Tales From The Crescent Moon

By May McNeer and

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Title: Tales from the Crescent Moon

Author: May McNeer and Charlotte Lederer

Language: English

Subject: Fiction, Literature, Children's literature

Publisher: World Public Library Association

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FARRAR & RINEHART
INCORPORATED

Publishers New York

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NOTE — THE MATERIAL which formed the basis of these tales was collected by Charlotte Lederer, from archives and other sources. She wishes to acknowledge indebtedness to the following Hungarian authors, in whose writings some of these folk-tales first took definite shape: Mikszáth, Yokai, Gárdonyi, and Mora.

TALES FROM THE CRESCENT MOON

LEGENDA

IN THE LAND of Hungary the moon rides high above lofty mountains, above spreading plains, above cities where mosques of the Crescent darken with their shadows cathedrals of the Cross.

It moves, a thin curve of silver, over fields where Magyar peasants live in houses of mud bricks white-

washed and edged with brilliant blue, thatched with straw. Where poppies spring among the grains, and where the workmen carve in wood forms of wheat and leaves and flowers over their windows. Where women weave and embroider in bright color reflections of the plants which grow around their doorsteps. Where shepherds guard their flocks in the hills, and herdsmen tend their cattle on the plains. The moon is a sickle to the farmer, who sees it bend above his rye.

In the days when the ancient Magyar race was young it looked in fear to the North, dreading the wild shaggy Tartars, yellow as parchment, with slanting eyes, who flashed down upon villages and left devastation in their wake. The Tartars came like the wind from plains, with savage heathen cries, and went as they came, unchecked. Then the moon was a taut bow, drawn by the hand of the Tartar.

A crimson tide, the Turks, swept across the land of the Magyars, from the East and the South. Over all the country the followers of Allah and of the Prophet Mohammed spread, until the Cross and the Crescent dwelt side by side, but the Crescent ruled the Cross. The Sultan Magnificent lived in Stamboul, city of conquered Greeks, but sometimes he made his court in Buda, of the Hungarians. The

moon came to be a curved glittering scimitar thrust in the sash of the Moslem.

Because the moon was a sickle there grew tales of Magyar peasants, of the simple manner of their lives, of their sheep and cattle and homes and crops. Because the moon was a bow there came from the Tartars wild stories of death and flight and mystery and adventure. Because the moon was a scimitar there sprang legends of jewels and djinns and dervishes and magic.

To the children of Hungary the thin curve of silver seems no longer the weapon of the Tartar or of the Turk. It is a shining bowl holding mystery, magic and homely fables: tales from the crescent moon.

THE CRIMSON SLIPPERS

THE CRIMSON SLIPPERS

MUSTAPHA HAMIL, the favorite shoemaker of the favorite wife of the Pasha of Szeged, sat cross-legged on a length of carpet which spread across the dark floor of his little shop. Through the door he could glimpse a strip of tur-

quoise Hungarian sky, cleft by the emerald branch of a linden tree in the garden. It was late spring, but Mustapha Hamil sat cross-legged on a length of carpet, and his hand wove swiftly, darting like a small brown bird clutching a shining needle in its beak.

Scattered around him, breaking the shadowed floor with islands of color, were piles of soft slippers, mounds of crimson, yellow and blue, like blossoms. Little boxes, bright shells filled with brighter jewels, rested at his right hand, and on his left were trays of delicate silk strands, glittering gold and silver. The day was warm, with a promise of heat soon to be fulfilled.

Mustapha Hamil bent his head as he worked swiftly. The crimson slippers under his glistening needle were growing in brilliance as the flower opens under a cloudless sky. Tiny beads of moisture stood on the forehead of the shoemaker, but he stopped not a moment.

There was a shadow in the doorway. A voice broke the silence of the shop.

"Allah Akbar! Allah is Great!"

Mustapha Hamil looked up at the fat man in yellow satin who stood before him.

"Allah Akbar!" he murmured respectfully, but his hand continued its flying motions.

"Honored shoemaker," came the oily voice of the richly dressed servant, "I am come from the Glorious Lady, whose slave I am. She, the most favored wife of our lord, the mighty Pasha, commands me to bring to her, instantly, the slippers which three mornings ago she desired you to make for her."

The shoemaker's hands dropped to his knee. He shrugged his shoulders despairingly, and drew the back of one hand across his damp forehead.

"Honored slave," he murmured, "for three days have I done nothing but sew on these same slippers for the favorite wife of our Revered Pasha. Three days and three nights have I worked on them, and no siestas have I taken to guard myself from the heat."

The slave frowned.

"Worthy shoemaker, I know only that my mistress commands me to have them brought to her instantly. Do you not know that tonight there will be a feast in the seraglio of the Pasha, and his favorite wife must have the handsome slippers to honor her lord, and to please him, by the Grace of Allah?"

The shoemaker heaved a sigh which seemed to come from the depths of his being. He held out before the eyes of the slave the tiny crimson slip-

pers, which were jeweled as the wings of a butterfly.

"Honored slave, these are finely wrought. There are none others so fine in all the land of pork-eaters in which we live. There are none so brilliantly jeweled. None so delicately embroidered. None so carefully planned. But more jewels remain to be placed upon them, that they may adorn fittingly the flower-petal feet of the Pasha's favorite wife. I can finish them after two more hours. I cannot give them to you now."

The slave smiled. He waved a pudgy hand.

"Then do you bring them on the instant they are finished to the palace of the Pasha, where I shall be awaiting them at the Seventh Gate. Be not later than sunset."

He bowed.

"In the Shadow of Allah! Allah Akbar!"

The harassed Mustapha Hamil inclined his head, as he answered,

"Allah Akbar!"

In the hour of siesta Mustapha Hamil, who was not in the habit of going into the street when the sun drew quivering waves of heat from the stones, stepped from the doorway of his small shop and began his long walk across the city. In his hands

rested the small slippers, like a pair of humming birds in their nest.

There were a few people on the narrow passageways, hardy workers and peasants who were accustomed to sleep only when the light of day failed them.

Mustapha Hamil muttered to himself,

"Even the dogs of the street are reclining in the shade, while I, unfortunate worm, who must have brought on my head the displeasure of Allah, must walk in haste through the heat!"

The palace was as far away as Mohammed's Paradise to the tired feet of the shoemaker. An old woman, with a basket on her arm, plodded toward him. But when her eyes fell on the pair of tiny jeweled slippers, she halted in amazement, and cried,

"Ah, what lovely slippers, aren't they? Who has such little feet? I wish I could wear them!"

Mustapha Hamil smiled, for he was not without vanity.

There came presently a young and cocky man, in the coarse dress of a camel driver. He glanced at the shoemaker, and his face cracked into a wide grin.

"Ah, by the beard of the Prophet, but those are

fine slippers, aren't they? I wish I might have them for my dancing girl!"

"That is an observing camel driver. He knows good work when he sees it," said Mustapha Hamil, pleased.

He turned a corner, and as he did so he noticed that the sweat was dropping from his brow. The shoemaker thought longingly of his cool little shop. In fact, he was thinking of it so intently that he almost plunged into the spare form of a lean dervish whose bell skirts billowed across the roadway. The dervish raised his head, stared, and glimpsed the slippers.

"Allah's Grace! Allah's Favor! By the robe of Mohammed but those are lovely slippers, aren't they?"

Mustapha Hamil smiled wearily, bowed, and walked away. But he had scarcely passed the dervish when a solitary Hungarian child, fascinated by the crimson slippers, ran up to him.

"Ah, Father Turk, what have you there? Fine shoes, red as a button, aren't they? I wish they were mine!"

Mustapha Hamil scowled and hurried on. He walked quickly past a small Christian chapel, and made his way down the street. There came from

the church a nun, in sober garb, and, although she raised her eyes but for a second to see her way, they seized upon the bright shoes. She spoke before she thought.

"Lovely slippers! Ah, how lovely, aren't they?"

The shoemaker frowned, whereupon the pious sister flushed hotly.

"Oh! Oh! Maria, Mother of God! Hail Maria, kind Maria, help me to repent of the sin of covetousness." She bowed her head remorsefully and hastened her steps.

Mustapha Hamil saw, with lowering brows, a barefoot gypsy girl, whose dusty rags, once gaudy, were soiled with the earth of a hundred highways. She seemed part of the heat and the glare. The Gitano stood, with insolent hand on hip, against a doorway.

"Ho, Son of the Prophet," she called, "I have made a pilgrimage to Mecca, have you? See," she thrust a sprig of shiny green leaves into her coarse black hair, "see my turban of sacred green!" Then the dark eyes caught a flash of crimson, and held it prisoner for a moment.

"Oh! What grand sweet slippers, those, aren't they?"

The shoemaker clamped his jaws together to

hold securely within his mouth frothing curses. He could not stop to brawl with a Gitano.

The heat was intense for so early in the year. The shoemaker's head felt full to bursting. He passed a sweet shop, where Turkish pastries oozed sirup on the trays. A fat shopkeeper, dozing behind his counter, suddenly awoke at the sound of footsteps, and stretched his neck toward the street as he saw the brilliant bits of crimson in the hands of Mustapha Hamil.

"Allah is Great!" he shouted, "By the toes of the Prophet but those are handsome slippers, aren't they?"

Mustapha Hamil did not turn his head, but strode away, for he was grinding his teeth.

He glared at the next passer-by, who was a crooked-back Hungarian shepherd, seemingly lost in the maze of dwellings. But the old man did not even see the rage of Mustapha Hamil. His astonished eyes were fixed rigidly on those dainty shoes.

"God of our Fathers! That man can make such things! Fine and wonderful, aren't they?"

The shoemaker scowled so fiercely that the frightened shepherd stumped hurriedly away, muttering to himself as he went,

"Pagans! Heathens!"

Mustapha Hamil's crescent brows drew together. He glanced up at the intricate lattice of a harem window as he passed, and thought he heard a sigh of regret. He raised his head. There was nothing visible but the delicate tracery of a seraglio. A murmur, heavy with longing came down to him.

"The lovely slippers! Fit for the crystal gaze of a Sultana! Fit for the rosy feet of a houri in Paradise! Beautiful, aren't they?"

Mustapha Hamil, the favorite shoemaker of the favorite wife of the Pasha, groaned and spat on the ground.

He emerged into a poorer section of the city, in order to take a shorter way to the palace of the Pasha of Szeged. But he felt his arm grasped with a trembling claw. The shoemaker, in his haste, was compelled to halt to shake off the offending hand. He swore to himself when he saw that a beggar had him by the sleeve.

"Alms, by the Grace of Allah! Alms!" The beggar, a cadaverous old man, peered from his hood and suddenly his dim eyes were fixed on the slippers.

"By all the Great and Mighty Powers of the Sultan, if those are not the goodliest shoes I have ever seen, aren't they?"

Mustapha Hamil said nothing. He shook like a

leaf grasped by a wild November wind. As he jerked away he heard the cracked voice muttering, "Fine shoes! Fine and noble shoes!"

The shoemaker turned into a narrow street which had but a small place to walk dry shod on either side, for down the center of the passage bubbled and chattered a brook, swollen by the spring rains. Mustapha Hamil, too angry to welcome the fresh smell of water, ran headlong into the bulky form of a heavy Hungarian policeman.

"What, you whiskered dog of a heathen, you! Do you—" He stopped and stared. "Ah, what handsome slippers! Red as a pair of cooked beets! Fine, aren't they?"

The shoemaker stalked away. His face reflected the color of his slippers, and his blood boiled within him.

"By all the powers, Great and Small, of Allah and of Mohammed the Prophet, if another person asks me that question I shall let my fist fly against his head!" He transferred the shoes carefully to his left hand.

But Allah seemed to have forgotten his faithful servant, for as Mustapha looked up he saw a Hungarian peasant girl, with gaping mouth, balancing shakily on a narrow bridge which crossed the brook.

"Ah! Ah! Ah!" she squealed, lost in delight at the sight which met her round eyes. "Such tiny slippers, they! Such a fine red color, what? Such beautiful jewels, so? Fine, aren't they?"

Mustapha Hamil stepped up to her, doubled his thin hand to a hard tight knot, and shot it forth. There was a resounding smack, followed by a tremendous splash. The woman, in her ten wide skirts, floated like a red and green poppy blossom on the gurgling stream.

"Ah, Merciful Virgin, protect and save me, who has done no harm, from the hand of this heathen! Ah! Aia! Help!"

The shoemaker stroke down the narrow walk, but he did not get far, for piercing screams from the peasant brought the Hungarian hojdu on the run. The policeman took a look at the girl, then leaving her struggling with her skirts and the water, he ran after and caught the Turkish shoemaker.

"Dog! Pig! Evil son of an evil race! Come with me."

He roughly grasped Mustapha Hamil and drew him back to the weeping girl, who had managed to hoist her brilliant garments to dry land.

"I shall take you both to the magistrate," growled the hojdu.

Mustapha Hamil went, as needs he must, saying nothing. But the girl chattered, and clattered, and clamored until the soldier grew weary, and bade her hold her tongue.

The nearest magistrate was a Hungarian. The hojdu, knowing his habits, took the prisoners to the home of the worthy. There they succeeded in gaining entrance to his house, but could not find its master. Thinking to see justice done, and that speedily, the policeman thrust the shoemaker and the peasant girl into the garden, where the magistrate was stretched out on a bench, enjoying his siesta under the shade of a branching mulberry tree.

The hoarse voice of the hojdu jerked him roughly from his cool dreams. The magistrate sat up and growled,

"What is this? What is this?"

"Ah! Aiaia! This dog of a Turk, him!" squealed the girl.

"That will do! That will do!"

The judge turned to the policeman.

"What does all this mean?"

"This Turk, with the slippers, he knocked her in the water."

The judge shouted irritably to the hojdu,

"Be still!" Addressing the shoemaker, "Pious Mussulman, what is this about?"

The Turk spoke quietly,

"Hail, Maria, Patron Saint of Hungary!"

The magistrate smiled, and crossed himself. His voice softened.

"Now, my son, tell me all of your troubles."

But the Turkish shoemaker bowed his head and murmured,

"Hail, Maria, Patron Saint of Hungary!"

The judge crossed himself again, but did not look so well pleased.

"Listen, Son of Islam, say something else or you shall have twenty-five lashes with a rod on your bare back."

The shoemaker inclined his head again humbly, and spoke,

"Hail, Maria, Patron Saint of Hungary!"

The magistrate leaped to his feet, shook his fist frenziedly in the face of the Turk, and, stumbling over the bench in his rage, he kicked it to pieces, howling with pain as he bruised his foot.

"Take this dog to the cellar!" he roared, "Get the rod! Notify the Turkish kadi!"

But Mustapha Hamil, favorite shoemaker of the favorite wife of the Glorious Pasha of Szeged, murmured, in great humility, even as he extended the tiny jeweled slippers in his brown hands.

"See, Wise and Honorable Judge, how angry this beautiful blessing made you when it was repeated but three times. Wise and Revered Magistrate, do you blame me for hitting this woman with my fist, and knocking her into a stream, when she asked me the question, 'Fine slippers, aren't they?' after eleven other simpletons had asked me the same within the hour? And when everybody could see what they are? Wise, Honorable and Worthy Magistrate, do you blame me?"

The judge listened. And he stared. And then he laughed long and loud.

"What is your name, and who are you, foxy Moslem?"

"Mustapha Hamil, the favorite shoemaker of the favorite wife of the Glorious Pasha."

The magistrate grinned widely, and slapped his leg.

"Proceed in Peace, Mustapha Hamil. And tell your Pasha to make you his favorite advisor instead of his favorite shoemaker, for there are many in his court not half so wise."

THE MAGIC KAFTAN

THE MAGIC KAFTAN

IN THE DAYS when Hungary groaned beneath the weight of the Turkish yoke, and no man could say whether his precious possessions would be seized on the morrow by wild Tartar, plundering German or marauding Turk, the city of Kecskemét was called free. But free it was in name only; free it was of a governing German baron, Tartar chief or Turkish bey. But by night there was the thunder of pounding hoofs, when Hungarians shivered in their beds, and knew without gazing into the dark street that flying Tartars had taken whatsoever they chose. There were days too

when German brigands, shouting hoarsely in a strange tongue, leaped into the city and out again, their saddles tied with plunder. Truly Kecskemét was free to all the wild winds that blew.

By far the most ferocious of these fierce thieves were the Turkish marauders, who knew, and laughed as they thought of it, that Kecskemét was free to them, for she had not the strength to bar them from her gates. Trembling citizens could not know when robbers would demand spoils, but they feared most when the far-famed fairs were held, when all the world of East and West met under tents in the market place. Then the air was scented with figs from Arabia, sweets from Stamboul, grapes from Hungary. Then the streets were noisy with tramping and stamping of hoofs, neighing of swift desert steeds, shouting of hawkers, and the fresh cries of Hungarian peasant girls behind their piled loaves of bread and trays of heart-shaped gingerbread cakes. Then the eye was dizzied with brilliant silks and rich embroideries, and Turkish trousers below red caps were dimmed by Magyar skirts and sheepskin vests sewed with colored wool.

Men traded, seemingly unconcerned save with the price of grain or the value of a cow, but their

eyes glanced ever and again toward the gates which led to the plains, for rich fairs attracted cut-throats as bears are drawn by the scent of honey. The women chattered and laughed and gossiped over eggs piled in snowy mounds, or golden tubs of butter, but they stared at each other in frightened surmise at the sound of every hoof beat clattering toward the fair.

There came a time when scarcely were the goods assembled, the tents placed, the trembling merchants and market women gathered, when roaring bands of thieves swooped upon them, carrying away merchandise, animals and often women. Indeed some brigand chiefs were so bold as to disdain raids in person, but sent instead a messenger into the city demanding what they chose. The citizens groaned, but gave their goods. In all the land of Hungary there had been no fair so splendid as that held in the free city of Kecskemét. In all the land of Hungary there came to be no fair so poor and destitute. The tents no longer held sweet spices from the East, brilliant silks and jewels from the South, barbaric ornaments from the North, and swift desert horses. Only the farmers timidly put forth food on the stalls, and the market place was a vast dusty plain.

One quiet Sabbath morning, beneath the sweet solemn tones of the bells, a group of sedate townsfolk, with hands folded piously, stepped into the street from the church. Walking a little in front of the others was the young wife of the Captain of the City Guard, and behind her paced her maid. There was a sudden thunder of hoofs, a quick flash of flying cloaks, a glimpse of black beards. The people stood staring, too horrified to move. Where the wife of the Captain had walked there was a space of vacant roadway. In the distance was the sound of a shriek, and a loud clatter of horses. The citizens cried out for the Captain, who, on hearing of his wife's abduction, leaped on his horse, grasped his sword, and disappeared toward the plains. He was never heard of again in Kecskemét.

Next day the members of the City Council met in the town hall and gazed at each other in great fear There was the murmur of angry townsmen outside.

"Ah," moaned an old man, "what is to become of us now? We have no Captain of the City Guard, for he will never return from the plains. No longer does our city shine with its mighty fairs. No longer does gold and silver pour through our gates in the hands of visitors. Our trading neighbors flee from us as if we carried the black death."

"Yes, yes," trembled another, as he wiped his damp brow, "no lives are safe in the city of Kecskemét, and in the street our people murmur angrily at our inefficiency. What can we do?"

A younger man leaped to his feet and shook his fist toward the plains.

"What can we do? We can fight for our lives and property! What if the Sultan owns our land? What if he comes down upon us, and slays us speedily for killing Moslem thieves? Still we will have avenged ourselves on some of the heathen dogs who plunder us!"

The men stared at each other and nodded. A strange voice startled the Senators. They turned their heads toward the door in amazement. Outlined against the bright glare of a noonday sky was the rude figure of a young shepherd, with tousled hair.

"Fight the Turks! No, not so! We must offer them our town."

The Council gasped. One member drew himself up with dignity, and folded his arms across his chest.

"The lad is mad. Drive him away. This is a serious discussion. What right has he to interrupt us so impudently?"

But the oldest of the city fathers stroked his gray beard and considered. Then he spoke slowly.

"My sons, this is not the time to consider our dignity, when the city of Kecskemét, once so rich, seems doomed. Our good Lord has been known

to speak through the mouths of fools. We shall invite the youth in to explain his strange words."

The boy entered the room in silence. There was a slight self-conscious swagger to his step, as if he were determined to forget his poor herder's clothing, but the eyes beneath his tangled hair were unafraid. He stood, waiting for an invitation to speak.

The old man stared intently at the newcomer. He asked:

"My son, who are you?"

"Bandi, a shepherd, Honorable Magistrate."

"Ah, and what did you mean by the strange words you threw at us just now?"

The youth lost his embarrassment. His eyes shone with the fire of an original idea. He thrust his head forward eagerly and cried.

"Why, Your Honor, it was only common sense. You, great and learned men of the city, look for a hard way. I, since I am Bandi, a shepherd from the hills, seek the simple method. It is plain. Do you not see, you, that if we fight the Turks, even though they are thieves, the Sultan will send a mighty army to destroy us for having slain followers of Mohammed the Prophet? But if we go to the Sultan with gifts, and make plea for a Turkish bey to live among us with his court, no doubt we can gain this and thus the marauders will fear to enter the city."

The Councilmen seemed stupefied. Truly the Lord God was wont to speak through the mouths of babes and fools. There was an excited wave of sound, which the voice of the oldest father broke suddenly.

"My sons, these words are wise. This is simple wisdom, which is great wisdom. We know that we cannot win by battle. This way may prevail. The Captain of the Guard is gone, taking our protection with him. That leaves a bench in our Council vacant. Why should we not include this youth for one day?"

And so it was done. Plans were made for the sending of a procession of carriages filled with gifts to the Sultan in Buda, not so many leagues away. But when the Councilmen came to decide who was to go with the gifts they found that they could not dispatch them in safety without a Captain of the Guard. Now the office of Captain of the free city of Kecskemét was a difficult one. Only the bravest man in the town dared accept the nomination, for he who wore the Captain's cap was as like to lose it swiftly, and his head with it.

No man of the Council wished to be elected Captain. No nominations could be made. And so, at the end of three hours, the old man, with a sigh of despair, announced that the office must be filled by lot. He brought out dice, eleven white and one black, and shook them in his hat. Each man drew blindfold, but when the twelfth cube came to be taken there was only Bandi, the shepherd lad,

to draw. The Council looked at him in doubt, but since Bandi was a member for the day he was entitled to take his chance. He opened his calloused palm, and disclosed the black dice. Thus was Bandi the youth made Captain of the City Guard of Kecskemét for one year and a day. No one envied him the office, but Bandi grinned, and rubbed his hands briskly on his old trousers, as if he had risen with the sun, and was preparing to settle down to the day's herding.

The new Captain took office immediately, and in truth, he wore his brilliant uniform with surprising ease. His soldiers looked at him disdainfully, for he knew nothing of military tactics, but Bandi did not even see their glances. He called together the Senators as he herded his sheep, and spoke to them.

"Your Honors, tell me where I can find a Turk who knows what would make the heart of the Sultan lean toward us? Is there such a fellow in the city, what?"

"Yes," answered the old judge, "there is such a one, and he dwells but across the way here. He treats with his master for us when we have need."

Bandi nodded briskly, and rubbed his hands hard on his colored trousers.

"Then call him in for me, will you, Father Councilman?"

The Turk came, stepping softly across the big hall, with eyes cast down, but when he looked up sharply and saw the youth wearing the sword of the Captain he halted in amazement. Bandi did not observe the astonishment, for his thoughts were intent on his plan.

"Worthy Mussulman," he said, "we wish to send handsome gifts to your master, the Great and Glorious Sultan, who dwells in Buda. Can you tell us what he might welcome, you?"

The Turk bowed profoundly. His dark eyes stared enigmatically into the blue ones of the youth.

"Honored and brave Captain," his voice was rich as the oil of the olive, "Honored Captain, the Great and Glorious Padishah, may he be blessed by the right hand of Allah, always desires new gifts that are fleet of foot, delicious of flavor, glittering of color, and soft to the eyes."

Having delivered his message the Turk bowed again and withdrew as softly as he had entered. There was quiet. Then a mutter of voices as the Councilmen gave expression to their bewilderment.

"What can it mean? Fleet of foot? Delicious of flavor? He but tried to confuse us."

Bandi said nothing, for he was thinking. Then he leaped to his feet and rubbed his palm energetically on his thigh.

"What can fleet of foot mean but horse? I know what he wants." He turned, laid his cap on the table and with a rough hand rumpled his hair until it stood on end again, and was entirely comfortable.

"He must mean," cried the youth, "horses, sheep, jewels and maidens."

For three days there was excitement in the free city of Kecskemét. Criers went through the streets, beating their drums, summoning all owners of fine horses to appear before the Captain of the Guard, and great was the astonishment of merchants and horse dealers when they saw before them a shepherd lad. But Bandi did not notice. He ordered them to bring their best and swiftest animals to the market square, where he had a competent judge of horses choose the finest fifty. Then the youth took from the city coffers a fair sum for the owners of the horses.

Again criers went through the city, and loudly demanded the most skillful jewelers to appear before the Captain of the Guard. Again a crowd assembled, and again they marveled, but Bandi did not notice. He ordered the jewelers to make of the

most glittering silver and precious stones of all colors for the Sultan a sword studded with ruby and sardonyx, a collar glistening with gems and a jewled box. Again he dipped into the city coffers and paid the men a fair sum each.

A third time the city walls echoed the brazen voices of criers as they bade all owners of fat sheep meet with the Honored, the Brave Captain of the Guard. Bandi secured one hundred snow-white sheep, and had them washed, rubbed and combed. Then he paid a fair price for them.

"And now," thought the worried councilmen, who saw their city gold vanishing rapidly, "and now the rash lad has finished, and will leave our few remaining coins."

But Bandi did not notice. He summoned criers, and, before the Council could gather its dismayed wits together, he had emptied with a sigh of satisfaction the last of the gold into bags, which he carried with him to the dealers in silks and ladies' garments.

Down the streets the criers went, accompanied by a roll of drum, and their voices rang out loud and clear, with a request so strange that all of the women of the city rushed to their windows to hear.

"Hear ye! Hear ye! Any maiden, if she have

claim to beauty, and if she desires a life of luxury and pleasure as wife of the Glorious Sultan of the Ottoman Empire, may walk before our Brave Captain of the Guard. Three of the most beautiful will be chosen. Appear this day, within the space of three hours, at the Town Hall. Hear ye! Hear ye!"

When Bandi returned he selected two of the Councilmen of the Council, and with them he looked into the faces of many maidens who passed before him. Soon two were chosen, two as fair as bright tulips, two maids who longed for the luxury of a Sultan's harem. But the quest was long, for Bandi, in making the announcement, little thought that so many desired to give up their freedom for wealth. None of the other maidens pleased him, and he had almost reached the conclusion that it would be best to send only the two rather than risk the displeasure of the Padishah, when a girl with flaming red hair, and bare brown feet, soiled with the dust of the streets, entered. Bandi stared, for, in truth, she was the most disreputable maid he had ever seen. Her long tangled hair fell over shoulders covered with a coarse dress.

The face of the girl was grimy. The Councilmen looked at each other and nodded agreement. There

was no use, they thought, in having this girl try on a brilliant costume and walk before them, as had the others, for she could never look presentable. Bandi stared intently but doubtfully at her. And then he saw her eyes, large and brown, flashing excitedly, and her attitude before them, as if unconscious of her disgraceful attire, with hands on hips and chin upraised. Bandi suddenly waved his hand.

"Go into the next room, you, and put on the garments you will find there."

The girl's eyes flickered in a tiny smile, but she said nothing, walking with a little swagger. The door closed behind her.

"Why do you waste our time thus?" asked an old man reproachfully. "We have much to do and we must leave at dawn for Buda."

"I do not know, Father Senator," answered Bandi, "there was something—"

The door opened quickly. The eyes of the Councilmen popped with surprise. As for Bandi, never had he seen in all his life such a maiden. She was tall, with clean red cheeks, and her flaming hair was flung about a lively face. She wore the Turkish garments Bandi had provided.

"Who are you?" asked the young Captain.

"Yulka, daughter of the tailor Fitos."

"Ah," exclaimed one of the magistrates, "daughter of a poor tailor. She shall be the third maiden."

Bandi returned to the courtyard, where his horses and sheep were assembled. He sent about all of the city, and gathered every red and white ribbon, and all little bells, to trim the animals. The horses were groomed and shining. The jewelers brought to him a fine sword, collar and box. Carriages were made ready.

"Truly," thought the people of Kecskemét, "no Sultan could be anything but pleased with these gifts."

It was a fine procession that wound its way through the streets and out into the country. First stepped the horses, arching their necks like taut-drawn bows, and raising their hoofs daintily. On their backs were Hungarian hojdus, in all the splendor of gala dress. Behind them trod the white sheep, decked with gay ribbons and bells, herded by two youths. Then there was one carriage containing the three Councilmen, one which held the maidens, and, last, rode the young Captain of the Guard, on a horse.

As the long procession entered the neighborhood of the mighty stone city of Buda, and wound along

beside the river to the gates, one of the magistrates noticed another line of carriages, smaller and much less pretentious than their own. He looked long, and turned with a face consumed with consternation to his companions. They stopped, got out, and went to the horse of Bandi the Captain.

"My son," said a thin man, "I have just seen two carriages of the city of Szolnok, our neighbor, enter the gates before us. I greatly fear that these men have gotten wind of our mission and are trying to slip in ahead of us with a similar request of their own."

"Well," said Bandi, unconcerned, "and what if they do, Father Senator."

"Do you not see," cried the man hoarsely, shaking his fist, "that if a Turk is put into their city we cannot get a bey ourselves, for the Sultan would not place more than one in a district?"

But Bandi pursed his lips indifferently, and rubbed his hands on his thighs.

"We will see which way the cock crows? Let us get on, Honorable Councilman."

The gates swung wide. The procession moved magnificently toward the palace of the Sultan, which had been the palace of Hungarian kings.

The oldest councilman of the city of Kecskemét

marched majestically into the reception hall, followed by the members and the Captain. The horses and sheep were placed with the hojdu in the courtyard. Inside the hall, which was hung with rich silks and embroideries, and was covered beneath their feet with thick rugs, the three councilmen waited nervously, but Bandi the Captain stood indifferently, patiently, for was he not accustomed to watching and waiting long hours on a hillside?

