

Harûn Pasha

Tales of Ancient Egypt

by Sax Rohmer, 1883-1959

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I

I will tell you this story (said Ferrier of the Egyptian Civil) with one reservation; comments are to be reserved for some future time. I can only tell you what I saw with my own eyes and heard with my own ears; I offer no explanation; I pass on the story; you can take it or leave it.

Some of you will remember Dunlap—I don't mean Robert Dunlap, who is chief officer of the PEKIN, but Jack Dunlap his cousin, the irrigation man who used to be stationed at Assuan.

You remember the build of the beggar?—the impression of scaffolding his figure conveyed? I always used to think of him as an iron framework, and he had the most hard-bitten head-piece I have ever struck; steel blue eyes and a mouth that was born shut. The dash of ginger in his hair, complexion, and constitution made up a Scotch brew that was very strongly flavored.

He came down to Cairo one spring, and a lot of us got together in the club—on a Sunday night, I remember, it was. The conversation got along that silly line; what we were all doing, and why we were doing it, what we had really intended to do, and how Fate had butted in and made sailors of those that had meant to be parsons, engineers of the poets, and tramps of the chaps who had proposed to become financiers.

Well, we had traveled up and down this blind alley for hours, I should think, when Dunlap mounted on his hind legs and took the rug with the proposition that nothing—*nothing*—was impossible of achievement to the man of single purpose. Someone put up an extreme case; asking Dunlap how he should handle the business of the son of a respectable greengrocer who, with singleness of purpose, proposed to become king of England.

He said it was not a fair case, but he accepted the challenge; and the way this junior greengrocer, under Dunlap's guidance, plunged into politics, got elected M.P., wormed himself into the confidence of the entire Empire by a series of brilliant campaigns conducted from John o' Groats to Van Diemen's Land; induced the reigning monarch, publicly, to advocate his own abdication; established a sort of commonwealth with his ex-Majesty on the board and Dunlap occupying a post between that of a protector and a Roman Cæsar—well, it was wonderful.

Of course, you can judge of the lateness of the hour from the fact that a group of moderately intelligent men tolerated, and contributed to, a chat of this nature. But what brings me down to the story is the few words which I exchanged with Dunlap at the break-up of the party, when he was leaving.

His cousin Robert, as you know, is well on the rippity side; but Jack, with all his fine capacity for heather-dew, had always struck me as something of a psalmster. I've heard that Bacchus holds the keys of truth, and it may be right; for out on the steps of the club, I said to Jack Dunlap:

"It seems you don't practise what you preach?"

"Don't I?" he snapped hardly. "What do you suppose I am doing here?"

"Engineering, I take it. Do you aspire to a pedestal beside De Lesseps?"

"De Lesseps be damned!" he retorted sourly. "Look at these."

He held out his hands, hardened with manual toil—the hands of a grinder.

"Clearly you are a glutton for work," I said.

"I am aiming at never doing another hand's stroke in my life," he replied, with an odd glint in his blue eyes. "My idea of life—*life*, mind you, not mere existence—is to be a pasha—one of the old school, with gate porters, orange trees, fountains, slaves, mosaic pavements, a marble bath."

He mixed his ambitions oddly.

"Someone to do all the shifting for me, and even the thinking; to hold a book in front of me if I wanted to read, to poke my pipe in my mouth, and to take it out when I wanted to blow smoke rings—and to *know* when I wanted it taken out without being told."

“On your showing, you are traveling by the wrong road.”

“Am I?” he snapped viciously. “Just wait awhile.”

That was all the indication I had of Dunlap’s ideas, and remembering the time of night and other circumstances, I did not count upon it worth a brass farthing; putting it down to the heather-dew rather than to any innate viciousness of the man. But listen to the sequel, which shifts us up just about twelve months, to the spring of the following year, in fact.

II

I had seen no more of Dunlap, and concluded that he was back in Assuan, or somewhere on the river, fozzling with his irrigation again. I never had the clearest conception of the work of his department, by the way. An irrigation man once started to explain to me about his section, mixing up surveying paraphernalia in his talk, telling me something about an allowance of half an inch variation in half a mile of bank, or chat to that effect; but I couldn’t quite make it out. My impression of Dunlap at business was very hazy; I pictured him measuring the bank of the Nile with a six-foot rule, and periodically kneeling down in the smelly mud to footle with a spirit-level. But he was a Senior Wrangler, as you remember, and a man, too, of more substantial accomplishments, and he drew five hundred a year from the Egyptian Government; so that probably I underestimated his usefulness.

