

MARIE CORELLI



ZISKA

GOTHIC CLASSIC

Marie Corelli

Ziska (Gothic Classic)

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CHAPTER I.

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It was the full "season" in Cairo. The ubiquitous Britisher and the no less ubiquitous American had planted their differing "society" standards on the sandy soil watered by the Nile, and were busily engaged in the work of reducing the city, formerly called Al Kahira or The Victorious, to a more deplorable condition of subjection and slavery than any old-world conqueror could ever have done. For the heavy yoke of modern fashion has been flung on the neck of Al Kahira, and the irresistible, tyrannic dominion of "swagger" vulgarity has laid The Victorious low. The swarthy children of the desert might, and possibly would, be ready and willing to go forth and fight men with men's weapons for the freedom to live and die unmolested in their own native land; but against the blandly-smiling, white-helmeted, sun-spectacled, perspiring horde of Cook's "cheap trippers," what can they do save remain inert and well-nigh speechless? For nothing like the cheap tripper was ever seen in the world till our present enlightened and glorious day of progress; he is a new-grafted type of nomad, like and yet unlike a man. The Darwin theory asserts itself proudly and prominently in bristles of truth all over him—in his restlessness, his ape-like agility and curiosity, his shameless inquisitiveness, his careful cleansing of himself from foreign fleas, his general attention to minutiae, and his always voracious appetite; and where the ape ends and the man begins is somewhat difficult to discover. The "image of God"

wherewith he, together with his fellows, was originally supposed to be impressed in the first fresh days of Creation, seems fairly blotted out, for there is no touch of the Divine in his mortal composition. Nor does the second created phase—the copy of the Divine—namely, the Heroic—dignify his form or ennoble his countenance. There is nothing of the heroic in the wandering biped who swings through the streets of Cairo in white flannels, laughing at the staid composure of the Arabs, flicking thumb and finger at the patient noses of the small hireable donkeys and other beasts of burden, thrusting a warm red face of inquiry into the shadowy recesses of odoriferous bazaars, and sauntering at evening in the Esbekiyeh Gardens, cigar in mouth and hands in pockets, looking on the scene and behaving in it as if the whole place were but a reflex of Earl's Court Exhibition. History affects the cheap tripper not at all; he regards the Pyramids as "good building" merely, and the inscrutable Sphinx itself as a fine target for empty soda-water bottles, while perhaps his chiefest regret is that the granite whereof the ancient monster is hewn is too hard for him to inscribe his distinguished name thereon. It is true that there is a punishment inflicted on any person or persons attempting such wanton work—a fine or the bastinado; yet neither fine nor bastinado would affect the "tripper" if he could only succeed in carving "'Arry" on the Sphinx's jaw. But he cannot, and herein is his own misery. Otherwise he comports himself in Egypt as he does at Margate, with no more thought, reflection, or reverence than dignify the composition of his far-off Simian ancestor.

Taking him all in all, he is, however, no worse, and in some respects better, than the "swagger" folk who "do" Egypt, or rather, consent in a languid way to be "done" by Egypt. These are the people who annually leave England on the plea of being unable to stand the cheery, frosty, and in every respect healthy winter of their native country—that winter, which with its wild winds, its sparkling frost and snow, its holly trees bright with scarlet berries, its merry hunters galloping over field and moor during daylight hours, and its great log fires roaring up the chimneys at evening, was sufficiently good for their forefathers to thrive upon and live through contentedly up to a hale and hearty old age in the times when the fever of travelling from place to place was an unknown disease, and home was indeed "sweet home." Infected by strange maladies of the blood and nerves, to which even scientific physicians find it hard to give suitable names, they shudder at the first whiff of cold, and filling huge trunks with a thousand foolish things which have, through luxurious habit, become necessities to their pallid existences, they hastily depart to the Land of the Sun, carrying with them their nameless languors, discontents and incurable illnesses, for which Heaven itself, much less Egypt, could provide no remedy. It is not at all to be wondered at that these physically and morally sick tribes of human kind have ceased to give any serious attention as to what may possibly become of them after death, or whether there IS any "after," for they are in the mentally comatose condition which precedes entire wreckage of brain-force; existence itself has become a "bore;" one place is like another, and they repeat the same monotonous round of

