. Henceforth I am a man like other men—I am free!" His eyes glittered feverishly; his voice sounded like the blast from a victorious trumpet. He was the Murad of old, the Firebrand of the embattled field—the last hope of Islam in the hour of disaster. And he shouted to Gabrielle the same wild shout which thrilled their beaten hosts with courage. Gabrielle sprang up, her heart beating wildly, and her dazzled eyes fastened upon his slightest motion.

"Listen, Gabrielle, listen!" He came towards her as though he were a panther crouching for a spring. Gabrielle faced him, the blood raging in her veins,

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tingling at her finger tips, and pausing to stamp a riper color on her cheeks.

“Gabrielle, my ship is coming, with war-tried veterans aboard, of whom I am the master—Swords of Allah, holding the keys of heaven and hell. Shall they bear me back to a distracted land, red with murder and black with fire’s trail? There shall be battles and slaughter—then—the Throne of Mahomet, for ’tis decreed.”

Gabrielle’s heart turned to lead within her; she saw the light of battle and not the glint of love in Murad’s eyes.

Then his tone changed. He moved closer. “What care I for the sultans and the kings who have gone before me? Their mouths are stopt with dust. What care I for the Prophet’s promises? His promises are There, and they are *lies*. But you, Gabrielle, you are Here, and you are the *truth*. Listen.

“In the far Arabian desert is the sunken paradise of Irem. There lieth the city whose mosques and minarets are of gold, whose streets are white and desolate, for no living thing is there to tread them. Even the rivers that run thereout are drunk up and lost in the famished sands. No man hath yet attained this paradise, none has lived within that wonder city. Until this day there has been no Prince of Fortune’s Cavalier, as you have made of me, my Gabrielle. You and I shall attain it. Bagdad to lovers is not far. Allah hath reserved it for us since the birth of ages. I shall transport you in the night from this garden unto that other paradise, even as the Afrit transported Bedreddin Hassan from Bassora unto Cairo. Dead you shall be to your kith and kin, whilst the Prince Imperial lies buried beneath this plate of

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brass. You and I shall make the world anew. Come, my Gabrielle."

Murad quivered with the most violent excitement. He held out his arms to Gabrielle.

"Let us go. Let us drink at the square pond of the Prophet, whose waters are whiter than milk. Let us sit beneath the tuba-tree, whose branches bend and set its fruits before us. Beautiful youths shall meet us at the gate, appointed to wait upon us. There shall we live, always at thirty years, for love grows no older. And we shall listen to the ravishing songs of Israfel, whose melody is the most wonderful of all God's creatures. Come, Gabrielle."

He spoke almost as she had heard him when the fever-madness came, and Gabrielle feared. Murad saw this, and quieted as though she had laid her hand upon him.

"Gabrielle," he said in a tone more gentle, "there be other countries to the south bearing good report, fair lands and high mountains and beautiful rivers. Thither could we go, you and I together, and make a paradise." Murad spoke quite calmly of these plans which for weeks had filled his mind.

"In those countries there be none of your people, and none of mine. You and I should be lost to all others. I have wealth, jewels and gold, beyond the treasures of many kings. Come, Gabrielle."

For some while the blood had been fading from Gabrielle's cheeks, leaving them intensely white. She stood erect and let go the hand upon the bench which had half supported her. She advanced a step towards Murad.

At the first opening of Gabrielle's lips, Murad seemed to hear again the tinkle of the temple bells,

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calling him to his faraway land. He heard the murmur of waters purified.

“Murad,” she said, “you ask of me that which you would not have me do. Would you in one moment undo the work of months? Yes, the work of a lifetime—for these weeks in the garden have been all of life to me. You have taught me everything I know; you have taught me the purity that comes from a strong heart like yours—not from an ignorant one like mine. You taught the lesson—I learned it.”

Gabrielle’s voice rose, and as she advanced Murad gave back before her. She pointed fearlessly to the plate of brass: “No, Murad, the Prince Imperial does *not* lie buried there. You do not mean it—that would be the lie of a coward. He is *not* dead, his duties have not been discharged. Selim gave his life in exchange for yours, that you might carry forward the Cause to which God ordained you. Selim cleared the trail, you shall march along it.” Gabrielle’s voice wavered and broke; she pleaded—weak, irresolute woman that she was.

