

# FOR THE HATED OF HALLEEM

BY NORMAN DUNCAN.

RUSSELL



Copyright by Norman Duncan.

THE relief of space and breeze and evening shadow, the repose of sprawling and low, easy chatter—the long, full breath of the day's end—had drawn the swarthy Syrians of Washington street to Battery Park; the band disturbed the solemn night, as a trivial word a funeral—obscuring the distant, long-drawn whistles and drowning the twitter and rustle in the trees and the restful swish of the waves breaking against the seawall. Battery place and Whitehall, from the old to the arches thereof, had come frankly, eager to hear the band. Ragtime and sentimental ballads—itching soles and a fleeting thought of love—move the native young of the tenement to double shuffles and tears, fast follow as they may. So Battery place and Whitehall made love and skylarked near the bandstand, and Washington street mooned afar off in the glistening shadows.

The rough influence of love in hiding shined young Alois Awad, Ameer of the seventh generation, and Halleem, Khouri's shoe-eyed daughter, to the solid edge of the crowd, and Alois, having plucked his eyes with the crimson and gray and gold of the train of the sun, turned as with the courage of impulse and whispered:

"What did Antar say of Abia, his beloved, the daughter of Malik, when his heart was sore?" And he thought she must surely hear the complainings of his heart.

"It is known to you, oh, Alois," she said with a quiet, trustful smile. "Therefore, how shall my ignorance fret me? I—think all things are known to you," she went on softly. "All things written, anyway, for Khalil Khayat has taught you."

Halleem bent her head and the breeze fluttered a tress of black hair out of place to hide the arch light in her eyes.

"This, Antar said," Alois faltered, pushing the tarboosh up from his hot, wet brow. "This he—"

Alois' throat suddenly was parched stiff; nor could he form one more word.

"Are the words hard to recall?"

"No, no, the words are well known to me."

Halleem brushed back the fluttering tress and the sight of her little hand and the bloom on her cheeks gave Alois the swift confidence of infatuation. He pointed to the faring sky over the Jersey shore.

"These," he went on, "are the words of Antar, spoken of his beloved: 'The sun as it sets turns toward her and says, 'Darkness obscures the land, do thou arise in my absence.' The brilliant moon calls out to her, 'Come forth, for thy face is like me when I am at the full and in all my glory.' The tamarisk trees complain of her in the morn and in the eve, and say, 'Away, thou waning beauty, thou form of the laurel!' She turns away dashed, and throws aside her veil, and the roses are scattered from her soft fresh cheeks. . . . Graceful in every limb; slender her waist; love beaming are her glances; waving is her form. . . . The luster of day sparkles from her forehead, and by the dark shades of her curling ringlets night itself is driven away. . . . Will fortune ever, oh, daughter of Malik, ever bless me with thy embrace? That would cure my heart of the sorrows of love!'"

The voice of young Alois had risen from husky stuttering to the cadence of rapture. The words were Antar's, spoken, in times long past, on a sandy waste, far, far away from where the elevated engine snorted over the long, smutty curve to the South Ferry terminal; but the vibrant anguish and the pleading of the last cry, the eternal passion, were of the pregnant moment. They rang true in the ears of Halleem, and her heart answered, leaping, yet afraid, as a cub lion, captive born, might sniff and whine with its first breath of the jungle.

Ah, she was a daughter of the land, was little Halleem! It was the first bold word of love she had heard; and it was as though now, suddenly, she had come to the crest of a hill and a fair, broad land, a land of gardens and rivers and shady places—her land, the very riches of her womanhood—was spread at her feet, with a sure path to tread, and a golden vista, leading whither the sun was rising, all Troy. So her heart throbbled, and there was a new, strange pain in it; and she wrung her little hands cruelly—though Alois would have given a year for a kiss of the flushing finger tips—and she turned her brown eyes to the harbor, where there was nothing to delight in them—though Alois could have wandered Hfeleg in their depths. For, indeed, she was very much afraid.

"Antar," Alois stammered, perceiving and ready to weep for regret that he had disquieted her, "he—he was a bold man. Shame to him, if she suffered!"

"He loved her very much."

"Ho!" Alois exclaimed. "His love was very great! Did he not carry her off from

the tents of her people, even against their spears?"

"Had he so great courage?" Halleem's breath came fast again, she stared, thus panting, at the unwieldy Annex ferry and its luminous track of foam.

"Ah," Alois sighed, "there is a gentler way, and—"

"Halleem! Little daughter!"

