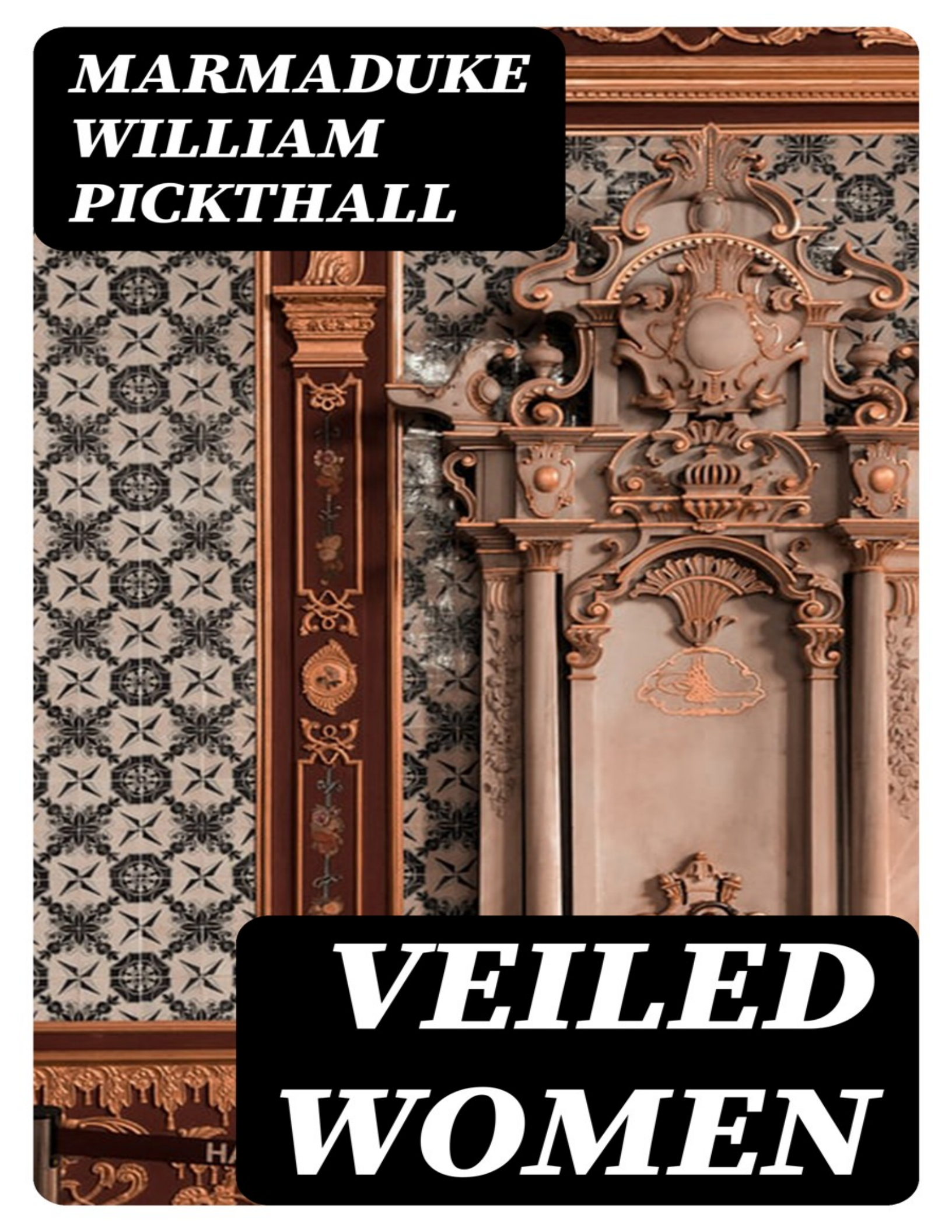


The background image shows a highly decorative Victorian interior. On the left, a wall is covered in a dense, repeating pattern of dark blue or black floral and geometric motifs on a light-colored wallpaper. To the right, a doorway or alcove is framed by an elaborate, carved wooden structure. This structure features two fluted columns supporting a pediment with a central medallion and intricate scrollwork. The overall aesthetic is one of opulence and detailed craftsmanship.

***MARMADUKE
WILLIAM
PICKTHALL***

***VEILED
WOMEN***

Marmaduke William Pickthall

Veiled Women

EAN 8596547245292

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CHAPTER I

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“If good the news, O bird, alight and welcome;
If bad, draw up thy claws and hie away!”