living in every spot where they congregate, whether it be east, west, north, or south. On the Riviera they find little to do except meet at Rumpelmayer's at Cannes, the London House at Nice, or the Casino at Monte-Carlo; and in Cairo they inaugurate a miniature London "season" over again, worked in the same groove of dinners, dances, drives, picnics, flirtations, and matrimonial engagements. But the Cairene season has perhaps some advantage over the London one so far as this particular set of "swagger" folk are concerned—it is less hampered by the proprieties. One can be more "free," you know! You may take a little walk into "Old" Cairo, and turning a corner you may catch glimpses of what Mark Twain calls "Oriental simplicity," namely, picturesquely-composed groups of "dear delightful" Arabs whose clothing is no more than primitive custom makes strictly necessary. These kind of "tableaux vivants" or "art studies" give quite a thrill of novelty to Cairene-English Society—a touch of savagery—a soupcon of peculiarity which is entirely lacking to fashionable London. Then, it must be remembered that the "children of the desert" have been led by gentle degrees to understand that for harboring the strange locusts imported into their land by Cook, and the still stranger specimens of unclassified insect called Upper Ten, which imports itself, they will receive "backsheesh."

"Backsheesh" is a certain source of comfort to all nations, and translates itself with sweetest euphony into all languages, and the desert-born tribes have justice on their side when they demand as much of it as they can get, rightfully or wrongfully. They deserve to gain some sort of

advantage out of the odd-looking swarms of Western invaders who amaze them by their dress and affront them by their manners. "Backsheesh," therefore, has become the perpetual cry of the Desert-Born—it is the only means of offence and defence left to them, and very naturally they cling to it with fervor and resolution. And who shall blame them? The tall, majestic, meditative Arab—superb as mere man, and standing naked-footed on his sandy native soil, with his one rough garment flung round his loins and his great black eyes fronting, eagle-like, the sun—merits something considerable for condescending to act as guide and servant to the Western moneyed civilian who clothes his lower limbs in straight, funnel-like cloth casings, shaped to the strict resemblance of an elephant's legs, and finishes the graceful design by enclosing the rest of his body in a stiff shirt wherein he can scarcely move, and a square-cut coat which divides him neatly in twain by a line immediately above the knee, with the effect of lessening his height by several inches. The Desert-Born surveys him gravely and in civil compassion, sometimes with a muttered prayer against the hideousness of him, but on the whole with patience and equanimity—influenced by considerations of "backsheesh." And the English "season" whirls lightly and vaporously, like blown egg-froth, over the mystic land of the old gods—the terrible land filled with dark secrets as yet unexplored—the land "shadowing with wings," as the Bible hath it—the land in which are buried tremendous histories as yet unguessed—profound enigmas of the supernatural—labyrinths of wonder, terror and mystery—all of which remain unrevealed to the giddy-pated, dancing, dining, gabbling throng of the

fashionable travelling lunatics of the day—the people who "never think because it is too much trouble," people whose one idea is to journey from hotel to hotel and compare notes with their acquaintances afterwards as to which house provided them with the best-cooked food. For it is a noticeable fact that with most visitors to the "show" places of Europe and the East, food, bedding and selfish personal comfort are the first considerations—the scenery and the associations come last. Formerly the position was reversed. In the days when there were no railways, and the immortal Byron wrote his *Childe Harold*, it was customary to rate personal inconvenience lightly; the beautiful or historic scene was the attraction for the traveller, and not the arrangements made for his special form of digestive apparatus. Byron could sleep on the deck of a sailing vessel wrapped in his cloak and feel none the worse for it; his well-braced mind and aspiring spirit soared above all bodily discomforts; his thoughts were engrossed with the mighty teachings of time; he was able to lose himself in glorious reveries on the lessons of the past and the possibilities of the future; the attitude of the inspired Thinker as well as Poet was his, and a crust of bread and cheese served him as sufficiently on his journeyings among the then unspoilt valleys and mountains of Switzerland as the warm, greasy, indigestible fare of the elaborate table-d'hotes at Lucerne and Interlaken serve us now. But we, in our "superior" condition, pooh-pooh the Byronic spirit of indifference to events and scorn of trifles—we say it is "melodramatic," completely forgetting that our attitude towards ourselves and things in general is one of most pitiable bathos. We