The thin man twisted his stringy neck toward his companions. He frowned heavily.

"So much money have we spent that the coffers of the city of Kecskemét are yawning empty. And all of the gold, all of the trouble may be in vain. Our neighboring judges of the city of Szolnok are enjoying now an audience with the Sultan. I greatly fear they will receive the bey."

After a long wait, when the councilmen were weary and heartsick with anxiety, a long door opened and two slaves entered. They bowed respectfully, their dark faces calm as the spirit of Allah.

"Messengers from the city of Kecskemét, his Glorious Majesty, the Sultan of the Ottoman Empire, will see you. Enter this door."

They rose. The Councilmen bowed, with pale faces, but Bandi's cheeks were ruddy as ripe apples, and as he went he rubbed his hard palms briskly on his embroidered trousers.

The room of the Sultan was in half light. Faintly the petitioners saw about the walls rare tapestries, intricately woven, and they felt their feet press familiarly precious mats of the Orient. Their eyes were fixed on a brilliant figure sitting immobile, cross-legged, on a cushioned divan which almost met and mingled its rich profusion with the color of the floor.

"Sons of the Christian God," spoke Padishah, "why do you desire this audience with the Sultan?"

They were silent, until the eldest Councilman, chosen spokesman because of his learning, said solemnly,

"Great and Lordly Padishah, we beg your favor for the free city of Kecskemét. We desire that you, O Sultan, give us a Turkish lord to make his home among us. This do we entreat of you."

The Sultan stroked his beard, but answered nothing.

Bandi spoke suddenly; his fresh young voice rang with a startling force through the room.

"Great Padishah, we have brought you gifts,

gifts worthy of your greatness. If you will look through that window you will see them in the courtyard."

The Sultan lifted his eyebrows, then rose with a rustle of silk and moved to the carved lattice. He glanced outside, and he saw there the fifty shining horses, and the hundred white sheep. He turned slowly and looked at the four men, but his gaze was without pleasure. Bandi held out the jeweled sword, collar and box. The Sultan murmured,

"These are good presents, but I have many horses as fine, many sheep as fat, many jewels as glittering."

The Senators looked at each other in dismay, but Bandi spoke.

"One more gift have we for you, Great Sultan. Permit me to bring it in."

The Padishah inclined his head. Bandi disappeared. And the Sultan, seated on his divan, closed his eyes in boredom.

The door swung open. Before the eyes of the Padishah were three maidens, as radiant as the houris in the Paradise of Mohammed. Bandi stood behind them, grinning.

The Sultan clapped his hands. Three slaves entered.

"Take these maidens to the seraglio, and give them the finest garments, and the most costly rooms that can be procured." He looked towards the Senators graciously.

"These are fine presents, for I have no wives so handsome as the three. I will grant your request."

The elders smiled and bowed, but Bandi the Captain, rubbed his hand gleefully on his trousers.

The oldest Councilman opened his mouth to speak, but before the words came the thin man jerked nervously.

"Oh Great and Wise Sultan," he cried. "This is our first request. Do not grant the desire of the Councilmen of the city of Szolnok which had audience with you today."

The Sultan narrowed his eyes, and he frowned, darkening his pleasure as the sun clouds the radiance of the minarets of Stamboul.

"Then will I grant that request. The desire of the Councilmen of the city of Szolnok is that a bey might be sent to the city of Kecskemét, for these men thought that might protect their own city, which is nearby. The audience is over. Go in peace."

The Sultan clapped his hands sharply. The dazed petitioners were led out of the room by

slaves, and into the outer audience chamber. They were sad, and when the full significance of their folly burst upon them they could not suppress their groans. The sorrowful magistrates made ready to leave, and as for Bandi the Captain, he frowned at his feet, and all of the glee had left his ruddy face.

The door at the far end opened. An official of the court of the Sultan entered, bearing in his hands a magnificent cloak, which was made of satin in the sacred color of green, and which was embroidered cunningly in gold threads. He extended it toward the men, and murmured,

"Our Mighty Master, the Sultan, has taken pity on your sorrow, for his eyes have feasted on three beauties, and he bids me present you with this kaftan."

The Councilmen looked at him in disgust, but Bandi took the cloak, for he thought that it might bring a little money if it were sold.

And so the two carriages returned, and behind them walked the fifty hojdus, the two herders. Last rode the Captain of the Guard. The journey was long, and was not lightened by the salt tears and the bitter words of the Councilmen.

A short distance beyond the city gates Bandi

glanced at the roadside, and saw a woman's figure clad in a brilliant dress, but dusty from the highway, half behind a tree. He looked. It was Yulka, with the same impertinent tilt to her chin.

Bandi stopped his horse quietly and let the procession move on around a bend in the road. Then he dismounted and strode up to Yulka.

"What is this? What? What?"

The girl said nothing. Her eyes were cast down, and her bare toes, she seemed to have cast away her fine sandals, made patterns in the dirt.

"Yulka, why did you come here, you? How did you get out of the Sultan's palace?" cried Bandi.

"Why," she threw back her head, and her eyes glittered. "Why but because I did not like the thought of Yulka married to such a husband as the Sultan." She glanced at Bandi slyly, "and a girl who has roamed the streets in freedom could never sit idle behind carved lattices. I twisted from the slave who was taking me to the harem, and ran like a hare through the palace until I saw bright daylight again. Ugh!" She shivered.

"Then you must be returned to the Sultan at once, for when he misses you, and knows that you have returned to our city, he will send troops down upon us."

"No," cried Yulka, "I'll not return."

"You will, you," shouted Bandi, snatching at her sleeve, "I am the Captain of the Guard."

But the girl had gone, running across a field. Bandi returned to his horse, and caught up with his men, but he rubbed his right hand furiously on his trouser leg.

The three older men assembled their fellow Councilmen of the Council late next night, so wroth were they, and they called Bandi only after they had reached a decision. The youth stood before them apparently undisturbed.

"What do you think will happen to the free city of Kecskemét now?" asked the oldest Senator. "All of our money is gone, and we have nothing for it. Brigands will come, and we cannot prevail against them."

Said the Captain, "Father Senators, we did it the wrong way, and we will have them just the same, us. We will get more gifts and go again. A prize may be gained the second time."

But the Councilmen muttered to themselves.

"My son," spoke an old man sadly, "there is no way to get more gifts in all the city. The Council has decided to cast you in prison as a traitor to our city of Kecskemét."

Bandi looked down, and he gently rubbed his palm on his thigh. He said nothing.

Next day the city mourned. There was not a cheerful face in Kecskemét. But at noon the sorrow turned to terrible fear, as a wild bearded horseman galloped into the streets and pulled up sharply before the Town Hall, where the Council was again assembled.

With a magnificent flourish of a dark hand, and an evil sidelong grin, the fellow handed a note to a Senator. The faces of the Councilmen were frozen with horror as the man sprang on his horse and disappeared. The note was from the bold Mohammedan Olaz, he who was more feared than six of the ordinary thieves who preyed on unfortunate Kecskemét. This insolent man demanded forty large bags of gold, with a hundred fine horses, and seventy rolls of the most precious silk.

"Ah, may kind Saint Istvan preserve us and all of our unhappy people from the hand of this heathen! We cannot supply him with these things, for we have nothing. There are not so many as ten bags of gold left in all Kecskemét." The magistrate drew his open palms upward with a gesture of inexpressible misery.

There was a sudden noise as one Councilman,

he who had asked that the desires of their neighboring city should not be granted, stood, turning over his bench abruptly. His face was crimson.

"What can we do?" he cried hoarsely, "what can we do but send this same mad youth out to the marauder, to say that we cannot supply his wishes."

"But that means death for him," murmured the oldest man. His words went unheard.

Within an hour Bandi walked, with woeful eyes, from the Town Hall to a lean shambling horse which stood, with drooping head, in the street. The people stared, and jeered and cursed as they saw a youthful figure, in the brilliant uniform of a Guard Captain, ride from the town.

Bandi went, a strangely disconsolate Captain. When his old horse had slowly paced almost half of the distance toward the tents of the wild and great Olaz, Bandi heard an eager voice calling him from the roadside. He looked up quickly, and stopped his nag. The youth stared, for the face was that of Yulka, daughter of the tailor.

"Yulka, what do you here, you?"

"O, me," she screwed up her mouth impudently, "I roam about as usual, for my old father cannot tell what to do with me, and when people question me I tell them that the Sultan did not like my

looks. He seems, in truth, satisfied with the other two delights of the eye, for he has not sent for me."

"Yulka, what do you do here?"

The voice of the girl changed suddenly, sharply. She cried,

"Bandi, Captain of Kecskemét, I, Yulka, command you to dismount from that horse!"

Bandi wonderingly got off and stood in the road. He was in a daze, and he only looked stupidly at the brilliant gold embroidered kaftan which the girl drew from behind her.

"Where did you get that, you?"

"Never mind where I got it. But I will tell you.

I stole it from the Town Hall, where it was flung as a thing of no value, on a chest." Her voice quickened. "Put it on, and ride out to the Chief. Do not ask me why. I did not stay in that palace five hours for nothing. I know what I know."

Bandi's face grew red. He shook his head violently.

"No, why should I do this, you? I am the Captain. I must go in my uniform."

He turned to mount his horse, but as he did so he felt himself jerked violently around. The kaftan was thrust on his arms. Yulka, like a small whirlwind, shoved him on his horse, and gave the astonished old animal a cut with a whip. He galloped furiously down the road.

"And when you come back safely," cried the girl, "I'll marry you."

The Councilmen of Kecskemét, fearful that their infuriated message and their sacrifice of the Captain, would bring the Chief all the sooner upon the city, hastily gathered together all of the valuables they could command, piled them in a wagon, and started for the camp of Olaz, to entreat him not to devastate their homes. But on the road they heard a shout of glee, and beheld Bandi, strangely clad in the green and gold kaftan, approaching as fast as he

could force his horse to move. The Senators could only stare.

"Here, Honorable Councilmen," cried Bandi, briskly rubbing his palm on the green satin of his robe, "here I am, safe returned, for when the Mohammedans saw the back of this cloak they bowed down to worship, and prayed me to command them. Which I did, for I sent them away."

"It is magic!" shouted the Senators.

Thus was Bandi, the Captain of the Guard, who had left his city in derision, returned in triumph. And thus he became a hero to the free city of Kecskemét. Every time that the fierce Mohammedan thieves came to demand spoils, Bandi rode out to them in the green kaftan. Every time they kissed its hem, and no man in the city of Kecskemét knew the secret of its magic charm.

Yulka said nothing. She led her former life, taking care of her old father's shop, and wandering through the streets as she pleased, barefoot. Her thoughts were on Bandi, and she told her father that the Captain of the Guard would marry her. Months passed, and Yulka waited for her wedding day to be named, but Bandi said nothing. The old man went to the young Captain, and asked him why he did not marry the girl. Bandi said,

"I want to marry her. I will marry her. But not until I get five thousand ducats of gold as a nest egg, for she brings me no dowry, and I have nothing."

Yulka shrugged her shoulders and twisted her mouth when she heard of this but old Fitos thought and thought of the problem, and of his shame because he could not give his daughter a dowry. And finally he had an idea, like a small insistent insect, buzzing in his head.

Now the magic green kaftan was kept in a strong chest in the Town Hall, and Bandi the Captain wore the key around his neck by a cord. Old Fitos the tailor had seen the kaftan many times, and, in his vanity, he believed that he could make a twin for it, so identical that no one could ever know them apart. He told Yulka of his thought, and she agreed to help him. She wanted those pieces of gold. So the girl begged the key from Bandi, because, she said, she wanted to look at the cloak. Bandi hesitated, but when he thought how she had saved his life with the kaftan, he yielded. Yulka slipped the cloak from its chest, and took it to the tailor.

Fitos was gleeful. He worked and he sewed for seven days and nights, and he sent Yulka to the

market place to find a rich Mohammedan stranger, who might want such a kaftan. On the seventh night Yulka brought two strangers to the dark little shop. The twin kaftan was finished, and was placed by the side of the magic one. In truth the old man had worked so skilfully that one could not tell the difference.

The strangers cried out when they saw it, and offered him two thousand ducats. But Fitos was crafty. He sent Yulka from the room. And he thought, in his vanity, that he could take pride and exult in his skill if his own kaftan, made by the poor tailor Fitos, should be used as the magic cloak and kissed by the lips of bearded brigands. Who could know?

For five thousand ducats he sold the strangers the old kaftan, and Yulka all unsuspecting, returned the new one to the strong box. The old man rejoiced when he handed his daughter her pieces of gold, paid for the magic kaftan, but he was a little troubled.

It was one year from Bandi's entrance to office when news came of another marauder outside the gates, who demanded spoils. The old tailor Fitos went to Bandi, who was his son-in-law, and asked to be allowed to go, wrapped in the kaftan, as

envoy to the robber. The Captain agreed indifferently, for he was getting tired of riding out in the cloak when he had so many affairs to attend to as Captain of the Guard. Fitos went, trembling, to the tents of the chief.

An hour later there was a great cry of terror, rolling like the reverberation of thunder across the city. Bandi thrust his head from the window and saw the tailor's horse, riderless, galloping madly through the streets. He knew that, somehow, the cloak had failed.

When the city of Kecskemét had been despoiled of its riches once again, the Senators gathered to decide what fate would be offered Bandi, their Captain. But the youth walked the floor of his room, trying to understand what had happened. He heard a small scratching at his door, and opened it to admit Yulka, who ran in, pale as death.

"Bandi," she cried, "my father sold the magic kaftan to strangers to give me gold for a dowry. This cloak he thought was exactly a twin, but I know the secret of its magic, and I know that he failed to place the sacred sign of the 'Ikcik ul Islam' upon the back of the hem in golden embroidery."

Bandi looked down, and rubbed his palm hard upon his thighs.

The Council of the city met. Bandi went before them, and told of the substitution of the magic cloak, and of how, by accident, the tailor Fitos had left out the tiny sign which worked the charm for all followers of Mohammed. But the Senators, mad with fear, refused to listen, and they cried out to him to choose either death or life imprisonment.

Bandi chose death.

But when they came for him, with a strong guard, they found no one but Yulka, who shrugged her shoulders, curling her mouth impudently as she did so.

"Where is he?" she smiled, "I know not at all, Your Honors."

The Councilmen, balked of their prey, seized the girl, had her bound and carried to the scaffold, followed by the bewildered people.

Yulka stood quietly, with her dark eyes like midnight pools in her white face. She looked intently toward the hills. Around her the people gathered, with a growing threatening growl.

There was a sound of swift hooves. Yulka threw up her head. The townsmen, convulsed with fear of brigands, drew away as water recoils from the prow of a ship. A horseman, his face covered by a fold of cloth dashed madly through the people, seized the prisoner, and fled as he had come. But those who stood nearest swore that before he leaned from his horse to grasp the girl Yulka, he remained motionless for a second, and rubbed the palm of his right hand once, hard, on his knee.

So did Bandi, the shepherd lad, pass from the free city of Kecskemét, where he was Captain of the Guard for one year and a day. He went, the people say, to find the stranger who bought the magic cloak, but he came back for Yulka, daughter of a tailor. And, they tell too, that whenever

danger threatens the city of Kecskemét, Bandi, the youthful Captain, will swing down from the hills flourishing a magic green kaftan, embroidered with the golden sign of Seik "ul Islam."

THE MYSTERIOUS MIRAGE

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THE WIDE PLAINS of Hungary spread for many leagues, bare, undulating, dotted with sparse brush, under the broad unending sky. There are few trees, for not even the peasants, who are scattered in rambling groups of houses, care to plant them. In months of heat the pitiless sun beats down in suffocating waves on the sands, and in winter bitter cold winds howl wildly, unhindered, from the Russias.

The plains have a strange humor, a mysterious beauty, austere and subtle. There is beauty in the clouds, in the gale-swept earth, in the brave growth of grass and low brush. There is beauty in the star-flung night, in the faint green of spring, and

in the savage wind. There is an awesome beauty in the mysterious mirage which appears to some on these plains, as it does in the deserts of Africa. This thing of air, like the reflection of deep green tree shade in a crystal lake, this mirage, is called in Hungary, the Fata Morgana.

Hundreds of years ago, when the Magyars were governed by the hand of the Turk within their country, and lived in deadly fear of the Tartar on their borders, the town of Debreczen sprawled, like a great growing youth, across acres of the plain. Debreczen had the whole expanse of plain for a site, and so it became a town of scattered homes and barns with fields between. In truth it was hard to know just where Debreczen began and where it left off, so casual was it in contour. The inhabitants had no walls, not even sheltering trees, and they had to depend on a wide shallow ditch, leagues in length, to protect them from wild marauders.

The people of Debreczen were pastoral. They were simple folk, country folk, who talked little and lived quietly—when the Tartars let them. The town was distant, and not wealthy enough for Turkish rulers to be interested in its welfare, and so it was called free, and was allowed to elect

its own governing body. For many years the chief magistrate, the biro, had been an old and wise man whose family name was Dobozy.

One day the father of Debreczen bent his brows together, until they formed a bristly wall above his scowling eyes. He rubbed his rough hand slowly up and down the coarse cloth of his garments, and listened intently to the harsh voice of a Tartar warrior who stood arrogantly before him.

"Our Mighty Chief, Olaz the Swift, who ranges the plains and takes what he desires, has condescended to have me bid you, at this hour, three days from today, send outside of the town to him, in this camp, one thousand loaves, one hundred horses, one hundred oxen, five large bags of gold, and all of the young and beautiful women of Debreczen. If you do not agree to his demands he will charge upon the town with his horses, and devour your lives and property in a great sweep of sword and flame. Three days from today, at this hour, he will come. I go to him. Allah is powerful!"

The Tartar grinned evilly, strode from the room, leaped on his horse, and was gone in a cloud of fine dust thrown up from the streets.

The old biro sat silent, too grieved for speech,

and then he rose as if in a daze, and found his pipe. The smoke seemed to give him courage, for he suddenly flung down the pipe and went to the market place, where he had criers beat their drums and called together all of the scattered inhabitants of the town. Many, who had observed the Tartar messenger, were already waiting anxiously for word. The old biro raised his hand. Chattering and muttering ceased. In the weighty silence of anxiety the voice of their leader was strong and hearty.

"My people, a great calamity has befallen the town of Debreczen, which desires but to live in peace. Many contributions have we made to the Tartars, who infest our plains, descending on us like a plague of death. Many horses, and much gold have we sent them, but now they come to us with a request that we dispatch, at this hour, in three days, to Olaz the Swift, one thousand loaves, one hundred horses, one hundred oxen, five bags of gold, and all of the young women of Debreczen."

A great cry rose and swelled and grew, like moaning wind in a forest. The old biro held both arms aloft, and there was silence.

"My people, this is the only plan that has come

to me. The loaves, the horses, the oxen and the gold we can spare, even though the loss of these cripple us, but we cannot give him our women as slaves. The city of Szolnok to the North, which is a stronghold, is friendly to our town. To it, at once, we will send the women and children. The men will remain here, to take the provisions to the Tartars, and to fight if need be."

A wild flurry of departure followed the old man's speech. Large covered wagons were rolled, on their rude-cut wooden wheels, into the dust of the market place. Into them climbed all of the women with their young children, and some of the old and infirm men. With cries and tears they waved farewell to their fathers and brothers.

"Do not return," warned the biro, "until you hear from us, for then all danger should be over."

The caravan, with as much speed as the horses and oxen could make, set out across the plains for the protection of their neighboring stronghold.

On the third day the men of Debreczen, wandering about their quiet town, which seemed to sleep even in the hours of light, felt that they paced in some strange far-off place of the dead. A sudden cloud of dust circling madly around beating hooves, drew anxious eyes to the market square, where the

old biro, calm and silent, awaited the Tartar messenger. The horseman drew up sharply, pulling his horse to its hind legs stiffly. He cried,

"Well, old goat, what have you to say to Olaz the Swift, who waits, his tents pitched, on the plains?"

The old man spoke slowly, rustily,

"Olaz the Swift demands one thousand loaves, one hundred horses, one hundred oxen, five bags of gold, and our women. Olaz may know that we will bring to him, on the second day from this, the loaves, the horses, the oxen, and the gold. But our women we have sent to another city, a stronghold where Olaz the Swift cannot reach them." His quiet voice rose until it echoed against the colored house fronts. "Our women he cannot have! This do I say for the town of Debreczen. There are only men left here, and they will fight."

The Tartar glanced swiftly about the houses, which stared back at him through vacant windows. He saw no woman, but he knew not whether to believe the old magistrate. He wheeled sharply. His voice struck suddenly on the ears of men waiting, ringing to them, brazen as a gong.

"Women, come out to save your men from the swords of the wild Tartars, who spare no one,

but will spare these if you will deliver yourselves!"

There was no slightest sound. The Tartar bowed ironically to the old biro, who stood, unsmiling.

"You are right, old goat. There are no women here. I will deliver your message to Olaz the Swift. Allah is Great!" He was gone, as he had come, a flash of purple flying garments, a pounding rhythm of hooves.

The old biro bowed his head sadly, and went into his house, for he feared an immediate attack, and knew not how to repel it. The Tartars were fleet, and cruel as wolves.

Presently, as dusk was falling, he emerged into the street and called together his band of faithful citizens.

"May St. Istvan, our saint, protect us from these infidels! We have no choice now but to fight for our lives."

The men of Debreczen gathered stones, and placed them upon the roofs of their houses, in readiness to cast down upon the Tartars when they should come. They lighted torches, and by the flickering flames loaded their guns, and polished such knives as they could gather. But they knew that the hordes of Tartars commanded by Olaz

the Swift could slay them all, leaving no living thing in the city. All night they prepared, and watched and waited, but when dawn came, heavy-eyed, to them there was no sight or sound of a Tartar horseman. The men grew uneasy, and murmured to themselves. But the old biro sat silent, quietly rubbing his palms on his knees, and nodding his head.

Men stood rigidly, with ears cocked towards the plains. There was the thudding of a horse, growing louder, but of only one horse. The same messenger of Olaz the Swift drew rein before the biro.

"My Mighty Master, Olaz the Swift, agrees to your terms. He bids you send at once the provisions and the gold. He promises to take these offerings, and leave your town in peace."

The biro bowed his head thankfully. There was a quick gasp of relief echoed about the square, and men loosed their holds on weapons. They ran about shouting joyfully, collecting the goods which they were to send out to the tents of the chief.

"In the shadow of Allah!" cried the Tartar, and was away in a shower of dust.

The biro called a young man, and to him he gave a message for the women of Debreczen, asking them to return at once, since the Tartar hordes would

be far away by another dawn. The young man, with a loud laugh, leaped on his horse and set out across the plains to the north.

When the herders of Debreczen marshalled their gifts before the Tartar tents, Olaz himself came forth to look them over. He thrust out his bushy black beard arrogantly as he slowly counted the horses, the oxen, the loaves, and the gold. He bowed low to the men, who shuffled their feet in fear.

"Greetings to you and to your great biro," he murmured, with a grin, which somehow made the men uneasy, "your great biro whose wise head devised this successful trick. Tell him Olaz the Swift bows to him in all humility." He stood, stroking his beard, and smiling.

But when the men of Debreczen had gone, the chief still stood and grinned. His Lieutenant approached.

"Master, shall I bid the men assemble these goods, and make ready to depart?"

Olaz turned to him and his smile broadened.

"You do not think that I keep promises made to Christian pigs, do you? Bid the men make ready to move, but not away. We go to the marsh north of the town, where reeds head tall will hide us until

the caravan comes. This marsh lies behind a slight hill; we will rest on the fringe of the water."

Thus a Magyar youth, who lay stretched behind a clump of bushes, which was too far from the camp for him to hear, but quite close enough to see, observed the Tartars making ready, after their evening meal and prayer, to depart. He ran swiftly to Debreczen, and told the biro his news. The old man bowed his head gratefully, and murmured his gratitude to St. Istvan.

The caravan set out from the stronghold of Szolnok at dawn, and the women sang as they rode, for they had not expected such good luck. There had been no battle, and they were returning now to their people. They wept and cried with joy, all of the day, but late in the afternoon, as they were jogging along, tired but happy, an old woman turned a sharp eye to the sky.

"Ah," she shrilled, "May the Virgin protect us, for the heavens are blood red, and there is a black and sullen cloud on the horizon. We will have a storm before we reach Debreczen."

But the younger women laughed at her,

"Mother," they called, "you have made too much vinegar; it has soured your tongue." The old woman muttered to herself angrily.

As the caravan approached Debreczen, a young wife called Anna, holding a sleeping child in her arms, glanced up in the soft light. She rode in the first wagon beside the driver, her old, almost blind, father. She threw her head up gaily, for she thought of her husband, safe in Debreczen, and of the home to which she was returning. But as she looked her eyes grew glassy with fear. Her neck stiffened, and her voice came with a little moan. With a great effort of will she cast from her paralyzing fear, and stood erect on the seat of the wagon.

"Look," she cried to those of the caravan. Her voice broke the evening air sharply, cutting through the happy unconcern. All the wagons halted, and the people scrambled from them. They stood, as fearful as she, and gazed, fascinated, where her finger pointed. Before them was the Fata Morgana, the mysterious mirage of the plains. As clear as the picture of the Virgin which rested above the altar of the church was a strange sight. At one side rose the reeds of a marsh, but in front there was a slight hill, and on the hill, outlined blackly against translucent sky, was the figure of a giant Tartar chief, who sat his horse and gazed in their direction, as if he probed the air for a glimpse of the caravan.

A low wail rose slowly from the women, beating

on the evening air like a lost wind on the plains. A voice rose.

"Could this be real? Have we reached the marshes and the hill just outside of Debreczen?"

"Nay," answered the old father who drove the

first wagon, "nay, this is the Fata Morgana. It is a warning to us to return to the North at once, for the Tartar chief waits."

And so the wagons turned with sudden creaking and the women returned to their places, shaking with fright.

But Olaz, who waited on the hilltop, could see nothing and he grew very angry. He was getting

impatient, for he had waited there most of the day, and his men were muttering their discontent with the damp marsh as a hiding place. Sunset came, with no sight of the wagons. He clenched his fist fiercely on his knee, and wheeled his horse.

"Out," he cried hoarsely to his Lieutenant, "they cannot be far! Perhaps they have turned back. We will ride to meet them."

His men plunged from the marsh like a flock of birds disturbed by an arrow. They sped, a vast, flashing horde on their fleet horses, toward the North. And the Tartar chief, Olaz, led them all.

The women of the caravan prayed and thanked

patron saints for their deliverance, but Anna who now rode in the last wagon often turned her head anxiously back toward Debreczen. She thought she saw a wisp of dust. It became an immense cloud. This could only be the Tartars pursuing them. She rose again and shrieked to the women to hasten.

"Tartars! They are coming behind us!"

The sky was a brilliant crimson, flecked with amethyst. Quickly, the light changed; instantly the plains grew dark. The earth was covered with a black cloak, and the sky was suddenly grim and desolate. The caravan stopped, appalled by the wind which came, howling like a demon, down from the North. The women huddled inside of their sheltering covers and wept, but the old men and boys rushed to their horses and oxen, unhitched them and pulled them into the lee of the wagons. The cloud of dust grew larger. Now they could hear the pounding of many hooves. The wind whipped savagely at the heavy coverings of the wagons, but could not tear them away.

Anna thrust her head into the tearing gale, and saw the Tartars, just coming into sight. She could hear their wild cries of triumph, and see the black beards flying back from their faces. The

hail came swiftly, like a thick curtain, blotting out sight of everything. The women cowered, and added their wail to the wind.

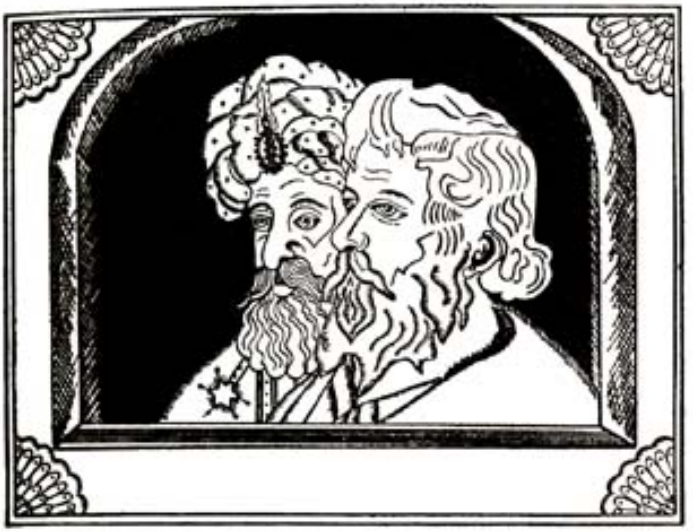
Olaz, whose sight of the caravan had so filled him with fierce glee, had not, in his swift ride, thought to observe the sudden darkening of the sky. When the hail came down upon him, pounding his head with great pieces of ice, he did not stop, but spurred on his mount, shouting to the men. But he had not reckoned with his horses, for the animals went half mad when the sharp cold stones cut their sleek hides. They reared and plunged and snorted, heedless of the angry curses of their riders, and as the storm grew greater, and the wind came like a fiend from the Abyss, they lost their heads completely. Some threw their riders to the ground and trampled on them. Others plunged back toward Debreczen, and into the marsh, where they drowned, with the Tartars who rode them. But the horse of Olaz the Swift galloped wildly across the plains until he reached the huddled caravan. With a frenzied neigh he cast the chief to the ground and disappeared toward the North.

When the wind died as suddenly as it had risen, and the hail ceased, trembling women and the old

men, with the young boys, emerged unhurt from their covers and looked anxiously for their horses and oxen, which were, for the most part, still in the shelter of the huge wagons. They dropped on their knees to pray, seeing nothing, for the night was dark. And then they remembered the dread Tartars. The strongest and bravest among them lighted torches to search the vicinity and find if the marauders could still be near. And so they found Olaz the Swift, who lay flung on the ground, dead, beside their wagons. There were no other Tartars to be seen. The women turned their wagons once again and went their way to Debreczen.

