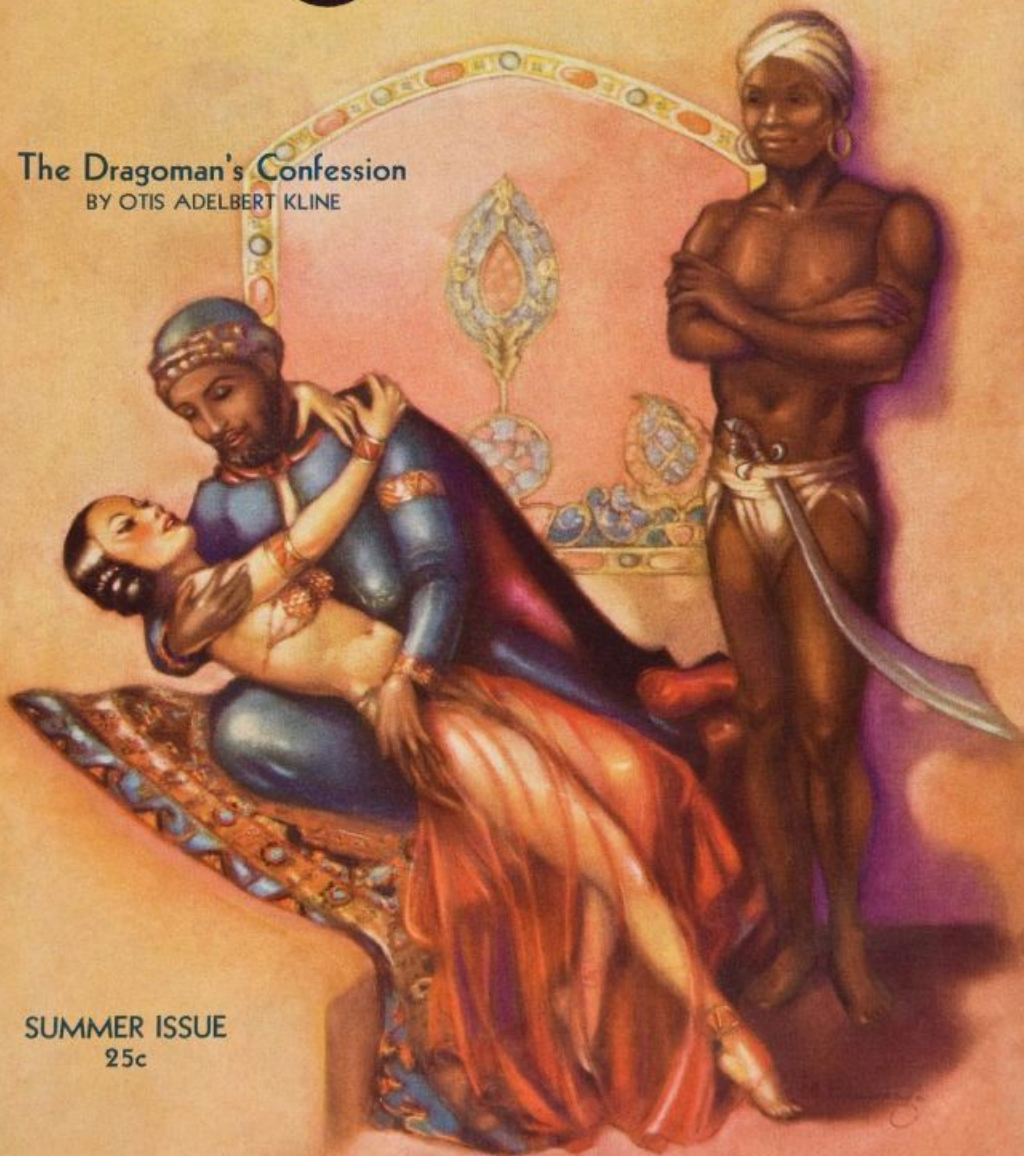


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The Dragoman's Confession
BY OTIS ADELBERT KLINE



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The Dragoman's Confession

By
OTIS ADELBERT KLINE

First published *Oriental Stories*, Summer 1932.

A smashing action-adventure story about an Arabian dragoman's love for a beautiful Chinese girl

The Wailing Wall of the Jews, *effendi*, is best seen when the shadows begin to lengthen, and not in this midday heat. Yet if you insist—No? Well then, here is the coffee shop of Silat, master brewer of *quahwah*, and I have bethought me of a wondrous adventure of mine, which I never before have related to mortal man.

Is not this shade refreshing after the heat and dust of the street, and is it not better far to be seated on this cushioned *diwan* than tramping beneath the blazing sun?

Ho, Silat! Bring two *narghiles*, heaped with your finest Persian tobacco, and scented with essence of orange flowers. And prepare for us coffee, black as the heel of an Abyssinian eunuch, bitter as aloes and quinine, and hot as the pitch in the cauldron of Jan ibn Jan, Sultan of all evil *jinn*.

The tale, *effendi*, is one which I would hesitate to tell to any but you, a confession of an indiscretion of the days of my youth, when—Allah forgive me!—I transgressed the law of the Koran. It is a story which I should not like to repeat to one who, like myself, is of the Faithful. But you, who have an understanding heart, and a sympathy for all races and creeds, will understand.

Once I told you a tale of a rose, *effendi*—of Selma, beauteous Rose of Mosul. I will now relate to you a story of a lily, a tiger lily from far Cathay. Was it not Sayyidna Isa himself who said that even the glory of the great Suleiman Baalshem, Lord of the Name, was as nothing compared to the splendor of the lily? Consider, then, the golden beauty of the tiger lily, with its slender throat and its graceful curves, greater than that of all other lilies. Reflect on this, *effendi*, and you may be vouchsafed some slight conception of the glorious perfection of a slender, black-eyed maiden of Cathay, who rightfully bore the name, Tiger Lily.

I pray you, *effendi*, for the purpose of this story, think not of me as the bent and wrinkled graybeard who sits before you, but as I looked in the days of my youth—tall and straight as a young pine, strong and brave as a tiger, and handsome as the bright moon of Ramazan.

I have told you, *effendi*, of my great love for Selma Hanoum, and of the magnificent palace we maintained in Mosul. So deep was our affection, each for the other, that it seemed that she but lived to please me, and I, her.

One day as I was strolling through the *souk*, I passed the hidden slave mart where I had purchased Selma in defiance of the Pasha's eunuch. It brought back a flood of memories, so, recalling the password, I made my way through the shop of the rug vender, which veiled the courtyard where this secret traffic was conducted.

I saw that I had arrived late, as most of the business of the day had been transacted. Many buyers were about to depart with their purchases, young and old, male and female, white,

yellow, brown and black. But one slave remained to be sold, a young maid of Cathay. Her master, a gray-bearded Pathan, helped her to mount the platform, and stood by while the auctioneer lifted the concealing cloak from her shapely shoulders, the better to display her charms to prospective purchasers.



“Ahmed roared out: ‘Wallah! Look where you are going!’”

“Ho, Defenders of the Faith,” he cried. “Behold! Praise God for permitting your eyes to see this lovely flower from far Cathay. Lo Foo Goak, the Tiger Lily, a princess in her own right, only daughter of a great Chinese war-lord. Worth her weight in gold. What am I offered?”

A beetle-browed Kurd at my left bid fifty piasters, which was, of course, only meant to start the bidding, as her master would scarcely have parted with a paring of her nail for so low a price.

The girl was undeniably beautiful by any standard. There was just enough tilt to her heavy-lidded almond eyes to give here a piquant expression. Her nose was small and straight, and her lips were twin rose-petals of delight. The clinging, translucent silk of her Chinese costume revealed firm, virginal breasts, a slender waist, and limbs that were marvels of grace and perfection.

The bidding swiftly grew louder and the bidders more clamorous as they began to realize, one after another, the tremendous worth of the slave-girl who stood before them. Of course, none believed that she was a princess, any more than did I, who knew the extravagant lengths to which auctioneers would go to dispose of their merchandise. But all knew the great market value of such unusual grace and beauty.

I stood idly looking on, taking no great interest in the proceedings, when the thought occurred to me that Selma Hanoum would be pleased with the gift of such a slave-girl. I took inventory of my gold, and found that I had about seventy pounds Turkish. The bidding had, by that time, reached fifty pounds, or five thousand piasters.

"I am bid but five thousand piasters for this Virgin of Paradise, this daughter of a Chinese prince, stolen from the garden of her father's palace by a Mongol raider, and sold by him to Yusuf ben Ali, the Pathan merchant prince, for a lakh of rupees. If a single para less than that sum is bid, he will take her to Samarkand, where beauty such as hers is appreciated."

The bidders had, by this time, narrowed down to two, a wrinkled *shaykh*, and a blubber-lipped Moor, black as ebony and ugly as a baboon. With much squabbling back and forth, they were raising each other's bids, ten piasters at a time.

"Six thousand piasters," I said.

Both stared at me, as if disgusted with my lack of business acumen, but the auctioneer fairly beamed.

"Six thousand piasters," he cried. "Who will bid seven?"

The *Magrhebi* raised my bid another ten piasters, and the *shaykh* raised his bid another ten. I grew impatient of their haggling.

"Seven thousand," I cried.

The two bidders glared at me, then looked sympathetically at each other.

"By Allah! Such bidding is outlandish," muttered the *Magrhebi*.

"*Ayewah!* It is ruinous," agreed the *shaykh*. "I am through."

"Not I," announced the *Magrhebi*. Then he shouted: "Seven thousand and ten piasters."

Hastily I rechecked the contents of my purse. This was more money than I had with me.

"I am bid seven thousand and ten piasters," cried the auctioneer. "Who will raise the bid?"

I shrugged my shoulders, and turned away. Then I heard a cry from the girl, which caused me to look back. She had drawn a knife from beneath her garments, and now held it poised above her bosom. "Dare to sell me to that filthy Blackamoor, O Pathan," she cried, "and I will slay myself."

The *Magrhebi* grinned. "*Waha!*" he exclaimed. "She is a little tigress. But fear not, O Pathan, I can tame her." In his hand he held a heavy, three-lashed *kurbaj* of twisted rhinoceros hide. With the quickness of a darting serpent, he struck, and the knife flew from the girl's fingers and tinkled on the flagstones of the courtyard.

"Seven thousand and ten," intoned the auctioneer. "Who will bid eight thousand?"

Again the *Magrhebi* grinned, and looked about him. Then he said: "There are no more bidders, auctioneer. She is mine. And here is your gold." He tossed a bag onto the platform, and reached up to help the girl down. But she drew back from him. "I will not be slave of yours, O great African ape," she said, defiantly.

With a frown, the *Magrhebi* swung his *kurbaj* and flicked her bare shoulder, raising three red welts. "Come quickly," he commanded, "or my three little black snakes will bite harder, and the next time they will draw blood."

"Never!"

He drew back his whip for a blow, but the girl did not flinch. She regarded him with a look of haughty disdain.

Again he swung the *kurbaj*. But by that time I had come up to him. Before he could lash her a second time I wrenched the whip from his grasp.