At any rate, I had forgotten his iron framework and mahogany countenance, together with his response (under the afflatus of heather-dew) at the time of which I am now speaking.

A little matter had cropped up which touched me on a weak spot; and with a mob of jabbering Egyptians and one very placid Bedouin flooding my room, I found myself thinking again of Dunlap and envying him his intimate acquaintance with Arabic.

Although I had been in the country quite twice as long as Dunlap, my Arabic was far from perfect, for I have always been a rotten linguist. Dunlap, as I now remembered, might have passed for a native (excepting his Scottish headpiece), and I ascribed his proficiency to an inherent trick of mimicry. There was something of the big ape about him; and after one function at which we both were present, I remember how he convulsed the entire club with an imitation of a certain highly placed Egyptian dignitary, voice and gesture being equal in comic effect to Cyril Maude at his best. In fact, if you notice, you will find that the best linguists, as a rule, have a marked apish streak in their composition.

Well, here was I at my wits’ ends to grasp twenty points of view at one and the same time; no two expressed in quite the same dialect, and each orator more excited than another. You know the brutes?

That got me thinking of Dunlap, and even after the incident was closed, I found myself thinking of him. Some friends from home were staying at Shepherd’s, and of course they had claimed me as dragoman; not that I objected in the least, for one of the party—when it was possible to dodge her mother—was, well, a very agreeable companion, you understand.

On this particular morning we were doing the bazaars. I have found by comparison that the average tourist knows far more of the Mûski than the average resident; in the same way, I suppose that for information regarding the Tower of London or the British Museum, one must go, not to a Cockney, but to an American visitor. At any rate, my party told me more than I could tell them, and my job degenerated into that of a mere interpreter. In the matter of purchases, I possibly saved them money, but their knowledge of the wares was miles ahead of my own. These up-to-date guide books must be very useful reading, I think.

Although I had tried hard to rush them past that dangerous quarter, the *Gôhargîya*, the ladies of the party had discovered a shop where little trays of loose gems, turquoises, rubies, bits of lapis-lazuli, and so forth, were displayed snarefully.

After that I knew where I could find them up to any time before lunch; I knew they were safe enough for the rest of the morning; and accepting my defeat at the hands of the jewel merchant who turned his slow eyes upon me and shrugged apologetically, I drifted off, after a decent interval (leaving young Forrest, who, mysteriously, had turned up, to do the cavalierly), intending to visit my acquaintance, Hassan, in the Sûk el-Attârin (Street of the Perfumers), not twenty yards away.

You know Hassan? A large, mysterious figure in the shadows of his little shop, smoking amber-scented cigarettes as though he liked them, and turning his sleepy eyes slowly upon each passer-by. Well, I drifted around in his direction.

Right at the corner of the street, a big limousine was standing; an up-to-date car, fawn cushions, silver-plated fittings, and simply stuffed with fresh-cut flowers. A useful-looking Nubian was chauffeur, and on the step squatted a fat and resplendent being in all the glory of much gold braid.

These *harêm* guards are rarely seen in Cairo nowadays—they belong to the other picturesque Oriental institutions which have begun to fade with the crescent of Islâm. There was something startlingly incongruous about this full-grown specimen, that bloated representative of Eastern despotism squatting on the step of an up-to-date French car.

It was a kind of all-round shock; I cannot describe how it struck me. It was something like running into Martin Luther at the Grand National or Nero, say, at an aviation meeting.

This was a frightfully hot morning, and the adipose object on the car step was slumbering blissfully. A moment later I spotted the charge which he was guarding with such sedulous care. She was seated in Hassan's shop—well back in the shadows—a gauzy white vision, all eyes and *yashmak*. A confidential female servant accompanied her. They made a pleasing picture enough, and a more suitable setting could not well be found. It was an illustrated page of the *Arabian Nights*, and it appealed strongly even to my jaded perceptions.

Of course, I was not going to interrupt the tête-à-tête; but from where I stood I could observe the group very well whilst remaining myself unobserved. It presently became evident that the lady of the *yashmak*, under the pretence of purchasing perfumes, was merely killing time, and my interest increased as the hour of noon grew near and the artistic group remained unbroken. You know the Mosque of El-

Ashraf by Hassan's shop? Its minaret almost overhung the place. Well, in due course, out popped the *mueddin*.