At the corner of a lofty housetop overlooking a great part of Cairo, a woman stood with arms uplifted and solemnly addressed a crow which seemed about to settle. The bird, as if the meaning of the chant had reached him, turned in the air with clumsy flapping, and withdrew, rising to join the hundreds of his kind which circled high above the city bathed in early sunlight. The woman shook her fist at his receding shape, glass bracelets tinkling on her strong brown arm. She sighed, “The curse of God on thy religion, O thou faithless messenger!” then, with a laugh, turned round to join the group of slave-girls, her companions, sent up to lay out herbs to dry upon the roof. These had watched her invocation of the crow with knowing grins. But one, a young Circassian, who sat watching while the others worked, betrayed surprise and asked the meaning of the little ceremony.

At that there was much giggling.

“Knowest thou not, O flower? It is the woman’s secret!”

“Secret of secrets, all unknown of men!”

“By Allah, men know nothing of it. In sh’Allah, they will be astonished some day!”

“O Hind, relate the story! Our honey, our gazelle, Gulbeyzah, has not heard it.”

Thus urged, the one who had adjured the crow, a free servant of the house, obsequious towards the slaves, its pampered children, explained as she knelt down again to work:

“In the name of Allah, thus it is related: Know, O my sweet, that, in the days of our lord Noah (may God bless him), after the flood, the men and women were in equal numbers and on equal terms. What then? Why, naturally they began disputing which should have the right to choose in marriage and, as the race increased, enjoy more mates than one. The men gave judgment on their own behalf, as usual; and when the women made polite objection, turned and beat them. What was to be done? The case was thus: the men were stronger than the women, but there exists One stronger than the men—Allah Most High. The women sought recourse to Allah’s judgment; but—O calamity!—by ill advice they made the crow their messenger. The crow flew off towards Heaven, carrying their dear petition in his claws, and from that day to this he brings no answer. But God is everliving and most merciful; a thousand years with Him seem but an hour. Perhaps He does but hold our favour over, as might a son of Adam, till the evening for reflection, to grant it at the last. In sh’Allah!”

“In sh’Allah!” came the chorus of a dozen voices; followed by a general laugh when Gulbeyzah, the Circassian, yawned and sighed, “Four goodly husbands all my own! O Lord, give quickly!”

“That is the reason,” Hind concluded, “why good women have a word to say to crows who seek to settle. Any one of

them may be the bearer of the blessed edict. The reason as related—Allah knows!”

“Good news and hopeful, by my maidenhood!—the best I ever heard!” chuckled Gulbeyzah, reposing with her back against the parapet. She then remained a long while silent, lost in day-dreams.

The hour was after sunrise of a spring morning in the twelve hundred and eightieth year of the Hegirah, the second of the reign of Ismaîl. The house was that of Muhammad Pasha Sâlih, a Turk by origin but born and bred in Egypt, who held a high position in the government. The girls, their task accomplished, sat down on their heels, each with her tray of basketwork before her, and sniffed the breeze, in no haste to return indoors.

“Praise to Allah,” one exclaimed with fervour, “we escape for an hour from that Gehennum there below. Never have I seen the lady Fitnah so enraged. Her wrath is not so much because her son desires the English governess, as because the Pasha sees no hindrance to the match. I tremble every time I have to go to her, lest in her fury she should damage my desirability.”

“Praise be to Allah, I am not her property,” replied another, “but that of her durrah, the great lady. Yet I know her for a good and pious creature, not likely to be so enraged without rare cause. They say this foreign teacher has bewitched the young man. He is mad. He flung himself before her in the passage as she came from driving. She spurned him, and they bore him, senseless, to his chamber, where for two days he weeps and moans, refusing

nourishment. It is enchantment, evidently, for the girl is ugly."

"Nay, by Allah, she is white and nicely rounded. But shameless! But an infidel!"

"She can change her faith."

"As easily as dung can change its odour!"

"Gulbeyzah here is whiter and more appetizing."

"Well, God alone knows what she is or is not. This is sure: I have no itching to go down into the house while Fitnah Khânum rages."

"Nor I!" "Nor I!" exclaimed the rest with feeling.