cannot write Childe Harold, but we can grumble at both bed and board in every hotel under the sun; we can discover teasing midges in the air and questionable insects in the rooms; and we can discuss each bill presented to us with an industrious persistence which nearly drives landlords frantic and ourselves as well. In these kind of important matters we are indeed "superior" to Byron and other ranting dreamers of his type, but we produce no Childe Harolds, and we have come to the strange pass of pretending that Don Juan is improper, while we pore over Zola with avidity! To such a pitch has our culture brought us! And, like the Pharisee in the Testament, we thank God we are not as others are. We are glad we are not as the Arab, as the African, as the Hindoo; we are proud of our elephant-legs and our dividing coat-line; these things show we are civilized, and that God approves of us more than any other type of creature ever created. We take possession of nations, not by thunder of war, but by clatter of dinner-plates. We do not raise armies, we build hotels; and we settle ourselves in Egypt as we do at Homburg, to dress and dine and sleep and sniff contempt on all things but ourselves, to such an extent that we have actually got into the habit of calling the natives of the places we usurp "foreigners." WE are the foreigners; but somehow we never can see it. Wherever we condescend to build hotels, that spot we consider ours. We are surprised at the impertinence of Frankfort people who presume to visit Homburg while we are having our "season" there; we wonder how they dare do it! And, of a truth, they seem amazed at their own boldness, and creep shyly through the Kur-Garten as though fearing to be turned out by the

custodians. The same thing occurs in Egypt; we are frequently astounded at what we call "the impertinence of these foreigners," i.e. the natives. They ought to be proud to have us and our elephant-legs; glad to see such noble and beautiful types of civilization as the stout parvenu with his pendant paunch, and his family of gawky youths and maidens of the large-toothed, long-limbed genus; glad to see the English "mamma," who never grows old, but wears young hair in innocent curls, and has her wrinkles annually "massaged" out by a Paris artiste in complexion. The Desert-Born, we say, should be happy and grateful to see such sights, and not demand so much "backsheesh." In fact, the Desert-Born should not get so much in our way as he does; he is a very good servant, of course, but as a man and a brother—pooh! Egypt may be his country, and he may love it as much as we love England; but our feelings are more to be considered than his, and there is no connecting link of human sympathy between Elephant-Legs and sun-browned Nudity!

So at least thought Sir Chetwynd Lyle, a stout gentleman of coarse build and coarser physiognomy, as he sat in a deep arm-chair in the great hall or lounge of the Gezireh Palace Hotel, smoking after dinner in the company of two or three acquaintances with whom he had fraternized during his stay in Cairo. Sir Chetwynd was fond of airing his opinions for the benefit of as many people who cared to listen to him, and Sir Chetwynd had some right to his opinions, inasmuch as he was the editor and proprietor of a large London newspaper. His knighthood was quite a recent distinction, and nobody knew exactly how he had managed

to get it. He had originally been known in Fleet Street by the irreverent sobriquet of "greasy Chetwynd," owing to his largeness, oiliness and general air of blandly-meaningless benevolence. He had a wife and two daughters, and one of his objects in wintering at Cairo was to get his cherished children married. It was time, for the bloom was slightly off the fair girl-roses—the dainty petals of the delicate buds were beginning to wither. And Sir Chetwynd had heard much of Cairo; he understood that there was a great deal of liberty allowed there between men and maids—that they went out together on driving excursions to the Pyramids, that they rode on lilliputian donkeys over the sand at moonlight, that they floated about in boats at evening on the Nile, and that, in short, there were more opportunities of marriage among the "flesh-pots of Egypt" than in all the rush and crush of London. So here he was, portly and comfortable, and on the whole well satisfied with his expedition; there were a good many eligible bachelors about, and Muriel and Dolly were really doing their best. So was their mother, Lady Chetwynd Lyle; she allowed no "eligible" to escape her hawk-like observation, and on this particular evening she was in all her glory, for there was to be a costume ball at the Gezireh Palace Hotel—a superb affair, organized by the proprietors for the amusement of their paying guests, who certainly paid well—even stiffly. Owing to the preparations that were going on for this festivity, the lounge, with its sumptuous Egyptian decorations and luxurious modern fittings, was well-nigh deserted save for Sir Chetwynd and his particular group of friends, to whom he was holding forth, between slow cigar-puffs, on the squalor of the Arabs, the frightful

thievery of the Sheiks, the incompetency of his own special dragoman, and the mistake people made in thinking the Egyptians themselves a fine race.

"They are tall, certainly," said Sir Chetwynd, surveying his paunch, which lolled comfortably, and as it were by itself, in front of him, like a kind of waistcoated air-balloon. "I grant you they are tall. That is, the majority of them are. But I have seen short men among them. The Khedive is not taller than I am. And the Egyptian face is very deceptive. The features are often fine—occasionally classic—but intelligent expression is totally lacking."