He turned to me, an evil look in his eyes, and laid his hand on his simitar. "So, my young cockerel, you would interfere between a man and his slave. Give me back my whip."

"Here it is," I replied, and lashed him across the face.

He whipped out his simitar, at this, but I brought the heavy butt of the whip down on his wrist, so numbing it that the weapon dropped from his fingers. Then I jerked his bag of gold from the hands of the astonished auctioneer, and hurled it into the *Magrhebi's* midriff with such force that he doubled up and fell on his face, while the coins from the bursted bag rolled all about him.

"Now take your gold, and get out," I told him, "or your three little black snakes shall sup on the blood of their master."

Half dazed, and completely cowed, he got to his knees and whined: "Do not whip me, master. I but jested, my lord. I would not have struck the girl again."

I tossed the whip to him, and turned to confront the astounded auctioneer, and the enraged Yusuf ben Ali, the girl's Pathan master.

"By God and again by God!" raged the Pathan. "How dare you ruin my business? I will go before the Pasha. I will have you beaten with palm rods. You——"

"Enough, *sidi*," I interrupted. "I will pay you eight thousand piasters for the girl. Does that suffice you?"

"Money talks," he replied. "Let me see your gold."

"Here are seven thousand piasters," I said, tossing him my purse. "Count them. And here," drawing a blazing ruby from my finger, "is a ring worth twenty thousand. I will leave it with our friend the auctioneer as surety, and he will pay you the other thousand."

The auctioneer examined the ring, a present to me from Selma Hanoum which I valued very highly, and with which I would not have consented to part permanently for any sum. Yusuf ben Ali counted the gold over twice. "It is correct," he said, finally.

"I will pay you the other thousand and keep the ring as surety," the auctioneer told him.

"I'll call for the ring this afternoon," I said. "Have it ready for me."

I helped the girl down from the platform. Then she adjusted her cloak and veil and we walked out, passing the blubber-lipped *Magrhebi* as he crawled about on his hands and knees, muttering to himself and retrieving his gold, past the staring crowd of purchasers and slaves, through the shop of the rug merchant, and into the street.

I swiftly led the way to the palace of Selma Hanoum, hoping she would be pleased with this beautiful gift I had brought her, and anxious to see the look on her face when I should unveil the gorgeous slave-girl from Cathay.

But as soon as I entered the *salamlik*, I knew that something was wrong. The *bowab* was not at the door, and in the rooms beyond I heard the women keening.

Completely forgetting the little slave-girl, I rushed into the *majlis*. There on a *diwan* lay my beautiful Selma, her women wailing around her.

In an instant I was at her side. On her face was the pallor of death, and there hovered about her the faint odor of crushed peach kernels.

"Selma!" I cried. "Selma, beloved!"

I touched her brow. It was cold as marble.

“She has been received into the mercy of Allah, *sidi*,” sobbed one of her women.

I knelt there beside the mortal remains of my beloved, too stunned with grief to know or care what went on around me. Presently, however, I became aware that some one was speaking to me. It was the little slave-girl I had just purchased. She had taken a small piece of pastry from a tray that stood on a near-by taboret, and was holding it before me.

“Do you recognize this odor, master?” she asked.

I sniffed it. “Bitter almonds. Cherry laurel,” I said. “What does it matter?” Having once been an *attar*, I recognized the familiar odor of a common flavoring essence.

“Might it not also be poison—prussic acid?” she asked.

True. Blinded by my grief, I had not even thought of this. It must be poison, for Selma had evidently been in perfect health when I had left her a few hours before.

I got to my feet. “Who brought these pastries to the mistress?” I asked.

An old slave-woman answered. “I brought them, *sidi*.”

“And where did you get them?”

“The new cook made them, my lord.”

The new cook! This brought suspicions. The day before, our old cook and his helper had left us to take employment with Ahmed Aga, one of the most prosperous of the dignitaries of Mosul, who had offered them ridiculously high wages. Shortly thereafter, two other men who had applied for their positions had been employed. I had not liked the looks of either of them at the time, but Selma had taken them on trial.

“Where is Musa, the eunuch?” I asked.

“Here, my lord.” Musa parted the hangings of the rear door of the *majlis*, and stepped within the room.

“Bring the new cook and his helper into the *salamlik*,” I commanded.

“Harkening and obedience, *sidi*.”

I went into the *salamlik*. Presently Musa entered with the new cook, a short, rotund, greasy-faced *Turki* named Sufeyd.

“Where is your helper?” I asked.

“He has gone to the *souk*, *sidi*,” replied Sufeyd, “to buy meat and vegetables.”

“So? Who made the pastry that was served to your mistress today?”

“I made it, my lord.”

“And what strange flavor did you add to it?”

“I added naught but essence of almonds,” he replied, sullenly. “My helper obtained it for me. He told me a few drops in the filling of each cake would give them a delicious flavor, thus pleasing my mistress with my work.”

“Here is the essence, *sidi*,” said Musa. He drew a small phial from his clothing and handed it to me. I drew the cork, and a whiff convinced me that it was indeed prussic acid.

“So your helper gave you this poison,” I said. “A likely story, yours. A cook taking advice from his helper.”

“Poison! *Sidi*, I swear to you by my head and beard, by the tombs of my forefathers, that I knew it not. *Sidi*, have mer——”

He got no further. Blinded by grief and rage, and thoroughly disbelieving the story of this villainous-looking rascal, I had whipped out my *simitar*. A swift, sure blow, and his head flew

from his shoulders, cutting off his speech for ever.

A moment later, I repented my rash act, when repentance came too late. I reflected that Sufeyd might have been telling the truth after all, that he might have been the dupe of some one else. But, assuming that he had not used the poison innocently, thinking it a harmless flavoring essence, and had been in a plot with others, I had for ever sealed the only lips which could tell me who those others might be.

As I stood there thus, with the poison phial in one hand and the bloody simitar in the other, the front door was suddenly flung open, and Daoud Aga, the *Yuzbashi*, or Captain of the *Hytas*, the Turkish Irregular Cavalry, entered, followed by a file of soldiers.

“Hah!” he cried. “I am sent to arrest you for one murder, and find that you have committed two. By slaying your accomplice you have saved the headsman one stroke, but he shall not be cheated of the other.”

“What do you mean? Who sent you?” I asked.

“I mean that you are under arrest for having ordered the poisoning of your wife, Selma Hanoum. His Excellency the Pasha sent me. If you have any further questions, let them wait until you stand before His Excellency.”

Hafiz Pasha, supreme ruler of the Pashalik of Mosul, glared at me as I was brought before him. I could see that, in his mind, I was convicted before being tried. Beside him sat Ahmed Aga, the man who had hired our cook and helper the day before. He was a handsome and extremely vain fellow of about my own age, and affected a short, crisply curled black beard.

“O miserable and ungrateful wretch of a *Badawi*,” said the Pasha. “Dare you deny the heinous crime of which you have been accused?”

“I have not been faced with an accuser, as yet, Your Excellency,” I reminded him.

“You will face him soon enough!” He turned to a soldier. “Bring the witness,” he commanded.

Ahmed Aga stroked his tightly curled beard and smiled.

“May it please Your Excellency, we have evidence enough to convict him without the witness,” said Daoud Aga. “Before I could arrest him, the villain had committed a second murder. Here is the poison phial, and here the bloody simitar with which he slew his accomplice, the cook.” He laid the two articles before the Pasha.

“So, O spawn of a pestilence, you sought to cover your trail with blood!”

“I sought vengeance, Excellency, on the slayer of my wife. In the extremity of my anger and grief, I——”

“Enough, O father of lies! Here is the witness.”

The soldier, at this moment, ushered into the room Mustafa, the shifty-eyed young *Turki* who had been employed to act as the deceased cook’s assistant.

“Tell your tale, Mustafa, and have no fear of your master,” said the Pasha.

“I bear witness,” said the fellow, looking down his greasy nose and avoiding my gaze, “that my master gave a bottle of strong-smelling essence to Sufeyd, the cook, this morning, and ordered him to use it in flavoring the pastries he was to prepare for my mistress.”

“You lie, O scum of the gutters!” I cried, springing toward him.

He cringed back, guilty fear written on his face. But the soldiers gripped me and dragged me back.

I appealed to the Pasha. “Your Excellency, would you condemn an innocent man on the unsupported word of so low a scoundrel?”

“It happens, O vile poisoner and assassin,” replied the Pasha, “that his word is not unsupported.” He signed to a soldier. “Bring the other witnesses.”

Two more ruffians of the type who would whine for a para by day, and slit your throat for one at night, were ushered in. They stated that they were friends of Sufeyd, and that they had stopped in his kitchen to pass the time of day with him that morning. Then both subscribed to the falsehood that while there, they had seen me give the powerful essence to the cook, with instructions to use it in the pastry he was preparing for the *hanoum*.

“What have you to say to this, O double murderer?” asked the Pasha, when they had finished.

“That I have never seen these lying malefactors before. For reasons best known to themselves, they bear false witness, as did the other.”

“Perhaps you have a witness to prove that you were not in the kitchen this morning?”

“As a matter of fact, I was in the kitchen this morning,” I replied.

“Hah!”

“But Selma Hanoum was with me. I stood beside her while she hired Sufeyd and this lying villain, Mustafa.”

“And you did not return later, as these three witnesses have testified?”

“No.”

“Since you show no signs of repentance and confession, I will confront you with still further evidence of your guilt.” He motioned to a soldier, who went out, and returned with an old Jew, whom I recognized as the keeper of a small chemist shop in the *souk*.

“Ishak,” said the Pasha, pointing to me, “have you ever seen this person before?”

“Often, Your Excellency,” replied the chemist. “Only this morning he purchased from me a small phial of prussic acid.”

“Ah! Is this the phial?”

“It is the same, Your Excellency.”

“That is all. The witnesses may go.”

As the four false witnesses who had sworn away my life filed out, I bowed my head to await my sentence. After all, what did it matter if death should claim me now? With the passing of Selma Hanoum, the light of my life had gone out. Why, then, should I cling to the empty shell of existence that remained? But life is sweet to us all, no matter how barren or sordid it may be, and so I spoke again to the Pasha.

“These are lies, all lies. Some one has poisoned my wife and conspired to ruin me—has paid these cutthroat dregs of Mosul to bear false witness. What possible reason could I have to slay her whom I loved above all else in the world?”

“That, O double murderer, we can answer, also,” replied the Pasha. He turned to Ahmed Aga. “Produce your papers, *sidi*.”

The *aga* drew from beneath his cloak a paper, the edges of which were brown and cracked with age, and respectfully handed it to the Pasha.

“Here, O dog of a *Badawi*, is a document signed by Ali Pasha, father of Selma Hanoum—may Allah concede them both mercy!—in which he acknowledges the receipt from the father of Ahmed Aga, on whom be peace, of twenty thousand pounds. I have had the interest computed, and the total amount now due is forty-two thousand pounds.