"La il aha illa Allah..."

There he was a very sweet-voiced singer, as I noted at the time, telling them there was no God but God, and all the rest of it; and presently he worked round to the side of the gallery overlooking Hassan's shop.

Then I could see which way the wind blew. He seemed to be deliberately singing at the picturesque trio—and the dark eyes of the lady of the *yashmak* were lifted upward—in reverence, perhaps; but I hardly thought so.

There was no doubt about the *mueddin*'s final glance, as he turned and retired from the gallery. I remained where I was until the *yashmak* left the shop; and as she had to pass quite close to me in order to rejoin the waiting car, I had a good look at her.

It was just an impression, of course, an impression of red lips under the white gauze, an oval Oriental outline, with very fine eyes—notably fine, where fine eyes are common—and a little exquisitely chiseled nose; a bewitching face. Just that one glimpse I had and a vague impression of rustling silk with the tap of high heels. A faint breath of musk still proclaimed itself above the less pleasing odors of the street; then, the female attendant having cuffed the slumbering Silenus into wakefulness, the car moved off and this *harêm* lily vanished from the bazaar.

I knew that my party was safe for another half an hour, at any rate, so I nipped along to Hassan's shop. Of course, he began brazenly by declaring that no ladies had been there that morning. I had expected it, and the attitude confirmed my suspicions.

Presently, when his boy had made fresh coffee, and Hassan, from the black cabinet, had produced some real cigarettes, we got more intimate. There was a scarcity of European visitors that morning; and excepting one interruption by a party of four American ladies, I had Hassan to myself for half an hour.

He raised his fat finger to his lips when I pressed my question, and rolled his eyes fearfully.

"She is from the palace of Harûn Pasha," he whispered with more sidelong glances. "Ah! *effendim*, I fear..."

We smoked awhile; then—

"The Pasha's wife?" I inquired.

"It is the Lady Zohara," he said.

This did not add greatly to my information; but I continued: "And the *mueddin*?"

"Ah!—do not whisper it... That is my brother, Saïd!"

"He raises his eyes very high?"

"Not so, *effendim*; it is she who raises her eyes. I fear—I fear for Saïd. The Pasha... you have heard of him?"

"I may have heard his name," I replied; "but I am quite unfamiliar with his reputation."

Hassan shook his head gloomily.

"He is the last of his race," he explained; "the race of the Khalifs. He inhabits the ancient palace—but much has been rebuilt, and much added—in Old Cairo, close behind the Coptic Church..."

"I did not know that such a palace even existed."

Again Hassan raised his finger to his lips.

"He is not like the other pashas," he said; "in the house of Harûn Pasha are observed to-day all the old customs as in the day of his great ancestor Harûn al-Raschîd."

"But a motor-car!"

"Ah, *effendim*, he does not scorn to employ modern comforts, nor do I mean that he is a strict Moslem. But you saw the one who sat upon the step? The harêm of the Pasha is well guarded; not only by such as he, but by the Nubians and by the other mutes."

"Mutes!"

"He has many slaves. His agent in Mecca procures for him the pick of the market."

"But there is no such thing as slavery in Egypt!"

"Do the slaves know that, *effendim*?" he asked simply. "Those who have tongues are never seen outside the walls—unless they are guarded by those who have no tongue!"

It was a curious sidelight upon a more curious possibility and I was much impressed.

"Your brother—"

"Alas! I have warned him! I fear, most sincerely I fear, that one dark night the same will befall him that befell the son of my cousin, Ali."

"And what was that?"

"He climbed the wall of the Pasha's garden. There is a fig tree growing close beside it at one place. Someone assisted him to descend on the other. But he had been betrayed; the Nubian mutes took him—and they—"

He bent and whispered in my ear.

"Impossible!" I cried— "impossible! bâss! bâss!"

"Not so, *effendim*—nor was that all. After that they—"

"Enough, Hassan, enough!" I cried. "Usbûr!"

Hassan sighed, raising fearful eyes to the minaret.

III

There has been nothing you are likely to disbelieve so far; but now—well, I specified at the beginning—no comments. Let me tell the story in my own way, and you have permission to *think* what you please.

There was a dance at Shepheard's that night, and young Forrest rather interfered with my plans again as to one of the members of the English party; I think I have referred to her before? That sent me home in a bad humor—at least not home; for as I was standing over by the Ezbekiyeh Gardens, wondering whether to go along to "Jimmy's" or not, I formed a sudden determination to go and have a look at the abode of Harûn Pasha instead!