“Oh, Murad, do not tempt me with a love that is of the earth. This frail and wicked body of mine—you may take it where you will, there is naught to hinder you. But you would destroy all that is sweetest in our love.

“Jean spoke of my ‘honor’; I care not for that, it is but a word. The pride of my name is nothing—I heard that name only yesterday. Love has been mine forever. Religion? You are my religion. My hope of heaven? I’d give it freely to go with you into a hovel or a desert—— Back! Murad, stop, for the sake of God! Yes, I mean that, and more—more than you can understand. Myself I would gladly give, but

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you I cannot sacrifice. You shall go back to your country, and go alone; in no other way can you accomplish that which is written."

Murad stood as a man who has slowly turned to stone. He did not move as she approached. She held out her arms, and her voice fell to a whisper: "These poor weak arms of mine clinging at your neck would be a clog to drag you down. The love you give to me would turn your people from you—would destroy you. Nay, do not shake your head; it was you who told me that. It was you who told me all things.

"I can bear the thought of Jean bidding here alone and cursing his dishonored daughter's memory. Mother Louise would strike my name from her list of pupils, my Church would cast me out—I could smile at that. My family name would be dragged in the dust, my husband hurt past the healing. I should be sorry, but that would not hinder me——"

"Do you—not—love me?"

"Love you? Why should I not? God planted love in my heart before I was aware. It is not wicked. It grew and grew until my heart became too small to hold it. It glorified this garden, it overflowed the world, and climbed into the heavens. 'Twas the love of my soul, Murad. Let it be—stainless."

She drew him to her gently. She kissed his hands; she kissed his temples; and last of all she kissed his lips. Then Gabrielle reached into her bosom and took out the Star with its broken chain. He suffered her to twine it round his neck, with the warmth of her breast clinging to it.

"Now, Murad, go. I send you, pure-hearted, to

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your destiny. Go, Murad ; let me keep my love ; do not take it from me—it is all I have. If it be sinful to love you and to kiss you, the sin has been in my heart for many weeks. Let me keep it there to dream upon.”

Murad stood before her, dumb and unmoving, while Gabrielle spoke on :

“Shall I repent this wickedness of mine? No, dear one, not if salvation were the price. I shall glory in it; I shall hoard it. I should boast of it were not the sin too sacred. Why do you look at me so? Of what are you thinking? Yes, I know.”

They stood apart in silence, but Gabrielle understood his thought. She looked at him steadily, and made the promise: “No other man shall ever touch my lips. This day I return to the convent. Our dear Christ will forgive this sin of mine even though I do not repent. He knows I cannot be sorry. I give my life to Him forever, after you are gone. I shall be the proudest, happiest woman who has ever lived in the world.”

“Happy?” His words came hollower than an echo. “Happy?”

“Yes, happy ; proud and happy. Have I not rested in your arms and kissed your lips? I shall clasp to my bosom this precious sin of your love—all my own. Nothing can take it from me. I shall remember your kisses in the murmur of my prayers. In the holiest music I shall hear your voice, and be not ashamed. You shall be mine, forever and forever. Murad! you have glorified me.”

Even as she spoke the sun uprose above the eastern wall. Its first brilliant shaft, straight as a lance on

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rushing charger borne, struck Gabrielle fairly across her brow.

She stood boldly upright, pale and pure, a woman glorified. And she lifted her clear blue eyes to meet the coming day.

CHAPTER XXXV

THE WOMAN GLORIFIED

THE level rays of the sun fell across Murad and Gabrielle. Murad's face rested in shadow, and Gabrielle's gloried in the shine. "This is left me," he said, touching the hilt of his scimitar; "I shall draw it in no impious quarrel."

Murad lifted his head proudly; his blade flashed in the sunlight. From that he looked to Gabrielle; the steel was not bluer than her eyes, or steadier. Murad came closer and raised the hilt to Gabrielle's lips. She kissed the jewels which his hand would grasp in day of battle.

Gabrielle did not speak, or move, or shift her eyes to avoid the rising sun. It was the end of all things.