Here Sir Chetwynd waved his cigar descriptively, as though he would fain suggest that a heavy jaw, a fat nose with a pimple at the end, and a gross mouth with black teeth inside it, which were special points in his own physiognomy, went further to make up "intelligent expression" than any well-moulded, straight, Eastern type of sun-browned countenance ever seen or imagined.

"Well, I don't quite agree with you there," said a man who was lying full length on one of the divans close by and smoking. "These brown chaps have deuced fine eyes. There doesn't seem to be any lack of expression in them. And that reminds me, there is a fellow arrived here to-day who looks for all the world like an Egyptian, of the best form. He is a Frenchman, though; a Provençal—every one knows him—he is the famous painter, Armand Gervase."

"Indeed!"—and Sir Chetwynd roused himself at the name—"Armand Gervase! THE Armand Gervase?"

"The only one original," laughed the other. "He's come here to make studies of Eastern women. A rare old time he'll have among them, I daresay! He's not famous for character. He ought to paint the Princess Ziska."

"Ah, by-the-bye, I wanted to ask you about that lady. Does anyone know who she is? My wife is very anxious to find out whether she is—well—er—quite the proper person, you know! When one has young girls, one cannot be too careful."

Ross Courtney, the man on the divan, got up slowly and stretched his long athletic limbs with a lazy enjoyment in the action. He was a sporting person with unhampered means and large estates in Scotland and Ireland; he lived a joyous, "don't-care" life of wandering about the world in search of adventures, and he had a scorn of civilized conventionalities—newspapers and their editors among them. And whenever Sir Chetwynd spoke of his "young girls" he was moved to irreverent smiling, as he knew the youngest of the twain was at least thirty. He also recognized and avoided the wily traps and pitfalls set for him by Lady Chetwynd Lyle in the hope that he would yield himself up a captive to the charms of Muriel or Dolly; and as he thought of these two fair ones now and involuntarily compared them in his mind with the other woman just spoken of, the smile that had begun to hover on his lips deepened unconsciously till his handsome face was quite illumined with its mirth.

"Upon my word, I don't think it matters who anybody is in Cairo!" he said with a fine carelessness. "The people whose families are all guaranteed respectable are more lax in their behavior than the people one knows nothing about. As for

the Princess Ziska, her extraordinary beauty and intelligence would give her the entree anywhere—even if she hadn't money to back those qualities up."

"She's enormously wealthy, I hear," said young Lord Fulkeward, another of the languid smokers, caressing his scarcely perceptible moustache. "My mother thinks she is a divorcee."

Sir Chetwynd looked very serious, and shook his fat head solemnly.

"Well, there is nothing remarkable in being divorced, you know," laughed Ross Courtney. "Nowadays it seems the natural and fitting end of marriage."

Sir Chetwynd looked graver still. He refused to be drawn into this kind of flippant conversation. He, at any rate, was respectably married; he had no sympathy whatever with the larger majority of people whose marriages were a failure.

"There is no Prince Ziska then?" he inquired. "The name sounds to me of Russian origin, and I imagined—my wife also imagined—that the husband of the lady might very easily be in Russia while his wife's health might necessitate her wintering in Egypt. The Russian winter climate is inclement, I believe."

"That would be a very neat arrangement," yawned Lord Fulkeward. "But my mother thinks not. My mother thinks there is not a husband at all—that there never was a husband. In fact my mother has very strong convictions on the subject. But my mother intends to visit her all the same."

"She does? Lady Fulkeward has decided on that? Oh, well, in THAT case!"—and Sir Chetwynd expanded his lower-

chest air-balloon. "Of course, Lady Chetwynd Lyle can no longer have any scruples on the subject. If Lady Fulkeward visits the Princess there can be no doubt as to her actual STATUS."

"Oh, I don't know!" murmured Lord Fulkeward, stroking his downy lip. "You see my mother's rather an exceptional person. When the governor was alive she hardly ever went out anywhere, you know, and all the people who came to our house in Yorkshire had to bring their pedigrees with them, so to speak. It was beastly dull! But now my mother has taken to 'studying character,' don'cher know; she likes all sorts of people about her, and the more mixed they are the more she is delighted with them. Fact, I assure you! Quite a change has come over my mother since the poor old governor died!"