Thus was saved the city of Debreczen, for the plains have a strange beauty, and a strange humor. And no man knows when he may see the mysterious mirage, the Fata Morgana

THE SPEAKING BIRD



THE SPEAKING BIRD

THE MAGISTRATE of Kecskemét, forgetful of important work which awaited him, stood at the window of his Town Hall and stared into the market place below, where color rioted in wide Hungarian skirts, embroidered sheepskin jackets, Mohammedan turbans and brilliant trousers. His ears were filled with ceaseless sounds of barter, squeals of pigs, neighing of horses, stamp of oxen, crow of cocks, and always, continuous and without pause, the cries, shrill, hoarse, laughing, angered, of his people. His eyes gathered in great mounds of produce, and his nose received gratefully the

scent of fresh-baked loaves and gingerbread, pungent, sweet.

The Magistrate turned to greet a friend who had entered and was standing behind him, as entranced as he.

"Kissler Aga," smiled the Judge, "although I have viewed this scene ten thousand times from this window, yet I forever feel a sense of discovery and delight when I look down upon it."

Kissler Aga laughed.

"And so do I too, for the spirit of Kecskemét is rampant in our market place on days such as these."

A slow procession moved majestically beneath them. A line of Arabian pure-bloods stepped daintily, haughtily beside their owners. Slow-footed oxen, plodding, gazing with deep mournful eyes, jingling bells incongruous with their dignity, moved slowly by. Harsh voices propelled them on their way. An old woman, with but five eggs in her basket, raised a voice as shrill and penetrating as if she hawked the wealth of nations. A boy ran in and out between the legs of animals, intoxicated with excitement.

Suddenly the eyes of the two men became fixed on the tall lithe figure of a young man, robed in shining silks, who wore above a proud, sad face a

saffron turban in which a ruby shone, like a baleful eye ever-watchful of the actions of the wearer. The Magistrate leaned forward in his window, with his hands gripping the sill. Around the neck of the strange man was a band of beaten gold, closely fastened to a slender silver chain which was attached to a similar band on the neck of a brilliant bird perched on his shoulder.

"Look!" cried the Judge to his friend, pointing into the dusty street. But he had no need to indicate the stranger, for Kissler Aga was also staring at the chained bird.

"How can this be? What does it mean?" murmured the Magistrate.

"Do you see the fellow who goes before?" asked Kissler Aga quietly.

The Magistrate saw then an immense man, whom he had not noticed, dark as only Turks were dark, clothed in the coarse dress of a camel driver, but who had no animal beside him. Instead he carried across his shoulder the straps of a large drum, which he beat with slow booming sounds. A crowd of swarthy folk was gathering curiously to the steady rhythm of the drum. The Turkish camel driver halted under the shadow of the Town Hall. Behind him the young man stood,

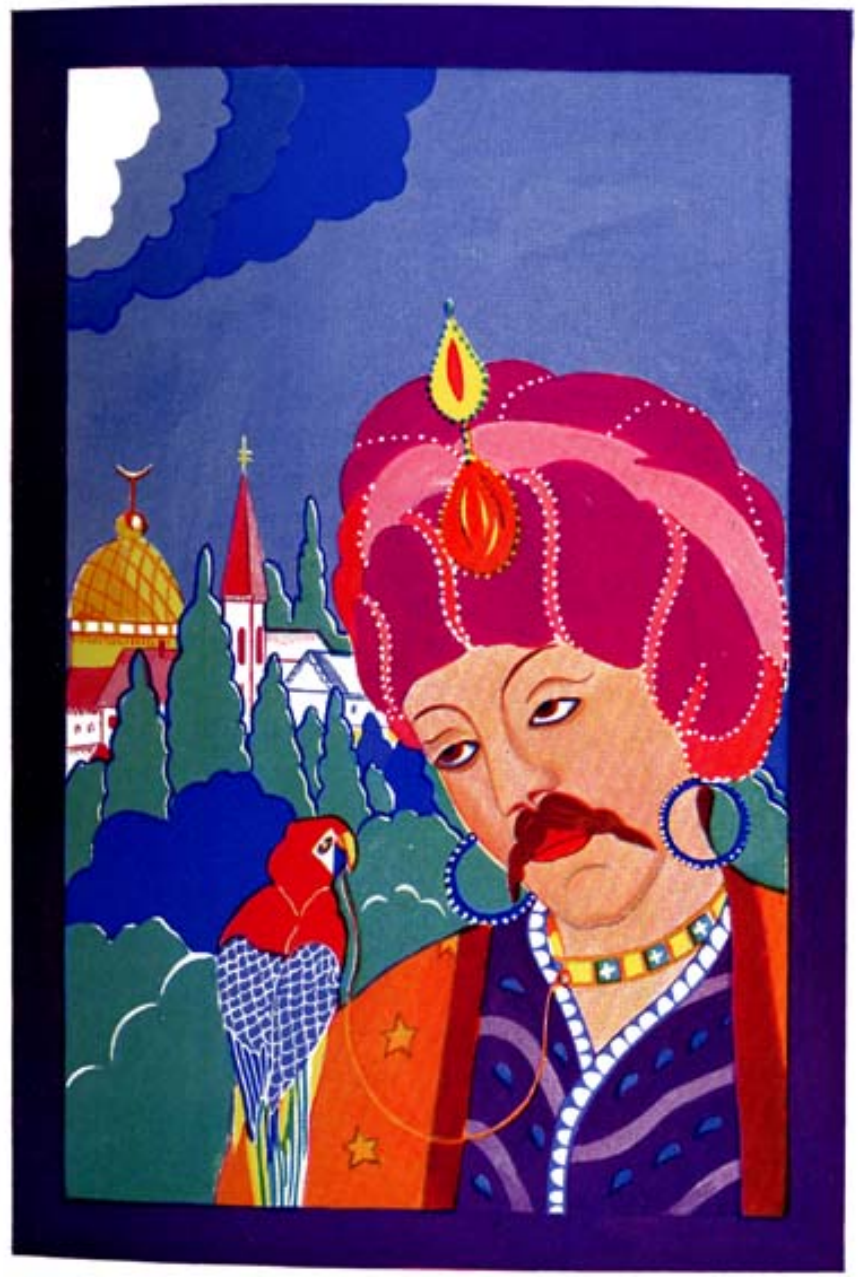
immovable as a figure in wood, his proud face set, rigidly indifferent to the gaping stares of the multitude. He made no sound, and showed no interest in anything about him until the bird, growing restless and disturbed, fluttered its wings and squawked twice. Instantly the stranger turned his head and spoke a few low words which quieted the bird.

The hoarse voice of the camel driver burst into the air, accompanied by incessant thuds on his drum.

"Come! Hear the Speaking Bird!" He thrust a thick-lipped face close to the parrot. "Speak, with the tongue of a human being!"

But the feathered creature instantly became a wild bunch of colored plumage. It extended a sharp beak and plucked a tiny piece of skin from the nose of the shouting man, who jumped back with a loud curse. The tall young stranger smoothed the little head of his bird, and spoke to it again in a low voice. The crowd, which had leaped away with the frightened jerk of the camel driver, again drew close. The big fellow recovered his voice.

"Here, by the Marvelous Grace of Allah, is a bird which has learned to speak. Give him bakshis, in the name of the Most High!"



His huge hand pounded once more on the head of the drum, and his cries became a chant as the Mohammedans among the crowd dropped copper coins into a small basket fastened to the neck of the parrot.

"Bakshis! Bakshis! Bakshis!" shrilled the bird.

The Magistrate leaned back and turned curious eyes to his friend.

"I do not understand how a young man dressed in the garments of a prince could become a common beggar in the market place? And why should he wear a bird chained about his neck?"

Kissler Aga shrugged his shoulders.

"I know the story, friend Magistrate, for I have seen this stranger before. He has wandered far since I first encountered him. His eyes flashed liquid fire that day; now they look like burnt-out coals."

The Aga sighed deeply.

"Do not speak of this story to anyone, for the Sultan's anger is in no way an advantage to a Hungarian, or to Hungary. I was in Stamboul three years ago with a friend. We walked through the narrow streets, not daring to gaze up at latticed windows, but feeling their mysterious presence. I was contemplating the Turks of the street, who

moved with a leisurely grace, and who seemed to me somewhat like their great pets, the cats, which walked in consciousness of superiority. Into the quiet of a morning street plunged a young man, dressed in foreign silks, whose whole face was consumed with an intense desire. He seemed to see nothing about him, neither the people nor the houses, but strode along with a fierce concentration on his purpose. I asked my friend of him.

"'Who is this man? He does not walk like a Turk, and he appears unlike anyone I have noticed in Stamboul.'

"'We all know of him,' answered my host, 'We cannot help but know of him, for he is an enemy of the Sultan.' His voice was lowered to a whisper. 'This man is a Georgian prince, last heir of a noble family. But a year since he was living in peace and content in his estate far to the North. He was betrothed to a princess of his country, and was looking forward to a life of happiness. One day he returned from a brief trip and discovered his home in ruins. Retainers ran about weeping and crying for mercy to their God. The young prince, they say, grasped a servant by his shoulder and shook him roughly.'

"'What is this excitement? Tell me at once.'

"The servant stammered out that the young and beautiful sister of the prince, who was accustomed to walk in her gardens each evening, had been seized by brigands and taken, no man knew where. The grief of the prince was profound. He searched madly the gardens, and the whole countryside, but could find no trace of the lost sister. And so, in great sorrow, the young man made a vow that he would not marry until he had found his sister, and had brought her back to her home. He would wander about the earth in search of her.

"And so, for many months he journeyed, without success, until he reached Stamboul, where he discovered that his sister had been taken by a gang of freebooters and sold to the Great Sultan, who had placed her in his seraglio.

"I asked my friend if the young man had made plea to the Sultan for return of his sister, and he said that many times the prince had begged for her freedom. He had sent all of the influential friends and relatives whom he could gather about him to ask for her, but the Sultan had refused to listen. And now, he said, there seemed no way left to the prince but to return without accomplishing his object, for no man could cross the wishes of

the Mighty Padishah. But still the Georgian remained in Stamboul, and still he hoped to find some means for her release."

Kissler Aga paused. After a long silence he continued.

"The parrot, they told me, was a friend of the young Georgian prince, and was the one companion of whom he never tired. The bird had been given to him by his mother, and was valued for that reason as well as for its own sake.

"Next day we were walking through the streets at the hour when the Mohammedans assemble for evening prayer. Far above us we heard the gentle sing-song voice of the muezzin bidding the faithful come. Passing before the mosque of the Sultan we stopped in surprise, for, standing inconspicuously against the outside, watching the people enter, was the Georgian prince, and he looked with desperate eyes from the temple to his bird, which sat on his hand. We waited curiously across the street to see what would happen.

"Presently the pompous Sultan emerged in all of his infidel glory, and we saw the people go down upon their knees on the street in homage to him. But the Georgian prince stood erect until the Padishah was opposite him, and then, with a pale

set face, he gave his beloved bird a flip. The creature stood directly in the path of the Sultan, and opening his beak, said in a croaking voice.

" 'Give up the Georgian princess. Receive the blessings of Allah!'

"The Mighty and Magnificent Sultan stood silent a moment, smiling, as if he would relent, but as a cloud passes over the bright face of the sun, his anger took possession of his pity. He jerked his hands upward, and clapped loudly. Instantly there came six tall black slaves, armed, who surrounded the prince and his parrot.

" 'Seize the Georgian!' commanded their master. 'Throw him in prison for his impudence.'

"The story is that for many days the young prince lay in a dungeon in the terrible Seven Towers, and then when he was taken out he found that sentence had been passed by the Sultan. The Georgian prince was to wander about the earth, guarded by a camel driver with a drum. About the neck of the prisoner was to be fastened a golden band, to which the bird must be chained. On the death of the parrot the prince could go free, with his sister, but as long as the creature lived his master must walk from city to town begging bakshis."

The Magistrate looked sorrowfully down upon the strange men who attracted so much attention in the market place.

"But Kissler," he asked, "why did he not kill the bird at once?"

"Because it had been given him by his mother, and because the bird was his beloved pet. He could not kill it. And parrots, as you doubtless know, are notoriously long-lived."

The two men leaned silently out of their window and watched the vivid life of the market. Across the square moved the prince, his face a cold mask, preceded by the coarse voice and rolling eyes of the camel driver, who beat on his big drum and cried to the bird for speech. But the drummer did not venture again close to his begging bird, for the parrot squawked excitedly every time that he saw the camel driver approach. The thin hand of the Georgian prince reached up once and again to smooth the brilliant plumage of his pet, to quiet him.

They could move but a few steps at a time, the interest they awakened was so intense, and the group of small boys increased so quickly.

"Hear the Speaking Bird! Tremble all ye people at the word of the Sultan, the Mighty, the Strong!" cried the camel driver.

"Bakshis! Bakshis! Bak-bak-bak!" shrieked the parrot.

At one side of the square was a stall, which was filled to overflowing by a fat woman, who sat, in

her ten wide skirts, behind a tiny table piled with loaves of fresh bread.

She chattered to a neighbor, but every few moments interrupted her gossip to cry in a loud voice,

"Bread! Bread! I have the best bread in all Hungary! Come, buy my bread!"

"Ah," she shrilled, "see the queer bird! The

strange man with the drum! The handsome young fellow! Chained to the bird he is."

"Bread" she cried, "bread, buy my bread!"

The prince and his jailor approached until they stood immediately in front of the stall.

"Come, hear the Speaking Bird," bellowed the camel driver.

"Bakshis! Bak-bak-bak!" squawked the parrot.

"Ah," called the woman, "listen to the marvelous creature. He speaks with a human voice."

She held our in her fat fingers a bit of warm bread. The parrot leaned over swiftly, as if to snatch the food, but its bright eyes saw a glistening gold ring which the woman wore. The ring was loose, for it belonged to her husband. With a lightning swoop the bird grasped the circlet in its open beak, and swallowed it.

The woman looked blankly at the bread which remained in her fingers, then she saw that her gold ring was gone.

There rose above the market square a shriek so shrill that the very pigs were quieted in surprise. Crowds rushed like a torrent toward the little tent, where an enraged woman stook shaking her fists and crying for justice. The Magistrate looked at his friend, Kissler Aga, and then they by unspoken

agreement ran for the door and out into the turmoil of the streets. The place was so dense with chattering, pushing bodies of people and animals that the two men had extreme difficulty forcing a passage through. By dint of thumping and shoving they made way, leaving a string of loud curses behind them as the farmers and merchants were hauled aside.

When the Magistrate and his friend reached the other side of the square they found the woman weeping and crying. The camel driver stood by, growling at the bird, sitting quietly on the shoulder of the young prince, who stood saying nothing, but with distressed eyes looking at the Hungarian seller of bread.

"Oh! Ah!" she wept, filling the air with her moans. "That ring was a signet given my husband by a noble Pasha whose life he had saved. It was magic! It was a charm! My husband did not know that I had it. I only took it for the day. Oh! Ah! You will give it back to me if the bird has to be killed to get it!"

The young man stared sadly into the eyes of his parrot, which sat, humped into his feathers, like an old woman under a shawl. The prince did not even hear the words of the woman, for he saw, anxiously,

that the bird was behaving in a strange manner.

He reached a gentle hand up to smooth its brilliant plumage.

"My old friend," he murmured, "why do you sit so? Why are you not excited, as usual?"

But the bird crouched lower. Suddenly, as the Magistrate turned to speak quietly to the woman, the parrot shuddered once, gave a low squawk, and fell over on the neck of the young Georgian prince.

"What is it, my friend?" cried the man. But the bird was limp.

"Ah!" whispered the prisoner, "he is dead."

He dropped his face into shaking hands and wept soundlessly. The woman was speechless, but the camel driver, with a simple, thick-lipped grin, strode over and, taking from his pouch a tiny golden key, unlocked the shining band about the throat of the young prince. The Magistrate gently took the Georgian by his arm and guided him away, while Kissler Aga shouted to the crowd to disperse.

For three days, in the home of the Magistrate, the young prince mourned for his friend, the bird, but on the fourth day he began to realize that happiness was again waiting for him. In the cool of early morning, mounted on a horse given him by the Magistrate of Kecskemét, he set out for Stamboul,

where he should see his sister again. He rode with head high, and a smile on his face for his thoughts were in Georgia, and on his journey with his sister to claim his bride.

But as the strange young man rode through the Hungarian country people noticed that he bore a wide band of light skin around his sunburned neck, and that he often put a gentle hand up to his shoulder, as if he stroked the plumage of a bird perching there.

THE WATER-PIPE

THE WATER-PIPE

ABDULLAH was a young man of pious habits. He believed in Allah and in Mohammed the Prophet; he repeated his prayers five times daily when the muezzin called from the minarets of the mosque; he gave one fortieth of his possessions yearly to the poor, and he had made his pilgrimage to Mecca, where he had kissed the sacred black stone which was brought from Paradise. Moreover Abdullah observed the rites of the Ramadan, which requires that each day for one month no good Mohammedan should taste food or water between dawn and sunset.

One afternoon, as the Ramadan was drawing to a close, the young man rose from his siesta and thought that he would go to see a friend, who was a

priest. Accordingly he went into the quiet streets and came to the home of the ulama. Abdullah knocked on the door. There was no answer.

"Ah," murmured the young man, "the priest rests, but soon he must arise, for it is almost time for the evening meal. I shall enter and wait for him to awaken."

He pushed open the door, and walked softly into the rooms. There was a queer scent in the air, which somehow seemed hazy to the young Turk.

"What is this?" said Abdullah, wrinkling his nose at the acrid odor. "What can be wrong with the place?"

He pushed aside a curtain and entered an inner chamber. But on the threshold Abdullah stood transfixed, for there sat his old friend the ulama, with a look of utter contentment on his face. Beside him was a strange copper vessel from which came bubbling sounds, and in its neck was extended a long coiled tube, ending in the pursed mouth of the priest. Abdullah's horrified eyes could scarcely take in the sight.

"What, ulama, drinking in the days of the Ramadan?" cried the young man.

The priest withdrew his mouth from the tube in some confusion.

"No, my son," he answered, "I am not drinking either wine or water. I am only drinking smoke."

"How is this?" cried the pious fellow. "Why do you drink smoke? What is that thing?"

"That is a water-pipe, called a narguluh. I am drinking smoke because it fills me with peace and content."

"Ah," murmured Abdullah darkly, "I do not think that even drinking smoke is approved by Allah, or by Mohammed the Trustworthy, during the sacred Ramadan."

The priest's face grew a dull red. He waved his hand threateningly toward his friend.

"Abdullah," he muttered, "if you tell of this sight I promise that you shall never taste the joys of Paradise, but shall remain forever in the everlasting fire of the Abyss."

Abdullah's face paled perceptibly.

"Oh, good ulama," he stammered, "I sh-sh-shall not tell-if-you will let me taste this fine smoke."

The priest stood, looked at the youth a moment, and then left the room, returning with an old copper narguluh, and a small bag of tobacco, which he thrust into the hands of the young man.

'Here, my son," said the priest, "take these home for your own, but tell of it to no one, for smoking

is against the law. I will show you how the water-pipe should be used."

Abdullah carefully wrapped his new possessions in a piece of cloth, and carried it excitedly to his rooms. He arranged the pipe and the water and the tobacco exactly as the ulama had told him, and sat down to smoke. The first puff gave him a feeling of elation; the second puff caused him to draw hastily; the third puff caught in his throat and made him cough; the fourth puff communicated a queer upheaval to his insides; the fifth puff made him ill. Abdullah left the pipe to seek his couch. Although he had fasted religiously all day, somehow he wanted no dinner.

The next morning the excitement returned. Abdullah, instead of sleeping during the forenoon, as was the custom of all who fasted in Ramadan, rose hurriedly and filled his narguluh. He must obtain this feeling of peace and content of which the ulama had spoken. Curiosity was triumphant. Abdullah enjoyed his pipe. He puffed and he puffed until the room filled with clouds of smoke, until the house was choked with the fumes, until this strange scent pervaded the street before his home.

Early in the afternoon a Turkish officer, strolling unhurriedly through the town, stopped short and

sniffed suspiciously. He stood quite still, and snorted. Galvanized into action the soldier looked around him and soon located the house where tiny puffs were slipping through the cracks.

"Allah save us all; the house is on fire!" roared the guard, charging at the place.

A crowd collected, instantly, in spite of Ramadan. The officer beat on the door, but there was no answer. He pushed, and entered the room. At first he could see nothing through clouds of fluffy smoke which billowed from one corner, and then the soldier discerned a face, a young and handsome face, which wore an expression of peace and content. He grasped the man by his arm.

"Flee by the grace of Allah! Your house is on fire!"

But the young fellow only smiled in a superior manner.

"No, the house does not make smoke. I make it."

The officer turned a horrified face toward the crowd which surged in at the street door.

"He makes smoke! That is forbidden by the laws of Allah. Give way!"

The big soldier roughly grasped Abdullah by his shoulders and pulled him away from his narguluh into the street. The people shrank from this con-

taminating man as if he were indeed the devil enveloped in fiery smoke from Hell.

Immediately Abdullah was taken before the Turkish magistrate who looked at him in disgust.

"Where did you get this filthy smoke-devil?"

"There was a man who taught me to drink smoke," spoke Abdullah, "but I cannot tell you his name, for that was my promise in return for the water-pipe."

The judge growled.

"If you do not tell me his name you shall have the stem of your evil narguluh thrust through your nose, and you shall be beheaded."

"No," said Abdullah sadly, "I cannot tell you his name."

Next day the young man was taken to the street, and placed on a stand, with his narguluh before him. He grew a little dizzy at the sight of many eyes regarding him. There was a sudden sharp pain.

"This is very strange," murmured Abdullah, for he felt as if he were floating lazily upward. His breath came evenly. He looked down. Far below him he saw a street, crowded with many people, and there was an odd round object lying on the ground.

"Ah, by the wisdom of Mohammed," cried Abdullah, "that must be my head, for no other

young man in all the town had such a fine shiny black beard! Lying in the dust too. Ah! Alas!"

Presently the street disappeared, and Abdullah glanced upward, wishing to get a sight of that which awaited him above. But all that he could see were great fat clouds which circled about him like the smoke from his narguluh. He moved his legs hastily, hoping to catch a foothold on something, for really it was rather disconcerting to feel nothing solid about him. His feet reached a particularly thick cloud. Abdullah breathed success. He was standing upright, and before him he saw a massive door of gray wood, which extended up beyond his sight into the unknown.

"What should I do now?" wondered the young man. "What is a door for but to knock?" He reached out and gave the panel a quick rap. There was no answer. He tapped again. With an immense creak, which sounded like a hundred thousand mice squeaking together, the door swung open. Abdullah peered through, but could see nothing. He placed his foot on the sill, and thought he would venture in.

But as he came to the entrance two angels appeared. One was tall and thin, dressed all in white, with wings like a swan, and the other was

short and plump and black as loamy earth. His wings were those of a bat.

"Honored Angels," complained Abdullah, "why do you come with such startling speed?"

The angels paid no attention to his remark, but turned to each other. Abdullah thought of his teachers in the school where he had learned the Koran. There was a certain similarity in manner.

"What," said the white angel irritably, "what shall we do with this soul? I think he is yours, brother, for he was caught smoking, and that in Ramadan." He glanced at Abdullah as if he looked on an unripe plum.

But the black angel shrugged his shoulders, and lifted his open palms.

"I don't want him, brother. He doesn't belong with us in the depths of the Raging Fire that splits everything, for he was a pious man, who traveled to Mecca and kissed the black stone." The dark angel gazed at Abdullah contemptuously, "and moreover, he is honorable, for he would not tell on the ulama."

But the white angel shook his head angrily.

"It is certain that he cannot go to the upper Heavens. We will compromise and leave him here, in the outermost region."

The angels moved aside, and beckoned condescendingly to Abdullah to enter. He moved in, but saw absolutely nothing about him. The angels were passing through another door, this one of ivory. Abdullah called.

"Good angels of Allah, where am I?"

The white angel would not turn his head, but the black fellow answered over his shoulder,

"You are in the Anteroom of Paradise."

Abdullah saw them go, and heard the ivory door click shut. He sat down, sadly, for all about him there was nothing.

"Well," murmured Abdullah, "this is better than the Fiery Pit, but I wish I had my water-pipe."

It was a strange place, for the young man felt nothing beneath him, and saw nothing over him or around him. It was neither hot nor cold, neither dark nor light, neither ugly nor beautiful. He felt no hunger, no thirst, and no satiety. Abdullah grew bored. Nothing happened at all.

For seven years and seven days, Abdullah remained in the Anteroom to Paradise, until he was so bored that he went to the ivory door and pounded vigorously with both fists. After three hours of this, Abdullah was covered with sweat, which trickled saltily into his eyes, but he continued to beat with his hands on the white door.

Suddenly the ivory barrier flew open. Abdullah stood, fists upraised, and saw the pale angel glaring at him.

"What does this mean?" thundered the angel, flapping his wings angrily. "Why do you disturb the peace of the First Heaven in this unseemly manner?"

Abdullah bowed respectfully.

"Gracious and Gentle Angel," he said, "I am so bored with the Anteroom to Paradise, which is neither hot nor cold, neither dark nor light, neither ugly nor beautiful, that I would disturb the serenity of any Heaven in order to get out."

"What do you want?" snapped the angel.

"I wish to present a petition to Allah. Will you take me to him?"

The angel stared in amusement at the effrontery of this man.

"Certainly not. Allah is too busy conducting the affairs of the world to talk with you."

"Take me to him!" roared Abdullah, threatening the angel with his clenched fists.

"Oh, all right," replied the angel nervously, "if you insist."

He beckoned to Abdullah to walk through the ivory gate. The young man found himself passing through the First Heaven, but the angel did not stop. He hurried, with a flutter of feathers and a swish of robe, through the Second, Third, Fourth, Fifth, Sixth and so into the last and Seventh Heaven. Abdullah was close behind him.

The young man stood quite still and looked around curiously. His guardian had disappeared. Strangely enough Abdullah could see nothing about him except great moving billows of gray white clouds, which sailed and eddied and coiled continuously. Abdullah drew in his breath, and with an immense puff he blew from his eyes the circling masses.

Before him was a big divan, which extended on either side out of his sight. It was made of gold, embossed in silver and precious stones, and covered with silks of rare and marvelous colors. Lying on the couch, with his pointed slippers crossed, and his eyes closed, was the largest man Abdullah had ever seen, whose beard was as black as ebony and as shining as polished metal. Abdullah's amazed eyes took in all of these marvelous details, as he murmured,

"This must be Allah?"

Then the young man saw, through the white masses, which came and went slowly, as if blown by the four winds of Heaven, a great golden narguluh bowl which rested on the floor of the Seventh Heaven. The water bubbled and gurgled inside of it, and the long coil of the pipe wound round and round the August One, ending securely in his mouth. Allah wore on his face a look of utter peace and content.

Abdullah stood first on one foot and then on the other. He saw that the narguluh was puffing out smoke, which formed the clouds above the earth. Abdullah took courage.

"Merciful Allah! Exalted Allah!"

The god slowly opened his eyes and looked at the man with a sleepy gaze.

"Great and Compassionate Allah! I come to beg a favor of you. I was a pious follower of the Koran, until a priest tempted me. I was cast into prison and beheaded, and now I have spent seven years and seven days in the Anteroom to Paradise. All this was done to me because I was found smoking a narguluh, and now I see that Allah himself drinks smoke."

The god's huge cheeks grew pink. He looked down in embarrassment, and then glanced at the young man out of the corner of his eyes.

He stammered, "But, but I must smoke to make the clouds, my son. What can I do for you?"

"There is only one thing that I desire," spoke Abdullah boldly. "Each man on the earth should live at least to the age of thirty-one, and that I was not allowed to do. I want to go back to earth to finish my allotted years, for I died too young."

Allah shook his head sadly.

"My son, that is one thing I cannot do for you. I am sorry."

"Ah, Great and Glorious Allah, grant me this?"

"No, my son, no."

"Is there then a greater power than Allah? Is the Highest afraid to make his own decision?"

"No" thundered Allah, in a voice which rever-

berated through the streets of Stamboul beneath, and set the pious to shuddering. "No, there is no Higher. I rule the Universe."

"Then, why should you not grant me this plea?"

"Well," spoke Allah judiciously, "just this once, as an exception, I shall grant your wish. But do not tell a soul, living or dead."

Abdullah bowed gratefully, and departed. He walked lightly through the Seventh, the Sixth, the Fifth, the Fourth, the Third, the Second, the First and the Anteroom of Heaven, and so was let down, during darkness, to earth.

The young man rejoiced exceedingly. When daylight appeared he swaggered through the streets, looking fondly at each familiar housefront, and gazing wonderingly at each changed building. But a queer and arid atmosphere seemed to pervade the whole city. Abdullah sniffed and wrinkled his nose, but the scent persisted. He noticed little wisps of smoke oozing through the cracks of doors and windows. Rigid with astonishment the young Turk began to stretch his neck up to each lattice as he passed. In every house he caught a glimpse of men smoking long copper or clay narguluhs.

Abdullah caught a passing youth by the sleeve and cried.

"What is this? Do all the men in Stamboul smoke the narguluh? It is not against the Holy Law?"

The boy glanced at him contemptuously,

"No of course not. Where have you come from, that you do not know that? We have not had such a law for as much as six or seven years. Everybody smokes the water-pipe."

Abdullah smoothed his beard.

"And is it still against the law to drink wine?"

"Certainly not," said the youth, "we all drink a little wine when we wish."

Abdullah threw his hands in the air.

"So! Then a short life and a merry one for Abdullah!"

Thus it was. Abdullah lived riotously. He smoked all day, and he drank and frequented the cabarets all night. He caroused wildly, and the mosques knew him no more. He soon forgot his knowledge of the Koran, and he gave no coins to the poor. One year and a day he lived, and then he died suddenly by the knife of a cut-throat.

Abdullah again felt himself floating lazily upward, but this time he knew where he was going. When he reached the door of gray wood, he lost no time in knocking loudly. The two angels appeared, one white and one black. The dark angel, however

smiled with broad delight on seeing Abdullah, and stretched a welcoming hand.

"Ah-ha!" he cried unctuously, "the soul is mine this time, brother."

The white angel stared stonily.