Murad turned. Never before had he left Gabrielle in the garden; it was always she who went and he that remained. Many times had Murad faced danger and death, but his step faltered as he passed the grapevine. He drove himself forward like a slave beneath the goad. With his thoughts lagging behind him, Murad did not hear the noises in the house, the scuffling of feet and the murmur of voices.

The door was closed. It was thrown violently open as Murad reached the dial. Through the hall he could see the front door standing open likewise, and the hall was full of men. Like a billow they surged along the narrow passage—a billow of tumbling turbans tipped

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with steel, for here and there a curving scimitar sprang like a tongue of spray into the air.

Younan and Taleb strove to stem the tide. Murad saw his two friends shoved aside by a tall broad-shouldered Frenchman who, sword in hand, led the onslaught upon the garden. Out of the door they burst like a pent-up torrent that widens as it strikes the plain. At first Murad saw nothing except a writhing mass of turbans and scimitars, of swarthy faces and wild black eyes. He heard their triumphant shout when they sighted him.

Murad halted. The path was narrow; Gabrielle was behind him, and his blade was in his hand. The Frenchman darted forward and raised his rapier, a glad cry on his lips: "Murad!" he shouted.

"Back, Raymond. Back!" Murad commanded so sharp and clear that De Tonnay stopped.

"El Prophet!"

"Son of the Star!"

Their shouts filled the garden, and two score blades glistened in the sun. Murad lifted his hand, crying aloud—one quick word in a strange tongue.

"Sword of Allah!" ejaculated El Tuerto. The one-eyed hero of an hundred battles prostrated himself upon the ground before his prince, as did all the others. The storm of turbans sank into a docile sea.

De Tonnay stood alone. He stared backward at this throng of gaunt and weather-beaten warriors kneeling with their foreheads to the earth. No less wonderingly did he regard the pale-faced youth who did not even smile upon, or greet them.

El Tuerto, grizzled and grim, lifted the fierceness of his solitary eye: "There is no God but God, and Mahomet is his Prophet. Praise to the Prophet."

GABRIELLE

Murad turned from the prostrate men and glanced behind him.

Gabrielle stood unmoving beneath the pine.

“Murad!” De Tonnay cried, and rushed forward to embrace him.

Murad blocked the path. His steel gleamed menacingly. De Tonnay gave back and marvelled.

One peremptory syllable came from Murad, keen as the crack of a whip. Those desert tribesmen bounded to their feet. Another word—they wheeled and marched into the open door of Dumb House.

“Let us go within, my Raymond,” said Murad, taking De Tonnay by the arm. Murad drew his friend into the hall, locked the door and stuck the key in his girdle. Then he hurried up the stair and shut the window which looked out upon the garden. Gabrielle yet stood beneath the pine.

Murad hastened to those windows which fronted the river and threw them all wide-open. Concealment was at an end.

For a moment he stood gazing upon the powerful ship whose decks swarmed with friends. A group of Tartar fighting-men lounged along the levee, viewing this new land with the calm possession of men who if they chose would take it for their own. Had not their banners overrun the world?

Raymond de Tonnay followed Murad up the stair, at a loss to account for his strange behavior. But none who wore the turban dared intrude upon their lord.

Murad came from the window and took De Tonnay in his arms. “My friend! My comrade!” he said, holding him at full arm’s length to look into his face.

“I joined them at Santo Domingo—with the other

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freebooters." De Tonnay laughed, as he answered the unspoken inquiry. "I had affairs in Louisiana," he further explained.

"I thought as much," Murad replied.

Then the suppressed and fevered energy of the East burst forth. Murad loosed himself from De Tonnay and shouted from the head of the stair, which summoned his warriors.

Up the stair they came like mountain cats from Arabia Petrea—men whose house is the rock, whose camp the torrent bed. They prostrated themselves in a circle round their chief.

Murad raised the veteran El Tuerto and kissed him on either cheek. "My father," he whispered, which gladdened the old man's heart with the pride of a lion for his royal whelp. At a word every man about him sprang up, making himself free as in the tent of a hospitable friend. Murad passed amongst them, patting their shoulders, and calling them affectionately by name, and speaking of the battles they had fought together. His eyes shone strangely; the star upon his breast burned with living flames.