The morning clamour of the city came up to them as a soothing murmur. Minarets dreamed round them in the sun-haze which was rosy at its heart but in the distance pearly with a tinge of brown. On one hand open country might be seen, green fields and palm trees crowding to the desert wave on which three pyramids stood out, minute as ciphers; on the other, ending the long ridge of the Mucattam Hill, arose the Citadel in smoky shadow, its Turkish dome and minarets, its towers and ramparts, appearing like a city of the sky. Here and there among the housetops a small cloud of doves went up, fluttered a moment and subsided peacefully. Kites hovered, crows were circling, in the upper air. Gulbeyzah watched their evolutions dreamily.

"Allah defend us from the liberty of Frankish women!" she remarked at length. "I could not bear it. To meet the stare of all men were too dreadful. My maidenhood would flush my brain and kill me. O pure shame! And yet they choose what men they like, the fact is known. In sh'Allah, the great

favour, when the crow does bring it, will not destroy our blessed privacy.”

“In sh’Allah, truly!” answered Hind, with vehemence. “Fear nothing, O beloved; God is greatest! Their freedom is from Satan, their liege lord—the curse of Allah on him! It is a travesty of God’s work, like all he does. Is it not known when Allah made the cow, he tried his best to do the same, but got no farther than the water-buffalo? All Heaven mocked him. Our charter, when it comes, will be perfection.”

“Talking of foreign women makes me curious to know how things are going, down below. Has the governess consented to give life to Yûsuf? Has the Pasha quieted the lady Fitnah?”

“Nothing could quiet her, unless it were the quick expulsion of the Englishwoman. Why did she ever have her children taught the lore of infidels? The fault is hers! She hoped to keep the Bey from honourable marriage, chaining his fancy with some slave-girl, her own creature.”

“With me, say plainly!” laughed Gulbeyzah, with a yawn. “I was brought into the house with that intention. Yet not her creature, for Murjânah Khânum is my mistress, and she would have seen to it that I was well respected. If the governess has pity on him—which I think not likely—as soon would the wild serpent wed the dove—my lady must provide me with a proper husband. I have no mind to wither as a fruit untasted.” She yawned again. “Will no one go into the house and bring me news?”

Up leapt a little Galla girl, a child as yet unveiled, all eyes and teeth with glee in the adventure.

"I go, O lady! I am not afraid. I will even enter the selamlik. I will find out everything."

"Be very careful, O Fatûmah, lest old Fitnah seize thee. She would rip up thy belly and pluck out thy entrails did she catch thee spying!"

The little black girl laughed and made an impudent grimace.

"And then the eunuchs! They will surely beat thee."

"By Allah, they must catch me first. Sawwâb adores me, and the others are too slow."

"Good. Run, ere curiosity consume me!"

The little negress shot off like an arrow. Down dark, malodorous stairs, through empty corridors, she glanced, incarnate mischief. In a pleasure court of the harîm, where orange trees in tubs grew round a pool, she stopped to listen for the voice of Fitnah. It came from an apartment on her right. Straight forward, where she wished to go, the coast seemed clear. Springing on tiptoe, she plucked a spray of blossom from the nearest tree; then ran on down a passage through the ornate screen, the boundary of the women's quarters, where a eunuch tried in fun to stop her; and in sight of a great hall where men were lounging, knocked at a door.

The word had scarce been given ere she glided in and held out the sprig of orange-blossom to the English governess, with every muscle of her body fawning, smiling. Without a look, she read the stranger's face, perceived she had been crying lately but now looked exultant, observed the order of the room, the foreign furniture; and then, before the Englishwoman could find words to thank her for the

pretty offering, kissed a white hand which proved as hot as fire, and darted out as noiselessly as she had entered.

As she was flitting back across the garden-court, she heard a male voice cry:

“Be silent, woman; or, by the Prophet, I shall have to beat thee!”

Crouching behind a tub, she listened eagerly. But though a wrangle was in progress not far off between the Pasha and his wife, the lady Fitnah, she could glean no more than the main tenor of it from the voices, of which the man’s was irritated and the woman’s mad.

At last the Pasha shouted:

“It is finished. No word more. I go straight to the Consul. Appeal to the Câdi, I beseech thee; of thy kindness, do so! He will tell thee, just as I do, that thou art demented.”

Another minute and he crossed the court, wearing his best tarbûsh and his official garb of black frock-coat and narrow trousers—a thing unheard of at that early hour.

Having seen him pass to the selamlik, Fatûmah ran like lightning through the dim old house, till, breathless, she emerged in dazzling sunlight and flopped down on the roof again beside the others.