But Abdullah was not satisfied. He bowed to the August Angels, and begged,

"Take me to Allah for a small audience. He knows me, for I have been to him before."

"Very well," agreed the white angel, as the black one frowned, "I shall bring him back to you, undoubtedly."

Once again they passed through the Anteroom, where Abdullah shuddered with remembrance, and through the Six Heavens and so into the Seventh. Allah sat, as before, smoking and blowing clouds to fill the air. He opened his eyes.

"Well, my son, what do you want this time?"

"Great and Glorious Ruler, again my life was cut off too soon. May I return to earth for a few more years?"

"No," spoke Allah, "for tobacco has been your ruin."

"Ah, but, Lord of Majesty, I do not like Paradise and I do not like Gehenna. Allow me to live on earth."

"Very well," said Allah, "but not as a man."

The Almighty waved a hand, and the white angel appeared. "Give him a shove," cried Allah.

Abdullah felt himself falling, whirling rapidly over and over until his garments were whipped into shreds by the wind. He landed in a field, and his feet sank deep into the earth. Abdullah could not draw them out. He felt himself spreading mysteriously. So he remained for many days and weeks and months. The sun and the rain and the wind beat upon him. Straight above he could see small white clouds rolling. One day he heard a voice.

"What a fine tobacco plant! How strange that it should grow here! Allah must have dropped the seed from Paradise."

THE PROPHECY OF THE DJINN

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ON THE COAST of Albania, where the wind rises high on gusty nights, were three caves, close to the pounding sea. Their rocky mouths looked out on a wide plain where no man lived and no grain grew. One cave seemed part of the shifting sands, which blew across its stone floor, another was flooded by the waves, low on the edge of the earth, and the third was of monstrous size, leading from the wastes to a sheer precipice at its back. They were grim and desolate, placed in wild country.

But the caves were known far and wide, and were

feared. In one dwelt a pious dervish, who, in a mad frenzy of devotion to Allah, whirled his ragged skirts around and around from dawn to dusk. The second cave was empty, save for the hollow sound of the waves, and the shrill cry of wind beating inside its rocky walls. But the third cave was placed away from the others, and was the home of a dark and mysterious Djinn. No man had ever seen the spirit but many had heard his voice from a distance. It was told that the Djinn was a prophet, who could foretell the future, but only a rash man ventured to stand within the dark depths of the cave and raise his voice hoarsely in question. The stone sides of the home of this spirit gave back no echoes to fearful human ears. There was, for a time, only the dense silence of death, until the answers of the Djinn rang, like the booming of a great bell, to startle sailors far out on the sea.

When no one came to disturb the peace of the Djinn, and there was therefore silence in the third cave, the pious dervish was happy as he whirled and prayed. But when the waters grew angry and winds shrieked the dervish thought, through the uproar, that he could hear the voice of the Djinn, and then he felt his knees shake so that he could scarcely turn his seventy times seven.

The dervish lived on roots and spring water and slept on the sand-blown floor of his stone cave.

One day the hermit rose at dawn, as was his custom, and turned his body reverently toward the

East to pray. He had just finished when he heard an unfamiliar noise behind him. He looked up fearfully and saw, not far away, an old man, with a long white beard, sitting on a horse. The man was of powerful build, with a head like a block of

granite. He wore rich satins and sat a fine Arabian mount. The eyes of the dervish shone wonderingly in his emaciated face.

"Worthy dervish," the man spoke in a voice which sounded like the clash of steel on steel, "do you live hereabouts?"

"Yes, Glorious and Exalted Pasha, I do. I live in this cave and I pray all day to the Divine Allah."

"Pious dervish, tell me this. Have you heard of a cave in these parts in which there dwells a mighty Djinn, with a voice of thunder?"

The dervish cringed on the ground. His hands trembled.

"Yes," he whispered, "he lives not far from here."

"Then," cried the stranger loudly, shaking in his left hand a silken bag, which clinked with gold, "if you will take me to him I will give you this purse. But if you do not," his voice rose, he clutched a jeweled sword with his right fist and held it stiffly aloft, "if you do not I shall give you the blade of this sword, to shorten you by a head!"

The dervish crouched in the sand.

"Ah, good master, I want not the gold for I am a dervish of Allah the Great, Allah the Merciful, and all things save prayer I have foresworn. I

want not the sword, for I wish to continue to live in the service of Allah the Compassionate."

"Then will you take me to the cave of the Dark Djinn?"

"Yes," nodded the dervish, rising on his thin legs, "but only to the entrance. I cannot go beyond. I do not want to know the future, for that is in the hands of Allah."

The stranger frowned heavily, and leaped from his horse with surprising agility for so old a man. Motioning with a wave of the flashing sword for the dervish to precede him, the Pasha strode firmly along. His face was set rigidly, his thick brows drawn together.

They passed the second cave, and heard the low moan of the sea. Then they walked across a long stretch of hot sand, broken by patches of bristly brush. The bright sun glittered on the jeweled handle of the sword, and on the brilliant loose trousers of the Pasha. But the dervish went like a ragged familiar ghost through the sand, the haunting lean spirit of the wilderness.

They came to a cavern of monstrous size, leading from the wastes to a sheer precipice at its back. Its dark mouth gaped blackly in the light, and from its depths came a breath of dank mouldering

air, cooling the hot sand. The dervish said nothing. He stood with long arm outstretched, his claw finger pointing toward the cave. And then he silently went back the way he had come, and did not look around.

There was silence from the cave. The stranger stood with legs wide apart, rooted for an instant to the hot earth. For that instant his senses recoiled, and he felt unable to take a step toward the mysterious cave. With a mighty effort of will he shrugged his shoulders, murmured a little Mohammedan prayer, and advanced firmly toward the entrance. He placed his sword and his purse at the doorway, and put his foot onto the cold floor of the cave.

Every step, slow, resounding, hollow, sounded like a bell tolling, tolling a death. The big man shuddered, but continued to advance although he could see nothing before him. At last he thought that he must be far enough in to make the Djinn hear him. He spoke, and his voice came as from the depths of a chasm, booming into the gloom.

"Come, Good or Evil Spirit! Allah has released you from the scorching fire of the Abyss to talk to mortals and tell the future. Tell me, O Good or Evil Spirit, what will become of me?"

His voice died away. There was no echo. All of his senses waited painfully, strung tightly in his body, for an answer.

A slow sound came toward him, beginning as a low moan, growing in volume until it filled the cave and made the rock walls vibrate with its awesome tone. Words emerged from the drone, and smote the Pasha's ears.

"Ahh-h-h! Yesterday you were younger than your youngest child! Ahh-h-h! Tomorrow you may be older than your ancestors! Ahh-h-h!"

The sound died as it had come, with a groan.

The Pasha shouted,

"But Spirit of the Unknown, I do not understand your lordly words. Make them plain to me."

Again the cave was silent. Again it filled with a growing volume of sound,

"The one you love best will betray you. Who sins by the sword must die by the sword. Allah's will! Masallah Allah!"

The Pasha grew pale and desperate.

"O Mighty Djinn, tell me, O tell me. Shall I enter the gates of Stamboul in glory?"

"Ahh-h-h! You will enter Stamboul and be placed on a silver stand within the gates. The people will gaze and rejoice. There will be a time

when you will be in two places at once. Ahh-h-h!" The mysterious voice ended hollowly, moaning like a lost soul in Gehenna.

The Pasha shuddered, but not yet had he received all of the information he had come so far to hear. He raised his voice.

"Tell me, O Djinn, what you mean by those words? For I do not understand them."

There was a faint low growl from the cave deeps.

"Tell me, O Djinn, if I may achieve great wealth, wonderful caskets of gems and gold?"

There was a growl so fierce that it made the hair of the beard of the Pasha stiffen. He took a pace back, but summoned courage, in his vanity, to cry,

"O Glorious Djinn, Mighty Spirit, tell me if I, Kadin al Khun, the powerful Pasha of Borod, may achieve happiness?"

Close on the end of his words came a terrific blast of sound, a monstrous roar of unearthly and fiendish rage, which filled his ears to bursting, and which lifted him bodily from the cavern and threw him, white with fear, upon the earth twenty feet away. The Pasha lay a moment afraid to move, and then, unhurt, he rose and went his way. As he walked shakily to the home of the dervish, and to his horse, he heard, with a convulsive

shudder, a moan dying in the black mouth of the cave.

Kadin al Khun saw the dervish whirling madly in an ecstasy of prayer, his dingy skirts widespread above the burning sand. The Pasha said nothing, for the dervish seemed not to see him. He mounted his horse and galloped toward his castle, recovering his pride as he went. And he remembered with a proud joy that the Djinn had prophesied his glorious entrance into Stamboul, the capital, home of the Sultan, on a silver stand amid rejoicing of the people.

In the tall stone castle of the Pasha lived Halide, his young wife. She was very young, scarcely more than a child. Her dark brows were slender crescents in the pale sky of her face, which brightened with joy when she heard the approach of her lord. Her small hands were perfumed ivory, plucking music from a mandolin for the Pasha. Her feet were flower petals drifting toward him on a stream. She spent the hours of his absence looking and longing for his approach. She had never seen another man. None save her master and the women of her household had ever beheld her face.

Halide was allowed the freedom of her fortressed castle on the sea. She was not kept in the usual

seraglio, so devoted to her was the Pasha, but had entrance to all of the great halls, and the little enclosed gardens of the palace.

She was the light of her master's eyes, and the bright jewel of his castle, high above the Golden

Horn. Every evening Halide played tinkling melodies to her lord on the mandolin; every morning he presented to her, with a great bow, trays of gold and gems held aloft by ebony Nubians. Halide's eyes grew round with pleasure as she looked upon the glittering ornaments, and she hung them all about her for the day, as a tree covers itself with dew drops.

But one morning Halide grew thoughtful. She had wondered for many days why Kadin al Kuhn disappeared mysteriously every night and reappeared at dawn. She went to the Pasha and bent before him.

"My great and noble lord, will you answer a question which puzzles Halide?"

The Pasha stroked his long beard and stared at her with devoted eyes.

"My favorite wife may ask what she wills. Her questions will be answered."

Halide trembled, and clasped her hands together tightly.

"My lord, why do you disappear every night, and return at daylight? Where do the wonderful gold and gems come from each morning?"

The Pasha looked long at her, and his mouth tightened.

"Halide, that I should tell no human, but I will tell you. Each night I go to the topmost room in the round tower, and there, with my monstrous machines, I make the gold and the precious stones. Tell no one of this secret."

Halide gazed at her lord with amazement. Truly he was a most powerful Pasha. He must be the greatest lord in the Ottoman Empire, next to the Sultan. She was satisfied.

But before many days were gone Halide, who had nothing to do but to amuse herself, and roam about the palace at will, began to think more and more often of the marvelous tower room with its monstrous machines. She took no more interest in the dainty food prepared for her. She cared no more for the gems and gold brought to her every morning by Nubians. She could not sleep, and she no longer wished to hear her slave girls play and dance and sing for her. But all of this she concealed from the Pasha, who noticed nothing, for his thoughts were centered on the day when he should go, acclaimed by the people, to be placed on a silver stand within the gates of Stamboul.

He stretched forth his hand, and slowly clenched his fist as the picture came to him. He would stop at nothing to insure his fame. As the days passed he almost forgot Halide, who had been his idol. He saw her as if she were wrapped in haze, an object on the far horizon. But Halide knew that he no longer thought only of her, and her curiosity grew.

One night Halide sat, pale and listless, singing a plaintive little song. Before her, with half-shut eyes, lay the Pasha, on a silken divan. In the midst of the song, as if he was unaware of her voice,

he leaped to his feet and abruptly left the apartment. Halide sat a second, stunned, and then she rose quietly, and on soft footsteps followed him. He did not turn or look behind, but went, with nervous stride, toward the tower room. Silently she crept after him.

Down the long halls of the palace, they went, through the gardens, where Halide stooped once to pick up three tiny pebbles from the path, and up the steep winding stairs of the tower. Halide's breath came in little gasps as she slipped, quiet as a small night animal, behind her lord, who did not look back. They reached the top, and the Pasha took from his neck the golden key on its yellow silk cord. The door opened with a groan and the master entered. Halide slid closer, but the place was dark. She could see nothing in the gloom except a black mysterious shape moving about. A sudden thin flame shot up from a lamp. Halide carefully placed her three pebbles on the door sill and ran on soft feet down the stairs.

Next morning the Nubians held out to her a tray filled with such a glittering array of colored jewels that Halide could only stare amazed. Amethyst, coral, sardonyx, ruby, pearl! The Pasha smiled at her absently, but he had a hard glint in

his half-shut eyes. She knew that he was not thinking of her. He slowly closed his hand as if he drew within it all of the riches and all of the power of the Ottoman Empire. Halide felt fearfully that her lord was in a far land and that some dark Djinn was leading him down a gloomy path to Gehenna. She shuddered, and resolved to discover his secret, and to help him.

When darkness came furtively upon the craggy castle, lapped softly by the little waves of the Bosphorus, Kadin al Kuhn grew more restless. He was keyed tightly to the thought of the night and his round tower room with its monstrous machines.

Halide rose as was her custom, and went for her mandolin, but when she returned the bright room was empty. The Pasha was gone. The girl dropped her instrument and ran, with soft sandaled patter, through the palace and across the gardens, black and silver in the night, to the tower. Up the stairs she crept on trembling feet, and so reached, with a small gasp of relief, the mysterious room. There was a tiny crack in the door, where the pebbles prevented its closing, and inside a sputtering lamp light fluttered and wavered uncertainly, tossed in some draught. Halide breathlessly pushed

the heavy door. At last it was wide enough for her slender body to slip through. She peeped in. There was no one in the place. She boldly walked through the door, but left it cracked open on the pebbles.

The room was as darkly mystic as the floor of an unfathomable sea, where roll the geniis in their glimmering translucent bottles. Halide shuddered, and clasped her hands. She crept slowly about the chamber, examining in the dim light of the one lamp, huge contorted machines which blocked one side of the place. She put out her hand to steady herself, for she was shaking all over, and felt the soft woven texture of a tapestry hung against the wall.

There was a faint sound, which seemed to come from the rocks beneath the castle. Halide's foot poised in its explorations and remained fixed in the air. Her ears drew back like a frightened kitten. The sound grew louder. Surely those were footsteps, and they came from below the floor, approaching the room. They were heavy and measured, but seemed almost within the chamber. Halide, with a little prayer to Allah, recovered her power of motion and hurriedly drew herself behind the tapestry folds. But she peeped cautiously around

the edge, for she was in a black corner of the room.

There was the noise of dragging under the floor Before her eyes the very boards rose mysteriously, and there came from them a figure. The feeble light gleamed on the glossy curls of a gray beard,

and flowing saffron robes. Halide saw that it was her husband, and yet she could scarcely believe it so. For this man had a cruel, fierce smile which twisted the face of her kindly lord into that of a tiger. She grew cold as death.

He stood above the hole in the floor and beckoned with a cupped rigid hand to something below.

Halide wanted to withdraw her eyes, but they were fixed immovably on the black hole. She grasped a fold of the tapestry to steady herself. The lamplight flickered uncertainly, and flared yellowly on two ebony heads which were rising from the floor. Halide thrust her hand into her mouth to prevent a scream. Her heart was pumping loudly.

The heads,with kinky hair and thick out-thrust lips rose silently and swiftly to the room. Two shining black bodies, wrapped about with crimson clothes, stood in the mysterious chamber and bowed before their master. Halide saw then that they were not geniis, as she had believed, but were Noba and Woba, the same grinning Nubian slaves who presented her each morning with the wonderful trays of jewels and golden ornaments. Her gaze traveled slowly down to the small limp objects which the slaves held between them. She saw with sad amazement that they were two children, beautiful as lily cups, and as pale. They appeared to be brother and sister, so alike were they with their delicate features and brown hair. And then Halide saw that their thin wrists were chained so heavily together that they could scarcely lift their hands. A sudden fear of the Pasha took possession

of her. If she could have escaped the room unnoticed she would have sped frantically from the secret, for something told her now that the knowledge would destroy her happiness.

The Nubians thrust the children forward and loosed their hold. The brother and sister sank to the floor. Kadin al Kuhn towered over them, legs wide apart, and his beard stood out like a sail in a stiff gale. He drew from behind his back a long crescent-like knife, glittering steel, with a handle which gleamed with jewels in his brown hand. He flourished above the heads of the children, and cried,

"Children of the Christian God, tell me where your father keeps his jewels and gold on the handsome Venetian bark in which he rests on the Golden Horn! Tell me this, that I may seize them tomorrow night, or by the lightning sword of Allah I shall sever your heads from your bodies."

But the children lay exhausted, too petrified by fear to weep, or to utter a word. The Pasha clenched his left hand until the knuckles showed white, but not a sound did they make. He suddenly lowered his gleaming blade.

"In this room you stay, with neither food nor water, until daylight. If at that time you tell me

I shall return you to your father's ship unharmed, if you do not, this sword shall be your reward."

He turned grimly, thrust his sword into his belt, and strode from the room. Halide, fascinated, watched the slaves, who had seemed so safe and ordinary to her in daylight, become, as they obeyed their master, mysterious demons risen from the slimy deeps. They merged into the darkness of the outer staircase, like shadows of evil departed from the earth. They locked the door of the room where the children were chained to a post which was driven into the floor. Halide slipped on trembling feet from the place, and reached her own room in safety.

The young wife crouched before the lattice of her window and looked out over the sea, where she could barely discern a ship rolling on the tide, outlined against the moon. She sighed and dropped her face in her hands, for she knew that her lord had never manufactured precious jewels for her. She knew that through the torture and perhaps the death of many innocent souls she had received trays of gems and of gold. But she was in deadly fear of her Pasha. He seemed to her a monster. And then she thought of the children.

She rose softly and dressed herself in garments

as bright and fragile as a butterfly's wing. She placed on her feet tiny jeweled slippers of blue, and about her long dark hair she twined glittering strands of gems. A small golden pair of scissors she concealed in her clothes.

Halide summoned three slave girls, who followed her as she walked on firm feet to the chamber of her lord. He was lying awake on his silken divan, smoking his water-pipe, and the long sinuous coils writhed from his lips. His face relaxed from its harsh immobility when he saw his favorite wife. He smiled. His hand slowly opened and lay supinely on his knee.

Halide bowed low before him, then motioned to her slave girls to play. They poised their instruments a moment, and drew from them a low monotonous chant, infinitely piercing. Halide rose to her full height. She danced, swaying slowly, moving gently as a small breeze on the gulf of Marmora. The music sang on, shrill and throbbing; faster moved the figure of the dancing girl. She turned back and forth, until she whirled like a mad dervish, and then, imperceptively, her motions grew slower, weaving. The Pasha's head drooped lower and lower until it rested limply on the cushions. Halide paused silently and waved the

slave girls from the room. She approached her husband on quiet feet, leaned over softly and snipped the cord which held the key of his tower room.

Then Halide ran nervously in her brilliant finery to the chamber, reaching it as the first gray fingers of morning were thrust into the sky. She found the children sleeping, exhausted by their sorrow, on the floor. When the girl touched them gently they gave small cries like those of animals in deadly pain, and cringed away from her hand.

"Hush, little ones," spoke Halide softly, "I come to help you. Tell me where I may find your father's ship?"

But the children only clung to each other and wept convulsively. After some moments they grew quieter and Halide talked to them a long time, telling them that she wished to take them to their own people.

"Come," she said, "we must go, for I know not how long the Pasha will sleep."

Halide drew the two children to their feet, and with a mighty effort, for she was not strong, opened the trap door. They crept fearfully down a long winding flight of stone steps, smelling the dampness and the mould. At the foot the rowboat in

which the slaves had brought the children to their prison was tied to a stake through an iron ring. The boy and girl shuddered when they saw it, but climbed into the boat, which washed back and forth against the steps on little waves. Halide, her breath almost stopped with fear, scratched her delicate hands, but she managed to unfasten the rope. She grasped the oars. She knew how to use them, for in those far-away childhood days she had often rowed out from Stamboul with her sisters and their duennas. They had sat demurely behind their veils watching the crowds of gay boats circling about the golden water, and they had often taken turn at rowing for their own pleasure. But Halide had never rowed as she did now.

She strained her eyes forward anxiously toward the sea, and tried to guide the frail boat in the direction in which the boy pointed. The children knew a little Turkish, but they were too frightened to be able to remember much of the language. The dawn broke, pale rose and gray before them, and they shivered in the chill winds. But Halide only sighed with relief because they were not pursued, even as she shuddered with cold in her thin garments. She pulled on the oars, back and forth, back and forth endlessly until her breath came

in sharp gasps and her hands were first blistered and then raw and bleeding. At last the high black prow of a ship came into view suddenly, startlingly, and the boy gave a cry of joy.

Halide rested a few minutes, and with a last pull she shoved the small boat beside the high one. From the mastheads she could see the pennons of Venice waving slowly. There was a sudden cry as a sailor observed the strange boat, holding two children chained to each other, and a slight girl in Turkish garments, whose long black hair waved behind her. Halide quickly drew her veil across her crimson face. She motioned to the sailor to take the children, for she meant to return to the castle on the rocks, but with a frenzied shout of joy the merchant, father of the boy and girl, ran to the side of the ship and bade the sailors lift all of the three into the vessel.

Halide, on the deck of this strange craft, drew back timidly, but the merchant, who spoke Turkish fluently, reassured her and told her that he intended to put into the harbor of Stamboul, and there seek audience with the Sultan. Halide, who knew that death lay waiting for her in the castle of Kadin al Khun, consented to go with them.

The Pasha rose from a sleep which had made him

forgetful for a few short hours of the heavy weight ambition had bound to his thoughts. He smiled, with a faint glimmer of his old humor, and then his mind was flooded with his plans for power and riches. Stamboul, a glorious city of desire, rose before his dizzy eyes, and he saw himself standing resplendent in shining garments, and bowing to the plaudits of the multitude. He jerked from his couch, but his glance fell, by chance, on a pair of tiny scissors lying on the carpet by his feet. He wondered, and then dismissed the thought from his mind. With hasty steps the Pasha went, sword in hand, to the tower chamber.

The door was tightly closed. The hand of Kadin al Kuhn felt for his key. Then he stood rooted to the stone floor, for the cord was no longer about his neck, and there was no key. He plunged at the heavy door, and with a push sent it swinging back. The room was empty, but the trap door stood open. The Pasha, like one demented, ran from the place calling hoarsely for his slaves, who knelt, trembling, before him. Suddenly into his mind came the picture of a tiny pair of golden scissors lying on the carpet at his feet. He sent for his favorite wife, but the women of the harem, with faces pale as death, told him that Halide had disappeared.

The Pasha cried out and wept, and tore his beard, but he did not search for his wife. He knew that the first prophecy had been fulfilled. From that hour Kadin al Kuhn walked as one wanders in a deep sleep, with a strange stony smile on his lips. If the one whom he loved most had betrayed him, then there must come to pass the other prophecy. He would be placed on a silver stand within the gates of Stamboul, and the people would rejoice.

Halide, in audience with the Sultan, the Venetian merchant and his children, said nothing. She grieved for her husband, and refused to accuse him, but the boy told how this Turkish girl had saved his life and that of his sister at the risk of her own. The Sultan frowned, for he did not wish to offend this merchant, who was one of the richest traders in his city.

"And how did he steal these Christian children?" he asked.

"He came on my ship at night, and took the little ones, who were playing alone near the rail. No one knew until an hour had passed. We thought that they might have fallen into the sea, O Mighty Padishah!"

The Sultan called his Visier.

"Send a note to this rash Pasha bidding him

explain his conduct toward the Venetian merchant." He turned to his audience, "Go in peace! Masallah Allah."

Halide waited in terrible anxiety for the messenger to return. She had gone to the home of her own people, and remained in seclusion there. But days passed, and she heard nothing. Then, when she had given up any hope of ever hearing of her lord, she received word that messengers of the Sultan had reported that Kadin al Kuhn, mad in his pride, had killed the first messenger, and that the spies had only escaped with their lives.

The Sultan rose in his wrath against the Pasha who dared usurp mighty powers. He called together a small army and sent it out to besiege the castle. Kadin al Kuhn, whose head was filled with the thunder of the prophecy of the Djinn; who could see nothing before his dazzled eyes save a silver stand; who could hear nothing save the rejoicing of the multitude, believed that his hour of power had come. He clenched his fists, and prepared for a siege.

Twenty days and twenty nights did the army of the Sultan batter at the gates of Kadin al Kuhn, but they could not force an entrance through the high stone walls.

And then one night a captain thought suddenly of the secret stairway into the tower chamber of which the young wife had told them. He dispatched men for boats. They returned when three dawns had risen ghostly on the sea. As the army redoubled its fire on the gates and walls, the captain with a few men broke in the small door to the stairway and crept up the steps, through the trapdoor, and into the room.

The Pasha, rejoicing at his continued victory strode about the torture chamber, clenching and unclenching his hands. There was a metallic sound before him. He stood frozen, hand on sword. As the Sultan's soldiers swarmed upon him the Pasha drew his curved and jeweled blade. But he was an instant too late, for the captain struck first and with a single lightning stroke, severed the head of the Pasha from his body.

The Sultan smiled, well pleased, when he heard of the fate of the rash lord, and he commanded that the body of Kadin al Kuhn be buried in his castle on the rocks, beside the Golden Horn, but that his head, as a warning to all those who defy the Sultan, the Mighty, the Great Sultan, should be placed on a silver tray and displayed inside the gates of Stamboul.

A multitude circled slowly around the silver stand on which they saw the head of the mighty Pasha of Borod, and as they moved they opened their mouths to rejoice, for an enemy of their Padishah had fallen in his pride. But the lips of the Pasha wore a strange stony smile.

On the coast of Albania, where the wind rides high on gusty nights, a pious dervish whirled his ragged skirts in mad devotion to Allah the Most High, for his ears caught a sound, like the booming of some great bell, of a voice from the mysterious cave, set high above the wastes of sand and sea.

THE ALL-POWERFUL KHAN

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THERE WAS A CHURCH, small, unpretentious, placed on the edge of the dangerous plains, where fierce Tartar hordes ruled the wilds. On the other side was a Hungarian village, the little center of a farming district. The homes were peaceful, until there came, with fire and sword, the All-powerful Khan of the Tartars, who snatched a slice of Hungary here and a wedge there, until he told himself with great arrogance that he was the conqueror of this Christian land. People crept to the little church to pray. All of the strong men of the village were dead, by the hand of the Tartar;

all of the homes were destroyed or damaged; all of the cattle killed, the crops ruined. People crept to the little church to pray. Beyond them stretched the unknown, the fearful plains.

Under the light of stars the wastes glowed with a pallid fear. Beyond the village Tartars were encamped around a great fire, built of logs brought leagues across treeless plains. Shouts from hairy throats mingled with the roar of flames, and grotesque shadows cast by moving figures threw a strange pattern over a tent, pitched at one side.

About this shelter ran frantic men in wild Eastern garb, bearing great trenchers of food. Horses neighed and stamped and snorted, jingling metal accoutrements, just outside of the light, and cattle screamed in terror as they were slaughtered for the feast. Oxen were roasted whole, adding a sharp smell of singeing hair and smoking flesh to the keen night breeze. Men shouted hoarsely and sang as they drank the blood of beasts. The Khan, All-powerful Khan of the Tartars, rested in his tent, and stared with black triumphant eyes into Hungary. Beside him lay his silver bow and his spear of burnished copper.

From the darkness to the South faint woeful cries, scarcely discernible in the din, came to his

ears. But the Khan heard, and smiled as he listened. He had eaten of the oxen, the lambs and kids taken by his men from Magyar farmers. He had drunk of the blood, and torn with his teeth warm loaves of Christian bread. He had wiped his greasy fingers on altar cloths snatched from churches. There was no smallest corner of this land unconquered by the All-powerful Khan of the Tartars.

The chief clapped his hands, sharply, abruptly. At once his guard appeared between the tent flaps, their fierce faces calmed by obedience. They bowed, with palms on foreheads. The Khan stared a moment coldly before him, then he pointed toward the South.

"Bring me the young captured women, that I may look at them."

The warriors grasped their spears, and disappeared into the night. Flinging themselves on horses they pounded toward the growing wail of women's voices, rising and falling like a funereal dirge, adding a mournful undertone to the loud feasting shouts of the Tartars. The leader of the guard whipped out a hoarse command to those who kept the women penned within a ring of weapons. The men rose willingly, growling approval, for they listened with longing to the noise

of revelry from beyond, borne to them in wisps of rude sound.

Huddled together, like sheep in a slaughter field, were fifty Magyar women and girls, who covered their faces with shaking hands, or lifted them in rigid prayer to the saints, even as their dazed eyes looked toward the distant stars, flung so serenely above the plains.

"Up! Up!" cried the Tartars rudely, "Get yourselves to the North, for the All-powerful Khan would look upon you."

But the women did not understand. They stared, stiffening with fright, at the incomprehensible words and rough gestures of the soldiers, but they did not move. A warrior, his beard bristling savagely, kicked an old woman who knelt on the earth, but she only crouched closer to the familiar soil.

A figure rose quickly from the confused group. The others crept closer to her, for she was Erzsébet, a resolute woman of higher education, who understood the language of the Tartars.

"Sisters," she called gently, "we must do as these savages command, for they have killed our fathers and brothers, devastated our lands, and taken us prisoners. We can do nothing but go. These dogs bring a message from their chief, who wishes to see us."

The women stood, grateful for leadership, and prepared to walk toward the roaring camp fire, but the leader of the guard stopped them with a shout. They gazed at each other once more confused by unknown words. Erzsébet stepped forward.

"What do you want with us now? We are obeying your commands."

"No," growled the warrior, "the Khan does not look on toothless hags. Only the young women are to go."

Erzsébet grew white as the stars. She repeated the message to the women, and saw the old ones sink, moaning, on the ground, while the younger members of the group wept hopelessly. Erzsébet threw her arm about the slender shoulder of a girl of fifteen who huddled at her side. The older woman clasped her rigidly, turning a desperate face to the wild and torch-lit countenances of the Tartars. The girl wept silently in small choking gasps.

"Mother," she whispered, "I will not go from you."

"No." The word came slowly, resolutely from the mother's pale lips.