Presently he smiled, stepped back, and twirling his scimitar above his head gave a most peculiar cry—a cry so wild and desperate it seemed to come from an animal with its back against the wall. Throat after throat answered him—the cry of the Meccan desert; sons of the rock parted their passionate lips—Tartar chieftains shouted that unforgotten cry which had sounded through the forum of fallen Rome. It was the cry of wander-lust and murder-lust and plunder-lust—the cry of tameless ages of man by man destroyed—the cry of the only beast that preys upon its kind.

GABRIELLE

The walls of Dumb House shuddered at the cry—such a cry as was never before nor ever since, and never again shall be—the cry of a barbaric past upon the shores of a no less barbaric future. Down sank its mumbling and its murmuring, and died in frightened silence.

Then rose a cry from Murad, the cry of his single throat, the defiance of his single scimitar. It thrilled and tingled in the veins of those bearded men—that cry which upon a losing field had been worth a thousand brawny arms.

Instant they rallied like tigers, men of the desert and the rocks—joining their voices unto his. They formed about him right and left, swinging their blades until a wall of steel defended the sacred person of their prince. Smilingly Murad lifted his hand; they were at peace.

De Tonnay stood dumbfounded, learning a new lesson in battle-madness. As he glanced into Murad's transfigured face he comprehended that power over other men with which the legends of the East endowed him.

Murad laughed, and that right joyously, as he bade his men give back. "Raymond, these are my turtle-doves," he said, good-humoredly. "It has been long since I have listened to their cooing."

The Moslems separated and moved about the room as they chose; the mood of their prince had changed. Now he was their friend, and all were equal.

Tuerto spoke bluntly in their own tongue. Murad's eyes blazed; he answered with a terse monosyllable. Tuerto gave command. Four of the men disappeared. Murad indicated a dozen whom he desired to remain. The others filed down the stair and went out at the

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front, forming round the door. Curious townspeople were beginning to peer inside.

Murad gave brief instructions as to the taking down of his canopies, the packing of his instruments, the folding of his rugs. Then he passed out, and into the garden.

Gabrielle was gone—he desired to be sure. Murad called half a dozen men and led them through the peace of the garden to the grave beneath the pine. “To the ship,” he said, and pointed at the tablet. Four men bore it away. The ground was levelled and strewn with needles of the pine. Murad glanced upward at the stately tree: “Allah planted it for Selim.”

Under his direction the men gathered his treasure from the hiding-place where Selim had secreted it. As one of them passed, Murad stopped him, opened a packet and took from it a cross of rubies. “It is the symbol of her religion,” he said to himself; “she shall wear it.” This done, he waved the men to leave him alone in the desolate and desecrated garden.

“No,” he shook his head; “what is done is done.” He did not sit upon the bench, did not gaze into the fountain; nor did he pause beside the curtain of the vines.

When Murad re-entered Dumb House he met Grosjean hurrying through the hall. “What means this?” Grosjean questioned.

“My ship has come; we sail to-day—within the hour if that be possible.”

Grosjean caught Murad by the hand and wrung it silently: “Have you need of friends? I shall go——”

GABRIELLE

“No; not you. Your duty is to her—the daughter of whom you spoke.”

“It is true. God speed you.”

“Let us go to the governor together,” suggested Murad; “I owe him much of thanks. Pardon me until I set these lazy fellows to their work.” Murad went up the stair and pointed his men to the articles which were to be carried aboard the ship. Twenty pairs of stalwart arms made short shrift of this work, and left the chambers of Dumb House empty as he found them.

Within an hour Murad returned from Government House with Grosjean. Four Indians ran their pirogue ashore and intercepted them.

One of them called to Grosjean in his guttural dialect. Grosjean stopped and held brief parley with the man. Several times the Indian nodded towards Murad’s peculiar dress.

When Grosjean came on again and joined Murad he said, “The Indian brings word of a ship that has run on a bar some eight leagues below. He says the men are dressed like yourself. They must be your friends—we shall send them succor at once.”

“No, let them be,” Murad answered in such manner that Grosjean asked no further questions.

Murad strode along the faster, his hand seeking the hilt of his scimitar.

At a respectful distance followed many colonials before whom these foreigners had fallen from the skies. The French officers gathered in groups, discussing the Prince Imperial and his romantic fortunes. Some of them were acquainted with Murad’s history, for there had been much gossip in Paris.