“Well, what news?” they clamoured.

“Great news!” Fatûmah panted. “Only listen! The English governess is going to marry Yûsuf Bey, and she has islamed!”

“Praise to Allah!” cried the others in amazement. “A Frankish woman convert! A great miracle!”

“The Pasha goes this minute to the English Consul, to confer with him and make arrangements for the ceremony.”

“Allahu akbar! Is it possible? But what says Fitnah?”

“What can she say, the poor one? The command is on her.”

“But, for the love of Allah, say, how didst thou learn all this?”

Fatûmah shut her lips tight, looking preternaturally cunning.

“Ha, ha!” was all she answered.

“Her tale is nonsense! She is making game of us,” exclaimed Gulbeyzah, breaking out in laughter. “She was not gone five minutes, that is known. Thou shalt be paid full measure, little poison-flower! Confess now that thy story is all lies!”

The marvel was that every word proved true.

CHAPTER II

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Muhammad Pasha Sâlih was intensely worried. As he drove toward the English Consul's office, he let deep furrows ravage his benignant brow, and combed his long grey beard with nervous fingers. The ever-shifting crowds, the eager faces, the laden camels rolling on like ships upon the sea of heads; the water-sellers clinking their brass cups, the cries of salesmen and the floating odours—all the pageant of the streets and all their rumour, which filled the sunlight and seemed one with it, went by unnoticed.

In youth he had been wedded to a noble Turkish lady, the sweetest and most gentle of companions. Never an angry word had passed between them. But, alas! when all her children died soon after birth, Murjânah Khânûm had grown melancholy and retired from life. She still dwelt in his house, was still the nominal head of his harîm; but for more than twenty years she had been dead to pleasure. At first he had amused himself with pretty slaves, being reluctant to infringe her dignity of only wife. Then, at her instance, for she feared debauch for him, he had espoused the daughter of a wealthy native, whom the caprice of a former ruler had exalted. The marriage, besides raising his importance, had brought him four male children. Yet at this moment, with the curses of the termagant still ringing in his ears, he almost wished he had let well alone and kept to concubines.

Allah knew that Yûsuf's malady was not uncommon at his age; the cure self-evident. The governess was not a heathen. She was of those who have received the Scriptures, therefore marriageable. Moreover, being, as he

shrewdly guessed, of no consideration in her native land, she might be tempted by a life of wealth and ease. To save his son from death, he had besought the Englishwoman, imagining that her consent would fill the house with joy-cries. Yet when the cause was won, the only possible objection cancelled by the girl's unlooked-for turn to El Islâm, behold! the lady Fitnah's grief was changed to fury. The wrangle with her had perturbed him at a moment when he stood in need of all his wits to brave the Consul. Well, Allah saw what trials he endured!

The carriage drew up in a quiet alley, before a gateway ornamented with a coloured picture of lions great and small in funny attitudes. Two Cawasses in silver-braided jackets with long dangling sleeves rose from stools beside the threshold and saluted. Muhammad Pasha passed between them, crossing a courtyard to a second door, wide open like the first. There, in a whitewashed room, two Copts sat at a table, cutting pens. They both sprang up at recognition of the visitor and strove to kiss his hands, which he prevented by patting each upon the shoulder kindly.

"Is the Consul busy, O my children?" he inquired. "I have an errand of importance. Please inform him."

"Upon my head. I go at once, by Allah!"

One of the Copts leapt to an inner door and knocked thereon. Enjoined to enter, he opened it just far enough for the introduction of his body, and slipped in. Anon returning in the same respectful manner, he beckoned to the Pasha. Then he flung the door wide open, and stood aside, with eyes downcast and hands demurely folded.

Muhammad Pasha entered with a beating heart. His mission was of essence delicate, and he was anxious to avoid all odour of offence towards a foreign representative possessing influence. Having touched hands with the Consul and exchanged greetings, he sat down on the extreme edge of a chair, and toying with his amber rosary, thus broached his business:—

“Monsieur le Consul,”—the conversation was in French of the Byzantine school,—“you remember the young lady whom you were good enough to recommend as an instructress for my children. Can you inform me of her origin, her previous history?”