The Tartar warriors strode among their captives, prodding them with spears, tearing the young women from the arms of the older ones. Shrieks

filled the chill air of the plains, and came, like music, to the ears of the grim Khan, who smiled.

At last the young women were separated, and the men made ready to drive them toward the tent of their chief, when the leader of the guard observed the small figure crouching behind the skirts of Erzsébet, who stood with stony face. He reached them in three great strides, and grasped the girl by her arm. She made not a sound, but clasped her hands tighter about her mother, who would not let her go. The Tartar, swearing savagely, threatened them with his weapons, but found that useless. He struggled with the girl, and then with the mother, but they were as one figure, moving in the glare of torch fire. The Tartar suddenly thought of the impatience of the Khan, and he trembled.

"Then if you will not be separated I shall take you together to the Khan, but you will suffer for this trick."

He gave a last pull, and jerked the girl from her mother, but as he took a step toward his horse she broke from him with a shrill animal cry, and was again united to the stiff figure.

The Tartar drew his whip and lashed the woman across her shoulders.

So they went. The women were driven, wailing monotonously, by warriors on horses, but behind them came, on foot, the leader of the Tartar guard, lash in hand, forcing two prisoners, who clung tightly together as they walked before him.

The man crowded his prisoners into the lighted tent, where flames from the burning pile outside threw strange shadows. The girl hid her head in the garments of her mother, but the woman stood, like a rock on a vast desert waste, gazing at the chieftain. He stared at her coldly.

"What does this mean? Why have you brought me this woman?"

The warrior trembled slightly, and tightened his hold on the shoulder of Erzsébet.

"Mighty Khan of all the Universe, I brought the woman because I could not separate her from this young girl."

"You refused to obey the commands of the Khan of the Tartars?" said the chief evenly, with half-shut eyes, to the Magyar woman.

"Yes," she answered slowly, but with no trace of fear, "She is my daughter."

"Do you know the punishment for such a crime?"

"No."

"I shall have you burned alive. Don't you know

that I conquered the world? How do you dare, with your puny strength, to oppose me?"

Erzsébet looked around, turning her head woodenly, as if on a pivot. She stood with her daughter in the center of a half circle of fierce bearded faces, above strange garments and gleaming weapons. Before her the Khan, resting on skins of wild animals, looking at her through slitted eyes, did not conceal a cunning triumph.

She said nothing. The Khan spoke.

"Do you not know that I have burned your Hungarian houses to the furthermost ends of this country? Do you not know that I have leveled your halls of justice, and destroyed your growing grain? Do you not know that I have killed your soldiers and your farmers, your nobles and your officials? Do you not know," he leaned forward, voice low and tense, "that you are in my power?"

The mother stood still, stiffly. She opened her lips, but no sound came. Behind the face of the Tartar she saw again the smoking ruins of her home, her city ablaze, her husband and sons lying in their own blood. She felt the lash of the warrior driving her forward, painfully, step by step. She held the shaking girl tightly to her, and threw up her head. There was a strange exalted light in her

eyes. Her hair, hanging about her shoulders, gave her face and figure the expression of Maria, high above an altar. Her voice rang clearly through the tent, and into the night air of the plains, where the roar of flames devoured it.

"You have conquered the world, but you have not conquered God! The Virgin will receive us in her Grace!"

The Khan rose slightly, suddenly, from his couch of skins, and then settled back. His jaw was fixed savagely, and his fingers caught a fold of cloth, ripping it with a rasping sound. The tone of his voice cut like the blade of a knife.

"I have not conquered your God? I shall destroy every standing church of the Unbeliever, every chapel. No priest shall live. No figure of your Virgin goddess shall remain! You shall watch me do this, and confess that I have conquered the Christian God."

He thought of the small church, dedicated to the Virgin Maria. It was a simple place of worship, built for the peasants, who had knelt for years before its one ornament, a painting of the Virgin which hung behind the altar. The Khan had thought it not worth destruction, but the village around it was desolate. Only old women with young children, living almost starved in the shells of their homes, ventured to creep into the church after dark to beg mercy of the Virgin. The priests, who had tried to save their flock, had perished with the other men. Alone the Virgin remained, looking with sad pitying eyes upon her bare chapel.

The Khan of the Tartars, riding arrogantly through the village, sought out this church standing in the ruins of a once prosperous community. He drew rein sharply before the door, and his eyes glistened.

"Bring me those two women!" he shouted to the captain of his men.

Erzsébet was thrust before him, holding by the hand her pale daughter.

"Woman, do you see this church? We shall soon discover whether your Christian God will protect you."

The two Hungarian women were roughly thrust through the door of the chapel, and bound securely to the little altar, where they knelt, almost fainting.

"Maria, Mother of our Lord, give us protection from the cruel hand of the heathen, who has brought destruction to our peaceful land! Maria, Mother of our Lord, in whom we have faith, save the house of God. Sainted Maria, cover us with a little corner of your sacred cloak!"

The voice of the woman filled the small building with its supplicating tones. Outside, she could hear the Tartar warriors cursing and yelling as they ran about piling great heaps of dry brush against the frail walls of the chapel. And, like the tolling of a big bell among smaller ones, she could hear the Khan of the Tartars giving swift commands as he drove his men around the Christian church.

Suddenly the woman and the girl heard a prolonged shout of triumph. They trembled, and bowed their heads. A silence, strange and portentous, filled the little space about them. They

lifted their faces and stared with fearful eyes at each other.

"Ieieieie-ee-ee!" came from the throats of a hundred bowsmen, who had withdrawn to a distance. As the women raised drawn countenances to the Blessed Lady they saw a flaming arrow dart through the window and strike the picture of the Virgin Maria. But the picture did not burst into fire. Like a torch dropped into a still pool the arrow became a charred stick, and fell, harmless, to the floor. But where it had struck the white robe of the Virgin appeared a tiny golden star.

The two women bowed down, touching their faces to the altar, and it seemed to them that the robe of the Virgin had covered them.

On the outer walls of the church licking flames enveloped the wood in a crackle of fire, as burning arrows were shot into the pitch and dry brush. But there was an immense peace in the hearts of the women, for they knew that their prayers had been heard, and they seemed, strangely, to feel above them the soft robe of the Gentle Lady.

From the sky came a terrible roar, diminishing to a feeble shriek the voices of Tartar men and their horses, which shrilled wild cries of fright across the plains. A second peal of thunder, louder than the

first, filled the ears with a deafening volume of sound. The heavens opened, letting a flood of angry water descend like an avalanche upon the heads of men and beasts. The flames which ate their hungry way up the walls of the church of the Virgin Maria were cast down and extinguished with a hissing noise. The dry brush and pitch were reduced to an impotent mass of sticky fragments, and above them stood the little chapel, impervious.

The two women heard the thunder, and wild shouting of Tartars, and they knew that water from above had quenched the flames. They crouched, quivering, and listened to the noise of the warriors, yelling savagely to their horses gone mad and filled with frenzy, plunging, fighting, kicking. They knew that the army of the great chief had been broken, that horses were falling, killing and injuring their riders, or were dashing wildly into the unknown wastes of the plains. They heard the deep gong voice of the mighty Khan of the Tartars, who had conquered the world, burst into a heavy roar, as pounding hoofs bore him out of the village. Wind, fiercer than Tartar hordes, drove the army asunder and lifted men from their saddles, flinging them to earth. The two women fell, fainting, on the bare floor of the chapel.

All night the storm raged, and the women and children of the village cowered behind their broken walls in fear. All night the Tartars shrieked like fiends, until their voices were indistinguishable from the screams of their animals.

Next day the air was calm. People came from hiding to find that all of the Tartars who had not perished had fled into the plains. They searched, and discovered the cold body of the mighty Khan lying in a shallow pool made by a river which boiled and hissed its overburdened way, unheeding of its victim. He lay as if in state, with long water weeds coiling about his head, moving back and forth in the waves. The Magyars fell on their knees, and then went to their church to pray.

But when they stood in the doorway they looked with awe upon the little place, for the two women were lying before the altar peacefully sleeping. On the floor was a charred arrow, and above, gleaming in the early light of morning, they saw a tiny golden star upon the white robe of the Virgin. On the face of the painted Saint was a faint smile.

The sun has risen and set; storms have beaten themselves out; the river has risen in swollen anger; gentle winds have blown; other conquerors have come many times to the little village on the edge

of the plains, have come and gone. But the little church still stands, rebuilt and repaired by devoted hands. People of the town still tell of that fearful night, when the mighty conqueror, the Khan of the Tartars, defied God, and when the two women were saved under the robe of the Virgin. Pilgrims tread weary miles to kneel before a dim painting, which bears on its robe a tiny golden star.

THE FLOWER DRINK

THE FLOWER DRINK

THE SULTANA SAT, surrounded by her slaves and attendants, with her eyes fixed on the graceful forms of dancing girls, but her thoughts went beyond their bending figures. She seemed not to see the swaying bodies and the gliding steps, for often she sighed. The slaves glanced at their mistress anxiously, fearing her displeasure, but she was oblivious. She was a Sultana indeed, for of all of his harem the Mighty Padishah relied only on his first wife to give him wise counsel

concerning the government of his vast kingdom. There was no way in which she would not strive to help him.

For some minutes she had not observed a slave who bowed again and again before her, touching his broad palms to his forehead humbly. Suddenly the Sultana saw him. She frowned.

"What do you wish?"

"Gracious Lady," murmured the fellow, "there is an old man waiting at the seraglio gate, and he has stood there patiently for seven days. Today I asked him his reason, and he bade me give you, O Noble Queen, a message. He bids me say to you, 'From the seed comes the flower. From the flower comes truth. Truth may aid even the Lordly Sultan in his Exalted Palace.' "

The Sultana sat a moment in thought. She understood none of the message except the last line. If the Sultan could find aid?

"Bring the old man to my private rooms. Bid these girls go."

The Sultana rose and went alone into her chamber. She motioned to one trusted slave to follow her, since she knew not who this old man might be. Presently there came to her a creature so ancient that his skin was parchment; his eyes looked more

confidently into another world than this; he seemed to be the figure of death walking through life. The Sultana shuddered slightly, but controlled her voice.

"Old man," she said softly, "Why do you come to me? What does your message mean?"

The ancient bowed so low that his flowing robes swung loosely about his withered legs, and his long gray beard almost touched the floor. His eyes seemed not to fix themselves on anything within the room, but he spoke to her in a voice like a lost wind low along the ground.

"August lady, I am a conjurer. I know secrets that no ordinary man could hear and live. But one I have discovered which I shall give to you alone. You shall know it, but you shall not reveal it. You shall aid the Sultan with it, but you shall not reveal it, on pain of death."

The Sultana bit her lip nervously, but replied,

"And you say this secret can help my Lord, who is the Great, the Kind, and the Gracious?"

"Yes," muttered the old man, "yes, yes."

The Sultana considered,

"What price do I pay for this secret?"

"You have a daughter, a princess said far and wide to be more beautiful than the houris in Mo-

hammed's Paradise. Allow her to stand but seven minutes, unveiled, on the open balcony which looks on the garden of pomegranates."

"Ah no!" cried the Sultana, "a Mohammedan princess cannot stand outside of her harem unveiled, not even on a balcony which looks on a walled garden."

But the old man's faint eyes still looked into the distance, and he answered only.

"From the seed comes the flower. Truth may aid even the Lordly Sultan in his Exalted Palace."

The Sultana paled. She clasped her hands tightly, then swiftly she looked up at the slave, who stood, impassive, by the door.

"It is safe. Wait for me outside."

The man bowed low and went. The Sultana stared anxiously at the old man.

"No man will speak to my daughter, if I do as you say?"

"No man will speak to her," answered the conjurer.

"And no harm will come to her?"

"No harm will come to her. Only happiness such as she has never known."

The Sultana's eyes lost their hunted look.

"Then I shall do as you say. At what time?"

"When the moon first gilds the minarets of the mosque."

"Very well. She shall stand there alone, unveiled. Tell me the secret."

When the moon rose, full and round, above the mosque of the Sultan, her light cast a silver glow over the pomegranate garden, where a tall young man stood, half hid in tree shadow. He turned his head rigidly upward toward a tiny balcony, watching.

Suddenly he started slightly forward. A door opened. Standing against the railing, with her eyes fixed on him, was a princess, radiant as the moon herself. For seven minutes the man and the girl stood silently, absorbed in each other. For seven long minutes they gazed, and when the princess withdrew behind her latticed door the two were not strangers, but were forever bound together. The young man remained rigid, under the tree, until a voice, like a low wind along the ground, bade him hasten from the garden.

Next morning the Sultan paced his room as a lion paces a cage. He jerked his beard, and shook his head each time that a slave appeared from the Sultana asking permission to talk with him. But all day the slave returned, until the patience of the Padishah was a thin and fragile thread.

"Then bid her come," he shouted furiously, "She cannot help me now in any way."

The Sultana appeared, and she carried on a small tray a tiny vial of a clear amber liquid, which gave out a delicious perfume, filling the room. The Sultan did not even see or smell the strange bottle, for he was beside himself.

"Come," said his first wife calmly, "do not be so angry, my Lord, for I bring you aid."

"How can you help me now?" demanded the Sultan. "My enemy is a great and powerful man. I know him to be the one who is defeating me on every side, but I cannot find evidence of his treachery."

"Could you have him dine with you tonight?"

The Sultan jerked his beard.

"Of course."

"Then send for him at once, and give him this invitation. Do you see the bottle which I hold? It contains a magic drink, extracted from a rare flower. This liquid poured into wine causes the drinker to tell the truth. You may ask him questions, and he cannot refuse to answer."

The Sultan stared and then he smiled.

"Light of my hours, you are indeed a Queen of whom Allah himself might be proud. I shall do as you say."

For many days the Sultan triumphed. His enemies were mysteriously leveled, and in all of his kingdom there came to be none who could gainsay the wishes of their Padishah, for they thought him a dealer in magic, although what sort of magic they did not know.

The Sultan slept peacefully, for he rejoiced in his success. One night as he lay on his couch, absorbed in pleasant dreams of glory, the Mighty Padishah heard a slight scraping sound on a small balcony which connected his apartments with the seraglio overlooking the garden. He crept on quiet slippers to the balcony, and strained his eyes along its length. There was a dark figure sliding cautiously across the narrow passage. The Sultan moved forward tiger-like, and grasped the shoulder of a tall young man, who made no effort to free himself. The intruder was drawn swiftly into the apartment of the Lord, who placed a jeweled knife carelessly on a table, and waved a hand to a couch on the far side of the room. The Sultan turned heavy brows to his unexpected guest.

"Why do I find you on my balcony, creeping about like a thief?" The eyes of the Padishah swept swiftly over the rich garments and pleasing face of the young man. "You do not seem to be a common cut-purse."

"No," said the stranger quietly, "I am not a thief."

"You came to kill the Sultan?"

"No, Gracious Lord, I did not come to slay the Glorious Sultan. I have no reason to wish his death."

"Why did you climb upon my balcony?"

But the stranger looked down, and said not a word.

The Sultan brought his clenched fist sharply upon the taboret, causing the jeweled knife to jump and ring with a bell tone. The hand of the Padishah slowly closed upon the small dagger,

which he raised slightly. The eyes of the young man were fixed upon it, fascinated, as it glinted in the glow of a lighted lamp.

"Perhaps this may call to your mind the intention which brought you here?"

The young stranger lowered his head, and said nothing.

Suddenly the Sultan clapped his hands, with a snapping sound. Two immense black slaves appeared instantly from behind a tapestry. Each grasped tightly in his fist a long curved sword.

The Sultan bowed ironically.

"No doubt these will freshen your memory?"

But the intruder sat as still as a lake on a windless day. He did not flick an eyelid.

The face of the Sultan grew crimson. He swung his arm upward, and spoke in a harsh metallic voice to the impassive slaves.

"Take this fellow to a dungeon, and guard him carefully."

The young man went without a sound, followed by the slaves.

All night the Sultan lay awake, and his fears grew greater. He believed that he must have some unknown enemy. He was determined to torture the stranger until he should confess.

On the following morning the Padishah was so irritable that his Sultana questioned him mildly.

"My Lord, what has happened to vex you so, when I thought that your troubles had ceased?"

He jerked at his beard.

"There crept into my balcony last night a young man, who said that he had not come to slay me. But he would not give me the reason that had sent him, like a thief, to my Palace. I shall torture him until he confesses, for I fear a great unknown enemy may have sent him."

"My Glorious Lord," said the Sultana softly, "I am here to help you. Torture will not wring from this fellow the name of those who sent him, if he would not tell you in the night. Loose him, invite him to dinner, and I shall prepare the magic drink for him."

The Sultan smiled suddenly.

"I had forgotten your drink. That will bring his answer."

"My Lord, shall I stand behind a screen, to hear what he shall say?"

"Yes," granted the pleased Sultan, "you may do that."

The young man was brought into a small room, where he saw, with amazement, a table spread

with wonderful dishes of food and cups of wine. On a divan beside the dinner was the Sultan, who graciously waved to the stranger a place opposite. He seated himself cautiously, and stared around him, for he feared treachery. But, he thought, one may as well die by poisoning as by the sword. He was hungry, for no food had been brought to him all day. "My last meal will be a fine one," he mused, as he bowed ceremoniously to the Sultan.

Throughout the feast the Ruler conversed agreeably, and the young guest answered amiably. When the dishes were emptied, and slaves had poured rose scented water over the hands of the diners into golden basins held below, a small tray was brought. The Sultan graciously passed a silver cup to the stranger.

"Ah," thought the young man, "May Allah save my soul, for I am soon to present it at the gates of Paradise."

He lifted the cup, and tasted the drink. His whole being was suddenly permeated with a delightful perfume which seemed to his enchanted senses to be the essence of a thousand gardens of blossoms. He sniffed at the rare drink, but could not remember having known a flower so fragrant.

The cup was empty. The guest saw as through a rosy haze his host looking at him narrowly, and he waited expectedly for a shudder of death to pass through his frame, but none came. He felt that he was drifting, enveloped in colored clouds, above the earth, which was covered with millions of swaying, perfumed blossoms. And yet he could clearly see the eager dark face of the Sultan, the table, and a screen which stood at one side of the room. There was a voice.

"Tell me, rash young man, your name?"

The stranger felt a tremor take possession of him. He did not want to speak the truth, but he knew that it was coming from his lips through no wish of his own.

"I am Prince Achmed, of Persia."

"Ah, and why do you come to Stamboul?"

"I came for a wife. I had heard, even in my far land, of the beauty of a princess, daughter of the Sultan."

The brows of the Padishah closed suddenly above his beak-like nose as darkness descends on the earth. His voice rasped.

"Why did you creep into the balcony of the Sultan?"

"Since I saw the face of the princess my being

has burned with a fever. I desired to look but once again into the light of her eyes."

"Why did you not ask for her hand?"

"I know that my station is not high enough for the Sultan to consider. I know that she is already promised."

The Mighty Padishah stood like one carved of stone, glaring upon the young man. Behind him a screen shook a little, as if the calm air of the room had been broken by a small breeze.

The slaves appeared, and at the bidding of their master led the stranger, who walked in a daze back to his dark dungeon. The Sultan dropped to a divan, shaking with anger. He raised his fist slowly into the air. From behind the screen emerged the Sultana.

The Sultan saw her suddenly.

"Did you hear?"

"Yes," she whispered, "I heard."

"He has seen Princess Aischa. To see the unveiled countenance of a Mohammedan woman is a crime. To look upon the face of a Moslem princess means death. He dies tomorrow."

The face of the Sultana was paper white, as she begged leave to go to her own apartments, but her Lord did not even see her when he inclined

his head, for his thoughts were deep in the dungeon.

That night the Sultan had strange dreams, which caused him to rouse in horror from his couch, and to sink irritably on awaking. He saw wild shapes of men and monsters, all against him. He saw the whole world as his enemy. He saw himself conqueror of the earth. He saw always in his hand the silver cup of fragrant, clear liquid, forcing, forever forcing it down the throats of his victims. He saw his swords red with blood, and his dungeons filled with shrieking men. He awoke covered with cold sweat, exhausted by the efforts of his dreams.

At daylight the Padishah rose feverishly and called his slaves, who rolled enormous frightened eyes at each other as they went to do his bidding.

"Get the keys of the dungeons. I shall go myself and bring this insolent young man to the torture chamber. Follow me."

Down they went through richly hung halls and apartments, until they felt the cold damp breath of the prisons break on their faces. In the light of torches the Sultan, followed by his slaves, traversed the dim aisles until he reached a dungeon where no beam of light ever shone. He unlocked the massive door and flung it open, casting his

torch flicker into each corner. But nothing was there except large rats which scuttled from the light. The Sultan could scarcely credit his eyes. Frenziedly he searched, until he could not but believe that his bird had flown. He turned on the slaves.

"Dogs! Pigs! What did you do with the keys in the night?"

"Master, we kept them safe. Master, we had them by our sides. Master, all night we did not sleep above stairs."

The Sultan strode from the dungeons. His servants shrank as they saw him, and prostrated themselves on the floor. There was a mad gleam in his eye. He called his Guard.

"Seek out every corner of the city for this strange youth, who is a prince from Persia. Send men on my swiftest horses to every road which leads from Stamboul."

His beard shook and his teeth chattered. The Guards ran, scurrying like the rats.

All day the Mighty Sultan sat, waiting, gloating in the thought that any minute the young man would be brought before him, dragging heavy chains behind him. But the Guards did not return, and they sent no word. In the evening the Sultana,

her hands trembling so that she was compelled to clasp them behind her, spoke in a low voice.

"My Lord, I must tell you that which will bow your head in grief. Our daughter, the Princess Aischa, has disappeared, and no one knows where she may be."

The Sultan stood like stone. His eyes were glassy, hard, brittle. His beard jerked spasmodically. His wife withdrew with a fearful glance, for he seemed a stranger to her.

Three days passed. The Palace of the Sultan was turned upside down by searchers. The Sultan had each of his many servants and slaves brought before him, one by one, and he questioned them. But he heard no word of the fugitives. It was as if they had disappeared into thin air. Not a corner of Stamboul remained secret, and the people of the city ran about like frightened cats when soldiers roughly entered their homes.

The Sultan neither ate nor drank for two days, and his eyes burned like a madman's. He paced his apartment, from room to room, until he reached the balcony which overlooked the pomegranate garden, and then, as if the sunlight blinded him, he rushed back into the depths of his chambers. On the second night he had a dream, so clear and

clear-cut that he rose before dawn to reflect upon it. Before his eyes came a picture of a woman, heavily veiled. He saw her lead two figures, young forms, dimly discovered, from the dark mouth of a cave into the sunlight. The two figures were of a man and a girl. He strained to see who had them by the hands, but he could only know that it was a woman, and that there was something vaguely familiar about her.

It must be true that one of his wives had helped the princess and the stranger prince from the Palace. But which one? There was no way of knowing. Until the sun struck the bowed head of the Sultan he sat, filling his mind with the dream picture. He thought of his private keys to all of the rooms of the Palace, and nervously he ran to his little chest. The keys were there, but one of them, the large iron dungeon key, held a tiny bit of fresh earth in its groove. He dropped the heavy bunch with a clank, as if they had been red hot. A plan had formed in his mind. He called the Sultana to him, and watched her face as he said,

"Light of my Eyes, I have found a man who, I am sure, knows of this trick which has been played on us. Tonight I wish to ask him to dinner, and to give him the drink. Bring me your vial."

The Sultana bowed.

"Yes, my Lord, I shall do as you say. I have only half a vial left, but that should be sufficient."

"You know the secret of making more?"

"Yes, but he who made it for me has left Stamboul. I know not where he has gone. I can make a fresh supply but that will take many days."

"Very well, bring me what you have."

The Sultana, trusted wife of the Padishah, was resting but not sleeping when a heavy knock came on her door. She rose herself and opened it. Outside stood a slave of the Sultan, who bade her see the master at once. She went quietly, but she trembled.

The Sultana entered from the little balcony, and gazed in wonder at the table spread before her Lord. Great platters of rare foods were flanked on either side by two places. At one of them sat the Sultan, who waved his first wife to the other. She shook until her teeth chattered as she silently obeyed, for in the eye of her Lord she saw a cold gleam.

"My Trusted Queen," spoke the Sultan in an icy voice, "eat of these dishes, for I wish to celebrate. I have discovered he who betrayed me, and liberated the prince. It is for you, ruler of my seraglio, to rejoice with me."

"Yes, my Lord. I rejoice with you."

But the voice of the Sultana came as a faint dying wind from her lips. She tasted the food, but she could not swallow; she summoned her courage, but she could not speak. She lifted her cup, and held it in midair, for from the silver goblet came a delicate, wonderfully fragrant odor of some strange flower. The Sultana lowered her hand when she saw the eyes of her Lord. They glowed with a queer mad light, like the phosphorescent moons of a cat's eyes in the dark.

The Sultan leaned forward and gripped his table with white knuckles. His throat was tense with strained muscles.

"Why do you not drink, Light of my Life?"

"I—I have no wish to drink."

"I command you to drink."

The Sultana looked toward the garden. She raised her cup steadily, and swallowed part of the delicious flower drink. The Sultan relaxed, and smiled. Then quickly he thrust his face toward her and spoke, harshly.

"Do you know who freed the prince, and sent our daughter with him?"

The Sultana lay against the cushions of her divan. She looked at her Lord with gentle dreamy

eyes. She felt no fear, only a cloud-like sensation of great pleasure. She answered softly, as she had spoken when a bride, and her husband was a young ruler, filled with noble ambitions, a stranger to greed and thirst for ruthless power.

"I do, Lord of my Household."

"Did you do this thing?"

"Yes. My daughter loved him. He was a noble prince. I could not let him die."

The Sultan clenched his hands rigidly. His face grew purple with congealed blood. His lips could hardly form one word.

"Why?"

The Sultana murmured, as if in explanation to a child,

"My Lord was no longer the great ruler, whom I wished to help. I asked the conjurer, who taught me the secret of the magic drink, to go with the prince, his master, for I saw that my secret was being used falsely by the Sultan."

"What is this secret?"

The Sultana looked into the burning eyes of her husband. She stared, fascinated, as if she was being charmed by a snake. Her lips opened unconsciously. With a shudder she closed them. A cold fear crept over her body, stiffening her

muscles. Into her mind came the realization that she must tell the secret. She felt in her right hand the silver cup, and knew that she had swallowed but half of its contents. She felt herself slipping easily, so pleasantly, down into a bottomless gulf. Great clouds of vapor were creeping toward her. She knew beyond doubt that in another moment she must tell the formula for the magic drink. It would be so easy to let go. Suddenly into her thoughts came the face of her daughter, and behind was a glimpse of her husband's eyes, fierce, cruel. A shrill cry, like an animal in mortal pain, tore itself from her being. She rose like a sleep-walker, the silver cup in her hand, plunged across the room to the balcony, and flung herself over its heavy stone railing.

The Sultan staggered to his door and turned his mad eyes to the garden. Lying on the earth was the form of his Sultana, and on her face was the gentle, happy smile which she had worn when she tasted the drink. Beside her was an empty silver cup. Over her body red and white pomegranate petals spread a canopy of bloom in the half light of evening, and the air was filled with a fragrance of infinitely sweet blossoms, which seemed to come from the lips of the Sultana.

THE FOXY GOBE

THE FOXY GOBÉ

A LONG ROAD stretched across the country, shimmering in the heat. Trees infrequently cast welcome shadows across the parched earth. Two small figures, bent with fatigue, wound along the road, jogging on a weary horse, which drooped his head forlornly. Ali, a tobacco merchant, turned to his wife, Eminah, who was mounted behind him, and spoke irritably.

"By the beards of my ancestors, but this is a hot and wearisome ride! I do not know why we came."

The woman, whose meek dark eyes looked upon the world mildly from a plump face, clasped her hands over her mantle, and then lifted her veil a trifle from her perspiring chin. Who was there to see her countenance on this lonely road?

"Ah, Allah is merciful to us, for he allows us to come on this visit to our daughter, who has been married these five years to as prosperous and pious a silk merchant as you will meet in any city. We will reach their home soon. Why do you complain? Allah is good."

But the only answer she received was a deep grunt of discomfort. The horse plodded on, and the sun beat upon them mercilessly. Ali raised his head, for he thought that he had heard the sound of water dashing over stones. Faintly the splash and gurgle came to his ears. He sniffed pleasantly, and his scowl grew less pronounced. A tree, invitingly green, was spreading dusty leaves over a small section of the highway. The Turk smiled, and turned to his wife.

"By the beard of Mohammed the Prophet, but I smell water. Here, do you wait in the shade of this tree while I take the horse for a cooling

drink, and I shall bring a mouthful back to you presently."

Immediately the Turk disappeared with the horse into a little valley, following the sound of water flowing. His wife sat thankfully in the shade of the big tree, and thought with satisfaction how delighted her daughter would be to see them. She smiled gently, and turned her kind face toward the town they were approaching.

"My daughter," she murmured, "your mother is coming to see you. What a fine visit we shall have! We shall sit in the garden of your lovely home and eat ripe plums, and, ah me, how we shall talk! I shall see your nice children, and we shall go together to the mosque for evening prayers when the muezzin calls." The woman nodded and nodded her head in pleased reverie.

She pricked up her ears, for there was a sound of footsteps thumping heavily on the road. Eminah, wife of Ali the tobacco merchant, hastily drew her veil into place, for she was a good Mohammedan woman, well versed in all modest conventions. Looking up curiously she saw before her a solid Hungarian fellow, clad in the rough homespun dress of a Gobé farmer. His countenance was broad and good natured, with eyes as round as buttons, but

he wore a stupid expression. He looked as if he might have just traded a fine horse for a blind, toothless nag.

As the Gobé plodded methodically by, he turned his solemn eyes on the woman, and, like a clumsy cart, wheeled and came to her.

The peasant saluted broadly, waving his huge hand, and spoke in a husky voice in broken Turkish, as if he had lived forever in a solitude, and this was but the third time he had ever used his vocal chords.

"May Allah bless you, noble lady!"

The Turkish woman nodded her head kindly, and smiled easily.

"May God help you, Christian. Whence do you come?"

The Gobé pointed a wide finger vaguely toward the West.

"I come, good lady, from beyond."

