

his head and pressing his lips to her fingers in homage that was not perfunctory.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

The Favor of the Sultan

WHEN Mavrocorthato came home that night, his wife confided the whole situation to him. She felt that it was beyond her power to handle alone. While in some respects there was not much sympathy between her husband and herself, when it came to any matter of importance she knew that she could rely on his help, whether he entirely approved of her actions or not. So to-night, although at first he stormed at being dragged into the American's dangerous love affairs, in the end he joined with madame in planning for its success.

The next morning, before he was out of bed, Weir received the following note:

MY DEAR MR. WEIR.—Madame Mavrocorthato has confided to me the peculiar state of your affairs, and the interest she takes in them. I have been too long in this country to dare to raise your hopes. Nevertheless, come to visit us at once. The less people know about your movements the next few days, the better it may be for you.

With my cordial wishes for your success, believe me,

Yours sincerely,

PANTELY MAVROCORTHATO.

P. S. I shall wait breakfast for you.

Weir leaped from his bed. He thought he could read between the lines the guaranty of his getting Rhasneh. Could he really have read between the lines Monsieur Mavrocorthato's words to his wife, "We will at least keep the young idiot out of mischief till I have time to see whether there is any chance," he might not have been in such high spirits.

As it was, he was bitterly disappointed after his arrival at the Greek's, to learn that the plans for the morning were only an excursion to Stamboul with his hostess, to see the procession at the unveiling of the Prophet's Mantle. During the drive there, it took all of Madame Mavrocorthato's powers of conversation to persuade him that she was acting for the best.

Weir found small interest in the gorgeous procession, with its Arab Zouaves, its Anatolian infantry, and its splendid, thoroughbred riding horses of the Sultan, until Counsellor Mavrocorthato, madame's father in law, rode up to the window of their carriage and began commenting on the passing show.

"There is our new Master of Ceremonies," the counsellor said, indicating a gallant figure on horseback, whose uniform outshone in splendor all the gorgeousness about him. "It is a great advantage to have a beautiful daughter, is it not?"

They looked at the man he indicated, and madame impulsively cried out, "Why, that is Tak—" and then tried to stifle the words that surprise had brought from her lips.

"Yes, that is Takshan Pasha," the counsellor continued her sentence placidly. "He is the father of the beautiful Hanum Rhasneh—Gusel Hanum, they call her."

From outside the carriage the counsellor could not notice the sudden stiffening of Weir's figure inside.

"She is said to be betrothed to Haleb Bey, son of my friend Osman Pasha—dissolute young scamp!" Mavrocorthato went on. "But the Sultan can be a very deaf man when he wants to, and has evidently not heard of this betrothal; for I hear he has ordered Takshan Pasha to bring him his daughter as his two hundred and ninety-seventh wife, as soon as she gets over a slight illness that is keeping her indoors at present."

"And how soon will that be?" madame asked softly.

"How can I tell? Perhaps as long as it is safe. If I know Takshan Pasha, he is not the man to desire his daughter brought into the atmosphere of the Yildiz Kiosk. He doesn't look a happy man, in spite of his new honors, does he?"

Madame and Weir were already scanning the face of Takshan Pasha, as he rode by, impelled by more than interest in the counsellor's gossip. Madame was trying to read in it signs of a breadth of mind which would be willing to give his daughter to an infidel, if that would make her happy; and Weir looked at him with the mixed feelings one possesses toward a man who has tried to murder him within the week, and yet whose son in law he wishes to be. But neither was able to gain much from the inscrutable countenance of the Turk, who bore sorrow and honors without showing the effects of either.

The procession passed off without unusual incident to the mass of the spectators. The people received the gratification which always comes to them at seeing many men in uniform marching in regular ranks. And their loyalty to the ruler who trembled to show himself to them was increased by the sight of him in his carriage, waxen faced and passive, except for his glittering, black eyes which flickered over his subjects, intensely alert for any sign of contemplated assassination.

There was one slight occurrence, however, that to most of those who saw it was trivial; to two men brought the hot fear of death; and gave to Weir his opportunity. The order about driving the carriage of the Sultan up to the door of the mosque itself had been given, as the Sultan had desired;

yet when the carriage arrived at the place where it usually stopped, the coachman drew in his horses. Whether the driver forgot his important orders—as train dispatchers sometimes send trains to sure destruction—or whether his action was the result of false orders given him by some intrigant against Takshan Pasha, it is impossible to say. If any man knew, he held his tongue for his neck's sake.

The Sultan had had a bad dream the night before; he had dreamed that he had come upon the dead body of a man, and on turning it over had seen it was himself. So much terror had this inspired in him, that he would have refrained from going to the mosque on this day, and declared himself ill, were it not that a report of his ill health, so well founded as this, would almost of a surety precipitate trouble and revolt among the various classes of malcontents, who were only awaiting a favorable opportunity to start an insurrection.

Now when the carriage stopped at the place where he had especially ordered it not to, the instant fear of the Sultan saw plot and assassination. Hoarsely he called to the coachman to drive on. With swift furtiveness his hand sought his ever ready revolver in his bosom. Like fire his glance played over the heads of the multitude for the unseen foe.

Takshan Pasha saw what had happened, and frantically wheeled his horse around toward the coachman. For the fraction of a second the Padishah took the old Pasha for an assassin, and his finger was already tightening on the trigger of the revolver, not yet pointed at his minister. Then with his swift knowledge of men, he saw that Takshan Pasha had no evil intent toward him; yet the taint of that sudden suspicion remained.