“Excellency, I only know what she herself confided: that she was educated at a religious institution for poor children of good family. She has no relatives. She came here to be governess in an English house which, by the father’s sudden death, was brought to poverty two weeks before she came. She found herself here without a situation and with little money; and as she was well recommended and impressed me as respectable, I thought of you, remembering that you desired an English governess. I trust that you are satisfied of her efficiency?”

“Altogether. She has been a month now in our house, and almost is become like one of us. She is so charming. It is there, the trouble. She is ravishing. Monsieur le Consul,”—here the Pasha changed his tone for that of one who bares his heart, discarding courtesies,—“I am very gravely troubled. The anxiety I suffer cuts digestion and gives me frightful belly-pains. My son adores this demoiselle, and she

adores him. The affair deprives me of all taste for food. You see my sufferings!”

“Continue, Excellency!” said the Consul grimly. He got up from his chair and paced the room. The Pasha kept the corner of an eye upon him, as he proceeded:

“What can I do? The demoiselle has been secluded from my household, as I promised you. But youth leaps boundaries; love can speak through walls. My son has seen her in the passages—their eyes have met—What know I? Youth is fatal.”

Here the Pasha wiped his eyes.

“Monsieur le Consul, when I heard of this two days ago, I put my son in prison; I went myself and reasoned with the demoiselle. I have reasoned with them both, entreated, threatened; but without result. I fear my son will die if he may not espouse her. The demoiselle implores me not to cast her forth. She says—it is so touching!—that we are her only friends, that she never met with kindness till she came to us.”

“Beg her to come this afternoon and see me,” pronounced the Englishman, whose face had darkened by perceptible gradations as he listened.

“That is precisely what I come to ask: that you will scold her. God knows how the responsibility has weighed upon me. She is not the match I should myself have chosen for my son; but still I should be glad of the alliance, because of the esteem I have for all the English. I stand impartial in the case and greatly worried.”

“Thank you, Excellency. Send her to me this afternoon. Is there anything else?”

The Pasha had already risen to depart.

“One thing.” He dropped his voice to a stage whisper. “In the frenzy of her love she asks to be of our religion. She has made an oath of her conversion before witnesses. (The Consul swore.) But have no care. We will forget it, if”—the Pasha laid great stress on the condition, and for once looked boldly in the other’s eyes—“if, after consultation with you, she should wish to recant.”

“But you say that there are witnesses to her conversion,” cried the Frank, with bitterness. “I fail to see how it can be forgotten. There would be a riot.”

“The witnesses are of my house,” rejoined the Pasha suavely. “My command is guarantee of their discretion.”

“Send her to me!” The final words were uttered from tight lips beneath a formidable frown, as the Consul flung the door wide open for the Turk’s departure.

“Sont-ils fanatiques, ces brutes-là? Peuh!” respired the Pasha, shaking the dust from off his boots as he regained his carriage. “The girl will have a cruel hour, poor floweret! That dog would like to kill her. But, God be praised, the law of El Islâm is still sufficient to protect a convert in a Muslim land!”

His thoughts of the lone foreign girl were full of kindness. She was his daughter. He would care for her true happiness. And then the thought of Fitnah’s rage, recurring, caused him to frown, and swear, and gnaw his underlip.

CHAPTER III

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Immediately on his return to his own house, Muhammad Pasha sent a eunuch to announce his coming to the lady Fitnah. He found her lying on a couch in her state-room. Two slaves, who had been busy fanning her, retired before him. Seeing she lay still with eyes closed as if quite exhausted, he drew near and whispered:

“Now, in sh’Allah, O beloved, thou wilt hear my reasons.”

She opened great brown eyes, bloodshot with wrath, and glared at him a moment.

“Well, what news?” she asked, with studied coldness.

The Pasha then embarked upon his story; but, at mention of the Consul, she sprang up with rage renewed, expectorating:

“Curse thy father! ‘She will see the Consul,’ sayest thou? The Consul! May the Consul and his whole race rot with agony! It is simply to evade a duty which is thine and thine alone. Eject her from the house at once, thou paltry coward! She will kill our son. I know thy guile, by Allah! Thou wilt say, ‘The Consul orders her to marry Yûsuf. We must obey the Consul,’—O salvation!—when all the while thyself art father of the mischief. Oh, let her not come here, or, by my fruitfulness! these hands shall cling to her and not leave hold till they have made her so that no man could desire her.”

Expostulation proving vain, her lord retired in great annoyance. He had to fear a scandal in his house, an inquisition by the Consul, ignominy, if Yûsuf’s mother came in contact with the English lady.