“Selma Hanoum knew of the existence of this note, but the noble and generous Ahmed Aga, because of the friendship which had always existed between their fathers, never pressed her for payment, knowing that she, the greatest lady of Mosul, would thereby be impoverished, and hoping that she would marry some one with wealth and station to match her own, so that this considerable part of his inheritance might be returned to him.

“But she wedded with him, O consort of mangy camels—with a penniless beggar from the desert wastes. Without a doubt, she told you of the debt, and you plotted to elude it and seize her wealth by compassing her death and becoming her heir, knowing that the obligation of her father could not be brought to you for payment. You asked for a reason, and I have the reason here, signed and sealed by Ali Pasha, two witnesses, and a venerable *kazi*.”

“Your Excellency,” I cried, aghast at the net of false evidence which was tightening around me, “that paper is a forgery, and the man who forged it sits in the place of honor at your right hand. I see it all, now. It was Ahmed Aga who hired my cook and helper and sent his own tools to apply for their places, Ahmed Aga whose gold paid these dregs of the bazars to bear

false witness against me, in order that he might seize the palace and property of Selma Hanoum.”

The Pasha looked horrified. Then his brows knitted in anger. “Vile wretch and base prevaricator!” he said, “think not to avert your fate by maligning one of our most pious and upright citizens. For such as you, any death is too good. Had you shown some sign of repentance I would only have had you beheaded, but as it is, you shall have a more lingering and painful passing.” He turned to Daoud Aga. “Take this low-born swine to the center of the *souk*, and there impale him, that all may see his shameful death, and that other villains of his stripe may be warned.”

Once more Ahmed Aga smiled, as he stroked his curled black beard.

As the soldiers dragged me from the Pasha's presence, I saw, standing near the door, a slight veiled figure. For a moment, a pair of night-black almond eyes gazed into mine and flashed me a look of sympathy which showed that among those who stood in the audience chamber, I had at least one friend. I recognized my little slave-girl from Cathay.

The thought came that I should at least give this girl her freedom before being done to death, but when I held back to speak to her, my conductors jerked me forward, while Daoud Aga, walking behind, prodded me with the point of his simitar.

A crowd of riffraff which had gathered in the street outside, greeted me with cries of: "Kill the poisoner! Slay the assassin!" and many coarse jests at my expense. "Where is he to be beheaded?" I heard one ask, as the rabble fell in around and behind me.

"He is not to be beheaded," answered a soldier, "but will be permitted to view the *souk* from a lofty and narrow seat until such time as Shaitan shall see fit to seize upon his condemned soul."

"An impalement!" cried another. "How long will he live, *effendi*?"

"Only Allah is all-knowing, *ya hu*," replied the soldier; "yet if his viscera be sufficiently tough he may last out the day, and even glimpse tomorrow's sun."

Dazed by the terrible realization of what was in store for me, I stumbled on, scarce hearing their foul jests and fouler maledictions. Those who could get near enough, kicked, struck, pinched and pulled me, while others hurled refuse and spat upon me. Soon my garments hung in filthy tatters and my body was a mass of bruises. I could scarcely realize that I, an innocent man, and until now one of the most affluent and respected citizens of the pashalik, was about to suffer the death by torment which is meted out only to the lowest and most depraved felons. It seemed that I must be the victim of some hideous nightmare from which I would presently waken—that these, my tormenters, did not really mean to slay me.

By the time I reached the *souk*, I was so weakened by the beating I had received and the contemplation of the horrible fate that was planned for me, that I could scarcely stand, but was supported on either side by the two soldiers.

Presently the executioner came, pushing his way through the crowd and carrying a heavy stake on one shoulder. An assistant followed him with a spade. The executioner drew his *jambiyah* and began whittling the narrow end of the stake, while his helper commenced the heavier but less skilful task of digging the hole for it.

Evidently an expert in his line, the executioner took great pride in his grim profession. The conscious cynosure of all eyes, he worked with many flourishes and grandiose gestures, yet with extreme care in order that the stake might have just the proper degree of sharpness and smoothness to insure me a lingering and painful death. For if it were too sharp, my weight might instantly drive it into my vitals and thus swiftly release me from my misery, while a few rough edges or splinters might cause hemorrhages which would lead to coma and death, thus again defeating his purpose, and disappointing the crowd which counted on gloating over my miseries for many hours to come.

His whittling done with, the executioner critically surveyed the work of his perspiring assistant, who was just completing the hole. After a few unnecessary instructions, which were

obviously intended to parade his authority before the rabble rather than instruct his helper, he took a cord from beneath his garments, and ordered me to hold out my wrists to be bound.

At this juncture, however, there occurred a sudden interruption. "Make way for the Pasha's emissary," some one shouted. "Stand aside for the messenger of His Excellency."

There was a clatter of hoofbeats behind me, and a rider, whose features I could not see because a corner of the *kufiyah* was drawn across the face, clattered up, waving a pistol menacingly, and crying: "By order of the Pasha, this execution must stop. The prisoner is to be taken before His Excellency at once, as new evidence has just come to light. Set the prisoner on the horse."

Daoud Aga looked insolently up at the rider. "Whence came you, fool?" he asked. "Be off, before we sharpen a second stake for you."

"I am from the Pasha, O great baboon," replied the rider, pointing the pistol full at the Captain's head. "Order the prisoner placed on the horse at once, or this instant will I send your unbelieving soul to Eblis, who waits to seize it."

Daoud Aga quite evidently did not believe that the rider was from the Pasha. Nor, for that matter, did I. The Captain seemed convinced, however, that the daring horseman meant business, for his face paled, and he signed to the two soldiers to lift me into the saddle. They complied, for I was too weak to mount alone. I swayed dizzily, and would have fallen but for my tight grip on the pommel. A swift glance at me evidently convinced the rider that I could hang on, for we wheeled and rode off through the disappointed crowd in the direction of the Pasha's palace.

Before we had ridden far, I heard the report of firearms behind us, and bullets began singing around our heads. My rescuer, who was still leading my horse, suddenly turned toward the east gate of the city. We passed through the gate unchallenged, clattering across a stone bridge, then a narrow island, then a bridge of boats—for the Tigris was at flood and the ford impassable—and landing, plunged through the dust and desolation that had once been mighty Nineveh. Presently we turned again, this time toward the northwest, following the windings of the river, so I judged that we were making for Telkef.

After we had ridden thus at breakneck speed for some ten miles, we stopped to breathe our horses. During that swift ride my companion had not addressed a word to me, and I had been too weak to attempt any conversation. I had noticed that my rescuer was small, much smaller than the average man, but I gasped in amazement when, with the *kufiyah* drawn aside, I recognized my little slave-girl.

"Lo Fool!" I exclaimed. "So it was you who saved my life! May Allah requite you."

"To abandon one's master is to become a flower without a root," she replied, modestly. "Here, I have brought you a simitar, *jambiyah* and pistol."

She handed me a bundle, which I unwrapped. The wrapper was a cloak and contained the weapons she had named. I armed myself as she was armed, and threw the cloak over my tattered garments.

"By what powerful magic did you obtain these horses, weapons and clothing?" I asked.

"Fowls are best caught with rice grains," she replied. "I saw two *Hyttas* who had just ridden into the city, standing beside their horses. To one, I signed with the eyes as I passed. Then I turned into an empty dwelling near by, but as I turned, I signed also to the other, unknown to the first.

“When the first seized me, I snatched his pistol and held him off, whereupon the second came to my rescue. They quarreled, and the second man choked the first into unconsciousness. Then, with the butt of the pistol, I sent him to join his fellow in oblivion. It was easy to appropriate what clothing and weapons I needed, and ride off with the horses.”

“You are a jewel of inestimable worth, Lo Foo,” I said, “and have performed a dangerous and difficult task as no man could have accomplished it.”

“No jewel sparkles except by reflected light, my lord,” she replied. “If I have attained some brilliance, it is in the light of your presence. But come. You are weary and wounded. If I mistake not, that is a deserted farmer’s hut at the foot of yonder hill, and there are provisions in the saddle-bags.”

“Tiger Lily,” I said, as we walked our horses toward the tumbledown hut, “I am a broken and ruined man, a fugitive from the power of the Pasha, yet you honor me as if I were a sultan, with all the wealth and magnificence of Salah ad Din.”

For some time she made no answer. Then, as she turned her face toward me, I saw that tears trembled on her long, curved lashes. “I am a stranger in a strange land,” she replied. “You saved me from worse than death at the hands of that black, blubber-lipped *Shaitan*. You are my master—my father and my mother. Shall I, who would have shared your prosperity, desert you in adversity?”

“You have read me a lesson in loyalty which I shall never forget,” I told her.

As no signs of pursuit developed, we permitted our tired horses to walk all the way to the hut. Then we tethered them, and went inside. I gathered wood and soon had a fire crackling, while Lo Foo brought a waterskin and a few utensils, some flour, sugar, dates, clarified butter, and coffee, which she had found in the saddle-bags. First she set the dates to simmering in the clarified butter. Then she mixed bread. While it was baking, she brewed coffee.

Watching her make these preparations, I marveled at the wondrous ways in which Allah guides our footsteps so that we may fulfil our destinies. Had I not idly wandered into the slave mart that morning, and then been led to purchase this slave-girl for Selma Hanoum, I would have been, at that very moment, dying a slow and painful death, hooted and jeered by the rabble of Mosul.

We sipped coffee until the food was ready, then ate our dates and freshly baked bread. Our simple meal finished, Lo Foo brewed more coffee, then pleasantly surprized me with a *chibouk*, which she had found in the saddle-bag, stuffed with *Suryani* tobacco and surmounted by a glowing coal from the fire.

Although Lo Foo was bright and cheerful, and was obviously trying to distract my mind from the great sorrow which had overtaken me, my bosom was constricted and I had not the power of peace. Presently, as I grew more melancholy with each thought of my lost Selma, I arose, and went outside to attend to our horses. After unsaddling the weary beasts and rubbing them with grass, I took them down to the river, about a half-mile distant, to drink.

The sun had dropped low on the horizon, so I made ablution and prayed the sunset prayer, ere I started back. I was walking toward the hut in the gathering dusk, leading the horses, when six armed men, who had evidently been watching me from ambush, suddenly sprang out of a ravine only a short distance from the hut, and confronted me. The foremost, whom I recognized as one of the cutthroats who had home false witness against me, plucked out a pistol and snapped it in my face. It did not go off, luckily for me, and drawing my own pistol, I shot him through the heart.

As he slumped to the ground, another fired at me and missed. In the meantime, the four remaining villains, who had no pistols, had drawn their simitars, and began to circle me to the right and left. The horses had not flinched during the shooting, and now, seeing that against such overwhelming odds my only hope lay in flight, I turned and swung to the bare back of my mount, and slapped him on the flank.

The well-trained beast responded with a leap and a burst of speed that quickly took me out of reach of my assailants, while his mate galloped behind me. But it was written that I should not thus escape them, for the animal suddenly stumbled and went to his knees, pitching me over his head. I fell heavily, alighting on my back with such force that the wind was knocked from me. For a few moments I lay there, gasping for breath and unable to rise. I could hear the triumphant cries of my enemies and the thudding of their feet as they came nearer and nearer, which stimulated me to make desperate efforts to get to my feet. Finally I succeeded, and drawing my simitar and *jambiyah*, stood there at bay, reeling like a man whose senses have been stolen by *arak*.