Ross Courtney looked amused. A change indeed had come over Lady Fulkeward—a change, sudden, mysterious and amazing to many of her former distinguished friends with "pedigrees." In her husband's lifetime her hair had been a soft silver-gray; her face pale, refined and serious; her form full and matronly; her step sober and discreet; but two years after the death of the kindly and noble old lord who had cherished her as the apple of his eye and up to the last moment of his breath had thought her the most beautiful woman in England, she appeared with golden tresses, a peach-bloom complexion, and a figure which had been so massaged, rubbed, pressed and artistically corseted as to appear positively sylph-like. She danced like a fairy, she who had once been called "old" Lady Fulkeward; she smoked cigarettes; she laughed like a child at every

trivial thing—any joke, however stale, flat and unprofitable, was sufficient to stir her light pulses to merriment; and she flirted—oh, heavens!—HOW she flirted!—with a skill and a grace and a knowledge and an aplomb that nearly drove Muriel and Dolly Chetwynd Lyle frantic. They, poor things, were beaten out of the field altogether by her superior tact and art of "fence," and they hated her accordingly and called her in private a "horrid old woman," which perhaps, when her maid undressed her, she was. But she was having a distinctly "good time" in Cairo; she called her son, who was in delicate health, "my poor dear little boy!" and he, though twenty-eight on his last birthday, was reduced to such an abject condition of servitude by her assertiveness, impudent gayety and general freedom of manner, that he could not open his mouth without alluding to "my mother," and using "my mother" as a peg whereon to hang all his own opinions and emotions as well as the opinions and emotions of other people.

"Lady Fulkeward admires the Princess very much, I believe?" said another loungeur who had not yet spoken.

"Oh, as to that!"—and Lord Fulkeward roused himself to some faint show of energy. "Who wouldn't admire her? By Jove! Only, I tell you what—there's something I weird about her eyes. Fact! I don't like her eyes."

"Shut up, Fulke! She has beautiful eyes!" burst out Courtney, hotly; then flushing suddenly he bit his lips and was silent.

"Who is this that has beautiful eyes?" suddenly demanded a slow, gruff voice, and a little thin gentleman,

dressed in a kind of academic gown and cap, appeared on the scene.

"Hullo! here's our F.R.S.A.!" exclaimed Lord Fulkeward. "By Jove! Is that the style you have got yourself up in for tonight? It looks awfully smart, don'cher know!"

The personage thus complimented adjusted his spectacles and surveyed his acquaintances with a very well-satisfied air. In truth, Dr. Maxwell Dean had some reason for self-satisfaction, if the knowledge that he possessed one of the cleverest heads in Europe could give a man cause for pride. He was apparently the only individual in the Gezireh Palace Hotel who had come to Egypt for any serious purpose. A purpose he had, though what it was he declined to explain. Reticent, often brusque, and sometimes mysterious in his manner of speech, there was not the slightest doubt that he was at work on something, and that he also had a very trying habit of closely studying every object, small or great, that came under his observation. He studied the natives to such an extent that he knew every differing shade of color in their skins; he studied Sir Chetwynd Lyle and knew that he occasionally took bribes to "put things" into his paper; he studied Dolly and Muriel Chetwynd Lyle, and knew that they would never succeed in getting husbands; he studied Lady Fulkeward, and thought her very well got up for sixty; he studied Ross Courtney, and knew he would never do anything but kill animals all his life; and he studied the working of the Gezireh Palace Hotel, and saw a fortune rising out of it for the proprietors. But apart from these ordinary surface things, he studied other matters—"occult" peculiarities of temperament, "coincidences,"

strange occurrences generally. He could read the Egyptian hieroglyphs perfectly, and he understood the difference between "royal cartouche" scarabei and Birmingham-manufactured ones. He was never dull; he had plenty to do; and he took everything as it came in its turn. Even the costume ball for which he had now attired himself did not present itself to him as a "bore," but as a new vein of information, opening to him fresh glimpses of the genus homo as seen in a state of eccentricity.

"I think," he now said, complacently, "that the cap and gown look well for a man of my years. It is a simple garb, but cool, convenient and not unbecoming. I had thought at first of adopting the dress of an ancient Egyptian priest, but I find it difficult to secure the complete outfit. I would never wear a costume of the kind that was not in every point historically correct."

No one smiled. No one would have dared to smile at Dr. Maxwell Dean when he spoke of "historically correct" things. He had studied them as he had studied everything, and he knew all about them.