In this dilemma, as in every other which concerned the household, he went for counsel to his only love and first of wives. He sent a herald of his coming to Murjânah Khânum, and after a decent interval repaired to her apartments. She received him in a large room, with no other solid furniture than a low desk on which a manuscript of the Corân lay open; but exquisitely clean and sweet, a contrast to those quarters of the house where Fitnah reigned. The windows were constructed of the finest lattice-work, which made the light within seem rare and delicate. Murjânah, old but stately, fondled her lord's hand.

"Thy face is careworn," she exclaimed, perusing it. "In sh 'Allah, all the news is good."

"In sh 'Allah," he replied mechanically. "But Allah knows that I am greatly troubled. I know not what to do." And he proceeded to describe the madness of the lady Fitnah. At the tale's conclusion, a light laugh surprised him.

"Thou askest what to do," exclaimed Murjânah, "when there is danger that a foolish woman, mad with jealousy, may harm a guest of ours! Hear the word of Allah: 'When ye have cause to fear their disobedience, ye shall reprimand them, ye shall banish them to beds apart, and ye shall beat them.' Is not that plain? Beat her! It is thy sacred duty. No, no, she will not cry against thee to the Câdi. She will hide her fault. All women look to men for government, and if it is withheld, have cause of grief. Trust me, beloved, there is no good woman who would not rather suffer stripes occasionally than grow for lack of them into a shrieking haridan. Fitnah Khânum is my durrah, and I love her truly, as the mother of our darling children, and for many virtues.

Still I say to thee on this occasion: beat her soundly. Bestow on her a perfect beating, O my soul!"

The Pasha kissed his old wife's hand submissively, and went forth from her presence with a face of awe. The high proceeding needed courage, for a man so kindly. He went to the small chamber where the eunuchs sat when not on duty, and called, "Sawwâb! Meymûn! Bring me a big kurbâj. Attend me, both of you!"

The silent, swift obedience of those servants showed the impression made by his unusual sternness. Their help was necessary that the scene to come might wear the aspect of an execution, not a struggle.

Whip in hand, Muhammad Pasha crossed a courtyard and entered a small room remote from others.

"Bring Fitnah Khânum hither secretly!" he told the eunuchs.

Sawwâb, the fat, was seized with trembling; while Meymûn, a tall, gaunt creature, gave a deathlike grin. They sped, however. Three minutes had not passed before the lady Fitnah, deftly bound and gagged, was borne into the lonely chamber and the door was shut.

Half an hour later, Muhammad Pasha Sâlih sat conversing with the English lady, preparing her intelligence to meet the Consul's arguments, which he forewarned her would be all misstatements born of blind fanaticism. When married to Yûsuf, he assured her, and himself believed it, she would hardly know the difference from an English home.

CHAPTER IV

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The English girl, meanwhile, experienced a passionate elation, like new life. The Pasha's exhortations were not needed. Rebellion, which had always lurked beneath her trained subservience, now clothed her in its flames and made her terrible for any one who dared assail her new-found pride.

What had she to regret? From childhood she had been repressed, humiliated, and ordered to be thankful for bare daily bread. In Christian families her lot had been unenviable. Here, in this Muslim household, she was somebody. The month spent here had been the happiest in her life. But, bred up to regard employers as a race apart,—impressed, moreover, by the grandeur of the house and by the rank of Pasha,—she had never dreamt of being thought an equal by her entertainers. When Yûsuf Bey, whom she had noticed for his beauty, assailed her in the hall, she had imagined his intentions far from honourable, judging from past experience in English houses. She had fled to her own rooms, ashamed and angry, while the image of his face alight with passion remained to trouble her against her will. When the Pasha came and begged her in most flattering terms to condescend to marry his unworthy son, she nearly swooned. All her resistance sprang from incredulity. When once convinced that the demand was earnest, she gave way with grateful tears. Then her resolve became a living faith. It was to break the bondage of the past completely, to cast in her lot for ever with these friends who wanted her.

They were wealthy, of exalted rank, and yet they wanted her. They thought her lovely, who had always been esteemed entirely plain, with her squat figure, apple cheeks, and sandy hair. The sleekest youth in all the world desired her. It was so marvellous that she was forced to rub her eyes and fix their gaze on homely objects to dispel the sense of some enchantment. The difference of religion gave her no concern; indeed, the change was welcome, she had been so cramped by English pietism. In this mood, she was fire against the Consul. A world of happiness was opened suddenly, and there were those who would debar her from it. Woe betide them!