Seeing the plight I was in, my enemies advanced with exultant shouts. One, whom I recognized as the third miscreant to bear false witness against me before the Pasha, sprang in

close, expecting to find me an easy victim, and slashed viciously at my neck. He proved to be a clumsy swordsman, and weak as I was, I managed to parry the blow and return one in kind, which stretched him on the ground.

This gave the others pause, and for a moment they stood back, shouting curses at me. It was evident that whoever they might be, they were neither swordsmen nor soldiers, so I judged that, like the two I had slain, they must be hirelings of Ahmed Aga. The one who had a pistol began to reload it, so I did the same with mine. Seeing this, he desisted, and called to his companions to all charge me at once.

By this time I had recovered my breath, and my confidence in myself had been considerably heightened. I thrust the still useless pistol back into my sash, and once more drew simitar and *jambiyah*. They spread out to surround me, but still feared to come within reach of my blade. Lying scattered on the ground in the vicinity were a number of ancient bricks, made before the time of Suleiman ben Daoud, on whom be peace, and stamped with cuneiform inscriptions. They had evidently fallen from the panniers of some pilferer of the ruins of Nineveh, perhaps during a raid by robbers, who naturally would not carry off such things. My cowardly assailants now began hurling these bricks at me, and as they kept coming from several directions at once, I could not avoid them all, dodge as I would. Presently, after I had received a number of painful, though not dangerous bruises, one struck my left knee, so paralyzing it that I was forced to stand on my right leg only. A moment later, another caught me on the back of the head, and down I went, still dimly conscious, but unable to move hand or foot.

With yells of triumph, my enemies now rushed in to finish me. One planted his foot on my body, and raised his simitar to hack off my head. I was convinced that my end had come.

But at that moment a pistol shot rang out, and my would-be beheader fell across my body, blood oozing from a round hole in his forehead. Then Lo Foo, who had been attracted by the sounds of the conflict, came running up. She threw down her smoking pistol, and drawing her simitar with her right hand, snatched mine up with her left.

What came after took place so swiftly that my eyes, dulled by the blow I had received, could scarcely follow. Often had I seen men fight with simitar and *jambiyah*, but never before had I seen any one use *two* simitars at the same time. She struck at the head of my nearest enemy with the right, and when he parried, brought the left across his abdomen with a swift, drawing cut, disemboweling him.

The remaining two had, meanwhile, recovered from their astonishment at this sudden onslaught, and as their comrade went down, both attacked her simultaneously. I have said that these men were obviously not expert swordsmen, and that was true enough; yet with two of them against one, and that one a mere slip of a girl, I despaired for her life. I made a desperate effort to rise, and succeeded in dragging myself from beneath the body that had fallen across me. But when I tried to get to my feet, a dizziness assailed me, and I fell back to my elbows.

Through the dim haze that had gathered before my eyes, I saw a bewildering whirl of swiftly flying blades. Then suddenly one of Lo Foo's antagonists went down with his head split open. The other, seeing his comrade's fate, turned to flee, but only hastened his own end. The girl sprang forward, and with a sweeping moulinet smote his neck so that his head leaped from his shoulders. After that I saw no more, for consciousness left me, and it seemed that I was sinking into a black, cold void.

When my senses returned, it was broad daylight. I was lying in the hut, with two cloaks beneath me, and two more thrown over me. A pile of pistols, simitars and *jambiyahs* lay on the floor, and beyond them, eight saddles, with saddle-bags, waterskins and other equipment, were piled against the wall.

I sat up, and discovered at one and the same time a dull ache in my head and a sharp pain in my left knee. Exploration revealed a bump on the back of my head that had been carefully bound. Raising my coverings, I saw that my knee, also, had been bandaged. Then Lo Foo entered.

Depositing the bundle of firewood she was carrying beside the smoldering fire, she came over, and kneeling beside me, said: "Good morning, my lord. I trust that you slept well, and that the pain of your injuries has grown less."

"I rested in complete oblivion, little one," I replied, "and the wounds are nothing. But tell me, who brought me here, and whence came all these weapons and this equipment?"

"I brought you, my lord."

"You brought me!"

"Yes, master."

"But how?"

"I carried you."

"*Wallah!* You carried me?" I looked at her slight figure, her slender limbs and dainty hands. She was at least a foot shorter than I, and probably did not weigh much more than half as much.

She saw my look of unbelief, and said: "You doubt it? We have a saying: 'The sea is not measured by a bushel, nor is a man always known by his looks.' I will show you."

Before I was aware of what she was about, she had bent and clasped me around the waist. With no more effort than if I had been a sack of grain, she threw me across her shoulder and stood erect. She walked over, and gently lowered me to a place beside the fire, with a little chuckle of merriment. "You see?"

"*Alhamdolillah!* You are as strong as a man!" I exclaimed.

"Stronger than some men, my lord, but not quite so strong as you," she answered modestly, "though I may understand the laws of leverage better, having been taught them by my father."

"Your father must be a remarkable man," I told her. "Who is he?"

"My father is the Wong Tse, Chin Wah, a prince of the ancient blood, whose lands are partly in China and partly in Mongolia. In the days of his youth, he wandered much in foreign lands. And everywhere he went, he studied methods of offense and defense, both with weapons and with the bare hands, for he knew that some day he must take over the domain of the great warrior prince who was his father, and that it would require a strong man, well versed in these things, to hold that domain."

"Then you are really a princess!" I exclaimed.

"I was once a princess," she corrected. "Now I am but a slave."

"Is it customary in your country to train a princess in the arts of war?" I asked.

“Not at all,” she replied. “My father longed for a son. But I was his first-born, and when I came, my mother died. So great was his love for my mother, that when she was taken, he could bear to have no other woman near him. He said that I should be both son and daughter to him, and that when he was gone, I should be war-lord in his place. Accordingly, although he saw that I was educated in all the arts and wiles that are taught our women, he himself, when I was very young, set about teaching me to shoot, fence, box, ride and use the lance. He taught me an art he had learned in Nippon, *jiu jitsu*, and trained me daily in the exercise which he loved best—two-sword fighting.

“As soon as I was old enough, I went with him on hunting expeditions. Once, when we were on a hunt, I became separated from the rest of the party, and was captured by a band of Mongol outlaws, but not before I had slain five of their number and wounded several more.

“The bandit chieftain tried to woo me, but I broke his arm. He would have slain me, then, but his men restrained him. Some called me Lo Foo, the Tigress. My own name, in our language, meant ‘Lily.’ Soon they were calling me the Tiger Lily. A few days later, the well-guarded caravan of Yusuf ben Ali, the Pathan trader, camped near us, and I was sold to him as the Tiger Lily.

“Yusuf, the old dotard, had me brought to his tent that night. He attempted to beguile me with honeyed phrases, but when he saw that I would have none of him, attempted force. I spared his old bones, but after I had thrown him over my head, he desisted. Later he brought me to Mosul along with other merchandise, having heard that high prices were paid for virgins in its slave market.”

She had knelt by the fire as she began her narrative, and set about preparing our morning meal, a repetition of the one we had eaten the night before. She looked so gentle, so feminine and so daintily alluring at this domestic task, that had I not seen what I had seen with my own eyes, I should have considered her story wholly incredible.

“Lo Foo,” I said, as she handed me my coffee, “some day, if Allah grants me life and strength, I will restore you to your father.”

She turned her great black eyes full upon me, and in them was a look of tenderness. “You are kind, my master, but I doubt that such happiness lies in my destiny. And we are taught that it is wise to submit to destiny.”

“All things are possible to Allah,” I replied.

For some time we ate our simple meal in silence. Then Lo Foo said: “This morning as I went for water, I saw twelve troopers of the *Yuz Bashi* riding along the river bank.”

“They were looking for me, beyond a doubt,” I replied. “Perhaps we had best leave this place, and ride for the mountains.”

“As I was gathering firewood, I saw ten more *Hytas* in the other direction,” she continued.

“Strange they didn’t see our horses!” I mused.

“I tethered them all in the ravine before daybreak,” she replied. “The bodies of our enemies I hid in a clump of shrubs. Fortunately, our fire had burned down to a few glowing coals, and there was no smoke to betray us.”

“By the life of my head!” I swore, “now I know that you have not slept all night. We remain here, and you shall sleep all day.”

“I will sleep if you so command, master,” she replied, submissively. But she would not do so until she had put away the food, cleansed the dishes, and brought my *chibouk* topped with a

glowing coal. Then she curled up like a kitten, on the couch of cloaks I had just quitted, and fell asleep almost instantly.

When I had finished my smoke, I went to the doorway and stood idly looking out. During the rest of the day, I saw no less than six parties of *Hytas* pass our hiding-place. But none came to look for us in the ruined hut.

In the late afternoon I heard the tinkle of camel bells, and saw a large caravan pass down to the river. It was accompanied by much live stock, and many women and children; so I knew it was not a band of traders but a company of the wandering *Badawin*, seeking pasture for their flocks and herds. Soon a miniature town of tents stood on the river bank, and the countryside was dotted with herds attended by the younger boys of the tribe.

I knew it would only be a question of time before our horses should be discovered in the ravine by these young herdsmen, though they might escape detection for the present, as night would soon fall. So I decided that we had best be on the move. Accordingly, I baked bread, made *samb*, and brewed coffee. Then I awakened Lo Foo.

While we ate the hastily prepared meal, I told her of the *Badawin* encampment, and of my resolve to leave as soon as it should be dark enough to hide our movements.

“Have you decided where we will go, master?” she asked.

“Not definitely,” I replied. “Perhaps it will be best to ride east, swim our beasts across the Great Zab, and cross the mountains into Persia.”

“And then?”

“I don’t know,” I confessed.

“The Persians are as likely to slay you for your possessions as the Turks,” she said. “I know, for I have just come through Persia.”

“That is true,” I admitted. “But there, at least, I will not have a price on my head.”

“What of these *Badawin*?” she asked. “Should they not prove friendly? You are a *Badawi*, are you not?”

“They are of my race,” I replied, “but of a tribe unknown to me. However, all *Badawin* in this territory are unfriendly to the *Hytas* because of the depredations of Mohammed Pasha, Hafiz Pasha’s predecessor. Nor would the troopers of the *Yuz Bashi* dare to approach their camp, except in considerable force.”

“Then you are one with them in your enmity against the Turkish regime, as well as in race. Why not claim protection from their *shaykh*?”

“In that case,” I replied, “Hafiz Pasha would offer a reward for me, and I, a stranger in their midst, should be exchanged soon enough for gold.”

For some time Lo Foo knit her delicately arched brows in thought. Then she said: “I doubt that we could ride far in any direction, with the *Hytas* swarming over the country in search of us. And as you say, the *Badawin* might be willing to surrender you to the Pasha if tempted with sufficient gold. I believe there is but one thing for us to do.”

“And what is that?”

“Ride back to Mosul.”

“What! I trust that you have not taken leave of your senses.”

