

Grant Allen



*Ivan Greet's
Masterpiece*

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'Twas at supper at Charlie Powell's; every one there admitted Charlie was in splendid form. His audacity broke the record. He romanced away with even more than his usual brilliant recklessness. Truth and fiction blended well in his animated account of his day's adventures. He had lunched that morning with the newly-appointed editor of a high-class journal for the home circle—circulation exceeding half a million—and had returned all agog with the glorious prospect of untold wealth opening fresh before him. So he discounted his success by inviting a dozen friends to champagne and lobster-salad at his rooms in St. James's, and held forth to them, after his wont, in a rambling monologue.

“When I got to the house,” he said airily, poising a champagne-glass halfway up in his hand, “with the modest expectation of a chop and a pint of porter in the domestic ring—imagine my surprise at finding myself forthwith standing before the gates of an Oriental palace—small, undeniably small, a bijou in its way, but still, without doubt, a veritable palace. I touched the electric bell. Hi, presto! at my touch the door flew open as if by magic, and disclosed—a Circassian slave, in a becoming costume *à la* Liberty in Regent Street, and smiling like the advertisement of a patent dentifrice! I gasped out——”

“But how did ye know she was a Circassian?” Paddy O'Connor inquired, interrupting him brusquely. (His name

was really Francis Xavier O'Connor, but they called him "Paddy" for short, just to mark his Celtic origin.)

Charlie Powell smiled a contemptuously condescending smile. He was then on the boom, as chief literary lion. "How do I know ye're an Oirishman, Paddy?" he answered, hardly heeding the interruption. "By her accent, my dear boy; her pure, unadulterated Circassian accent! 'Is Mr. Morrison at home?' I gasped out to the Vision of Beauty. The Vision of Beauty smiled and nodded—her English being chiefly confined to smiles, with a Circassian flavour; and led me on by degrees into the great man's presence. I mounted a stair, with a stained-glass window all yellows and browns, very fine and Burne-Jonesey; I passed through a drawing-room in the Stamboul style—couches, rugs, and draperies; and after various corridors—Byzantine, Persian, Moorish—I reached at last a sort of arcaded alcove at the further end, where two men lay reclining on an Eastern divan—one, a fez on his head, pulling hard at a chibouque; the other, bare-headed, burbling smoke through a hookah. The bare-headed one rose: 'Mr. Powell,' says he, waving his hand to present me, 'My friend, Macpherson Psaha!' I bowed, and looked unconcerned. I wanted them to think I'd lived all my life hob-nobbing with Pashas. Well, we talked for a while about the weather and the crops, and the murder at Mile End, and the state of Islam; when, presently, of a sudden, Morrison claps his hands—so—and another Circassian slave, still more beautiful, enters.

"'Lunch, houri,' says Morrison.

"'The effendi is served,' says the Circassian.