The Pasha himself escorted her to where a harîm carriage waited. Sawwâb the eunuch held the door for her.

"The carriage will be there to bring you back," the Pasha told her. "I have ordered the servants by no means to return without you, upon pain of death."

The implied suspicion that she might be kidnapped made her laugh.

"Remember, my son's life is in your hands—such pretty hands! His earthly happiness is trusted to this carriage, all too vile to hold so sweet a burden. Day and night he dreams of nothing but your charms. If your mind changes he will surely die."

She laughed and kissed her fingers to the dear old man, as she stepped up into the carriage. The eunuch slammed the door, which was close-shuttered, leaving her in perfumed shade. A burning blush suffused her as she thought of Yûsuf—his strained, eager face, his yearning lips, beheld that once to haunt her consciousness, a naked shape

of love. But pride was uppermost in all her thoughts just then—pride in the comfortable carriage, the attentive servants—pride in her new-found value, in her new-found relatives, and in the daring resolution she had made to break with England. The foreign clamour of the streets, the curious, heady odours, flattered her with a sense of strange adventure.

Radiant, she alighted at the gate which bore the royal arms of England, near which an open carriage also waited, and passed into the Consul's office. She expected sternness, but the Consul smiled agreeably, and after shaking hands with her, took up his hat.

"I have been thinking," he observed, "that all I have to say could be much better said by some one else—a woman. I should be hampered by embarrassment." He smiled. "So, if you don't mind, I have sent a note to Mrs. Cameron, asking leave to bring you out to tea with her this afternoon. I have a carriage at the door."

"I also have a carriage," she replied, with a light laugh, as they went out together. She could not but admire his strategy, for Mrs. Cameron, the leader of the English colony, was a gentlewoman of the straightest Christian outlook, the last person whom a renegade would care to face. She had, moreover, been all kindness to the stranded girl, hospitably entertaining her until she found a situation. Since going to Muhammad Pasha's house the governess had spent a Sunday with her, and heard warnings. To brave her now would be an ordeal, but no matter. The destined bride of Yûsuf scorned all fear.

Out at the gate the Consul eyed her carriage with intense disfavour, especially Sawwâb the eunuch, who stood ready at the door.

“You will kindly come in mine,” he said peremptorily.

“Then you will kindly tell the Pasha’s man to follow,” she replied, with eyes that twinkled laughter at his show of temper.

He shouted to the Pasha’s coachman, and got in beside her. For a while they drove in silence, the Consul stealing glances at her face from time to time. She knew that he was struck by the new charm of her. His manner had a dash of gallantry which was amusing.

“I hate to see you in that carriage, with those servants,” he exclaimed at length impulsively. “You must forgive me. I have lived here years, and know the country.”

Again she laughed and her eyes quizzed him. The thought that she knew more than he did, possibly, was made conviction by his next remark:

“Please realize that you are absolutely free. Whatever may have happened—I mean whatever influences have been brought to bear—those people cannot hurt you now, or even reach you.” This man who knew the country suspected the good Pasha of iniquity, and looked upon his palace as a den of vice. She said:

“There has been nothing of the kind. I have never been so kindly treated or so happy.”

He hemmed and hawed, remarking:

“Well, remember what I say. And don’t forget that, as a British subject here, you have great privileges which, whatever happens, you will be unwise to forfeit. I hope you

will confide in Mrs. Cameron. There is no one in this world more kind and trustworthy."

She answered, "Thanks!" and turned from him to contemplate the passing scene. Their carriage flew along a sandy lane between walled gardens of the suburbs, with here and there a mansion closely shuttered towards the street. The road was covered with the long procession of the fellâhîn returning outward to their villages—men straddled over donkeys between empty paniers; women stalked erect and queen-like in their graceful drapery; here and there a camel sauntered, led by some bare-legged boy—the whole, obscured by clouds of dust, illumined warmly by the rays of the declining sun, or steeped in the deep shadow of mud walls. Foot-farers, forced aside to let the carriage pass, stared at its inmates with contemptuous eyes. The garb of Europe was a blot upon the peaceful scene. Her heart went out to all those people, plodding, contented, in the sunlit dust. Henceforth she would be nothing strange to them, she swore it.