The horses started up, and to most of the on-lookers the incident was as nothing. They continued to shout for long life for the Sultan, as if their own happiness depended upon it; while—an ancient form only—the dwarfs of the palace proclaimed from the steps of the mosque, "Be not overproud, oh, Padishah; for there is a greater above you—even Allah!"

From their position, the two in Madame Mavrocorthato's carriage and the old counsellor on horseback saw everything clearly. The two least versed in Ottoman politics noticed nothing especially

man who sees the way, where before he has seen none, and reckons not the obstacles.

Madame Mavrocorthato turned to the counsellor. "Father," she said in Greek, "will you please leave us now? Another time I may tell you why."

The counsellor looked surprised, but bowed politely, and forced his horse away among the crowd. Good breeding saves much explaining.

Weir sprang from the carriage. "I will bring him here in a minute," he said.

"Go up to him quietly, touch him on the arm, and say 'Voulez?' He will think you one of the Sultan's secret European agents, and will follow you without protest. He is the kind of man who will go to his death without a scene."

The Sultan was now in the mosque, and Weir was unable to find Takshan Pasha anywhere. He concluded that the Pasha was one of those who had been invited to witness the unveiling of the Mantle of the Prophet. He did not know, however, that within the mosque the Sultan had pointedly turned his back on the man upon whom he had delighted to shower the most distinguished honors up to the last few minutes.

When the Sultan came out and jumped into his victoria, taking the reins himself, as was his custom when returning from the mosque, Weir managed to get near Takshan Pasha, who carried himself in his unmerited disgrace as erectly as he had during his unsought exaltation. Just as he was about to mount his horse, the American touched him on the shoulder.

The old man turned, and the eyes of the two met for an instant as steel meets steel. "What do you wish?" Takshan Pasha asked courteously.

After a significant pause, Weir said in French, "Come!"

For a second the old Pasha stood rigid. Then he gave the reins to his Arab groom, and with a slight gesture of the hand, as if to say "Kismet," he followed the American.

During the short walk to Madame Mavrocorthato's carriage, it seemed to Weir that he had never loomed up so conspicuously before. As a matter of fact, only a few persons had noticed him address Takshan Pasha, and those few had not looked again. It is well not even to see the fall of a favorite who is a favorite no more.

When they reached the brougham, the door opened from within. The two men stepped inside. The coachman laid his whip on his horses' backs and tore off through the lane which their frantic plunging made for them in the crowded streets.

Takshan Pasha looked bewildered when he recognized Madame Mavrocorthato. "Have we not made a mistake?" he asked, his courtesy asserting itself even in the presence of his great danger.

Weir could not understand him. Madame answered.

"No, there is no mistake. We saw your danger, and this young American volunteered to save you."

Takshan Pasha drew himself up, his Ottoman pride resenting the thought of saving himself against the august wishes of his master.

Madame Mavrocorthato, divining what was in his mind, leaned toward him, her eyes shining. "When the storm is over, you can come forth again. Now you must think not of your pride, but of your daughter."

"My daughter!" he repeated, hope lighting his eyes.

"Yes. If anything should happen to you, what would become of her, alone and defenseless in Therapia?"

Takshan Pasha did not speak, from the bitter disappointment that her words gave him, by showing that she knew nothing of Rhasneh. Yet at the mention of his daughter, his own pride and all else faded away into insignificance; and his face, which had been unmovable at disgrace and death for himself, showed the agony of his mind in regard to her.

Madame Mavrocorthato noticed his expression with sudden consternation. She recalled the plan by Rhasneh to meet Weir at the Bridge of Galata on the night after he had been thrown into prison. She laid her hand on the old man's arm, and in order that Weir might not understand, asked in Turkish:

"Where is your daughter?"

"Alas! madame, I do not know. I fear—may I almost hope—that she has run away with a young giatour whom she has seen and loved."

Weir had understood no word of all this, since the conversation was carried on in Turkish. In the pause that now ensued, he said cheerfully, "I must find some way to keep the old gentleman under cover till to-night; then I'll smuggle him on board the Bluebird. Can you lend me your carriage for the rest of the day? It wouldn't do to take him to my hotel."

"No, you must not take him to your yacht to-night. If the Sultan wishes to find him, he will be sure to search it." Madame thought hard over the problem. "We will keep him in our house for a few days, till the excitement dies down. Then you can take him to the Bluebird."

Of the confirmation of her worst misgivings about Rhasneh, madame said no word. She felt that she must keep up her courage both for the old father who hoped Rhasneh might be safe with her lover, and



He Led the Sultan's Parade to the Mosque.

significant. The old counsellor compressed his thin lips.

"There goes a dead man, I am afraid," he said, indicating Takshan Pasha with a slight nod.

"Why," his daughter in law exclaimed, "what has happened?"

"Did you not see the Sultan's face when the carriage stopped, and the look he cast on our friend?"

"He looked frightened for an instant. I saw nothing else."

The counsellor smiled sadly. He liked Takshan Pasha. "When our master is made afraid, he puts him who has caused him fear where he cannot do so again. There will be a sad ending to the honors that have been heaped on Takshan Pasha of late."

The counsellor's words brought very close to Weir the tragic possibilities of serving a despot.

"Do you mean," the American cried incredulously, "that just for having the Sultan's carriage stopped in the wrong place Takshan Pasha might lose his life?"

"If he is wise, he will not wait to see," the counsellor replied; "though escape may be impossible by the time he comes out of the mosque."

Weir looked up eagerly at Madame Mavrocorthato. Here might be a chance given him by fortune which no amount of striving on his part could have obtained. He read comprehension in her glance.

"It is dangerous!" madame said under her breath. Weir laughed softly, the laugh of a strong