Mind you, I was not surprised to have lived in Cairo all these years without having heard of the place; I had learned things about the Mûski in the morning, from my tourist friends, which had revealed to me something of my pitiable ignorance. But I was determined to mend my ways, so to speak, and I thought I

would turn my restless mood to good purpose, by improving my knowledge of my neighbors.

I induced the torpid driver of an *arabīyeh* to drive me out to Old Cairo. He obviously considered me to be even more demented than the rest of my countrymen, but since the fare would be a substantial one, he tackled the job. Mad expedition? Quite so; but you appreciate the mood?

After we had passed a certain quarter—a quarter which never sleeps—there was nothing livelier than decayed tombs *en route*. In the chill of the evening I began to weigh up my own foolishness appreciatively, but having got so far as the Coptic Church—you know the church I mean?—I was not going back unsatisfied; so I told my man to wait, and started off to look for the famous palace.

I must say the scene was impressive; a sky full of diamonds and a moon just bursting with light. The liquid night—sounds of the Nile alone disturbed the silence, and the buildings might have been made of mother-o'-pearl, so flawless and pure did they seem, gleaming there under the moon.

Well, I wandered up some narrow streets—past ruins of former important houses, and all that—until I found myself in the shadow of a high wall which obviously was kept in good repair. I followed this for some distance, and I could see trees on the other side; at one place a perfect mat of those purple flowers hung over the top; gorgeous things; the name begins with a B, but I can never remember it. This seemed promising, and as there was not a soul in sight, nor, on the visible evidences, a habitable building near me, I began to fossick for a likely place to climb up.

Presently I found the spot, and at the same time confirmation of my belief that these were the precincts of the Pasha. A fig tree grew beside the wall, affording an admirable means of reaching the top—a natural ladder. In a jiffy I was up... and overlooking one of the most glorious gardens I had ever seen or dreamt of!

It must have been planned by an artist simply soaked in the lore of the Orient. It set me thinking of Edmond Dulac's illustrations to the *Arabian Nights*. Apart from those pages, you never saw anything like it, I swear. The position of each tree was a study; the arrangement of the flowerbeds was poetic—that is the only word for it; there was a pond with marble seats around and a flight of steps with big copper urns filled with growing flowers, mosaic paths, and lesser pools with fountains playing. I peered down into the water, and the moon rays glittered magically upon the scales of the golden carp which darted there. And all this fairy prospect was no more than an introduction, as it were, a sort of lead-up, to the Aladdin's Palace beyond.

I saw now that what with palms and the natural rise of the land back from the Nile, the wonderful palace, with its terraces and gleaming domes, must actually be invisible from all points; a more secret locality one could not well imagine.

As to this magician's abode, which lay before me, I shall not attempt to describe it. But turn to the illustrations which I have mentioned, or to those of Burton's big edition; I will leave it to the artist's and your imagination to fill up the canvas.

Lights shone out from a hundred windows. Out of the ghostly, tomb-like silence of Old Cairo, I had clambered into a sort of fairyland; I stood there with the spray from a fountain wetting me, and rubbed my eyes. Honestly, I should not have been surprised to find myself dreaming. Well, you may be sure I was not going back yet;

there was not a living soul to be seen in the gardens, and I meant to have a peep into the palace, whatever the chances.

The likeliest point, as I soon determined, was to the west—where a long, low wing of the building extended, and was lost, if I may use the term, in a great bank of verdure and purple blooms. I took full advantage of the ample shadow cast by the trees, and came right up under the white wall without mishap.

To my right, the wall was obviously modern, but to my left, although in the distance and under the moon it had seemed uniform, it was built of sandstone blocks and was evidently of great age. The palace proper, you understand, was fully forty yards east; the place before me was a sort of low extension and evidently had no real connection with the residential part.

Just above my head was a square window, iron-barred, but this did not look promising, and cautiously, for I was hampered by the creepers which grew under the wall, I felt my way further west. Presently I encountered a pointed door of black, time-seared wood, and heavily iron-studded. Then, with alarming suddenness, the quietude of my adventure was broken; things began to move with breathless rapidity.

A most dreadful screaming and howling split the stillness and made me jump like a startled frog!

The sound of a lash on bare flesh reached me from some place behind the pointed door. Screams for mercy in thick, guttural Arabic, mingled and punctuated with horrifying shrieks of pain, informed my ignorance unmistakably that mediæval methods yet ruled in the civilized Near East.