"Here we are!" The Consul's voice disturbed her reverie. He shouted to the driver and the carriage stopped. The harîm carriage drew up close behind it. A door in a high wall was opened by a smiling negro. A minute later she was in a cool verandah, looking on a well-kept garden, outside a very English drawing-room.

It was a house where all was tidy and precise, a hostile element to one in love with the untrimmed profusion of the Pasha's palace. She hated it as servants hate a nagging mistress.

“Now, having brought you two together, I shall leave you,” said the Consul pleasantly. “This young lady, Mrs. Cameron, has gone and got herself into a precious fix. Confess her thoroughly, and then we’ll find some way to get her out of it.”

“But I have no desire to get out of it,” cried the girl, exasperated. “The fix, as you are pleased to call it, is my greatest happiness.”

But the Consul was already gone, delighted as it seemed to wash his hands of her. She found herself alone with Mrs. Cameron.

“We’ll have some tea at once, and you must see the children,” was that lady’s first remark, so different from the attack anticipated that the guest, all nerved for battle, felt defrauded. Though ready to resist with fury, she lacked the energy required to open fight. Tea came, and with it the three tow-haired children, whose presence made all talk impossible. The girl sat moody, in abeyance, replying briefly to remarks addressed to her. The garden perfumes became stronger as the sun sank. They, or some kindred but more subtle influence, obscured her brain with fumes in which her purpose loomed unreal and enormous. The homely scene appealed to her against her will. Almost she had the sense of hands held out to her, while Mrs. Cameron was talking nonsense with the children. This playing on her nerves seemed a mean stratagem. Hot anger grew beneath her careless shell.

At length the youngsters were dismissed. The girl then braced herself to meet the blow. Again she felt a keen pang of deception when her hostess said:

"I am going to ask you a great favour. Stay the night with me! My husband is away at Alexandria. I am really lonely."

"Thank you very much, but it is really quite impossible,"—there was poison in the honey of this sweet reply,—"I have a carriage waiting."

"We can send it with a message."

"No, really, thank you! I have stayed too long already." She suddenly bethought her of the master move, and rose determined.

"No, sit down, my dear!" cried Mrs. Cameron. "I have to talk to you. And though I would rather have had the night in which to think things over, I must, since you force me to it, speak quite simply now. I say: Don't do it, child! Don't take the step the Consul tells me that you contemplate! He thought that you had been seduced by unfair practices; but that, I see from your behaviour, is not so. It is just the charm of novelty, the spirit of adventure—is it not?—with just, perhaps, a little mischief prompting, a little grudge against the dull life you have led. My love, you must not be allowed to do it—you, an Englishwoman! It degrades us all. I have lived out here for years, and I assure you that, if a daughter of mine declared her will to marry one of them, sooner than it should happen I would kill her with my own hands. A girl!—It is unheard of! With their view of women!"

"It is plain you know nothing about them," sneered the other; "at any rate, about the class of people I have mixed with. They have the greatest reverence for women. You suppose, because we veil—"

"We!" interjected Mrs. Cameron.

“Yes, we; for I am one of those whom you so grossly slander.” A drum of battle beat at either temple of the girl thus brought to bay. Her brain reeled with indignation, and her voice grew husky. “I say, you think because we veil that we are quite degraded, the same as we do when we see your faces bare. The difference is one of custom only. Underneath our veils, in our own houses, we are just as happy and as free as you are.... It is too droll! You fancy that Mahometan women have their lives made miserable? Why, I have never known such happy women. From my rooms, I hear them laughing, playing, singing all day long.”

“Poor things! They know no other life. You do, and would be miserable in the same conditions. Have you ever thought of what polygamy involves—for women, anyhow?”

“It seems to me extremely sensible and kind to women. It takes into consideration facts which we slur over, cruelly. It gives to every girl a chance of motherhood.”

“My dear!” exclaimed the mentor, greatly shocked.

“I don’t care what you think. It is quite true.”

“You are young and inexperienced. We who live in the country hear of things of which you cannot possibly know anything—things that I wish most heartily that you may never know. That is why I beg of you earnestly to change your mind.”

“Nothing will make me do that.”

“Then you are honestly in love, and we will say no more on that point.” The forbearance was so unexpected that the governess was startled and stared at Mrs. Cameron with unbelieving eyes. The elder lady showed such trembling earnestness that she grieved for the necessity to shock and