THE WOMAN GLORIFIED

Grosjean heeded neither the people nor the officers. He walked straight on, and though Murad's mind was busy with his plan concerning the sultan's ship, yet he paused in front of Grosjean's door hoping he might be invited to enter. But Grosjean held his pace unabated and vanished with Murad into Dumb House.

"Your daughter," Murad said; "she of whom you told me—give her this—from your guest."

Grosjean glanced at the splendid cross which Murad pressed into his palm. "No;" he drew back astonished; the rubies were worth a province.

"Nay, my friend, it was stolen from the Christians and has lain in my father's treasury many years. I came not by it honestly, and do but restore it to its own people. Take this for the convent," he touched with his foot a bag which rested in the corner. "And this, this is for you." Murad bestowed his ring upon Grosjean, a gift of trifling value.

"Your grateful friend," he said, "has worn this since he came to manhood. Perchance it may recall him when he is gone."

"Murad! Oh Murad!" De Tonnay cried as he stepped into the door, for it was darker, and he could not see. "Ah, I thought you had entered here." To Grosjean he did not speak, except by a courteous inclination of the head. Murad divined that the men were strangers.

"Permit me," he said; "this is my old comrade, Raymond de Tonnay—Grosjean——" Murad spoke the word hesitantly.

De Tonnay grasped the other's hand. "Your Grace, I crave pardon. I have been in Louisiana but an hour, and, being much occupied with Murad's affair, have neglected my own."

GABRIELLE

Murad listened to their interchange of compliments, but their words entered not his mind. This was Gabrielle's husband—that was all he could think. The clown who owned a jewel was not less conscious of its value than was Raymond de Tonnay.

An hour slipped by, two hours. Murad's warship rocked impatiently on the river whilst the boats were filling her casks with water.

Yet when all was done and everything was ready for departure, Murad remained in the house. He walked again in the ravished garden, hoping against hope that Gabrielle might come.

Then he remembered seeing two women in convent garb come together to the house of Grosjean. One, of majestic port, he guessed to be Mother Louise.

"Gabrielle will come no more," he said, and he left the garden forever.

Tuerto the one-eyed, Tuerto the fierce, had trod on coals since Murad whispered to him the sultan's ship had gone ashore. The chance of such a capture thrilled his revengeful soul. The ground became too hot for him to stand in one place. Murad had not commanded Tuerto not to stride up and down in front like a jaguar.

Murad stepped out of Dumb House, his features rigid as Tuerto had often seen them on the eve of desperate encounter. He nodded.

Tuerto's solitary eye flashed back its fiery thanks, and passed the order to his admiral, Malec Khadir ben Ibrahim.

Boats hurried back and forth. Now but one waited at the water-line, to take their prince aboard.

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Grosjean and De Tonnay walked with him to the crest of the levee. There Murad stopped.

Out of Grosjean's door came three women. One was Gabrielle—the others did not matter. She walked buoyantly between the others. Her face was pale, but even at that distance Murad felt the glory shining from her eyes. A mad desire seized him—to bear Gabrielle by force aboard his ship. He looked at her again. She wore the ruby cross upon her breast, and his thought shamed him.

“Let us wait, good mother,” she said; “’tis a brave sight to witness the sailing of a ship.” Murad saw her look into the mother's face and meet a smile of perfect comprehension. He knew that the woman of God understood the woman of the garden.

“Whither, my daughter?” Grosjean called.

“To the convent, with Mother Louise,” she answered him steadily; “you will come there when the ship is gone; I would speak with you.”

Gabrielle watched Murad embrace her father and De Tonnay, then step into the boat. The rasp of oars wrenched at her heart. She watched the boat as it went, and saw him climb aboard the ship.

Mother Louise put an arm around the girl. And Gabrielle, with Murad's kiss upon her lips, set her face towards the convent.

CHAPTER XXXVI

THE DESTINY OF MURAD

“THE Indian spoke truly.” Malec ben Ibrahim handed the ship’s glass to Tuerto. “It is Al Borak.”

The admiral and Tuerto kept their eyes upon a ship whose upper spars were visible above the forest where the river curved. A bit of canvas, sufficient to steady her, showed itself from Al Borak’s topmost peak ; otherwise her rigging was quite bare.