Screams and supplications merged into a dull moaning; but the whistle of the lash continued uninterruptedly. Then that too ceased, and dimly came the sounds of a muffled colloquy; a sort of gurgling talk that got me wondering.

I had just time to creep away and conceal myself behind a thick clump of bushes, when the door was thrown open, and the most gigantic negro I have ever set eyes upon appeared in the opening, outlined against the smoky glare from within. He had one gleaming bare arm about the neck of an insensible man, and he dragged him out into the garden as one might drag a heavy sack; dropping him all in a quivering heap upon the very spot which I had just vacated!

The negro, who was stripped to the waist and whose glistening body reminded me of a bronze statue of Hercules, stood looking down at the insensible victim, with a hideous leer. I ventured to raise myself ever so slightly; and in the ghastly, sweat-bedaubed face of the tortured man—whose bare shoulders were bloody from the lash—I recognized the Silenus of the limousine!

In response to a guttural inarticulate muttering by the black giant, a second Nubian, of scarcely lesser dimensions, emerged from the dungeon with a jar of water. He drenched the swooning man, evidently in order to revive him; and, when the wretched being ultimately fought his way back to agonized consciousness—to my horror he was seized, dragged in through the doorway again, and once more I heard the whistle of the lash being applied to his lacerated back, the skin of which was already in ribbons.

I suppose there are times when the most discreet man is snatched outside himself by circumstances? The door of this beastly torture-room had not been reclosed, and before I could realize what I was about, I found myself inside!

The wretched victim had been hauled up to a beam by his bound wrists, and the huge Nubian was putting all his strength into the wielding of the cat-o'-nine-tails, drawing blood with every stroke; whilst his assistant hung on to the rope running through a pulley-block in the low ceiling.

All in a sort of whirl (I was raving mad with indignation) I got amongst the trio, and landed a clip on the jaw of the son of Erebus which made his teeth rattle like castanets.

Down came the fat sufferer all in a heap in his own blood. Down went my man, and began to cough out broken molars. Then it was my turn; and down *I* went with the second mute on top of me, and the pair of us were playing hell all about the blood-spattered floor—up, down, under, over—straining, punching, kicking... then my antagonist introduced gouging, and I had to beat the mat.

It had been a stiff bout, and the stinking shambles were whirling about me like a bloody maelstrom. When things settled down a bit, I found myself lying in a small cell skewered up like a pullet, and with a prospect of iron grating and stone-flagged passage before me. I was more than a trifle damaged, and my head was singing like a kettle. If I had thought that I dreamed before, it was a struggle now to convince myself that this was not a nightmare.

Amid the rattling of chains and dropping of bars, a fantastic procession was filing down the passage. First came a hideous, crook-backed apparition, hook-nosed, and bearing a lantern. Behind him appeared two guards with glittering scimitars. Behind the guards walked a fourth personage, black-robed and white-turbaned—a sort of dignified dragoman, carrying an enormous bunch of keys.

The iron grating of my dungeon was unlocked and raised, and I was requested, in Arabic, to rise and follow. Realizing that this was no time for funny business, I staggered to my feet, and between the two Scimitars marched unsteadily through a maze of passages with doors unlocked and locked behind us, stairs ascended and stairs descended.

From empty passages, our journey led us to passages richly carpeted and softly lighted. By a heavy door opening on to the first of the latter, we left the squinting man; and, with the two Scimitars and Black Robe, I found myself crossing a lofty pavilion.

The floor was of rich mosaic, and priceless carpets were spread about in artistic confusion. Above my head loomed a great dome, lighted by stained glass windows in which the blue of lapis-lazuli predominated. By golden chains from above swung golden lamps burning perfumed oil and flooding the pavilion with a mellow blue light. There were inlaid tables and cabinets; great blue vases of exquisite Chinese porcelain stood in niches of the wall. The walls were of that faintly amber-tinted alabaster which is quarried in the Mokattam Hills; and there were fragile columns of some delicately azure-veined marble, rising, graceful and slender, ethereal as pencils of smoke, to a balcony high above my head; then, from this, a second series of fairy columns crept in blue streaks up into the luminous shadows of the dome.

We crossed this place, my heel taps echoing hollowly and before a curtained door took pause. An impressive interval of perfumed silence; then in response to the muffled clapping of hands, the curtain was raised and I was thrust into a smaller apartment beyond.