“Tell me, master, have you one friend in Mosul whom you can trust?”

“There is one, yes,” I replied. “He was absent on a hunting-trip yesterday, or he would have been at my side to defend me.”

“Is he a householder?”

“Yes, and greatly respected in the community,” I replied. “He is Hasan Aga, uncle of Selma Hanoum.”

“Do you think you can convince him of your innocence?”

“I am sure of it.”

“Then, my lord, I suggest that we ride back to Mosul on the back of a camel this very night. We have eight horses, with complete equipment, extra weapons, and supplies. The *Badawin* have many camels, and you should easily be able to arrange a trade with their *shaykh*. I will go in my proper raiment, and as your *harim*.”

She took her woman’s raiment from one of the saddle-bags, and while I smoked my *chibouk* before the door, swiftly donned it. Presently she appeared in the doorway, cloaked, and veiled to the eyes.

“I regret that I must part with my simitars,” she said, “but I have two pistols and a *jambiyah* beneath my cloak, and a bundle of simitars will be strapped to my saddle in case of need. Come, let me change your appearance.”

I had already exchanged my tattered finery for the best of the clothing she had taken from my assailants, which was poor enough. She now, after taking a small pot of kohl from among her cosmetics, blackened the inner corners of my eyebrows so they appeared to run together, and kohled my eyelids in such a manner that I looked slightly cross-eyed. Then, after she had darkened the day’s growth of mustache which had appeared on my upper lip, her mirror convinced me that I should be able to pass even my closest friends, unrecognized.

We saddled the horses, loaded the equipment, and started for the encampment, just before sunset. I rode into camp in time to pray the sunset prayer with a group of young men who had just brought in a herd of camels. Then I asked them to direct me to the tent of their *shaykh*.

They led me to a large and capacious tent of black goat hair, before which stood a tall, handsome *Badawin* about forty years of age. After we had exchanged *taslims*, I said; “I am Sa’id bin Ayyub of the Banu Asadin.”

“And I am Shaykh Abd er Rahmin, of the Abu Salman,” he replied, courteously. “*Bismillah*. Enter in the Name of Allah. This is your tent, and we are your slaves.”

The *shaykh* led me into the reception room of his tent, which was crowded with his relatives and followers, and strangers enjoying his hospitality, and also occupied by two favorite mares and a colt. He bade me be seated, and sat with me, in the upper place, divided from the *harim* by a goatskin curtain. Pipes and coffee were brought, and a small boy, who came from the *harim* at a summons from Abd er Rahmin, was sent back with directions that my wife, who waited outside, was to be taken inside and entertained forthwith.

The *shaykh* politely refrained from questioning me, and we talked trivialities for some time. But gradually I got around to that for which I had come, as is customary with our people.

Abd er Rahmin listened sympathetically while I told him of being set upon by six robbers the day before, nor did he show the slightest disbelief when I said I had vanquished them all, single-handed, and appropriated their horses, weapons and equipment. I told him that I had no use for all these horses and weapons, and as my *harim* was weary of traveling on horseback, would like to exchange four horses with their equipment, for a riding-camel with a *shugduf* litter.

“Were the *harami* from Mosul?” he asked.

“I am positive of that,” I replied, “because when they rode up to surround me, thinking me an easy prey, I heard one say that they would take my *harim* back to Mosul to sell in the slave mart.”

“By Allah, good!” he exclaimed. “Now I know that you do not wish to take any of their horses into Mosul, for fear they might be recognized.”

I had told him this because I knew how his people hated the ruffians of Mosul, hoping it would arouse his sympathy, but I now saw that it had, in addition, aroused his cupidity. He knew he had the power to drive a hard bargain, and would make the most of it.

We haggled back and forth over many cups of coffee, and *sharibat*, and several pipes of ‘*Ajami*, he because he wished to get all he could for his camel and litter, and I because it was the thing to do, and he would have been suspicious had I not done so. But I had come prepared to leave all our horses, and most of our equipment, in exchange for what I wanted, so in the end the bargain was thus concluded.

For some time, savory odors had been issuing from the women’s quarters, and now a sheep, roasted whole, and surrounded by boiled rice drenched in clarified butter, was brought in on a huge platter.

“*Bismillah*,” pronounced the *shaykh*, placing me at his right hand, while as many as could conveniently do so squatted around the platter. “With health and appetite.”

Highly pleased by the bargain he had driven, Abd er Rahmin showered honors and compliments upon me, and fed me choice bits of meat and dripping balls of rice with his own hand.

I grew nervous before the feast was over, as I was anxious about Lo Foo, knowing she would be expected to unveil and remove her cloak in the *harim*, and wondering how she would conceal her pistols and dagger or account for them. I was also extremely impatient, now that our plans had been made and half carried out, to start for Mosul.

But I was compelled to avoid all appearance of haste, and so remained to partake of fruits, sweetmeats, more coffee, and another pipe. By this time, half the evening had slipped away, so I arose to take leave of my host. He sent one of his small sons into the *harim* for Lo Foo, and we walked out to where a boy watched my dearly purchased camel, which was kneeling, laden and waiting.

Lo Foo came out a moment later, and took her place in the *shugduf*. I climbed in on my side of the crude litter, the camel rose, and we were off, followed by the cordial *taslim* of the *shaykh*.

As we rode away from the camp in our swaying litter, the countryside was wrapped in a clear, moonless night that was like a spangled, blue-black cloak, with sparkling stars for sequins.

“How did they treat you in the *harim*?” I asked Lo Foo.

“They were very polite,” she replied.

“And didn’t they question you?”

“Only as to the health of my parents, brothers and sisters, all my paternal and maternal uncles, aunts and cousins, and yours. I managed to hide my weapons under my sash before I removed my cloak. When I unveiled, I think they took me for a Tatar, as I caught some sullen looks among the older women. But I quickly told them I was from Cathay, whereupon all grew cheerful once more. And were you well received by the *shaykh*, my lord?”

“Most cordially,” I replied, “and was particularly and singularly honored after he had made certain he was to profit mightily by my visit. But Abd er Rahmin has a good heart, after all. He could have slain me, and taken everything.”

“True,” she agreed. “He could have taken everything—like Ahmed Aga.”

At mention of my deadly enemy, my anger and grief flared up and were like to choke me, as I thought anew of the irreparable loss I had sustained because of the machinations of this thief and murderer.

Lo Foo must have quickly sensed the effect her words had upon me, for she said: “Pray forgive me, my lord. I spoke hastily, and without thought.”

“If I could but meet that vilest of vile poisoners, man to man,” I said, “I would quickly put an end to his enjoyment of his ill-gotten gains. As for forgiving you, why, that is done already, for any transgression against me, now or in the future. It is written that for the sake of one good action, a hundred evil ones should be forgotten. And this being true, I am indebted to you to the extent of at least a thousand.”

“You are generous, my lord. As we rode out of the camp I thought of a plan which, if possible of execution, might bring about the wish you just expressed—to meet your enemy face to face, where none can interrupt.”

“A plan? Tell it to me.”

“Not now, master. First let me mature it a little more, and also, if it will not wring your heart too much, tell me of the adventures at which you have hinted, which led up to your marrying Selma Hanoum.”

Lo Foo, it was obvious, had a remarkable understanding of the workings of the human emotions. Although it was difficult for me to begin my narrative, I found as I got into it, that this was exactly what I wanted to do—to talk to some one about my lost love, and the romantic adventures which had brought us together. I wanted to linger over each wonderful memory and to share it with a sympathetic and appreciative listener. Such I found Lo Foo to be.

And so, while I related the story of our adventures, and enlarged on the beauty, grace and goodness of my dear departed, thus somewhat easing the burden which hung so heavily upon my heart, our patient beast stepped off the long miles; and before I realized it, we were at the bridge of boats which led to the east gate of Mosul.

We crossed this bridge, the island, and the stone bridge beyond without interruption, but were halted at the gate by a gruff soldier, a half-dozen of whose comrades stood near by.

“Who are you, to ride into the city thus unattended at this hour of the night?” he demanded. “And whence came you?”

“I am Sa’id bin Ayyub,” I replied. “We left Telkef early this morning, but were entertained all afternoon and half the evening by the *shaykh* of the Abu Salman, hence the lateness of our arrival.”

“Saw you aught of two riders on the way, one a tall, beardless youth of about your own size in tattered finery, the other shorter, and wearing the colors of the *Hytas*?”

“We saw many *Hytas*,” I replied, “and several bands stopped to question us, but met no riders such as you describe.”

“Whither are you bound?”

“To the house of Ahmed Aga, who is the friend of my cousin. Can you direct me?”

When I mentioned the name of the opulent *aga*, the gruff manner of the soldier changed, as if by magic. Politely, he gave me minute directions as to how I could reach the house which had been my own. Then he stepped aside, and we passed into the city.

We made straight for the residence of Ahmed Aga, but of course passed it, and stopped before the house of Hasan Aga. After causing the camel to kneel, I dismounted, and knocked loudly on the door. The place was in darkness, showing that the inmates had retired, but presently I heard shuffling footsteps in the *salamlik*, and the voice of Hasan, himself, asking: “Who are you?”

“Your nephew,” I replied. “Open quickly, in the name of Almighty Allah.”

“I have many nephews,” he replied, cautiously.

“I am he who bought the rose, which was stricken by the viper,” I replied, reluctant to give my name for fear of being overheard.

At this, I heard the bolt slide back, and knew that Hasan had understood my allusion to Selma Hanoum and the man who had poisoned her. He opened the door a little way, and held up a flickering lantern, by the yellow light of which I saw his gray-bearded, kindly face. But seeing my changed features, he started back, and was about to close the door again when I thrust my foot through the opening.

“I am really Hamed, O uncle, but in disguise,” I said. Then he recognized my voice and flung the door wide.

“Who is with you?” he asked, now speaking in a hushed voice.

“A slave-girl I purchased for Selma Hanoum the morning she was murdered,” I replied.

“*Bismillah!* Enter, both of you,” he invited. “I will bring in your equipment and turn the camel free. It would not do for the beast to be found in my stables. Suspicions might thus be aroused.”

Lo Foo and I stepped into the *salamlik*, and waited there in the darkness. Presently I heard him slap the beast’s flank and order it to be off. Then he came in with our meager pile of belongings.

“I left the litter on the mangy beast,” he said. “Both are so dilapidated that it is problematical which will break down first. But come into the *majlis*. You must be weary and hungry.”

“Weary we are, uncle,” I replied, “but not hungry, as we have been stuffed by the *shaykh* of the Abu Salman. However, I’ll smoke a pipe with you after we find a place for Lo Foo to

sleep; that is, if you want to hear my story tonight.”

“She shall have my empty *harim*, and welcome,” replied Hasan. “As you know, though I have been enabled to keep this house and in a measure refurnish it, due to your generosity and that of my sister’s daughter, on whom be Allah’s mercy and His blessing, my business has not prospered, and I have been unable either to marry, or purchase slaves. As Ahmed Aga took over all the possessions of Selma Hanoum this morning, and I was assured of no further income from her estate, I was forced to discharge my servants.”