"Ah," cried simple Eminah, wife of the tobacco merchant, "if you come from Beyond, perhaps you have met with my fine son Mohammed, who fell fighting in the Sultan's army, and who sits with the Blessed in Paradise?" Her hands fluttered like pieces of paper, in front of her, and her lips trembled excitedly, beneath her veil. The eyes of the woman glistened innocently.

The Gobé's face was stupid and impassive. He nodded his heavy head slowly up and down twice.

"Yes, pious daughter of Allah, I know your son Mohammed, and I am his best friend."

The mother wept with joy. Her emotions washed gently in and out, like waves, moistening the soft sands of her mind.

"Ah, Allah is Great! Blessed is the name of Allah! You are the trusted friend of my son Mohammed, who is in Paradise! Tell me how he fares?"

The Gobé raised his eyebrows slowly, and spoke heartily.

"He lives well, and is in good health."

"Ah, Merciful Allah, that is good. I rejoice in the blessing of Allah. But is there anything he wants?"

"Well," spoke the Gobé, rubbing his chin with a grimy forefinger, which was as brown as a fat sausage, "well, noble lady, he gets plenty of nectar and ambrosia, but he could do well with a little more money, for coffee and tobacco you know."

The Gobé turned, as if to plod away, but the Turkish woman cried out to him,

"Wait, good Christian Magyar, wait one moment! I beg of you. Do you go Beyond?"

"Yes," mumbled the Gobé solemnly, "I am on my way beyond."

The woman drew from the fold of her wide blue cloak a small bag of gold and silver coins. With trembling hands she thrust it towards the peasant. Her eyes radiated joy.

"Allah will bless you if you will take these to my son Mohammed, in the name of his mother Eminah."

The Gobé stretched out his hand and received the purse. He spoke with dignity.

"Kind daughter of Mohammed, these coins will purchase a goodly amount of coffee and tobacco, and they will greatly cheer he who gets them."

He left, walking with the same slow jog toward the West.

Eminah sat down, trembling with pleasure, and she smiled meekly, and smiled again, and nodded her plump face with great satisfaction. She was going to see her daughter, and her daughter's children, and she had sent a gift to her son in Paradise.

When Ali returned, with a jar of cool water for his wife, and the dust washed from his face, he stared in amazement at her. She appeared to be already cooled and comforted.

"What is it, Eminah, has Allah sent a cup of cold water down to you from Paradise before I could return with this one?"

The woman turned excitedly to her husband; her hands fluttered before her.

"Ali, my husband," she cried, her words fumbled together, "there was a man—Hungarian peasant—best friend—valued friend—Mohammed—our son Mohammed—from Paradise—gold—tobacco—and gave him my purse!"

"What do you mean, you chattering woman?" cried Ali, for he thought that she had suddenly taken leave of her senses.

Eminah laughed with pleasure, confusedly.

"Good husband, Allah has been kind to us." She spoke slowly, trying to compose her thoughts. "He sent along this road but five minutes ago, a good man, a Gobé, who says that he is the best friend of our son Mohammed in the Beyond, and who took with him my purse as a gift for our son, to buy tobacco and coffee."

"Did you say this was a Gobé? And you gave him gold?"

"Yes, yes," she was too pleased and excited

to notice her lord's dismay. "And he took them to our son Mohammed. Allah be praised, for he surely sent him along this way."

It was Eminah's turn to be surprised when Ali abruptly walked to his horse and leaped on its back, shouting to her as he spurred the animal.

"Stay there, foolish woman, until I return."

The Turk pushed on his horse frenziedly, but the Gobé, who had continued his impassive walk up the road, caught, from a good distance, the quick tap of hoofs. He hastened his stride and turned to an inn, which sprawled by the road.

Inside the cool room the inn-keeper spread his bulk across a bench, and his head drooped lower and lower over a fat neck as he dozed. He looked up angrily when a big hand caught his shoulder and shook it roughly.

"Here, old ox, wake and listen to me!"

The inn-keeper stared at a husky Gobé glaring down at him. "What do you want? What do you mean by shaking me so roughly?"

"Blessed be the Lord! The Turkish army is upon us! Can't you hear the horses! Flee for your life!"

The fat inn-keeper listened a second, then, with surprising agility, bounced up and tore off his apron. With a clattering of boots he disappeared

through the back door; the Gobé, thrusting out his head to watch, saw him climbing frantically up a steep hill nearby.

Ali, the tobacco merchant, muttered furiously as he pushed his horse on.

"Ah, by the beard of Allah the Glorious, but this is a real Gobé trick! There are none so sly and cunning in all this land of wine-growers as those pestiferous Gobés. I will show him that he cannot so easily take money from a simple Moslem wife."

His beard bristled fiercely in the breeze. His eyes were fixed on the road, but he saw no Gobé peasant plodding along. Then the Turk drew rein suddenly. Before him was a wide rambling Hungarian inn, where the door stood open. His face lit with savage joy. He jumped down, and strode into the place.

Cool shadows stretched across the earthen floor. A heavy inn-keeper, in white apron, sat on a bench and his head drooped lower and lower over a fat neck as he dozed. The Turk shouted.

"Say, Unbeliever, have you seen a sly Gobé, who carries in his hand a purse of Turkish silk?"

The man opened stupid eyes, filmed with sleep.

"Eh! Ah! What was that? A Turk! a Gobé?"

He looked dazed. Then it seemed to dawn on him that a Mohammedan was standing before him

with a fierce gleam in his eyes. The inn-keeper jumped up suddenly, and bowed three times servilely. He murmured,

"Good master Turk what can I do for you? Do you wish cool shelter for man and beast? It is here. Do you wish fine food, Hungarian it is true, but excellent? It is here. Do you wish sleep on a bed which is covered with big pillows of best quality down? It is here. Do you wish wine to drink? It is here. Do you wish—"

"I don't wish anything," yelled the Turk, "except to know where that Gobé has gone, the Gobé who stole my wife's purse?"

"Gobé? Gobé?" The inn-keeper looked vastly confused. He turned about slowly and gazed into every corner of the bare room, as if he expected a Gobé to materialize, like a genie from the earth floor. Suddenly a thought appeared to strike him like a gleam of light in a dark stable. His face broke into a pleased grin.

"Gobé! Gobé! Why didn't you say sooner that you wanted a Gobé, though why anybody should want a Gobé I don't know?" He paused to scratch his head and ponder this problem.

"Christian pig" bellowed the Turk, "did you see a Gobé?"

"Yes, yes, I saw a Gobé," cried the inn-keeper seemingly pleased with his perspicacity, "he came by here a few minutes ago, but I was sleepy."

"Where did he go? By the beard of my grandfather, where did he go?"

"Go, why where could he go but up that way?"

The Turk ran from the room, shaking with rage, and saw, like a fly on a wall, the figure of a stout man who seemed to be climbing, in frenzied haste, the rocky hill across the fields. The Turk snorted with satisfaction, and, with wide trousers whipping about his legs, made off across the fields. Now the Moslem was a muscular man. He had some difficulty pulling his feet through the brambles and tangled bushes, calling on all of his Mohammedan prayers to aid him. The Christian who climbed was fat, and, moreover, his extreme fear of the Turkish army hindered him rather than aided him, for he stumbled and fell, and rose, and rolled, and caught himself, and raged and puffed. The Moslem gained on him.

Up the hill they went, climbing and slipping. Once the Christian, thinking he must be far enough from the Moslems, sat down thankfully to rest on a stone; then suddenly he caught sight of a crimson fez and a pair of saffron trousers. His eyes bulged

helplessly. He leaped into the air like a rubber ball, and scrambled up the hill, sputtering, terrified.

"Ah! Ah! Saint Francis protect me from the Heathen!" wheezed the Christian.

"Ah! Ah! Allah give the dog of an Unbeliever into my hands!" muttered the Moslem through set teeth.

Allah was triumphant. The Turk reached the Christian, and his hands descended on the Hungarian's shoulders heavily.

"Oh!" cried the red faced Magyar, whose cheeks shook up and down, "Oh! why do you take me! Take my horses! Take my sheep! Take my goods! But let me go, good Mussulman! I have done nothing to you and your armies."

"Armies, what do you mean? Thief! Give me my wife's purse."

"Purse! I have no purse. I have seen no purse!"

The Turk glared.

"Aren't you the Gobé who offered to take coins to my son Mohammed?"

"No! No! Noble Moslem, I am not a Gobé, and I know nothing about your son Mohammed!"

The Turk shook him again angrily.

"Then who are you, Unbeliever?"

"I am the poor and unfortunate keeper of that

inn down there. A Gobé just told me the Turkish armies were upon us, so I ran."

The Moslem had a sudden terrible thought. He plunged to the side of the hill and looked. There was the clap of horses hoofs growing fainter and fainter. He could just glimpse the heavy figure of a peasant who urged the animal to greater speed. The Turkish tobacco merchant tore his garments. He stormed and cursed from one side of the hill to the other, while the fat inn-keeper sat and watched him in dismay. The Turk halted suddenly, realizing the futility of his rage. He stroked his long beard, and shrugged his shoulders, and went down the road toward the tree under which his wife, Eminah, sat patiently waiting, absorbed in pleasant dreams of her son's delight when he received a gift from his fond mother.

Her husband appeared, tired and hot and disgusted. Eminah stared at him, round-eyed.

"Lord of our household, where is the horse?"

"Why, Light of my Life," murmured Ali, the tobacco merchant, "I thought, by the beards of my ancestors, that your ducats were not much of a gift for our son Mohammed, so I sent him the horse as well!"

THE KNIGHT OF THE MADONNA

THE KNIGHT OF THE MADONNA

SLOW SWEET TONES of the bells of a Carmelite Convent dropped into the warm late afternoon air as leaves drift softly down upon a stream. Tall sober trees and green bushes seemed to have paused in their rustling, to listen intently, as the measured song of the bells mingled with the rush of water in a brook.

Along the footpath which wound narrowly beside the small stream came heavy footsteps, purposeful, unwavering, advancing toward the convent. The sun had just dropped behind the low roof of the chapel, leaving a flood of pearl light wavering through the foliage. A woman was

hastening along the path. She was strongly built, with the arms of a peasant who has grown from childhood with the thought that she must work for her daily bread. Her broad shoulders seemed able to bear the weight of much more than the small basket which she bore, almost empty, in her hand. The woman wore the dress of a novice in the Convent of the Carmelites, and her long skirts swayed as she hastened her steps toward the bell song. A small frown etched faint lines above her heavy brows. She greatly feared that she had stayed too long with old Julia in the village, where she had gone to carry medicines and healing herbs. She was afraid that she would be late for evening worship, and that the stern Sister Superior would reprimand her.

Her stride lengthened, and then paused abruptly. She tipped her head aside and listened intently. There was a faint sound, like the moaning of the wind in a pine tree. Could that be a part of the brook's gurgle? She thought not, for it seemed to come from the other side of the path.

The novice resolutely drew back the screen of bushes, and her eyes were startled by the bright blue yamsach and yellow head-gear of a Mohammedan dervish, whose emaciated form was lying

on the grass, immobile save for the broken breaths which came from him in little shuddering gasps. The nun looked at him pityingly, for she thought that he was in great pain.

"Are you ill, pious Mussulman?" she asked gently, with a friendly smile on her broad face.

The dervish opened his eyes and stared at her for a moment with no hint of recognition, then understanding came to his drawn face, in which the bones stood out rigidly.

"Yes, woman, very ill."

"Is there not something I can do for you, good Mussulman?"

"No, not so. Allah wants me to die. Leave me to my fate."

The nun gazed at his burning hollow cheeks and knew that he was ablaze with fever. She saw his claw-bent fingers resting on the ground. She nodded her head several times, and then pursed her lips, for she was a determined woman.

"Listen, pious man, if Allah wanted you to die he would not have sent me here to help you."

The dervish lay still, thinking. His face broke into a cracked smile.

"Those are wise and true words, Christian woman."

The nun hurried to the brook and dipped into a small pitcher which she carried in her basket some of the clear cold water. She gave it to the dervish, holding up his head as she did so. Then she paused to consider.

"Good Moslem," she said in her loud slow speech, "I know not what to do? I cannot leave you here overnight. If I go to the convent for help for you I may return too late. And, besides, we nuns cannot leave the convent after dark."

"Leave me to my fate," moaned the wretched dervish.

"No; our Gracious Lady forbids us to leave our brother in need."

"Does your Lady forbid you to leave even an Unbeliever?"

"Yes, even a Pagan," said the nun.

The dervish looked up. "Your Virgin Miriam is indeed a gracious lady, but, Massallah Allah, my feet will not carry me even a pace, Sister of Mercy."

The big novice folded her arms across her broad chest, and smiled down at the thin dervish.

"Then," she said firmly, "never mind, for my feet can carry us both." She picked up the basket from the ground and drew it on her wrist. The novice

gathered into her strong arms the bundle of bones which was the dervish and moved slowly toward the last echo of silvery bells.

The gentle sisters were assembled at their evening devotions. Kneeling devoutly before their small chapel altar they prayed, with heads bent, with hands folded, with lips moving. Their eyes were cast down. As the service drew to a close and the nuns rose, the Sister Superior saw, with stern displeasure, that one novice was absent. Dusk was drawing into the chapel through the open door. All of the eyes of the nuns turned in astonishment toward the slit of darkness. In the doorway stood Sister Susanna, like a sturdy tree, and she bore in her arms the unconscious form of a dervish arrayed in sacred garments of the Moslem.

The Sister Superior suddenly understood and stepped forward, her stiff frown changed miraculously into a quiet smile. She called two other novices, and they took the dervish into their infirmary.

Thus for many days the Christian nuns fought the fever of the Mohammedan dervish, and cared for him night and day. Thus for many days the Mussulman was unconscious. The bells tolled solemnly the presence of dawn. The nuns filed quietly to chapel, where they bent their knees in prayer for

the unfortunate dervish. The bells rang out morning service. The days came and went, with their quiet myriads of duties about the Convent of the Carmelites. And of all of the nuns who ministered to the sick none was so devoted as Sister Susanna.

One day the dervish opened his eyes, and was conscious of his wasted body, which scarcely moulded the bed covers into a mound. He knew that he had passed from death into life.

"Ah," he murmured to himself, "Allah did not want his true disciple to go to Heaven."

He saw himself alone in a tiny whitewashed room. Through the open window came the heavy perfume of a jasmine bush in flower. He heard sweet voices singing, their tones falling gently into the clear air.

"*Ave Maria. Gratia Plena*—"

The dervish could not remember how he came to be in such a strange place. His mind slowly filled with doubt. What was he doing there?

"Maybe I am in the Paradise of Mohammed the Prophet," he whispered to himself, "perhaps those sweet sounds are the songs of the houris, the blessed maidens who serve in Heaven?"

The songs ceased, dying in a last lingering note. The puzzled dervish closed his eyes, but opened

them suddenly as he heard the door creak gently and saw Sister Susanna standing before him with a cool beverage in one hand and a glass of medicine in the other. His mind jumped instantly, and the dervish saw again the grass and the trees, and heard the voice of a nun mingle with the sound of a brook.

"Praise be the Virgin, our Gracious Lady, the dervish is saved!" cried Sister Susanna.

The man whispered.

"Is that how a dervish was saved to the service of Allah and of Mohammed the Prophet, through the aid of the Lady Miriam?"

After some days he was able to drag his emaciated form around the garden, and, at the end of two weeks, he felt that he was again himself. The dervish wandered about the quiet place, pondering soberly his recovery, and one day he came slowly to the chapel. The nuns had finished their songs, and departed, and the solemn bells were silent. There was a dusky haze in the small cool place.

The man stepped hesitatingly within the door and stared at a painting of the Virgin Mary which hung behind the altar. Then he murmured,

"Miriam, Mother Isa, I think that you have saved the life of poor Hafiz. I will, for the rest of my days, be your dervish."

Hafiz glanced around quickly, and saw no one, except the gentle aloof face of the Virgin. He unfastened his blue cloak, and cast it off.

Then the dervish closed his eyes ecstatically, stretched his arms out rigidly on either side of him, and began to whirl. Slowly he turned around on his toes, and then a little faster. Faster and faster he wheeled. He began to spin dizzily, until his skirts stood out like a full yellow moon, and his tall hat became a pillar of light. His arms like flails thrashed the air. Thus Hafiz the dervish whirled, according to sacred Mohammedan laws of his order, in honor of Miriam, the Christian Virgin.

When he had reached the magic number of turns, seventy times seven, Hafiz stopped, scarcely able to stand in his weakness. He looked up at the Gracious Lady Miriam, and it seemed to him that she smiled benignantly down upon her poor servant.

Hafiz told the good sisters that he had been interrupted in a pilgrimage to Mecca by the wasting fever, from which the Virgin had saved him. He thought that he must go on his way toward the Shrine. But the nuns of the Carmelite Convent convinced him that he was not yet able to walk so far, and that he should abide with them for a longer time to recover his strength.

And so the dervish spent his days composing beautiful Turkish poems to Allah, to Mohammed and to the Gracious Lady Miriam. He helped the sisters gather green branches and sprigs of herbs to heal the sick. Often Hafiz walked in the garden and drank in the dizzy perfume of the jasmine flowers. Often too, when the chapel was deserted, the dervish performed his own devotions in honor of Miriam, the Virgin, by whirling the sacred seventy times seven.

One day Hafiz, pacing alone in the garden, heard a great sorrowful lamentation rising from the chapel. He wondered, and when the nuns, their faces wet with tears, emerged, went to Sister Teresa, who spoke his Turkish language.

"Pious Sister," he asked, "Why do the Ladies of Mercy weep and lament?"

"Ah," murmured the nun, "we are praying night and day that one of our sisters, who is ill to death, may be spared to us."

"Who is the sister ill to death?"

"Sister Susanna, so good, so kind, so pious, so strong! She has caught a fever. If it be the will of our Lord to take her—and yet we pray that she may be spared." The nun bowed her head in sad resignation, and walked slowly away.

She did not see the stricken face of Hafiz the dervish.

Hafiz walked about the garden, where he prayed to Allah and to Mohammed to save good Sister Susanna. But where he put his feet he knew not, and where he knelt and bowed his head to the ground in prayer he could not say. For the poor dervish was wild with grief, that so good and kind a sister should go.

And then a thought came to him. It was growing dark in the garden. The nuns had left their chapel, and gathered indoors, as was their law. Shadows

of branches thrust gaunt black arms into the evening sky. Hafiz entered the dark chapel.

One solitary ray of moonlight struck with silver the beautiful face of the Virgin Mary. Hafiz whispered:

"Look here, Glorious Lady, Kind Miriam, I am Hafiz, your dervish. Look at your poor servant. I have honored you according to my creed, the creed of sovereign life. I have whirled for you the sacred seventy times seven, Miriam. So I deserve a hearing. Glorious Lady, do not let Sister Susanna die! Kind Miriam, your truest servant asks this

of you. Put your lovely velvet cloak around her, that she may find health in its folds. If you will do that I promise to make a pilgrimage to Persia! I promise to bring you the richest silks that human hands can weave! The most intricate embroidery, such as none of the wives of the All Powerful Sultan ever had. Listen to your dervish. Gracious Lady, save Sister Susanna's life!"

Hafiz the dervish cast his blue cloak from him desperately, and began to whirl, faster and faster, until he was a glittering jewel flashing in the faint moonlight. When he had reached seventy times seven he fell, almost unconscious, on the cold floor. The little chapel was dark and ghostly.

The dervish had scarcely the strength to raise his lean face toward the Virgin. But in her eyes he saw a promise.

Next morning Sister Susanna awoke from her feverish dreams, and heard, through her window, the pæns of thanksgiving which rolled from the nuns.

As the good sisters knelt within the chapel and prayed and sang their joy and relief, none of them thought to turn and look at the open door behind them.

But the face of the Virgin Mary was toward

the door, where Hafiz, the dervish, stood. Their eyes looked long into each other's as do those who share a wonderful secret. And then Hafiz the dervish, Knight of the Madonna, winked and nodded his head, as he whispered,

"You kept your word, Glorious and Kind Miriam. Be sure that I shall keep mine. Today I am starting for Persia."

As the nuns rose, with smiling, tremulous faces, there were faint sounds of footsteps on the path. The Madonna gazed, gentle, inscrutable, from her altar.

THE MINIATURE

THE MINIATURE

NEAR STAMBOUL, on the shores of the Golden Horn, where the Sultan ruled his far-flung domain, was a prison called the Seven Towers. All of the lands of East and West which had felt the power of the Turk shuddered when they heard of the dread Seven Towers, for of the many who had been taken to the grim fortress no man had ever been known to escape. It was filled with political or war prisoners, wretched souls

who wore out their lives in its dungeons, deep down where they constantly heard waves of the Bosphorus lapping. Above, surrounded by spiked walls, were gardens where the more fortunate were allowed to walk at times. Leading to the Stamboul road was an immense gate, and through this prisoners were led, dragging their heavy chains, to sweep streets in the magnificent city. Near the sea, giving on a private garden, was the home of the Pasha who was in charge of the prison; with him dwelt his young son. Over all frowned grimly the Seven Towers, mighty guardians of the power and glory of the Sultan.

The old Pasha ruled the prison, with its wretched men, its jailers and its slaves, as the Padishah ruled his Ottoman Empire. He was grim as the fortress, and as silent. There were but two beings for whom he cared: his master the Sultan, and his young son, Hassan.

Hassan was a quiet youth of twenty, who stayed entirely within his own apartments except on the occasions when he went forth to review his father's troops. Since childhood he had been taught all of the secrets of warfare, for the Pasha was a man of influence, with his private troop of horse and his position of favor under the Sultan.

One day the young man was wandering idly about his household, picking up and replacing the costly objects and weapons gathered by his father from all over the East, when he came to a small table, inlaid intricately with ivory and mother-of-pearl. Hassan stood by a window and looked into the gardens, placing his hands on the little table as he leaned forward. There was a sudden movement beneath him, and he jumped back, amazed. In the tiny piece of furniture a small drawer had sprung open, revealing a purple velvet casket, with a clasp of tarnished gold. Hassan, wondering much, drew it forth and looked within. There was a miniature painted in delicate colors of the loveliest face the youth had ever seen. He walked through the rooms with the jeweled picture in his hand, and as he looked long at it the conviction grew on him that this was not the face of a Turkish woman. He replaced the miniature in its casket, and closed the secret drawer, but the picture became to him a dream. He thought of it constantly, and often he went to the small table to gaze upon the delicate painting.

At last Hassan felt that he must know who this miniature represented. He decided to go to the Pasha.

"Honored Father," he said, holding out the purple box, "some days ago I found this lovely painting in a secret drawer of a table. Since then I have been unable to forget it. Tell me who it is?"

The old man drew his brows forbiddingly together, but when he spoke his voice was low and sad.

"My son, this is a painting of your mother. Since she died I have not followed the custom of my people and taken other wives, for I have wanted no other."

The son looked at the face of the young girl, and marveled.

"But Father, she is beautiful, and she does not look like other Turkish women. Was she of some other race?"

The old man frowned, and dismissed Hassan with a wave of his hand.

"That I can never tell you. Go now to your soldiering, for the Sultan sends me word that an important campaign is on hand."

The youth went to replace his picture, but he pondered long on the question, and determined that some day he should discover for himself from what race his mother had come.

He obeyed his father's commands, and went

from the Seven Towers to drill his troops, but his mind was elsewhere. As he passed back to his home late in the afternoon, riding his black horse, he saw with pitying eyes a long line of foreign prisoners, who moved in steady monotonous rhythm along the road from Stamboul, where they had spent the day working. Their heads were bent, like weary animals; their hands fell lifelessly at their sides, and their feet dragged endless steps in the dust, pulling heavy chains behind them. All of their faces were turned down. On the road their listless eyes seemed to trail, like their chains.

Hassan passed without arousing a tiny flicker of interest as his horse threw clouds of dirt in their grimy faces. But, with a shock, as if a dying dog had suddenly cast a glance of venomous hatred at him, Hassan observed the last man in the long line raise his head and throw a look of terrible defiance at him. The fellow was a short heavy-set man, who had obviously just arrived at the prison. He was a foreigner, a prisoner of war, no doubt. Then his head sank back into line with those of his companions, and Hassan spurred his horse forward, leaving the apathetic victims of the Seven Towers clanking their chains behind him.

The young Turk leaped from his horse, and ran

lightly into his father's apartment. The old man looked up and smiled.

"Father," cried the son, "I have never wanted a foreign prisoner as a slave, but today I saw one that I wish to have. Can this be arranged?"

"Yes, my son, but take care in your choice, for many of these are dangerous men."

"I will take care. I want the last man of the work gang which is now returning from Stamboul."

"Very well," said the Pasha, astonished at his son's desire, for never in the past had Hassan wanted to have any knowledge of, or association with, the prisoners. "Tomorrow he shall be sent to you."

Hassan went to his rooms, and leaned far out of the open latticed window, wondering why he had made this request. He did not know. From the little garden below he caught the poignant scent of jasmine in flower, and from the upper prisons across the court he heard a sad song, repeated constantly, dirge of the prisoners of the Seven Towers.

"If they ask you where I am
Say that I lie in Seven Towers.
I am wearing iron chains,
And my heart is full of sorrow."

The song was droned, at different hours, in many tongues, the languages of the captive nations of the Mighty Sultan. Often the son of the Pasha could not understand any words, but he knew the tune. And somehow, tonight, there was a faint familiar ring to the song's meaning. Somehow he knew what they sang, although he could not remember having heard this strange language before. He leaned far out on his elbows to puzzle out this feeling. Perhaps he had heard these words so often that he felt the meaning of them? Perhaps only this sad monotonous music suggested the words to him? But even as he thought of these reasons, he knew that somewhere, in the distant past, he had heard this language, and had understood it.

In the early morning young Hassan sat on a divan, drinking his coffee, and looking expectantly toward the door. Presently the panel was flung back and a black slave stepped aside for a prisoner, who bowed with sullen eyes before his new master. Hassan waved the black slave from the room and bade his new servant seat himself. The man, with a stiff face, sat in a far corner, saying nothing. His master spoke.

"Do you speak Turkish?"

"Yes, a little."

His voice was dry with despair and hate.

"Are you willing to be my man?"

"As well your man as another's."

Hassan smiled.

"Come, do not be so filled with venom. You are a victim of war, just as I should be if captured in your country. I only wish you well. I obtained this place for you because you seemed to have more spirit than your fellow prisoners."

But the man ignored the youth's winning smile, and spoke slowly, harshly.

"Yes, I still have a little hatred. My fellows have too long lived in Seven Towers. I will be your slave. I will do as you command, but I will never lower my spirit to a pagan Turk."

The young master smiled again, delightedly.

"Good," he cried, "you are the man I have long wanted. I ask nothing of you save a promise not to knife me in my sleep."

"That I give."

"Then drink of this coffee."

The man drank stiffly, but his gaze was not so filled with hatred as when he had entered the room.

For many days and weeks the two men lived, sharing all activities. Hassan procured a good horse for his friend, as he insisted on calling the

foreigner, and gave him many privileges as well as fine clothing and much freedom. But he could not give the prisoner weapons; that the old Pasha forbade.

One day the young Turk was called hurriedly to his father's rooms. He saw the Pasha sitting with a pale face among spread papers.

"Hassan, my son," spoke the old man. "You have been well trained in all things pertaining to war, but you have not yet won your spurs in battle. Your time has come. I am too old to go, and our Glorious Master, the Mighty Sultan, commands that my troops shall be sent among the vanguard into a foreign country. You are to lead these men. I put my faith in you, Hassan. Go immediately. Allah be with you."

The young Turk's face flushed with pleasure, but he only bowed to his father, and murmured his thanks for the trust placed in him.

All day the Captain made his preparations, assisted by his chosen servant, the prisoner, who seemed nervous and excited by the news. Secretly the young son of the Pasha took the jeweled miniature and concealed it on his person.

The servant turned to his master.

"Where do you go, Hassan bey?"

"That I cannot say yet. I receive my sealed orders tomorrow as we leave."

"Am I to go with you?"

"Certainly, friend Grouch. I need you to keep my spirits down, when they threaten to rise above the clouds."

"Never fear," murmured the prisoner, "but that they will go down. You have not been to battle. I have."

On the following day the old Pasha called Hassan's servant to him and spoke kindly.

"I have observed the care with which you treat my son. You are going into battle with him. He is as yet untried, and may take undue risks. I give you this sword, with which to protect him. If you fulfill this obligation to me, when you return to Seven Towers you shall walk free, to go back to your own country if you wish."

The man bowed, and took the sword, but the Pasha could not catch his words.

Captain Hassan, young son of the powerful Pasha of Seven Towers, rode through Stamboul accompanied by the shouts of men; and with his brightly caparisoned horsemen he went, part of the Sultan's army, North and West.

The servant was silent as he rode behind his

jaunty young master, but as he observed the direction the horses were taking his face cracked into a slow smile.

The army swarmed into Hungary, which was a seething cauldron of political unrest. Battles were being fought in all sections, but the Sultan was determined to subdue Transylvania, the part of this country which had not been bent to his wishes. The servant of Hassan bey looked about him carefully. He seemed to recognize places that he passed, but he said nothing, and when he spoke to anyone it was always to his master, and always in Turkish. For many weeks they journeyed, the advance guard of the Sultan's army, until they reached the high mountains and narrow passes of Transylvania. Here the ways were rugged, and the castles perched on heights were grim and strong. The army was halted, for word had been brought that a Hungarian horde was descending from the mountains. Tightening the girths of their horses the Turks advanced.

The two armies met on a wide valley field, which looked up toward the hills. Turkish cannons roared defiance at the Christians, who answered with fire spitting into the night. All through the dark hours the battle continued with boom of cannon and spurts

of flame from the long guns. But when daylight streamed over the field the armies came together, their horses rearing and plunging.

"Allah Akbar!" shouted the Turks, who thrust daggers in their mouths and then with their right

hands grasped pistols. On their jeweled saddles, with harness decorated in silver and gold, they flashed at the Christians, their swift horses beating the soil of Hungary.

"Hail Maria!" roared Magyars, charging at the Moslems, with spears fixed and eyes blazing hatred under their fur caps.