I found myself standing before a long *dîwan*, amid an opulence of Oriental appointment which surpassed anything which I could have imagined. The atmosphere was heavy with the odor of burning perfumes, and, whereas the lofty pavilion afforded a delicate study in blue, this chamber was voluptuously amber—amber-shaded lamps, amber cushions, amber carpets; everywhere the glitter of amber and gold.

Amid the amber sea, half immersed in the golden silks of the *daïs*, reclined a large and portly Sheikh; full and patriarchal his beard, wherein played amber tints, lofty and serene his brow, sweeping up to the snowy turban. From a mouthpiece of amber and gold he inhaled the scented smoke of a *narghli*. Behind him, upon a cushioned stool, knelt a female whose beauty of face and form was unmistakable, since it was undisguised by the filmy artistry of her attire. With a gigantic fan of peacock's feathers, she cooled the Sheikh, and dispersed the flies which threatened to disturb his serenity. A second *houri* received in her hands the amber mouthpiece as it fell from her lord's lips; a third, who evidently had been playing upon a lute, rose and glided from the apartment like an opium vision, as I entered between the guardian Scimitars.

I found myself thinking of Saint Saen's music to *Samson and Delilah*; the barbaric strains of the exquisite *bacchanale* were beating on my brain.

Black Robe advanced and knelt upon the floor of the *dîwan*.

"We have brought the wretched malefactor into your glorious presence," he said.

The Pasha (for I knew, beyond doubt, that I stood before Harûn Pasha) raised his eyes and fixed a stern gaze upon me. He gazed long and fixedly, and an odd change took place in his expression. He seemed about to address me, then, apparently changing his mind, he addressed the recumbent figure at his feet.

"Have the slaves returned with the female miscreant and her partner in Satan?" he demanded sternly.

"Lord of the age," replied the other, rising upon his knees, "they are expected."

"Let them be brought before me," directed the Pasha, "upon the instant of their arrival. Has Misrûn confessed his complicity?"

"He fainted beneath the lash, excellency, but confessed that he slept—that pig who prayed without washing and whose birth was a calamity—on several occasions when accompanying the lady Zohara."

"Leave us!" cried the Pasha. "But, first, unbind the prisoner."

He swept his arm around comprehensively, and everyone withdrew from the apartment, including the Scimitars (one of whom cut my lashings) and the lady of the fan. I found myself alone with Harûn Pasha.

IV

"Sit here beside me!" directed the Pasha.

Being yet too dazed for wonder or protest, I obeyed mechanically. My exact situation was not clear to me at the moment and I was a long way off knowing how to act.

"I am much disturbed in mind, and my bosom is contracted," continued the Pasha, with a certain benignity, "by reason of a conspiracy in my *harêm*, which

came to a head this night, and which led to the loss of the pearl of my household, a damsel who cost me her weight in gold, who entangled me in the snare of her love and pierced me with anguish. Know, O young Inglisi, that love is difficult. Alas! she who had captivated my reason by her loveliness fled with a shame of the Moslems who defamed the sacred office of *mueddin*! In truth he is naught but the son of a disease and a consort of camels. My soul cries out to Allah and my mind is a nest of wasps. Relate to me your case, that it may turn me from the contemplation of my sorrows. At another time, it had gone hard with you, and penalties of a most unfortunate description had been visited upon your head, O disturber of my peace; but since this child of filth and progeny of mules has shattered it forever, your lesser crime comes but as a diversion. Relate to me the matters which have brought you to this miserable pass.”

There was some still little voice in my mind which was trying to speak to me, if you understand what I mean. But what with the suffocating perfume of ambergris (or it may have been frankincense), my incredible surroundings, and the buzzing of my maltreated skull, I simply could *not* think connectedly.

A memory was struggling for identification in my addled brain; but whether it was due to something I had seen, heard, or smelled, I could not for the life of me make out. I heard myself spinning my own improbable yarn as one listens to a dreary and boresome recitation; I didn't seem to be the raconteur; my mind was busy about that amber room, furiously chasing that hare-like memory, which leaped and doubled, dived under the silken cushions, popped up behind the Pasha, and flicked its ears at me from amid the feathers of the peacock fan.

I drove right on to the end of my story, mechanically, without having got my mind in proper working order; and when the Pasha spoke again—there was that wretched memory still dodging me, sometimes almost within my grasp, but always just eluding it.