He led the way through the scantily furnished *majlis*, into the sitting-room of the *harim*. In this there was but a single *diwan*, one small rug, several ottomans, and a few taborets. Hasan took a candle from a niche, and lighting it, led Lo Foo to the door of one of the sleeping-rooms. He gave her the candle, and said: “In there you may sleep, little one, safe from all fear.”

We then returned to the *majlis*, and bidding me be seated, he went out to fetch pipes and coffee. He returned presently, but before he had the charcoal glowing, Lo Foo came out of the *harim*. She was attired in the clinging, silken garments of her native land, which set off her slender beauty, and had donned a thin, translucent face-veil, out of respect to Hasan Aga, though she was no *Moslemah*.

“I slept all day, master,” she said to me, “and can not retire so early. Permit me to serve you, and to remain with you for yet a little while.”

Without waiting for my reply, she went over and took the coffee things from Hasan, who, nothing loth, turned everything over to her and came and sat beside me. Though he was far gone in years, I saw his eyes kindle with admiration as he glimpsed her thus without her heavy street garments, and knew that the years had not robbed him of his appreciation of beauty.

While we waited for our coffee and *narghiles*, Hasan told me what I most wanted to hear. He described the magnificent funeral of my lost love, and told me where she had been buried. Tears were welling both from his eyes and mine, when Lo Foo served us.

I then related in detail my adventures since my purchase of Lo Foo, and when I had finished he said, “By Allah, there is no doubt that Ahmed Aga is the *afai*, the venomous viper who caused my sister’s daughter to be poisoned, and who bribed false witnesses to swear away your life, that he might get possession of her wealth and property. Small wonder that, when he learned of your escape, he set six of his own cutthroats on your trail with orders to slay you. The Pasha must be told the truth of this matter.”

“Who is to tell him?” I asked. “And what proof is there? You and I know that Ahmed Aga is guilty, and that I am innocent, but how can we prove it?”

Hasan stroked his white beard. “Aye. That’s the difficulty,” he said. “We can’t. And it would be of no use to go before Hafiz Pasha without proof.”

“I know a way to bring the murderer to justice, my lord, and restore to you all but her whom you have lost for ever,” said Lo Foo, placing fresh charcoal on my pipe-bowl. “But it will take time.”

“To accomplish my purpose, I would spend a lifetime, if need be,” I replied. “What is the plan?”

“It will not take a lifetime,” she said, “but it will take months.”

“And what am I to do in the meantime?” I asked.

“You are to grow a beard,” she replied, and turning, retired to her room.

Despite the fact that I was confined in the house of Hasan Aga, the months passed quickly. This, I know now, was because of Lo Foo, but at the time I did not realize it. She went out daily in her woman's garb, that concealed all but her eyes, purchasing our food and tobacco in the *souk*, preparing our meals, and looking after our comforts as only a woman can.

One day she brought back four Chinese swords she had purchased, *gims*, she called them, and thereafter, each day, she taught me two-sword fighting as she had learned it from her father, the great war-lord. Often, when I was morose, she danced for me, graceful, rhythmic love-dances, into which she put such depths of feeling that, had I not been blinded by my sorrow and by my hatred of the man who had brought it upon me, would have then revealed her true feeling toward me.

I was not blind to her beauty, but believed I appreciated it as one does a great work of art, unconscious of the flame which, day by day, grew brighter in my bosom.

Often we whiled away the long hours with story-telling. I would relate to her stories I remembered from *The Thousand Nights and a Night*, and she, in turn, would tell me marvelous tales of devils and dragons, of love and war, which she had learned from her own people. Also, she gave me lessons in her language, which I knew passably well because of my previous journey through Cathay, and I taught her to read and write Arabic.

My only other amusement was looking out through the latticed windows of the upper story at the passing throngs of the city. Almost daily I saw the perfidious Ahmed Aga, with his curled beard and magnificent robes, riding forth from, or returning to, the palatial home that had once been mine, on a prancing, richly caparisoned charger. And at such times the hot blood would rush to my face, and my anger and grief would drive me to distraction.

One day I sat before the lattice with Lo Foo beside me, when a procession of strangers such as one seldom sees in Mosul, passed. Brown-skinned, they were, with slanting eyes and high cheek-bones. Their leader, and several of the others, wore ragged, drooping mustaches, but most of them were smooth-faced. They wore queer, funnel-shaped hats with turned-up rims. Some of them had straight, shiny queues hanging down their backs. Their garments were of heavy quilted material edged with fur or wool, and they bestrode sturdy, shaggy ponies, the like of which I had never seen before. All wore swords. Some carried muskets, some bows and arrows, and some, long, slender lances.

I turned to ask Lo Foo if she knew what manner of men they were, and saw that she had gone deadly pale. "Why, what is wrong?" I asked, surprized.

"Those men," she replied, her voice quivering with emotion. "They are a company of my father's Mongol cavalry. And he who rides at their head is Tserin, my father's most trusted captain."

Behind the riders, who numbered at least a hundred, came the cameleers with their stocky, two-humped *Bukhti* camels. They were laden with felt tents, and many bales, bundles and boxes, the contents of which I could only guess. And on several of them rode handsome, richly dressed Chinese girls.

"Your father has sent for you, Lo Foo," I said. "I will have Hasan Aga bring their captain here, and you shall go back with him."

“But master, I——” She hesitated, apparently at a loss for words, her eyes lowered. “I will go, of course, if you wish it. But Tserin must repay you the sum you paid for me.”

“You have already repaid me a thousandfold,” I replied. “I will not touch your father’s gold.”

“But what of my plan to help you?” she asked. “It nears fruition. I can not leave you with the task undone.”

“I’ll accomplish it alone, somehow,” I told her.

“No, I will remain to help you. And Tserin shall help us. He can be very useful, as you will see.”

That afternoon, when Hasan returned, I sent him out to look up the captain of the Mongols. He was to tell him nothing, except that if he would come to his house alone, one would be there who could give him news of her whom he sought.

Lo Foo went into the *harim*, where she spent considerable time, evidently preparing herself to receive her father’s captain. For when she emerged, she wore her most gorgeous Chinese raiment, and had done her hair in a strange but exceedingly becoming manner. And she had discarded her veil.

She stopped before me for my approval. “How do you like me thus, master?” she inquired.

“You are gorgeous, as always,” I replied. “You are like a precious jewel which blazes forth with undiminished glory in any setting. But I must admit that this one is particularly appropriate.”

She smiled, and seated herself on a *diwan*. But the smile was a little wistful, as if I had not said precisely what she wanted to hear.

A moment later, Hasan entered, followed by a stocky Mongol with a long, stringy mustache that drooped at the corners. At sight of Lo Foo unveiled, the *aga* gasped in amazement, but the Mongol dropped to his knees before her and bowed again and again, his forehead touching the floor at each bow.

“This unspeakably base and unworthy person who has the honor of being your slave, rejoices with mighty rejoicing at finding Your Highness alive and well,” he said.

Lo Foo smiled, and signed for him to rise: “It is good to see you once more, my faithful Tserin,” she replied. “Tell me of my father.”

“Alas,” said Tserin, “that I should be a bearer of bad tidings! On the day you were stolen from us, the Prince suffered a fall from his horse, which injured his spine. We carried him back to the palace, and the greatest and most skilful of physicians were sent for. They found that his back was broken, and must be put in a cast, if he were to be kept alive, even for a short time. This was done, and they held out hopes for his recovery. But he knew they lied to ease his mental anguish, and demanded the truth. Finally they admitted that he would never ride again, and that he was not long for this earth.”

Tears streamed down the old captain’s cheeks as he finished his brief recital, and I saw that the eyes of Lo Foo were brimming. But she held up bravely. “You have but confirmed the news which came to me when I saw you at the head of the riders this morning, Tserin,” she said, her voice shaking with emotion. “I knew that if my father were alive and able to ride, he would have come for me himself.”

“He has sworn to fight off death until you return to take charge of your patrimony,” Tserin told her. “Then he will be willing to join his ancestors. I have brought six slave-girls to minister to your wants, and a royal *yurt* with the richest of furnishings, and everything you

will require for travel in state. Also, the Prince sent with me much gold, to buy you from him who has purchased you, and warriors to take you if he will not sell.”

“My master paid eight thousand piasters for me, lost a ring worth twenty, and has kept me and been kind to me these many months. You will pay him the equivalent of thirty thousand, or more, if that will not suffice him.”

Tserin drew a heavy purse from beneath his garments and looked at me inquiringly.

“I will not sell,” I told him.

“What!” The captain scowled fiercely, and his hand sought his sword hilt.

“I have informed Lo Foo that I would not take her father’s gold,” I said. “She is free. If you must spend the money, give it to the poor who till the Prince’s estates.”

Tserin turned to Lo Foo. “I await Your Highness’ commands,” he said.

“It shall be as my master says,” she told him. “I am free, and upon our return, the gold will be distributed to our poor. But this will be only on condition that I be permitted to assist him as I planned to do, before I go. And not until then will I consider myself free.”

“But you must go at once,” I said. “Your father needs you. Even a day’s delay may mean that you will never see him again, alive.”

“I am my father’s daughter,” she said, proudly, “and I know what he would have me do to uphold the honor of our house. Tserin, I will not require my slave-girls at present. Take your company outside the city and pitch the *yurts* where water and grass are plentiful. Then bring me two stout warriors. When I have done what I will do, then tomorrow or the next day, perhaps, we will start for home.”

“Your lowly slave hastens to carry out Your Highness’ commands,” said the captain, making profound obeisance. Then he backed out the door.

As soon as he had gone, Lo Foo called me to her side. “When you told me the story of your adventures with Mohammed Pasha, the despoiler,” she said, “you mentioned a souterrain which connects this house with the one which Ahmed Aga has taken from you. I would like to know through which room in Ahmed’s house one passes to enter this souterrain.”

Hasan brought paper, pen and ink, and I quickly sketched for her a diagram of both houses, showing how the souterrain led from one to the other, and indicating, so that there could be no mistake, the room in Ahmed’s *harim* through which the secret panel might be reached.

“Who knows of this secret passageway, other than you and Hasan Aga?” she asked.

“Musa the eunuch knows,” I replied, “but I am sure he has told no one. Nor will he. He is loyal to the memory of Selma Hanoum, and to me.”

“It is enough for my purpose if Ahmed Aga does not know,” she said.

Then, taking with her the diagram I had made, she turned and went into the *harim*. When she came out she was cloaked and veiled as a *Moslemah*. To me, she said: “I think it best, my lord, that you go into the upper rooms and remain there for some time.” To Hasan, she said: “It may be that Ahmed Aga will call on you, thinking you are my master, and offering to buy me from you. Make the price as high as he will pay, but sell me.” Then she turned and went into the *salamlik*.

Hasan looked at me inquiringly.

“By Allah and again by Allah!” he exclaimed. “What is she up to now?”

“I know no more than you,” I replied, “but you must trust and obey her.” Then, leaving the old fellow muttering pious ejaculations in his beard, I mounted to the upper chambers and

took my place at the latticed window.