Sir Chetwynd murmured:

"Quite right—er—the ancient designs were very elaborate—"

"And symbolic," finished Dr. Dean. "Symbolic of very curious meanings, I assure you. But I fear I have interrupted your talk. Mr. Courtney was speaking about somebody's beautiful eyes; who is the fair one in question?"

"The Princess Ziska," said Lord Fulkeward. "I was saying that I don't quite like the look of her eyes."

"Why not? Why not?" demanded the doctor with sudden asperity. "What's the matter with them?"

"Everything's the matter with them!" replied Ross Courtney with a forced laugh. "They are too splendid and wild for Fulke; he likes the English pale-blue better than the Egyptian gazelle-black."

"No, I don't," said Lord Fulkeward, speaking more animatedly than was customary with him. "I hate, pale-blue eyes. I prefer soft violet-gray ones, like Miss Murray's."

"Miss Helen Murray is a very charming young lady," said Dr. Dean. "But her beauty is quite of an ordinary type, while that of the Princess Ziska—"

"Is EXTRA-ordinary—exactly! That's just what I say!" declared

Courtney. "I think she is the loveliest woman I have ever seen."

There was a pause, during which the little doctor looked with a ferret-like curiosity from one man to the other. Sir Chetwynd Lyle rose ponderously up from the depths of his arm-chair.

"I think," said he, "I had better go and get into my uniform—the Windsor, you know! I always have it with me wherever I go; it comes in very useful for fancy balls such as the one we are going to have tonight, when no particular period is observed in costume. Isn't it about time we all got ready?"

"Upon my life, I think it is!" agreed Lord Fulkeward. "I am coming out as a Neapolitan fisherman! I don't believe Neapolitan fishermen ever really dress in the way I'm going

to make up, but it's the accepted stage-type, don'cher know."

"Ah! I daresay you will look very well in it," murmured Ross Courtney, vaguely. "Hullo! here comes Denzil Murray!"

They all turned instinctively to watch the entrance of a handsome young man, attired in the picturesque garb worn by Florentine nobles during the prosperous reign of the Medicis. It was a costume admirably adapted to the wearer, who, being grave and almost stern of feature, needed the brightness of jewels and the gloss of velvet and satin to throw out the classic contour of his fine head and enhance the lustre of his brooding, darkly-passionate eyes. Denzil Murray was a pure-blooded Highlander—the level brows, the firm lips, the straight, fearless look, all bespoke him a son of the heather-crowned mountains and a descendant of the proud races that scorned the "Sassenach," and retained sufficient of the material whereof their early Phoenician ancestors were made to be capable of both the extremes of hate and love in their most potent forms. He moved slowly towards the group of men awaiting his approach with a reserved air of something like hauteur; it was possible he was conscious of his good looks, but it was equally evident that he did not desire to be made the object of impertinent remark. His friends silently recognized this, and only Lord Fulkeward, moved to a mild transport of admiration, ventured to comment on his appearance.

"I say, Denzil, you're awfully well got up! Awfully well! Magnificent!"

Denzil Murray bowed with a somewhat wearied and sarcastic air.

"When one is in Rome, or Egypt, one must do as Rome, or Egypt, does," he said, carelessly. "If hotel proprietors will give fancy balls, it is necessary to rise to the occasion. You look very well, Doctor. Why don't you other fellows go and get your toggeries on? It's past ten o'clock, and the Princess Ziska will be here by eleven."

"There are other people coming besides the Princess Ziska, are there not, Mr. Murray?" inquired Sir Chetwynd Lyle, with an obtrusively bantering air.

Denzil Murray glanced him over disdainfully.

"I believe there are," he answered coolly. "Otherwise the ball would scarcely pay its expenses. But as the Princess is admittedly the most beautiful woman in Cairo this season, she will naturally be the centre of attraction. That's why I mentioned she would be here at eleven."

"She told you that?" inquired Ross Courtney.

"She did."

Courtney looked up, then down, and seemed about to speak again, but checked himself and finally strolled off, followed by Lord Fulkeward.

"I hear," said Dr. Dean then, addressing Denzil Murray, "that a great celebrity has arrived at this hotel—the painter, Armand Gervase."

Denzil's face brightened instantly with a pleasant smile.

"The dearest friend I have in the world!" he said. "Yes, he is here. I met him outside the door this afternoon. We are very old chums. I have stayed with him in Paris, and he has stayed with me in Scotland. A charming fellow! He is very French in his ideas; but he knows England well, and speaks English perfectly."