Salim Khouri, to whom fat came with prosperity, had waddled within hearing distance; and this was the asthmatic call. He came up puffing, but smiling a broad, indulgent smile. "Little star," he said in the dialect, taking one of Halleem's thick braids in his chubby hand to fondle it, "now ain't she a little star, Alois? Ha-a-a!" His eyes twinkled with affection for her. He moved his arm to the bench rail at her back, and she sank against his comfortable breast and from this safe, familiar place flashed an inscrutable smile to Alois.

Now Alois reproached himself for having blurted out his passion in the ear of his helpless well-beloved after the rough Western fashion, and so ashamed was he in his own sight that soon he could bear to sit no longer with Halleem and her father. So he said a flushing, shamefaced good-night and went away, and wandering without aim he came to the place where the fireboat lay purring in her dock. This was a quiet place, shaded by the Aquarium from the noise of the band. He sat down where there was a view of the darkening harbor—the shadows were then closing round the statue of Liberty—and as he thought dreamily of his own beloved the words of Antar, spoken in ecstasy, hurried crowding through his thoughts, weaving themselves with them, for they had been in his mind many days. Again and yet again he said the words, and the high cry, welling from his heart, made his soul to tingle. His eyes were suffused with tears; he looked up and it was as though a holy light falling through wide, glowing gates threw all things near into shadow and when the heaving, slimy water at his feet took form again he was not so sad as he had been.

Elsewhere in that crowded, dusky park Jimmy Brady was looking, sharp-eyed, for his LIT Peach. Affecting a loud manner to deceive his heart into quieter beating, he pried through the crowd around the bandstand, searched the benches near the barge office, threaded his way through the moving, chattering throng on the broad promenade near the sea wall and traversed swiftly the quiet interior walks. Though tempted by the invitation in many a sweet, bright eye, he suspended his quest only to cuff a bullying urchin and caress the dritler bullied one.

Thus, while Alois Awad gazed out over the darkened harbor, young Jimmy Brady—in the pride of his job at Swartz & Rattery's, in the glory of his white duck trousers and rolled gold jewelry and natty new red tie, in the hope of his merry, sanguine temperament, searched persistently for Halleem the shoe-eyed, his LIT Peach, to tell her that he loved her.

This was Jimmy's of the snapping eye and gentle heart and broad shoulders and ready teeth and quick right fist and laughing rejoinder and springy step and bulldog purpose, and strengthening pull on the Alderman of the ward and vocabulary of five hundred words. Lord, he had words enough! It is the kiss and the hug—the heart—when it comes to love. The girls of the tenements would be better off if their steadies were all like him.

"Ho! Meester Brady. Good eveln," said Khouri, the merchant, when Jimmy came, beaming, to where he sat with Halleem; and the Little Star looked up shyly and nestled closer to her father's breast, that she might conceal the confusion that strangely overcame her always when Jimmy Brady came suddenly into view.

"Wake 'er up! Say, wake 'er up!" Jimmy jerked out; and then he burst into a loud laugh. "Say, she's in a trance."

"She ees seek—no," Khouri answered in concern, scratching his head.

"Aw, I'm on'y stringin' y'u," Jimmy said quickly. "Ain't y'u on?" He looked at the old man in sly amusement, which Halleem's light titter fired into a laugh; then he caught Halleem by the arm and drew her, insistently, gently, to her feet and held her there. "Aw, come on," he went on; and the wheedling tone was tinged with a certain masterfulness that sounded sweet in Halleem's ears and drew a swift, confident glance to his face. "It's the time we walk. Ain't that right?"

"Meester Brady—yes," she answered softly. "I go weeth you."

"Ho!" Khouri exclaimed, looking off down the walk. "My frien, Meester Khayat, he come. I see heem. He have somethin' to say. Ver-ee important, Ho, ho! Take her weeth you, Meester Brady. Take her; sure, eet ees the Land of Liberty!"

Young Jimmy, in the silence of deepest suspense, led his LIT Peach to a deserted bench, over which a kindly spreading bush cast a seclusive shadow; and there

they sat down, having spoken not one single word on the way. Halleem gave him many an observant side glance in the meek, covert way her people know; and now as his lithe strength and bold, eager face impressed her young heart anew, it flashed over her, ecstatically, that this was Antar, born again, and she, Abia, his beloved, whom he had carried off in the night, triumphantly, even against the spears of his enemies, and she closed her eyes, and wished that the green bench and the flagstones and the salty breeze and the swinging, glaring arc lamp and all the chatter might be changed, magically, as of old, into a swift, coursing steed and the sands of the desert and the free, hot breath of the night and a million twinkling stars and the cries of pursuing enemies. As for Jimmy, he wondered at his fading courage.