After I had kept my vigil at the lattice for some time, I saw the opulent and perfidious Ahmed Aga riding toward home on his prancing, spirited steed, as was his custom at this hour of the day. Below me, I heard the door open, then saw Lo Foo step out into the street, a basket under her arm. As if she had not seen the *aga*, she walked straight in front of the spirited horse.

Ahmed reined up and roared: “*Wallah!* Look where you are going, *ya bint!*”

Lo Foo turned as if she had seen the *aga* for the first time, and with a swift motion drew aside her veil and shot him a languishing look from beneath the fringed curtains of her eyelids. Then she as swiftly replaced the veil, and turning, started off down the street.

Instantly the *aga* rode after her. But when she saw him coming, she turned as if frightened, and hurried back toward the house of Hasan.

Ahmed wheeled his prancing steed, rode after her once more, and dismounting, caught her by the arm. “Not so fast, my little *hourî*,” he said. “Be not afraid, but come with me to my house. I will cover you with pearls and diamonds, and you shall be the queen of my *harim*.”

Lo Foo twisted her arm from his grasp. “Stop!” she exclaimed. “You know not what you are saying. I belong to Hasan Aga, and will enter no house save his.”

“Perhaps Hasan Aga will sell you,” suggested Ahmed, stroking his crisply curled beard and ogling her.

“Perhaps,” she replied. “After all, another can cook and fetch and carry for him as well as I. He is an old man, and has no other use for me.”

Ahmed eyed her hungrily. “But I am not an old man, little one, nor am I accounted unhandsome. And I’ll swear I would find a more fitting occupation for such a budding flower than polishing pots and baking bread. What say you to a change of masters?”

Lo Foo lowered her gaze, coyly. “I must not forget that Hasan is still my master,” she answered, softly.

“I’ll go in and see him now,” said Ahmed, starting for the door.

“Wait.” She laid a restraining hand on his arm. “No use to go in now. He is not at home. Come tonight after the sunset prayer, and make no mention of our conversation, or he will be furious and refuse to sell me. Also, he will beat me, and it may be that he will kill me.”

“Very well. I will come after the sunset prayer. And what is your name, that I may identify you?”

“I am his only slave-girl, so the name does not matter,” she replied. “Merely tell him that your second wife saw me at the *hammam*, and would like to have me to serve her.”

“I will be patient until after the sunset prayer,” said Ahmed, swinging into his saddle. Lo Foo watched him ride away, then turned and entered the house.

I hastened downstairs to meet her.

“You heard?” she asked.

“I both saw and heard,” I replied. “Now what is to be done? Are we to capture him here in Hasan’s house, when he calls to purchase you?”

“And bring suspicion on me and my house?” asked Hasan.

“Hardly,” replied Lo Foo. “You, O uncle, will pretend that I am your slave-girl, when Ahmed comes to call on you this evening. You will agree to sell me, but only after extracting every last piaster you can from him. I will then go with him.”

“Wait,” I interposed. “I refuse to permit you to make such a sacrifice.”

“But there will be no sacrifice, my lord,” she said. “It is merely an adventure, and one which I shall enjoy.”

“Ahmed *is* a handsome youth,” I said, and could have bitten my tongue off the next instant when I saw her flush to the temples.

But her reply was calm enough. “You misunderstood, master. I fear no man, and am perfectly capable of taking care of myself. Now for the rest of the plan. As I have said, I will go with Ahmed Aga to his house. I will dance for him, and he will desire me. But I will refuse to go with him into any room, save the one which has the secret panel that connects with the souterrain. That is why I asked you for a diagram of the house. I had to know that room beyond any shadow of doubt. You, my master, will be waiting behind the panel. Tserin will be with you, and two of his warriors will stand at the bottom of the ladder to assist in case of trouble. But you must not, under any consideration, enter the room until I sign for you to do so, no matter what takes place.”

“There is too much danger to you in this plan,” I said. “I refuse to be a party to it. I prefer to leave Ahmed to his ill-gotten gains, rather than put you in such peril.”

“Then, for this once, my lord, I must disobey you. Either you will carry out my plan as I have outlined it, or I will enter the house of the *aga* myself, at the first opportunity.”

Whereupon, there being nothing else left for me to do, I agreed.

Shortly thereafter, Tserin returned with two warriors. All three made obeisance before Lo Foo, and she set the warriors to preparing our evening meal. After we had eaten, the three Mongols declined *narghiles*, but smoked, instead, their strange, baton-like pipes with tiny brass bowls, each of which held only a pinch of tobacco.

Presently there was a knock at the front door, and all of us except Hasan scurried hastily back into the next room. We heard him admit the young *aga*. Then he clapped his hands, and Lo Foo went out to serve pipes and coffee.

For more than an hour we sat there, smoking and waiting, while Hasan dickered with his guest. Then Lo Foo came in and hastily gathered some of her belongings into a bundle. “The poisoner bought me for thirty-five thousand piasters,” she said. “I am going with him now. Don’t fail to be behind the panel at the end of the souterrain, as planned.”

“We will be there,” I assured her.

Then she was gone.

An hour later, I stood at the top of the ladder in the end of the souterrain, peering through the peephole in the panel. I was looking into an empty bedchamber in the *harim* of Ahmed Aga, the chamber which had once been Selma Hanoum's and mine.

There drifted to me, from the *majlis*, the throbbing of drums and the shrilling of hautboys; so I knew there was dancing—that presently Lo Foo would dance before the *aga*, and if all went well, would enter that very room with him.

And so it came to pass. For presently the music ceased, and I heard voices in the hallway outside the door—the voices of Ahmed Aga and Lo Foo. The *aga* was saying: “This house is yours, my little dove. Choose from among all the rooms which one you will, and if it is occupied the occupant must vacate in your favor. But choose quickly, light of my eyes, for you have so fired me with desire that I am consumed with waiting.”

They stopped before the door, and I heard Lo Foo say: “I like this room, my lord.”

“It is the room of Salamah, my first wife,” said Ahmed, “but she is fortunately visiting her mother. This room it shall be. Ho, Musa, guard this door, and see that we are not disturbed.”

I heard the familiar tones of Musa, as he replied: “Harkening and obedience, *sidi*.” Then Lo Foo entered, carrying a small bundle of her belongings. She was followed by Ahmed, who closed and bolted the door.

As I have said, Lo Foo had danced before me many times, but always in the silken raiment of her native land. Never before had I seen her in the abbreviated costume of a gipsy dancing-girl, and I was lost in wonder and admiration at the beauty it revealed. Glittering shields of beaded openwork covered breasts so perfect that to ornament them was like painting the lily. About her slender waist was clasped a jeweled girdle, from which depended a skirt of filmy black material through which the white gleam of her shapely limbs was plainly visible. Except for the customary bracelets, anklets and rings, she wore no other clothing or ornaments.

Perfectly imitating the sinuous gait of a gipsy dancing-girl, she walked to the *diwan* and stretched her slim, alluring form upon it.

His face aflame with passion, Ahmed began tearing off his clothes and flinging them right and left as if he would never want them again. When he had stripped to his soft, silken shirt and skull-cap, he hurled himself at the princess like a tiger springing upon its prey.

At this juncture, I could scarcely restrain myself from opening the panel and leaping into the room, simitar in hand. But because of the positive injunctions Lo Foo had put upon me, I refrained.

A moment later I saw why she had so instructed me—and marveled. As Ahmed came toward her, she rose to meet him, and grasping his wrist with both hands, turned and drew it across her shoulder. A downward pull on the arm, and a slight heave of her shapely back, assisted by the amorous *aga*'s own momentum, sent him catapulting through the air. Feet up and head down, he struck the wall with his back, an impact that must have knocked the breath from his body. Then he fell in a crumpled heap upon the *diwan*.

Lo Foo quickly bent over him and struck him a sharp blow behind the ear with the edge of her hand. Then she signed to me.

I opened the panel and stepped into the room, followed by Tserin.

From outside the door came the voice of Musa. "What was that noise, *sidi*? Shall I break in?"

"Answer him," whispered Lo Foo. "Say everything is all right."

"We were playing at tag and overturned a chest, Musa," I called, imitating the voice of Ahmed. "Pay no attention, and keep good watch."

"I hear and obey, *sidi*," was the reply.

"Now, my lord," Lo Foo whispered, "you must quickly exchange clothing with this prisoner, for he may recover consciousness soon. Tserin will help you."

With the aid of the Mongol captain, I swiftly removed my clothing and donned the silken shirt and skull-cap of Ahmed. While we were dressing him in my garments, Lo Foo opened her bundle and busied herself laying out cosmetics and heating a small curling-iron in a candle flame.

When all was in readiness, she trimmed and curled my black beard, and then, looking from Ahmed's features to my own, applied deft touches here and there from her tray. Presently she held up a mirror before me, and I started back in amazement at the image I saw therein, for it was the face of Ahmed Aga.

Lo Foo turned to Tserin. "Take this carrion to the house of Hasan," she said, indicating the senseless form of Ahmed. "Shave off his beard, bind him hand and foot, and see that he does not escape."

The captain went to the open panel and softly called his two warriors. They came to the top of the ladder, and we passed the limp form of the *aga* to them.

"You may go now, Tserin," said Lo Foo. "Tell Hasan Aga that tomorrow my master will call upon him by way of the front door, and I by way of the souterrain."

He bowed low, and followed his men down the ladder.

Lo Foo closed the panel. "We must sleep now, my lord," she said. "Tomorrow will be a trying day, for with my help you must establish yourself as Ahmed Aga in this household."

"There is but one *diwan*," I said. "I will sleep on the floor, and you may have it."

"Why, it is a large *diwan*, and there is ample room for both," she said. "Yet if you object to sleeping with me, it is I who will lie on the floor."

"It is not that I object to sleeping with you," I replied, "but that I believed you would object to sleeping with me."

"Not at all," she assured me. "Why should I?"

"Why, er, it's not customary," I stammered.

"For a slave-girl to sleep with her master? Why, it is common practise, both in your land and mine, and has been throughout the ages. You yourself told me how the great and holy Daoud, slayer of the giant Goliath, and father of Suleiman the Wise, slept with a virgin when very old, to gain warmth for his aged bones."

Her argument was unanswerable, yet I knew that if I occupied the *diwan* with her, I should be expected to sleep. And I was certain that if Malik Daoud himself, in the years of his utmost senility, had this ravishing little beauty beside him instead of Abishag the Shunammite virgin, he would not have slept a wink, either.

"I am not sleepy," I told her. "Do you get some sleep, and I will sit and smoke."

"No, my lord. If you can not sleep, then you must rest, at least." Gently she pushed me back upon the *diwan*. Seeing that there was no escape, I stretched out, turned my face to the wall, and closed my eyes.

With tender solicitude she threw a coverlet over me. Then I heard her removing her jewelry and bangles and placing them on a taboret. A moment later the *diwan* gave almost imperceptibly under the slight pressure of her body, and I sensed the gentle warmth and intoxicating fragrance of her, there beside me.