“Your amusing narrative has diverted me,” said the Pasha; and he clapped his hands three times.

It never occurred to me, you will note, to assert myself in any way; I accepted the lordly condescensions of this singular personage without protest. You will be wondering why I didn't kick up a devil of a hullabaloo—declare that I had come in response to screams for assistance—wave the dreaded name of the British Agent under the Pasha's nose, and all that. I can only say that I didn't; I was subdued; in fact I was down, utterly down and out.

Black Robe entered with eyes averted.

“Well, wretched vermin!” roared the Pasha in sudden wrath; “do you tell me they are not here?”

The man, with his head bumping on the carpet, visibly trembled.

“Most noble,” he replied hoarsely, “your lowly slave has exerted himself to the utmost—”

“Out! son of a calamity!” shouted the Pasha—and before my astonished eyes he raised the heavy *narghli* and hurled it at the bowed head of the man before him.

It struck the white turban with a resounding crack, and then was shattered to bits upon the floor. It was a blow to have staggered a mule. But Black Robe, without apparent loss of dignity, rose and departed, bowing.

The Pasha sat rocking about, and plucking madly at his beard.

“O Allah!” he cried, “how I suffer.” He turned to me. “Never since the day that another of your race (but, this one, a true son of Satan) came to my palace, have I tasted so much suffering. You shall judge of my clemency, O imprudent stranger, and pacify your heart with the spectacle of another’s punishment.”

He clapped his hands twice. This time there was a short delay, which the Pasha suffered impatiently; then there entered the squint-eyed man, together with the two Scimitars.

“I would visit the dungeon of the false Pasha,” said my singular host; and, rising to his feet, he placed his hand upon my shoulder and indicated that we were to proceed from the apartment.

Led by Crook Back, in whose hand the gigantic bunch of keys rattled unmelodiously, and followed by the Scimitars, we proceeded upon our way; and it was beyond the powers of my disordered brain to dismiss the idea that I was taking part in a Christmas pantomime. Many steps were descended; many heavy doors unbolted and unbarred, bolted and barred behind us; many stone-paved passages, reminding me of operatic scenery, were traversed ere we came to one tunnel more gloomy than the rest.

Upon the right was a blank stone wall, upon the left, a series of doors, black with age and heavily iron-studded. The only illumination was that furnished by the lantern which Crook Back carried.

Before one of the doors the Pasha paused.

“In which is Misrûn?” he demanded.

“In the next, excellency,” replied the jailer—for such I took to be the office of the hunchback.

As he spoke, he held the lantern to the grating.

I found myself peering into a filthy dungeon, the reek of which made me ill; and there, upon the stone floor, lay poor Silenus! He raised his eyes to the light.

“Lord of the age,” he moaned, lifting his manacled wrists, “glory of the universe, sun of suns! I have confessed my frightful sin, and most dire misfortunes. Of your sublime mercy, take pity upon the meanest thing that creeps upon the earth—”

“Proceed!” said the Pasha.

And with the moaning cries of Misrûn growing fainter behind us, we moved along the passage. Before a second door, we halted again, and the jailer raised the lantern.

“Look upon this!” cried the Pasha to me—“look well, and look long!”

Shudderingly I peered in between the bars. It had come home to me how I was utterly at the mercy of this man’s moods. If he had chosen to have me hurled into one of his dungeons, what prospect of release would have been mine? Who would ever know of my plight? No one! And beyond doubt I was in the realm of an absolute monarch. I silently thanked my lucky stars that my lot was not the lot of him who occupied this second dungeon.

As the dim light, casting shadow bars across the filthy floor, picked out the features of the prisoner, I gave a great start. Save that the beard was more gray, longer, filthy and unkempt, and that, in place of the nearly shaven skull, this unhappy being displayed dishevelled locks, the captive might easily have passed for the Pasha.

I met the eye of this terrible despot.

“Look upon the false Pasha,” he said; “look upon the one who thought to dispossess me! For years, by his own miserable confession, he studied me in secret. When I journeyed to my estates in Assuan” (I started again) “he was watching—watching—always watching. His scheme, which was whispered into his ear by the Evil One, was no plant of sudden growth, but a tree, that, from a seed of Satan planted in fertile soil, had flourished exceedingly, tended by the hand of villainous ambition.”

I clutched at the bars for support. The stench of the place was simply indescribable; but it was neither the stench nor the bizarre incidents of the night which accounted for my dizziness: it was the sudden tangibility of that hitherto elusive memory.