"Meester Brady," Halleem said at last, poking fun at him in a sly way, "you have say we walk. You forgot. Eet ees fun-ee."

"Eh!" Jimmy ejaculated; then staring abstraction took hold of him again.

The distant band struck up a swinging music-hall song—about the Only Girl—that then ran riot in men's ears. The music and the voices of the people, singing, came, mellowed and undulant, through the space between.

"You're lit!" Jimmy burst out explosively; he turned to her, but stopped dead, shivering.

"It? Wat ees eet?" she asked, pursing her lips.

"Her! You're her! Lord, y'u're slow!" Jimmy's voice would have savored of disgust had it not been saturated with a deeper emotion.

"Hair?"

"The On'y One-me Honey," Jimmy had the anxious face of a man on trial, when the foreman of the jury stands up, solemnly, and the courtroom is hushed.

"Ah," she sighed, shaking her head, "I do not know eet."

"Can't y'u hear 'em sing?" he plained.

"Ain't y'u got no ears? You're it, I tell y'u—y'u're—y'u're—her."

The song came out of the distance again, blurred by the wind.

"Hear it?" said Jimmy, raising his hand. Halleem only looked at her ear and listened. The heart of Jimmy was going like a piston rod and he was gulping to keep his throat moist and fit.

Just one girl, only just one girl; There are others, I know, but they're not my pearl.

Just one girl, only just one girl; I'd be happy forever with just one girl.

"Ain't y'u on?" Jimmy asked in a drawn, hollow whisper. "Ain't it penetrated yet?" His honest heart was near to bursting. He hitched closer and looked down in her eyes craving the light of love.

"You're it—me honey—me sweet thing!" Did he after all have words enough? He went on desperately, plunging to the end.

"Follo' me? Can't y'u see? Me honey—the on'y one-me peach."

There was no responsive light in Halleem's eyes—only a wondering shadow. His passion disclosed itself slowly. The shameful, effeminate words were forced out of his throat at last; but he gulped long before he would give them utterance.

"I love y'u!" he cried tremulously, stretching his arms out. "I love y'u!"

Then he took her hand and waited for a sign; and he was white and groggy, and he knew it.

Halleem put her handkerchief to her eyes and cried quietly; but she left her little hand lying inclosed in Jimmy Brady's great, thrilling palms.

"Drop it! Stop it!" Jimmy exclaimed impulsively, his own lips twitching; for he thought he had his sign. "Don't y'u cry any more, lit' girl. L ain't got no kick comin'. I take me punishment like a man. Look at me. Cast yer orb on me face."

He turned a brave face up to her; but she would not look, and had she looked she would have seen tears in his eyes.

"It's all right," he went on doggedly. "Don't cry, I ain't goin' to say any more. I'm done, I tell y'u. You'll git a better man 'n me. It's all right. There ain't no kick comin' here—honest, there ain't. Stop it!" he cried, in agony. "You're breakin' me heart. I didn't mean t' make y'u cry. I'm takin' me punishment all right." He pulled her hand away from her eyes and through her tears she smiled at him. "That's all right, lit' girl," he crooned. "You won't be bothered wit' me any more. I'm hurt," he moaned. "Oh, I'm hurt awful; but it's all right. You'll git a better man. Come on home now, lit' girl. Don't be afraid. I won't hurt y'u. I know wen I'm licked."

He left her at the door of her father's house and she watched him swing down Rector street to West, whistling bravely as he went, and she went upstairs very solemn and she asked her heart many times that night whether she was sad or happy, but her heart was silent.

Now, when on the next morning Salim Khouri, the merchant, portentously solemn, sat himself down in his great chair, waiting for his narghile to be made ready

—for it was Sunday—and told her, while she filled the bowl and blew the charcoal into a glow and handed him the long tube, that Khalil Khayat had made offer for her hand for young Alois Awad, Ameer of the seventh generation, the Light of His Eyes, Halleem knew whom she loved. Then, indeed, she knew that she loved Jimmy Brady, and she thought there was no man to compare with him in strength and beauty and courage; but she said, blushing, that she would have her answer ready when Khalil Khayat should call in the evening, and went out with a numb heart to tell the beloved of her heart that indeed he must love her no more; for she was a dutiful daughter.