Slowly the Hungarians were pushed back by

the ruthless Turks until they stood close to their mountainous walls. But here they remained, and all the fire of the enemy could not drive them farther. They hid in ravines, known only to them, and sallied forth at night to attack their invaders. The ranks of the Turks became imperceptibly thinned, until reinforcements from the Sultan's army arrived. For thirty-two days and nights they fought, pounding against a heavy fortress which stood high on a rock, but the Turks could not take it. And then, early in the morning, the Hungarians made an unexpected sally.

The Turks leaped to their swords and horses and plunged forward.

"Ga Kerim! Ga Feltah!" shouted Captain Hassan, kicking his spurs into his horse's flanks.

But the Hungarians were strong with a desperate courage. This was their last stand. Transylvania was the only fastness left unconquered by the Mohammedans. The Christians fought all day like demons from the pit, and when night came down over the bloody fields the Turks found themselves so weakened by losses they were obliged to withdraw. Quietly they went, but no longer were their crescent flags outflung. They drooped, torn and stained, above the heads of battle-worn

men, returning to the scathing words of their Sultan.

During the interminable hours of the battle the servant prisoner kept in the background, for he had no wish to expose himself to the fire of his countrymen. When he saw his people fighting so valiantly he intended to desert his post with Captain Hassan and return to his own. But he could not.

"Very well," he thought, "I shall stay, according to my promise to the old Pasha, and watch over his son until the battle is over. But then I shall consider myself free, and shall slip over under cover of darkness to my people."

So he decided, and so he waited, carefully watching his master during the thirty-two days. But on the last disastrous day, when the young son of the Pasha rode forth in the lead of the troops, his servant lost sight of him. The Turkish army returned to the Sultan without Hassan bey, but the prisoner stayed and searched for days among the dead, scattered starkly on the soiled earth. Then the man declared to himself that his young master had disappeared. He had not gone back with his men, and he was not on the field of the dead. The prisoner sat down to consider.

"Surely," he muttered, "I am now freed. What do I owe to these pagans, who keep so many of my fellow men in the Seven Towers? Surely I can go my way now."

But there rose before him the boyish smile of the young Turk who had taken him from his wretched chains and placed him as a friend in his own household. The man stood, with a sigh of despair, and began his long walk to the South, to Stamboul to the Seven Towers.

Young Captain Hassan awoke with a confused memory of a shout, which seemed to come from his own lips:

"Allah Akbar! Ga Kerim!"

But when he opened his eyes the battle field had disappeared, with its bloody ground, trampled earth and cries of wounded men and horses. Absolute stillness was about him, but this was not the stillness of death. He felt with a trembling hand the elaborate covers over him, and saw that he was in a carved bed, foreign to his eyes. Before him was the wide expanse of a great room, decorated with handsome tapestries, and furnished richly. He tried to sit up, but dropped helplessly back to his resting place, for there was a terrible pain in his leg. Young Hassan opened his lips to call

a question, but the big room echoed his feeble syllables, with no response. He fell into a deep sleep.

When the Turk awakened he felt rested and alive. An old woman was leaning over the bed to feed him with a large spoon from a basin of broth. Standing slightly behind her he saw a young girl. Hassan stirred, and spoke in Turkish.

"Who are you? Where am I, old woman?"

But the crone shook her head back and forth, and muttered to the girl in a strange tongue. Instantly there flashed before the man's eyes a long line of prisoners, drearily dragging their chains, and he heard again the mournful chant of Seven Towers. The words of this woman he could not understand, but there was an undertone of familiarity to the sound of the syllables. He lay quietly, trying to fix his wandering memory, but not succeeding.

For many days the Turk lay in his strange new surroundings, without knowing who the people were who cared for him. He supposed that he was in a Hungarian household, and that it must be the home of a noble. The girl did not return, but Hassan thought of her and wondered why her face seemed familiar to him. He was haunted by shadows. When he arose, to walk with shaking

steps about his apartment, the old woman grinned toothlessly, triumphant with her cure, and called the master of the house.

Hassan bowed ceremoniously to an old man who entered with stately step. The master was tall and spare, and his eyes were kindly. He waved his guest to be seated, and chose a chair for himself.

"I trust that you are not suffering any want?" spoke the older man in Turkish.

Hassan smiled and nodded.

"You speak Turkish? This is indeed a pleasure to me, for I have heard no word of my native tongue for many weeks. I have suffered no want, and have enjoyed comfort and privileges, which, as a prisoner, I did not expect."

The old man smiled slightly.

"You are a prisoner in my house, but you are also a guest. I see by your manner that you are of high family.

"I thank you for your courtesy," answered the Turk.

"If you will give me your word not to attempt escape you shall be accorded the freedom of my household, and of its gardens."

"I give my word. Will you tell me where I am?"

"You are on an estate in Transylvania, not far

from the battle fields. My son, who fought there, picked you up half dead, and brought you here, for you appeared to be a valuable prisoner."

Until he recovered his entire strength Hassan remained in his room, but when he felt well again he began to wander through the great halls and chambers of the palace. From the windows he could look down across steep stone walls to a valley far below. His prison was a pleasant one. It was a mighty stronghold, one of those which the Sultan in all of his power had battered in vain. There were tiny gardens behind the high walls, and heavy guards about the gates. Hassan had no thought of escape, but he knew that some day his father would find him, and possibly exchange him for an equally valuable prisoner in the Seven Towers.

Each day he walked through the palace, looking with pleasure on the magnificence of the furnishings, which seemed Italian in style. The green and white marble squares of the floor echoed his lonely footsteps, for no one came to keep him company, and he sat for hours in high carved chairs, covered with heavy Oriental tapestry. Only the Turkish carpets, captured from his countrymen, reminded him of his home. When evening drew in he was

called to a great repast in the long hall, where he sat as an honored guest beside his dignified host, who conversed with him politely. There was a large household assembled for this meal. The host with his calm wife, mistress of the home, had collected into his castle his son, his two daughters, his sister, a widow now, and her two children, a young boy, and the girl whom Hassan had seen standing timidly behind the old woman in his room.

None of them spoke Turkish except the old noble, but Hassan found to his surprise that he was picking up the Hungarian language very rapidly. He knew now why the girl seemed familiar to him, for in the young face he discerned a faint resemblance to the painted miniature which he wore always in his garments.

One day Hassan walked through the palace, far up into a gallery where he had never ventured before. It was dark and gloomy there. The small high windows let in a few dim colored lights through their glass, but the pictures, oil paintings hung on the walls, gathered little of it into themselves. He passed them with but a glance, when his gaze became fixed on a face, a young girl's face. He paused in astonishment, rooted to the floor. With trembling hand Hassan drew from his tunic

his little miniature, and held it up to the picture. The face was identical. With intense excitement The Turk went to his Hungarian host, who greeted him politely, but with brows raised at the intrusion.

"Most honored host," spoke Hassan, scarcely able to control his voice, "Have you ever seen this face before?"

He thrust before the old man's eyes the miniature.

The Hungarian looked at it, his eyes full of wonder.

"Yes, that is a portrait of my sister Julia." He sighed. "But I did not know that she had ever had

her miniature painted? And those are strange garments she wears. Where did you find this?"

Hassan took the miniature and replaced it in its case.

"That is the portrait of my mother. My father, who is a Turkish Pasha, beloved of the Sultan, spoke to me of her, but would not tell me of what race she came. Is not her painting in the upper gallery?"

"Yes," answered the old man, "It has been there since she disappeared many years ago. She was my youngest sister. One day she walked with her maids beyond the castle gates to gather blossoms in the forest. We feared no danger then hereabouts. But a young Turk, who rode with a few men, saw her and carried her away with him on his horse. The maids ran screaming to the castle, but I was away at the time, and when a search party was organized and dispatched she could not be found."

Hassan said nothing. The old man sat, lost in memory, and then he looked up with a welcoming smile.

"Hassan, son of a Turkish Pasha, you are, after all, the son of my sister. Tell me, was she happy with her prince?"

"Yes," answered the Turk, "my father took no other wives, even after her death."

"Then we take you into our family. My nephew, henceforth you are one of us."

From that day Hassan the Turk became Hungarian as far as he was able to adapt himself. He took all of his meals with the family; he learned their language, and he came to feel that they were, indeed, his people. At evenings, sometimes, when he sat at his window, and looked upon the heavy stone walls which surrounded the palace, he thought of the Seven Towers, of his old life there, and of his father. And then he sighed with regret. But most often he forgot much of his past life, and was happy with the new. He rode out with the young men, hunting the wild boar. He conversed with his old uncle. He watched the girls as they sat weaving tapestries. He became attached to the still, old lady, mistress of the household. He began to feel that he might remain here forever.

But there came to the castle gate a ragged man in Hungarian clothing, who begged entrance of the guard. They allowed him to go into the kitchens, where he ate and drank and slept, for he had traveled many miles. They questioned him curiously, but he would tell the servants nothing.

At last he asked if there was a Turkish bey, a prisoner, in the household?

"Yes," answered the pot boy, "but no prisoner he is. He is a prize, a pig of another color. They take him into their arms as one of the family!"

"What?" asked the stranger, and then muttered to himself, "Hum!"

Presently he roused himself and asked the pot boy to take him to this popular prisoner. The youth refused, for he was afraid, but the stranger went from servant to servant until he reached the man who waited personally on the old noble.

"I will take you to my master," said the man firmly, "and you can tell him why you wish to see this Turk."

When they reached the master's rooms the stranger grinned suddenly, for there sat a young Turk, talking amiably with the old host.

But when Hassan turned his head and saw the ragged traveler he leaped to his feet and clapped the man hard on both shoulders with his hands.

"Friend Grouch!" he cried. "How came you here?"

The ragged stranger looked down, and then he spoke slowly.

"Your father, the Pasha, knowing that I am

Hungarian, sent me to look for you. I have searched many months. He wishes you to return."

"Ah," murmured Hassan, "how can I return? Do you know that this is my uncle, brother of my mother?"

The servant gazed from one man to the other in wonder, and then shook his head.

"But the old Pasha wishes you to return."

"How can I return?" repeated Hassan, "I am a prisoner in your land of Hungary."

"No," spoke the uncle sadly, "we could wish to have you remain with us forever, but the son of my sister is not a prisoner in her brother's house. You may go when you like."

Hassan bowed his head. He looked about at the objects grown so familiar, and he thought of the face of his young cousin, who had reminded him of his mother.

"No," he cried, "No, I cannot go back!"

But his uncle placed a gentle hand on his shoulder.

"My son," he said, "you may not decide this thing so quickly. Go to your room and consider. Tomorrow you will tell us your decision."

All night the young man sat at his window and thought of the war in his blood, the war between

the countries of his mother and his father, or paced the floor and dreamed. All night he dreamed of a future in this Hungarian household, which had adopted him, but in the midst of such thoughts he saw suddenly the grim old face of the Pasha, the flag of the Sultan waving over his own troops; he heard the voice of the priest calling to prayer; he smelled the thousand and one scents of a Turkish household; he saw the camels bobbing their supercilious faces monotonously as they trod the narrow streets of Stamboul. When morning came he went with firm step down the wide marble stairs to his mother's family, assembled in the great hall.

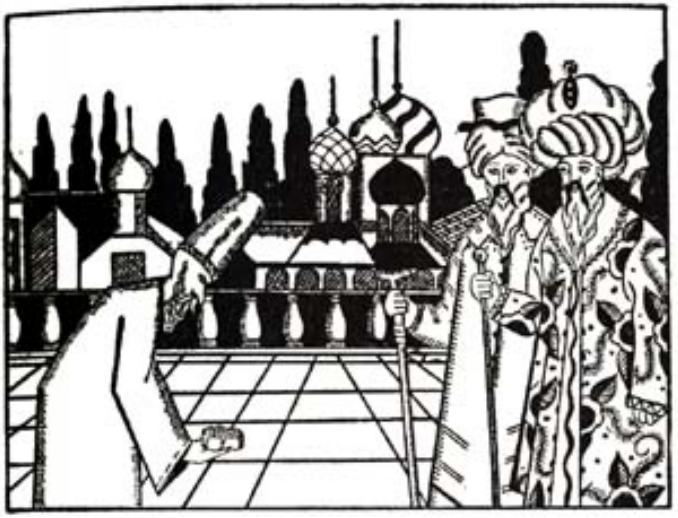
"My uncle, and my people," he said, "I would stay here with you, for you are part of me. But my country must be that of my father. I have pledged my word to the Sultan, and so I must go. But I shall ask the Pasha, my father, to intercede for me with the Padishah, so that I may use my sword in another country than Hungary. And some day, when peace comes, I shall return, perhaps."

He turned, with a sharp intake of breath, and went from the palace. The old man, with his family, stood in silence and watched him go, and with them was the prisoner of the Seven Towers,

who had won his freedom. They saw a black horse gallop wildly down the steep hill, and across the valley, and as he ran a faint shout came to them on the wind.

"Allah Akbar! Ga Selim!"

THE STORK KALIF



THE STORK KALIF

THERE WAS A KALIF, grand ruler of the glorious city of Bagdad, who rejoiced in a long beard, a golden water-pipe, the love of his people, and a cook who prepared the most luscious fresh fish and frogs' legs ever known. Moreover, this remarkable Kalif could sit for hours on one leg with the other thrust straight out before him; he could repeat the whole of the Koran; and he could tell his subjects exactly the core of their heated discussions in the bazaar the day before. He could, and often did, inform the old sweets pedler of a sale he had made, mention to the rug merchant

a debt he owed, ask a camel driver if his runaway son had returned, and congratulate a young man on his recent marriage. The people of Bagdad whispered that their Kalif had twenty eyes and thirty ears.

Every morning the Kalif received petitioners in his great palace, but during the afternoon he was not to be seen by any man, for he gave out that he spent the latter part of the day in siesta. But the citizens of Bagdad did not know of a tiny door which led from the palace into a quiet lane.

"Come, Ali Ben Manzar," called the Kalif to his Grand Vizier, "it is time we collect news of our subjects. We will go into the bazaar."

Ali Ben Manzar collected two merchants costumes, which speedily changed the Mighty Kalif and his Vizier into dealers in silks. They went into the city of Bagdad, as was their secret custom.

But as they turned toward the city an old pedler, withered as a brown leaf, glanced at them keenly once before he dropped his eyelids and thrust under their noses, in a shaking claw, a handsome jeweled box.

The Kalif halted, attracted by its beauty.

"What are you selling, father?" he inquired.

"Snuff boxes, Worthy Pasha."

"How much do you charge for them?"

"One piece of gold, Glorious Pasha."

The Kalif threw to him two pieces of gold, and took the snuff box held out to him. It glittered and sparkled in the late afternoon sun as the Kalif and his Vizier walked away. Presently they came to a quiet lake on the outskirts of the city, where glassy water reflected an even sky, and where frogs were croaking in the reeds. The Kalif, who felt somewhat fatigued, thought that it would be well perhaps to rest on the shore for a time, before returning by way of the bazaars to his palace. He held out the snuff box, and laughed.

"I have bought this box for two pieces of gold, and should like a sniff. I shall see if it contains snuff."

He opened the lid and saw the tiny opening filled with a brownish dust. But as the Kalif reached for a pinch he perceived a small piece of parchment fitted neatly into the inside of the lid. He drew it forth curiously, and found it to be folded three times. The Grand Vizier thrust his head forward to see what the slip contained. The Kalif slowly read aloud:

"A sniff of snuff gives thee wings,
A cry Csalavèr gives thee hands."

"Ah," said the Vizier, thinking this a fine joke, "the box is magic, Glorious Padishah. Let us try the snuff."

"But," objected the Kalif, "do you believe that the written word here can bring us back to our own shapes?"

"Why not," shrugged the Vizier, "if the snuff gives us wings so must the word give us our hands."

The Kalif was sorely tempted. He looked into the cloudless sky, and longed to fly there high above his city of Bagdad. He took a pinch of snuff, and held out the box to his Grand Vizier, who likewise raised a few grains to his nostrils. They sniffed long and loud. There was a sudden rustling, a feathery stirring, and the Kalif saw before him a large stork standing with wings outspread. He opened his mouth to laugh, and to cry.

"So the charm worked for you, Ali Ben Manzar?"

But all that come from the mouth of the Kalif was a hoarse,

"Kalap! Kalap!"

The Vizier flapped his wings and extended his beak widely, but all that he said was,

"Kalap! Kalap!"

However, having become birds, the Kalif and his Grand Vizier understood the language of the air.

"Kalap! Kalap! Let us fly above the lake!" squeaked the Kalif.

"Kalap! Kalap! That is a good idea," clacked the Grand Vizier.

And so they spread their wide white wings and soared, with a rare taste of freedom, above the water, and across the city, where the Kalif saw his people praying and sleeping, talking and fighting, selling and buying. He observed with his small eyes the servants of his palace, and the soldiers of his army.

"Truly," thought the flying Kalif, "a stork of the air knows more of my city than does the Kalif himself."

As evening drew close about the large birds, the Grand Vizier saw apprehensively that they must return to their duties. He swooped near enough to his master to screech into his face,

"Glorious Padishah, we must return to the palace, for night draws near, and we shall be missed."

The Kalif, so much was he enjoying his flight, did not wish to return, but he felt, with a sigh, that Ali Ben Manzar was right. They wheeled with a sweep of rustling wings toward the secluded lake, where they settled to earth and stood on their long and spindling legs.

The Kalif, who had hidden his snuff box under a low bush, drew it forth and read again the magic word. He raised his beak.

"Csalavér!" he croaked, and turned his eyes toward his Grand Vizier, expecting to see before him the familiar brown face and turbaned head of Ali Ben Manzar. But the Kalif could scarcely stand in his amazement, for the Grand Vizier was not there. There was only the big feathered form of a stork.

"Csalavér!" he screamed in horror. "Csalavér! Csalavér!"

But storks they remained.

The Grand Vizier grew terrified. He flapped his wings, and ruffled his feathers, and stood first on one foot and then on the other. He opened his pointed beak and uttered a cry.

"Csalavér! Csalavér!"

The smooth water of the lake showed not a ripple, and the air echoed the sounds of two storks, who seemed beside themselves with terror. They flew about, filling the evening with raucous noises and broken feathers which they tore out in their frenzy. Then they grew tired, and decided to settle down quietly and talk the situation over.

"Ali Ben Manzar," spoke the stork Kalif sadly,

"it seems that some enemy has contrived to outwit us. What can be done to relieve our plight?"

"Noble Padishah," answered the weary Vizier, "I know of nothing. We must continue to live as birds until we can discover the right word to bring us back to our own shapes."

And so the Kalif of Bagdad and his Grand Vizier, searched hungrily along the reeds, where they thrust their long beaks into the silent water and plucked forth their meal of fish and frogs. As the moon rose, round and solemn yellow, above the city of Bagdad, it stared in surprise at two large storks which slept, side by side, in the shallow edge of the lake. Each bird stood with one leg drawn up beneath it, with slanting eyes closed, and with an expression of mournful sorrow on its feathered face.

At earliest gleam of gray dawn the Kalif and his Grand Vizier spread their wings and soared anxiously above Bagdad to observe what excitement was caused by their disappearance. They flew first to the gate of the palace, to look for the old snuff box pedler, but were not astonished to see the corner empty of human life. All day they flapped their wings above the city, but not once could they discover the wrinkled man with his tray of jeweled boxes. In despair they settled above the palace to

watch the wild astonishment of the courtiers and servants, chamberlains and soldiers, who searched in every possible corner of the grounds and gardens as well as the buildings. Beneath the circling storks were retainers dashing madly about like a nest of stirred ants.

The Kalif swooped low to hear what they were shouting.

"Ah," cried a slave, "the very birds of the air come to help us seek our Revered Master, who must have been seized by demons."

The Kalif flew away, somewhat consoled, for he knew that the people grieved for him.

Next morning the officials of the palace were obliged to announce in the market place that the Lord Kalif and his Grand Vizier had disappeared, no man knew where. There rose to the storks overhead a prolonged cry of grief and terror, which filled the heavens like a roll of summer thunder. The birds went again to their lake, and screeched "Csalavér!" into the air, but knew, even as they did so, that the charm had no power. So they spent their days, and every night they slept on one leg in the margin of the lake, after a supper of fish and frogs.

Weeks passed, and the storks still flew about the

city anxiously. One day, as they sailed slowly above a highway which led from the neighboring kingdom into Bagdad, the birds saw below them a long procession of sumptuous riders, decked in brilliant silks, who sat upon camels and horses which trailed colored shawls in the dust of the road. Servants and slaves walked beside the riders. The Kalif grew suspicious. He swooped quickly down until his wings almost brushed the astonished head of the first horseman, who wore the robes of a prince. The Kalif rose again, uttering a harsh clack from his open beak.

"Ali Ben Manzar," he cried, "This prince is no other than the son of Kadhur, who has always wished us ill! I think little good can come of his arrival in leaderless Bagdad."

But all that the men of the long procession heard as they looked curiously upward was a loud,

"Kalap! Kalap!"

All the way to the city the storks flew around and around in the air above the gorgeous train of horses, camels and men. When the procession reached the palace and trod confidently through its gates, the storks flapped their wings wildly, and could scarcely restrain themselves from pecking the intrepid prince with their sharp beaks. But the Kalif knew, with

sorrow, that no such proceeding could help their situation. He watched, almost holding his breath, and saw the doors swing open. From the palace came an obsequious body of courtiers and retainers, followed by slaves, who bowed to the ground

before the prince. The lord inclined his head haughtily, and spoke.

"My Noble Father, Kadhur Khan of the neighboring kingdom, who revered and honored your Exalted Kalif, has received word from his Chief Wizard that the ruler of Bagdad is dead. Knowing that the August Kalif had no heirs the Khan as sent me, his

younger son, to live in your city and be your lord."

The palace officials bowed respectfully, while from the crowd which had followed the strangers through the streets and was now jammed about the gates, came a long shout of joy.

"Long live the new Kalif!"

Large tears fell from the eyes of two big storks which stood on the palace roof, but the people did not see this strange sight, for their heads were bent in loyalty to the new ruler.

"Come," spoke the Vizier, "it does not avail us to remain here now. Our city is lost, for the son of Kadhur Khan cannot but be an evil man. Let us fly to the deep forest, where we may find peace."

And so the storks disappeared, a flash of white against the blue, and the people of Bagdad prepared to celebrate their new Kalif's rule.

Over the lake the big birds sailed, and beyond the hills to a forest, which was cool and dark and quiet, and which filled them with a sad peace. They lived on tree toads and small fish from a brook, and they did not speak of Bagdad or of the new Kalif.

When some months had passed the Grand Vizier, as was his usual habit, was searching out the most succulent frogs from among the moist leaves on the earth to bring triumphantly to his master. He left

the Kalif standing on one leg gazing mournfully before him, and wandered, hopping and flying, some distance into the wood. There was a tiny, tender green frog which eluded him hop after hop, springing diabolically from under the very beak of Ali Ben Manzar, the Grand Vizier of the Glorious Kalif of Bagdad. But the Grand Vizier persisted, until, losing sight of his prey, he found himself suddenly in a distant part of the wood which neither of the storks had ever visited before. He looked all around him, and felt a strange fear take possession of his spirit. There was a queer droop to every leaf. Not a ray of sunshine penetrated the dark green depths, and the very shadows seemed evil. Nothing moved; there seemed to be no faintest breeze, and absolute silence enveloped the forest like a smothering veil.

The Vizier shivered, and could not restrain a jump of fright as he heard a sharp loud sound. It seemed to be a quick tapping immediately before him, but he could see nothing. Quietly the stork moved forward, and was instantly relieved to perceive that the noise was made by a woodpecker, whose red head moved spasmodically up and down as she drove her little beak into the bark of a tree. Ali Ben Manzar stared, and was amazed,

for as the small bird prodded methodically into the trunk large round tears, glittering silver, rolled from its eyes and dropped with tiny splashes on the leaves. The Grand Vizier quietly withdrew, and returned to his master, forgetting the tender frog.

The Kalif was still standing on one leg looking sorrowfully into the distance. He did not turn his eyes when his Vizier came to earth beside him, with an excited rustling of feathered wings.

"Glorious Padishah!" cried the stork, "In a distant part of this forest, where I wandered after a lively frog, I came upon a strange place where the very earth seemed queer. There was no sound, not a breeze, although here we have both wind and noise of insect. Then I heard a quick tapping, and discovered a tiny woodpecker which wept large silver tears as it worked for worms."

"How can that interest us?" inquired the apathetic stork.

"Come, let us discover if we can converse with the bird. I do not know that we can get any benefit from this, but the very leaves seemed enchanted."

"Very well, Ali Ben Manzar," agreed the Kalif, without much conviction.

Flying across the tops of the trees the two

storks soon discovered the place where their forest was dense and quiet and filled with black shadows. They settled to earth on its edge, and hopped into the sunless place. Ali Ben Manzar paused to listen, and presently they caught a faint sound of

tapping. Silently the storks appeared. The Kalif, who had thought that nothing could surprise him again, was astonished to see the small bird with tears rolling from its eyes. He advanced.

"Good woodpecker," he clacked, "can you understand the words of a stork?"

The little bird turned her brilliant head toward

the intruders and once again the dark wood was filled with complete silence.

"Who are you?" she chirped.

The Kalif spoke.

"Then you understand our language? This is indeed fortunate. Why do you weep as you search for worms?"

"Ah," answered the bird in a voice choked with sobs, "I have good cause to weep, stork. You have always been a bird, and no doubt you enjoy the life, but I—I am forced to go in this disguise of my true self."

The storks fluttered their wings excitedly.

"What is your trouble, woodpecker?" inquired the Kalif kindly.

"I have been turned into a woodpecker by the sorceries of an evil man, Kadhur Khan, who lives in the kingdom which borders this forest."

"So Kadhur is a sorcerer!" murmured the stork. "What can be done to change you to your original shape?"

"My fate is to remain a woodpecker, because I refused to marry the evil son of that sorcerer, until a man, in human form, asks me to marry him. And that can never be."

The woodpecker turned her little red head

and the storks again saw tears spilling from her eyes.

"In addition to my harsh fate," sobbed the small bird, "I am forced to listen night after night to the devilish incantations of three wizards who meet with the Khan in this enchanted wood."

"So," said the Kalif, "they meet in this wood, do they? Could you tell us where?"

The woodpecker nodded her head toward the South.

"Straight through the trees where a circle of grass is open to the sky." She resumed her tapping with a deep sigh.

The Kalif nodded to his Grand Vizier, and with a great flapping of wings the two storks flew South. In the midst of the thick forest they saw beneath them a small circle of green, in which no tree nor bush grew. The big birds came to earth here, and hopped into the surrounding underbrush, where they hid themselves securely in thick foliage. All day they stayed there, scarcely moving, and when the moon flooded the grassy circle with pale light they were rewarded for their patience. Three men stealthily crept forward and sat, with legs crossed in the circle, where they were joined by two others, who were swathed in dark cloaks.

The Kalif peered through his bush as the cloaks were thrown aside, and nodded to his companion when he caught a glimpse of the squinted eyes of the Khan, and the haughty profile of the young prince, the new Kalif of Bagdad.

"My son," muttered the Khan in a low voice, which was barely distinguishable to the listening storks. "My son, how does the city of Bagdad receive you?"

"How should it receive me?" answered the young man, "I am the master there. The people are not so joyful as they were when I first arrived, but they obey."

"It is well. Is there any way in which I can help you further?"

"No," said the son, "but I would like to know just how you disposed of the Kalif?"

The old man grinned slyly.

"I can tell you now that my plans have worked so well. Disguised as a pedler I sold to the Kalif and his Grand Vizier a magic snuff box, the contents of which transformed them into storks. They tried it out, thinking the magic a fine joke, but also believing that the word written within the lid would change them again to men. But I prevented that. I substituted one letter in the word. I made

the paper read 'Csalavér' instead of 'Czalavér'. They must remain forever storks."

The son laughed.

"But now," spoke the old Khan, turning to his companions, "we need new magic for our deeds. To work, all of you."

The storks had heard enough. Hardly daring to move lest they should crackle the underbrush, they were forced to stay in their cramped corners until the magicians put out their fires, ceased their brewing and incantations, and departed at dawn.

The storks emerged trembling with every feather. High into the air they flew, and did not stop until they came to the tree of the woodpecker, where they had scarcely regained their footing before they repeated the magic word, and found themselves once more the Kalif and his Grand Vizier, Ali Ben Manzar. The two men embraced with tears, while the woodpecker looked on, amazed. Then the Kalif, in all his dignity, bowed low to the small bird, and spoke,

"Fair woodpecker, I have come to ask your hand in marriage."

Before the eyes of the men the bird vanished, and they saw a slender princess, with joyful eyes, standing among the trees. She inclined her head.

"Noble Lord," she murmured, "you have made my life once more my own. Therefore I give it into your keeping."

The Kalif and his Vizier walked, one on each side of the lovely princess, until they came to the city of Bagdad. When the people saw their kind master striding through the streets as if he had never been away they were filled with awe, and prostrated themselves to pray before him all of the way. But the Kalif did not stop. He came to the gates of the palace, where the Grand Vizier cried to the keeper,

"Behold your master has returned! Open to him!"

The people of Bagdad were weary of the constant hauteur, the cruelty and the avarice of the new lord, and so they set up a great shout of welcome. The keeper flung wide the gates. The slaves thrust open the doors, and soldiers assembled around their Kalif. The young necromancer was seized and bound, while the Kalif set off with his army for the neighboring kingdom of Kadhur Khan. In seven days he returned victorious, for all of the magic of the Khan failed to prevent his people from turning against him when they found a good opportunity.

In seven days the wedding of the woodpecker

maiden and the stork Kalif was celebrated with great joy by the people. But the Padishah no longer sat on one leg; he folded two beneath him, and in all the peaceful days of his life the Glorious Kalif of Bagdad could not look with pleasure upon fish or frogs' legs. He charged his cooks never to allow either in the city of Bagdad for a hundred years and a day, and this command was feelingly inforced so long as he lived, by his Grand Vizier, Ali Ben Manzar.