In build, in complexion, in certain mannerisms underlying the dignified assumption, Harûn Pasha might well have been the twin brother of Jack Dunlap!

A frightful possibility burst upon me like a bomb; clutching the bars with quivering hands, I stared and stared at the wretched impostor in the cell. *Could* it be? Had he been mad enough to make some attempt upon the Pasha? And was this his end?

I looked around again. I searched the bearded features of the Pasha with eager gaze. Good God! either I was going mad, or incredible things had been done, were being done, in Cairo.

I had not seen Dunlap for a year, remember, and in the ordinary way I did not see him more than half a dozen times in twelve months, so that, all things considered, it was not so remarkable that I had overlooked the resemblance. A full beard and mustache, artificially darkened eyelashes, a shaven head and a white turban, are effectual disguises; but if you can imagine Dunlap—the Dunlap you remember—so arrayed, then you have Harûn Pasha. Imagine Harûn Pasha, dirty, bedraggled, a hopeless captive... and you have the prisoner who crouched upon the straw in that noisome dungeon!

For the second time that night I was lifted out of myself. I turned on the man beside me in a blazing fury.

“You villain!” I shouted at him, and clenched my fists—“do you *dare* to confine a Britisher in your stinking cellars. By God! sir...”

Harûn Pasha clapped his hand over my mouth; the two guards had me by the arms from behind. But my cries had aroused the man in the dungeon, and, as I was dragged down the passage, these moaning words reached me, spoken in Arabic:

“Help! help! Englishman! A crime has been committed! I appeal to Lord—”

A door was slammed fast with a resounding bang, and the rest of the captive’s appeal was lost to me. One of my guards had substituted his hand for that of the Pasha, but now it was removed; and, speechless with rage, I found myself being thrust up stone stairs—and I realized that by a moment’s indiscretion, I had ruined everything.

Back in the amber apartment once more, with the two Scimitars at the door and Harûn Pasha reclining upon the cushions, I found speech.

“What are you going to do with me?” I demanded.

“My son,” replied the Pasha with benignity, “I pardon all! Your great courage and address, together with the modesty of your deportment, and the spirit of

adventure which has brought you to your present unfortunate case, plead for you in a manner which my clemency cannot resist. It is my unhappy lot often to be called upon to punish. To-night, those gloomy dungeons which you have seen will echo, alas, with the howls of miserable wretches who are responsible for the loss of the pearl of my soul; for I am persuaded that she has fled with the son of offal who profaned the words of Allah from the minaret. This being so, I would temper my proper severity with a merciful deed. You shall never speak of what you have seen within these walls, save in terms suitably disguised. You shall never seek to return, nor, by speech with any man, to confirm whatsoever you may suspect. Upon this warranty, you shall depart in peace.”

He clapped his hands twice, and a houri of most bewitching aspect glided into the *dīwan*.

“Bring sherbet!” ordered the Pasha.

The maiden departed; and whilst I was yet trying to come to a decision (the Pasha had mentioned no alternative, but my imagination was equal to the task of supplying one!) she returned with a tray upon which were porcelain cups and two vessels of beautifully chased gold.

Harûn Pasha decocted a sparkling beverage, and, with his own hands, passed the brimming cup to me.

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I knew you would not believe it; but I warned you, and I made a stipulation. Your idea is that I must be a poor sort of animal to accept so dishonorable a compromise? I agree. But the situation was even more peculiarly difficult than is apparent to you at the moment. Without *seeking* the information, I learned from Hassan of the Scent Bazaar that his brother had indeed fled with the beautiful Lady Zohara, no one knew whither; and this confirmation of the Pasha’s sorrows touched a very tender spot in my heart!

Then there is another little point.

When the Pasha removed the elaborate stopper from the first of the golden vessels to which I have just referred, *my* eye alone perceived that a bottle, bearing a familiar black and white label, was contained in this golden casing. The flavor of the decoction with which we sealed our infamous bargain clinched the matter.

I was absolutely thrust out of the presence chamber before I had time for another word; but, looking back from the door and meeting the eye of the Pasha, I encountered a most portentous wink. Therefore I have stuck to my bargain.

Oh! I have not given much away. The Pasha is not called Harûn, and the palace is nowhere near the Coptic Church in Old Cairo. Because, you see, I only knew one man who winked in quite that elaborate fashion—and his name was Jack Dunlap!