But why should she tell Jimmy Brady this? Ah, for the touch of his hand again! What was the courage of the new Antar? She would risk herself in the depths of his eyes! What would he venture? Her purpose weakened; she hesitated; she pressed on. Hal she thought, clenching her little fists, she would dare him to try to carry her off! She pulled the blouse into a snug fit about her little waist and pressed the massive silver comb into place in her wifful hair, and touched the ribbon at her throat—pressing on all the while to Battery Park.

"But my father he say, 'Eet ees the country of liberty,'" she thought. "Eef I marry queek he say, 'Oh, Lestie Star, why you not tell of father? Lestie Star, why you not tell of father? You marry? Shame—not tell of father!' Then I cry—I mus' cry, I feel so bad—an' he say, 'Sh'h, Lestie Star! You happy?' An' I say, 'Yes, I love heem.' An' he say, 'Come, I hug you.' He good man,' he say. 'I know heem. Come, I hug you.' An' he hug me, an' he—he-anger no more."

In the evening of that day Khalil Khayat

In the Evening of that day KHAYAT SAT WITH ALOIS AWAD.

at sat with Alois Awad, the Light of his Eyes, in the back room of the coffee-house of Nageed Flani, which is on Washington street, not far up from Battery Park, and may be found any day. They were waiting for the time to come when Khalil Khayat should go to the house of Salim Khouri, the merchant, to hear the answer of Halleem, his daughter; and they were smoking heavily, stantly.

Alois Awad trembled in his chair, and drew swift signs, and sought distraction in the jumbled pattern of the wallpaper and the voices in the outer room, and consumed a hundred matches to keep his cigarettes alight, and was vacant and flushed by turns. Two dreams fought for place in his mind; and he would harbor neither, the one for that he would not dread it, the other for that he dared not entertain it.

"It is near time," said the old man at length. "I shall start now for the house of Salim Khouri for the answer to the Light of his Eyes."

Khayat sat stiff in his chair, for Jimmy

Brady came swiftly through the outer room, crying buoyantly: "Hello, Flani! Lord, ain't it hot! Ain't old man Khayat here?" His heartiness was infectious; all the men laughed sympathetically as he passed by. He burst into the little back room. His chest was swelling, his head was thrown back, he was drawing his breath as though all air were pure and bracing; his hat was on the side of his head—fairly over the ear, jaunty, saucy; his cigar was in the corner of his mouth and at the political angle; his eyes were flashing. He slapped Alois on the back—a resounding thwack, that made the Syrian wince.

"Much 'bliged," said Alois delightedly. "You welcome. Sit down. You happy, eh?"

Old Khayat rose seatedly and drew out a chair. "Be courteous, Meester Brady," he said. "Toshi, Toshi!" he called. "One cup coffee—one more for Meester Brady. How ees is your health to-day, sair? Eet ees very warm, ees eet not?" There was a twinkle in Khayat's eyes; young Jimmy Brady was acceptable in his sight.

"Say, I'm—I'm married," Jimmy blurted, grinning radiantly. His voice was shrill and shaking; such was the measure of his happiness. "Hear me? I'm married. I got a lit' wife, an' she loves me—loves me, er she's a Jar. Ha, ha!" he laughed abruptly, vacantly; then he gasped, happily and continued, as in a burst of confidence: "It's this way, Mister Khayat—I run away wit' the girl, an' the old man ain't on yet. Now, I ain't crawlin' myself, but me nerves is all gone. I want somebody to square it. Understand? Somebody t' square it—break it easy—let the old man down light. Understand? It's sudden, but it's all right; there won't be any tearin' done. The man I want is you,

Understand? He knows y'u, an' w'at y'u say goes wit' him. Just break it. Follo' me? All y'u got t' do is—tell him. Now."

Khayat was laughing, and Alois, now peculiarly responsive to the mood of the young lover, was smiling. Such, then, was the joy of love! Ah, that he might know it!

"You have not told me the name of the young ladee," Khayat interrupted, sobering. "Who ees the dear ladee? Can it be that she ees Syrian?"