THE TALISMAN

THE TALISMAN

THROUGH THE LAND of Hungary moved a strange and magnificent caravan. Camels, elephants, horses and oxen trod on each other's heels, as wagons rumbled along the rough roads, men shouted hoarsely, brilliantly garbed attendants waved authoritative hands, and soldiers, under crescent flags, with curved swords by their sides, marched in far-flung array. Swarthy bearded faces looked from behind primitive gun carriages. Following the procession was a horde of ragged companies, unattached to the main army, which plundered and robbed on frequent sallies, always returning to their protecting hosts. Leading the

imposing caravan was the Lordly Sultan, Suliman II, who rode in triumph behind his personal guard.

Hungarians scattered from the path of this foreign serpent, coiling along their highways as mice flee from the hungry jaws of a cat. And yet Suliman himself sent out information that the visit was only in the interests of peace, that he was on his way to Buda to see the infant king, who had recently been crowned after the violent death of his father. The Sultan asserted himself to be the rightful guardian of the baby ruler, and he made it known that he but came to Buda to straighten the situation, and to make sure that various unscrupulous men did not impose on the youth of the king.

"I come to protect a defenceless country from the Emperor Ferdinand of Austria, false pretender to the throne of Hungary," declared the Most High Padishah of the Turks, as he looked with appraising eyes on the rich fields of this land.

Buda was torn between two large factions, made up, on the one hand, of those leaders and nobles who believed that the country should be given over to Ferdinand of Austria, as protection against the ruthless Turks, and, on the other, those who had secretly asked the aid of Suliman II to save them from greedy Ferdinand. Only a small body

of desperate soldiers, who with their captains were scattered in occasional companies throughout the country, had any faith in the ability of Hungary to protect herself from both of these powerful monarchs. These few received no attention and their word had no weight in the capitol.

Suliman was advancing as rapidly as he could force his procession of men and animals, for he intended to arrive in Buda before Ferdinand could establish himself there.

A small body of loyal Hungarian soldiers rode slowly along a road toward the village of Palota, where they hoped to rest their tired mounts for the night. Captain Dobo, their young leader, who had two days before watched from a distance the long caravan of Turks, shook his head sorrowfully. He thoughtfully rubbed his grimy hand over the stubble on his brown cheek, and wheeled to face his men, who looked with tired but confident eyes at their youthful and sometimes reckless captain.

"Times are bad, my boys," said Dobo, "I wish the Sultan had stayed in Stamboul where he belongs. If a man has no other intention than to see his so-called ward in Buda why should he travel with an immense army, all fitted out with weapons of every description?"

The lieutenant smiled grimly at his captain, as he murmured,

"Never believe in pledges, friend István."

"But when a Sultan takes his oath on the Koran to protect the land of Hungary and its baby king—"

"Keep out of his way," answered the lieutenant somberly.

As the Captain opened his mouth to make another remark he was suddenly flung into the air by his horse, and it was only a clever grasp of his reins and a swift controlling jerk that prevented a headlong fall. The animal had reared straight up and it stood now quivering, ears flattened to its head, its nostrils distended.

Dobo's thin face stiffened, and his watchful eyes glanced quickly around him, as he motioned for silence. Like an apparition from behind a sand hill appeared a dark gaunt face, streaked with strands of coarse black hair. Dobo sighed in relief, and out of the corner of his wide mouth he called softly to the scarecrow figure.

"Sárossy!"

The fellow emerged until he stood beside his master. He wore the ragged fantastic skirt and jacket of a Mohammedan dervish.

"What are you doing here," asked the Captain,

"when you are supposed to be in the wake of the Turkish army?"

"Master," he replied in a rasping voice, "I heard the words of a troop of marauders, which follows the army, but uses the procession only as a cover for thieving. These men plan to attack the village of Palota today, to steal all they can get their hands on, and make prisoners of the people. A dervish bey leads them. Already they have pillaged many towns, and they have with them a number of Hungarian prisoners, young women and children. They talk of surprising the village, killing the old, taking the young, firing houses. They get a good price for our women and children in the slave market of Stamboul. I came to warn you, for they ride close behind me."

Captain Dobo clenched his fist until the tendons stood out like cords.

"By the name of all the Saints, where are they?"

"Not far behind us. They outnumber your forces ten to one."

Dobo twisted angrily in the saddle.

"Will we let these heathen dogs treat our people so?" he cried to his men.

"No," muttered the Lieutenant, "we can fight, and die if necessary."

"Lead us after the devils!" yelled the soldiers. But their captain had, with an effort, regained his coolness. He raised an arm sharply for silence.

The gypsy fell to the sand and placed his ear against its warmth. He rose suddenly.

"I hear the trot of horses. They come faster than I thought."

"Quick, behind the hills for cover," ordered Captain Dobo, spurring his horse from the highway.

Within a few seconds there was no sound save the persistent chirping of a cricket. The road was bare, for men, animals, and the gypsy had vanished. The noise of the trot of horses grew louder. Up the highway came a strange collection of fighters, with an assortment of prisoners. Leading them was a Turkish dervish, his dingy skirts spread over his horse's flanks. He rode an Arab mount, but instead of beads he wore a sword, and thrust in his sacred sash were two pistols. Between them he had placed his yatagan, the keen Turkish dagger, convenient to his reach. From beneath his turban the young desperado looked upon his surroundings with fierce black eyes.

Behind him was the troop of disreputable soldiers, about a hundred in number, who bore the marks of

cutthroats. Following were wagons, stolen from Hungarian farms, and filled with women and children, chained together, who stared out upon the country with desperate hunted eyes. Bringing up the rear were the dregs of the military, ruthless vagabonds driving cattle and horses, men who could not even be trusted to fight with the unsavory crew ahead of them.

The young dervish bey reined in his horse for a moment and looked around him, for he wished to discover if possible a short cut to the village, which he hoped to plunder as quickly as he could. As the weary prisoners and animals came up behind he lifted his sword, shouting to his men, and pointed toward the sand. They advanced slowly, but as the feet of their horses sank in the loose soil a wild cry rose around about them from the very earth.

"Hail Maria!"

From all directions the Hungarians plunged at the Turks. The Mohammedans in sudden panic believed themselves surrounded by a large Christian army.

"Allah! La Illah Allah!" they yelled.

Among the sand hills it was impossible to know how many had risen to attack them, and the Turks were filled with fear. They scattered wildly, while

the Hungarians cut them down like grass before the sharp blade of a farmer's sickle. They tried to turn their horses to flee, but only a few escaped in the confusion. The ragged guardians of the prisoners fled at the first shout, leaving their charges hiding in the wagons.

"Dogs!" roared the dervish bey, brandishing his sword, and looking wildly about, "Can't you see that this is only a handful?"

But in the fearful clash of sword and gasp of sudden death the leader could not be heard. The forty-five Hungarians fought like forty-five devils, and the frightened cattle ran about among the Turkish horses, upsetting many in their fear.

The fight was soon over. Dobo had lost but five men, most of them slain by the hand of the frothing dervish bey, but of the hundred fierce Turks twenty were dead among the sand hills. Many others were wounded, and with folded hands they begged the Christians for mercy.

Captain Dobo, with Béldi his lieutenant, rounded up the prisoners and cared for those of the wounded in greatest need. They put a strong guard about the Turkish leader, who was trying to stop the flow of blood from a sword cut on his temple. Then they walked aside to consider.

"What shall we do with them?" asked the lieutenant.

"Shoot the dogs! Or hang them!" answered his captain, looking with pity on the women and children crouching in the wagons. The lieutenant followed his glance and replied,

"No, that would not free those unfortunates from their chains. We must help them."

"You are right," said Dobo, turning to the dervish bey. "Where are the keys to those chains?" he asked sternly.

The Turk shrugged his shoulders, and shoved his bandage, which he had drawn from beneath the folds of his turban, slightly higher.

"I do not know," he smiled scornfully. "Do you think that I lower myself by keeping the keys of slaves like a common jailer?"

"Where are they?"

Again the Turk shrugged.

"I do not know. The captain of my prison guard wore them on his belt, but, as you see, the dog has disappeared."

"Tell me the truth," spoke Dobo, "or you shall pay with your life."

The Turk scowled, and drew himself up contemptuously as he snarled.

"Dog of an Unbeliever! My father is Selim, Mighty Pasha of Szolnok. He keeps as prisoners uncounted Hungarians. To avenge my death he would kill a hundred of your nobles. Let me go in peace and I can promise to give you a thousand ducats, with all of the jewels in my belt."

"We don't need your money," muttered Dobo.

"Then exchange me for your most valuable noble in my father's prison."

"How do I know that you can be relied upon to keep your promise?"

"I swear by the Koran!"

But Dobo shook his head.

"As if I didn't know that the oath of a Mohammedan by the Koran, if made to an Unbeliever, is not binding to you Moslems."

The Turk slowly held out in the palm of his hand a gold ring, intricately made, which held a blood-red ruby in its center.

"Here is my talisman," said the Turk seriously, "Take me with you, and send this ring to my father. When he sees it he will know that my life is in danger. You may demand what you will."

Captain Dobo pursed his lips reflectively, and then shook his head. He felt trickery in every word of the Turk. But Béldi grasped his friend by the

arm and pulled him aside, out of hearing of the impassive Moslem. He whispered.

"Come, István, let's give the filthy pig a chance! My brother, who is your old friend, and is as you know a valuable man to our cause, is in the prison of Selim, Pasha of Szolnok. You may buy his freedom, and that of others."

The Captain stood in thought. His lieutenant continued.

"Send the gypsy to Selim Pasha with the ring, and your demand. If the dervish lied it is in our power to kill him when we hear from the spy."

The Captain relented. He took the ring, placed it carefully on his finger, and set about having the wagons with the women and children brought up. The wounded he ordered put into some of the wagons, and all of the Turkish prisoners who could walk he lined up before him. The small band of Hungarian soldiers knew that they must reach Palota before any other Turkish detachment might arrive. After burying the dead, and obliterating as many traces of the battle as possible, the weary Hungarians at last shepherded their crowd into the village, which received them, at first in fear, and then, on discovery of the victors, with great joy. Blacksmiths were called to file away the heavy

chains of the women, and their sisters of Palota washed their lacerated ankles, bound them, and took the unfortunates into their homes until they should recover.

Late at night Captain Dobo and his lieutenant took their prisoner to the stone manor house, the strongest building in the vicinity of the village. The drawbridge was down, for the squire of the manor did not fear an attack from thieves with a company of soldiers in his neighborhood. Dobo pounded on the heavy oaken gate, sending a muffled thud through the castle, which seemed to awaken at the sound. Feet could be heard running about, and then there came to the listening ears outside the voice of an old man, commanding his servants to hasten.

"Who knocks at my gate?" roared the squire.

"Captain Dobo, of the Guards!" shouted the belated guest.

"Open the gates!" thundered the squire to his retainers.

The three men walked in, and were hailed by the old squire.

"Which is Captain Dobo?" asked their host.

"Here, good sir," replied the leader, whereupon his questioner threw both arms around him and clasped him in a bear grip.

"The Lord brought you," he roared, "You are a valiant man—one against three they tell me—it took me back to my youth just to hear of your battle." He paused for breath, and coughed, then looked at the sullen dervish bey. "Who is your prisoner?"

"He is a valuable man, if what he says is true," answered Dobo. "He was the leader of the infamous crew we captured yesterday. His father is Selim Pasha, of Szolnok, and we have agreed to hold him in exchange for some of our men whom the Pasha has as prisoners."

Dobo held out the ring, watching the ruby flash in the torch light.

"This ring we are to send to the Pasha, to let him know that his son is in danger."

The old squire threw back his hairy head and laughed loudly.

"Selim bey! You have caught a rare bird! By Saint Anthony but you have! We will put the fighting cock under lock and key."

He led the way into his castle, through many cold stone passageways, winding deeper and deeper into the rocky earth, until he reached the furthermost dungeon, which was large and dark. Their footsteps echoed hollowly across its floor, and Dobo

could see in the flickering torch light nothing but the damp rock walls and one bench which stood in the middle of the floor. From a high window, cut through solid stone and barred with iron, a faint light glimmered.

"How came a window in a dungeon so deep?" asked Dobo of the squire.

"It is safe enough," answered the old man, "for it goes through the side of the cliff on which this castle perches, and below is the moat."

"Very well, you can rest here for the night," said Captain Dobo to the Turk, who threw his lean form on the bench, and glanced at the three men contemptuously.

"How could the son of Selim bey fall so low?" growled the squire, glaring at the ragged dervish garments and the vagabond air of the young Turk.

The prisoner shrugged, and smiled with a curl of the lip. He sent a sharp swift glance toward the small window, and then lifted his palms, murmuring.

"Allah is Great! No Unbeliever can guess his ways."

"If your ways are Allah's ways," exploded the old man, "then I have not much respect for your Allah." He shoved the two guests ahead of him,

and locked the door with a large key, thrusting it in his belt and patting it with an affectionate hand.

"I shall not let this key go from my touch until your messenger returns from Selim Pasha," he declared in satisfaction.

All the way back to the upper chambers the old man muttered to his new friends.

"Yes, my sons, Hungary has paid some price for the opportunity to learn the Turkish language! And I paid a price with my health." He coughed raspingly. "Three years and five months I was a prisoner in the Seven Towers of Stamboul. I am still dragging my right foot, so long did I wear the heavy chain." He sighed, but his face brightened as he thought of his captive. "Now we have one of the dogs, and a fancy breed at that."

Bêldi and Dobo flung themselves on benches in the great hall of the manor house, where the old squire seated himself opposite them. Candles were lighted. Food and wine were brought. When they had finished eating Dobo was silent. Bêldi and his host talked until far into the night, but the young leader only sat and turned his hand back and forth watching the big ruby flash its phantom gleams of blood-red light before his eyes. The old man looked at him, and suddenly inquired,

"My son, had I not better put that ring in a safe place? You cannot sleep with it on your finger."

"This is a pagan charm," answered Dobo slowly, "but I do not know its nature. I only know that it is very valuable to the Turk. I do not think that the Sultan's army would go out of its way to avenge this little party of Turkish stragglers. The Padishah is too anxious to reach Buda for that. But one never knows. They must have received some news of the fight by now from fugitives. You had better caution your guards at the gates. No, I shall keep the ring."

"By Saint István but that is wise counsel! I shall go do as you say."

The old man stumped from the hall, coughing as he went.

"In Peace we sleep," said Dobo with a smile.

When the squire returned he found Dobo had laid off his armor, as had also his lieutenant, and they were both stretched out on wide settles prepared for sleep.

"My sons, why do you not go to bed?" cried the host.

"No," replied Dobo, "tomorrow I send the ring with my gypsy to Selim Pasha in Szolnok, but

tonight I take no chance on losing it. We will be comfortable here."

"Yes, yes," murmured the squire, "do as you like. I can no longer sleep on hard benches, but then I am no longer young, and I spent three years and five months in the Seven Towers. God grant you better luck, young warriors."

The candles flickered and died, leaving great shadows across the hall where Captain Dobo and his lieutenant slept the sleep of the weary.

As the first sun rays lightened the gloom of the hall Bèldi opened his eyes and spoke softly to the Captain, who jerked awake instantly.

"Anything wrong?" asked Dobo sharply, looking at his hand. But the ring was still there, glowing with countless red fires.

"No," answered Bèldi, yawning, "I but thought it time to rise. The gypsy will be here soon."

"Yes," said Dobo, "but first when our good host comes we will go down to see how the dervish bey fares."

"Why do that?" asked Bèldi in astonishment, "he could not get out of that vault."

"Ah, but the ways of Turks are devious. They know of tricks of which we do not dream." He shook his head. "But I do not know how he could

get out. We will see him. I wish to get his letter to his father."

There was a noise behind them, and the old man entered followed by a servant who rolled his eyes in blank astonishment at having been told to serve the best wine in the castle. He placed before the two strangers two wooden flagons, painted intricately on their round surfaces, and the old host filled them for his guests.

"Drink, my sons, you need it," he said, as he sniffed the fragrance of his choice wine.

The three drank, and then went into the dungeons to talk with their prisoner. The squire carried a lighted candle in his hand, for the morning light penetrated but dimly below the upper floor. They entered, but there was no sound other than their footsteps. The old man walked slowly about the room, his footsteps following him in ghostly echo, but he could see no occupant. He looked at his guests in amazement, unable to believe his eyes. For once his tongue could not form the words it wished to utter. Dobo struck his forehead with his fist.

"There was something in that Turk's look last night as we left this room that warned me. I should have guarded him," he cried remorsefully.

Bėldi seized the candle from his host's hand and went to the narrow window.

"Here," he shouted, holding the light high above his head, "see this! The dog has gone this way. He may be drowned in the moat. Shall we search for him?"

Captain Dobo and the squire moved closer and saw that the bars of the window had been bent rigidly aside, leaving a small aperture in the center.

"That Turk must have the strength of ten men, and so lean too!" muttered the squire, shuddering. "I am glad that he did not get those hands on me."

"There is no use to search for him, Bėldi," replied Dobo sadly, "for he is far away by now."

Bėldi lowered the candle, which gleamed fitfully over the bench on which they had left their prisoner. A small slip of parchment fluttered to the floor. He reached for it, and handed the letter to his chief.

"Dog of an Unbeliever," read Dobo aloud, "next time do not sleep when you have a dervish bey in your power. I have joined the Sultan's forces. I want my ring. I can pay you as much gold as you ask. Send to my father, and demand what price you will for it in money. But if you do not I shall return to kill you, for the ring belongs to me.

It is a family charm, a talisman, which protects my life in battle. The ring is defiled by the hand of an Unbeliever. The sooner you send it the better for you.

"The Dervish Bey."

The squire shook his head heavily.

"What will you do with it, my son?"

"Keep it, of course," answered Dobo. The ring flashed a bloody spark from the fire in its heart as the Captain of the small Hungarian force left the castle of the old squire and leaped on his horse.

The Sultan went his triumphant way, and took Buda by ruse, since the city was too divided to divine his purposes. He placed his own men, and Hungarians who were in sympathy to him, in high official positions, and then he journeyed back to Stamboul, with his imposing procession of camels and elephants and horses and men. Great bodies of soldiery he sent to attack stubborn strongholds held by loyal Hungarians, and most of these he conquered by force of arms. The Austrians swarmed across Hungary's borders on the West, and met the Turks from the East in fierce battles. The disputed land was exhausted, her fields trampled, her men slain, her women and children

taken to the slave market in Stamboul. The people led hunted lives, and prayed for better times.

Those who remained were required to pay grinding taxes to the Turks, who claimed to be protecting them from the Austrians, and when the Austrians occupied their territory they were forced to give food and shelter and animals, until almost nothing remained. For many years Hungary suffered, but there yet existed a few warriors, desperate in their struggles for independence, and a few strongholds unconquered by either ravager. Among these fighters was Captain Dobo, who seemed to lead a charmed life, so active was he, and so easily did he appear to escape all wounds. Back and forth through the land he fought with the fury of a wild animal trapped in its den. And always there flashed, with blood-red fire, the big ruby in his strange ring.

The dervish bey collected another large body of Turkish desperadoes, who plundered and killed and burned wherever they went. But their leader with the ferocious eyes did not ride into battle with such bravado. From the day that Captain Dobo had taken him by surprise in the sand hills he became more cautious. Instead of leading his men with a wild yell of "Allah, Il Allah!" he urged them on from a safe distance, and only plunged into the fight

if his aid seemed absolutely necessary. For days he looked down at his finger, where in a small circle his flesh was a lighter brown, and frowned as if a thousand devils were treading on his heels. His wanderings led him all over Hungary. Wherever Turks were fighting Christians the dervish bey could be seen, waving his men on. He developed a queer habit of staring intently into the faces of every prisoner who was an Unbeliever, and in his battles he seemed to thrust his long neck forth, looking from side to side like a vulture seeking carrion. But he never found the face he sought.

Sometimes the Turk heard of valiant Captain Dobo, who was said, even among his enemies, to bear a charmed life, but the dervish bey could never quite meet him. The Christian hopped like a flea before the strong hand of the Moslem. No man could say whether Captain Dobo would attack before tomorrow's dawn, and then before his scattered enemies could gather themselves to launch a counter-attack, be miles away hidden in the hills and forests, or on the wastes of the plains he knew so well.

Three times the dervish bey was wounded, and raved in delirium about his talisman, held by an Unbeliever, but each time he recovered with a more

intense desire to have again his ring, and with it the head of him who wore it.

Onward the Turks pushed, until the crescent flag was a familiar sight everywhere in the land of Hungary except in one corner, the ancient stronghold of the Magyar race, between the left side of the Danube and the Lake Balaton.

To Balaton Lake Dobo took his wife and little son for safety, and left them in a quiet village behind the fighting line. Dobo, who was no longer a captain, but had reached the rank of general, rode swiftly back to his fort, built above a mountain pass. Here the general collected all of his forces, and waited for the Sultan's army to appear. It was the last undefeated stronghold, and the men who guarded it prepared to defend it to the end. The Sultan swore to take it, but Dobo only strengthened his fortification, and doubled his precautions.

At Balaton Lake the wife of General Dobo sat in her garden, for the weather was mild. She smiled affectionately at her young son, who rode a fiery steed made of an old scabbard. As he galloped about the grass his shrill voice was raised in excitement, called forth by imagination.

"Hi! Ho! After you, Turks!"

The mother, whose back was to the road, think-

ing how like his father the child looked, smiled. Then an anxious little frown drew her brows together. She knew that the greatest battle of recent years was to be fought between the armies of the Sultan and that of her husband. She sighed, for in these tumultuous months she had been compelled to look on peace as only a dream. Suddenly she shivered in a chill breeze which drifted across the garden. The general's wife rose quietly and went into the house to get her shawl.

The excited little voice continued to shout lustily, as the boy rode his scabbard. A deep sound startled the child, and he paused, looking at the fence, where a tall man in the dark broadcloth garments of a prosperous Hungarian artisan, stood leaning his elbows on the rails. But the fellow had not the calm look of an artisan. His fierce black eyes burned beneath his cap, and to the child there seemed a strange air about him.

"Would you like to ride a real horse?" he asked, pointing to one which stood, cropping leaves, near the road.

"Wouldn't I?" laughed the boy, "When my father comes back from fighting the Turks he will bring me the Sultan's horse."

"So your father is at Eger Fort?"

"Yes, he will drive all the Turks out."

"What is the name of your glorious father?"

"General Dobo. He knows how to fight pagans."

"Oh! So! Captain Dobo! General Dobo!" murmured the stranger, as if to himself. He slowly

closed his dark hand on the fence until he seemed to strangle the rail.

The boy jumped up and down, laughing.

"My father cannot be wounded, for he took a ring from a Turk who was high as a tower. The ring was magic, and he cannot be hurt while he wears it. He wouldn't give it back for a heap of gold as high as a mountain."

"So! He took a ring from a Turk! Where is this ring?"

"He wears it always."

"Do you want to see another magic ring?"

The artisan drew from his right hand a sparkling golden circle, which he held before the fascinated eyes of the child. The little boy advanced, dragging his scabbard horse at his side. He reached up toward the ring to touch it with a finger, when a strong hand clasped him around the mouth, muffling his shriek, and an arm lifted him swiftly over the fence and onto the horse. The stranger sprang on behind, and disappeared down the quiet road in a thunder of hoofs and a cloud of fine dust.

The wife of the general wondered at the noise, for it was seldom that she heard a horse in this vicinity. She thought of her husband, and the idea came to her that he might have sent a messenger. She ran from the house, flinging the shawl about her shoulders, and out into the road. Nothing was visible.

"It must have been a passer-by," she murmured, turning to the garden.

"Pál!" she called, when she did not see her son. "Pál! Where are you? I told you not to leave the garden."

The scabbard was lying neglected on the grass, but there was no sign of her boy. The mother walked slowly about, expecting to find him hiding behind a clump of bushes, but she could see nothing. A faint alarm struck chill into her heart. She raised her voice.

"Pál! Pál! Come at once. It is growing dark."

But there was no sound save the sighing of the trees and the rustle of night insects swarming into the shadowy gloom. The woman clutched her shawl with both hands, and ran like a wild thing back and forth across the garden. She cried out incessantly and then stopped to listen, but could hear no answer.

Filled with fear, she ran into the house shrieking for her maids, who appeared with round frightened eyes.

"Search the house for Pál. I cannot find him. You, Julia, run for the Magistrate of the Village, and ask him to come with searchers. Something has happened."

The quiet place became alive in a moment. The whole house was turned upside down, and not one smallest corner remained unsearched. The old Magistrate, his boots hastily drawn on, and his pipe still in his fingers, appeared with all of the men he could find in the village.

All night they looked, beating the bushes for miles about, holding torches aloft, and the mother ran with them, crazy with her grief, until she sank exhausted on the road and was taken to her bed. For many days they searched on the road, with no sign of the child, and then the wife of General Dobo sent a swift messenger to her husband in Eger Fort.

The man arrived at Eger in the midst of vast confusion. Spies had just come on tired horses to report that the army of the Sultan was advancing, followed by camels and a great mass of magnificent weapons. Cannons rumbled along, and Turkish soldiers carried in addition to their curved blades long-barreled muskets. Flags, blazing with color, waved over the army, and the bright garments of the Moslems frightened even the birds from their nests along the roadside. But Dobo was grim. He smiled, turning to a captain.

"We are ready to receive them. Let them come with their elephants and camels decked with color! This is our last stand, and such things do not frighten us. Our determination will go farther than their flags and tassels."

He gave minute instructions, but in the middle of them a disheveled man from the country, grimy and hot, bowed before him, ducking his head.

"Good Master Dobo," he muttered sadly, "I have a message from your wife. She bids me tell you that your young son has been carried away by a strange man. We could find no trace of them. Only an old woman saw a running horse, bearing a dark man holding tightly to a boy. They were riding to the South."

General Dobo leaped up. His face grew crimson, and then pale. The dark sunburn of his fighting years turned a livid yellow. He gripped his table.

"What did you say? My son stolen. Going South! He must be in the country taken by the Turks now."

There was a tense silent second, as the general dropped into his chair with his face in his hands. Then the fort was filled with noise. Men shouted swift orders. An officer appeared in the door.

"General, the Sultan's army is encamping beyond the hill to the South. We may expect an attack tonight."

The general rose in a daze.

"Yes, yes, the Sultan's army," he murmured, like an old man, "Prepare for the siege." He saw the messenger. "Go back to my wife. Tell her that I shall not rest until my son is found."

The messenger slipped from the North gate and rode a fresh horse to Lake Balaton.

Early in the morning the Turks besieged the narrow mountain pass, which was guarded like a great watch dog by Eger Fort. For three days the cannons roared, spitting tongues of flame. For three days the men within the fort worked like

demons repairing gaps made in their walls by the cannon blasts. For three days the Sultan sent his shrieking hordes to storm the gray stone castle, but for three days he did not succeed. The Hungarians were fighting their last fight against the followers of Mohammed.

General Dobo had no time to think of his grief. He ran like a man filled with frenzy from one weak

point in the walls to another, encouraging his men, shouting orders, making lightning decisions. Always as he went there flashed from his hand the blood-red fire of a ruby.

On the second day a white flag was lifted in the forest to the South, and a Turkish messenger appeared. He wore the ragged soiled garb of a dervish, but on his head was not the tall cap of the Mohammedan monk, but a turban of green, relic of a pilgrimage to Mecca. Instead of sacred beads he clasped a curved knife in his sash, while he held aloft with his other hand the white flag.

General Dobo climbed to the wall, where he stood like a boulder, outlined sharply against the sky. His men cried out to him that the Turks were treacherous, that he should not expose himself so, but their leader seemed deaf. His eyes were fixed on the messenger, who approached close enough to shout.

"Ah," called the dervish, bowing ironically, "the brave General Dobo, once Captain Dobo, who wears a talisman which keeps him from harm! I have a message from the Sultan. He bids me tell you that if you will surrender this fort he will leave you in peace, and will go with his army back to Stamboul at once. If not he will blast your fort

from its foundations, and make your women and children prisoners. This is my message from the Glorious Sultan. I asked him to send me here, for I have a message of my own. You have my talisman, and I have your son. He is safe now, but if you do not deliver my ring to me I shall be forced to take it from your dead hand when the fort is in ruins. Your son shall be sold in the slave market at Stamboul."

The dervish bowed again, in exaggerated humility, and then looked the general in the face, throwing back his dark head. The eyes of the Turk were on fire with desire. The eyes of the Hungarian were stony.

"We will not treat with pagans!" cried Dobo, in a voice of ice. "If my son and I perish, we perish."

A great shout went up from the fort. His men dragged the general from the wall, and the dervish walked with savage steps back into the forest.

The battle began again, fiercer than before. But the fort withstood the fire. When another exhausting day had passed there was sudden quiet. The Hungarians put themselves on guard, for they feared some ruse, but all night and all the next day there was not a sound. Cautiously they sent out spies into the forest, but they could scarcely believe their words when they returned.

"Many of the Turks lie wounded or dead among the trees," said the spies, "but the army has withdrawn. We questioned a wounded soldier, who told us that the Sultan had word that serious revolt threatens his conquered lands to the East. He has left us in peace, for we are not so important to him as the others. Already the army is on its way to Stamboul."

The Hungarians cried out, and then wept helplessly with relief. When they had buried their dead, and cared for their wounded they went forth to search the forests. General Dobo led the party, but his eyes were filled with fear for what he might find. He clasped in his right palm a ring, which he hoped to exchange for his son, if he could find the dervish bey. He looked for hours, and then, as the sun was setting, he stumbled over that which he sought. Lying stiffly on the earth was the figure of a dervish, with curved sword beside him. His green turban was splotched with dark blood, but his fierce black eyes were closed. Curled up close to him, as if he sought protection even from this dead enemy, was a small boy, sound asleep. The general leaned over the dervish and lifted his son in his arms. The boy opened his eyes sleepily.

After the siege of Eger General Dobo retired to

Lake Balaton, where he and his wife for many months could not let their child out of their sight without a shudder. The general often stared wonderingly at his right hand, where a thin band of lighter skin testified to the fact that for many years he had worn a ring. But from the night when he had found his boy the talisman had disappeared. He supposed he had lost it in the forest.

The body of the dervish bey was buried by a Hungarian farmer, who was too superstitious to allow a dead pagan to lie on his land. Under the tree he lay, where he had died from a battle wound. On his mouth was a strange grim smile, and in the green folds of his turban, where it had fallen from the hand of an Unbeliever, flashed unseen a blood-red ruby.

THE END.