By the sound of her faint, regular breathing, I knew that Lo Foo soon slept. But I could not. Although it had been my intention to remain all night with my face to the wall, I soon found this a most uncomfortable arrangement. As says the old proverb: "All are not asleep whose eyes are closed," so it was with me. And though I counted sheep, goats and camels in my mind's eye, until I had numbered more of these animals than are to be found in all Arabia, I only grew the wider awake, and so fidgety that I could scarce restrain myself from leaping up and shouting.

Presently, when it seemed that my entire left side was dead, and that millions of tiny, tantalizing imps were fingering all my nerve ends, I found that I must turn on my back. This I contrived to do very quietly, and without touching her who slept beside me, blissfully unconscious of the agony I was undergoing.

What a relief! With a pricking like that of a thousand needles, circulation was restored to my left side, and the imps ceased to pluck at my nerves. Now, as I lay there in a little more comfort, I decided to give over counting sheep, and as sleep was impossible, think of the important things I must do on the morrow.

But sleep, it seems, is a fickle mistress. No sooner did I cease to court her, and begin conning my plans for the coming day, than a drowsiness assailed me, and I passed into dreamland.

My dream carried me back to the old happy days when Selma Hanoum and I slept, side by side, on this very *diwan*. I must have turned on my right side shortly thereafter, for the dream ended, and I awoke to that elusive sense of reality which comes in a half-sleeping, half-waking state. Perhaps I had thrown my arm across Lo Foo in my sleep, for it appeared to be a tactile sensation, the velvety feel of her, that had caused my dream to vanish. Yet, somehow, I was not sure but that this was another dream. Dimly, I recall that a soft hand took mine, removed it just a little from the position it had occupied, and held it. Then once more slumber claimed me.

Bright sunlight streaming down upon my face, awakened me. For a moment, I did not realize where I was. Then I recognized the familiar decorations and furnishings of the room that had been mine and Selma Hanoum's for many happy months.

Lo Foo had donned her native silken garments, and was combing her glossy black hair. But when she saw that I was awake, she sprang up and unbolted the door.

A slave-girl entered with a ewer of water and a basin. I made ablution and prayed the dawn prayer, after which another slave-girl brought coffee and breakfast.

When she had gone out, Lo Foo bolted the door once more. "While you slept, I had breakfast," she said, "and then went about, meeting the inmates of this house. Today, I think it best that you do not ride forth, as is Ahmed Aga's custom, to attend the Pasha, but send a slave to him, pleading illness. Many of the inmates you will know, as the *aga* kept most of Selma Hanoum's slaves. But when you see one you do not recognize, stroke your beard three times in succession, and I will call that person by name, so you will make no mistakes."

After breakfast, I went forth into the *majlis*, and Lo Foo kept constantly at my side. "Remember," she whispered, "Hamed the Dragoman is no more. You are Ahmed Aga. Cultivate his mannerisms, speak as he would speak, and in private, copy his signature until you can duplicate it perfectly without the slightest hesitation."

Things came about as Lo Foo had predicted, while I marveled at her foresight, and though I feared that at least one of the slaves who had served me for many months would recognize me, none did so. Before midday I knew the name of every inmate of the house who had been a stranger to me.

Ahmed, I learned, had two wives, but fortunately, no children. The second, I triple-divorced that morning, paying her double her dowry and sending her back to her parents. The other, who was visiting her mother, I resolved to divorce upon her return. His hostlers, slave-girls and eunuchs, most of whom had been Selma's, I retained for the present.

That afternoon I ordered Ahmed's prancing charger brought out, and rode to the house of Hasan, resolved to deal with Ahmed himself. I would give him a simitar with which to defend himself, and felt confident that the will of Allah would prevail for the right.

Lo Foo, meanwhile, was to lock herself in the bedroom, then pass through the souterrain into Hasan's house.

I was about to dismount before my old friend's door, when I noticed a hooting, jeering rabble coming down the street, following four men who bore a much bedraggled body on a crude stretcher. This sight aroused my curiosity, and I remained in my saddle to watch them pass.

As they drew closer, I saw, with a start of surprise, that the corpse wore the same clothing I had worn the day before, and greatly resembled me as I looked before I had grown a beard. The clothing was sodden, and water dripped from it into the dust of the street.

"Has some one been drowned?" I asked a camel-driver, who trailed along at the edge of the crowd.

"A vile malefactor has reaped his just reward," he replied. "The corpse of that foul murderer and wife-poisoner, Hamed the Dragoman, who escaped the executioner some

months ago, was seen floating in the Tigris, and some fishermen just hauled it out.”

Swiftly I dismounted, and gave my reins to a groom, who had followed me on foot. Hasan answered my knock, and led me into the *majlis*. Tserin and his two warriors were there, smoking their baton-like pipes, but Lo Foo had not yet arrived.

“Where is Ahmed Aga?” I asked.

Hasan looked at me slyly, and winked at Tserin. “Why, you are Ahmed Aga,” he replied.

“If I am Ahmed Aga, then where is Hamed the Dragoman?”

At this moment, Lo Foo entered, and the three Mongols instantly bowed to the floor before her.

“What have you done with the prisoner?” she demanded. “Why isn’t one of you guarding him?”

Hasan cleared his throat. “The base and inhuman monster has met with the justice of Allah,” he said. “Last night when he was brought in, I recalled that he was the poisoner of my sister’s daughter, on whom be peace, and that his blood-wreak belonged to me. I would have slit his throat, but Tserin had noticed a thriving young bamboo sprout in my garden. He reminded me that, through the machinations of this villain, my nephew came near to meeting death by impalement, and explained how, in Cathay, they have a singularly effective way of letting nature perform such tasks. The dog died before daybreak this morning, and we flung him into the Tigris, after putting papers on his person which would positively identify him as Hamed the Dragoman.”

“I can not find the heart to be angry with you, uncle,” I said, “though you have stolen the vengeance which belonged to me.”

“*Waha!*” he replied. “We but made a bride of him, instead of a groom. He would have been groom to a tiger lily, but instead, we made him bride of a bamboo.”

The three Mongols, it seemed, were not to get off so easily. Lo Foo spoke rapidly to them in their own tongue. It was apparent that she was furiously angry and they were very much frightened.

“Forgive them, Lo Foo,” I said. “After all, the affair was more Hasan’s doings than theirs.”

So she relented, and after a pipe and a cup of coffee with Hasan, we returned to the palace, I on my horse, and she by way of the souterrain.

That night I sat in the *majlis* of my *harim*, an opulent *aga* with wealth, land and slaves, and the finest home in Mosul. Wearing rich silks and costly jewels, and reclining amid the soft cushions of my luxurious *diwan*, I was surrounded by slave-girls, eager to court my favor and do my bidding.

Behind a screen at the far end of the *majlis*, musicians were tuning their instruments. And in one of the rear rooms, Lo Foo, with the assistance of two of my slave-girls, was spending much time over her toilette. She was to dance before me that night, her dance of farewell, for on the morrow she would leave Mosul for ever.

Presently I heard the tinkle of anklets in the hallway, and Lo Foo entered. Musa, the eunuch, signed to the musicians behind the screen, and they began to play.

Then Lo Foo danced.

Never before had I seen her so beautiful, so radiant, or so madly alluring. The key color of the ensemble she had chosen for that dance was red, the color of love. Her skirt was a tenuous, diaphanous material of a shade that matched the red of her lips, and was suspended on a girdle of cloth of gold, studded with rubies. Her breast shields were blood-red coral beads, woven on golden threads, and her anklets and armllets were gold, decked with figures of red lacquer.

The dance was one of passionate love—of wooing and of mating. Never had she danced thus before me, and never had I been so powerfully affected. The throbbing music, the rhythmic swaying of her slim, young body, and the matchless perfection of her face and figure, held me enthralled. Forgotten were my sorrow and my affliction, which had, up to this time, hung before my eyes as a veil, blinding me to the true worth of her who danced before me, to the fact that I loved Lo Foo—had loved her since first I saw her there in the slave mart.

Suddenly I realized that the dance was over. The music had ceased, and the little dancer had flung herself down before me. I caught her up, and she nestled in my arms like a tired child. But her eyes were the eyes of a woman, and they were starry with a light which a man, though he see it but once, may never mistake. The fragrance of her breath intoxicated me like heady wine. Unmindful of the slave-girls and the eunuch, I claimed the sweetness of her lips. Her arms stole about my neck, and clung. Still holding her in my arms, I stood up, and carrying her into our room, gently lowered her to the *diwan*.

Behind me, Musa, the eunuch, closed the door.

Gently I unclasped the soft arms from around my neck.

“I can not remain here with you tonight, Lo Foo,” I said. “I will go through the souterrain to the house of Hasan.”

“But why?”

“Because I love you.”

She clung to me, would not let me go, and again those starry lights in her eyes thrilled me.

“Stay, my lord,” she pleaded. “I have always loved you. And now I love you so much that it hurts.”

As on the morning previous, I was awakened by the sun shining in my face. Lo Foo, I thought, had gone out into the *harim* for her breakfast. For some time I lay there, indolently blinking in the sunlight, reviewing glorious memories.

But presently, as Lo Foo did not put in an appearance, I sat up. Then I saw a note lying on the taboret beside the *diwan*, and recognized the painfully scrawled handwriting of my little princess, who, despite my patient teaching, wrote wretched Arabic. My heart fell as I read the note. It said:

Beloved:

It would have been easier for me to pluck my heart, bleeding and quivering from my bosom, than to leave you thus. But a daughter's first duty is to her parents, and my dying father needs me. I can not remain to say farewell, for in your arms my will deserts me. So this is the only way.

Farewell, and may the God of your people and the Gods of my ancestors watch over you. I will always love you.

Your broken-hearted,

Lo Foo.

I dressed hastily, and dashing out into the *majlis*, called for my horse. A few moments later, I was riding madly through the streets of Mosul. Presently I passed the city gate, and came to the place where the Mongols had camped. The circular places showed where the *yurts* had stood, but not a single peg remained.

For a time I entertained the insane idea of following Lo Foo's caravan. But reason told me that I could never hope to overtake the swift Mongol riders. And even if this were accomplished, it would only increase the agony of our parting.

Accordingly, I turned my horse, and sadly rode back to my desolate house.

Two years passed, during which I sought forgetfulness by giving myself up to the pleasures which my great wealth commanded for me. Then, one day, a Mongol called at my house. He had come through with a caravan of traders from Cathay. After handing me a small parcel, he made obeisance and withdrew.

With trembling hands I undid the parcel. It contained a small, richly fashioned jade locket, and a folded bit of parchment. I sprang the catch of the locket, and there smiled out at me the features of a handsome baby boy, done in life-like colors. Unfolding the parchment, I read: "Thy son, and mine, beloved." There was no signature, but a royal seal held by its stem a dried and lacquered tiger lily.

And thus, *effendi*, there passed out of my life the rare and beautiful flower from far Cathay. But, though she was not a *Moslemah*, I have never ceased to love her—may Allah forgive me!—nor will I, so long as there is life within me.

Ho, Silat! Bring the sweet and take the full.

[The end of *The Dragoman's Confession* by Otis Adelbert Kline]