Three men were in the prow of the Firebrand—as Murad’s ship had been re-christened—signifying their purpose to set the East ablaze. Malec and Tuerto stood, the admiral using his glass, Tuerto using his single eye. Murad sat negligently in a chair, watching the delicate tracery of spars outlined against the blue, as though it were the web of some gigantic spider of the skies. He gazed across the tree-tops, admiring the blue serenity, and listened as Tuerto and Malec planned destruction for Al Borak.

“She lies against the farther shore,” said Malec, “where the current sets. ’Twas that which drove her on the bar. When we round this bend the wind will come behind us ; it could not be better.”

Tuerto, the Gray Fox, lent his cunning to their stratagem. They summoned Denfert, Tournon, and the Chevalier de Senlis—De Senlis having much experience of the seas.

Five minutes is over-long for men who know their

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trade. De Senlis was placed in apparent command of the ship, and the flag of France floated from her poop.

Every Moslem vanished. Every turban and tunic and scimitar hid itself away; scabbardless they waited, with bared arms and ready limbs.

Buccaneers manned the ship, as seamen at their ordinary duties. Their weapons lay beneath coils of rope, under gun-carriages, and in the shadow of the gunwales. Behind the port-holes, ready to open on the instant, threatened the double-shotted guns.

“We shall come alongside as if to give her aid,” said Malec ben Ibrahim; “then grapple her, send a broadside by way of courtesy—and three hundred boarders.”

Tuerto concealed his Moslems in the companion-ways and behind the cabin doors, like a loose avalanche hanging against the mountain side.

“Come,” said Malec to Murad; “let us to our cabin. There must be no turban or robe in view when we round yonder point.” Murad followed without a word; he saw the arrangements, and nodded that they were good.

The decks were clear of Moslems. Gunners stood ready watching De Senlis. The buccaneers, divided into two parties, were to be led by Denfert and Tournon. After them would come Tuerto and the turtle-doves of Murad.

Murad went to his cabin on the port side of the ship. The bustle of preparation ceased. Men stopped their running to and fro. Every tongue was still. A scintillating silence sparkled on the river; a silence sinister and sullen, overhung the ship.

The Firebrand hugged the right bank of the river.

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She rounded the bend, and a steady current bore her diagonally across, just as in the early hours of the morning it had borne the luckless Al Borak.

Murad from his station at the port-hole could see Al Borak plainly. She rested on an even keel, and quite in mid-stream, such is the treacherous nature of these sand-bars that form in unexpected places. When the Firebrand hove in sight Al Borak's boats abandoned their soundings of the channel, and the ship hoisted signals of distress.

A transverse current hurried the Firebrand along as though she were a chip, directly towards Al Borak. Tuerto grasped his scimitar; it seemed they must likewise go ashore. But the pilot held confidently to the wheel; he knew the bottom of this river as he knew the floor of his own hut, and had assured Malec that he could trim the edge of that bar as a knife trims the skin from a peach.

Murad heard Al Borak's call for a cable; he heard the polite parley between De Senlis and her first officer; he saw those half-naked and weaponless men in her boats; he noted the unguarded condition of her decks. Murad smiled.

Then he ceased to smile. His lips clenched tighter than a thumbscrew. Near the mast he saw Yazan, the sultan's chamberlain—Yazan, who was keeper of the bowstring—Yazan, who had strangled Hassan in the prison, and who had doubtless performed the same murderous duty for Selim. Murad could not look upon Yazan and smile.

On either side the chamberlain stood two Moorish slaves—four in all—giants selected for their stupid ferocity. Murad knew them well. There were Khaled and Kaifour, motionless upon his right—Mozdar and

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Amru upon his left. The same four had flanked the chamberlain when he stood above Hassan's body in the Caucasus prison. All wore their arms; not one dared trust himself unarmed.

Behind this group, but apart from them, Murad saw perhaps a hundred men, common sailors, petty officers, and fighting-men. Though he gazed with intensest hatred upon the chamberlain, Murad pitied those other creatures. "Misguided children," he said; "they know no better."

The Firebrand was slowly approaching. Her ports were closed, though the gunners watched De Senlis for the word. Others held the grappling-hooks at hand, ready to bind Al Borak in the clutch of death. A dozen pairs of hands reached out from Al Borak's gunwales to grasp the succoring cable of the French.