"She's a dago all right—the prettiest I'll dago y'u ever see," Jimmy rattled, with rising emotion. "She's all right. Her heart, it's all right, too. She—she—loves me." Jimmy stretched out his hands and lifted up his rapt face and continued, inspired to describe the graces of his beloved. "She loves me! Say, her eyes—my Gawd!—her lit' hands—her hair—say, I'm foolish—touched. Are y'u on? Soft, I am—nutty! I ain't right in me head any more. It's her eyes—her lit' hands—her—"

"Ah," said Khayat, gently, "but you have not told me her dear name. How can I have help you, eet I—"

"Halleem Khouri's her name," said Jimmy; "an' she's a beaut. Say, I'm foolish! Her eyes is brown, an' her hair is black—"

The muscles of Khalil Khayat's face stiffened in their position; but the light of interest in his eyes expired, and it was full in them thereafter. His heart faltered—stopped—beat on again, with slowly lessening pain. Here a muscle in his face relaxed; there another. Muscles after muscle weakened and gave; soon his blue, twitching face, still upturned to Jimmy Brady, wore a shallow smile that passed, anon, into ghastliness—soon a dull melancholy—soon a look of fixed weariness. Then he sighed, and let his eyes fall to his coffee cup, where he kept them, fearing the greater pain in a sight of the face of Alois Awad.

Alois' cigarette had fallen to the tablecloth and there he let it lie, while it fired the fabric and smoldered foully. His shoulders had fallen in; his head was swaying like the top of a tall tree in a great wind. He kept his eyes up—forced the very smile in them to hold its place. Then his head sunk; his body tottered; he would have fallen, strengthless, over the table, had he not caught the edge and stiffened his arms.

"Hi!" Jimmy exclaimed. "Who hit y'u?"

He could not understand. Here was a physical effect. But who had struck the blow? "Say, y'u look like a game pug after a right hand jab on the jaw. You look as if y'u was jolted fer fair. Wat—wa's doin'?"

"Agh!" said Alois faintly. "I have smoke—too much smoke."

"Groggy and game an' comin' up t' the scratch, eh?" Jimmy laughed. "Here, drink yer water." There was silence. Jimmy turned to Khalil Khayat. "Wat's doin', I'm askin'?"

Khayat held up his lean hand imperiously. "Ox-cuse me," he said, contorting his features into a kindly smile. "I weel speak weeth Meester Awad een my own tongue."

"Cert," said Jimmy.

Khayat turned to Alois. "Well!" he said simply; but there was a wondrous depth of tenderness in his voice.

"What is my love?" answered Alois Awad, Ameer of the seventh generation, in the purest speech of his people, and his eyes were shining and his voice was shrill and sure, as of a prophet of high calling. "Is it a thirst that cries for quenching? Rather is it water freely given to a parched throat. Is it a consuming flame, to turn to ashes the joy of my beloved? Rather is it a fire kindled in a wintry place, burning brightly in the night, that she may bask in its heat and dream of sunlit places. Is it the night, harboring the frightful shapes of darkness? Rather is it the twilight, and the amber song of the wilderness. Is it a tempest, to stir great waves to engulf the ship of her happiness? Rather is it a favoring breeze, to speed her into port. Is it a winged arrow, the arrow of my bow, straight aimed in the cunning of my eye, flying swiftly, seeking out her fair breast to tear it? Oh, the cruel song of the arrow; and again, and yet again, oh, the cruel song of the arrow! Nay! Rather is it a shield for my beloved—a shield encompassing her, a shield of tried steel—my shield, defending her against the arrows of sorrow."

"The Light of my Eyes!" Khalil Khayat murmured rapturously, tingling to his finger tips. "The Light of my Eyes!" He looked long in the young man's face, and he pulled his gray mustache tremulously and drew long, deep breaths through his expanded nostrils, like a man lifted out of himself by the courage of a champion. "I know the meaning, Light of my Eyes!"

"What's this?" Jimmy demanded, dazed. "Somebody's hurt—I-I—do I know. Ain't somebody hurt?"

"I weel go weeth you," said Khayat, rising steadily. His dark face was then emotionless. He looked absently for his hat—under the table, on the hooks, on the chairs, and he flushed when he found it on his head. "Come!" he continued. "Salim Khouri; eet ees a frien." My words they have power weeth heem. He have's respect for me. He weel forgivee. Let me but say eet weel, and all weel be well. She weep, have you say. Little Halleem weep to go home! Let us have hurry. She weel be forgivee. Wat I say, Khouri he weel do."

Not turning to look at Alois Awad, the Light of his Eyes, Khalil Khayat went out. His old rusty hat was on the back of his head, pulled down to his ears. He was staring absently straight before him. Was it a smile on his face? Was it the shadow of pain? Was it a smile touched with regret? Men wondered as he passed, along with Jimmy Brady, and they turned to look again, but they could not tell whether or not it was well with Khalil Khayat that day.