The pilot made good his boast. The Firebrand barely grazed Al Borak, and her prow crept along the other vessel's side. Murad watched the two ships and formed a sudden resolution—one of those mad freaks whose audacity had proven their success.

He darted out of his cabin and tossed his robe aside. Beneath it he wore a tight-fitting vestment of white. The Star of Murad blazed on his breast. Like a flash of light he crossed the deck and sprang upon a gun. "Hold your fire," he said to De Senlis, who was too astonished to stop him.

For a moment Murad's scimitar glittered in the sunlight. Then he vaulted aboard Al Borak, alighting face to face with Yazan.

The vessels grappled. Al Borak reeled, and shuddered as in the jaws of a devouring monster.

"Down, Yazan, down!" Murad shouted. "Down like a dog!"

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Yazan stared incredulously—hesitated—wavered—then Murad struck him. He fell, whether dead or no Murad took no thought.

“Down Khaled ! Down Kaifour ! Mozdar ! Amru, down !” The slaves dropped upon their knees and grovelled, beating their foreheads against the deck.

Murad planted his foot on Yazan and shouted the same shrill cry which had thrilled the walls of Dumb House.

Scattered warriors on Al Borak stopped as though they'd heard a call from heaven ; they wheeled and looked to Murad, as the faithful turn their eyes to Mecca. For one unbelieving instant they stood dazed and dumb, not crediting their senses. Murad's shout rang out again, the rallying cry of undaunted Islam. Fierce and deep and strong came the answer from every corner of the sultan's ship. Throat after throat caught up the cry—man after man obeyed it.

They gathered round him, some with lifted blades, some with blades in sheath, some with empty hands. As they were, they came.

Vainly the officers of Al Borak strove to stem the tide of their defection. At the first shout Murad's rushing turtle-doves had come to join him, but found no work to do. Al Borak was already his.

“Bind the officers, and these,” Murad ordered, kicking one of the four. “Let the others be.”

Tuerto, outstripped by younger limbs, was not the first to gain Murad's side. His eye flamed ; he had struck no blow.

Murad sought to pacify him : “Al Borak is yours,” he said, touching the veteran upon the shoulder ; “you shall turn her guns upon False Mahomet in his palace. Stay, Tuerto, this is my flagship. Tear

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down that ensign." Willing hands drew the sultan's emblem to the deck, and delirious men stamped upon it.

Murad opened his vestments and unwound a cloth from his middle. It was a banner of white, and bore for device a Raven, with outspread wings.

"Fly this," he ordered; "it is a talisman of victory."

A scream of triumph rose from the multitude as the mystic banner fluttered upward and unfurled itself upon the breeze. The huge black Raven opened his wings, and flapped above their heads.

"An omen! An omen! He shall have meat in Stamboul."

Then there happened a marvel, a miracle the wonder of which was narrated in the remotest tent of Islam. Five hundred faithful stood vouchers for its truth. It was this, as breathless they told it:

When the Firebrand came alongside, Al Borak was fast aground: Murad sprang aboard and she trembled beneath his foot. Whilst Al Borak flew the sultan's flag she stood steadfast as a mosque upon a mountain. These facts were true, beyond all cavil.

Yet, at the very instant the Banner of the Raven soared aloft—when the Raven flapped his wings and took flight towards the East—Al Borak shook herself violently, then slipped like a swan into the midmost channel of the river. For behold! she bore the anointed Prince of Destiny.

The midday sun shone down on Murad's face, upturned and glorified. The clamorers hushed as he lifted his eyes towards the Raven. They listened.

His lips scarcely breathed the word, that word which no man understood, which the gods had given

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unto him alone: "Gabrielle," he whispered unto the banner; "Gabrielle!"

His nearest warriors caught up the word of magic paramount: "Gabrielle!" they shouted, until the woods, the river, and the skies answered them again.

* * * * *

"Gabrielle!" they shouted again in the flush of triumph when False Mahomet tottered from his throne.

* * * * *

"Gabrielle! Gabrielle!" they shouted in the reverence of their love, when they set the Crown of Islam firmly upon Murad's brow—the Prince of Destiny.

And none save Murad knew the fulness of its meaning.

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